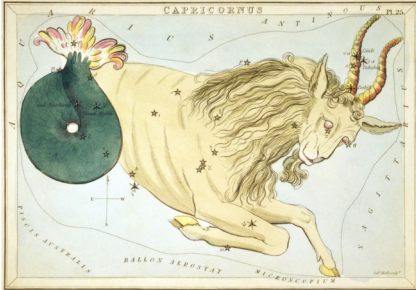


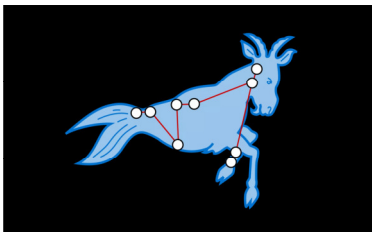
Zodiac constellations 6: Capricornus

The smallest of the zodiac constellations, Capricornus represents a sea goat or a goat with a fish's tail. Its name is the Latin for 'horned goat', 'goat horn', or 'having horns like a goat's'. Although ranked 40th in size of the 88 constellations and faint, it has one of the oldest mythological associations.



It has consistently been represented as hybrid of a goat and a fish from Middle Bronze Age, the first known depiction found on a cylinder seal from ca 2,500 BCE. It was also recorded in the Babylonian star catalogue. It had three possible sources in Greek mythology.

In one tale, the goat-like God Pan jumped into river, turning himself into a creature that was part fish, in order to escape the sea monster Typhron. In another, Capricornus was the goat Amalthea who suckled the infant Zeus when his mother, Rhea, saved him from being devoured by his father Cronos. The goat's broken horn transformed into a cornucopia, the horn of plenty. Thirdly, it could refer to the sea-goat Pricus, father of half-goat, half-fish creatures. Intelligent, honourable and able to speak, they were favoured by the gods. Pricus was linked to Chronos, the god of time, who made Pricus immortal and also able to manipulate time. Pricus's many children moved from the seashore to the land, becoming goats and losing their ability to think and speak. Lonely, Pricus begged Chronos to let him die, but he refused, leaving Pricus now living indefinitely in sky as Capricornus.



One of Ptolemy's 48 constellations, it is located in an area of sky with many water-related constellations including Aquarius, Pisces, Eridanus. This area is called 'the Sea' or 'the Water'.

The Sun passes through Capricornus from late-January to mid-February. Precession of the equinoxes means that the Sun is no longer in Capricornus during the northern hemisphere's winter solstice, as it was until 130 BCE. However, astrological Capricorn still begins with the solstice.

Notable features include:

- Alpha Capricorni: a wide pairing of unrelated stars Named Algedi, the Arabic word for 'the kid' (goat child), it is best viewed through binoculars. (Algedi).
- Delta Capricorni: the brightest star in the constellation (Deneb Algedi). Like other stars eg Deneb, Denebola, it's name is the Arabic word for 'tail' for its location towards the end of the sea-goat's tail.
- M30: a modest globular cluster forming hazy patch when viewed with a telescope

Sources: Ridpath, I (Ed) 2012 Oxford dictionary of astronomy Oxford, OUP, Ridpath, I (Ed) 2006 Astronomy London, Dorling Kindersley, en.wikipedia.org