

were rather the work of the imaginative and mythological tendencies of man, than of mere convenience and love of arrangement. "The constellations," says an astronomer of our own time,²⁷ "seem to have been almost purposely named and delineated to cause as much confusion and inconvenience as possible. Innumerable snakes twine through long and contorted areas of the heavens, where no memory can follow them: bears, lions, and fishes, large and small, northern and southern, confuse all nomenclature. A better system of constellations might have been a material help as an artificial memory." When men indicate the stars by figures, borrowed from obvious resemblances, they are led to combinations quite different from the received constellations. Thus the common people in our own country find a wain or wagon, or a plough, in a portion of the great bear.²⁸

The similarity of the constellations recognized in different countries is very remarkable. The Chaldean, the Egyptian, and the Grecian skies have a resemblance which cannot be overlooked. Some have conceived that this resemblance may be traced also in the Indian and Arabic constellations, at least in those of the zodiac.²⁹ But while the figures are the same, the names and traditions connected with them are different, according to the histories and localities of each country;³⁰ the river among the stars which the Greeks called the Eridanus, the Egyptians asserted to be the Nile. Some conceive that the Signs of the *Zodiac*, or path along which the sun and moon pass, had its divisions marked by signs which had a reference to the course of the seasons, to the motion of the sun, or the employments of the husbandman. If we take the position of the heavens, which, from the knowledge we now possess, we are sure they must have had 15,000 years ago, the significance of the signs of the zodiac, in which the sun was, as referred to the Egyptian year, becomes very marked,³¹ and has led some to suppose that the zodiac was invented at such a period. Others have rejected this as an improbably great antiquity, and have thought it more likely that the constellation assigned to each season was that which, at that season, rose at the beginning of the night:

²⁷ Sir J. Herschel.

²⁸ So also the Greeks, Homer, *Il.* xviii. 487.

²⁸ Ἄρκτον ἦν καὶ ἄμαξαν ἐπικλησιν καλέουσιν.

The Northern Bear which oft the Wain they call.

²⁸ Ἄρκτος was the traditional name; ἄμαξα, that suggested by the form.

²⁹ Dupuis, vi. 548. The Indian zodiac contains, in the place of our Capricorn, a ram and a fish, which proves the resemblance without chance of mistake. Baily, i. p. 157.

³⁰ Dupuis, vi. 549.

³¹ Laplace, *Hist. Astron.* p. 8.