

[music]

[00:00:23] **Jordan:** Hi, I'm Jordan.

[00:00:25] **Kit:** And I'm Kit.

[00:00:26] **Jordan:** Welcome to *Starry Time*, where stars plus lines

[00:00:30] **Kit:** equal stories.

[00:00:32] **Jordan:** This is episode 2 on our monthly constellation Corona Australis, the Southern Crown. Last week we covered the cosmic background of this constellation.

[00:00:43] **Kit:** We said hi to Ptolemy and Bayer. We learned about contact binaries and molecular clouds.

[00:00:50] **Jordan:** Pretty stellar.

[00:00:53] **Kit:** This week we're going to be retelling and ret constellationing the mythology of this constellation.

[00:00:59] **Jordan:** Goodness, Kit, if there ever was a myth in need of a ret constellation.

[00:01:04] **Kit:** Yes, no doubt. Let's get into it. As we mentioned in the last episode, this constellation was included in Ptolemy's *Almagest* from the 2nd century as the Southern Crown, but other cultures and even the ancient Greeks had other names for the constellation. In ancient Greece, it was also sometimes known as the crown of Sagittarius, and the ancient Romans called it the golden crown of Sagittarius.

[00:01:26] **Jordan:** Going even further back to Babylonian astronomy, this set of stars was once again associated with our guy Sagittarius or their Pabilsag, and was known as the Cargo-boat.

[00:01:40] **Kit:** Yes. In Gavin White's *Babylonian Star-Lore*, White suggests that this is a symbolic boat that isn't actually linked to any of the many godly boats of the time. He suggests that it's a symbolic representation of new life and is somehow linked to pregnancy or bringing forth new life in some way. Yes, the Cargo-boat.

[00:02:02] **Jordan:** Well, that's something. Yes. Complicated. Okay.

[00:02:08] **Kit:** As our mom would say. That's interesting.

[00:02:11] **Jordan:** That's interesting. It makes me think.

[00:02:15] **Kit:** Yes, I didn't see this interpretation in other places, but, yes, that is something that I read.

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[00:02:21] Jordan: There does seem to be some conflict or difference in this Mesopotamian era, because I also saw that this constellation was known as The Bark and was associated with our pal The Goat-Fish, though there wasn't a ton of information about what kind of bark or how it got into the night sky out there.

[00:02:41] Kit: Yes, there seems to be some ambiguity. In Chinese astronomy, this constellation is part of the Black Tortoise of the North. Still other cultures have seen the constellation as a boomerang in a canoe, among other things. In more contemporary history, this constellation has been imagined as the crown of eternal life from the New Testament.

[00:03:02] Jordan: I mean, it does sort of make sense to me more as a boomerang or boat than a crown. I mean, it does look like a semicircle, but the shape, yes, it's pretty vague.

[00:03:14] Kit: Definitely. Let's get into the Greco-Roman myths of this constellation.

[00:03:21] Jordan: All right. The myth of Corona Australis is most often connected to the birth of the god of wine and general partying, Dionysus in Greek myth, also known as Bacchus in Roman traditions.

[00:03:35] Kit: Yes, and I do think that it's important to remind everyone as we start this new season that these mythologies are often a bit muddled and chaotic. The myth we're going to be talking about is one of several origin myths for Dionysus.

[00:03:49] Jordan: Yes, it's really hard to pin down the birth of the party. When it comes to someone like Bacchus or Dionysus, I mean, it's part of an oral tradition and there's going to be a lot of different variants. Also the fact that these myths evolved and changed within the cultures that they were in in order to better interpret the world that they were living in.

[00:04:11] Kit: Yes, absolutely. All right, tell me more about this Corona Australis and how Dionysus is part of this story.

