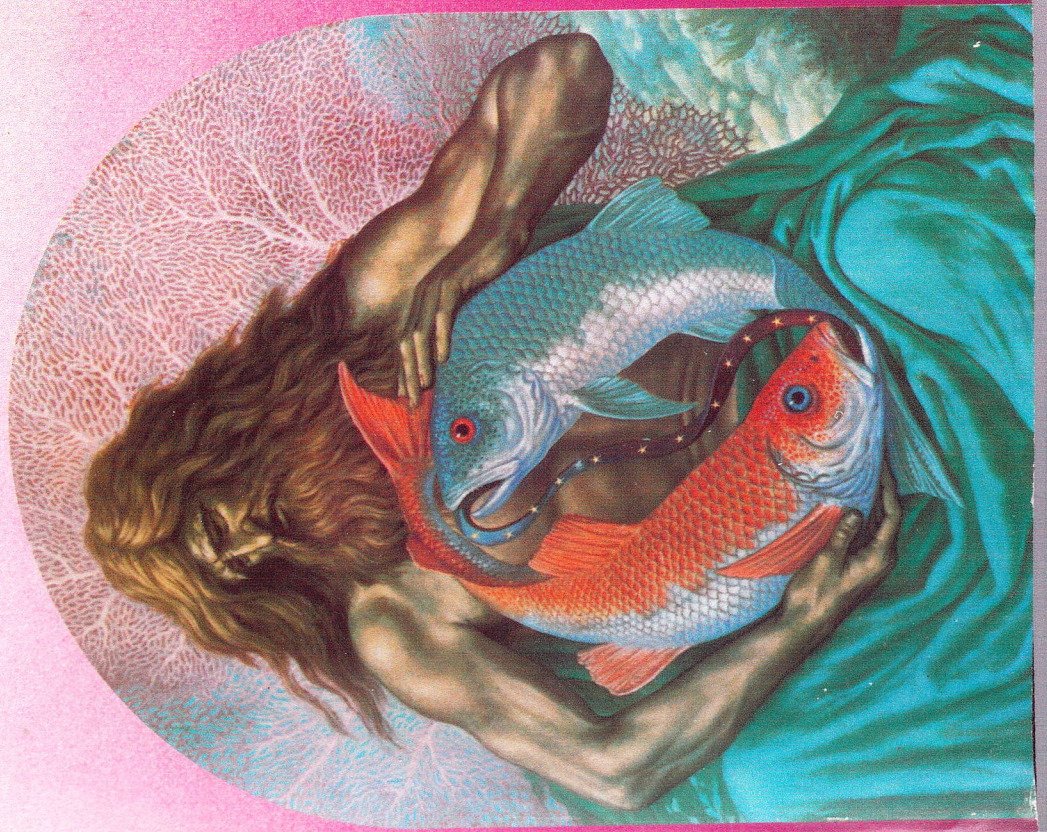


# JOHFRA ASTROLOGY



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From Johfra's own introduction:  
"The signs of the zodiac have been drawn in much the same way for hundreds of years. Only in painting was there some scope for new interpretation."

"So I decided to get right down to the essence of each sign and then meditate briefly 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, so giving each painting more background and allowing the spectator more scope for free association. In this way, the twelve signs became a cycle of twelve meditations following the course of the zodiac."



When Verkerke Reproductions commissioned me in 1973 to depict the twelve signs of the zodiac so that they could be made into posters, I realized there would be little point in simply adding to the vast number of decorative renderings of these signs already in existence. 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 Cabbala, 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.

It goes without saying that being an artist, I approached my work completely subjectively. The material itself was taken from established sources. Its application and conjunction were my personal interpretation. As I worked, each painting became an act of meditation.

The posters were first published in 1974 and since then they have spread over the whole world. They have become common property and one result of this is that more and more people have become curious about the underlying symbolism.

There is an excellent, well documented book on the subject by Hein Steehouwer, *Johfra en de Zodiac*, published by Ankh Hermes of Deventer in The Netherlands but, unfortunately, it is only available in Dutch. Hence my being asked by Verkerke Reproductions to write a short commentary about my zodiac paintings so that those in other countries who know my work may understand it better.

I shall begin by saying something about symbols and their working in general in order to explain what I had in mind as I painted.

It is commonly accepted that anything to do with religions and mysticism shies away from objective and analytical judgement. Such judgement ignores and even kills the spirit.

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.

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.

The more symbols are linked together, the ever deeper and richer their sphere of operation will become. Together, they define and clarify each other.

In brief: a symbol, to those who meditate upon it and who can lose themselves in it, is like a door that

opens out on to a fresh vista of consciousness. Symbolism is not exact and transferable like mathematics. It is not a science; it is more creative of atmosphere, and enlightening, like poetry. A symbolist is, above all, a poet, just as all poets are free symbolists because they too work with hints and indications.

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 Cabbala.

These systems have become so intricate and profound that it would be impossible here to give more than a rough indication of their basic ideas. Some of the most brilliant minds have developed these ideas over the centuries so it is certainly not within my power to go deeply into these matters. In any case, the interested reader can easily refer himself to the existing literature if he wishes to examine the subject more thoroughly.

