

Asterism: Goat Creature Corner (Plus)

Intro

Jordan: [Music] Hi, I'm Jordan.

Kit: And I'm Kit.

Jordan: Welcome to Starry Time

Kit: Asterisms Edition.

Jordan: Where stars plus lines equal stories

Kit: With an asterisk.

Jordan: In these episodes, we'll explore ideas, concepts, or people that didn't make it into the main show, or maybe just some things that we'd like to talk about a little bit more.

Kit: This week we have a bit of a hybrid episode. We're going to start with the discussion of the goat myths that are connected to the constellation Auriga and Capella, the goat star.

Jordan: And then we'll get into a classic story time creature corner featuring the goats.

Goat Star Myths

Kit: As we talked about in our myths and retcons episode on Auriga, many cultures connected this area of the night sky to goats in some form or fashion. And the imagery of goats persists in a lot of the drawings of the constellation.

Jordan: And yet, Kit, somehow none of the charioteer stories we discussed really incorporated the goats into the myth. Well, I mean, except for our amazing, incredible retconstellations that combined the two. But, yes.

Kit: I mean, we took the assignment seriously, unlike Ptolemy. Ahem, but despite this transition from goat or goat herder to charioteer, we still have a star called Capella, which means little goat.

Jordan: So, of course, there's a myth that goes along with why there is a goat in the night sky, even if it is just a star. We may have something better than a goat already. The very beginnings of Starry Time. Does anybody happen to recall a certain seagoat?

Kit: Shout out to Pricus , aka Pan, aka Capricornus. Season one, episode one.

Jordan: Speaking of Capricornus, Kit, you know who I miss?

Kit: Who?

Jordan: I miss Typhon. You know, we haven't seen the father of monsters in a while. He was such a vital part of our first story. Ummmm, I wonder what he's been up to.

Kit: Well, a little spoilers. We'll get a teensy weensy glimpse of him at the end of our story today, but unfortunately, most of this story is actually about Zeus.

Jordan: It wouldn't be Greek mythology if there wasn't some appearance from Zeus. And the fact that he's a main character in this story somehow doesn't surprise me.

Kit: I mean, he does not seem like the most chill guy.

Jordan: Mm mm.

Kit: Maybe, though, it's because of his own early life experiences. So if you're a fan of Greek mythology, you likely know that Zeus's father, Cronus, had taken to swallowing his children whole when they were born to prevent his children from doing what he himself did to his own parents.

Jordan: And Cronus is a Titan of course, making him sort of a second generation of gods. In the Greco-Roman cosmogony slash mythology, aka origin of the universe story. Cronus's parents were Gaia, Mother Earth, and Uranus, Father Sky. And Cronus was jealous of his father, and so later in life overthrew him. But in classic Greek myth, he gets his own comeuppance. And it gets pretty weird and gross as well. But maybe we can save that for another day.

Kit: Yeah. The story of Cronus overthrowing Uranus is a whole separate thing. Um, but anyways, he overthrows his dad and was then justifiably worried that his own children would try to overthrow him. But instead of, like, trying to be a good dad, right, and, like, you know, ensure that his children felt supported and loved and that he became beloved, he just ate them. So by the time his wife.

Jordan: Oh, and sister, let's mention that.

Kit: Right. His wife is also his sister. Wife slash sister Rhea.

Jordan: Sister wife, I think is the correct term, [laughter]

Kit: slash wife. So his sister slash wife Rhea gives birth to child number six, and at this point, she's just, like, really fed up with Cronus. And of course, child number six is no other than our guy, Zeus.

Jordan: The big z himself.

Kit: Indeed. So Rhea has had enough, and she comes up with a great plan. I don't know why it took her six children to get to this plan, but it did.

Jordan: Maybe she was just hoping Cronus would change, but, okay, by the 6th time, what did she decide to do?

Kit: She feeds her husband a rock that's been wrapped up, swaddled, and hides Zeus away in the mountains.

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Kit: He has there a foster mother named Amalthea And there's two sort of traditions about Amalthea Some say she was just literally a goat that suckled Zeus.

Jordan: Goat milk. Goat cheese. Goat Mom checks out. Okay, that's a very literal

reading, and I understand that.

