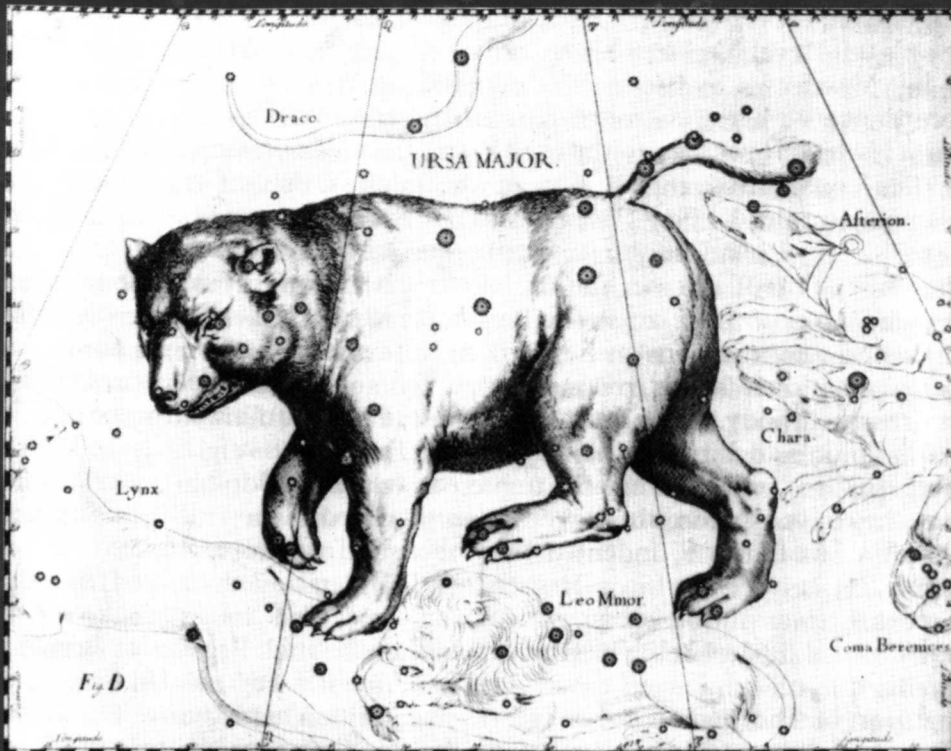




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ed. Tomasz Mikocki

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THE PLEIADES IN LITHUANIAN ETHNOASTRONOMY

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Summary

The article tackles the meaning of the Lithuanian name of the Pleiades. It also analyses Lithuanian folk lore about the visible motion of the Pleiades. It discloses the way countrymen (19th - 20th century beginning) orientated in the night time, set calendar terms for farm work, did meteorological prognoses according to the Pleiades. There are also presented materials about the mythological interpretation of the origin of the Pleiades.

The name of the Pleiades

The noticeable star cluster – the Pleiades is most often called the *Sietynas* 'the Chandelier' by the Lithuanians. We can find various phonetic variants of this name in different places of Lithuania: *Sietimas*, *Sietinis*, *Sietinys*, *Sityns*, *Sytynas*, *Sytinys*, *Sétinys*, *Setynas*, *Sétinas*, *Sétynas*, *Satynas*. Astronim *Sietas* 'the Sieve' could be considered as the older name of this star clusters. Its phonetic variants are also to be found: *Sietis*, *Sytas*, *Seitas*, *Sétis*. Because of comparatively small dimensions of the Pleiades they are very often called by diminutive names: *Sietelis*, *Sietukas*, *Sitelis*, *Sytelis*, *Sytukas*, *Sietynėlis*, *Sietynukas*, *Sietinėlis*, *Sitinėlis*, *Sétynėlis*. Extended names could be mentioned separately: *Žvaigždžių sietas* 'Sieve of stars', *Dangaus sietas* 'Sieve of the sky' [Vaiškūnas 1993:19]. Slavic forms of the Pleiades could be found in the Lithuanian ethnic lands in Byelorussia: *Sietka*, *Setka*, *Sietkelė*, *Sietačka*, *Sitka*, *Sitko*, *Sitok*, *Sitkė*, *Sitočka*, *Sitački* etc. [Vaiškūnas 1998]. Sometimes we can find very rare and original names of the Pleiades: *Kašikutis* 'Basket'¹, *Bičių spiečius* 'Swarm of Bees'², *Sėjikai* 'Seeders' or 'plovers'³, *Dvylikinė žvaigždė* '12 o'clock star'⁴, *Vainykėlis* 'Wreath'⁵, *Mergaičių vainykėlis* 'Girl's wreath'⁶.

We can find quite often in the Lithuanian ethnoastronomical materials that the word *Sietynas* is used not only for the Pleiades, but also for to denote an abstract defini-

¹ EAA – Told by *Vaškevičius S.* Teklinavas (Murowany most) village, Suvalkai region in Poland. Written down by Vaiškūnas J., 1989.

² EAA – Told by *Pavolas J.*, and *Pavolienė V.* Pošnia village, Lazdijai region. Written down by Vaicekauskas A., 1984.

