

# MATARIKI AND THE SEVEN SISTERS

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## Introduction

Since the dawn of time mankind has been fascinated by the night sky. It was widely thought that the stars were some kind of hard shelled hollow ball surrounding the earth and thus we have the term 'heavenly firmament'. In this presentation I propose to illustrate a relationship between some aspects of a group of stars and their importance to indigenous peoples and Freemasonry.

One of the Charges enjoined upon the Fellow Craft is to make a daily study of the seven liberal arts and sciences, of which the science of Astronomy is one. Astronomy is the last in the list of Arts and Sciences. From early times the lights of the night sky have been held in awe by generations, and have been used as a means of conveying messages of events that were to happen or those that have happened. We are all aware of the star of Bethlehem and the story it told and how it was used by the Magi to plan their journey to Bethlehem.

The Maori of New Zealand knew of the Star Cluster they called Matariki (Eyes of Ra who to them is the Sun God) and it is this story I wish to share with you today.

Before doing so we must understand many of the uses and titles of these celestial bodies.

## Celestial Objects and Freemasonry

### 1) *The role Astronomy has played on Masonic ritual*

Freemasonry abounds with allusions to various celestial objects and phenomena in addition to allegorical content, unique to Masonic Ritual. These can be understood to represent cycles such as the annual and daily solar circuits, planetary orbits and even axial precession.

Many of the edifices constructed by the Early Operative masons betray an inordinately high level of geometrical and astronomical proficiency with many oriented to astronomical events, such as the solstice and equinoxes. By marking the solstices, equinoxes and other phenomena, mankind gradually became able to gain a sense of space, time and the rhythms of

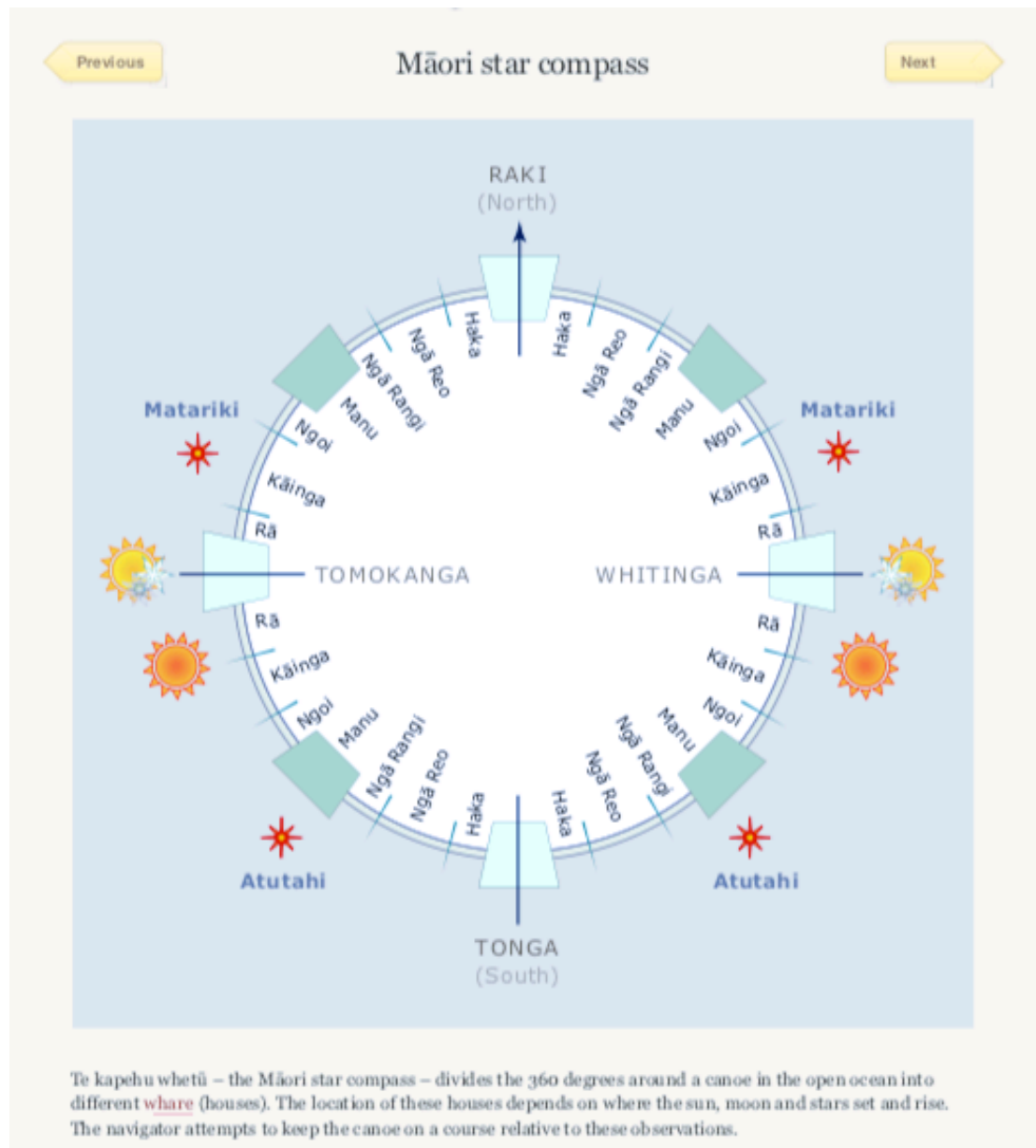
the Earth. By extrapolating the accumulated data and the procedures used in the observance of astronomical events, mankind was able to apply this knowledge to other areas such as agriculture, navigation and architecture.

