

The more I have learnt about Astrology and Cultural Astronomy, the more I enjoy the history of the constellations. I would like to look further into the ethnohistory and astromythology relating the constellation The Pleiades.

Working Title

The Pleiades: Commonalities of astromythology in geographically, socially and historically isolated cultures.

Why

The Pleiades is a constellation that is recognised by many ancient cultures, first appearing in Chinese literature in 2357 BC.¹ Schaefer (2006, pp. 100) attributes naming rights of The Pleiades to the ancient Sumerians, whose constellation was ultimately adopted by the Greeks, and transmitted into western culture.² Recognised, and often commented on by authors, are perceived similarities between myths of differing cultures, separated geographically, socially and historically.³

To my knowledge, despite the prolific commentary as to worldwide astromythological similarities, there appears to be no comparative study of these commonalities concerning the astromythology relating to The Pleiades from geographically, socially and historically disconnected cultures.⁴

Context

Recognition and anthropomorphic interpretation of the constellations is ubiquitous throughout the world's cultures. Mythology relating to the constellation of The Pleiades is evident in many ancient socially and geographically isolated cultures including (but not limited to) the Maya of South American, North American Indian culture (Iroquois Nation), and the Australian Aboriginals.⁵ Authors have long commented on commonalities existing between geographically, socially and historically isolated myths, and superficially there appears to be thematic similarities between myths of different origins, but detailed analysis has not been undertaken.⁶ A large number of myths associated with The Pleiades are dominated by the relation of The Pleiades to the constellation of Orion (who is regularly cast as hunting or chasing the constellation), or become the focus of creations myths (i.e. Mayan), and others signal renewal and agriculture.⁷ In Greek mythology, The Pleiades are mentioned as

¹ Savill, M. 1960 *Herman Leight: Pre-Inca Art and Culture*. Translated from the German by Mervyn Savill. The Orion Press, New York, pp. 62; Schaefer, B. E. The Origin of the Greek Constellations. *Scientific American*, Vol 295, No. 5 (November 2006), pp. 96-101 [Hereafter Schaefer 2006]; Miller, R. Pleiades perceived: MUL.MUL to Subaru. *Journal of American Oriental Society* Vol. 108 No. 1 (Jan- Mar 1988), pp. 1-25 [Hereafter Miller 1988]; Horowitz, Wayne. Mesopotamian Star Lists. In: (Ed) Clive Ruggles *Handbook of Archaeoastronomy and Ethnoastronomy* 2015, Chapter 168, Pages 1829-1833 [Hereafter Horowitz 2015]; Allen, Richard H. 1963 *Star Names: Their Lore and Meaning*. Dover Publications, New York. Pp.392 [Hereafter Allen 1963]

² Schaefer 2006 pp. 100; Andrews 2018 pp. 96; Thompson, Gary 2018 Origins of the Ancient Constellations by John Rogers; Ancient Zodiacs, Star Names, and Constellations: Essays and Critiques <http://members.westnet.com.au/gary-david-thompson/page90.html> Accessed 20th February 2019 [Hereafter Thompson 2018]

³ Rogers John, H. Origins of the ancient constellations: I. The Mesopotamian Traditions. *Journal of British Astronomical Association*. 180.1, 1998:9-28 [Hereafter Rogers 1998a]; Andrews 2018 pp. 65; Rogers, J. H. Origins of the ancient constellations: II. The Mediterranean traditions. *Journal of the British Astronomical Association*, 1998 vol.108, no.2, p.80; Lansing John G. Pleiades, Orion and Mazzaroth. *Job XXXVIII.*, 31, 32. *Hebraica*, Vol. 1, No. 4 (Apr., 1885), pp. 236-241

⁴ Andrews, Munya 2018 *The Seven Sisters of Pleiades: Stories from around the World*. Spinifex Press Geelong Victoria [Hereafter Andrews 2018]; Tweit Susan J. Chapter Title: The Pleiades. Book Title: Search For A Common Language: Environmental Writing And Education. Book Editor(s): Melody Graulich, Paul Crumbley. Published by: University Press of Colorado, Utah State University Press. (2005)

⁵ Andrews 2018 pp. 97; Beauchamp W M Onondaga tale of the Pleiades, *Journal of American Folklore* 1900 13:281-282 [Hereafter Beauchamp 1900]; Buckstaff, RN Stars and Constellations of a Pawnee Sky Map. *American Anthropologist* 1927 29: 279-285 [Hereafter Buckstaff 1927]; Campion Nicholas 2008 *A History of Western Astrology: Volume I The Ancient World*. Continuum Press. Pp.11; E C Krupp 1991 *Beyond the Blue Horizon: Myths and Legends of the Sun, Moon and Stars and Planets*. Oxford University Press Pp. 242-49;

⁶ Andrews 2018 p. 54.

