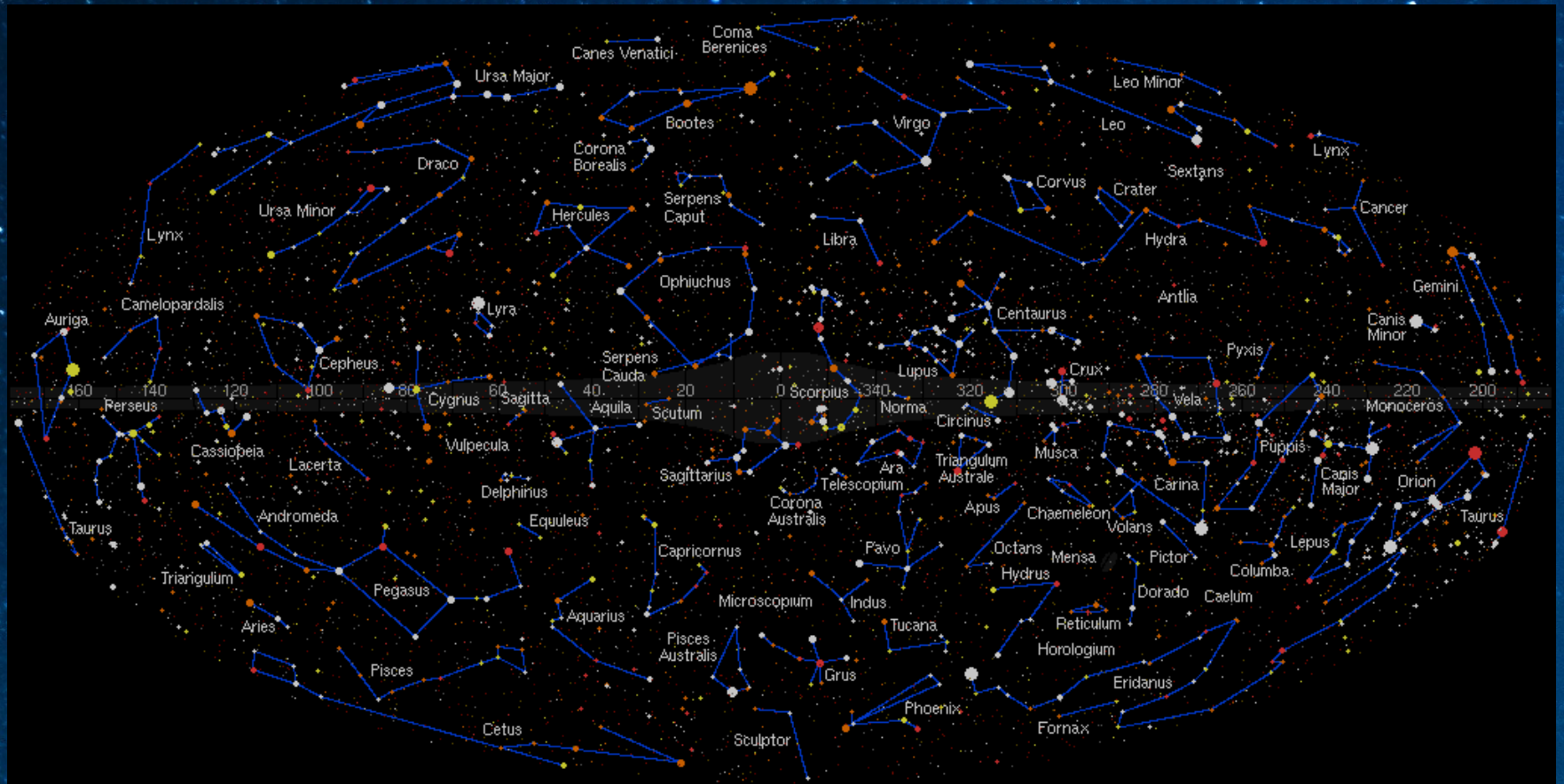


# Constellations and mythology



*The 88 constellations at the night sky*

# *Origin of the Constellations*

**"Constellation"** is the name we give to seeming patterns of stars in the night sky. In general, the stars in these groups are not actually close to each other in space, they just appear to be close when viewed from Earth.