³ *Ibidem* and EAA – Pelesa (Пеляса) and Ramaškonys (Рамашканцы) villages, Balatna (Воранава) region in Byelorussia. Written down by Vaiškūnas J., 1991; Dovyčiai vilages, Klaipėda region in LKŽ 318.

⁴ People defined when it is midnight (12 a.m.) according to the Pleiades.

⁵ EAA – Told by *Šimelionis V.*, Pelesa (Пеляса) village, Balatna (Воранава) region in Byelorussia. Written down by Vaiškūnas J., 1991.

⁶ *Ibidem* and LKAR 2/355/ – Mištūnai village, Šalčininkai region.

tion of a constellation. This lets us think that people perceive the Pleiades not as thing, a sieve in this case, but just as of coming together of the stars into one compact group.

Definition of the appearance and movement

While speaking about the appearance of the Pleiades, most often it is said that it is a dense (lit. *dikta, tanki*) 'little heap' (lit. *krūvutė*) of stars. Quite often the Pleiades are defined as *pundukas* 'a little bundle', *gumburiukas* 'a little knob (lump?)', *kalniukas* 'a little hill', *kauburėlis* 'a little hillock', *gojukas* 'a little grove', *kupečiukas* 'a little stack', *kepaliukas* 'a little loaf', *šluotelė* 'a little broom' of stars. Some people say that this cluster is round, reminding a small sieve to bolt flour, others say that it is square, reminding a cart. Here are also comparisons with a chandelier of candles in a church or even a cabin are known too⁷.

Most often people say that there are 7 stars seen in the Pleiades, seldom they say that there are 5, 6, or 8-9, and sometimes even 12, 15, 16 stars. Sometimes they maintain that there are a lot of small stars in small space. Actually man with a bare eye can see 7 stars, and those stars remind an irregular rectangular. This rectangular can be compared with a cart but not with a round sieve (maybe speaking about side-view). The proposition that the host of stars in the Pleiades is of round form can be derived from the name of the constellation – *Sietynas, Sietas* – inspired by the association with a tool of a round form (because sieve and chandelier are round). Probably, when astronomic knowledge lost its importance and man stopped looking at the stars for practical reasons, only associated, but not the visible appearance of the constellation remained in his mind. It should be mentioned that sometimes the stars of the Pleiades are compared with the holes in a sieve⁸. Such comparison comes from the archaic imagination that all the stars are just holes in the sky and the heavenly light gets through them.

People noticed that at long November nights before the Advent the Pleiades' movement is similar to the Sun's in summer. People say: "...*That Sietynas goes like the Sun in summer, by the same way*" [SPSO 161, LTA 2243/107/, LTA 2260/89/, LTA 2312/423/, etc.]. That's how people guessed the time according to the Pleiades at night, as they did according to the Sun at daytime: "*People guess the time from the Seitas star, it goes round the Earth by the same way, the Sun at daytime and the Sieve at night*" [LTA 2243/107/, LTA 2260/89/, LTA 2251/308/, etc.]; "*It (Sietynas) went like the Sun, followed the sun's paths*"⁹. The movement of the Pleiades is also compared with the movement of the Moon: "*Sytynas ... goes like the Moon*"; "*They (The Stars of the Pleiades) seem to be moving next to the Moon...*"¹⁰.

The position of the Pleiades is usually defined with respect to the parts of the world: "*Sietynas appears in the East*", "*rises in the east*", "*turns to the West*", "*goes down in the west*". What about the culmination of the Pleiades it is often said that they are "*in the*

⁷ EAA – Told by *Juodaitytė S.*, Griškabūdis village, Šakiai region. Written down by *Vaiškūnas J.*, 1992; Medilas (Мядзель) region in Byelorussia look at NIC IV 431.

⁸ LTA 2247/20/,/17/. EAA – Told by *Leonavičius J.*, Vilkapėdžiai village and *Bancevičius J.*, Lumbiai village, Suvalkai region in Poland. Written down by *Vaiškūnas J.*, 1989. Told by *Šimelionienė M.* Pelesa (Пеляса) village, Balatna (Воранова) region in Byelorussia. Written down by *Vaiškūnas J.*, 1991.

⁹ EAA – Told by *Strimaitis J.*, Griškabūdis, Šakiai region. Written down by *Žiemys E.*, 1992.

¹⁰ EAA – Told by *Juodaitytė S.*, Griškabūdis village, Šakiai region. Told by *Mikutavičienė B.*, Butkiškė village, Kelmė region. Written down by *Vaiškūnas J.*, 1992. Also: *Gimtasai kraštas*, vol. 1, 1940, p. 61.

South”, “in the middle of the Sky”, or simply “high”. It is also said that they are “above your head”, “vertically” or “where the Sun is at 12 o’clock”. Quite often the position of the Pleiades is defined according to the rise of constellation above the horizon. Unfortunately, though it is defined simply in general outline “*Sietynas has risen*”, “*Sietynas is low*” [LTR 4508/26/; Also: LTA 2246/51/, LTA 2253/101/, LTR 4235/150/, LTA 2258/71-72/, LTA 2249/82/, LTA 2312/425/, LTA 2316/35/, LKŽ XII 532].

