



## “Slit Belly Swamp”

### A Japanese Myth of the Origin of the Pleiades?

This article analyzes the entry for Harasaki in *Harima Fudoki* and provides a fresh interpretation. Through comparisons with Lévi-Strauss’s *From Honey to Ashes*, it is argued that in the Harasaki tale the kanji for “concubine” is not a copyist’s mistake as previously thought. The drowned “concubine” is revealed to be Carp, a trope representing a licentious woman. Her internal organs float upwards to become individually the six visible stars of the star cluster Pleiades, thus accounting for their mythological origin. It is inferred that this Japanese version is a vestige of such myths that are found worldwide, and that its transmission may date from several thousand years ago.

KEYWORDS: Japan—*Fudoki*—myth—starlore—Pleiades—honey—Carp/carp—female jealousy—internal organs

THE Pleiades is a small cluster of stars within the constellation of Taurus, and is catalogued by astronomers as M45. It forms the brightest star cluster in the night sky: six are visible to the naked eye, but the entire cluster contains several hundred stars (Andrews 2004, 12; Hall 2004, 100–102; Taylor 2005, 38–45). The first new moon after the heliacal rising of the Pleiades heralds the midwinter solstice in the southern hemisphere and the summer solstice in the northern hemisphere—though the date has shifted somewhat over time due to precession. At present, the heliacal rising of the Pleiades at latitude 35°N occurs around 19 May, but “[f]ive thousand years ago their rising marked the northern spring equinox; this was known as the Pleiad-month and signified the year’s beginning.”<sup>1</sup> As one example, the point where the Pleiades appears on the northeast horizon in the southern hemisphere corresponds with where the sun rises at the midwinter solstice, and may be used as a marker (Hall 2004, 56; Taylor 2005, 39). Such observations were calendrical markers in preliterate societies for establishing dates for annual rituals, aquatic and terrestrial harvests, and for navigation, and were thus of enormous importance for survival. It is noteworthy that one recent study found that traditional methods of forecasting rain by observations of the heliacal rising of the Pleiades among Andean potato farmers proved more accurate than more scientific methods of long-range weather forecasting (Orlove, Chiang, and Cane 2002, 433). Therefore, it can be argued that one function of the myths about the Pleiades is as a mnemonic for the intergenerational transmission of this kind of traditional knowledge.

ANDREWS’s (2004) global survey of myths associated with the Pleiades identifies “universal” themes and motifs. The majority of such myths are about *young women*, typically seven, with one sister who is either missing or lost; they are *pursued*, typically by an older man or group of men; they are associated with *water/aquatic birds*, and with *bees and honey*; and they are associated with *women’s initiation* and fertility (italics for my emphasis).<sup>2</sup> The best-known version in the West is the ancient Greek myth of the Seven Sisters (see also, for example, DEMETRACOPOULOU 1933; GIBBON 1972, 241–44; HOWE and HIRSCHFELD 1981). A vestige appears in the Grimm’s fairy tale, *Der Trommler*, The Six Swans (MILLER 1987, 57; GRIMM and GRIMM 2004, 224–31).

Normally known in Japanese by the name *subaru* 昴, ANDREWS (2004) cites UCHIDA (1973) to the effect that there are more than sixty dialect words for the

Pleiades in Japanese (ANDREWS 2004, 301). Those like *subaru*, widespread in central and southern Japan (for example, *sumaru*, *subari*, *sunmari*, *suwaidon*), essentially mean “clustered.”<sup>3</sup> Others further east around the Kanto Plain and Hokuriku (such as *muzura*, *mutsuragosama*, *mutsunarisama*, *rokutaiboshi*, *rokuyōsei*) clearly denote “six stars,” while others again across all those regions (for example, *nana-tsuboshi*, *nanayoboshi*) mean “the seven stars.”<sup>4</sup>

The earliest specific reference to the Pleiades in Japan occurs in the following extract from *Tango no Kuni Fudoki Itsibun*, probably first recorded in the early eighth century, in the well-known tale of Shimako—more popularly known nowadays as Urashima Tarō:

They [Shimako and Kamehime the Turtle Maiden] held hands and slowly walked on. They arrived at the gate of a splendid residence. The maiden said, “Wait here a moment...,” opened the gate and went inside. Thereupon, seven children came along and said to each other, “Ah! He’s Kamehime’s companion!” Then another eight children came along and said to each other, “Ah! He’s Kamehime’s companion!” From this he learnt the maiden’s name to be Kamehime. In due course Kamehime returned and told Shimako about the children. She said, “The group of seven children are the Pleiades. The group of eight children are the Hyades. You need not think it strange.”<sup>5</sup>

However, another well-known tale from the same source, which is to say from the same district of Japan, while not *specifically* referring to the Pleiades, is so similar to other myths of the Pleiades around the world as to be unquestionably a variant. This is how it goes:

Tango Province. Taniha no Kōri.

To the northwest of the Kōri Office lies Hiji Village. At the top of Hiji Mountain in this village there is a cold water spring. It is called Manai Well. It has now turned into a bog [*numa*].

Eight heavenly maidens flew down to this spring and bathed. It so happened that an elderly couple were there. They were called Grandpa Wanasa and Grandma Wanasa. This couple came to the spring and by stealth they hid the garments of one of the heavenly maidens. Thereupon, the maidens who still had their clothes all flew back up to heaven, leaving behind only the maiden who had no clothes. She was embarrassed [at her nakedness] and stayed in the water.

Then the elderly couple said to her, “Heavenly maiden! We have no children. Please would you become our daughter?”

She replied, “I alone have remained in the world of humans. I have no choice but to follow you, I suppose. But please, give me back my clothes.”

Grandpa said, “Heavenly Maiden, why do you try to deceive us?”

