

“Reach the Sky” - Erasmus+ Partnership 2015-2017



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ZODIAC

A collection of European legends, myths and stories related to astronomy





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ROMANIA

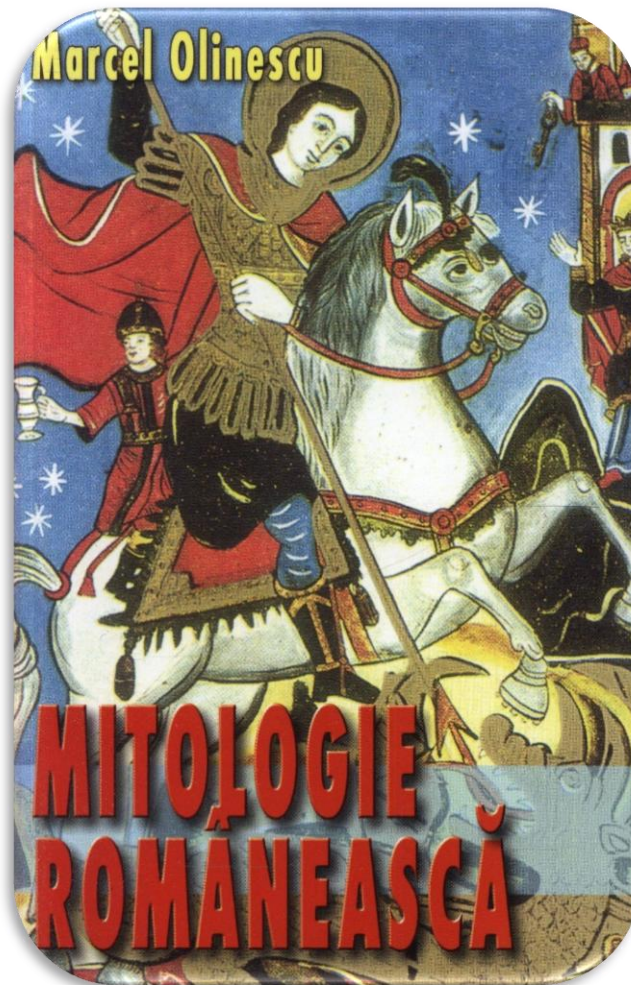
The rich mythology and folklore of Romania is poorly-known beyond the borders of that country, largely because of cultural isolation for much of this century and before. The mythology is in general a mixture of Christian and earlier Pagan themes, and in parts seems to preserve very ancient aspects from earlier cultures that other European mythologies have either forgotten, or perhaps never had. For instance, the Romanian constellations are similar to those found in the West, but are a mixture of adapted Christian and agricultural symbols, with a few retaining historical links to the Roman conquest of Romania (then called Dacia).



The Making of the World

By Marcel Olinescu

Marcel Olinescu (September 17, 1896–February 15, 1992) was a Romanian engraver. In 1926, Olinescu went to Botoșani to teach at “A. T. Laurian” High School. The following year, he settled at Arad, where he taught drawing at the boys' commercial high school. From 1933 to 1937, he edited the local “Știrea” (The News) newspaper, while in 1931, he co-founded an artistic society in Arad. Together with other members he edited the literary and cultural magazine “Hotarul” (The Border). His book “Romanian Mythology” is one of the well know piece of his writing masterpieces.



"Romanian Mythology" by Marcel Olinescu





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- **Abyss**

In the beginning, before Old Adam and even before God, there was nothing in this world but pitch darkness. Nothing whatsoever, no Earth, no Sun, no Moon, nothing but a great stretch of water taking up the endless chasm. Wherever you turned or looked only water. And this water was motionless like a mirror. At a moment, nobody knows when and how for nobody witnessed the thing, the waters started to ripple slowly as if somebody was blowing over their surface. Big circles cropped up as it happens on a lake when a stone is thrown across or a frog dives in. As these circles kept on overlapping they formed waves, foamy waves that emerged on the dark metal-like table of endless water, flowing from here to there. The waves rolled their foam into white wavelets like soap bubbles in a basin. The never-ending movement of the waves pushed them into the middle of this vortex where all the foam exploded like a huge water-lily. Then a butterfly and a worm roamed this froth, coming, as they say, from the world under, from a different world.

- **God**

After a time, the butterfly shed its wings and turned into a young, handsome lad, lighting up the darkness around him. And this was God. Then, the worm too turned into a creature, into Satan or the Devil. At first, he was human also but did not shine light. And since they had been born the same way and were the only beings living in this endless immensity of water and darkness, they got on well together.

- **The Devil**

As the Devil saw it the two of them were equal, and therefore called he God “*Brother*” but God did not like that and called him back “*Not-my-brother*” or “*My-no-good-brother*”. Most likely the Devil preserved something of the worm features for envy consumed him, and he wanted by all means to be God’s brother, yet God kept on calling him “not-my-brother”. Now, the Devil blew his top when he saw God turn into a dove that started to fly across the waters – for God can change as he pleases. Therefore, he made himself three pairs of wings, and cuddling up in the waters said bitterly:

“You take the air, I take the water!”

So much he wanted to be the master of something. That was how these realms came into being...

God, after having made everything in heaven, on earth and in water continued to live on earth. Only when a woman cast garbage before him and bawled out after him did he realize that it was not befitting to mingle with the likes of these folks, and so he built himself some palaces in heaven. Still, he kept on visiting earth of which he had become fond, and together with Saint Peter, now and then he tested the mettle of people’s souls.





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These stories date from that time. At night, before retiring, God made Saint Peter tell him a tale so that he could sleep better. But in time, as people’s nature grew meaner and meaner and he himself got older he no longer descended on earth: some say that occurred at the deluge, others say later on.

- **God’s Countenance**

God is represented as an old, savvy man since wisdom comes only with age. He has a beautiful white face, surrounded by snow-white beard and rich hair, flowing on his back as meek old priests do. Though ancient, he is vigorous, and runs the affairs of the world as smoothly as he did in the beginning.

- **How the Earth Was Built**

God walked across the waters, and the Devil stuck to him like a bur. Once the Devil complained to God that he had not even a single sliver of dry land to rest his bones for all that wide expanse of endless water. He had tried to make himself a bed out of foam but foam being foam, it washed away from his hands. Then God ordered him to dive to the bottom of the sea, and bring hence a handful of dust in his name. Old Scratch dived into the deep straight like an arrow but ambition would not leave him, so he picked some clods in his name not in that of God, and then rose up to the surface of the water. With the waves hitting from all sides, grains of sand started slipping from his fingers, so by the time he came before God he was empty-handed. And God scolded him:

“See, that happened because you didn’t obey me! You did not fetch the dust in my name.”

And the Devil stayed in the water to his knees. Enraged, he swam a second time to the bottom, and said:

“I take these clods in my name not in that of God.”

God heard him and blew softly so that the surface of the water turned into ice. The Devil, afraid to lose the dust again, closed his fist tight. But when he wanted to come up he was prevented by the layer of ice, and fighting to get free, he let the grains slip from his hands. Now, he managed to get out of water solely to his waist. The third time he said:

“I take these clods in my name and in that of God,” but again he could not take the least bit to the surface, and stayed in water to his neck.

The fourth time God blew harder and the ice was ten inches thick and the Devil, seeing he could not break it and fearing he could drown, said most enviously the words that God had told him:

“I take these clods in the name of God” but on his way up he could not help himself and added...
and my name.”





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For this, when he got to the surface only a few grains were left in his hand. Then God picked his nails with a straw as Satan had long, dirty nails like naughty children, so God found enough material to make a small cake. He blew up on it, folded it and kneaded it to the point that it became a quite comfortable coach.

“Well, now,” said God, “we have a bed to rest in when we are tired.”

“We do, Brother,” replied the Devil who, like the fly returning from the field, attributed to himself the desert of having created the earth.

When night came God lay in the bed he had concocted, making room for the No-Good-Brother to cuddle up next to him.

“Don’t we bless it, now that we’ve made it?” the Devil asked God.

“We don’t do anything for it’s late. We’ll bless it tomorrow,” and God stretched his limbs, and made believe he had fallen asleep.

- **The Sun**

God had made the earth and was smiling contently at his feet. But the Devil kept on mumbling and protesting unhappily. The entire world was still plunged in darkness as there was no light. Certainly, God could go wherever he pleased as his eyes could pierce all darkness and even the soul of the Devil. Satan complained of having to grope like a blind creature through marshes and pits, stumbling all the time.

“Why don’t you make light, God, so that I and the other beings on earth can see where we go and distinguish one day from another?”

- **The Making of the Sun**

God did him this favor too. He sent the Devil to the four points of the world to bring flint, precious stones, and gold. When he had brought him everything God put them aside and as he did not want to create light with his no-good brother witnessing (so that the Devil could not copy him later on, or, as he was all thumbs, he might set the world on fire) he sent the Devil to bed on account he was tired and would get to work the following day. All said and done, they went to bed and when God heard the Devil snoring, he got up slowly and set to creating the sun.

- **The Sun’s Carriage**

To be able to travel better on the highways of heaven, God turned out a carriage, with wheels and axle, and seven magic horses drawing it. The driver of the carriage is the sun who is an archangel – the holy sun – handsome and forever young, with such a brilliant face than one cannot look him in the eye.





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- **The Sun’s Palace**

The sun inhabits a crystal palace in the first sky. One has never seen or imagined such a wondrous construction. Only God’s palaces are more beautiful. That’s where he keeps his golden carriage and the magic horses that eat live coals, and pull the carriage every day from east to west on the invisible heavenly paths. Some say 12 oxen draw this carriage in the morning, when the sun leaves home until he reaches midday. That is why the sun rises so slowly in the morning. And the morning is longer, more fruitful. At the middle of the day the oxen return home alone, and the sun lingers behind a little, to rest. Then he puts seven hares to his carriage, which accounts for the fact that the carriage now rides faster, and evening sets in. When he dismounts at night, the sun takes a small wafer and a glass of wine.

- **Virgin Mary, the Mother of the Sun**

The sun’s mother, who, according to some people was the Virgin Mary, tends to his palaces. She prepares his food which he takes before leaving, and the victuals for the road, the little snack of 10 and the big lunch of midday. She also prepares his bath of dew which he takes to steel himself, before setting out for the road. The sun was blessed later on by God for all the good he does to people, shining light on their labor and warming up their bodies. Therefore, it is a sin to speak evil of or to throw dirt at the sun.

- **The Making of the Moon**

People got wind that God was about to give them something for their own use and benefit, and they wandered what it could be. The Devil brought the things God had asked for, but as before God did not want to work with Satan present at all.

“What else do you want me to do?” the Dickens asked reluctant to leave.

“Go and raise hell,” God advised him to get rid of him.

“Encircle it with solid walls, and lock it up with many iron gates so that nobody may escape it.”

Old Scratch went away happily to achieve something all by himself. Seeing himself alone, God struck a flint against a precious gem and there came forth light: a virgin.

- **Human Moon**

The Moon is human: at first she is small, lithe like a babe, and you can barely see her in the sky; like a nail she grows, her wings spread all around like a turkey’s or a peacock’s tail when it gyrates it, and she is round like a coin. She is like a creature in the prime of her life. But from this moment she starts getting old and becomes smaller and smaller, her wings seem clipped until she is again as small as a nail. Finally, she disappears from the sky just like man’s life fades away. And then she gets born anew.



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- **The Moon’s Face**

The moon is an extremely beautiful maiden, called *Ileana Cosânzeana* but she is now proud and cold after having been unhappily in love with her brother, the sun. She is dressed all in white. Her wings are made of sterling silver strewn with gems. Her carriage is also silver, drawn by seven white horses. Some believe that seven devils draw her carriage, and do it gladly since the Moon being cold they get to cool off some of the heat that scorches them in hell.



Ileana Cosânzeana

- **The Sun’s Love**

The sun was a handsome lad, and his mother wanted to get him to marry. So, she sought wide and far, all the kingdoms where she heard there were marriageable girls but the sun didn’t fancy any of them. He traveled the earth and the sky and did not find a more beautiful girl than his sister, *Ileana Cosânzeana*.

- **The Sun’s Wedding**

And the sun left his sister, to prepare a big and pompous wedding ceremony they then started for the church. But when the priest was about to declare them husband and wife, all the lights went out all of a sudden, all the bells grew hoarse and then remained muted, the saints hid their faces, looking away, and the clergy fell to their knees.

- **How Heavens Was Made**

The saints and the seven apostles rejoiced very much because God fulfilled their will and allowed them to make the sky, only that people should help and support them by fasting all the time. (Because when people eat meat saints lose weight.) That is why there are seven days of fast since at first there were seven saints who created heavens. God gave wings to the seven saints so that they could go beneath the core of the earth and bring forth a gem more precious than anything found on earth. The saints fetched so much stone, limpid like glass and blue like chicory flowers and the eyes of the angels, and they made the sky from it like a vault above the earth, placing under it seven pillars also made of precious gems. They prop up the sky and this is a most difficult task for the sky is heavy and big like a bell. The apostles asked God to command people to fast in perpetuity seven times a year, one time for each of the pillars, so that these do not become frail and allow the sky to tumble off.





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- **Nine Skies**

There are nine skies one on top of each other, all made of gems. God abides in the ninth together with Saint Nicholas with whom he consults in the running of the world. The Holy Trinity inhabits this place, too. The holy sun, the holy moon, and Saint Elijah live in the first sky. The others are inhabited by the other saints according to their rank. In the ninth sky there is very much light and long tables can be seen when the skies open. That is paradise. The skies open only once a year, on Epiphany Day. One year in heavens seems a day. When it is midnight on earth, bells in heavens chime for God, and the angels dance around the Holy Trinity.



Romanian Peasants’ Beliefs in Stars & Sky

By Ion Ottescu

In 1896 prof. Ion Ottescu made a sky map, projected for the location of Bucharest. On it, he put all the astronomical constellations visible from Romania, in their classical Greco-Latin groupings, with detailed explanations for each constellation. Then he sent the map to all the teachers in Romania, with a special letter in which I requested them to ask the oldest peasants about their beliefs in the constellations, the sky, the Earth, Sun, Moon, eclipses, thunder, lightning, clouds, rain, etc., and anything else they wished to communicate to professor Ottescu. From the papers returned to him, plus his own researches, he have created what he think to be both an interesting and comprehensive work, named "Romanian Peasants' Beliefs In Stars & Sky", who was published in Bucharest, Romania, 1907.

☞- Romanian Sky’s Constellations -☞

The Romanian people formed the following constellations on the sky:

- I - The constellation *Carul Mare* (the **Great Chariot**), with the star *Cărăușul* (the Carter) or *Uciğă-I Toaca* (He Who Will Be Killed By The Bell Board) or *Uciğă-I Crucea* (He Who Will Be Killed By The Cross), the bitch *Paloșchița*, *Ursul* (the Bear) and *Lupul* (the Wolf). This constellation is also called *Ursul Mare* (the **Great Bear**) and *Șapte Boi* (the Seven Oxen), with the star *Văcarul Mic* (the Little Herdsman). [Ursa Major]
- II - The constellation *Carul Mic* (the **Little Chariot**), or *Ursul Mic* (the **Little Bear**), or *Plugușorul* (the **Tiny Plough**), or *Grapa* (the **Harrow**),



Carul Mare / The Great Chariot





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with the star *Stâlpul* (the **Pillar**), or *Candela Cerului* (the **Sky’s Votive Light**), or *Împăratul* (the **Emperor**), or *Steaua Ciobanului* (the **Shepherd’s Star**). [Ursa Minor]

❖ Ursa Major and Ursa Minor

Usually, these are called *Carul Mare* (the Great Chariot) and *Carul Mic* (the Little Chariot). The four stars which form the trapeziums in each are called *Roatele Carului* (the Chariot Wheels), and the remaining three are *Proșapul* (the Shaft), or *Tânjale Carului* (the Slow Chariot Shaft), or *Oiștea* (the Axle). In other instances, they are called *Ursul Mare* (the Great Bear) and *Ursul Mic* (the Little Bear), the trapeziums being *Trupul Ursului* (the Bear’s Body), and the three separate stars *Coadă Ursului* (the Bear’s Tail). The Little Chariot is also called *Plușorul* (the Tiny Plough) or *Grapa* (the Harrow). The peasants have grasped the important idea that the two Chariots are always to the North, and many of them use these as a direction guide at night.

The star Polaris is sometimes called *Împăratul* (**the Emperor**), and at other times *Candela Cerului* (the **Sky’s Votive Light**), because it is a comparatively immobile star with little diurnal movement, and it is the most luminous star in that part of the sky. Other peasants called Polaris *Steaua Ciobanului* (the **Shepherd’s Star**), because it is a guide for shepherds in the night. However, the Shepherd’s Star is also a name given to the planet Venus when it is *Lucefărul de Seară* (the **Evening Star**), as is also found in France.

In the Great Chariot, near the second star in the Shaft, there is a small star called Alcor or Saidac in astronomy. Saidac is an Arabic word which means “trial”, because it was used by the Arabs to determine the clarity of the atmosphere. The Romanian peasants call this star *Cărăușul* (**the Carter**), who drives the oxen of the Chariot; other peasants call it *Cățelusa* (**the Little Bitch**), which accompanies the Chariot, and she sometimes has the name *Paloșchița* (which is a Slavic name that simply means “Little Bitch”). However, many of the peasants also see *Cățelusa* as the star near the Chariot Wheel, where the Shaft begins [which may be Alioth (Ursæ Majoris)].

There is a beautiful legend about the Big Chariot, which runs as follows: A man called Pepelea had a wager with God that he could push the Great Chariot as far as the Milky Way. However, when Pepelea pushed the Great Chariot, God moved the Milky Way, and thus Pepelea lost the bet. For what can a man do against God? This myth epitomizes the rotation of the Chariot and the Milky Way around the celestial Pole, as if the sky was a single piece.

Another myth explains the same thing and also accounts for why the Chariot has its shaft awry: The Great Chariot, which has four wheels and three pair of oxen (every star of the Shaft is here imagined as a couple of oxen), climbed up a hill. At the top, God said to the Carter, “Uphill, uphill with God’s help”. But the Carter answered him, “With or without God, I am at the top”. Then God, in order to humble the man, made the oxen go backwards, damaging a wheel. Ever since, the Chariot has always rounded the Pole backwards.

Very important evidence for the Romano-Dacian origins of the Romanian star patterns is found in the way the peasants explain the use of these Chariots. They say that the Emperor Trajan put in the Great Chariot the slaves from Dacia that he had conquered, to carry them to Rome, and he set their chiefs in the Little Chariot. *Paloșchița* is then Trajan’s bitch.

The Romanian people also call the constellations Auriga and Perseus chariots. Auriga is *Carul lui Dumnezeu* (God’s Chariot), because at the world’s end, Jesus Christ will transport all the righteous men to Heaven in this Chariot. Perseus is *Carul Dracului* (the Devil’s Chariot), because after Christ’s



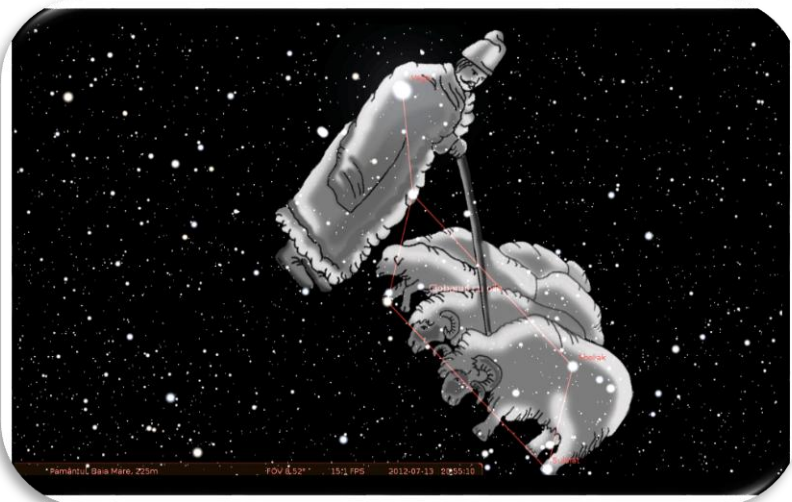
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Judgement, He will send all the sinful men to Hell in this second Chariot. “Heaven and Hell are in the sky”, the peasants say.

- III - The constellation *Balaurul* or *Zmeul* (the **Dragon**). [The Dragon]
- IV - The constellation *Omul* (the **Man**). [Hercules]
- V - The constellation *Ciobanul cu Oile* (the **Shepherd with His Sheep**), with the star *Ciobanul* (the **Shepherd**), which is also called *Luceafărul cel Mare de Miezul Noptii* (the **Great Star of Midnight**), or *Luceafărul cel Frumos* (the **Beautiful Star**), or *Regina Stelelor* (the **Stars’ Queen**). [Lyra]

❖ Lyra

This is called *Ciobanul cu Oile* (the Shepherd with His Sheep), the star Vega being the Shepherd, and the four stars which seem to follow him, forming a quadrilateral, being the Sheep. A popular expression is: “In the days of Lent or Advent, the people can eat cheese only after the Shepherd’s rising”. “The Shepherd is seen in the sky until sunrise”, says the peasants. The star Vega is also called



Ciobanul cu oile / The Shepperd with his Sheeps

Luceafărul cel Mare de Miezul Noptii (the **Great Star of Midnight**), or *Luceafărul cel Frumos* (the **Beautiful Star**), or *Regina Stelelor* (the **Stars’ Queen**), because the stars have their leader, just like people on Earth. This is like the Lord’s Prayer; “as in the heavens above, so on the earth below”.

- VI - The constellation *Crucea Mare* (the **Great Cross**), or *Crucea Miezului Noptii* (the **Midnight Cross**), or *Fata Mare cu Cobilița* (the **Great Maiden with a Yoke**), or *Cobilița Ciobanului* (the **Shepherd’s Yoke**), with the star *Fântâna din Răscruci* (the **Fountain of the Crossroads**). [Cygnus]



❖ Cygnus

In the popular imagination, this is the Cross on which Jesus Christ was crucified. Thus when the peasants see it in the night sky, they cross themselves, saying that Christ showed Himself to them.



Crucea Mare / The Great Cross

- VII - The constellation *Crucea Mică* (the **Little Cross**). [Delphinus]
- VIII - The constellation *Vulturul* (the **Eagle**), or *Vulturul Domnului* (**God’s Eagle**), or *Fata de Împărat cu Cobilița* (the **Emperor’s Daughter with a Yoke**). [Aquila]
- IX - The constellation *Coasa* (the **Scythe**). [Cepheus]
- X - The constellation *Căpățâna* (the **Skull**), or *Carul Dracului* (the **Devil’s Chariot**), or *Barda* (the **Axe**), or *Toporul* (the **Little Axe**). [Perseus]
- XI - The constellation *Scaunul lui Dumnezeu* (**God’s Chair**), or *Mănăstirea* (the **Monastery**). [Cassiopeia]
- XII - The constellation *Igheabul Puțului* (the **Drain of the Well**). [Andromeda]
- XIII - The constellation *Puțul* (the **Well**), or *Gavădul Mic* (the **Little Horse-Stud**). The Drain and the well together are *Puțul cu Igheab* (the **Well with a Drain**). [Pegasus]
- XIV - The constellation *Vizitiul* (the **Charioteer**), or *Trăsura* (the **Carriage**), or *Surugiul* (the **Coachman**), or *Carul lui Dumnezeu* (**God’s Chariot**), or *Tarcul* (the **Goat-Fold**), with the star *Capra* (the **She-Goat**), and the three stars *Iezii Caprei* (the **She-Goat’s Kids**). These three stars are also considered a distinct constellation, called *Burghiul* (the **Little Auger**), or *Sfredelul Pământului* (the **Earth’s Auger**). [Auriga]
- XV - The constellation *Văcarul* (the **Herdsmen**). [Bootes]
- XVI - The constellation *Hora* (the **Ring Dance**), with the star *Fata Mare din Horă* (the **Great Maiden in the Ring Dance**), and the two stars *Lăutarii* (the **Singers**). Other names are *Casa cu Ogradă* (the **House with a Courtyard**), or *Coliba* or *Cociorva* (the **Hut**). [Corona Borealis]
- XVII - The constellation *Șarpele* (the **Serpent**), or *Calea Rătăciților* (the **Road of the Lost Men**). [Ophiuchus and Serpens]
- XVIII - The constellation *Peștii* (the **Fishes**), or *Crapii* (the **Carp**). [Pisces]
- XIX - The constellation *Berbecul* (the **Ram**). [Aries]



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- XX - The constellation *Taurul* (the **Bull**), or *Gonitorul* (the **Running Bull**), with *Lucafărul Porcesc* (the **Bright Star of the Pig**), or *Porcarul* (the **Swineherd**). [Taurus]
- XXI - The constellation *Cloșca cu Pui* (the **Hatching Hen with Her Chicks**), or *Găina* (the **Hen**). [Pleiades]

❖ Pleiades

The Pleiades are formed into a separate constellation by the people, called *Cloșca cu Pui* (the **Hatching Hen with Her Chicks**), or *Găina* (the **Hen**). The Hatching Hen is the most important constellation for the peasants, and they always know where to look for it. In the winter months, the Hatching Hen is their night clock, and they measure time before day-break by this constellation’s height in the sky. The name derives from the physical shape of the Pleiades, because the Hatching Hen walks first, followed by Her Chicks.



Cloșca cu Pui / The Hatching Hen with Her Chicks

There are some special peasant beliefs about the Hatching Hen. He who sees it rising on Great Sunday [the first Sunday after Easter] will have good luck. He who sees it rising every day before Saint Peter’s Day [June 29] will always be on-time for all events. When the Hatching Hen appears in the sky at *Sânziene’s* Day [June 24, Saint John the Baptist’s Day], she has the power to make the maize grow.

- XXII - The constellation *Vierii* (the **Boars**), *Porcii* (the **Swine**), or *Scroafa cu Purcei* (the **Sow with Her Piglets**). [Hyades]
- XXIII - The constellation *Frații* (the **Brothers**), or *Gemenii* (the **Twin Brothers**), or *Romulus and Remus*, with the star *Comoara* (the **Treasure Chest**), or *Comoara lui Iov* (**Yahweh’s Treasure Chest**). [Gemini]
- XXIV - The constellation *Racul* (the **Crayfish**). [Cancer]

❖ Cancer

This is called *Racul* (the **Crayfish**), and it has the following myth: When Christ was crucified, his torturers wanted to thrust four spikes into His body, two in His palms, a third through both His feet together, and a fourth, longer, one through His navel. But the Crayfish stole the longest spike, and took it far away, walking backwards. From that time, the Saviour blessed the Crayfish to be eaten



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on all the days of the year without restrictions. In order to keep alive the memory of its action, the Saviour decided that the Crayfish should walk backwards forever, and set it in the sky.

- XXV - The constellation *Calul* (the **Horse**), or *Leul* (the **Lion**), or *Gavădul Mare* (the **Great Horse-Stud**). [Leo]
- XXVI - The constellation *Fecioara* (the **Virgin**). [Virgo]

❖ Virgo

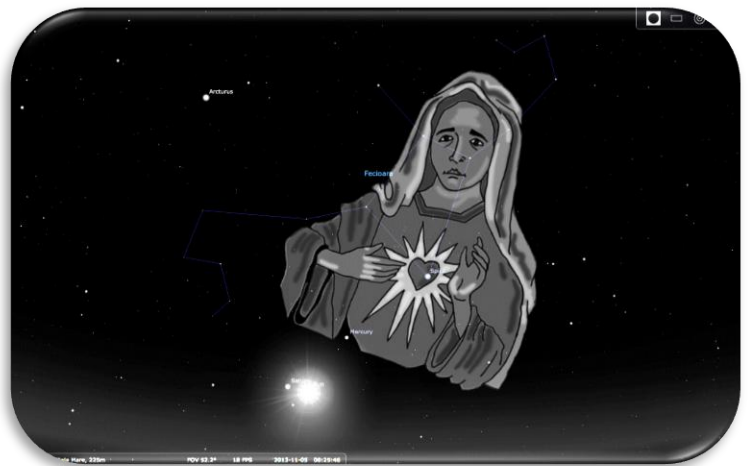
The Romanian people call it *Fecioara* (**the Virgin**), who represents the Virgin Mary. The star Spica, being very white, indicates the Maiden’s spotlessly clean heart.

- XXVII - The constellation *Balanța* (the **Balance**), or *Cântarul* (the **Scales**). [Libra]
- XXVIII - The constellation *Scorpio* (the **Scorpion**), with the star *Ochiul Scorpiei* (the **Scorpion’s Eye**). [Scorpius]
- XXIX - The constellation *Arcașul* (the **Archer**). [Sagittarius]
- XXX - The constellation *Țapul* (the He-Goat), or *Cornul Caprei* (the **Horn of the She-Goat**). [Capricornus]

❖ Capricornus

A popular belief is that when lightning appears from the Horn of the She-Goat, then rain is sure to follow.

- XXXI - The constellation *Vărsătorul* (He Who Pours Out the Water). [Aquarius]
- XXXII - The constellation *Trefetițele* (the **Three Saints**), or *Trei Crai* (the **Three Kings**), or *Trei Crai de la Răsărit* (the **Three Kings from the East**), or *Toiege* (the **Staffs**), or *Cingătoarea Regelui* (the **King’s Belt**). [Orion]
- XXXIII - The constellation *Rarița* (the **Little Plough**), or *Plugul* (the **Plough**), or *Grebla* (the **Rake**). [Orion]



1Fecioara / The Virgin

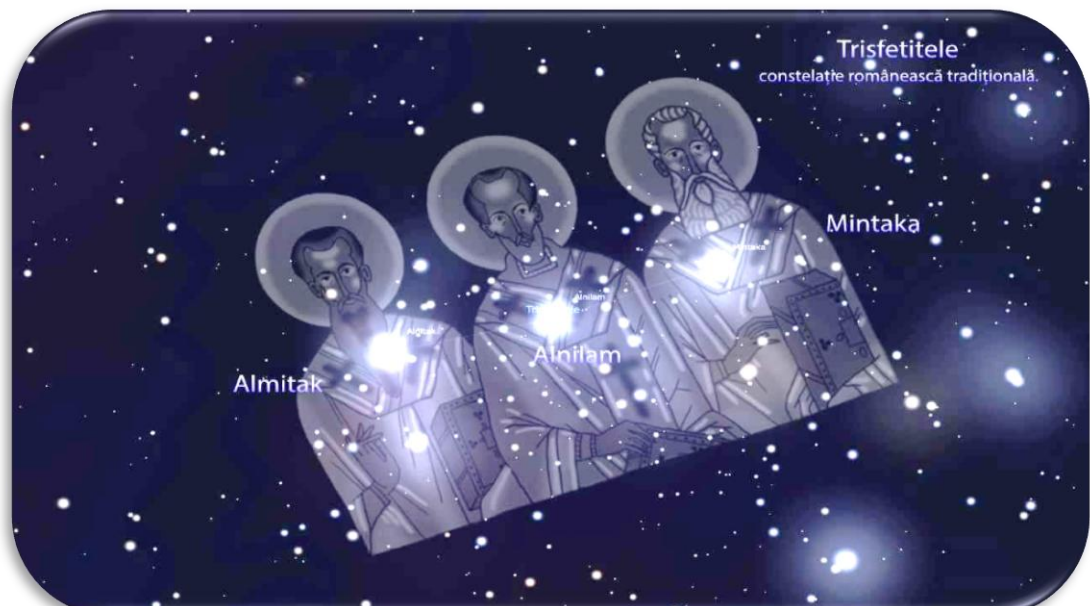


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- XXXIV - The constellation *Secera* (the **Sickle**). [Orion]XXXV - The constellation *Sfredelul Mare* (the **Great Auger**). [Orion]

❖ Orion

This is a constellation to which the peasants accorded great importance, but the stars composing it are grouped differently to what we find in astronomy. The three stars from Orion’s Belt are called by the peasants *Tresfetițele*, which means **the Three Saints**, Vasile, Grigore and Ioan, or *Cei Trei Crai* (**the Three Kings**), or *Craii de la Răsărit* (**the Kings from the East**), who are the three wise men who came bringing gifts to Christ, or the three kings Saul, David and Solomon. They are also called *Toiege* (**the Staffs**), or *Cingătoarea Regelui* (**the King’s Belt**), names which remind us of Aaron’s Staff and Orion’s Belt respectively, which are other astronomical variants.