I am simply concerned here with giving a summary introduction to the three philosophical systems that have affected and shaped my way of thinking as a

background to the symbolism that I have borrowed from them.

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.

While this doctrine is very positive, it does impose a strict rule of life and ethics; it places all things in their context and gives each situation its own perspective. Yet it is this vision in particular, the notion of a continuing evolution towards an eventual perfection that has fruitfully affected esoteric thought, particularly astrology which developed – to its own advantage – from predicting the future to being an ethical doctrine.

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 Tresmegistos (thrice-great Hermes). There were originally many writings but these are now chiefly represented by the eighteen treatises of the *Corpus Hermeticum*. The first book, the *Pymander*, tells how Hermes, in a trance, is set opposite an elevated being who makes himself known to him as the 'godly Pymander', 'the Mind', 'the being that is beyond itself'. This Pymander was the Word, the inhabiting *Logos*. It was Hermes' *alter ego*.

A dialogue follows with Pymander answering Hermes' questions and showing him all 'essential things' in a series of visions. These expositions form the Hermetic cosmology and philosophy. Alchemy is its practical expression, as well as being the spirit of astrology.

To illustrate this, I should like to draw attention to the so-called *Tabula Smaragdina*, the Smaragden or Emerald tablet on which the synthesis of the whole philosophy is said to be engraved. It contains the key to this doctrine and the guide to alchemy, and it antecedes the *Corpus Hermeticum*. Here is the complete text (I have given it all because every phrase is important to the whole):

It is true!

It is sure!

It is the full truth!

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.

And as all things have been and come into being from the One, through one mediator, so are they all born from this one Marriage by adaptation.

The father of it is the Sun,

The mother is the Moon.

The Wind has carried it in his womb,

the Earth is the wet nurse.

The father of all perfection of all the world is here.

Its force is entire if it is turned into earth.

You shall, softly and with great insight, separate the Earth from the Fire, the subtle from the gross.

It rises from the Earth to the sky and again descends to the Earth, so taking to it the force from that which is above and that which is below.

So shall you own the glory of the whole world and therefore shall all darkness flee from you.

This is the powerful strength of all strengths, for it shall vanquish anything subtle, and anything solid penetrate.

Thus is the world created.

From this shall, in the same way, wonderful adaptations be created.

Therefore have I been called thrice-great Hermes because I possess the three aspects of the Wisdom's doctrine of the whole world.

What I have said about the preparation of gold, the operation of the Spiritual Sun, is finished.

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 every-

thing else - whether positively or negatively depends on the vibration key. So every being that sends out on 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.

We are all tuned in one way or another. We are all individually determined and we all have to react when we are touched by vibrations that are linked with certain configurations of the planets 'as above, so below'. Our microcosmos is tied to the macrocosmos by thousands of threads. The most important ones for us are drawn in the horoscope. When 'above' moves, 'below' cannot fail to move too.

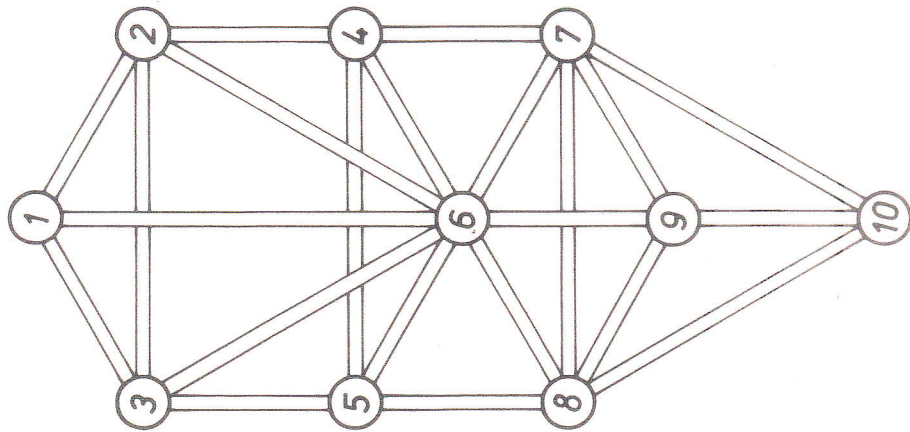
One might object that this view of the world is fatalistic, as fatalistic as you can get. Man hangs in the cosmic web of his fate and is manipulated like a puppet through the course of the stars. What about free will or the chance of it and its development? Our position would be hopeless if this was as far as the doctrine went. There is, however, more. We do also have the ability to choose. As we mature through repeated experience and gain insight in ourselves and our situation, we can place ourselves in a different relationship towards new events and emotions. The new positioning is accompanied by another tonality. We then react increasingly to other new vibrations and correspondingly less to those which earlier nourished us. This brings movement to our lives. We become new beings, new people. Our freedom lies in the choosing of our master.

This process 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 higher 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 Cabbala, the secret philosophy of the Jews. This ingenious doctrine finds perfect expression in one symbol: the Tree of Life.



One can meditate endlessly upon this symbol and constantly discover new perspectives.

