

A Pacific history

It is not certain as to where kites first came from, but it is said that they were first known to the people of the Pacific Islands, where they attached bait to the tail of the kite to catch fish.

Even today, some natives of the Solomon Islands use kites as a fishing aid.

In the Polynesian Islands, kites were associated with gods. A kite represented the god Tane, as well as the god Rongo who was the patron saint of the arts, kites, and kite flying.

The Maori word for bird is 'manu' and it is in the shape of a bird that they made their kites. It was believed that birds could carry messages between humans and gods.

Sometimes, the kites represented the gods themselves. The Maori god, Rehua, is depicted as a bird, and was thought to be the ancestor of all kites.

As kite flying was considered a sacred ritual, it was often accompanied by a type of chant called the turu manu. Here is a translation of a turu manu.

My bird, by power of charm ascending,
In the glance of an eye, like the sparrow hawk,
By this charm shall my bird arise,
My bird bestride the heavens.
Beyond the swirling waters,
Like the stars Atutahi and Rehua,
and there spread out thy wings,
To the very clouds. Truly so.

The Maori also used kites for divination and for funerary purposes.

*An excellent book is available:
Te Manu Tukutuku: a study of the Maori kite by Bob Maysmor*