Guessing the time of a day

During long autumn and winter nights people could guess the time quite precisely according to the movement of the Pleiades. That’s why they are sometimes compared with a clock: “*Sėtynas shows time as a clock*” [LTA 1300/4/], *Sėtynas served as a clock for us in Butniūnai...*” [LTR 4286/121/]. In November the Pleiades culminate at about midnight and it was known that: “*When Sietynas rises – that means it is before midnight, when it goes down – it is after midnight*” [LTA 2256/103/. Also: LTA 2246/51/, LTA 2249/81/, LTA 2312/414/]; “*Sietynėlis is going down, the day will come soon*”¹¹. People could guess the time even more precisely. If the Pleiades are in the East and as they say “*takes one quarter of the sky*”, that means it is 8 p.m. If they are in the “*middle of the sky*” that means it is midnight. And if they are turned to the west and “*take half of the sky*” – it is 3 a.m. [LTA 2260/88/. Also: LTA 2312/418/,/423/; LTA 2240/62/ etc.]. People guessed the time from the position of the Pleiades according to separate objects of the surroundings: “*Sėtynas on the garner, so let’s go to bed*” [LTA 2257/184/]; “*Sėtynas and Grįžula ratai (The Big Bear) are on the garner – it’s time to get up*”¹².

In September people got up to trash when the Pleiades, were in the south-east [LKŽ XII 534.]. In October – when they were culminating. At that time the time was guessed in the following way. The Pleiades rise – it is evening, the Pleiades in the south-east – it is 8-9 p.m., the Pleiades are in the south – it is 2-3 a.m. the Pleiades are going down it is 7-8 a.m. [LTA 2312/420/ and also: LTR 4286/123/, LTR 4287/26/]. In December round about Christmas the culmination of the Pleiades (2-3 hours before midnight) was the sign for children to go to bed¹³.

Defining the terms for farm work and meteorological observations

It was also noticed that the Pleiades not only move in the same way in the sky as the Sun and the Moon, but they are not always visible as the Moon too. Sometimes they are visible in the morning, sometimes in the evening, sometimes all night through, but sometimes they disappear. In the end of April when the Sun comes nearer the Taurus constellation, the Pleiades disappear in evening-glow. They say that they stay invisible throughout all summer when nights are short and they appear only in autumn. In the end of September and in the beginning of October they are already visible not high in the east. It is true, but observing the sky all year round, we could notice the Pleiades much earlier. People’s way of life itself determined the observation time of the heavenly

¹¹ EAA – Told by Čibirienė L., Dudeniškis village, Ignalina region. Written down by Vaiškūnas J., 1989.

¹² LTK – Pažiegė village, Zarasai region. Written down by Būga J., 1939 and also LTA 2257/184/.

¹³ EAA – Told by Armonaitytė O., Paluobiai village, Šakiai region. Written down by Vaiškūnas J., 1992.

bodies. Most often people observed the stars in the evening after the Sunset and early in the morning while getting up for work. Observing the stars like this they could notice the following important position of the Pleiades:

1. Evening (heliacal) setting (04 23)¹⁴.
2. Morning (heliacal) rising (07 10 - 15).
3. Morning culmination (09 15).
4. Morning (achronal) setting (12 13).
5. Evening (achronal) rising (09 23).
6. Evening culmination (02 10).

Ethnographic material proves that the setting of the Pleiades in the evening glow was very important for the Lithuanian farmers. People defined the beginning of spring season work on farm according to the position of the Pleiades in the sky. It was known, that the lower the Pleiades appear after the sunset, the nearer the spring is. People said: "If *Žvaigždžių sietas* 'the Sieve of stars' is high, so spring is far" [LTA 2319/13/]; "If the *Žvaigždžių sietas* 'the Sieve of stars' went down with the evening glow, it would be warm (spring) soon" [LTA 2259/89/]; "*Sietas* 'The Sieve' disappears and a cuckoo starts to call" [LKŽ XII 532]. When the Pleiades entered the evening glow people started to plough fields, got ready for spring sowing. It was said: "*Sietynas* 'The Sieve' in the glow, the bull in a furrow"¹⁵; "*Sietynas* 'The Sieve' in the glow, the grey (horse) in the meadow (just before St. George)"¹⁶; "If *Žvaigždžių sietas* 'the Sieve of stars' is not in the glow it's not the time to let your horse into the meadow"¹⁷. There was a link between the heliacal setting of the Pleiades and St. George's day (04 23). From that day the Pleiades are not seen for more than 2 months because they hide in the sunlight. Only on the second decade of July they appear shortly in the morning glow in the east.

