



## The Pentagram as Symbol of the Perfect Man

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*'Five for the symbols at my door.'*<sup>1</sup>

*'The Twelve Apostles'* (Dorsetshire folk-song.)

Amongst the schools of Hermetism operative in Europe during the High Middle Ages the pre-eminent symbol of Man, the microcosm in his primordial estate as *Pan-Anthropos* or *Insan al-Qadim* (Adam Qadmon), was the 'pentangle' or pentagram: likewise in *Tasawwuf* this symbol recurs for example at the centre of the 18-angled '*gul*' or emblematic 'rose' of the Qadiriyya Tariqah which is composed of a pentagram (within a geometric pattern formed of 6 interlocking triangles: the numbers 5 corresponding to the macrocosm and 6 with the macrocosm) – the pentagram according to Sufic doctrines symbolises man the microcosm – more exactly it embodies the Perfect Man (*Insan al-Kamil*) existent at the Centre, the being in whom the fullness of the possibilities emanating from the Divine Principle, the archetypal Qualities of God, are realised in the equilibrial 'totalisation' of their harmonic plenitude. Thus we see revealed the symbolic meaning of the human form within the pentagram, the '*figure of the Blazing Star, which is a symbol of Man, and more precisely of "regenerate man"*.' (René Guénon: 'The Great Triad', ch. 15, pp.95, Hillsdale NY 2001)

The co-identity existing between this five-pointed symbol and the five wounds of Christ emphasizes the sacerdotal function and regal office of the Universal Man as mediator between Heaven and Earth, just as in Jesus, the Messiah, the divine and human natures coincide, this sacrificial mystery of mediation revealing the essence of the Christic mystery. In the 14th

<sup>1</sup> A reference to the use of the pentagram in apotropaic folk-customs: '*the pentacle or pentagram, the five pointed star drawn with one line... (is) very commonly inscribed on the threshold to keep away the evil one.*' (Lucy Broadwood & E. Fuller Maitland: 'English County Songs' London 1893.) Strictly speaking this relates to the contingent application of traditional sciences at the cosmological level of the intermediate or subtle domain, pertaining to the employment of 'knots' and 'points' in the phases of 'coagulation' and 'solution' – cf. the Middle English name for the pentagram as the 'Endless Knot' and the creation of this symbol in the interlocked blades of sword-dancers in rural England is also termed a 'knot'. René Guénon refers, in this respect, to '*the magical use of knots, which has its counterpart in the usage of the points in the "dissolution" process.*' C.f. 'The Great Triad', ch.6, note 13.

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century poem 'Gawain & The Green Knight', the golden pentangle<sup>2</sup> upon the green ground of the hero's shield represents the characteristically *Kshatriya* refraction (via the initiatory way of *Amour Courtois*) of the 'holy truth', the five angles representing qualities<sup>3</sup> required for the attainment of the term of the Lesser Mysteries whose goal and end is conquest of the central 'Holy Land' identified with the Terrestrial Paradise. The pentagram at the same time can represent the 'transcendent man' realised within the term of the Greater Mysteries, the unconditioned state correlating with the Heavenly Paradise.<sup>4</sup>

This traditional symbol, transmitted via the Pythagorean-Platonic doctrine (the transmission of the Tradition which is ultimately to be traced back to the polar Hyperborean paradise of the primordial epoch) preserved within the medieval sphere both in Christendom and within Islam, the Primordial doctrine which finds expression in the schools of Hermetism, notwithstanding the abusive deterioration of traditional sciences in the inferior domain of magical arts and despite such residues having by later eras in the Western world becoming completely falsified, corrupted and obscured within the sinister morass of occultism via baleful influences emerging and predominating after the close of the Middle Ages.<sup>5</sup> From the viewpoint of the metaphysical symbolism of Tradition the pentagram is to be interpreted within the integrally theocentric and theomorphic perspective, in realisation of the archetype of the divine human or 'Universal Man', the mediator between the poles of Essence and Substance, of Spirit and Matter. So we see that René Guénon asserts concerning the 'star of five points' that '*...5 is the number of the "microcosm"; this correlation is moreover expressed in cases where the star contains the actual figure of a man (the head, the arms, and the legs being identified with its 5 points), as seen in Agrippa's pentagram.*' ('The Great Triad', ch. 15, note 4.)

