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978-0-521-17990-4 - Reports of the Cambridge Anthropological Expedition to Torres Straits, Volume VI

A. C. Haddon, W. H. R. Rivers and A. Wilkin

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REPORTS  
OF THE  
CAMBRIDGE ANTHROPOLOGICAL EXPEDITION  
TO  
TORRES STRAITS

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CAMBRIDGE ANTHROPOLOGICAL EXPEDITION  
TO  
TORRES STRAITS  
VOLUME VI  
SOCIOLOGY, MAGIC AND RELIGION  
OF THE  
EASTERN ISLANDERS

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## PREFACE

AT the request of certain friends this account of the Sociology, Magic and Religion of the Eastern Islanders of Torres Straits is published as Volume VI. of the Reports, before issuing Volumes I. and IV., and as a consequence the index to the whole series cannot appear in this volume. The next volume to be published will be Volume IV., which will deal with the material and æsthetic life of the natives, and Volume I., which will follow later, will contain a summary of our main results and an index, in addition to a detailed account of the physical characters of the Torres Straits Islanders.

The following is the system of spelling which has been adopted:

<i>a</i> as in "father"	<i>ò</i> as <i>aw</i> in "saw"
<i>ã</i> as in "at"	<i>u</i> as <i>oo</i> in "soon"
<i>e</i> as <i>a</i> in "date"	<i>ũ</i> as in "up"
<i>ẽ</i> as in "let"	<i>ai</i> as in "aisle"
<i>è</i> as <i>ai</i> in "air"	<i>au</i> as <i>ow</i> in "cow"
<i>i</i> as <i>ee</i> in "feet"	<i>ei</i> as <i>ay</i> in "may"
<i>ĩ</i> as in "it"	<i>oi</i> as <i>oy</i> in "boy"
<i>o</i> as in "own"	

The consonants are sounded as in English.

A. C. HADDON.

May, 1908.

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## ERRATA

- p. 26, line 19, for 'south-east' read 'south.'  
p. 39, footnote 3, for *Bezam* read *Beizam*.  
p. 42, lines 18, 22, for 'Ger' read 'Gèp.'  
p. 56, line 17, *Damid* or *Damud*, Mr Bruce spells it either way.  
p. 101, line 4 from bottom, for 112 read 118.  
p. 143, line 29, for *eros ia* read *erosia*.  
p. 153, 1st par., *Nesur atparek* or *atperik*, "petticoat on both sides."  
p. 154, line 12, for *baba lam* read *babalam*.

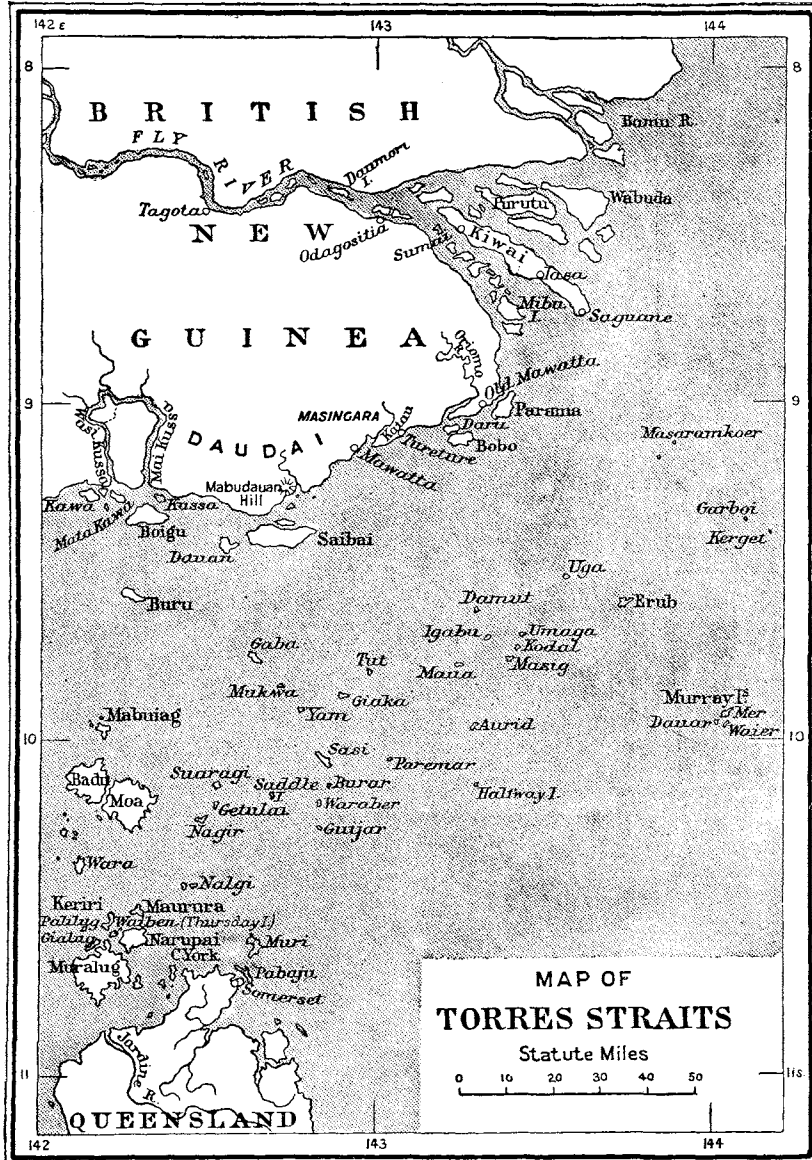
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## INTRODUCTION.