The heavenly maiden said, “Well now, the hearts of heavenly beings know only trust. It is you who has a doubting heart, isn’t it, so that you do not return my clothes.”

Grandpa excused his rudeness, saying, “It is ever the way of this world to be suspicious and have no trust. That is why I did not return your clothes to you,” and he gave her back her clothes.

She followed them home and lived with them for more than ten years.

Now, this heavenly maiden made very good wine. Drinking just one cup of this wine cured all ailments. (Abridged.) In this way, she became rich. The heavenly maiden loaded her treasure onto handcarts and gave it to Grandpa Wanasa. Under these circumstances his family became very wealthy indeed, and the whole district of the muddy lagoon (*hiji no kata*) prospered. That’s how it came to be called Hijikata Village. Since then it has been abbreviated to Hiji Village.

Later on, Grandpa and Grandma said to the heavenly maiden, “You are not our child, and we only borrowed you to live with us for a while. We don’t need you any longer, so be gone with you now.”

At this, the heavenly maiden looked up to heaven and cried bitterly, and lay prostrate on the ground and wept. “I did not come here of my own free will. I came because you so wished. Why should I suddenly suffer being rejected out of your ill will?” she protested. However, Grandpa simply got more and more angry with her, and told her to leave.

The heavenly maiden departed through the gate in tears. She lamented to the village folk, “Since I have been steeped in the world of humans for so long, I cannot go back up to heaven. And as I have no parents here, I have nowhere else to go. What should I do? Oh, what should I do?!”

She wiped her eyes and sighed, and looking up to heaven she sang this song:

When I look up/to the Plain of Heaven,/it is all shrouded in mist./I have lost my way home./I know not where to go.

She finally left that place and arrived at the hamlet of Arashio no mura. She told the village folk, “When I think of the elderly couple, my heart is as bitter as coarse salt [*arashio*].” Hence it was called Arashio-mura in Hiji Village.

Then she arrived at Nakiki hamlet in Taniha Village, leaned against a zelkova tree and wept. Hence it was called Nakiki-mura [“weeping tree”].

Next she arrived at the hamlet of Nagu in Funaki Village, Takano Kōri. There she said to the village people, “Here my heart has calmed down [*nagushi*]. For that reason she stayed thereafter in this village. She is enshrined as Toyo-uka-nome no mikoto in Nagu Shrine, Takano Kōri.<sup>6</sup>

The implication, of course, is that the eight heavenly maidens were the stars of the Pleiades, with one of them being lost to the world of humans, leaving seven in the sky. This is one of the versions of tales categorized generically as having a “Swan Maiden” or “Crane Wife” motif.<sup>7</sup>

Yet another related tale appears in a *Fudoki Itsibun* fragment for Ōmi Province, headed *Ika no Woumi*:

This has been passed down by the elders. Ōmi Province, Ika no Kōri, Yogo Village. It happened at Yogo Lake to the south of the village. Eight celestial maidens turned into white birds and descended from the Heavens, to bathe in the cove at the southern end of the lake. At that moment, Ikatomi was on the hill to

the west, saw the white birds from afar, and marvelled at the sight of them. He wondered whether they might not be gods in human guise, and when he went to take a look, sure enough, they were. Ikatomi felt enamored of them, and wished they would not go home. Stealthily, he sent his white dog to steal their feather cloaks. He got the cloak of the youngest sister and hid it. When the Heavenly Maidens became aware, the seven elder sisters flew back up to the Heavens, but the youngest one could not fly away. Her route back to the Heavens was blocked, and so she became an earthling. The cove where the Heavenly Maidens bathed is called Kami no Ura [Deity Bay] nowadays. Ikatomi married the youngest sister and they lived there. Eventually they had children—two boys and two girls. The elder brother was called Omishiru, the younger brother was called Nashitomi, the elder sister was called Izerihime, and the next was Nazerihime. They were the founders of the Ika no Muraji lineage. Later on, their mother searched [and found] her Heavenly Feather Cloak, put it on, and rose up to the Heavens. Itomi kept her empty bed, and never ceased lamenting for her.<sup>8</sup>

Here it should be pointed out for later reference that the locus of this tale, Lake Yogo, is a small lake to the north of Lake Biwa.

There is yet another version of the “Swan Maiden” myth in a *Fudoki Itsubun* fragment for Suruga Province, titled *Miho Matsubara* (Miho Pine Grove), which unfolds as follows:

According to the stories handed down by the elders, there was once a Heavenly Maiden. She came down from the Heavens and left her feather cloak to dry on the branches of a pine tree. A fisherman picked it up and looked at it, and was speechless at how light and soft it was. He wondered whether it was a six-*shu* cloak,<sup>9</sup> or a cloak of the Heavenly Weaving Maiden. The Heavenly Maiden asked him for it, but the fisherman would not give it back to her. The Heavenly Maiden wished to return to the Heavens, but without her cloak she could not. There being nothing else she could do about it, she married the fisherman. Later on, the woman took back her feather cloak one day, and rode away on a cloud. It is said that the fisherman became a mountain ascetic and flew up into the sky.<sup>10</sup>

However, the chief aim of this article is to demonstrate that in addition to the above sources, there is another, less obvious, myth of the origin of the Pleiades recorded in ancient Japanese literature: the tale of “Slit Belly Swamp.” It is perhaps noteworthy that the location of the tale of Slit Belly Swamp is no more than about 120 kilometres/75 miles as the crow flies from the location of the Shimako myth, through the head-to-head valleys of the Yura and Kakogawa Rivers.