[00:04:20] Jordan: All right, all right, all right. Well, let's start season 2 off with a bang. Buckle up. Here's our favorite anti-hero, the king of the gods, Zeus himself, back out on the prowl, again, just assuming eagle form as you do, and looking for some companionship. Not from his wife Hera, however. Who should catch his eye, but the mortal woman Smelly. Is that how you would pronounce it?

[00:04:57] Kit: Smelly. [laughs] Smelly. I don't know how to pronounce it, but Smelly is very funny. Smelly.

[00:05:09] Jordan: Semele it is. Semele or Smelly depending on how you wish to pronounce it.

[00:05:16] Kit: I'm tired. Oh my God. Okay.

[00:05:20] Jordan: Don't let her name fool you. She's described as fair faced and a white armed maiden. She was either a Theban princess and/or a priestess of Zeus. At any rate, Zeus seduces her and lo and behold, she becomes pregnant.

[00:05:40] Kit: You know, it does happen sometimes.

[00:05:42] Jordan: Sometimes it's a cargo boat, sometimes it's a pregnancy. Now Hera, of course, Zeus's wife, dot, dot, dot, finds out and is jealous. So jealous in fact, that she decides that Semele or Smelly has to die. She goes in disguise as a crone and befriends our friend Semele. Semele confides that she is a thunder lover.

[00:06:13] Kit: Thunder lover. [laughs]

[00:06:16] Jordan: Thunder. Thunder. Thunder lover. No, this is a real Zeus epithet. We would not shove innuendo into our pod.

[00:06:25] Kit: Never.

[00:06:25] Jordan: Never. Not here.

[00:06:26] Kit: I didn't just post something on our socials about smash or pass on the 12 Olympians. That's just not our style.

[00:06:34] Jordan: Hera, knowing that mortals, of course, could not see the true form of the divine gods, convinced Semele that if Zeus really loved her like Semele thought, he would show her his true form and in one source come to her as he came to Hera.

[00:06:55] Kit: Oh, that makes me feel yucky.

[00:06:58] Jordan: Yucky. Eek. Pretty eek. Pretty cringe. Now, for some reason, whether blinded by love or bound by a promise on the River Styx, Zeus eventually does as she asks. Zeus rolls in with the thunder, lightning and general pomp and reveals his divine self. Not so shockingly, Hera was right and she's killed. However, she is also pregnant and Zeus takes this fetus and sews it into his thigh for the rest of the gestation period. Which makes a lot of sense.

[00:07:37] Kit: Yes.

[00:07:38] Jordan: Once Dionysus is born, Hera gets up to some additional pretty messed up stepmom stuff.

[00:07:45] Kit: Yes. Some of the stories related to those Hera antics are related to the myths of the Hyades. The Hyades are also an open star cluster in the constellation Taurus. Yes, we should probably put them into an asterism sometime soon.

[00:08:01] Jordan: Indeed. We'll leave that for another day. Because ultimately

Dionysus gives Hera a big middle finger and winds up rescuing his mother Semele from the underworld and even makes her a goddess.

[00:08:16] Kit: I did not know that just any random god could do that, but that's cool. Good job to Dionysus. I also read a version of this myth where Semele's sister starts a rumor after she dies that she was killed by a lightning bolt because a mortal had actually impregnated her and she blamed Zeus and Zeus was totally free from fault.

[00:08:39] Jordan: Ooh, I like this. It's a little immaculate conception payback from Zeus, I guess. This is some tough stuff.

[00:08:47] Kit: Very tough stuff.

[00:08:50] Jordan: In the end, this wreath is placed in the sky to symbolize this story, because a wreath of ivy was a common symbol of Semele's son Dionysus.

[00:09:02] Kit: Well, I would say that the myth definitely shares some of the themes with other myths we've talked about so far in the first season. Once again we have this reinforcement of patriarchal societal gender norms that pits women against each other. Hera is jealous and targets Semele instead of Zeus. Semele is then punished for desiring Zeus.

[00:09:26] Jordan: Yet Zeus, the one with the most power in this situation, is never punished.

