

Tokelau

1. Description

1.1 Name(s) of society, language, and language family:

Tokelau, Tokelauan, Austronesian (1)

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

TKL (1)

1.3 Location (latitude/longitude):

9 00 S, 172 00 W (2)

1.4 Brief history:

“Tokelau's atolls have been populated by Polynesians for about 1000 years, but it wasn't until the 18th century that 'Tokelau' came to exist. A series of wars at this time united these previously fiercely independent atolls. At the end of the wars, Fakaofu had conquered Atafu and Nukunonu, bringing them under the rule of the god Tui Tokelau and creating the first united entity of Tokelau. Soon afterwards, Tokelau came to the attention of English and US ships sailing by. Whalers frequented the atolls in the 1820s, and in the middle of the 19th century missionary groups began devoting time to the spiritual wellbeing of the Tokelauans. From the 1840s to the 1860s, first Catholic, then Protestant missionaries from Samoa converted the people of the three atolls to Christianity. Conversion was a mixed blessing. The French missionary Pierre Bataillon transported 500 reluctant Tokelauans to Wallis Island in the 1850s because he feared they would otherwise die of starvation. Then Peruvian slave traders seized about 250 people - half of the atolls' population - in the 1860s. The combined effect of missionaries, slaving and disease reduced Tokelau's population from 1000 to only 200. Desperate to save the remaining people, Tokelauans pleaded with the UK for protection as a British colony, and in 1889 Tokelau was annexed into the Gilbert & Ellice Islands Protectorate. In the early 20th century, large numbers of Tokelauans left their homes to work the phosphate mines of Banaba (Ocean Island) in the Gilbert Islands took over responsibility for Tokelau in 1925, the flow of emigration shifted to Western Samoa (then also a NZ territory). Following Samoa's independence in 1962, Tokelauans relocated to NZ. In recent years, Tokelau has been moving towards self-government in free association with NZ (like the Cook Islands and Niue), but a referendum in February 2006 failed to result in independence for the tiny territory.” (3)

1.5 Influence of missionaries/schools/governments/powerful neighbors:

Missionaries brought a number of changes to Tokelau. The missionaries converted a large number of people to Christianity, which remains the dominant religion today. However, missionaries also brought disease and took some of the indigenous people into slavery, which killed a lot of people. (3)

1.6 Ecology (natural environment):

“The mean average temperature is 28 deg C. July is the coolest month and May the warmest. From April to November the east-southeasterly trade winds dominate climatic conditions. Rainfall is heavy but irregular. A daily fall of 80 mm or more can be expected at any time of the year. Severe tropical storms, once rare, have become more frequent in recent years.

Cyclones in 1987,1990 and 1991 caused extensive damage to houses and general infrastructure. There is some concern about the possible threat to Tokelau's long-term survival from climatic change. Poor soil quality and rapid drainage result in low fertility except in areas where efforts have been made to improve soil composition. Coconut and pandanus are the most common plant species although other species common to central Polynesia are found in smaller numbers. Staple food crops include bananas, papaya, taro and breadfruit. Migratory seabirds are common visitors to these atolls. Otherwise rats and lizards are common along with domesticated pigs and poultry. Mosquitoes infest the undergrowth.” (4)

1.7 Population size, mean village size, home range size, density

In 2012 the population for the island was estimated at 1,368. (2) In 1863 the indigenous population was estimated to be around 530 people. (5) Thus giving a population density of 112 people per km² in 2012 and about 44 people per km² in 1863.

2. Economy

2.1 Main carbohydrate staple(s):

Coconuts which were their main food stable along with swamp taro, pandanus fruit, and breadfruit and they often import rice and flour (7)

2.2 Main protein-lipid sources:

Fish, crab, turtle, bird eggs, and crayfish (7)

2.3 Weapons: Bow and arrow, blowguns?:

For fighting they used wooden spears and clubs. (7)

2.4 Food storage:

No signs of food storage

2.5 Sexual division of production:

“What is regularly done by men or women, young or old, is clear. Men fish and harvest, doing most of their work outside; women process and allocate food and oversee the home and family. Children fetch and carry; young adults undertake the most arduous tasks; elders are managers.” (6)