## ***2) Role Astronomy has played on Masonic thought***

The abundance of allusions to various celestial objects which are unique to Masonic Ritual and can be understood to represent cycles such as the annual and diurnal solar circuits. There are various references in our ritual to the sun (Rising in the East and setting in the West) and the Moon and the Stars. Some say that the seven stars referred to in the ritual may be Pleiades. The circumambulation shows the direction of apparent movement of the sun, with the Junior Warden representing the sun's meridian, when it was time to call everyone from work to refreshment. The Senior Warden is placed in the West to mark the setting sun. The absence of officers placed in the North indicates a lack of light coming from that direction. Further astronomical references are found throughout the three degrees: The sun is in the centre of our system while the earth revolves on its axis, Jacobs Ladder, the three principal steps, the winding staircase, the Triple Tau, 'Wisdom Strength and Beauty', the three pillars, and the Point within a circle. Amazingly, there are seven references to Pleiades or the seven stars in the Old Testament of the Bible, but more of this later.

The connection between astronomy and freemasonry is ancient. If we were to imagine the Lodge Room to be a building minus a roof, and high twelve being Midday, we would be travelling through space on an earth that is turning and if you were facing west you would be turning backwards as the horizon is rising. It would then appear to us, the midday sun disappears below the western horizon, and all natural light would be diminished, except that which comes from the stars above. Just before nightfall a bright object appears near the western horizon, which is thought to be the planet Venus. In a Masonic Lodge Venus is shown as a star in the East above the Masters Chair, and it is from this position it is said that all learning has emanated.

## What is Astronomy and Matariki?



Astronomy is the branch of science that deals with celestial objects, space and the physical universe as a whole. This includes objects we can see with the naked eye such as the sun, moon,

planets and stars. Also included are objects that can only be seen with telescopes or other magnifying type instruments.

There are four types of Astronomy.

ASTROPHYSICS - applying the laws of physics in space

ASTROMETRY - mapping celestial bodies

ASTROGEOLOGY - Examining rocks, terrain, and material in space

ASTROBIOLOGY - Searching for life outside of Earth. Astronomy has and continues to revolutionize our thinking on a worldwide scale.

In the past Astronomy has been used to measure time, mark seasons and navigate the vast oceans. It is one of the oldest sciences and part of every cultures' history and roots. From early times the lights in the night sky have been held in awe by generations being used as a means of conveying messages of events to happen or have happened.

*The Importance Of Celestial Bodies/Astronomy Within Indigenous Societies.*

Staub writes in his paper *The Emblem of the Seven Stars*:

*"There is a notable constellation which can generally be seen from the entire habitable surface of our planet. Known to many as the Pleiades, these stars can be seen equally from Dunedin in Otago, New Zealand, and Poole in Dorset, England. Sir Francis Chichester (1901-1972), the famous sea and air navigator, an inventive world circumnavigator of great renown and accomplishments, had this to say in some of his early writings: "The Pleiades are considered to be a good test of eyesight. If an observer can discern seven stars in the group on a very clear night in England, he can take it that his eyesight is really excellent" (Staub 1991:1)*

For many Freemasons the group of seven stars has many different connotations around the world and the symbol of the seven stars and the stars themselves are around us all the time. As Freemasons we first encounter them on the Entered Apprentice tracing Board where on one of the earliest tracing Boards by John Cole shows seven stars in a circle around the moon. Nothing in any ritual or official explanation refers to the star group Pleiades. Some may argue that the seven stars on a tracing board are taken to be Pleiades but of more importance for some

is the number Seven. For example, the seven stars are linked with the seven days of the week, seven colours of the rainbow, and the anciently known seven planets.