#### “SLIT BELLY SWAMP”

In one of Japan’s oldest extant documents, *Harima no Kuni Fudoki* 播磨国風土記, which dates from approximately 714 CE, there appears the following curious tale to account for the origin of a place name in present-day Hyogo Prefecture:

腹辟沼。右、号<sub>二</sub>腹辟<sub>一</sub>者、  
 花波神之妻、淡海神、為<sub>レ</sub>  
 追<sub>三</sub>己夫<sub>一</sub>、到<sub>三</sub>於此<sub>二</sub>處<sub>一</sub>、遂  
 怨瞋、妾以刀辟<sub>レ</sub>腹、没<sub>三</sub>於  
 此沼<sub>一</sub>。故号<sub>二</sub>腹辟沼<sub>一</sub>。其  
 沼鮒等、今无<sub>二</sub>五藏<sub>一</sub>。

FIGURE 1. *Kanbun* text based on the *Sanjōnishiike* manuscript: TENRI TOSHOKAN ZENBON SŌSHO WASHO NO BU HENSŪ IINKAI 1972, 419; AKIMOTO 1958, 346–48; UEGAKI 1997, 116–18.

*Harasaki Numa*. Harasaki was named for a goddess who disemboweled herself and died at this marsh. The goddess from Afumi, the wife of the god Hananami, came upon this place while she was chasing her husband [and discovered that her husband had already gone elsewhere]. Greatly disappointed, the goddess disemboweled herself and jumped into the marsh. This is why the place is called Harasaki (disemboweling). The silver carp in this marsh are said to have no entrails. (AOKI 1997, 228–29)

Aoki's translation above provides the broad outline of the tale, but some of the details are erroneous, and further explication is required. For, example, the clause in parenthesis above does not appear in the original text and is her interpretation (based on earlier commentaries) (AKIMOTO 1958, 347).

Like so many place name “folk etymologies” contained in Japan's ancient documents, at first sight the tale appears to hinge on a pun on the place name—Harasaki (see PALMER 2000; 2001a; 2001b; 2007a; 2007b; 2008; 2009; 2010). First let us consider the literal and most likely meaning of this place name.

In the context of places, *hara* almost invariably refers to a feature of the landscape: *hara* 原, meaning an uncultivated grassland of some sort, such as a moor. The orthography of *saki* is variable, with the kanji 先, 前, 埼, and 崎 all commonly applied. The basic meaning common to all of these is “front,” “ahead,” “beyond,” or “jutting out.” So *saki* appears in place names referring to the “head” of a landscape feature: to capes, headlands, or promontories jutting out into water (the sea, rivers, lakes); or as spurs of a mountain or ridge jutting into the surrounding flat land of

plains, basins, and valleys. *Nu*, *nū*, or *numa* 沼 refers to a wetland, pool, bog, swamp, or marsh. (It is noteworthy that this is the same landscape feature as appears in the entry for Hiji Village above). Taken together, therefore, it can be surmised that the place name *Harasaki no numa* originally indicated a “pool” or bog at the edge of a grassland, perhaps where a spring rose—as in the entry for Hiji Village. The Harasaki entry appears in *Harima Fudoki* as the last in the section on Kamo no Kōri 賀毛郡, Kawai no Sato 川合里 (AKIMOTO 1958, 347; UEGAKI 1997, 117–18). Its site has not been ascertained,<sup>11</sup> but the wetland in question seems to have covered a large area (KADOKAWA NIHON CHIMEI DAI JITEN HENSAN IINKAI 1988, 1756).

The narrative in this tale hangs on overt puns on *hara* and *saki*: *hara* 腹, meaning “belly,” and *saki* 辟 (裂・割) meaning “slitting,” “dismembering.” Hence the tale unfolds of a jealous wife, who for reasons that are not explicit in the tale, either disembowels *herself* in a pool in this swamp (as Aoki translates), or rather, as I shall tentatively argue, disembowels *her husband’s mistress* and drowns her here.

UEGAKI (1993b) suggests two possible explanations for this curious myth: (1) that there was once a small shrine here to the person who (he argues) committed suicide, where local inhabitants offered gutted (rather than whole or live) fish, this being an explanation for the information of the centrally-appointed local government officials who were charged with compiling the *Fudoki* document; and (2) that there were no longer any carp here, but that there was a myth handed down locally that there were gutless carp at the bottom of the water—as elusive as the Loch Ness monster (UEGAKI 1993b, 105–106). Either way, these explanations are simplistic, and we need to broaden our “mythological” horizons for clues.

#### THE DEITIES

The couple in this myth are identified as deities (*kami*) called here Hananami no kami and Ōmi no kami. Elsewhere in *Harima Fudoki* there is a place named Hananami-yama.<sup>12</sup> *Hananami* combines Chinese characters meaning “flowers” and “waves,” which could perhaps be interpreted as “gentle waves” (on water) or “flowers waving in the wind,” but here it appears to refer to a male deity of water or waves.<sup>13</sup>

The name of his wife, Ōmi no kami, simply means “the deity of Afumi (= Ōmi) Province” (AKIMOTO 1958, 338, n. 2; UEGAKI 1993a, 121). Ōmi Province is contiguous with Lake Biwa, Japan’s largest body of land-locked water. From this it may be deduced that this divine couple are somehow primarily associated with the *freshwater* of lakes. Moreover, it should be borne in mind that Lake Yogo, which is very close to the north end of Lake Biwa, in Ōmi Province is also the locus of the Feather Cloak myth related above.

#### CONCUBINE?

The text of the sole extant manuscript copy is regarded by Japanese exponents of *Fudoki* as problematic, owing to the character 妾, meaning “concubine.” One problem is that an essentially Chinese concept is here being used

to express a social institution that did not have exact parallels in Japan at the time of the recording of this tale in the early eighth century, let alone in the setting of this tale—which, as I shall attempt to demonstrate, is no doubt of much greater antiquity.