2.6 Land tenure:

“Land is the chief wealth and the dominant interest of the Tokelau native, and the main source of his subsistence and building materials. Rights to land are based on relationship to kindreds, which forces everyone to know his genealogy accurately. Without land one can not exist in the community.” “An individual's holding or subdivision consists of one large piece or several small pieces planted with coconuts, pieces of wooded land, and land in the village for houses or cook sheds. The boundaries of plantation land extend into the water to the edge of the reef and along the lagoon shore for a short distance. Fishing rights in the water covering this land belong to the land holders, but the privilege of fishing is not withheld from others at the present time.” (7)

2.7 Ceramics:

Women worked with fiber and men worked with wood. (8)

2.8 Specified (prescribed or proscribed) sharing patterns:

“People request what they need from others and give to neighbors and kin. A formal and versatile system of absolutely equal sharing, both in receiving and providing, operates in the Village.” (6)

2.9 Food taboos:

The Tokelau considered turtle, whale, and swordfish to be scared fish that when found were shared among the community. However, if a person was found to be keeping one of these for only their household their house was burned down and their property and canoe destroyed. (7)

2.10 Canoes/watercraft?

“The canoe is the most important and valuable property of an atoll islander. It is a vital necessity in procuring his food supply from the sea and from his plantations across the lagoon. All contact with other islands is dependent on the canoe. The Tokelau men were skilled navigators, visiting Samoa, Uvea, and Fiji as well as the other Tokelau atolls. Double canoes were used for long journeys but single-outrigger canoes were used in fishing excursions from Fakaofu to Atafu, and in war fleets, raiding among the islands of the group. The double canoe has been completely abandoned since the government prohibited its use for travel between the atolls. Many lives have been lost in canoes blown off their courses. All inter-island travel must now be made on the trading schooner from Samoa. Three classes of canoes are recognized on the island today: the small outrigger canoe (*paopao*) with a single-piece hull, the single-outrigger fishing canoe (*vaka*) (pl. 3, B) made of segments of tree trunks, and the double canoe (*lualua*). *Paopao*, the Samoan name for the smallest dugout canoe, is said to be also a native Tokelau name. However, there is only one *paopao* in the group, and that was made for the use of the Samoan missionary on the lagoon at Atafu. This *paopao* is modeled after the *vaka* and has two outrigger booms and the Tokelau attachment to the float. The hull is made from a single tree trunk, but the sides are built up in one or two places where the sinuous growth of the tree left depressions. The small size and the name are probably Samoan features.” (7)

3. Anthropometry

3.1 Mean adult height (m and f):

3.2 Mean adult weight (m and f):

4. Life History, mating, marriage

4.1 Age at menarche (f):

No specific age listed but when young girls showed signs of puberty they put on a leaf skirt to cover up. (7)

4.2 Age at first birth (m and f):

4.3 Completed family size (m and f):

The family consisted of the father, mother, and children but no average number of children was listed. (7)

4.4 Inter-birth-interval (f):

The intervals of birth are estimated at two years. (6)

4.5 Age first marriage (m and f):

For both boys and girls marriages often took place between the ages of 16-18. (7)

4.6 Proportion of marriages ending in divorce:

Divorces are extremely rare and in the 1971 survey only 4 out of 1618 people were divorced. (5)

4.7 Percent marriages polygynous, percent males married polygynously:

Hooper and Huntsman noted that marriage was strictly monogamous and Macgregor noted polygyny was practiced but extremely rare. (5) (7)

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

Young boys would present food and flowers to the family of the young girl they intended to marry. (7)

4.9 Inheritance patterns:

“When property is divided within a kin group it is divided in the names of the founders' children, either living or dead, in equitable shares. The actual division may entail considerable negotiation among spokespersons of the recipient groups, and once the initial division is made it is possible for recipients to redivide the property at the level of the subsequent generation.” (6) And Huntsman notes that all offspring inherit from both parents (8)

