

Capricorn

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Capricorn

Capricorn, 22 December – 19 January. The tenth sign, **cardinal earth**, ruled by **Saturn**. It opens at the December solstice, the year's lowest point and its turn back toward light. The figure is not a goat but a **sea-goat**: the forequarters of a goat, the hindquarters of a fish. The constellation is faint, a shallow triangle of modest stars, and it is easy to miss — which has never mattered, because this sign's authority comes from its date and its emblem rather than its brightness.

Religion and myth

The sea-goat is one of the oldest and most durable images in the sky. **MUL.SUHUR.MAŠ**, *suhurmašu*, the Goat-Fish, is attested in Mesopotamian art and text well before the zodiac was organized, and it is the emblem of **Enki**, Akkadian **Ea** — god of the Abzu, the sweet waters under the earth, and of wisdom, craft and cunning. The composite creature appears on cylinder seals and boundary stones as Ea's own sign. This is not a story attached to a star pattern afterwards; it is a functioning religious emblem that happens to also be a constellation, and it puts Capricorn alongside **Taurus** as one of the two places where the zodiac's Mesopotamian layer is unmistakably cult.

The Greek account is thinner. **Aegipan**, or Pan himself, fled the monster Typhon by plunging into the Nile; the submerged half became a fish, and Zeus set the resulting shape in the sky in gratitude for help against Typhon. Hyginus also records the alternative that the goat is **Amalthea**, who suckled the infant Zeus on Crete, though that goat is more usually attached to Capella in Auriga. Both are **Hellenistic literary catasterism** — explanations built to account for an inherited picture nobody could otherwise justify.

Rome gave the sign a political career. **Augustus** adopted Capricorn as a personal emblem, striking it on silver coinage and using it on gems and monuments. Suetonius reports that he published his horoscope and issued a coin with the sign under which he was born. Since Augustus was born on 23 September — which is Libra — scholars disagree about what Capricorn was to him: **his conception sign, his Moon sign, or a deliberate solstice claim about renewal**. The dispute is genuine and unresolved.

Key dates

Date	Event
c. 2000–1600 BCE	The goat-fish appears in Mesopotamian glyptic art as the emblem of Enki/Ea.
c. 1000 BCE (<i>contested</i>)	MUL.APIN lists MUL.SUHUR.MAŠ among the stars in the path of the Moon.
5th century BCE (<i>contested</i>)	Capricorn becomes the tenth of twelve equal 30° signs.
c. 27 BCE – 14 CE	Augustus circulates Capricorn as an imperial emblem on coinage; its relation to his birth chart is contested.
c. 150 CE	Ptolemy catalogues Capricornus in the <i>Almagest</i> and assigns Saturn the rulership in the <i>Tetrabiblos</i> .
antiquity	The December solstice point stood in Capricorn, which is why the southern limit of the Sun's overhead track is still called the Tropic of Capricorn .
present	Precession moved the solstice point into Sagittarius around two thousand years ago; the Tropic of Capricorn is now a fossil name, and the Sun spends all of tropical Capricorn against Sagittarius's stars.

In the year

Capricorn is the solstice and the month after it: the shortest days, the deepest cold in the north, and the beginning of the climb back. Its festivals are all about surviving and restarting — **Saturnalia** ends as the sign opens, with the sign's own ruling planet giving the festival its name; **Brumalia**, the Roman **Kalendae Ianuariae** on 1 January, Christmas and Epiphany all fall inside it. The patient, uphill character later assigned to the sign is a fair description of the weeks in which nothing grows and the light returns anyway.

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