

**Periander**, **Pittacus**, **Solon**, and the astronomer **Thales**; again in the **Alexandrian Literary Pleiad**, or the **Tragic Pleiades**, instituted in the 3d century B. C. by **Ptolemy Philadelphus**, and composed of the seven contemporary poets, variously given, but often as **Apollonius of Rhodes**, **Callimachus** or **Philiscus**, **Homer the Younger of Hierapolis in Caria**, **Lycophron**, **Nicander**, **Theocritus**, and our **Aratos**; in the **Literary Pleiad of Charlemagne**, himself one of the Seven; in the **Great Pléiade of France**, of the 16th century, brought together in the reign of **Henri III**, some say by **Ronsard**, the "Prince of Poets," others by **d'Aurat**, or **Dorat**, the "Modern Pindar," called "**Auratus**," either in punning allusion to his name or from the brilliancy of his genius, and the "Dark Star," from his silence among his companions; and in the **Lesser Pléiade**, of inferior lights, in the subsequent reign of **Louis XIII**. Lastly appear the **Pleiades of Connecticut**, the popular, perhaps ironical, designation for the seven patriotic poets after our Revolutionary War: **Richard Alsop**, **Joel Barlow**, **Theodore Dwight**, **Timothy Dwight**, **Lemuel Hopkins**, **David Humphreys**, and **John Trumbull**,—all good men of Yale.

I have not been able to learn when, and by whom, the titles of the seven sisters were applied to the individual stars as we have them; but now they are catalogued nine in all, the parents being included. These last, however, seem to be a comparatively modern addition, the first mention of them that I find—in **Riccioli's *Almagestum Novum*** of 1651—reading:

Michaël Florentius Langrenius <sup>1</sup> illarum exactam figuram observavit, & ad me misit, in qua additæ sunt duæ Stellæ aliis innominatæ, quas ipse vocat Atlantem, & Pleionem; nescio an sint illæ, quas Vendelinus ait observari tanquam novas, quia modò apparent, modò latent.

. . . the great and burning star,  
Immeasurably old, immeasurably far,  
Surging forth its silver flame  
Through eternity, . . . Alcyone!

Archibald Lampman's *Alcyone*.

η, or Fl. 25, 3, greenish yellow.

**Alcyone** represents in the sky the Atlantid nymph who became the mother of **Hyrieus** by **Poseidon**; but, though now the **Light of the Pleiades**, its mythological original was by no means considered the most beautiful. **Riccioli** wrote the word **Alcione** and **Alcinoe**, and some early manuscripts have **Altione**.

The early Arabs called it **Al Jauz**, the Walnut; **Al Jauzah** or **Al Wasat**, the Central One; and **Al Na'ir**, the Bright One;—all of **Al Thurayya**. The

<sup>1</sup> This Michel Florent van Langren was of Antwerp, a contemporary and friend of Riccioli, and associated with him in giving names to the various features of the moon's surface.

later Al Achsasi added to this list **Thaur al Thurayya**, which, literally the Bull of the Pleiades, *i. e.* the Leading One, probably was a current title in his day, for his Italian contemporary Riccioli said, in his *Astronomia Reformata*, that the *lucida* "Alcinoe" was **Altorich non Athorrie**. Hipparchos has been supposed to allude to it in his  $\delta\zeta\upsilon\varsigma$ , and  $\delta\zeta\upsilon\tau\alpha-\alpha\varsigma$ , τῆς Πλειάδος, the Bright One, and the Brightest One, of the Pleiad. Yet, in the face of these epithets, Ptolemy apparently did not mention it in the *Syntaxis*; while Bailly, in his edition of Hyde's translation of Ulug Beg's *Tables*, affixed Flamsteed's 25 and Bayer's  $\eta$  to the 32d star of Taurus, which is described as *stella externa minuta vergiliarum, quae est ad latus boreale*,—our Atlas.

In Babylonia it determined the 4th ecliptic constellation, **Temennu**, the Foundation Stone.