BY A. C. HADDON.

THE Eastern Islanders of Torres Straits inhabit the volcanic islands of Uga (Stephen's Island), Erub (Darnley Island), and the three Murray Islands, Mer, Dauar and Waier. They speak the same language and practically regard themselves as one people, though there does not appear to have been very much communication of late between the Miriam of the Murray Islands and the Erub *le* and Uga *le*. In former times there was occasional communication between the Miriam and the inhabitants of the nearer central islands. Most of the latter are now uninhabited, and it is probably quite impossible to discover anything about their past history.

There are a few persons living on Uga, but they have not been studied. The fine island of Erub is now mainly peopled by natives of various South Sea islands, most of the men having married Erub women. There are still a few unmixed aborigines on the island, but they have become so modified by contact with Europeans and other foreigners that, I believe, very little of their original lore remains. At all events we were not able to investigate them, and it is most likely that their former customs and beliefs will never be recorded. What little is known about these people is due to the visits of Jukes (*Voyage of H.M.S. "Fly,"* 1847, Vol. I. pp. 169—194, 208—210, 244—261), D'Albertis (*New Guinea,* 1881, Vol. I. pp. 236—242), and a few remarks by the Missionaries, W. Wyatt Gill, A. W. Murray, and S. MacFarlane.

The Murray Islands owing to their relative inaccessibility and their comparatively large population offer a better field for research. One or two Europeans and South Sea men lived there at various times before it became the headquarters of the London Missionary Society. Mataika, a Samoan teacher of the L.M.S., crossed over from Erub in 1872 to evangelise the Miriam (p. 265). In 1877 the Rev. Dr S. MacFarlane removed the headquarters of the Mission to Mer, and two years later he established the "Papuan Industrial School and Teachers' Seminary," an institution which had for its



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object the teaching and training of young people from various islands of Torres Straits and from the neighbouring coasts of New Guinea. The "Papuan Institute," as it was more generally termed, began with over sixty young men and boys, they were instructed in the English language, and more than twenty were sufficiently trained to become native teachers, most of whom went as evangelists to New Guinea (cf. *Among the Cannibals of New Guinea*, by Rev. S. MacFarlane, LL.D. London, 1888, pp. 81—91). Mrs MacFarlane spent some years on the island teaching the girls. Under the skilful management of Mr Robert Bruce, who had been a yacht-builder of Glasgow, the Industrial School was a great success. Besides building and furnishing houses, a twenty-ton yacht, the "Mary," was built of local timber by the natives under his direction, and the fittings and the necessary smith's work were also done on the spot. The Industrial School ceased operations when Dr MacFarlane left in 1886. The Rev. and Mrs A. E. Hunt arrived in 1887 and left in 1890. Since then the church has been under the sole direction of a Samoan teacher.

