

1. Description

1.1 Name of society, language, and language family: Tiwi, Tiwian, a language of Australia (4)

1.2 ISO code (3 letter code from ethnologue.com): 639-3: tiw (4)

1.3 Location (latitude/longitude): Northern Territory, Melville and Bathurst Islands are located 40 kilometers north of Darwin at 11° 30' S and 131° 15' E. The land is approximately 7,500 square kilometers. (2 pg. 4)

1.4 Brief history: The prehistory of the Tiwi is related to that of other Aboriginal Australians. Recently calculated dates for earliest signs of human cultural activity are approximately forty thousand years ago. The Tiwi themselves are mentioned in historic records from the early eighteenth century, when they came in contact with Dutch, Portuguese, and British explorers. Prior to these recorded contacts by Europeans, there is evidence for early Chinese and Indonesian contact but no sustained settlement. The first foreign settlement on the Islands occurred in 1824, when the British established Fort Dundas. After five years of hardship the settlement was abandoned and it was nearly seventy-five years before European settlement was again attempted early in the twentieth century. In 1911, Father Gsell, M.S.C., established a Catholic mission at Nguiu on the southeastern coast of Bathurst Island, and following this development there was a significantly increased amount of contact with White Australians. (3)

1.5 Influence of missionaries/schools/governments/powerful neighbors: The missionaries brought with them clothes that the Tiwi started to wear polygynous marriages, prenatal or childhood betrothals were outlawed or at least discouraged by the new catholic system. schools taught them which did have some bearing on their tradition beliefs such as conception. There was also a switch from a patrilineal to a matrilineal system. (1 pg. 107-111) (2 pg. 136-137)

1.6 Ecology: The land is relatively flat with a low central ridge on Melville Island running west to east. Running south to north from this ridge are nine rivers. On Bathurst there is less elevation and draining rivers are small and largely tidal. Along the tidal reaches of rivers and smaller streams are mangrove forests, while mixed eucalyptus and cypress forests characterize much of the uplands. At the freshwater headlands of the larger rivers are small areas of true rain-forest vegetation and along the coast are areas of sandy beach and rocky reef. The rainfall is monsoonal, with heavy rains occurring between November and March. Almost no rain falls from June to September; the nights are cool and the air is filled with smoke from the fires of hunting parties. The range of temperatures is only a few degrees during the monsoon season, averaging about 27° C, while during the dry season the range is greater. (3)

1.7 Population size, mean village size, home-range size, density: The population of Melville and Bathurst Islands varies between 1,000 to 2,000 people, band size ranged from 100-300 there were some 7-9 bands, there number would fluctuate (1 pg. 11) (4)

2. Economy

2.1 Main carbohydrate staple(s): Yams, cycad, and cycad nuts, cabbage palm, pandanus, wild plum, and apples. (2 pg. 38)

2.2 Main protein-lipid sources: Kangaroo, wallaby, opossums, various fish, dugong, geese and other birds, turtle eggs, crocodile, snakes, lizards (2 pg. 38)

2.3 Weapons: Bow and arrow, blowguns?: Many different varieties of spears, throwing sticks, and several war/fighting and hunting clubs, flaked stone axes. (2 pg. 132-134)

2.4 Food storage: All carrying and storage utensils were made of bark (2 pg. 170)

2.5 Sexual division of production: In the precolonial subsistence Economy the division of labor was such that hunting in the sea or air was the exclusive domain of men, while extracting roots, seeds, fruits, etc. from plants rooted in the ground was the exclusive domain of women. However, aside from these particular exclusions, both men and women hunted and gathered ground- or tree-dwelling animals, shellfish, turtle eggs, and the like from the shore, and both sexes contributed equally to the daily diet. There were no full- or part-time specialists. (5 pg. 198)

2.6 Land tenure: There are a number of named local groups that hold exclusive responsibility for geographically distinct areas (*murukupuni*, or "countries") on the two islands. The number and boundaries of these countries are known to have fluctuated over the nearly one hundred years of recorded Tiwi history. (3)

