Summoning the Powers Beyond

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Traditional Religions in Micronesia

Jay Dobbin

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CONTENTS

Chapter 1

Introductory Issues

Micronesia as a Separate Culture Area

It was Dumont d'Urville whose 1834 report of his voyage around the world divided Micronesia into three parts: Melanesia, Micronesia, and Polynesia. The names have been used off and on in history, even if islanders never would have thought of themselves in terms of the tripartite division. Colonial powers then began picking through the island groups in each of the three divisions, with the result that Micronesia, for example, was divided into British, Japanese, and American colonies prior to World War II. Today, all of the islands in Micronesia are independent countries, except Guam and the Northern Marianas, which remain American territories. We might begin, then, by considering whether it is legitimate to view this group of islands that has come to be known as Micronesia as a single region.

Micronesia stretches from 13 degrees north to 6 degrees south latitude and from 140 degrees west to 174 degrees east longitude, forming a 1,600-mile arc stretching from Tobi, just north of New Guinea, to the Marshalls and Kiribati. Scattered within these archipelagos are two Polynesian outliers (Kapingamarangi and Nukuoro) and two highly isolated islands (Banaba and Nauru).[1] The total land mass of about a thousand square miles, however, is divided between over two thousand islands and atolls, with Guam being the largest single island (225 square miles) and many with an area of less than one-tenth of a square mile. With a total of 2.85 million square miles of ocean, the vast mass of Micronesia is water. The total population of the region today is about half a million people, which leads to the question of how so few people traveled over so much water and settled on so many small and scattered islands. The answer can be found by looking at a combination of linguistics and archaeological research.

Linguistically, all of Micronesia belongs to the large Austronesian language family, which includes much of Indonesia and the Philippines, parts of New Guinea, and all the Polynesian-speaking islands such as native New Zealand, Tahiti, and the Hawaiian Islands. Nearly all of the Micronesian languages also belong to a subgroup titled Oceanic; only

Palauan and Chamorro (the language of the Marianas and Guam) belong to a different subgroup of Austronesian: Western Malayo-Polynesian. Linguists have been puzzled by the language of Yap, but most recently it, too, has been classified as Oceanic. These linguistic classifications are important because linguistics and archaeology provide most of the evidence for the origin of the Micronesian peoples and the reasons for their differences. The inhabitants of most of the islands speak a Chuukic language or a dialect thereof.[2] The case of Yap is highly problematic, and it may be the single member of a unique Oceanic subgroup, while Nauruan is different from any language within or outside Micronesia.

There are three different regions from which Micronesian languages most probably originated. Palauan and Chamorro are closest to Philippine and Indonesian languages, while the much-debated Yapese has its closest relatives in the Admiralty Islands, north of New Guinea. The closest linguistic ancestors of Kiribati, the Marshalls, and Kosrae come from someplace between the Solomon Islands and Vanuatu in Melanesia, with Pohnpeian and Chuukic coming from the same Melanesian sources or perhaps through Kiribati and the Marshalls. Archaeological evidence such as pottery also seems to correlate with these three separate origins.[3]

Thus, on the basis of the linguistic and archaeological evidence, Palau and the Marianas were settled earliest, probably out of the Philippines or Indonesia or perhaps even Taiwan. Yap appears to have been first colonized by people from the Admiralty Islands of New Guinea. Eastern Micronesian settlement appears to have moved rapidly from Kiribati, the Marshalls, and Kosrae and then on to Pohnpei and the Chuukic-speaking islands.

Dating the peopling of Micronesia is difficult for the simple reason that radiocarbon dates vary greatly in reliability and range, and the indirect evidence from introduced plants and animals and from slash-and-burn farming is only suggestive of human occupation. The earliest direct dating from radiocarbon methods and pottery types was, until recently, from Palau (about 200 BC) and the Marianas (about 1400 BC). However, based on the indirect evidence of core samples and perhaps very early radiocarbon dates from Palau, newer archeological dating may push Palauan settlement back to 1000 BC or earlier. Archaeological dates for first evidence of the population of these islands are now in flux, even more so now with some recent excavations pushing back Micronesian date estimates by as much as a thousand years.

Added to the linguistic differences are the radically different environments across Micronesia, especially the difference between the high islands—mostly volcanic in origin, often lush in vegetation—and the coral atolls, sandy and with poor soil only a few feet above sea level, limited

vegetation, very limited rainfall, and scarce drinking water. These conditions put understandable limits on cultural and social adaptations. The low coral atolls, for example, had neither the stone nor the population to build such megalithic monuments as those on Pohnpei and Kosrae. Still, the Chuukic atolls of the central Carolines were geographically close enough to each other to develop an elaborate trading exchange, while distant and isolated Nauru had far less opportunity for exchange with other islands. Yet environment is not deterministic; it only sets the parameters within which culture responds. A good example is the development of centralized and hierarchical religious organization. The high islands, with their greater landmass and larger populations, offered the cultures that developed there the potential for a more elaborate organizational structure, but this was not necessarily the case. Indeed, the high islands of Kosrae and Pohnpei developed religious organizations with centralized and hierarchical priesthoods, yet the high islands of the Chuuk Lagoon and the Marianas produced no such political or religious centralization.

It might appear that Micronesia is just a cluster of geographically proximate islands situated to the west of Melanesia and Polynesia. Certainly Micronesia is not a highly homogenous culture area. Nonetheless, the position taken here is that, although these islands show great cultural diversity, there is also a sufficient degree of cultural similarity to allow us to speak of Micronesian religion or religions.[4]

The Need for This Work

The study of traditional Micronesian religions is badly neglected, even though other aspects of culture, such as kinship, politics, and social change, have been well researched. Since World War II there has been no monograph on the old religions of Micronesia; the only two book-length treatises are limited to the Chuuk Lagoon.[5] However, one of the largest anthropological undertakings ever conducted in the Pacific was carried out in Micronesia shortly after the war. This was the Coordinated Investigation of Micronesian Anthropology (CIMA), sponsored by the U.S. Navy along with several American universities and philanthropic organizations. In 1947, CIMA put twenty-five cultural anthropologists into Micronesia. No CIMA report was devoted to the old religions, although several members of the team published reports with extensive sections on religion.[6]

This situation was not always so. The German occupation of much of Micronesia[7] produced the other large-scale expedition of researchers into Micronesia: the German-led Hamburg South Sea Expedition of 1908–1910.[8] Each volume of reports contained lengthy and detailed

sections on the old religions. The German period also saw an outburst of ethnographic books, articles, and reports by colonial officials, traders, sea captains, and missionaries, much of it devoted to the old religions. No colonial power in Micronesia has ever produced such a level of ethnographic material by nonanthropologists. So extensive were these German publications that the great collector of all things ethnographic, Sir James G. Frazer, was able to draw heavily on the German literature and produce the only published volume dedicated exclusively to Micronesian religion: *The Belief in Immortality and the Worship of the Dead,* vol. 3: *The Belief among the Micronesians* (1924).

The primary goal of this work is descriptive; that is, the collection and reconstruction of the old religions of preindustrial Micronesia, insofar as this is possible with the limited evidence at hand. This reconstruction is difficult because all the inhabited islands of Micronesia have converted to Christianity. No Micronesian-wide generalization can be made as to how much this conversion changed their previous beliefs and worldview, although good evidence exists for certain areas.[9] Local medicines, old chants, formulas, and rituals are still widely used despite intense missionization, which dates back a century or a century and a half in some regions. The reconstruction proposed here is a task fraught with difficulties, and there is no hope of making it totally comprehensive. In the first place, the traditional religions were not static, and some (such as those in Pohnpei) were already in decline even before missionization and heavy westernization. Moreover, the record, even from the period of German occupation, is fragmentary.

Difficult or not, this undertaking is worthwhile if only because religion is such an important aspect of island traditions, even if one long neglected in Micronesia. Furthermore, there are no syntheses or book-length summaries of Micronesian religion available, as there are for Melanesia and Polynesia.[10] Finally, a contemporary reassessment of the old religions is needed to correct early and continuing incorrect generalizations, not only about Micronesian religion but also religion in general.

A Working Definition of Religion

"Religion," wrote Erwin Goodenough, "arises from the universal human experience that human beings live in the midst of a vast external universe in the face of which they find themselves essentially helpless. At the same time, they are involved in social forces over which they have little control."[11] While Goodenough has given us an interesting analysis describing the *why* of religion, he does nothing to show us an effective answer for *what* religion really is. There is no agreement from nineteenth- and

twentieth-century writers on any single definition of religion. Some writers use a substantive definition, taking the position that religion is defined by its essence, which is generally a belief in the supernatural.[12] Other writers (Geertz 1966 and 1973, for example) take a functionalist approach: They do not really define what religion is or what it consists of but are satisfied with explaining what religion does and how it works. Both approaches have advantages and disadvantages, but because religions pervade most aspects of preindustrial life and are not limited to the world of the supernatural, the functionalist approach works better in this case. As a working functionalist definition, a simplification of Clifford Geertz's approach fits Micronesia, where religion pervaded most aspects of life and where it is most difficult to separate out any discrete beliefs and rituals dealing with the supernatural. Simplified, Geertz's definition might read like this: Religion is one and only one of the world's great symbolic meaning systems.[13] Other symbolic meaning systems could be science, political ideology, or even common sense. This flexibility in the functionalist approach helps to explain why religion can rise and fall in the consciousness of a country, and why it can be important at one stage of an individual's life and not at another time. Presumed here is that every human needs some explanation of the world he or she lives in; presumed also is that the human needs not just explanation but also guidance and directions for living in this world.[14] In this sense, each meaning system—religion, ideology, science, art—is an explanatory and normative meaning-giving system. What makes religion different from the other meaning systems is its attempt to both descriptively and normatively place humankind within the total cosmos and in time dimensions beyond the present.

Essentially, religion offers meaning—explanatory and normative—through a set of symbols. Sometimes the symbols are generically the same. Music, for example, is a powerful religious symbol but can also be, as Geertz noted, an equally powerful symbol in the art meaning system. While both art and religion use music, they each use it differently. I remember in the 1960s undergraduates telling me how their experience at a rock concert was "religious." Students would pay a modest fortune to attend the latest rock star's concert. As one student told me, "Everybody needs something to keep his head screwed on." Obviously the rock performance, the sound, the visual and staging effects, and the perception of beauty were realities that became symbols of meaning for the students. The point is this: Religion is *like* art, ideology, or science, but it uses a different symbol set or the same symbol set, such as ritual or mythology, in a different way. This book is about the religious symbols Micronesians used to find meaning before their mass conversion to Christianity.

The word "symbol" probably needs little explanation. The basic meaning is very simple: "something that stands for something else." Some symbols are probably so close to the object they signify that their meaning is obvious, but many are not. It is doubtful, for example, that the elaborate kava (*sakau*) ceremonies held in the Pohnpeian communal meeting houses (*nahs*) would be understood by a stranger to Pohnpeian society. There is something special about the structure of the building, the seating arrangements, the order of presenting the *sakau* cup; it takes knowledge of the culture to understand more than the obvious in this symbol set.

Religion is not a privately owned set of symbols that is the property of some eccentric individual, nor is it owned by a society; the use of religious symbols to give meaning to life is found across the globe. In that sense, it is "one of the world's *great* meaning systems." The modified definition from Geertz does not require anyone to say that religious symbolic meaning systems are better than any other competitor such as science or art, although given individuals and societies have in fact found religion to be a better source of meaning. It also should be noted that not all the alternative meaning systems are equally available to all societies. Clearly, science is, at best, only minimally available in preindustrial societies.[15]

Important to understand here is that symbols and meanings are not just an intellectualizing affair. Meaning can also be found in behavior, in those actions called ritual, as well as in sacred things, places, and people.[16]

All symbolic meaning systems offer a path through life. What distinguishes a religious meaning system is that it so often proposes an integration of the life of the individual and the group within times and places that transcend the immediate existential work of daily experience. Religion catches this world and the time beyond in a unique way; the religious understanding of the cosmos puts demands and obligations on believers. The descriptions of the cosmologies of Micronesia later in this work will make it apparent that the religious view of the universe and of time is radically different from that offered by science.

Finally, implied in the above description of symbolic meanings systems is that they all deal with power: the power to understand and direct human existence. Little wonder that Karl Marx called religion the "opiate of the people"; he rightly saw that religion can have great power over the minds and lives of a population. But his description was pejorative. A more positive recognition of the power in religion was recognized by Rudolf Otto, who characterized it as the "mystery which both attracts and repels"—a phenomenon not completely understood but that can generate opposites in human behavior: love and fear, approachability and distance.

Sources

It would be almost impossible to do participant-observation fieldwork on ancient Micronesian religions. The old religions are gone and only remnants and memories remain. One can, as Francis Hezel and I have done, collect and analyze dozens of cases of possession and trance, for example, but this behavior is no longer culturally captured or institutionalized within the lineage or the clan mediums and hanging shrines of the community houses. One can also collect—as Jack Tobin did in the 1970s and recently published (2002)—a wealth of folklore, but this folklore is now separated from a living and vibrant culture of the preindustrial societies of Micronesia.

Even many of the post–World War II ethnographies, with their obligatory nod to traditional religions, were the product of "memory culture"—in other words, they were accounts of beliefs and rituals no longer practiced.[17] Here and there in the ethnographic record, one can see the use of older written sources, uncited and unnamed. There can be no objection to memory culture, if that is all there is to be found. Throughout preparation of this work, however, I have constantly sought out elders to ask them the meaning of religious vocabulary of which the younger generation has never heard. Even so, this work is not the result of intensive fieldwork.

This work is drawn mostly from written sources from the turn of the nineteenth century and the period immediately after World War II.[18] The hiatus of materials from between the world wars is due to the fact that few Japanese anthropologists studied religion at that time.[19] Yet having the German sources from before World War I and the American ones soon after World War II is especially fortuitous, for both of these periods were twilight times for the old religions. The host of German authors—colonial officials, traders, missionaries, ethnographers—and, of course, the great German South Sea Expedition of 1908–1910 all found the high islands (mostly the large, volcanic islands rather than coral atolls) in this twilight period of decline. On many of the remote outer atolls, however, the old religions were in vigor up until after World War II. Thus, American CIMA anthropologists such as Lessa, Burrows, and Spiro found newly converted populations where the memories of the old ways were still fresh.

There are four significantly large sources, at least in terms of sheer volume, that cover the subject of Micronesian religion. These are the reports of the Hamburg South Sea Expedition of 1908–1910 (ESE), the *Anthropos* articles and special publications,[20] the CIMA reports after World War II (funded in part by the U.S. Navy, then in control of the largest portion

of Micronesia), and finally, to a much lesser extent, the reports of the nineteenth-century Congregational missionaries.[21]

There are problems with each of these sources, however. If one looks at the introductory volume of the German South Sea Expedition,[22] for instance, one learns that the actual fieldwork of the expedition at some Micronesian sites was only a few days long (as on the atolls southwest of Palau).[23] Moreover, the published final reports were sometimes based on field notes later collated and written up by someone who neither knew the language nor had ever visited the region.[24] Since anthropology was in its infancy in 1908, it is not surprising that the leader of the expedition, Augustin Krämer, was a colonial government surgeon and that other members were not ethnographers. Furthermore, the emphasis of the kind of anthropology done by the expedition was on the material culture of the islands, with long sections, for example, devoted to the warp and woof of Micronesian weaving. All of this is understandable in a museum-sponsored expedition. It must also be noted that although their volumes are thick, their fieldwork was not always impressive. Hambruch, for example, spent about a month on Nauru, had very few informants, and still produced two thick volumes.[25] The local priest, Father Kayser, himself an amateur linguist and author of the first grammar and word finder for the Nauruan language, said about Hambruch's grasp of the language, "He understood almost nothing" (1917–1918). To their credit, however, it must be said that the Hamburg Expedition researchers seem to have read and summarized in print everything written on the islands before them. Also to their credit is the fact that some of their works remain a priceless source of folklore and traditions for some of the islands. Hambruch's work on Pohnpei is a good example; it is still being used and integrated into local oral histories (Mauricio 1993).

The second large source is the *Anthropos* publications, mostly the work of German Roman Catholic missionaries in Micronesia. These publications often contain the first rudimentary dictionaries and grammars of the islands' languages. The advantage of these missionary works is that the authors often spent years on their island learning and speaking the language. By contrast, no Hamburg expedition researcher spent more than ten months on an island. The only individuals who could compete with the missionaries in knowledge of the language were those freelance ethnographers, such as the great Jan Stanislaw Kubary, or the longtime resident trader Karl Semper, and an occasional colonial official such as German physician Max Girschner. None of the American CIMA team after World War II spent more than eight months in the field, although some, like Ward Goodenough, returned more than once. In any case, it is curious indeed

that the Christian missionaries should be the ones to put in writing the story of the old religions that Christianity supplanted. Many had a real knack for ethnography and linguistics: Bollig for Chuuk, Erdland for the Marshalls, Sixtus Walleser for Yap, and Salvador Walleser for Palau.[26]

The third main source, the CIMA reports, as mentioned earlier, have little time for religion, except for the obligatory bow to the traditional belief system.[27] Yet there are significant exceptions. William Lessa's collections of mostly Ulithian folklore, Spiro's description and classic Freudian analysis of Ifalik (Ifaluk) spirits, and Burrows' description of trancelike possession in the inspiration of songs by Ifalik women are still some of the most detailed descriptions of postwar island religion. Also from the CIMA researchers came several scholars whose lives have been devoted to Micronesian research, one of whom eventually produced a monograph on the religion (Goodenough 2002).

Finally, the reports and publications of the American Board of Commissioners of the Foreign Missions (ABCFM) still give valuable insights into the collision of Western and island Pacific cultures. Most of the reports are diatribes against the island cultures, but they still manage to be informative. Among these Boston-based missionaries are men like Luther Gulick, who preserved in writing much of the culture he saw in decline.

Methods

This work, as mentioned before, is largely a reconstruction based on written sources, or rather an ethnohistorical view of traditional religions. Ethnohistorical work anywhere at any time is fraught with difficulties, as is the very word "traditional." Some writers completely avoid the term "traditional" because for many societies there is no single, canonical tradition. The term is still used here with full knowledge that there is no definitive tradition but often only a history of evolution and change. Three disciplines aid in ferreting out the information. The first is ethnography and ethnohistory, or what Americans would call sociocultural anthropology. The two other disciplines are archaeology and linguistics.

Oral History

Whether our sources are called myth, oral tradition, or oral history, whether the local people regard some of the myths true and others entertaining, folklore is at the heart of this reconstruction of the old religions. The problem, then, becomes determining where reality ends and the fairy tales begin. I take the position here that all myth and oral tradition is true—myths relate something that some group believed and passed down

from generation to generation. To find the completeness of "their truth" in myth and tradition is largely impossible. The most that I or anyone else can do is to find out how myth and tradition worked for them. I try to avoid any psychologizing of those long dead, instead trying to find out how the living descendents viewed the traditions of their ancestors. This raises the question of how the meaning of the traditions was recorded through interviews with islanders conducted long ago. For the most part, that means how German and American anthropologists recorded the traditions and local interpretations. Sometimes, however, the anthropologists recorded only the traditions, so the contemporary anthropologist is left to his own wits to determine what these traditions meant to the people and why they were true for them. Such are the built-in limitations of ethnohistory as a functional approach.

There are a few places in Micronesia, such as Pohnpei, where the locals put their treasured family histories in writing. These are enormously valuable because the written histories are both description and interpretation. But regardless of who wrote down the traditions, oral histories or myths used as history are always filled with problems. The writings are not history in any modern sense of the term, although even modern historians know well that all history selects and interprets data. A written oral history, like Luelen Bernart's *Book of Luelen,* is a mixture of Pohnpeian history, myth, poetry, Christian overlays, and a variety of other ingredients. Even so, oral history or myth as history should not be bypassed. Minimally, it offers at least clues about the past. Unfortunately, oral history is also notoriously bad on times and dates, which is precisely why many do not use the term "oral history" but refer to "oral tradition." Another problem with oral history and myth is that it is difficult to separate out Christian missionary influence. Many islands have stories about a great flood, to cite an obvious example, often sounding much like the biblical Noah; but the great flood is, after all, a worldwide mythic theme.

Linguistics

The second discipline that can produce information on the old religions of Micronesia is linguistics. After all, it is the linguists who have given us the modern dictionaries that often provide both an old and contemporary meaning for important terms. A good example is the word for "heaven" or "sky," generally found throughout Micronesia as some variation of *lang*. Ward Goodenough and Lothar Käser, after investigating the old and contemporary meaning of this word in the Chuukic-speaking languages, propose that an older meaning of the word referred not only to heaven or sky but also to the places on earth where the spirits and gods lived while

working on earth. The observation might seem trivial at first glance, but their investigation shows why certain places were considered not just dangerous because of local spirits but sacred, because here the helpful ancestor spirits dwelt. And for some of the words that bedevil most of the Pacific religions—"mana" and "taboo" are classic examples—one needs the help of linguistics as well as anthropology. The dictionaries produced by Ward Goodenough are exceptionally rich in detail about the religion of the Chuuk Lagoon, as is Lewis Josephs' for Palau; others are disappointingly brief in entries dealing with religion.

Additionally and more importantly, linguistics is the major source in Micronesia for tracing the origins and colonization of the islands. Linguistics thus offers answers as to why the Marianas, Yap, and Palau are culturally so different from the rest of Micronesia; these three island groups are from a different subgroup of the Austronesian language than the rest of Micronesia. If Palauan religion appears significantly different from the rest of Micronesian religions, this is not surprising; Palauans come from an earlier colonizing people and probably from a different homeland—Southeast Asia. The Chuukic-speaking islands, on the other hand, appear to come from a later colonization and from a different region, probably somewhere between Vanuatu and the Bismark Archipelago.

Archaeology

The third source discipline is archaeology. Recent archaeology brought the promise of much-needed chronology and data to the cultural picture. Unfortunately, Micronesian archaeology is, like the study of religion, a neglected discipline; its findings contribute little if anything to reconstruction of a chronology or a diachronic view of culture and religion. Archaeology is constrained by its very method: The stones don't speak—at least they do not by themselves say much about religion. Rarely, in Micronesia at least, does archaeology contribute to a better understanding of religion. Generally speaking, Micronesian archaeology tells us something only when it is combined with ethnography and oral traditions. One of the best examples of this is Rufino Mauricio's doctoral dissertation: He uses oral traditions, many recorded in 1909–1910 by Paul Hambruch of the Hamburg Expedition, along with surface monuments, dwellings, shrines, and even the megalithic Nan Madol to reconstruct the religious and political prehistory of Pohnpei. Ross Cordy's reconstruction of Kosraean prehistory is also a combination of oral traditions (most derived from Ernst Sarfert's volumes in 1910 [published in 1919 and 1920]) and archaeology to reconstruct the prehistory of the old kingdom centered at Lelu.

Readers will also recognize a functionalist at work in this book. While it is true that functionalism can be applied too broadly and can never legitimately psychologize the needs of a culture—especially the needs of a vanished culture—there is also considerable evidence for what might be termed an "indigenous functionalism." In essence, this means that the peoples of Micronesia remembered the folklore, the myths, and the rituals because they functioned and worked for them. In other words, the sources are functionalist prior to any outside analysis.

We have negative and positive examples of this functionalism in Micronesia. The great man-made earthen step mounds of Palau remain largely a mystery to Palauans and Western observers. Their meaning and function were already forgotten in the 1860s and 1870s when Kubary and Semper asked about them, and they are not mentioned in Palauan myth or oral history. Western observers can propose functions, such as defense, agriculture, or village structures, but the indigenous meaning and function is lost. A positive form of this functionalism is the upright prismatic basalt monolith near Wene, Pohnpei. In this case, oral tradition tells us what the monolith was used for: Here the candidate for the chieftain-priest of the nearby religious center was crowned, confirmed, and elevated to his status by a company of his fellow priests. Functionalism is a valuable tool to understanding Micronesian religions; Micronesians were indigenous functionalists, as were most of the anthropologists who worked with the old religions.

The Plan of This Volume

The next chapter is an overview of Micronesian religion, but the heart of the work follows with chapters about the details of religion in each area (excluding the Marianas and the Polynesian outliers).

The lead-in chapter of the areal studies covers the Chuukese-speaking complex of islands and atolls, an appropriate beginning, I think, because the group contains the largest population in Micronesia, stretches broadly across the region, and had many contacts with other language and culture groups in Micronesia.

The Chamorro-speaking group of the Marianas is omitted, first of all because of the intensive and long Spanish military campaign against the indigenous peoples and their religion; second, because of the occupation and intermarriage with Philippine and Mexican settlers and garrisons; and third, because the very early and long-lasting Catholic missionization stamped out most of the local religion. No other group of islands in Micronesia suffered such intensive and long-term pressure on their

indigenous population, culture, and religion. Furthermore, a thorough treatment of the Chamorro religion would require more than a single chapter and thus is beyond the page limitation of this single volume.

The two Polynesian outliers, Nukuoro and Kapingamarangi, are not given separate chapters because I find their greatest value is highlighting the contrast between Polynesian and Micronesian religion; hence they are discussed in the concluding chapter.

In the concluding chapter, I highlight the similarities and differences between the areas within Micronesia and then attempt an appreciation or evaluation of Micronesia religion. Finally, I address the evidence of my tentative hypothesis that the Micronesian religion is sufficiently different from that of Polynesia and Melanesia to justify the continued claim of a Micronesian religion.

Some readers may be disappointed that there is not more analytic dissection of the beliefs and practices, but the primary need addressed here, to repeat, is collecting the mass of detail from different periods, different languages, and a host of different types of researchers into a single volume narrative description of Micronesian religion. Deeper analysis would require another volume.

Chapter 2

Overview of the Micronesian Religions

Early visitors to Micronesia spoke about the region as having no religion or temples, although the earliest records did describe gods and worship.[1] In fact, nearly all later reports, ranging from the letters of the Spanish Jesuit missionary Cantova in the early eighteenth century to American ethnographers after World War II, suggested extensive and complex religions, admittedly showing much variation over both geography and time. The only two exceptions are the German ethnographer Finsch (1893) and the French naval commander Freycinet (1829). Why Finsch and Freycinet should fail to see religion is obvious: Nothing observed met their definition of what a religion should be. Neither explorer saw religious edifices, organizational structure, or the grand ritual they experienced in Europe. What they and the earliest European visitors missed, others would later find, even if the old religions of Micronesia were less lavish in display and ritual than their Polynesian neighbors.

Spirits

Micronesians regularly divided their spirits first into a family of the sky gods—often *Anulap, Luuk,* and *Olofat*[2]—then another class of gods, categorized according to a genealogy of brothers and sisters, who live in the sky, sea, or under the sea but are thought of as patrons. They could be patrons of breadfruit, pandanus, fishing, navigation, or any of many other things as well. This second category of gods often comprises the culture heroes who bring technology to humans, such as *Likodaner* of the Marshalls, who teaches her son—and thus humankind—how to tack into the wind with a sailing outrigger (Erdland 1914, 154). Sometimes gods with different names carry out the same function on different islands: While *Sinlanka* is the breadfruit goddess on Kosrae, it is *Soumai* on Chuuk and *Luhk* on Pohnpei. Although confusing, there appears to be a pattern. Obviously these patron-class gods will vary depending on the

ecology of the region. Pandanus ritual is important on Kiribati and the Marshalls because it is a staple crop there, just as breadfruit is in the eastern and central Carolines. Oddly enough, when one comes to regions such as Ulithi, Yap, and Palau, where taro is the key starch crop, there is little ritual and interaction with the gods and spirit world. Lessa quite rightly notes the complexity of fishing ritual, but he incorrectly comments that "Paradoxically, little or no magic at all is applied to food plants, probably because these grow well with little assistance other than such practical steps as working the soil, weeding and fertilizing" (1987, 501). Some of the most elaborate "fructification" rituals in Micronesia involved the "calling" of the breadfruit souls from the sacred south (*Aur*), and, on the island of Puluwat in particular, this was often accompanied by a month-long ritual surrounding the appearance of the goddess *Hewanu* in the form of a conger eel.

Sky and patron gods are mostly beneficial to humans, bringing an abundance of food and practical knowledge. There is great variation, if not contradiction, in the genealogies of the gods and goddesses, many of whom are begotten by a divine being and a human or animal, especially an eel or whale. The most consistently seen god or demigod is *Wonofáát* (often spelled *Olofat*). From one end of Micronesia to the other, he is either pure trickster (Ulithi) or a combination of trickster and culture hero. In Kiribati he is the creator god and trickster *Na Areau,* while in the Marshalls he is *Letao* the trickster. In the Chuukic-speaking islands, *Wonofáát* is something of a troublemaker.[3] There is always variety in the Micronesian religions, but it is a variety based on common themes, like the existence of a trickster god.

It would be wrong to overgeneralize and say that the sky gods are aloof from human affairs. Certainly the patron gods are more important to daily affairs, but the Chuuk warrior-priests, the *itang,* regularly invoked not only the war god *Resiim* but also the great sky gods, *Enúúnap* and *Luuk*.

Many of the islands have another category of spirits; these are more like goblins, ogres, trolls, and nasty spirits hiding in the jungle or on the reef.

But the largest and perhaps most important category is that of the ancestral spirits. By far the greatest rituals involved those souls of the deceased relatives whose ambiguous character could make them either troublesome or helpful to their living relatives. Frazer (1924) once called this "ancestor worship," and in this he was partially correct. Supplications and offerings are made to the spirits of the dead for advice, guidance, cures, divination, and even inspiration for dancing. But often the behavior is really only respect and honor for the past generations of the lineage or

clan. A consistent pattern is that the gathered mourners wait for three or four days after a relative's death or burial for the soul of their kinsperson to leave the home and make its way up through the layers of the sky world, where it undergoes a test of some sort in order to determine whether it will enjoy bliss or remain trapped. Islanders believed that the spirits of the dead were potentially dangerous and wanted them away from the homestead, but they also often hoped that one might take possession of a kinsperson and offer the family assistance as a spirit medium.

As to whether or not, in the after-death judgment made by *Enúúnap* and *Nuuk* (*Luuk*), the outcome is based on the deceased individual's life on earth, the answer is both yes and no. There is probably no aboriginal belief that the individual's behavior on earth merited bliss or condemned him to suffering. Nor is there any aboriginal belief in predestination. But there is an ethics or a morality associated with the afterlife based on one's earthly service to the community. The afterlife is a continuation of life itself. After death, the soul is transformed into a human spirit. This spirit could be especially helpful by taking possession of a living family member to help the lineage or clan. There is a definite connection between the soul during life, especially in its service to the group, and its destination after death. The soul that in life has violated community rules and taboos will not find an ancestor spirit to help it on its way to the sky world. Admittedly, the judgment of the soul after death is sometimes described as lacking any relationship to morals, while at times it sounds too much like a Christian overlay. Still, the claim that life on earth is not related to life after death is unsustainable.

Most Micronesians lump together the sky gods, patron gods, earth and sea goblins, and the deceased ancestors under a single term, such as the Chuukic *énú*. It is the translators who gloss the real differences into gods, spirits, and ghosts.

Occasionally, a spirit of the deceased developed a following—a cult that transcended lineage, clan, or island and became a regional god or spirit. Such was the case with the Ulithian child Marespa, whom Lessa (1976) traced back to about 1840 and whose cult spread throughout the central Carolines and even to Yap; his shrines could still be seen after World War II (Metzgar 1979). Such figures, however, were rare in Micronesia.

