

The Most Curious Zodiacal Sign of All: Capricorn, The Goat-Fish

August 1, 2017 Alison Gunn, Ph.D. 3 Comments

Capricornus, in the 'watery' part of the heavens. Click on the image for 'Star Tales' about this constellation.

Capricornus, in the 'watery' part of the heavens. Click on the image for more from Ian Ridpath's 'Star Tales' about this, and other, constellations.

As background for the upcoming 10th house nodal axis post, we are taking a look at symbolism and meaning behind Capricorn, the uniquely curious 'goat-fish.'

In a previous post, we saw the ancient proclivity for hybridizing two different types of creature in the previous sign, Sagittarius, which is symbolized by a half-human, half-horse centaur.

However, Capricornus (distinguished from the astrological sign Capricorn) stands out as a unique type of hybrid: half-goat, half-fish, it speaks of an earlier time in history, when ancient cultures combined two types of being, either two animals, or an animal with a human, to create a 'new' mythological beast.

These myths, it seems to me, serve to express a deeper truth about what it is to be human, which is that we haven't necessarily left our connection with the raw brutality of nature behind us in our quest for evolution. Mythological hybrid animals, however, represent something more fantastical, and seem to reflect the fears, values, and beliefs of the culture which created them.

Capricornus is one of the oldest recognized constellations, going as far back as Mesopotamia. Mesopotamia seems to be the earliest civilization that specifically associated a god, Ea (Enki for the Sumerians) with both a goat and a fish.

Enki, with one foot on land, one in the water. These seeming 'contradictions' sum up Capricorn's ability to function in both realms, adding to the versatility of the native, if both functions of the personality are allowed to fully develop.

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Ea lived underwater, in the 'abzu,' the 'ocean beneath' the earth, and is associated, amongst other characteristics, with fertility. However, fertility for the ancients was expressed rather differently than we, in our scientific age, are accustomed to. While cylinder seals often picture this god standing in a flowing stream full of fish, the fluid—the subterranean 'abzu' he's standing in—is both water and semen:

Sumerian texts about Enki often include overtly sexual portrayals of his virile masculinity. In particular, there is a metaphorical link between the life-giving properties of the god's semen and the animating nature of fresh water from the abzu. Until recently, however, many of the more explicit details have been suppressed in modern translations.

With Enki [...] the fertilising agent is also water [...] Sumerian "a" or "Ab" [as in 'abzu'] means "semen". In one evocative passage in a Sumerian hymn, Enki stands at the empty riverbeds and fills them with his 'water'".[9 (Click for the citation source within original article on Wiki)]

The crucial piece of information gleaned from these earliest Mesopotamian sources (that, it seems to me, is missing from later explanations about 'why a goat with a fish tail?') is that, for the Mesopotamians, from whom we have inherited this sign almost completely unaltered, the relationship between water and earth is complicated.

This relationship, from my experience, is seen in the behaviors, but more importantly, the 'hidden' real life of the sign itself. It's not easy to sum up Capricorn for a reason. Further on, we'll see that these qualities help shed some light on the all-too-easily-pigeon-holed 10th house. The house of "simple" attainment it is not.

The earth/water relationship is symbolized by the not-insignificant imagery of Enki, one foot firmly planted in the river floor, surrounded by streaming fish. He is connected to both water and earth at one and the same time. He is also a creator: out of clay and blood, he sculpts humankind, intended to serve the gods. Also, he is a highly sexual god, in that he pretty much keeps a harem of goddesses going simultaneously, populating the earth.

Sumer, the southernmost region of Mesopotamia, created a cosmology that divided the world into three basic 'zones': Earth formed the first layer; beneath that lay the void, the underworld; beneath these two was Abzu, the 'primeval ocean', whose fresh waters created lakes, underground aquifers, wells, and, importantly for Enki, the marshland he was thought to rule over.

Marshland is crucial to the cult of Enki; this chthonic god becomes associated with death because marshland exists at the 'edges' of the mortal world. Marshland, bogs, swamps, fens, are all associated with the liminal realm between life and death, a mysterious, transformational region (although perhaps not one we ordinarily associate with Capricorn).

