



Foundation Module Sky Mythology

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A full-page background image showing a person's silhouette standing on a dark horizon, looking up at a vast night sky filled with stars and the Milky Way galaxy. The person is positioned in the lower right foreground, facing away from the viewer towards the horizon. The sky is a deep blue-black, densely populated with stars of varying brightness. The Milky Way is visible as a bright, hazy band of light stretching diagonally from the upper left towards the lower right. A soft, yellowish glow is visible along the horizon line, suggesting a light source just below the horizon. The overall mood is contemplative and awe-inspiring.

The constant nature of the sky gives a view of order. Humanity makes use of this order for divination, views of the divine, calendar, physics and history/story.

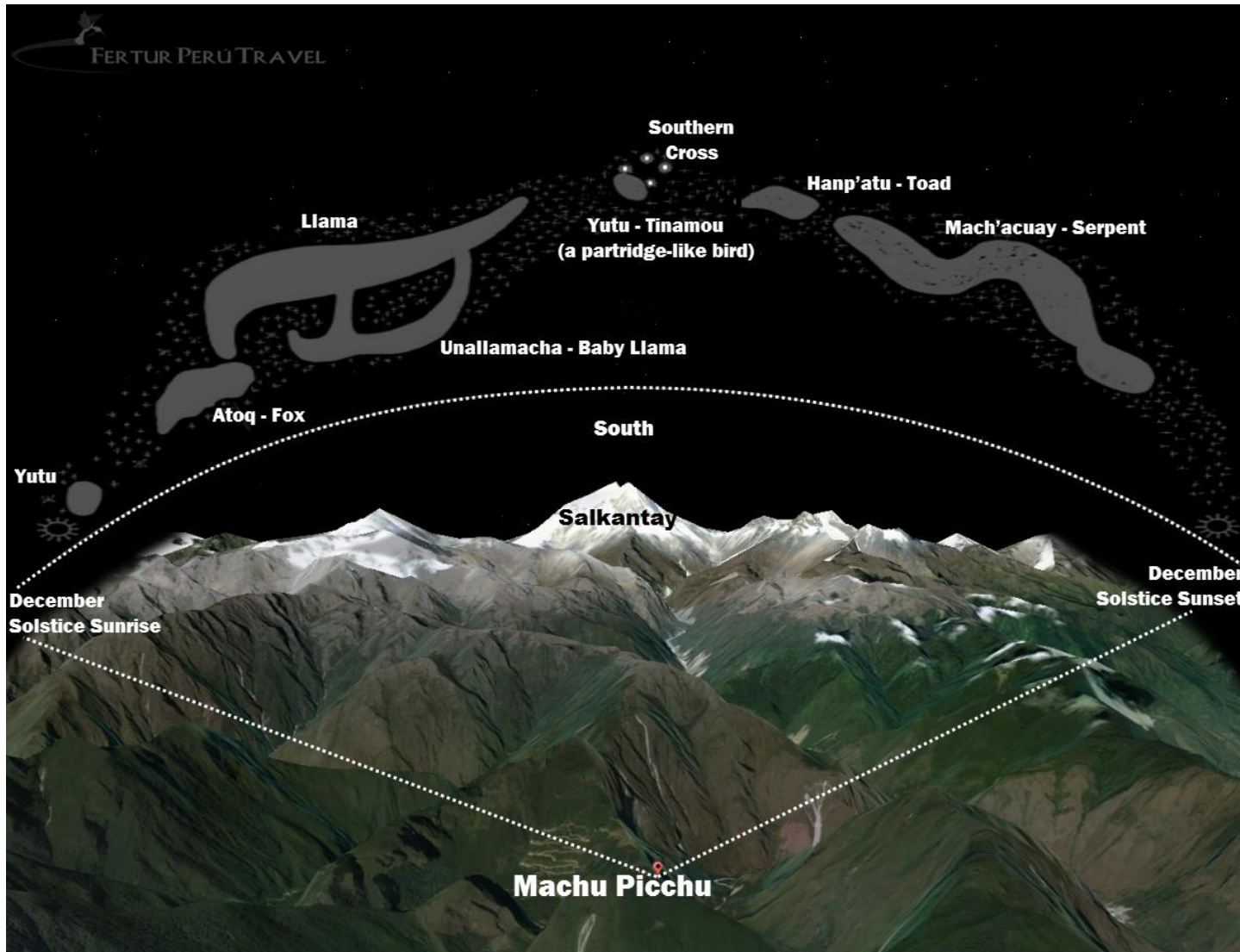
Thus the sky is a carrier of a community's cultural stories.

Sky stories are a part of human culture and embrace topics such as:

- **Calendar stories:** the cycle of the seasons which are mirrored in the movement of the heavens.
- **Cosmological stories:** stories which explain the lunar phases, or other such natural rhythmic event. These are cosmological stories which describe and give meaning to a phenomenon of the sky.
- **Navigational stories:** Stories that teach pathways defined by stars.
- **Explanation stories:** the mythologizing of a heavenly event, a comet, or a moment of wonder.

Many of these stories are fragile for if they lose their link to the sky, then the understanding of their original meaning can be misplaced. In such cases the story may continue to live in oral tradition but become increasingly obscure or even absurd to the new listener's ear.

Cosmological Stories – stories that describe the world



An illustration of how astronomical phenomena and the sacred mountain & ceremonial center of Machu Picchu could be associated in Inca beliefs (graphic adapted from Johan Reinhard 2002 / Gary Urton 1981 / Google Earth 2012)

Inca Constellations - Mach'acuay – the Serpent:

One of the major "dark" constellations was *Mach'acuay*, the Serpent.

Mach'acuay was said to oversee all snakes on Earth, protecting them and helping them procreate.

The constellation Mach'acuay is a wavy dark band located on the Milky Way between Canis Major and the Southern Cross.