In 1929 the International Astronomical Union defined 88 constellations that are today recognized as the "official" constellations.

Long before the invention of the telescope, early civilizations invented star patterns and named them after animals, objects, heroes, gods, and beasts from stories and myths.

Many of these myths were probably created to explain changes in the sky due to seasons, etc.

The ancient Greeks named many constellations. Forty eight of the constellations we know were recorded in Claudius Ptolemy's «Almagest» ( 2nd century A.D.).

# *Constellation Names*

Constellation names that come from Greek mythology or refer to figures from Greek and Roman myths are probably the ones that are best known.

Constellation names associated with figures from mythology were given to a number of prominent constellations.

These include most of the members of :

- the **Perseus** family: *Perseus, Andromeda, Cassiopeia, Cetus, Cepheus, Pegasus and Auriga*
- the **Hercules** family: *Hercules, Sagitta, Aquila, Lyra, Cygnus, Hydra, Crater, Corvus, Ophiuchus, Serpens, Centaurus, Lupus, Corona Australis and Ara*
- the **Orion** family: *Orion, Canis Major, Canis Minor, Lepus*
- the **Zodiac** family: *Aries, Taurus, Gemini, Cancer, Leo, Virgo, Libra, Scorpius, Sagittarius, Capricornus, Aquarius, Pisces*
- the **Ursa Major** family: *Ursa Major, Ursa Minor, Draco, Canes Venatici, Boötes and Corona Borealis*

# Johannes Hevelius

Johannes Hevelius (1611 – 1687) was an astronomer. In his book, *Firmamentum Sobiescianum, sive Uranographia*, an atlas of constellations, artfully depicts the forms of the then-known constellations.



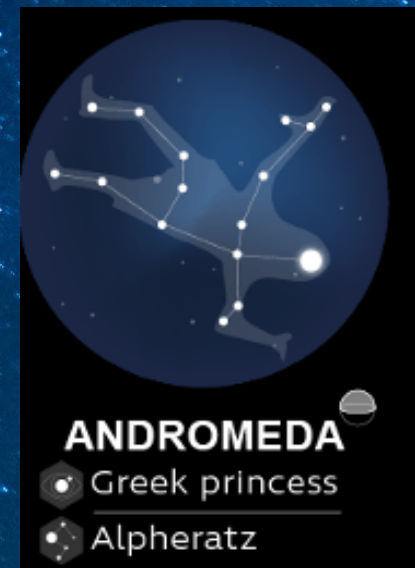
*The north hemispfere*



*The South hemispfere*

# Andromeda

She was the daughter of Queen Cassiopeia and King Cepheus of Ethiopia. The Queen boasted about her own beauty, saying she was more beautiful than the Nereids (sea nymphs). This angered Poseidon. To cool his anger, Cassiopeia chained her daughter to a rock on the beach as a sacrifice to the sea monster Cetus. Andromeda was saved at the last minute by her hero and love interest, Perseus, who killed Cetus.



# Canis Major - The Greater Dog

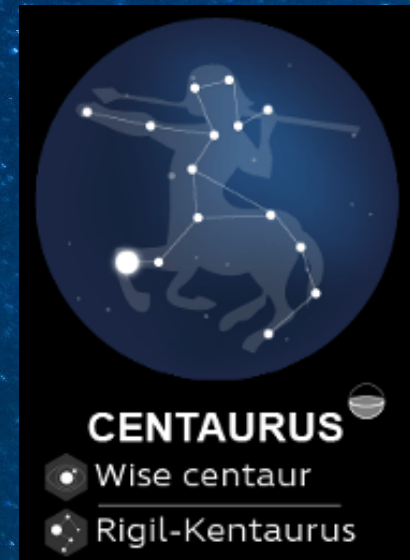
He is one of the two hunting dogs belonging to Orion the hunter. The dogs were placed in the sky along with Orion when he was killed by the scorpion.





# Centaurus, The Centaur

Centaurus, represents the centaur, the half man, half horse creature in Greek mythology.



