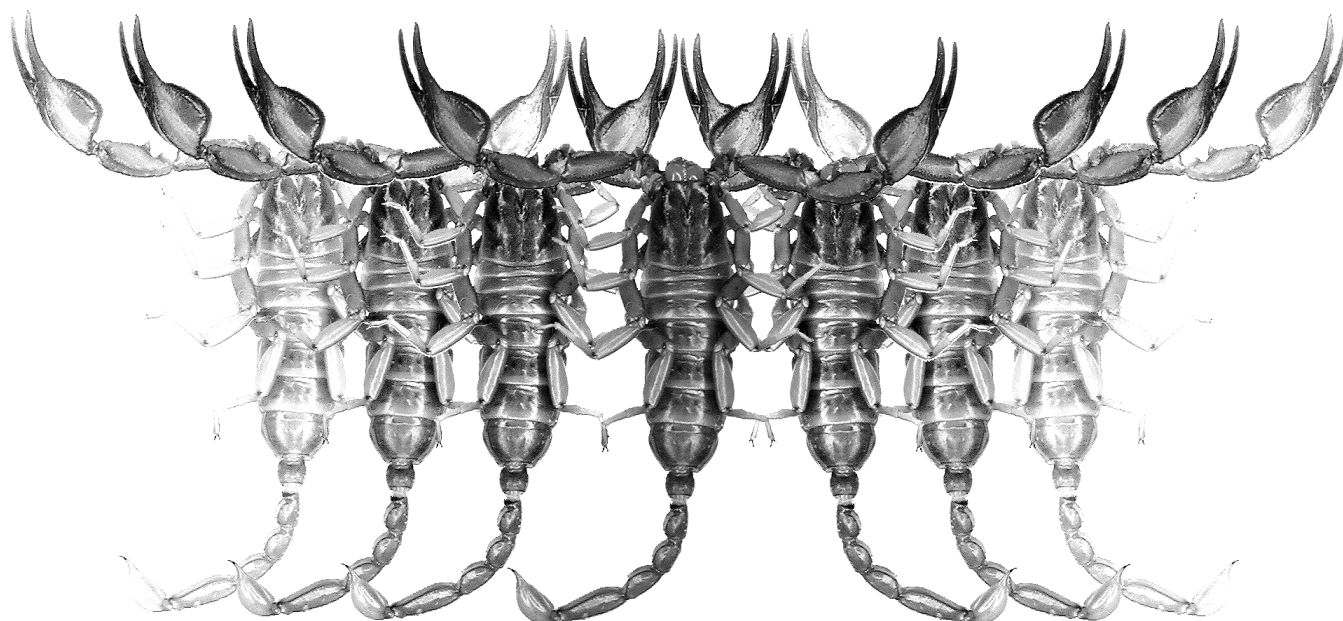


Euscorpius

Occasional Publications in Scorpiology



Scorpions 2011

John L. Cloudsley-Thompson 90th Birthday Commemorative Volume

**Scorpions in the Modern Cuban Culture:
An Introductory Iconography**

Luis F. de Armas

August 2011 – No. 116

Euscorpius

Occasional Publications in Scorpiology

EDITOR: Victor Fet, Marshall University, ‘fet@marshall.edu’

ASSOCIATE EDITOR: Michael E. Soleglad, ‘soleglad@la.znet.com’

Euscorpius is the first research publication completely devoted to scorpions (Arachnida: Scorpiones). *Euscorpius* takes advantage of the rapidly evolving medium of quick online publication, at the same time maintaining high research standards for the burgeoning field of scorpion science (scorpiology). *Euscorpius* is an expedient and viable medium for the publication of serious papers in scorpiology, including (but not limited to): systematics, evolution, ecology, biogeography, and general biology of scorpions. Review papers, descriptions of new taxa, faunistic surveys, lists of museum collections, and book reviews are welcome.

Derivatio Nominis

The name *Euscorpius* Thorell, 1876 refers to the most common genus of scorpions in the Mediterranean region and southern Europe (family Euscorpiidae).