Some nations define a link between the appearance and disappearance of the Pleiades and the rain season. For example, some of the native tribes of Australia and Africa and the inhabitants of New Guinea and Marshall Islands are sure that the appearance of the Pleiades after their temporal disappearance brings rain. Also the Romans used the word Pleiades not only to name the group of stars, but also for poetical name of thunder and shower [Дворецкий 1986:591].

The Lithuanian ethnographic material lets us consider that the Lithuanians defined the beginning of summer's rainy days according to the heliacal rising of the Pleiades. This supposition is proven by the coincidence of the visible heliacal rising of the Pleiades with the folk calendar's day of *the seven sleeping brothers* (07 10). According to this day people guess about the quantity of precipitation for the second half of summer. People are sure that if it's raining on that day, so it will be raining for 7 days, or even 7 weeks. So 7 brothers, 7 days, 7 weeks, 7 stars of the Pleiades. We can add for comparison that people of the native tribe Eve in Africa suppose that appearance of Orion should be followed by rain, which usually lasts for 7 days. The same number of stars is in this constellation [Gładyszowa 1960:168-169]. The relation of the seven stars of the Pleiades with the day of seven sleeping brothers is proven by Lithuanian legend

¹⁴ Here and later are given real dates of appearance of the Pleiades above the physical horizon in the geographical latitude of Lithuania (including extinction and twilight's length).

¹⁵ EAA – Told by *Jezerkis V.*, Papilė village, Šakiai region. Written down by *Vaiškūnas J.*, 1992.

¹⁶ EAA – Told by *Andriukaitienė M.* Griškabūdis village, Šakiai region. Written down by *Žiemys E.*, 1992.

¹⁷ LTA 1480/22/. See also LKŽ XII 532,534 and [Gasparavičius 1988]. The latter source gives erroneous information that the Pleiades set in the glow at dawn.

according to which the stars of the Pleiades are 7 brothers who fell asleep in the basement of the church built by themselves (further more in detail). The legend mentions even the name of the youngest brother – *Danasas*, who is sleeping at the feet of the other brothers [SPSO 134-136].

Probably our ancestors observed the north-east skies very attentively on the 10th of July just before the dawn. They wanted to see the Pleiades (*The Seven Brothers?*) at least for a short time in order to guess about the weather. It is very important to know about the weather in haymaking time. People wanted to know if the second part of summer would be wet or dry. The Russians also waited for the appearance of the Pleiades at that time. They even called the 11th of July (old style) *Яфимии стожарницы* (Russ. *Стожары* – the Pleiades). It was supposed that shining of the Pleiades on that day predicted a successful bear hunting¹⁸.

The other significant position of the Pleiades was their culmination before the sunrise, which indicated a half of the autumn sowing. In the 17th century M. Pretorius wrote, that a certain position of the Pleiades was a good sign for the Lithuanians to start sowing [Dundulienė 1988:55]. People said that God had put the Pleiades into Sky for people to know when it was time to sow rye [LTA 2247/20/]. “*If the Sietynas comes to the south before dawn, it is time to sow rye*” [LT 382]; “*The Sietynas turns to the south, it means time has come to sow rye...*” [LTR 4508/7/]. When the Pleiades appeared in the Southwest before dawn, it was the end of September and people picked potatoes¹⁹.

The first morning setting of the Pleiades was also being observed. It was noticed that the Pleiades go down before the sun rise at about the beginning of the Advent. Astronomical achronal setting of the Pleiades happen on about the 30 November – 1 December. But at that time its setting behind the horizon is not seen because of the morning glow which fades this cluster above the horizon at about 10°. If the place is not very open, the disappearance of the Pleiades could be considered as their setting. If the observer is in the open area, the visible setting of the Pleiades could be seen on about 13 December. It coincides with the beginning of the Advent according to the old calendar. People could guess about the coming spring according to the first morning set of the Pleiades: if the Pleiades go down before the Advent, so an early spring could be expected. If they go down on the Advent, then a late spring could be expected [LKŽ XII 534]. A certain position of the constellation, was a sign of the returning Sun. “*They say, when the Sietynas goes down before Christmas, so the day is already getting longer*” [LTA 2261/39/].

Very little lore is left about the first evening rise of the Pleiades. In October, when the sun is down, they are already seen in the east: “*In the evening it [the Sietynas] is in the east. Then it comes later and later. That means that later it won't be seen in summer*”²⁰.

We lack information about observation of the evening culmination of the Pleiades. All we know is that: “*Sietynėlis is in the middle of the sky in the evening and it goes down where the Sun rises. Then we know that the day will come soon*” [LTA 2247/44/].

¹⁸ *Круглый год Русский земледельческий календарь*, Москва 1983, p. 280. Other constellations such as *Ursa Major* or even the North Star are called by the name of *Стожары* in some Russian dialects. But in the former times this name could be assigned only to the Pleiades, because this name is best known for Byelorussians, west Bulgarians, Serbs and Croats.

¹⁹ EAA – Told by *Andriukaitienė M.*, Griškabūdis, Šakiai region. Written down by Žiemys E., 1992.

²⁰ EAA – Told by *Laurinaitis J.*, Degutynė village, Šakiai region. Written down by Vaiškūnas J., 1992.