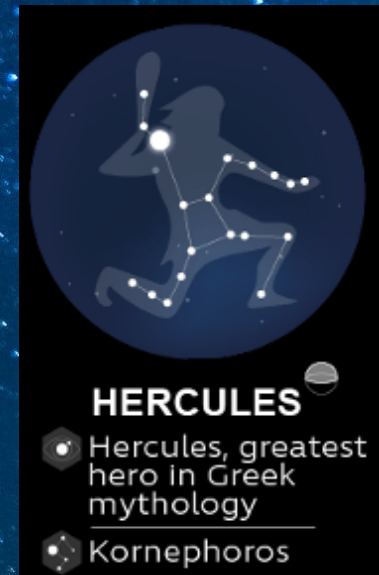
# Cygnus, the swan

Phaethon died when he fell out of the chariot of the Sun and into the River Eridanus. His brother Cygnus repeatedly dove in search of Phaethon. In mercy, the gods transformed him into a swan.



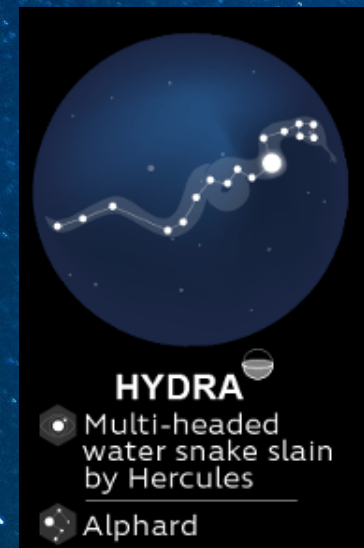
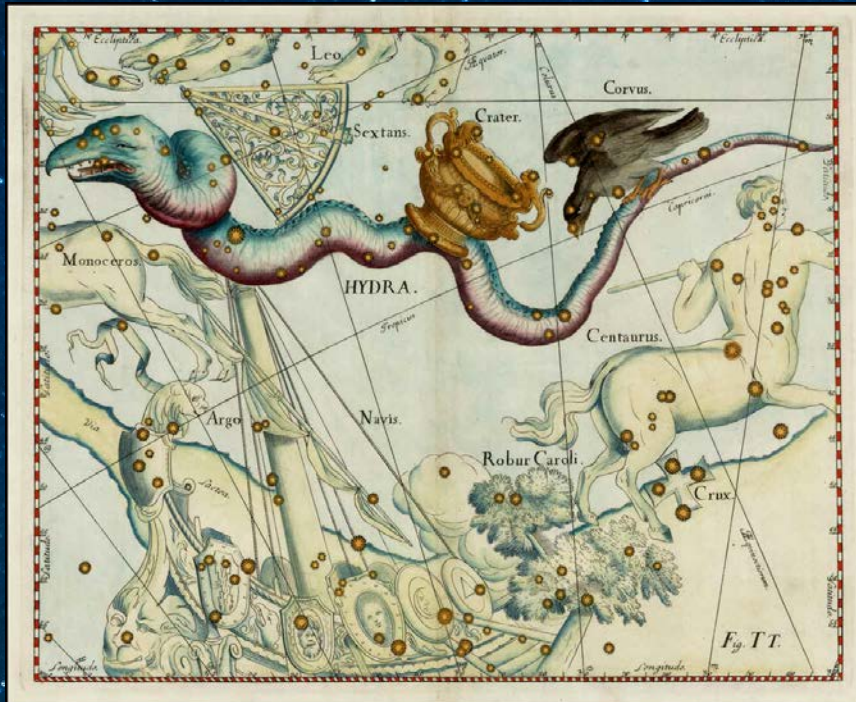
# Hercules

Hercules was the son of Zeus and a mortal woman named Alcmene. Hera made Hercules temporarily insane and he killed his wife and children. In punishment for the crime Hercules was given twelve impossible tasks. Only if he completed these tasks he would be a free man. Hercules performed many great feats which made him famous.