Also rare is the belief that each living person has two spirits or souls, a good one and an evil one. The good soul becomes the helping spirit, which can possess its living kin, choose mediums, and in general divine and inspire for the living. Evidence for the dual soul comes from the Chuuk Lagoon, the Mortlocks, and Yap (Bollig 1927; Tolerton and Rauch 1949; Müller 1917).

Shrines

Where and how the helper spirits interacted with the living varies. Early reports were quite correct in claiming that there were really no temples in Micronesia. Instead, there were small shrines outdoors or indoors where the ancestors or the gods were remembered and presented with offerings. There were boxes in caves or in small stone enclosures where the skulls of the ancestors were preserved and honored (as in the Marianas and Kiribati). Occasionally, a basalt stone monolith was considered either the incarnation of a founding ancestress, as on Namu (Pollock 1976), or a place for coronation and ritual, as in Wene, Pohnpei. On the high volcanic islands of Kosrae and Pohnpei, huge basaltic platforms were built for ceremonies, while on Yap stone platforms were erected for the priest's houses. Throughout the Chuukic-speaking islands, however, there were no such stone platforms, simply hanging shrines or altars in dwellings or in canoe houses. Oddly enough, these shrines were often in the shape of a double-hulled canoe, a design otherwise unused in Micronesia. In the central and western Carolines, the shrines get increasingly larger as one goes west; the shrine of one of the spirits on Ulithi was actually large enough for a person to enter.

There are reports of spirit houses for Yap and Palau. On Yap, small stone platforms were topped by a shrine or a priest's house; on Palau, the shaman's divining hut was either a separate small house near the community meeting house (*bai*) or a room in the shaman's dwelling. On Tobi, something was found that may be the closest thing Micronesia had to a building dedicated to a deity and performance of ritual. The building was large enough for the local priests to receive, rather begrudgingly, the German ethnographers of the Hamburg Expedition as overnight guests there. The same building contained something resembling an altar at one end and a full-sized, single-hulled sacred canoe suspended from the rafters.

The variation pattern in the Micronesian shrines is typical of so many features of Micronesian religions—they show a continuum from east to west. In this case, the "shrines" get bigger as one moves westward from Kiribati and the Marshalls—neither of which really had shrines, only sacred places—to Tobi. In the central Caroline atolls and in Yap and Palau, small huts were built on or near graves as houses for the deceased spirits.

Taboos

Another pattern that varies greatly across Micronesia is the concept of taboo. The belief that something, someone, or some behavior is prohibited

with divine sanctions is probably close to being a cultural universal. In Micronesia, taboos appear to have been strongest in the Marshalls, Yap, and Palau. In the Marshalls, the chiefs could impose taboos for one thing or another, and they themselves were surrounded by elaborate taboos—although not as elaborate as the Hawaiian system of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Sometimes the Marshallese taboos seem very secular, as when breadfruit picking was prohibited due to short supply. Other taboos were associated with the places where medicine was made or islands where the chiefs were buried. Without a doubt, many of the taboos surrounding paramount chiefs bolstered their positions as sacred, as descended from the gods and goddesses (Pollock 1976). These political positions, as with the paramount chiefs in the Marshalls, needed more than just a little infusion from the sacred sky gods, because their titles were often achieved through politics and contested in battle.

In Yap, taboo was very different, although the island did have the familiar Micronesian-wide taboos regarding menstruating women, women on canoes, and so forth. Taboos in Yap also governed mealtime: There were rules regarding who could eat with whom and also what was to be eaten on certain occasions. Suffice it to say that the food taboo system formally recognized, legitimized, or even bolstered the social structure of castes and classes and gender. Nowhere else in Micronesia is there such a complicated taboo system. In this case, however, the nature of the taboo is a marker of social and political stratification as well as a symbol of the sacred.

Religious Leaders

Yap, like other high islands (Kosrae, Pohnpei, Chuuk Lagoon), had both a priesthood and, for lack of a better word, sorcerers. By the time the Hamburg South Sea Expedition reached Yap in 1909, Müller found only the remnants of a priestly hierarchy with their stone platform shrines. He also discovered the Micronesian-wide use of possession and trance for divination, but this seems to have already been in decline.

Müller also thought that the Yapese had two religions: one of the great sky gods, as found elsewhere in Micronesia, and a second of the "vegetation demons," whose rituals are described in the only complete annual calendar we have for religion and horticulture. It may, however, be more accurate to classify Müller's "vegetation demons" as patron gods of agriculture.

The religion of Palau was characterized by priests and/or shamans who competed with the high-titled political leaders for secular power. As

on Yap and elsewhere, the mediums were entranced during their sessions, although the feature of possession is less evident than in the Chuukic-speaking islands.

Change

The religions of Micronesia were not static. It is impossible to catch a "snapshot" of Micronesian religions at the time of early contact because they were already changing and had undergone earlier changes as well. One cannot say that the first big change was the result of Christian missionization. The priestly line on Pohnpei, for example, was already dying out when the first Protestant missionaries arrived in 1852. In fact, missionary Luther Gulick watched the last old priest die during the smallpox epidemic of 1854. Rufino Mauricio (1993) calls the death of the priestly line and its incorporation of some priestly titles into the lines of the paramount chiefs (*Nahnmwarki*) the "secularization" of the old religion. On Yap, long before it turned Christian, the priestly traditions and even the popular Marespa cult were in decline. What does remain across Micronesia to the present day are the possessed and entranced mediums, whose role and actual behavior is much like the mediums of old, despite the fact that they no longer hold any official status (Dobbin and Hezel 1995).

Unlike Melanesia, Micronesia had few nativist movements. Short-lived and geographically limited returns to the old spirit dancing appeared on Chuuk and the Mortlocks in 1895 and 1904 (Tolerton and Rauch 1949). Whether the events of 1895 and 1904 can be labeled "nativistic" is doubtful; I would think that they were simply an expression of incomplete conversion. The Modekngei movement on Palau was also nativist, stimulated by the rapid modernization in Palau that occurred under late German rule and early Japanese administration. Modekngei continues as a syncretistic religion of the old shamanistic traditions and Christianity.

Cosmology

An important feature of the pre-Christian religions was their cosmologies, for they represent the universe in which the gods and humans met. Kiribati, Banaba, and Nauru pictured the universe as originally a monstrous Tridacna clam that an eel helped the creator god pry open, thus creating the earth and the heavens above. Pohnpeians, at least in some myths, pictured the universe as a huge meetinghouse. In this Pohnpeian example, one of the gods comes down from the roof of the heavens, enters it at the

end of the horizon, and from there proceeds to a Pohnpeian island to find a human bedmate.

Chuukic-speaking peoples, however, have the most complicated cosmology and portray the universe (not the earth) as a globe with many layers of the spirit sky world, including the layer of earth (or the islands in the sea) and the earthlike world under the sea.[4]

Rituals

What sort of rituals took place within these cosmologies? Micronesia offered a wide range of ritual that united humans and spirits in this cosmos. There were rituals of life crises—especially war, sickness, and death. Burial ritual was especially important, as it was the occasion for the souls to be transformed into spirits. Genuine rites of passage were rare, with death and female puberty being the only significant ones. The only reconciliation ritual I know of is the pounding and offering of *sakau* on Pohnpei, a rite now incorporated into the Roman Catholic sacrament of penance.

Undoubtedly the highest formal ritual known at the time of contact was the elaborate ceremony, performed by the priests of the Pohnpeian Saudeleur dynasty, in which a turtle was sacrificed in propitiation to the sacred eel. The breadfruit fructification rituals on Puluwat also involved feeding and honoring the sacred conger eel. The eel was a common symbol of the gods and clans, ranging from Kosrae, where the eel was associated with the breadfruit goddess, to Puluwat and the central Carolines. Similar rituals for the increase of pandanus were once held in Kiribati and the Marshalls.

Much ritual was also tied to politics. On Kosrae, groups of priests solemnized the coronation of the king (*tokosra*). Priest-chiefs controlled key shrines and lands on Pohnpei well into the nineteenth century. The Chuukic breadfruit offering (first fruits) is a thanksgiving ritual to the breadfruit deities, even as it is an acknowledgement of the local chief's control of the land. The present Pohnpeian *sakau* rituals in the community houses may be, as Mauricio suggests, a secularization of the priestly functions from times before the development of the modern meetinghouse and current high chiefly titles (*Nahnmwarki* and *Nahnken*), or they may be genuine religious ritual performed for the gods by figures that are both secular and political.

The traditional exchange of goods (*sawei*) between Yap and the Carolinian atolls all the way to Puluwat and Pulusuk (today's Houk) may have had a religious dimension, or the myths associated with it may simply be a justification for the tribute system to Yap. Alkire is closer to the

reality when he claims that the religious myth justified the relationships; but even when the myths faded with the coming of Christianity, the *sawei* relationships between some of the islands continued.[5] As already noted, even the extensive food taboos on Yap may be more of a justification for the Yapese ranking system than a religious ritual.

Dancing, on the other hand, which is so secular to the contemporary Western ethos, is clearly a religious ritual here, as the nineteenth-century missionaries recognized. Dances accompanied major rituals, particularly those dealing with breadfruit. Some dances were "secular" but others were called "spirit" dances because they were handed down to entranced mediums by a spirit. The wooden staffs of the mediums were later put on the hanging altar, festooned with garlands. Dance has a critically important role in expressing the community dimension of religion in Micronesia, as it does throughout much of the Pacific.

Readers of a positivist or rationalist vein will want to label all the above as simply magic and sorcery from an age of flat-earthers. But long before the modern worldviews, this cosmos of anthropomorphic gods and possessing ancestors served as an explanation and meaningful regulative symbol for the islanders. Beneath the magical symbolic veneer are concepts of relationships and responsibilities to nature and to the social entity. I fail to see the evidence for the statement so often made by early traders, government officials, and missionaries that the old religion was any more a product of slavish fear than the hellfire and condemnation by the premodern fundamentalists of either Protestantism or Catholicism.

Chapter 3

The Religion of the Chuukic-Speaking Islands

Within Micronesia is a continuum of linguistically and culturally related islands and atolls, more closely related to each other than to any other group within Micronesia. The shared features of these islands include the Chuukic languages, which can be broken down into distinct languages and dialects.[1] The islands also show great similarity with respect to their religion, considerably more than can be demonstrated for Micronesia as a whole.

The Chuukic islands are distributed from Tobi in the west (near New Guinea and the equator) in an arc, up and around to the Mortlock Islands in the east. Most of the Chuukic isles are flat coral atolls.[2] The Chuuk Lagoon, one of the largest lagoons in the world, differs in that it has high mountainous islands, which are basalt rock formed by ancient volcanic activity, in the island-cluster State of Chuuk. There are also colonies of Chuukic populations on Saipan, Pohnpei, Yap, and Palau.

The social structure of the Chuukic continuum is limited to the lineage and clan levels of organization, with short-lived alliances between lineages, clans, and islands.[3] This fact is critically important because Chuuk religions, like all religions, reflect the social structure. In this case, both the social structure and the religions are fragmented and highly localized. The Chuukic islands never developed the hierarchical priesthoods found on Kosrae, Pohnpei, and Yap. Chuuk religious specialists, by and large, remained part-time diviners and healers working at the lineage or small atoll level.

Just as the Chuuk religions reflected the social structure, they also reflected or addressed the everyday needs and life of the people: concern with livelihood and food supply, the crises of nature (drought, disease, and especially typhoons), warfare between lineages and islands, passing on traditions and titles, and death. I have organized the religious expressions of these everyday concerns using three Chuuk words representing focal concepts that recur time and again. These concepts, related as they are to

one another, seem to provide a logical framework and, in turn, open the door to a chain of other elements in the old religions. These key terms are as follows:

- *Énú:* spirits, including what would be called gods, spirits, ghosts, demons, and souls of the deceased.
- *Roong:* spirit knowledge, with related concepts such as the sacred, the efficacious, or the spirit power (*manaman*) and the forbidden and tabooed (*pin*).
- *Sowu:* experts, specialists, those who knew how to do extraordinary things, who possessed the *roong* to be successful in their rituals and actions.

The spirits or *énú* are undoubtedly important. The importance of spirit knowledge or *roong,* on the other hand, is not so obvious; its importance is that it is the invisible connection between the spirits and their chosen vehicles, the *sowu*. There are other important concepts, such as the possessed mediums (*wáátawa*), hanging shrine (*faar*), the breadfruit caller (*sowuyótoomey*), and the war and strategy leader and guardian of traditions (*itang*). Essentially, these key terms lead one into the realm of the spirits and their cosmos and into their interaction with living humans within the cosmos.

What is attractive about the key symbols or concepts is that they can explain so much. They can subsume so many of the key words near and dear to the history and anthropology of religion in the Western world, but they manage to do so without using the highly etic (that is, something from an outsider's point of view) concepts such as pantheon, cosmology, ritual specialists, and other such terms. *Énú,* for example, encompasses gods, spirits, semidivine beings or demigods, ghosts, ancestors, and souls. It also refers to the cosmos where those spirits live and interact with living humans. An approach that focuses on the key symbols or concepts in this case bypasses the limitations of a single English word gloss and also seems to do justice to both the emic and etic quest for understanding.[4] The rest of this chapter is a description and analysis of the key concepts of *énú, roong,* and *sowu* within the Chuukic-speaking islands.[5]

This chapter is disproportionately long, but the reasons for this length are simple. First, the Chuukic-speaking islands are the only culture group which spans from the east to the west of Micronesia, making these islands an ideal spot to see geographic variations within a single culture group. Second, Chuuk, taken as a whole, presents the best ethnographic record in Micronesia. The time depth of the sources is excellent and the

literature is overwhelmingly vast when compared to what we have on other Micronesian regions.

Sources on Religion

The Chuukic-speaking islands and atolls probably have the best sources in Micronesia for the old religions. The abundance of good sources is due to a variety of circumstances, one of which is simply the geographic spread and number of islands in the Chuukic arc from Tobi to the Mortlocks. The earlier sources range from a 1721 Spanish report by Father Cantova and an account of the French naval commander Duperrey's 1848 visit to the German reports of Max Girschner and Jan Kubary in the late nineteenth century and the pre–World War I accounts of the Capuchin missionary Laurentius Bollig. There are also the thick volumes produced by Krämer, Damm, Hambruch, and Sarfert following the South Sea Expedition of 1908–1910, while the record of Hijikata on Satawal during the 1920s is one of the few detailed ethnographic reports from the Japanese period translated into English (Hijikata 1997).

After World War II, the American Coordinated Investigation of Micronesian Anthropology (CIMA) project sent to Micronesia forty-two scholars, most of them anthropologists, including Ward Goodenough and Thomas Gladwin to the Chuuk Lagoon, Edwin Burrows and Melvin Spiro to Ifalik (Ifaluk), and William Lessa to Ulithi. All provided considerable detail on the old religion, which some of them were observing just before or after atoll-wide conversions to Christianity (Kiste and Marshall 1999, 469–471). The postwar American period of ethnography also produced works from other anthropologists working in what was then the U.S. Trust Territory. A notable example is Frank Mahony's work on medicine (1970), one of only two works on medical anthropology produced in Micronesia.[6] By the late 1960s and the 1970s, the next generation of anthropologists was producing works with some relevance to the old religion, notably John Caughey (1977) and Roger Mitchell (1967, 1968) for Chuuk; William Alkire on Lamotrek (1977, 1978, 1989), Mac Marshall for Namoluk (1972); and James Nason for Ettal (1970). By the 1980s, we have Catherine Lutz on Ifalik (1980a, 1980b) reviewing and critiquing the earlier work of Burrows and Spiro. Meanwhile, from the mid-1970s through the mid-1990s, Francis Hezel was offering researchers and the public alike the only Micronesian-wide histories of the area (1983, 1995). My own work has focused on possession and trance in Micronesia, and I am now seeing a new generation of doctoral candidates in anthropology researching revitalization movements and possession and trance in the Mortlocks.

One characteristic of the literature should be noted: The postwar ethnographies were not interested primarily in religion, although that was Ward Goodenough's originally intended subject of study. Melford Spiro's Ifalik research is the only fieldwork and publication to focus primarily on religion, although William Lessa's *Tales from Ulithi* and *More Tales from the Ulithi Atoll* might be considered as examples of emphasis on religion in the post–World War II ethnography.

Not only are the Chuukic-speaking islands blessed with a considerable ethnographic record over more than two centuries, they can also count at least five major theoretical works that directly relate to the old religions. Other regions in Micronesia have theoretical works, but only the Chuukic has theoretical works on religion. The earliest is Spiro's Ifalik work, which used a classic Freudian framework to interpret aggression, spirits, and possession. Next is Frank Mahony's dissertation on spirits and traditional medicine. Ward Goodenough, exploring the legendary relationships interpreted as connections between Chuuk, Pohnpei, and Kosrae, proposed a sky-god cult with a focus on the symbol of basalt stone. Lothar Käser, a Liebenzell missionary at the time of his fieldwork and conversant in the Chuuk language, did extensive interviews on the nature of the spirit world and, more particularly, on the concept of soul. Most recently, Catherine Lutz returned to Spiro's Ifalik to examine the cultural determination of emotions, a study inextricably tied up with the ethnography of spirits and spirit possession. To these theoretical works should be added, at least for honorable mention, the works of those two indefatigable armchair collectors of ethnography, James Frazer and Wilhelm Schmidt. Both Frazer's work on the concept of immortality in Micronesia (1924) and Schmidt's treatise on the gods and mythology (1953) are deeply dyed in a now-discredited diffusionism and in equally discredited evolutionary schemas. Still in all, they are early theoretical works attempting to gather the data into the meaningful explanation we call theory. Finally, it should be noted that the heavy hand of functionalism leans on much of the ethnographic work done in the Chuukic-speaking islands.

The Spirits

Énú as an all-embracing term might be best translated as "all supernatural beings" (Burrows and Spiro 1953, 207), but that does not mean that the Chuuk peoples did not distinguish between different kinds of *énú*.[7] On Ifalik, for example, anthropologist Melford Spiro found that the islanders clearly distinguished between helping spirits and harmful ones. There was also a distinction between those spirits "who came into being" (the spirits

of the deceased ancestors) and those who had always existed. In Ulithi, an outlying atoll of Yap, Lessa classified the spirits according to their functions: the ancestors who care, the demons who menace, and the gods who control (1966a, 45ff.; see also 1950a, 115). This classification comes rather close to the distinctions used across Chuukic-speaking Micronesia:

- Harmful spirits (although a few can be helpful)
- Ancestor spirits (although not all of them become helping spirits)
- Gods (cosmic, creator gods)
- Gods (helpful to humans as patrons of skills, crafts, and the arts)

Harmful Spirits

The harmful spirits might appear the least important, but quite the contrary is true. One rarely meets a god. It is more likely one will meet one of these spirits, who lurk in the darkness waiting to "bite" someone. "Bite" is the Chuukese metaphor for harm coming from the spirit world. Most of the harmful spirits are located at specific locations on land or in the sea. The *chénúkken,* to cite one example, are harmful spirits found in shallow waters of the reef. There are spirits in the bushes, in trees, and in special places like big rocks. Although these harmful spirits are everywhere, it would be incorrect to assume that the Chuukese believed in animism—that is, that everything in nature has an anima, or "soul." These nasty spirits were not the "souls" of nature.

Gods

Gods, on the other hand, are clearly from the sky world. Some of them are remote from the daily affairs of humans; they did their work sometime long ago at the beginning time of the cosmos, and now they are taking it easy in the highest tiers of the sky. These remote "sky gods" were often creators of the atolls and of other gods. In the oldest records about the Chuukese, these sky gods are set apart from the rest of the pantheon.[8] What is not too clear in the early reports is the distinction between the sky gods and the gods who do their work on earth, although the latter also come from the sky and live there. Most of these earthbound gods are what might be called patron deities. Every occupation and specialty seems to have had its own patron deity: one for navigators, one for house and canoe builders, another for weaving, and still others that controlled the breadfruit harvest. Sometimes there were elaborate rituals dedicated to the patron deities of particular occupations or specialties. (A description of the rituals for the patron deities of house building and of breadfruit trees is offered later in this chapter.) These patron gods were much closer to the

daily activities of making a living and in that sense are more important than the more removed sky gods.[9]

Enúúnap is always classed as a sky god and generally as the chief of the gods; the name literally means "great spirit." Although *Enúúnap* is, for the most part, unconcerned with the daily needs of humankind, he himself is given very human characteristics in the little he does do from his lofty place in the sky. Bollig writes:

> Besides *Onulap* [*Enúúnap*], the Jupiter of the Chuuk people, there is still a large number of others, in part male, in part female, in part sympathetic, in part unsympathetic. The gods in their customs are often not a bit better than the Chuuk people themselves. They eat, drink, dance, play, marry, and also perform many a trick which is not at all appropriate for gods. Even *Onulap,* although the best one in the sky, is a true old Kanaka chief, who lies on his mat in his hut and stares straight ahead. Just like the Chuuk regions, they have also transplanted in the sky the inhabitants with their good and bad qualities (Bollig 1927, 7).

Like the Olympian gods of ancient Greece, these gods show feelings, smart over hurts, and betray a lust and vengeance that is all too human:

> Like many other great gods, *Anunap* [*Enúúnap*] is not very active in myths. He is shown as a somewhat harried father administering to a rather troublesome brood. . . . *Anunap* has his hands full in repairing the roof of his house and dealing with the jealousies aroused by the appearance of a handsome young stranger on the scene. . . . *Anunap* suffers quietly the calculated arrogance of his son *Rongelap*. . . . It is rather *Anunap's* sons and daughters who from time to time visit the earth and interfere in human affairs (Mitchell 1968, 144–145).

The gods, then, do fit into a "family" in the sky, but Chuuk genealogies of the divinities are notoriously inconsistent. Next to *Enúúnap* in rank and importance is *Nuuk* (often spelled *Luk* or *Lukeileng*), who is a kind of heir apparent and who does most of *Enúúnap's* work.[10] From the mythology describing him, *Nuuk* is represented at "the right hand" of *Enúúnap,* sometimes even handling the "threads of human life" for his father (Damm et al. 1935). *Nuuk* is generally helpful to humans; in the Mortlocks he is the patron of carpenters (Kubary 1880, 259), and on Ifalik he was reputed to have taught humankind the art of tattooing.

Wonofáát (often spelled like *Olifat,* depending on the dialect) is, in turn, the son of *Nuuk*. Sometimes, however, *Nuuk* and *Wonofáát* are said

to be brothers. Western readers might be tempted to identify *Enúúnap* with the biblical God and *Wonofáát* with the devil or Satan. No such identification should be made, however, because *Enúúnap* is not portrayed as almighty or eternal, and *Wonofáát* is not the essence of evil. By and large, the Chuukic *Wonofáát* is just a trickster who manages to mess up, cheat, or lie about whatever he touches.[11] He lives in the sky world but comes to earth to create havoc and seduce women, harass men, and even fight with his brother or father, *Nuuk*. Indeed, there is no completely evil being in the entire host of sky gods; there are earthbound gods, gods of the high seas, and gods of the land beneath the seas. There is a myriad of mean little spirits one might call demons, but there is no personification of evil like the biblical devil, despite the association some missionaries made between the old Chuuk gods and Satan.

Today the only way to gain some feel for the Chuuk meanings of the gods is through their recorded mythologies. Here is one of the most famous of the *Wonofáát* myths:[12]

> The inhabitants of the Carolines worship three divinities who they believe reside in the sky. They are *Alouhilap, Lougheling,* and *Olifad* [*Enúúnap, Nuukeileng, Wonofáát*]. They attribute the following origin to them. They believe that throughout eternity there has existed a goddess called *Ligopoup,* the creator of the universe. She sent into the world *Alouhilap,* inventor of all the sciences and dispenser of glory. His son is *Lougheling,* whose mother and birth are unknown. *Lougheling* had two wives: one, *Ilamoulong,* lived in the sky; the other, *Tariso,* was a plain mortal but of great beauty. She bore *Olifad* four days after the beginning of her pregnancy. It is said that as soon as he was born he began to run. . . . Following the custom in this land of having the newborn drink the milk of the young coconut, his mother *Tariso* gave him one of these nuts. In order to drink he had to raise his eyes, and he saw his father *Lougheling* in the sky. He climbed toward him with his mother, and from that time on *Olifad* and *Tariso* detached themselves from the world. . . .
>
> In this way, along his route [to the sky], he dispensed maledictions for similar refusals. No one recognized him before he arrived near his father, who alone could recognize him. They sought a way to kill him.
>
> In front of a large house undergoing construction, *Olifad* asked for an implement to cut the leaves of a coconut tree for the roofing. They spurned his request, and immediately all the others were changed into statues.
>
> *Lougheling* and *Alouhilap* knew that *Olifad* had betaken himself to the sky. When they heard of the metamorphosis of the workers they asked the one who had retained his original form if he had met anyone. . . . .

Lougheling ordered one of his people to go look for the workmen changed into statues. They all arrived, to the great astonishment of those who were present, for it was only *Alouhilap* and *Lougheling* who knew that the child was *Olifad*.

The construction of the house was continued; and when they had to make the hole in the ground for setting up the posts, *Olifad* undertook the job, which gave much satisfaction to those who were working, for they hoped to find a way to kill him and avenge themselves of the harm he had already done—and could still do. But, guessing their plan, he provided himself with red earth, charcoal, and the ribs of coconut leaves, which he had taken care to hide. Then he began to make the hole, keeping enough space at one side so he could escape. When all was ready he let them know. At once they threw one of the posts on top of him, and covered it with earth to smother him. *Olifad* withdrew into the hole that he had saved, and began to chew the red earth, which he cast out. His murderers thought that it was blood. Then, when they saw the charcoal that he had also chewed, they thought that it was his gall, and concluded he was dead. However, with the rib of a coconut leaf he pierced the length of the post, and having left in this way he seated himself at the top without being seen. Ever since that time trees have a heart.

The work ended, the workmen assembled to eat. *Olifad* told an ant to give him a small piece of coconut. The ant brought what it could. By his divine power he changed the piece into an entire fruit, and then said in a loud voice, "Attention! I am going to divide my coconut." At these words the others turned around and, surprised at not having killed him after all, they thought that he was none other than Alous, that is to say, the devil. They did not persist any less in their design to have him die, and they told him to take dinner to Thunder. *Olifad* left with joy, but, by foresight, armed himself with a reed. Upon entering the house of Thunder, he said to him, "Well, I am tired of having brought this food to your deformed mouth." Thunder wanted to hurl himself upon him, but he put himself in the reed and escaped. Thus he accomplished his mission without mishap, to the great astonishment of his companions.

Lougheling began to look for his son, and having come upon him lifeless and full of worms, resuscitated him and asked him who had killed him. *Olifad* answered that he had not been killed but was sleeping. Nevertheless *Lougheling* had the *fela* come and gave him a blow on his upper jaw with a club. So this fish has this jaw shorter than the other.

It was then that *Alouhilap, Lougeling,* and *Olifad* passed into glory, and occupied themselves with rendering justice to the human race (Freycinet 1829, 108–111; Lessa 1961, 82–84).

The reader can easily see from this single story that other gods of the sky world are like *Enúúnap:* divine but also very human. Stories about *Wonofáát*'s birth may vary, but the pedigree is always high, generally as a son of *Nuuk*. He is a precocious child who pops out of his mortal mother's head. He is shunned by his father and, in a fit of sibling rivalry, kills his half-brother *Khiou*. He is not a kind god. With humans, however, he is mostly just mischievous, playing various sexual pranks on girls. Unlike his father and grandfather, he rarely receives offerings, prayers, or cult worship.[13]

This threesome of grandfather, son, and grandson shows the widest distribution of all the various Chuukic gods and their relationship. They are found in the oldest record of Chuukic spirits and gods, Father Cantova's letter of 1721, where Cantova clearly identifies *Eliuilep* as the father of *Lugeileng* and *Lugeileng* as the father of *Olifat*. The threesome was again singled out by Chamisso's Woleaian friend Kadu almost a century later.[14]

Earthbound Gods and Spirits

There were innumerable children of *Nuuk, Enúúnap,* and other celestial deities, and many of them performed valuable functions for humans, especially in canoe and house building, sailing and navigating, fishing, growing breadfruit, and controlling the Pacific Ocean weather. The reader should be warned, however, that the distinction between sky gods and earthbound ones (patrons) is not a rigid category; there seems to always be at least one myth on each atoll that is an exception. The genealogical relationships might vary greatly from island to island, but in general these earthbound gods were teachers of technology and skills and patrons of human work. *Mwárise,* for example, was the Mortlock Islands' patron of sailing and protector of sailors. He taught his wife, a woman from the island of Ettal, and their younger son the art of sailing.[15] In thanksgiving, the son made an offering at the spirit shrine hanging from the boathouse rafters. Afterwards, wrote Girschner, the navigators would also make a similar offering when they landed (1912–1913). *Semenkóórór,* although a sky god, was widely described as the bringer of various skills to humans (Bollig 1927). He also controlled the sun, moon, stars, and—most importantly—brought rain for the breadfruit (Girschner 1912–1913, 184). He was an expert in the construction of houses and canoes as well (Damm et al. 1935, 177). *Sowunóón* was the god who created fishes; he lived under the sea and was lord of this underworld, but the actual work for human beings was done by his son, *Enúúset*.[16] *Enúúset* was the true ruler of the ocean and was the patron of fishermen, who knew his magic and observed his taboos for success in fishing. If someone on the fishing boat had sex recently, *Enúúset* would become angry and spit on the man when he landed

on shore. Afterwards, the man would develop swollen legs or testes. There was, of course, a love spirit: a goddess called *Inemes* in the Chuuk Lagoon and the Mortlocks. Described as either very ugly or beautiful, chants and prayers appealed to her for the power to attract.[17] The daughter of *Inemes* was known as "Night Flirt," and *Inemes*' sisters were patronesses of dancing; eroticism seemed to run in the family. Other goddesses, however, were quite domestic, such as *Nisáreere* and *Nipáánau,* the teachers of weaving.

It is not surprising that numerous patron deities were associated with breadfruit. Breadfruit is critically important to the eastern Chuuk isles—more important as a main foodstuff than anywhere else in Micronesia. In the mystic south (*Ewúr*) of the Chuuk universe, the Lord of the Breadfruit (*Sowumey*) ruled and controlled the breadfruit growing and harvesting. He was supplicated with offerings, chants, and spirit-power medicine (*sáfey*) made by the *sowuyótoomey,* the "breadfruit caller."[18] To promote the budding of the trees, the *sowuyótoomey* charged about blowing a conch horn, and when the breadfruit reached maturity in March and April, pounded breadfruit was made and brought to the chief as part of a first-fruits offering and meal (Krämer 1932, 505). The Puluwat breadfruit ritual was extraordinary in its complexity; certain parts were conducted only when the breadfruit god, *Hewanu,*[19] who lived on *Ewúr* (a mythical island in the south sky), arrived on Puluwat incarnate in a conger eel (Damm et al. 1935).

The earthbound gods were numerous. They were linked into the divine hierarchy in different ways from place to place, but in general they were the good gods of earth and sea who became the patrons of humans in need. Krämer, for example, listed twenty-five gods for the Chuuk Lagoon, none of whom were sky world gods (1932, 319–322).

