

## SPASH Astronomy

### Week 10

#### Mythology of the constellation Hydra

Hydra was a nine-headed monster in the form of a long, writhing water snake. It attacked, killed and ate anyone who ventured near its swampy abode in Lerne. To slay this dreadful beast was the second of Hercules's twelve labours. This was an enormously difficult task, since every time Hercules succeeded in cutting off one of Hydra's heads, two would grow where the one had been. Added to this, Hera, who had always been resentful of Hercules, sent a giant crab to nip and bite at his feet as he attempted to slay the monster. He finally achieved this after instructing his nephew, Iolaus, to burn each neck stump immediately after he, himself, had severed the head, thus preventing any re-growth. (Hydra can be found on week 8)

1. Alphard (alpha) – 2 – orange – meaning: The Solitary one

#### Mythology of the constellation Lepus

An ancient constellation, LEPUS, The Hare, is seen by the Greeks as representing the prey of CANIS MAJOR. (Lepus can be found on week 7)

1. Arnebl (answer) – 2,7 – pale yellow – meaning: The Whole
2. Nihal (beta) – 3.5 – deep yellow – meaning: none

#### Mythology of the constellation Eridanus

The long, winding, sprawling constellation Eridanus has been identified variously as the rivers Tigris, Euphrates, Po, Nile, Ebro, Rhine and Rhone, and Homer referred to it as an "Ocean Stream" which circled the earth. One legend which has a particular association with Eridanus is that of Phaeton, son of Helios, the Sun God. As a young man, Phaeton desperately wanted to drive the sun chariot across the skies - a task always undertaken by his father. In this desire, he was encouraged by his sisters and mother. His father steadfastly refused to give his permission as he knew that Phaeton was not yet strong enough for such a task. However, after much pestering he finally agreed. The two white horses were harnessed, Phaeton climbed aboard and took up the reins to drive the sun across the heavens. It quickly became clear that he was not strong enough to control the horses. At first they galloped so high in the sky that the earth far below was in danger of freezing, then they swept so close to the earth that it became scorched. Zeus had watched all this in growing anger. His patience finally snapped, and he threw a thunderbolt straight at the chariot. Phaeton was killed outright, falling into the sacred river Eridanus. For their foolishness in encouraging him in such an irresponsible adventure, his sisters were turned into trees along the riverbank.

1. Achernar (alpha) - .45 - - meaning: The Star at the End of the River (Eridanus can be found on week 7)

#### Mythology of the constellation Monoceros

A modern constellation, MONOCEROS, The Unicorn, was named by Petrus Plancius, the Dutch astronomer in 1613, and recorded in Jakob Bartsch's star chart of 1624 as "Unicornu". However, some astronomers believe that it was known in more ancient times, and was possibly seen as representing the figure of a horse. (Monoceros can be found on week 8)

#### Mythology of the constellation Cetus

As with many constellations, there is no one specific creature represented by CETUS. To the ancient Babylonians it was the great sea monster Tiamat, symbolising Chaos. It has been depicted by some as a sea-serpent or dragon fish, whilst others saw it as a great whale. But it is probably best known as the sea monster sent by Poseidon to devour Andromeda. Fortunately for her, Perseus arrived on the scene just in time to slay the dreaded monster and claim Andromeda as his bride.

1. Menkar (alpha) – 2.9 - bright orange – meaning: The Nose (Cetus can be found on week 9)

Aira (beta) - 1.7 – flushed yellow – meaning – Star in the Hole



## Mythology of the constellation Scutum

SCUTUM is another constellation named by Johannes Hevelius, this one in 1690. He originally called it "Sobieski's Shield" in honour of King Jan Sobieski III, of Poland, a strong, brave monarch who had prevented the Turks from invading Vienna in 1683 as well as repelling many attacks on his homeland. (Scutum can be found on week 8)

1. Alpha - none - 3.98 - meaning: none

## Mythology of the constellation Sagitta

The constellation SAGITTA, The Arrow, has long been seen as an arrow, first by Hebrews and Persians, and then by Greeks and Romans. There are varying accounts as to which particular arrow it represents, however. One suggests that it is the arrow used by Hercules to kill Zeus' pet eagle Aquila as it pecked at Prometheus every evening. Conversely, another proposes that it is, in fact, the arrow held in Aquila's own talons. Yet another account puts forward the notion that the arrow is that used by Hercules when he killed the birds which plagued the people of Stymphalus. (Sagitta can be found on week 8)

1. Gamma - none - 3.56 - meaning: none

## Mythology of the constellation Equuleus

EQUULEUS, The Little Horse, has several possible mythological identities, amongst them that it represents Celeris, the brother of Pegasus. With regard to the Gemini twins, Castor and Pollux, it has been identified both with the horse given to Castor by the god Hermes and, alternatively, with the animal given to Pollux by Hera.

1. Alpha - none - 3.92 - meaning: none