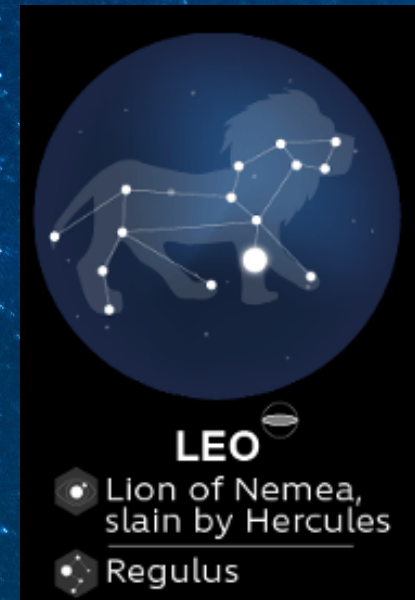
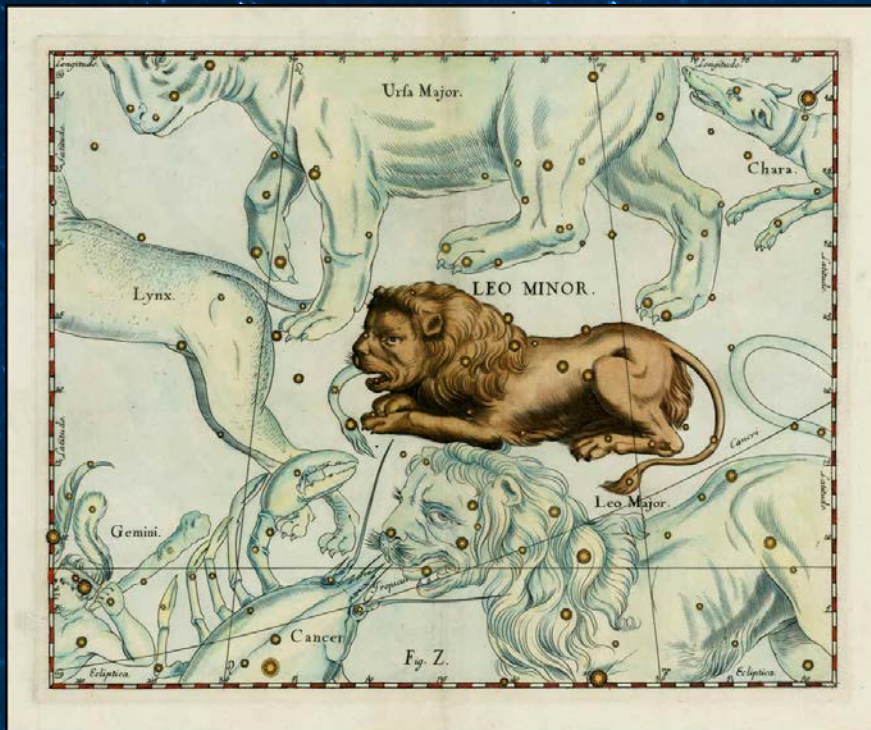
# Hydra, the water snake

This constellation represents the Lernaean Hydra slayed by Hercules. Hydra had nine heads and one of them was immortal. As one head was severed by Hercules, two more took its place. Hercules burned each head to keep them from regenerating, until he reached the final head which he discovered was immortal. He buried that one under a rock. The celestial Hydra is depicted with only one head, presumably the immortal one.



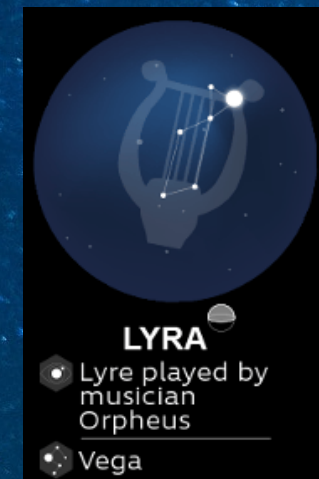
# Leo, the Lion

Leo to the ancient Greeks represented the Nemean Lion killed by Hercules as one of his twelve labors. Hercules strangled the lion as one of his tasks. He wore the skin as a trophy. It is one of the most easily recognizable constellations due to its many bright stars and its distinctive shape that is reminiscent of the crouching lion it depicts.