Localized Gods

Some islands had gods that were important in the local hierarchy but not found outside the region. A case in point was *Tilitr,* the patron god of Ifalik and brother of *Wonofáát* (Burrows 1949, 176). He did a lot of things for the people of Ifalik. He was sent down to Ifalik by *Enúúnap* to drive out evil spirits, instruct about curing disease, bring back lost canoes, and teach human beings the kind of songs that invoke him and his heavenly relatives. *Tilitr* made all this information known through answering questions put forward by favored individuals or by taking possession of individuals and speaking and singing through them. Burrows witnessed one such possession and had an informant who was regularly possessed by *Tilitr.* This experience and fieldwork became the basis for Burrow's later work, *Flower in My Ear* (1963), on the role of song and dance in the art, entertainment, and religion of the people. It is the only work in the Chuuk world

to explore exclusively the important role of music and dance as it comes through the inspiration of the gods in dreams and possession. Westerners might find it strange that dance could be both erotic and religious, but the unification of these two concepts is regularly found in the Chuuk world outside of Ifalik. Suffice it to say, Ifalik's *Tilitr* is a good example of contact with the gods through dance and song.

Ancestor Spirits

The Chuukic word *énú* can cover the entire spectrum of the spirit world, from sky world gods such as *Nuuk* to spirits of living and deceased humans. This is not to say that islanders failed to distinguish between the various *énú*. When Chuuk people spoke about their deceased kin as *énú,* they often added the word "human," so the term became *énúyaramas*. Earlier writers correctly saw the critically important role of the *énúyaramas* or deceased relations in the beliefs and practices of the Chuuk peoples.

Essentially, the belief is that after death the spirit or soul of the person hovers about the burial or funeral location. The living kin often hoped that the spirit of the deceased would take possession of one of the living members and become a source of information and decisions for the family or lineage, with the possessed person serving as the medium or diviner for the group. In any case, the spirit was helped to ascend into the sky world on the smoke of the deceased person's moveable property, which was burned on the grave, but might return to live in the hanging shrine or altar in the boathouse or the home itself (sometimes called *faar*). This short summary, however, does not begin to do justice to the complexity of Chuukese beliefs about the soul.

One distinctive feature of Chuuk human spirits is the belief in the double spirit or "soul" of the living. It was first recorded by Bollig (1927) during his 1913–1919 work in the Chuuk Lagoon;[20] earlier writers such as Kubary and Girschner apparently did not record the same belief in the Mortlocks. Since that time, however, the double soul belief has been confirmed by the CIMA report from the Mortlocks (Tolerton and Rauch 1949) and by the fieldwork of Lothar Käser (1977), who had at least one of the same informants used by Bollig over half a century earlier. The concept is also reported for Yap (Müller 1917). Functionally speaking, the double soul belief may be but a variation on explanations for the existence of good and bad spirits or the good and the bad in human beings, beliefs that were widespread in Micronesia.

This belief, as described by Bollig (1927) and Käser (1977), may be summarized as follows: In late pregnancy or at birth, the body develops two spirits, each called *ngúún;* the good one is called *ngúnúyéách* or *énúúyéách*

(spirit + good) and the bad one is called *ngúnúngngaw* or *énúúngngaw* (spirit + bad).[21] The good spirit exists before birth, but the bad one is born with the body and is bound to it during life. The good spirit can leave the body during life, and this is what creates dreams. During the life of the body, the good spirit grows and develops its identity, just as the body grows and develops. At death, both *ngúún* are released from the body and become *énú,* with the good one called *énúyaramas* (human spirit) and the bad one called *soope*. At about three to four days after death, the good spirit then makes its way up the layers of the sky to be judged by *Enúúnap* or *Nuuk;* it thereafter lives in the sky layer below the gods. But these *énúyaramas* get lonely for their old friends and relatives, their villages, and their clans, so they descend to earth both to help kin and to enforce lineage and clan rules.

Ngúún is sometimes translated as "soul," and this is not entirely wrong. But as Lothar Käser has pointed out, the Western idea of the soul includes different meanings than the Chuuk islanders understand by *ngúún*. Still, there is similarity in the belief that the soul is an element that continues beyond death.

One of the characteristics of the good spirit is its tendency to wander away from the living body. Another is that it may be seen as a duplicate or reflection of the body's shape. It is this image or reflection that is seen in dreams. The good spirit can work when the body sleeps, leading the human into a dream scene about, for example, threatening danger, and thereby functioning like the unconscious. Dreams are therefore segments of what the good spirit constantly experiences. The dream is a kind of window through which humans from this world are given a glance into the beyond and allowed to experience things and processes that could not be experienced without the dream (Käser 1977, 240ff.). Still another quality of the good spirit is that it has bodily characteristics, and so a footprint can be left on the grave when it departs the body (234).[22] These characteristics may be visible to everybody in dreams but only to designated mediums in a waking state (233). The good spirits can smell, eat, and taste, but they are especially responsive to smell (235). They can run, swim, and even dance (163); they weigh as much as big men, and the weight is felt by the mediums when the good spirit speaks from atop the shoulders.

It is precisely these bodylike characteristics that lead Käser to call the good and evil spirits the "spirit doubles" of the living human. The good spirit can live and exist apart from the body as well as before and after the birth of the body; the bad spirit, on the other hand, is bound to the life of the body and after death must appear as something other than human in form. Another way of putting this is that the soul (*ngúún*) is spirit but is closely identified with a material thing, even though the material element

may be dead. Each *ngúún* once was and still is associated with a particular body.[23] Käser's concept of the spirit double sets off the Chuukese *ngúún* from the Christian notion of soul, but "spiritual double" is his own terminology to summarize both the spirit and matter-bound characteristic of the *ngúún*. Islanders perceive two of their own manifestations of the *ngúún* as shadow and as reflection.

The struggle between the good and bad spirits throughout life reaches a climax at death with the bad spirit jumping on the good one and trying to eat it (Bollig 1927, 21). At night, islanders would light a lamp or fire to get rid of the bad spirit, which was thought to be afraid of light. The bad spirit remains near the body until burial, when it wanders out from the grave and becomes greatly feared as a spirit or ghost (*soope*).[24] These *soope* are known for their aggressiveness in biting, eating, and devouring people. They flee from light and spend the daytime in dark places like the mangrove swamps, holes in the earth, and under stones, and so protection is simple. Bad spirits don't like crowds, so people don't go out alone; and if someone is forced to go outside, he or she carries a light, rubs turmeric on the body, or uses special medicines such as holy water. In the past, when someone screamed or went into a rage, the source was assumed to be a *soope* (Käser 1977, 214ff.).

In Chuukese belief, spirits of any sort are potentially dangerous, and so the living kin and mourners are ambiguous in their behavior even towards the good spirit. The good soul (*ngunuyééch* or *énuuyééch*) at the time of death, funeral, and burial was seen as a spirit with potential for good or evil. The good spirit hovered about the body for three or four days; then the mourners helped the spirit mount into the sky by burning the deceased's moveable possessions on the grave in the hope that the spirit would go up on the smoke into the sky world. Some of the good spirits traveled up the smoke into Ledidi, where they wandered about restlessly and could do harm.[25] Others were led directly to the sky world by a guardian spirit (*énúúsór*) without having to wander about, and there they were tested by *Enúúnap* (Bollig 1927, 23). These good spirits were the ancestors (*énúyaramas*) who became patrons of their families, lineages, and clans. These were the spirits whom relatives hoped would also descend and take possession of one of the living members, who in turn became the sought-out medium for the kin group (67).

Different Kinds of Ancestor Spirits

As Bollig recorded, not all good spirits became sought-after and honored ancestors. A spirit's opportunity to become one of the few honored ancestors in no way depended on the person's status or achievements during life.

Essentially, one's rank, title, age, and wealth were all irrelevant. Some of the honored ancestor spirits were powerful chiefs in life; others were helpless babes who died in infancy. Still others were patron kin from the household, the lineage, or the clan. For Ta islet on Satowan in the Mortlocks, Kubary (1880, 258) records that the ancestors of the five chiefs were the top-ranking gods. For Ulithi, Lessa reports that the most remembered of the two "Great Ghosts" was a historically verifiable Ulithian baby named *Marespa,* who died in infancy, possessed the living, and engendered a possession cult with spirit houses throughout the western Carolines.

The story of *Marespa* is interesting for several reasons. First of all, it is one of the only cases where a deceased human becomes the object of a widespread, interisland cult. Second, although *Marespa* is exceptional in becoming the focus of a widespread cult, the evolution of a deceased human spirit to a worshipped being is indicative of a more widespread process, the "bumping up" of famous ancestors into the status of gods, as Kubary observed in the Mortlocks. *Marespa* was born about 1868 and died when only a few weeks old. When Lessa conducted his fieldwork in Ulithi in 1947, *Marespa*'s grave was still there on the atoll. *Marespa,* sometime soon after death, took possession of one of his relatives. The relative became the mouthpiece or medium for *Marespa* and spoke in the high-pitched voice of a woman, offering predictions of coming events like a typhoon, an epidemic, or loss of life on a sea voyage. *Marespa*—"the great ghost," as Lessa called him—gained such a good reputation for his predictions that little shrines were built in his honor, and people often made offerings to him of sweet-smelling oils. His fame spread to Yap, Palau, and the Chuukic-speaking atolls south of Palau.[26]

The story of *Marespa* is the only well-documented story of an ancestor becoming the focus of an areawide cult, but the principle of certain ancestors becoming regarded as more powerful than others is widespread in the Chuuk world. An example from Ulithi mythology is the story of *Iongolap* [*Enúúnap*], who was originally of a Yapese father and a Yapese mother and who left Yap and created Ulithi. The same principle recorded for *Marespa* is at work in the Ulithian *Iongolap:* One is promoted to being the "Great Spirit," or sky god, while the other is demoted in origin to show the linkage between Ulithi and Yap. The Ulithi case of *Marespa,* the baby, and *Iongolap,* the Yapese son, are good illustrations of the fluidity over time of all the categories of *énú.* It is not without reason, therefore, that Chuukic speakers often lump together all sorts of gods, spirits, and ancestors under the one word *énú.*

However one ranks the various spirits of the deceased, there is little doubt that they were among the spirits and gods most involved in the

daily life of Chuukic-speaking peoples. Still, Chuukic religion is not merely ancestor worship. Respect, honor, and offerings to the ancestors were important, but the sky world gods and those working on earth still played a key role in the religion of daily life. A good case is point is *Hewanu,* the breadfruit god of Puluwat. One of the most elaborate rituals ever recorded in the Chuukic-speaking world is a fertility ritual involving this god, who is certainly not an ancestor and is variously placed as one of the sons or daughters of *Enúúnap* or *Nuuk*.

Transformation into a Good Ancestor (*Énúyaramas*) and Voyage to the Sky World

If you ask a Chuukese islander what happens at death, he or she will say that the soul (*nguun*) leaves the body. Death is also the crossover point when the good spirit (*énúúyeech*) becomes a helping ancestor spirit, *énú* or *énúyaramas*. The funeral, mourning, and burial are all filled with signs and symbols of what happens to the good spirit. Father Cantova's description of the Chuuk religion, taken from islanders who had drifted into Guam in the early eighteenth century, also includes the earliest record of a Micronesian funeral, but the report contains nothing about the change of the soul into a helpful ancestor spirit. Later writers, however, did recognize the key event of the old funerals: the transformation of the soul into an *énúyaramas*. The fate of the soul was the critical question at the old funerals; people were decidedly less concerned with what happened to the physical body.[27]

As in funerals in so many places throughout the world, death was followed by wailing and even formal laments. Then came preparation of the body (washing, daubing the skin with turmeric, etc.). The body laid in state as relatives and friends brought "death gifts" and grave goods.[28] As the body was readied for burial on land or sea, drippings from the body were collected by the funeral expert, mixed with sweet-smelling oil, and given to the closest relatives to smear on their bodies or to drink.[29] If the body was buried on land, it was placed with the face towards the sea so that the soul might take flight by land or by sea (Bollig 1927, 16). With the preparation for burial began a series of symbolic acts intended to deal with the good soul of the deceased. The family watched the body or the grave for three nights in order to give the good soul an opportunity to possess one of them. On the fourth day after death, the relatives piled the remaining moveable property of the deceased on the grave and torched it, hoping that the soul would be liberated from the body and rise on the smoke to be with the great spirits in the sky world (Gladwin and Sarason

1953, 166–167). If the good spirit did not possess one of the living relatives before its ascent, no more would be heard of it. Possession of the kinsperson was a sign that the good soul, having now become *énúyaramas,* wanted to maintain contact with the family or lineage (Goodenough 2002, 144). The gathered relatives and mourners would tempt the good soul to settle down on the hanging altar or shrine (*faar*) and choose one of the kinfolk present to be its medium (*wáátawa,* literally the "canoe of the spirit"). If a plover flew within sight of the glow from the fire burning on the grave, it was a sign that the good soul had found its place (Bollig 1927, 22). The land property of the deceased was marked off with folded or knotted coconut fronds; the property was thus tabooed for a period of time "so that the spirit feels the freedom to return there" (Gladwin and Sarason 1953, 167).

In summary, the focus of the old Chuukic mourning and death ritual was concerned with resolving the ambiguity about the good soul. It was not known whether or not the soul was to become a helping spirit for the family and lineage, remembered through a *wáátawa*, or helped to rise from the body and go to a place in the sky world. It was also not known what needed to be done about the bad spirit and whether or not the house and land would have to be exorcised to be rid of it. In short, the heart of the old death and mourning ritual was the soul.

As Lessa saw on Ulithi already by the 1940s, much of the old belief and practice had disappeared, but some was resilient and continued. How much of the double spirit or soul belief continues is impossible to know; no Protestant or Catholic wants to talk about it for fear of being labeled a pagan. But the belief in potentially good and helpful spirits of deceased kin is certainly alive and well, as the next section will show. Possession no longer seems to occur as frequently at the time of mourning and burial, yet I am told that it still happens occasionally in the Chuuk Lagoon. People are still afraid of bad ghosts or spirits, and many report still seeing them. The three- or four-day period after burial is still observed, as the ancestors continue to be important in the belief and practice of the people.

In Chuuk, there was never any doubt about a life after death, as the death and burial practices clearly indicate. There is a place in the sky world for each human according to his/her kinship group, occupation, and rank. Moreover, there is a judgment or a test, conducted by *Enúúnap* or *Nuuk* once the deceased good spirit reaches the upper sky world. It is not clear from all the reports if this test is a judgment based on good and bad behavior on earth; the test could just be the passing through of the banging boulders on the way to the place of rest in the sky (Girschner 1912–1913). One thing can be said for certain. The record attests to three

different norms for admission into the afterlife: One is based on the good or evil deeds of the individual; a second is based on the status of the soul on earth; and the third is when the soul of the deceased is put to some sort of trial or test.

In the Mortlocks, for instance, early reports suggest that the fate of a soul in the afterlife is based on either its earthly behavior or its earthly status:

> Upon the death of a man the soul (*nenin*) leaves his body; it can take the form of a sea bird and appear to the living in that shape. Its fate depends on the life led on earth. If it was without sin and if the spirit is an *anusor,* a strong soul, the friendly god *Olaitin* leads it up the ladder (*faoso*) to the continuously banging rocks at the entrance. . . . The souls of chiefs and elders also have a higher rank in the hereafter. Individuals famous in life for strong government, battle successes or the like are made mighty protectors of their family after death (Girschner 1912–1913, 194).

This would seem to be typical of the belief system throughout the broader Chuukic-speaking region.

The Cosmos of Chuuk

Problems

There are serious problems that arise when one attempts to offer a comprehensive explanation of the Chuukese universe. The first problem is that no one recorded what the cosmos meant to the Chuukese. Various researchers have provided us with an elaborate picture of the Chuuk universe, but there is no description of the understanding that Chuukese had of this universe.[30] According to the descriptions we have, the Chuukese universe has several layers or tiers of the sky and a world beneath the surface of the sea (Bollig 1927; Damm et al. 1935, 190). Whatever significance these layers might have is lost to us; the most a contemporary researcher can do is to infer from the pictures *what their cosmos tells us about the islanders themselves.* Cosmologies across the globe, however, show a clear pattern in that they reflect or replicate life on earth; they project the culture and social life of groups and of the human situation onto the screen of the greater universe. This is the assumption made here, and it will guide my approach in the remainder of this section.

The second problem is that apart from the descriptions and pictures from researchers, most of whom did their fieldwork before World War I, all that remains as an object of study are the recorded myths of the Micronesians. Hence, mythology and folklore are the only tools to flesh

out the sketches of the old cosmologies, and they are the only link still available to connect the encompassing cosmos with life in ancient Micronesia.[31] Today, however, neither the myths nor their cosmos are seen represented in the lived religious practices of the people.

Meaning of the Cosmos

What follows are some characteristics of the Chuuk cosmos, together with reflections on what they tell us about the people of these islands. Although this picture of the universe is certainly the most complex recorded in Micronesia, it is not unusual when compared with other parts of the Pacific.[32] Based on the drawings or pictures of this cosmos that are included in this chapter, I will offer a brief narrative summary of what the universe looked like to Chuukese. As illustrated in figure 1, based on a narrative description of the cosmos reported in Bollig (1927), the universe looks like an inverted bowl above the surface of the sea. The sea and the extent of the islands are bounded, finite because they are covered in all directions by the vault of the heavens (level 1). The islands are earth platforms, almost pylons that are sunk into the sea until they reach the bottom of the seas,

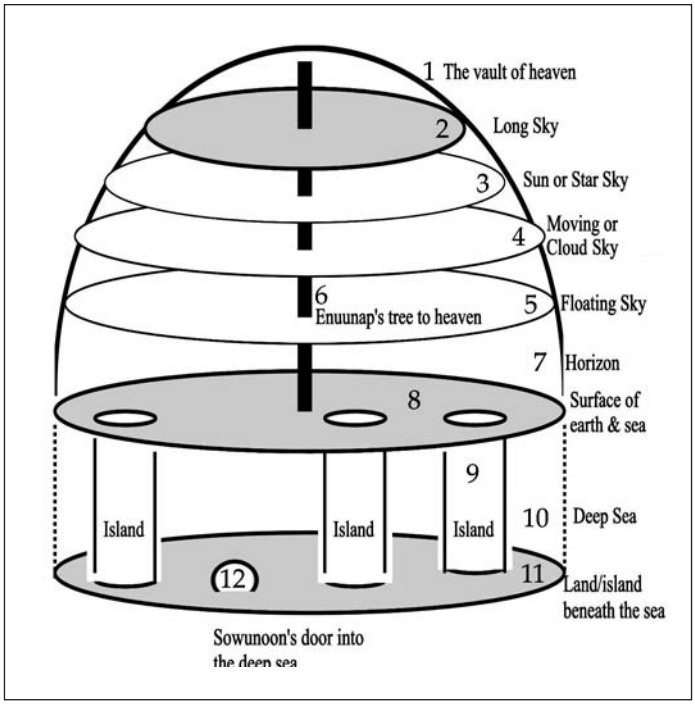

Figure 1: The Chuuk cosmos (as described in Bollig 1927)

where they rest on the earth, the island *beneath* the oceans (level 11). The sun and the moon rise in the Sun or Star Sky (level 3) within the east side of the vault, travel across the vault to the west, and there sink beneath the horizon (level 7). They then traverse the earth *under the sea* and rise again up to the horizon in the east.

The sky world within the vault of the heavens has several tiers above the earth and sea. On the topmost tier, in a level called Long Sky (level 2), dwell the gods. It is from this place that the patron gods come to the help of humans, as do the spirits of deceased ancestors. Beneath this layer of the heavens is another known as Floating Sky (level 5), which serves as a way station for human spirits on their journey to Long Heaven above. Below this is the surface of the ocean, reefs, and islands (level 8), the locus of interaction between the Chuuk people and their patron deities and returned ancestors. In the deep sea (level 10), various sea gods and goddesses live and protect their domain. The land beneath the sea (level 11) is ruled by the sea god *Sowunóón,* who sometimes rises to the ocean floor from a little trap door (#12).

In figure 2, drawn from information derived from Néma, an island in the upper Mortlocks, during the German South Sea Expedition, we are offered a single slice of the vault of heaven: the highest tier, known as Long Sky, the home of many of the Chuuk deities (Hambruch 1935, 153). Located in the center of this plane is the house of *Enúúnap,* in which reside *Wonofáát, Semenkóórór,* and two or three other gods. In the northern part of Long Sky is the Home of the Winds, while at the southern end is the island of *Ewur,* prominent in the breadfruit ritual throughout the Chuuk area. Also found on this map are the Heaven of the Spirits, the final resting place of the spirits of those who have died and been admitted to this spot, and *Nechiichi,* the way station for these human spirits before final admission into the Heaven of the Spirits.[33] Nearby is *Neepwénnúkap,* a hole filled with black muck where spirits might be sent for misbehavior in the spirit world. The house of the Rainbow Spirit, *Mwáresi,* the god of war but also the patron of navigation, is marked in the southwest, while *Wutteres,* his meeting house reputed to be filled with weapons, was positioned in the southeast. Finally, there is the Heaven of the Sea, about which little is known.

What does this picture of the universe say about the Chuukese of old? Despite its similarities with the cosmos of other peoples, the Chuuk cosmos also has significant differences, even from other island groups in Micronesia. Just as there is little emphasis on the heavenly bodies such as the stars and sun and moon, so too is there no prominent sexual motif. The Chuuk gods mate and raise families, but sex seems to be almost an

afterthought (except for the trickster *Wonofáát*). In the myths of Palau and Yap, the sun has a more prominent role. The Chuuk cosmos fails to show signs of great transformations and changes on earth. On Palau and Yap, by contrast, a great flood reorders the surface of the islands and the sea, and from this a new social and political order is created. Moreover, Chuukese myth speaks little about the grand creation of the islands, except for the stories about Fais, which was fished out of the sea by the gods. The main social change in the Chuuk cosmos is the movement of people on seagoing voyages assisted by the gods, as in the movement from Pohnpei to Chuuk. There are mysterious places in the Chuuk cosmos that deal with the begin-time—*Yap, Katau,* and *Matang*—but time is really not an important factor in the Chuuk cosmos and myth. There is no great annual festival of renewal, although the seasons—especially the breadfruit season—are of paramount importance in the lives of the Chuukese.

The Chuuk cosmos is not the impersonal universe of the astronomer or scientist, with ineluctable forces acting on life; it is very personal, with its population closely tied to the affairs of earth. If there are typhoons in the Chuuk world, for example, it is because *Nuuk* has been keeping track

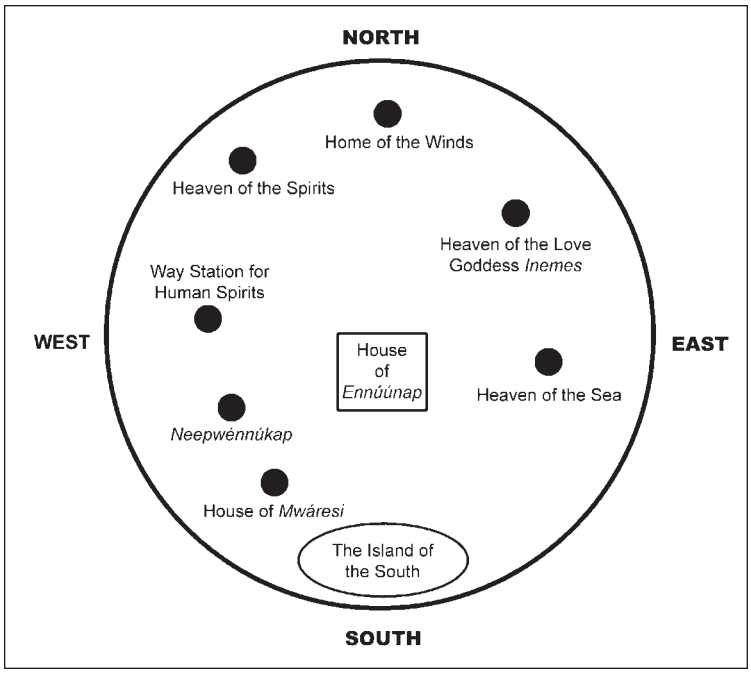

Figure 2: Long Sky, the uppermost tier of the heavens (Hambruch 1935:153)

of human behavior and reports bad behavior to his father *Enúúnap,* who in turn orders the god of the seas and the world beneath the sea to send a typhoon as punishment. Malinowski was ever so correct when he said that the myths about the cosmos are not just stories but realities lived and experienced (1954, 108).

In many ways, the Chuuk cosmos is a projection of earth into the sky, the sea, and the world beneath the sea. As Bollig remarked, *Enúúnap* in the highest tier of the heavens is like an old Chuuk chieftain, stretched out in his meeting house, resting and taking care of his young and often unruly children and lineage. Many of his children and grandchildren are the patron deities whose protection and patronage cover the main work in any earthly living compound or lineage: fishing, taro farming, harvesting breadfruit, weaving, fishing, sailing beyond the reef, making tools, building houses, and so on. On the uppermost tier of heaven, called Long Sky, there are houses for *Enúúnap*'s parents, in-laws, and his main children. *Enúúnap*'s family is like a human family: filled with foibles, fights, and feuding, despite the relative harmony of the sky cosmos. The cosmos and its gods are the personification of what moderns might call the forces of survival: obtaining the resources needed on a day-to-day basis and living as part of an extended family and lineage.

Chuuk relies heavily on breadfruit as its staple, which can be eaten immediately as *kkón* (pounded breadfruit in "loaves") or fermented and preserved as *maar* (so that it can last for years and serve as a fallback if the next breadfruit season should fail and starvation becomes a real possibility). Hence *Ewúr,* the region in the south of heaven, is central in Chuuk myth and ritual, for it is the place of plenty, the place where the breadfruit spirits live. A host of gods and goddesses live in *Ewúr,* all of them involved in sending to earth the spirits of the breadfruit, without which the trees would not blossom and produce good breadfruit. These were the spirits the breadfruit caller beckoned and prayed to; these were the spirits whose arrival was celebrated by elaborate rituals, followed by the presentation of first fruits to the breadfruit caller and the chiefs. One might say that the Chuuk cosmos is concerned with the maintenance of social harmony, but it is especially focused upon receiving the pragmatic blessings of good rain, good harvests, good fishing, and a good spouse and children. There is no heavenly salvation to interfere with these practical matters.

For all the complexity of what is above the islands and below them, the plane of the island surfaces and the surface of the ocean is the focal place where humans, nature, and the gods meet. That plane, dividing the heavens above and the sea below, is the most important place in the cosmos. That the gods come to the islands and on the sea to help humans is

a far more important consideration in myth than the ascent of the good souls to the uppermost tier of heaven. Even those good souls are forgotten unless they descend back to their shrines, the hanging miniature double canoes in the meeting houses and boathouses. This cosmos is very much an anthropocentric universe.[34]

In trying to explain the meaning of the Chuuk cosmos, many questions remain unanswered. One tier of the sky, just below the one where the gods live, is Sun or Star Sky, but neither the individual stars nor the sun and moon play any important part in the cosmos; this seems strange for a people who used the heavens and a star compass for dead-reckoning navigation.

One thing is reasonably certain about the Chuukese universe. In the sky world and the world of the ocean and below the sea, there is a place for everybody: good gods and good souls, cruel deities, those who have failed the test or ordeal before *Enúúnap,* and those who just did not follow the rules of the group. The sky world does not appear to be a kind of Valhalla given over to warriors and warlike demigods, although good warriors have their rewards in the Chuukese afterlife. It is, quite simply, a place of harmony—harmony in social relationships, including those of love, courtship, and sex. Whatever the daily foibles of the gods and goddesses that inhabit this universe, the myth message is still clear: Do not upset *Enúúnap* and his kin. The projected importance of social well-being of the group is central. Order in the universe is paramount. The welfare of the group and the relationships within the group are of highest importance. Any concept of a personal and individual salvation is foreign to this universe. The cosmology of the Mortlock Islanders emphasized the group orientation, and the prominent clans of the Mortlocks were said to have their separate "clan heavens," which could include everything within the clan's island holdings as well as what was beneath the sea. The clan heavens could be pointed out, right above the land and sea holdings of the clan.[35] Whether the islanders ever saw their part of the universe as an up-turned bowl is doubtful; for them it was the curving and encompassing "vault of the heavens," above the horizon in all directions.[36] This vault, at any rate, is the key metaphor or image of the cosmos—a lively, active place, with spirit traffic continually occurring up and down the cosmic layers.

The Meeting of the Divine and the Human

Roong (Spirit Power)

The organizing strategy for this chapter focuses on three key terms: *énú, roong,* and *sowu*. The first part examines *énú,* the all-embracing term for gods, goddesses, and spirits. Because the *énú* live, play, and work in a

Chuuk universe, the layout of the Chuuk cosmos also had to be examined. This section now turns to the living people who were the chosen vehicles for the work of the gods and spirits. Most of them are called *sowu,* translated variously as "specialists," "experts," or "masters" of this or that task.[37] But the *sowu* of the old religion are in a special class because the title required *roong,* or "spirit power," which was given by the gods and spirits.[38] Although the *énú* rarely worked directly with the living, except perhaps in dreams, they are believed to select and use the living as their chosen vehicles for communicating with humankind. Individuals could inherit or be taught the *roong* of their parents or elders, or they might pay to learn the spirit power.

Ultimately, as Frank Mahony (1970) realized, all *roong* comes from the spirits. It does not exist independently of the spirits and humans; it is "incarnate" in the chosen humans. Two studies have especially highlighted the importance of *roong* in Chuuk belief and ritual. Mahony narrowed in on *roong* in the Chuuk system of medicine and curing; most of his data came from the Chuuk Lagoon. Eric Metzgar (1991) analyzed *roong* beliefs, especially those closely associated with the status and role of the navigator, on the central Carolinian atoll of Lamotrek.

The Chuukese are vague about the concept of *roong,* but basically it is anything for which there is a medicine. In the Chuuk system of local medicine, Mahony concludes, "Most spirit powers not only specify certain medical formulae as cures for illness, but also indicate the kinds of symptoms or sicknesses for which the medicine is intended" (1970, 143). Thus, within the context of sickness and curing, every medicine (*sáfey*) has its *roong* and corresponding spirit, and every *roong* has its symptoms. Yet *roong* extends well beyond curing physical ailments only. For example, there is a *roong* called *ómwmwung* (love magic), which is associated with the love goddess *Inemes.* It has nothing to do with curing sickness but is considered powerful nonetheless; its medicine has "caused more than one woman to discard her clothing and to rush about completely naked in frantic pursuit of the man who applied the medicine" (144). "Breadfruit" is the name of another type of *roong,* one that includes knowledge about breadfruit calling (*ótoomey*) that was given to the breadfruit caller (*sowuyótoomey*). The caller appealed to the spirits with offerings, pleaded with them in chants, and put medicine on the trees to hasten maturity of the fruit (164).[39]

In the system of local medicine, *roong* is about power; in the sailing and navigating world of the central Carolinian atolls, however, it is more about spirit-given knowledge (Metzgar 1991, 40 and 133–134). *Roong* is used to denote sacred knowledge, noted Metzgar, in contrast with *reepiy,*

which is secular knowledge. *Reepiy* would include, for example, knowing the special words to show respect in the interaction between nephew and uncle or sister and brother (142). *Roong,* on the other hand, is filled with esoteric words, "talk of the spirits." The master communicates with the spirit world by virtue of the established argot that a patron spirit taught to the first human who learned the skill. These words and taboos, which are associated with the individual *roong* spirit powers, form a curriculum that must be learned and obeyed. In a general sense, this information forms the "contract" between a master of a *roong* profession and the spirit power(s) behind the specialization, skill, or art (143).[40]

How one receives *roong* varies. The spirits are the ultimate sources, and they often communicated through dreams or a spirit medium's possession trance. Mahony relates that "Through these spirit mediums, the spirits of the dead taught their descendents new medicines. . . . Spirit mediums are ultimately the sources of all medicines, since medicine is communicated to man through these channels" (1970, 136–137). Mahony seems to eliminate dreams, which recently have become important with the demise of the public and on-demand mediums. Those who have received *roong* power and knowledge through dreams, like the entranced and possessed recipient of medicine, can and often do pass it on to their children or keep it within the kin group. In this regard, some specialization, or *sowu,* seems to have been inherited.