There are ethnographic materials which say that people not only could define the time of the day, time for sowing rye, potatoes according to the position of the Pleiades in the sky but they also did find out when it was time to mill corn, to bolt it or start making fishing rods. In winter, at about Christmas time, people used to guess about the harvest of the coming year according to position of the Pleiades with respect, perhaps, to the planets. People said: “*If Sietynas is following bright stars, so the family (farm – hands, hired workers) will be expensive...*” that means that the harvest will be good and manpower will be expensive. And if bright stars are following the Pleiades, so the mentioned situation will be vice versa [LKŽ XII 534 or TŽ III 343].

The material collected and analysed here proves, that in the recent past the Lithuanian farmers were well acquainted with the visible moving of the Pleiades and put their knowledge into practice successfully.

The Pleiades in the Folk songs

The Pleiades are mentioned together with the Sun and the moon in some Lithuanian war and wedding folk song. A soldier separated from the family equates the Pleiades with the brother left at home [LLD III 1 48:80; 52:84]. The Pleiades help soldier to mourn for the brother [LLD III 1 4:42] or most often replace him:

-Ant dangaus sietynas –	<i>The Sietynas in the sky -</i>
Tai mano brolelis,	<i>This is my brother,</i>
Žviesios žvaigždelės -	<i>Bright stars -</i>
Tai mano seselės.	<i>They are my sisters [LLD III 1 244:251].</i>

The lad who is proposing to the maiden is compared with the Pleiades: The Pleiades replace a brother for a lonely girl – bride [LDK II 811-814; LKŽ:534; SDG 256, 257:216; TD IV 324:125;327:126; 410:165; JSD 420:369; 480:419; LLD V 3 141:142 and variants: LTR 2032/27/; 4165/13/; 284/424/; 284/257/; 1829/3025/; LLD V 3 145:148; 154:157; 156-158:158-160 and variant LMD III 197/7/]:

Žvaigždė sesulė	<i>The star my sister</i>
Vainikėlį pynė,	<i>Twined the wreath,</i>
Sytas brolelis	<i>The Sytas my brother</i>
Žirgelius pakinkė.	<i>Harnessed the horses [DM 197:243].</i>

The lad who is proposing to the maiden is compared with the Pleiades [JSD 202:198]:

Velij būčiau ant dangaus	<i>I'd better be a star [maiden]</i>
Žvaigždėlė bežibanti,	<i>In the sky,</i>
O aš sietynėlis	<i>And me Sietynėlis [lad]</i>
Pagal tavo šalelę...	<i>Beside you [JSD 257:243].</i>

The Moon, the Sun and the stars mentioned in the songs usually correspond to the father, mother and sister (sisters). In wedding songs there is *the mother – Sun* who usually packs a dowry (*kraitis*), *the father – Moon* who gives a portion (*dalia*), sisters stars who twine the wreath or sit next to the bride. The sieve harnesses the horses in the songs, calls a lot of people to the wedding, sits next to the bride or accompanies the bride. For example:

<i>Neturiu brolelių</i>	<i>I haven't got brothers</i>
<i>Lydėt per laukelį,</i>	<i>To see me off,</i>
<i>: Neturiu seselių</i>	<i>:I haven't got sisters</i>
<i>Vainykėliui pinti :</i>	<i>To twine the wreath:</i>

<i>Mėnuo tėvelis</i>	<i>Father Moon</i>
<i>Tai atskirs dalelę,</i>	<i>Will give me a part</i>
<i>: Saulelė močiutė</i>	<i>:Mother Sun</i>
<i>Tai sukraus kraitelį, :</i>	<i>Will pack me a dowry,:</i>

<i>Sietynas brolelis</i>	<i>Brother Sieve</i>
<i>Lydės per laukelį,</i>	<i>Will see me off,</i>
<i>:Žvaigždės seserėlės</i>	<i>Sisters stars</i>
<i>Nupins vainikėlį. :</i>	<i>Will twine the wreath.: [LLD V 3 157:159]</i>

One thing is common to all the Lithuanian folk songs that mention the Pleiades: the Pleiades are compared with the brother in one or another way [Vaiškūnas 1994:16-20]. At first sight it seems unusual that the Pleiades are compared with the sieve and the brother. But we should bear in mind that the folklore materials prove that some time ago the stars of the Pleiades were imagined as seven brothers (this will be discussed later).

So we may think that the comparison between the Pleiades and the brother in the Lithuanian folk song is not an accidental poetical simile. Most probably we face the characteristic folk image of the Baltic mythology here that there is a certain tie between a man and a star. It is supposed that there is a star in the sky for every man on the earth. When a child is born a star goes out. Sometimes a host of stars in the sky is imagined to be the members of the same family. So there is no surprise that the Pleiades could replace a brother for a lonely hero from this point of view. If so, facing solitude or separation he or she reveals his or her dependence upon the kinship of the heavenly bodies using the words of songs and at the same time gives a psychological lift for his soul and personality to higher divine level where earthly separation is substituted for heavenly community.

