



Astral Myths in Estonia

- ★ **mythological content** of recordings associated with celestial objects (constellations) -> possible fragments of **astral myths**.
- ★ **The Sky** is a place to live for **Celestial people** (Sun, Moon, Star are ones of them) and **all their staff** is visible as constellations. So are there Shaftbow, Sieves, Flail and Rake.
- ★ Probably there was (at first) a direct connection between the earthly environment and the objects in the sky, almost a one-to-one conformity between an earthly object and its counterpart in the sky.
- ★ We do not know, how complex is this system, we have too few recordings and there is a regional variability of constellation names.
- ★ This system is multilayered and time related. I can mostly use a newer layer, this is more abstract, it has a lot of loans and probably contains some artificial constructions.
- ★ As example of loan: the **Greater Cross** (the Swan - *Cygnus*) and the **Smaller Cross** (the Dolphin - *Delphinus*) that are widely known in current European folk astronomy originates from the 6th century and was provided by Saint Gregory of Tours.



The Big Dipper

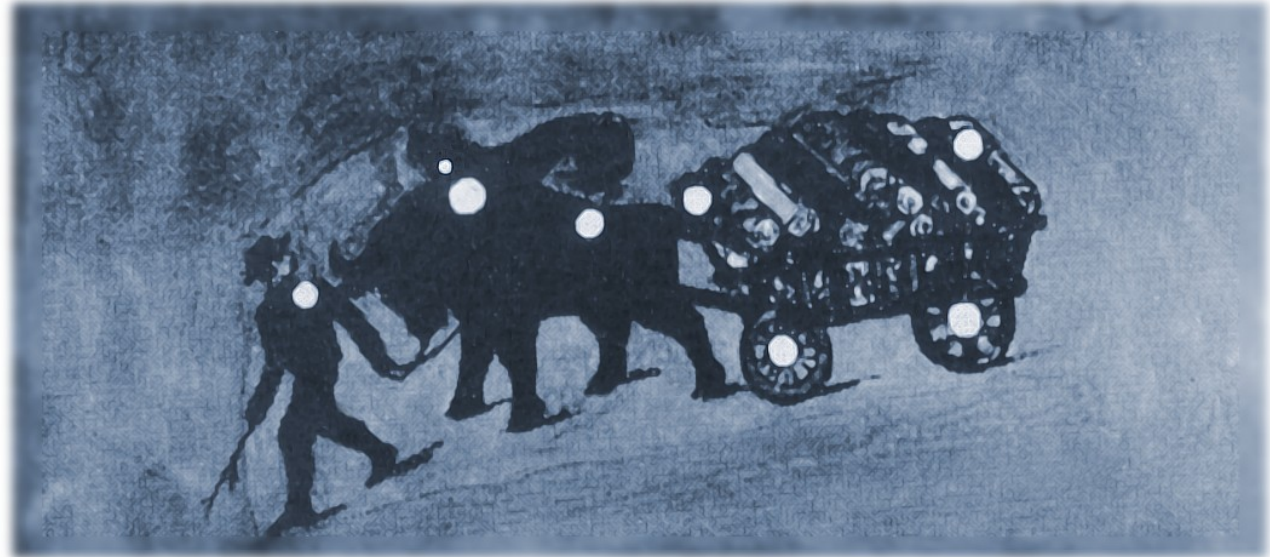
This wellknown constellation has old name Odamus, similar to Finnish name Otava.

Meaning of this name is yet uncertain. Big Dipper is well-known as Great Wain nowadays.

It was important constellation to measure the time and to find the north direction.