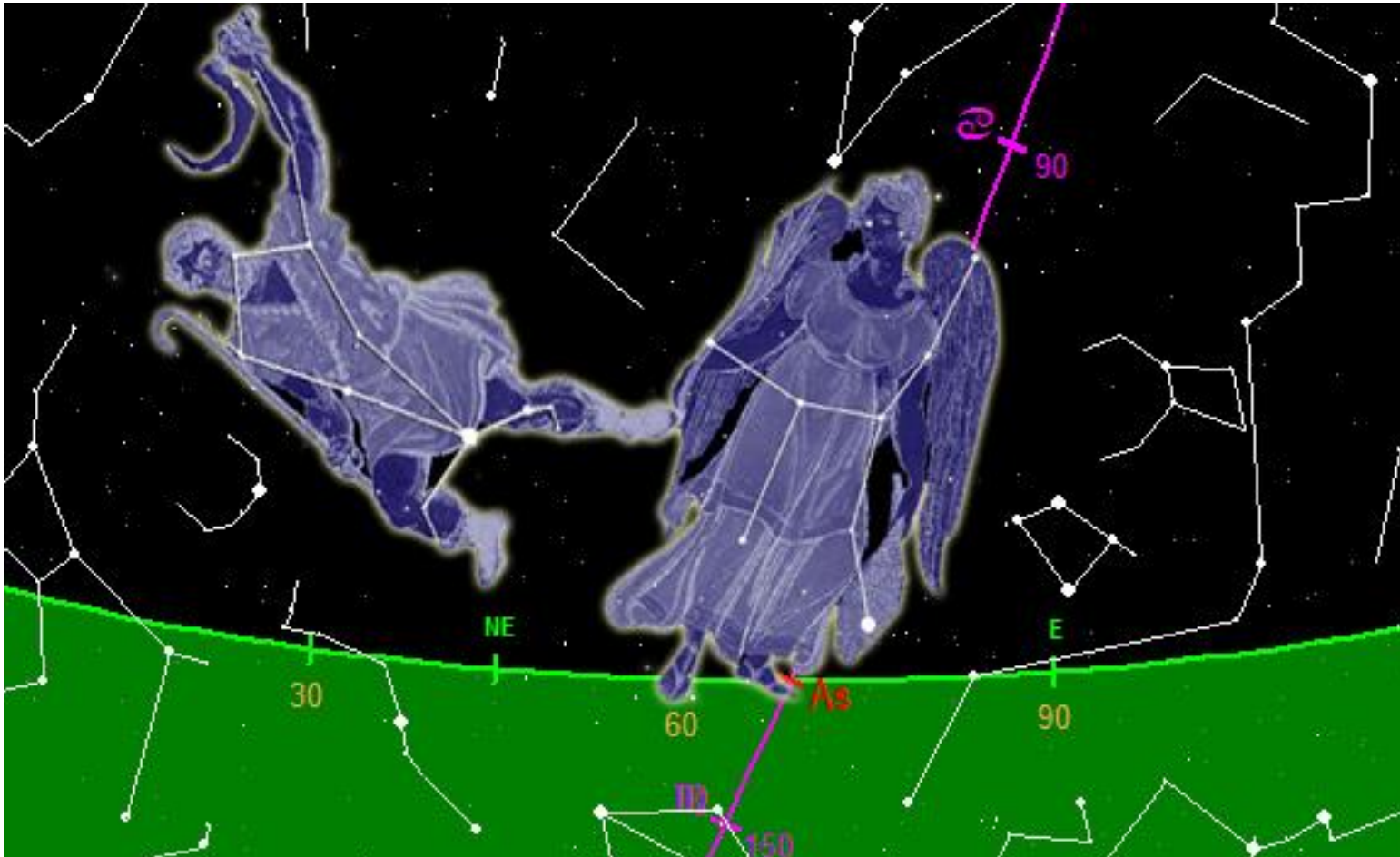
In the 1600s the constellation serpent "emerges" head-first in the Inca region in August and begins to set in February.

Christopher Minster

<http://latinamericanhistory.about.com/od/ancientlatinamerica/p/Inca-Star-Worship-And-Constellations.htm>