The number of recorded *sowu,* even those with religious association and *roong,* is vast. One list gives fourteen types of *sowu* simply for healing by massage, while another gives fifteen different ones for canoe and house building (Metzgar 1991, 345, 347–348). Those specific ones selected here because of their prominence in the Chuuk world are the sorcerer (*sowuppéwút*), the diviner (*sowupwe*), and the healer (*sowusáfey*)—all of whom are masters of various aspects of Chuuk medicine. Also selected are the master woodworker or master of canoe and house building (*sowufanafan*), the breadfruit caller (*sowuyótoomey*), the master of war strategy (*itang*), and the entranced medium or diviner (*wáátawa*).[41]

Healers

The three masters of Chuukese medicines—*sowuppéwút, sowupwe,* and *sowusáfey*—are noteworthy because they work together to activate the system of local medicine called *sáfeen Chuuk*. In these three specialties, one can see Chuuk healing and curing as a system. More importantly, one can also see *roong* both as the power and knowledge of the specialists and in the spirit power causing the illness. Following Mahony (1970), the *sáfeen Chuuk* can be divided into several events or procedures (figure 3).

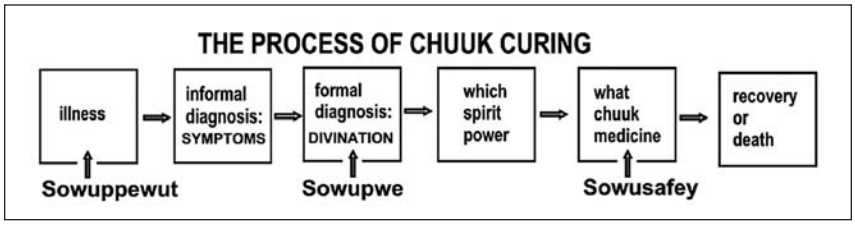

Figure 3: Process of Chuukese healing, from sorcery to divination to curing (Mahoney 1970: 58)

Much if not most Chuuk illness is considered spirit-caused. The thing that caused the illness thus falls in the arena of sorcery (*ppéwút*). Bollig writes,

> What embitters life for the Chuuk natives is the *boud* [*ppéwút*] (sorcery to harm another). The *boud* occurs in innumberable forms. Nearly all *sourong* [*sowuroong*] know how to make the *boud* with the help of their *énú;* the *itang* in particular is a feared *souboud*. Yet there are also very distinct *souboud* who, with the help of an *onungau* [*énúúngngaw*], are able to bring all kinds of trouble to human beings. How often one can hear from sick people the words *Emen a boud ngeniei,* somebody has cursed me, bewitched me. The *boud* prevents women from giving birth, disturbs children's growth, makes limbs swell, spoils one's work, steals one's good spirit, and brings inevitable death (1927, 73–74).

Not all sickness is caused by the human intervention of sorcery; some illness can be caused by the spirits directly. The sea spirits, for one case, can bring sickness when someone has violated the taboos (*pin*) about fishing and sailing, especially by having sexual intercourse before going fishing. Sickness or injury caused by *ppéwút* can be cured either by chants (spells) or medicine or a combination of both (Caughey 1977, 145). Bollig gives an example of one song that was sung to protect against countersorcery after the *itang* had rubbed his body with *amaras* (a bitter medicine made from crushed bark):

> Strong is my skin
> Strong is the bitterness
> Which member is bitter
> My head is bitter
> Strong is my skin
> Strong the bitterness (1927, 58 and 65).

The Chuukese also used *sáfey* to turn back the sorcery on the sorcerer himself. Sorcery is sometimes defined as the intentional use of means to cause harm, but in Chuuk it is also a means of protection. Anyone making medicine must take measures to protect him or herself against those who do not want to see the medicine work and those who have caused the illness. It follows, then, that the healers themselves (*sowusáfey*) must have also been sorcerers.

In between the cause and the cure of illness are the informal and formal diagnoses of the cause. Informally, the Chuuk islanders look for symptoms that are widely known and linked to certain spirits and their *roong*. For example, there are different sea spirits who may be behind the symptom of fever (Mahony 1970, 50). Formally, divination was used to diagnose the illness. The most common type of divination is that of the *pwe,* which can be worked through positioning small shells or, more commonly, by tying knots in coconut palm fronds. The key, of course, is in the interpretation. *Pwe* was and still is widely practiced throughout Micronesia; it can be used to find solutions to a range of problems, including whether to fish or not, whether to make love or not, and even whether or not to build a house. The interpretation of the sequence of knots in the fronds requires considerable memorization and varies from island to island, as has been explained in detail by Girschner (1912–1913) and Bollig (1927). Micronesians in general are much given to the use of divination of various sorts, both in making daily routine decisions and in more important matters. Micronesians of the past, not just the Chuukese, had divination techniques to cover all aspects of life where the outcome was chancy or in doubt. Inasmuch as the early missionaries failed to eradicate this "gambling with the fates," divining is still widely used in Micronesia. Some societies across the globe are very concerned about knowing "their life chances," and the peoples of the Chuuk islands are one such group.

Finally, after diagnosis and identification of the spirit power, Chuuk medicine is prepared and applied by the medicine specialist (*sowuousáfey*). Like the *pwe* divination, local medicine (*sáfey*) is a widespread practice throughout the Chuukic world. Although *sowuousáfey* might be translated as "medicinal experts," Caughey (1977, 144–145) calls them "masters of curing," a term that better catches the status of those working with the medicine. But *sáfey* is another of those highly ambivalent words; perhaps that is why the translation as "medicine" is the closest one can get and still capture its meaning. First of all, *sáfey* covers both local medicine and Western or "hospital" medicine. Second, it includes both materials for curing and the materials for harming and protecting. Third, it includes both physical elements—mostly plants, fruits, and bark, but also dirt, pieces

of clothing or hair—and nonphysical elements, such as chants or songs. Fourth, *sáfey* is linked to spirits and spirit powers: "Every Chuukese spirit power has a particular medicine, or medical formula, associated with it, and this formula constitutes the specific remedy for an affliction by that spirit power" (Mahony 1970, 87).

At this point, one could object that healing as it was practiced in Chuuk was nothing more than magic. Indeed, various writers and ethnographers have referred to the *sáfey* ingredients and chants as magical, but two factors weigh against a simple label of "magic." First, Chuuk medicine does not fit neatly into the category of magic (or that of science or religion) as proposed by the classic definitions of Malinowski or Frazer, as Mahony rightly saw. Magic according to Malinowski is a private affair between the specialist and the client, but most Chuuk medicine requires participation from the family, the audience, or the entire atoll, and as Mahony described it, it may also require a number of different interacting specialists. Second, magic according to Frazer is manipulative, not beseeching or imploring. If one examines many of the chants or songs, they are pleas to the spirits; one might even say they are "prayers." It is important to understand that in Chuuk, medicine is the profoundly communal nature of the work of the spirits and their chosen human channels, and that the spirits are prayerfully asked to help in effecting the desired outcome.

Master Builders

The master builder might look like one of those *sowu* or experts whose work is primarily secular and not religious. Canoe construction and house building are primarily technical skills, but here one again encounters the diffused nature of religion in preindustrial societies. In the belief of the Chuuk islanders, the *roong,* or skill-knowledge, of building is bestowed by the spirits. Hence, the master builder must, as *sowufanafan,* perform certain religious rituals to build a good outrigger or house. The religious dimension was viewed as a cultural imperative, as Bollig saw when he included the *sowufanafan* in his list of "carriers of religion" (1927, 72).

In the case of canoe construction, the religious ritual was woven throughout the process. It began with the felling of the breadfruit tree. Here the servant of the breadfruit spirits, the *sowuyótoomey,* accompanied the chopping with a prayer and offering in hopes that the core of the tree would not be rotten. This is another good example of religious ritual that is not magic in the Frazer sense of manipulation. The *sowuyótoomey* begged and made offerings and repeated the prayer if the felled tree was indeed rotten.

Next, the trunk was rough-hewn, but when it was brought to a house for building the canoe, a sacred time began for the *sowufanafan* and his helpers. Knotted coconut leaves were put around the house as markers: No one could enter, especially not women. The *sowufanafan* and his workers stayed there day and night during an extended work period. They could leave after a time only if the *sowufanafan* declared an end to the taboos (*pin*). Curiously, while they were sequestered in the construction hut, there were food prohibitions and taboos for the helpers and apprentices, but the *sowufanafan* himself was free from all this because he was the master of the *pin*. The success of the work depended on the ritual of the *sowufanafan,* such as the offering of prayers to *Enúúnap* and the observance of the prohibitions of the spirits (*pin énú*). Those caught violating the taboos were sent away. The medicinal master (*sowuyótoomey*) came every morning and afternoon to "caress" the canoe and to sing. The master builder could also order a break, during which all taboos were lifted. At the launching of the finished canoe, the outrigger was adorned with coconut fronds and the master builder sang. According to Bollig, on some islands it was customary to launch the boat near a launching stone, a rock upon which a sea spirit lived. Offerings were thrown in the sea for this spirit. If the boat was a rowing canoe, it was then tested in a race. In the center of the boat to be tested was the breadfruit master, who again caressed the boat and called on the spirits. As the boat gained speed, both the breadfruit master's invocations and the rowing became wilder. On completion of the race, a feast was held to thank the spirits and the master builder. The taboos then lost their force.

In sum, the role of the master builder was both technical and religious. The presence of the breadfruit master was another indication that the building and launching was religious. The religious dimension of the canoe construction should not be classed with the obligatory blessings given to new ships in the Western world upon their completion. The Chuuk thinking was different: The critical time was during construction. There were many other "masters" (*sowu*) whose status and role was likewise a tandem of technical skills and religious observance.[42]

Breadfruit Callers

The breadfruit caller (*sowuyótoomey*) is easier to see as a religious status holder, although he, like most of the other *sowu,* was a part-time practitioner. If any of the *sowu* could also be classified as a priest, it was the *sowuyótoomey,* for he not only carried out ritual to help the breadfruit grow and mature, he also led the community (village, atoll, or series of atolls) in petitions asking the breadfruit spirits to bless each group of

family-owned trees. Anyone with even a superficial familiarity of the Chuukic atolls and islands knows the importance of breadfruit in the traditional diet. If Grimble (1972, 242) could refer to the Kiribati (Gilbertese) as "the pandanus people," one could also call the Chuukic-speaking islanders the "breadfruit people." It was the Chuukic land-harvested staple—more so than pandanus, taro, or banana. Ishikawa (1987, 10) claims that apart from the Marquesas in eastern Polynesia, no other group so depended on the breadfruit; he even proposes a "breadfruit culture complex." Aside from any notion of a culture complex, breadfruit is critically important for Chuuk survival, and this dependence is expressed in the people's religion. Rituals of increase and protection are described in many of the early reports. The most elaborately detailed ritual, described in both early and post–World War II reports, is the breadfruit summoning ritual (*ótoomey*). Its place in the Chuukic spirit world was not just important but also unique. The breadfruit god was *Sowumey,* "Lord of the Breadfruit," or *Sowuyéwúr,* "Lord of the South," whose very name includes the mystical southern sky world, *Ewúr,* where the breadfruit deities lived and where the *sowuyótoomey* would go at death. The *sowuyótoomey* were the human links to the breadfruit deities and thus to the fertility of this critical resource. They were held in exceptionally high regard: Krämer found mummified breadfruit callers (1932, 325–326). So important was their function that sometimes the larynx of a famous breadfruit caller was preserved in a hanging shrine (*faar*) (Mahony 1970, 164–165).

The sequence of events in the breadfruit ritual is described in detail by Goodenough (2002, 192–203). The ritual events are clearly fertility or increase ceremonies to guarantee a good crop. The Chuukese would have never called it a fertility or increase ceremony; for them it was the "calling" or summoning of the breadfruit spirits under the leadership of the master of the summoning, the *sowuyótoomey.* The *sowuyótoomey* and the medicine makers, *sowusáfey,* were two of the most important ritual masters in the daily life of the Chuuk people.

In Bollig's description, the rite focused mostly on the work of the breadfruit master in the "sacred time" both before the breadfruit matures and at the first picking. The *sowuyótoomey*'s main job was at the meeting house or canoe shed (*wuut*) (1927, 77). There, an outrigger from a canoe was planted upright in front of the house. According to legend, such an outrigger once bore the first breadfruit from the south. Offerings of food for the gods of *Ewúr* and deceased breadfruit callers were piled up in front of the house.[43] The breadfruit caller sat in front, pounding breadfruit on a piece of pumice, which according to legend also drifted in from the south. Each morning and evening he left his house to inspect the breadfruit trees,

blowing his shell horn as he moved along. On these walks, he watched for natural omens about the coming crop and made medicine for those who had offended the breadfruit spirits and to protect the breadfruit trees from thievery. As the breadfruit-calling ritual was coming to an end, the *sowuyótoomey* and select men in the village would race toy canoes in the shallows just offshore for a period of about four days (Krämer 1932, 326–328).[44] A men's sitting dance was also performed in the breadfruit caller's meeting house for a week or so. Finally, when the first harvest was finished, the *sowuyótoomey* had the privilege of making the first pounded breadfruit loaves and also received gifts of breadfruit.

Perhaps not so surprising is the fact that the *sowuyótoomey* was also in charge of ritual for the increase of fish, which with breadfruit was one of the two staples in the traditional diet. His work was considered so critical that when he died, his spirit went straight to *Ewúr,* but parts of his body or hair were kept on island lest he take the whole harvest to *Ewúr* with him. By far the most interesting and detailed description of the work of the *sowuyótoomey* comes from Sarfert's work on Puluwat (Damm et al. 1935, 202–208).[45] Actually, Sarfert described two different rituals, one occasional and the other annual, but both connected to the breadfruit god *Hewanu*.

According to Sarfert, the god *Hewanu* ("Eel Spirit") lived in the south (*Ewúr*) and appeared in the incarnation of a conger eel. Usually these eels lived at sea, but once a year they came close to the shore and sometimes one found its way onto the beach. *Hewanu* came to Puluwat and other islands for one of two purposes: either to announce the death of someone in the circle of those conducting the breadfruit ritual or for harvesting the breadfruit itself. The Puluwat breadfruit priest would immediately recognize the purpose of the eel's coming and was expected to tell the islanders whether the visit was a death announcement or the revelation that breadfruit season would be good. If the visit announced a death, the ritual became one of loud wailing and crying.

The priest and the islanders took the eel to the community building where it was put on mats under a special wood frame, erected for the visiting *Hewanu*. *Hewanu* remained there for a public vigil of four days, receiving wreaths of flowers and offerings of coconuts. Taboos were activated for the circle of men attendant on the sacred eel: Women were not allowed in the building, and those connected with the circle of breadfruit ritualists were not even allowed to talk with women. The breadfruit priest selected thirty men and the chief to stay with *Hewanu*. Restricted viewing began after the fourth day of arrival, when the priest took the sacred eel to his hut with only his closest helpers in attendance.[46]

The breadfruit priest was believed capable of talking with *Hewanu* without anybody else understanding. He also offered prayers to the god. Sometime later, the eel was ceremoniously released. All the men of the island took presents of food to the eel; those who were leaving for their home atolls likewise left gifts of food. The priest then wrapped the eel in mats and took it to another part of Puluwat Atoll. He left *Hewanu* in a special tabooed place, with these words: "I leave, you remain here. I go to Puluwat and shall go to sleep." The presents and offerings were piled on the sacred eel, and each day the breadfruit priest returned to the spot to see if *Hewanu* had left. When the eel had disappeared, the priest returned to his own hut; the offerings remained and rotted, presumably in the Chuuk and Micronesian-wide belief that the soul or spirit of the gifts had been eaten by the god. The place was then placed under taboo for four months. In 1910, Sarfert learned that the *Hewanu* had not appeared for several years, and the resident trader could remember only one time that the sacred eel had appeared.

The rite of calling the breadfruit described for Puluwat was considerably more of a communal ritual than those described for the Chuuk Lagoon. On the day of the ritual, the men and boys were decorated in turmeric cosmetics, various ornaments, and a double-knotted coconut frond around their necks.[47] They gathered at the canoe house of the breadfruit priest, with no women allowed. The priest, holding a spear and a coconut frond, led the procession of males to the south of the atoll, because it was from the sacred south that the breadfruit spirits came. Swinging his spear back and forth, he also led chanting, with the procession joining in the chorus. Having reached the southernmost part of the atoll, the priest then turned north, again swinging his spear back and forth but now pointing to the ground. As the procession arrived in front of each house, the priest swayed back and forth until he plunged the spear into the ground. The house owner then lifted the spear with some earth around it and put the earth in a basket. This ritual was repeated at every house. The priest then said a formula over the earth-filled basket, so that the crops of those houses might produce a copious breadfruit harvest. He finally took all the baskets and dumped the earth on his own land, where it was not to be touched under force of taboo.

After the procession, the priest set out with his relatives and associates on a voyage to the atolls belonging to Puluwat. This might take a month, and the ritual was somewhat different. Here the priest held a fan and beckoned the breadfruit to come, while one of his companions blew the conch horn to tell *Ewúr* that the calling ritual was taking place. As the chanting commenced, another man shot stones with a slingshot at

the breadfruit branches so that there would be many buds. A third threw shrubs or branches with a coconut frond tied on them, a request for the breadfruit to be sent from the sacred south. A fourth companion chewed medicine and blew it at the breadfruit, as a precaution against the premature falling of the fruit. When the calling ceremony was underway, all but the priest and his companions left the area.

During the calling ritual, numerous taboos were set in place. For example, no other canoes could set sail while the breadfruit priest was on his rounds of the atolls. Two canoes from a neighboring atoll were once stranded in the boathouse of the German trader, Herr Kobelt, for an entire month. Kobelt, who had to feed the stranded crews, informed the colonial administration, which punished the local priest, Belanuk, with a year's exile on Saipan.

Itang

If any figure in Chuuk matches Rudolf Otto's definition of religion as *"mysterium tremendum,"* it is the *itang*. The *itang* surrounded their work with a sense of mystery, secret knowledge, and even a semisecret "language." *Itang* is a difficult term to translate or gloss; the status has been variously described as "priest" (Krämer 1932, 269) and as "political priest" (Goodenough 2002, 39). Essentially, *itang* dealt with war and politics and also with traditions and oratory; their main job was tactical planning for war and the direction of battle operations. When the German colonial administration in 1901 called for the Chuukese to surrender all firearms, warfare all but ended in the Chuuk Lagoon. Even with their most visible role ended, the *itang* continued to be the keepers of tradition and masters of oratory. By the time Father Bollig came to Chuuk in 1913, there were *itang* present to interview, even though few of the famous *itang* war leaders were still alive. Although the *itang* were his main informants and he gives a favorable and memorable description of their former work in battle, he lambastes them for their continued practice of sorcery.

Someone might object to labeling the *itang* as religious leaders, but the blend of war and religion is not surprising. European history is filled with the figures of sword-wielding bishops and clerics. The best writer on *itang,* Bollig, thought they were religious figures; he portrays them as one of the main "carriers of religion" and states that "what has been written about religion in this work comes most from the idang [sic]" (1927, 51). The patron of the *itang* was the god of war, *Resiim*.[48] Bollig's informants claimed that *Enúúnap* and *Semenkóóror* were the greatest of the *itang* and had sent the *itang* system to earth to guide humans (Bollig 1927, 46).[49] In their battle canoes and in land skirmishes, they chanted and invoked the

great sky gods, *Enúúnap* and *Nuuk*. Their battle chants and prayers and maintenance of tradition are probably why Krämer and Goodenough call them "priests," but the best case for their religious character is the description of their work before, during, and after a battle.

Bollig (1927, 48ff.) gives the only known description of *itang* at war. He notes in passing that many of the wars were the result of *itang* mischief making and intrigues. Still, when war did break out, the *itang* took command. At the planning session, the *itang* spread out his mat and made an animated map by moving bananas around to show the reefs, land, and canoes. At the time of actual engagement, he displayed a carved wooden figure of a human, shark, or other animal; sometimes he used an enemy corpse. Bollig found one such human corpse on mission lands. If this effigy (*énúúsooso* or *sooyénú*)[50] was the body of a dead warrior, the face was mutilated and a spear put in his hand, pointing at the enemy. Although the figure was not worshipped, one of the best warriors, the "vehicle of *Resiim,*" placed offerings by the figure. The idea behind the effigy was to fire up the troops; the soul of the image was supposed to carry the victorious warriors into the village of the enemy to wreak their vengeance. If the engagement took place on water, the *itang* was in his canoe blowing his sacred conch trumpet and holding high the *itang* spear. On land, the *itang* stood with the warrior of *Resiim* and began a call to the heavens, to *Enúúnap,* with the troops chiming in on the last vowel of each verse. With the enemy doing the same, one can imagine the tumultuous cacophony of the scene. Here is one such call:

> The one who is there in the sky,
> The one to whom I plead,
> Take along the miraculous power of my words
> Take along the heat of my words,
> Take along the shaking of my words,
> So-and-so shall die.[51]

Following this invocation was the *itang* spear dance, during which the *itang* shook his sacred spear against the enemy, danced, and sang the spear dance songs. After this he sprinkled some medicine (*sáfey*) on the troops.

There is some evidence outside the Chuuk Lagoon that the *itang* dealt more with tradition and navigation than war.[52] Metzger records use of the word on Lamotrek, although islanders claimed that the "language" was known only on the western islands of Puluwat, Pulap, Houk (Pulusuk) and Tamatam (1991, 160). It could well be that *itang* was an eastern Chuukic phenomenon.

It is probably appropriate that *itang* should remain in history an ambiguous word.[53] Any attempt to fathom the meaning of the word has to come head on with three important terms in the lexicon of the old religion: *mana(man*), *roong,* and *pin*. Generally speaking, *manaman* means "effective power." Often its association with the religious or the spirit world is only indirect. A good chief, for example, shows *manaman* in his actions, and the *itang* of Bollig's description prays for *manaman* from *Enúúnap*. *Manaman* is the outward expression of some knowledge connection with the spirit world. The spirit-given knowledge of medicines, chants, and ritual behind *manaman* is called *roong*. Whether or not the spirits will give the *itang* candidate *roong* is not a certainty, but the matter is decided when the *itang* fails to demonstrate *manaman*. If that effective power is not visible, then the *itang* is either without connection to the spirit world (*roong*) or has violated a taboo (*pin*). One is only able to make traditional medicine if one has *roong*. *Pin,* often translated as "taboo" or "sacred," includes certain places, people, and things that are out-of-bounds because of their association with *roong* and *manaman*. The place where medicine (*sáfey*) is made can be *pin;* a dead man's land may be marked off with plaited palm leaves (*wuput*) because it is *pin;* and contact with a menstruating woman is *pin* for an *itang*.

Today the *itang*—informants say that there are six or seven real *itang* around the Chuuk Lagoon—are steeped in tradition, wisdom, and the disappearing lore of Chuuk. They are still honored for their oratory, especially in eulogies for the dead. *Itang* are a meaningful reminder that the old religions of Chuuk have evolved to avoid being overwhelmed by Christian conversion.

Spirit Mediums

The *wáátawa* is a possessed or entranced medium, a diviner of things unknown and unseen. When the *wáátawa* has entered into a state of trance or altered state of consciousness, the person is considered to be a vehicle, or *waa,* of the spirit, generally the spirit of an ancestor.[54] Chuukese now use "possession" to describe their understanding of the trance episode, but it is likely that in former times the episodes were more descriptive, such as *"awarawar énú"* ("the coming of the spirit") or *"emen sope a toota won . . ."* ("a spirit is on . . . "). During the trance event, the spirit is believed to speak through the voice mechanism of the human person, sometimes giving unsolicited information and judgments, sometimes answering the questions of those gathered around the *wáátawa*. Some of the oldest records of Chuukic-speaking peoples tell of these entranced vehicles of the spirits. Today the trance episodes continue to occur, and

the belief in possession by the deceased ancestors is still widespread in the Chuukic-speaking islands, but status as a recognized medium or diviner has vanished (See Dobbin and Hezel 1995). The description here will deal only with the *wáátawa* as an institutionalized status within the old religion, as recorded by Western observers before World War I.[55]

The *wáátawa* of old were not simply individuals who had a religious experience; they were in the service of their lineage and the possessing ancestors. This service was recognized as a position whereby the spirits of the past members made contact with their living kin to give advice and information about the great and small problems of the lineage. It is in that sense that the *wáátawa* had an institutionalized status, every bit as much as an ordained minister, priest, or rabbi has today. The status of the *wáátawa* was rather circumscribed, however, inasmuch as they were in the service of a small group—the lineage—and generally represented only one ancestor. The status was also transient, so that when a *wáátawa* "lost his spirit," he then ceased to be *wáátawa*. From the viewpoint of the believing kinfolk, the *wáátawa* was not an achieved position; it was ascribed because the *wáátawa* was chosen by the spirit. Admittedly, the status of the *wáátawa* would not have been immediately apparent to early observers because of the low-key nature of status in the Chuukic-speaking islands.[56]

Becoming a *Wáátawa*

In the Chuukese way of thinking, the position of *wáátawa* was open to anyone whom the spirits might choose. There seems to have been no profile of personality types that were especially apt to be chosen, but there were expectations that undoubtedly had some influence on who would be the chosen vehicle. It was hoped that each lineage would have both a male and female *wáátawa*. The occasion for becoming a *wáátawa* was the death and mourning of a kinsperson. "As soon as someone in the tribe has died," wrote Bollig, "the people gather and tempt the soul so that it will settle down on the *faar* [hanging shrine] and choose one of the persons present as *uanönu* [*wáánaanú*]. If the spirit grants this plea, the one chosen is regarded as *uanönu* until the spirit leaves him again" (Bollig 1927, 60–61).[57]

The *wáátawa*'s calling on the occasion of a death in the lineage highlights three characteristics of this status: kinship, the ancestors, and the hanging shrine.

The link between the *wáátawa* and kinship is unmistakable. The occasion of the calling is the death of kin. The possessing spirit is kin. Even the actual behavior of the possessed person is kinship related. Most often the spirit speaks to kin, the spirit is kin, the changed voice is that of kin,

and the work of the *wáátawa* is in the service of kin. In this regard, the *wáátawa* is characteristically Chuukese, since Chuuk society was and to a significant degree still is a kinship-based culture.

The link with the ancestors is also unmistakable in the calling of the *wáátawa*. The spirit of the recently deceased lineage member chooses the *wáátawa* to be its channel of communication with the living. The *wáátawa* fits the literal meaning of "medium," in that the *wáátawa* bridges the gap between the dead and the living. Again, this is a typically Chuuk characteristic. Nowhere else in Micronesia was the belief, the respect, and the ritual surrounding the ancestors as strong as it was and still is in the Chuukic-speaking islands. Other cultures in the region certainly had ancestor beliefs and ritual as part and parcel of their old religion, but Chuuk had the most prominent ancestor cult.[58] Little wonder then that Kubary, writing in 1877, would describe the religion of the Mortlock Islanders as ancestor worship (1880, 258ff.).

Even the place where the *wáátawa*'s calling first occurs is associated with the ancestor spirits. Hanging from a rafter in the *wuut,* or meeting houses of old, was a small shrine or altar, often in the shape of a miniature double-hulled canoe, known as the *faar* (figure 4). By and large, the Chuukic-speaking islands had no house-sized temples or shrines, only the *faar,* in which the ancestor spirits lived when they returned to earth. When they chose a new *wáátawa,* they descended from the *faar* onto the shoulders of the newly appointed *wáátawa*. Offerings of food and sweet-smelling garlands were hung on the *faar.* Dance staffs were placed on or beneath them because some of the dances, which *wáátawa* themselves often led, were inspired by the ancestor spirits or given to honor the spirits. The *faar* is found across the Chuukic language group and even in other non-Chuuk regions such as Palau, although with variations in the shape and design. It could be a tiny double-hulled canoe,[59] a hanging platform for offerings and gifts, or a boxlike frame with curtains of shredded hibiscus that also held offerings. Sometimes the shrine was called the "seat of the gods," the abode of the spirit ancestors.[60]

The importance of the *faar* is that it was not only a symbol of the presence of the ancestors, but it was also the place from which they made connections with the living: It held the beloved and helpful ancestor spirits. Other Micronesian cultures such as Pohnpei and Palau had stone markers and stone holy places to remind people of the gods and the ancestors. Still other Micronesian cultures, such as Yap, had special holy platforms where the priests honored the gods and the ancestors. In the central Chuukic atolls such as Ulithi, small spirit houses were built near or over the graves of the ancestors, especially famed ancestral spirits like the aforementioned

Marespa. But in most of the Chuuk islands, the *faar* was the only visible focal point of the meeting of the living and the dead.