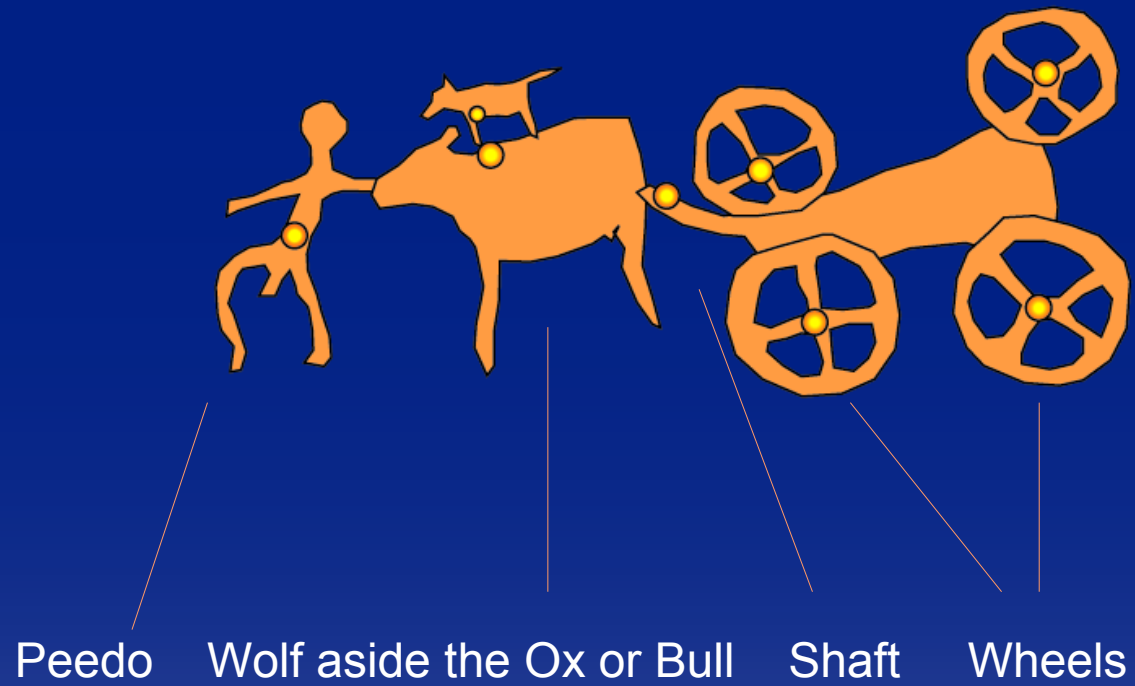
The Wolf beside th Ox

One of the oldest Estonian Star name, written down by Salomo Heinrich Westring from the beginning of 18-th Century is the Wolf beside the Ox. It is a dimmer star Alcor near the bright Star Mizar.



Jakob Hurt published his book about Estonian Astronomy 1898 on the basis of his collected materials. And in this book is a little story about a man, who carried wood with his wain, a wolf attacked an ox. Grandfather (synonym of God in that national-romantic mood) harnessed wolf beside the ox, and so they are going, at first the man, then the ox and the wolf, who tries to pull the wain toward the forest. This story was published as the fairy-tale and considered to be the only Estonian star myth.

The Wolf beside th Ox



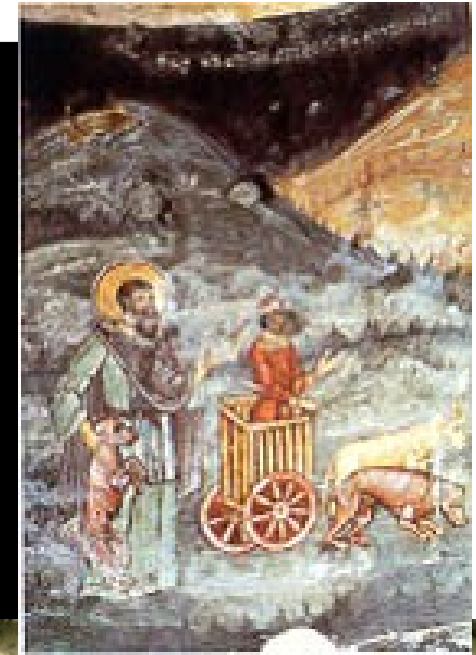
In Slovenia, from an article about slovenian star names by Milko Matičetov, was almost exactly the same story about the Big Dipper (Zemona, pri Ilirski Bistrici), only the man was St Martin.

It's thought that the Ox represents the Catholics, while the wolf (or fox) represents the Protestants. In Christian iconography, the Ox is a metaphor for patience, strength, docility, and humility. In this context, the use of the ox could reflect the willingness of the Catholics to submit, to labor diligently for the good of others. On the other hand, the wolf (or fox), as seen by Catholics of the times, symbolizes Protestant cunning and guile or any number of other Protestant evils including lust and greed. www.virtualvienna.net

The combination of Wolf and Ox is probably known also in Bulgarian region (Zvezdnoto nebe nad nas by Darina Mladenova).



St. Naum of Ohrid



Harnessing of wild animal, wolf or bear, is somehow common for saints (St Herve, St Fillan, St Naum, St. James of Tarentaise), but wolf was harnessed by Estonian epic hero Kalevipoeg and of course by Baron Münchhausen also





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Dum raptum super astra vides, Elifæe, Magistrum,
 Aufers deciduam, præmia magna, togam.
 Veste sub hac, plenus sub qua fuit igne propheta,
 Non frigere Dei cor in amore potest.