The Pleiades in the Legends

The Pleiades as Sieve

The origin of the Pleiades in the Lithuanian ethiological legends, recorded mostly in the fourth decade of the 20-th century, is linked with the image of God's mother Mary. This constellation is depicted as a small sieve. Here is a typical legend: "*Mother Mary had a sieve for riddling flour. But once it had disappeared. She learnt that it were devils who had stolen it and she sent St. Mark to get it back. The devils didn't want to give the sieve back and St. Mark had to fight. (That's why it is said that somebody is knocking like Mark in the hell [when somebody makes much noise knocking about]). While fighting they bent the sieve and St. Mary couldn't use it any more. So she hung it on the sky. Now we can see it and we call it Sietynas*"²¹. There are four variants of this

²¹ LTA 2306/9/ – Marijampole district. It was published in [Balys 1951:17].

legend explaining where St. Mary got the sieve from. One legend tells that shepherds brought eggs in the sieve to mother of God when Jesus was born [LTA 1300/29/, LTA 2018/32/]. The other legend tells that it was brought by the three Wise men [LTA 2244/65/, LTA 2336/99/]. But one thing is common in all the legends: the sieve was stolen by the Devil (*Velnias*). Later Mary finds the crumpled sieve herself [LTA 1542/394/] or sends somebody to get it back. (St. Elias is mentioned besides St. Mark). One legend tells that Jesus asks St. Matthew to bring back the stolen sieve from the hell [LTA 2336/99/].

The researcher of the Lithuanian folklore B. Kerbelytė says that these legends about the Pleiades were created in Pre-Christian times. In her opinion the characters of these legends obtained Christian image later when modifying the legends in the influence of Christian religion. Earlier the christianised characters of the legend should correspond to the mythological creatures of the Lithuanian legends. Mary corresponded to *Laumė* [Kerbelytė 1977:120-125]²², Devil to the Pre-Christian *Velnias*, *Velinas* (god of the earth and the underground and guardian of the dead). The god of thunder *Perkūnas* perhaps was the one who got the sieve back from the devils. The variant of the legend has survived where it is said directly that exactly *Perkūnas* has done it [LTA 1471/64/; *Balys* 1939:35]. The significance of a household utensil (sieve) is not accidental. We can see from the texts of the legends that the sieve is necessary for Mary and the devil. None of them wants to give it back. And if the god of thunder *Perkūnas* fights for it, that proves the sieve to be a very important household utensil²³.

Let us look for the reasons of its significance. We can consider that the personage deity *Laumė* could be hiding behind the image of Mary in the Lithuanian legends. It is supposed that *Laumė* was *Perkūnas*' wife [MHM:40; *about the relation between Laumė and Perkūnas see: Vėlius* 1977:122-124]. Then it is worth, to look for the usage of the sieve in the mythical family of *Perkūnas*. In this respect we get valuable information from the Latvian mythological songs. Here we find that the mother of brothers' *perkūnai* or the daughters of *Perkūnas* use the sieve for making drizzle. Later we will see that the sieve and *Perkūnas*' children appear together in the plots not by accident.

*Pērkonīši pieci brāli,
Ko tā jūsu māte dara?
-Mūsu māte sietus pina,
Smalki lieti jāsiļā.*

*Perkūnas children five brothers
What is your mother doing?
Our mother is weaving sieves
For making drizzle.*

*Ei, Pērkon, vecais tēvs,
Ko tās tavas meitas dara?*

*Hey, Perkūnas, the old father,
What are your daughters doing?*

²² It is thought, that *Laumė* in East Balts mythology was the goddess of accouchement and earth. Later she degraded to chthonic natural spirit similar to Celts *fee* 'fairy'. A. Gater derives the word *laumė* from **loudhmē-/ā/* and compares it with *Lauzerai*, the name of a Wendish goddess, Greek *Eleutheros*, and Latin *Liber*, a deity of vegetation. E. Frenkel thinks in a similar way and derives this name from *ide. *leudh-, *loudh-* 'grow' [Frenkel 1962:346].

²³ E.g. in one of the legends *Mary* asked *Elias* (i.e. St. *Elias* – personifying thunder in Christian times) what he was doing in hell that there was such a great noise heard even in heaven. And he answered: "*Devils were breaking rocks and throwing at me, because they didn't want to give back the sieve*" [LTA 2244/65/]. The other legend says: "...*St. Matthew get back the sieve with such thunder that it was heard in heaven*" [LTA 2336/99/; *Balys* 1951:17-18].

*Manas meitas pakaļ gāja,
Smalku lietu sijādamas*²⁴.

*My daughters are going after
And sifting drizzle.*

It is possible that earlier the origin of rain was explained like this. For instance *kondo* nation in India supposed that it rains when god of rain *Pidzu Pennu* pours water through a sieve [Тайлор 1989:397] while standing in heaven. Perhaps not accidentally *Strepsiadēs*, a character from *Aristophanes* (446-385 BC) "*Clouds*", speaks to *Socrates* about the origin of rain and lets it out: "*I have always thought that Zeus makes Water through the sieve*" [Aristofanes 1989:23].