Cosmological Stories

Sky stories can also represent a holder of knowledge

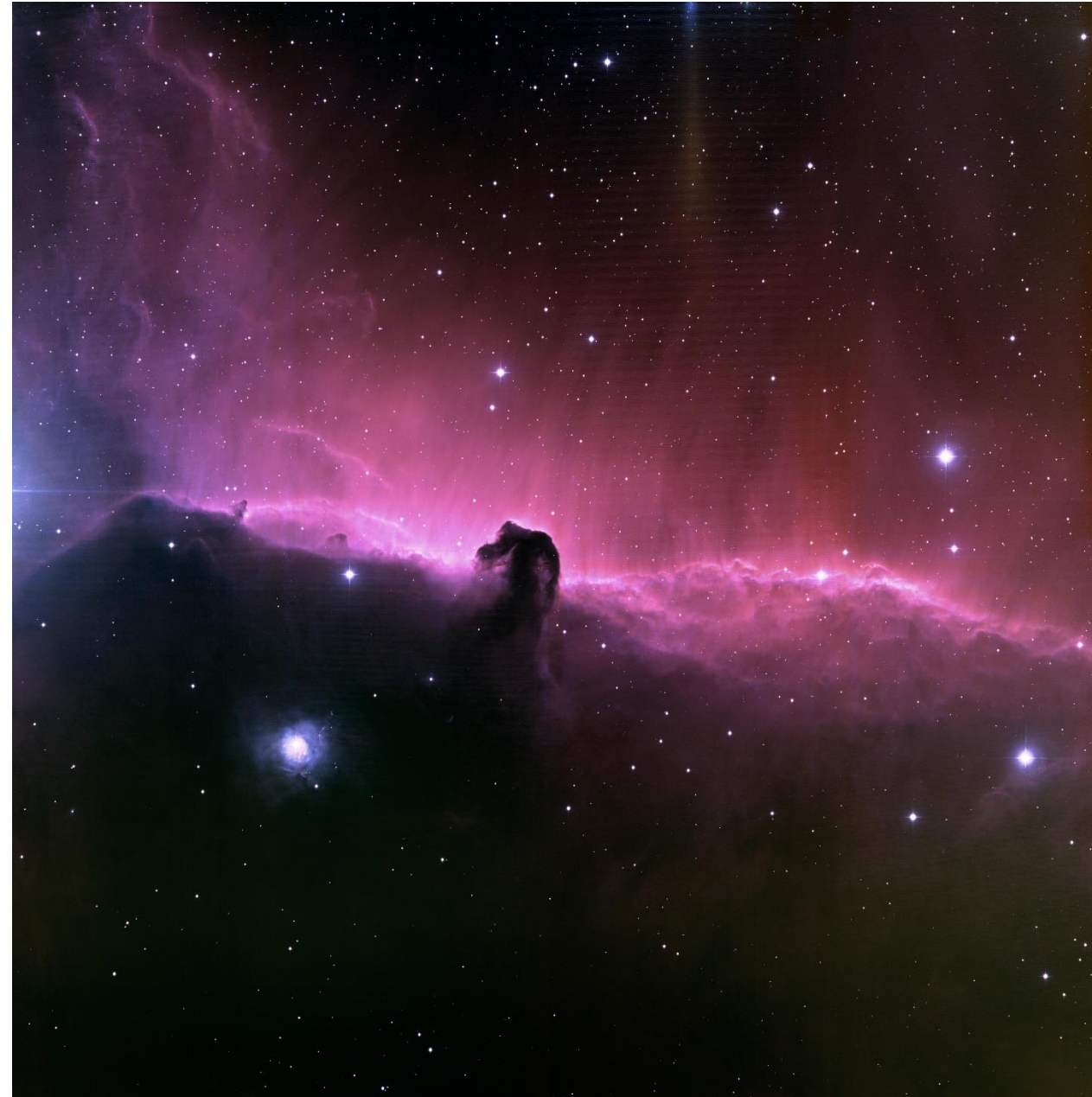


Bootes and Virgo rise together and both constellations, in the Greco Roman sky, are associated with the knowledge of agriculture.

Their stories are largely lost, but their images remain.

Cosmological Stories

Images of the formation of stars
and nebula are the new images of
Western cosmological stories



Cosmological Stories: Stars, Lakes and Marshes – earth and sky combined



Stars, Lakes and Marshes

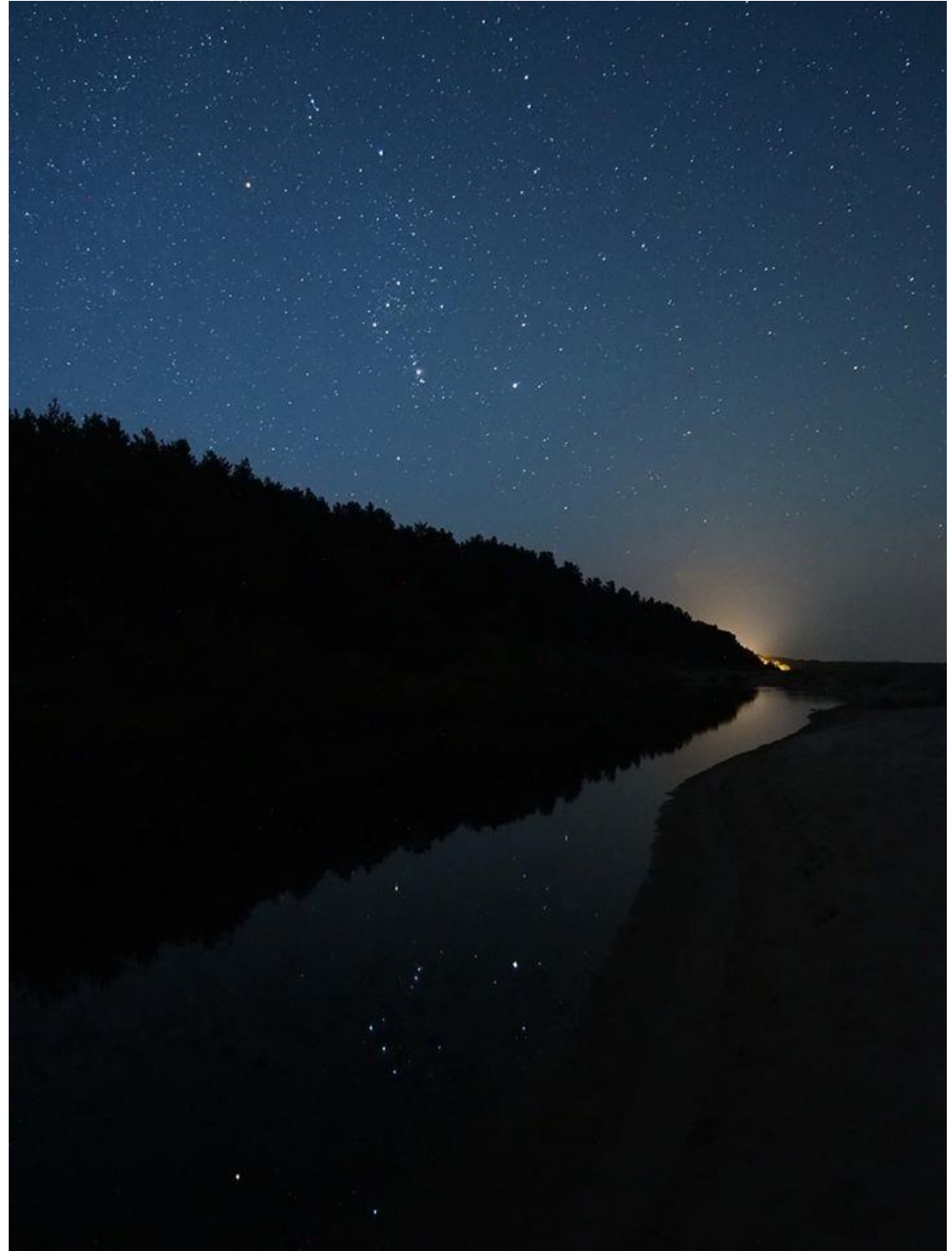
From the Old Kingdom Egyptian Sky – through to the Greco-Roman period