The *wáátawa* offered knowledge about the unknown that was not available to ordinary people. It might be more accurate to say that they were the means whereby the spirits spoke to their living relatives. The sign that the spirits had deigned to speak was in the convulsive, frenzied behavior of the *wáátawa*. After the initial selection by the spirit to be *wáátawa,* the ritual behavior was conducted in three stages. First, the ancestor spirit might be called by the medium or by someone else. The spirit demonstrated its presence by a whistling sound or by the trancelike behavior of the *wáátawa*. The ecstatic behavior of the medium was followed by a state of relative calm when the spirit, through the *wáátawa's* voice, either spontaneously offered information or gave answers when the chief or headman posed questions to it. Sometimes the second and third stages did not occur. Important to note here is that the *wáátawa* could move into a state of trance "on demand," so to speak. The stage when the *wáátawa* moved into trance may have been stimulated or triggered by the "calling" of the

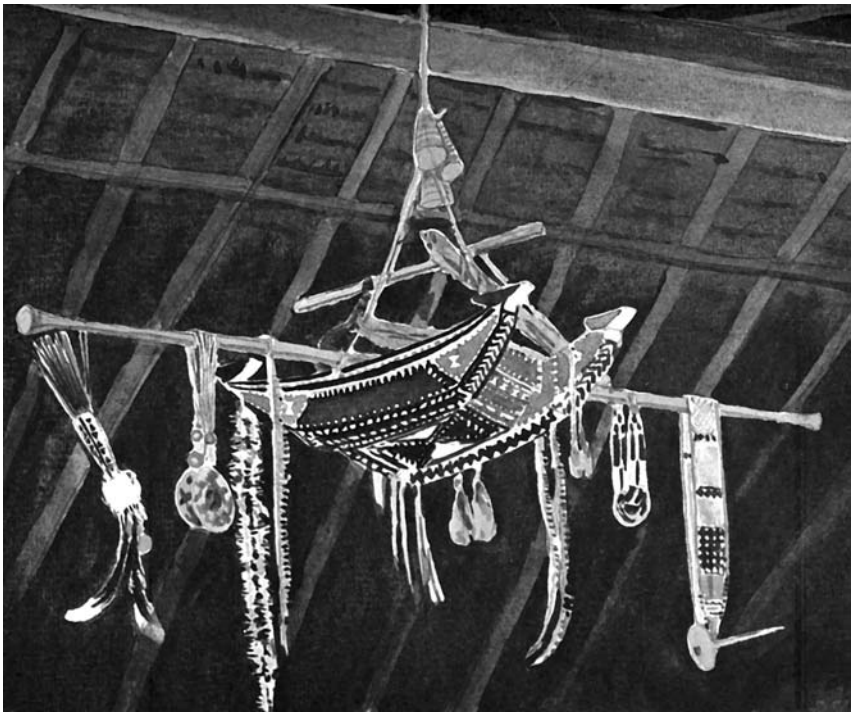

Figure 4: *Faar*, or family shrine, in the form of a double-hulled canoe (Krämer 1932, Table 27)

spirit by one of the assembled group or by the gyrations of the medium. The best and most detailed description of the *wáátawa* at work was made by Bollig, and it is worth citing in its entirety:

> [We] shall consider only the direct residing, which manifests itself in the belief in the *uanönu* [*wáánaanú*]. It is to be recalled that, according to the views of the islanders, the spirit which has appeared at the invocation of the spirits takes up residence on the *far* [*sic*]. The *uanönu* is in the service of this *far* and the spirit sojourning on it. He makes the *far,* hangs it up, tends to the *asor,* calls the spirit to jump down from it and settle on his neck. In this condition, he speaks with the spirit, asks him questions in the spirit language, presents to him the people's wishes, and also receives many a revelation. The common people prefer to have recourse to the *uanönu* in their religious needs. All the spirits, except for *Onulap,* seem ready to jump down, but especially those of the most recently deceased. The *uanönu* like to see the souls of deceased children coming down to them, because they have the advantage of being *wenewen,* that is, sincere, while adults are even able to deceive the *uanönu.* Some *uanönu* asserted that never yet had the soul of a deceased Christian come down to them. Anyone—men, women, boys, girls—can be chosen as *uanönu* or *uomar,* that is, a canoe of the spirit. The choice is wholly at the discretion of the spirit.
>
> As soon as someone in the tribe has died, the people gather and tempt the soul so that it will settle down on the *far* and choose one of the persons present as *uanönu.* If the spirit grants this plea, the one chosen is regarded as *uanönu* until the spirit leaves him again. If the people have a request about which the spirit is to give information, he is summoned. The *uanönu* is the medium. The summoning takes place amid certain ceremonies. At night the people gather in the *udd* (meeting house) in which the *far* is hung. A quantity of food and other objects is collected, in part as *asor* for the *önu,* in part as gifts for the *uanönu,* in order to make them both obliging. Then the dancers grasp the *kurukur* (dance stick) and dance the spirit dance (*dugia*), in order to show the spirit their veneration. The *uanönu* lies calmly on his mat and waits for the right moment. He suddenly feels as though goose flesh were spreading over him. He jumps up, takes hold of the *kurukur,* and jumps about, while he shouts hi, hi. . . . It is not long before he feels by the heaviness of his neck that the spirit is sitting on him. He stands still, begins to tremble, bends under the weight of his neck, and sometimes even begins to foam. He presses his lips together hard so as not to speak quickly, since he might easily falsely announce the spirit's words because of hurrying too fast. Finally the people call to him: "*Wäsi menginom,* tell your revelations." The *uanönu* now asks the spirit:

> "*E seiö,* who are you?" Whereupon the spirit begins to talk. The people pose their questions, express their wishes, which the *uanönu* communicates to the spirit in spirit language and receives the answer in the same language. The summoning is not always done in this fussy manner. Some *uanönu* are so easily susceptible that it suffices to strike them on the arm with an *ubud,* and they begin to tremble.
>
> The performance does not always turn out as desired. It might be that the spirit who settles down is an *onuau* or *önurot,* which the people notice at once by the furious, wild behavior of the *uanönu.* Then they quickly hide everything dangerous, such as knives, fire, etc., so that the *uanönu* cannot cause a disaster for anybody, for it has often happened, as the natives asserted, that such a raging one threw all kinds of things at the heads of those present and ran after them with bush knives. If, on the other hand, the *uanönu* speaks calmly and softly, the people are delighted, for the spirit is an *önusor.* Unfortunately, however, the revelations not infrequently turn out to be wholly a fraud. Then the natives grumble about the false *uanönu* and *önumaken* (liar spirit), but they do not so quickly lose faith in the business. Next time it will turn out better (Bollig 1927, 60ff.).

The *wáátawa* may speak in an altered tone and voice, sometimes imitating the voice of the deceased ancestor, or make gestures reminiscent of the remembered behavior of the ancestor. Sometimes the verbiage is incomprehensible to the witnessing groups and the *wáátawa* goes wild. The *wáátawa,* however, may move into a period of calm and speak in intelligible words, answering the questions posed by the group. If one can extrapolate from contemporary Chuuk trance episodes, the session may end with the *wáátawa* falling asleep and remembering little or nothing of what happened.[61] But what can be seen of the manifest behavior was not the important element to the Chuukese of old. The trance behavior was only a sign that the ancestor spirit was trying to communicate with its kin. Critical to the Chuuk belief is their interpretation that the trance means the coming of the spirit and, more importantly, that the spirit speaks to them through the *wáátawa.* The words of the spirit are the essential ingredient of the ritual.

Distribution of the *Wáátawa*

Possession and trance were and are found across the Chuukic-speaking islands. From the evidence at hand, it is not always possible to determine if the possessions and trances were found in people of status, like the *wáátawa* of the Chuuk Lagoon and Mortlocks. However, the record

shows the trance phenomenon with a divining or mediumlike function from Tobi in the west to the Mortlocks in the east.

Southwest of Palau are four low-lying islands of Chuukic-speaking peoples, which are now part of the Republic of Palau and are either uninhabited or sparsely populated today. On these islands, both Kubary and members of the German South Seas Expedition observed and recorded possession-trance ceremonies. These ceremonies were performed by specialists and were of the type that might be called official or on demand. Kubary visited Sonsorol in 1885 and was invited to observe a ceremony performed by a local "priest" named Taur. With his hands prayerfully folded and his eyes closed, Taur's upper body shook and he let out a soft whistle; then, drenched in sweat and in a rather excited state, he told Kubary that "two men got in him and said: 'Everything goes well. The white man belongs to him and is his friend'" (1889, 85). Kubary, however, was quite skeptical about the performance and doubted whether he had seen a genuinely native version of the ceremony.

On Tobi, members of the German South Seas Expedition also observed possession-trance ceremonies by the local "priests":

> The chieftain raised his hand to the heavens, the priest let himself down on the altar on a large bowl turned upside down. They began a type of litany or trading-off song in a wailing voice, amid loud rattling in the throat, sniffing, and hissing. The only intelligible word was tobacco. When it was over, the other priest, almost blind, was led in and the hissing began anew. Gliding on his knees and loudly squabbling, a third priest moved towards the white men and the accompanying Palau man. The chieftain made it known to them that [the spirit] *Rugeiren* was now in the body of the priests. Meanwhile, the cry swelled louder in intensity and shortly reached a peak of about three minutes, during constant muscle spasms and sniffing, while all were deathly still (Eilers 1936, 109).

German colonial administrator Georg Fritz (1907) had observed a similar episode shortly after the turn of the century, describing the "priests" as clearly in a trance or ecstatic state. The shipwrecked American sailor, William Holden, may have seen a similar performance back in the 1830s, but his description is vague (1975, 86–87). In any case, the entranced "priests" on Tobi, like those on Sonsorol, functioned as something of a court oracle for chiefs and were persons of significant power and influence (Eilers 1936, 106).

On Pulo Anna and Merir, on the other hand, German expedition members heard that healers rather than diviners subjected themselves to

possession-trance. Eilers (1935, 246) relates that there were once men on Pulo Anna to whom the ancestor spirit *Maretaisai* appeared and, upon payment of a gift, healed the sick. The possessed healer shook violently as he spoke. Sarfert described a similar possession-trance healing ritual on nearby Merir (356). People who believed their illness to be caused by other persons prayed to a spirit by the name of *Masaa* and offered a gift to the spirit's medium. When *Masaa* appeared, the medium shook violently, shouted and sang, and seemed to contend with the spirit that had brought on the illness.

On Tobi, spirit boats were found hanging from the rafters in the spirit houses. The German Expedition meticulously described the layout of the two spirit houses, one of which had been seen almost a century earlier by Holden and measured thirty by fifty feet. Augustin Krämer, who stayed in one of the spirit houses, describes it as having three parts: a spare room (where he lived) and two other parts, one of which contained the spirit boat and was off limits to all people (Eilers 1936, 106–108). An altar stood in the spare room; here the priests became entranced as the god *Rugeiren* (*Nuukeileng*) took possession of them. *Rugeiren* was believed to descend by means of the spirit boat and speak to the priest. Curiously, one spirit boat was double hulled; the other was a simple outrigger hung with plants, flasks, and necklaces, as well as bowls of turmeric and oil-gifts to the god *Rugeiren.* The spirit boats were repainted in an annual ritual that was conducted by the chief and followed by a feast.

Continuing around the geographic arc of Chuukic-speaking islands are a string of low-lying coral atolls that stretch almost five hundred miles from Ngulu, southeast of Yap, to the westernmost outliers of Chuuk. There was and still is considerable interchange between the islands through the *sawei* trading and exchange pattern.

The Russian naval explorer Frederic Lütke, who visited some of these islands in 1827, described a type of possession and exorcism on Woleai that differs from what is reported from other parts of Micronesia. A few individuals, wrote Lütke, enjoyed the prerogative of seeing and hearing *"Hannoulape"* (*Enúúnap*) and making known his commands; but "apart from that, they enjoy no particular consideration or privilege" (1835, 187–188). These individuals, Lütke reported, were often subject to attack by the evil spirit who lives in the coral. When this spirit establishes itself in the body of the chosen one, the person lets out a horrid howling and goes through all kinds of contortions as he rolls on the ground. At this point the exorcist (conjurer or incantor) arrives and declares that the evil spirit has taken over the man and that he, the exorcist, is prepared to fight this enemy. With a pair of lances in hand, he immediately attacks the possessed

person and pursues a ritual battle with the hostile possessing spirit. The sick man arises and begins fighting with the exorcist; they do battle for a time, throw their lances, and then pick up their dance sticks and start dancing and throwing coconut milk here and there until they are completely exhausted. Lütke reported that this sham combat could be repeated, sometimes continuing for weeks, until the exorcist announced victory. In times of calamity, added Lütke, the possessed also sought to divine the intentions of *Enúúnap* through the agency of any of their children who died at an early age. It appears that individuals with a propensity for possession emerged from the general population and, once recognized, were sought out by others for divining *Enúúnap's* will. As noted, however, Lütke makes a point of mentioning that these mediums had no special privileges.

Sometime in the 1860s, German trading captain Alfred Tetens recorded an episode in which "a high priest appeared who, in the belief of the islanders, was possessed by some spirit, and in his ravings he answered the questions of the king" (1958, 92).

From Ulithi comes the only widespread cult figure in the Chuukic-speaking islands: the baby-become-spirit who possessed his chosen vehicles throughout the central Carolines. Lessa found that on Ulithi, until recent times, many people were selected by *Marespa* to be his mediums. Those who were habitually possessed could lay claim to the title of *wasoma,* while those possessed only once or twice could not make that claim. The *wasoma,* therefore, are possession-trance mediums of the official or status type. By the time he wrote, Lessa had to rely on his informant's recollection in order to reconstruct a picture of possession-trance, spirit mediums, and the *Marespa* cult on Ulithi; for, as Lessa reports, "Today there is no one living who has been possessed by *Marespa,* yet in the recent past there were many such persons" (1950a, 120).

Spirit possession in the central Carolines had clearly waned by the early twentieth century, when the area was visited by the German anthropologists of the South Seas Expedition. When Hambruch arrived on Ulithi and Sarfert visited Sorol in 1909, all that remained was the memory of possessions—in contrast to earlier times, when "the spirit often went into ordinary people who then practiced a kind of prophecy" (Damm 1938, 199). What is noteworthy in Hambruch's brief comment is that possession occurred in ordinary people ("gewöhnlichen Menschen"), whom Hambruch and his editors do not identify as official mediums.

On Puluwat, one of the easternmost atolls of the area, on the other hand, the German ethnologist Sarfert found evidence for the survival of possession-trance—both on demand and involuntary. One boy on Puluwat, who was said to be frequently possessed by a spirit of the dead,

"prophesied" the arrival of the South Sea Expedition's steamer. There were two variations on possession-trance according to Sarfert. In some cases, like that of the boy, the human host trembled, speaking rapidly but comprehensibly; in other cases the host spoke unintelligibly in epileptic-like fits. Those who spoke in comprehensible language could predict future events such as the arrival of ships, the outbreak of epidemics, and the disappearance of people; they also were a source of new medicines and remedies (Damm and Sarfert 1935, 200–201).

Informants from Woleai recently testified that, up until the end of World War II and even after, there were individuals known as *walalus* ("canoes of the spirit") who summoned the spirits. One informant spoke of a female *walalus* on Eauripik. When she was in a trance state, people would ask which spirit was upon her; speaking for the spirit and in its voice, she would answer their questions. When asked the whereabouts of some people taken to Yap during the war, she correctly described their exact hiding place under an orange tree. Chants based on her responses to these questions are still sung and danced on Woleai today, although this type of mediumlike possession is no longer practiced (John Hagileiram, personal communication).

Anthropologists working in the region shortly after the war continued to record possessions. Burrows and Spiro, who witnessed possession-trance episodes on Ifalik during the 1940s, agree on the main ethnographic detail. According to these authors, spirits did not possess at random but sought out someone in their own matrilineage. There might be several possessed persons of either sex in a single matrilineal line, but a person who was repeatedly selected as a host for the spirit soon became recognized as a *walalus*. A special person was the *tamon alusuia,* which Burrows and Spiro translate as "leader for (matters concerning) the *alus,*" whom they describe as a hereditary religious-medical specialist (1953, 242). Unlike other possessed Ifalik people, the *tamon alusuia* was possessed by only one spirit, who used him as his unique mouthpiece. The *tamon alusuia* inherited the office patrilineally and passed it on to a trainee designated by the possessing spirit.

Evidence from the eastern Chuuk islands is extensive and spans a time-depth of at least a century, although as said before it is difficult to know when the *wáátawa* ceased as an official status holder. Kubary, the Polish-born naturalist who visited Chuuk in 1877, was the first of several early authors testifying to institutionalized spirit possession involving a recognized medium: "The chief is the middleman between the call and the spirit of his ancestor. But to contact the spirit an incantor 'au-ua-ro-ar' [*auwarawar*] is necessary. He squats and rubs the inside of his thigh and

howls and wails ecstatically. The chief then asks his questions and interprets from the stammer of the magician the answer" (1880, 258).

Later, during German rule, the colonial physician Ernst Girschner verified Kubary's description of possession occurring to a recognized status holder, the *wáátawa* or *wáánaanú:*

> If one wishes to get advice from the spirits, one goes to a *waitaua,* tells him what is desired, and gives him some gifts for his services. The sorcerer sits on the ground and calls the spirits. They come and set themselves down on him (*moatu*); he is possessed by them, and becomes an *auwarawar,* a possessed one. This is manifested in his quivering, cramped hand motions, nodding head and such. He enters a state called *merik;* the spirits open his mouth (*sanau*) and speak through him.[62] First one, then another spirit speaks, for anyone can, if he wants to, receive an answer through the seer, but in a special language, different from the ordinary, the spirit language. The *merik* state does not last long, about 15 minutes, and after awakening the *Waitaua* tells the others what he has heard (1912–1913, 191–192).

Also from the German period is Bollig's description of the *wáátawa* in the Chuuk Lagoon, which has already been quoted, and which is probably the most extensive in the literature (1927, 60–64).

Hambruch, who visited the outer island of Néma (Nama) with the South Seas Expedition, observed the same linkage with the lineage that Bollig observed. On Néma, the spirit of the dead often enters into a living person amid groaning and convulsions and speaks about matters of importance to the chief and his family (Krämer 1935, 154). It was the chief who called upon the spirit, although the latter usually spoke through someone else in the chief's family. In one such dialogue between chief and spirit, the spirit voice berated the lineage for not following his wishes and threatened to kill one of its members. The chief handed the entranced man a gift and coconut water and pleaded with the spirit: "We will fulfill all your wishes. But kill none of us, because, look, we must die once, and we will see you then. Spare us thus this time" (155–156). The medium here was more than a court oracle and, as Bollig noted, served the whole family group. On nearby Losap, Sarfert found a hanging miniature double canoe similar to that described by Bollig; it was called the "spirit seat" (144).

After World War II, however, the long and rich descriptions of the *wáátawa* disappeared. By that time, mediums were "being neglected and forgotten" (Mahony 1970, 139). Gladwin and Sarason described possession as rare (1953, 166), and Mitchell's informants told him the

institution of spirit medium was on the decline and a medium was not always necessary for communication with deceased kin (1975, 89–90). Yet, the phenomenon-interpretation of spirit possession, which was described in the literature from the 1950s to the 1970s as rare and in decline, underwent a resurgence from the 1970s on and is still widely discussed and witnessed today.

One cannot live in Chuuk without hearing stories of possessions and ecstatic behavior. It is not the purpose of this monograph to examine what continues despite widespread adoption of Christianity, but it is apropos here to note that the work of the *wáátawa* continues. People continue to be possessed or made the "canoe" of their ancestors. The events are not rare by any means. The status of the possessed persons, however, has changed. They are no longer the carriers of a recognized status in the service of the lineage or the community. By and large, these cases do not originate in the spirit descending from the *faar* to take possession of its chosen *waa,* or canoe. Now the possession events are more private and spontaneous and more for the benefit of the individual in trance. They are more in the service of a smaller circle of kin—more often the immediate or nuclear family or an extended family. I have argued elsewhere that the contemporary possession cases continue because they have been found effective in handling personal crises and in handling what might be called "family therapy" (Dobbin and Hezel 1995). The continuance of this and other elements of the old religion is indicative of the fact that the old beliefs did give meaning to its believers. The practices of the *wáátawa* continue because they can still give meaning in a Christianized culture, with its more empirical and scientific worldview.

Chuuk Nativist Movements

Two movements occurred in the Mortlocks in 1895 and 1903, both of which featured returns to ecstatic native dancing and trance ritual. Dancing appears to be the most prominent feature of both movements, but why dancing should be considered a nativist "return" needs some explanation. Granted that some missionaries would have objected to a simple waltz or polka, the Chuuk dancing was much more than just "a dance." Some dances were highly erotic, while others were religious spirit dances inspired by the ancestor spirits and presented in their honor.

In distinguishing between the two types, Father Bollig remarks, "No indecent word occurs in these spirit dances, in contrast to the other dances" (1927, 40). It was believed that chiefs called for the dances at the command of the spirits and that the spirits had a prominent role in the

dances (Krämer 1935, 283). The mediums (*wáánaanú*) could receive the divine inspiration for a dance, teach this spirit-inspired dance, and then lead the dance itself. In one village on Tol, an island in the western part of Chuuk Lagoon, Krämer found dance staffs in the hanging double-canoe shrine and a row of them placed on a rack directly beneath the shrine. There is little doubt, therefore, that the missionary objections to the dances were more than puritanical prudery. The dances were symbols of the older sexual morality and the old spirits.

But the return to erotic and spirit-inspired dancing was only a symbolic reversion to a religious past teeming with spirit life that had been nearly obliterated with the arrival of Christianity. The old religions of the Chuukic-speaking islands emphasized direct contact with the spirit world through the *wáátawa,* not only for the reception of the spirit-revealed ingredients and chants for traditional medicines (*sáfey*), but in many other instances when individuals worked with the spirits for the benefit of the community. Christianity, on the other hand, emphasized a more indirect connection with god, whether through the word of the Bible or the ritual of Mass and baptism. The contrast between the direct contact with the spirits in the traditional religion and the indirect contact in Christianity cannot be overemphasized, as Tolerton and Rauch observed (1949, 176ff.). There was a radical change in thinking, and the prohibition against dancing was only one powerful symbol of that change.

Regarding the outbreak of dancing in 1895 in the Mortlocks, one wonders if this was indeed a nativist or a revitalization movement, as Reafsynder claims (1984, 84), or merely an expression of resistance to missionization and a symptom of backsliding among recent converts. Yet another interpretation might be that the new converts saw no fundamental incompatibility between the old and new ways. Francis Price, one of the Protestant missionaries in Chuuk, wrote of such an interpretation from the congregation on Kuttu (an islet in Satowan): "*Kutu*—Here they dance like a tidal wave on the island. . . . After a brief service I asked them how the Christians were doing. They said they were all doing well. I said, 'How is it about the *Puarik* [dancing]?' 'Well,' they said, 'they went to the dance but they also went to church.' 'Oh,' I said, 'you serve the devil during the week and God on Sunday, do you?' They said, 'We do'" (*The Friend* 1895, v53, 6:43).

The 1895 events may be more of a commentary on the superficiality of conversion and missionization than a genuine nativist movement, but it is difficult to make any sort of judgment because the descriptions of the events are so sparse and derive mostly from missionary sources. In reference to the islet of Ta, Price wrote, "*Heathen Dance* came to the

island and swept them nearly all away" (*The Friend* 1895, v53, 6:42), and "On reaching Ta they found the teachers, Robert and Mary . . . faithful and laborious, but the people had gone far astray. They had resumed the old licentious heathen dance" (*Missionary Herald* 1895, 280). But when Price returned on a tour of the Mortlocks in 1901, he thought the tide of native "revitalization" had been turned (Reafsnyder 1984, 86–87). Either the turn of the tide was short lived or Price was wrong, because the dancing returned in great strength in 1903.

The events that began about 1903 are more clearly a nativist movement and show a clear symbolic return to the pre-Christian ways (Reafsnyder 1984, 87ff.). The reports from the Protestant missionary publications echo the stories of the 1895 events. On Namoluk, "It was a sad story there, for almost all of the professed Christians had gone back to the painting of their bodies and the heathen dance in the hope of attaining favor with the government" (*Missionary Herald* 1904, 251). An article on Namoluk a year later reports, "The people have forsaken the way of life, and most of them have turned back to the ways of the world. The teacher does not seem to influence the people at this place, and the children join in dancing and show no interest in coming to school" (*Missionary Herald* 1905, 196). Finally, in 1906, a discouraged missionary wrote the following:

> This I can say, that many of the heathen Christians have become lukewarm; they have joined in with the old heathen dances, and not only dance three times a month as the vice-governor has permitted them, but on some islands they are dancing for weeks and even months at one time. What can a servant of God do in such a case when the worldly authority commands the heathen to dance? These dances which the heathens are keeping on all these islands [Mortlocks] are very abominable (*Missionary Herald* 1906, 436).

In conclusion, one can only say that the people of the Chuuk Lagoon and the Mortlocks did not accept American Protestant Christianity without some resistance, however short lived that resistance might have been. The events of 1895 and 1903 should at least serve as a challenge to the claim that "the impression surfaces that these people were weary of their religion and practices. Some of the old traditions had lost their grasp. . . . Their religion could not cope with the changes" (Müller 1985, 28). Perhaps it might be at least as accurate to conclude that sometimes island people could not cope with the new religions.

This chapter has offered a synthesis of the various descriptions of Chuuk religion made over two and a half centuries. Analysis will come

in later chapters, where the Chuuk phenomena are compared with beliefs and practices in other Micronesian cultures. The focus here has been on the spirits and gods—the *énú*—and their intermediaries, the religious masters of spirit power—the *sowu* who possess *roong*.

With regard to the spirits, Chuukic religions show no strong affiliation of its pantheon with the stars, sun, and moon. This is all the more surprising because the Chuuk world is the world of great navigators and seafarers who used the stars and even a "star compass" (Goodenough 1953; see also Riesenberg 1965 and 1972). In addition, the genealogy of the gods, which may be a bewildering morass of who begat whom, shows great consistency from east to west throughout the Chuukic region. There is a widespread distinction between sky world gods and those that are more earthbound. There is also a series of brother and sister deities who work as patrons and teachers for human beings. On the east-west axis of the Chuukic-speaking islands, to be sure, there is a waxing and waning in the popularity of certain gods and goddesses. The pattern appears to be a slow fading of the breadfruit goddess and the love goddess as one moves westward into the central Chuuk islands, while the importance of *Nuuk* grows from east to west. As might be expected, the gods of the sea and of sailing and navigating are accorded higher honor as one moves into the central Chuukic atolls of Ifalik, Ulithi, and Lamotrek.

But the record of the old religion is so detailed and often so localized that a summary does little justice to the wealth of recorded tradition and observation. Even so, summaries have their place in permitting readers to grasp the large picture of religion across the 1,600-mile arc of the Chuukic-speaking islands.

Chapter 4

The Religion of Pohnpei

Sources for Traditional Religion

Anyone writing about the old religions of Micronesia faces two critical issues. First, are the various island religions sufficiently similar to be able to make a common outline for each island culture? Second, how reliable are the island oral histories for reconstructing the history of religions now long dead? Earlier chapters discussed these questions from a general point of view; but they are of particular interest and importance in the case of Pohnpei. Let us first examine the sources for traditional religion in Pohnpei.

The first extensive and methodical attempt at recovering the stories of Pohnpei came in 1910 when Paul Hambruch spent nine months recording the oral histories of the island, eventually compiling some four hundred stories in what became the largest source available.[1] By then, the priesthoods, rituals, and sacred centers of the old religion were only a memory in the minds of his informants. The record is then silent except for some of the Pohnpeians who—between the world wars and shortly after World War II—began to put in writing their stories and the oral histories of their clans. Two were translated into English: Luelen Bernart's *The Book of Luelen* (1977), with an accompanying volume of annotations by the editors and translators (Fischer et al. 1977), and the *Silten Manuscript* (Silten 1951). Other written oral histories are known to exist, but they remain as secret memories in the possession of their authors' families. Pohnpei, like all the islands of Micronesia, has recorded oral traditions that have revealed almost everything we now know about the old religion. What is different in Pohnpei, however, is the fact that the Pohnpeians themselves wrote down their traditions, which were later translated into English. Pohnpei also had a definite status for the keeper of traditions, especially those traditions called *poadoapoad* (the sacred stories of Pohnpei's past). The guardian of these traditions was the *soupoad;*[2] he was more than just a storyteller, he was the respected keeper of his family's traditions (Mauricio 1993, 113–114).

The problem, then, is not lack of evidence or data; the problem is the value of the evidence. Any description and analysis of the old religions has to face the question of the value and validity of oral history in general and Pohnpeian oral history in particular. The major writers of anthropology and history about Pohnpei agree that the oral histories are important, but there is disagreement on their value for history. David Hanlon and Rufino Mauricio see much that is valid about the past in the oral traditions; Glenn Petersen thinks they tell us more about the present than the past.[3] Their disagreement reflects a wider, older, and more global debate on the historical value of oral history.

Then where does that put Pohnpeian sources? The approach taken here leans towards the side of oral histories as a legitimate source of information about the past, but these represent a particular kind of history. The Pohnpeian oral traditions are contradictory, filled with supernatural beings, places, and events, and they are terribly incomplete. They cannot be used for timelines and chronologies—at least not without great skepticism. No one has recognized better the limitations of *poadoapoad* than the Pohnpeians themselves: "Now this is not a direct story, but what I say has glanced off it, but let those who know hear later and set this story straight," wrote Luelen Bernart (1977, 154).

Oral Histories and the Development of Pohnpei's Religion

For all the disagreements about Pohnpeian traditional histories, both contemporary commentators and the histories themselves agree on several underlying beliefs about the past. All the histories agree that Pohnpei's religion was not always the same: It developed and changed. Perhaps nowhere in Micronesia is there better evidence of the dynamic changes that took place *before* the arrival of Christian missionaries, but one cannot find any common sequence of stages or phases or any agreement on who the key legendary founders and promoters of these changes really were.

One could attempt some sort of a concordance between the old and contemporary writers. The translators and commentators for Bernart's *Book of Luelen* have already tried to do just that, showing the "variant readings" of the oral traditions. But any concordance is doomed to failure because of the nature of Pohnpeian oral histories: They are not oral histories for *all* of Pohnpei; they are family and clan histories for certain limited districts in Pohnpei. Of course, one could also attempt to describe in detail how the oral histories differ from one another, as Glenn Petersen does in *Lost in the Weeds* (1990). The book's title, taken from a Pohnpeian proverb, is appropriate: Petersen's labyrinth of traditions leaves no clear picture of what happened, only themes that cut across the Pohnpeian histories. Yet

this, in a different way, is another concordance—at the level of common themes or underlying beliefs—but one that is frightfully difficult for the nonspecialist to understand. I think, however, that Petersen has hit on the best kinds of data one can extract from the oral histories: common themes or underlying beliefs that run through the histories.

In addition to common themes, the Pohnpeian traditions also emphasize certain distinct features of the old religion, such as the regional ritual centers, the priesthoods, ritual sacrifice, divining, and healing. The traditional sources are very good at pointing out the radical changes that took place in Pohnpeian religion. Some of these features lasted into the early historical period and were described and occasionally witnessed by beachcombers, missionaries, and traders. In summary, this means not only that Pohnpeian themes are similar from one oral history to another but also that the oral histories agree about structural elements of the old religions. This chapter analyzes those common themes of underlying beliefs and the agreements about the major structural elements of the past religion.

Common Themes in the Development of Pohnpeian Religion

The first theme has already been mentioned: Pohnpei's religion was not static. Change is a dominant theme in all the oral histories. It is altogether possible that other Micronesian cultures experienced a similar religious dynamism, but Pohnpei seems to be the one island where there is extensive evidence of change. Certainly the myths, legends, and oral histories of islands such as Yap and Palau describe significant political changes legitimized in myth and legend, but there is not much evidence there of how religious belief and practices changed in tandem with the political developments.

In all the written or translated Pohnpeian oral histories, the authors take a linear rather than a cyclic approach to history—a second theme in the oral traditions. Pohnpeian history unfolds in a sequence of stages, not in an annual cycle or any cyclic pattern. Perhaps this approach shows, especially in the case of Luelen Bernart's history, the influence of the biblical view of history taught at the Christian missions, but there is no belief in the inevitability of progress and the inherent goodness of change, the ideas that so appealed to nineteenth-century westerners. The stories of the rise of the Saudeleur dynasty and its demise under Isohkelekel demonstrate the Pohnpeian theme of change as ambiguous—it can be for good or evil. As Silten wrote, history can be about good or evil, truthful or filled with lies (1951).

A third theme or motif in the oral histories is the foreign origin not only of the population but also of technology and a variety of innovations. *Katau* and *Yap* are the places of origin often mentioned according

to traditional accounts. *Katau* was long equated with the island of Kosrae, but Ward Goodenough (1986) has questioned this identification. If he is correct, then *Katau* means a place "over the horizon" to the east, a mystical place of supernatural origin, and *Yap* refers to the mystical place to the west, on the other side of the horizon, rather than the actual islands of Yap. Some oral historians have claimed the Marshalls as the homeland of the Pohnpeian clans, and indeed some of the Pohnpeian clan names are the same as those in the Marshalls (Fischer et al. 1977). But whether *Katau* refers to Kosrae and whether *Yap* signifies the real islands of Yap is not important to the basic belief structure of Pohnpeians; the important point is that the people came from elsewhere.[4]

The fourth theme, which runs like an unbroken thread through myth and legend up into the historical period (dating from the early nineteenth century), is the belief that the very geology of Pohnpei and its developing culture are the result of the gods and humans working together. There is no divine "Let it be done" concept to account for Pohnpei: The divine or supernatural was always interacting with the human. In fact, if one reads the myths of the earliest geological and demographic foundation of Pohnpei, the work was mostly accomplished by humans, with supernatural assistance. The heavenly gods become more prominent in Pohnpeian history after the appearance of missionaries and other foreigners from across the seas.