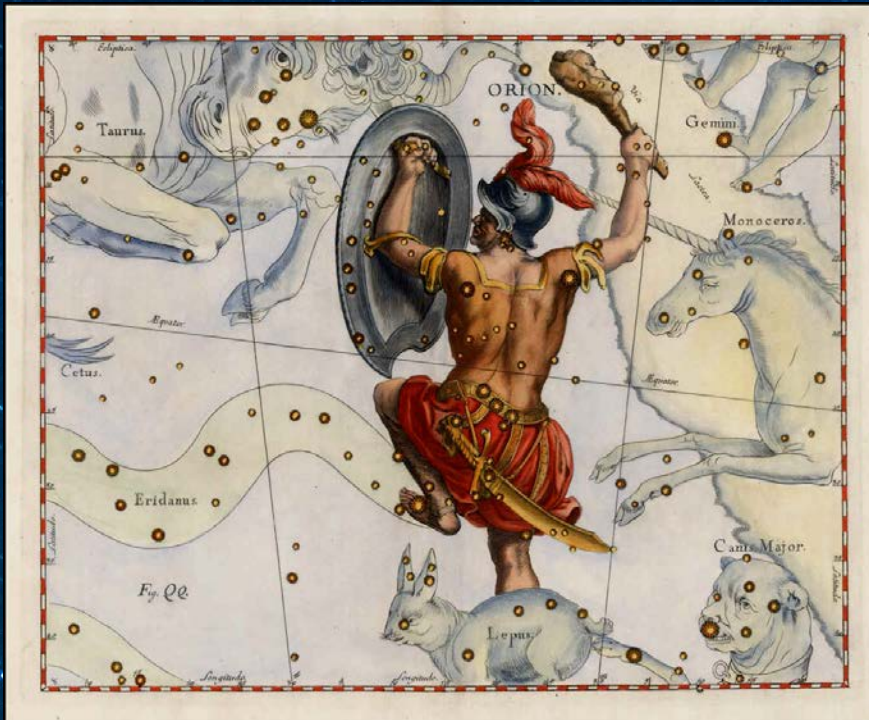
# Lyra, the harp

Apollo invented the lyre and gave it to Orpheus whose music could tame wild animals. When Orpheus' wife Eurydice died, he descended to the realm of the dead to retrieve her soul. His music charmed all the creatures of the underworld and they agreed to release the soul of his wife. Just as he was reaching the light of the world Orpheus turned to see if Eurydice was behind him and at that moment she disappeared. After Orpheus died Zeus placed his lyre in the sky as a tribute.



# Orion, the Hunter

Orion was the greatest hunter. Unfortunately he boasted that he could hunt any animal on earth. In response to his vanity, a single small scorpion stung him and killed him. Zeus placed Orion in the winter sky and Scorpius in the summer sky so they could not see each other and thus not fight. In Homer's *Odyssey*, Orion is described as exceptionally tall and armed with an unbreakable bronze club



# *Pegasus, The Winged Horse*

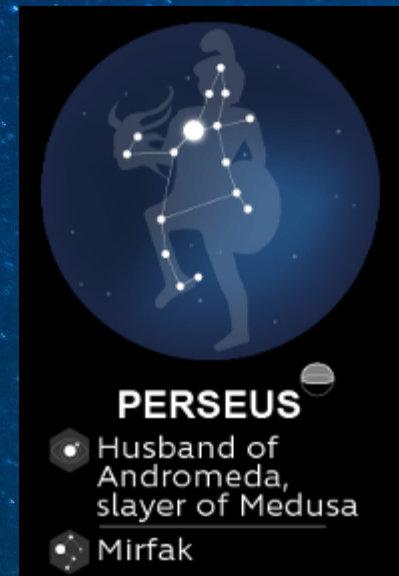
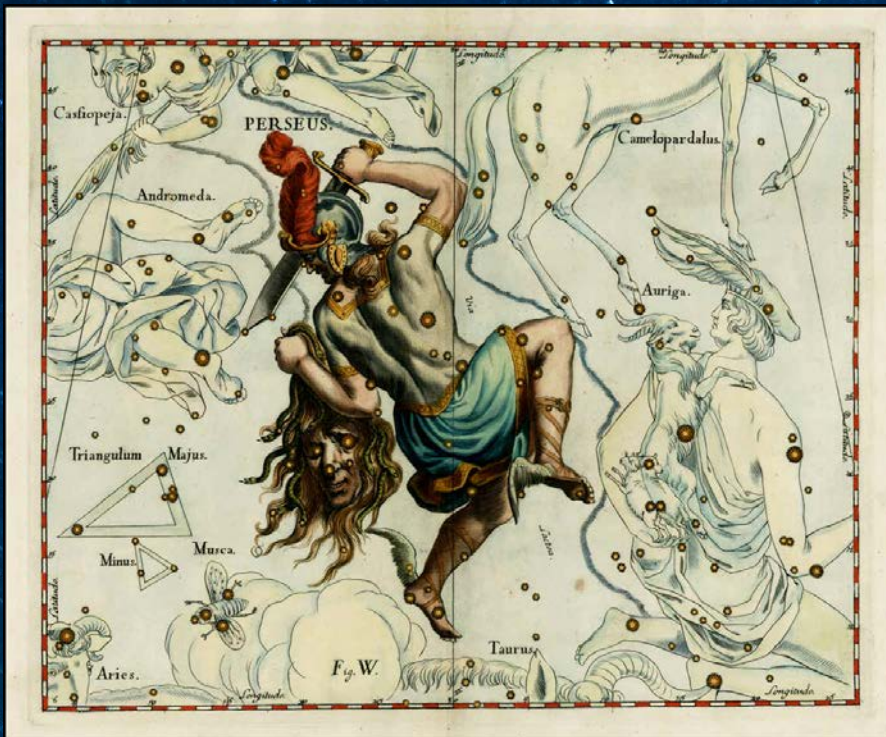
Pegasus in Mythology was a gigantic white winged horse. The constellation, according to legend, was created when Bellerophone, his rider, attempted to reach the sky. Zeus then considered this act an insult and sent an insect to bite Pegasus. Pegasus left and threw Bellerophone back to Earth. But Pegasus continued in the stars where he remained as a constellation.