4.10 Parent-offspring interactions and conflict:

“A child stayed with his mother, or with a wet-nurse living outside the home, until he was weaned—a period which often lasted two years. Adoption was common, and a child frequently left home when he was one or two years old. No strong feeling of solidarity existed within the family proper and children were freely exchanged. Collateral relatives of the parents who were childless often brought up a child. When a child was old enough to assist in the work of the household and had several young brothers and sisters, he was sent to help his grandparents, if they were not living in the home of his parents, or to an aunt or uncle who needed extra help. Children frequently left home of their own accord. In the simple village life, where the children roamed in and out of every house, the separation from parents was not absolute. A child always knew who his true parents were and understood his relationship to his foster parents.” (7)

4.11 Homosexual activities, social attitudes towards homosexuals:

No homosexual activity noted

4.12 Pattern of exogamy (endogamy):

Pattern of exogamy was observed as cousins and direct blood relatives were avoided in marriage. (7) (6)

4.13 What is the belief of the role of males in conception; is paternity partible? Are these “other fathers” recognized?

Children know who their biological parent is and understood the relationship between them. No other fathers were recognized. (7)

4.14 What is the belief of the mother’s role in procreation exactly? (e.g., “receptacle in which fetus grows”)

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

4.16 Occurrence of sexual coercion, rape

4.17 Preferential category for spouse (e.g., cross cousin)

Spouses are often not related as marriage between relatives up to second and third cousins are avoided. (6)

4.18 Do females enjoy sexual freedoms?

4.19 Evidence of giving gifts to extramarital partners or extramarital offspring

None as adultery was considered a huge crime against society. (7)

4.20 If mother dies, whose raises children?

4.21 Adult sex ratio: number of adult males divided by number of (reproductive) females

4.22 Evidence for couvades

No evidence for couvades

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

None as children knew their biological fathers

4.24 Kin avoidance and respect?

Brothers and sisters would avoid each other. See 4.26

4.24 Joking relationships?

4.25 Patterns of descent (e.g., bilateral, matrilineal) for certain rights, names or associations

Descent was bilateral (7)

4.26 Incest avoidance rules

“While the children were young they were unclothed and intermingled without regard to sex or relationship, but as soon as brothers and sisters approached puberty they observed strict rules of avoidance, carried on throughout life between all relatives of the same generation who were termed brother or sister by one of the opposite sex. This usually included all cousins to the fourth degree. All communication between a brother and sister was passed through the intermediary of their mother. A boy must not utter any indecent or obscene language before his sister or conduct himself incorrectly; he must not sit on a mat with her or enter a house where she was. A sister left the presence of a brother unless he was much younger. This avoidance was more rigorous between true brothers and sisters and first cousins than between more distant relatives, but the freedom that existed between unrelated girls and boys was never permitted.” (7)

4.27 Is there a formal marriage ceremony?

“ The wedding feast consisted of a few large fish, perhaps a turtle, a pile of coconuts, and dishes of cooked coconut meat and pandanus fruit, for the island produced no garden fruits or fowls. A group of the villagers marched among the houses singing and shouting the formal announcement to all the community: “Kaitaoso, Kaitaoso, Kaikati, te mafua, ngutu” (Jump like a fish, jump like a fish, eat by biting the small fish bait in your mouth). This was sung to the bridegroom who secured his bride (literally, the bait) in the wedding. The wedding ceremony consisted only of the presentation of gifts and feasting. All relatives of the couple came to the wedding feast (*kainganiunga*) bearing the gift mats which they placed before the bride and groom. The bride received the mats of the groom's family, divided them, and presented them to the members of her family who had brought mats. The groom took the mats of the bride's family and distributed them among his relatives. All who aided in preparing for the wedding or contributed to the family display of wealth by the presentation of mats were repaid from gifts brought by relatives of the son-in-law or daughter-in-law. The couple received little of the wealth which passed through their hands. When the distribution was completed, the couple sat together for most of the day, eating with the guests who had come to pay their respects. No symbolic joining of the two, other than their remaining together on a mat throughout the day, signified their marriage. The groom remained at his wife's house and was allowed to sleep with her on the first night. The consummation was called *moemuli*. Virginity was not held at great premium, and no tests or formal proof were made to the family of the groom.” (7)

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

4.29 Is marriage usually (or preferred to be) within community or outside community? (m/f difference?)

Marriage is preferred to be within a village but not with anyone of relation. (6)