Trisfetițele / The Three Kings

“*Trisfetițele*” plus the stars Rigel, Saiph and Bellatrix form the constellation *Rarița* (**the Little Plough**), or *Rarițele* (**the Little Ploughs**), which announces the end of the night for the peasants: “Wake you up, for Rarițele has risen!” is an expression used before the maize harvest. Between Rigel and *Tresfetițele*, there is an arc of seven stars. These stars form *Secera* (**the Sickle**). *Trisfetițele* and the star Betelgeuse form the constellation *Sfredelul Mare*, sometimes *Spitelnicul* or *Spitelnicul Mare* (**the Great Auger**), which has as its point





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the star Betelgeuse, while *Tresfetitele* forms its handle. The Great Auger is directed with its point towards the Treasure Chest that is the star Pollux in Gemini.

Here is what the peasants from Neamț and Buzău counties think of it: At the world’s end, the Great Auger will approach the Treasure Chest, and pierce it. Then, all the money of the Treasure will pour out upon the Earth, but in exchange, all the water will disappear. Suffering from thirst, the people will run to the gold and silver fallen from the Treasure Chest, thinking it is water, but they will be disappointed. Then the Antichrist (or *Anti Hârș*, or *Anti Hârț*) will appear, offering a cask of water and a chariot filled with bread for those who will submit to him. But those who trust him, drink his water and eat his bread will become even more filled with thirst and hunger. Those who refuse, and keep their belief in God, will prefer to die. Then Christ will appear to them, offering them a piece of wafer and a glass of wine, which will quench their hunger and thirst. This will be the Time of the Afterlife, and Christ will begin the Judgment of the Afterlife, or the Last Judgment.

A work from Urșai, in Neamț County, there is another myth: The peasants tell the following about the constellations of the Great Auger and the Great Chariot. In olden times, a man searched for Yahweh’s Treasure Chest in the sky, and, discovering it, thrust the Auger into it; both Auger and Treasure Chest are seen today near the Slaves’ Road [the Milky Way]. Then he returned home, to collect his Ox-Chariot to carry the Treasure in. But in the future, when the man returns to put the Treasure in his Chariot, then the world will change. God will drain all the waters from the Earth, and down will come a rain of silver money. The people, discovering money and not water, will burden themselves with the coins. But Saint Peter will appear in their path with a basket of wafers and a glass of water, and will offer them to the people who were not so greedy for money, but will offer nothing to those who were too greedy. The first group will be satiated forever, but the second will remain thirsty and hungry.

- XXXVI - The constellation *Câinele Mare* (the **Great Dog**), or *Dulăul* (the **Mastiff**), with the brilliant star *Zorilă* (**Of the Daybreak**). [Canis Major]
- XXXVII - The constellation *Cățelul* (the **Little Dog**). [Canis Minor]

❖ Canis Major and Canis Minor

They are called *Câinele* (**the Dog**) or *Dulăul* (**the Mastiff**), and *Cățelul* (**the Little Dog**) respectively. The star Sirius, the most brilliant star in the sky, in Canis Major, is called by the peasants *Zorilă* (**Of the Daybreak**) or *Lucafărul din Zori* (**the Great Dawn Star**), because when it rises at dawn and the other stars all disappear, it seems to struggle against the dawn, until full daylight arrives. Sometimes the planet Venus is also called *Zorilă*, but usually the Romanian people accord to this planet only the names *Lucafărul de Seară* (**the Evening Star**) and *Lucafărul de Dimineață* (**the Morning Star**). However, as I said before under the





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Ursæ, the Evening Star is also called the Shepherd’s star. The real situation is that the star Sirius appears at dawn in August, in the midst of the peasants’ agricultural works.

- XXXVIII - The constellation *Chitul* (the **Whale**). [Cetus]
- XXXIX - The constellation *Porumbița* (the **Turtle Dove**). [Columba]

Just like other peoples, the Romanians put their myths into the sky, composed from memories of their Roman origins (the two Chariots of Trajan, Romulus and Remus, the Roman Archer, etc.), elements of their new religion, and Pagan names from old Dacia. They filled-up the remaining gaps with agricultural items and people, which explains why they see in the sky things like the Cross, Monastery, Plough, Bell Board, Scythe, Sickle, etc. s agricultural apotheosis is not surprising, agriculture being the Romanian peasant’s life. The majority of the constellations imagined by the Romanian peasants look like the objects they are supposed to be, a rare thing in astronomy.

☞ -Romanian Sky Myth-☞

After the world’s creation, the Sky and the Earth were very close together. But man was indifferent, and did not understand this divine generosity (God’s counsel being good under any conditions). Man’s indifference was so pronounced that one day a woman threw a child’s stained nappy into the sky-although fortunately, it did not actually touch the sky. God became very upset at this, and removed himself and the Sky far away from the Earth, so that we now say of something, “*It is far away, like the sky*”.

The woman was the culprit, for the woman has “*a long dress and a short mind*” or is only “*good to make trouble*”. But the Man suffered because of God’s absence, and so he decided to journey to the Sky, looking for the Creator. He knew the road would be difficult and long, so the Man took with him his Great Chariot with four oxen, his Small Chariot, his Votive Light from the wall, the Great Cross of the Church, the Fountain of the Crossroads, his Axe, his Great Auger, his Small Auger, his Sickle, his Scythe, his Great Plough, his Small Plough, his Mastiff from the sheepfold, his Little Dog from the courtyard, the Hatching Hen with her Chicks, the Sow with her Piglets, the Shepherd, the Herdsman, the Charioteer and Hora-the Ring Dance from the village. Because he wanted to appear before God like a good Christian, he took with him the most necessary human beings and things, to provide him with cheery company and help in times of trouble. He also took seeds and wheat to till and sow in the sky’s fields for his future food.

Then he set off, and he travelled for a long time, but in the middle of the Sky’s road, “*He Who Will Be Killed by the Cross*”, the Devil, stopped him.

“*Where are you going?*” asked the Devil.

“*None of your business!*” replied the Man.



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“Who are you looking for?” queried the Devil.

“Leave me alone!” shouted the Man.

“You are a petulant fellow!” retorted the Devil.

“That’s not true! You are a scoundrel and an evil one!” was the Man’s response.

Then the Devil, furious, pulled out from his bag the Dragon, the Violent Serpent, the Great Bear, the Damned Scorpion, the Angry Horse and the Skull, and threw them around the Man to scare him. But the brave Man began to fight with the Devil, and their battle created a great storm beneath the Sky, called by us on Earth “*the rabid wind*”.

In the meantime, the strong Mastiff and the Little Dog attacked the Horse, so the Horse ran far away. The Shepherd struck the Dragon *Balaurul* with a yoke. The Herdsman banished the Serpent with the Ring Dance. The Charioteer crushed the Skull with the Axe. With the battle going so badly, the worried Scorpion, which had tried to seize the Man with her claws, burst in a moment, and blood gushed from her eye. Only the oxen of the Great Chariot ran off, when the frightened Great Bear became rigid with terror. Now, we see these events in the sky. In the midst of all these creatures, people and things, the victorious Man appears large and grandiose, while the Devil is very small and huddled.

God made the Man to be king in the Sky, as on Earth. Even the Devil recognises the Man as his master! But the Man still has a long way to go to reach God. He trusts in God’s help when he asks Him something with a pure soul.

We know too the Man’s road. It can be seen on clear nights without the Moon. Its name is the Milky Way. It became white because in the battle the Shepherd accidentally overturned the milk pails when he struck the Dragon with the yoke, and the milk poured out all along the Man’s path.

☞- “*Calea Lactee*”: The Milky Way-☞

In the Sky Myth, we saw an explanation for this whitish band that divides the sky into two parts by its middle, and that it is seen well and completely only on the clearest of nights, without the Moon. Its appearance fills one’s heart with a kind of superior respect, a kind of majestic feeling, similar to that experienced by a believer entering into a grandiose temple.

This majestic feeling was remarked upon by the Romanian people, who initially saw in the Milky Way the Emperor Trajan. Thus they called this whitish band Troian, or *Troianul Cerului* (the **Trojan of the Sky**; terrestrially, Trojan was the name for snow-drifts), or *Calea lui Traian (Trajan’s Way)*, or *Drumul Robilor* (the **Slaves’ Road**), imagined as the way used by Trajan for his journey to Dacia, and for transporting the Dacian prisoners back to Rome, once they had been placed in the two Chariots.

Those who only call this band the Slaves’ Road have the following explanations about it:





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1. The Slaves’ Road was marked on the sky by God to commemorate the numerous slaves captured by the Emperor Trajan in his wars with Dacia.
2. In ancient times, the indigenous populace was transported as slaves into a remote Empire, which lay to the south and west (obviously, this is the Roman Empire). When they escaped, they did not know the way to return to their country, so God indicated their direction on the sky.
3. Trajan transported the captured Dacians to Rome, but they escaped, and ran back along Troian, travelling only at night.

However, these versions of the Slaves’ Road were altered with time, and later became:

- a) A sign to be followed by escaped slaves generally.
- b) A sign for the conquerors, to transport away the enslaved people.
- c) A road for all the people when they reach the sky, because all are slaves on Earth.
- d) A road for those slaves who escaped from the eastern Pagan territories. For instance, on this road were said to have come back the Romanians from Moldavia, escaping from the Tartars. The Tartars’ headquarters were in the Crimean Peninsula. Sometimes the Tartars were called *Căpcăuni* (a type of dog-headed monster-men). A similar situation occurred for the Wallachian Romanians, escaping from the Turks, who came from the south. Thus, using this road, the escaped Romanians were able to return to their own country. It is said the Slaves’ Road will disappear when slavery dies on Earth.
- e) The Slaves’ Road is the way to be used by the people when they go to their Final Judgement, because all men are God’s slaves.
- f) Using this road, the souls of the dead ascend to Heaven.

Concerning the name of the Milky Way, the Romanian peasants have other legends (similar to that where the milk poured out from the Shepherd’s pails in the Sky Myth). I remember one of them told to me by my mother, in which the Milky Way was the milk poured from a mother’s breast as she searched for her son in the sky, after he had been abducted by an Eagle.

Another Romanian legend says: Once, a man stole some wheat straw from another man, and carried it off in a chariot. He was caught and brought to judgment, but he committed perjury, saying he was not guilty, although the victim had followed the traces of straw all the way to the thief’s house. But God, to indicate which man lied, and to teach everybody forever that it is a great sin to swear falsely, put in the sky the appearance of the chariot, and the road which the straw had fallen out onto.

The last names for the Milky Way here are *Crângul Cerului* (the **Sky’s Grove**) and *Drumul Orbilor* (The **Road of the Blind**), but the second one is derived from a phonetically confusion with *Drumul Robilor* (The **Slaves’ Road**).



☉- The Earth -☾

The Romanian peasants do not have the idea that the Earth is a sphere isolated in space. For them, the Earth is a plane, *“like the face of a table”*; at its edges, the Earth meets the sky, and it is supported by various things from below. Some of them think the Earth is propped up by several pillars (usually three), made of iron, or wood, or wax. These pillars are gnawed at by an old *“zgrițuroaică”*, and it is her activities which produce earthquakes. This *“zgrițuroaică”* - who is a kind of supernatural monster-woman - eats only maize and water from the people of the Earth. When women sift maize, the part that remains around the edges of their sieves is thrown away for *“zgrițuroaică”*. Similarly, when women go to the spring to fill their pails with water, the water they use to wash the pails with is thrown onto the ground to be drunk by *“zgrițuroaică”*. Thus, says the peasant, economical thrift is good, because any kind of waste can give an enemy advantages.

Other peasants set Judas Iscariot in the place of *“zgrițuroaică”*. There are also peasants who say the Earth is a substance created by God, and set by Him into water on the back of a big fish. When the fish moves, the Earth shakes. As evidence for this, they affirm that wherever one goes on Earth, if one digs deeply enough, water will appear. Some put the fish and the pillars together as supports for the Earth, but others have two fishes or two buffaloes, because they are also well-able to stay in the water.

Finally, other peasants explain earthquakes as being produced when God looks down, *“because the Earth knows that on it, many sins and wrongdoings happen, and it cannot look at God without shaking from fear.”*

I shall conclude by telling some legends. The first explains the creation of the mountains and valleys:

God created the Earth as a waste field, but He remarked that it was too large to fit under the sky. So, He sent the bee to ask the hedgehog for a solution. The hedgehog referred to his own rolled aspect.

“If the Earth cannot be fitted under the sky as it is too smooth everywhere, it must be tightened, rolled up, wrinkled with hills, mountains and valleys.”

Then the bee told God of the hedgehog’s opinion, and God finished the Earth off as we see it today, with hills, mountains and valleys.

Another popular explanation: Once upon a time, the fishes which support the Earth on their backs became angry and writhed about greatly, making the Earth shake terribly, and the water below became very stormy, which created the valleys, mountains and hills. At the same time, springs were opened in the Earth, which are the source of the rivers.

Other explanation for the Earth’s creation:



In the beginning, when the Earth was not yet created, and only the water was in place, God called the frog to Him, asking her to go to the ocean bottom to look for some earth. After a long time carrying out this order, the frog came back to God with a little earth in her mouth, telling Him that at the ocean bottom there was a lot of earth. So God commanded the waters to move back to the sides, and leave the Earth above. His order was executed, and from that time forth, the Earth has stayed above the waters. From then on too, God blessed the frog, and he who kills a frog commits a grave sin.

☉- The Sun -♋



Moon and Sun

For the Romanian people, the Sun is a living and holy being: Saint Sun. A tale from Neamț County runs: *“It is a sin for men to speak ill of the Sun, because if he is annoyed, he will no longer send light and warmth to them. Sometimes, he may even burn them!”*

The Sun is portrayed as a beautiful man with a face so bright that the entire Earth is illuminated by it. Daily, the Sun traverses the canopy of heaven, riding a buffalo from early morning to noon (because this uphill way is the more difficult), a horse from midday into the afternoon, and a lion from the afternoon into the evening. Other peasants simplify this to just a buffalo or a bull from morning to noon, and a lion or a horse from noon to evening. It is possible that this belief is connected to the fact that in the summertime, the Sun rises immediately after the constellation of the Bull, and when it sets, the constellation of the Lion (or the Horse in its popular Romanian form) is the first seen in the west.

At evening-tide when the Sun dismounts, he eats a piece of wafer, and drinks a glass of wine; other peasants think that he eats like this three times a day. After his supper, the Sun travels through *“tărâmul celălalt”* (**other space**), which surrounds the Earth, on foot, and reappears next day in



the east. His unseen way between sunset and sunrise passes through underground caverns and hidden vaults.

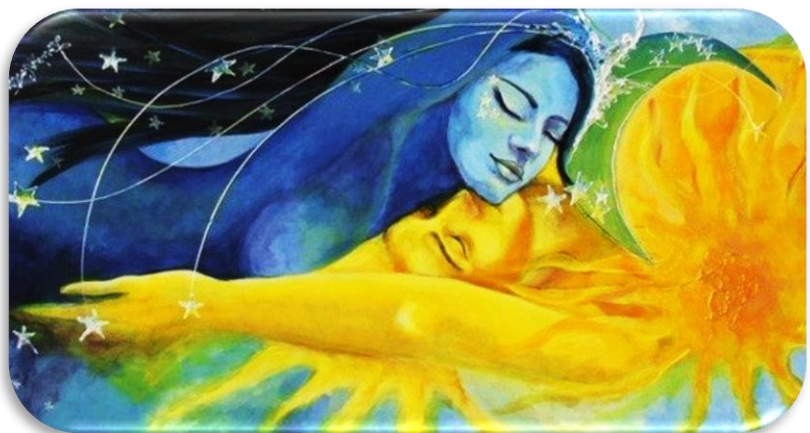
Some peasants, however, think that the Sun rides only a lion to cover his whole route through the sky. In the evening, tired, he and his lion sleep in a dark place. During their rest, some large monsters transport them back to the east. Next morning, if the Sun slept well, he rises glad and bright, but if he slept badly, he rises angry, and hides his face among the clouds. The lion does not like to stay near us all the time, so in the winter months, he runs further away from the Earth, to make us ask him to come back closer again.

☾- The Moon -☽

Like the Sun, the Moon is a saint, a virtuous woman who lightens the night, and reposes during the day. The Romanian people imagine the Moon as a beautiful maiden, the twin, or younger, sister of the Sun. This familial link, and the fact that these two heavenly bodies do not meet for long in the sky, has given birth to many legends from the same source, namely that the Sun wanted to marry his sister the Moon, but that this wedding was stopped by something, and then the Moon fled from the Sun. The following two tales illustrate this.

The Sun, the most handsome of young men, could not find a more suitable wife for himself than the Moon, the most beautiful of young girls. But at their wedding party, the hedgehog heaped up dust-piles in the Sun’s court, saying that these were fodder for the guests’ horses. The wedding guests were amazed, and asked the hedgehog:

- “Why do you do this?”
- “Because if a brother marries his sister, God will stop the rain and all the food for the horses will disappear”, answered the hedgehog, “so the horses must learn to eat dust”.



Sun and Moon: Cosmic Love

Then the guests told the Sun what the hedgehog had said. The Sun became scared, and called off the wedding. As we see, in the people’s imagination, the hedgehog is a kind of philosopher, very modest and moral.



The second story: The Moon is the Sun’s sister, but, because the Sun wanted to take her as his wife, she always ran away, so as not to be caught up by the Sun. In Romanian popular beliefs, sometimes the Moon was said to be originally as luminous as the Sun, because they were twins. The Moon’s light became less, because after the failure of their wedding, as God wanted the Moon to keep out of the Sun’s view, she hid at the sea bottom. The sea water quenched her brightness.

The Moon’s phases impressed the Romanian peasants too, but they did not understand what they were, and so they found a simple Christian explanation: Every month, God renews the Moon to demonstrate that He can make little things great, and great things small. When the new Moon first appears, the peasants look to see if they are carrying any money in their bag. If they are, it will be a good month. Some of them take an empty bag and make the sign of the cross while looking at the new Moon, asking her to help them.

The peasants also see the Moon’s spots and think, without understanding that they are mountains and valleys, that the Moon is a man’s round face, with his eyes and nose formed by the spots. Most of the peasants, however, explain the Moon’s spots as being in essence the shepherd called Abel (the first shepherd on Earth, according to the Bible), who was killed by Cain. Here are some other explanations:

- a) The Moon’s spots are a shepherd with his pipe and sheep. His name is Abel, and God set him on the Moon to show mankind how mild he was.
- b) The Moon’s spots are two brothers. The big brother killed the little one, and as a punishment, has to carry his dead brother’s body, which drips blood.
- c) The Moon’s spots are two brothers, one of whom is punished by having to drink fuel oil because he killed the other.
- d) The Moon’s spots represent Cain, who drinks the blood of his brother Abel, whom he killed.
- e) On the Moon can be seen a shepherd with his sheep, propped up by his crook; near him is a fountain and a woman, who came here to drink the water and speak with the shepherd.

This last image concerning the Moon’s spots is the most widely-circulated. It may be a projection onto the Moon of the constellation of the Shepherd, who has beside him in the sky the Great Maiden with a Yoke and the Fountain of the Crossroads.



☾- Eclipses -☽

The Romanian people think that eclipses of the Moon exist because the Moon is eaten by unearthly monsters called “*vârcolaci*” (Latin “worm-like creatures”, from *vermicolacius*, *varkolak* in Slavonic). The “*vârcolaci*” are explained in various ways as being:

- a kind of animal smaller than a dog, or simply small dogs;
- “*balauri*” or “*zmei*”;
- animals with many mouths like octopus suckers;
- ghosts called “*pricolici*”;

They also have various origins, including appearing: from children who die unbaptized, or from children born to unwed parents. One important question is, how does the Moon remain whole if she is eaten by the “*vârcolaci*”? Some people explain this by saying that as the Moon is more powerful than the “*vârcolaci*”, she can only be bitten by them, because if she were to be swallowed, it would be the end of the world. Thus many peasants make a terrific din when there are eclipses, in order to scare away the “*vârcolaci*”; they ring the church bells, hit trays, shoot guns, play instruments loudly, and so forth.



Vârcolac/ Werewolf

Other peasants say that because the Moon is so great, she tires out the “*vârcolaci*” which attack her, forcing them to liberate her. Still others say that it can all be explained through running; the Moon runs very quickly, and the “*vârcolaci*” can only nip briefly at her, before falling behind.

Eclipses of the Sun are explained by some peasants just like lunar eclipses; the “*vârcolaci*” eat the Sun, and the Sun is saved because the lion which he rides fights with the “*vârcolaci*”, protecting him. An alternative explanation is that during a solar eclipse, the Moon runs quickly past the Sun, and God darkens



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the Sun in order that he should not see the Moon, because of their unacceptable love. This belief is actually quite close to reality, because during a solar eclipse, the Moon passes in front of the Sun, which is the cause of the eclipse. Some peasants say that the Sun, seeing men’s wickedness, is disgusted, and hides his face; or the Sun's darkening is a sign from God to cause men to repent their sins. This idea also recurs in an extended form, since there are peasants who think that eclipses of the Sun and Moon happen when God commands the “*vârcolaci*” to eat them, in order to scare people into abandoning their sinful ways.

When eclipses occur, some Romanian peasants consider it necessary to light Easter candles and pray. Some peasants think solar and lunar eclipses foretell wars and calamities, but they see these as more especially foretold by comets.

☾- Meteors as falling stars -☽

For the Romanian peasants (as also with some other peoples across the world), the saints and angels living in the heavens set alight candles, which are seen as stars. These candles represent individual lives on Earth. Each person has their own star-candle, which is lit at their birth, and when they die, their star falls, and is extinguished. Support for this is found even in the Romanian national myth-ballad Miorița (“The Little Ewe”). The Romanian author Vasile Alecsandri, (1866), which derives from the ancient Dacian ritual of periodically sacrificing the best young man as a good herald for the supreme god Zamolxe. Miorița concerns three shepherds, one each from the three major historical Romanian provinces, which were states in the middle Ages: Transylvania, Wallachia and Moldavia. The shepherds from the first two provinces decide to sacrifice the Moldavian, because he is the best of them and the richest. The magical little ewe of the myth's title warns the Moldavian shepherd of his fellows' intention. Nobly, he accepts his fate (this makes sense, as the participant in the Dacian ritual would have been considered especially favoured, his death honoring his god), but asks the little ewe to tell his animals:

*"I married a proud princess,
The world's bride,
And a star fell
At my wedding party,
The Sun and Moon carried my coronet
/ .../
And the stars were my torches..."*



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In essence, this myth compares death with a cosmic wedding.

If a star is very great and bright, it belongs to an emperor, but if it is small and faint, it belongs to a simple man.

☄- Comets - The tailed stars -☄

The Romanian people call comets “Stele cu Coadă” (Tailed-Stars), and think they are divine signs placed in the sky to announce the coming of great hardships, such as bloody wars between kings and emperors, epidemics or plagues of men and cattle, famines, etc., and that these will occur in the place the tailed-star goes to. Even the end of the world will be heralded by a tailed-star, thus many peasants think, on seeing a comet that the end of the world is at hand, and prepare themselves for death using their remaining time for prayers. In fact, all the beliefs in the evil portents of comets existed from the earliest times with all peoples.



Graphic illustration on the cover of the book of I.M Stefan “Celestial stones, small planets, and stars with tails”

What can we say when, even in our own times, many prognosticators forecast that a comet will destroy the Earth, and give the time of its coming? But the cunning comet does not wish to respect their anticipations! Romania’s war for independence in 1877-78 contributed to the people’s beliefs in the forecasting ability of comets. In a paper, a peasant remarked:

“Sometimes, stars are seen with tails, which forecast bad events, like wars, plagues, etc.”

In 1877, while the Romanians fought with the Turks, a star was seen in the sky with a little tail; then the tail began to lengthen, and the star drew nearer to us; only close to the end of the war did this tailed-star disappear. On Epiphany the sky opens. Victor Anestin, a tireless popularizer of astronomy in Romania, claimed that this





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faith is bound to an astronomical phenomenon. Thus, on Epiphany (6th January) and St. Andrew`s days (30 November) people believed that the sky opened, because sometimes a bright light came through the clouds, accompanied by rumblings that faded in a flash. It was likely to be bolides – very bright balls of fire that crossed the sky on their flight to Earth. It is possible that the crossing of such fireball over the sky to cause our popular superstition. The vivid brightness of this ephemeral star, sifted through the clouds` thick sieve, gave the impression that the sky might split in two.

Christianity did not erase from Romanian thought all the old beliefs and legends from the pagan Romanians. From them, some tales remained clear, but others became confused. This happened with all the Christianized peoples, however. These old beliefs are included in the people`s innermost convictions, but they are not annexes of the Christian religion.

Some indeed are heresies, which hinder the peasants in their field work on days which are not Christian holidays; others make the peasants superstitious; but they also have a positive aspect, telling of the people`s origins. Such heresies, and the people`s legends and language, together with their history, form the Golden Book of that people. Then, even history must recognise them, but this source is frailer, needing more discrimination to use. From this work, we have seen so many valuable data about this Golden Book of our origins that nobody could be in any doubt about our Dacian - Roman beginning.

☞- The Legend of the Sun, the Moon and the Sunflower-☞

The Sun and the Moon are known to be the King and Queen of the sky. What few remember, however, is their tumultuous love story and its sad ending. Discover the Legend of The Sun, The Moon and The Sunflower.

- The Voiceless Princess

Many years ago, these lands were ruled by a brave and kind king. He was loved by his people and he had a good heart, but God gave him a heavy weight to carry. His favourite daughter, the most beautiful of the princesses was born voiceless.



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The king was devastated, for his daughter was brilliant, brave and peerlessly beautiful. But, without a voice, no prince in the world would make her his wife. The king begged to God for a cure, but He did not respond, and left him hopeless.

One day, out of the blue, a witch came at the King’s castle and demanded to see him, for she had a cure for the beautiful princess. The King did not believe in sorceries, but he was so desperate that he invited the witch in.

- A kiss from the Sun

„My King” she said. „God might not have answered your prayers, but you see... There is a cure for your daughter’s illness”.

„What evil sorcery are you talking about?” he asked.

„You know the Prince of light, the Bright Sun. He is magic, my king. All she needs to do is to steal a kiss from the bright lord, and her voice will come out clear and beautiful as a bird’s song.”

The king knew he could not trust the witches, but he loved his daughter so much, he had to at least try. Therefore, that very day he called his most trustworthy people and demanded they organize a ball for the great lord of light.

They sacrificed thousands of pigs, they brought wine from the best wineries in the country and they prepared a feast like no one else had seen before. The good Sun was honoured to be invited at such a great ball and he came open hearted.

- The Devil’s Touch

Meanwhile, the devil was cooking something evil. He went to visit the Moon, the Sun’s wife. Everybody in these lands knew that the Moon was a jealous soul, for she had the most charming husband in the world. The devil, knowing that she will become furious, told the Moon:

Your Highness, how are you not mad when your beloved husband is marrying someone else?”

„What do you mean?” she jumped.

„Take a look yourself”, the devil said, pointing to the great feast at the Court.



There, the Moon saw her husband drinking and laughing with the King. There was dancing and singing and plenty of wine, it very much resembled a wedding. The music suddenly stopped, and the mute princess came in the ballroom. She was beautiful and young and she was looking at the Sun as he was her one and only chance to happiness. The princess threw herself at his feet and begged him from all her heart to give just a kiss.

- The Revenge

After witnessing this scene, the Moon became very mad and her judgement very dark. Wrongfully thinking that her husband was marrying someone else, she threw lightning and thunder and a terrible spell that turned the princess into a flower resembling the Sun.

Fairly, the Sun was furious to see the evil that had been done. He took the flower and planted it on a field where he could always watch upon her. As for his wife, he threw her so far away in the night, making sure he'll never have to see her again.

Many years have passed and the flower is now known as the Sun Flower. Even now, she still follows the sun, hoping she will be given a voice, clear and beautiful as a bird's song.



☞- “Sânziene”-The Romanian Magic Summer Solstice’s Fairies-☞

Without no doubt, the Romanian mythology is extremely rich and fascinating. All sorts of fantastic creatures cohabit with humans in a harmonious, but strange way. Romania is home to some of the most amazing legends and superstitions and an endless source of inspiration.

The legend of the three Fates is present in many cultures around the globe. In-stead, in Romania, they have a quite special status as they are the first divine creatures to interact with the humans. On the third day of a new-born baby, it is believed that the Fates are coming in order to predict the child's future. The young mothers helped by the midwives, properly prepare the room for the Fates' arrival. They put



different gifts such as sugar and salt, wheat flour, water and wine, different seeds, sweets, books or candles. In this way, the Fates are pleased and they will predict a good life from the newborn baby. The legend says that the Fates are actually three “*iele*” (sort of Romanian bad fairies) with special gifts. The first Fate, called “*Ursitoarea*”, is the oldest and the tallest and the one who predicts about how lucky and happy the life of the baby will be. The second Fate is Death, the keeper of the Thread of Life and she predicts how long the life of the little human will be. And finally, the third Fate is Destiny, tiny and cute, this fairy always tries to balance the previous two predictions so the baby can enjoy a beautiful life.