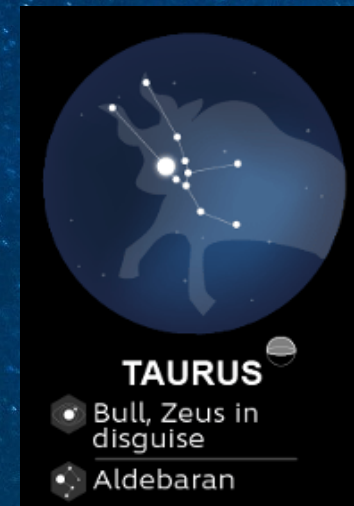
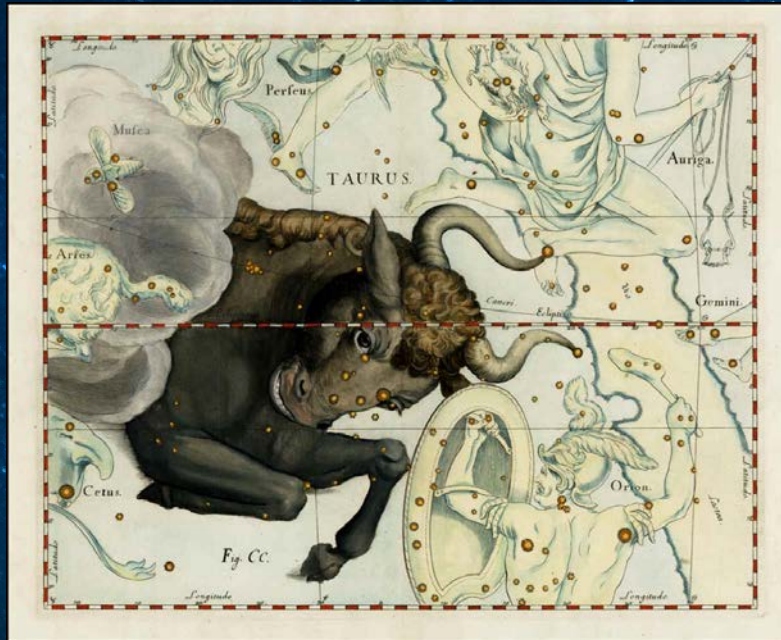
# Perseus

Flying on Pegasus Perseus saw the beautiful princess Andromeda chained to a rock, about to be sacrificed to Cetus, a sea monster. Perseus offered to kill Cetus in exchange for Andromeda's hand in marriage. After killing the monster Perseus married Andromeda.