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

“Marriage took place when the children were 16 or 18 years old and was usually the result of parental planning. The family council, which decided the matter of a boy's marriage, was composed chiefly of members of the paternal side of the family from whom the boy would receive the greater part of his inheritance.” (7)

4.31 Evidence for conflict of interest over who marries who:

Yes, it was taboo to marry a direct relative and often marriages would be avoided up to a third even fourth cousin. (7)

Warfare/homicide

4.14 Percent adult (male) deaths due to warfare:

4.15 Outgroup vs ingroup cause of violent death:

War seemed to be primarily out-group (7)

4.16 Reported causes of in-group and out-group killing:

“A war between two islands was often settled by a duel between two men chosen from the warriors on each side. A great warrior carrying his spear and accompanied by one or two followers appeared before the enemy and challenged their champion to duel. If the challenge was accepted, the two war parties assembled on either side of the *malae* or on the beach to watch the two individuals decide the outcome. The challengers, met, each carrying a spear on his right shoulder. Each grasped the point of the other's spear and placed it on his left shoulder. Both were accompanied by three or four men who stood behind and grasped the shaft of the spear of their leader. The spearing of an opponent was a great feat of strength, for one had to hold the opponent's spear while forcing his own spear, with the aid of the men behind him, and plunging it into the opponent's chest. These duels lasted for hours, and often when a man had been speared, another behind him took his place and recommenced the duel. It was the duty of the warrior's cousins, the sons of his eldest paternal aunt, to assist him in a duel.” (7)

4.17 Number, diversity and relationship with neighboring societies (external relations):

“Since the establishment of the hegemony of Fakaofu in "ancient times," there has been little conflict between the atolls. Tokelau has no hostile neighbors. Internal conflicts are mediated effectively by the village councils. Conflict is also channeled into competition between the two village sides in various entertainments, including ongoing cricket matches and song-dance exchanges. When on occasion this competition becomes too intense and threatens to disrupt the peace, the competing sides are simply revised, so that enemies and allies are scrambled.” (6) Thus war seems to be rare but on occasion it does happen and was settled by a duel.

4.18 Cannibalism?

No signs of cannibalism

5. Socio-Political organization and interaction

5.1 Mean local residential (village) group size:

5.2 Mobility pattern: (seasonality):

No mobility pattern as it is a group of small islands with the same climate

5.3 Political system: (chiefs, clans etc, wealth or status classes):

“Each island had a chief and council which governed its society. While Nukunono and Atafu

were subject to Fakaofu, the chief of Fakaofu was the supreme authority of all the islands. He was looked upon as king by the first missionaries and referred to by this title in their writings. All chiefs and council members were elders of their community, for advanced age was a requirement, if not the primary qualification, to hold office. The social principle that age and long experience were essential to gaining wisdom and sound judgment pervaded the whole social order. Even the heads of the kindreds were selected on this basis in preference to following the eldest line of patrilineal descent if this would bring a younger man into office. Even among the elders there was gradation of position according to age, which is illustrated in the order of seating at feasts. The high chief sat in the position of first rank, and the eldest men (*kailau*) sat beside him. Their juniors (*kaikava*) and the older men of the community sat next to them. The men of the *kailau* and *kaikava* were appointed by the high chief.” “The high chief of the Tokelau Islands was a patriarchal head. He had full authority over all the people and established their laws, which he enforced by his power to curse any one to death.” “Membership in the village council, *kau kolomatua* (the company of old men), was confined to heads of kindreds. These heads were the eldest of the senior generation of their kindreds and at Fakaofu were elected by the *fale pa*. The approval of the high chief was necessary before they could take office. The council deliberated on all land disputes, and serious infractions of the law under the advice of or by the consent of the high chief. It also directed community enterprises, decided the times for ceremonial fishing by the village fleet, and the gathering of food from the plantations.” (7)

5.4 Post marital residence:

After marriage the men would live with their wife’s family in a matrilocal system. (6)

5.5 Territoriality? (defined boundaries, active defense):

Every family has defined land which is highly important to them but there are no signs of defense as members of a community all had land and were peaceful amongst each other. (7)