In the Papyrus Carlsberg I, dated second century CE, part II deals with the life of a star. It begins by discussing the star decans so arranged as one star dies while another is born. The work then turns to the life cycle of a star and Neugebauer's and Parker's translate IV, 35-37, lines 9 to 10 as follows:

Their [the stars] tears drop becoming fish. The life of a star begins in the lake. It goes forth from the water; it flies upward, out of the sea and out of the previous form. It is the life of the stars. They go forth from the Duat and they withdraw to the sky.

Otto Neugebauer and Parker, *Egyptian Astronomical Texts. Vol. 1. The Early Decans* (Providence, Rhode Island: Brown University Press, 1960), 68.

Nasa Picture
of the day
22 Nov 2019



A Calendar Story



Emu in the Sky by Kyle Pickett (Australia).

"When the Yallabirri (emu) appears in the sky in preparation for the laying of the eggs."

For the Yamaji people of the Murchison region of Western Australia, the appearance of an emu-like shape along the Milky Way has signalled the start of emu-egg collecting season for thousands of years.

<http://www.australiangeographic.com.au/topics/history-culture/2014/11/aboriginal-art-aims-for-the-sky>

Explanation Stories

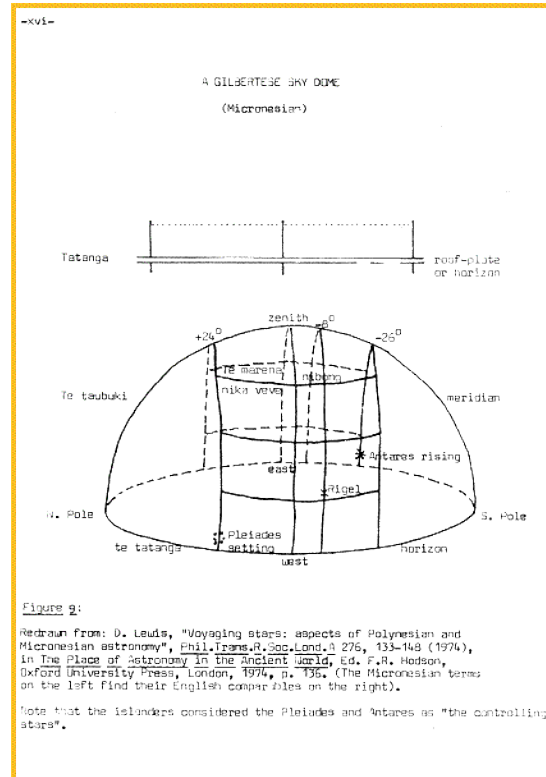
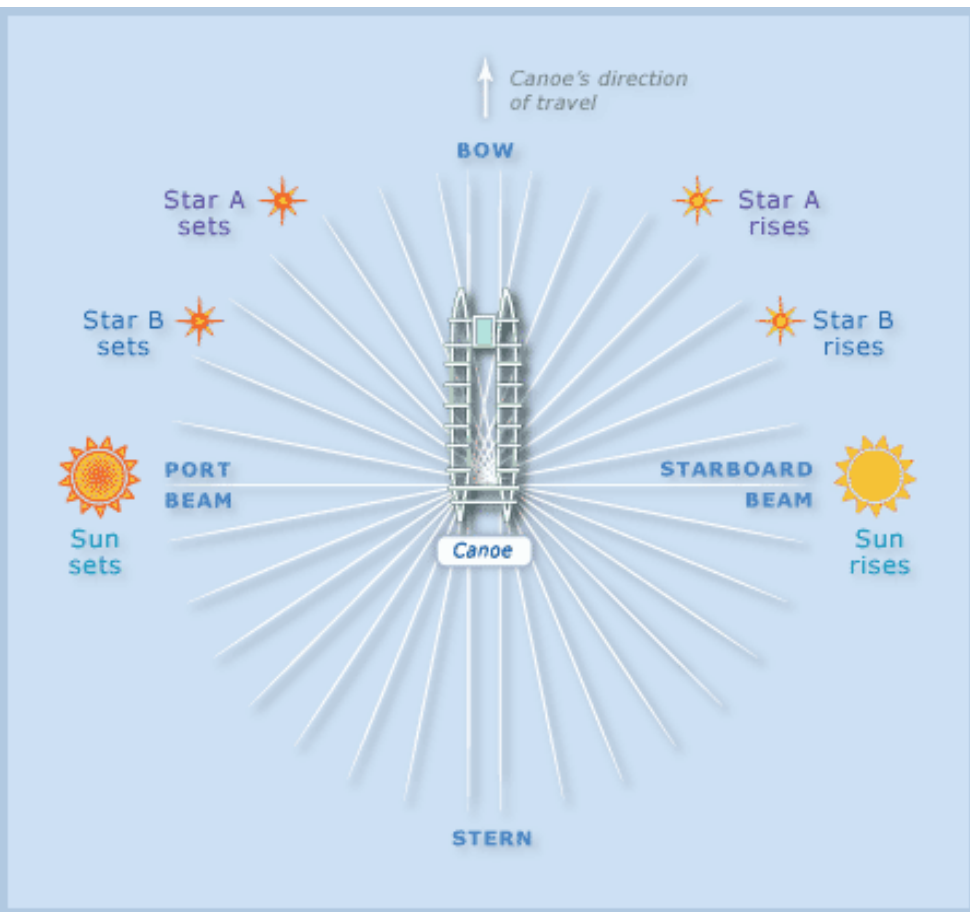
The Moon and the Thunders from the Cherokee people of North America.