[00:09:30] Kit: Exactly.

[00:09:31] Jordan: This myth also serves more practical purposes, like explaining the natural phenomena of thunder and lightning and could explain deaths by lightning in a very generous sense. It also provides an explanation for why we never really see the gods, as in if we could, it would kill us. Which is very convenient.

[00:09:54] Kit: Yes, right? It sort of helps to create and maintain this distance between mortals and gods. It creates them as distinct and powerful. Even though the Greco-Roman gods tend to be much more human like than the all powerful, all knowing gods that are more common in the Judeo Christian traditions.

[00:10:16] Jordan: It reinforces this idea that the mortals need to respect the gods and their wishes no matter what, and they should be unquestioned and even seeing them would destroy you.

[00:10:29] Kit: Right. It's also kind of interesting to me to think about Semele's myth as related to hubris and gender norms. Sort of a gendered punishment that she's undergoing here because Dionysus is really conceptualized as this norm breaking rebel god. In the end he basically just brings his mom back and it kind of to me is like, "Does this undermine the more problematic parts of the myth?" Zeus ought not have killed Semele, obviously, and Hera ought not have punished Semele for Zeus's infidelity. Then in the end, Dionysus's just kind of like-- it all sort of comes back to the

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status quo and in fact even better because now Semele is now a goddess. Do you have any other analysis things, things that we should talk about before we get to retcons?

[00:11:14] Jordan: I mean, long story short, yes, this is just a classic myth we have of women being pit against each other and Zeus getting away scotch free. Again, the element of hubris and pride of stupid mortals, we might be even able to mate with the gods, but lest we see them in their true form. I think it does a really profound job of enforcing both patriarchy as well as the established religious credo of the time.

[00:11:54] Kit: Great. Let's take a quick break and then let's do our retcons.

[music]

[00:12:08] Jordan: Welcome back to our next segment. Ret Constellation. In this segment, me and Kit, we reimagine, we reboot and we revise the myths of our monthly constellation in hopes to either modernize, subvert or deepen the story. Sometimes we also just try to make them less cringey.

[00:12:28] Kit: This one has a high cringe factor.

[00:12:32] Jordan: Indeed. Yes, it's classic in all the wrong ways. Do you want to start us off with your ret constellation?

[00:12:40] Kit: I actually have two retcons. I had one that came to me first and then I had a better idea. I think I'll start with the one that is the better idea, and then I'll tell you what the original one that I came up with was. Does that sound okay?

[00:12:52] Jordan: That sounds perfect.

[00:12:54] Kit: All right. The first retcon is a Semele retcon. In my version of the myth, Semele is a princess who doesn't want to marry. She's independent, she's smart, she wants to rule as queen on her own. Now we've met Zeus, unfortunately, and he sees Semele and he sees a real opportunity for conquest. What a feather in his cap. What a lightning bolt in his satchel to get Semele in his bed because he's gross. He tries to seduce Semele in various forms, but each time she sees through his seduction and rebuffs him. She's like, "Get out of here. I am busy, and I'm not interested."

Semele seeks the help of Hera in getting Zeus to leave her alone and together they devise a plan. Because Hera is getting really sick of this. It's super embarrassing. It's also just annoying. She's a friggin goddess and her husband's out here doing what he's doing. The next time Zeus attempts to woo Semele, he brings down thunder and lightning to try to scare her because again, he's gross. He fails to notice that Semele is wearing a conductive crown disguised in plants that Hera has provided for her. As she refuses Zeus again, he has just come to his limit and he throws a lightning bolt at her. Because of the crown, the lightning doesn't kill her, but turns her into an immortal goddess with the power to drive anyone into a frenzy and to make them

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immune to the charms of Zeus.

[00:14:46] Jordan: That one makes a lot of sense. I have a lot of questions about the conductive crown on a mechanical engineering level.

[00:14:56] Kit: Don't worry about it.