5.6 Social interaction divisions ? (age and sex):

Men primarily fish and harvest while women take care of the house and the family. Young children do little tasks, while young adults do the larger roles all while the elderly manage. (6)

5.7 Special friendships/joking relationships:

5.8 Village and house organization:

“On one leeward islet of each atoll is a clearly bounded village. Rectangular houses, until recently of thatch construction, are more or less aligned to well-defined paths. The villages are densely settled yet the open houses give a sense of spaciousness. At the lagoon shore, reclamations faced with coral boulders—from which extend over-water latrines—alternate with natural shores where vessels are beached. The ocean or back of the village is the preferred location for cook houses. Here the prevailing winds carry smoke out to sea. Village amenities—church, meetinghouse, and cricket pitch—tend to be clustered in the center, while recently constructed public structures—copra sheds, hospitals, and schools—are located at the peripheries.” (6)

5.9 Specialized village structures (mens' houses):

There are a variety of specialized structures including the god house which was a large residence of the chief, men's houses which were long buildings in which men held meetings, feasts, and hung out, cook house for cooking and finally structures for storage of canoes and goods. (7)

5.10 Sleep in hammocks or on ground or elsewhere?

5.11 Social organization, clans, moieties, lineages, etc:

Members of each cognatic kin group reside throughout the village and interact regularly (8)

5.12 Trade:

There is no current market for local products

5.13 Indications of social hierarchies?

There seems to be the hierarchy of the chief and council being above the villagers but that is the only noticeable hierarchy as the society is often described as egalitarian.

6. Ritual/Ceremony/Religion (RCR)

6.0 Time allocation to RCR:

6.1 Specialization (shamans and medicine):

"The priests (*taulaitu*) at Fakaofu probably belonged to a superior social group including the high chief and the council of elders. They were venerated because of their age as well as their sacred character." (7)

6.2 Stimulants:

6.3 Passage rituals (birth, death, puberty, seasonal):

At puberty both young boys and girls would wear clothes to cover their private parts. After puberty the boys would be circumcised. "All male members of society were circumcised, sometimes at puberty, but usually five or six years later. When the village council decided that there were enough uncircumcised boys for a group operation, the operator (*to-funga*), Te Nifo (the Tooth, because he operated with a shark's tooth), was ordered to confine them in a single house for the operation. The operation, which was, strictly speaking, superincision, was performed by pulling the foreskin forward and raising it on to a small, flat stick. A longitudinal slit was then made with a shark's tooth. Nothing was applied to aid the healing or to cover the incision." (7) "After death, the body of a man was prepared for burial by his father's sister, the body of a woman by her mother's sister. With the aid of other women she washed and oiled the body and dressed it in a new garment of coconut or hibiscus leaf, decorating it with flowers and a wreath on the head. It was finally wrapped in new mats before burial which took place on the day of death. With it were put the mats and pearl shell ornaments (*lei*) which friends and family had presented." (7) The family would go onto mourn and then bury the body in the ground.

6.4 Other rituals:

See marriage. Every year for four weeks the people would hold a ritual to honor the god Tui Tokelau. (7)

6.5 Myths (Creation):

6.6 Cultural material (art, music, games):

The Tokelauans used to have many ancient dances but they were said to be forgotten when the missionaries arrived. (7) The Tokelauans have many songs and some instruments including a wooden gong, drums, conch shells, and flageolets. (7)

6.7 Sex differences in RCR:

6.8 Missionary effect:

After missionaries arrived the culture and religion of Tokelau became predominately Christian.

6.9 RCR revival:

No revival as Tokelau is 98% of some form of Christianity.