So as to avoid going too deeply into this matter and to restrict myself to what is relevant to the astrological symbolism I have used, I shall simply mention the following: with each revelation, one can primarily distinguish two things, namely, a force and a form principle. A force expresses itself in a form which it has concentrated, according to its nature and meaning, from the universal primordial substance. One can therefore suppose that there are two principles present in the creation, each working upon the other: the impulse works upon the substance as an illuminant and stimulant. The substance in its turn acts as a brake upon the impulse and gives it form. At the point where force finds balance in form, consciousness arises: a being.

In the cabalistic tree of life, this is represented by three pillars. The right-hand one (pillar of force or strength) is called the pillar of mercy, of grace. The left-hand one (pillar of form) is called the pillar of severity while the middle pillar is called the pillar of generosity. This image also occurs in freemason lodges in imitation of the two pillars in front of the temple of Solomon: Jachin and Boaz. The middle pillar is omitted but is then formed by the new member being initiated into the Mysteries. He makes a synthesis of the two antitheses.

These three pillars are furnished with ten points, the sephiroth. The creative impulse descends down the levels through the sephiroth, moving from the pillar of strength to the pillar of form and back again to the pillar of strength. This influx is based in the tenth and lowest sephira, Malkuth, material nature, at the foot of the middle pillar.

Each sephira is essentially a way of being, a functional modus, and the whole structure can be visualized as a fountain whose water gradually overflows from the top basin to fill those beneath, each overflowing in turn and so representing the passing on of the strength that constantly changes its nature as it passes through the sephiroth. The structure is ex-

pressed in four ways, each one a tree of life. The four are placed above each other and overlap, the lowest sephira of the highest area Malkuth also being the highest sephira of the area lying beneath it, Kether, and so on. The highest world is called Atziluth. It is the kingdom of the Archetypes and God has immediate influence on his creation from the ten sephiroth of this area (this is analogous to the Neoplatonic first creation of the world of primordial ideas).

The second kingdom is called Briah, or the world of Creation. Here the force is transmitted through the ten archangels who inspire the sephiroth.

The third kingdom is Yetzirah: the world of Formation. Here, according to their natures, the angelic choirs or hosts influence the created beings via the sephiroth. The fourth and lowest kingdom is Assiah, the material world which is depicted by the signs of the zodiac and the seven former planets which are here called the *Mundale Chacra*. This fourth kingdom is the one we are chiefly concerned with in astrology.

In my symbolism, I have related the planets to the sephiroth 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 cabballism 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 colours, 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.