A fifth motif is that much of the divine interaction with humans is with the high gods (*enihwos*), not the lesser patron gods or with ancestors or clan deities. One cannot say of old Pohnpei that the high gods were remote and that petitions for help were made to deities closer to the daily affairs of humans. Nor can one say that the old religion was just an ancestor cult. Ancestors were certainly revered and a source of knowledge about such specialties as medicine, but the ancestors who, like the high gods, were subsumed under the general category of other ghosts, spirits, and gods (*eni*) play nowhere near the important role they do in the Chuukic-speaking world.

A sixth theme is the tendency toward belief in decentralization, a characteristic already well documented in the changing political history of Pohnpei.[5]

Finally, all the oral histories show Pohnpeians as a people of ritual. Even as the old ritual centers and their priests died out, the somewhat more secular institutions that inherited the priestly titles continued some of the past ritual. The dual title system of the Nahnmwarki and Nahnken show that the Pohnpeian institutions today, as of old, are replete with high ritual.

Key Features of Pohnpeian Religion

As already noted, the oral histories do not agree on the stages or phases in the evolution of Pohnpei's religion, nor do they agree on the chief actors.[6] However, they do agree that the old religion had certain features that were no longer alive and functional by the beginning of the twentieth century. There are five such features, and they are inextricably woven together in traditional accounts:

1. Sacred stones and sacred natural features of the land.
2. Ritual centers such as Nan Madol, Salapwuk, and Wene.
3. Priests, organized into hierarchical groups, who carried out their functions at the cultic centers such as Nan Madol.
4. Plant and animal sacrifices carried out by some of the old priesthoods.
5. Divining and healing ritual, traced back to the oldest (mythological) stage of Pohnpeian history.

It is also quite clear from the oral traditions that Pohnpeian historians believed the old features did not simply disappear. They were incorporated into a new blend of the secular and the sacred in the title system of the Nahnmwarki and Nahnken titles, into the ceremonies in the meeting houses (*nahs*), and into a healing belief system adapted to Christian belief and modern medicine. How the traditional Pohnpeian rituals have been combined with the more contemporary ceremonies of the *nahs,* the high-titled personages, and the contemporary healing practices will be reviewed at the end of this chapter.

The best way to organize the features of the old religion is first to give a short summary of the old Pohnpeian belief about the spirits and gods and their cosmos; second, to focus on the most famous of the cultic centers, their priests, sacred stones, rituals, and sacrifices; and third, to trace the history of healing and divining in Pohnpeian history.

Traditional accounts point to three of these cultic centers as the most influential in the past and also significant contemporary symbols, although all three are now abandoned. They are Salapwuk, Wene, and Nan Madol. Salapwuk appears to be the oldest, although no date for its beginning and rise to prominence can be established with any amount of certainty. According to traditional accounts, the patterns of worship in Wene came from Salapwuk, and both centers predate the religious ritual at Nan Madol. The Wene and Salapwuk centers also functioned as semi-autonomous districts, with the highest ranking priests controlling both the worship and the governance of the districts.

The Old Pohnpeian Cosmos and Its Spirits

A Picture of the Cosmos

As elsewhere in Micronesia, the traditional Pohnpeian cosmos is important in depicting where the interaction between spirits and humans took place. As elsewhere, attempts to harmonize all the traditional detail into a single picture are difficult, if for no other reason than that traditions record those details from different times and from different parts of Pohnpei. It may be that radically different pictures are recorded, with no attempt made to reconcile the differences.

The basic structure of the cosmos was (1) a sky world with layers, (2) land, (3) sea, and (4) the world under the sea. The land is, of course, Pohnpei, but it included those mythical or real places from which the founders came. Hambruch describes the cosmos in these terms:

> On the horizon, the earth meets . . . the ocean; thus, one can go from the ocean floor, *Pased,* to the heaven. The view of the islanders is formed according to the, for them, visible world. The shape of the whole is a conical section; the ground surface, a circular shaped disc, forms the *Pased,* the residence of the spirits after death. Over this lies the ocean, and in the middle of the ocean lies Ponape and some other known neighbor islands. Above the whole, like a hollow bell, the firmament is inverted. In the sky, the gods reside. People also can be led up there sometimes. The stars dip during the setting in the sea, arrive in *Pased,* glow there, and in the morning come up again on the opposite side of the ocean, in order to bestow their light on the inhabitants of the earthly world (1936b, 169).

The vault of the sky was described as an inverted bowl, but there were also four beings that held up the heavens with its three layers. The four beings seem to be on or beyond the horizon (called the "Eaves of Heaven").[7] In one story, the sky above is compared to the gabled roof of the meeting houses (*nahs*), which *Luhk* climbed down and slipped under the eaves and into Pohnpei to cavort with human women (Hambruch 1936b, 169). The *nahs* may well be a symbol of this cosmos pictured as a meeting house.[8] On Pohnpei itself are many sacred or special places, generally natural stone formations, where myths of Pohnpei's origin are recorded as taking place and where different spirits lived. Some of these places deal with human destiny and the *enihwos* (high gods), especially a spot called *Pweliko,* in the Wene chiefdom, which leads to the place where deceased humans face their trial on the way to doom or bliss. The

souls who make it to *Pahnsed* may return to earth as ancestor spirits (*eni aramas*) and may gather for dancing and general merriment at places on Pohnpei and the nearby atoll of Ahnd (Ant).[9] These gathering places of the *eni aramas* [spirits of the dead] were sometimes marked with man-made stone enclosures or walls called *merei,*[10] which also functioned as shrines for the living (Hanlon 1988, 153, 267) and were identified as such in historic times (Hambruch 1936b, 98–99).

In short, the structure of the cosmos is very similar to those in eastern Micronesia. The general features of the Pohnpeian cosmos are found across Micronesia but show the least similarity with the cosmos of Palau.

Classifying the Many Spirits in the Pohnpeian Cosmos

The Pohnpeian spirit world was densely populated with *eni,* the island's all-embracing word for spirits, gods, ghosts, and demons. The *eni,* in turn, can be simply divided by origins: The rulers of land, sea, under the sea, and sky are without human origin (*enihwos*), but the spirits of the deceased (*eni aramas*) are of human origin. This two-kind typology was adopted by Hambruch and more recently by Mauricio and Hanlon. Undoubtedly, the two-kind typology reflected Pohnpeian belief, but it also poses some problems.

In the most recent list there are over fifty deities, the highest of whom were the *enihwos* (Mauricio 1993, 467ff.).[11] Since *wos* means "to sprout," Fischer and his coeditors interpret the *enihwos* as gods who spontaneously came into being and were not formerly chiefs or other distinguished humans (1977, 81–82). These high spirits included all of the clan spirits (Bernart 1977, 90). Considering that there were formerly about twenty different clans, the large number of *enihwos* is not unreasonable.

The three most important *enihwos* were *Nahnsapwe, Daukatau,* and *Luhk*. *Nahnsapwe* was the thunder god patron of the chiefly clan of Madolenihmw but seems to have had a wider worship, especially by the farmers of the old cult center at Wene. He was the god who was imprisoned by the Saudeleur ruler for bedding down the queen. *Nahnsapwe* was then rescued and fled to *Katau,* where he fathered a son by a human who returned to Pohnpei as the legendary Isohkelekel and who, in turn, defeated the Saudeleurs. He was created by *Daukatau,* god of the beginnings of organized religion and the crop-fertility deity, worshipped at the cultic center in Salapwuk. *Luhk* filled out the triad of the most popular of the *enihwos* and is credited with the divine assistance that changed the polity and religion after the fall of the Saudeleur dynasty at Nan Madol (Hambruch 1936b, 65–66).[12] Deities found elsewhere in Micronesia also

appear here on Pohnpei, like the trickster *Olopat* [*Wonofáát* in Chuuk], who, true to his mythic character, deceived a man and stole his wife, land, and wealth (Mauricio 1993, 478; Hambruch 1936b, 191–192).

Added to the *enihwos* are gods of places, such as *Nahnsahwinsed,* lord of the sea and cause of the much-feared "mangrove sickness" (Mauricio 1993, 472–473). There was an *enihwos* who dwelt in the sea but was petitioned in love chants. Another was *Isoheni,* who was the guardian deity of clans on Ahnd Atoll (474). Thus the *enihwos* could be the masters of land, sky, sea, and weather; guardians of the clans; patrons of the arts; or patrons of house and canoe building. Some *enihwos,* especially *Nahnsapwe* and *Daukatau,* were notorious for their affairs with human females (Hambruch 1936a, 98–115).

The *eni aramas* are the spirits of the ancestors, or if one accepts Hanlon's definition, the ancestors of commoners or those without chiefly titles.[13] Two problems arise from this definition. First, some of the gods classified as *eni aramas* were also guardians of the clans and were worshipped as such; *Inahs,* protector of parts of Nett chiefdom, is one example (Mauricio 1993, 468). Moreover, a number of deities, although not classified as *enihwos,* function like *enihwos* in that they serve as clan guardians and patrons of crafts. What appears to separate them from the *enihwos* is that none of these "almost gods" were lords of one of the major parts of the cosmos, such as the sky or the world under the sea. *Nahnimwitik,* for example, was the patron of the drums and of the priest (*Kiroun Aip*) at the Salapwuk cult center who was responsible for the high priest's announcements (478–479). The sacred moray eel (*Mwohnsamwohl* or *Nahn Samwohl*) that was offered sacrificed turtle meat at Nan Madol rituals is impossible to classify (Hambruch 1936b, 94), being neither lord of a natural realm nor of human origin. Many of these "lower" gods were guardian spirits of clans or the leading chiefs. One clan deity roamed about the earth as a beautiful woman who lured men to their doom, driving men crazy with love for her (Mauricio 1993, 478). Yet another difference from the *enihwos* is that few if any of these lower deities appear as culture heroes, such as *Nahnsapwe* who brought kava to earth, or *Daukatau* who brought the title system, or *Luhk,* instrumental in the new polity of decentralized paramount chiefdoms.

Added to the categories of *eni* are some groups that are either supernaturals or beings with power beyond that of any human. This includes the ancient dwarfs, or "wee people" (*sokolei*), who are found across Micronesia and Polynesia and are described as a "kind of small spirit" (Hambruch 1936b, 100). The beings that Hambruch refers to as demons

or demonesses are difficult to classify; they may be evil *eni aramas,* but they certainly are prominent in Pohnpeian traditional stories.[14] The Pohnpeian world was filled with demons of all sorts: house demons, night demons, and tree demons (Hambruch 1936a, 121). This may be one reason why Hambruch could conclude that "helpful spirits are very rare" (122) and the Pohnpeian dictionary could define *eni* as "ghosts, usually considered malicious" (Rehg 1979, 9).

In summary, Pohnpeian tradition clearly delineated gods who controlled the forces of nature (*enihwos*) and the spirits of deceased ancestors (*eni aramas, eni lapalap*); but this distinction does not sufficiently address the problem of beings who fit somewhere in between the nature-based deities and the deified ancestors. In terms of the function they serve and the work they perform, therefore, one can observe in the Pohnpeian pantheon the five types of spirits found elsewhere in Micronesia: (1) high gods dwelling in the sky, in the sea, or in the world under the sea; (2) patron deities; (3) place-bound spirits; (4) the spirits of ancestors; and (5) a residual category of spirits such as the "wee people." The Pohnpeian spirits are different, however, because of the emphasis on deities who protect the clans.

Another characteristic of the Pohnpeian gods is the fact that throughout the legendary history down to the fall of the Saudeleurs and the rise of the Nahnmwarki polity, the gods worked *with* humans and at times appeared less powerful than the humans (a Saudeleur ruler, for example, could capture *Nahnsapwe*). When the gods were at work, they worked *with* humans, as in the case of the building of the rock foundation of island Pohnpei or in the case of the priest, Soukisen Leng, going up into the heavenly canoe of *Luhk* and there discussing what was to become of the Pohnpeian governing system.

Yet another difference in the Pohnpeian pantheon is that the gods and goddesses are not genealogically linked together as one big family. True, there are stories here and there of this deity marrying another one and his daughters marrying humans, but this is rather exceptional, compared to some of the pantheons from the Chuukic-speaking islands. This lack of divine genealogies in Pohnpei may reflect the dispersed power of politics and religion.

Finally, the ancestors-become-spirits (*eni aramas*) seem to play a far less critical role in the affairs of the living than is the case, for example, in the Chuukic world. Oral traditions tell us where the deceased go and what they have to do to get there, but there is precious little on human destiny and becoming a godlike spirit (*eni*). Like most other islands and regions of Micronesia, the deceased Pohnpeians faced a trial or a test before entering the third heaven (Mauricio 1993, 346–351).

Becoming *Eni Aramas*

Records of old-time funerals and burials, with all their conflicting details, reveal the Micronesian-wide ambiguity about the dead at the time of the funeral. The living wanted the spirit of the deceased to leave and not to return. Priests would put a large stone on the breast of the deceased while they conducted "secret prayer rituals" to prevent the deceased from returning and taking off some relatives with him or her (Hambruch 1936a, 91). On the other hand, they welcomed returning spirits of the dead and even believed that every living person had as a personal guardian an *eni aramas*.[15] Although *eni* may have generally been considered malicious spirits, the spirits of the dead usually showed themselves as benevolent to the living (122–123).

To understand how the feared dead could be transformed into guardian ancestor spirits, one must first examine the events surrounding the burial and the trial or judgment facing the deceased. From Hambruch comes this description:

> Thus is the custom regarding the dead. When someone dies, he is buried, charms are said and stones are put on his breast, so that he will not return at night to go about the people and make the people ill. Four days after the death the people make many wreaths; they also cook food and take it to the place where the dead person rests. Then they hang all these things in the trees, settle down and watch whether the soul of the deceased will appear and fetch some of the things they have left. If a bird comes flying in and eats from the food, they believe that it is the soul of the deceased which has come to consume the offerings so as to continue its journey. Then they weep. For now the soul goes to *Paset* [*Pahnsed*] in order to strengthen itself and go even beyond to *Puileko* [*Pweliko*]; then it proceeds to *Kankapir* [the swinging bridge], and there visits a woman named *Li Kapir,* where it sings in order to put the guardians of that place in a good mood. Next it must walk over a narrow rope that is being rapidly spun around by the guardians. The soul must then hasten to the place called *Uasa puilepuil* [*Wasah pwilipwil*]. The soul that makes progress is cast over to the place, *Puileko,* from which he cannot return until he is completely decayed. In such a fashion the deceased arrive at the other world, *Paset* (1936a, 116–117).

Tradition offers an alternative ending or description of *Pweliko* as *Wasahn soupwur,* "the place of no return." (Bernart 1977, 93). Thus, *Pweliko* could either be a transitory place or a place where evil spirits remain permanently confined. As the abode of the condemned, *Pweliko*

was imagined as "dark, cold, and significantly for the clean Ponape people, as very dirty" (Hambruch 1936a, 115). Whether the deceased soul is permanently condemned or is allowed to pass on to *Pahnsed*—the underwater paradise where feasts are celebrated as they are in this world—depends on the outcome of the trial at the swinging bridge. Hambruch elaborates on this trial:

> Two spirits, a man and a woman, stand guard at the entrance of the paradise. They test the arriving souls of the departed as to whether they can sing well. They allow only singers with beautiful voices to enter. The bad singers are banished to the *Pueliko*. . . . The soul must step across a bridge which leads from the earth to *Pajit* [*Pahnsed*]; it is called *Kan Kaper,* dancing bridge. On it stand guards, devil figures who are ready to abduct the souls to *Pueliko*. At their sight the deceased begins to dance. The dance makes the guards forget their duty, so that the dancer can finally jump from the bridge to the place of bliss. He who cannot dance is hauled to *Pueliko* (1936a, 115–116).

According to this variant belief, those who succeed in the trial became the *eni aramas,* and they alone can and will return to the land of the living. The ambiguity at the time of burial is therefore resolved: Only the good ancestor spirits can return.

The Old Cultic Centers

Much of the tradition about the Pohnpeian religion before the twentieth century focuses on the three great ritual centers at Salapwuk, Wene, and Nan Madol. The following rough chronology, coordinating archaeological findings and oral traditions, might help to put the life of these ritual centers in historical context:

500 to 5 BC	Oldest archaeological dates of the earliest human settlement on Pohnpei.
AD 1 to 1000	More evidence of human settlement, such as breadfruit storage pits, stone foundations of houses, and some pottery. The end of this phase marks the beginning of the use of basalt columns in the construction of Nan Madol.
1000 to 1500	During this phase, the megalithic basalt "islands" of Nan Madol are built, with places for the residence of the ruling dynasty of the Saudeleurs, priestly quarters, royal tombs, and places of ritual sacrifice.

1500 to 1826	Called the Isohkelekel phase, after the legendary conqueror of the Saudeleurs, this period is marked by the decline and demise of Nan Madol as a political and religious center and by the rise of a decentralized polity of autonomous paramount chiefdoms under a dual set of chiefs, the Nahnmwarki and the Nahnken. There is still little contact with the Western world through visiting ships.
1826 to 1885	Period of increasing contact with European and American ships.
1852	Arrival of the first Protestant missionaries.
1854	The great smallpox epidemic, when the power of the old religion was pitted against the power of the Christian missionaries (one of the missionaries was also a physician who vaccinated many Pohnpeians).

The early dates in this chronology are based on archaeological evidence and use of a hypothetical twenty to thirty years as the average length of reign of the Saudeleur rulers and Nahnmwarkis listed in oral history accounts (Mauricio 1993). From the oral histories of the priest-chiefs at the Salapwuk center, it appears that the site was a religious, ritual center perhaps dating back to between AD 1 and 500, a time frame that certainly predates the period when Nan Madol was an active political and ritual center (200). The earliest date of settlement at the Wene ritual sites is AD 408 (Ayres and Haun 1981; Mauricio 1993, 279). On the basis of both archaeological evidence and oral history, it is likely that the beginnings of the ritual center at Wene parallel the main construction at Nan Madol between AD 1000 and 1500. The reigning priest-chief there broadened the base of his territory during the Sapwataki wars about AD 1700. Sometime after the victory of the Wene priest-chief, he assumed or was given the title of the autonomous paramount chief of Nahnmwarki of Kitti.[16] By the time of the first extensive Western exploration and ethnography (Christian 1899; Hambruch's work in 1910 was not published until 1932 and 1936), Nan Madol, Salapwuk, and Wene were no longer functioning as cultic centers, and the priests across the island had already died out.[17] This chronological sequence and dating may be helpful in giving some historical perspective to one of the main elements of the old religion.

The Ritual Center at Salapwuk

When Salapwuk became an important center is not clear in the traditional accounts. These accounts maintain, however, that there was a time before

Salapwuk and the other centers, a time when religion was not so focused and organized, when there were no ceremonies (Bernart 1977, 65). The Pohnpeians of that era "kept themselves apart. . . . They killed each other and worshipped stones, trees and animals" (Mauricio 1993, 427: quote from Hambruch 1936b, 2). The person who supposedly changed all that was the priest-chief called the *Soumwen Leng:* "He was the man who started a ceremony to the high god entitled *Daukatau,*" wrote Luelen Bernart (1977, 65). The ceremony may have centered on the conferral of the very *Soumwen Leng* title that the high priest at Salapwuk received from *Daukatau* (91).[18] In any case, the introduction of ritual and titles is viewed as the beginning of organized religion on Pohnpei. Besides serving as priest-chief, *Soumen Leng* was also said to be the first diviner or prophet on Pohnpei, predicting the great flood that he and his family all survived (65). He was also the priest-leader of the Salapwuk area, although little is known about how he governed the area.

Today the Salapwuk area is still well known to Pohnpeians, although its function as an active ritual center died out at least a century ago (Mauricio 1993, 222). It is well remembered because Salapwuk and the *Soumwen Leng* represent the beginnings of the title and ranking system that continues to dominate Pohnpeian culture. Oral historians believe that the conferral of the first formal title took place in Salapwuk when the god *Daukatau* (or *Nahnsapwe*) bestowed the title *Soumwen Leng* on the leader of the local clan. In Pohnpeian traditions, remarks Rufino Mauricio, "The Salapwuk landscape . . . is sacred. . . . The person responsible for keeping Salapwuk a sacred region of the island is the Soumwen Leng," even though today the holder of this priestly title no longer carries out the rituals of old (1993, 197).

The place in Salapwuk where *Soumwen Leng* is believed to have received his title is a boulder called *Sokosokenleng,* or "the landing of heaven," a very visible marker of the tradition (Mauricio 1993, 199). Local oral historians believe that over eighty *Soumwen Leng* have ruled Salapwuk since the title was first conferred at this boulder. If one extrapolates from the average age of the last six *Soumwen Leng,* the first bestowal of the title must have taken place about AD 1500, or perhaps much earlier.[19]

Salapwuk is considered a "sacred landscape" for reasons that go beyond the founding of organized religion and the title system there. According to legend, four women arrived at Salapwuk in ancient times and built the rocky foundation of the island—the actual basaltic stone structure on which Pohnpei rests. Another local historian, interviewed by Mauricio (1993, 233ff.), indicated that the very name of this island comes

from the work the four women did at Salapwuk, thus explaining why the stones of Salapwuk are sometimes also called the "Pohnpei rock."[20]

Other natural landmarks and man-made structures there also underline the traditional importance of Salapwuk and the role of its priest-leader. A large stone outcrop with a big circular hole, for example, is known as the "Mooring Pool," because here is where the legendary discoverer of Pohnpei, Sapikini, was thought to have landed and anchored his canoe (Mauricio 1993, 236–237). Another example is seen in the long, man-made trenches and mounds, which are neither breadfruit pits nor irrigation ditches and are much too large to be house platforms. Local historians call them "paths" (*ahl*) that symbolically linked Salapwuk to other agricultural sites on Pohnpei. Here *Soumwen Leng* supposedly performed rituals to ensure good crops and prosperity. One such path, known as the Great Path of the Season of Plenty, linked Temwen Island, a coastal region to the east, and Salapwuk, an inland region in the west of Pohnpei. This suggests that *Soumwen Leng*'s ritual may have extended from Salapwuk all the way across the interior of Pohnpei to Temwen, the island that would later become the site of Nan Madol (239).

The Rituals of the *Soumwen Leng*

The main function of *Soumwen Leng* was to preside over rituals to ensure good crops and harvest, to obtain good weather, and to set the annual calendar. [21] Some of the rituals performed by *Soumwen Leng* and his priests were closed to all but the priests; others demanded the participation of the entire community. One ritual for good weather, attended by the whole community, is described below as it was recorded by Hambruch in 1910. Two interesting elements of this communal ceremony are the ritual use of kava (*sakau*) and its use as a sacrifice.[22]

> At the times when wind, rain and thunder prevail, we arrange a request for fine weather so that it will be good again. First, the head priest orders all servants to come together in order to fetch kava shrubs. They then go forth and dig kava roots, especially the *rametel*,[23] which they carry off and throw on a heap. The head priest rises, takes his shell knife, cuts the kava branches off, and says his conjuration four times. He severs the roots so that all the kava leaves are now stripped off. He then hands everything to the servants, who now have to clean the kava. When the cleaning of the kava is finished, one of the men takes a conch shell and goes to fetch water in it. Now the people bring in the kava. The high priest takes a beaker; a man pours water in it and carries it off. The high priest [*Soumwen Leng*] then appoints a man to stand on the stone on which the kava has

> been placed. As this man climbs on top of the stone with the beaker, the high priest prepares to recite the conjuration. The high priest then begins the conjuration, which has four verses. When each is finished, the man pours some water out of the beaker. Since there are four verses, he will pour water out four times. When this is finished, the people who cleaned the kava gather it together and turn it over four times before they begin pounding it. First they beat the stone four times in rhythm; then they begin to pound. When they have pounded just a little kava, the high priest holds a beaker ready and waits for the pauses in the beating on the stones. With three blows they end the beating, after which the high priest lifts the beaker and twice utters a kind of groan. He then turns the beaker over and pours it on what will become kava. In the same moment the final beating ends. Then the high priest again takes his seat and waits for the kava. Now the kava is squeezed out in a beaker and the first cup brought to the high priest. He accepts it and prays to *Tau Katau* and *Nan Zapue* [*Daukatau* and *Nahnsapwe*]. This happens four times. After this the other people also may enjoy the drink. When all are drunk with kava, the high priest commands one last beaker to be brought. He accepts the beaker, prays over it again, drinks a little of it and then empties it outside the house. At the time that this sacrifice is made, the weather clears up, the wind and rain cease, and the thunder is no longer heard. All the people are well again. They leave, but reassemble again on the next day to make the same sacrifice and to repeat this for four days. After one day's rest, the people again reassemble and perform the same ritual for another four days. This ends the ritual (1936a, 238–240).

Other rituals, too, are associated with *Soumwen Leng*. He gathered together his priests at an enclosure at Salapwuk to pray for a bountiful harvest (Hambruch 1936a, 135ff.). He led rituals to attract fish to the nearby fishing grounds (Mauricio 1993, 246). He was also called upon to prophesy future events and was sought as a diviner to help make decisions—functions that may be related to his role in determining the calendar by astronomical observations. He was expected to set the times for festivals and ritual days in the annual calendar because it was believed that "he knew the secret of the passage of time" (244). His role in this regard may have even extended well beyond his own territory, so that he was fixing the dates for worship and festivals across Pohnpei. In carrying out these duties, *Soumwen Leng* had a number of assistants who expanded his personal role and influence; some of these assistants held priestly titles. One, who was known as *Morohn,* went about the countryside saying prayers, blowing on a triton horn, and inviting the people to meetings; another was

responsible for food preparation at worship gatherings; and several others were tasked with the preparation of the *sakau* used for rituals (136).

According to Pohnpeian tradition, the god *Daukatau* is said to have also bestowed a high priestly title upon *Soukisen Leng,* head priest and secular lord of the other ritual center in Wene. Although believed to be originally of lower status than *Soumwen Leng,* the high priest of Wene eventually eclipsed his influence (Hambruch 1936a, 134). As political sands shifted, Wene became more prominent than Salapwuk, and both eventually yielded to the religious-political power base in Nan Madol. Over the course of time, Nan Madol disappeared from the scene, but the priests of Wene under *Soukisen Leng* moved from the ritual stage to become the secular paramount chief (Nahnmwarki) and high title holders of the semiautonomous territory of Kitti.

Meanwhile, the center at Salapwuk stayed on as an independent barony within Kitti until after World War II, although the Salapwuk priestly titles, including *Soumwen Leng,* lost their ritual functions sometime in the late nineteenth or early twentieth century. Even so, Salapwuk is remembered as the sacred site at which Pohnpeian priests and their people established the first formal religious ritual on the island. It may lack the impressive megalithic templelike edifices of Nan Madol, but Salapwuk stands as the original cultic center on Pohnpei.

The Ritual Center at Wene

All three of the major ritual centers—Salapwuk, Wene, and Nan Madol—are located in the southernmost part of Pohnpei. The traditional explanation for this is that only in the southern districts could be found the sacred stones and sacred places possessing *manaman* (supernatural power), and so priests developed there. The northern chiefdoms of Sokehs and Nett had no such sacred stones. Hence, those chiefdoms had no priests, only *sounwinahni*—sorcerers, conjurers, and magicians (Mauricio 1993, 126).[24] The sacred stones in Wene, as in Salapwuk, are both natural and man-made—but both types were and still are markers in the legends of Pohnpei. At Wene, for example, there was a stone with five grooves called *Lahngapap*.[25] This stone marked *Soukisen Leng*'s prediction that Pohnpei would eventually be divided into separate and autonomous chiefdoms, thus replacing the centralizing policy and ritual of Nan Madol and the Saudeleur dynasty. Another sacred stone was the *Wenehros,* where the high priest *Soukisen Leng* performed rituals to ensure the prosperity of crops (293–294). In another section of Wene is the *dolen eni* [literally the "hill of the spirit"] where the tombs of the *Soukisen Leng* and his twelve priests are said to be located (301). The tombs are next to a freshwater

spring, *Pweliko,* which tradition identified as a deep hole between the underworld and the third heaven, the place where the spirits of the dead had to pass on the twisting bridge (Bernart 1977, 93).

The high priest of Wene, *Soukisen Leng,* although he originally received his title at the hands of the high priest of Salapwuk, eventually was perceived as outranking him.[26] Indeed, *Soukisen Leng,* who came to prominence after the Saudeleurs, "was the greatest priest of all Ponape," according to Luelen Bernart (1977, 146). It was *Soukisen Leng* who made Isohkelekel, the victor over the Saudeleurs, the first paramount chief (Nahnmwarki) of the new polity of Madolenihmw. It was *Soukisen Leng,* whose role changed from that of a semi-autonomous priest and chief to political leader, who became the first Nahnmwarki of Kitti. The high priests in both Salapwuk and Wene may have served as priestly leaders of their districts, but *Soukisen Leng* was much more involved than his counterpart from Salapwuk in the politics and political change on Pohnpei.

Soukisen Leng was assisted by twelve other priests and helped by eight titled specialists (Mauricio 1993, 139). By all accounts, they conducted a variety of rituals, most of which were concerned with the prosperity of land and sea. The rituals often involved offerings of kava to the thunder god, *Nahnsapwe.* Although there were many priests in other parts of the island, what made *Soukisen* distinctive was the fact that he and his priests worshipped the high gods, the *enihwos,* not the lesser gods or spirits (Bernart 1977, 147). Two rituals in particular are remembered in detail.

The first ritual, *kampa,* was a seven-day annual cycle of agricultural or crop ritual, but the meaning of the word *kampa* is unknown and the significance of the entire ritual is not entirely clear (Bernart 1977, 147; Mauricio 1993, 129). Bernart called it a time when all work, singing, or any noise was prohibited, but he left no record of the ritual activities, other than the comment that the ritual had to do with some kind of calendar—"the counting of the years" (Bernart 1977, 147). Perhaps, as Mauricio suggests, it consisted of some type of stargazing or prediction of eclipses (1993, 129).

More is known about the second ritual, the rite of promotion to the status of *Soukisen Leng.* When the reigning titleholder died, the death was kept secret until the twelve priests and section chiefs gathered to select a replacement.[27] The new *Soukisen Leng* was called to a place called *Pahler,* the same holy place where the *kampa* ritual was held. There the appointee went through a purification rite before he was anointed and declared the *Soukisen Leng.* After this the new high priest would proceed to another nearby sacred site where he would take the first cup of *sakau,* step up on a sacred stone, offer the cup to *Nahnsapwe,* and then proclaim publicly that he was the new *Soukisen Leng:* "*Nahnsapwe,* I have become *Soukisen Leng.*"[28]

Details regarding the many other rites of the Wene priests are sketchy. Under *Soukisen Leng,* rites were conducted at various sites, each to ensure bountiful crops and fish and to guarantee the successful preservation of the banana and breadfruit stored in pits (Mauricio 1993, 139). The chief priest of Wene, like his opposite number in Salapwuk, frequently left his cult center and traveled about to perform ritual.[29]

The power of priests at the Salapwuk and Wene centers seems to have been derived from their control of the forces of nature and the harvest, their ability to prophesy, and their role as mediators between the gods and humans. As far as is known, this was done by ritual and custom rather than through coercion (Mauricio 1993, 142).

