

Kia ora, gday and welcome to the History of Aotearoa New Zealand, Episode 15: Matariki. As those of you who follow me on social media may know, I had to delay the next episode by a week due to having to go to Hamilton Fieldays for work, which if you went there by the way, maybe you met me and didn't know it! Anyway, I did that cause it was so tiring and I got no work done that week so I delayed the next episode to next week but I decided to give you a quick and dirty episode to make up for it on an event that is coming up very soon, which is of course Matariki!

'What's Matariki?' I hear the overseas listeners cry. Well, Matariki is the name of the Maori new year which occurs around the end of May or sometime in June, July in the middle of winter, cause remember, we live backwards down here. Matariki is signalled by the rising of the star cluster (not constellation, apparently there is a difference) of the same name. Again, I hear the overseas listeners cry 'but I've never heard of the Matariki star cluster!' Actually, yes you have, just by a different name! For most of you, you probably know Matariki as Pleiades or the Seven Sisters. It's known by all sorts of names all over the world, such as Makali'i, eyes of royalty, by the Hawaiians, Subaru (yes, that Subaru), meaning gathered together, by the Japanese and Messier 45 by nerds. The cluster contains about 500 stars but only seven to nine are visible to the naked eye with it being one of the closest clusters to Earth at 440 light years away, which is still pretty far. As I mentioned, Matariki signals the Maori new year as it rises low in the north east in mid-winter, appearing in the tail of the Milky Way just before dawn. The celebration of Matariki takes place over days or even months but is held at different times depending on the iwi. Some would start when Matariki was first spotted by the lookouts who keep any eye out for it before the dawn, others start at the rise of the next full moon or at the next new moon. If you want to find Matariki, it's actually pretty straightforward. Start with the southern cross, which will be upside down at this time of year and go left until you find Orions belt. To the bottom left of the belt is a triangle of stars named after a Tainui spade and to the lower left of that is a bright star cluster called Matariki! But just hold on there a minute before you run outside. Remember, if you are in the northern hemisphere, that won't work, all the stars will be the wrong way round or not visible at all, in the case of the southern cross.

As we already know, Maori explained their world through myth and Matariki was no exception. The word Matariki means eyes of god after the fact that Tawhirimatea, god of winds and storms, in his anger when his parents were separated, he ripped out his eyes and crushed them, throwing them onto the chest of his father to become Matariki. This is also said to be the reason why the winds come from all directions, because Tawhirimatea is blind and trying to feel his way around. Matariki is also said to be a mother surrounded by her six daughters who appear to assist Tama-nui-te-ra, the sun after his winter journey has left him weakened. They are also said to come help their tupuna wahine, their grandmother, Papatuanuku, using their unique gifts to bring mauri, life force, back to her as well as learn new skills and guard them. Tupu-a-nuku or Pleione is the oldest and tends to the plants with Papa, making sure they grow big and strong. She is a symbol that we each have our special time and place and grow our pukenga, strengths. Tupu-a-rangi or Atlas sings for the children of Tanemahuta, reviving the forests, birds as well as the lizards. From her we learn the importance of sharing our gifts with others and appreciating those shared with us. Waipunarangi or Electra goes with Papa to the oceans, lakes and rivers to prepare Tangaroa's children, the fish, to feed the people. Papa also teaches her how the water spills from her lover, Rangi to water people, animals and plants as well as how it returns to him from the heat of Tama-nui-te-ra. She lets us know that if you give to others, that kindness will be returned to you. Waiti and Waita or Taygeta and Maia are the twins that care for the insects. The twins know about teamwork, just like insects and help them with pollinating or ants with building to help the plants grow. Through them we learn how to be a team through altruism and supporting one another. Ururagi or Merope always races to her

grandmothers arms to hear her stories which puts Papa in the right mood after the cold and darkness of winter and helps prepare her for her other mokopuna. She reminds us that a good attitude is the key to success. Matariki herself or Alycone watches over her tamariki, children, to ensure they do their best.