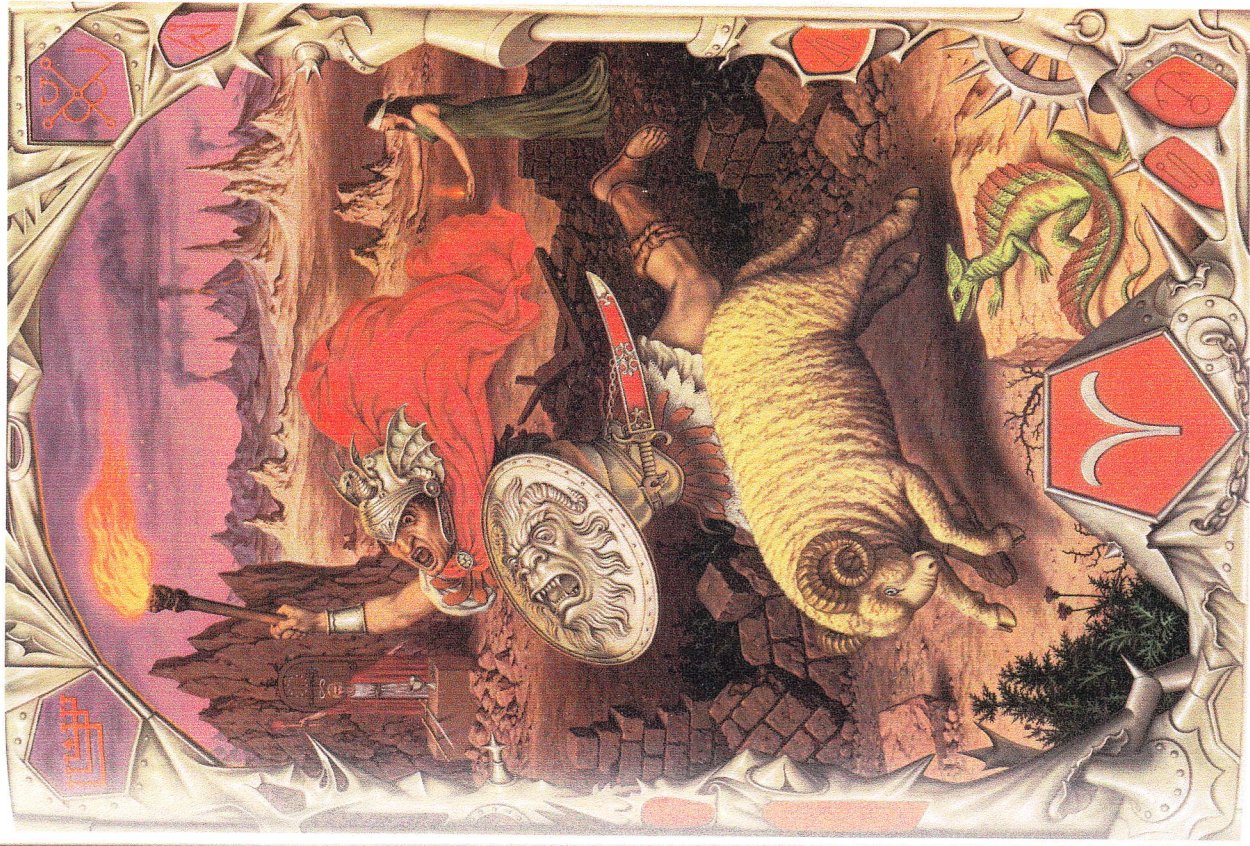
## ARIES

Aries, the Ram, is a fire sign. The sun is in Aries from 21 March to 21 April. It is ruled by Mars. It is a positive sign, fire in generation. In Aries the sun is in the beginning of spring bringing new light, new life.

I have tried to stress the fact that the development through the twelve signs starts with Aries. For this reason I have chosen to depict the primitive ram. It is of course obvious that there are also higher Ram 'natives', more mature spirits whose Aries nature is more highly evolved. Yet, with an eye to earliest beginnings, the ram is depicted here in full movement, his main characteristic. He runs blindly through everything. He is no ordinary, mindless ram though, he is the famous ram of Greek mythology whose golden fleece was conquered by the Argonauts from the fierce dragon that guarded it. Closely linked with Mars, his ruling planet, he gallops past, oblivious to his surroundings, completely closed in on himself.

The warrior is Mars, god of war. He is in full armour, and yet his sword stays sheathed. He has not come to destroy; instead, he bears a burning torch in his raised right hand. Here he is Prometheus, bearer of light. He kindles the fire of enthusiasm. The ram brings the *élan* of a new beginning. He is the pioneer. Old edifices of the established order topple down. Opening is made for fresh developments.

There has not yet been time for experience under Aries, hence the presence of the figure Avidya (ignorance) as Aries was imagined in ancient Buddhism. (1) She appears with her lamp in the background at the right, carrying it before her to light her surroundings. She can see nothing through her blindfold which represents her lack of experience of life. Nevertheless, she wears the green cloth of hope. As counterpart, the magician of the Tarot is to be seen in the left background. (2) He is a native of Aries, at a high level. Through experience, he has become the ruler controlling the four elements of creation with his Mars power, and he will use his will to work positively on them. The





elements of creation are symbolised by the magical attributes lying on the altar before him. They are the staff (3) with which he controls the elements of fire (to be compared with the world of Atziluth from the Cabala); the sword (4) which rules over the elements of light (the third world, that of Yetzirah); the goblet, (5) the element of water (the second world, Briah's), and the pentagram (6) (the fourth world of Assiah). With his right hand, he holds his staff (7) up to the heavens to attract the cosmic powers, which he directs down to the earth, his field of operation, with his left hand. (8) The never-ending circle, the lemniscate, (9) can be seen above his head. This is the sign of the eternal.

The magician stands in front of a closed door in the rocks, which bears a circle of twelve stars. (10) These signify the twelve stages of development through the signs of the zodiac that will start behind the door.

A lizard-like creature (11) sits on a stone in the foreground. It is the Basilisk, whose mere look could destroy all life. The Cabbala has this creature as symbol of Geburah, the sephira that is associated with Mars. In alchemy it corresponds to the Salamander, the inspiration (inhabitant) of the element of fire.

The entire presentation is framed by pointed iron shapes which strike through each other and which I have used to try to express the character of the powers of Mars.

At the bottom, the official Aries sign is to be seen in a regularly sided five-cornered symbol, the pentagon. (12) The pentagon refers to Mars, being associated with the fifth sephira of the cabbalistic tree of life.

The following magical signatures can also be seen in the presentation: going round the picture starting from bottom left, the signatures of the planetary archangel Samael, (13) the astrological sign of Mars, (14) the seal of the planetary spirit Pharos Phaley, (15) the sign of the planet Mars itself, (16) the sign of the planetary intelligence Graphiel (17) and three signs belonging to the planetary intelligence Barzabel. (18)



## TAURUS

Taurus, the Bull, is an earth sign. The sun is in Taurus from 20 April to 21 May. Venus is its ruling planet.

It is a negative sign, earth in generation.

When the sun stands in this house, new life emerges.

I depicted the action, *élan* and unchecked movement of the positive first sign Aries; following on from that, I now show the passivity and susceptibility typical of Taurus, the next sign. Under Taurus, substance is moulded into matter, the basis of life. I have particularly tried to stress the fertile, luxuriant nature of the sign.

Under Taurus all is harmony and peace, due to the ruling planet Venus. By falling asleep, Mars has surrendered. (1)

I have provided Taurus with two symbolical representations: one is the Egyptian Apis, and the other is Jupiter in the bull form he assumed to carry off Europa. Here Europa is another representation of Venus. She has a rich girdle around her waist (2) and holds up a burning lamp (3); these are the 'magic weapons' assigned to her in the Cabbala. She is draped in a transparent green veil to suggest the plant kingdom. I chose the bull Jupiter because the planet Jupiter also rules growth in the plant world.

