

1. Description

1.1 Name(s) of society, language, and language family: Marshall Islands; Marshallese/Ebon (Dialects: Ralik, Ratak, and Enewetak/Ujelang) and English; *Austronesian*, Malayo-Polynesian, Central-Eastern, Eastern Malayo-Polynesian, Oceanic, Central-Eastern Oceanic, Remote Oceanic, Micronesian, Micronesian Proper, Marshallese (1)

1.2 ISO code (3 letter code from ethnologue.com): MAH (1)

1.3 Location (latitude/longitude): Between 160° and 173° E, and 4° and 14° N (3a)

1.4 Brief history: Originally settled circa 1000 BC by other Polynesian peoples; Spain claimed the islands in the 1500s but made no effort to colonize or explore them; Germany eventually took control of the islands in 1885 only for Japan to take over during World War I; the US then won control over the islands in 1944 and proceeded to conduct nuclear tests exposing many of the Marshallese people to radiation and making Bikini atoll completely uninhabitable; The Marshall Islands gained full independence in 1990 and now has a Compact of Free Association with the US which means that the US provides a great deal of financial assistance as well as defense of the islands (3a)

1.5 Influence of missionaries/schools/governments/powerful neighbors: Arrival of missionaries (from American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions) in 1857 greatly reduced number of dialects to the 3 recognizable ones today as a result of creating a writing system using Latin script; The US military base is a main source of jobs; was once a Trust Territory of the US, but now is mostly independent, although US has huge influence (2); contact with US has led to widespread urbanization and heavy reliance on imported goods in large cities, namely the capital, Majuro; During World War II, was a site for US nuclear testing, so many natives have received compensation for the numerous problems it caused; US has created pressure to make land available to be bought and sold; polygamy prohibited by missionaries (3);

1.6 Ecology (natural environment): Temperatures are 81°F on average; It is comprised of numerous islands which form atolls which typically encircle a lagoon; the land is typically only a few meters above sea level; the soil is not suited to agriculture; (3)

1.7 Population size, mean village size, home range size, density: Total population is more than 60,000; 50% in Majuro, 19% in Ebeye (2); 971 people per square mile (3);

2. Economy

2.1 Main carbohydrate staple(s): imported rice (3c)

2.2 Main protein-lipid sources: fish, chicken, and pigs (3c)

2.3 Weapons: Bow and arrow, blowguns?: spears and swords (6)

2.4 Food storage: woven baskets and rolled preserves (6)

2.5 Sexual division of production: Women dominate land related activities such as gathering food and the domestic sphere; men can travel freely away from the village for work and dominate activities related to the sea and sky such as hunting, fishing, and canoe building. (2)

2.6 Land tenure: partially matrilineal, but fairly flexible (i.e. males in good standing can maintain working rights on the land for more than one generation). Land is held (not owned per se) by clans or extended families. Some land and fishing waters are communal. US has created pressure to make land available to be bought and sold. (2)

2.7 Ceramics: n/a

2.8 Specified (prescribed or proscribed) sharing patterns: 4-5 related families will form a cookhouse group and gather food and prepare meals together, men, women, and children all contribute, though young men and women do most of the work. This has become less and less common among urban families, where they rely more on cash than sharing, which has created problems for many urban families. (2)

2.9 Food taboos: n/a

2.10 Canoes/watercraft?: Canoes, built by men (2)

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): same as first marriage (12-14) (6)

4.2 Age at first birth (m and f): 1 (3c)

4.3 Completed family size (m and f): varied extensively, although the irooj often had excessively large families since they were allowed 6-10 wives. (6)

4.4 Inter-birth-interval (f): 2-3 years of lactation

4.5 Age first marriage (m and f): M: 14-16, F: 12-14 (6)

4.6 Proportion of marriages ending in divorce: Large number of divorces in experimental marriages, usually before there are any children, but once a couple has a child then divorce is rare. In the event of divorce between a couple with children the mother's family will adopt the child or the mother's next husband will adopt the child. (3c)

4.7 Percent marriages polygynous, percent males married polygynously: Polyandry and polygyny were both common before the arrival of missionaries (polygyny more so than polyandry). (3c)

4.8 Bride purchase (price), bride service, dowry?: n/a

4.9 Inheritance patterns: An individual's core identity is derived from their mother and their external features are attributed to their father; An individual's possessions are traditionally burned at death, of the small amount remaining the family retains little (nothing more than mementos) and the rest is distributed to community members. Clanship is matrilineal while blood is patrilineal. (2)

4.10 Parent-offspring interactions and conflict: n/a

4.11 Homosexual activities, social attitudes towards homosexuals: Sodomy is a crime and a person can be imprisoned for up to 10 years, however no one has been prosecuted in many years and one of the chiefs is openly gay. (5)

4.12 Pattern of exogamy (endogamy): Exogamy preferred for clans, endogamy common within atolls due to difficulty of travel (3c)