Kit: Other tradition says Amalthea is a goat tending nymph who fed Zeus with the milk of her goats. And honestly, it doesn't really matter either way. The core idea here is Amalthea has something to do with goats, and she keeps Zeus from dying when he's brought there as an infant.

Jordan: Shout out to you, Amalthea. So from there, Zeus goes on to make his father, Cronus, puke back up his previous five siblings, and together they unite to overthrow Cronus and his group of second generation gods, the Titans themselves, and lock them up in Tartarus, which I believe is pretty much just the center of the Earth. And this is called the Titanomachy.

Kit: Mmhmm. Not everybody is cast into the despair pit, though, um, because we still have Oceanus, Helios, Atlas, Prometheus, and a few other Titans that I guess Zeus likes who get to stay around. But here's where we get a glimpse, a tiny glimpse of Typhon. Apparently, Gaia, of course, Mother Earth was pretty upset that Zeus sent her children, who she actually helped to overthrow Uranus and the other sort of first generation. She is really upset by this imprisonment, and she gives birth to Typhon as revenge for this, um, what she perceives as this unjust sort of imprisonment of the Titans

Jordan: But it doesn't totally make sense because also, Gaia got overthrown by Cronus at the same point in time.

Kit: Yeah, and like I said, maybe she helped them overthrow Uranus. Like, it's not really clear. Um, but, you know, I think the best reading of it is, like, maybe she's just a really

good mom who, like, loves her kids unconditionally.

Jordan: A complex web, these primordial gods they weave.

Kit: So, in the end, we have this goat star that is in sort of memory of Amalthea. And in some version of the myths, her skin, if she was a goat, or the skin of her goat, if she's a nymph that tends goats, becomes the Aegis that Zeus and then Athena carries.

Jordan: And there we have it, the myth of Capella, the goat star. Almathea, we wouldn't have all these great Zeus stories without you. Let's take a quick break and come back for a less mythological and more scientific exploration of, well, of course, goats. In our classic segment, creature corner

Creature Corner

[Music] Kit, it feels like it's been too long since we've done a creature corner, but we are back, and this one is featuring probably an overlooked but underappreciated species of animal called the goats. Before I give my favorite goat facts, can I just ask you what off the top of your head, given your life experience, what do you know about goats, Kit?

Kit: I know only a couple things about goats. I know goats have rectangle shaped pupils. I know that they come in various sizes. Like, I know there's very little goats, and then there's bigger goats. I know that mountain goats are good at walking on mountains.

Jordan: Excellent.

Kit: Mostly because of those Planet Earth episodes, you know, where they'll, like, show them walking and then something attacks them, and then, like, they hold their footing somehow, and it's riveting. I know that goats eat plants. That's pretty much. Well, okay, wait. I also know that goats like to head butt people. And then, like, I've seen hilarious videos of them headbutting people in the butt. And those are very funny. They're really funny.

Jordan: Classic head butt to human butt. [laughter]

Kit: It's very funny. And, um, that's honestly all I know about goats. So I am looking forward to knowing more about goats.

Jordan: Well, you ended with a real important fact there. I'm glad you saved the best for last.

Kit: It's very important.

Jordan: Kit, let's start at the beginning. The first goat remains found in archaeological sites in western Asia, Anatolia, Turkey, dates around 9000 years ago. There's some debate if they were first domesticated in the Middle East or if they were domesticated in Turkey. But most researchers now believe that goats are descended from a mountain ibex that is found in West Asia called caprus

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Jordan: agraris. And in the past 10,000 years, we've now created over 300 different breeds of goats from this original species. So, in research that was published in Biology

Letters, it was found goats will look people in the eyes when they're frustrated with the task and could use help. In that sense, they're a lot more like dogs than other animals that we've domesticated. So, for the study, a team trained goats to remove a lid from a box in order to receive award. And as, the final task, they made it so the lid couldn't be removed from the box. Then they recorded the goat's reactions when they gazed toward the experimenters who were in the room, as if they were asking for a little help.

Kit: I think they're actually like, are you people kidding me with this?

Jordan: And they would, in fact, look longer if the person was facing the goat than if the person was facing away. So goats have become very well acclimated to humankind and how we work over the past 10,000 years.

