

# Preface

During the writing of this book's companion volume, *The Lost Constellations*, it became clear that the entire project would not fit conveniently into one book of reasonable length. While the original pitch for the project involved only a single book, the editorial staff at Springer-Praxis offered to publish two books covering the project's complete contents, provided a sensible division into two parts existed that would make for acceptable lengths of the resulting books.

My initial reaction was to simply split the assortment of roughly 40 lost constellations into two halves, but on further consideration I found the contents could be naturally divided into two groups based on the answers to a series of questions of the nature of any given figure:

- Was it original?
- Was it 'popular'?
- Was it a constellation?

The last question isn't at all rhetorical: some figures that came and went from historical maps and charts were merely fragments of larger constellations that took on lives of their own. Their status as asterisms ranks them somewhat below the fully-fledged inventions related in *The Lost Constellations*.

While many figures regularly appeared on charts and globes over several centuries, others found only limited circulation. They came and went over much shorter periods, and some only ever appeared on a single map. In the most extreme cases, enterprising cartographers simply poached the creations of the past, appropriating their stars for new constellations that suited their own motives. These historical curiosities enrich our understanding of astronomy as a human enterprise, as much as astronomy is a reflection of both our aspirations and our shortcomings as a species.

The result of this sorting is a set of 16 diverse figures with complex and distinct stories that do not quite fit the mold of *The Lost Constellations*. This volume tells those stories, in many cases for the first time. In addition, two complete families of constellations are described in appendices to the main text: the inventions of the sixteenth century German mathematician Petrus Apianus and the eighteenth century

English botanist John Hill. Hill's constellations are reproduced here in their entirety for the first time since their original publication in 1754.

It is my hope that readers will find among these pages a garden of celestial delights that will challenge both casual stargazers and serious amateur astronomers alike to find something new and interesting among the familiar figures of the night sky.

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