2.7 Ceramics: No, not traditionally (6)

2.8 Specified (prescribed or proscribed) sharing patterns: Patterned sharing of land animals and large sea animals begins by distinguishing the provider and the cook (not necessarily by sex), each getting a primary division of the catch. Secondary division and distribution takes care of all members of a group camped together for the night. Vegetables and shellfish and other food collected in quantity is general distributed throughout the camp during the late afternoon meal. (2 pg.171-172)

2.9 Food taboos: Pregnant women cannot eat carpet snakes, fish, hawksbill turtles, the eggs of snakes of crocodiles, and they cannot eat yams for the entire rainy season and for most of the dry season. Any animal killed by a hawk is taboo for human consumption. If a crocodile has tasted human flesh it is taboo to eat. (5 pg. 144)

2.10 Canoes/watercraft? Yes, traditionally they made canoes out of the bark of eucalyptus trees, caulked with honeycomb or vegetable gum and the sides held apart with a few sticks. Today they also have crude dugout canoes carved out from the kapok tree, the techniques for making these canoes were learned from the Malay directly or the mainland natives indirectly. (1 pg. 4)

3. Anthropometry

3.1 Mean adult height (m and f): N/a

3.2 Mean adult weight (m and f): N/a

4. Life History, mating, marriage

- 4.1 Age at menarche (f): From what I have read they would begin to live with their husbands at around the time before puberty which was at approximately 14 years of age, but the Tiwi believed that sexual intercourse was the only and direct cause of menarche. (
- 4.2 Age at first birth (m and f): I couldn't find an exact number but I would estimate for my research that the progression of sexual instruction was gradual and sexual intercourse was not usually preformed for a year after the women began to live with her husband so probably around the age of 15-16.
- 4.3 Completed family size (m and f): I could really find an answer, this number could vary widely depending on the number of wives that a man had, as well as their ages, and how long the man lived, all of these factors due to the Tiwi having such high rates of polygny.
- 4.4 Inter-birth-interval (f): N/a
- 4.5 Age first marriage (m and f): Females are continuously married from the time that they are born until the time that they die. Men do not usually marry until they are in their very late 20's (being rare) or thirties (were they will usually be marrying and old and undesirable women) it is not until their lat 40's and fifties that they start marrying more women and women of their choosing, for this is when they are at the height of there "political" careers. (1 pg. 14)
- 4.6 Proportion of marriages ending in divorce: Divorce was quite rare, don't have any actually numbers, it usually came about when a husband beat his wife too severely or too often in which case the wife's father or brother or both would rescue her, she would then reside with her rescuer. (2 pg. 229)
- 4.7 Percent marriages polygynous, percent males married polygynously: Polygyny was very high among the Tiwi, important men would have some twenty or more wives and some say up to 100 wives though this seems to be a bit of an exaggerated. (1 pg. 17)
- 4.8 Bride purchase (price), bride service, dowry?: The young woman (the mother-in-law) and her son-in-law are in a reciprocal relationship in which the son-in-law is obliged to "feed" his potential wife's mother, providing her not only food but any goods and services she demands. In return he will receive as wives all daughters born to his mother-in-law prior to their sexual maturity. (2 pg. 106)
- 4.9 Inheritance patterns: Most things were left at the grave site, the family didn't want the items because they were considered taboo, and that they would be a constant reminder of the person that was dead, whoever very valuable item such as canoes and houses were passed down patrilineally but need to be smoked to cleanse them before they could be used. (5)
- 4.10 Parent-offspring interactions and conflict: N/a
- 4.11 Homosexual activities, social attitudes towards homosexuals: N/a
- 4.12 Pattern of exogamy (endogamy): They practiced endogamy in that they only married other Tiwi (which has somewhat changed since European contact) and exogamy in that they married outside of their clan. (2 pg. 19)
- 4.13 What is the belief of the role of males in conception; is paternity partible? Are these "other fathers" recognized? The male must "dream" of a child before it can be born or sent to his wife, and he must be geographically in his country to be able to "dream". But this seems weird because I have read that the reason that females are constantly married for their entire lives is for fear that they might me impregnated by a spirit, in which case the male plays no part in the pregnancy. (2 pg.) (1 pg. 14)
- 4.14 What is the belief of the mother's role in procreation exactly? (e.g., "receptacle in which fetus grows") Basically they are the receptacle in which the child grows.
- 4.15 Is conception believed to be an incremental process (i.e., semen builds up over time)? No
- 4.16 Occurrence of sexual coercion, rape: N/a
- 4.17 Preferential category for spouse (e.g., cross cousin) They had cross cousin marriages (1 pg. 27)
- 4.18 Do females enjoy sexual freedoms? N/a, there were extramarital affairs and they were not common place
- 4.19 Evidence of giving gifts to extramarital partners or extramarital offspring: N/a, but more the likely not as this would cause conflict and possibly lead to accusations of seduction and a duel and possibly war.
- 4.20 If mother dies, whose raises children? The women's husband.
- 4.21 Adult sex ratio: number of adult males divided by number of (reproductive) females: It appears to be 50-50 (1 pg. 15)
- 4.22 Evidence for couvades: N/a
- 4.23 Different distinctions for potential fathers (e.g., lesser/younger vs. major/older): No
- 4.24 Kin avoidance and respect? N/a
- 4.24 Joking relationships? N/a
- 4.25 Patterns of descent (e.g., bilateral, matrilineal) for certain rights, names or associations: Matrilineal with respect to clan organization, the major unit of social structure was patrilineal (1 pg. 111)
- 4.26 Incest avoidance rules: Yes, there were rules in place to guard against incest but I couldn't really find any information that described what those rules were. (2 pg. 77)
- 4.27 Is there a formal marriage ceremony? No
- 4.28 In what way(s) does one get a name, change their name, and obtain another name? Children are named by their mother's husbands, and their names were changed after their mothers husband died, in which case they were renamed by there mother's new husband (their step-father). Although ones name was supposed to be taboo upon the death of the man that gave it , there were instances were a certain name would be used again or come back into favor but only after some time had passed. (1 pg. 21-24)
- 4.29 Is marriage usually (or preferred to be) within community or outside community? (m/f difference?) Inside the community always, because they were isolated from the mainland, although due to European influence that started to change after friendly contact was established in the early to mid 1900's. (1 pg. 15)
- 4.30 Are marriages arranged? Who arranges (e.g., parents, close kin)? Yes marriages were arranged. They were usually arranged by the father of the women, in rare cases her brothers, and it still rarer cases in her sons (1 pg. 14)