Although Matariki is used by most iwi as the signal of the new year, some use Puanga, commonly called Rigel which is part of the Orion constellation. The reason for this isn't some sort of doctrinal difference ala the Great Schism as the iwi that follow this still recognise Matariki. It's more a practicality as the areas where this tradition is prevalent, namely Taranaki, Wanganui and the West Coast of the South Island, all have large mountains to the east of them, blocking their view of Matariki itself. Like her counterpart, Puanga is associated with good harvests as around the time it rises, kereru are fat from eating miro and tawa berries, which ferment in their stomach, which of course makes them drunk and easy to catch. The first bird of the catch was usually given to the most senior woman in the whanau and the stomach was eaten by pregnant women to quell food cravings and ensure the food they ate was healthy and nutritious.

Given that Matariki is at the end of autumn and the start of winter, it was a celebration of the recent harvest. The stores were full of preserved meat, vege and fish and was a time of singing, dancing and feasting due to the variety and abundance of food. It was also a time to look ahead as Matariki was used to determine the next planting season, if the stars were bright and clear, the next harvest would be good and planting would begin in September. If they were dim though, a cold winter was in store and planting would be delayed to October. Matariki would later disappear from the sky in April, which would indicate the time for harvest and preserving crops, cementing it as a crucial part of the planting and harvest cycle. Like many new years traditions though, Matariki was as much about looking back at that the year that was as much as it looking forward to the year that will be. In amongst the revelry and joy, there was always a hint of sadness as this time was also to remember the those who had passed on during the year. Some more modern traditions have people saying the names of the dead to the stars or opening a hangi to warm the stars after their cold winter as some believe the stars hold the souls of the departed. Something really interesting Maori did during this time though was that they flew kites!

There are 17 known types of traditional Maori kites but only three types have survived in seven specimens found in London, Hawaii, Auckland and Wellington. Some were shaped like birds, such as the manu totoriwai, manu meaning kite, which was meant to look like a robin or the manu kaka, which was meant to look like, well, a kaka. Both took much skill to make, usually being made by high ranking men, though elders were said to be the only ones who knew the spell that made a kite fly well. One of the largest kites was the manu kahu, the harrier-hawk kite, which was documented in 1850 by artist Charles Barraud. It was 1.5m high with a wingspan of 3.6m and had a mask bearing a moko attached. There were also kites similar to this that were meant to look like men with wings and had masks with teeth, moko and hair made of hawk feathers. It was supposedly the tribal kite of Ngati Porou of East Cape. Another large kite was the manu whara which was tapu and only made by priests for divination, requiring several men to fly it. It was made of tree roots, raupo and toetoe, that fluffy stuff you see at the beach in the flax. Anyway, the sticks of these kites projected up and could injure or kill if the kite crashed. Another type of kite made by Ngai Tahu of the South Island was called rakau-he-whaka, which was two sticks in a T shape flown by a line of young men and some times women and elders in competitions. Children also had their own smaller versions as well that they could handle on their own.

Matariki has been celebrated for hundreds of years all the way up to the 20th century, where it died for a bit with the last festival being recorded in the 1940s. It was later revived in 2000 to a crowd of

500, then 15,000 and has just grown from there until today where it is so popular there are regular calls for it to be made into a national holiday, replacing Queen's birthday. Today the festival is celebrated with waka races, kite flying, both modern and traditional, as well as events related to Maori arts, crafts, food and conservation. Those of you in Wellington likely received a booklet about all the events going on in the city this year. Matariki has also increased the interest in traditional Maori navigation techniques, as it was used to navigate across the Pacific with some people sailing from Rarotonga to Aotearoa using only traditional sailing and navigation methods. In 2019, the year this episode is being recorded, the Matariki festival proper begins on the 25th June, in 2020 it will start on the 13th of July and in 2021 the 2nd July. So if you are in Aotearoa New Zealand I'd encourage you to get involved in your local events and if you live overseas, maybe take your kids out to fly some kites. Or if you don't have kids, do it anyway! This year is also the 250th anniversary of the arrival of Captain James Cook to Aotearoa which will involve a flotilla of traditional Maori and European vessels travelling around the country, including a replica Endeavour, Cook's ship on his first voyage. It might be worth giving it a look if it is coming to a port near you!

If you want to send me feedback, ask a question, suggest a topic or just have a chinwag you can reach me through email at historyaotearoa@gmail.com or Twitter at History Aotearoa or Facebook at History Aotearoa New Zealand Podcast. Don't forget to rate us on iTunes or your preferred podcast platform and to tell your friends to help us grow and teach more people about the history of our island nation! Have a safe, fun Matariki and as always, haere tu atu, hoki tu mai. See you next time!