In India it was the junction star of the *nakshatras* Krittikā and Rohini, and individually **Amba**, the Mother; while Hewitt says that in earlier Hindu literature it was **Arundhati**, wedded to Vashishṭha, the chief of the Seven Sages, as her sisters were to the six other Rishis of Ursa Major; and that every newly married couple worshiped them on first entering their future home before they worshiped the pole-star. He thinks this a symbol of the prehistoric union of the northern and southern tribes of India.

We often see the assertion that our title is in no way connected with Ἁλκυῶν, the Halcyon, that "symbolic or mystical bird, early identified with the Kingfisher," the ornithological *Alcedo* or *Ceryle*; so that although the myth of the Halcyon Days, that "clement and temperate time, the nurse of the beautiful Halcyon,"

When birds of calm sit brooding on the charmed wave,

is not yet understood, some of Thompson's conjectures as to its stellar aspect will be found interesting. He writes that

the story originally referred to some astronomical phenomenon, probably in connexion with the Pleiades, of which constellation Alcyone is the principal star. In what appears to have been the most vigorous period of ancient astronomy (not later than 2000 B. C., but continuing long afterwards to influence legend and nomenclature) the sun rose at the vernal equinox, in conjunction with the Pleiad, in the sign Taurus: the Pleiad is in many languages associated with bird-names . . . and I am inclined to take the bird on the bull's back in coins of Eretria, Dicaea, and Thurii for the associated constellation of the Pleiad. . . . Suidas definitely asserts that the Pleiades were called Ἀλκυόνες. At the winter solstice, in the same ancient epoch, the Pleiad culminated at nightfall in mid-heaven. . . . This culmination, between three and four months after the heliacal rising of the Pleiad in Autumn, was, I conjecture, symbolized as the nesting of the Halcyon. Owing to the antiquity and corruption of the legend, it is impossible to hazard more than a conjecture; but that the phenomenon was in some form an astronomic one I have no doubt.

**Mädler** located in Alcyone the centre of the universe, but his theory has been shown to be fallacious. There is no satisfactory reason for his conclusion, and not much more for Miss Clerke's remarks as to the probable size and distance of Alcyone,—that it shines to its sister stars with eighty-three times the lustre of Sirius in terrestrial skies, while its intrinsic brilliancy, as compared with that of the sun, is 1000 times greater. All this rests upon the extremely doubtful assumption of a parallax of  $0''.013$  deduced from the star's proper motion.

It culminates on the 31st of December.

The three little companions, easily visible with a low-power, form a beautiful triangle  $3'$  away from Alcyone.

Multi ante occasum Maiae coepere.

Vergil's 1st *Georgic*.

Fl. 20, or Bessel's  $\epsilon$ , 4.

**Maia** appears in the motto as personifying all the Pleiad stars, and the poet cautions the farmer against sowing his grain before the time of its setting.

She was the first-born and most beautiful of the sisters, and some have said that her star was the most luminous of the group; in fact, Riccioli, in his *Almagestum Novum*, distinctly wrote of Maia: *dicta lucida Pleiadum & tertii honoris, quae mater Mercurii perhibetur*, although in the *Astronomia Reformata* his "Alcinoe" is the *lucida*; so that we are uncertain which of these stars was the **Pleias** that he used for some one of the group. But the mythological importance of the goddess whose name Maia bears would indicate that Riccioli may have been correct as to the first of these identifications, and that the titles of the two stars perhaps should be interchanged.

The name also is written **Mea** and **Maja**, the feminine form of *majus*, an older form of *magnus*. Cicero had the word **Majja**, calling the Pleiad *sanctissima*, for in his day Maia was only another figure for the great and much named Rhea-Cybele, Fauna, Faula, Fatua, Ops, familiarly known as Ma, or Maia Maestas, the Bona Dea, or Great and Fruitful Mother, who gave name to the Roman month, our May.

Ovid added to her title **Pleias uda**, the Moist Pleiad, as another symbol for the group; and Dante used her title for the planet Mercury, as the Atlantid was mother of that god.

The equivalent **Maou**, for the Pleiades in China, is singularly like the Latin word.