4.13 What is the belief of the role of males in conception; is paternity partible? Are these "other fathers" recognized? n/a

4.14 What is the belief of the mother's role in procreation exactly? (e.g., "receptacle in which fetus grows") n/a

4.15 Is conception believed to be an incremental process (i.e., semen builds up over time)? n/a

4.16 Occurrence of sexual coercion, rape: In a recent survey 86% of women reported being the victims of violence and 66% the victims of sexual abuse (5)

4.17 Preferential category for spouse (e.g., cross cousin): immediate or extended cross cousins are preferred, but marriage to nonrelatives is increasingly common. (2) Clan exogamy and atoll endogamy are most common. (3c)

4.18 Do females enjoy sexual freedoms? Yes, the society was very promiscuous before the arrival of missionaries, anyone could essentially have sex with anyone else of the opposite gender (6)

4.19 Evidence of giving gifts to extramarital partners or extramarital offspring: n/a

4.20 If mother dies, whose raises children?: Mother's family adopts the child

4.21 Adult sex ratio: number of adult males divided by number of (reproductive) females: 1.04 (ages 15-64) (4)

4.22 Evidence for couvades n/a

4.23 Different distinctions for potential fathers (e.g., lesser/younger vs. major/older) n/a

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: largely matrilineal, external features from father (2 and 3)

4.26 Incest avoidance rules n/a

4.27 Is there a formal marriage ceremony? yes

4.28 In what way(s) does one get a name, change their name, and obtain another name? n/a

4.29 Is marriage usually (or preferred to be) within community or outside community? (m/f difference?):
within the atoll, but outside of the clan, although within the clan is not uncommon. (3c)

4.30 Are marriages arranged? Who arranges (e.g., parents, close kin)? n/a

4.31 Evidence for conflict of interest over who marries who: n/a

Warfare/homicide

4.14 Percent adult (male) deaths due to warfare: n/a

4.15 Outgroup vs ingroup cause of violent death: foreigners who drifted ashore were often either killed or enslaved, also high-ranking prisoners of war (with the exception of young girls) were systematically killed (6)

4.16 Reported causes of in-group and out-group killing: out-group killing mostly during times of starvation when someone would wash ashore in order to avoid having more mouths to feed or because of warfare (7)

4.17 Number, diversity and relationship with neighboring societies (external relations): little relationship with neighboring societies, far too isolated until later contact with Europeans (7)

4.18 Cannibalism? No

5. Socio-Political organization and interaction

5.1 Mean local residential (village) group size: n/a

5.2 Mobility pattern: (seasonality): n/a

5.3 Political system: (chiefs, clans etc, wealth or status classes): Legislative branch of government made up of a popularly elected Parliament and a Council of Iroj; President is elected by Parliament, selects cabinet from Parliament; Iroj are chiefs who lead multiple groups of families (bwij) (3)

5.4 Post marital residence: fairly flexible due to shifting circumstances and land tenure; no specific social norms about which gender leaves their home although inheritance of land is matrilineal (3c)

5.5 Territoriality? (defined boundaries, active defense): the islands and atolls function as natural boundaries, however land tenure is subject to change within a community and is typically shared land, so there are not necessarily explicitly defined boundaries, and no sources mention anything substantial about active defense, although weapons such as spears and swords are evidence of the existence of some defense and warfare. (7)

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

5.7 Special friendships/joking relationships: n/a

5.8 Village and house organization: see 5.13 and 2.8

5.9 Specialized village structures (mens' houses): tattoo houses (6)

5.10 Sleep in hammocks or on ground or elsewhere?: Family members with higher rank have higher sleeping platforms (2)

5.11 Social organization, clans, moieties, lineages, etc: A bwij is a group of extended families/clans who work together and share food, housing, land, and resources; multiple bwij form a larger group headed by an iroj (chief) (3)

5.12 Trade: Dried coconut or copra; shells; fish; sell fishing rights to Taiwan, China, and Japan; food and beverages make up largest percentage (31%) of imports; US Dollar is main currency (3b)

5.13 Indications of social hierarchies?: A bwij is headed by a an alap, multiple bwij are headed by a chief in rural areas. In more urbanized areas, there is a very large and widening gap between rich and poor and social standing is partially based on clan membership but mostly due to economic disparities. (3)

6. Ritual/Ceremony/Religion (RCR)

6.0 Time allocation to RCR: The Kurijmoj celebration lasts several weeks

6.1 Specialization (shamans and medicine): reliance on healers because of hospitals in disrepair that are not always easily accessible. (3a)

6.2 Stimulants: n/a

6.3 Passage rituals (birth, death, puberty, seasonal): possessions are burned at death (2); the celebration of a child's first birthday (soon after birth) is a huge celebration put on by the family (6)

