1. Description
1.1 Name(s) of society, language, and language family: Meriam culture, Speak Meriam with dialects in Boigu, Bulgai, Buglial, and Tagota, language of Australia (1)

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

1.3 Location (latitude/longitude): Queensland north-east of the country, Murray Island, Eastern Torres Strait Island (1)-

1.4 Brief history: Settled in Murray Island thousands of years prior to European exploration and settlement of Australia. Contact with the Meriam people and Europeans began once the Torres Strait became a means of passage between the Indian Ocean and the Pacific Ocean in the 19th Century. Westerners began to settle on the islands in 1872 when the London Missionary Society founded schools on the islands. In 1879, the Queensland Government annexed the islands. In 1936, Islanders rejected government control when the Protector of Aborigines managed their wages and boats. In 1939, the Torres Strait Islander Act was passed giving Islanders more authority in their affairs and established local governments on the islands. (3)-

1.5 Influence of missionaries/schools/governments/powerful neighbors: 1872, the London Missionary Society founded a missionary school on Murray Island, European government has influenced Meriam culture but for the most part the Meriam have taken the government to court and won their rights as aboriginal settlers as stated in the "Brief history" above. (3)-

1.6 Ecology (natural environment): Coral reefs, high vegetation, moist, tropical environment. (8,13)

1.7 Population size, mean village size, home range size, density: 450 people reported, village size depends on size of the families; territory is based on traditional laws of boundary and ownership, (3,11,12)

2. Economy
2.1 Main carbohydrate staple(s): Garden, main carbohydrate is yam. (2,10)-

2.2 Main protein-lipid sources: Big fishers; maintain stone fish-weirs and crayfish holes. Retain fishing rights over reefs extending 60km north and south of Murray Islands. Turtles are a main protein-lipid source.(2,8,10)

2.3 Weapons: Bow and arrow, blowguns?: Bows (13)

2.4 Food storage:

2.5 Sexual division of production: Men fished and worked on the gardens while women stayed at home and did house chores and raised the children. (8)

2.6 Land tenure: The eldest son gets the lion's share- girls get very little, just enough for a marriage portion.- Besides his share of the family land a son inherits any property left to his mother during her life. An only daughter inherits the property of both parents, but if her paternal uncle- her father's eldest brother- is alive, he acts as guardian both to her and to her mother, on whom however the real responsibility rests. On the death of a wife, the husband must give back her portion to her relatives - at least as soon as he contemplates remarriage. If there is no family and no surviving relative, the neighbors divide deceased's land among themselves. Women often own land specially given to them by their mothers. On their marriage, such land is handed over, to be equally divided, among their brothers. An adopted son, if there be no children, takes precedence over blood relations. A child adopted out of his or her own family does not inherit land from the real father. If the wife is a widow, the eldest brother of the late father can take charge not only of the land and gardens, but also of the house, the personality of the occupants, and may even demand of the widow the bodies of her children. That in former times he generally married his deceased brother's wife. (8)

2.7 Ceramics:

2.8 Specified (prescribed or proscribed) sharing patterns: Meriam people are encouraged to share at a very young age. (8)

2.9 Food taboos:

2.10 Canoes/watercraft? Have canoes made out of dugouts. Canoes were twenty meters in length, and equipped with double outriggers and a distinctive form or rigging which allowed for gathering resources from a wider range. (10,13)

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): Around 11 to 15 (14)

4.2 Age at first birth (m and f): As soon as they, get married so around 18.5 years old for females and 20.2 years old for males. (13)

4.3 Completed family size (m and f): On average 4.8 members per family (13)

4.4 Inter-birth-interval (f):

4.5 Age first marriage (m and f): Male: 20.2 years old, Female: 18.5 years old (13)

4.6 Proportion of marriages ending in divorce: 2.8% (15)

4.7 Percent marriages polygynous, percent males married polygynously: Meriam people have adopted Christianity and only have one wife or husband. (8)

4.8 Bride purchase (price), bride service, dowry?: Women lose their land when they get married and it is divided among her brothers. (8)

4.9 Inheritance patterns: Ownership is directly related to kinship and includes rights over land, sea resources and objects as well as knowledge of stories, songs, dancers etc.