Venus wears a garland of seven red roses. (4) The rose is Venus's flower, and there are seven because that is the number of Venus (Netsah) in her position as seventh sephira on the cabbalistic tree of life.

This is also why the sign of Taurus (middle bottom) is shown as a seven-pointed star, (5) forming the heart of a heraldic rose. The planet Venus, the morning star, shines over the goddess's head. (6)

Amor, or Eros, child to Venus and Mars, flies through the air leading two white doves, the birds consecrated to Venus. (7) This child is the ruler of love, being the result of a harmonious interplay between oppositely placed poles.

The second Tarot card is in the background: the



high priestess Isis who belongs to the sign of Taurus. (8) Because of her death and rebirth, she represents the veiled mystery of nature. She bears a triple crown showing the moon in her waxing, full and waning phases, growth being influenced by the moon. This also explains the crescent moon at her feet. She sits in an alcove throne; the tympanum rests on the two cabbalistic pillars: the red marble positive pillar of force or strength Jachin on the right, and the black marble negative pillar of form Boaz on the left. The tympanum balances and connects the two principles.

There is a symmetrical cross on the high priestess's breast which represents the four elements that are the basis of material revelation. The scroll on her lap, partly hidden by her clothes, is the Torah, the law, which at this stage of development cannot yet be completely penetrated.

Those born under the sign of Taurus have a special love for all earthly things. They also have a sense for harmony and beauty in nature and art.

This was the guiding principle behind the decoration of the frame which is composed of sumptuous rococo cartouches made of copper, the metal of Venus. Into this frame I worked the following magical signatures of various aspects of Venus.

Starting from the left-hand side, from top to bottom, they are: the planetary seal, (9) under that the seal of the planetary intelligence Hagiel. (10) Then comes the seal of the planetary spirit Kedemel (11) and under that the astrological signature of Venus. (12)

In the top right-hand corner is the seal of the Olympic planetary spirit Hagith. (13) Under that the godly letters of Venus, (14) and then the seal of the order of angels belonging to this planet, the Principalities, (15) and next below that the signature of Asmodel the angel of Venus and inhabitant of the house of Taurus; (16) then another signature of Asmodel, (17) this time as angel ruling over the month of May, in the same cartouche as the bottom-most signature of Anael, another ruler of May. (18)



## GEMINI

Gemini, the Twins, is a positive sign, air in generation. The sun stands in Gemini at the end of May the bloom month when new life, created in March, blossoms out. Mercury is the ruling planet.

Continuing on from the idea that Aries brings the initial power that is then given form in Taurus, I have placed the accent in the third sign on its dualism. The problem of this dualism I have taken as the main motif in my depiction of the sign. Gemini is ruled by the growing consciousness of the relationship between the self and the non-self and the interplay of opposing poles in the cosmos. The problem is how to achieve union through interchange.

Hence the symmetrical construction of the painting. All positive elements - on every level, as much macro as micro-cosmic - are on the right, and all the negative on the left. The dualism between the poles resolves itself in a bridge leading to one union. The colours were also chosen with this in mind. Red is positive, blue negative and the union between them a golden yellow (the colour of higher insight). The background is purple, a mixture of the red and the blue. The golden clouds show the element of air under which this sign falls.

The two pillars from Solomon's temple also appear in this painting. The red pillar Jachin is crowned by a budding staff, symbolizing fire; the first suit of the Tarot pack is also staffs. (1) The sun, bringer of strength and life, radiates out above it.

The left-hand, feminine, pillar Boaz, bears a silver goblet in which to receive the powers of the sun (goblets, or cups, are the symbol for water in Tarot). (2) The moon shines above it, reflecting the power of the sun. At the microcosmic level, these opposing principles are embodied in the perfect man and the perfect woman. He points to the heavens and she to the earth, so uniting their human natures ('as above, so below'). With their other hands they hold the staff of Mercury, the caduceus. This emblem of the ruling planet has



10

11

12

pride of place because of the importance of Mercury to this sign. The symbolic form of the staff encompasses the same basic idea. The polar powers are represented by the two snakes which find harmonious resolution in the golden central staff. The staff is crowned by a winged mirror because Mercury, or Hermes, rules over this intellectual faculty which is 'like a mirror that reflects all things while itself remaining clear and motionless.' (3) That is why our Mercury principle has, through our intellectual faculty, evolved to wisdom so that all opposites can harmoniously be united. Quick as thought, Hermes is the winged messenger, the mediator. He is also the Psychopompus, the Guide to Souls who accompanies the dead to the other side.

A lion and unicorn lie in the foreground, another illustration of the opposing principles. The lion embodies godly love as descending power, while the unicorn suggests the pure virginity of the receiving primordial substance. In ancient India the sign of Gemini was often presented as a lion and unicorn guarding the gate to the Holy City where the 'King of Power and Beauty' resides.