Euscorpius is located on Website ‘<http://www.science.marshall.edu/fet/euscorpius/>’ at Marshall University, Huntington, WV 25755-2510, USA.

The International Code of Zoological Nomenclature (ICZN, 4th Edition, 1999) does not accept online texts as published work (Article 9.8); however, it accepts CD-ROM publications (Article 8). *Euscorpius* is produced in two *identical* versions: online (ISSN 1536-9307) and CD-ROM (ISSN 1536-9293). Only copies distributed on a CD-ROM from *Euscorpius* are considered published work in compliance with the ICZN, i.e. for the purposes of new names and new nomenclatural acts. All *Euscorpius* publications are distributed on a CD-ROM medium to the following museums/libraries:

- **ZR**, Zoological Record, York, UK
- **LC**, Library of Congress, Washington, DC, USA
- **USNM**, United States National Museum of Natural History (Smithsonian Institution), Washington, DC, USA
- **AMNH**, American Museum of Natural History, New York, USA
- **CAS**, California Academy of Sciences, San Francisco, USA
- **FMNH**, Field Museum of Natural History, Chicago, USA
- **MCZ**, Museum of Comparative Zoology, Cambridge, Massachusetts, USA
- **MNHN**, Museum National d’Histoire Naturelle, Paris, France
- **NMW**, Naturhistorisches Museum Wien, Vienna, Austria
- **BMNH**, British Museum of Natural History, London, England, UK
- **MZUC**, Museo Zoologico “La Specola” dell’Universita de Firenze, Florence, Italy
- **ZISP**, Zoological Institute, Russian Academy of Sciences, St. Petersburg, Russia
- **WAM**, Western Australian Museum, Perth, Australia
- **NTNU**, Norwegian University of Science and Technology, Trondheim, Norway
- **OUMNH**, Oxford University Museum of Natural History, Oxford, UK
- **NEV**, Library Netherlands Entomological Society, Amsterdam, Netherlands

Publication date: 7 August 2011

Scorpions in the modern Cuban culture: An introductory iconography

Luis F. de Armas

P. O. Box 4327, San Antonio de los Baños, Artemisa 32500, Cuba.

Summary

Some graphic examples of the role of scorpions in the present-day culture of Cuba are presented. They include tattoos, jewels, carpets, caps, and drawings by children, among other objects of personal or social usage. Increased use of this arachnid as a cultural element among Cuban people during last 50 years seems to be directly related with globalization, mostly through the TV and movies.

Los escorpiones en la cultura cubana moderna. Iconografía preliminar

Resumen:

Se presenta una pequeña muestra gráfica del papel del escorpión en la cultura contemporánea de Cuba, la cual incluye tatuajes, joyas, alfombras, gorras y dibujos realizados por niños y niñas, entre otros objetos de uso personal y social. El incremento en el uso de este arácnido por los cubanos durante el último medio siglo parece estar directamente relacionado con la globalización, mayormente a través de la TV y los filmes.

The role of the scorpions in the culture of the ancient peoples has received special attention by several researchers (for recent reviews, see Cloudsley-Thompson, 1986, 1990; Melic, 2002; Ferrer, 2009), but it has been almost neglected in relation with the present-day culture. In both continental and insular Caribbean area, the only attempts to study the ethnobiology related to these arachnids are those of Armas (1998, 2001), and Armas & Abud (2000), although some interesting data may be found in other contributions (see Armas, 1986; Viquez, 1999).

Armas (1986, 1998, 2001) reported several aspects of the scorpions in the contemporary Cuban culture (tales, vernacular names, traditional use in medicine and Afro-Cuban religions, literature, music, craftsmanship, and toponymy), but in none of those papers were given graphic images (drawings, photos) of that matter. Then, the principal object of the present contribution is filling this deficiency. Descriptive aspects previously treated will be not herein repeated.