4.10 Parent-offspring interactions and conflict: No reports of parent-offspring conflict

4.11 Homosexual activities, social attitudes towards homosexuals:

4.12 Pattern of exogamy (endogamy): Marriages are exogamy, marriage prohibitions were defined in terms of kin categories, in such a way as to exclude anyone with whom a blood tie could be established. (13)

4.13 What is the belief of the role of males in conception; is paternity partible? Are these "other fathers" recognized? One father that helps raises the children. (8)

4.14 What is the belief of the mother's role in procreation exactly? (e.g., "receptacle in which fetus grows") Meriam people believed the mother was the receptacle in which the fetus grows. (8)

4.15 Is conception believed to be an incremental process (i.e., semen builds up over time)? Believed in just one time of having sex got you pregnant. (13)

4.16 Occurrence of sexual coercion, rape: Few reports of Europeans taking advantage of the Meriam women, but the Meriam could do nothing about it because the Europeans were more advanced in technology relating to fighting. (13)

4.17 Preferential category for spouse (e.g., cross cousin) Not related to the individual. Marriage prohibitions were defined in terms of kin categories, in such a way as to exclude anyone with whom a blood tie could be established.   (13)

4.18 Do females enjoy sexual freedoms? No

4.19 Evidence of giving gifts to extramarital partners or extramarital offspring: Gifts were given to keep peace among families. (13)

4.20 If mother dies, whose raises children? Father can remarry (8)

4.21 Adult sex ratio: number of adult males divided by number of (reproductive) females: The female to male ratio is about equal. (13)

4.22 Evidence for couvades: No

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

4.24 Kin avoidance and respect?

4.24 Joking relationships?

4.25 Patterns of descent (e.g., bilateral, matrilineal) for certain rights, names or associations: All living people are linked partrilineally with ancestral beings by inherent and imperishable bonds. (6)

4.26 Incest avoidance rules: Marriage prohibitions were defined in terms of kin categories, in such a way as to exclude anyone with whom a blood tie could be established. (13)

4.27 Is there a formal marriage ceremony? Yes, converted to Christianity so they have normal weddings. (8)

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?) Within community to keep the culture intact. (8)

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

4.31 Evidence for conflict of interest over who marries who:

Warfare/homicide

4.14 Percent adult (male) deaths due to warfare: Headhunting was a big thing and warfare was always occurring internally. (13)

4.15 Outgroup vs ingroup cause of violent death: Warfare both inter-tribal and against European ships in transit through the Coral Sea. Hereditary enemies were common and there was always a constant possibility of surprise attack. Fighting was uncommon with the European settlers because the Meriam knew they were outmatched with military technology. (3,13)

4.16 Reported causes of in-group and out-group killing: Meriam have a reputation of being fierce warriors and skilled mariners. (3)

4.17 Number, diversity and relationship with neighboring societies (external relations): Mostly internal relations with other tribes in the Torres Strait. (13)

4.18 Cannibalism? No reports of Cannibalism

5. Socio-Political organization and interaction

5.1 Mean local residential (village) group size:

5.2 Mobility pattern: (seasonality): Travel during September, this is the time of voyage when the men sail off. (10)

5.3 Political system: (chiefs, clans etc, wealth or status classes): Governed by the Community Council also elders of the community hold a position of respect and have a major influence on island life. Clans that follow the law of Malo. (3,8)

5.4 Post marital residence: The woman is returned her land that she had before marriage and the man keeps the rest of the land. Woman usually returns to her family to live. (8)

5.5 Territoriality? (defined boundaries, active defense): Boundaries defined by traditional laws of boundary and ownership. The Meriam have clear demarcated property boundaries. Ownership is directly related to kinship and includes rights over land, sea resources, and objects. Eddie Koiki Mabo in 1981, overturned the doctrine of terra nullius in High Court, judges declared, "the Meriam people are entitled as against the whole world to possession, occupation, use and enjoyment of the lands of the Murray Islands." Leafy bamboo poles were erected as boundary markers on the reef. (3,4,5,7,8)-

5.6 Social interaction divisions ? (age and sex):

5.7 Special friendships/joking relationships:

5.8 Village and house organization: Houses made of grass. Villages are not very spread out and have central sacred house. (8)