Although Babylonian teacher Berossus is attributed with writing a text in the 3rd B.C. associating Enki with Greece's Kronos (Roman Saturn), it's not unreasonable to draw comparisons between Enki and Hades/Pluto.

For one thing, Enki was portrayed in cylinder seals as existing in subterranean, marshland locations. There is no Greek god in the astrological pantheon associated with marshland other than Pluto:

Though in time Hades and his region became a synonym for Hell, his original domain was a territory somewhere "far below," encompassing marshlands, desolate areas, and lands watered by mighty rivers (The 12th Planet, Zecharia Stinchin; p. 77).

Enki is associated with 'sweet', or fresh water, and is also associated with fish, particularly goatfish, which were burned and sacrificed at his altars.

Capricornus, seen from the gods' perspective.

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In later history, in Babylon, astrologers thought of Capricornus as the 'goat-fish,' or *ma's* (Francesca Rochberg, *The Heavenly Writing*, p. xxv). The Akkadian civilization called the tenth month the 'cave of the rising of the sun', and for them, Capricornus represented the sun rising from the 'great deep of the underworld' (William Tyler Olcott, *Star Lore of All Ages*, p. 116).

The constellation is located in the heavens next to other water-related constellations, including the water-bear Aquarius; the sea monster Cetus; the two fishes, Pisces; Eridanus, the river; and the largest constellation of all, the ship, Argo.

With its fish-tail, symbolizing the rains and floods of the winter season, Capricorn is capable of 'watery' sensitivity and compassion—often deliberately hidden from view. Yet the Chaldeans saw that the sun began to 'mount the sky' when it appeared in this constellation, and they compared the constellation to a wild goat (W. T. Olcott, *Star Lore of All Ages*, p. 115).

Aratus (4th c. B.C. Greek poet) called this constellation the 'horned goat'; by this time, the Greeks associated Capricorn with the god Pan (who was mostly known as a god/spirit of nature; his sanctuaries were usually away from cities, in rough, non-developed, parts of Greece).

The Devil, or the horned god (inspired by Pan). From the Thoth tarot deck, designed by Aleister Crowley and painted by Marguerite Harris.

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There is evidence that Enki is one of many gods fused together to form the Serpent in the Garden of Eden. It's also true that the connection made between the goat god Pan and the Zodiac sign Capricorn helps explain how it was eventually possible for Christianity to transform Pan into the Devil rather than Hades, a chthonic god much older than Pan, and therefore 'forgotten' by the Christian era.

There is a train of thought, by the way, that associates the goat-nymph Amaltheia with Capricorn, but this is not entirely accurate. In myth, it was Amaltheia who nursed Zeus as a baby. In gratitude, he immortalized her in the heavens, but she became 'Capra,' only one of the stars in the Capricornus constellation, rather than the constellation itself.

I know we'd like to assign a greater role to women and the feminine in the heavens, and I'm all for that, but Capricornus is such an old constellation that I think it's important to know the accurate meaning of its origins.

I find it interesting that the oldest mythical associations with the constellation Capricornus have, over time, come to symbolize what I consider to be the most well-known characteristics of the Zodiacal sign, Capricorn.

Capricorn is renowned for living out a strong desire for attainment; if she doesn't succeed at her goals (realistic or not) the repercussions of failure can be severe. Capricorn keeps an eye on her wallet, her competition, and her level of progress. Yet, we know all these things—this is the standard view of this sign, the stuff we are told over and over again.

But Capricorn is also a highly sensitive sign, something that far too many people either do not know, cannot perceive, or take for granted. The combination of an earth and water influence possibly doesn't sit well with many Capricorns, making them irritable if you aren't paying close enough attention to their fragile sense of self.

It is easy to hurt one of these very gentle people, but that's largely because they aren't good at letting anyone know what it is they're really feeling. Possibly they themselves don't know, but it's also completely likely that this sign, more than any other, keeps more of their true nature quiet.