Sânzieni

Each year, on the 24th of June, Romanians celebrate the pagan holiday of “*Sânzieni*” (also known as “*Drăgaica*”), a pagan tradition which coincides with the Orthodox holiday of the birth of St. John the Baptist. Along with the Fates, “*Sânzieni*” are part of the big and charming family of “*iele*” – gracious fairies with magical powers. “*Sânzieni*”*le* were considered to be some beautiful women living in the woods or fields unexplored by man. Unlike the most of “*iele*”, “*Sânzieni*”*le* are always

good and kind with humans. On the on the night of June 23rd to June 24th, they turn into fair-haired beauties and dance under the moon. The heavens are open on this magical night and miracles can happen. It is said that on the night before their day, they use to fly over meadows, smelling and touching the wild flowers, enriching them with special healing properties. “*Sânzieni*” is also the Romanian name of a wild yellow flower, commonly known as the Lady’s bedstraw (Latin—*Gallium Verum*), frequently used in ancient healing potions. So, the 24th of June is the perfect day for collecting this flower, along with other local medicinal plants. Moreover, on “*Sânzieni*”*’s* Eve, it is said that they bless the animals and the fountains, strengthen the marriages, heal people of different diseases and then like to dance and sing until dawn. According to the Romanian tradition, in the morning of “*Sânzieni*”, people were gathering bouquets of the flowers with the same name, make wreaths, and threw them on the roof. It was believed that the person would have a long life if the wreath remained on the roof. People were also making wreaths with the flowers picked on this day, or they were linking them in the form of a cross, and were taking them to church where they were sanctified. Then, they were bringing them back home and keep them for various magical practices, including treating illness and scaring the evil. The night of “*Sânzieni*” is one of peace and tranquility. The dew that falls is drenched in enchantment and if you bathe your face in it you will be (even more) beautiful. If you take it from the flowers at dawn, it will cure rheumatism,





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arthritis and other aches and pains of the bones, rejuvenating and energising. Any object left outside during the night touched by this magical dew may be considered an amulet. And in addition to all this sparkling, glistening alchemy, storms never happen and, says legend, even the wind is silent.

But this holiday also focuses on celebrating the Sun. This is way, on “*Sânziene*”’s Eve, people still use to make huge campfires on top of the hills and to dance around it. The bravest men even try to jump over the fire as it is believed that the fire will purify them and all their sorrows will disappear in the flames. In some villages, the young boys are trying to impress the girls by playing with fire, literally. They take burning torches and start to rotate them, creating circles symbolizing the Sun, in a dangerous but captivating sparkling show. Then, the unmarried girls go to gather some Lady’s bedstraw’s flowers to put under their pillow asking “*Sânziene*” to help them dreaming their true soul mate. “*Sânziene*”’s Day has its own specific rituals, mainly focused on love spells. In some regions, especially in the country-side, it is common that the young girls to play the role of “*Sânziene*”. One of the girls is chosen to represent “*Drăgaica*”, the most powerful of “*Sânziene*” fairies. After she is dressed in white and embellished with golden wheat spikes – the symbol of Sun and summer – she must gather all the other girls into a big circle and dance.

This holiday has deep astronomical meaning that arises from the ancient Sun worship. Solstice of June 21st is celebrating in an obscure and encoded way in the people's life, three days after its astronomical time. This traditional celebration reliefs ancient astronomical knowledge. At the solstice, the day begins to shrink and the Sun fall early in the heavens! The yellow golden fragrant flower crown (Gallium Verum) and the traditional round Romanian dance “*hora*”, and the fire show of young man are just the reflection of Zodiac crossed by life-giving star, the Sun. This day also marks the middle of summer and celebrates nature and fecundity. So, “*Sânziene*” is a feast of love and happiness, quite similar to the famous Midsummer Night, when the skies are opening and miracles happen on the entire world who becomes a magical realm.

☞- Sarmisegetuza Regia, the door to other worlds-☞

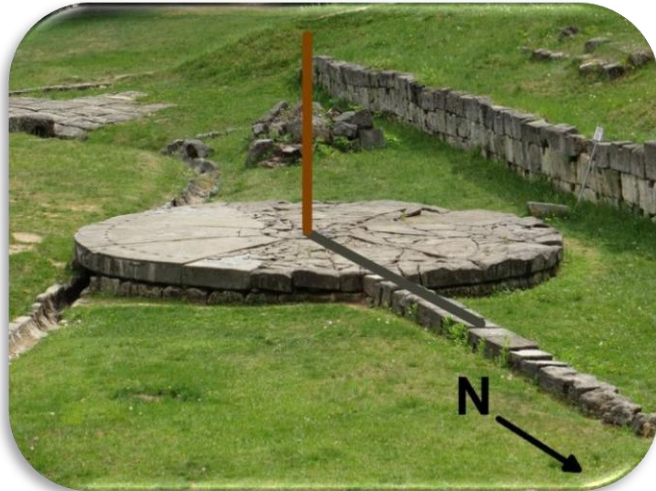
Sarmisegetuza Regia, the Dacian fortresses from Orăstiei Mountains, Romania was founded over 2000 years ago. It is situated at an altitude of 1200 meters and is one of the location from the UNESCO's World Heritage list. The name of the fortress, Sarmisegetuza apparently comes from "Sarmis is getuza"



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meaning "Hermes is the defender", that's because Dacians worshiped the Sun knows as Hermes, Sermesse, or Sarmis Sarmis. The ancient capital of pre-Roman Dacia was destroyed in 106 by the Roman army. Strabon, the famous Greek historic and geographer, notes various things about the scientific and astronomical knowledge, reminding about Zamolxis as one who learned from Pythagoras some heavens' science.

Obviously, at that time, astronomy supplied to the needs of orientation and chronology, very useful to populations that were always fighting but also for the respect of the rhythms of agriculture and hunting. The sacred feasts were also cyclical and the sky was seen as the refuge of divinities. One of the priests' main concerns was how to establish correct calendars.



At Sarmisegetuza, the most important preserved building is the sanctuary. This fact must not surprise us: there are appreciations about the level of the Dacian culture, which go back up to Haerodotus (5 century BC).

This fortress include a complex made from six sanctuaries and, therefore the place was named "the sacred place". The bigger Sanctuary of the fortress consists of three concentric circles made up of andesite columns, embodying a 30 meters large solar calendar, and known as Dacian calendar. Near this sanctuary is a Solar Disc or a Andesite Sun. Some people believes that this Andesite Sun is the gateway to other worlds. According to some historians, it seems like the Andesite Sun served as an altar of sacrifice, it has a carved stone basin for the sacrifices' blood. Another hypothesis is that the Andesite Sun had the role of a sundial. We can also suppose that the ingenious builders Included in the dimension/position of the gnomon knowledge about the change of the Sun's altitude during the seasons. Thus, during the noon of the winter solstice, the year's longest shadow had to position to the eastern edge of the stone prolongation, while during the summer solstice the shadow had to touch only





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the edge of the disk, the blocks becoming the pages of an eternal celestial calendar.

The Great Circular Sanctuary is alike Stonehenge, and the Andesite Sun resemble Mayan calendar, and this is a fascinating fact, that the Dacian people knew the secrets of astronomy. They had a very precise way to calculate time. The Andesite Sun is a surprisingly accurate calendar. This sanctuary is a circular platform with 10 rays. It can be compared to the famous Mayan calendar. It still remains a mystery the way in which it was built. The rocks were brought from very far, more than 100 km away.

Often, this Dacian settlement ruins are ideal destinations for the people who loves astronomical phenomena. According to historical documents, the Dacians were knowledgeable of the movement of the stars, so Sarmisegetusa Regia is a symbol of ancient science. The Gothian historian Jordanes believed that in this region of the world there were persons “almost as scholarly as the Greeks”. In his work “De origine aetibus que Getarum”, he wrote that Dacians knew the 12 zodiacal signs, how the Moon heaves on and vanishes, the name of 346 stars, etc. Therefore it is easy to see why the great circular sanctuary, still preserved at Sarmisegetuza, illustrates perfectly the level of the astronomical knowledge of our ancestors concerning the Universe, the time, the seasons, the geographic and astronomic orientation. The sanctuary has a calendar system still insufficiently studied, but the Andesite Sun is a jewel of universal culture, unfortunately badly preserved and hardly known.

☞- “Lucefărul” – The Evening Star -☞

by Mihai Eminescu

English version by Petre Grimm

Mihai Eminescu is considered one of the most important poets of the Romanian language, and is cherished as a national poet in both Romania and Moldova. He represent the Romanian nation in mankind's concert. One of the greatest lyrical poets of world literature, comparable with Byron, Shelley or Lermontov, a revolutionary poet in terms of attitude, a poet whose life-span only lasted 39 years (1850-1889), to posterity an inestimable treasure of verse. One the most famous poem by the Romanian national poet, Mihai Eminescu. It is an epic poem which tells a beautiful story in romantic style (romantic meaning both the “love” romantic and also the romantic period).





There was, as in the fairy tales,
As ne'er in the time's raid,
There was, of famous royal blood
A most beautiful maid.

She was her parents' only child,
Bright like the sun at noon,
Like the Virgin midst the saints
And among stars the moon.

From the deep shadow of the vaults
Her step now she directs
Toward a window; at its nook
Bright Evening-star expects.

She looks as in the distant seas
He rises, darts his rays

And leads the blackish, loaded ships
On the wet, moving, ways.
To look at him every night
Her soul her instincts spur;
And as he looks at her for weeks
He falls in love with her.

And as on her elbows she leans
Her temple and her whim
She feels in her heart and soul that
She falls in love with him.

And ev'ry night his stormy flames
More stormily renew
When in the shadow of the castle
She shows to his bright view.

* *

And to her room with her slow steps
He bears his steps and aims
Weaving out of his sparkles cold
A toil of shaking flames.

And when she throws upon her bed
Her tired limbs and reposes,
He glides his light along her hands
And her sweet eyelash closes.

And from the mirror on her shape
A beam has spread and burns,
On her big eyes that beat though closed
And on her face that turns.

Her smiles view him; the mirror shows
Him trembling in the nook
For he is plunging in her dream
So that their souls may hook.





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She speaks with him in sleep and sighs
While her heart's swelled veins drum:
-"O sweet Lord of my fairy nights,
Why comest thou not? Come!

Descend to me, mild Evening-star
Thou canst glide on a beam,
Enter my dwelling and my mind
And over my life gleam!"

And he listens and trembles and
Still more for her love craves
And as quick as the lightning he
Plunges into the waves.

The water in that very spot
Moves rolling many rings
And out of the unknown, dark, depth
A superb young man springs.

As on a threshold o'er the sill
His hasty steps he leads,
Holds in his hand a staff with, at
Its top, a crown of reeds!

A young Voivode he seems to be
With soft and golden hair;
A blue shroud binds in a knot on
His naked shoulder fair.

The shade of his face is of wax
And thou canst see throughout -
A handsome dead man with live eyes
That throw their sparkles out.

-"From my sphere hardly I come to
Follow thy call and thee,
The heaven is my father and
My mother is the sea.

So that I could come to thy room
And look at thee from near
With my light reborn from waves my
Fate toward thee I steer.

O come, my treasure wonderful
And thy world leave aside;
For I am Evening-star up from
And thou wouldst be my bride.

In my palace of coral I'll
Take thee for evermore
And the entire world of the sea
Will kneel before thy door."

-"O thou art beautiful as but
In dreams an angel shows,
The way though thou hast oped for me
For me's for ever close.

Thy port and mien and speech are strange
Life thy gleams don't impart,
For I'm alive and thou art dead
And thy eyes chill my heart."

* *

Days have passed since: but Evening-star
Comes up again and stays
Just as before, spreading o'er her
His clear, translucent rays.

In sleep she would remember him
And, as before, her whole
Wish for the Master of the waves
Is clinching now her soul.

-"Descend to me, mild Evening-star
Thou canst glide on a beam,
Enter my dwelling and my mind
And over my life gleam!"





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He hears: and from the dire despair
Of such an woeful weird
He dies, and the heavens revolve
Where he has disappeared.

Soon in the air flames ruddy spread,
The world in their grip hold;
A superb form the spasms of the
Chaotic valleys mold.

On his locks of black hair he bears
His crown a fierce fire frames;
He floats as he really comes
Swimming in the sun's flames.

His black shroud lets develop out
His arms marbly and hale;
He pensively and sadly brings
His face awfully pale.

But his big wonderful eyes' gleam,
Chimerically deep,
Shows two unsatiated spasms
That but into dark peep.

"From my sphere hardly I come to
Follow thy voice, thy sight;
The bright sun is my father and
My mother is the night.

O come, my treasure wonderful
And thy world leave aside
For I am Evening-star from up
And thou wouldst be my bride.

O come, and upon thy blond hair
Crowns of stars I shall crowd,
And more that all of them, up there,
Thou wild look fair and proud."

"O thou art beautiful as but
In dreams a demon shows,
The way though hast oped for me
For me's for ever close.

The depths of my breast ache from the
Desire of thy fierce love
My heavy, big eyes also ache
When into them thine shove".

"But how wouldst thou that I come down?
Know this - for, do I lie? -:
I am immortal, while thou art
One of those that must die!"

"I hate big words, nor do I know
How to begin my plea;
And although thy discourse is clear
I don't understand thee.

But if thou wantest my flamed love
And that would not be sham,
Come down on this temporal earth,
Be mortal as I am!"

"I'd lose my immortality
For but one kiss of thine!
Well, I will show thee how much too
For thy fierce love I pine!

Yes, I shall be reborn from sin,
Receive another creed:
From that endlessness to which I
Am tied, I shall be freed!"

And out he went, he went, went out,
Loving a human fay,
He plucked himself off from the sky,
Went for many a day.





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* *

Meanwhile, the house-boy, Catalin,
Sly, and who often jests
When he's filling with wine the cups
Of the banqueting guests;

A page that carries step by step
The trail of the Queen's gown,
A wandering bastard, but bold
Like no one in the town;

His little cheek - a peony
That under the sun stew;
Watchful, just like a thief, he sneaks
In Catalina's views.

"How beautiful she grew" - thinks he -
"A flower just to pluck!
Now, Catalin, but now it is
Thy chance to try thy luck!"

And by the way, hurriedly, he
Corners that human fay:
-"What's with thee, Catalin? Let me
Alone and go thy way!"

"No! I want thee to stay away
From thoughts that have no fun.
I want to see thee only laugh,
Give me a kiss, just one!"

"I don't know what it is about
And, believe me, retire!
But for one Evening-star up from
I've kept my strong desire!"

"If thou dost not know I could show
Thee all about love's balm!
Only, don't give way to thy ire
And listen and be calm.

So as the hunter throws the net
That many birds would harm,
When I'll stretch my left arm to thee,
Enlace me with thy arm.

Under my eyes keep thine and don't
Let them move on their wheels
And if I lift thee by the waist
Thou must lift on thy heels.

When I bend down my face, to hold
Thin up must be thy strife;
So, to each other we could throw
Sweet, eager, looks for life.

And so that thou have about love
A knowledge true and plain,
When I stoop to kiss thee, thou must
Kiss me too and again."

With much bewilderment her mind
The little boy's word fills,
And shyly and nicely now she
Wills not, and now she wills.

And slowly she tells him:- "Since thy
Childhood I've known thy wit,
And as thou art and glib and small
My temper thou wouldst fit.

But Evening-star sprung from the calm
Of the oblivion,
Though, gives horizon limitless
To the sea lone and dun.

And secretly, I close my eyes
For my eyelash tears dim
When the waves of the sea go on
Travelling toward him.





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He shines with love unspeakable
So that my pains he'd leach,
But higher and higher soars, so
That his hand I'd ne'er reach.

Sadly thrusts from the worlds which from
My soul his cold ray bar...
I shall love him forever and
Forever he'll rove far.

Like the unmeasured steppes my days
Are deaf and wild, therefore,
But my nights spread a holy charm
I understand no more!"

-“Thou art a child! Let's go! Through new
Lands our own fate let's frame!
Soon they shall have lost our trace and
Forgot even our name!

We shall be both wise, glad and whole
As my judgement infers
And thou wouldst not long for thy kin
Nor yearn for Evening-stars!"

* *

Then Evening-star went out. His wings
Grow, into heavens dash,
And on his way millenniums
Flee in less than a flash.

Below, a depth of stars; above,
The heaven stars begem, -
He seems an endless lightning that
Is wandering through them.

And from the Chaos' vales he sees
How in an immense ring
Round him, as in the World's first day,
Lights from their sources spring;

How, springing, they hem him like an
Ocean that swimming nears...
He flees carried by his desire
Until he disappears.

For that region is boundless and
Searching regards avoids
And Time strive vainly there to come
To life from the dark voids.

'Tis nought. 'Tis, though, thirst that sips him
And which he cannot shun,
'Tis depth unknown, comparable
To blind oblivion.

-“From that dark, choking, endlessness
Into which I am furred,
Father, undo me, and for e'er
Be praised in the whole world!

Ask anything for this new fate
For with mine I am through:
O hear my prayer, O my Lord, for
Thou gives life and death too.

Take back my endlessness, the fires
That my being devour
And in return give me a chance
To love but for an hour!

I've come from Chaos; I'd return
To that my former nest...
And as I have been brought to life
From rest, I crave for rest!"

-“Hyperion, that comest from
The depths with the world's swarm,
Do not ask signs and miracles
That have no name nor form.





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Thou wantest to count among men,
Take their resemblance vain;
But would now the whole mankind die
Men will be born again.

But they are building on the wind
Ideals void and blind;
When human waves run into graves
New waves spring from behind.

Fate's persecutions, lucky stars,
They only are to own;
Here we know neither time nor space,
Death we have never known.

From the eternal yesterday
Drinks what to-day will drain
And if a sun dies on the sky
A sun quickens again.

Risen as forever, death though
Follows them like a thorn
For all are born only to die
And die to be reborn.

But thou remainest wheresoe'er
Thou wouldst set down or flee.
Thou art of the prime form and an
Eternal prodigy.

Thou wilt now hear the wondrous voice
At whose bewitched singing
Mounts woody get skipping to skies
Into sea Island sinking!

Perhaps thou wilt more: show in deeds
Thy sense of justice, might,
Out of the earth's lumps make an empire
And settle on its height!

I can give thee millions of vessels

And hosts; thou, bear thy breath
O'er all the lands, o'er all the oceans:
I cannot give thee death.

For whom thou wantest then to die?
Just go and see what's worth
All that is waiting there for thee
On that wandering earth!"

* *

His first dominion on the sky
Hyperion restores
And like in his first day, his light
All o'er again he pours.

For it is evening and the night
Her duty never waives.
Now the moon rises quietly
And shaking from the waves,

And upon the paths of the groves
Her sparkles again drone...
Under the row of linden-trees
Two youths sit all alone.

-“O darling, let my blessed ear feel
How thy heart's pulses beat,
Under the ray of thy eyes clear
And unspeakably sweet.

With the charms of their cold light pierce
My thought's faery glades,
Pour an eternal quietness
On my passion's dark shades.

And there, above, remain to stop
Thy woe's violet stream,
For thou art my first source of love
And also my last dream!"





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Hyperion beholds how love
Their eyes equally charms:
Scarcely his arm touches her neck,
She takes him in her arms.

The silvery blooms spread their smells
And their soft cascade strokes
The tops of the heads of both youths
With long and golden locks.

And all bewitched by love, she lifts
Her eyes toward the fires
Of the witnessing Evening-star
And trusts him her desires:

-“Descend to me, mild Evening-star
Thou canst glide on a beam,

Enter my forest and my mind
And o'er my good luck gleam!”

As he did it once, into woods,
On hills, his rays he urges,
Guiding throughout so many wilds
The gleaming, moving, surges.

But he falls not as he did once
From his height into swells:
-“What matters thee, cloud of dust, if
'Tis me or someone else?

You live in your sphere's narrowness
And luck rules over you -
But in my steady world I feel
Eternal, cold and true!”



POLAND

☞- A Polish Legend about Constellations-☛

There are only three well known and distinguished constellations in the region of Warmia and Mazury: Orion, Ursa Major, and part of Taurus.

Star observation was mainly an occupation of those who needed this ability to have some sense of direction, thus most information could be gained from fishermen and shepherds. That knowledge means not only the ability to point at a specific object in the sky but also the ability to observe its movement.

Celestial navigation is still fairly well- known. The most popular "clock" among Masurian and Warmian people is Orion. The second most popular are The Pleiades and definitely the least popular is Big Dipper. Aside from orientation within time period of 24 hours, seasons were also defined by stars' and constellations' position. The Pleiades and Orion are used in both of these calculations.

The other use of the knowledge of the stars is defining directions. The Pleiades, Orion, Big Dipper and Milky-Way are mainly used for this purpose. This



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skill however is mostly used by fishermen only. Also, country dwellers of Warmia and Mazury regions predict weather using stars' brightness and visibility.

Stars in folk beliefs, like all incomprehensible and distant phenomena, were surrounded by mystery. According to beliefs, human fate is connected with the stars and the conviction that every person has its equivalent star was very popular. Shooting-star was a sign of death. According to one of the most common beliefs, pointing a finger at the night-sky or counting stars could in some cases cause death.

The movement of the stars is referred to as "ambulation". Using such a word, related to the gambit of living creatures, is very distinctive and generally compatible with a belief that stars are alive.

☞- Legends about Copernicus-☞

- **Lubawa’s Waterworks**



In 1539 in the town of Lubawa Copernicus paid a visit to his friend, Bishop Teidemann Giese. The scholars wanted to drink a cup of clear water. When it was delivered, the bishop said to the astronomer that it wasn't as clear and cold as it should be, because the spring was located outside the town. So, before the water was delivered, it lost its flavour and regenerative attributes. The bishop added that he would like to have the water source close to his home. Copernicus smiled and went near the church in Lipce, from where the water was delivered. After he examined the spot, he organised a party of men and the building of a waterway was started. Even before leaving Lubawa, Copernicus was able to drink some cups of crystal-clear and cold water with his dear friend. Nowadays the city's waterworks as well as pilgrims visiting the town use this water source - it's because the water near the church in Lipce is believed to have healing powers.



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• Copernicus’ Sandwiches

Legend has it that Copernicus made a great discovery during the war between Poland and the knights of the Teutonic Order. It was around the year 1516. During the battle a problem emerged - many people were suffering from digestive problems. Copernicus thought that the reason for this problem was eating bread. It wasn't uncommon for bread to be thrown to the ground. People didn't really bother, they grabbed the bread and ate it, despite the fact that it was dirty. According to Copernicus, something that was on the dirty bread was causing the soldiers' stomach disorders. The astronomer found a way to prevent it. He said that the top of the bread should be greased with any edible substance. He found out that the perfect substance would be butter. Therefore, another great and practical discovery was added to the "On the Revolutions of the Celestial Spheres" – the sandwich.



☯- Kupala Night-☯

In the past Life of former Slavs largely depended on the cycle of astronomical phenomena. During events like the vernal equinox or summer solstice the most important pagan ceremonies used to take place, for instance Kupala Night (Noc Kupały), celebrated at the shortest night of the year, summer solstice night. It was the festivity of fire, the Sun, the Moon, and also abundance, love and fertility. People used to celebrate it mainly in the Middle East Europe, but it was known in other cultures, too. During Kupala



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Night young men used to light a fire by rubbing pieces of wood. It was a way to impress single girls with their strength. The bonfires were known as Sobótka. As time went by, the notion of Sobótka turned into another name of Kupala Night.

This ritual used to be one of the most important holidays for Polish Slavs. The tradition says that women and men were girded with artemisia, women also had to wear garlands. Garlands were made of herbs. Young people were singing, dancing around a bonfire and jumping over it. Dancing was one of the



ways to exile evil spirits far from the villages and fields. Jumping through the fire used to be one of the main solemnities in tribute to the Sun – ‘bright god’, it had to provide purification of the soul from evil, every illness and bring happiness. It was believed that souls came back to warm up.

The mystical fern flower played a significant part in Kupala Night festivities. According to legends, it blossomed at the summer solstice night. Its extraordinary glow showed the way to hidden treasures.

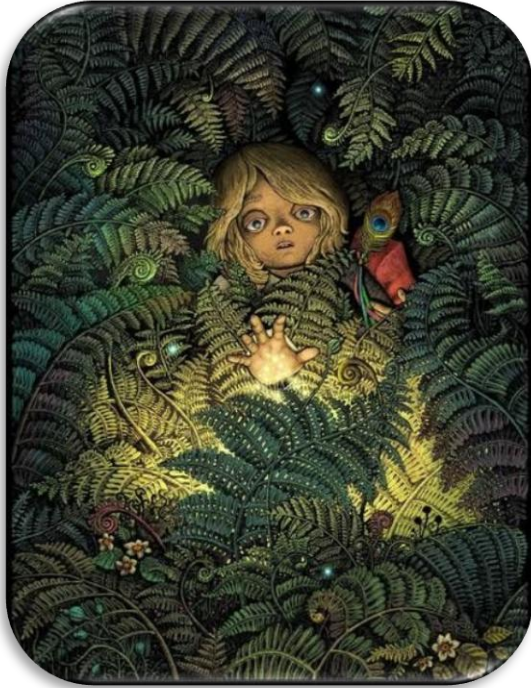
The one who found the flower could acquire whole wealth and happiness, but it was really hard to attain it. Sometimes it was even impossible. One of the old legends describes a heroic trial to find this magical flower by Jack - one of the poor kids from the village.

☞-Legend about fern flower-☞

Once upon a time Jack heard about an extraordinary fern flower with mystical abilities. He decided that he needed to find it. He had been preparing for this adventure for a few months. At the Kupala Night teenagers from his village went on Sobótka ceremony, but Jack went to the forest to fulfill his dreams. At the beginning of his journey he didn't have any difficulties, but the further he walked the harder it was. The flower was guarded by witches and woody creatures.

Jack was more worried about poverty than monsters, so he continued his adventure. Just before the sunrise he found the flower. It had five petals and looked gorgeous. Jack wanted to pick the flower but suddenly the Sun rose and the flower disappeared. He didn't give up and tried again the following year. Unfortunately, the same situation happen again. His third trial was successful. He found the flower





before the sunrise. The magical flower warned him that if he shares his belongings with someone, he will lose everything. Jack agreed to these terms and then the flower settled in his heart. Then Jack could afford to fulfill his dreams. He had everything he wanted. He had servants, lived in a huge castle and ate exotic food. He lived a life of a rich man and took part in a lot of parties, but he couldn't stop thinking about his family. One day he decided to visit them. He went there, but no one could recognize him. He saw that they didn't have much money, but he didn't want to lose his goods, so he went back to his castle. He tried to forget about that situation, but he really missed them, so he went back there again. The trip finished with the same result. He went back to his old lifestyle, but he visited his family soon. Then he found out everyone had died because of poverty and hunger. He realised he could have saved them and he felt guilty. He said that since they had died, he should have died too. Then the ground came apart and absorbed him. The evil flower ended up on a milk carton.

Since then no one could find fern flower.

In the 14th and 15th century bishops tried to ban Sobótka, but they realized it was impossible, because it was deeply rooted in the Slavs' culture so they changed the date to a more Christian one, which was 23/24 June, that is St John Baptist's Day. That's why the name changed to Bonfire Night. It doesn't make any sense in English, but in Polish its Noc Świętojańska, which can be translated as Saint John's Night.

- The famous festivities of Kupala Night in Europe took place at the Ślęza Mountain in Poland.
- The name "artemisia" ultimately derives from the Greek goddess Artemis (Roman Diana), the namesake of Greek Queens Artemisia I and II. A more specific reference may be to Artemisia II of Caria, a botanist and medical researcher who died in 350 BC. In fact, ferns are not flowering plants. However, some experts think that the flowering fern myth has its roots in reality. In the past, the grouping of plants was not as exact as modern taxonomic ones. Numerous flowering plants resemble ferns, or have fern-like foliage, and some of them indeed open flowers during night time. Also, certain true ferns, e.g., *Osmunda regalis* have sporangia in tight clusters (termed "fertile fronds"), which may appear in flower-like clusters, and as a result they are commonly known as "flowering ferns".
- On this day in Latvia everyone has a day off work.





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- End up on a milk carton – In the United States during the mid-1980s, there was a practice of putting the faces of children who had gone missing (and were presumably kidnapped or abducted) on a milk carton, in an attempt to get neighbours of the person who had abducted the child to notice and report him or her.

☾-Slavs and the Moon-☾

The Moon loomed large in almost all existing cultures and so it did with former Slavs. Lunar phase was the main determinant of agricultural year. It was connected with works on the farm and religious rituals. Work done by the bees is connected with the Moon cycle. These insects choose the type of work they do depending on the Moon. It is proved that the Moon influences fruit, too. They grow faster during the full moon.

In villages in the 19th century Poland, there was a ritual of greeting the rising Moon. People were bowing the knees or taking the headgear off. It was believed that bowing to the Moon and making a triple wish would make their dreams come true. Former Slavs prayed to the Young Moon (period between new moon and first quarter, waxing gibbous).

The New Moon phase was very important for herbalists from Ukraine and Belarus. It was believed that herbs should have been harvested and consumed during it, because they were the most effective just then.

Full moon was significant for the newlyweds. The wedding should have taken place during the full moon, because then their marriage could be happier in the future. They would have more chances to have plenty of kids, too.

Former Slavs used to believe that moonlight was very dangerous for their children. To protect them, they put cradles far away from the moonlight. Also, they used to put a bucket of water next to the window, because they wanted to frighten the Moon and drown it in the water.

Witches were connected with the Moon, too. Slavs believed that witches could bring the Moon down to the Earth with their magic powers. In Eastern Europe people believed that the Moon absence in the sky was caused by wolves. They thought that wolves “ate” the Moon. In other regions of Europe people thought that when the Moon was absent from the sky, it was shining on the land of the dead.



The Moon used to play an important role in the Polish culture. It was an inspiration for poets, writers and singers. One of the most popular legends is a story about a Polish nobleman – Twardowski. He signed a pact with the Devil, selling his soul in exchange for special powers Twardowski landed on the Moon, where he has been living until now.