Previous commentators have been at a loss as to how best to interpret the character 妾, and tentatively agree that it is a copyist's mistake for some other kanji, probably either 受 for “self” or 妻 for “wife” (UEGAKI 1993b, 103 and 1997, 118, n. 3). In other words, they argue that the passage means: “she [the wife] disembowelled herself...” and “drowned herself...” Aoki follows this interpretation in her English translation at the top of the preceding page (AOKI 1997, 229).

The grammar of this section of the manuscript, if read as classical Chinese, is ambiguous, since the subject of “bear a grudge and be angry” is not stated and must be inferred from context. There appear to be three possible interpretations:

(1) the kanji for “concubine” refers to the wife, Ōmi-no-kami, so there are two actors involved: the husband-deity is full of resentment that his wife has followed him, and *he* slits *her* belly with a knife;

(2) the kanji for “concubine” refers to the wife-deity, so there are two actors involved: she is full of resentment towards her husband and slits *her own* belly with a knife;

(3) the kanji for “concubine” refers to a third person, presumably a mistress of the husband, so there are three actors involved: the wife Ōmi-no-kami is full of resentment towards the mistress and *she* slits *the mistress's* belly with a knife.<sup>14</sup>

While the first option is grammatically possible, the cultural context of “bearing a grudge” tends to suggest that the subject is a woman, so is less persuasive.<sup>15</sup> As noted above, Japanese commentators have opted for the second reading. However, as anthropologist Claude Lévi-Strauss repeatedly insisted, we should not assume that anything in myth is “incorrect” or “superfluous” just because we do not understand its inclusion (see, for example, LÉVI-STRAUSS 1973, 121, 127). Could there, in fact, be a plausible explanation for the appearance of the kanji for “concubine” that supports the third option above? Certainly, the presence of a mistress explains why the husband-deity had absconded, and it also indirectly accounts for the wife-deity's passionate anger; but for other reasons elaborated below, I believe that “concubine” is entirely intentional.

#### SILVER CARP

The tale concludes with the observation that “Even now the carp in this swamp have no entrails.” The fish referred to are specifically called *funā*: “silver carp,” (UEGAKI 1993b, 105) probably one of the genus *Carassius*, many of which are now endangered species in Japan. This is a freshwater fish with a silvery olive or brown back and silver belly, which grazes in the mud at the bottom of ponds and waterways, and which has formed a part of the diet since ancient times. It is still served as a raw delicacy (*sashimi*) in some parts of Japan, and continues to be a local speciality of cuisine around Lake Biwa.

## ENTRAILS

The word in the manuscript for “entrails” is literally “five organs”: the vital organs comprising the heart, kidneys, liver, lungs, and spleen, and the word is glossed as *wata* (UEGAKI 1993b, 105). Obviously it is physiologically impossible that the fish should have no guts. The myth does not narrate what happened to the entrails of the disembowelled woman; neither does it tell what became of the now missing entrails of the fish; nor does it provide any clues as to how the lack of internal organs in the woman relates to the lack of entrails in the fish. Nevertheless, we grasp almost intuitively that the one is somehow mythologically connected to the other.

To recapitulate the story: this tale is of a wife who disembowels herself, or an “eternal triangle” in which a jealous wife pursues her husband and his lover to this place, where she disembowels the mistress before throwing her in the swamp to drown. Whichever of the three interpretations above is applied, the presence in the swamp of an empty-bellied woman’s body results in the fish in the swamp thereafter becoming likewise empty-bellied. There is clearly some obscure connection between the two mythological motifs, but what exactly could it be?

## THE GIRL MAD ABOUT HONEY

Once again, LÉVI-STRAUSS is instructive. In *From Honey to Ashes* (1973), he explores at great length a myth cycle of South America that he calls “the girl mad about honey.” It is noteworthy that while ANDREWS (2004) makes no reference to the work of Lévi-Strauss, she points to lakes, water and rainfall, and to bees and honey, as recurrent motifs in myths of the origin of the Pleiades.

Essentially, the heroine in the native American myths who is greedy for honey is the daughter of Sun (her father) who is the master of aquatic spirits (LÉVI-STRAUSS 1973, 136). While in some myths the “greed” is “alimentary” (for honey), in others it refers to cupidity (excessive lust, greed for sex). The “poles of disjunction” in these myths are sky (father Sun) and water (aquatic spirits), and the dry and the wet. Lévi-Strauss’s work on myth established indisputably that extreme oppositions and transformations are both ubiquitous in mythological thought. While honey is by far the most desirable of terrestrial raw foods categorized as vegetables, fish are the most desirable of aquatic foods. In other words, honey ≡ fish, both gastronomically and figuratively. Hence the fish in our Slit Belly Swamp tale start to suggest the possibility that they may be a transformed version of the South American “girl mad about honey” myths.

The analysis of the myths about “the girl mad about honey” is so complex (as always with Lévi-Strauss!) that a brief summary risks losing the logical connections he makes, and space here precludes much elaboration. In short, though, he observes that throughout the Americas these myths contain motifs in common, including among them that (a) *the protagonist falls into a lake*, (b) *worms or fish devour the flesh*, and (c) *only internal organs remain floating on the surface*

[my emphasis] (LÉVI-STRAUSS 1970, 243–44; 1973, 263). These entrails turn into aquatic plants or the star cluster Pleiades. Lévi-Strauss concludes that this myth cycle is an explanation for why the annual appearance of the Pleiades in the night sky heralds either the dry season or the wet season (depending on the specific geographical location) when freshwater river fish are plentiful and mature enough to be caught (LÉVI-STRAUSS 1973, 269).

To be sure, at first sight, a connection between these South American myths and that of the Japanese Harasaki Swamp might seem tenuous and farfetched. However, it is noteworthy that in southern Japan, likewise, the appearance of the Pleiades heralds the imminent onset of the marked wet season of monsoon rains.