Interestingly there are seven references in the Bible to seven stars:

- i. two by name, both in the book of Job: *He made all the Stars – the Beast, Orion, the Pleiades and the constellations of the southern hemisphere* (Job: 9-9); *Can you hold back the movements of the Stars? Are you able to restrain the Pleiades or Orion? (Job:38 – 31)*
- ii. One by reference in the book of Amos: *It is the Lord who **created the seven stars** and Orion, it is he who turns darkness into morning and day into night.* (Amos: 5-8),
- iii. And four references to seven stars in the Book of Revelations: Rev: 1-16, Rev: 1- 20, Rev: 2-1, Rev 3 -1.

Early indigenous peoples were able to travel far and wide due to their ability to read and navigate by the Stars. The local populace used the Stars for guidance in planting and fishing and travelling. To the Maori of New Zealand the star cluster Pleiades is known as Matariki (Eyes of Ra the sun god) or the seven sisters. In years gone by Matariki was thought to determine the success of the crop for the coming season, and it was important to recognise the part it played in nature's cycles. In Autumn, when Matariki disappears, it is the signal the time to gather and preserve the crops, and so it was an important marker on their harvest calendar. In Australia Star maps are so crucial to navigation that even some modern highway networks and towns are based on Aboriginal star maps (Fuller et al. 2014).

### **The sky is a reflection of the land**

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander traditions describe the land, sea, and sky as a unified 'cosmoscape'. The skyscape is often perceived as a reflection of the landscape, complete with rivers and forests inhabited with fish, birds, animals, and ancestral beings. In one Aboriginal tradition, the sky south of Adelaide is called ("*beyond the clouds in the sky*") where the primary sky ancestor Baiami lives. The Milky Way is often seen as a river, and stars represent waterholes, mountains, or other natural features.

These natural features, as well as human-made features, are used as waypoints for traveling people, revealing travel routes, places to stop for food and water, and housing. Travel across the landscape is encoded to memory in the form of song lines (song series). These are series of songs that tell the singer/traveler about the landscape, and where to find necessities.

Song series can stretch from coast to coast across Australia. Because they cross-different language boundaries, song series are also in multiple languages (which change when the traveler crosses into a new area). Aboriginal elders and knowledge custodians have shared some of their astronomical knowledge, which demonstrates the use of star maps as memory aids for navigating overland routes to important cultural ceremonies. The people had to find the best route from *Point-A to Point-B* (often separated by hundreds, or thousands, of kilometers) and know the best places to stop for shelter, food, water, and medicine. The people then had to find a way to encode all of the information about the journey to memory and pass it on to new generations.

The stars serve well for this function. Notable patterns of bright stars were used to represent important waypoints on the overland journey across country the star maps were not exact representations of the overland route But rather, the relationship between the location of a star in relation to the other stars and corresponding landscape features represented, were committed to memory (Fuller 2016).

These star maps are a means of teaching navigation for travelers outside of their own local country. The lines connecting the stars were used to denote the general pathways across the landscape, and travel was done by day, not night. When, after 1788, colonists ventured out and met with Aboriginal people of the region, the people took the colonists on the same travel routes. Where the Aboriginal people stopped for food and shelter, usually near a prominent water source, these places became settlements and later towns. The pathways between these towns became roads and highways. In fact, when many of the star maps are laid on top of existing Australian highway networks it can be seen that many of the Aborigine routes are being used today (see Clarke 2007-8 for more details).

### **How did the Māori use the stars to travel?**

At night the rising and setting of the stars align the canoe in a direction of travel through the night, until the Earth's own star, the sun, rises and is used at dawn and dusk. Navigators also used the direction of large ocean swells to guide them. As noted by Sir Percy Smith:

*“The great knowledge of the stars they possessed enabled them to guide their vessels from end to end of the Pacific. Having collected a considerable amount of knowledge of Astronomy and they gave names to all the principal stars as well as many constellations”* (Percy Smith 1922).