This myth speaks of a woman who is the sun and her lover. He, the moon, **only comes to her once a month** when the moon is dark however she wishes to discover the identity of her mysterious lover thus on one visit **she smudged his face with ash**. The next day when the moon appears in the sky his identity is revealed as his face is covered with marks. He becomes so ashamed of being discovered that to this day he tries to stay as far away as possible from her and when **he does have to come near he tries to make himself as small as possible**.



The cultural purpose of the story is cosmogonic in that it offers an explanation of the waxing and waning of the moon and its relationship to the sun, it reminds people that the moon is a tiny silver sliver when it is close to the sun and assures them that the patches and patterns on the surface of the moon are normal.

Navigational Stories



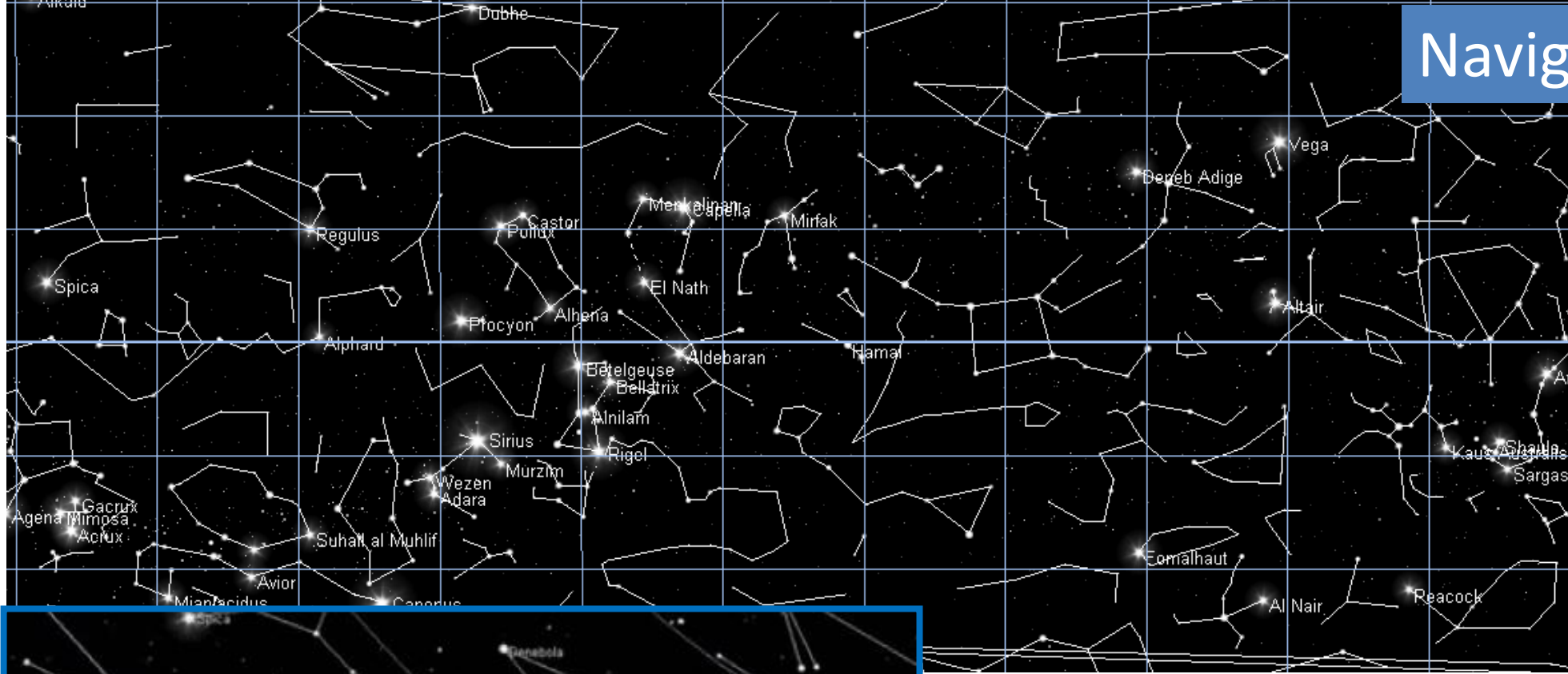
Children were taught the lines of stars using the specially constructed roof of a maneaba

1. Kursh, C. O. & Kreps, T. C. (1974). 'Starpaths: Linear Constellations in Tropical Navigation'. *Current Anthropology*, 15, 334-337.

Rāwiri Taonui. 'Canoe navigation - Ocean voyaging', Te Ara - the Encyclopedia of New Zealand, updated 15-Nov-12
 URL: <http://www.TeAra.govt.nz/en/diagram/2223/using-a-canoe-as-a-compass>

Navigational Stories

Linear constellations, transformed into stories could have acted as directional aids – story lines.



Zhitomirsky, S. (1999). 'Aratus' "Phaenomena": Dating and Analysing its Primary Source'. *Astronomical & Astrophysical Transactions*, 17, 483-500.

Also see Brady, Bernadette, 'Star-Paths, Stones and Horizon Astronomy', in *Stars and Stones*, ed. by F.Pimenta and others (SEAC, 2011).

Mapping the Sky with Stories - Stars, Lakes and Marshes

God's Lake – belonging to a temple (all temples had a sacred lake)

Heavenly topography

Great Lake – a part of the morning sky.

Jackal Lake – a part of the twilight sky, morning or evening.

Lake of Reeds – a part of a sky constellation or area of the sky.

Nurse Lake – a body of water in the night sky.

Shu's Lake - a body of water in the night sky.

Stork Lake – a body of water in the western sky.

Winding Canal – the ecliptic.

Marsh of Reeds - to the south of the ecliptic.

Marsh of Rest, or offerings – to the north of the ecliptic.

The Akhet – 'the Place of Becoming Effective' the area just below the eastern horizon.

