

The Sad Story of the Three Siblings

(*La triste historia de los tres hermanos*)

Arab myth from the 10th century

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A long time ago, there was a brother and two sisters travelling together across the sky. The younger sister was Gomeisa, a star in the constellation Canis Minor. The older sister was the dazzling Sirius, the bright star of the constellation Canis Major. Their young brother, Canopus, was a star named Souhail, which means "bright star" in Arabic.

The three of them were walking through the sky when Canopus saw Al Jaouza, known today as Orion. He was stunned by her beauty. They fell in love and decided to get married. Unfortunately they had terrible bad luck on their wedding day. Canopus accidentally hit his bride and she fell, broke her back and died.

Canopus was so sad and ashamed of what had happened that he fled. He ran away to a place where nobody would know him so that he could forget what had happened. He travelled south, crossing a light blue river. The river is represented by the Milky Way. Canopus left his two sisters on the other side.

Sirius also decided to cross the river to join her brother in the southern skies. Now the two sisters are on different sides of the Milky Way and Gomeisa was left alone grieving over the separation from her brother and sister. Her sorrow dimmed her eyes and she now shines less brightly in the sky.

Stars α , β , γ , ...

Stars are grouped into constellations according to their apparent proximity in the sky. Originally each star had its own name. As astronomers observed and catalogued an increasing number of stars, the ways of naming stars changed. Stars were identified with a Greek letter followed by the name of its constellation. In each constellation, stars are named α , β , γ and so on, in order of decreasing brightness. So, for example, Sirius is the α star in Canis Major because it is the brightest star in the constellation. Canopus, the second brightest star in the sky, is designated α Carinae. Gomeisa was originally the brightest star in Canis Minor but has become dimmer. It is therefore now the β star in Canis Minor. Is that the reason for this sad story?

Rosa M^a Ros



maria vidal