

1.4: The Constellations

Early peoples told stories about the shapes and patterns they saw in the stars, like connect-the-dots. These shapes are called Constellations. Today astronomers recognize 88 “official” Constellations. These are taken from many of the historical constellations. Many of today’s 88 official constellations are Western European in design and history.

Whereas some Constellations are easy to recognize, most are not. Constellations are basically connecting the dots or stars that make up these constellations. To be able to see all 88 Constellations, we would need to be at the equator.



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Many peoples throughout civilization identified patterns in the stars. For example, the constellation we now call Orion the Hunter was seen as different shapes by different people around the world, including:

- China: Shen, the supreme warrior
- Egypt: Orion or Osiris in Ancient Egyptian traditions
- India/Hindus: Skanda, a celestial General riding a peacock

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