The Egyptian Sky





Ilgari Inyayimanha (Shared Sky) , a collaborative painting by Australian Aboriginal artists from Yamaji Art.

D(L)akota Star Map

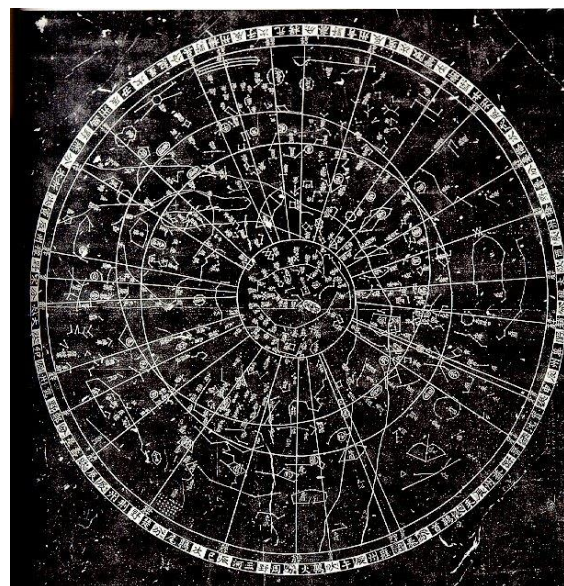


Images from Annette S Lee,
<https://magazine.wustl.edu/2014/February/Pages/Annette-Lee.aspx>



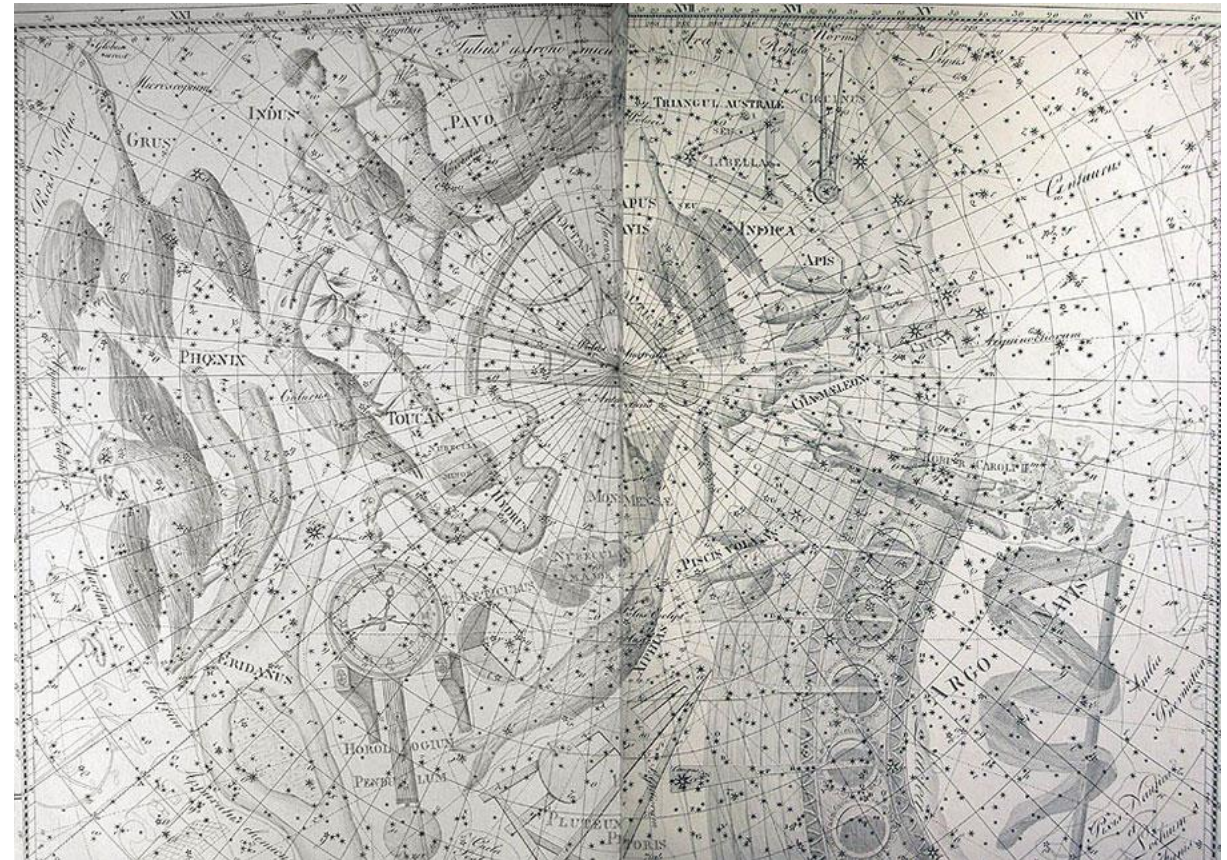
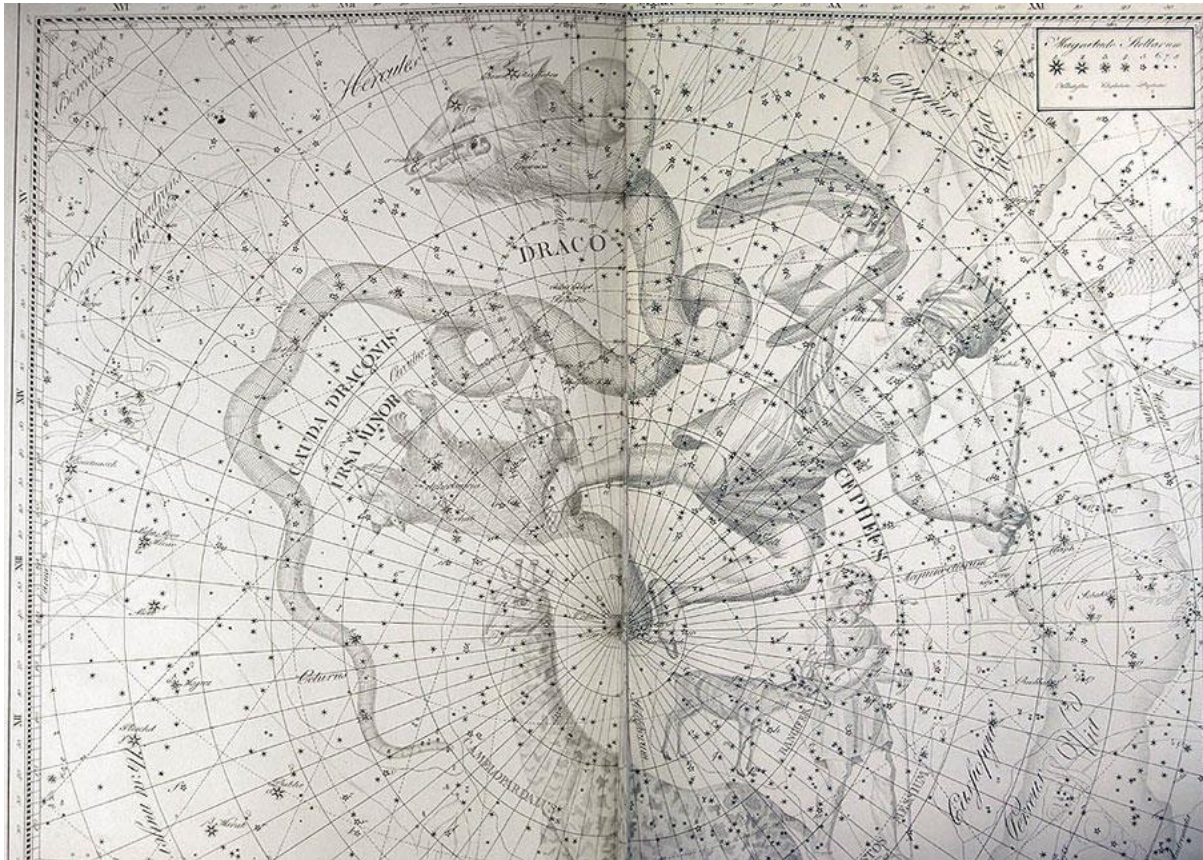
The Chinese Sky