*Der Mantel fällt dir zu, da Gott Euch beyde trennet
 (dich, Jünger, und Prophet) durch feurige Gestalt.
 O Mantel (theure Gab!) drinn der Prophet gebrennet
 in dir wird wol kein Mensch an Gottes Liebe kalt.*

Estonia has been Lutheran country for the centuries. So we have very few stories connected with different saints.

But Big Dipper has two names, connectable with holy men.

Sandivanker (The wain of sant). In modern Estonian language the word Sant means a poor, ill and probably physically or mentally defective man or women.

Eelija vanker (The chariot of Elijah). Elijah rode into Sky with a chariot which has burning wheels.

St Catherines Day mummers are singing, that they are coming by the Milky Way (Birds Way), there is opinion, that St Martins Day mummers are somehow connected with Great Wain.

Lyra



Old two wheeled Cart.

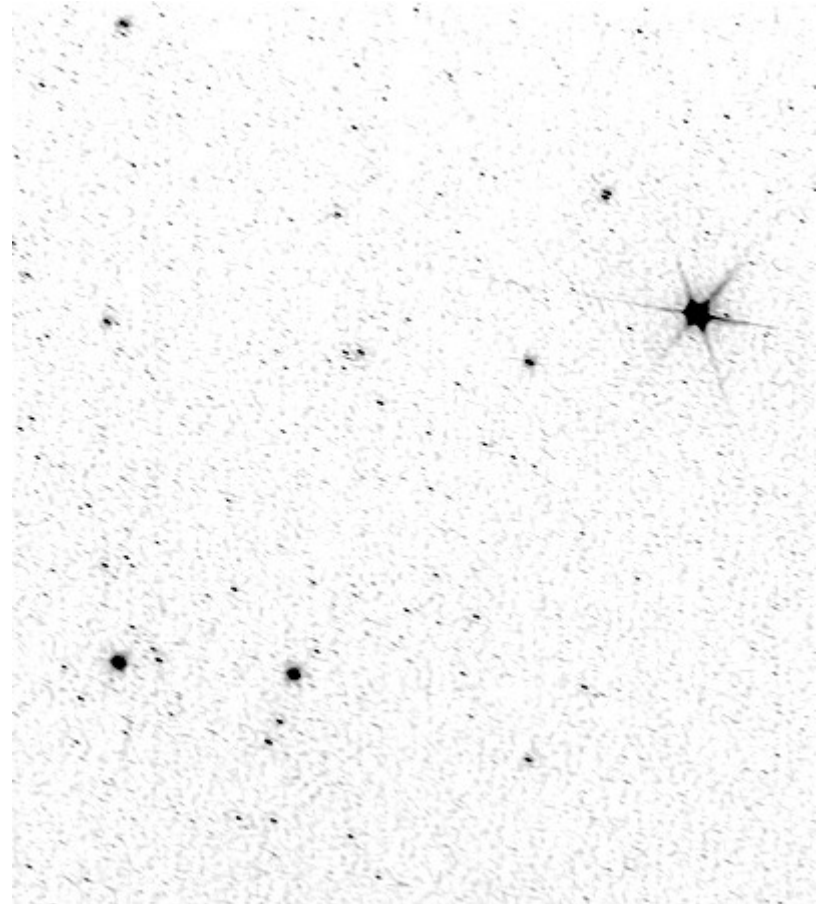
Known on island Saaremaa and Northern Estonia. Probably based on the analogy with **Great** and **Little Wain**.

From Palmse:

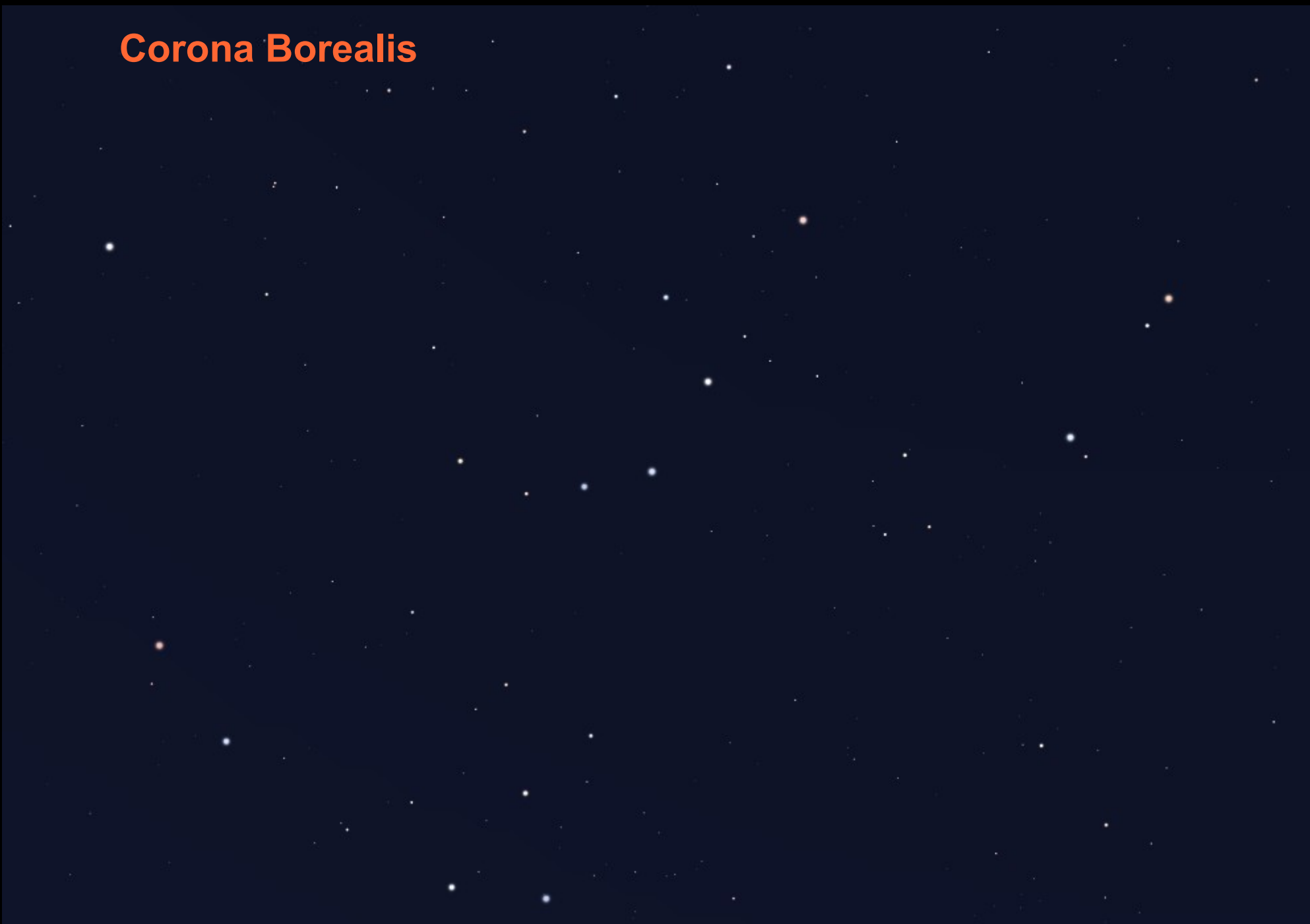
Ritch people have a lot of horses and oxes, they can use the big wains, but a poor freeman has nothing more than two coats.

He build two twowheeled carts and harnessed coats to haul his load. Grandfather put him to the Sky for his great assiduity.

Called **Kings Hat** In Southern Estonia.