In Cuba, the tattoos were mainly restricted to sailors, convicts, and people of doubtful morals. But during last decades, as in other countries (see Monserrat, 2010), the practice of decorating the body or some of its parts with permanent or temporary tattoos has been increased as a non-transgressive performance. Scorpions in tattooing are borne by men, as well as by women, mainly on the neck, back, waistline, arms, and ankles (Fig. 1, A-B). Some people do it by imitation of certain

actor or actress, or as a Zodiac symbol according to their birthday date. At least in Cuba, scorpion images are most frequently solicited for tattoos than those of spiders (L. F. de Armas, pers. obs.).

In this country, scorpions are also relatively common as decorative motives in jewels (earrings, amulets, bracelets), keeper of the keys, carpets, caps, and other objects of personal or social usage (Fig. 1, C-F; 2, A-B, E), although some of them are not Cuban, but imported products.

As showed in Figs. 2, C–D, children also have a particular concept of the scorpion figure (note that none of their authors received special information regarding this animal).

In the so-called “*ferias de artesanía*” (artisan market) of Havana City, it is common to observe scorpions carved in precious or semiprecious wood, which certainly are very attractive souvenirs. But ironically, when several years ago I suggested to the Cuban Ministry of Communications the edition of a series of stamps on scorpions and other arachnids, the proposal was discarded because supposedly these animals are very repulsive and not appropriate for that purpose. However, the stamp series issued in 1999 by the Czech Republic (Fig. 2, F) reflects a very different point of view.

Increased use of the scorpions in tattooing, artisan jewels, and other objects of personal or social usage among Cuban people, seems to be result of the glo-