5.9 Specialized village structures (mens' houses): Men and women live in the same house. (8)

5.10 Sleep in hammocks or on ground or elsewhere?

5.11 Social organization, clans, moieties, lineages, etc: Clans. (10)

5.12 Trade: Meriam people trade with surrounding tribes and cultures for scarce resources. (13)

5.13 Indications of social hierarchies? The elderly are superior and are honored within the community. They have say in social activities and lead ceremonial rituals. (3)

6. Ritual/Ceremony/Religion (RCR)

6.0 Time allocation to RCR:

6.1 Specialization (shamans and medicine):

6.2 Stimulants: Zogo, a natural or artificial object of great magical potency, power to communicate with lamar, intentional power like cosmic energy moving in a spiral, sacred, the spirit power of Malo, 'divine wrath', holy. Zeub, a pipe of peace. (8)

6.3 Passage rituals (birth, death, puberty, seasonal): A child's first fish catch is celebrated by a feast in his or her honor. (8)

6.4 Other rituals: Mabo day, Coming of the Light, Tombstone openings, Malo dance in honor of Koiki Mabo, The first turtle for the season may appear as early as May during the early southeast season, although the time when turtles are plentiful begins in the northeast season about October and goes through until January or February. A very important feasting ceremony marks its arrival, bringing together the whole island. Everyone must have a taste of the first turtle. In earlier times, word was sent around by blowing the trumpet shell. The turtle was then taken to a sacred ceremonial ground whose site changed to the church ground after the conversion of the Meriam to Christianity. Meriam have a competition of what man can grow the tallest yam crops, the winner is honored more than the champion turtle hunter. (3,8,10)

6.5 Myths (Creation):

6.6 Cultural material (art, music, games): Big into dance to celebrate rituals and to tell stories of their culture. (8)

6.7 Sex differences in RCR: Women and children are not present at the departure and do not sight the fishing gear when the voyagers leave. (10)

6.8 Missionary effect: Most convert to Christianity. With missionaries arriving warfare and internal fighting stopped. (8,13)

6.9 RCR revival:

6.10 Death and afterlife beliefs: Believe in the rebirth of the spirit of a person, lamar. The dead rest on the western side of Mer and then travel to Boigu, the isle of the dead. (8)

6.11 Taboo of naming dead people?

6.12 Is there teknonymy? No

6.13 Briefly describe religion (animism, ancestor worship, deism, magic, totems etc.): Believe in their god Bomai/Malo. Bomai is a zogo that appeared as a canoe on Mer island and then later as an octopus where the Meriam took it in and knowing it was a zogo they took care of it. Believe in the power of the sea and its physical and spiritual inhabitants. Follow Malo's law which are the basic human rules; do not kill unnecessarily, do not steal, etc. Malo created a sacred order of hereditary priests and established a ritual center, with ceremonial grounds and a sacred house. Every individual has his own store of magical power that helps them in life. (6,8,9,13,16)

7. Adornment

7.1 Body paint: Slight body paint during rituals, but not on the face. (16)

7.2 Piercings: No (16)

7.3 Haircut:

7.4 Scarification: No (16)

7.5 Adornment (beads, feathers, lip plates, etc.): Headdresses, cone shaped pendants, armlets cut from cone shell, cassowary feathers, and masks (8,16)

7.6 Ceremonial/Ritual adornment: Initiates wear a sacred mask of Malo-Bomai, sacred star-headed clubs of Malo. Have totems that link them to the sea. (8,16)

7.7 Sex differences in adornment: Males participate in the rituals only. (16)

7.8 Missionary effect: Still perform rituals for cultural reasons not that they actually believe the reasons for the rituals. (8,13)

7.9 Cultural revival in adornment:

8. Kinship systems

8.1 Sibling classification system: Men are more important than women. The eldest son gets the lion's share- girls get very little, just enough for a marriage portion.- Besides his share of the family land a son inherits any property left to his mother during her life. An only daughter inherits the property of both parents, but if her paternal uncle- her father's eldest brother- is alive, he acts as guardian both to her and to her mother, on whom however the real responsibility rests. (8)

8.2 Sororate, levirate: Levirate marriages occur. If the husband dies the husbands oldest brother has right to the land and the family is he so chooses. (8)

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

9. Other interesting cultural features (list them):

1. Without the voyages they are canoe-less and friend-less. Shut into small island homelands, without that dynamic interaction with others which fuels creative change as well as reaffirming established custom. (10)

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