Referring to the above mentioned facts we can suppose that St. Mary's sieve in the legends about the origin of the Pleiades earlier could be *Perkūnas* wife's *Laumė* tool. And she or her children (brothers, daughters) used it for making rain. Probably the stealing of the sieve (the Pleiades) was connected with the heliacal setting of the Pleiades (04.23) and their getting back and hanging up in the sky was connected with the heliacal rising (07.10). This way the rate of rain in the second part of summer was explained in the mythical of thinking. The sieve was taken from the devils and returned to its owner *Laumė* who used the sieve to make rain. It is interesting to mention that we can find the opinion in the present Lithuanian folklore that it seldom rains before St. John's day. It is testified by the well - known saying: "*Though we can't call rain before St. John all together, but after St. John even one woman can*" [LT 383] It is interesting to admit that the meaning of the old Prussian name of the Pleiades *Paicoran* could be explained like *paikas oras* 'bad weather'²⁵.

It is common in the legends not only where the sieve disappears, but also why its form is irregular. It is referred that the sieve was bent in the fight with the devils.

The Pleiades as 7 brothers

Some of the Lithuanian legends explaining the origin of the Pleiades depict the stars of the Pleiades as 7 brothers [SPSO:134-136; Dundulienė 1988:55]. One of the legends recorded in 1890 says that 7 men agreed to live friendly like brothers and they were building a church for 6 years. When the work was finished the voice of God told them to go for rest in the cellar of the new church. So they went there and fell into eternal sleep. Only the youngest brother *Danasas* God let him to stay among people and have a nice time. He enjoyed himself walking from one pub to the other for the whole year. Only after year he returned to his sleeping brothers and begged for mercy. The brothers had pity on the youngest one and let him lie at the foot of the bed. And since then a heap of 7 stars have been rising and people call it **Sietynas** [SPSO:134-136].

Most probably the youngest brother in this legend corresponds to Merope the star of the least brightness in the constellation of the Pleiades. The reference to the Pleiades as a group of people is spread all over the world. It is especially common with the nations that are less remote from the primitive way of life. For example the Indians of North America call the Pleiades: 7 sisters; 7 brothers; 7 children that entered heaven; 7 dancing boys. In the islands of Malaysia archipelago the Pleiades are called 7 men or 7 people. In New Zealand the Pleiades are considered to be the eyes of seven dead

²⁴ B 33708, compare with – B 33699, also: Jonval 1929:100-101.

²⁵ Information from the personal letter of Russian linguist Prof. Dr. V.N.Toporov (1996).

brothers (only one eye of every brother is seen) etc.²⁶. It is supposed that the name of the Pleiades *Baby*, *Vabki* also could mean a group of women to the Polish and some other Slavic nations [*Gładyszowa 1960:24, 28, 214*]²⁷. The name of the Pleiades is made from *Волос-, Влас-, Влащ-* (for example the Russian *Волосожары*). Some researchers are prone to derive it from the name of the Slavic god *Велес, Волос* (corresponding to the Lithuanian god *Velinas, Velnias*) [*Святский 1961:88-89; Рут 1974a:154-155*]. Serbian ethnoastronomist N.Jankovich explains the Serbian name of the Pleiades *Влапићи* (seldom *Влашчићи*) as a plural form of the patronimic derivative of the name of the god *Волос, Велеш* [*Jankovic 1951:141*]. He thinks that the name of this constellation should be understood as the sons of god *Волос = Велеш*²⁸. There is also a link between the Pleiades and 7 brothers in the Serbian folklore. Even the names of all the seven brothers are mentioned for example *Миле* and *Милета, Раде* and *Радета, Боре* and *Борета* and the youngest *Пригимаз* [*Jankovic 1951:139*]. The legends in which the Pleiades are linked with the 7 brothers or sisters usually in one way or the other explain why one star (Meropa) is the smallest in the cluster. It is known that there is a link between Merope and one of the 7 daughters of titan Atlas and oceanide Pleione in Greek mythology. It is explained that 6 daughters married gods and only Merope married the mortal Sisyphus. That's why she's hiding from people's eyes.

As we have already seen the Lithuanian legend about the Pleiades as 7 brothers speaks about the youngest brother *Danasas* separately. The other Lithuanian legend tells us that the head god punished goddess *Laumė* for her love affairs with a mortal young man and the fruit of their love son *Meilus*²⁹ was thrown to the sky among the stars of the Pleiades [*Jucevičius 1959:75-76*].

Russian scientists V. Ivanov and V. Toporov have reconstructed the so called main myth about the god of thunder *Perkūnas* on the ground of the Baltic, Slavic and Balkan materials. The myth speaks about *Perkūnas* who punishes his wife (she might be *Laumė*) for her adultery with the chthonic god *Velinas* and exiles her 7 or 9 children from heaven to the earth or underground. Only the youngest son who is *the Perkūnas'* son is separated. He passes all *Perkūnas'* tests and after rebirth is empowered to rule over natural changes including rain [*Иванов - Топоров 1974*]³⁰.