[00:14:58] Jordan: Yes, that's a great part about myth is that, don't worry about it.

[00:15:02] Kit: Magical objects.

[00:15:03] Jordan: And Hera helped. I mean, teamwork makes a dream work. All right, so that one I liked a lot and already is making me feel like my retcons need a lot of work. I appreciate all the thought and creativity put into that one. You're telling me you even have another one? Give me the second one. What's the other ret constellation myth that you came up with.

[00:15:30] Kit: The other one was the one that I sort of initially had, which is more simple. It's making use of the idea that in some names of this constellation, it's thought of as the crown of Sagittarius. That got me thinking about my retcon of constellation Sagittarius from season 1. For those who hadn't listened or maybe you forgot because for some reason you didn't store this into long term storage, I don't know why, but my retcon was that Sagittarius is actually Sagittaria.

She's a Centaurus who invented the bow and arrow. She left her patriarchal society to found and lead the Amazons warrior. That's now who Sagittaria is. In this retcon, it's actually the Amazons who popularized the idea of a golden wreath being awarded to those who perform extraordinary deeds, or so courage, rather than the invention of the Roman army. The southern crown is now a golden crown and it is an Amazonian symbol of extraordinary courage. That's how I connected it.

[00:16:38] Jordan: I like this one a lot because now we're getting into the kit ret constellation extended universe, where your ret constellations are intersecting with each other to create a full narrative. I like this one a lot. I like this one a lot. Please do go back and listen to Sagittarius and learn more about Sagittaria if you're curious how this all connect.

[00:17:05] Kit: Yes. This wreath is at the feet of our good friend Sagittarius as an offering of her many accomplishments. Yes, I like this idea. Extended universe. It's all interconnected. You got to listen to every episode or you'll be lost. I mean, these are tricky myths to follow. What about you? Where did you take this retcon?

[00:17:25] Jordan: First, why not just make Sagittarius a wreath? Give him a nice little wreath. We need more headgear representation. It can't just be all crowns all the time. Maybe some wreath culture would be good. Then I heard your ret constellation, all of the extended universe elements, and it makes me think that I need to be taking this a little bit more seriously.

[00:17:56] Kit: Well, I mean, I do think it makes more sense because of where the constellation is physically located, which we talked about on cosmic background, it really doesn't make sense that it has this whole other Dionysus story to it. There also didn't really seem to be a story about the Sagittarius Crotus or the Centaur wearing it. It would make more sense if it was a narrative or a story about a wreath of that constellation. I think that's true. Honestly, even if it was simply that it's just the crown of Sagittarius, that's better than this myth of Dionysus and Semele and Zeus. Listen, you got rid of all the problematic parts.

[00:18:45] Jordan: The other part that I came up with was to retain most of it, but when I look at this shape, it does kind of look to me almost like a shield. A half circle or semicircle, a pregnant-

[00:19:00] Kit: Boat?

[00:19:00] Jordan: Pregnant boat. In my ret constellation, each one of these stars forms a shield that protects people from Zeus' desire. You look up at night and you see each of the stars, and as long as you're looking up at this shield in the sky, it blocks you from Zeus being able to inflict his will upon you. That was one ret constellation. Then another one was that just like each one of these could just be representative of one of Zeus's adulterous affairs and only Zeus can see this constellation. It's just sort of each one of them forms this constant reminder of his crown of infidelity and maybe something that allows him to rethink and maybe even feel guilt for his actions. You could take it either way. A warning and shield for people or a constant reminder to Zeus of everything he's done wrong.

[00:20:11] Kit: Yes, and I think that's important because I think we talked about one of the things that's so problematic and so disturbing and cringey about these myth is like, Zeus just never seems to feel bad. He never stops behaving badly. He never has a conversation with Hera about maybe they need to change the nature of their relationship or maybe they need to break up. They need to get on the same page. No, just next week he's a white bull seducing Europa. It's a lot. I like this idea of him having to be actually reminded of the consequences of his actions or alternatively, something that protects people from Zeus. Because I think that that's necessary.