### THREE CODES: ALIMENTARY, SEXUAL AND ASTRONOMICAL

With reference to the American myths, Lévi-Strauss continues:

If we try to see the system as a whole and to determine its basic characteristics, we can say, then, that its peculiarity is the simultaneous exploitation of three codes: an alimentary code the symbols of which are the typical foods of the dry season; an astronomical code which refers to the daily or seasonal movement of certain constellations; thirdly, a sociological code built around the theme of the badly brought up girl who betrays her parents or her husband, but always in such a way as to be incapable of performing the mediatory function in the marriage relationship which is assigned to her by the myth.

(LÉVI-STRAUSS 1973, 266)

The third point is remarkable, since it aptly describes the roles of both the jealous wife and the mistress in this *Fudoki* entry. Indeed, it suggests to me that the kanji for “concubine” is by no means a copyist’s error as scholars of ancient Japanese literature have hitherto assumed. In the South American myths, the actors tend to be siblings or in-laws, corresponding to the wife and husband’s lover in Japan. By her actions the wife is clearly too possessive of her husband. This accords exactly with Lévi-Strauss’s observation that the wife is too “greedy” in some way (in this case apparently too possessive of her husband) as in the American myths he analyzes, and that she thereby fails in her appropriate marital and socially prescribed role (LÉVI-STRAUSS 1973, 255). On the other hand, she has chased her husband to this place, where, it appears, he has been lured by the greedy mistress who appears to want him all for *herself*.

In our *Fudoki* myth, the third, sociological, “code” predominates (= the jealous wife/greedy mistress), while the first, alimentary, code is alluded to (= fish, entrails), and the second, astronomical, is absent (= Pleiades) in any *explicit* way; but even this may be implied if we remember that the entrails in the American myths later turn into, and account for the origin of, the Pleiades—the appearance of which in Japan heralds the arrival of the monsoon rains.

In the American myth cycle concerning the girl mad about honey, a frequent motif is the transformation of one of the protagonists into a particular creature

(for example, Capybara, Woodpecker). This is suggestive, since it logically explains the otherwise unclear relationship between the disembowelled woman and the disembowelled carp: it now makes sense if we propose that upon sinking into the swamp pool, the disembowelled mistress *turns into* Carp, thus accounting for why the carp in this swamp allegedly still have no entrails.

At the same time, again by analogy with the South American myths, it may be inferred that the internal organs float to the surface of the water, where they carry on floating upwards into the night sky to turn into the Pleiades. Indeed, in the Harasaki myth the manuscript copy specifies the “*five* internal organs,” which was not strictly necessary in Old Japanese merely to denote “guts” as a whole. Again, perhaps Lévi-Strauss is proven justified in emphasizing that nothing in myth is superfluous. From this particular expression we may infer that the “five internal organs” (heart, kidneys, liver, lungs, and spleen) correspond individually to five of the stars in the Pleiades, of which six can be seen fairly easily with the naked eye.<sup>16</sup>

There are some further observations to be made about the significance of “belly” and “entrails” in this tale. *Hara*, “belly” or abdomen, is ambivalent in Old Japanese: it can be a metonym connoting both “digestive system,” as is overtly the case here, and with reference to women “womb,” which may perhaps be covertly implied, given the sexually related crime of passion described. It may be surmised, then, that it is her womb that turns into the sixth star of the Pleiades.

Earlier it was noted that fish = honey. Honey is the most desirable of foodstuffs, and edible in its raw (=natural) state, unmediated by fire (cooking/culture). It is the ultimate gastronomic seducer, and is metaphorical for sexual seduction (LÉVI-STRAUSS 1973; for example, 122, 163, 169, 299). We must suppose that since honey = fish, the fish in this tale bears similar connotations. That is why, mythologically, it is a fish (Carp) that the husband’s seducer turns into. And conversely this metaphor further supports my interpretation that the mistress actually turns into Carp.

#### THE CARP AS METAPHOR

But why carp and not some other freshwater fish such as trout or *ayu* [sweetfish]? *Funa* is a species of freshwater carp with no barbels (or “beard” as it is described in Japan)—so presumably it was not symbolically regarded as “masculine” but as “feminine.” It is recorded as having been eaten raw in the form of *namasu* (=sashimi) or *sushi* in ancient Japan, and was regarded as the greatest delicacy (JŌDAIGO JITEN HENSHŪ IINKAI 1967, 638; NAKAMURA et al., vol. 5, 1999, 227). In other words, while honey was the most desirable of “vegetable” foods that could be eaten raw for indigenous Americans, *funa* for the Japanese was its freshwater piscine equivalent. (Sashimi remains to this day the paramount delicacy of Japanese cuisine.)

*Funa* is a variant of *fune*, which has various meanings related to the hollowing out of a log, such as “dugout canoe/boat” and “trough” (for brewing saké) in Old Japanese (NAKAMURA et al., vol. 5, 1999, 227, 232–33). (In the first of those functions it is contained *by* liquid, and in the second it is the container *for* liquid.)

Once again, in Lévi-Strauss's analysis of the South American "girl mad about honey" myths, it is noteworthy that he has a great deal to say about "troughs": "Finally, as in the Chaco myths dealing with the origin of mead, the idea of the trough comes to the forefront" (LÉVI-STRAUSS 1973, 187). Among other points, honey among native Americans is obtained from bees' nests *in* hollow tree trunks; and the trough for brewing mead (honey beer  $\equiv$  saké) is made *from* a hollowed-out tree trunk. In this context, it is undoubtedly significant that in the variant Japanese tale in the entry for Hiji Village, the heavenly maiden is an excellent saké brewer.