6.10 Death and afterlife beliefs:

“The spirits of the dead (*nganga*) were thought to go to Tualiku, where the god Te Sesema reigned. Tualiku was not localized, but the meaning of the name, “the back of the sea”, suggests that it lay over the rim of the horizon. It was a true paradise of Polynesian imagination, where the blessed danced and ate all day and night and wore flowers in their ears, and pearl shell ornaments (*lei*) around their necks, forbidden to all common men in life. In Tualiku there was also a purgatory where the souls of men who were damned by never having been circumcised in life (*ngatino seki faeloa*) walked through eternity with great stone discs like grindstones on their backs.” (7)

6.11 Taboo of naming dead people?

6.12 Is there teknonymy?

6.13 Briefly describe religion (animism, ancestor worship, deism, magic, totems etc.)

“The elements in the religion of the Tokelau people were characteristic of the religions of western Polynesia. The pantheon was comprised of a supreme deity who resided in the sky and a group of nature gods who dwelt in the world. No stone maraes or platforms were erected to the gods. Ritual was very slight and almost entirely confined to an annual ceremony to the supreme deity. Communication was held with ancestral spirits. Nature spirits abounded in the woods and sea.” (7) Modern day Tokelau practices Christianity.

7. Adornment

7.1 Body paint:

For festive occasions people who rub themselves with coconut oil to make their skin shine. (7)

7.2 Piercings:

“The ear lobes of all babies were perforated shortly after birth. The insertion of earrings of turtle shell or bone later in life was a matter of personal choice. Girls and women distended the ear lobes by inserting short flat sticks to stretch the opening. Larger sticks were put in week by week until the original perforation was 1 or 2 inches in diameter. It was common for older women to carry their mat-mending needles (*susulu*) twisted in the loops of their ear lobes.” (7)

7.3 Haircut:

“The natives of today say that their ancestors wore their hair long and dressed it with lime to kill vermin. Wilkes (34) says the men at Atafu wore their hair 1 or 2 inches long all over the head and that many had “false curls tied on a string to be bound round the head.” He believed this ornamentation due to the fact that many men were inclined to baldness—a common characteristic today. The curls were worn in the front, and the hair was dressed with simple combs made of sections of coconut-leaf midribs bound at one end to a wooden cross piece. There was no custom of keeping certain locks uncut till marriage.” (7)

7.4 Scarification:

“The Tokelau people tattooed the face, upper arms, breast, waist, and sometimes the wrists and calves of the legs with a few lines and simple figures, but apparently did not tattoo the body from the waist to the knees as was common in Samoa, Uvea, Futuna, and Rotuma. Both men and women were tattooed after marriage. The operator (*tufunga ta tatau*) drew the design on the skin with tattooing ink mixed from charred coconut and a little water. Then he placed the puncturing instrument (*pakiau*), made of a short stick with a set of fine teeth of turtle bone lashed at right angles at one end, over the design, and tapped deftly on the handle with another light stick. The conventional facial tattooing for the men consisted of a band (*sei*) on each side of the face, extending from the juncture of the ear lobe and cheek toward the corner of the mouth.” (7)

7.5 Adornment (beads, feathers, lip plates, etc.):

“The people have always used flowers and wreaths as their chief ornaments for any occasion. Young girls are constantly weaving wreaths of *tiale* or *kanava* blossoms. Everyone prepares some floral ornament of coconut leaves or vines for himself before all dances or feasts. Formerly pearl-shell ornaments (*lei*) were worn by women and children, but were tapu to all men except the high chief. These ornaments were made in the shape of trolling hook shanks from the halves of mother-of-pearl shells unfit for use in fishhooks. Whales' teeth, cut into cylindrical sections (*lei*), were worn as necklaces or perforated and worn as pendants. These were the chief treasures of the people. Large pieces of shell also were ground into cylinder shape and worn as necklaces or bands across the forehead.” (7)

7.6 Ceremonial/Ritual adornment:

“The men's fringed kilt (*kafa malo*), worn on ceremonial occasions, was woven of *kie* pandanus (pl. 7, A), plaited with the technique used in making pandanus mats. It was about 5 feet

long, 1.5 feet wide, and had a fringe about 2 feet long on each longitudinal border. The kilt was worn folded lengthwise with the fringes hanging down.” (7)

7.7 Sex differences in adornment:

Men wore malo or breechcloth made of leaves and women wore titi a garment made of leaves that went from the waist to the knees. (7)

7.8 Missionary effect:

7.9 Cultural revival in adornment:

8. Kinship systems

8.1 Sibling classification system:

8.2 Sororate, levirate:

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

9. Other interesting cultural features (list them):

Note: The book by Macgregor has lots of other interesting information and can be found online.

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