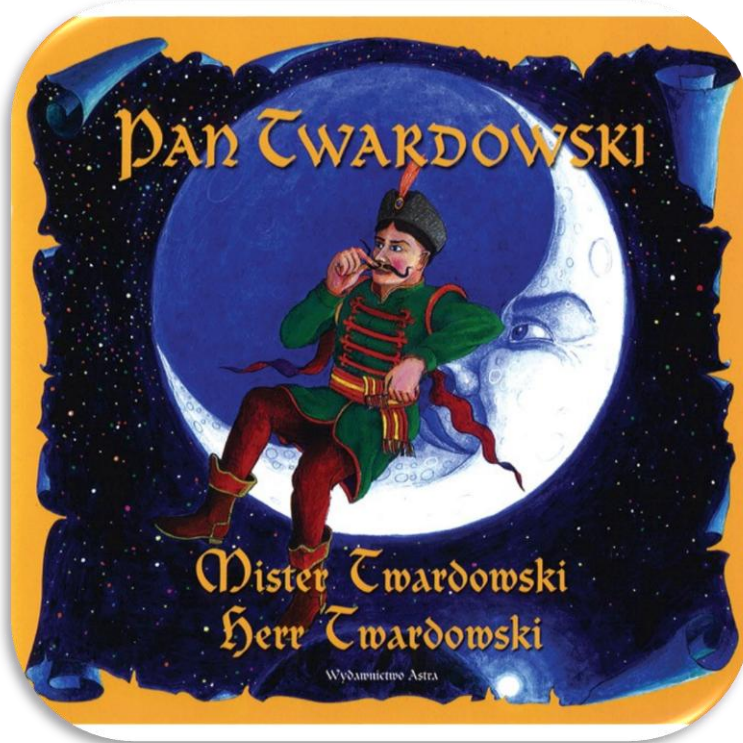
☞- Legend about Twardowski-☞

Long time ago a nobleman Jan Twardowski lived in Krakow. He was educated, loved books and science. He was also interested in magic, but after many years of research he found out that spell casting was impossible without the help of supernatural forces. So he searched in his books and found volumes about the summoning of devils. After conducting the rituals a devil appeared in Twardowski's room.

Twardowski told the devil about his research and the desire of using true sorcery. The devil said that his dreams would soon come true. All he needed to do was to sign a contract. The terms were simple.

The man's soul would belong to the devil. But Twardowski was clever – he added the second term. His soul could be taken only in Rome, where he was going to travel soon. The demon was satisfied, but he didn't know that the nobleman wasn't going to even come close to Rome. The contract was sealed and the devil had to help Twardowski cast any magic his master could think of.

Armed with new powers, Twardowski started a journey around the country. With magic he created a huge rooster that he was able to ride on as on a horse and visited many cities and villages. But much to the devil's surprise, Twardowski started using his powers to do good deeds! And so the wealth and fame of Twardowski grew. Once he even met King Zygmunt August. Years passed and the devil was still unable to get the nobleman's soul.





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Finally, he disguised himself as a peasant and came to Twardowski asking to cure his ill mother. The sorcerer agreed to come to the tavern, where the woman would be. As soon as they got inside, the devil started to laugh and said:

- “I’ve got you now Twardowski! Thy soul belongs to me. The pact should be fulfilled. This tavern is called Rome!”

The sorcerer got pale and cursed his foolishness. But he had to act quickly, because the devil had already grabbed him and carried above the Earth, to Hell. So he started to chant the prayer to Saint Mary. Already with the first few words, the devil became visibly weaker. When Twardowski stopped, it turned out that the power of the prayer was so great that the devil’s pain forced him to drop his prey and escape to Hell. Jan Twardowski safely landed on the Moon.

It is said that he sits there till this day, smoking his favourite pipe and wistfully watching the Earth...

☪-Zorica and Danica-☾

These names mean simply Dawn and Daystar, but in folklore accounts of all Slavic nations, they are often described as persons, or associated with persons, in pretty much the same way as Sun and Moon. Danica is often called Sun’s younger sister or daughter, and was probably associated with Morana. Consequently, Zorica was either Sun’s mother or older sister. It is quite possible this was a Slavic relic of the Proto-Indo-European dawn god.

☪-Slavic God Triglav-☾

Triglav also sometimes called troglav is a god or complex of gods in Slavic mythology, similar in nature to the Trinity in Christianity or Trimurti in Hinduism. A variant of his name is Troyan. Triglav is a unity of three gods. The exact members of the triad vary by place and time. An early variation included Svarog, Perun, and Dajbog. Later, Dajbog was replaced by Svetovid or Veles. Triglav is



usually described as a fusion of these gods. More rarely he is said to be their son. It may also be a unity of lesser gods (Lesser Triglav).



In one legend, Triglav is veiled completely, so holy that he cannot see the evil deeds of men. He rarely appears around mortals. Triglav is depicted as a three-headed man sometimes with bands of (gold) blindfolds over his eyes, or a man with three goat heads. Several temples dedicated to Triglav existed near Szczecin, Poland. During the period of Christianization, these temples and statues of Triglav were completely destroyed.

Triglav's heads represent sky, earth and the Underworld. Some priests believed that Triglav has three heads because he rules all three kingdoms (sky, earth and hell) and has a binding over his eyes so he could not see people's sins. His eyes are said to possess great power (that's why all eyes on his statues are covered). It is generally believed that Triglav, the highest mountain in Slovenia, was named after the god.

☯-The Goddess Saules Mate-☯

“Saule (pronounced SEW-lay) means ‘the sun’ and is the most powerful of Latvian heavenly Goddesses. She is the Goddess of the sun and of fertility, the patroness of all unfortunate people, especially orphans (as the only one to substitute the mother, to warm the child; mother is compared to Saule speaking of kindness, and bride as speaking of beauty). She is the mother of Saules meitas or meita (plural or singular). She is said to live on the top of the heavenly mountain (some model of world), where She rides during the day in her chariot. At night she sails with her boat on the world sea. The motif of permanent motion is apparent in this image, as well as the idea of the sun shining somewhere else during the night. Of course, the diachronic aspect is to be taken into account. In several cases she appears as the ruler in heaven, especially in relations with Meness.”



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Patricia Monaghan tells us that “Saule ruled all parts of life, from birth into her light to death when she welcomed souls into Her apple tree in the west. Even the name of the ocean on which the Balts lived was hers, named for Balta Saulite (‘darling little white sun’). She was worshiped in songs and rituals that celebrated Her nurturance of earth’s life, for She was Our Mother, called various names like Saulite Mat (‘little sun-mother’) and Saulite Sudrabota (‘little silver sun’).

She was married in the springtime of creation to the moon man Menesis. Their first child was the earth; after that, countless children became the stars of heaven. Saule was a hardworking mother, leaving the house at dawn each day and driving her chariot across the sky until dusk. Menesis, however, was fickle and carefree, staying home all day and



only sometimes driving his moon-chariot. The light of Saule’s life was her daughter (variously named Austrine, Valkyrine, and Barbelina, but most generally called Saules Meita, the sun’s daughter), the beloved lady of the Morning Star (or Venus).

Each evening, after she had bathed her weary horses in the Nemunas River, Saule looked for the child. But one evening she could not find her – for in her absence, Saule’s beautiful long-haired daughter had been raped by Menesis.

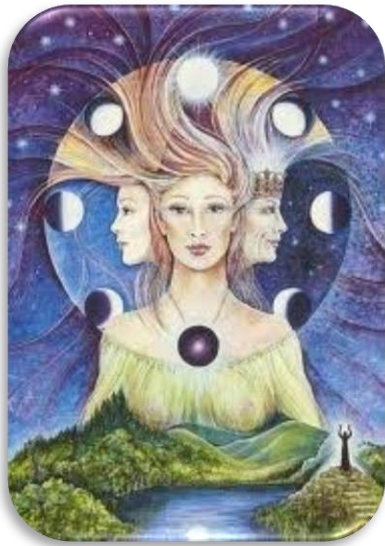
Furious beyond words, Saule took a sword and slashed the moon’s face, leaving the marks we see today. Then she banished him forever from her presence; thus, they are no longer seen together in the sky – the end of the happy paradise before the evil came into our world.

Saule was worshiped every day when her people would bow to the east to greet Mother Sun. But she was especially honored on summer solstice, Ligo, when she rose crowned with a braid of red fern blossoms to dance on the hilltops in her silver shoes. At that moment, people dived into east-flowing streams to bathe themselves in her light. All the women donned similar braided wreaths and walked through the fields, singing Goddess songs, or daina. Finally, they gathered around bonfires and sang the night away.



Because Lithuanian is the oldest extant Indo-European language, it is thought that the Baltic mythologies hold clues to the original beliefs of the people. But scholarly convention has it that the Indo-Europeans worshiped a sky father embodied in the sun. Whence, then, this powerful sun mother? Marija Gimbutas, herself Lithuanian, believed Saule to be an Old European Goddess of that woman honoring culture that preceded the Indo-European invasions; Saule was to give way to a male solar divinity. But sun Goddesses in other Indo-European areas show there is room for study”.

☾-Zvezda Dennitsa-☽



In Slavic mythology, Zorya (alternately, Zora, Zaria, Zarya, Zory, Zore = "Dawn"; Zorza in Polish, Zara-Zaranica (Belarusian: Зара-Зараніца), Zvezda, Zvezda, Danica = "Star") are the two guardian goddesses, known as the Auroras. They guard and watch over the winged doomsday hound, Simargl, who is chained to the star Polaris in the constellation Ursa Minor, the "little bear". If the chain ever breaks, the hound will devour the constellation and the universe will end. The Zoryas represent the Morning Star and the Evening Star.

The Zoryas serve the sun god Dažbog, who in some myths is described as their father. Zorya Utrennyaya, the Morning Star, opens the gates to his palace every morning for the sun-chariot's departure. At dusk, Zorya Vechernyaya—the Evening Star—closes the palace gates

once more after his return.

The home of the Zoryas was sometimes said to be on Bouyan (or Buyan), an oceanic island paradise where the Sun dwelt along with his attendants, the North, West and East winds.

The Morning Star is Zorya Utrennyaya (from Russian utro, meaning "morning"; also known as Zvezda Danica, Zvezda Danica, Zvezda Dennitsa, Zvezda Dnieca, Zvezda Zornitsa, Gwiazda Poranna, Rannia Zorya, Zornica, Zornička), who opens the gates of





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Dažbog's palace each morning so that the Sun may begin his journey. She is a patroness of horses, protection, exorcism, and the planet Venus, and Slavs would pray to her each morning as the sun rose.

Conflicting accounts exist of her marital situation. In some myths, she is described as the wife of Perun and would accompany her husband into battle. In this role she was known to protect those warriors she favoured against death by letting down her veil. In other accounts, both she and Zorya Vechernyaya were the wives of the male Myesyats, the moon god, and by him bore all of the stars. However, some have both Zorya as virgin goddesses, while describing Myesyats as an unrelated female moon goddess.

The Evening Star is Zorya Vechernyaya (from Russian *vecher*, meaning "evening"); also known as *Večernya Zvyezda*, *Večernya Zvezda*, *Zvezda Vechernaya*, *Zorya Vechernyaya*, *Zvezda Wieczoniaia*, *Zvezda Wieczernica*, *Zvezda Vechernitsa*, *Gwiazda Wieczorna*, *Vechirnia Zorya*, *Večernyača*, *Večernica*), who closes the palace gates at dusk, after sunset and Dažbog's return. She was associated with the planet Venus or Mercury. Some myths described both her and her sister Zorya Utrennyaya as the wives of the moon god Myesyats and the mothers of the stars, but other accounts cast both Zorya as virgin goddesses.



SPAIN

☯- St John’s Eve and Summer Solstice in Tenerife -☯



St John’s Eve is known in the Spanish-speaking world of Tenerife and the other Canary Islands as “*Noche de San Juan*”. It is a very important time for festivities, for bonfires, fireworks and beach parties.

The night of 23 June is one of the biggest fiesta times of the year and in many places it is as big if not bigger than the New Year’s Eve celebrations. It is in keeping too with the Summer Solstice of the Pagan calendar.

It is a Fire Festival that marks the time of the shortest day and the most daylight. There is a very magical and almost surreal feeling to the



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event as it is celebrated. The festival combines elements of both Pagan and Christian traditions and imagery.

La “*Noche de San Juan*” is prepared for well in advance in Tenerife. People of the villages and towns all around the island make bonfires in readiness for lighting them on the night of St John.

The beach is covered in people, including family groups. Candles are lit and there is usually a disco too with dance music blaring out over the sea. Many people, especially the countless teenagers, go in the water. At midnight it is a tradition for people to go in the sea because it is believed that bathing at such a time is purifying and cleansing.

There is the idea that all of “*Noche de San Juan*” is about getting rid of anything bad. In religious terms the fires can be thought to ward away demons and evil spirits. In some places mainly young men will jump three times over smaller fires.

Fireworks are set off, mainly large Catherine wheels, Roman candles and rockets. By the morning after the island is shrouded in smoke and the smell of burnt wood and ash.



☯-Qixi Festival-☯

By Junqui Shao (Spain)

The Qixi Festival, also known as the Qiqiao Festival, is a Chinese festival that celebrates the annual meeting of the cowherd and weaver girl in Chinese mythology. It falls on the seventh day of the 7th month on the Chinese calendar. It is sometimes called the Double Seventh Festival, the Chinese Valentine's Day, the Night of Sevens, or the Magpie Festival. The festival originated from the romantic legend of two lovers, Zhinü and Niulang, who were the weaver maid and the cowherd, respectively.



The Chinese folk tale is about a love story between Zhinü the weaver girl, symbolizing Vega, and Niulang, the cowherd, symbolizing Altair. Their love was not allowed, thus they were banished to opposite sides of the Silver River (symbolizing the Milky Way). Once a year, on the 7th day of the 7th lunar month, a flock of magpies would form a

bridge to reunite the lovers for one day. There are many variations of the story. The earliest known reference to this famous myth dates back to over 2600 years ago, which was told in a Chinese Classic poem.

The tale of The Weaver Girl and the Cowherd has been celebrated in the Qixi Festival since the Han Dynasty. The Qixi festival inspired Tanabata festival in Japan, Chilseok festival in Korea, and Thất Tịch festival in Vietnam.



☞-Milky Way Legends-☞

- **Hercules**

The Greek were great astronomers. They spend a lot of their time studying the sky, naming stars and constellations and relating them with their myths. One of their strangest traditions was to go down to earth making love with another person than their partner. Zeus fell in love with Alcmena and in the following Hercules was born.

Since the birth of Hercules he had to face many dangers. The wife of Zeus, Hera, got angry, because her husband had a child with another woman. When Alcmena gave birth, all the gods and mortals were happy and congratulated the mother. Until one day, Hera came down from Mount Olympus with the intention to get rid of the baby. So she hatched a malefic plan. As soon as Hera was alone, she went to the cost of Hercules and put two snakes in it, which should kill the baby. Nevertheless, Hercules killed them with his strength. From that moment, all the Gods fancied the baby, because some day he would be immortal and it was Hermes who wanted to turn Hercules into an immortal. So one afternoon, while Hera was totally asleep, Hermes laid the baby to her breast, so that the baby nurses the immortal milk. Hera woke up, before Hercules started drinking. She pushed Hercules away and the milk was spilled and remained floating in the sky forming stars in the form of bows of cotton.



- **The Coyote**

The mythology from Navajo tells that the Milky Way was created by the fraudulent God Coyote. In the process, the holy people were slow and Coyote got angry. By anger, he chose a red star called Ma'io. He put the star in the south and it appears only in the short periods of the year. Coyote threw stars on his head forming the Milky Way. The stars weren't properly placed and so they couldn't be named.



☯-The weaving princess and the shepherd-☯

This story or legend took place many years ago. The jade emperor had a daughter named Zhinu. She could come down from heaven to earth through a magical robe. One day, while bathing in the river, she was seen by a pastor and he fell in love with her. To avoid her return to earth, he took her magic robe and then he took her to his home. Her father was furious, but it was too late, because his daughter had already fallen in love and married the pastor. After some time Zhinu felt homesickness and she decided to visit her father. She took the magical robe that her husband had stored, to get to heaven to her father. Her father did not want to let her go, so the emperor drew a river in the middle of the sky (the Milky Way), so that Zhinu could not return back to her husband. But he felt sorry for the young lovers and therefore he permits that they can see each other on a bridge on the river the seventh day of the seventh month of the lunar year.



☯-Estonian Legend-☯

Lindu was a young maid who was designated to protect the birds. The youth of the region asked to marry her, but they were being rejected. She also rejected the stars. A comet managed leave her excited and he said goodbye, promising to return to marry her. She started to embroider her wedding dress with a lot of emotion. The time passed and the comet didn't return. The lonely bride cried silently. The father of Lindu summons the winds to release her from the pain. The winds agreed and took her to a brilliant palace located on the borders of heaven. Often, the comet passes to fulfill his promise, but Lindu is still motionless. In the deep nights, we can see a bright white band, that today, we call the Milky Way.



☉-Guayota-☾



Guayota, in Guanche mythology of the Tenerife (Canary Islands), was the principal malignant deity and Achamán's adversary. According to Guanche legend, Guayota lived inside the Teide volcano, one of the gateways to the underworld. Guayota was said to be represented as a black dog and was accompanied by demons, also in the form of black dogs, known as Tibicenas.

According to legend, Guayota kidnapped Magec (the sun) and shut it up in the Teide, plunging the world into darkness. Humans prayed to Achamán who saved Magec, and instead locked Guayota up in the Teide. Guayota is the king of evil genies, and was worshiped in the island of Tenerife in the Guanche religion.

Currently, like other aboriginal gods, Guayota remains a typical canary creature folklore. His evocation is present in many and varied elements of popular culture:

- In the northern city of Puerto de la Cruz is a pub named after him: the Pub Guayota.
- In Granadilla de Abona is based the association: Bomberos Guayota (Guayota Firemen)
- There is also the Grupo Folklórico Guayota.
- A heavy metal band named after him.
- There is an ultimate team called ¡Guayota Ultimate!

Guayota is featured as the main antagonist in "Night Broken" by Patricia Briggs, the eighth novel in her Mercy Thompson series.

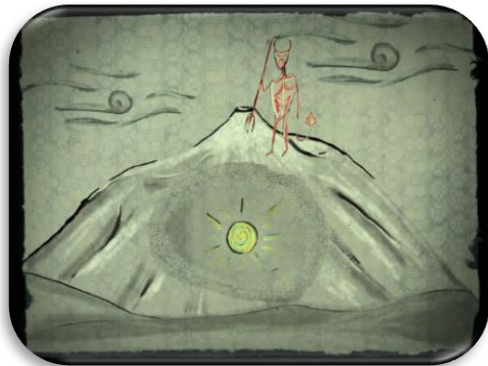
In the indie video game Gaurodan, Guayota appears as the final boss



☉-Achamán-☾



Achamán is the supreme god of the Guanches on the island of Tenerife; he is the father god and creator. The name means literally "the skies", in allusion to the celestial vault (the sky). Achamán, an omnipotent and eternal god, created the land and the water, the fire and the air, and all creatures derived their existence from him. Achamán lived in the heights and sometimes descended upon the summits of the mountains, contemplating his creations.



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Other names of Achamán are:

- Achuhuran
- Achahucanac
- Achguayaxerax
- Achoron



On other islands, its name also varied, however it is not known if they really belong to the same god. Although if they relate to the supreme god:

- Acoran (Gran Canaria)
- Abora (La Palma)
- Oraham (La Gomera)
- Eraorahan (El Hierro)

In Lanzarote and Fuerteventura, the name of the supreme god is unknown.



SLOVENIA

☉-The Three-Headed One - Slavic God Triglav, the God of Universe-☾



*Three-headed God on island of Rujen,
Eastern Germany*

The simulacrum of this deity was distinctive by its three heads, which were conjoined, because his very name means “The Three-Headed One”. According to old Slavic mythology, Triglav had three heads as a symbol of his sovereignty over the three worlds: heaven, earth and underworld.

In Triglav’s case, the number three is a powerful symbol – it is an expression of a very archaic numinous power. The triads are a constant feature in the Celtic and Slavic symbolic of the Universe. Also the Christians established the doctrine of the Holy Trinity as a central dogma of Christianity. The doctrine of a God, who is in the same time the creator, the creature and the creating, Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

Triglav is the remarkable cosmological narration from the Slovenian folklore tradition. The name Triglav has been used for the highest Slovenian mountain which has »arose from the sea« (i.e. the peak of the Julian Alps). Historical sources explain his three heads in relation to the kingdoms of heaven, earth and underworld. The trinity principle frequently appears in the mythical traditions; they are linked to the highest mountain of Slovenia, Triglav (Eng. “Three-headed”). Trinity is the principle of “tročan” tradition from West Slovenia which represents a belief into three basic forces of nature: fire (sun), water



and earth. The three spheres of cosmos are combined in the theory of the main early Slavic myth about the heavenly god Perun, the underworld god Veles and the goddess Mokoš.



Slavic Gods

However, the highest mountain in today's Slovenia, Mt. Triglav (1864 m), was very probable named after the one-time three-headed god as described above by the chroniclers Ebbo (ca. 1155) and Monacus Prieflingensis. This mountain does definitely not have three peaks (heads); therefore its name is certainly not a geographical, but only a mythological one. Such a statement was made already in A. T. Linhart's historical book (1791), in which he ascribed to Triglav three dominions: the atmosphere, the earth and the water.

☯- Caves as Entrances to the World Beyond-☯

Although Slovenia is a small country it has over 10.000 discovered caves and by the scientific prediction another 10.000 of undiscovered ones, most of them in the Karst region.

Until the expansion of science in 19th century, caves remained in this traditional perception a part of the mysterious and unknown world. Traditionally, caves were the dwelling place of supernatural beings,





*Centuries ago, peasants spoke of baby dragons living deep underground.
Today we know them as olms.*

originating from other worlds. People used to frighten children with the supernatural beings from the caves. The mischievous children were frightened with the threat, that the devil or the dragon would find them and take them to the cave. Most of the people who entered the other world never recovered from the experience, they were confused, scared, and surprised. This can be confirmed by many experiences of meeting supernatural beings, for example after meeting Krvavo stegno (Eng. “Bloody leg”) in Porčinel cave, a boy was never

“normal” again, or after cave exploration a villager came home laughing like a fool and then committed a suicide.

In the most famous Slovenia cave lives a real baby dragon, The olm. olm is deeply embedded in the Slovenian mythology. Its first mention in literature appeared in 1689, in the fifteen-volume encyclopedia “The Glory of the Duchy of Carniola”, by the naturalist and polymath Janez Valvasor. A student of the Enlightenment and the first Slovenian (or, at the time, Carniolan) to be inducted into the Royal Society of London, Valvasor heard stories about baby dragons while investigating the unusual behavior of a spring near the town of Vrhnika, about fifteen miles west of Ljubljana. Each day, the spring would run strongest at around nine in the morning, then the flow would lessen; the stronger flow would resume at about midnight. The villager who showed Valvasor the spring explained that a dragon lived in the cave beneath it. When the water filled the cave, reaching the dragon’s neck, the beast would become uncomfortable and shift around, emptying the cave and disrupting the spring. Curious but skeptical, Valvasor asked the man why he thought there was a dragon. Because, the man explained, after heavy rains, baby dragons would wash up aboveground, a clear indication that an adult lived



below. Olms still get marooned at the surface after heavy rains, and dragons still hold an important place in the Slovenian national consciousness. Ljubljana’s iconic architectural feature, Zmajski Most, or Dragon Bridge, boasts four sheet-copper dragon statues, one at each corner. St. George, who is famous for his dragon-slaying, watches over the city as the patron saint of the castle chapel. Ljubljana is also where Jason and the Argonauts are said to have landed after recovering the Golden Fleece, and some versions of the story have Jason slaying a dragon in a lake between Ljubljana and Vrhnika. As the dragon became a symbol of Ljubljana, so the olm became a symbol of Slovenia’s natural heritage and national identity, even appearing on one of the coins for the tolar, the country’s pre-euro currency.

☞-Kresnik and the Summer Apparitions-☞

The summer solstice is connected with a number of customs and beliefs that are similar throughout Europe. In Slovenia, a characteristic supernatural being that makes an appearance during this period is Kresnik (Krsnik, Krstnik, Šentjanževac). Kresnik’s attributes are the sun and the fire (in Slovene, kresati denotes to kindle fire by striking). Judging by these attributes and narrative tradition, Russian philologist Nikolai Mikhailov established Kresnik’s similarity with the principal Slavic God Perun, the Thunder God and the conqueror of Veles. Mikhailov linked Kresnik with fire, lightning, and with golden colour, thus with atmospheric phenomena. Like Perun, Kresnik had defeated the dragon, or Veles, God of the Underworld and of earthly riches. The structure of the tales about Kresnik can be classified into eight principal episodes:

1. Kresnik was born and lived in the castle (on the glass mountain, in the ninth kingdom, in Bear’s castle). His mother carried him for nine years, and the child had to be baptized ten or nine times. He was recognized as a Kresnik by his horse hooves or other marks on his body.
2. Kresnik rode with his brother Trot in the golden carriage through the sky, and was attacked by the Snake, whom he conquered in single combat.
3. Kresnik owned many cows and other riches. One day, a dragon stole his wealth and locked it in a crag. Kresnik found his cattle with the help of his four-eyed dog or 172 From Tradition to Contemporary Belief Tales a magic plant that could open cliffs; then he conquered the dragon, and reclaimed his wealth.
4. Kresnik traveled at night and fought for the benefit of his country. People said that when there was lightning in autumn, the Kresniki were fighting each other. Therefore people tied the wheat sheafs with thick bindings, so that Kresnik when he seized a sheaf and beat with it, in the end still had something in his hands. If he gained the victory the country was rich.
5. Kresnik was greatly tempted to acquire the Snake Queen’s beautiful crown. The crown would bring plenty of money to the person who owned it. Kresnik gets hold of some strong horses and makes the corridor from his to the snake’s castle. He plays cards with the Snake Queen for her crown.



When the Queen notices the theft of her crown she raises such a hue and cry that a multitude of gigantic snakes rush from everywhere. Kresnik escapes with the help of his horses through the corridor to his castle.

6. Kresnik fell in love with the beautiful daughter of the Snake Queen. Since he could not otherwise enter the Queen’s palace, he turned into a dwarf. As he reached the courtyard everybody started to laugh and mock him. At night he turned into a handsome prince and took the princess with him.
7. Consequently the Snake King dispatched a dragon to Kresnik’s castle. In the castle a beautiful princess named Vesina was living. The dragon spent six months watching over her. On St. George’s Day the handsome count Kresnik, appeared with a bright sword and positioned himself over the snake. After he had conquered the snake, golden wheat started to fall onto the ground. Kresnik took Vesina for his wife, and his country was wealthy.
8. Kresnik’s wife noticed one day that Kresnik was away during the night. When she finally saw him on the roof, she called him by his name, and Kresnik fell down and killed himself.

The well-known legend describing Kresnik’s adventures is the legend of the Kresnik of Vurberg castle. This legend contains most of the cited episodes, except the second and the third episode. The second episode is depicted in another tale collected in 1858 in Styria: Kresnik had a brother named Trot. One day the brothers were flying in a golden carriage to a feast given by the Babylonian Snake Queen. During the ride it started to thunder fiercely. Although the Snake Queen had always fawned over Kresnik, in reality she couldn’t stand him. So she dispatched a snake that had mighty wings like an eagle. The snake appeared from the fog, attacked Kresnik, and tried to slaughter him. But Trot cut its head off with a golden axe. As the snake flickered its tail into the clouds the clouds produced an immense downpour of rain, almost drowning Kresnik and Trot. But the swift hooves of Kresnik’s horses, fast as lightning, managed to save their master from the flood.



Old Slovenian God Kresnik

☚-Dogana, the Goddess of Dawn-☚

The Carantanian-Slovenian mythological researches were fatally influenced by the pan-Slav ideology. In sense of its interpretation, the Slav »predecessors« of Carantania should have settled the Eastern Alps, this is, ancient Noricum and Carantania (today's modern Austria and Slovenia) in the 6th century AD. Supposedly, this is the period of migration from their original homeland behind the Carpathian



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Mountains (Russia), leading over the Balkans. Consequently, the pagan pantheon of Carantanians - Slovenians should have been identical with the »all-Slav Pantheon« of the Russians.

The existence of such a »Slav« pantheon is quoted by mythologists, mostly of Russian origin, who are teaching at universities and other academic institutions in Europe and America. They simply equate the early Russian people's tradition and its myth with a common Slav mythology that includes also the none-Slavs. In fact, the »Slavs« are an academic construct imagined on base of the Slav linguistic family.



There are no historical documents confirming the arrival of the supposed »Old Slavs« in the Eastern Alps, which should have taken place in the 6th century AD. Neither in an indirect way by ethnological factors, nor, as in our case, by mythological similarities between Slovenians and Russians. A false "Slavic" pantheon, that has Russian deities at its stern, like Perun, Veles, Makoš, Morana etc., which should have existed in the one-time Slovenian pagan belief, is an easily demonstrable error, or better said, a forgery, due to the pan-Slav and south-Slav ideology. In the pre-Christian period, Carantania had its proper deities, which were inherited from the natives of Noricum, the Roman province in the Eastern Alps. The Noricans belonged to the great people of the Vends (Veneti), who in the pre-Celtic period settled Central Europe.

Several Norican deities, like Noreia, Latobius, Belin (Belenos) had also an honourable place in the great Roman pantheon. Others were only worshiped by the Norican people and entered later the pantheon of Carantania. One of them was the Goddess of Dawn.

In classic mythology, the Goddess of Dawn was identical with Eos, a Greek goddess, which appears in the Roman pantheon under the name Aurora. She was considered a sister of the Sun and the Moon. Eos, or Aurora, was the successor of the very ancient deity of pre-Arian (pre-Indo-European) origin. She still exists in the pantheon of modern India and bears the name Usha, which literally means »dawn«. In the Rig Veda her image symbolizes the break of dawn and she warns the people that it is time for preparing the fields and do everyday shores.



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In the Slovenian (Carantanian) people's tradition there are some traces that she once also ranked among other ancient deities. Her symbol was the morning star, Danica - in Slovenian. Nothing else could have personified her more in the very remote period. But after Christianization, this personification was certainly erased from the people's mind. I think, her shape was associated with the Guiding Star, which led to the Three Kings. It is the only symbolic star that has been preserved in the memory of Carantanian – Slovenians. It is quite possible that in Carantania the Goddess of Dawn was Zora, literally meaning »the dawn«. This name has been preserved in one of the popular Slovenian ballads called »Young Zora« (Mlada Zora). Its contents is as follows:

Zora was guarded by her two brothers in a high castle. One day, when she leaned out the window, the young king (kraljic mlad) came to escort her to his castle. Because her brothers kept watch, she used her powerful spell: By putting a magic root under her tongue, she would appear dead and be buried in the castle vault. Then the young king would return and remove the root from under her tongue. She would then wake and he would take her with him to his castle. When her brothers found out, they went to find her. In the ensuing fight, the young king was struck and died.

In this story, Zora is certainly a personification of dawn, or better said, the morning goddess. The »young king« could only have been Jarnik, the God of Spring. The »brothers« present in general the Dioscuri (Castor and Pollux), the Gemini constellation, which appears towards the end of May. Then, with the arrival of summer, the spring deities, like Jarnik, Zora and Vesna bid farewell.