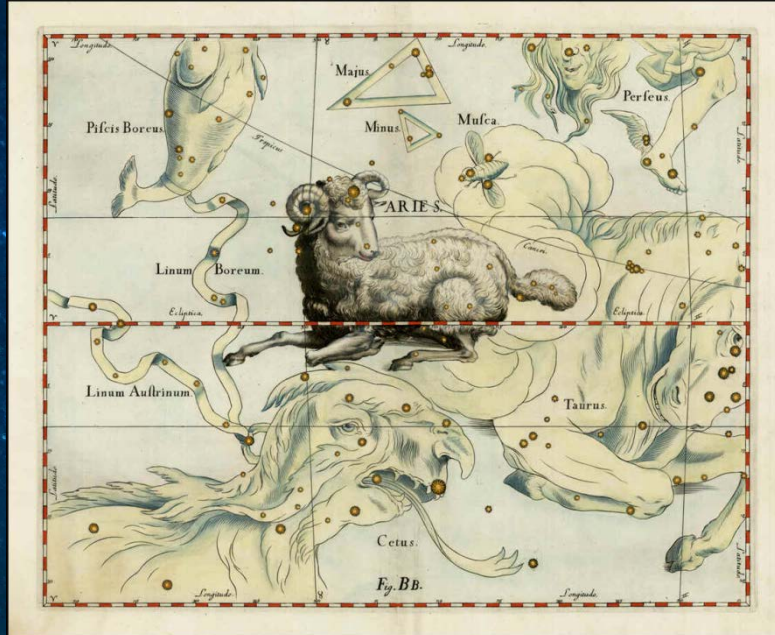
# Taurus, The Bull

Taurus symbolizes the white bull that Zeus sent to kidnap Europe, while she was playing with her girlfriends on the coast of Phoenix and took her to Crete. The constellation includes the well-known star clusters, the Pleiades and the Hyades. The Pleiades represent the seven daughters of Atlas.



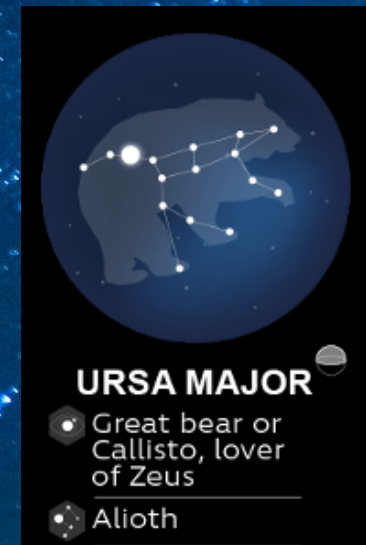
# Aries, The Ram

Nephele had two children with Athamas, who eventually tried to have the children killed. Hera sent a golden ram so the children could escape by riding its back. One of the children, Helle, fell off and died in the sea. The other child, Phrixus, sacrificed the ram to Zeus. The skin of the ram developed special powers and is the same relic that was later sought by Jason and the Argonauts (Golden Fleece).

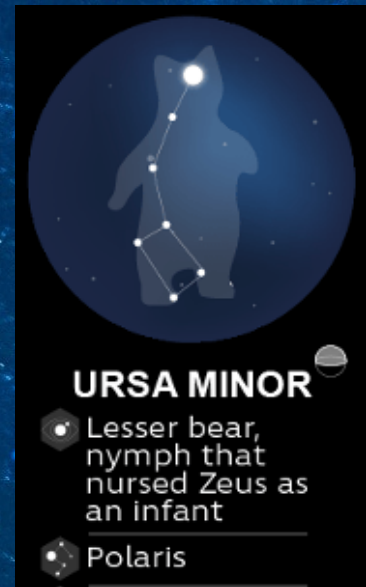


# Ursa Major

Zeus fell in love with the nymph Callisto. Hera, upon hearing that Callisto had given Zeus a son named Arcas, turned Callisto into a bear. One day Callisto saw her son in the woods and attempted to approach but could only growl. Seeing the bear, Arcas prepared to attack. To protect Callisto, Zeus changed Arcas into a bear as well and then placed them both in the northern sky swinging them up by their tails.



# Ursa Minor, the Lesser Bear



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This presentation was created by students taking part in the programme  
"Four Seasons in the Sky"