There are indications, too, that they were acquainted with the fact that the earth is round, or that it is not flat. They would of course, know this through their voyages, by the appearance of fresh stars as they progressed either north or south. In making long ocean voyages, the ancestors of the Maori carried on their vessels one or two expert star-gazers, men versed in the lore and the sailing-directions laid down by Kupe, who is said to have been the first Polynesian voyager to reach New Zealand, seem to be fairly explicit. They are as follows:

*“Keep the sun, moon, or Venus just to the right of the bow of the vessel, and steer nearly south-west.” (Percy Smith 1922)*

This voyage was made in November or December and the usual true course from Rarotonga (the supposed source of the start of the great migration) to Auckland is about SW by W. The stars under Matariki are in the East, while the stars known to Maori as Wero are in the west. These latter stars gave the sailing directions while the former or Matariki Stars denoted weather and seasons.

It has also been noted that steering in the longer voyages of Tahitian navigation was in the day and by the sun and in the night by the stars:

*“when setting out on a voyage, some particular star or constellation was selected as their guide in the night” (Ellis 1829).*

Few compass points have specific names; in most cases the wind-names were employed as such. “In olden times great stress was laid on this knowledge for the purpose of fishing, and especially for their long sea voyages from group to group” (Lewis 1972).

## **Pleiades In Folklore And Literature**

### **Japan**

Japan was the first automaker to use a Japanese word in its name – Subaru. Have you ever wondered what those stars represent and where the automaker got its name? Back in 1953 Fuji Heavy Industries was created with 5 separate companies. The Name Subaru is also the

Japanese name for a cluster of Stars known by many as Pleiades and according to Greek mythology they were once Atlas's Daughters.

You may be wondering why there are only six stars in the Subaru logo if in fact it is named after a constellation of seven daughters. The reason is that to the naked eye, the cluster of stars appears to only have six stars – two are so close together, they appear as one big star. In Subaru's logo the large star symbolizes Fuji Heavy Industries and the five smaller ones indicate the five companies that merged to form Fuji Heavy Industries. The emblem's background is nearly always blue, as the colour of the actual Pleiades stars are actually blue. The Subaru brand has established a universal brand identity thanks to a global use of the six star emblems.

### **Australia**

Depending on the language group or Clan there are several Aboriginal stories regarding Pleiades. Some Indigenous Australians believe the Pleiades was a woman who had been raped by the man in the moon. In a legend from the people of southeastern Australia, seven women who were the first to possess the secret of fire represented the Pleiades and each one carried live coals on the end of her digging stick. The legend continues with the women refusing to share their coals with anybody and they were ultimately tricked into giving their secrets. As a result the sisters were swept into the night sky and their glowing fire sticks became the bright stars of Pleiades cluster.

Another version from the central desert area tells of seven sisters being chased by a man. He tried to practice love magic on one of the sisters but she wanted nothing to do with him and ran away with her sisters. With the aid of the spirits of Uluru they were transformed into stars. The lover transforms himself into what is commonly called the morning star in Orion's belt and continues to chase the seven sisters across the sky. (See Star Cluster Pleiades in Folk Lore and Literature – Psy Minds.

<https://psy-minds.com/star-cluster-pleiades-folklore/>)

### **New Zealand**

Occurring in late June the winter solstice is seen by the New Zealand Maori as the middle of the winter season. It follows directly after the first sighting of Matariki in the dawn sky. This event marks the start of the Maori New Year and is said to be when the sun turned from his northern journey with his winter bride and began his journey back to his summer bride.



The Maori people have given names to the seven stars as follows:

- Matariki, the mother
- Papatuanuku The Grandmother:
- **Daughters**
- Tupu a Nuku: the eldest daughter
- Tupu -arangi: Loves to sing
- Waipunarangi: travels with her Grandmother
- Waiti and Waiata: Matariki's twins
- Uruangi: Races her sisters to be first.

For the purpose of this presentation I have decided to explain how these sisters can be related to our Masonic brethren. Each year Matariki the mother and her daughters journey across the sky to visit their Tupuna wahine (Grandmother) Papatuanuku.

Like many Masonic Brethren, yourselves included, travel great distances to be with OUR Brethren. While spending time there they learn from their Kuia (Our master) the skills and knowledge which they guard and pass on to other Brethren.

Tupu-a – nuku is the eldest daughter and spends time tending to plants. She pays special attention to making sure they have everything they need to grow and mature. When we see her shining we are reminded that we all have our own time and space which we need to grow and mature.