*Fune* is also by connotation a euphemism for "vagina" in old Japanese.<sup>17</sup> As I have demonstrated elsewhere, homonyms needed only to be approximate to work in punning in old Japanese (PALMER 2000, 2007a, 2008, 2009). Thus, by homonymic word association, so prominent in the orality of ancient Japan, the mistress  $\equiv$  vagina/*fune/funa*  $\equiv$  carp/*funa*. There may even be an echo here too of the "girl mad about honey" in another metaphorical way, since wild honey ( $\equiv$  seduction) tends to be found in bees' nests in hollow tree trunks ( $\equiv$  vagina).

This interpretation, linking carp in myth to socially destructive seduction unmediated by marriage, is corroborated by a parenthetical tale in the contemporaneous *Nihon shoki* (720 CE). The entry for the fourth day of the ninth month of the sixth year of the reign of "Emperor Ninken" provides no fewer than three versions of a story, which is summarized as follows. A woman called Funame ("Carp Woman") marries a man called Karama, by whom she has a daughter, Nakume, who in turn marries a man called Yamaki. They have a daughter called Akitame (= Funame's granddaughter). Funame's husband and daughter both die, and Funame beds her son-in-law, Yamaki, by whom she has a son called Araki. This makes Araki both the maternal uncle and paternal half-brother of Akitame. Eventually Funame's granddaughter Akitame marries her son, Araki. As a result of this complicated family incest initiated by Funame's seduction of her son-in-law, Akitame is in great distress (ASTON 1972, I: 396–97). Funame "Carp Woman" in this tale too is thus excessively lustful, in a manner that disrupts the social functions of marriage—in this case resulting in incest rather than murder. In short, the *funa* silver carp represents—perhaps, we might add, through its form and large frequently-opened mouth—the vagina of a woman of loose morals in Japanese mythology. It is now obvious why it is Carp who is the protagonist in the Harasaki myth, and could hardly be any other fish.<sup>18</sup>

There is yet another observation to be made about *funa* "carp." I have demonstrated elsewhere that synonymic substitution played a large part in generating puns in the orality of ancient Japan; further, I demonstrated that the set of puns in a given myth, both overt and covert, all ingeniously revolve around a particular theme or themes (PALMER 2000, 2007a, 2008, 2009). The nearest synonym for *funa* 鮒 "carp" is undoubtedly a different species of carp, the *koi* 鯉. An entry for Kashima Kōri in *Hitachi Fudoki* lists *funa* and *koi* together in the context of delicious foods (AKIMOTO 1958, 70–71; UEGAKI 1997, 394–95; AOKI 1997, 61). The word for *koi* carp (Old Japanese: *koŕi*) is a play on *koi* 恋 (Old Jp: *koŕi*) meaning "love" or

“yearning” for someone or something, “missing” one who was absent. Here again, with *i* and *ī*, as I have found elsewhere, the pun disregards the *kōotsu* 甲乙 distinctions of old Japanese vowels. And here again, the connotations of the pun are entirely apposite to the tale, and moreover, contribute to the understanding of it. That *koi* was employed as a *double entendre* regarding an amorous encounter between a man and a woman is confirmed by another episode that appears in the *Nihon shoki* entry for Keikō 4, spring, eleventh day, second month (ASTON 1972, 1: 190).

“Bearded,” that is, having barbels, the *koi* species of carp is well known in East Asia as representing masculinity. In China it was called the king of freshwater fish, which could climb the famous waterfalls called the Dragon Gate on the Yellow River, where it would carry on rising upwards into the sky, transform into a dragon and become the master of clouds and rain, especially spring rain (EBERHARD 1986, 57; NAKAMURA et al., vol. 2, 1984, 534). This is a motif that shares motifs of rising to the sky and association with freshwater and rain, in common with the South American myths of the origin of the Pleiades noted by Lévi-Strauss.

The identification of fish with the vagina occurs frequently within folk tales classified under the motif of *vagina dentata*, or the toothed vagina. This motif involves a sexually voracious woman, whose vagina actually has teeth or in whose vagina she has inserted a sharp-toothed fish such as a pike, eel, or herring, with the result that she may castrate her male partners. These tales are geographically centered on the Pacific Rim, with tales reported from the New Zealand Māori, the Tuamotu Islands of French Polynesia, the Marquesas Islands, the Apayao of the Philippines, the Li of Hainan, the Paiwan of Taiwan, Okinawa, Korea, the Nōto Peninsula in Japan, the Ainu of Karafuto and Chuckjee, the Yukagir of Siberia, twenty-seven versions among ethnic minorities in India, the whole of the west coast of North America, and the Mataco of South America. It is thought that they have been transmitted from great antiquity (HO 1964, 43–45; THOMPSON 1960 vol. 3, 164, F547.1.1; LEGMAN 1975, 431–35). It could be postulated therefore that the association of vagina with carp in the most ancient of Japanese texts may be a vestige of the *vagina dentata* motif.

#### FURTHER CONNOTATIONS

That “honey ≡ fish” applies to their attributes: honey is normally sweet, and freshwater fish are “sweet” insofar as they are not salty to the taste like most saltwater fish. Lévi-Strauss discusses honey in its metaphorical sense as representing the “sweet” honeymoon period of early and cordial marital relations. Myth presents in opposite polarities. Clearly, the marital relationship in the Harasaki myth has become deeply embittered. The kanji 怨瞋 in the manuscript copy mean “to bear a grudge” and “to be stark staring angry, full of blind fury” respectively. Aoki’s translation of “greatly disappointed” hardly hits the mark. The wife’s emotion is far more extreme: murderous, actually.

