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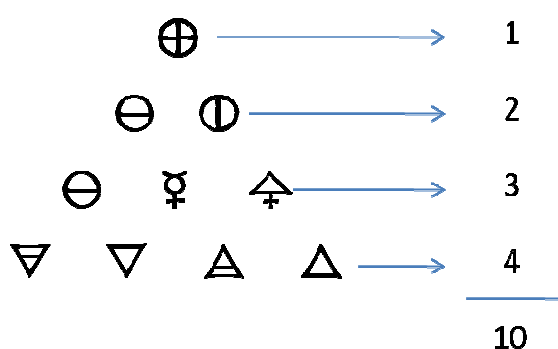
TRIPLE SYMBOLISM OF THE ALCHEMIC ELEMENTS IN ASTROLOGY

Very Respected Assembly of Brethren,

The following does not pretend to be dogmatic information at all. It is, simply, the fruit of some personal reflections regarding a possible relationship between the zodiacal archetypes and the symbolism of the four elements and the three hermetic principles. I necessarily leave, for a future occasion, the completion of these thoughts by comparing the aforementioned with the activity of nature in the corresponding zodiacal periods. Thus, by studying this one from an alchemic and a hermetic view rather than a divinatory one, an approaching to the understanding of the astrological model is aroused.

It does not seem possible for me to begin this statement without reminding that the paradigm of the knowledge of the ancient world was based on the number ten (10).

According to the alchemic Cosmogony, from the chaotic, primitive and withdrawn in itself (1) state of the matter or Hyle ($\oplus$), appears a first distinction, thus creating a dual universe or, better said, a polar one, manifested by two (2) great energetic streams: the Nitrum ($\textcircled{1}$), of masculine, electrical, active and immaterial nature and the Natrum ($\ominus$), of feminine, magnetic and passive nature and generative of the material level. So, for the medieval alchemists, the matter would have three (3) Principles: Sulphur ($\textcircled{\text{S}}$), that is to say the particular consciousness that each thing has of itself and that makes it different from all the others, this means, the principle that identifies it; Mercury ($\textcircled{\text{M}}$), it means, the force field or vital body where that creature evolves through mechanisms of relationship and adaptation; and Salt ($\ominus$), principle that shapes, embodies and gives material consistency to the existing things. The same matter manifests itself in four (4) states: solid, related to the symbolism of the element Earth (∇), liquid, related to the element Water (∇), gaseous, typically bound to the Air ($\triangle$) and, finally the radiant state, which corresponds with the element Fire ($\triangle$).



According to the traditional knowledge, from the addition of the ternary (3) and the quaternary (4), arises the number seven (7), represented by seven creative forces, symbolized by seven days in the Creation, by seven rainbow-colour rays, by seven aspects or expressions of the soul that, in the case of the human beings, must cognitively integrate themselves in their highest dimension throughout existence and, finally, so I do not go on further, in the alchemic simbology, through the metallic

manifestation of seven universal essences that must be purified until they are freed of those residual aspects fruit of the operations of differentiation suffered after their emanation and distance from the original unity.

However, continuing with the same model of traditional thinking, from the multiplication of three (3) by four (4), arises twelve (12). This number has been commonly used by the different cultures in order to attract attention to its importance: twelve tribes in Israel, twelve apostles and, closer to the subject under review, in the astrological field both in the Ancient Egypt and in India, in China, in Meso and South America and, in a closer way, in the Greco-Roman civilization with the twelve signs of the zodiac.

The alchemist, according to the cosmogony mentioned before, finds out that the matter manifests itself in four states, represented by the classical ELEMENTS. Each one of them has three expressions:

1. Its more **essential**, nascent, emerging aspect, in connection with the Principle of identity or alchemical Sulphur: the creation of the element.
2. Its development, its **highest expression**, stable, in connection with the formative, with the Salt of the alchemists: the summit and durability of the element, and
3. Finally, the **final cycle** of each element, its transformation and end, **that gives birth to the next one**, in connection with the adaptive aspects and, therefore, with the hermetic Mercury.

Considering that the element Fire is the origin of creation, whether is seen as a spark or as a huge explosion consequently, the element Earth remains as a residue. This last develops itself by finally generating the element Air, which also expands and develops, generating in turn the element Water. So the elements follow a defined pattern of origin, of manifestation and of transition from one to another, in a sequential way.

Continuing this idea, the **essential** part of the element Fire is the nascent, emerging Fire: the SPARK mentioned before. A spark comes out of nowhere, with spontaneity, abruptness and violence. It is the seed of the element Fire. However, it does not still have its complete power. It produces an answer and induces to movement. A spark is bound with explosion, reactivity and dynamism. It is the Fire of **Aries**.

The spark, when it finds combustible material, evolves to its **highest expression**: the maximum Fire, BONFIRE. It is the Fire in contact with the Air. This is a Fire that consumes the matter, transforming it into heat, brightness and light. It resembles the Sun when it is in its splendour. It is the Fire of **Leo**.