[00:20:53] Jordan: Yes, right. It's either feel some responsibility or at least give his victim some recourse. Right?

[00:21:00] Kit: Yes.

[00:21:01] Jordan: All right. Well, I think we both did really great. Started season 2 off with a bang. Now let's end with our newest addition to ret constellation, AKA our myth Oracle, AKA our Chat GPT ret constellation. Can you tell me what prompt you gave it?

[00:21:20] Kit: I don't remember the exact prompt. In the future, I'll make sure to keep it because I was just kind of playing around. I asked the Oracle about the myth of the Southern Crown, about Semele and Zeus, and I think I asked something like,
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"Can you change the power dynamics of the myth? Can you reverse them in some way?" Are you ready for what the Oracle has given us as the myth?

[00:21:42] Jordan: Please, Oracle, tell us the myth.

[00:21:45] Kit: Apologies because the Oracle does indeed steal things. If this is your ret constellation, let us know and we'll link to your book or your story or what have you. Here we go from the Oracle. "In a reimagined version of the Semele and Zeus myth, the roles of mortals and gods are flipped. Semele is a powerful deity and ruler of her own realm who becomes enamored with Zeus, a mortal man with whom she has a passionate affair.

However, as their relationship progresses, Semele begins to feel insecure about Zeus mortality and demands that he prove his love by becoming a god like her. Despite warnings from other mortals about the dangers of such transformation, Zeus goes through with it, but the process proves too much for his mortal body to handle, and he perishes. Semele is left to mourn the loss of her lover and come to terms with the consequences of her own insecurities. The story highlights the perils of power imbalances and the importance of accepting and loving someone for who they are." Oracle out.

[00:23:03] Jordan: Myth Oracle. Dang. Now, I'm not going to credit on your ret constellation, but definitely better than what I was able to bring to the table. It turns out my language learning model, synapses and neurons, not quite as impressive as an oracle that has access to all the myths of human history. Excellent job. I can see some parallels between that reconciliation and other myths that do exist.

[00:23:33] Kit: Right.

[00:23:35] Jordan: I also like the idea of Zeus perishing. That's great.

[00:23:41] Kit: Appealing.

[00:23:43] Jordan: You know I pitched that as a ret constellation multiple times. Perhaps I was consulting the Oracle whether I knew it or not, or the Oracle was consulting with me. No, I like this. Great. I even like the idea if I was to take this as the prompt, I would then make the crown what killed Zeus.

[00:24:02] Kit: Yes. Good idea.

[00:24:03] Jordan: He puts on the southern crown and that's what leads to his demise. I mean, the greatest thing about the Oracle here is that it allows you to consider your own myths in a new way.

[00:24:17] Kit: I also think it's interesting that even in this version of the myth, the Oracle right away is having there be consequences. Semele, actually, feels bad about it. Already it's an improvement in so many ways from the original myth. Yes, I just thought that was interesting.

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[00:24:36] Jordan: Yes. The power and balance without consequences in the first myth is just so heinous.

[00:24:42] Kit: So bad.

[00:24:43] Jordan: Even just having characters or a myth. I mean, this is just the basic structure of a story, but it's a story in which there's guilt and there are repercussions, as opposed to the original myth, as we said, which is just to reinforce certain societal norms which may or may not have been the most equitable. Perhaps not. That brings us to the end of our episode this week, Myths and Ret Constellations. Join us next week for the pop culture segment of our exploration of the constellation Corona Australis.

[00:25:26] Kit: This has been Kit.

[00:25:28] Jordan: And Jordan.

[00:25:29] Kit: Sisters, lovers of stars and stories.

[00:25:32] Jordan: We'll see you next time.

[00:25:34] Kit: *On Starry Time.*

[music]

[00:26:00] [END OF AUDIO]