Humility, pragmatism, seriousness of purpose and an overall sense of the importance of time ticking away, stems from their highly developed sense of kairós (instinctively knowing the right time to act or decide about something). Of all their many characteristics, I think this is the one that's least appreciated by the rest of the world. The ability to watch and wait silently for the right moment to act, like the fisherman Enki, should not be taken for granted; it's a highly sophisticated survival skill.

Finally, I think their innate kindness is also overlooked. This is not Libra's kindness, nor is it Cancer's. Libra is kind from a need to do what's right, or be seen as 'nice,' but also to feel connected to others. Cancer is kind because it feels wrong to be mean-spirited. But when Capricorn is kind, it stems from the sense that this is how to nurture growth in things and people; again, it's a survival instinct.

It seems to be a reflection of their karma, as depicted in many myths about the particularly 'base' qualities seen in the more negative expressions of this sign (aggressive behavior; lack of concern for others, including their property; not to mention their openly lascivious, lustful nature; and then there's the idea promulgated by society that the goat takes more than he gives), that Capricorn (and the 10th house) represent certain situations and tendencies to be wary of.

Pan chasing the water nymph Syrinx. The nymph was transformed (as happens so often in Greek mythology to prey attempting to evade capture by an over-eager suitor). In this case, she was transformed into a reed plant, thereafter named after her, which was used to create the Pan Pipes. Painted by Paul Dulac, 1935. Pan (and by association, Capricorn) has a bad name because of these kinds of avaricious behaviors.

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Capricorn has, over the millennia, become associated with off-putting, even scary situations and behaviors. The potential for twisted negativity is going to rear its ugly head here (especially in the 10th house, which has the potential to show us some otherwise inexplicable, and inexplicably stupid, arrogant, and chauvinistic behaviors, mixed with some extraordinarily giving and charitable deeds).

I personally think too many Capricorns are irritable and crabby as hell because they're not-so-secretly miserable. They find it hard to express their feelings; if they're not projecting them, they're bottling them up, or sublimating them into their work (work is so much easier to control than the self or other people, after all).

This isn't just because Capricorn is ruled by Saturn, although I do think there's a facet of Capricornian behavior that's obviously dominated by a Saturnian 'I am just a cog within the wheel' view of life, which seems to force the native into overwork as a way to justify his being on the planet.

When a sign (or a sign in a house) is miserable, it tends to act out the most negative side of what was otherwise positive potential; for Capricorn, the Enki-like ability to produce and create is turned into an expression of dominance, control, and not just overwork, but hyperwork, where all the person really does is work. He is not a human being at that point, but a human doing, who only values himself when he's 'productive.'

Finally, I think Capricorn reflects the ancient Enki motif of being responsible for the survival of the species; he's a fisher, a hunter/gatherer, and becomes one of the primary movers of the Zodiac largely because he exists both at the beginning and end of time. I also think we need to further investigate the potential for Capricorn to be understood as a chthonic energy (going back to the link with Enki of ancient Mesopotamia). It's quite possible that this dark energy would help us understand better the types of skills, but also the types of psychological pressure, this sign encompasses.

I bury links in my text, which you might not necessarily click on, but try not to miss this one about the history of Enki and his relationship to the snake in the garden of Eden; it's very interesting. And be sure to check out this very interesting blog, which discusses more symbolism of Capricorn and every other sign.

Capricorn Mythology, What is it about?

Capricorn Mythology in ancient Sumeria was associated with the planet Saturn and the Mesopotamian god Enki.

The goat-fish is a representation of Enki, seen on Babylonian monuments.

Enki was a god in Mesopotamian legend; later Enki became Ea in Babylonian legend. In the beginning, Enki was the main supreme being of the metropolis of Eridu.

Later Enki's cult influence circulated from end-to-end of Mesopotamia (north-central Anatolia -- (Hittites) and Northern Mesopotamia--- (Hurrians)...

Enki was the god of artisanship (gašam); water, saltwater, lake water (a, aba, ab), intellect (gestú, meaning "ear") and creative activity (Nudimmud).

Babylonian Capricorn Mythology

In ancient Babylonian legend Capricorn was described as the "deity Ea", who was fishtailed. Ea was the "Antelope of the Sea".