The **end of the cycle** of Fire occurs when the bonfire transforms itself in EMBERS, giving rise to the ashes, that is to say, giving birth to another element. This is a Fire in contact with the Earth. The Fire remains in the embers radiating heat and it can both stir up again if it is fed with air, or accelerate the transformation of the Fire into Earth (ashes). The Fire of the embers represents the magma, the Fire in the matter, in the Earth, which represents the permanence of the subtlest in the thickest, producing a slow transformation and a constant radiation. It is the Fire of **Sagittarius**.

The previous cycle of emerging Fire or SPARK that gives rise to a stable Fire or BONFIRE and that ends with the Fire of EMBERS, is finished with the generation of another element: Earth.

The **essential** parts of this new emerging element are the ASHES, SALTS AND CRYSTALS. After a combustion, the organic material returns to its inorganic origins, which create the mineral crystals, of defined and measurable lines and angles. All of it is related with values such as hardness, consistency, permanence and firmness. It is the Earth of **Capricorn**.

The Earth, following the aforesaid model, tends to its **highest expression** through chemical reactions between inorganic bodies, generating the Earth that can be fertilized. The Earth produces organic life when it is impregnated by the Water, giving birth to the vegetables and the vegetative life that is sustained in the matter emerged from the Earth. All this suggests absorption and fertility. It is the Earth of **Taurus**.

The **final** state of the Earth after the last harvest, after having faded away giving fruits of all kinds, is the FALLOW, in which the Earth is stratified, exhausted. When the Earth has already given all its vegetable fruits and seeds, its mineral nutrients get weakened; it dries out, cracks, splits and stratifies, providing an image of inertia and aridity. It is like the Earth punished by the Fire. It is the Earth of **Virgo**.

From the vegetable metabolism arises a new element, essential for the animal life: the Air.

The **essential** from the element Air has been born: the oxygen, the STRENGTH OF LIFE. It is the emerging air. The oxygen that arises from the vegetable metabolism makes the Air the support of the vital force that *animates* animal life and thus the so-called *animic* functions. The softness of the nascent breeze is the image of harmony, fluidity, lightness, balance and proportion. It is the Air of **Libra**.

The Air, like the previous elements, tends to its **highest expression**: the expanding WIND. It is an Air mobilized by the action of the difference of temperatures, Air in contact with Fire. When the Air expands, it cleans and unifies all that it includes. The Air purifies itself this way, thanks to the igneous action that it receives from its contact with the solar fire and communicates it to the aerobic creatures. It is the air of **Aquarius**.

The **end** of the air cycle results in the formation of the STORM. The extreme, variable and in full dispersion movement of the gaseous elements that are found in the Air gives birth to the element Water. Furthermore, the Air, when it mobilizes the Water, oxygenates and vivifies it. It is the Air of **Gemini**.

This way, a new element has been created, the Water in its essential, emerging state.

The **essential** of the element Water is found in rain water. Storms usually create a rain that, by being born, refreshes the air and thus prompts to seek refuge. This water is collected by the solid elements, to which it moulds. It is the Water of **Cancer**.

The Water, being dispersed in the shape of rain, by falling to the ground, unifies and acquires its **highest expression** by coming into contact with the Earth, where it forms rivers, torrents and bogs. The Water, by falling to the earth, impregnates it with its seed of life. It can be observed that the Water, when it comes into contact with the Earth, gets contaminated and ferments whereas the Earth, on the contrary, revitalizes and is fertilized. The Water falling to the earth offers an image of

penetration, fermentation, dissolution, fertilization, putrefaction and death. It is the Water of **Scorpio**.

Thus, one gets to the **end of the cycle** of this last element with the return of the waters, collected in the shape of rivers, to the immense OCEAN. The water, by flowing into its origin, provides mineral elements that are used as nutrients for all the subaquatic life, from which air creatures will be created in its next evolutionary step, starting a new cycle. It is the image of recollection, extension and multiplicity. It is the Water of **Pisces**.

With the previous statement I have pretended to reflect that a large portion of the archetypical content of the meaning of each one of the zodiacal signs comes from the observation of what I have called the *cycle of the elements*. This one, as we have seen, consists on observing the following sequence:

Fire – Earth – Air –Water

I have also wanted to reflect that each one of this four elements can be studied according to three different states: the one of its origin, which I have called **essential** aspect of the element; the one of its **highest expression** and development and, finally, that **end of the cycle** of the element where it coexists with the new one, according to the aforementioned sequence and that is generated by it.

In order to deal in a more complete way with the symbolism of the zodiacal archetypes, it lacks the regard of the polar aspect of each sign, the one of the septenary force that animates it and, finally, the one of the image of the behaviour of the vegetable and animal kingdoms within nature, as well as the meteorological determinant that precisely generates such a behaviour.

I beg benevolence, Dear Brethren, for the consideration of this little draft that does not pretend to be anything but a simple starting point in the observation of our nature. I also apologize for the extremely synthetic character of a statement that, because of its complex content, should be the object of a large essay.

Yours sincerely and fraternally,