6.4 Other rituals: Special ceremony for tattooing which involved food sacrifices to the gods who brought tattooing to the Marshallese

6.5 Myths (Creation): The Story of Lijebake: The wife of a god who's granddaughter was mistreated by the people of Kiribati, so she turned herself into a turtle and her husband into a frigate bird; she swam and he flew until he could no longer see the islands, they then settled the islands now known as the Marshall Islands. (6); Most agree that 3 types of power (e.g. divination, deception, chiefs, etc) are derived from 3 original sisters (7)

6.6 Cultural material (art, music, games): canoe-making is considered an art form; there is also a strong oral tradition of song and legend and elaborate speeches are often given to commemorate important events such as a first birthday; there have been recent attempts to revive traditional dancing (similar to hula dancing) (2); music and jepta dancing are an important part of Kurijmoj (Christmas) a four month

long celebration; mat weaving (largely done by elders too old to cook or fish); woven handicrafts made from coconut and pandanus fibers (baskets decorated with shells, fans, belts, handbags, and hats) (3a)

6.7 Sex differences in RCR: women were not allowed to witness tattooing ceremony, although they were present to sing and use drums to hide any moans or cries of pain. (6)

6.8 Missionary effect: Christianity is the religion of the majority, although it is mixed with the indigenous polytheistic religion. (3c)

6.9 RCR revival: recent revival of traditional dances, especially at important celebrations (3c)

6.10 Death and afterlife beliefs: Death is seen as a passage from one form of existence to another; an individual lives on in their children (who give them ancestral status) and the work they put into the land; death does not mean a loss of interaction with members of one's community. (2)

6.11 Taboo of naming dead people?: n/a

6.12 Is there tekonymy?: n/a

6.13 Briefly describe religion (animism, ancestor worship, deism, magic, totems etc.): Before the arrival of missionaries, the religion was polytheistic; belief in magic and ESP is still common as are "seers, curers, purveyors of evil magic, and weather magicians" alongside mission pastors; ancestors who have died are still believed to be present and active participants in their clan's day to day lives. (3c)

7. Adornment

7.1 Body paint: Tattoos were common as an artistic and social expression before missionaries outlawed them (3c); Men's tattoos were typically uniform, with the exception of the irooj who also had tattoos on their faces and upper shoulders, images related to the sea were most common; women were the ones who maintained the practice of tattooing after it was banned; shoulder tattoos for women held great importance in Marshallese culture and hand tattoos were highly personalized such that you could

identify a woman by the tattoo on her hand, finger tattoos were restricted to women of chiefly rank, and arm and leg tattoos were also common in women (6)

7.2 Piercings: n/a

7.3 Haircut: Women and men wore their hair long; men tied their hair in a tight knot at the top of their head, women a knot at the neck and children wore their hair loose. (6)

7.4 Scarification: Scar tattooing was restricted to men and involved inserting a midrib of a coconut leaf under the skin which was then set on fire. Scar tattoos were incorporated into the regular tattoos on the chest (6)

7.5 Adornment (beads, feathers, lip plates, etc.): woven head ornaments (wut) with artificial flowers and shell jewelry for women; armrings and armbands made out of different types of shells; arm and head ornaments made from seabird feathers; pendants were also made from shells in addition to whale and porpoise teeth and turtle shells; the Marshallese also took great pride in their belts which were intricately woven and adorned; earlobes were also commonly extended using shark teeth for piercing and then leaves to enlarge them, they were then often used for carrying things like pipes or pencils; young girls would also dye their nails red. (6)

7.6 Ceremonial/Ritual adornment: tattoos, see above

7.7 Sex differences in adornment: n/a

7.8 Missionary effect: outlawed tattooing

7.9 Cultural revival in adornment: n/a

8. Kinship systems

8.1 Sibling classification system: similar to Hawaiian (3c); men will formally refer to their sisters as "mothers" since they are the mothers of the matrilineage (7)

8.2 Sororate, levirate: n/a

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

9. Other interesting cultural features (list them):

Numbered references

1. www.ethnologue.com
2. www.everyculture.com
3. http://www.encyclopedia.com/topic/Marshall_Islands.aspx
 - a. Worldmark Encyclopedia of Nations (2007)
 - b. Worldmark Encyclopedia of National Economies (2002)
 - c. Encyclopedia of World Cultures
4. The World Factbook: <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/rm.html>
5. The New Internationalist: <http://www.newint.org/columns/country/2005/03/01/marshall-island/>
6. Digital Micronesia: Marshalls: http://marshall.csu.edu.au/Marshalls/Marshalls_Culture.html
7. **Narrative, Cosmos, and Nation: Intertextuality and Power in the Marshall Islands**

Phillip H. McArthur

The Journal of American Folklore , Vol. 117, No. 463 (Winter, 2004), pp. 55-80
<http://www.jstor.org.proxy.mul.missouri.edu/stable/4137613>