In another Slovenian fairy tale, the Goddess of Dawn bears the name Dogana. In modern Slovenia, her significance is not known anymore. This legend is also a love story, which unfolds as follows:

Once upon a time, there lived the Green Hunter. He always returned laden with rich booty from the mountains and even captured a golden roe-deer, the greatest value that the forest could give. Thus, the mermaid Dogana loved him for that. She dwelt beside the sea and every morning she herded the small sheep to the mountain meadows. However, the Green Hunter fell in love with the daughter of a mighty king, who demanded to bring him the golden roe-deer. Otherwise, he would be beheaded. The Green Hunter entered the forest and waited for Dogana, but on this very day, because of dense fog, she did not bring her small sheep out to pasture. He knew that he could not fulfill the king's wish and threw himself into the precipice. The meaning of the mermaid's name is most likely connected to the very ancient pre-Semitic root *D-h »to turn relatively visible« (Möller). The consonant h is often equated with g, thus *D-g, from which, I think, the name Dogana originates. The pre-Semitic period is equal to the pre-Indo-European period (before 2000 BC). Thus, irrespectively of the fact that Dogana is only a mermaid in this fairy tale, she must be considered a goddess of very ancient origin, as in the case of Živa.

Her name has been preserved until this very day, although its meaning has been lost. In the tale, the small sheep are evidently fleecy white clouds. What is the meaning of the Green Hunter? He is the man, who dared to pursue the golden roe, a sacred animal, which was the messenger of divinities.



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Therefore, the Green Hunter was sentenced. At one time, the Goddess of Dawn celebrated a proper feast day. It was held in February, this is the month of the approaching Spring, when the break of dawn begins earlier. In this month the ancient Roman world celebrated the Feast of Lights. On this day, crowds of people with burning torches marched through the streets and praised the return of the morning light.

On February 2nd, the Church pays tribute to the feast of Mary's Purification, generally known as Candlemas. In Slovenian tradition, it is called Svecnica (pron. svetchnitsa), after »sveca« (candle). It is quite possible that the candle was a symbol of the very ancient Goddess of Dawn. Nowadays, she is already immemorial and has fallen into oblivion, but her symbol, the candle, has been preserved in the people's customs.

At several sites in Slovenia, for example in Styria, there was a custom called cuckanje (pron. tchutchkanye), which draws some of its elements from pre-Christian times and has been celebrated until recently. First, candles would be consecrated at Candlemas, after service they would be taken home and a lighted candle would be placed in each and every window of the house. A small replica of a church would be lowered over the burning candle, as it was believed to have »protective powers and to scare away evil spirits« in the coming year. Also bedding, sheets, shirts... would be blessed with consecrated candles. In other places, like in Velika Nedelja (Styria), cuckanje was observed in a very special way. Standing completely still, one is counting how many times he will be circled by a lighted candle, carried by another person, before the flame will be blown out by the breeze. The years of his life span should equate to the number that he had counted. It is about a custom of “time counting”. In India, the goddess Usha is counting time. The flame of the candle represents the human life: As long as it is burning, life lasts, when the flame burns out, life stops. The Goddess of Dawn was spinning the thread of life and apportioned it to men. Therefore, since times immemorial human imagination is influenced by her in so many ways.

This is also confirmed by the root of her prehistoric name Dogana, her Slovenian appellation. The Goddesses Živa (life) and Dogana (life span) played the most important role in the fate of mankind.

☿-Vesna, the Goddess of Spring-♊

When I was doing my research paper on Carantanian mythology, I could not find any direct traces to the Goddess of Spring, who appears in the Slav world under the well-known name Vesna. Since her name emerged among other former deities, I thought at first that she was one of the goddesses imported to Slovenia by the advocates of the pan-Slav (Russian) ideology. She is very well attested in Russian and Ukraine folklore. But in the people's tradition of Slovenia (Carantania), her name and shape cannot be found.





In Noricum, the Roman province, which preceded Carantania, there are no leads in the search for an indigenous goddess of spring. Neither could I establish a connection between her and the veneration of her Roman double the ancient Flora, which was foremost the Goddess of Flowers. Her day of celebration was called Floralia. It was held in April and in early May and symbolized the renewal of the cycle of life, marked with dancing, drinking, and wearing flowers. Flora was married to Favonius, the wind god, and her companion was Hercules. Due to her association with plants, her name in modern English also means plant life. Flora was depicted by the Romans wearing light spring clothing, holding small bouquets of flowers, sometimes crowned with blossoms.

According to the well-known ethnologist Pavle Zablatic (Celovec – Klagenfurt), the Day of St. Florian took over the role of Flora. His feast day is May 4th, which is very close to the Roman festival of Flora, marked with wreaths of flowers and many processions from April 28 to May 3.

Anyway, such a supposition is not justifiable. Normally, the Goddess of Spring appears at the beginning of the season, this is, in March. Furthermore, she does not reflect on male but on female principles, this is fertility. Therefore, St. Florian could have taken over only the role of Kresnik (fire).



Indeed, this day is associated with fire, boys go around with torches, it symbolizes the power of the sun, that gives warmth to the earth and therewith life to nature.

Was Vesna, or similar goddesses of spring under different names, already an important deity in the pantheon of the ancient Vends (Veneti), who at one-time populated Central Europe? In the people's tradition of the territory, what is now Germany, there are no traces of her. So, when the German mythology was reconstructed in the 19th century, the well-known Jacob Grimm († 1863) discovered a paper from Beda Veneabilis (673 – 735). Beda says, the name Easter (Ostern, in German) originates from the goddess Eostrae. From this name, so Grimm, should also derive Eostur, the old-high-German name for April.

In this way Ostara, the probably German goddess of Spring, was reconstructed, which is now enumerated in the Germanic pantheon. Her feast day should coincide with the feast of Easter. The patriotic fantasy ascribed to her also the role of the goddess of Aurora and the incorporation of sunrise, etc.

In the Slovenian people's narrative we encounter the name Vesna in form of Vesina. She was the sister of Kresnik (fire, sun) and lived in castle Vurberk (Wurmberg, Kacjak) near Maribor. One time, when Kresnik was away from home, an enormous dragon clung to the castle walls and tried to besiege the fortress. But Kresnik came back in time and defeated the monster. Then he married Vesina and they lived happily ever after.

In this story, the dragon represents the winter, which is defeated by the power of the sun (Kresnik). Now, that spring (Vesna) has been freed, the fertile season of the year can start its life cycle.

Another Slovenian story tells of high mountains where the fairies, called Vesne, live in beautiful palaces. They descend into the valley only in February and drive around in wooden chariots. Therefore, this month is called Vesnar.

Both stories testify, that at one-time Vesna, the goddess of spring, existed in the Carantanian – Slovenian pantheon, too. I think, she was also found in the pantheon of the ancient Vends. We do not know exactly, why she disappeared. It is possible that she was replaced by Maya (the goddess of May), who coincides very well with Flora. However, apart of the two stories found in the Slovenian people's tradition, Vesna left other traces behind during her presence in the Slovenian pantheon.

In the above story Vesna appears as Kresnik's sister. But in the people's tradition she has no shape, even though she has been portrayed in such a form in modern illustrations. She is simply a conception of Spring.

In Slovenia, without calling her by name, she is still very much alive in folklores. At one-time, she certainly had her proper feast day, which after Christianization was probably associated with Palm Sunday, called Cvetna nedelja (Flower Sunday) in Slovenian.





“Zodiac”



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On this Sunday, young people bring bunches of green boughs (in Littoral palm boughs) to the benediction in the church, which are nicely decorated with flowering branches and other greenery. They are small works of arts which are also called butara (bundle), and at several Slovenian sites the butara is quite high. For example, in the valley of Rož (Rosental), in Carinthia, it measures up to 6 meters in height - a real masterpiece.

In some parts of Slovenia, the butara is known under the name of presnec or begànca, which means pieces of bread. Indeed, tiny slices of cut bread were tied to the butara. It was a symbolic warning that spring has arrived and fields had to be ploughed. The act signified the hope for a good harvest and plenty of bread.

The green boughs of the Slovenian butara, which have been blessed in church, were used in people's customs for many occasions. For example, when a storm approached in summer, dried boughs of butara were burnt and the smoke was let out into the open air, as to prevent damage to properties and crops. On the holy evening before Christmas, New Year and Epiphany, dried and blessed boughs of butara were placed on embers in a container and carried through house and stall, so that the smoke would penetrate all rooms and protect people and animals from danger.

Anyway, it is interesting to know, that in Rož valley the boughs of the butara had to be tied with willow. Indeed, at one-time, the willow-tree was consecrated to Vesna. In the Ukraine, for example, Palm Sunday is still today precisely called Willow Sunday and the boys symbolically beat the girls with willow switches. The switch is a symbol of fertility.

The willow flowers, the “macice”, in full bloom was the first pasture for bees and insects, which in the past played an important role in the economy. Thus, the honey was of a unique sweet alimentation.

What does the name Vesna literally mean? The very ancient root *au-means »to dawn« (Möller). From it, with a prefix, derives the Latin word ver (spring). It refers to the period, when the break of dawn comes earlier. The name of the Roman cemetery called Campo Verano evidently reflects the very ancient faith of the resurrection of the souls in a new spring. From the same root derives the name ves(na), consonants like r and s are often changing. Thus, the name Vesna means exactly that: Spring.

It is possible that in ancient times, even though it reflected a female principle, it was never personified in a female figure. It was simply experienced as an awakening of nature, symbolized by early flowers and willow-trees.



☯-Zeleni Jurij and the Spring Time-☯

All of these frightening activities of mid-winter supernatural beings awaken the spring that is heralded by Zeleni Jurij (Green George) on St. George’s Day, he is known as Jack in the Green in England. Zeleni Jurij is, like Kresnik, supposed to be Perun’s son.

As the son of Perun Jurij is in the central to the pre-Slavic vegetation and fertility myth. Jurij was taken by envoys of Veles to the land of the dead from which he returned to the world of the living in spring. As a harbinger of spring, Zeleni Jurij is also connected with the circular flow of time and with renewal. The mythic story recounts how young Jurij rides his horse from afar, from the land of eternal spring and the land of the dead – from Veles’ land – across a bloodstained sea, through a mountain to a green field.



Celebrating the arrival of Zeleni Jurij – the harbinger of spring

However if we regard the folk custom and the narrative tradition about Zeleni Jurij as a common source, we can see that Zeleni Jurij is the young god - the son of Perun. Nowadays the customs and processions connected with Zeleni Jurij are being revived mostly by folklore groups that enact them, particularly in Bela Krajina where the customs of celebrating St. George’s Day have been preserved longest.

☯-Yugoslavia's secret space program-☯

The Yugoslavia's secret space program is a myth of a secret multi-billion-dollar deal involving America's purchase of Yugoslavia's space program in the early 1960s.

Yugoslavia developed a space program, as the forgotten third player in the Space Race beside United States and Soviet Union, which Josip Broz Tito then sold to the John F. Kennedy administration in the U.S. in return for \$2.5 billion in "overseas aid" which boosted Yugoslav economy. When the imported technology failed to deliver its promised results for the NASA's future Moon landing, an angry U.S. applied



pressure to Tito, including financial blackmail and threats of military action, culminating in a secret CIA plot that triggered the bloody breakup of Yugoslavia.

The myth is based on several facts: the work *The Problem of Space Travel* by Herman Potočnik (1892–1929) influenced German, American and Soviet scientists, but it is speculated that U.S. agents confiscated his surviving unpublished notes. In the early 1960s the financial support from the U.S. was larger than NASA's annual budgets, and after Dwight D. Eisenhower the policy was continued by Kennedy. Tito was the last foreign statesman to visit Kennedy before his death, and reasons for the U.S. financial support are not understood to this day. There existed scientific cooperation between the United States

and Yugoslavia, including the Yugoslav visits by the crews of Apollo 8, 9 and 11. On 26 September 1967, in Belgrade was held the first-ever international symposium on space exploration "First Steps toward Space", while the second in New York. On 27 June 1971, in Belgrade was held an exhibition on space technologies, which brought together American and Soviet specialists, and fostered future cooperation. Many Yugoslav engineers were employed by NASA, including Milojko Vucelić who worked on Apollo 11 and 13 and Anton Mavretič. The crew of Apollo 11 carried with it the flags of 135 countries including Yugoslavia during the Moon landing on 20 July 1969. The Yugoslavian lunar sample display is now held at the Museum of Yugoslav History in Belgrade.



"Houston, we have a problem" film poster

The myth became popular in January 2012 when the Slovenian filmmakers uploaded a short video clip on YouTube, which received in excess of one million views, as well as extensive media attention including by Smithsonian Institution. Most of the viewers believed in what they saw in the video, and in the same year internet survey by Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, 41.8% of the respondents of the online poll voted that they believe that Yugoslavia sold the program to US and the myth is true.



TURKEY

☞- Ancient Turkic Calendar-☛

Calendars make the time systematic. The work of measuring the time deals mostly with celestial events and celestial body. The Turks has also developed a twelve-year animal cycle calendar on their own to measure the time. In this calendar, they named each year – a total of 12- an animal. Each 12 year period was called “müçe/müçö/müşel/müçöl”. In Turkoman and Kirghizs and Kazakhs, the names “yıl övürmek”, “jil gayıruw”, “cıl sürüü” were given for counting of the year. Based on their observations, the Turks have given information both about the features of each year and about the effects of those years on human character.

Today, a Turkic calendar of twelve-year cycle is a wide spread in Central Asia, Siberia, the region of Ural and Volga, and Caucasus Turks. The common names of the 12 animals in the calendar, and the same legends of all Turkic and Mongolian people associated with them - is a clear evidence of this.

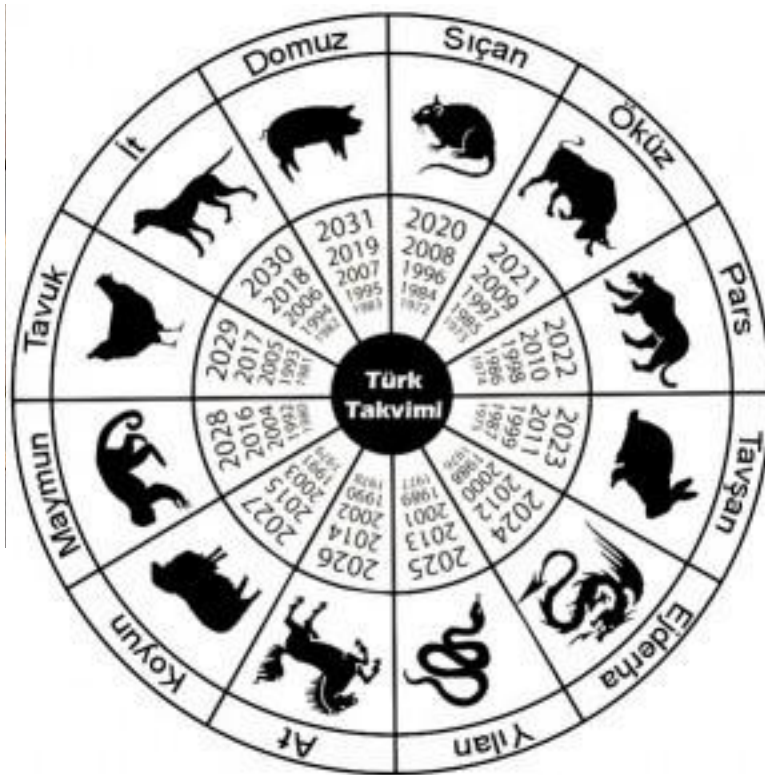
Mahmud Kashgar tells the following story about the cycle:

Turks chose twelve different names of the animals and then put them in twelve years; children's age, the seasons of wars and other things were counted by the repetition of these years

It has a following basis:



One of the Turkic Kagans (king) wanted determine the time of the war which was a few years ago; he forgot the year of the war; at the end Kagan organized a congress with his nations and at the congress he said: "How we forget the time, after us will forget others in future; If so, let's name each year in accordance with twelve constellations in the sky and number twelve now; let's explain our trade turnover with these years; let's make it as indelible mark between us". The nation approved his suggestion.



Then Kagan went to hunt; He gives a command: "Bring animals to the Ili River". It was a big river. People forced animals, drove away by the water. Preyed on animals; A group of animal jumped into the water; twelve went out of the water; each year was named after each animal out of the water. The first animal was a mouse. For the being first, a mouse was remembered as the beginning of the year, and named as a "mouse year"; then the names of the animals were put in the following order: Cow, Tiger, Rabbit, Dragon, Snake, Horse, Sheep, Monkey, Chicken, Dog, Swine.

Turks considered that each year has its own moral, and made predictions and calculated success

based on that. In the year of Cow will be increased logging in the war because cows bunt with each other; the year of Chicken means the abundance of food and drink, but will be contradictions among the people. In the swine year there will be a lot of snow and cold, because the character is going to be a problem. Thus, the Turks believed that the same thing would be every year.

In the 14-15th centuries, it is known that this calendar was used under names such as "History and Turks" and "The Old Man and Turkan". The author of the oldest Islamic source, a famous astronomer of his time (10-11 cc.), Biruni in his essay "Al-Athar-ul Bakiye" mentioned twelve animals on the calendar. A wide spread twelve-year cycle in the 13-16th centuries in the Turkic-Mongol Empire was extended under name of "Twelve animal Turkic Calendar".



☞- Sky Related Beliefs in Turkish Mythology-☞

The Turks have in their history presumed the “sky cult” holy because it symbolized love, eternity, infinity, grandeur, and the Tengri (God). The most important reason why the sky was presumed holy in the conventional Turkish religion was that, they believed that the god was at the highest stage of the sky, and that the sun, moon, and the stars that expelled the darkness which was assumed as the mother of evil, were rendering under his tent. This conception was so strong that, the Sky God was the “Sky Soul” and was a very divine being



Attributes of gods and goddesses who played a key role in Turkish mythology, functions and etymology of names shows compliance with the above planets and planetary order. According to this; Land-Han Saturn, Jupiter Ulgen, Mars sled God, Venus Umay (Ayizit), Mercury Mergen meets God.

In the beliefs of the ancient Türks and Mongols all existing on the Earth is subject to Tengri – the incarnation of a celestial beginning, the Creator of a Universe, the ‘Spirit the Sky’. It was Tengri who first of all appeared as a Supreme deity located in a celestial zone of the Universe, ruling the fates of entire peoples, and their rulers, the Khagans, Khans etc. In the Orkhon stone inscriptions was imprinted the belief expressed by Bilge-Khagan of the role of Sky – Tengri: ‘All human sons are born to die in time, as determined by Tengri’.



- **Kayra Han (Land Han)**



Kayra Han or Kara Han is the Spirit of God and creator god in Turkic mythology. Supreme god of the Tatars. Son of the sky deity (Gök Tengri). In ancient Turkic belief Kara Han is neither male nor female nor even human in form, but a pure goose that flies constantly over an endless expanse of water (time). Kara Han is the ruler of the three realms of air, water and land, seated on the seventh level of the universe, from which it determines the fate of its creation. After creating the universe it planted the nine-boughd tree of life, from the branches of which came the ancestors of humans. Thus emerged the nine races (nine clans) It has three sons: Ülgen, Mergen and Kyzaghan.

According to a Tuvinian (Turkic people ethnic group living in southern Siberia) legend, The giant turtle which supported the earth moved, which caused the cosmic ocean to begin flooding the earth. An old man who had guessed something like this would happen, built a raft. Boarded it with his family, and he was saved. When the waters receded, the raft was left on a high wooded mountain, where, it is said, it remains today. After the flood Kaira-Khan created everything around the world.

- **Ülgen (Bay Ülgen)**

In Turkic and Mongolian mythology, the birch tree, regarded as a cosmic axis between earth and sky, was regarded as sacred to him, as was the horse (horse-sacrifice was a part of his worship). Ülgen symbolizes goodness, welfare, abundance, plentiness of food, water, etc. Furthermore, he created earth, heaven and all living beings. In addition, he controls the atmospheric events and movements of stars. He creates land for people to live on, the heads of both humans and animals and the rainbow. He was regarded as the patron god of shamans and the source of their knowledge.



It is believed that Ülgen has been created from Tengri (Tengere Kayra Khan). He is the highest deity after Tengri in the Mongo-Turkic pantheon. Often, Ülgen is compared with Tengri and at times they are thought to be on par, or even the same. In some sayings, the name/function of Ülgen may be (partially) interchangeable with that of Tengri.



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Bai-Ulgan lives on the sixteenth floor of the sky above the stars, sun and moon in a golden house. Mere humans may never reach him, excepting shamans or kams, who possess astral powers. Animals are used for sacrifice in worship of him, especially horses. Once in every third, sixth, ninth, or twelfth year, a shaman may sacrifice a white horse as the first step of reaching Ulgan. Then he must ride its soul, penetrate through all the layers of heaven until he reaches Ulgan. Firstly, the kam(shaman) meets Yayik who is the servant of Ulgan. This entity informs the kam whether or not the offering has been accepted. If the sacrificial rite has been successful, the shaman is able to learn from the omniscient Ulgan of impending dangers, such as bad harvests.

- **Koyash (The Sun)**

Sun for the ancient Türks was an esteemed God. The ancient Türkic mythologies said that the Sun is the son of Tengri, and His mother is Earth. Therefore, it circles between the father and mother. The ancient Türks and Mongols worshipped power and vital force of the god Sun. It was not possible to imagine life without energy and influence of the Sun.

In antiquity was a ritual of greeting sunrise. Huns, coming out in the morning from aul (village. – Translator’s note), welcomed the ascending sun and bowed to Him. Praying Türks turned to the sunrise. They worshipped Sun because Tengri and His assistant Kun (Sun) supervise the created world by means of the Sun rays which are strings linking the spirits of plants with the Sun.

The ancient Türks knew a solar ray as a transmission medium for embryo of life sent by Tengri to the man. A vivid example is the genealogical legend of the birth by a shamaness, from a Türkic ancient noble clan Ashide, of the son An-Lushan, later famous, who rebelled against Tan dynasty of imperial China. At his conception a ray of light penetrated the yurt. It is possible to also recollect the ‘famous pramother of the Mongols, Alan-Goa, who originated the clan of Gengiz-Khan, conceiving from a ray which penetrated the yurt through a smoke hole.

The ancient Türks associated the movement of the sun in the sky with a flight of a fiery bird, winged horses, etc. Winged horses as a symbol or personification of the Sun were widely spread in the cosmogonic myths of the Türkic peoples. In addition to the horse and birds with the symbol of Sun were also connected such animals as ram, deer, bull. The huge number of domestic artifacts decorated with signs and symbols of solar ornament, found on all the territory of Eurasia, testifies to a wide distribution of the cult of the Sun between the Türks. Such signs are pictured in large numbers on ceramic vessels and female earrings.



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- **Moon (Ai)**

Ancient Türks’ mythology regarded Moon as a daughter of Sky God Tengri and Earth. Ancient Türks perceived goddess Moon dually: Moon frightened them and at the same time they loved her. The moon was represented as a Lady and as a symbol of the night. The night is darkness, when the malicious spirits emerge from all holes. All feasts and jamborees of malicious spirits occur at night. The



rituals and hypnotic sessions of witches were always conducted according to the phases of the Moon and, mainly, in a full moon. At night the illnesses amplified, causing more often deaths at this time. Robberies, murders are done mainly at night. On the other hand, the Türks trusted the magic force of the Moon. She was a sole night lantern. To please Moon those born during full moon were given names as such: Aisylu, Aituly, Ainir, Aizirek, Ainaz, etc. From ancient times the Türks noticed that woman and moon have the same secret force. The female cycles, her mysterious bleedings, coincided with the monthly phases of the moon. Female pregnancy lasts about nine lunar months, and more often women deliver during a full moon.

Three phases of the moon also had their signs. It was believed that at ‘ai naazy’ (new moon) the moon symbolized a young girl, who grew day to day. She is pure and modest. At ‘ai toly’, ‘tuly ai’ (complete moon) Moon personified a mature woman – mother. In this period she is good-natured and favorable. At ‘ai karty’ (old moon) the Moon aged, became wise, but at the same time quarrelsome and malicious. Before death Moon reigned in absolutely dark night, she was not visible. In these three nights, it was believed, life and death meet together. After the meeting they separate, to meet again in a definite period. The old Moon died, a new one was born, and together with her a new life, new cycle, new round was born, and so on indefinitely.



- **Ay Ata**



There is also another belief related to the Moon. According to the mythology, he is a moon god, and he has been living in sixth floor of the sky with Gun Ana (Turkish: Gün Ana), the sun goddess, who he is coupled with. While Gün Ana is symbol of warmness and hotness, Ay Dede is the symbol of cold.

In Turkey, he is well known in modern times, Ay Dede is popular amongst children due to tales being told about him. The mythology is more common amongst Central Asian Turks, such as Altaians and Yakuts, who still have populations who actively practice Tengrism.

Notably, in the Epic of Oghuz Khan, Ay Tanrı also is mentioned as the father of Oghuz Khan, even though that part remains somewhat unclear. It's also notable Oghuz Khan's second son was named Ayhan (Ay Khan, "moon khan").

- **Yildiz Han**

Knowledge of stars was very important in ancient Turkish belief. It was the only way to learn the time at night. Stars are the first things that Turks saw as divine figures. They are the fundamental of the creation.

- **Stars**

The ancient Türks and Mongols revered stars. For them were brought sacrifices. The Star deities, in the opinion of the Türks, influence the human happiness, richness, cattle, and others, and each star corresponds to a Kut of a man on the Earth, and when the man dies, his star also falls on the Earth.

A happy man, protected by a fate, was called “a man with a star”. The ancient Türks knew many stars, but the most popular, which they continuously encountered in practical life, were:



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1. **A Polar star** – Timer Kazyk (iron stake) was a reference during night travels. The name Iron Stake, probably, was given due to a visual immovability and, consequently, two close stars moving around it, like horses on a cord tied to a stake, were named ‘two white horses’. According to the cosmological ideas of ancient Türks, the sky looked like a cupola of a yurt. The Polar star was called ‘A Smoke hole of the Sky’, a mythological center the Sky ostensibly serving as a pass to other worlds. The history of its creation is:



There was a time, when the Sky and the Earth came in disorder. The Sky pressed on Earth, and the Earth split. A great Chaos came to the Universe. Black storm grasped the Earth, the ashes of earth mixed up with clouds, the thunder roared, lightning flashed, hailstones fell the size of a duck egg. People, animals and birds perished, only groans were heard above the Earth, fear and confusion, suffering and grief reigned. Mountains moved, rivers were overflowing, fire clinched forests and steppes. The moon, sun and the stars lost their tracks, and were swept in a chaotic spinning. Three years reigned Chaos, three years lasted the disaster, until the Lord the Sky, god Tengri in great anger hammered into Universe a golden stake.

The golden stake of the god Tengri secured the Sky and the Earth, and became an axis of the world, around which hold the path the moon and the sun, stars and comets. And the end of the stuff can be seen at the night in a dark sky, people named it a Polar star.

2. **Big Bear** was called Seven Elders. They were given as offerings kumyz, milk and animals. Seven Elders kept a stolen daughter of Pleiads.
3. **Pleiads** – Urker. The Türks noticed a forward movement of Pleiads to Big Bear and thought that Pleiads pursued Seven Elders to free the daughter. The Türks determined by Pleiads the time of night and the seasons.
4. **Venus** – Shepherd’s star. By the rise of this planet the Türkic shepherds brought herds to the aul (village) corral.
5. **A morning star** – Chulpan¹². The Türks named children in honor of favorite stars.





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☯- Myths about Milky Way-☯

1. The Road of The Warriors

For thousands of years, Man has been looking up to the night sky, making him think about that bright stripe running through the starry night. Generations were wondering about it and passed the legends to their children and grandchildren. To the Hungarians and Szekelys the explanation of the Milky Way was the legend of the War Horse Journey. This was also their explanation of the creation of the galaxy.

According to the tradition: the Szekely's origin when the head dies, the body vanishes after. After Attila's vast empire fell apart, the conquered people revolted, and the Hun descendants turned their weapons against each other. Attila's sons had lost their lives in those bloody battles. Only one of them stayed alive: The smallest, the sweetest, Csaba leader.

When the liberated people shared Attila's country, Csaba gathered the remaining Huns and told them: "Far, far away, where the sun rises, on the land of Scythian ("Szittyorszag") live our good relatives, our Hungarian brothers. If you want me to, I will take you there, and we will come back together to take over our father's, Attila's land!"

So the Hun army sprung up. It was a few thousands soldier including their wives and children, but they could not get further than the snowy mountains of Transylvania. They stopped at the "Reka" stream, where Csaba split the troops in half. He said:

"One half will come with me to the land of Scythian ("Szittyorszag"), the other half will stay here and wait for our returning."

To those who stayed, Csaba showed how to build houses from stone and wood, instead of a tent, and said:





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"As far as the river can flow down, as long as spring comes after winter, as long as the blessing comes down from the sky, my people, your name will be from now on "Szekely" (for this term, "settle here" would be my closest English version).

Because of the many enemies, Csaba promised that he would come back immediately to fight for and protect them when they send him a message that they are in trouble. He said:

"You can send me a message through fire or water - be your messenger the air or even our Mother Earth!"

But soon after Csaba left with his people, all of a sudden, there was a big wind storm, and the message was in the air:

"Turn back, Csaba, turn back, the Szekelys are in trouble!"

So the Huns immediately turned back and cut off all the enemies that attacked the Szekelys. Then they continued their journey toward Scythian ("Szittyország".)

They went on for a while, when a swollen river stopped them. The water brought Csaba a new message:

"Turn back, Csaba, turn back, the Szekelys are in trouble!"

Again, the Huns returned right away, and cut off all the enemies that attacked the Szekelys.

On the third time the Huns were already "behind the beyond" when a terrible ice storm fell on them with thundering and lightning. The fire from the sky brought Csaba another message, so they turned back again and saved their Szekely blood from shedding. At the end, they finally arrived to their destination, Scythian ("Szittyország") without any obstruction.

The Hungarians greeted their Hun brothers lovingly. They shared their tents and bread with them, and listened to their stories about Attila's legacy. Finally, the Hungarians said to them: "We are still weak to take over such a large inheritance. We need to grow, to multiply. Stay with us for a while, and later on we can go together!"

So Csaba settled down among the Hungarians. Years passed by, they got old, and one day their eyes closed for an eternal sleep. The Hungarians buried them with love and respect under the beautiful green mounds together with their horses, and swords.





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They slept there for hundreds of years, undisturbed. But then again, the Szekelys were surrounded with enemies. This time the enemy was even bigger and more powerful than before. The Szekelys fought hard for a week, but to no avail! There were lots of enemies!

So they fought their last battle on a dark night. The ground trembled under their pounding feet, and the Szekely elders moaned:

"Oh, father Csaba, you can't help us any longer..." But lo and behold: Csaba leader sure helped again!

At that very moment there were loud clashing-rattling sound all over Transylvania's sky. Bridle-bits clashed, swords clapped while on the sky between the stars, Csaba leader's shiny horsemen appeared. *"Do not give up, Szekely!"* Csaba is here with us!" So the Szekelys gained their strength back.

Their enemies were horrified. They threw their guns away and ran like there is no tomorrow. Who could battle with dashing souls from heaven?