The Chinese sky was divided into **five great regions or palaces called *gong* 宮**. These were equated with the directions north, south, east and west and also with a middle region. The middle region was the most important as it housed among its stars the celestial image of the emperor surrounded by his family and civil and military officials. This part of the sky has constellations such as ‘the prince’, ‘the concubine’, and ‘the throne’ and is a reflection of life on earth. <http://idp.bl.uk/4DCGI/education/astronomy/sky.html>

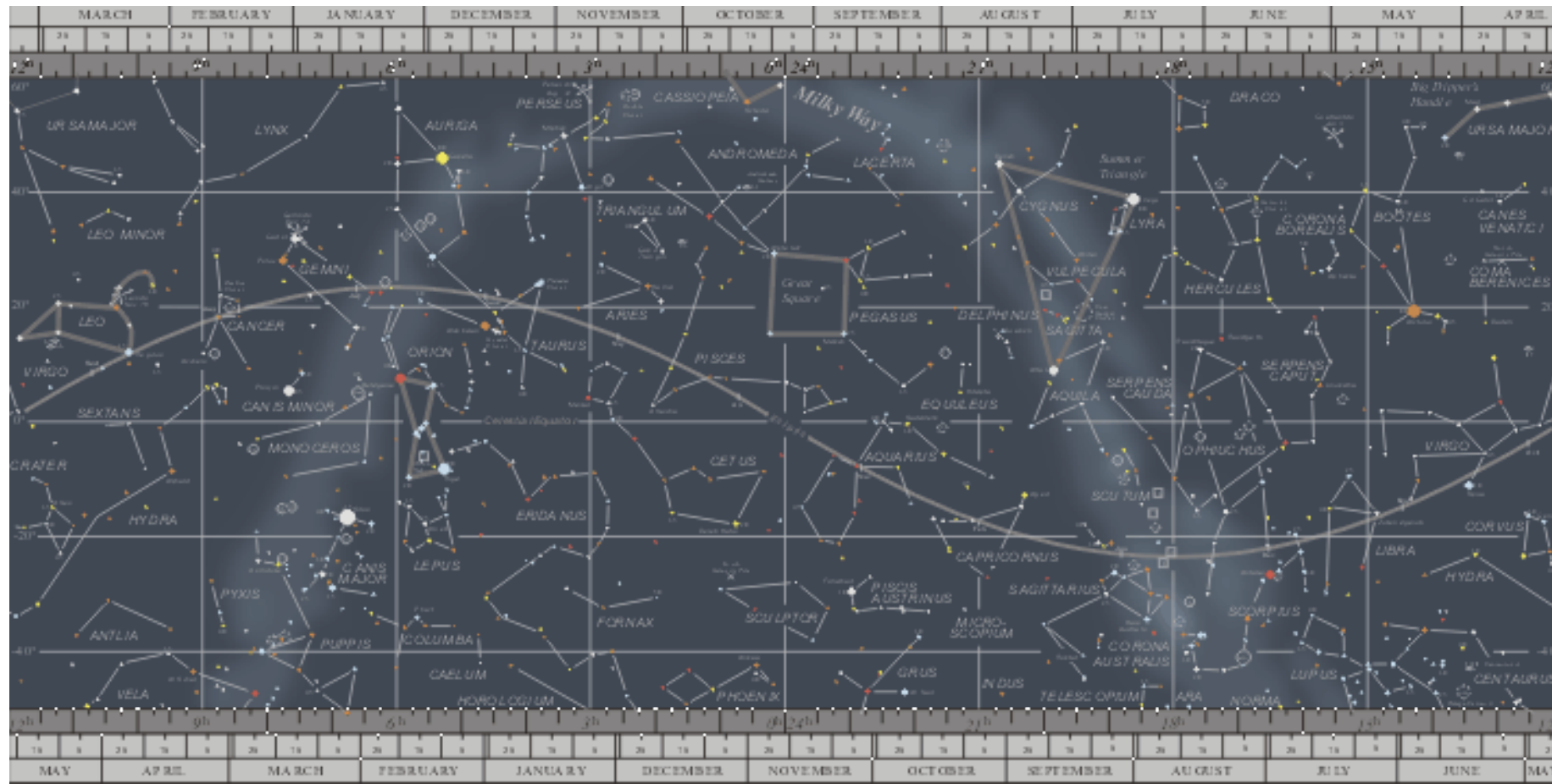


Ink rubbing of a stele at the Confucian Temple, Suzhou, Jiangsu province
Southern Song dynasty,
Chunyou reign, dated 1247