I spent five months on Mer in 1888—89, being mainly engaged in zoological investigations, and made many friends among the natives. The ethnological information I then collected was of too fragmentary a nature to be worth publishing as a whole, but I published two folk-tales, "The legend of Malu" [Bomai] and "Nam Zogo" in *Folk-Lore* (Vol. I. 1890, pp. 181, 186), and an account of various ceremonies, including the initiation ceremony and Malu dances of the Bomai-Malu cult in the *Internationales Archiv für Ethnographie* (Bd. VI. 1893, pp. 131—162). The present volume supersedes the earlier publications. I purposely did not investigate the Miriam with much detail as my friend, the Rev. A. E. Hunt, the resident missionary, had promised me that he would do so. Mr Hunt published a paper on "Ethnographical Notes on the Murray Islands, Torres Straits," in the *Journal of the Anthropological Institute* (Vol. XXVIII. 1899, pp. 5—18). Those of his observations which we were able to corroborate have been incorporated in this volume, but in some instances he misunderstood what his informants endeavoured to tell him.

Our party reached Mer on May 6, 1898, and we left on September 8 in the same year, but all of us were not on the island during the whole of that period.

At the time of our visit the islanders had been under Mission influence for about twenty-five years; and practically all the adult natives were professed Christians and all the younger ones had been to school. Shortly before the departure of the Hunts, Mr John Bruce was appointed schoolmaster under the auspices of the Queensland Government, and since then has most successfully taught the Miriam children.

It might be urged that owing to missionary and other influences the condition of the Murray Islanders has been so modified that ethnological investigations must have a very uncertain value. An objection of this kind is more specious than real.

## INTRODUCTION.

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Mission influence could scarcely have made a serious impression on the natives till about 1880. I do not know when the last Bomai-Malu ceremony was held, possibly about 1875. Men who were thirty to forty years old then, were alive not only in 1888 but in 1898; and since initiation took place at adolescence, there must have been many men who were conversant with the ceremonies at the time of my two visits. Though this particular custom may have died out many years ago, the memory of it was green. One can never tell to what extent maimed portions of old ceremonies may have persisted long after they have been supposed by missionaries to have been eradicated. Indeed we know that this has occurred in the case of many of the smaller ceremonies of the Miriam, and even now all has not yet quite disappeared.

Usage relating to kinship, inheritance, the regulation of marriage, and other aspects of native social life would not be affected directly by the white man. The change in economic conditions, owing to the presence of foreigners, is by no means so marked in the Murray Islands as it is in the Western Islands. Therefore we feel confident that our accounts describe the original social conditions with a fair degree of accuracy.

Our greatest difficulty was naturally with customs related to magic and religion. Not only had a good deal disappeared from actual practice, but there was a reluctance on the part of the natives to talk about certain subjects, partly because the latter were originally of a secret or sacred character (and the native even now is very reticent about such matters), partly because he has been taught that he ought to be ashamed of the past; not that he really is, but he believes that the white man expects that he should be, and therefore his natural tendency is at first to plead ignorance. Even the profession of Christianity does not make all the difference that one might at first sight think it would. I am under the impression that the most moral and pious heathen are the most likely to be attracted by a higher form of social order and religion. These are just the men that have a strong sense of reticence and of the sacredness of religious customs; in changing their beliefs and customs, their attitude of mind would remain much the same, and they would not be disposed to treat lightly that which had previously meant so much to them. Nor must one overlook the necessity of reticence with regard to secret matters which was learnt in the impressionable age of youth and enforced through the fear of punishment by means of sorcery, or by spiritual or other agencies.

Even with good intentions and a friendly disposition on the part of the native there were many difficulties in the way of getting information which are familiar to those who have had experience in similar investigations. We communicated by means of jargon English, which, owing to the school instruction most of the natives had undergone, was not of so crude a character as is generally the case, and precision was given to the statements of the natives by a copious use of native words and phrases.



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A. C. Haddon, W. H. R. Rivers and A. Wilkin

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INTRODUCTION.

We naturally took ordinary precautions to check one informant by another. But in spite of all our efforts this volume would have presented a very different appearance had we not had the ungrudging assistance of Mr John Bruce. For a decade he had lived on the island in intimate association with the people—young and old. Under all conditions of life, from birth to death, in joy, sorrow, or perplexity, one and all appeal to “Jack,” and never in vain. Mr Bruce has placed his intimate knowledge of the people entirely at our disposal, both when we were neighbours in Mer and since we returned to England, and on behalf of myself and my colleagues I take this opportunity to thank him heartily for all he has done for us and for science.