Corona Borealis



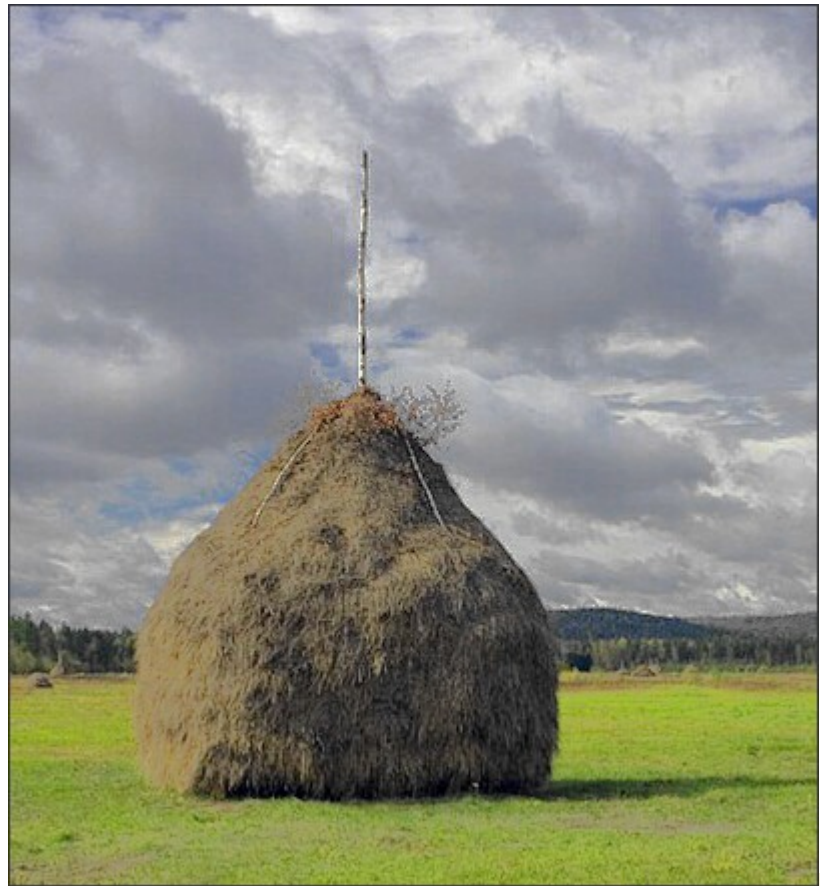
Corona Borealis



The Base of the Haystack

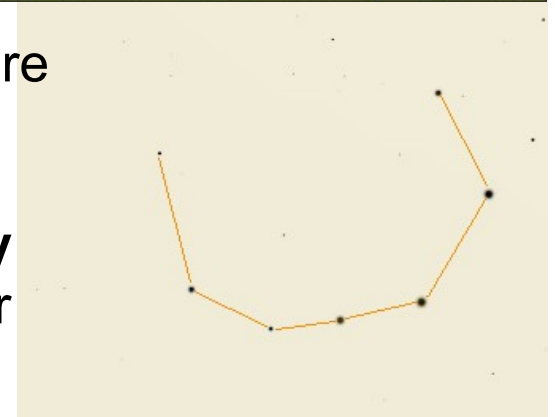
Known name for *Corona Borealis* in Estonian western region, two basic stories:

- ★ Stars are wooden sticks rammed into ground for building basement for the haystack. Naughty herdsmen pulled part of them out ...
- ★ Part of basement were burned by angry herdsboys from **Tartu county** (Paistu).



From the second sample is clear, as the haystack itself belongs to heavenly beings, destroyers are common people, who had power to interact there life.

- ★ From Southern Estonia its known as the **Heavenly Fence** for the cattle. The host let the opening for gate.



The Oldest

One of the oldest written ethnoastronomic texts is:

When the Sieve moves into the light of Dawn, the Bull moves into the furrow (Vestring)

from the Manuscript of the Estonian-German Dictionary by Salomo Heinrich Vestring (about 1720-1730). This saying is widely spread over Estonia and it means in astronomical language that if the Pleiades have a helical rising, it is time to start ploughing fields up.

Helical rising - if the raising star is first time visible before rising of the Sun, it has helical rising.



Fig. 18.—Ploughmen.—Fac-simile of a Miniature in a very ancient Anglo-Saxon Manuscript published by Shaw, with legend "God Spede ye Plough, and send us Korne & cnow."

A grand old man of Baltic Ethno-astronomy (at this time it was called **paleoastronomy**) Heino Eelsalu (1930-1998) mentioned in his book *Ajastult ajastule* (From Era to Era) that this saying must be at least 2000-3000 years old.



In this period was the point of Vernal Equinox (it moves due the precession 1 deg in 75 years) in constellation Taurus and helical rise of Pleiades was possible, if they raised significantly earlier than Sun. So the helical rise of this well known and specific star cluster indicates, that the vernal equinox (spring point) was passed and the spring began.

The great change from hunters community to the agricultural society was on Estonian area by archeological data about 5000 years ago. Pleiades was at that time easy visible morning constellation.

Conclusions

- ★ Big Dippers name **Great Wain** itself is borrowed from the Germanic people, probably the origin of the name *Elijahs Chariot* and the story about wolf and ox is from the paneuropean Catholic layer of the constellation names, spread at least German influenced area. The name *Sants Wain* connects Big Dipper directly with Saint.
- ★ A variety of names *Corona Borealis* (it is quite small and not very bright constellation) shows, that it was somehow important. And it was probably connected with interaction between different worlds.
- ★ The only bit of information we can somehow date from available material, is one saying. If the name of Pleiades *Sieve* has Swedish origin, it is possible, that the name Great Wain is also from this layer and older name *Odamus*, finnish *Otava* is much older.