4.31 Evidence for conflict of interest over who marries who: There were some instances of disputed wives, in which case two men thought that a woman was or should be his wife via betrothal. (1 pg. 28)

Warfare/homicide

4.14 Percent adult (male) deaths due to warfare: N/a, although duels/warfare seemed common it doesn't appear that many people died as a result, usually once the defendant was wounded by the accuser the fighting would stop (in the case of a duel). The same for wars as they followed the same general formula as a duel but were longer due to the fact that there were more people and grievances to be settled (1 pg. 80- 86)

4.15 Outgroup vs ingroup cause of violent death: Probably spearing, or injuries caused by spears, or the throwing of sticks and war/fighting clubs. Same for both. (1 pg. 80)

4.16 Reported causes of in-group and out-group killing: The main cause of ingroup conflict was over women, be it an accused case of seduction, or concerning the right to wives, but not of other resources. Outgroup conflict because of intrusion onto their land. (1 pg. 80-83) (1 pg. 99)

4.17 Number, diversity and relationship with neighboring societies (external relations): The Tiwi were relatively isolated, no real contact to the mainland of Australia, they would come into contact with Malay fishermen, and then when the Europeans (Portuguese, Dutch, British) came. They were also relatively hostile prior to approximately 1900, their treatment of outsiders before that was to generally rob, spear, and kill them. (1 pg. 9) (1 pg. 99)