Tupu – a – rangi loves to sing and her Grandmother takes her to the forest to sing for all the children of Tanemahuta who is the God of the forest and all other creatures. Her beautiful voice revives the forest and all other creatures including the birds. Freemasons love to sing and many areas have their own Masonic choirs. Singing enhances the spirit of the Ceremony. As Freemasons we learn from Tupu-a -rangi the importance of sharing our gifts with others while appreciating those that are shared with us.

Waipunarangi, accompanies her Grandmother to the waters of the oceans, lakes, and rivers where she prepares the children of the God of the Sea to feed the people. And so we have the Stewards of the lodge performing this task, knowing that what you give to others in kindness will come back. It is a lesson that we should all learn.

Waiti and Waita are Matariki's twins and the Grandmother (our Master) knows that they would be able to care for the less able because they know about working as a team. When Brethren work together as a team amazing things can be achieved.

And so as Matariki and her daughters travel across the sky and many Masonic likeness's can be attributed to them. Matariki and her daughters travelling reminds us of our obligation as Freemasons to visit and support each other. The Grandmother, like our Master, prepares for the year ahead so that his lodge and time are not wasted and the Brethren are able to learn about Freemasonry.

Tupu -a – nuku is the eldest sister and spends her time paying special attention to making sure everything is needed. Tupu-a -nuku can be likened to the Lodge Director of Ceremonies whose job it is to see that every thing is in order.

As the year draws towards its shortest day in New Zealand and the air becomes cooler the Star Cluster of Matariki appears in the Southern sky. Traditionally for Maori the appearance of this Star Cluster signals the beginning of a time to remember the dead and celebrate the new beginnings. For other groups the rising of this Star Cluster also known as Pleiades, often marks important calendar points.

Matariki to the Maori people refers to the mother and the six other stars are her daughters. Matariki as the mother does what all-good mothers do watches over and helping her daughters. With her support, encouragement and supervision her children will be able to do their very best.

Freemasonry is like Matariki and her daughters with Past Masters, Grand Officers and Brethren of long standing all able to watch over the Brethren, guide them and ensure they do not make mistakes. A lodge with a number of Matariki Brethren is very lucky and they are to be treated with respect.

## **Matariki in Modern Times**

*So what has Matariki to do with modern times?*

A letter to the Dominion Post some time ago suggested that "However, maybe the promotion of Matariki, as a mid winter event, could be extended to include all other cultures." On June 24, 2022 a public holiday was declared in answer to many requests. For the first time in New

Zealand history the people of this country will commemorate a time that is meaningful to the Maori people and will be celebrated by all cultures. Many and varied are the celebrations and they link us all with our land, our nature and our people.

The Matariki spirit has also touched freemasonry. In the Masonic district of Hauraki a new lodge has been formed. With the permission of V.W Bro Lukaszwich the District Grand Master at that time was given permission to relate the beginning of the proposed new Lodge. The Hauraki District No 5 actively promoted the concept of a single, income generated Masonic Centre and with it the establishment of a new lodge within the Northern District. The lodge was consecrated in the second week of October 2019 and was named Lodge Matariki No 476. The foundation Committee decided not to have a geographical name as the majority of the Lodges in the district are currently identified in such a manner. By using a Masonic name it would only mean something to Freemasons so it was decided to have a modern sounding name. This to the public and others in general, reflects the multicultural society that we are as a nation. The committee agreed on the name Matariki for the new lodge because it needs to be for, and reflect the future.

Matariki in Maori refers to remembering the dead but also new life and the planting of new crops. Masonically, it represents the constellation of stars of the First Degree tracing board referred to as Pleiades, the Maori word for Matariki.

## **Conclusion**

It has been my pleasure to bring you the stories of Matariki (Pleiades) and to be fair I have only scratched the surface. There are many stories still to be told but this could be for another time and by another presenter. The high visibility of the star cluster Pleiades in the night sky has guaranteed a special place in many cultures both ancient and Modern - including Freemasonry. Furthermore, numerous cultures, before, after and independent of the Greeks, have incorporated this star cluster into their legends and beliefs to such an extent that they have become the ingredients of which basic themes of human life emerge and being universal and innate, their influence can be detected in the form of myths, symbols, rituals and instincts of all human beings. For modern day people the study of the stars and numbers should not be taken for granted and as Freemasons we are urged to make a daily advancement in our knowledge.

**Quote:**

*All wish to possess knowledge, but few, comparatively speaking are prepared to pay the price.*

**Rudyard Kipling**

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