Capricornus is recognized by the name the "Gate of Death" (polar to the Cancer sign, "Gate of Birth". Capricorn relates to the time the Sun embarks the tenth part of its orbit and relates to the time of new knowledge.

Ea is perceived as coming up from the oceanic abyss to teach humanity the wisdom of the gods.

The Capricorn zodiac sign is called "šaxû ibex" in Babylonian. The sun in that month moved into the "suxûru" or fish constellation, which is called the star of Tashmetum.

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Tashmetum is a goddess of Akkadian mythology.

Tashmetum is the wife of the deity Nabu....Nabu is the god of wisdom and writing in Babylonian Legend. Babylonians revere Nabu because he is the son of Marduk (or Merodach) and his wife, Sarpanitum. In addition, Nabu is worshiped since Enki/Ea is his grandfather.

However, the whole depiction of Capricornus as we know it now derives from the Greeks.

In Grecian mythology

Capricorn Mythology begins with Cronus who was a giant, and the Father-God of the deities. Even as Cronus brought down his own father named Uranos, Cronus realized one of his own children would subvert him.

Thus, when each of his and wife Rhea's babies were born, he ate them whole. Hestia, Demeter, Hades, Poseidon, Hera, altogether, swallowed before they could mature and jeopardize his dominion.

Rhea wanted a child, so when Zeus was born into the world, Rhea hid baby Zeus in a cave and placed him with surrogate parents. Then, Rhea draped a stone in swaddling clothes and fed that to Cronus. Thus sparing Zeus the same fate as his sisters and brothers.

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There are other variations of this legend. In another variant, a goat-tending nymph called Amalthea or Adamanthea brought up Zeus.

Yet in another version of this myth, the actual goat itself named Amalthea brought up Zeus.

However, the one thing that never changes in all the stories is that Zeus suckled on goat's milk, or ambrosia in some versions.

When Zeus was more grown up, he freed his uncles by Cronus, who were held captive --the Titans (powerful deities who were elder gods) and the Cyclopes (a primordial race of giants, each with a single eye in the middle of its forehead) --

The Titans and Cyclopes gave Zeus great power over thunder and lightning.

With the Titans and the Cyclopes assisting, Zeus brought down Cronus, and pressured him to cough up Zeus' brothers and sisters, Hestia, Demeter, Hades, Poseidon and Hera.

To continue the story, Zeus then placed Amalthea or Adamanthea in the heavens (this is called Catasterismi in Greek which means: placing amid the stars) in thanks, as the constellation Capricornus, the Goat.

The horns from Amalthea the goat later became the Horn of Plenty, or Cornucopia. Ancient sources say that Cornucopia comes from the sun "taking nourishment" in provision for its ascent north.

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Additionally, Capricorn Mythology is linked with the Saturn and the God Aristaeus.

In some adaptations of the Capricorn Mythology, the goat's skin is the Golden Fleece that Jason and the Argonauts sought out and stole.

Yet in another custom, Capricorn stands for the deity Pan-the goat god who metamorphosed into a sea animal.

One legend says, when Pan was being assaulted by Typhon, Pan plunged himself into the Nile River; the parts above the river water stayed goat, however the parts below the water changed into a fish.

Even now, the Capricorn constellation is portrayed as a sea-goat, (a goat with a fish's tail).

Fun facts in Capricorn Mythology

*Capricornus is one of the eighty-eight new constellations, and one of the forty-eight constellations named by Ptolemy.

*The constellation is known as Capricornus. Saturn rules Capricorn, and its symbol is the goat. Capricorn is also shown as a hybrid sea animal or Dolphin.

*From Mesopotamia we get the early representations, and some of the current ones, drawn as a half-goat, half-fish.

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Capricorn from the Latin (Capricornus, literally meaning, Goat-Horned), directly translated to Greek (Aigokeros)-- Goat-Horned, from the words aigos or aix a goat and keros a horn, translated to Akkad (Suhur-massa), translated to Sumerian (Suhur.mas), both Akkad and Sumerian meaning the Fish-Goat.

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