The Szekelys were relieved. Csaba leader's valiant men went back under the green mounds the same way as they came out. But that bright white path, which was trodden by their horse hoofs remained on the sky and is still shining. It's the Milky Way, which the Szekely calls the The Road of The Warriors. You can see it every time when you look up at the sky.

2. Birds' Path

The name "Birds' Path" is used in several Uralic and Turkic languages and in the Baltic languages.

Among the Finno-Ugric peoples and other Siberians, for example, the Milky Way is directly linked with migrating birds. Traditional name for the Milky Way in several Uralic and Turkic languages is Birds' path. This name refers to the autumn Milky Way. Just after dark, it bridges the sky from the northeast to the southwest, and it is regarded as the high-altitude flight path for waterfowl headed south for winter. Both this configuration of the Milky Way and the absence of the birds are emblems of winter's onset. The constellation Cygnus, the Swan, belongs to this part of the Milky Way. It, too, wings south when the stars come out, and it may be evidence of an old and more widespread tradition of the Milky Way's seasonal role.

In Uralic myth, the birds travel only at night. The Milky Way directs their flight, but they do not just fly south. In winter, the birds' journey beyond the horizon to the Land of the Birds, which is really a



realm of the dead. The birds are killed there and remain until spring, when their magical resurrection lets them return north

3. Beliefs about Solar Eclipse

Muslims turn to Allah during eclipses of the sun and the moon, because these astronomical events are the signs of the apocalypse, as it says in the Qur’an (75:6-9):

He asks:” *When judgment day comes?*

“This day will come when the vision will be blurry and the moon will go into eclipse, the sun and the moon will merge depriving us of their light.”



☞- Legends about Taqi al-Din and the demolished Ottoman observatory-☞



An illustration of an astronomer observing the comet of 1577 using a quadrant

It is rumored that the very first Ottoman observatory was founded in the 17th century and demolished soon after. Several stories have been attributed to the observatory and its founder, Taqi al-Din, throughout history, but the truth is hidden between the lines of these legends and stories

There are two legends given as examples every time Turkey's backwardness is discussed. The first one is the late arrival of printing and the second is the destruction of an observatory.





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Purportedly, a man called Taqi al-Din founded the first observatory in our history in Istanbul in 1571. However, the religious men, who dominated the society and the state, destructed the observatory as they were against knowledge and science. Oh such bigoted people!

Firstly, it must be said that Taqi al-Din's observatory was not the first observatory in the Ottoman Empire. Since old times, observatories or similar institutions like "muvakkithane," a place where prayer times were calculated using astronomical methods, existed in Islamic madrasahs and large mosques. This is because time is a requirement for all – obligatory – religious practices in Islam. It is necessary to know the time to make one's religious practices valid. In the Islamic world, therefore, astronomers ("munajjim" in Ottoman Turkish) were always trained. The observatory of Taqi al-Din was independent from a madrasah and was established with a special purpose.

The second issue is that Taqi al-Din was already a religion scholar himself. His real name was Muhammad ibn Ma'ruf and he came from Damascus. He was known as Takiyüddin al-Rasid (Taqi al-Din the Observer). His father was a qadi (Islamic judge). He studied at a madrasah and became a qadi in Egypt. In 1570, Taqi al-Din came to Istanbul with his family, where he met with the famous religion scholars of the period. He was then assigned as "munajjimbashi" (the head of astronomers). Taqi al-Din took the attention of Sheikh al-Islam Hoca Sadeddin Efendi, the teacher of the Ottoman emperor. With his encouragement, he founded an observatory to solve some problems in astronomy. Ottoman Sultan Murad III provided the observatory's finances. He spared no expense and did not avoid any burden. Some of the materials for the observatory were brought in from Egypt. The sultan accepted and whatever Taqi al-Din requested. All of these details can be followed in the accounts of the Ottoman archives.

Finally, the observatory was opened under the name "Dar al-Rasid al-Jadid" on the hillsides of Tophane in 1577. Until that time, Taqi al-Din conducted observations at the Galata Tower, and also founded a library composed of astronomy books at the observatory. Taqi al-Din developed the instruments that were found at observatories at that time and also invented some new ones. His staff consisted of 16 people; including eight observers, four clerks and four servants. During those years, they had a chance to observe a comet passing by the earth. Certain modern historians, who are unaware of these details, assume and say that the observatory was established for astrological purposes; however that was not the case. Ala al-din Mansur's Persian poetic manuscript "Shahinshahnama" (Book of King of Kings) sheds light on this case. His work mentions the meeting between the sultan and Taqi al-Din. The sultan was asking him about observations and Taqi al-Din said, "There were doubtful points in Ulugh Beg's "Zij" (astronomical chart). With the help of observers, the chart has been now corrected." What Taqi al-Din said, means that the purpose of establishing the observatory was to correct the astronomical charts prepared by famous Turkmen astronomer Ulugh Beg, who lived in the 15th century.

So, why was the observatory shut down? Supposedly, Qadizade Ahmad Shams al-Din Efendi, who was the Sheikh al-Islam at that time, wrote a letter to the sultan. He notified him about gossip saying that the observatory is ominous and that a plague epidemic broke out due to the observatory. It was also being said that disasters occur in every region where observations are carried out. In 1580, the sultan closed the



observatory. Further, Chief Admiral Kılıç Ali Pasha destructed the building through bombardment. These accounts were said by Atâî, who was known for his biographical books on Ottoman scholars. However, Atâî's birthday was later than this case and therefore he could not know this. Moreover, he even gave wrong dates for the observatory's opening and closing in his book. Qadizade was a qualified scholar in both rational and religious sciences and had worked on geometry and astronomy. It is ridiculous to even think that such a scholar could write a letter like that. Therefore, it is not right to depend on Atâî's words, in this case.

Some hints about the incident are available in Shahinshahnama. Taqi al-Din asked the sultan, "The enemy [those who were jealous of them] is dying of grief. You may order to stop the observations, which will be a lesson to those who are low-minded and jealous people." In other words, the observatory achieved its purpose and there was no need to increase the tension. It can be understood that Taqi al-Din was a unique person. He was able to get along well with important statesmen, but could not create a proper relationship with lower officials. He presumably confronted them with envy and hostility. Historian Ali of Gallipoli also described Taqi al-Din as someone who was difficult to get along with in his "Kunh al-Ahbar" (Essence of Histories). When other negative occurrences like the plague epidemic were added, Taqi-al Din understood the situation, closed the observatory and stepped aside. However, he continued his studies. Taqi al-Din passed away in 1585, at the age of 60 and was buried in Istanbul's Yahya Efendi Mausoleum.

Summary:

1. Taqi al-Din was already a scholar himself. Hoca Sadeddin Efendi, who encouraged and protected Taqi al-Din, was the head of the religious men. The Ottoman sultan was the one who commissioned to establish the observatory and spared no expense. So, to whom, how and why did religion scholars oppose?
2. The observatory founded by Taqi al-Din was not the first observatory, but was the first one that was independent from a madrasah and mosque.
3. The observatory was established with a particular purpose. When it reached its objective, it was closed as it completed its mission.
4. Was the observatory founded for astrological purposes? No. It was about developing and correcting the works of famous Turkmen astronomer Ulugh Beg.
5. Did some social incidents, jealous people, and mischief-makers have a role in the closing of the observatory? Probably, but religious men, never!
6. Was this the end of observation and astronomy studies in the Ottoman Empire? No. These activities were at the top of essential sciences in a high Muslim society like the Ottomans. It is not right to lay down the governments' obligation on pursuing real politics to religion or religion scholars.





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Taqi al-Din's contributions to astronomy are known worldwide. At that time, only Tycho Brahe's observatory in Denmark had perfect instruments like Taqi al-Din had. However, Taqi al-Din had a higher number of instruments and his clock was more punctual than the one Brahe had, which meant their observations were more precise. His book "al-Turuq al-Saniyya" on automatic machines was a first in its field. Taqi al-Din wrote one book in the field of medicine-zoology, three books on physics-mechanics, five on mathematics and 20 on astronomy, most of which have not yet been explored. His work about the specific gravity of materials and Archimedes's hydrostatic principles is attention grabbing.

☪- Arab and Islamic Astronomy -☾

During the period when Western civilization was experiencing the dark ages, between 700-1200 A.D., an Islamic empire stretched from Central Asia to southern Europe. Scholarly learning was highly prized by the people, and they contributed greatly to science and mathematics. Many classical Greek and Roman works were translated into Arabic, and scientists expanded on the ideas. For instance, Ptolemy's model of an earth-centered universe formed the basis of Arab and Islamic astronomy, but several Islamic astronomers made observations and calculations which were considerably more accurate than Ptolemy's. Perhaps the most fascinating aspect of Islamic astronomy is the fact that it built on the sciences of two great cultures, the Greek and the Indian. Blending and expanding these often different ideas led to a new science which later profoundly influenced Western scientific exploration beginning in the Renaissance.

- **Purposes of Islamic Astronomy**

Perhaps the most vital reason that the Muslims studied the sky in so much detail was for the purpose of time-keeping. The Islamic religion requires believers to pray five times a day at specified positions of the sun. Astronomical time-keeping was the most accurate way to determine when to pray, and was also used to pin-point religious festivals. The Muslim holy book, the Koran, makes frequent reference to astronomical patterns visible in the sky, and is a major source of the traditions associated with Islamic astronomy.

Another important religious use for astronomy was for the determination of latitude and longitude. Using the stars, particularly the pole star, as guides, several tables were compiled which





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calculated the latitude and longitude of important cities in the Islamic world. Using this information, Muslims could be assured that they were praying in the direction of Mecca, as specified in the Koran.

Aside from religious uses, astronomy was used as a tool for navigation. The astrolabe, an instrument which calculated the positions of certain stars in order to determine direction, was invented by the Greeks and adopted and perfected by the Arabs (see picture).

The sextant was developed by the Arabs to be a more sophisticated version of the astrolabe. This piece of technology ultimately became the cornerstone of navigation for European exploration.

- **Great Islamic Astronomers**

Science was considered the ultimate scholarly pursuit in the Islamic world, and it was strongly supported by the nobility. Most scientists worked in the courts of regional leaders, and were financially rewarded for their achievements. In 830, the Khalifah, al-Ma'mun, founded Bayt-al-Hikman, the 'House of Wisdom', as a central gathering place for scholars to translate texts from Greek and Persian into Arabic. These texts formed the basis of Islamic scientific knowledge.

One of the greatest Islamic astronomers was al-Khwarizmi (Abu Ja'far Muhammad ibn Musa Al-Khwarizmi), who lived in the 9th century and was the inventor of algebra. He developed this mathematical device completely in words, not mathematical expressions, but based the system on the Indian numbers borrowed by the Arabs (what we today call Arabic numerals). His work was translated into Latin hundreds of years later, and served as the European introduction to the Indian number system, complete with its concept of zero. Al-Khwarizmi performed detailed calculations of the positions of the Sun, Moon, and planets, and did a number of eclipse calculations. He constructed a table of the latitudes and longitudes of 2,402 cities and landmarks, forming the basis of an early world map.

Another Islamic astronomer who later had an impact on Western science was al-Farghani (Abu'l-Abbas Ahmad ibn Muhammad ibn Kathir al-Farghani). In the late 9th century, he wrote extensively on the motion of celestial bodies. Like most Islamic astronomers, he accepted the Ptolemaic model of the universe, and was partially responsible for spreading Ptolemaic astronomy not only in the Islamic world but also throughout Europe. In the 12th century, his works were translated into Latin, and it is said that Dante got his astronomical knowledge from al-Farghani's books.

In the late 10th century, a huge observatory was built near Tehran, Iran by the astronomer al-Khujandi. He built a large sextant inside the observatory, and was the first astronomer to be capable of measuring to an accuracy of arcseconds. He observed a series of meridian transits of the Sun, which allowed him to calculate the obliquity of the ecliptic, also known as the tilt of the Earth's axis relative to the Sun. As we know today, the Earth's tilt is approximately $23^{\circ}34'$, and al-Khujandi measured it as being $23^{\circ}32'19''$. Using this information, he also compiled a list of latitudes and longitudes of major cities.





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Omar Khayyam (Ghiyath al-Din Abu'l-Fath Umar ibn Ibrahim al-Nisaburi al-Khayyami) was a great Persian scientist, philosopher, and poet who lived from 1048-1131. He compiled many astronomical tables and performed a reformation of the calendar which was more accurate than the Julian and came close to the Gregorian. An amazing feat was his calculation of the year to be 365.24219858156 days long, which is accurate to the 6th decimal place!

Western science owes a large debt to Islamic and Arab scientists, whose contributions range from the Arabic names of stars which we still use today to the mathematical and astronomical treatises used by Europeans to enter our modern world of science.





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Zodiac Mythology

☞- The signs of the Greek Zodiac-☞

In ancient Greece, the signs of the Greek zodiac were identified with twelve groups of stars (constellations) which we can see in the night sky at different times during the year. They were also associated with one of the four elements - Earth, Air, Fire and Water - and behind each one of them lies a fascinating story. As a matter of fact, the word itself, "zodiac", comes from a Greek word meaning "the circle of animals" - "animals" referring to all living creatures. And indeed, with the exception of Libra, each one of the myths is associated with living beings, either animals or humans. Each sign of the zodiac has a story with gods and people, legends, religious faiths, unusual events and above all a mystery which can't be unlocked. The word "zodiac" derives from *zōdiacus*, the Latinized form of the Ancient Greek *zōidiakòs kýklos* (ζωδιακὸς κύκλος), meaning "circle of little animals". *Zōidion* (ζώδιον) is the diminutive of *zōion* (ζῷον, "animal"). The Greeks "borrow" this concept from Babylonians, who thought that The Sun is passing through 12 fazes. The Greeks had their own explanations, they believed that each star and constellation is a representation of their faith.





Aries (March 21 - April 20) is the first sign of the Greek zodiac, marking the beginning of spring and the start of a new cycle of life. The story of Aries is linked with the myth of the Golden Ram, which saved two kids, a brother and a sister, from being sacrificed in order to appease the gods.

Jason, the Argonauts and the quest of the Golden Fleece

The story of Jason and the Argonauts talks about a great journey by water to a far away land eastwards of Greece. According to myth, the purpose of this journey was to find and bring back the golden fleece of a ram which was kept in that far away land.

The story of the journey is described in a long poem entitled "The Quest of the Golden Fleece", written by the poet Apollonius of Rhodes, who lived in the third century B.C. Actually, the poem ends with the return of the heroes to Greece. What happened afterwards, that is the story of Jason and Medea, is described in the play "Medea" written by the famous playwright Eurypides.

How it all started?

The tale of the Golden Fleece begins when Athamas, king of Orchomenus, had left his wife Nephele, to marry Ino, who was a daughter of Cadmus, the legendary king of Thebes. In order to secure that her own son would inherit the kingdom, Ino plotted the destruction of Athamas's son, Phrixus and his daughter Helle. To that end, she damaged all of the seed grain in the kingdom. When the crops failed, messengers were sent to the Delphic oracle for guidance. Ino then bribed the returning messengers to change the oracle: Phrixus must be sacrificed!

Athamas reluctantly agreed to heed the false oracle. But just as he raised the knife over his son on the altar, a wondrous, golden winged ram appeared, taking both Phrixus and Helle on his back to carry them away. While they were crossing the strait which separates Europe from Asia, the girl slipped and fell into the water. She was drowned; and the strait was named after her Hellespont (Sea of Helle).

The boy came safely to land to the country of Colchis on the Black Sea. Although the Colchians were fierce people, they were kind to Phrixus and their king, Aetes, let him marry one of his daughters. In gratitude to god Zeus for having being saved, Phrixus sacrificed the ram and gave his golden fleece as a present, to king Aetes.



The story of Jason

Jason was the grandson of Tyro and her uncle Cretheus. Being the eldest son of Tyro, Jason’s father, Aeson, should have inherited the kingdom of Iolcus, a seaport in Thessaly (northeastern Greece), which Cretheus had founded. But Tyro, had also twin sons by the god Poseidon and one of these twins, Pelias, had seized the throne. Aeson feared for his life and that of his unborn son. So, when his wife Polymede gave birth to Jason, Aeson claimed that the baby had died at birth. He entrusted the boy to the care of Cheiron, the wisest of the centaurs, who had also tutored Hercules.

“Beware of the one-sandaled man”

When he reached manhood, Jason set on his journey to Iolcus, to claim the throne that was rightfully his. Before he reached the city, he came to the river Anaurus, where he met an old woman who was trying to cross the river. When he gallantly volunteered to carry her on his shoulders, he lost one of his sandals which got stuck in the mud of the river bed. After putting the old woman down, he sped off to Iolcus. What Jason did not know was that the old woman was actually goddess Hera, who hated Pelias, because he never offered her any sacrifices, or paid her any respects. As the story unfolds, it will be shown how the goddess was planning to take her revenge by helping Jason along. Pelias soon heard of the one-sandaled man who had arrived in the city. This news frightened him, for an oracle had once warned him that a man with one sandal would some day cause his death.

Right away, Pelias sought to confront Jason and demand from him to reveal his identity. Jason had no hesitation to answer the truth, announcing his intention to reclaim the city's throne either for his father, or for himself. Pelias wanted to kill his nephew right away, but he knew that would not be very wise, as he would violate the laws of hospitality and thus incur the wrath of the gods. So, looking for another way to dispose of him, he assigned him an impossible task: To go and retrieve from Colchis, the golden fleece! If Jason was successful, he promised that he would immediately return the throne to him. The young hero, without hesitation, immediately jumped on his uncle's challenge: He agreed and immediately set off to plan his epic journey.

Assembling the crew

After consulting the oracle at Delphi, Jason invited the most daring noblemen from all over Greece, to join him. The roster of those accepting his invitation, was truly impressive: It included the top of the cream of all the brave heroes that lived at the time. Some of these, were the following:



- Hercules, the mightiest of all heroes
- Polydeuces, the son of Zeus by Leda and an expert boxer
- Castor, the twin of Polydeuces who was an expert in taming, training and riding horses
- Euphemus, son of Poseidon, who was so fast, that he could allegedly race across water without getting his feet wet
- Periclymenus, son of Poseidon as well, who could change his form at will during battle
- Nauplius, son of Poseidon, an expert seaman
- Orpheus, son of Apollo, the most gifted of all musicians.

In addition to those who claimed divine birth, the ambitious recruits included also Tiphys, who was assigned to be the pilot of the ship, as well as the brothers Telemon and Peleus. The latter would later marry the sea goddess Thetis and beget Achilles, the greatest hero of the Trojan War.

Ready to sail, on board the Argo

Jason's crew named themselves the Argonauts, after their magnificent ship, the Argo. This was built under the watchful eye of goddess Athena, who according to myth, had taught humans about the art of sailing the seas. The ship's beams came from Mount Pelion in Thessaly and included a talking beam from the oaks of the Oracle at Dodona. From this beam, the Argonauts would receive advice during their long journey. After offering a traditional sacrifice to Apollo, the argonauts set sail for Colchis.

Arriving at the island of Lemnos

Midway across the northern Aegean Sea, the Argonauts arrived at the island of Lemnos. The strange thing about this place was that the only inhabitants were women. Year earlier, the women of Lemnos had failed to honor the goddess Aphrodite properly. To punish them, the goddess had given the women a horrible odor which drove their men away, seeking refuge in Thrace. There, they raided the area and brought back with them to Lemnos female captives, with whom they began having children.

Enraged, the native women of Lemnos killed all their female adversaries, as well as all the men. When the Argonauts set their foot on the island, the women saw them as their potential lovers and lured them into their bed chambers. Jason himself mated with their queen, Hypsipyle. The Argonauts were finally convinced to leave the island and continue their journey, only when Hercules, who remained on board Argo, sent a message questioning them whether this was the way they wanted to gain glory for themselves.



More adventures on the way

Hylas is abducted by a nymph Hylas is abducted by a nymph while gazing in a lake. After Lemnos, the argonauts made a stop at the island of Samothrace, where they were initiated in the Samothracian Mysteries, religious rites that they hoped would help them in their journey.

Their next adventure was in an island at which they made a stop after they passed the Hellespont and entered the Sea of Marmara. There, while they were being greeted on land by the natives who welcomed them, their ship was attacked by fierce giants. Fortunately, Hercules, who was left on board the ship as one of the guards, managed to beat them single handedly.

Once the crew set sail again, they were forced to stop in Mysia, (northwestern Asia Minor), when Hercules broke his oar. However, when they were on land, Hercules lost his young companion Hylas, who was abducted by a river nymph, while he was gazing inside the river waters. While Hercules and a fellow member were in vain searching for the lost youth, the Argonauts set sail and left without them, prompted by the sea god Glaucus to leave the hero behind, as Zeus intended him to complete his labors.

Encounter with the clashing rocks

The winged sons of Boreas help the blind Phineus The argonauts help blind Phineus. At the southern end of the Bosphorus, they stopped in Salmydessus, a land ruled by Phineus, whose wife was a sister of Zetes and Calais, the twin winged sons of Boreas. They found the king starving, filthy, blind and so weak he could hardly move.

Zeus had sent the Harpies, horrible creatures, to punish him, because, being a prophet, he had disclosed sensitive information about the future to the humans. The Harpies, would steal his food and pollute whatever they left behind, with a terrible stench. The Argonauts prepared some food for Phineus to set a trap for the Harpies. When they appeared, stole the food and set off, the winged brothers pursued and caught them. Just then, Iris, Zeus' messenger, descended from Olympus. If the twins spared the Harpies, Zeus promised they would leave Phineus alone. Zetes and Calais reluctantly released the Harpies, and returned to Salmydessus.

Phineus was so grateful, that he foretold some of what the future held for the Argonauts. Most importantly, he offered valuable advice on how to navigate the treacherous Clashing Rocks ("Sympligades" in Greek) at the eastern end of the Bosphorus; the entrance to the Black Sea. These two enormous floating islands, driven by the wind, crushed everything in their path as they smashed against each other without warning.



As the Argo neared the end of the Bosphorus, following Phineus' advice, the Argonauts released a dove that flew directly between the Clashing Rocks. Phineus had told them that if the dove could make it through the strait, so would Argo. The rocks clashed together, but the dove only lost a couple of feathers. So, when the rocks separated again, the 50 Argonauts rowed with all their might: Like the dove, the ship made it almost all the way, losing only an ornament from the stern. The Clashing Rocks parted once more and with spell broken, they remained forever apart.

Confronting Aetes, the mighty king of Colchis

The Argo soon entered the mouth of the river Phasis, where Aea, the capital of Colchis lay. The king Aetes being so powerful, Jason and the Argonauts needed all the help they could get from their divine allies, Hera and Athena. When Jason sought their help, they agreed that they would bribe Eros, the winged god of love, with a golden ball to wound the heart of Aetes' daughter, Medea. For, if Medea, a powerful witch, would assist them, even to the point of betraying her father, Jason and the Argonauts would have a chance to win the Golden Fleece.

A priestess of the Underworld goddess Hecate, Medea was the first in Colchis to see the Argonauts. Smitten by Eros, she instantly became infatuated with Jason. The next day, when the Argonauts went to meet the king, he was not so pleased to meet them and when Jason asked him for the fleece, he proposed a test of strength to him. If he would be successful, then he would gladly hand over the fleece to the Greeks. Like the test Pelias had set for Jason, this one too seemed impossible: He would have to harness a pair of fire-breathing bulls to a plow, sow a field with dragon's teeth and then kill all the men who sprang from this seed.

Having accepted the challenge, Jason later met with Medea for the first time at dawn, in the shrine of Hecate at Colchis. There, he made her a solid promise that, should she help him, he would take her back to Iolcus with him and honor her forever.

The next morning, before undertaking the test, Jason anointed himself and his weapons with a magic drug that Medea had given him. With the drug protecting him from the flames, the young hero forced the bulls to their knees and quickly harnessed them. Within a few hours, he had sown the entire field with the dragon's teeth. When the armored men sprang from the earth, Jason hurled a big stone among them, thus starting a fight among themselves. In the resulting confusion, he then rushed in with his sword gleaming, and started swinging it. By nightfall, all the fierce warriors had been slain!



The escape from Colchis

Despite Jason's triumph, Aetes did not intend to keep his promise and he started plotting against the Argonauts instead. Medea, who knew of her father's vicious plans to get rid of the Greeks, she quickly went to meet Jason and tell him that she was ready to help him steal the fleece and then sail away with him, away from her father.

Hearing her words, Jason followed Medea to the place where the fleece was kept under the watchful eye of a terrible dragon who never slept. When the beautiful sorceress used her magic to cause the sleepless beast to nap, Jason managed to snatch away the fleece from the tree branch that was hanging. Running back to Argos, they sailed fast, away from Colchis. Learning of the theft, Aetes quickly set his son Apsyrtus and a fleet of warships against them. Half the fleet headed for Bosphorus; the other half for the mouth of the Danube. Though the Argo had made for the Danube as well, Apsyrtus arrived there before them. The Argonauts soon found themselves trapped: A Colchian ship guarded the entrance to the Danube River. They took refuge on an island sacred to Artemis where they knew that Colchians would never dare launch an attack that might offend the goddess.

Medea kills her brother

Sending him a message claiming that she had been abducted, Medea lured her brother to a meeting on the island, where Jason ambushed and killed him. Then the Argonauts killed everyone on Apsyrtus' ship and fled towards the Danube.

According to another version of the myth, the horrible deed of Medea to cause her own brother's death, was even worse: Apsyrtus was just a child who ran away with his sister on the Argo. Jason and Medea then killed the innocent boy, dismembered him and tossed his body parts into the sea. This act forced the Colchian ships to call off the chase, in order to collect the poor boy's remains for burial.

God Zeus, infuriated by Medea's horrible act of betraying her brother, brewed up a storm and ordered the evil doers to seek purification for the murder from Medea's aunt Circe, who lived on an island off the western coast of Italy.

More adventures on dangerous waters

Rather than finding an outlet to the sea and sailing all the way around the southern coasts of Greece and Italy, the Argo chose a circuitous route of inland rivers to cross northern Greece and Italy. After making its way to the western Mediterranean, the ship finally sailed on to Aea, the island of Circe. Without asking any questions, Circe purified Jason and Medea with the blood of a pig and made sacrifices to both Zeus and the Erinyes (Furies). But, when Circe found out who





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they were and how Medea had betrayed her father and her fellow countrymen, she angrily chased them off the island. To their good fortune, however, Hera was again there to help them. The goddess ordered favorable winds from Aeolus, the keeper of winds, and asked the sea goddess Thetis for help, too.

As they approached Anthemoessa, home of the Sirens, whose seductive singing had caused so many sailors to abandon their voyages and slowly waste away from hunger, Orpheus began to sing and play with his lyre as loudly as he could. By drowning out the alluring singing of the sirens, Orpheus saved the Argonauts.

To reach the Ionian Sea, west of Greece, the Argo still had to navigate the narrow strait between the cliff of Scylla, a six-headed beast that preyed on sailors from a sea cave, and the whirlpool of the monster Charybdis. But, Thetis secretly took the helm and steered them safely through. The Nereids then safely skimmed the Argo over the surface of the water around Sicily. This prevented the violent currents from carrying them into the Wandering Rocks - moving rocks that destroyed ships attempting to pass among them.

After crossing the Ionian Sea, the Argonauts reached the Greek island of Drepane (probably the same as Corfu today). Here, to their great surprise, they met with other half of Aetes' fleet, who had been after them all along. The Colchians demanded the immediate return of Medea and the Golden Fleece. The Argonauts then sought help from the local king and queen, Alcinous and Arete. They agreed to protect them from the wrath of the Colchians on one condition - Jason and Medea had to get married. So, the crew performed the marriage rites that very night in the sacred cave of Macris. From then on, the cave was known as the Medea's cave. The next morning, the king of Drepane informed the Colchians that he would not allow them to take Medea from her new husband. The Argonauts then were free to go.

Just as the Argo reached the southern coast of Greece, a strong wind blew them all the way across the Mediterranean Sea to the Libyan coast. An enormous wave then deposited the ship far inland, leaving it stranded on the desert sands. With the help of three nymphs who appeared before them, the Argonauts managed to put Argo on rollers and carry her across the desert for nine days.

When they arrived at the salt water lake Tritonis, the Argonauts went out to search for fresh water. On their expedition, they found the Garden of Hesperides, where the nymphs informed that, after stealing their apples, Hercules had created a fresh water spring. After returning to Argo, the crew searched for days but could not find an outlet from Tritonis to the sea. After making a plea to god Triton, he finally responded, pushing the ship all the way to the Mediterranean.



After the long journey across the sea, the Argonauts arrived at Crete. But the giant Talus prevented them from landing, by hurling giant rocks at them. The last of the giants of the Bronze Age, Talus was invulnerable - except for one vein near his ankle. Medea used her sorcery to hypnotize the giant, who stumbled, banging his ankle against a sharp rock. The vein burst and the giant fell dead in the sea.

The return home

While Jason was far away on his mission, rumors began spreading in Iolcus that ship and her crew had all been lost. Pelias, encouraged by this news, forced Jason's father Aeson to commit suicide by drinking bull's blood, which was a fatal toxin. Then, Pelias killed Jason's younger brother Promachus. Jason's mother, in her desperation, killed herself with a sword. Finding out about the horrible deeds that his uncle had committed against his family, Jason docked Argo outside the city, while Medea came up with a horrible scheme to seize the throne from Pelias.

She disguised herself as a crone and entered the city. After claiming that Artemis had sent her to restore Pelias's youth, she finally convinced Pelias to submit himself to her promised "treatment". The spell, Medea said, required the cooperation of Pelias's daughters. Reluctant at first, they finally consented to Medea's dreadful recipe: They cut up their father into pieces and put his body parts into a cauldron to stew.

With Pelias out of the way, the Argonauts quickly seized control of the city. However, Jason's shipmate and son of Pelias, Acastus, who succeeded his father to the throne, expelled Jason and Medea from Iolcus, disgusted by the way that his father was killed. The couple then sought refuge in Corinth after an invitation extended to them by the local people.

Medea's dreadful revenge

Jason and Medea settled in Corinth, where they had two children. As the years passed by, Jason increasingly found Medea, whom the Corinthians hated and were afraid of, an embarrassment to him. So, when king Creon of Corinth offered him the hand of his daughter Glauce, Jason eagerly accepted. Divorcing Medea and marrying the king's daughter, would add to his own power and prestige, as well as ensure the citizenship rights of his children.

But, he was unaware, what Medea would do in retaliation to his betrayal. Betrayed, divorced and then exiled by Creon, Medea took advantage of her final day in Corinth to send Glauce a robe and a crown for her wedding, as a gift. When the naive Glauce tried on the robe, which Medea had drenched in poison, it burst into flames. The fire consumed not only the poor girl, but also the entire family of Creon and the palace.



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To hurt Jason even further, Medea killed her own children. Leaving Iolcus, she even took their bodies with them, so that Jason would not be able to bury them. The evil sorceress escaped Corinth on a chariot pulled by dragons, a gift from her grandfather Helios.