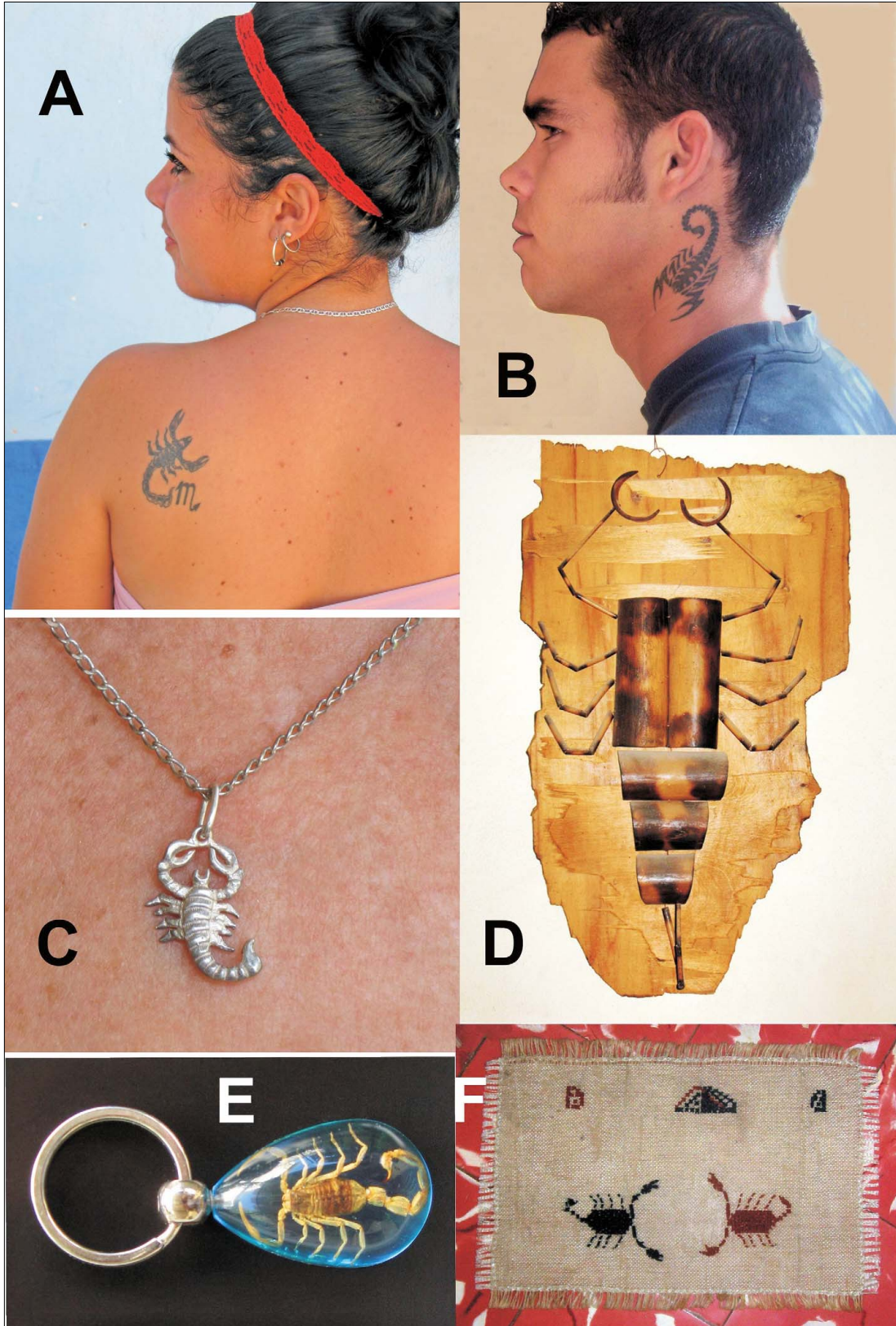


Figure 1: Scorpions as cultural motives in Cuba. **A–B,** Tattoos on two young people from San Antonio de los Baños, Artemisa Province. **C,** a silver jewel made in Mexico, borne by a woman in Havana City. **D,** Bamboo scorpion made by a Cuban artisan. **E,** a keychain with an acrylic piece containing a scorpion (made in China). **F,** small carpet made by a young woman artisan from Santiago de Cuba.