Between them, a dog-faced baboon, the cynocephalus, sits on a circle that suggests union. The baboon is used here as double symbol. In Egypt, it was the personification of Thoth, the god of wisdom and knowledge, the equivalent of the Greek Hermes and Roman Mercury. He is also represented here as the lower analytic intelligence (that apes). He is the scientific investigator, measuring the world with his dividers, a symbol used as far back as the Middle Ages for the human personality.

He sits on the sign of Gemini which is contained in a figure consisting of a positive (red) and negative (blue) square which together form an octagon: in the cabalistic tree of life, Mercury is assigned to Hod, the eighth sephira, so his number is eight. (4)

Two Tarot cards are seen, one for each pillar, that are usually associated with the sign of Gemini. On the right is the Fool, the nil card of the greater arcana. A young soul joyfully and unsuspectingly sets out along

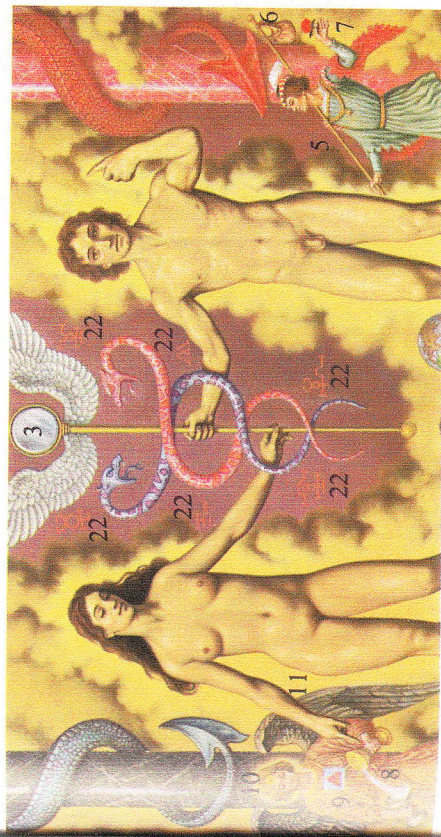
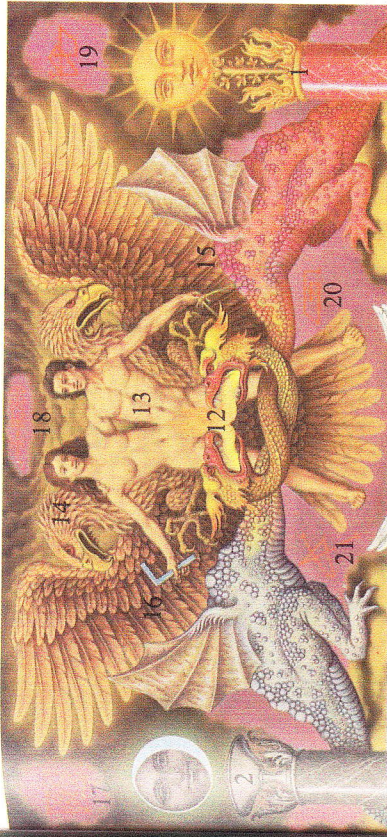


his path of life through the incarnation. The travelling staff is his will. (5) The knapsack hanging from it (6) is to contain the experiences he collects in life. He is richly clothed and full of good cheer. The rose in his hand (7) represents his eternal spark of divine inspiration. He stands for the first task, and now will have to choose with care in his confrontation with dualism.

'Temperance' is at the foot of the left pillar. She is the mature soul who has learned the lessons of this sign and she pours a suitable proportion of the strength or power of the sun into the moon goblet. (8) There is an emblem on her breast, a red triangle in a blue square, which represents the polar powers joined in harmony. (9) The golden sun, symbol of higher knowledge, radiates out from her forehead. (10) She has wings to show that she has been raised above earthly things. (11) She is the Sophia, Divine Wisdom. This Sophia refers to the resolution of dualism which takes up all the upper part of the painting where I have followed one of the essentials of alchemy: 'the conjunction of opposites.' The pillars finish in two alchemical dragons which represent the various cosmic principles of polarized power. They retain their respective colours up to the point where their necks entwine, when an intense exchange of powers takes place in which both red and blue become a radiant golden yellow (the colour of insight, the higher Mercury). (12) The Androgynous, the mythical dual being, in which the masculine and feminine merge to form a perfect human, rises from the fire like a phoenix. (13)

This resolution of all human dualism is the deepest mystery and highest goal of alchemy. The Androgynous is also represented as a double-headed eagle (a heraldic symbol). (14) Masonic symbols have been used to show that the actions of the perfect human being encompass both of its poles: dividers for the aspect of strength (15) and the carpenter's square for the aspect of form. (16)

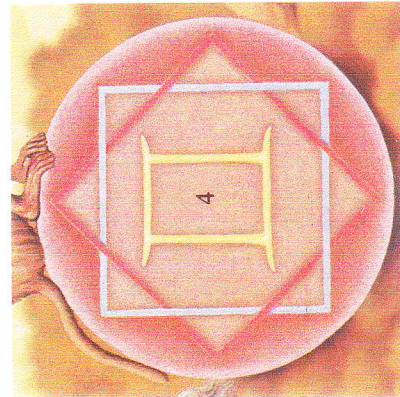
Now on to the magical seals taken from the hierarchy of angels and other astral beings that fall under Mercury.