One might ask why these ancient priesthoods, whose autonomy survived the centralizing policies of the Saudeleurs at Nan Madol and whose legendary activities were integral to the history of Pohnpei, died out before the Christian missions took hold on Pohnpei. There seems to be no adequate answer, but clues as to why the priesthoods disappeared seem to lie in the new political system that emerged after the defeat of the Saudeleurs at the hands of Isohkelekel and his warriors. Both *Soumwen Leng* of Salapwuk and *Soukisen Leng* of Wene were already both political leaders as well as priests. Yet the new system, with dual chiefly lines of Nahnmwarki and Nahnken and the ceremonial meeting centers (*nahs*), was also a fusion of the sacred and the secular. In effect, then, the old system of autonomous cultic centers may not have seemed too much different from the new system of decentralized and highly ceremonial chiefdoms under the Nahnmwarkis.[30] The conferral on *Soukisen Leng* of the new title of Nahnmwarki of Kitti, according to oral tradition, is in itself no radical change; it may simply have been recognition of the expansion of *Soukisen*'s territory from the small polity of Wene to the newly enlarged chiefdom of Kitti.

The transition from priest-chief of Wene to the Nahnmwarki of Kitti was not difficult for *Soukisen Leng* inasmuch as he was already both a secular and sacred leader. Moreover, he appears to have played a crucial role in laying out the new course for leadership on Pohnpei after the fall of the Saudeleurs: according to some traditions, he was the one who, along with the leader from Ant Island, conferred the new title of Nahnmwarki on Isohkelekel. Legend has it that after the fall of the Saudeleurs, *Soukisen Leng* and the leader of Ahnd Atoll got into a canoe that had come down from heaven and discussed with the god *Luhk* "what would be done in Ponape at this time" (Bernart 1977, 80–81). Later, *Soukisen* rallied troops to defeat opponents at Sapwataki and thereby united all the small territories in what is today the chiefdom or *wehi* of Kitti (Bernart 1977,

101–102). Afterwards, the title of Nahnmwarki was conferred on him in recognition of his victory.

As political status and titles overshadowed the cultic or ritual status, the result was either secularization or absorption of the sacred by the secular. Secularization does not mean that Pohnpeians became any less religious; it simply means that the sacred came to have a less independent status in the chiefdoms.

The Ritual Center at Nan Madol

The history of Nan Madol as recorded by Luelen Bernart is the story of a good thing gone awry. The legendary founders of the megalithic structures at Nan Madol and of a new kind of worship were the young brothers, Ohlsihpa and Ohlsohpa, who landed at Sokehs on the northern coast of Pohnpei. Supposedly related to a sacred people who settled there earlier from some unknown place in the west, the two brothers are described as "wise and daring." They tried to erect a suitable place for their "ceremony"[31] at Sokehs and then at two other locations before finding the suitable place at what is now called Nan Madol in Madolenihmw. According to Luelen Bernart, the people were happy to work on the great walls and platforms of Nan Madol, while he mentions, almost as an aside, that the people were later put to work building places for fighting and refuge as well as meeting chambers for the nobles (1977, 28).

Not all traditions accord the brothers equal importance in the rise of Nan Madol—one tradition does not even give their names—and other accounts stress the primacy of the political changes over the religious quest. Bernart wrote that Ohlsihpa and Ohlsohpa had "the ambition to do something special for their state and, if possible, to procure hegemony for Ponape which was then not yet united under one king. They erect a structure from basalt stones, consecrate it and institute a festival of worship, Pun en tsap [*Pwongen Sahpw*], the one to honor the gods, demons and spirits of the ancestors" (Bernart in Hambruch 1936b, 74–75). Regardless of the tradition cited, however, the foundations of Nan Madol were involved with religion, the *Pwongen Sahpw,*[32] which concluded with the sacrifice of a turtle to the sacred eel. This ritual, attributed originally to the two brothers and the best remembered of all the rituals at Nan Madol, outlived the political dynasty of the Saudeleurs.[33] According to Luelen's account, the founding of the dynasty was universally supported by the people of Pohnpei. After Ohlsihpa died, Ohlsohpa became ruler, the first Saudeleur. Bernart writes, "Everyone obeyed him, for they were used to his voice from the time when they cooperated in the work of the town" (1977, 33).

The Rituals and Priesthood at Nan Madol

There is a certain irony in the fate of Nan Madol. The more than ninety artificial and man-made islets of the complex represent religion and politics on a grand scale. These basalt structures are so imposingly large that the other ritual centers of Salapwuk and Wene cannot be compared to them. One basalt enclosure, the residence of the Saudeleur ruler in Nan Madol, is almost the size of three American football fields (Morgan 1988, 75). Most of the fifty-eight islets in the "upper town" section of Nan Madol were houses for the priests, elaborate mortuary structures, and places for sacrifice and worship. Neither of the two ancient and influential religious centers, Salapwuk and Wene, had anything resembling the grandiose architecture of Nan Madol. Nonetheless, in the end, the four or five hundred years of the Saudeleur reign seem to have left little mark on the customs of the people.[34] *Soumwen Leng* of Salapwuk was credited with initiating the title system, a system that still dominates much of Pohnpeian culture. *Soukisen Leng* of Wene led the shift of the priesthoods into the more secular status of the paramount chiefs, a dual noble line headed by the Nahnmwarki and Nahnken that endures up to the present. Overall, the modern title system with its *sakau* rituals and its symbolic presentation of the first fruits to the Nahnmwarki is much closer to the rituals at Salapwuk or Wene than to the sacrifice of the turtle at Nan Madol.

Not much is known specifically about the priests at Nan Madol.[35] The priestly offices at Nan Madol were the same as in neighboring Wene, although the titles differed (Hambruch 1936a, 134). These offices generally had to do with specific functions during rituals, such as pounding the ceremonial *sakau,* blowing the conch shell horn, beating the drum, chanting, and saying prayers. Priests fell into one of two ranks: The high titles were called *samworo* and the lower ranks were called *laiap* (Bernart 1977; Mauricio 1993, 370). If the priests at Nan Madol were like the priests at other centers, they fulfilled a wide variety of functions while serving as the mediators between the gods and humans (Hambruch 1936a, 135).

The ritual most closely identified with religion at Nan Madol, as has been noted, was the sacrifice of a turtle to the sacred eel. This was possibly the "ceremony" that the brothers Ohlsihpa and Ohlsohpa brought from Sokehs around the north of Pohnpei and down to Nan Madol. The sacrifice of living creatures was new, perhaps the concluding part of the older worship focused on the land, the worship that arose at Salapwuk and Wene. Myth and legend tell that the original sacrifice to the sacred moray eel (termed *Mwohnsamwohl* or *Nahn Samwohl*) was not a turtle but a dog. Two boys, according to the myth, were so hungry for the meat

of the dogs sacrificed at Nan Madol that they traded their mother, a turtle, for the dog.

The symbolism of the sacrificed turtle is complicated; not all oral histories agree on its meaning. According to one interpretation (Hanlon 1988), at the sacrifice, the turtle (*wehi*) was divided into three portions, which symbolized the three original chiefdoms (also known as *wehi*), or the "turtle chiefdoms."[36] Symbolically, the individual turtle chiefdoms gave up their autonomy to the sacred eel, symbol of the centralizing Saudeleur dynasty.

The second interpretation of the turtle-eel sacrifice focuses on the construction at Nan Madol, in particular the islet of Pahn Kedira, the residence of the Saudeleur (Mauricio 1993, 153ff.). Each corner of the walled enclosure was named after one of the three *wehi* or chiefdoms, and a fourth corner was called *Keimwin Katau,* which symbolized the contribution of non-Pohnpeian Micronesians on the island. According to the second interpretation, because the turtle can live both on land and in the sea, the sacrificed turtle is a symbol of the merging of the older worship of the land (*Pwongen Sahpw*), as led by the Salapwuk and Wene priests, with the newer worship of the sea, as led by the Saudeleurs (Mauricio 1993, 151ff.). In other words, the older worship focused on land and crop and offerings (inanimate things), even as the later worship focused on the sea and sacrifice of animate beings; these two ritual forms are blended together in the turtle-eel sacrifice at Nan Madol.[37]

Whatever the interpretation of the symbolism of the sacrifice, the rite was powerful enough to remain in force for perhaps two centuries after the fall of the Saudeleurs. It was performed as late as the reign of Luhken Kesik, the paramount chief or Nahnmwarki of Madolenihmw, who died in 1836 (Mauricio 1993, 157). This Nahnmwarki stopped the rituals at Nan Madol because of a squabble between the presiding priests, although the ritual sacrifice may have been performed later at other locations. What follows is Hambruch's record of the last performance at Nan Madol:

> Before the ceremony, turtles were caught and stored in a pool known as Pahseid close to Usendau Islet. On the day of the Nahnisohnsapw[38] ceremonies, a number of priests would transport, on canoe, one of the turtles from Pahseid to the shore of Temwen Island known as Sekerena. Here the turtle was bathed, anointed, and decorated with cords made from coconut fiber. After the purification rituals, the turtle was positioned upright on the canoe between the priests, Oaron Maka and Soupwan [priestly titles], who sat on the right and the left sides of the turtle and braced it. The priest, Dauk Madolenihmw,[39] stood in front of the turtle and stared at its eyes. Every time the turtle blinked, Dauk would do the

same. The other three priests on the canoe were Nahlaimw, Nahnapas, and Nahnkei. . . .

From Sekerena the priests took the turtle to another shore at Temwen Island called Nanwei (the present chiefly residence of the Nahnmwarki of Madolenihmw) where the turtle was lifted from the canoe and dropped four times on a large stone (possibly a flat stone slab used for ritual purposes). From here the turtle was transported to Idehd Islet where the final sacrificial and redistribution ceremonies were held. The turtle was killed on Idehd. The killing of the turtle was the responsibility of the priest, Nahnkei. The gutting of the turtle was the responsibility of the priest, Nahnsoahm. After the gutting, Wasai would take the stomach of the turtle and offer it to Mwohnsamwohl [the moray eel, also known as Nahn Samwohl]. If the moray eel's head was sticking up above the water in its tunnel at Idehd, Wasai would pacify it with a magic chant before offering it the turtle's stomach.

The turtle was baked at Idehd in the presence of the Nahnmwarki of Madolenihmw. The priests, Nahnapas, Nahlaimw, and Soupwan were responsible for the redistribution ceremonies of the cooked turtle. Only the Nahnmwarki and the priests were allowed to have their shares of the turtle. No commoners and women were permitted to participate in the turtle ceremonies. During one of the Nahnisohnsapw ceremonies, perhaps between 1800 and 1836, one of the participating priests with the title of Nahukei did not receive his fair share of the cooked turtle. He became distraught and intentionally killed many moray eels, consumed them, hence, desecrating the sacredness of Mwohsamwohl. His act prompted the Nahnmwarki of Madolenihmw, Luhken Kesik, and his nobles to end the Nahnusuhnsapw ceremonies on the island. (Mauricio 1993, 157–158).

The Fall of the Saudeleurs

Even though the turtle-eel sacrifice and the priests of Nan Madol were originally in the service of the Saudeleur, the ritual sacrifice and its priestly performers outlived the demise of the Saudeleurs. The picture that tradition paints of Nan Madol and its rulers toward the end of the Saudeleur reign is far from bright: "Some of them were good, some bad, some oppressive and cruel and bad" (Bernart 1977, 73).[40] The sins of the rulers were against the gods as well as humans, as the oral tradition makes clear: "The Lord of Teleur [Saudeleur] was doomed by the great gods. All his titled men in Pohnpei no longer felt sympathy for him because of his cruelty and oppression of them all the time. . . . He did not respect any of the high gods. This is why the gods took away his honour and he became doomed by all of them" (Bernart 1977, 71).

The mythological rationale for the fall of the Saudeleurs is indicated in the two terms "high gods" and "dooming." In the Pohnpeian pantheon, the high gods are the *enihwos,* deities who always were. Thus, the highest levels of the divine hierarchy condemned the Saudeleurs, especially since one of the Saudeleurs imprisoned a high god, the thunder god *Nahnsapwe,* a god who predated the Saudeleurs and who was worshipped at the old ritual centers of Salapwuk and Wene. The one who proclaimed the supernatural dooming was none other than the high priest of Salapwuk, *Soumwen Leng*. It is clear from the traditional accounts that the dynasty was understood to be supernaturally condemned. Even today, dooming [*riahla*] is believed to occur in the form of sickness or death as a punishment for offense against the spirits or gods (Ward 1977, 93ff.). It is not an illness nor identified by symptoms; it is a supernatural cause of punishment. As Ward puts it, "There are no medicines for doom. The remedy lies beyond the competence of herbal or magical specialists" (95–96).

Tradition about Isohkelekel varies, but there is agreement that the story begins when a Saudeleur had the brazen audacity to imprison the god *Nahnsapwe* for having an affair with the Saudeleur's wife. *Nahnsapwe* was freed and had another affair with a human, in the mythical place named *Katau*. The outcome of that second union was Isohkelekel, who came back from *Katau* to seek vengeance on the Saudeleurs. According to tradition, Isohkelekel and an army of 333 men defeated the Saudeleur, who changed himself into a little fish and disappeared from the scene. Isohkelekel then became the new ruler, not of all Pohnpei, as the Saudeleurs claimed for themselves, but only of the *wehi,* or chiefdom, of Madolenihmw. The title Nahnmwarki was bestowed on him by the priest-chief of Wene, *Soukisen Leng,* after deliberations with the ranking ruler of Ahnd Atoll and the god *Luhk*. Of special significance here is the major change that took place because of Isohkelekel: The attempt to centralize the separate polities of Pohnpei under the Saudeleurs was abandoned. The new structure was to be decentralized and chiefdoms run by dual lines of nobility. Isohkelekel was reputed to have had a significant impact on political forms on Pohnpei with the help of the gods, but the most significant changes in religion are not attributed to him. It is *Soukisen Leng* of Wene who is credited with this.

After the wars against Sapwataki (c. AD 1700), *Soukisen* became the first Nahnmwarki of a united and greatly expanded chiefdom of Kitti. With the successor of Isohkelekel as Nahnmwarki of Madolenihmw and *Soukisen* of Wene as Nahnmwarki of Kitti, the ritual centers gradually ceased to function and the priestly titles were absorbed into the two royal lines.[41] Undoubtedly the change from ritual centers and priests to ceremonial centers (*nahs*) and paramount chiefs was a process, not an event. The

crowning blow to the old cultic priests came with the smallpox epidemic of 1854, when many of the remaining priests, according to the missionary-physician Luther Gulick, died as a result of their refusal to accept inoculation from the Christian missionary. With the demise of the ritual centers and their priests, the remains of the old religion of Pohnpei vanished as an institution separate from the secular powers. The sacred stones and sites at Salapwuk and Wene are still held in reverence, but the megalithic remains at Nan Madol are simply ruins. These ruins, which indeed comprise one of the largest man-made structures in the Pacific, attract tourists who are charged a fee to visit. Yet Nan Madol still carries a message, social if not religious, for Pohnpeians: It is a reminder of the evil of greed and a warning against the oppression that accompanies political centralization (Petersen 1990). The stones and sites at Salapwuk and Wene, on the other hand, remain markers in the myths and legends of early Pohnpei and of changes that are even today embodied as part of Pohnpeian life.

Divining and Healing

Divining

Divining and healing are among the oldest religious rites mentioned in Pohnpeian oral histories; they are also documented in the earliest records made by outside observers.[42] The experts in divining and healing could be either priests or nonpriestly specialists. The priests of the great cultic centers were famed for their predictions: The high priest of Salapwuk announced the dooming of the Saudeleur rulers at Nan Madol, and his counterpart in Wene, *Soukisen Leng,* predicted the rise of the autonomous states following the demise of the Saudeleurs (Hambruch 1936b, 4 and 1936a, 315–319). The high priests at both Salapwuk and at Wene knew the secrets of the seasons, predicted heavenly events including eclipses, and set the agricultural calendars. During the reign of the Saudeleurs, one famed high priest at Nan Madol by the name of Lapona, who was ceremonially seated just to the left of the Saudeleur, served as the court oracle; he may well have been possessed by a spirit when he made his predictions (1936b, 204–214).

Some priests—perhaps just the lower ranks, the *laiap*—put themselves into a state of trance and, as the "vehicle of the spirit," answered questions and made prophecies. Some lay people also produced prophecies while they were believed to be possessed by the gods, even though they showed none of the signs of a trance (Hambruch 1936a, 131). The spells and prayers of the priests or the possessed diviners, writes Hambruch, "occur at all imaginable occasions, e.g. weddings, illnesses, and are directed at the ancestor spirits" (138).[43]

Besides great and momentous events, some important regular events called for divining, although it is unclear whether this was done by priests or lay persons. Pohnpeians once believed that every person had a personal guardian spirit (*eni silepe*), who would protect the individual against sorcery by a counter magic.[44] Divining of some sort was needed to determine which ancestor spirit (*eni aramas*) and/or clan or high god (*enihwos*) was at work in such cases (Hambruch 1936a, 115).

Divining was just as important in the nearby atolls of Sapwuahfik (Ngatik), Mwoakilloa (Mokil) and Pingelap as it was on Pohnpei itself, according to the German ethnographer Anneliese Eilers, although she found far less detail in the outer islands. On Mwoakilloa, she found that people still remembered a spirit house where the priest was asked questions regarding the future, but she made no mention of possession or trance with respect to this house (1934, 380). Jane Hurd, who collected oral histories from Pingelap, traced the history of possession of one legendary spirit, *Isohpahu,* who was believed to have been the fourth paramount chief of Pingelap (1977, 41–42). According to Hurd's account, this spirit had a long history of possessing prominent Pingelap leaders, including the highest island chiefs (43, 98). Hurd recorded the stories of *Isohpahu* seeking out new mediums but included nothing on the mediums themselves, their ritual, or behavior.

Divining, as noted, was not the exclusive property of the priests. In 1856, missionaries Edward Doane and Albert Sturges witnessed a divining séance led by the chief's wife, a medium or diviner (*tehnwar*).[45] She was possessed by the ancient god *Isopahu,* who was announced as having arrived from *Pahnsed,* the land under the sea. The medium's performance failed to impress the invited missionaries:

> [The medium's] talk was all in loud whispers. We at once saw it was a woman dressed in a man's clothes, but as we wished to lead her out we asked many questions about the land of her residence, &c., and she did the same to us. . . . We continued our interview for some half hour or more . . . then threw the mats aside that screened her from the crowd, hoping they would see for themselves, but they closed their eyes and scampered out of the house! During the evening we came again to the house and found a large crowd there, some of whom were possessed by the spirit, and were crying, singing, praying and throwing themselves into all sorts of contortions and shapes most frightful (ABCFM, Sturges, 10 May 1856).

The episode described by Sturges is a significant but rarely recorded case of possession and trance. The chief's wife was believed to be possessed, even speaking in an altered masculine voice; but when the missionaries

tore down the barrier of mats and revealed the woman, she was not in an agitated or ecstatic state—what might be called an altered state of consciousness. What the missionaries saw, then, was a classic case of possession performance before a group of believers, but a "possession" that was not accompanied by trance or an altered state of consciousness. When the missionaries returned later, however, they found that the Pohnpeian devotees, along with the woman herself, were in what appeared to be a genuine trance (altered state of consciousness). These events are significant because they demonstrate that the belief in possession is not always conditioned by the trance state.

The oral histories by Bernart (1977) and by Silten (1951) also provide records of divining through spirit possession and trance.[46] Bernart wrote: "When the spirits would possess them the bodies of the mediums would change greatly. He no longer had the appearance of people nor the voice of people. His eyeballs would be like the eyes of a wild beast and his voice would be different" (1977, 93). The Silten manuscript has but a fleeting reference to the spirit mediums taking part in revolt against the Saudeleurs, who were toppled sometime in the 1600s (1951, 20). By the early 1970s, Roger Ward would conclude that nowadays "little is heard" of diviners and mediums (1977, 19). Even just after World War II, Riesenberg could report that he knew of only one individual who continued to divine for the presence of sorcery (1948, 411).

Although the Pohnpeian traditions do not list the broad spectrum of physical objects used in divining, as Kubary did for Palau, there are scattered references in the literature to some other types of divining. Besides spirit possession, divining was done by dreams (Ward 1977) and through observations of the movement of the stars and clouds (Bernart 1977, 148–149). Pohnpeians also once used "crying into a drinking coconut" to diagnose disease (Riesenberg 1948, 411), in addition to divination through counting knots tied in strips of coconut fronds or observing the patterns of shells cast on the ground.[47]

Little is reported about the divining by spirit mediums after World War II. In 1947, anthropologist Saul Riesenberg found only a single man on Pohnpei who knew how to divine with a kava cup while possessed (1968, 109). Although Riesenberg recorded various other cases of mediums undergoing trance-possession, some involved in curing rituals, these were but distant memories of past personages and rituals.[48] By the time anthropologist Roger Ward began his fieldwork on Pohnpei in the early 1970s, spirit possession had become a relatively common occurrence once again, but the possessions were mostly found in adolescents, women, and low-status adults (1977, 19, 229). In sum, then, some divining continued

but was carried on apart from individuals who enjoyed the formal status of recognized mediums or oracles. Pohnpei is unique in Micronesia because the island had cases of possession alone (without accompanying trance), trance alone (without accompanying possession belief), and cases of possession together with trance.

Healing and Medicine

At first glance, the traditional Pohnpeian concepts of illness and medicine appear much like the old medical "system" of Chuuk Lagoon (Mahony 1970): that is, belief in illness as spirit caused, an elaborate list of physical symptoms indicating the possible spirit cause, diagnosis by means of divining, a cure or "medicine" composed of both words and physical ingredients, and use of counterspells or magic to check whoever unleashed the spirit cause of the illness. Also, both Chuuk and Pohnpei made accommodations in their healing systems to incorporate Christian belief and Western or "hospital" medicine. Beneath the surface of general ideas about illness and healing, however, lie significant differences.[49]

Pohnpei, unlike Chuuk, recorded oral traditions tracing healing back to the old priesthoods, probably a thousand years ago. In the first record of Pohnpeian healing, made in the 1830s, the castaway James O'Connell observed that the priests were important medical curers (1972, 153–155), although other sources indicate that some women also served as healers (Hambruch 1936a, 173). The priests would put their hands on the sick to find out what spirit or demon caused the sickness.[50] The range of sicknesses tended by the priests and lay experts ranged from leprosy to headaches, from broken bones and war wounds to insanity (166–181). In the case of insanity, the priests would perform an "exorcism" to get the soul back into the body; in other cases, the priests or lay experts conducted a procedure to exorcise a spirit so that it leaves the possessed and no longer spreads sickness and fear (179, 138). Hambruch recorded one of the spells or prayers used in exorcism: "We fear you, but yield. Yes, we want to drive you away, you evil spirit that dwells in this man. Sea Spirit, go into the sea. Land Spirit, go into the earth. . . . Just yield. . . . Go away. . . . Yield. I ask the oracle here about the sick man. At the source of the river, on the mountain, where evil spirits live, you who torment this man here, depart now!" (139)

Despite the fact that the healing by the priests and lay experts covered the gamut of Pohnpeian sickness and disease, Pohnpeians were unable to control the great smallpox epidemic of 1854 by traditional means.[51] By 1854, the institution of priesthood had already been weakened, but the failure of the priests to compete and control the epidemic surely hastened their demise. Hanlon writes,

> Of all the cross-cultural events between Pohnpeians and American Protestant missionaries in these first years of contract, none held more significance than the smallpox epidemic of 1854. During the six months that the disease raged over the island, Pohnpeians and missionaries confronted each other, prayed to their different gods, feared for their lives, despaired at times, and, in the end, tried to give meaning to the tragedy around them. In this high drama, both spoke clearly of who they were and how they viewed the world (1988, 109).

Pohnpeians had invoked their gods by offering feasts, but this did not help.[52] When the missionary-physician, Luther Gulick, successfully inoculated two highly ranked chiefs, Pohnpeians saw the power (*manaman*) of the Christian God. The old priests refused the vaccination at first, and their last-minute pleas for help were refused by the missionaries, the "keepers of different gods" (Hanlon 1988, 111). Although the success of the new God hastened the demise of the priests and their healing, the role of the lay healers persisted. Why this was so may be that the lay healers better accommodated themselves to the new religion. The evidence for this, however, comes from long after 1854. The oral histories recorded the continued healing without pejorative comment, and Riesenberg and Ward documented the post–World War II accommodation to Christianity, a topic covered later in this chapter.

Healing Belief and Practices in the Twentieth Century

By the end of World War II, most Pohnpeians were affiliated with either the Protestant or Catholic Church, so that when Riesenberg (1948) and Ward (1977) published their findings on local medicine, they saw only fragments of the old healing system that Gulick confronted in 1854. The postwar anthropologists encountered beliefs and practices that were no longer in competition with Western beliefs. On the one hand, Western medicine and Christianity had won the fight with the old priests; on the other hand, the Pohnpeians had integrated the new and the old. Ward comments that the end product was not so much a synthesis of the old and new but accommodation of the old to a new worldview (1977, 257ff., 279–280). The best evidence of this accommodation comes from the twenty-five-year period following World War II, the time frame covered by the work of Riesenberg and Ward. From this time period, one can look back to the nineteenth century and see how Pohnpeian traditional medicine has accommodated Western influence—but on its own terms, with beliefs and practices that fit into the traditional belief system regarding (1) the causes of sickness, (2) the healers, and (3) the ultimate sources of healing and medicine.

Regarding the causes of sickness, Pohnpeians classified sickness into two broad categories: "sickness of the body" and "bad sickness." "Sickness of the body" came from natural or nonsupernatural causes.[53] "Bad sickness," or "Pohnpeian sickness," was caused by spirits or by sorcery and could be treated only by local Pohnpeian medicine. In a small category by itself were those sicknesses caused by separation of the soul and the body—what earlier reports called "soul-loss," which called for exorcisms and priestly ritual to return the soul to its body. These categories reflect a different understanding of causality than Frank Mahony (1969) found in the Chuuk Lagoon. All Chuuk illness, according to Mahony, was linked to the spirit powers; but on Pohnpei, the nonsupernatural or "sickness of the body" category—such as burns, skin ulcers, skin rash, or backaches—accounted for three-fourths of the identifiable illnesses. Ward attributed this, in part at least, to acculturation. Why Pohnpei should have so acculturated in the core belief about illness compared to Chuuk is not immediately apparent.

Of the spirit-caused sicknesses, the mangrove spirit was the most prominent and the most feared on Pohnpei (Ward 1977, 82ff.). The mangrove spirit or demon was actually one of the high gods (*enihwos*): *Nahnsahwindsed,* Lord of the Seas, and one of the few sickness-causing spirits still recognized by name. *Nahnsahwindsed* was known as the source of a spirit sickness when Hambruch recorded this about the "Lord of the Sea":

> Once in old times there lived a spirit in Ponape called *Nan sau en set*. This spirit always stole women whom he liked; he killed them, because in former times people and spirits always wanted to marry other women. He administered them something that made them ill and of which they died, so that he could easily fetch others when they were dead. This demon always lived in the mangrove bushes. He was named *Nan sau en set*. Now, when he had made a woman ill, some people who understood spells went to the woman and drove out the spirit, so that she was freed from him and got well again. Nowadays there are no longer many people who know the medicine; they are no longer numerous, and they are becoming fewer and fewer, for the people of the kind who understand the medicine are different; and their medicine is more valuable and more difficult to make. One person used to drive out the spirit, but the spirit was very gifted with magic, and thus they said that he was a spirit who had developed out of himself, who had not been born, because he was so gifted with magic. So this spirit killed many women in former times. Today this spirit no longer appears, nor does he kill many people any more (1936a, 88).

Hambruch also described the medicine used in treating this illness:

> They give her a medicine (from breadfruit and ginger-roots) and say in addition: Just go away from here. Just go away from there, *Nan Sau en set!* Just go away *Nan Sau en set*. Go away into the water, sleep in the water. Or go to the dry land, sleep on the land! Just go away, *Li on en Meilen* [the sister of *Nahnsau*]. Go away into the water, sleep in the water. Or go to the dry land, sleep on the land. Vanish, *Nan Sau en set*. Vanish, *Li on en Meilen*. Remain under the island of Ant. Travel in the daytime; travel at night, Spirit. Get away with you, go to your place, Spirit. Get away with you, desist from the woman (1936a, 79).

Hambruch's story concludes with the comment that the "medicine" to cure mangrove sickness was difficult to find and becoming rare, although in the 1970s Ward would find a curer who specialized in mangrove sickness medicine and estimated that he and his father had given the medicine to four hundred patients over twenty years (Ward 1977, 84). All the symptoms of mangrove sickness were described to Ward as associated with hostile or unfriendly behavior. A woman might no longer want to have sex with her husband because she was actually having intercourse with *Nahnsau,* as indicated by "love scratches" on her body (83). A woman might become pregnant by an affair with *Nahnsau,* resulting in a miscarriage. Yet another type of mangrove sickness showed as its symptom the rise and fall of the patient's fever, synchronized with the tides in and out of the mangrove forests. The medicines for mangrove sickness could be a potion to drink, a medication to bathe in, or a steam bath treatment.[54]

The mangrove sickness, probably the most infamous of the spirit-caused illnesses, was attributed to *Nahnsahwinsed,* but many other spirits caused illnesses as well. Thus even the "wee people" (*sokole*), who lived in holes in the earth, might cause pains in the joints and other sicknesses. Illnesses were also attributed to land spirits as well as clan and lineage spirits (Ward 1977, 88ff.).

Sickness attributed to family spirits is especially interesting because it illustrates how spirit sickness can be tied to kinship. These spirits were important, writes Ward, but none more so than the spirit of the firstborn female of the matrilineage (1977, 90). If these spirits (*eni*) were not given the attention they craved from the living, they might punish the living with sickness, especially spirit possession (*kati-eni*). The family spirit might take possession of a young lineage-member's body, as evidenced by cries of pain from the victim and a trancelike state. When the medicine was administered, the possessed victim might speak in the voice of the spirit and tell

the gathered kin of her grievances. But Pohnpeians showed an ambivalence regarding possession and trance similar to that demonstrated by their Chuukese neighbors. The traditional Pohnpeian mediums (*soun kati-ani*), like the one observed by missionaries Sturges and Doane in the 1850s, were believed to be possessed, but this was not regarded as a sickness and was deemed acceptable "since it was entered into deliberately and served a valid social function" (92). By the 1970s such possessed mediums had all but disappeared; even possession as a sickness was rare, being found mostly among people who migrated from the Chuukic-speaking Mortlock Islands.