The Sufic symbolism of the pentagram is traditionally linked with the Quranic verse '*Hold fast...to the bond with Allah and do not be disunited.*' (Al-Imran 3: 102-3), just as in 'Sir Gawain & The Green Knight' it is said '*... the English call it, in all the land, I hear, the Endless Knot,*' resuming the significance of the pentagram as a 'vinculum', enlinkment or bond<sup>6</sup> which pertains

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<sup>2</sup> The poet of 'Gawain & the Green Knight' declares that '*...the Pentangle...is a symbol which Solomon conceived once to betoken holy truth, by its intrinsic right, for it is a figure which has five points, and each line overlaps and is locked with another...*' ('Sir Gawain & The Green Knight', trans. B. Stone, Middlesex 1959). The poet of 'Gawain' goes on to equate the five points of the pentagram with the five wounds of Christ upon the cross in whom the hero puts his trust and the five joys 'that the Holy Queen of Heaven had of her Child' which are Annunciation, Nativity, Resurrection, Ascension, Assumption.

<sup>3</sup> (i) *fraunchise* – generosity, magnanimity; (ii) *felaschyp* – fellowship, loving-kindness; (iii) *clannes* – cleanness, purity; (iv) *cortaysye* – courtesy (equating with the Sufic concept of *adab*); (v) *pite* – compassion. These constitute initiatic qualifications within the chivalric mysteries, the regal way or *via amoris* of the Lesser Mysteries equating with the *Kshatriya* initiation or *Vira-marga* in Sanatana Dharma. Within the Craft-associations and artisanal Guilds of the Middle Ages the 'five points of fellowship' are to be found which survived in the initiatory ritual of 17<sup>th</sup> century Freemasonry: '*How many points of the fellowship are ther? Ans: five, viz. foot to foot, Knee to Kn(ee), Heart to Heart, Hand to Hand, and ear to ear.*'

<sup>4</sup> Insofar as the 'true man' represents the visible 'trace' of or 'substitute' for the 'transcendent man' upon the horizontal plane of manifestation, the centre-point which signifies the axis from whence irradiates the 'Action of Presence'.

<sup>5</sup> Most especially the debasing effects of Renaissance humanism, which gave rise to fatal deviations laying the ground for the secular-rationalistic atheism of the 'Enlightenment'; this fundamentally 'luciferian' and hubristic 'humanism' is one of the shadowy tap-roots of modernity.

<sup>6</sup> Concerning the 'conjunctive' number 5 Agrippa Von Nettesheim says that '*it is a bond that binds all things*' (De Occulta Philosophia, Bk II, ch. viii '*Of the number five, and the scale thereof.*')

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to the mediatorial office of ‘primordial man’ as Pontifex – in the epic ‘Shahnameh’, the 10<sup>th</sup> century Persian poet Ferdowsi articulates the traditional position when he says that man was created ‘*to become the key to all these close-linked things...You were produced out of two worlds and nurtured in some respects to be a go-between.*’ Hence we encounter in the emblematic language of Freemasonry the pentagram and furthermore René Guénon instructs us concerning ‘*the symbolism of the Blazing Star as a symbol of regenerated Man residing in the “Middle”...*’ (The Great Triad, ch.16, n. 19).

However, in keeping with the conditions of cyclical decadence predominating during the present era the subversion or inversion of traditional symbols, which René Guénon considered in the context of tendencies manifesting the influence of the Counter-Initiation, are all too visible in the abuse of the pentagram within pseudo-esoteric subcultures of occultism where it becomes a focus of sinister and tenebrous forces, agencies of the Adversary. The inversion of the pentagram subverts an image of ‘primordial man’ to depict instead the fallen man, expelled from the Centre, in centrifugal exile from the ‘Heart of the World’, after expulsion from the Terrestrial Paradise which was his true estate – thus turned upside-down, inverted in comparison with the normal state of the being, the symbol of the pentagram then conveys a depiction of the Fall of man and his corrupted and degenerated condition, as also of the fall of Lucifer and the rebel angels from Heaven. As Jallaludin Rumi says: ‘*When the nature of Harut and Marut was changed, they fell from the height into the pit at Babylon, where they remained shackled head-first*’.

