

Aquarius

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Aquarius

Aquarius, 20 January – 18 February. The eleventh sign, **fixed air**, ruled by **Saturn** in the traditional scheme. The glyph is two parallel zigzags, read as running water. The constellation is large, faint and hard to see from a lit sky, but its picture is clear enough on a chart: a figure tipping a jar, with a stream of stars pouring south and downward until it ends at **Fomalhaut**, "the mouth of the southern fish". Aquarius sits in the stretch of sky the ancients called **the Sea** — Capricornus, Pisces, Cetus, Eridanus and Piscis Austrinus are all neighbours, and all of them are wet.

Religion and myth

The Babylonian constellation is **MUL.GU.LA**, "the Great One", drawn as a giant holding an overflowing vase. It is identified with **Ea**, the same Enki who owns the goat-fish of **Capricorn** next door — lord of the Abzu, the fresh water beneath the earth. Two consecutive signs belonging to the same water god is not a coincidence; this whole quarter of the ecliptic was Ea's, and in Mesopotamia the Sun passed through it during the rainy months. The water pouring out of the jar was the water actually falling.

Greek tradition replaced the god with a servant. Aquarius became **Ganymede**, the Trojan prince whose beauty made Zeus carry him off — in an eagle's talons, or as an eagle, with Aquila conveniently adjacent in the sky — to serve as cupbearer to the gods. A competing account makes the figure **Deucalion**, who survived the flood Zeus sent to end the Bronze Age. Both are **Hellenistic literary catasterism** rather than cult; nobody sacrificed to the water-bearer, though the Ganymede story travelled well enough to give the constellation its Latin name.

The modern layer belongs here too, and should be labelled. The **"Age of Aquarius"** is not ancient. The idea of astrological ages defined by which constellation the March equinox occupies is a nineteenth-century occultist construction, absorbed by Theosophy and popularized in English by the 1967 musical *Hair*. Because the ages depend entirely on where you draw constellation boundaries, published start dates for the Aquarian age are spread across several centuries and there is no method that would settle them. Treat any specific date for it as **invented, not calculated**.

Key dates

Date	Event
c. 1000 BCE (<i>contested</i>)	MUL.APIN lists MUL.GU.LA, the Great One with the overflowing vase, among the stars in the path of the Moon.
5th century BCE (<i>contested</i>)	Aquarius becomes the eleventh of twelve equal 30° signs.
c. 275 BCE	Aratus's <i>Phaenomena</i> describes the water-pourer and the stream running to the southern fish.
c. 150 CE	Ptolemy catalogues Aquarius in the <i>Almagest</i> and assigns Saturn the rulership in the <i>Tetrabiblos</i> .
19th–20th century CE	The "Age of Aquarius" is constructed by modern esotericists; its start date is unfixed and boundary-dependent.
present	With about 24 degrees of precessional drift, the Sun spends nearly all of tropical Aquarius against the stars of Capricornus , not reaching the constellation Aquarius until about 16 February.

In the year

Aquarius is midwinter's second half — the fixed sign that holds the cold in place before spring is credible. In Mesopotamia and the Levant these were the rainy weeks that filled the wells and made the year possible; in northern Europe they are the hungry gap. **Imbolc** and **Candlemas** (1–2 February) fall inside it, both concerned with the first stirrings of light and lambing, as do the Roman **Lupercalia** (15 February) and the **Parentalia** (13–21 February), the days for tending the dead. It is a sign about supply — water stored, ancestors remembered, the future provisioned — which is not far from what later astrology made of it.

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