Johann Bode published in 1801 his atlas, *Uranographia*.
This was the last celestial atlas to contain mythology.



The modern Western view of the sky is now largely devoid of myth and disconnected from calendar



Considering one
heavenly body, the
Moon.

Sky Myths



Moon Mythology

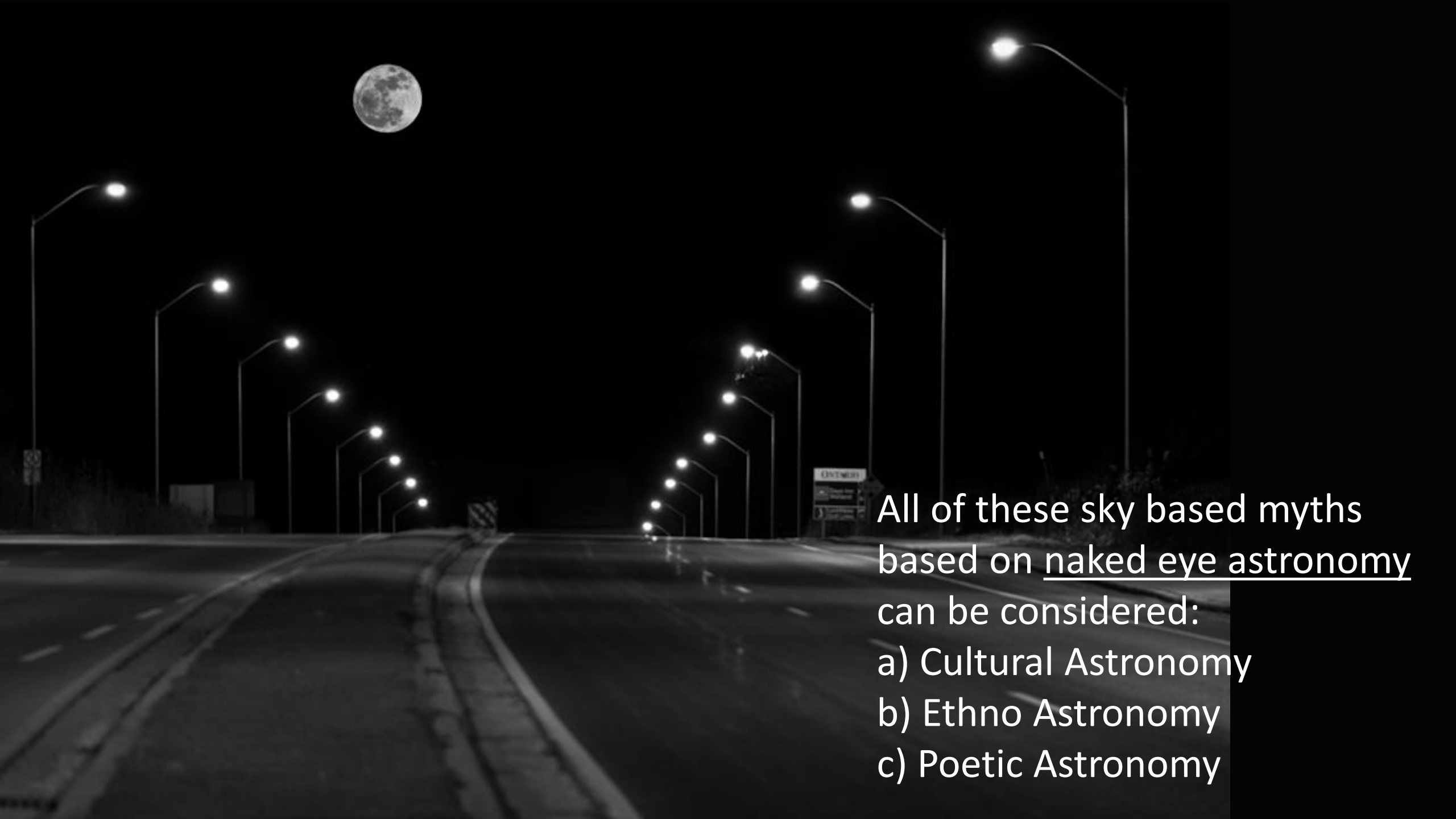
There is probably more mythology focused on the moon then any other heavenly body, including the sun.

- Stories about lunar rhythms.
- Stories about lunar time.
- Stories about the moon and weather.
- Stories about lunar thinking – intuition.
- Creation stories – when linked to the sun.
- Stories about the faces in the moon.
- Stories about moon and fertility.
- Stories about the moon and planting cycles.
- Stories about the moon and ‘fate’.
- Stories about life and death and rebirth.
- Stories about monsters and the moon.

Cashford, J. (2003). *The moon : myth and image*, London, Cassell Illustrated.

Beaulieu, P.-A. (1999). 'The Babylonian Man in the Moon'. *Journal of Cuneiform Studies*, 51, 91-99.





All of these sky based myths
based on naked eye astronomy
can be considered:

- a) Cultural Astronomy
- b) Ethno Astronomy
- c) Poetic Astronomy

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<https://www.astrology.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/03/uitc88.pdf>
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