Starting at the top of the frame, going from left to right, they are: the planetary seal of the angel Ophiel; (17) centre top, the signature of the archangel of Mercury, Raphael, (18) and, next to that, the seal of the Olympic planetary spirits of Mercury. (19)

Just under the red dragon's belly can be seen the seal of the planetary spirits that are subordinate to the angel Ophiel (20) and under the blue dragon's belly the signature of the planetary intelligence Tiriël. (21)

Since Mercury represents thought, a neutral faculty that is used in everything, one can talk of a higher and a lower Mercury. Thus in ancient times, Mercury was considered the god of wisdom and knowledge every bit as much as the god of merchants, liars and thieves. (Mercury stole Apollo's bullocks.) One of the most important processes in the Great Work of alchemy, the sublimation of quicksilver or mercury, represents the process of ennoblement of thought. The result was known as *Mercurius Sublimatus* in alchemy and is referred to in various secret signs; six of these I have drawn on either side of the central staff of Mercury. (22)



## CANCER

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 commonly illustrated, the rather large crab but the small hermit crab whose behaviour 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 and quickly rehuses itself. From this secure position, the creature lies in wait for its prey which it grabs quickly with its large claws and pulls in to its house to polish off at leisure.

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

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 armour 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 Chinese, 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 re-created 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 behaviour. 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 downwards: 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 egocentricism 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 forefront 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 (left). (3)

The regality of this sign is brought out in the luxuriant landscape with its majestic palms, erect cypresses, sunflowers 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: (4) the birth of the self-sacrificing Sun

God. There is a widespread 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's case, he is betrayed by Judas, killed on the cross (the four-fold 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.

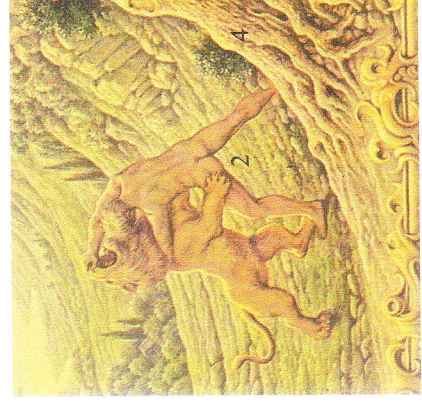
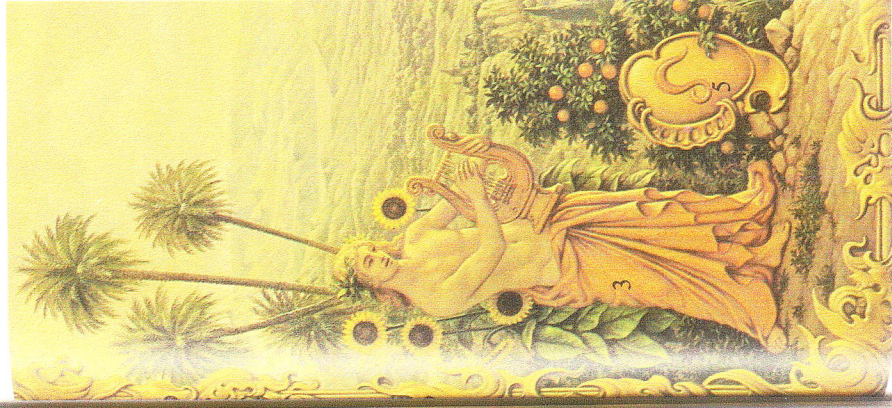
The sun also occupies a central place on the middle pillar of the cabbalistic tree of life. It is Tiphereth, the sixth sephira, also known as the 'Sun fire' or the 'Son of the All-Father' (Kether, the first sephira which stands directly above Tiphereth). The spiritual function of the intermediary is 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. 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 contains (middle) the seal of the Olympic spirits who control the domain of the sun, (7) (top) the sign of the gnostic spirit Sorath (8) and (bottom) the sign of the planetary intelligence Nakhiel. (9)

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



## VIRGO

Virgo, the Virgin, is a negative sign, earth in being. The sun is in Virgo at the end of August, the harvest month when the ripe corn is harvested. The planet Mercury is its ruler.

In the first six signs the self is central to the development of the personality. This stage ends with Virgo. Everything here is broken down as finely as possible (1) and this great mass is now regulated by man. This is the stage when details are examined. Matter is characterized by the fact that it can be split up into atoms. Because of this Virgo represents material nature in the form of the Fertile Mother. She is the Greek Demeter with the ear of corn, (2) the Roman Ceres, the Egyptian Isis with her green veil of growth, (3) and Maria, the bridge of the heavens and mediator, the world soul or *Amina mundi*. In the Egyptian 'Book of the Dead' the sign of Virgo is also represented as the 'gateway to the kingdom of Osiris.' (4) From a macrocosmic point of view, she is the universal primordial substance from which the material cosmos is condensed. (5) That is why I have added four cherubim to the frame, those from the vision of Ezekiel; they represent the four Evangelists as well as the four elements. The angel in the top left-hand corner represents John the Evangelist (the water element). (6) The eagle at the top right (the elevated scorpion of astrology) is Matthew and the element of air. (7) The lion is Mark (fire). (8) The ox is Luke (earth). (9)