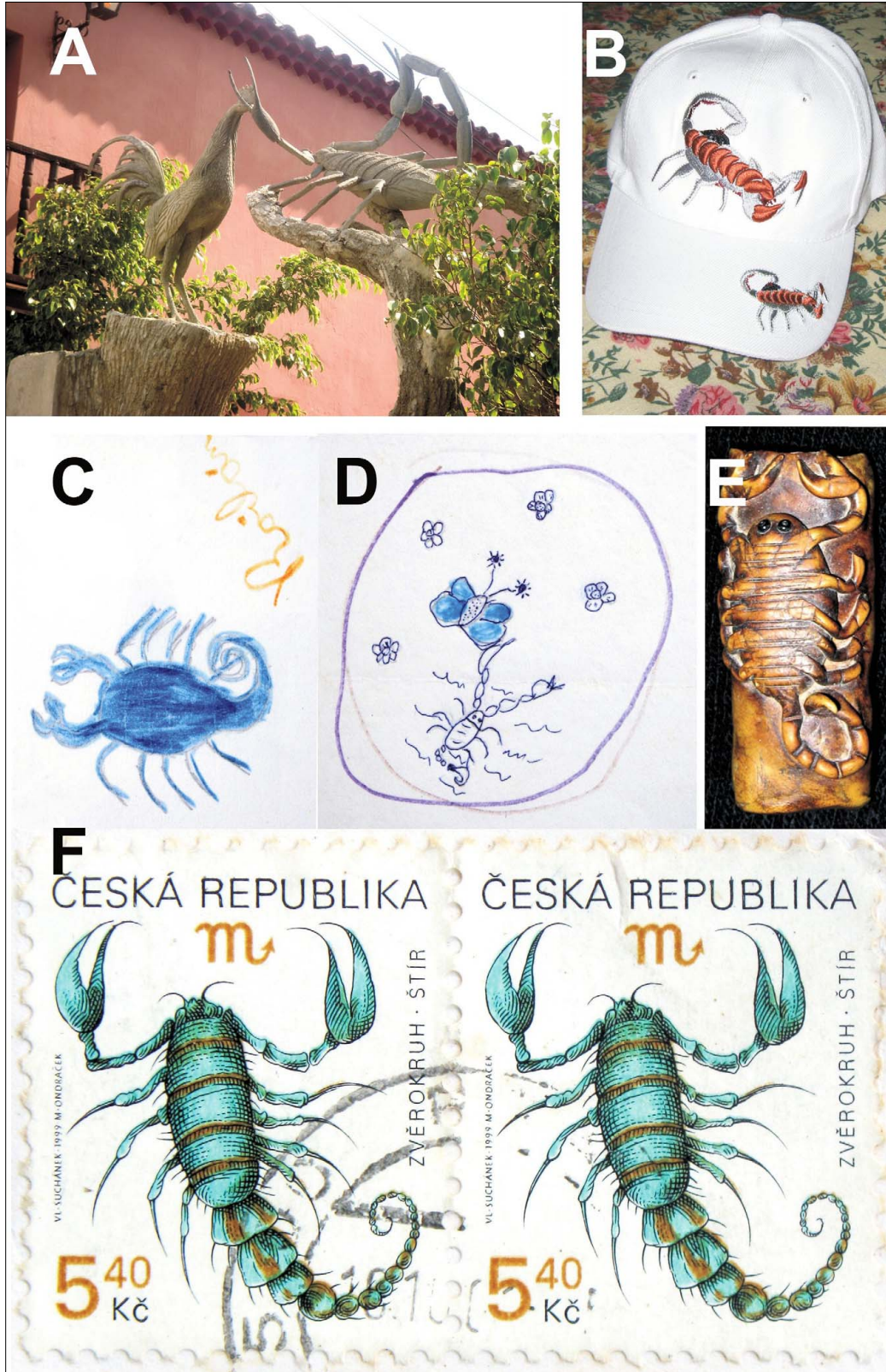


Figure 2: Scorpions as cultural motives in Cuba. **A**, front of the restaurant “El Gallo”, in Bejucal town, Mayabeque Province (photo by Johannes de Armas Concepción). **B**, a cap showing scorpions (made in China). **C–D**, scorpion drawings by children: **C**, by Roilán Azcuy Rodríguez (San Antonio de los Baños, 10 years old; June 2000); **D**, by Glenia Díaz Concepción (Arroyo Blanco, Sancti Spiritus; 7 years old; 1997). **E**, match-safe made with synthetic materials by a Costa Rican artisan. **F**, stamps issued by the Czech Republic in 1999.

balization, mostly through the influence of TV and movies.

Acknowledgments

I am very indebted to Victor Fet and Michael E. Sologlad for revision of the manuscript and kind help with English editing, and to Johannes de Armas Concepción for providing photo of Fig. 2 A.

Bibliography

- ARMAS, L. F. DE. 1986. *El alacrán*. La Habana: Editorial Gente Nueva, 51 pp.
- ARMAS, L. F. DE. 1998. El alacrán en la imaginación popular cubana. *Cocuyo*, La Habana, 7: 29–30.
- ARMAS, L. F. DE. 2001. El alacrán en la cultura cubana contemporánea. Una aproximación. *Revista Ibérica de Aracnología*, 4: 99–103.
- ARMAS, L. F. DE & ABUD ANTUN, A. 2000. El alacrán en la cultura de República Dominicana. *Revista Ibérica de Aracnología*, 1: 77–79.
- CLOUDSLEY-THOMPSON, J. L. 1986. The mythology of scorpions and spiders. *Actas X Congreso Internacional de Aracnología*, Jaca, Spain, 1: 13–16.
- CLOUDSLEY-THOMPSON, J. L. 1990. Scorpions in mythology, folklore, and history. Pp. 462–485 in: Polis, G. A. (ed.). *The Biology of Scorpions*. Stanford, California: Stanford University Press.
- FERRER, J. 2009. Entomología fantástica: Apuntes para una mitología del escorpión. *Boletín de la Sociedad Entomológica Aragonesa*, 45: 583–587
- MELIC, A. 2002. De Madre Araña a demonio Escorpión: Arácnidos en la mitología. *Revista Ibérica de Aracnología*, 5: 112–124.
- MONSERRAT, V. J. 2010. Sobre los artrópodos en el tatuaje. *Boletín de la Sociedad Entomológica Aragonesa*, 45: 477–497.
- VIQUEZ, C. 1999. *Escorpiones de Costa Rica / Costa Rica scorpions*. Costa Rica: INBio, 90 pp. [Bilingual edition].