

Blog Two

Aboriginal Song Lines and Creation Ancestors

By Mary Moynihan



As part of the creation stories of traditional Aboriginal culture there is a belief that their 'creation ancestors travelled across the country creating the landscape, the animals and the law under which human society was to live. The journeys of these ancestral beings across the country make up a song line'¹.

A song line is a creation storyline that crosses the country 'putting all geographical and sacred sites into place in aboriginal culture'². Sacred ancestral stories are passed down from generation to generation through song lines telling the creation story of a particular piece of land and the cultural story of its people, as well as defining the land that people live on. The song cycles create a kind of cultural network that criss-crosses the landscape highlighting ancient sites situated along the song lines, tied together through creation narratives. The spirit of the ancestor beings who created the song lines live on in the landscape, animals and people as an ongoing presence and re-creating a song line today is a way to remember not only the landscape and the creation myths but the stories of the people themselves which can be expressed through songs brought to life by each generation.

¹ <https://japingkaaboriginalart.com/articles/songlines-important-aboriginal-art/>

² <https://japingkaaboriginalart.com/articles/songlines-important-aboriginal-art/>

One story associated with the song lines is the Seven Sisters Mina Mina Jukurrpa story, a woman's 'dreaming site' situated in the Tanami Desert near Salt Lake country in Australia. Dreamtime may be used to describe the 'unique stories and beliefs' as well as religious beliefs owned and held by different Aboriginal groups . . . _the Dreaming - or Jukurrpa in Warlpiri language - is seen as going from the past to the present to the future all at once, so it is something that sits outside ordinary timelines'.

The Seven Sisters refers to a group of stars in the sky known as Pleiades which can be seen in the night sky in the Northern and Southern hemispheres. In ancient Greek mythology the Seven Sisters stars are called Maia, Alcyone, Asterope, Celaeno, Taygete, Electra, and Merope. Their parents were Atlas, a Titan commanded by the god Zeus to hold up the earth, and Pleione, the mythical protectress of sailors'.

After a chance meeting with the hunter Orion, the Pleiades and their mother became the objects of his pursuit. To protect them from Orion's relentless amorous advances, Zeus changed them into a flock of doves which he then set in the heavens. Zeus was also rumoured to have fathered children with three of the sisters. The Seven Sisters are also known as the 'Water Girls' or the 'Ice Maidens', due to their association with water, be it seas, rivers, rain, hail, snow, ice or frost. The Greek legends often refer to the sisters as 'Oceanids'. Some sources claim that the name 'Pleiades' originates from the ancient Greek word 'plein', meaning 'to sail'.³

Within Aboriginal culture the Pleiades group of seven stars or Seven Sisters are a dreaming story related to an ancient song line that travels across Australia from the central desert up to the west coast. In the seven sisters dream time the stars are the

'Napaljarri sisters being chased across land and sky by Jukurra-Jukurra (the morning star), a Jakamarra man in love with the seven sisters, specifically fixated on the oldest sister. When on Martu country, where the seven sisters take humanoid form and live on the ground, they're known as Minyipuru. As they travel further east and decide to fly through the sky to escape their lustful

³ <http://lucindariley.co.uk/myths-and-legends/>

pursuer (and at times avoid country belonging to others), they switch languages and become known as the Kungkarangkalpa'.⁴

According to the myth, both the man and the woman have the ability to transform or 'shape-shift' with the man using various disguises such as a snake or a shaded tree or tempting fruit, in his efforts to try and capture and control the women. But the women are strong and clever and use various guises to outwit him and stay out of his control. They can change shape into rocks, trees or flowers.

'Although he succeeds once in hoodwinking and brutalising the eldest sister, causing her to become dreadfully ill, ultimately the sisters, in a convincing and intelligent expression of female solidarity, outwit their antagonist'.⁵

There is a mystery to the story of the Seven Sisters as there is with all mythical tales and adventures. The actual stars in the night sky that make up the Pleiades are often referred to in both Eastern and Western culture as the 'sailing stars' guiding seafarers to safety. The story of the seven sisters riding across the desert fleeing a sorcerer can be seen as a story of survival and solidarity as people flee from persecution in an effort to create a better world to live in. The sisters are not weak or victims, they are strong and defiant in their efforts to remain free. They are the warrior hunters in their attempts to continue to shine bright and to maintain a space that is their own. They are strong warrior women and their presence can be found in all cultures from Aboriginal to European culture offering key role models for young people.

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⁴ <https://sinchi-foundation.com/news/dreamtracking-pleiades-worlds-oldest-civilization/>

⁵ <https://sinchi-foundation.com/news/dreamtracking-pleiades-worlds-oldest-civilization/>

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