It is no coincidence, either, in terms of the structure of this myth, that the jealous wife murders her husband’s mistress (or perhaps that the wife commits

suicide) by *disembowelment*. (The text also specifies that she performs this with a knife, a point that Aoki's translation omits.) At the opposite gastronomic pole of "deliciously sweet fish," which like honey is most palatable when fresh and raw, are the viscera of fish, which are bitter to the taste. "For us [Europeans], then, honey is totally on the side of sweetness; it lies at one end of an axis at the opposite pole from bitterness or sourness...." (LÉVI-STRAUSS 1973, 283). In South America, however, honey ranges from the sweet to the sickly and poisonous, so that for indigenous Americans, honey may intrinsically contain extremes of taste. And like South American honey, Japanese silver carp contain extremes of sweetness (the flesh) and bitterness (the entrails). What is incorporated through cultural processes—cuisine consumed orally—is the antithesis of that which is expelled from the body—excrement expelled anally. Containing excrement, the guts come into the category of "anti-food" and are therefore representative of that which is beyond cultural, that which is anti-social. The wife's production of her rival's (or her own) guts externally, which should remain decorously contained within the body, symbolizes both her excessive bitterness towards her culturally approved sexual partner (her husband) and her antisocial behaviour (jealousy and murder of his mistress).

#### IMPLICATIONS FOR PREHISTORY

As Lévi-Strauss stresses, it is not acceptable when myths seem to be incomplete to simply imagine or gratuitously invent what might have once filled the gaps. On the other hand, he claims, it is quite legitimate to look to other myths with similar motifs for clues as to what filled the gaps through a process of reasoning that considers in a holistic way the myth cycle to which it belongs (LÉVI-STRAUSS 1973, 127–28). In this case, the Japanese myth of Harasaki Swamp is so fragmentary that its meaning has largely baffled previous scholars. This alone suggests that it could be the vestiges of a very ancient tale, one that had already become considerably "lost in transmission" by the time it was recorded in the early eighth century. Indeed, Lévi-Strauss himself observes that the group of South American myths which has the girl mad about honey as its heroine may be found:

...in a strangely modified and depleted form [even elsewhere in the Americas], with the result that certain versions barely hint at the theme of the girl mad about honey, to which they make no more than a brief reference. In other versions it is set in so different a context that it is almost unrecognizable until behind the superficially divergent stories more exhaustive analysis reveals the single basic pattern which reestablishes their unity. (LÉVI-STRAUSS 1973, 119)

The inferences drawn above clearly raise the seemingly implausible possibility that this *Fudoki* myth could be related to those recorded by Lévi-Strauss for the Americas. Claude Lévi-Strauss held a "deep conviction that Japanese mythology and American mythology, each in its own way, use sources which go right back to paleolithic times and which were once the common heritage of Asiatic groups later disseminated throughout the Far East and the New World" (LÉVI-STRAUSS 1973,

378). The coincidence of motifs in such remarkable detail in the present study suggests that Lévi-Strauss might have been right.<sup>19</sup> He was unlikely to have been acquainted with the myths contained in *Harima Fudoki*, since at the time of his writing it was not translated and not yet readily available in European languages.

Recent research into prehistoric human migrations is revealing that people in Palaeolithic and Neolithic times were much more mobile than was previously thought possible. Archaeological excavations are putting back in time the era when parts of the Pacific Rim were settled. The peopling of the Americas remains hotly debated, but there is little doubt that it was at least 14,000 BP, and there are serious suggestions—albeit disputed—that North America might have been populated as long ago as 50,000 BP (*National Geographic*, May 2005, “The First Americans?”). It is evident through archaeology that humans transferred their thought in the form of technology wherever they migrated, providing the environment allowed it. Mythological thought has no such environmental limitations. So, though hard to prove, it is after all likely that humans took their knowledge, including their myths, wherever they travelled.

I have argued elsewhere that at least some of Japan’s myths (so-called “Banana” type and Flood myths) derive from the “drowning” of Sundaland after the end of the last Ice Age and the arrival of “refugees” from Southeast Asia from around perhaps 10,000–7,000 BP (PALMER 2007b and 2010). That the rise of the Pleiades marks the beginning of a New Year for many indigenous groups around the Pacific rim, including Polynesians, may also simply reflect that a common ancient understanding of the universe, including vital knowledge related to food supply, travelled with them to the destinations where they eventually settled.

Since Pleiadean myths based around common themes are possibly also portrayed in the seventeen-thousand-year-old Lascaux cave paintings of France, and even occur among Aborigines whose settlement of Australia is accepted as dating back some sixty-thousand years, Andrews argues that it is plausible that these myths have a common human origin “stretching back thousands of years before the appearance of ancient Sumer, Akkadia and Babylon” (ANDREWS 2004, 11, 13).

KIRK (1974, 255) argues that: “It is only when a rather complex and specific motif occurs in two distinct places and not elsewhere that a probability of direct influence arises, and even then the occurrences may stem from an unknown archetype and not be directly interdependent.” In the case of the Japanese tale of Harasaki Swamp and the South American myths of the “girl mad about honey,” the complexity and specificity of the motif are so strongly coincidental that Kirk’s observation must surely apply. It is more likely that some “unknown archetype,” as he puts it, was the provenance of both, than that either one was the direct source for the other.

So far as I am aware, the only scholar hitherto to have attempted systematically to pinpoint Japanese myths that corroborate Lévi-Strauss’s hunch is the anthropologist Nakazawa Shin’ichi 中沢新一, especially in his series “Cahier Sauvage” (NAKAZAWA 2002a; 2002b; 2003a; 2003b; 2004). Nakazawa explores commonalities between Japanese myths and those of both North Asia and North America, and argues (or speculates, depending on one’s view) that those common roots derive

from the Palaeolithic era, dating back perhaps some thirty thousand years. He argues that mythological thought emerged at that time to form the foundations of “humankind’s first philosophy” and that mythological thought thrives to the present in various guises (MURATA 2010, 202).

Whenever and from wherever the Harasaki myth of *Harima Fudoki* was ultimately derived is impossible to say, but it is arguably a vestigial myth of the origins of the Pleiades dating from several thousand years ago, and it seems possible that it was taken to Japan by some of the earliest settlers of the Pacific rim.