⁷ Rogers, J. H. Origins of the ancient constellations: II. The Mediterranean traditions. *Journal of the British Astronomical Association*, 1998 vol.108, no.2, p.79-89 [Hereafter Rogers 1998b]; Ceci, Lynn Watchers of Pleiades: Ethnoastronomy among Native Cultivators in Northeastern North America. *Ethnohistory*, Vol. 25, No. 4 (Autumn, 1978), pp. 301-317; Evans 1998 pp.42; Olcott, W T 2004 *Star Lore: Myths, Legends, and Facts*. Dover Publications NY. Pp. 401; Coe 2011 pp. 222;

navigational aids (due to their helical rising in the month of May), and as a result of their helical rising, have been considered “watchers” and timekeepers in many cultures.⁸ It has been argued that two versions of the zodiac may have been developed: the first for ritual purposes, the second more rustic version for farming purposes.⁹ Other myths, such as the ethnoastronomy of ancient Mesopotamia and Sumerian civilisations, are believed to be dovetailed with practical calendar timings, for activities such as farming and the coming of the rains.¹⁰

An obvious comparison includes the repeating number of seven (a conclusion due to the number of stars that can be seen easily with the naked eye, excepting of course the Japanese constellation labelled Subaru), overwhelmingly the constellation is viewed as female, and when in association with the constellation of Orion, Orion is the hunter or chasing The Pleiades.¹¹ There will be no doubt more similarities and differences elucidated as different astromyths are analysed.

How

The intended methodology will be a literature based research concerning the astromythology of different cultures relating to The Pleiades. Literature will be sourced using such academic databases as JSTOR, review of original research (i.e. Andrews 2018), and primary sources [such as Hesiod (*Work and Days*)] as appropriate.

Myths from varying geographical locations (i.e. North and South American, Chinese, Indian, Australian Aboriginal, Greek) will be sourced to provide a worldwide representation of astromythology that relates to The Pleiades.¹² Thematic variables will be catalogued and statistical analysis conducted to determine if the commonalities of differing astromythologies are real or imagined.¹³

As a secondary aim, if time permits, I would like to conduct a further evaluation on selected myths comparing them to modern astronomical findings.¹⁴

⁸ Evans, J. 1998 *The History and Practice of Ancient Astronomy*. Oxford University Press. Pp. 42 [Hereafter Evans 1998]; Coe, Michael 2011 *The Maya* Eighth Edition, Thames and Hudson pp. 222 [Hereafter Coe 2011]; Aveni, Anthony 2008 *People and the Sky: Our ancestor and the Cosmos*. Thames and Hudson, pp. 47; Miller 1988 pp. 3; Allen 1963 pp. 395; Jenks, Stuart. Astrometeorology in the Middle Ages *Isis*, Vol. 74, No. 2 (Jun., 1983), pp. 185-210; Thompson, J.E. S. Maya Astronomy. *Philosophical Transactions of the Royal Society of London, Series A. Mathematical and Physical Sciences*, Vol. 276, No. 1257, The Place of Astronomy in the Ancient World (May 2, 1974), pp. 83-98; Oxby, Clare. A Review of African Ethno-Astronomy: With Particular Reference to Saharan Livestock-Keeper. *La Ricerca Folklorica*, No. 40, *Società pastorali d'Africa e d'Asia* (Oct., 1999), pp. 55-64 [Hereafter Oxby 1999];

⁹ Schaefer 2006, pp 96; A. M. Hocart The Common Sense of Myth *American Anthropologist, New Series*, Vol. 18, No. 3 (Jul. - Sep., 1916), pp. 307-318 [Hereafter Hocart 1916]; Rogers 1998 pp. 9; Foreshaw, Peter 2013 Chemistry, that Starry Science. In: (Eds Nicholas Campion and Liz Greene) *Sky and Symbol: Proceedings of the Ninth Annual Sophia Centre Conference, 2011*. Sophia Centre Press 2013. Pp. 171; McLeod Alexis 2016 *Astronomy in the Ancient World: Early and Modern Views on Celestial Events*. Springer Switzerland Pp. 27 [Hereafter Alexis 2016]; Rogers 1998a, pp. 25; Laouli 2006 pp. 6; Rogers, 1998b pp. 81.

¹⁰ Rogers, J. H. Origins of the ancient constellations: I. The Mesopotamian traditions. *Journal of the British Astronomical Association*, 1998 vol.108, no.1, p.9-28 [Hereafter Rogers 1998a]; Laouli, A. The Greek Myth of Pleiades in the Archaeology of Natural Disasters. Decoding, Dating and Environmental Interpretation. *Mediterranean Archaeology and Archaeometry*, 2006 Vol. 6, No. 2, pp. 5-22; Oxby 1999 pp. 59;

¹¹ Andrews 2018 pp. 58.; Beauchamp 1916 pp. 281;

¹² Most, G. 2018 *Edited and translated by Glenn Most. Hesiod Theogony. Works and Days. Testimonia*. Loeb Classical Library.; Andrews 2018; Rogers 1998a; Rogers 1998b.

¹³ Rogers, 1998; Andrews 2018; Schaefer 2006; Beauchamp 1900; Hocart 1916; Alexis 2016; Buckstaff 1927

¹⁴ Thompson, J.E. S. Maya Astronomy. *Philosophical Transactions of the Royal Society of London, Series A. Mathematical and Physical Sciences*, Vol. 276, No. 1257, The Place of Astronomy in the Ancient World (May 2, 1974), pp. 83-98