4.18 Cannibalism? N/a

5. Socio-Political organization and interaction

5.1 Mean local residential (village) group size: 100-300 (1pg. 11)

5.2 Mobility pattern: (seasonality): N/a

5.3 Political system: (chiefs, clans etc, wealth or status classes): Characterized by the matrilineal clans and by the local groups affiliated with each country. In matrilineal clans, Leadership was largely ceremonial and was conferred according to seniority and competence among the males. Under the Country system of organization, some leaders in the past were men who achieved great prominence through arranging multiple (reportedly sometimes as many as a hundred) marriage contracts for themselves; they also were men whose domestic groups were very large and regionally influential. Such men also gained notoriety as ceremonial leaders in song, dance, and art. They were the "Big Men." (6)

5.4 Post marital residence: Women live with their husband wherever he is residing until she dies, but she doesn't begin living with him till she is given to him. (1 pg. 26)

5.5 Territoriality? (defined boundaries, active defense): They had somewhat defined territorial boundaries, but I didn't find any information that suggests that the territories were actively defended, this is probably due to the fact that the Tiwi resided in a rich environment where food was plentiful enough that conflicts didn't arise. (1 pg. 12)

5.6 Social interaction divisions ? (age and sex): N/a

5.7 Special friendships/joking relationships: Friendships were formed between males usually for the promise of marriage to the daughters of other men, and for those men to have access to his daughters. (1 pg. 14)

5.8 Village and house organization: the house organization included the man, his wife or wives, their children, and some common holdovers such as bachelor uncles, visiting cousins. (1 pg. 13)

5.9 Specialized village structures (mens' houses): They made temporary bark shelters of many different varieties during the rainy season. During the dry season shelter was only needed to provide shade, and were only constructed to if the area was not protected by trees, they were made from bark or leafy branches. (2 pg. 25)

5.10 Sleep in hammocks or on ground or elsewhere? Slept on the ground (2 pg. 25)

5.11 Social organization, clans, moieties, lineages, etc: Tribe, bands and clans and the household unit. (1 pg. 11)

5.12 Trade: External trade with the mainland peoples did not exist prior to the early twentieth century and the arrival of European settlers on the islands. (6)

5.13 Indications of social hierarchies? The more wives that a man was able to obtain seemed to mark their status within a clan. (1 pg. 51)

6. Ritual/Ceremony/Religion (RCR)

6 Time allocation to RCR: Apart from big ceremonial occasions the Tiwi did not have much concern with religion in their daily lives except in some form of the taboo system, it is only through this system that the sacred world affected him. (1 pg. 89)

6.1 Specialization (shamans and medicine): There were no full time shamans or curers, although they did believe that some possessed greater knowledge for plants and animals for which medicines and cures were made. (2 pg. 235)

6.2 Stimulants: N/a

6.3 Passage rituals (birth, death, puberty, seasonal): There were death rituals which were very important, as well as puberty rituals for females and initiation rituals for the males. The annual kulama yam ceremony is held near the end of the wet season (November-March). The three-day ritual involves the digging, preparation, cooking, and eating of the kulama type of wild yam. The yam symbolizes reproduction and maintenance of life, both human and nonhuman. Participants must, in addition to carrying out the preparation and cooking of the yams, compose and sing more than a dozen new songs throughout the three days. Other major ceremonies include the celebration of the transition of the living to the world of the dead. In connection with funeral rituals, elaborately

carved and painted poles are commissioned and paid for by the close kin of the deceased, and for related activities painted bark baskets and spears are also manufactured. (6)

6.4 Other rituals: They followed a heavy amount of taboos, these regarded the death of relatives, his wife giving birth, his sisters son being initiated, women during pregnancy, and many more. (1 pg. 87)

6.5 Myths (Creation): Pukwi made the country the first time. The sea was all fresh water. She made the land, sea and islands. She came out of the sky in daytime. She was as big as Karslake Island. Like an alligator she was and she was black. (2 pg. 3)

6.6 Cultural material (art, music, games): The Tiwi would make paintings using bark as a medium and using the same red, white, yellow, and black colors they used for body paint, they created songs for the death and initiation ceremonies, elaborate grave post were carved and painted, as well as many decorative spears that were also used in these ceremonies as well as signs of a mans wealth (1 pg. 90)

