

# SCOPE On the skies

**Slaying the Minotaur, suicide in the Aegean, and immortality, all in a myth.**

Art by Max-Karl Winkler



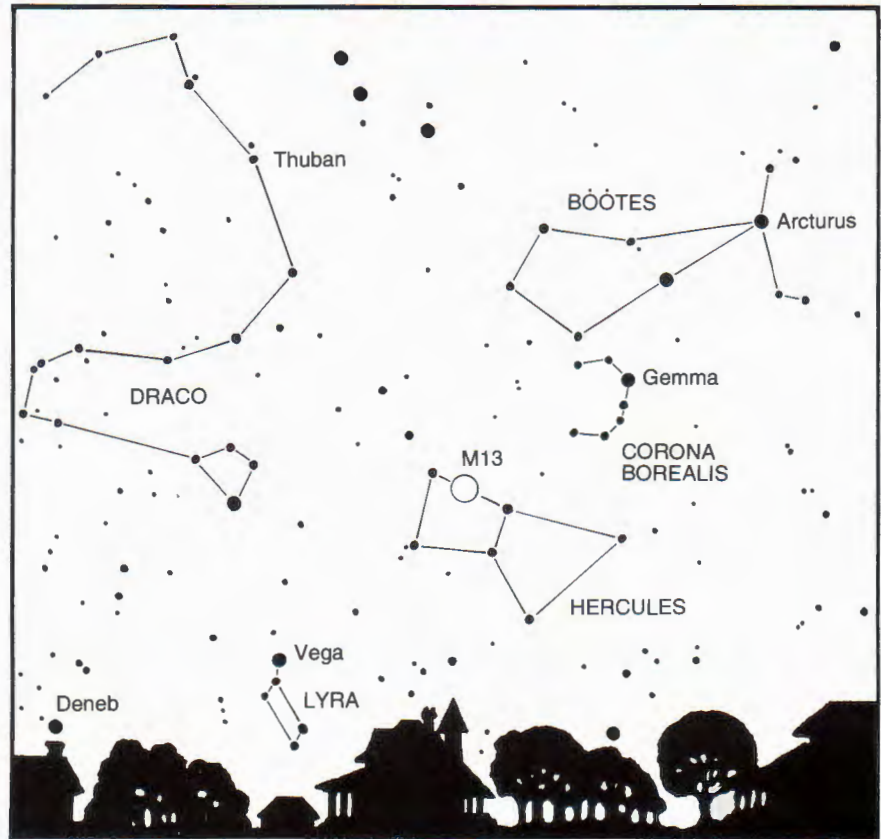
Appearing over the eastern horizon in the early spring are two faint, yet interesting, constellations—Hercules the Strongman and Corona Borealis the Northern Crown. Corona Borealis is located west of Hercules and east of Bootes the Herdsman. It is often referred to as Ariadne's Crown, and in some cultures it is called the Beggars' Bowl. The constellation is marked by its brightest star, Gemma or the Gem Star.

## The divine crown

The mythology about Ariadne's Crown is a tale of love and deceit. During a conflict with the Athenians, Minos, the king of Crete, lost his only son. Overwrought with sorrow, Minos imposed a punishment on the Athenians that required seven young women and seven young men to be sacrificed each year. These young people were to be brought to the island of Crete and entrapped in a labyrinth as food for the Minotaur.

After the Athenians had endured this cruel tax for two years, Theseus, son of the king of Athens, Aegeus, proffered a plan to end the yearly sacrifice. He asked Minos if he could sail to Crete with 13 other young men and women as part of the year's sacrifice, but be allowed to try to slay the Minotaur. The Cretan king accepted Theseus' request. Theseus sailed away under a black sail, and told his father that if his mission was successful, he would return under a white sail.

During the meeting between Theseus and Minos, Theseus met Minos' daughter



**LOOKING NORTHEAST ABOUT 9 P.M. ON MAY 15, 1992.**

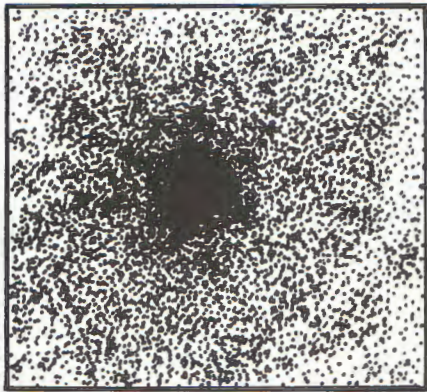
Ariadne. Not only did Theseus convince Minos of his plan, but he also fell in love with Ariadne. Ariadne gave Theseus a ball of string and told him to unwind the ball as he traversed the mazelike passageways of the labyrinth. Upon successfully slaying the Minotaur, Theseus found his way back by following the string to the entrance.

After Theseus escaped, Ariadne agreed to return to Athens to marry him. However, on the long voyage back to Athens, two personal tragedies beset Theseus. When Theseus and Ariadne stopped en route at the island of Naxos, Bacchus the Wine God fell in love with Ariadne. Bacchus ordered Theseus to leave, without letting Ariadne know of his departure. Theseus obeyed him, and saddened by the loss of the beautiful Ariadne, forgot to replace the black sail with a white sail as he had promised his

father. When Aegeus saw Theseus' ship approach rigged with a black sail, he thought that his son's mission had failed and that he had been killed by the Minotaur. Aegeus, in his despair, jumped to his death in the Aegean Sea.

When Ariadne realized that Theseus was gone, she became upset, until Bacchus convinced her that Theseus had abandoned her on the island and was not worth crying over. Bacchus then offered to marry her, but Ariadne was by then disenchanted with mortal men and did not believe Bacchus was really a god. To prove his divinity and show the world his respect for Ariadne's beauty, Bacchus threw his crown into the sky, where it still hangs today. Ariadne accepted Bacchus' proof and consented to marry him, become immortal, and live on Olympus with the other gods.





### What's in a cluster?

Hercules, one of the two strongmen in the sky, appears very faint, differing greatly from the other strongman, the

bright constellation Orion. The best-known feature of Hercules is the star cluster, M13. Appearing as a barely visible, fuzzy cluster in the sky, M13 is a globular star cluster—millions of old stars gravitationally bound together.

Globular clusters orbit the galactic halo in eccentric orbits that are highly inclined. According to current theory, they are composed of old stars of approximately the same age as those found in the galactic nuclei, and are thought to have formed at the same time as the universe—about 10 billion years ago. On the other hand, open clusters travel in the spiral arms of a galaxy, orbiting the galactic center in almost circular paths. Open clusters are mostly composed of hot, young stars.(1,2)

### Evening planets

**Jupiter:** Visible in the southwest two hours after sunset.

### Moon phases

New Moon - May 2

First Quarter - May 9

Full Moon - May 16

Third Quarter - May 24

### References

1. Jones, B. (1990). *The Practical Astronomer*. New York: Quarto Publishing Company.
2. Asker, J.R. (1992). Data from Hubble, GRO Likely to Shake Astronomical Theory. *Aviation Week & Space Technology*, 136(3), 24-25.

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