

Constellations

JAMA MAPUN, CAGAYAN DE SULU ISLAND, TAWI-TAWI ISLAND GROUP PROVINCE, SOUTHERN PHILIPPINES. *It is common for many people to use stars and constellations as guides when traveling or to mark seasons, but to the Jama Mapun of Cagayan de Sulu in Tawi-tawi, these are also linked to local folklore and major economic activities such as planting, fishing and hunting. The following documentation of Jama Mapun constellations is based on Eric Casiño's Jama Mapun ethnoecology: Economic and symbolic (of grains, winds and stars).*



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THE JAMA MAPUN has an extensive list of constellations, such that some star patterns do not even have English counterparts. Those that have are interpreted or seen differently, such as the Big Dipper which, to the Jama Mapun is *Bobo*, a fish-trap with a string tied to it. When many stars are seen in the *Bobo* constellation, it is a good sign for fishing. Meanwhile, two stars from the constellation Centaur is called *Anak datu*, as it is imagined as the two sons of a datu trying to spear a blowfish. Near it is the constellation Southern Cross, which to the locals represent the body of the blowfish (*Bunta*) being speared by the *Anak datu*. Orion's belt, meanwhile, is *Batik* or *Balatik* or the shaft of the spear-trap. The *Batik*, in turn, is seen as aimed at the constellation *Mopo* (pig) or Pleides in English. The *Mopo*, aside from being related to hunting, also signals the start of the planting season (at dawn, when the *Mopo* is at the three-o'clock position in the sky). Common in Southeast Asia, the Milky Way is seen as *Naga*, or a snake or dragon. The North Star is *Sibulut*, which is used for navigating; the Morning Star, *Kababasan* and the Evening Star, *Bintang Gauk*.

Among the agriculture-associated constellations, the *Tanggong* is the only pattern that does not resemble a plant. However, it is closely linked to their origin of rice planting myth which involves three personages – one male and two females traveling in a single line across the sky. Aside from the *Tanggong*, the *Niyu-niyu* which is a group of stars resembling a coconut palm (*niyu*) and *Niyu-niyu punggul*, which is seen as a crown of coconut leaves without a trunk, are constellations associated with planting (of coconuts). Meanwhile, the *Tendak* are three stars arranged in a triangle associated with sailing and wind prediction, since to the locals, it resembles a small walking fish found in swamps and mangroves. The *Lumba-lumba*, on the other hand, is a pattern named after the dolphin and is associated with wind prediction.

The Jama Mapun also has the *Sangat bawi*, or pig jaw, as the V-shape pattern resembles this. It is also associated with the *Batik* in a hunting legend. Lastly, they have the *Kabaw* (crab) which they imagine as the body and pincers of a crab.

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(opposite page) A Jama Mapun Sama anchoring her boat with a pole, having marked her sailing with the stars.