The final act of an epic story

Medea fled to Athens, where she convinced king Aegeus, who later became the father of Theseus, to marry her by promising him children. Aegeus and Medea, who had a son named Medus, lived in Athens for many years. However, when she tried to kill Theseus to clear a path for her own son, Medea and her son were exiled by Aegeus.

With nowhere else to go, Medea returned at last to her homeland of Colchis. There, Medus, prompted by his mother, killed king Perses who in the meantime had dethroned his brother Aetes. Medus thus captured the throne for himself. From then on, no one knows what became of Medea.

As for Jason, he did not have a very glorious ending: When he became old, he tried to visit the wreckage of Argos, in the hope of rekindling his memory of the past glory days that he and his fellow Argonauts had once lived. While he was there, a beam from the rotten ship fell upon his head, striking him dead.

Jason had completed his mission, Zeus put the ram's Golden Fleece up in the skies, where it appears till today as the constellation of Aries.



Taurus (April 21 - May 21)

The next sign of the Greek zodiac is the constellation of Taurus (bull), associated with the legend of Theseus and the Minotaur.

Taurus is a zodiacal constellation. According to myth, Taurus represents the white bull-form taken on by Jupiter when he became in love with Europa, princess of Phoenicia. The princess Europa was impressed by the beauty and gentleness of the bull, and the two played together on the beach. Eventually, Europa climbed onto the bull's back, and he swam out to





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sea with her. He took her to Crete and revealed his true identity. The constellation Taurus consists of only the head and shoulders of the snowy white bull. The representation in the stars seems to show a raging bull, however, always about to plunge into Orion.

According to another myth, Theseus volunteered to be one of the youths from Athens who would be offered as food to the horrible monster Minotaur (half man, half bull) who stayed in Crete, in the labyrinth. But, when he was there and with the help of Ariadne, the legendary hero managed to kill the beast and thus relieve his city Athens from the terrible punishment imposed by the Cretan king Minos.

Theseus, the legendary king of Athens

Befitting Athens, a city renowned for its thinkers, Theseus, the chief hero of Athenian legends, was known more for his quick wits than his strength. His cleverness made him - along with heroes such as Hercules, Perseus and Odysseus - one of the great monster slayers of Greek mythology. The hero earned a reputation not only for his daring and intelligence, but also for his fairness. An early king of Athens, he was one of the first rulers to reform the government in the direction of democracy. As both a king and an adventurer, he defended the oppressed and consistently fought for the ideal of justice.

Early Youth

On his mother side, Theseus descended from Pelops, the great king of Pisa, whom the gods restored to life after his father Tantalus had tried to serve him to them in a stew. On his father's side, he was the son of either a king (Aegeus) or a god (Poseidon). King Aegeus of Athens had long wanted a child, but his efforts in two marriages had proved fruitless. He at last decided to consult the oracle at Delphi, where he received a cryptic instruction: "Do not unloose the foot of your wineskin until you return to Athens". The king was puzzled by this, failing to decipher the meaning.

Instead of returning directly to Athens, Aegeus headed for the small town of Troezen in Argolis. Aegeus hoped that his friend Pittheus - the king of Troezen - would help him solve the riddle of the oracle. Although the latter immediately interpreted the oracle - which of course had a sexual metaphorical meaning as you will see below - he did not share his interpretation with his friend, since he had other plans for him. That night, Pittheus got Aegeus drunk and led him to the bed of his daughter Aethra. Later that same night, Poseidon lay down with Aethra too - but neither Pittheus nor Aegeus knew of this coupling.



The next morning, Aegeus buried his sword and his sandals under a massive rock near Troezen. He told Aethra that if she gave birth to his son and that boy grew strong enough to push aside the stone, she should send him with these items to Athens. In this way, Aegeus would recognize him as his son. Aethra did have a son and named him Theseus. The boy soon demonstrated both strength and cleverness. As a young wrestler, he is credited with transforming the sport of wrestling from a contest of brute strength into an art that blended fighting skills with agility and quick wits.

At age sixteen, Theseus managed to move the stone, put on Aegeus's sandals and sword and set off for Athens. He ignored his grandfather's and mother's advice to sail across the Saronic Gulf. Instead, he chose to traverse the hazardous land route across the Isthmus of Corinthus.

The adventurous journey to Athens

The road to Athens was filled with horrible monsters, who terrorized the travelers, killing them in brutal ways. The hero encountered his first opponent near Epidaurus. This was the notorious Periphetes nicknamed Corynetes (meaning "Clubman"), son of the god Hephaestus, who killed travelers with a club (coryne). Theseus killed him and took his club as a trophy.

A little further along the road, the hero came across Sinis, who was also known as Pityocampetes (meaning "Pine Bender"). Sinis would bend back two pines, then capture travelers and tie each of their legs to each tree. He would then let the pines snap back into place, thus tearing the traveler apart. Theseus beat Sinis and punished him with the same treatment he had reserved for strangers.

While he was there, Theseus had his first erotic contact with Sinis's daughter, Perigune. A son, Melanippus, was born from their union. The hero had not gone much further when a ferocious sow rushed out at him. This wild pig had long ravaged the town of Crommyon. Named Phaea after the old woman who bred or owned her, the beast was yet another monstrous offspring of Typhon and Echidna. The hero used both sword and spear to kill the beast.

Near Corinth, by a location now known as "Kakia Skala" (meaning "Evil Ladder"), Theseus encountered Sciron, also a son of Poseidon, who would force travelers to wash his feet. As they bent over, he would toss them over the cliff into the Saronic Gulf, where the poor victims would be devoured by a huge sea turtle. The hero agreed to wash Sciron's feet, but when he bent down, he managed to grab him by the ankles and hurl him down the cliff, thus becoming the last victim of the man eating turtle.

Outside Eleusis, the hero fought and killed another son of Poseidon, Gercyon, who forced travelers to wrestle with him to death. Once again, he used wits, quickness and agility to defeat



brute strength. At the end of the match, he lifted Gercyon up and smashed him to the ground, killing him instantly.

The final monster encountered on the way to Athens, was named Procrustes. The father of Sinis the Pine Bender and son of Hephaestus, Procrustes would invite all weary travelers to rest at his home. But after his guests fell asleep, he would torture them: If their legs hung over the end of the bed, he would chop them off. If they were too short, he would attach weights to their arms and legs and would stretch them to size. As he had done with all the monsters he had encountered before, Theseus gave Procrustes a taste of his own medicine, by killing him the same way he used himself on his victims.

Arriving in Athens

When the hero reached the outskirts of Athens, he offered a sacrifice to Zeus Meilichius and was purified of the killings he had committed on the way. Tales of his feats had already reached the palace of Aegeus, who at the time was living with Medea. Being a sorceress and having recognized the identity of the young hero, she talked the king into poisoning the young stranger, in an attempt to prevent Aegeus from recognizing his son so that her own son Medus, would be assured of accessing the throne.

Aegeus thus invited Theseus to a symposium. During the meal, Theseus pulled out a knife to cut the meat. Aegeus immediately recognized it, as being the same one that he hid under the rock in Troezen, a long time ago. As soon as he realized that the young man he had before him was his son, he immediately poured out the tainted wine, officially recognized Theseus as his son and banished Medea and her son. After being declared the heir to the throne of Athens, Theseus faced and defeated his cousins, the sons of Pallas (Aegeus's brother), who had decided to kill the hero, as his sudden appearance had spoiled his plan to succeed his brother on the Athenian throne. He then captured the Marathon Bull, a wild beast which was ravaging the area around Athens. This bull was the same one captured by Hercules in Crete and brought to Tiryns in the course of his labors.

The expedition to Crete

The happy reunion of Aegeus and his son did not last long. Eighteen years earlier, king Minos of Crete had attacked Athens to avenge the death of his son Androgeus, who was killed by the Marathon Bull, following an order from Aegeus. Athens, weakened by the plague, succumbed to Minos and Aegeus averted the invasion by agreeing to pay a terrible price. Every nine years, Minos came to Athens to collect his awful payment: Seven boys and seven virgin girls to be offered as food to the savage Minotaur. Now, the time came for the third tribute.



The Minotaur, a monster with a bull's head and a man's body, was the offspring of Mino's wife, Pasiphae, and a handsome bull. At the beginning of Minos's reign, the king wanted to discourage any challenges to the throne by proving his divine right to rule Crete. He prayed to Poseidon to send him a sign, a bull which he promised to sacrifice. When the beast emerged from the sea, Minos admired it so much, that he substituted another one for the sacrifice. Poseidon, enraged, he avenged by making Pasiphae fall in love with the beast. Thus, the queen petitioned Daedalus, a brilliant inventor, to help her consummate her love. Daedalus constructed a hollow wooden cow and covered it with cow hides. The fake cow was so convincing, that it fooled the bull. Pasiphae, who was hidden inside the child, thus conceived a monstrous child, Minotaur.

Daedalus then designed the labyrinth, a maze like prison in which the Minotaur lived. No one - except its builder Daedalus - had ever got into the maze and managed to get out. Despite his father's protests, Theseus volunteered to join the group to be sent to Crete for the sacrifice. His plan was to kill the beast and thus end the payment of the tribute to Crete. Concerned about his son, Aegeus made him promise that, on his return home he would signal his survival by replacing the black sails of the ship with white ones. When the shipload of Athenian sacrifices arrived in Crete, Ariadne - a daughter of Minos - fell in love with Theseus. She resolved to help him escape by giving him a spool of thread and a sword. When he entered the Labyrinth, he attached one end of the thread to the entrance. He then unraveled the ball as he explored the maze. Eventually, he found his way to the center of the maze, where he slew the mighty beast with the sword that Ariadne had given him. Afterwards, he wound the thread back to the ball, thus following its trail back to the entrance.

The ship with the Athenians and Ariadne immediately set sail for Athens, thus escaping from Crete. They then made a stop at Naxos, a Greek island.

Myth tellers disagree on the final fate of Ariadne:

One myth says that Theseus abandoned her on the island Naxos. Ariadne, enraged when she found out, cursed him to forget to change the sails of the ship from black to white, thus driving his father Aegeus to death.

Another myth says, that god Dionysus, fascinated by her beauty, appeared in Naxos and stole Ariadne away to make her his bride. Still, a third version suggests that Ariadne died while giving birth to Theseus's child Ammathounta (Ammochostos) in Cyprus, where the ship was wrecked during a storm. She was buried in a woods consecrated to Aphrodite Ariadne.

Neglecting to change the sails of his ship, Theseus sailed on to Athens. Aegeus, who was eager to learn about his son's fate, saw the black sails of the ship from afar while he was standing



on a cliff overlooking the sea. Assuming that his son was dead, he leaped from the cliff to his death. The sea that claimed his body was named thereafter the Aegean Sea, in honor of his name.

Adventure with the Amazons

After his father's death, Theseus became king of Athens. As a king, he made significant moves towards establishing democracy and laying the foundations for the Athenian hegemony, which would reach its pinnacle in the fifth century BC. Being a king, however, did not discourage him from continuing his adventurous life. Some say he joined the Argonauts in their quest for the Golden Fleece. He also took part in the Calydon boar hunt.

He also contributed significantly to the victory of Hercules over the Amazons, in the relevant labor. While he was with Hercules in the land of the Amazons, Antiope, one of the Amazon queens, fell in love with him. Betraying her sisters, she followed Theseus on his way back to Greece. The Amazons pursued the hero and Antiope to Athens, where they engaged in a fierce battle. Hippolyte, defeated, escaped to Megara, where she died.

Antiope and Theseus had a son, Hippolytus. Storytellers disagree on the way she died: Some say she was killed by an Amazon warrior, while others say that she was accidentally killed by an Amazon ally of hers, Penthesilia, while they were battling against the other Amazons. Some even insist that Theseus himself killed her, when she attacked the guests at his wedding to Phaedra.

Phaedra and Hippolytus

Theseus was then married to Phaedra, who was Ariadne's sister. Out of wedlock, the king and queen had two sons: Acamas and Demophon. Theseus intended his sons to succeed him in ruling Athens, so he sent Hippolytus, his son from Antiope, to Troezen, where he would succeed the hero's grandfather, Pittheus.

When Phaedra met once Hippolytus in Troezen, she fell in love with him. But the youth did not respond to her advances, because he was devoted to the goddess Artemis and was indifferent to women. Devastated, Phaedra killed herself, leaving a letter to Theseus, who was away on a trip, in which she claimed that Hippolytus raped her. Theseus refused to listen to his son's version of the story. Enraged, he called for his son's death by invoking one of the three curses that his father Poseidon had once bestowed upon him.

As Hippolytus rode away along the coast in his chariot, a bull rose out of the sea and spooked the horses. The horses upset the chariot and dragged Hippolytus, who had become entangled in the reins, to his death. The goddess Artemis later appeared before Theseus, explaining to him the true



version of the story. The real culprit behind the plot was the goddess Aphrodite, who wanted to punish Hippolytus for neglecting her and choosing Artemis over her.

The tragic story of Phaedra and Hippolytus is the central theme of a drama by the ancient Greek playwright Euripides called "Hippolytus". His Roman counterpart Seneca also told a similar story in his "Phaedra".

The Abduction of Helen

Not taken aback from the tragic end of his amorous adventures in the past (Ariadne, Antiope and Phaedra), Theseus was set on finding a suitable wife. His choice was princess Helen of Sparta, the same one who later sparked the Trojan War. At that time, Helen was in the age of 10-11, while Theseus was reaching fifty. As the myth goes, Helen was a daughter of Zeus and was the sister of the twins, Castor and Polydeuces.

In this new adventure, he was assisted by his longtime friend Peirithous, king of the Lapithae, a tribe who lived in Thessaly (northeastern Greece). Peirithous first met Theseus when he tried to steal cattle from him, in an attempt to challenge the hero and see whether his fame for being a hero held to be true. When the two men met, they grew fond of each other and became close friends. Peirithous was especially grateful to Theseus when he helped him battle against the Centaurs - half-brothers of Peirithous since allegedly they all had Zeus as their father -, when, under the influence of alcohol, they created havoc at Peirithous's wedding with Hippodameia, at which they were invited as guests. In the ensuing war that broke out, Peirithous with the assistance of his friend Theseus managed to drive away all the Centaurs from Thessaly.

After the two friends abducted Helen from Sparta, they left her with Theseus's mother Aethra in the town of Aphidnae and then set out to find and capture Peirithous's choice of wife: Persephone, who at the time was residing in the Underworld with Hades.

The two heroes joined to make the perilous journey to the Underworld. When they met Hades, he unexpectedly greeted them with hospitality and offered them to sit on stone chairs. To their amazement, their flesh became fastened to the chair and on top of this, they lost memory of their identity and what they were doing there altogether. To Theseus good fortune, he was released from his Chair of Forgetfulness, when Hercules visited Hades to accomplish his last labor, the capturing of Cerberus. However, Hercules was unable to free Peirithous, as he had to leave Hades in a hurry, due to an earthquake.

Brought back to the living, Theseus found out that during his absence, the Dioscuri (Castor and Polydeuces, the twin brothers of Helen) had attacked Aphidnae, rescued their sister and



abducted and enslaved Aethra. Athenians were furious with Theseus, holding him responsible for all the disasters that he brought upon them. By the time Theseus returned from the kingdom of death, they had ousted them as their king and put in his place Menestheus, who according to the historian Plutarch was a direct descendant of the great legendary Athenian king Erectheus.

The Shameful Death

Unable to win back the throne, Theseus took refuge in the Aegean island of Scyrus. There, king Lycomedes, perhaps fearing that his renowned visitor would take away the throne from him, drove the hero to his death, by pushing him over a steep cliff into the sea, while they were having a walk. Long after his death, the image of Theseus, fully armed, arose and helped Athenians to victory, during the battle of Marathon (490 BC). When the Persian Wars ended, the bones of the hero were restored to Athens for burial. They were placed in the city center at the Theseion, which became a refuge for the weak, for slaves and for all those oppressed by the powerful.

The renowned king of Athens and the monster slayer hero was finally placed in the honorary position that he deserved, despite the foolish adventures that he forced his fellow citizens to endure during his reign.



Gemini (May 22 - June 21)

The constellation of Gemini is the next sign of the greek zodiac. It is linked with the story of the twin brothers Castor and Polydeuces (Pollux in latin). Actually, they were not twins in the ordinary sense, since they had different fathers. Their story starts when Zeus, king of the gods, wanted to have an affair with Leda, the lovely queen of Sparta. In order to fool her, he transformed himself into a beautiful swan.

In the course of time, Leda bore two eggs: One of them contained a baby girl named Helen (the same one who later was the cause of the Trojan War) and a boy called Pollux. These two were the divine children of Zeus. The other egg opened up to reveal another girl and boy, Clytemnestra (who later became the wife of Agamemenon, the military leader of the Greeks in the Trojan War) and Castor. These were the mortal children of king Tyndareus, the legitimate husband of Leda.

Despite the fact that one brother was divine and the other mortal, the twins Castor and Pollux grew to be inseparable. They did everything together and they loved each other dearly. Because they were so close, they were called by one name; the Dioscuri. As they were growing, they



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both loved all kinds of sport. Pollux was particularly good at boxing, while Castor was renowned for his skill and daring on horseback.

When Jason was recruiting the Argonauts to join him in his quest of the Golden Fleece, the Dioscuri eagerly accepted the invitation. During the expedition, they became famous for their ability to calm the rough seas, which once or twice had threatened to capsize the Argo. Poseidon, the god of the seas, had made the twin brothers joint saviors of shipwrecked sailors and granted them the power to send favorable winds whenever they wished. Even to this day, the sight of the stars of the Dioscuri in the sky is regarded by sailors as an omen of good luck.

Unfortunately, following a bitter fight that the twins had with other warriors, Castor was killed and was summoned to the Underworld. Pollux was heartbroken and prayed to almighty Zeus to take his life as well, for he would not bear to live without his brother. When Zeus invited to join him and the rest of the Olympians on Olympus, Pollux declined saying that he would not like to live forever, while his beloved brother was dead.

Zeus was so touched by the twin's love and affection for his brother that he arranged for them to be together again. They could divide their time between the heavens and the Underworld, spending one day high up in Olympus and the next day beneath the earth, in the realm of Hades.

In further recognition of their brotherly love, he set their images among the stars as the constellation of Gemini, so that they would never be again separated. They stand out as two equally bright stars in a constellation of weaker stars.



Cancer (June 22 - July 23)

The symbol of Cancer The constellation of the Greek zodiac known as Cancer (Crab), is linked with the second labor of the mighty hero Hercules, when he was assigned by Eurystheus to kill Lerna Hydra, a horrible water snake with a hundred heads. As the story goes, in the midst of Hercules' struggle, Hera, who was the hero's worst enemy, ordered a giant crab to go and help the Hydra by digging its claws into Hercules' foot. Howling with pain, the hero stamped on the crab furiously, crushing it to death.

Hera, being grateful for its support and in recognition of its attempt to help her, honored the crab by placing its image among the stars, as the constellation of Cancer.





Leo (July 24 - August 23)

The symbol of Leo, the fifth constellation of the Greek zodiac, is linked with Hercules' very first labor, the capture of the Nemean Lion. According to the myth, Hercules finally managed to kill the beast by strangling it to death. Then, he skinned the lion and took its pelt to wear it. He was then quite protected from his enemies, as the skin could not be penetrated from any known weapon of the time whether made of iron, bronze or stone.

Labors of Hercules Nr. 1: The Nemean Lion

In the first of the labors of Hercules, Eurystheus commanded the hero to bring him the hide of the Nemean Lion. The lion that had been terrorizing the valley of Nemea, was one of the monstrous children of Echidna and either Orthus or Typhoeus, or had fallen to earth from Selene (Moon). At first, Hercules tried to shoot it with his arrows, but seeing that the lion's pelt could not be pierced, he attacked it with his clubs. The lion ran away and hid in a cave with two entrances. Hercules blocked the one entrance, then wrestled with the lion and strangled it. He then skinned it and wrapped himself in its skin, after first offering a sacrifice to Zeus the Savior. He then returned to Mycanae with the lion thrown over his shoulder.

Seeing Hercules dressed in the lion's pelt, Eurystheus was so frightened that he ordered him to leave all his future trophies outside the city's gates. He then had a large, bronze jar forged and buried in the earth. Thereafter, whenever Hercules approached, the cowardly Eurystheus hid in this jar and had a messenger relay his next orders to the hero.

After its death, the famous lion was put on the sky by Zeus, to become the constellation of Leo.





Virgo (August 24 - September 23)

The symbol of Virgo The constellation of Virgo is associated with the story of Demeter and her daughter Persephone. For the ancient Greeks, the story of Demeter and Persephone helped to explain why the seasons change.

The Myth of Persephone

Persephone was the only daughter of Demeter, the goddess of grain, agriculture and fertility. Unfortunately for her, Hades, the ruler of the Underworld, had dreadful plans for her: He would steal her innocence and virginity and turn her into his dreaded queen.

The abduction

Hades, god of the underworld, fell in love with Persephone and wanted her as his bride. Despite his Brother Zeus's reservations when he sought his approval, he decided to abduct her. Zeus was concerned about the reaction of her mother Demeter, who would certainly would not consent to the prospect of her beloved daughter becoming queen of the Underworld. The abduction of the innocent maiden was quite spectacular: She was gathering flowers in a plain somewhere in Sicily, when Hades suddenly appeared, thundering across the plain in his four-horse chariot.

Before any of the girl's companions realized what was happening, the god swooped down swiftly and snatched the poor girl from her arm. Despite her screaming and pleas, no one else could hear her. The earth opened up before Hades's chariot and the powerful horses drove down into the chasm. As they both disappeared into the dark depths, the hole closed up behind them.

Demeter's desperate search for her daughter

When Demeter came to collect Persephone, she soon realized that no trace of her could be found.

Distraught and desperate, she searched high and low for her daughter. She traveled to the farthest corners of the earth, searching for nine full days and nights without ever stopping to eat, drink, bathe, or rest. As she was roaming the lands, she destroyed crops and livestock, threatening to make the earth barren forever and thus destroy all of humankind, in case she would not find her daughter.



Finally, on the tenth day, goddess Hecate told the grief stricken mother that Persephone had been carried away, but she did not know the identity of her abductor. To find the answer as to who was the culprit, Demeter went to god Heliuss, who saw everything that happened on the face of the earth. Heliuss indeed told her what happened, but, on the other hand, he tried to convince her that Hades would not be an unfit husband for her daughter. Enraged to find out about the truth, Demeter remained relentless in her pursuit, horrified at the prospect of Hades taking away her daughter. Realizing that Zeus was a possible accomplice in the abduction, she refused to return to Olympus. Instead, she roamed the earth in the guise of a mortal, forbidding the trees to bear fruit and the earth to nurture vegetable and fruit.

A full year passed by and Zeus became restless that, if he let Demeter persist in her pursuit, all humankind would starve to death. So, he decided to send to her all the gods and goddesses of Olympus to beg her change her mind. After he realized that all his efforts were made in vain, the almighty ruler of Olympus promised to Demeter that he himself would make sure that Persephone would return to her.

A deal is struck

God Hermes, summoned by Zeus, raced down to Hades to fetch Persephone. Hades immediately complied, but before he let the girl go, he urged her to eat a pomegranate seed. Alas, this apparent act of kindness was in reality a devious trick: Anyone who tastes the food of Hades, must remain in the Underworld! The deed having been done, Rhea, the mother of Zeus, Demeter and Hades, proposed a compromise which her children accepted: Persephone would have to stay with Hades in the Underworld for six months each year. The rest of the year, she would be allowed to ascend to earth to stay with her mother.

After agreeing with the deal, Demeter restored earth's fertility and returned to Olympus with her daughter. But, when the time came that mother and daughter would part, the earth became colder and less fertile, until the maiden's reemergence six months later.

The cycle of Persephone's descent to the Underworld and her subsequent ascension to earth, signify the progression of seasons, Fall and Winter succeeded by Spring and Summer. In the Fall, seeds were buried underground. But in the Spring, crops come out into the sun once more.

Queen of the Underworld

Although she spent only half of her life in the Underworld, little is known about Persephone's life above ground after her abduction. Below ground, however, she was dreaded forever afterwards as the goddess of the Underworld. So feared was she, that mortals often invoked her name in curses. The Queen of the Underworld had no children by Hades, but remained



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faithful to her. On the other hand, when he tried to have extramarital affairs, she made sure that her adversary would be punished. Such was the case, when her husband tried to seduce Minthe, who was a nymph: She reacted by turning her husband's potential lover into a fragrant mint plant!

Similarly, she turned the nymph Leuce into a white poplar tree, when Hades again tried his charms on her.



Libra (September 24 - October 23)

The stars that form the golden scales of Libra lie halfway around the band of the Greek zodiac, between Virgo and Scorpio.

Day and night are equal when the sun passes through the constellation of Libra. The scales are a symbol of balance and equity. More specifically, the scales were considered to be the symbol of Dike, meaning Justice, who was a minor goddess of the Underworld.

The fact that the ancient Greeks gave Libra a prominent place in the sky, signifies that they considered justice, equity and balance in general, to be the moral cornerstones of an ideal way of living.

Dike – a God of Underworld

Existing in the underworld realm, Dike personified justice through retribution. According to Hesiod, Dike was one of the three Charites (or Graces), daughter of Zeus and Themis. Dike is linked with the ancient Greek custom of persecution of the guilty, either by the community or by the victim's family. Her assistants were the Erinyes (Furies), who hound criminals.



Scorpio (October 24 - November 22)

The eighth constellation of the Greek zodiac is the one with the name Scorpio. The story of the scorpion is connected with different versions of stories that involve the mighty hunter Orion - a hero who is represented by another familiar group of stars.

Orion was said to be the tallest and the most handsome man of the then known world. He was often seen hunting in the woods and hills of ancient Greece with his pack of dogs. His



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constellation shows him striding across the heavens flourishing a gleaming sword on his bejeweled belt.

Many of the stories concerning the constellations of Orion and Scorpio reflect the annual rising and setting of their constellations, which appear to pursue each other across the sky.

One story tells how Gaia had sent the scorpion to sting Orion, in order to punish him for being too boastful, claiming that he was so mighty that he could easily rid the whole earth of all beasts and creatures. As soon as the scorpion was released from the breast of Gaia, it immediately stung Orion and its deadly venom sent him straight to his death. The scorpion was set up on the sky by Gaia to mark her victory, while goddess Artemis, who had loved Orion, placed his image on the sky as well, forming his own constellation. Because Orion had cared so much for his hunting dog, Artemis also put up a star for his dog: This is Sirius, the brightest star in the heavens.

There is another story about Orion and the scorpion.

One day, when Orion was out in the woods, he caught sight of seven beautiful sisters, the daughters of Atlas and Pleione. Orion loved them all at first sight and began to chase after them. The sisters, however, were terrified and cried out to Zeus to save them. Zeus heard their pleas and helped them by turning them first into doves, so they could fly away from Orion, and then into the seven stars which are now called Pleiades.

According to myth, Orion was stung by the scorpion as a punishment for chasing the seven sisters. Zeus decided that the constellations of Orion and the Pleiades were arranged in the heavens, so that it seemed that Orion was in constant pursuit of the seven sisters, without ever becoming successful, just as the Scorpio seems always to be chasing Orion, without ever touching him.



Sagittarius (November 23 - December 21)

The constellation of Sagittarius (the archer), depicts a creature called centaur, which has the body and head of a man and the hindquarters of a horse.

He is named after Cheiron, the most famous and king of the centaurs. He was semi-divine, as he was the son of god Poseidon. He was taught by god Apollo and goddess Artemis, and from them he learned both wisdom and spirituality.

He dwelt in a cave high up in the rocky, snowy sides of Mount Pelion. He was the oldest and wisest of all the centaurs and very strong. In fact, he was so famous, that many kings had trusted their sons to teach them. Among the most famous of his students were Hercules, and Jason, who later became the leader of the Argonauts.





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As the myth goes, Cheiron was destined to suffer a gruesome death: When Hercules was returning home to Tiryns after killing the Erymanthian Boar, he had a violent encounter with some drunken centaurs, which he managed to drive away near the place where Cheiron lived.

By accident, however, one of the poisonous arrows that Hercules used to defend himself from his attackers, went astray and hit his old teacher. Cheiron, being semi-divine, would not die, having to suffer an excruciating pain, because of the poison.

He was in such an agony, that Zeus himself felt sorry for the poor centaur and permitted him to give up his divine status and give it to Prometheus, the creator of the human race. So, Cheiron finally was left to die, relieved from the intolerable pain that was inflicted on him from the wound.

Centaurs

Centaurs were mythical creatures who were, from the waist up, human, while from the waist down they had the form of a horse. According to myth, the first Centaur was born from the union of Ixion and Nephele, a cloud, whom Zeus had changed into the form of Hera.

According to a different version, however, Nephele gave birth to many centaurs who in turn united with the mares of Mount Pelion, thus giving birth to the half-human, half-horse creatures. The Centaurs were associated with Dionysus through their great reputation for their fondness of red wine and their tendency to create fights whenever they got drunk.

Their most notable involvement in a fight, is the one that took place at the wedding of the king of Lapiths, Peirithous, with Hippodameia. Due to wine consumption, one of the centaurs who were invited at the celebration by the name of Eurytus, showed inappropriate behavior, stirring up a fight between the Lapiths and the centaurs.

As a result, the centaurs were defeated and driven away from Thessaly, which was their original location. The legendary hero of Athens, Theseus, helped his friend Peirithous to win the centaurs.

This was not the only case that the centaurs caused trouble. When mighty Hercules was returning to Mycenae after performing his fourth labor (the capture of the Erymanthian Boar), he had to fight with centaurs, when they got mad after smelling the wine that Hercules's centaur friend Pholus had given him as a gift. Lust was another one of the centaurs's characteristics. Greek mythology contains a lot of references about their amorous attacks on nymphs and mortal women. The most well-known, is the incident involving centaur Nessus, Hercules and the hero's wife Deianeira. The centaur tried to rape Hercules's wife, but the hero managed to kill him with his poisonous arrows.



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The most famous centaur was Cheiron. He was the son of Cronus, who disguised himself as a horse to lay with the oceanid Philyra and lived on Mount Pelion. Cheiron was considered to be very wise and was known to have raised and educated great heroes like Hercules and Jason. As the myth goes, god Apollo entrusted him his son Asclepius, god of medicine, for his education, since the centaur was very knowledgeable in medicine.

Cheiron had a tragic end, when he was accidentally hit by one of Hercules's poisonous arrows. Unable to withstand the pain inflicted by the wound, he gave up his immortality, transferring it to Prometheus.



Capricorn (December 22 - January 20)

The symbol of Capricorn The constellation of the Greek zodiac by the name of Capricorn, is as strange as that of Sagittarius. It is a sea god, with the head and half the body of a goat, and the tail of a fish. The story of Capricorn is associated with the birth of Zeus, the father of all gods.