The Pleiades emerging in the mythological plots together with the characters of the main myth *Perkūnas, Laumė, Velnias, 7 brothers* have reason to claim to be the characters of the astral code of this myth. Probably in the Baltic tradition there was a mythological plot where the Pleiades were perceived as 7 brothers who were kidnapped or exiled to the underground during the heliacal setting of the constellation. The heliacal rising of the Pleiades could be related with *Perkūnas'* victory against chthonic *Velnias*

²⁶ Here the names of the Pleiades connected with the number 7 are chosen deliberately. There are also names connected with other numbers [see *Gładyszowa 1960:19-24*].

²⁷ Most probably this name could be related to the Russian dialectal word meaning a piling of sheafs in field, a shock [see: *Рут 1974:52*].

²⁸ Like the word *божии* 'son of god' is derived from the word *Бог* 'god'.

²⁹ This name is associated with the Serbian names of stars of the Pleiades *Миле* and *Милета, Милисав*, also with *Милан* – father's name of the Pleiades imagined as 7 children [see *Jankovic 1951:139*].

³⁰ The punishment of the *Perkūnas* children and his unfaithful wife (*Laumė*) is discussed in: [*Судник. - Цивьян 1980:240-285*].

(Devil). According to the main myth, all the stolen wealth is released when Perkūnas conquers Devil, and then it starts raining [MHM 1 154, 530]. It corresponds to the above mentioned heliacal rising of the Pleiades related with the rainy period in summer.

The Sieve and 7 brothers

The image of the Pleiades as a sieve and as 7 brothers converge in mythological plots, folk songs, and even contemporary poetry:

1. Next to the plots of the Lithuanian legends where the Pleiades are compared with the sieve, we can find legends relating the Pleiades with 7 brothers or with goddess' *Laumė* son.
2. In Lithuanian folk songs, the Pleiades are mentioned as the image of brother.
3. In Latvian songs, the sieve dominates as a tool for Perkūnas' wife and children (daughters – sisters, sons – brothers) to make rain.
4. In the contemporary poetry we can find some contamination of the name of the Pleiades as *Sietynas* and Brothers or 7 brothers. Also we can find the association of the Stars with rain. For instance Lithuanian poet K. Boruta in his poem "Beviltiškos naktys" ("Hopeless Nights") speaks:

*Let me speak to the stars tonight,
Let me ask the advice of the **Sietynas Brothers**
How that terrible pain of heart to fight
How that misery without hope to endure [Boruta 1964:278]³¹.*

The Latvian poet M. Čaklais links the stars of 7 brothers to the cause of rain:

*Seven sad stars
Behind the cleft of clouds
Seven brothers are lamenting,-
rain is falling, wind is blowing.
What expects us?
What expects us?
After this rainy day?
Rainy week
Rainy summer,
Or the whole rainy age?³²*

In the former times the Pleiades could be called *Sietas* 'sieve' and *Septyni broliai* at the same time (in neighbouring or the same territory). In both cases there should exist corresponding mythological plot to answer the question: "whose sieve?" or "who are these brothers?" The above mentioned reasoning let us guess that one and the same plot could give us an answer to both of the questions. If the Pleiades were related with the main Indo-European myth, there must be the brothers, i.e. Perkūnas' children, and the sieve as the tool for making rain either. One more additional argument for the single myth could be the name of the Pleiades *Sėjikai* 'sowers'. So *Septyni broliai* '7 broth-

³¹ Translated by R. Urbonavičienė.

³² This poem by M. Čaklais was kindly directed to the author by A. Mičiulis. Translated by J. Vaiškunas and R. Urbonavičienė.

ers' – *Sėjikai* 'sowers' – *Sietas* 'sieve'³³. After the dissociation of the main myth the nomination of the 7-brothers remained in some nations, though other nations preferred the sieve. Still both have remained in the cultural subconsciousness³⁴.

Conclusion

1. The analysis of the recorded sources and even ethnographic materials recorded lately shows that the Pleiades were an important guide in the Lithuanian ethnoastronomy. People not only guessed the time at night but they also knew when to start agricultural work according to the movement of the Pleiades.
2. The analysis of the folklore and ethnographic materials lets us think that the Pleiades called Sietynas by the Lithuanians and associated with the farmer's tool sieve, earlier were linked with seven mythical brothers too.
3. The analysis of the mythological plots explaining the origin and movement of the Pleiades shows that the Pleiades could be an important personage of astral code in the main Indo-European myth.

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³³ Similar situation is fixed for the Lithuanian name of the Orion. This constellation is called *Šienpjoviai* 'haymakers', *Septyni šienpjoviai* 'seven haymakers' and it is compared to the scythe.

³⁴ E.g. In the Bulgarian materials we can find that the folklore has preserved the motive of sieve next to the actual names of the Pleiades – *Власи, Влашкови, Власци* and other [*Kolev-Kaloyanov-Koleva, see this volume*].

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