The upside-down (Gk. *anatrope*) condition of the primordial man, *Insan al-Qadim*, after the Fall is alluded to in the *Timaeus* of Plato where the heavenly *Anthropos*, descending into time and matter, from the domain of Being into that of ‘becoming’, descends headlong into the world of generation and mortality and becomes enmeshed in forgetfulness of his true nature and estate; henceforth fallen man is ‘*...upside down, as you might imagine a person who is upside down and has his head leaning upon the ground and his feet up against something in the air: and when he is in such a position, both he and the spectator fancy that the right of either is his left right...in a manner the very opposite of the truth; and they become false and foolish, and there is no course or revolution in them which has a guiding or directing power.*’

In the Hermetic text ‘Poimandres’ we also find an imagery of headlong descent occurring at man’s fall from his original spiritual station and in the apocryphal ‘Acts of Peter’ the saint is martyred upside down in an inverted position to signify the veritably ‘anotropic’ condition of the fallen man, exiled from his original estate who ‘*...falling head downward showed a manner of birth which did not formerly exist...suspended after the manner of his calling, whereby he showed the right as the left and the left as the right and changed all signs of nature, to behold the ugly as the beautiful and the really evil as good.*’ This describes the distorted, falsified perception of fallen man, so evident in our own days at the terminal phase of the Kaliyuga. St Peter exhorts us to *metanoia* and spiritual regeneration, disclosing that ‘*...the manner of my suspension is symbolic of that man who was first made. You, my beloved, who now hear...must renounce the first error and turn again*’.

The inversion of the pentagram representing primordial man is also intimated within Islamic tradition in the account of the fallen angels Harut and Marut (whose deviation and egoistic rebellion against the sacred order is reflected in the Kshatriya revolt against the Brahminic spiritual authority on the societal plane defined within *Varna Ashrama Dharma*, the dislocation and reversal of the normal disposition between Knowledge and Action which inevitably gives rise to error, heterodoxy and delusion.) As Jalalludin Rumi expounds in the ‘Mathnavi’ the

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upside-down suspension of the fallen angels in the well-pit at Babylon signifies man's fallen state in which *'the intellect and spirit are imprisoned in clay, like Harut and Marut in the pit of Babylon.'* Precipitated into the material realm of 'clay and water' man is immersed in heedlessness, illusion and amnesia. In Jewish tradition the fallen angel Shemyaza is likewise conceived as suspended upside-down in the stars of Orion, a constellation which in Arab lore is associated with Nimrod the mighty hunter, another figure who is the epitome of deviated titanic hubris, 'gigantism' and the 'luciferian' tendency of the revolted Kshatriya (which eventually paves the way for actual 'satanism' and demonic dissolution). These considerations underline why we should not be overly surprised to see the widespread inversion and profanation of the traditional symbol of the pentagram under such abnormal conditions as those prevailing at the present day, an epoch when man is truly plunged downward into the inferior psychic and material realms, toward the infra-human in an inexorable decline, the fatal consequence of man's total revolt against the hierarchic spiritual order emanating from, and depending timelessly upon, the Divine Principle.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> As Count Joseph de Maistre lamented concerning fallen man, and specifically the degraded beings of the latter days: *'The world...always holds an innumerable host of men so perverse, so profoundly corrupted, that, if they have been allowed to doubt certain things, they will also take the opportunity to redouble their wickedness and make themselves, so to speak, as guilty as the rebel angels.'* ('The Generative Principle of Political Constitutions', ch. LXVII, in 'The Works of Joseph de Maistre' edited and translated by Jack Lively, London 1965).