### CONCLUSION

The above analysis offers a fresh and more comprehensive interpretation of this Japanese myth, and in Lévi-Strauss’s terminology it can “reveal the logical armature hidden beneath seemingly strange and incomprehensible stories” (LÉVI-STRAUSS 1973, 157). Its opacity for scholars of *Fudoki* hitherto is understandable if we consider that it might be the vestige of an ancient and much more complex myth. Its antiquity has been suggested above from two different but related angles: the commonality of themes and motifs associated with myths about the origins of the Pleiades on the one hand, and the commonality of motifs associated with *vagina dentata* stories on the other. Either way, it is surely of at least Neolithic and perhaps even Palaeolithic origin, perhaps dating back to the earliest peopling of the Pacific Rim.<sup>20</sup>

In light of the above discussion, there is strong evidence that the kanji for concubine is by no means a copyist’s mistake: to the contrary it is pivotal to our understanding of the myth as a whole. It may be surmised that the eighth-century scribe who recorded this already-ancient Japanese tale in Chinese-style writing opted for this expression for lack of *le mot juste*, it being the nearest in meaning he could think of to employ with sufficient decorum.<sup>21</sup>

To summarize afresh: Ōmi-no-kami (a female deity of water) arrives here at this swamp in pursuit of her husband, Hananami (a male deity of water/waves), who has absconded with his mistress. In a fit of jealous rage she slits his lover’s belly with a knife and drowns her in this wetland. The various internal organs that have spilled from her slit belly separate from the rest of her corpse, float to the surface of the water, carry on floating up into the sky, and become the individual stars of the Pleiades, accounting for the origins of that star cluster. The bodily remains of the woman sink to the bottom of the pool, are eaten by the bottom-grazing silver carp, and are thereby transformed into Carp. But because her internal organs have already disappeared up to the sky, ever since then to this day the carp in this swamp have had no entrails.

On the basis of this new understanding, I propose the revised translation into English below:

Harasaki Swamp: It is called Harasaki because the deity Ōmi-no-kami, wife of the deity Hananami-no-kami, arrived here in pursuit of her husband. Then,

being enraged with bitterness, she slit his mistress's belly with a knife and [her body] sank into this swamp. Hence it is called Harasaki Swamp [that is, "Slit Belly Swamp"]. Even now the carp in this swamp have no entrails.

#### NOTES

1. HALL 2004, 102. It is unclear to which culture Hall refers here, but from the context it seems to be ancient Egypt.
2. ANDREWS 2004, 15–52. Clearly, folktales with the “Swan-Maiden” and “Crane Wife” theme are variants of this myth. Andrews appears unaware of this, and in her chapter titled “Subaru” she places undue emphasis, in my view, on the Shichifukujin 七福神 which were mostly introduced later into Japan (ANDREWS 2004, 291–317).
3. <http://ja.wikipedia.org/wiki> entry for Japan under the heading プレアデス星団 (The Pleiades Star Cluster), accessed 17 March 2010.
4. The Wikipedia website in Japanese titled 「星・星座に関する方言」(Dialect words for the stars and constellations) lists 64 words for the Pleiades with their regional locations. The source cited is Nojiri Hōkei 野尻抱影, 『星の方言集日本の星』 (Dialects for the Stars: Stars in Japan), n.d. <http://ja.wikipedia.org/wiki>, accessed 17 March 2010.
5. My translation, based on UEGAKI 1997, 476.
6. My translation, based on UEGAKI 1997, 483–87.
7. For discussion, see HATTO 1961; MILLER 1987.
8. My translation, based on AKIMOTO 1958, 457–59; UEGAKI 1997, 578–79; see, for example, MILLER 1987, 68.
9. Six *shu* approximates 375 grams (AKIMOTO 1958, 447, n. 11).
10. My translation, based on AKIMOTO 1958, 447; and UEGAKI 1997, 575–76. The implication may be that he developed powers of shamanic flight.
11. AKIMOTO 1958, 347, n. 22; TERABAYASHI and NAKAMURA 1998, 134. The latter wondered whether the said wetland has disappeared over the last 1,200 years or whether it was simply a made-up story in the first place.
12. Entry for Hafuta Sato, Taka Kōri. See AKIMOTO 1958, 339; UEGAKI 1993a, 119–121; UEGAKI 1997, 107; AOKI 1997, 221–22.
13. According to Dr. Wu Xiaoming 伍曉明, Confucian scholar, “flower” in this name may have connotations of a womanizer or playboy. Personal communication, August 2009, January 2010.
14. I am indebted to Dr. Wu for confirming that these are all grammatically plausible interpretations. Personal communication, August 2009 and January 2010.
15. See, for example, William CONGREVE (1967): “Heav’n has no Rage, like Love to Hatred turn’d,/Nor Hell a Fury, like a Woman scorn’d.” I am indebted to Dr. Wu for this point.
16. Which is why, of course, the logo of the Japanese auto manufacturer Subaru represents six stars.
17. Euphemistically, female genitalia were *fune* on account of being both boat-shaped and ridden, while the penis was the “mast.” NAKAMURA et al., vol. 5, 1999, 233.
18. For a further example and discussion, see PALMER forthcoming.
19. The “psychological” argument—that human beings evolved all thinking along the same lines, which accounts for the similarities in myth motifs across the globe—is hardly persuasive given the coincidence of even minute details, as demonstrated in this study. See GIBBON 1972.

20. Dates are constantly being revised with each fresh discovery, but roughly 30,000 BP now seems not implausible for both Japan and the Americas.

21. Dr. Wu corroborates that there was no equivalent word for “mistress” in the Classical Chinese of this era. Personal communication, January 2010.

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