The life that inspires matter – fertility, in other words – is symbolized by the transparent egg with its burning flame that the virgin holds in her hand. (10) The virgin wears a garland of corn and cornflowers. (11) The accent here is on grain, bread, symbol of the 'Heavenly Manna'. Her white wings bear witness to her state of chastity (birds are an ancient symbol of the soul). (12) A pentagram, the sign of the fivefold person (the five senses) glows above her head. (13)

All other symbols in this painting are determined by the ruler of the sign, Mercury. Hermes or Mercury,



in his Graeco-Roman form, is shown on the left. He tries to encompass the universe – in the background – with his intellect. (14) In his Egyptian form as Thoth, the scribe to the gods, he is to be seen on the right in the shape of the *cynocephalus hamadryas*, the Abyssinian baboon. (15) As Thoth, he is, above all, the judge of souls. He sits at the gate of Osiris through which the dead must go to reach the fields of Aalu (the name given by the Egyptians to the kingdom on the 'other side'). Thoth weighs every soul in his scales. The heart of the dead one is placed on one scale and the feather of *ma'at* (measure) in the other. The feather represents universal order and measurement of all things (Truth). (16) The two snakes from Mercury's staff are brought in too as astral factors. (17)

The bottom corners of the painting are taken up by aspects of Mercury. To the right is wisdom, represented in Egypt as the holy Ibis. (18) In front of that, to represent Jewish tradition, is a cabalistic book, opened to show the drawing of the tree of life. (19) Pythagoras's proposition is shown on the papyrus roll (20) to represent the Greek doctrine of the universe, and the closed book *M (materia mater)* refers to the most sacred text of the ancient Rosicrucians that contained their universal knowledge. (21) A bringing together thus of three important traditions of wisdom.

In the bottom left-hand corner symbols are shown that refer to another function of Mercury, that of *Transmutator*: the leader of the dead to paradise, the Psychopompus. In Egypt, this function of his is illustrated in the form of a jackal, an animal that frequents burial grounds. (22) If one takes this up in the alchemical sense, it means that if an initiate into the Mysteries manages to shake off his human existence through death, he will be resurrected as a new and eternal being. Hermes-Thoth plays the most important role in this transmutation. He is the embalmer who renders the body eternal. He is the thought that, transmuted as *Mercurius sublimatus*, leads to a new universal consciousness. This is a process of distillation (23) and takes place in Athanor, the alchemical furnace, (24)

where the new human being is formed.

Now come the magical seals and signatures. The astrological symbol of Virgo is below the Virgin's foot, contained in an eight-pointed star; this is because Mercury the ruler is associated with Hod, the eighth sephira on the tree of life. (25) Top left, behind Mercury's left foot, is his planetary sign. (26) Above his head is the seal of his Olympic planetary spirit Ophiël. (27) Top centre is the signature assigned to the archangel Michael under which Mercury comes. (28) To the right is the sign of the spirit Taph Thar Tharath; (29) right below the baboon is the sign of the planetary intelligence Tiriël. (30) The planetary seal of Mercury is shown on the shield in Thoth's hand. (31) Both signs below that are alchemical symbols for *Mercurius sublimatus*, the noble quicksilver. (32)



## LIBRA

Libra, the Scales, is a positive sign, air in being. The sun stands in this house at the beginning of autumn as it passes the equator to commence the winter. The ruling planet is Venus.

The special characteristics of this sign are balance and harmony. That is why the composition of the painting, like that of Gemini, has been kept symmetrical. In Libra, the accent is on the soul. In the six former signs the emphasis was placed on the evolving self; the non-self is central to the way experience is gained through the following six signs.

Venus, goddess of love, harmony and beauty, rules here. The point of Libra is, above all, the balance between head and heart, intelligence and feeling. To the symbolism surrounding this sign I have added Mercury, ruler of knowledge, in his Egyptian form of Thoth (1) and, correspondingly, the goddess Venus in her Egyptian form as Hathor, goddess of festivity and love, with her cow's ears and horns. (2) Both figures keep the scales in balance. In one scale lies a heart, in its Egyptian symbolic form of an urn. (3) The feather of *ma'at* is in the other. (4) Here again we have the judgement of souls, clearly linked though with loving wisdom.

Mercury is placed to the left and Venus to the right of the scales in accordance with the Cabbala where Hod, the sephira that rules over man's intellect, is at the bottom of the left tree of the pillar of life (the pillar of severity) with Netsah, feeling, standing opposite at the bottom of the right-hand pillar, that of mercy. In this way perfect balance is again expressed between reason and emotion. Both have absolute need of each other. Reason without emotion is sterile and deadly. Emotion without correcting reason is no more than sentimentality and creates chaos. Each is dangerous without the presence of the opposite pole.

Netsah is the seventh sephira. That is why there is a seven-pointed star between Hathor's horns. (5) Under this is the astrological sign of Venus. (6) Hathor