6.7 Sex differences in RCR: Women are largely left out of the male initiation ceremony (2 pg. 283)

6.8 Missionary effect:

6.9 RCR revival:

6.10 Death and afterlife beliefs: The most important myth of the Tiwi deals with the permanence of death, after the death-by-neglect of Purukupali's son. This culture hero walked into the sea with his son's body, declaring that henceforth all Tiwi shall die and never return to life. The spirits of the deceased reside in the country where they are buried, although to accommodate the increased mobility of Tiwi (over to the mainland and overseas) the spirits are said to be able to travel back to their "homeland" as well. The life in this spirit world mir-TOTS that of the living, in that the dead hunt, fish, and hold parallel ceremonies with the living. (6)

6.11 Taboo of naming dead people? The names of dead people immediately became taboo on their deaths and could not be used, the same was true of the all the names bestowed by a dead man on the children of his household, and all words in the language that sounded similar to the dead mans name. (1 pg. 21)

6.12 Is there teknonymy? No

6.13 Briefly describe religion (animism, ancestor worship, deism, magic, totems etc.) Tiwi religion focuses on ancestral spirits of those who have lived in the recent past and including those who, in "the Dreamtime," created the land, sea, and all that is found within. (6)

7. Adornment

7.1 Body paint: Yes, various colors (red, white, yellow, and black) of ochre. (2 pg. 50)

7.2 Piercings: N/a

7.3 Haircut: both males and females wore their hair longer and it was black and has been described as curly, wavy, and straight (rarer). The hair could also be smeared with or clumped together using clay or ochre. The men also had long beards, but the upper lip was kept clean. (2 pg. 263)

7.4 Scarification: Yes, the characteristic pattern there is one made in direct imitation of an object of nature, namely, the frond of the zamia palm. This simple type of cicatrices, consisting of two to five or more, parallel ridges, is found first, as vertically disposed ridges, about 10 centimeters in length, on the outer surface of the upper arm, in the region of the deltoid muscle secondly, as two or three horizontal ridges, about 20 centimeters long, upon the chest and abdomen, either in the epigastria or immediately below the nipples, or in the umbilical region; thirdly, as two or three ridges, horizontally disposed or slightly inclined from back to front, on the buttocks and outer surface of the thighs. Occasionally a horizontal row of short vertical sears is cut upon the forehead immediately above the eyes and also an asymmetrical-vertical group on the chest or back consisting of a number of parallel scars which-slant outwards and downwards from the sternum or spine, respectively. (2 pg. 231)

7.5 Adornment (beads, feathers, lip plates, etc.): Traditionally both males and females went completely naked, however the women usually carried a bark "shield" that they would use to cover their pubic areas when in the presence of strange males. (2 pg. 38)

7.6 Ceremonial/Ritual adornment: They wore various armband and hair belts, and head dress decorated with the feathers of various birds found on the island such and geese, and cockatoos. They would also paint there bodies in elaborate designs with the various colors already mentioned. (2 pg. 240)

7.7 Sex differences in adornment:

7.8 Missionary effect: Although the there is a catholic misson it seems to have influenced their rituals little. (1 pg. 105)

7.9 Cultural revival in adornment:

8. Kinship systems

8.1 Sibling classification system: In the first ascending generation, one's parent's siblings of the same sex are classified with the parent, and their children are classed with one and one's siblings. One's parent's opposite-sex Siblings are distinguished from each other, as are their children. One's siblings are distinguished in several ways: first by gender and then by relative age. Further distinction is made for siblings who have the same father but whose mothers are of different clans. (6)

8.2 Sororate, levirate: Yes, both systems were in place, but they were far from automatic. Sororate was more common then levirate however. (1 pg. 25-28)

8.3 Other notable kinship typology, especially cross-cousin (MBD/FZD) typology (Crow/Hawaiian/Omaha etc.):

9. Other interesting cultural features (list them):

Numbered references

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6. Goodale, Jane. "[Tiwi](#)." *Encyclopedia of World Cultures*. 1996. *Encyclopedia.com*. 12 Dec. 2011 <<http://www.encyclopedia.com>>.