Kit: Yeah.

Jordan: Not all goats are created equal. In another way that goats and humans are similar, I'm going to tell you about a trained goat called the Judas goat. Are you familiar with this?

Kit: No, I'm just thinking about goats headbutting people. [laughter]

Jordan: Well, the Judas goat is even worse than headbutting in the butt. This is a goat that is trained to associate with sheep or cattle or even other goats and lead them to a specific destination.

Kit: Oh, no.

Jordan: In stockyards, for instance, a Judas goat will lead sheep to slaughter while its own life is spared. Judas goats are also used to lead other animals specific pens and onto trucks. And, yes, they've fallen out of use in recent times, but there's still some places around the world where goats are doing the dirty work. But not all goats are doomed for a life of treachery. Sometimes goats get to live it pretty easy. Among the many pets that actually populated the White House during Abraham Lincoln's time in office were two goats named Nanny and Nanco. They were particularly beloved by Lincoln's son, Tad, who, get this Kit, I can't make this up, even used them for chariot rides around the White House.

Kit: Stop it. This is the real Auriga Taddy Lincoln.

Jordan: So, yes.

Kit: Incredible.

Jordan: Some goats are turncoats, aka turn goats, and will lead their friends to the slaughter. Some goats will attempt to manipulate humans in order to get what they want. And some goats just want to hang out. For instance, the goats who live in the very first quote "goat tower," which was built in Portugal in the 19th century. According to Francisco Guedes Almeida, a member of the 13th generation of the Guedes family, who owned this winery that built the goat tower. He says: "what's the purpose of the goat tower? There is no purpose. These are artistic daydreams with no functional explanation. But they are built upon by previous ancestors who believed that goats, quote, did not belong to the plains. So they built the goat tower so they could have a mountain."

Kit: So they could have a mountain. That is so cute. I love that. Stop. I love it.

Jordan: 19th century in Portugal, they started building towers for goats that they had domesticated because they started to feel bad. And my last fact I'm going to give you today continues inward on the Iberia peninsula. Some people in Portugal, as we see here in these wineries, will build almost castles for these animals. Further inward in Spain, we have a certain festival, which is a goat throwing festival that happens in the province of Zamora, Spain. It is celebrated on the fourth Sunday of January.

Kit: Wow.

Jordan: A group of young men throw a live goat from the top of a church.

Kit: No.

Jordan: The crowd below will then attempt to catch the fallen goat with a canvas sheet.

Kit: [gasp]

Jordan: some goats survive the fall,

Kit: oh!!!

Jordan: some do not.

Kit: I bet they have, like, heart attacks. Oh my gosh.

Jordan: If the goat does survive, it will be revered and paraded through Zamora, the small village, becoming a local legend for years to come. And the event is inspired by a legend that states that a goat, which miraculously fed the poor with its milk, fell out of a tower, but somehow landed safely. We've been from goat throwing off of goat towers,

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Jordan: 10,000 years of domestication, to the point where goats are willing to look us in the eye, or if we won't respond to that, headbutt us right in the butt. So, doesn't surprise me that we have Capella, the goat star, when our connection to these creatures has been a part of civilization for thousands and thousands of years.

Kit: Wow. That was a lot more about goats than I knew. I had no idea that they'd been domesticated for so long. I love the idea of a goat tower. Um, and not just because, you know, we grew up in a place that had a goat barn without any goats. Um, but, wow, I learned a ton. Thanks so much. do you happen to know why they have rectangle shaped pupils?

Jordan: Yes. It gives them greater peripheral vision. They're one of the very few mammals that do have this type of eyes. What that mostly means is that if we do start using them for chariot rides and races, we can have, very complicated tracks because they can see all around. If we want to do some Mario Kart stuff here with these goats, they'll be able to handle it. Call up Tad. That has been creature corner and the mythology of Capella, the goat star.

Kit: Wow. I feel like I know a ton about goats. I can't wait to post goat pictures for the entire week while we are promoting this episode. Thanks, Jordan.

Outro

[music] This has been Kit

Jordan: And Jordan.

Kit: Sisters, lovers of stars and stories.

Jordan: And we'll see you next time

Kit: On Starry Time. [Music]

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