As the story goes, when Rhea gave birth to baby Zeus, she feared that her cruel husband Cronus would devour her child, just as he did with the previous ones that she gave birth to. So, she secretly took her child to Crete, where he was safely kept in a cave on Mount Dicte. There, he was nursed and cared for by Amaltheia, whose name means "tender". She was a goat nymph, and she looked after baby Zeus with the greatest love and devotion, feeding him on her own rich milk and sweet lavender-scented honey.

Zeus's golden cradle was hung high upon a tree so that Cronus would never find him in Heaven or Earth, or even in the ocean. When Zeus later became the lord of the universe, he did not forget his goat-mother, Amaltheia, who had nursed him so lovingly. He took one of her horns and turned it into the horn of plenty, which is always filled with whatever delicious food or drink its owner may wish for, and is never empty.

Finally, in recognition of all she had done for him, she set her image among the rest of stars on the Greek zodiac, as the constellation of Capricorn.



Aquarius (January 21 - February 19)

The symbol of Aquarius The constellation of Aquarius shows a person pouring water out of a jug. It is thought that the story behind this group of stars is that of Ganymede.



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Ganymede was the son of king Tros, after whom Troy was named. The young prince was the most exquisite and handsome youth that ever lived, and was adored and admired by both gods and mortals.

Zeus, who was especially fond of beautiful people, was totally infatuated with Ganymedes's external appearance. Thinking it would be appropriate for so handsome a mortal as Ganymede to live with the gods, the mighty god disguised himself as an enormous eagle. He then flew down to Earth, captured the handsome youth and brought him up to Olympus.

Up there on the heavenly palace, Zeus had to find a job for his young protégée. So, he decided that Ganymede should be given the special honor of being his personal cupbearer.

The position was considered to be highly distinguished, since the person who was assigned the duty of the cupbearer, was responsible for pouring into the glasses of the Olympians the divine drink called nectar. This was the special drink that bestowed on the gods their eternal youth and vigor.

Zeus was forever fond of his cupbearer. So, he honored him by giving him a prominent position on the Greek zodiac, as the constellation of Aquarius



Pisces (February 20 - March 20)

The symbol of Pisces The image of the two fish swimming in different directions make the constellation of Pisces. Aphrodite, the goddess of love and beauty, was thought to be the source of inspiration for this particular constellation being set in the stars.

After Zeus had fought his father, Cronus, he defeated the race of the giants, who were the children of Gaia, the mother earth.

In revenge for the destruction of her children, Gaia gave birth to a horrible monster, called Typhon. He was the largest and most frightening creature ever born. From the thighs down him was a mass of coiled snakes, while his arms were so long that when he spread them out he reached a hundred leagues each way.

Let loose by his mother Gaia, Typhon thundered towards the Olympian home of the gods, declaring war on all of them. The gods hurried to disguise themselves, in the hope that the horrible creature would not find them:





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Zeus took the image of a ram; Hera, became a white cow; Artemis became a cat; Hermes turned into an ibis, while Ares became a wild boar. Lastly, the goddess Aphrodite and her son Eros, dived deep into the ocean and took the shape of twin fish.

When the fierce monster was finally captured by Zeus and all of the Olympians were transformed back to their original form, Aphrodite, being grateful to the fish who had landed their form to her and her son when they were in distress, put up their image on the night sky. Thus, Pisces became the last constellation of the Greek zodiac.



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OTHER CONSTELLATIONS' GREEK MYTHS





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Every constellation has a myth as to why it is in the sky the major constellations are as follows: Andromeda, Aquarius, Aries, Cancer, Capricornus, Cassiopeia, Cetus, Corona Borealis, Cygnus, Draco, Eridanus, Gemini, Hercules, Hydra, Leo, Libra, Lyra, Orion, Perseus, Pisces, Sagittarius, Scorpius, Taurus, Ursa Major, Ursa Minor, and Virgo.

Please remember that there are differences in the stories depending on who told it but they all pretty much have the same things in common only minor things change so these are told to the best of my ability.

- **Andromeda: The Princess**

Andromeda was the princess of Ethiopia, daughter of Cepheus and Cassiopeia. Cassiopeia bragged that she was more beautiful than Juno (the queen of the gods) and the Nereids. In order to avenge the insult to his nymphs, Neptune sent a sea monster to ravage the Ethiopian coast. The king consulted Ammon (oracle of Jupiter) who said that Neptune could be appeased only by sacrificing Cassiopeia's beautiful virgin daughter, Andromeda, to the monster. Andromeda was duly chained to a rock on the coast, fully exposed to the monster. Fortunately for her, the hero Perseus happened to be flying by on his way back from killing the Gorgon Medusa. When Perseus saw the princess without realizing it, he fell in love. Amazed at the sight of such rare beauty. Perseus tells Andromeda's parents that he'll kill the monster if they agree to give him their daughter's hand in marriage. They of course give him their consent, and Perseus kills the monster (His exact method of doing so varies in different versions of the myth). Andromeda is freed, and the two joyously marry.

Andromeda is represented in the sky as the figure of a woman with her arms outstretched and chained at the wrists.

- **Aquarius: The Water Carrier**

The water carrier represented by the zodiacal constellation Aquarius is Ganymede, a beautiful Phrygian youth. Ganymede was the son of Tros, the king of Troy. While tending his father's flocks on Mount Ida, Ganymede was spotted by Jupiter. In the form of a large bird the king of gods flew down to the mountain, whisking Ganymede away to the heavens. Ever since, the boy has served as cupbearer to the gods. Ovid has Orpheus (a poet of Greek Mythology, commonly known as the 'Master of Strings', referring to his skills with the lyre.) sing the tale:





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"The king of the gods was once fired with love for Phrygian Ganymede, and when that happened Jupiter found another shape preferable to his own. Wishing to turn himself into a bird, he none the less scorned to change into any save that which can carry his thunderbolts. Then without delay, beating the air on borrowed pinions, he snatched away the shepherd of Ilium, who even now mixes the wine cups, and supplies Jove with nectar, to the annoyance of Juno"

Aquarius is a summer constellation in the northern hemisphere, found near Pisces and Cetus. It is especially notable as the radiant for four meteor showers, the largest of which is the Delta Aquarid meteor shower in late July and early August.

- **Aries: The Ram**

Aries is a zodiacal constellation representing the ram of the Golden Fleece sought by Jason and the Argonauts. The ram had originally been presented to Nephele by Mercury when her husband took a new wife, Ino, who persecuted Nephele's children. To keep them safe, Nephele sent Phrixus and Helle away on the back of the magical ram, who flew away to the east. Helle fell off into the Hellespont (now the Dardanelles) between the Aegean Sea and the Sea of Marmara, but Phrixus safely made it to Colchis on the eastern shore of the Black Sea. Phrixus sacrificed the ram and presented the Golden Fleece to the king, Aetes.

Roughly 2000 years ago, the vernal equinox was in the constellation Aries. This is no longer the case, due to precession of the earth's axis, but Aries is still regarded as the first constellation in the zodiac.

- **Cancer: The Crab**

Cancer is a zodiacal constellation. As with many other constellations, its exact mythological origin is uncertain; however, the most widely accepted story is that Cancer was the crab sent to harass Hercules while he was on his second labor. As he battled the Lernaean Hydra, the ever-jealous Juno sent Cancer to nip at the hero's heels. The crab was eventually crushed beneath Hercules's feet, but Juno placed it in the heavens as a reward for its faithful service.

- **Capricornus: The Sea Goat**

This zodiacal constellation depicts the result of the sudden appearance of the earthborn giant Typhoeus. Bacchus was feasting on the banks of the Nile at the time, and jumped into the river. The part of him that was below water was transformed into a fish, while his upper body became that



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of a goat. From this point of view, he saw that Typhoeus was attempting to tear Jupiter into pieces; he blew a shrill note on his pipes, and Typhoeus fled. Jupiter then placed the new shape of Bacchus in the heavens out of thanks for the rescue. Capricornus has therefore from antiquity been represented by a figure with the head and body of a goat and the tail of a fish.

- **Cassiopeia: The Queen**

Cassiopeia was the beautiful wife of Cepheus, king of Ethiopia, and the mother of Andromeda. She is most famous in connection with the myth of her daughter, Andromeda. The goddesses went to Neptune, god of the sea, to complain. Neptune promptly sent a sea monster to ravage the coast (see Andromeda). By most accounts, Cassiopeia was quite happy with the match. In some versions of the myth, however, the queen objects to the marriage and is turned to stone when Perseus shows her the head of the Gorgon Medusa.

Although she was placed in the heavens by Neptune, the sea-god saw fit to humiliate her one final time (and for all eternity). He placed her so that she is seated on her throne, with her head pointing towards the North Star Polaris. In this position, she spends half of every night upside-down.

- **Cepheus: The King of Ethiopia**

Although his name is most well-known in connection with his daughter, Cepheus was placed in the sky of his own right: He voyaged as an Argonaut with Jason on the quest for the Golden Fleece.

Cepheus is generally represented as a robed king with a crown of stars, standing with his left foot planted over the pole and his scepter extended towards his queen.

- **Cetus: The Whale**

Some say this constellation represents the sea monster in the story of Andromeda. More frequently, though, Cetus is represented as a whale, which implies no connection to the Andromeda myth though it certainly is possible that the ancients perceived whales as monstrous creatures. It is relegated to the southern sky far from Andromeda, Cepheus, Cassiopeia, and Perseus.



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- **Corona Borealis: The Northern Crown**

This constellation is generally associated with Ariadne, the daughter of King Minos of Crete. His wife had borne a hideous monster, half-man and half-bull, and Minos had it sealed in a labyrinth designed by the famous architect Daedalus. The maze was so complex and confusing that Daedalus had a hard time finding his way out. Periodically, the Minotaur needed to be fed, and a number of Athenians would be put into the labyrinth for it to eat. This happened twice; on the third feeding, the hero Theseus was one of those chosen as a sacrifice. Ariadne fell in love with him, and offered to help if he would take her away with him when he escaped. He agreed, and she gave him a thread to unwind behind him to mark his passage. He killed the Minotaur, followed the thread out of the labyrinth, and sailed from Crete with Ariadne. Immediately he set sail for Dia, carrying with him the daughter of Minos; but on the shore of that island he cruelly abandoned his companion. Ariadne, left all alone, was sadly lamenting her fate, when Bacchus put his arms around her, and brought her his aid. He took the crown from her forehead, and set it as a constellation in the sky, to bring her eternal glory.

- **Cygnus: The Swan**

There are a number of possible explanations for the presence of the swan in the heavens. Some myths, state the swan was once the pet of the Queen Cassiopeia. Other versions state that the swan was Cionus, son of Neptune, who was wrestled to the ground and smothered by Achilles. To save his son, Neptune immortalized Cionus as a swan. There are other stories as well.

The story that fits the name goes as such: the swan was once Cygnus, son of Sthenele and a close friend of Phaethon. Phaethon died in the river Eridanus after attempting to drive the chariot of the sun, and Cygnus was overcome with grief that Jupiter could have struck down his friend: As he mourned, his voice became thin and shrill, and white feathers hid his hair. His neck grew long, stretching out from his breast, his fingers reddened and a membrane joined them together. Wings clothed his sides, and a blunt beak fastened on his mouth. Cygnus became a new kind of bird: but he put no trust in the skies, or in Jupiter, for he remembered how that god had unjustly hurled his flaming bolt. Instead, Cygnus made for marshes and broad lakes and chose to inhabit the rivers.

Cygnus is easily found in the summer sky. Also called the Northern Cross because of its characteristic shape, its brightest star is Deneb, which is part of the Summer Triangle with Vega and Altair.





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- **Draco: The Dragon**

It is unclear precisely which mythological dragon Draco represents. There are, however, three main contenders. Though I am only going to mention one.

Draco was the dragon killed by Cadmus. Cadmus was the brother of Europa, who was carried off to Crete by Jupiter in the form of a bull (Taurus). Cadmus was ordered by his father to go in search of his sister, and told he could not return unless he brought Europa back with him. Cadmus could not find his sister and to avoid his native country and his father’s wrath he asked Apollo’s oracle what land he should dwell in. Cadmus followed Apollo’s advice and found a suitable site for his new city. He sent his attendants to find fresh water to offer as a libation to Jupiter, and they wandered into a cave with springs. As they were getting water, however, they were all killed by “the serpent of Mars, a creature with a wonderful golden crest; fire flashed from its eyes, its body was all puffed up from poison, and from its mouth, set with a triple row of teeth, flickered a three-forked tongue” (Metamorphoses III 31-34). After his companions did not return, Cadmus himself went into the cave and discovered the dragon. He killed it with his spear, and then (upon the order of Minerva) sowed the dragon’s teeth in the ground. From the teeth sprung warriors, who battled each other until only five were left. These five, along with Cadmus himself, were the first people of the city of Thebes.

Though the story does not fit the constellation which is that of a Serpent that twines between the two Bears in the sky, if its full length were seen uncoiled. We see the constellation today as, twisting past Cepheus and between Ursa Major and Ursa Minor in the north, with its head beneath the foot of Hercules.

- **Eridanus: The River**

Phaethon was the son of Phoebus Apollo and the nymph Clymene. For his birthday one year, Phaethon asked his father for some proof that he was indeed the son of the sun-god. Apollo said he would give the boy any gift he desired as a token of his fatherly love, and Phaethon promptly asked for the chance to drive the chariot of the sun. His father balked, knowing that no mortal youth could possibly have the strength necessary to control the horses.

However, Phaethon insisted, and Apollo had granted his word. Phaethon drove off on the route of the sun, but sure enough, he could not control the powerful horses. He drove too close to the heavens, and then plunged too close to the earth, scorching both realms. Gaia endured the sun’s heat until she could bear it no more, and then she called upon Jupiter for help: The omnipotent father called upon the gods and even upon the sun himself, who had bestowed his car upon Phaethon, to be his witnesses that, if he did not bring help, the whole world would come to a grievous end. Then he mounted up to the highest point of heaven, that height from which he is wont to spread clouds





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over the broad lands of earth, whence he sends forth his thundering and hurls his flashing bolts: he had no clouds then to draw over the world, no rain to shower down from the skies. He sent forth a thunderclap and, poising his bolt close by his right ear, launched it against the charioteer. Phaethon, with flames searing his glowing locks, was flung headlong, and went hurtling down through the air, leaving a long trail behind: just as a star, though it does not really fall, could yet be thought to fall from a clear sky. Far from his native land, in a distant part of the world, the river Eridanus received him, and bathed his charred features.

As a constellation, Eridanus is the longest in the sky, meandering from Orion to Cetus.

- **Gemini: The Twins**

Polydeuces (also known as Pollux) was the twin brother of Castor. Both Castor and Polydeuces had the same mother, Leda, but Polydeuces' father was Jupiter while Castor's father was a mortal man named Tyndareus; because of this, Castor was mortal while Polydeuces was immortal. When Castor died, Polydeuces asked Jupiter to let him share his own immortality with his twin. Jupiter, acknowledging the heroism of both brothers, consented and reunited the pair in the heavens. Castor and Polydeuces were unique among those placed in the sky in that they are not represented merely as a constellation but as actual stars which mark the twin's heads in the constellation. Castor is bright white binary star, while Polydeuces is orange.

- **Hercules**

Hercules was the son of Jupiter and Alcmena, and was hounded all his life by Juno. (This is ironic, because in the original Greek myths, Juno is named Hera and Hercules is Heracles, which means "glory of Hera.") Juno was unhappy with Jupiter's infidelity, and saw Hercules as a living, breathing symbol of her shame. She delayed his birth, and when Hercules was a mere baby sent two snakes into the crib he shared with his mortal half-twin Iphicles. Hercules killed them both with his bare hands. After a precocious childhood and adolescence, Hercules married Megara (daughter of Creon, king of Thebes). Juno succeeded in driving him mad, though, and he killed his wife and his children. As atonement, he serves the king Eurystheus, performing the twelve labors for which he is most famed. Hercules also accompanied Jason on his quest for the Golden Fleece and assisted in the war between the gods and the giants. He remarried, and eventually died after accidentally poisoned by his wife Deineira. He was subsequently immortalized, even though he was by birth only half immortal.



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The constellation Hercules shows the hero wearing the skin of the Nemean Lion while holding his characteristic club and Cerberus the three-headed dog. He also rests his foot atop the head of Draco the dragon. The constellation is huge but rather dim.

- **Hydra: The Water-Snake**

This constellation represents the Lernaean Hydra, slain by Hercules as his second labor. The Hydra was a multi-headed monster. The most common opinion says that it had nine heads (some say more). What made the Hydra so difficult was the fact that, whenever one of its heads was chopped off, two would grow in its place. Hercules managed to get around this rather major obstacle by having his nephew, Iolaus, cauterize each stump with a hot iron as soon as Hercules could chop off a head. The hero then buried the monster's immortal head beneath a rock.

Hydra is a long and wandering constellation, stretching almost from Canis Minor to Libra. It lies south of Cancer, Leo, and Virgo, and is best seen in the northern hemisphere during the months of February through May.

- **Leo: The Lion**

The zodiacal constellation Leo is generally accepted to represent the Nemean Lion, killed by Hercules during his first labor. According to myth, the Nemean lion had an impenetrable skin. Hercules got around this potentially serious obstacle by wrestling the lion and strangling it to death. He then removed one of its claws, and used it to skin the animal. From then on, Hercules wore the skin of the Nemean Lion as protection.

- **Libra: The Scales**

Libra is a zodiacal constellation. It represents the balance or scales, and is one of the oldest constellations. Although now associated with Virgo, a goddess of justice who had scales as the emblem of her office, it was once associated with the fall equinox. On that day, the days and nights are of equal length (i.e. the moon and the sun are in balance).

Libra is represented in the heavens next to the hand of Virgo.



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- **Lyra: The Lyre**

The myth behind this constellation is the myth of Orpheus not the lyre. The lyre was manly the end result of the myth so here is the myth of Orpheus.

In Greek mythology, Orpheus was the son of Thracian king Oeagrus and the muse Calliope (some versions have Orpheus' father as the god Apollo). Apollo, fond of Orpheus, gave him a small golden lyre, which he quickly mastered. Taught to sing verses by his mother, Orpheus was so skilled at making music that he was called "Master of Strings" capable of such music that even rocks and animals would be compelled to dance. Upon the death of his wife Eurydice, Orpheus was so distraught that his mournful singing brought nymphs and gods to tears. Traveling to the underworld, he used his music to soften the hearts of Hades and Persephone, who allowed him to bring his wife back to the upper world on the condition that he walk in front and not look back until they had both arrived on the surface. In his anxiety, Orpheus forgot his warning and looked back when he alone had reached the surface, and saw his wife vanish, this time forever. At the time of his death, Orpheus had become an apostate, spurning all gods save for Apollo, whom he thanked for his golden lyre. For this he was ripped apart by Dionysian Maenads only his head and lyre remaining. His head floated down the Hebrus, continuing to sing sad songs until it was buried on the island of Lesbos, while his lyre was carried to the sky by the muses and placed among the stars.

True to his legend, Orpheus is the archetypal musician in literacy and lore, and he stands for foolish human folly (for turning back out of doubt) as well as sacrifice (for dying for Eurydice).

Lyra may be easily picked out in the sky because it contains Vega, at zero magnitude the second brightest star visible from the northern hemisphere. Vega is also part of the summer triangle, formed with Deneb and Altair.

- **Orion: The Hunter**

There are two different versions of the Orion myth, depending on the identity of his parents. Here in one of them.

This myth states that he had no mother but was a gift to a pious peasant from Jupiter, Neptune, and Mercury. Orion fell in love with Merope, daughter of Oenopion and princess of Chios. Her father the king, however, would not consent to give Orion his daughter's hand in marriage--even after the hunter rid their island of wild beasts. In anger, Orion attempted to gain possession of the maiden by violence. Her father made Orion drunk depriving him of his sight and cast him out on the seashore. The blinded hero followed the sound of a Cyclops' hammer till he reached Lemnos, and came to the forge of Vulcan, who, taking pity on him, gave him Kadalion, one of his men, to be his





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guide to the abode of the sun. Orion proceeded to the east, and there meeting the sun-god, was restored to sight by his beam. After this he dwelt as a hunter with Diana, with whom he was a favorite, and it is even said she was about to marry him. Her brother [Apollo] was highly displeased (she was, after all, a virgin huntress). One day, observing Orion wading through the ocean with his head just above the water, Apollo pointed it out to his sister and said that she could not hit that black thing on the sea. The archer-goddess discharged a shaft with fatal aim. The waves rolled the body of Orion to the land, and bewailing her fatal error with many tears, Diana placed him among the stars.(stated in some versions Apollo,worried for Diana's chastity, sent a scorpion to kill Orion.)

Orion is one of the most well-known constellations, visible in the southern sky during northern hemisphere winters. According to the versions of the myth which have him killed by Scorpius, the two were placed on the opposite sides of the sky from each other so that they are never visible at the same time.

- **Perseus**

Perseus was one of the great heroes of classical mythology. He was the son of Jupiter and Danae, and is best known for his killing of the Gorgon Medusa. This was a rather complex task, as anyone who saw her hideous face would be turned immediately to stone. Perseus accomplishes the task, however, by the aid of Pluto, Mercury and Minerva. Pluto lent his helmet of invisibility to Perseus, Mercury lent the hero his winged sandals, and Minerva allowed him the use of her shield. With the aid of the helmet and the sandals, Perseus was able to get within striking range without being detected by Medusa or the two immortal Gorgons. He then used the reflection on the shield to guide his killing blow, and flew off unharmed bearing the head of Medusa. He was rather tired and wanted to rest when he arrived at the lands of Atlas, at the ends of the earth. Atlas, however, tried to turn him away with his considerably greater strength. Perseus was infuriated and showed him the head of Medusa, turning the Titan into "a mountain as huge as the giant he had been. Perseus flew on until he spotted the beautiful maiden Andromeda, who was chained to the rocky shore as a sacrifice to a sea monster. Perseus promptly fell in love with her, killed the monster, and married the princess. There are some variants on the myth of Perseus. According to some versions, he had to win the winged sandals and the helmet from the three Graeae. When he died many years later, Perseus was immortalized as a constellation.

He may be found near Andromeda and her parents, Cepheus and Cassiopeia, in the northern sky. The hero is depicted with a sword in one hand and the head of Medusa in the other.





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- **Pisces: The Fish**

The giant Typhoeus suddenly appeared one day, startling all the gods into taking on different forms to flee. Jupiter, for instance, transformed himself into a ram. Venus and her son Cupid were bathing on the banks of the Euphrates River that day, and took on the shapes of a pair of fish to escape danger. Minerva later immortalized the event by placing the figures of two fish amongst the stars.

The zodiacal constellation Pisces represents two fish, tied together with a cord.

- **Sagittarius: The Archer**

The zodiacal constellation Sagittarius represents the centaur Chiron. Chiron was renowned for his gentleness. He was an excellent archer, musician, and physician, and tutored the likes of Achilles, Jason, and Hercules. Chiron was accidentally shot and wounded by Hercules. The arrow, which had been dipped in the poison of the Lernaean Hydra, inflicted great suffering on Chiron. In agony, but as an immortal unable to find release in death, Chiron instead offered himself as a substitute for Prometheus. The gods had punished Prometheus for giving fire to man by chaining him to a rock. Each day an eagle would devour his liver, and each night it would grow back. Jupiter, however, had at the request of Hercules agreed to release Prometheus if a suitable substitute could be found. Chiron gave up his immortality and went to Tartarus in place of Prometheus; in recognition of his goodness, Jupiter placed him in the stars.

- **Scorpius: The Scorpion**

Scorpius is a zodiacal constellation. The scorpion is generally believed to be responsible for the death of the great hunter Orion. According to some myths, the scorpion stung Orion in response to his boast that he could defeat any beast; according to others, it was sent by Apollo, who was concerned for his sister Diana's continued chastity.

In either case, Scorpius was placed in the opposite side of the sky from Orion so as to avoid any further conflict.

- **Taurus: The Bull**

Taurus is a zodiacal constellation. According to myth, Taurus represents the bull-form taken on by Jupiter when he became enamored of Europa, princess of Phoenicia: The princess Europa was



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impressed by the beauty and gentleness of the bull, and the two played together on the beach. Eventually, Europa climbed onto the bull's back, and he swam out to sea with her. He took her to Crete and revealed his true self.

The constellation Taurus consists of only the head and shoulders of the bull.

- **Ursa Major: The Great Bear**

The wood-nymph Callisto was a maiden in the wild region Arcadia. She was a huntress and was one of Diana's warriors. Jupiter caught sight of her and immediately desired her. He took on the shape of the goddess Diana and spoke to Callisto, who was delighted to see the form of her mistress. She began to tell him of her hunting exploits, and he responded by raping her. The cruelty of Juno resulted from the goddess's easily-aroused jealousy. Unfortunate Callisto bore a son to Jupiter, Arcas, and infuriating Juno. Out of jealousy, the wife of Jupiter transformed the girl into a bear. She lived for a time in the wild, until Arcas came across her one day while hunting. Unknowingly, he was about to kill his mother in her bear form, but Jupiter took mercy on Callisto, stayed Arcas's hand, and transformed him into a lesser bear. The king of gods then placed both mother and son into the heavens as neighboring constellations.

Ursa Major is Callisto.

- **Ursa Minor: The Lesser Bear**

Arcas was the son of Callisto. When Arcas was fifteen, he was out hunting in the forest when he came across a bear. The bear behaved quite strangely, looking him in the eyes. He of course did not recognize his mother, and was about to shoot her when Jupiter prevented him. Arcas was transformed into a bear like his mother, and the two were taken up into the sky. Juno was annoyed that the pair should be given such honor, and took her revenge by convincing Poseidon to forbid them from bathing in the sea. It is for this reason that Ursa Major and Ursa Minor are both circumpolar constellations, never dipping beneath the horizon when viewed from northern latitudes.

Ursa Minor is better known as the Little Dipper. Ursa Minor also represents Arcas.

- **Virgo: The Virgin**

Virgo is a zodiacal constellation. According to the ancient poets, the virgin is also sometimes known as Astraea. She lived on the earth during the Golden Age of man, which is described by Hesiod:





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First a golden race of mortal men were made by the immortals who have Olympian homes. They lived in Kronos' [Saturn's] time, when he ruled the sky, they lived like gods, with carefree heart, free and apart from trouble and pain; grim old age did not afflict them, but with arms and legs always strong they played in delight, apart from all evils; They died as if subdued by sleep; and all good things were theirs; the fertile earth produced fruit by itself, abundantly and unforced; willingly and effortlessly they ruled their lands with many goods. But since the earth hid this race below, they are daemons by the plans of great Zeus [Jupiter], benevolent earthly guardians of mortal men, who watch over judgments and cruel deeds, clothed in air and roaming over all the earth (Works and Days 109-125).

The "daemons" of which Hesiod speaks are invisible spirits which watch over men. Presumably, although it is unclear, Astraea is the daemon whose province is justice. The emblem of her office was therefore the scales (Libra), which are seen next to Virgo in the sky.

Virgo is the second largest constellation and is highest in the northern hemisphere during May and June.





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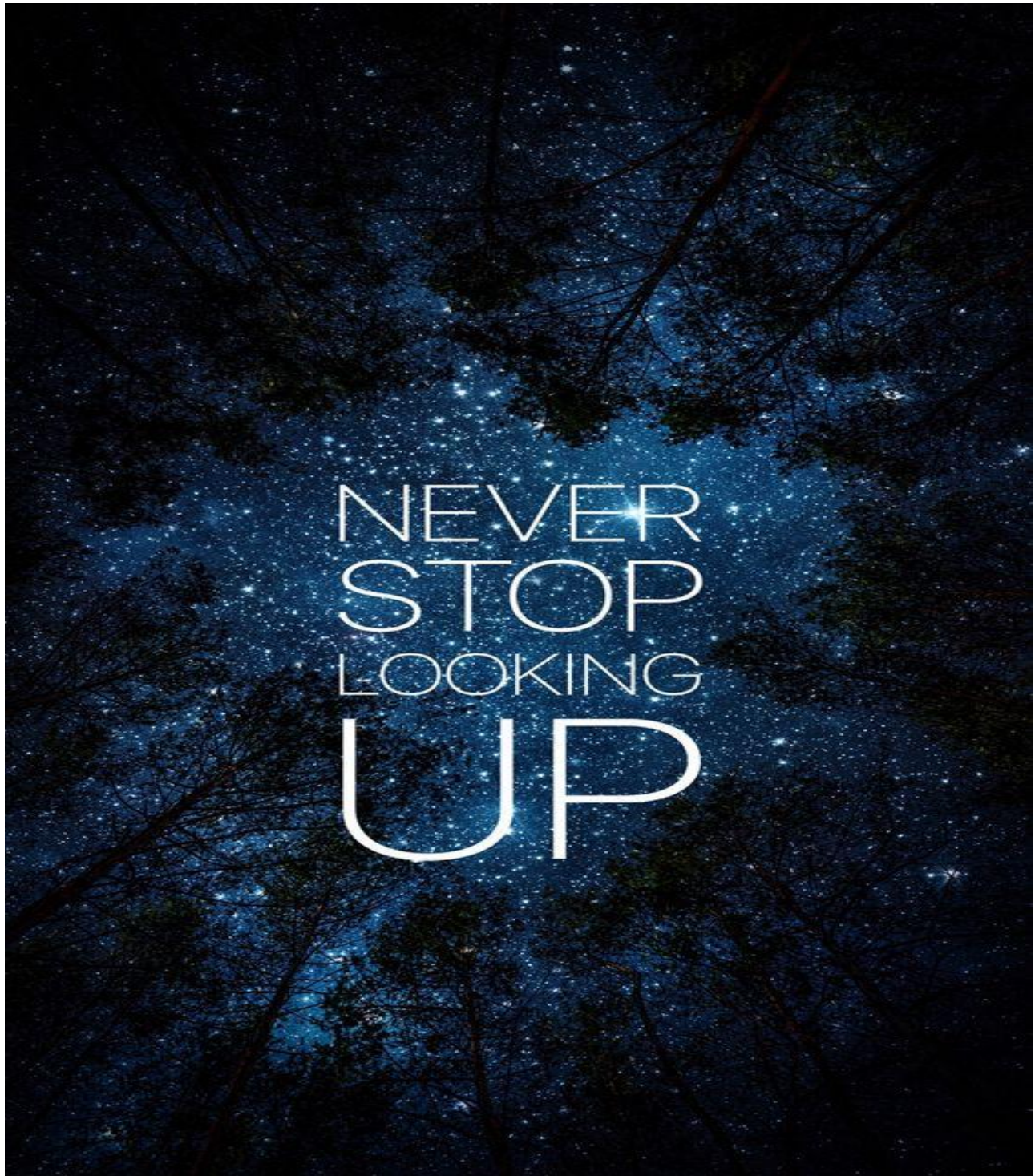




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