Sorcery (*kau*) was not only the cause of sickness, it was a "definite disease" in its own right, with symptoms such as headache, limb pains, fever, and weight loss. Pohnpeian *kau* has been variously described as black magic, harmful magic, and, of course, sorcery. A typical instance of the use of *kau* might stem from competition or jealousy between clans, lineages, or individuals. "One party will send *kaw* [*kau*] to the other and the latter will sicken and die unless the counter-agent and method of returning the *kaw* are known" (Riesenberg 1948, 410). The cure for the victim of *kau* was Pohnpeian medicine: a combination of *wini* (physical ingredients prepared and applied to the victim) and *winahni* (the formulae, spells, or prayers). A simple example of *kau* was the one called *siepil,* where the sorcerer or the perpetrator stood upstream from the victim's bathing spot and stirred into the water a mixture of pounded leaves while reciting a spell, thus bringing blindness to the bather (Ward 1977, 100). Another example of *kau* used the ashes of a rat-damaged coconut, crushed shrimp, and pounded wild yam tubers, all wrapped in a packet and thrown onto the victim's land, thus destroying all the crops and sickening the landowner. The trouble with using *kau* was that it sometimes backfired, since countermagic or *kau* was used effectively against the perpetrator. Ward concludes that sickness was more apt to be blamed on the spirits than sorcery, which he suggests is a Micronesian pattern (contrary to the overwhelming importance of sorcery in Melanesia) (104).

It is almost impossible to determine if sorcery and fear of it have declined since the nineteenth century. Inasmuch as Christian belief has depopulated the old cosmos filled with spirits—*Nahnsahwinsed,* for example, seems to now be one of the few sickness-causing spirits remembered by name—the role of spirit-caused illness must logically have declined or been reinterpreted to accommodate Christian belief. Thus, *Nahnsahwinsed* becomes the Christian devil; the Christian God intervenes in family affairs replacing the kin spirits, and it is God's power that gives the plants used in spirit medicine their efficacy and power (Ward 1977, 275ff.). If Ward is correct, then the rise in "body sicknesses" (nonsupernatural or natural sickness)

has been concomitant with a shrinking belief in spirit- or sorcery-caused illness in deference to Christian beliefs. In a questionnaire given to 1,218 Pohnpeians, 91 percent of the respondents expressed strong agreement that sick people should be treated by the hospital first. Ward interprets this to mean that medicine for natural or "body sickness" should be tried before the medicines for spirit and sorcery sickness (110–111). In other words, hospital medicine has neatly fitted into Pohnpeian belief of both natural and supernatural causes for illness.

Obviously, the shifting belief in the causes of sickness will be reflected in the status and roles of the healing specialists. The priests have disappeared from the scene, but what traditional healing remains is performed by the lay specialists who were working at the time the priests were still functioning. Two of the most important specialists then and now were the medicine makers (*sounwini*), who specialized in the concoction of the physical ingredients, and the experts in spoken formulae, spells, and prayers (*sounwinahni*). Added to these medicine experts were a variety of diviners who diagnosed the kind of sickness or the source of the sickness or sorcery, but especially the *soun-kati-eni,* the possessed medium, and the *soun-pwe,* who divined by interpreting knots made in the ribs of coconut leaves. The trend since World War II has been continued use of the *sounwini* as respected herbalists and as stewards of the power God gave to the plants. They have staked out a limited territory for themselves and for hospital medicine. As one healer said after the death of a victim of mangrove sickness, who had also been operated on in the hospital: "I told the family before I started that if the sickness is cancer, as the hospital says, my medicines won't work. I was right. My medicines proved that he did not have sorcery" (Ward 1977, 259).

The declining influence of the spell and prayer specialists (*sounwinahni*) can be seen from the Rehg dictionary (1979, 102), where *sounwinahni* is translated as "sorcerer." On the other hand, at least three Pohnpeians told me that the "new" *sounwinahni* are those who know the power of prayer and faith healing. I have no idea how widespread that reinterpretation is, but it does fit the Pohnpeian belief that curers are persons with power beyond the ordinary to combat sickness (Ward 1977, 252).

What remains something of a mystery to me is why divination—at least that performed by recognized experts in possession divination (*soun-kati-eni*) and leaf-knot divination (*soun-pwe*)—has virtually disappeared as a part of the diagnostic procedure of traditional medicine. As noted earlier, Ward writes that "Nowadays, "very little is heard of" the diviners and mediums (1977, 19). He argues that divination in medical diagnosis was never as important on Pohnpei as in the Chuuk-speaking islands; that

Pohnpei did not have the complicated divination identified in the Chuuk world; and that diviners there had a higher status than on Pohnpei (110). His argument is weak, because the status holders of religious and medical divination have largely disappeared on the Chuukic islands, being replaced by a more personal problem–oriented possession and trance pattern.

In any case, the sources of the medicine used by the medicine makers and the spell-prayer experts remain quite traditional, with notable exceptions. As in other Micronesian societies, knowledge of medicines comes from spirit ancestors who use dreams to communicate this to people. The ingredients and words of dreamed medicine become, in turn, inherited medicine during the following generations; but if the candidate has neither dreamed nor inherited medicines, he or she can buy the secret knowledge of the ingredient mixture or the right spells or prayers. What may be new to the picture of contemporary local medicine on Pohnpei—and perhaps in Micronesia overall—is the use of experimental medicines: If one medicine does not work, try another. This, too, may be an accommodation of traditional healing to a more empirical worldview.

In short, the belief structure behind Pohnpeian healing has changed significantly since the time of the old priests, but it has changed in ways that dovetail neatly with Pohnpeian beliefs, Western medicine, and Christian belief:

> The processes in terms of which change in Ponapean medicine is to be understood are accommodation, elaboration, incorporation, and resynthesis rather than modernization, as the term has often been used. Far from turning away from traditional medical belief, the Ponapean response has been to make use of hospital medicine and to accept Christianity while at the same time reaffirming and elaborating elements in the traditional system which will enable it to survive. The result is not an amalgam of traditional and introduced elements but an adaptation to the new which remains faithful to the old. Despite technological, social and religious change, medical belief and much of medical practice in modern Ponape is still predominantly Ponapean (Ward 1977, 280).

The pattern in Pohnpeian religion, as seen in the oral histories and ethnography, is one of a gradual rise and fall. Organized religion was in the forefront of Pohnpeian life during the days of the ritual centers at Salapwuk, Wene, and Nan Madol, but then it played less and less of an independent role in the political life of the autonomous chiefdoms. It is difficult not to judge this pattern of decline, as Mauricio does, as the secularization of Pohnpeian religion. To judge from the oral histories, it is more

likely that the priests, like *Soukisen Leng,* only reclaimed their dual status as priest and chief in the wake of the failed Saudeleur dynasty. How the secular polity of the dual royal lines overshadowed the priestly function will remain in the mists of an unknown past.

Like the ritual centers and priesthoods absorbed into the ranks and rituals of the meeting houses of the paramount chiefs, traditional healing has also been transformed. Traditional medicine no longer competes with the medicine of the Western missionaries: It has been reinterpreted as working parallel to the outside influences of hospital and church.

Chapter 5

The Religion of Kosrae

Early Accounts of the Religion

Sometimes anthropology depends on luck, as when the anthropologist happens to be on the scene at the right time with the right people. Such was the case with Ernst Sarfert when the German South Seas Expedition arrived on Kosrae in 1909.[1] All members of the expedition were on board the steamship *Peiho* in order to work on the island for the planned stay of little more than a week; expedition members thought the old culture was wiped out and little evidence of it remained. Contrary to expectations, Ernst Sarfert came upon some remarkable informants and needed more time on Kosrae. He had found three very knowledgeable informants, including the reigning king (*tokosra*), who had been raised in the court at Lelu when that village was still the political and religious center of Kosraean life. The old *tokosra* as a youth had served on a Hawaiian steamer, so he knew English; he had been called back to Kosrae when there was no acceptable replacement for the deceased *tokosra*. By the time of his return and reign (1890–1910), the religious and political center at Lelu had been abandoned and the gods, stories, and rituals of the old religion forgotten. Most of the Kosraeans in 1910 were Christians, having been converted by the Boston-based Protestant missionaries who arrived on island in 1852. In addition to the old *tokosra,* Sarfert found two other key informants who spoke English. Later he was to find a notebook with the handwritten descriptions of the old gods, written or copied, ironically enough, by a Christian teacher. Sarfert knew he had hit on incomparable resources, so he stayed behind in Kosrae for three months while the other expedition members returned to Hong Kong on the *Peiho* at the end of the their two-year ethnographic mission in Micronesia. What is known about the pre-Christian religion of Kosrae today is mostly owing to Sarfert's work. There had been earlier expeditions and forays by naturalists to the island, but they produced little on the religion, compared with the detail and depth of Sarfert's findings.

Louis-Isidore Duperrey's 1824 visit of ten days was recorded by the ship's surgeon, René Lesson. For observations and reports on the religion,

Lesson would write that "We know absolutely nothing of their religious rites, we did not see any houses in appearance destined for cult purposes."[2] Yet Lesson was so fascinated by the authority of the *tokosra* and the respect for the royal burial mausoleums that he was led to wonder, "Does religion play a part in this and are the chiefs the high priests of some cult?" (Ritter and Ritter 1982, 62)

What Lesson only intimated, Captain Frederic Lütke of the Russian naval expedition found three years later. Since he and his crew could not speak Kosraean and did not have a translator, "we could only obtain very obscure notions on their religion," Lütke wrote (1835, as translated in Ritter and Ritter 1982, 129). At least he did find the name of one of the gods and his "family"; he also located house shrines and witnessed two rituals. The god was *Sitel Nazuenziap* [*Sitel Nosrunsrap*],[3] who had "neither temples, morals, nor idols," but in the corner of each house was a four- or five-foot-long wand representing the house god, where offerings of *seka* (*sakau*) leaves and branches were left, along with the "marine trumpet" (conch shell).[4] Lütke also observed strings of flowers between two trees, "one of the little homages to *Sitel Nosrunsrap*" (Ritter and Ritter 1982, 129).

The first ritual he saw was the drinking of *seka* as an "oblation" in honor of *Nosrunsrap*. The prayer the Kosraeans recited during *seka* drinking was in reality a ritual toast to the gods and to the *tokosra:*

> Talaelen seka mai . . .
> *Sitel Nazuenziap*
> Rin seka
> Naitouolen seka Seouapin seka
> Chiechou seka Mananzioua seka Kajoua-sin-liaga seka
> Olpat seka
> Togoja [tokosra] seka.

The meaning of the first line of the toast is not recorded, but the ritual appears to conclude with a toast to the "king" (*tokosra*). Following the name of leading deity *Sitel Nazuenziap* (*Nosrunsrap*) are the names of three of his children: *Rin, Naitouolen* and *Seouap*. *Kajoua-sin-liaga* is the wife of *Nosrunsrap, Sinlanka* the breadfruit goddess (here with the honorific female title for the "queen"). *Olpat* appears to be a cognate of the Chuukic deity *Olifat*.

The second ritual witnessed by Lütke also focused on *Nosrunsrap* and was later explained to Lütke by the priest performing the ritual. Here is Lütke's description of the event:

> The ceremony . . . took place in Sipe's[5] cookhouse and consisted of the following: the man who played the principal role was seated, his legs folded underneath him, on the back of the tub in which they carry the water when they drink *seka*. He had a necklace of young coconut branches around his neck and held in his hands the wand representing *Sitel Nazuenziap* [*Sitel Nosrunsrap*], which he continually pressed against his knees. . . . His eyes were troubled; he kept turning his head, sometimes hissing in a strange manner, sometimes hiccupping, and sometimes rattling and spitting, as they ordinarily do when they drink *seka*. He pronounced broken and inarticulate words. . . . The whole thing seemed to be an imitation of that state of a man drunk with *seka,* and I thought for a long time that he really was. He had the triton shell horn in front of him. He blew the horn, while waiting for the stones on the hearth, and everything was readied for the cooking of the breadfruit, but with the calmness and silence attendant to solemn occasions. When all these grimaces were prolonged long enough, Sipe took the horn and respectfully presented it to the official, who having blown on it, got up soon after, and fled from the house by the side door putting his foot while passing by on the lit hearth. We were told that he had run to the *Togoja's* [*tokosra*] to repeat the same comedy. He ran in the streets moving the wand in all directions, and those who found themselves in his way dispersed in a hurry. At the end of half an hour or so, he came back carrying the wand like a gun posed for a bayoneete [*sic*] charge, entered the house by the side door, lowering his body and as if in secret, and after having replaced the wand, came to sit with us as if nothing had happened (Lütke 1835, 1:396, as translated in Ritter and Ritter 1982, 134–135).

Eighty-three years later, Sarfert was able to fill in the details about *seka* ritual, about the minor chiefs like the Sipe, about the god *Nosrunsrap* and other gods, about possession ritual, about the dance rod, and a household shrine. The main difference between the Russian observations and Sarfert's, however, is critical. Sarfert recorded much more about religion, but the information came from the memory of his informants about a culture long dead. Lesson and Lütke, on the other hand, gave eyewitness accounts. This difference is important because Sarfert's informants and Lütke's eyewitness record both agree about main features such as the ritual use of *seka* and priests who went into a trance.

Between the 1835 Russian visit and Sarfert's in 1910, there were many ships—especially whalers—that landed at Kosrae, but the sum total of what they observed in the realm of religion was little. Nevertheless, what

happened between the 1830s and 1910 was important: The old social structure and the religion died a quick death. The reasons for the disappearance of this complex social structure are many, but disease and the concomitant low birthrate and high death rate are probably the main reasons. The population declined from three thousand in the 1830s to three hundred at the end of the nineteenth century. As a result of the decline in population, there simply were not enough people to support the various secular and religious status holders nor to continue the traditions and old rituals. Christianity merely stepped into the picture at the right time. The quick death of the old culture and its religion makes Sarfert's good fortune in finding a few of the older people who remembered the cult of earlier days all the more significant. The remainder of this chapter is mostly a summary and analysis of Sarfert's record.

Gods and Spirits

The Kosraean Gods and Their Priests

The Kosraean gods and priests are similar to the gods and priests found in old Pohnpei and Yap. Both Pohnpei and Yap had cultic centers dedicated to different gods and attended to by hierarchical colleges of priests. Kosrae is different, however, because of the supporting relationship between the rural priesthoods, the centralized priesthood, and the centralized political structure. One has the impression that the pantheon of gods was an islandwide belief, with different priesthoods as the focus for a cult to one god or another within the pantheon. This is a striking contrast with the Pohnpeian high gods (*enihwos*), who were highly localized within different parts of the main island and whose cult was often limited to certain clans (Mauricio 1993, 467–483).

The two main deities were *Sinlanka* and her husband *Nosrunsrap* (*Sitel Nozienzap*). She was the breadfruit goddess, and he was the god of thunder and associated with the turtle. By Sarfert's times, these were the only deities widely remembered, although some of their children and other gods were important when Lelu was still a cultic center and political capital. *Soap,* for example, was an ocean god whose name (*sojap*) means "Sir Yap."[6] Formerly, Kosraeans knew of deities who worked much like those found in the rest of Micronesia. *Nalok* had been the "supreme" god who kept the sun going. Other deities were *Nalik,* patron of canoe building; *Niatiat,* patroness of fishing; *Selik,* a bush spirit (as Sarfert calls him); and *Sikaus,* associated with the many taboo places. But only *Sinlanka, Nosrunsrap,* and *Sikaus* were served by a group of priests. Sarfert apparently learned little about these divinities other than their association with

the forces of nature. Some were associated with natural phenomenon—*Nosrunsrap,* for example, with thunder and lightening, and *Sinlanka* with breadfruit harvests, famine, and typhoons. Some had what older anthropologists would call a "totem" or identifying animal—the turtle for *Nosrunsrap* or the white heron for the fishing patron *Niatiat* (Sarfert 1920, 395–406).

The rituals performed by these priests, which will be described later, illustrate the importance of the three gods—*Nosrunsrap, Sinlanka,* and *Sikaus*[7]—in Kosraean society. First, however, some note should be made of how the priests served not only the spirit world of the gods but also the political power structure focused on the *tokosra.* By all accounts, the *tokosra* was the paramount chief at the top of a feudal structure in which he was supreme—even considered sacred—and was served with tribute from low-ranking chiefs or land managers up and through the higher ranked chiefs.[8] The high chiefs and the *tokosra* owned the land, but the *tokosra* redistributed land when a high chief or titleholder died. Some of the priests of *Sinlanka* and *Sikaus* were appointed by the *tokosra* and held high chiefly titles or were commoners elevated to ranks in the nobility.[9] The priests of *Sikaus* and *Sinlanka* led the coronation ritual of a new *tokosra,* and the top priests of *Sikaus* also functioned as oracles for the *tokosra.*[10] The priests of *Nosrunsrap* led some minor rituals in Lelu, such as the one described by Lütke, and they also led the elaborate ritual, the *epan,* in thanks for an especially good breadfruit crop. They also came from their shrines in outlying areas to Lelu to perform annual rituals not described in detail by Sarfert. In any case, it is clear that the priestly groups served both the sacred and the secular; or perhaps it would be better to say that they were the link between the gods and the feudal structure of old Kosrae. Indeed, they were part and parcel of that feudal structure as titleholders. In a certain sense, the political service of the priests was like that of the mediums (*korong*) in Palau, the main difference being that Palau had no centralized political structure and the priests there apparently were not organized into distinct and separate groups. If more was known of the priests at the two ancient ritual centers of Salapwuk and Wene on Pohnpei, or even those at the megalithic complex of Nan Madol, one might be able to make more comparisons. Of course, Nan Madol of Pohnpei and Lelu of Kosrae are both massive basalt complexes, and the symbols of the eel and turtle were important at the two locations. How the cults of Pohnpei and Kosrae were related is still debated by the experts, as we shall see later in this chapter. Suffice it to say that the pre-Christian religion of Kosrae evidences the clearest example in Micronesia of structured, hierarchical priests within a centralized polity.

The Spirit World

Little is known about the spirits, other than *Sinlanka* and a few of the higher deities. Luther Gulick, visiting missionary from Pohnpei, was quoted by Sarfert as saying that the general Kosraean word for the ancestor spirits and the nature deities was *anut,* although there is also a word for the human soul: *nan.* Sarfert accepted Gulick's distinction between deities without human origin, such as the nature deities and the ancestral spirits. Thus, Gulick and Sarfert lumped the crop deities (e.g., *Sinlanka,* the breadfruit deity) together with the patrons of work and occupations (such as canoe building, fishing) and called them nature spirits.[11] Gulick and Sarfert cautioned, on the other hand, that the distinction between those ancestors who are especially highly regarded and the nature deities is "by no means a palpable one" (Gulick 1862, 244, as quoted in Sarfert 1920, 394).

As for the transformation of the soul of the living into a spirit ancestor, the living being's soul (*nan*) was a "second being" that survived death and wandered to the realm of souls (which could be Mili[12] or Pingelap or Yap or even a mythic island). Many of the spirits of the dead had the same character or personality they had in life, and the spirits or souls of the dead could be summoned for information by mediums (*tol*) who could conjure (*anutnut*).[13] The *tol* were diviners who became possessed or could induce a trancelike behavior at will and afterwards report to the questioner the spirit's responses and prophecies. Each medium had his own specific ancestor spirit (*anut*). One of the most famous mediums was so renowned that he was said to have risen from *tol* to the rank of a priest (*tomon anut*). A medium at work was what Lütke witnessed in 1835, as described earlier in this chapter (Sarfert 1920, 420).

Sarfert received information about the old Kosraean burial practices of the *tokosra* and the chiefs, but nothing about what happened to the souls who were not lucky enough to be the possessing spirit of a medium.[14] All we know is that the spirit of some ancestors was paid the homage of offerings and sacrifices, while others were feared but not given offerings. Just as little was recorded regarding the fate of the dead, so almost nothing is recorded about the Kosraean image of the cosmos: "I could not find any trace of a cosmogony . . . [except that] a woman resides in the moon . . . and plaits sleeping mats" (Sarfert 1920, 420).

In short, one can see in the Kosraean pantheon traces of what on Pohnpei or Chuuk would be sky gods (*Nosrunsrap* as a thunder god) or patron divinities (*Sinlanka* as the breadfruit goddess) or bush gods (*Selik*) and the ancestor spirits who were given offerings, but there are few other recorded details to flesh out the Kosraean picture of the pantheon working with the living and within a defined cosmos.

The Small and Grand Rituals of the Gods

In another stroke of good fortune, Sarfert found a notebook about the old religion written in 1896 by a Kosraean teacher who had died before Sarfert's visit (1920, 396). Most of the notebook was devoted to *Sinlanka,* her priests, and her rituals.[15] As seen through the notebook, her cult is the best example of priests performing a ritual in honor of a Kosraean deity. The 1896 writer reported that there were two sites on Kosrae where there were houses of worship to *Sinlanka,* each led by a different priestly society: The first featured nine differently titled priests, and the second had six titled priests.[16] The most important function of the first priestly society was processing to Lelu for the coronation of a new *tokosra*. Prior to the procession, differing ceremonies were held in the ranking priest's house. A shell trumpet was filled with a special kind of leaf that they prayed over morning and night. The ranking priest (*ko*) held instructions for fighting with sticks. He also struck on a basalt slab morning and evening, at which signal *seka* (kava) was brought to the priest, which he prayed over and drank. At his bidding, others assembled at *Sinlanka*'s house, drank kava, and prayed. More is recorded from Kosrae than Pohnpei about the old and sacred use of kava.

The second society of six priests was also involved with the *tokosra*'s coronation. After they had completed preparation rituals at their shrine, they too marched in procession to Lelu for the coronation, a rite known as "*Sinlanka* goes to Lelu." The preparation included the harvesting of breadfruit for the *tokosra* and the second-highest titleholder, the *kanka*. While the breadfruit was made into the fermented loaves, the priests stayed in the newly built house of the goddess, praying and drinking *seka* every morning and night.[17] After about two weeks, the prepared, fermented breadfruit was carried in procession to Lelu. When they arrived, the high priests of both societies came to the new *tokosra* and his wife, shook their hands, and proclaimed,

> My god, my god [*Anut lasa . . .*],
> You leave me here, you return,
> You go, you return,
> Always, always,
> Go and return quickly (Sarfert 1920, 354).

After this ceremony and presentation of gifts to the new *tokosra,* they went to all the chiefs and repeated the ceremony before they returned to their "houses of *Sinlanka.*" The event, called "Day of *Sinlanka,*" was a great feast day for the entire island, according to the author of the notebook.

The complex of rituals for *Sinlanka,* led by her two priestly societies both in their home villages and in Lelu, is among the most detailed records of religious ceremonies in Micronesia.

Another of the grand rituals, described by Sarfert as a "national" celebration, was held only occasionally, when the breadfruit harvest was especially big. The feast, called the *epan,* might be held only every three to six years and away from or at Lelu, but it always involved the entire population of Kosrae and might last for months (1920, 406). Any high-ranking titleholder or a chief might call the *epan* (407). After the *epan* was called and scheduled by the titleholder, the preparation period began. First was the construction of a spirit house (*imon anut*) at each of the taboo locations—tabooed because only the priests of *Sikaus* or the *tokosra* were allowed to enter; others who entered without permission of the priests could be punished by death ordered by the king (406).[18] In Lelu alone there were fourteen such spirit houses. *Sikaus*' priests were assigned to live at each spirit house, each with its living quarters and cookhouse; they stayed there during the entire *epan* and were provided with food from the king. At each site was the basalt slab that a priest banged morning and night in a special way as a signal. A *seka* root was placed next to the basalt slab as a gift to *Sikaus.*[19]

The feast then broke down into various smaller groups. Sarfert's old *tokosra* informant remembered one such feast, which seems to have included a physical endurance test for young boys:[20]

> All the chiefs and priests of Lolo were assembled here on a certain day. The ceremony took place with half-grown bodies. The deceased king himself as a boy once participated in one with fifteen other boys; it was the *epan* of his adoptive father, a *kanka.* The boys had to pass from *kanka's* homestead, which was situated on the canal, to the taboo place, and to swim across the canal in the process. Here they squatted down in four ranks by groups of four in front of the assembly. At the king's signal, one row stepped forward, squatted down, counted to four aloud, and then called: "*Wol anut, wola met,*" which is allegedly supposed to mean: "I go with the gods, I go with the humans." At the words "*wol anut,*" the boys had to turn to the left as far as possible—while squatting—and at the words "*wola met*" had to do likewise in the opposite direction, without moving their feet from the spot. Whoever lost their balance and leaned on their hands was informed by the priest of his impending death. At the feast in question, everyone executed the movement faultlessly, for it had been specially practiced beforehand. After all four ranks had completed the ceremony, the site shifted to the interior of the cookhouse of the taboo place. Here they waited until sundown. The priest *Kulap* took each of the

> boys individually into his dwelling. Here he had to squat down before a thin slab of basalt and break a kava root, which lay next to the stone, into four pieces. He had to put them down in front of the stone, and to pound them in exactly the same manner as the priests used to do. The boys passed the entire night until dawn in doing this (Sarfert 1920, 406–407).

Yet another part of the *epan* was the *sar ik,* a rather complicated feast or ritual that involved four men bringing live turtles before the chief with a fifth man executing a special dance. At the end, the turtles were released unharmed into the sea. Again, Sarfert found that his informant did not know the meaning of the ritual. A ritual canoe regatta was the official end of the *epan,* after which a dancing competition between the various villages was held at night in the *tokosra*'s large house.

Although the *epan* ritual was complex—really a series of separate rituals or festivals—the overall meaning is not clear. There are still unexplained features, such as why the occasion was a bountiful harvest of breadfruit, but the dedication made was made to *Sikaus* rather than to the breadfruit goddess *Sinlanka;* what meaning the trial and instruction of young males had; and why there was a presentation of turtles.

Examples of the smaller or minor rituals include those to the bush spirit, *Selik*. During the clearing of fields for cultivation, he was invoked by the words *"Selik kofein ima"* ("*Selik,* food in the field," that is, "Give the field much food"). Priests at Lelu used the same phrase when entering their taboo places. This was also the greeting made by those entering the *tokosra*'s house. Sarfert's designation of bush spirit (*Buschgeist*) for *Selik* was probably the wrong word to identify this god. The same word was used in other works on Micronesian religion for the evildoing spirits who inhabited trees or bush. *Selik,* however, worked as a god of the crops: He made both cultivated and wild crops to flourish (Sarfert 1920, 408).

Sarfert also described sites where offerings were placed, but he apparently learned little about any accompanying toasts or prayers. He found the coast of Kosrae marked by stones where offerings were made to the spirits of the location. At one harbor, for example, was a fishing spirit, *Sefundä,* who was said to reside on a rock on the reef. Women offered him preserved breadfruit before going fishing and a fish on his sacred rock after fishing (1920, 416). By the time of his stay in 1910 and after the mass conversions to Christianity, of course, Sarfert saw nothing of the house shrines Lütke and his crew observed almost a century before.

Another minor ritual included the prayers made before drinking *seka,* such as the one recorded by Lütke in 1827. Finally, there were the rituals,

marginally religious to all appearances, of divining with strips of young coconut foliage, a ritual found across Micronesia. One should be wary of classifying the knot divining (of young coconut fronds) as nonreligious; Kosrae's neighbors thought of knot divining as a gift of the gods and a source of power (see McArthur 1995); a similar religious association with knot divining was made in the Chuuk Lagoon (Goodenough 2002).

In general, the Kosraean rituals can be easily divided into two types. First are the grand public rituals, such as the coronation or the *epan,* both of which clearly bound religion to the feudal order of the *tokosra* and the hierarchy of high chiefs, to the land managers, and to commoners, with the priests (*tamon anut*) always mediating between the political structure and the gods. Second are the smaller or minor rituals used for working the land, for fishing, and for building. These really are not a private class of rituals but are specific to a small group of people. What linked together the public and minor rituals were the gods, especially the well-known gods such as *Sinlanka, Selik, Nosrunsrap,* and *Sikaus.*

Sacred Places

Lelu itself was the megalithic residence of the *tokosra,* court officials, and priests and was the location for such rites as the coronation. Many structures in Lelu were the tombs of the former *tokosra.* Recent excavations have identified feasting houses and kava-pounding stones in association with these tombs, evidently the relics of mortuary ritual (Cordy 1993). Within Lelu were enclosures for groups of priests. However, no specific sacrificial locations are identified by archaeology or tradition as have been recognized for the turtle-eel sacrifices at Pohnpei's Nan Madol.

There were also local, rural shrines (taboo places) where the priests gathered for rituals to their gods; sometimes there was a spirit house built on the sacred or tabooed place. These shrines also functioned as residences, not only for the gods themselves but also for the residing priests. What is unusual about the configuration of Kosraean sacred places was the positive or supportive relationship between the local, rural shrines or spirit houses and Lelu; priests from the local places where the deities lived would come in procession for ritual in Lelu. There is no other example in Micronesia of this relationship between the local/rural and the central, although there were hints of such a local/central configuration in Yap, where the gods "moved" or were "loaned" from the popular religious centers to other shrine sites (*taliiw*) on Yap.

There were places of sacrifice or offering found all over the island. These were sometimes just a rock where offerings were deposited.

Kosrae: Connections with Other Islands

Since the last half of the nineteenth century, the search for "origins" has been a favorite sport of anthropologists, travelers, naturalists, and almost any visitor to Micronesia except for the missionaries. I would argue here that it was also a most important topic for the islanders themselves all across Micronesia; their legends and myths are replete with the stories of origins. Any claim to a title such as the "Traditional Religions of Micronesia" must squarely face the question of origins. The religion of old Kosrae was and still is the place where this question is best confronted. Hence, Kosrae becomes a test case for the legends and myths as well as the ethnographic data about connections within Micronesia. Other areas could have been chosen, such as the connections between Yap and the Chuukic atolls east and into the main Chuuk Lagoon, but that geographic focus does not have any debated questions answered from an array of sources such as tradition, ethnography, archaeology, and linguists. Thus, Kosrae is the best place to start.

The pivotal questions are not complicated, although the evidence for answers may be difficult indeed. Can a link be established between Kosrae and its neighboring high islands, Pohnpei and the Chuuk Lagoon? Does any link or lack thereof with neighboring high islands change our understanding of the religion of Kosrae itself, or those of Pohnpei and Chuuk?

As usual, the tools to answer these questions are ethnography (which here includes traditions and mythology), archaeology, and linguistics. In this case, ethnography poses the question and offers answers, while archaeology and linguistics confirm or reject the conclusion. What follows is the evidence of connections and origins from each of these disciplines.

Archaeological Evidence

The archaeological evidence for connecting Kosrae and Pohnpei has long impressed outsiders in the ruins of Lelu and Nan Madol, although the religious function of these ruins derives mostly from traditions, legends, and myths. It might be helpful here to give the time lines for the sites, as derived from the most recent excavations:

For Nan Madol (Ayres and Mauricio 1997; Mauricio 1993)

- 1–500 BC: Earliest settlement of Pohnpei.
- AD 1–1000: Indigenous religion of sacred sites (e.g., Salapwuk and Wene).
- 1000–1500: Rise of Nan Madol and Saudeleur dynasty.

- 1500–1826: Isohkelekel phase (rise of Nahnmwarki polity and demise of the turtle-eel sacrifices.
- 1826: Historical phase (last turtle sacrifices; death of last priests). Beginning of written accounts of oral histories (Hambruch research in 1910, published 1932–1936).

For Lelu on Kosrae (Cordy 1993)
- AD 1200–1400: Initial artificial expansion of Lelu.
- 1400–1650: Continued construction of Lelu.
- 1820–1850: Zenith of Lelu.
- 1850: Decline of Lelu.

For Chuuk Lagoon (King and Parker 1984)
- 5 BC: Earliest evidence of settlement.
- Hiatus: Until AD 1000 or 1200 for archaeological evidence.

Comparing only the time lines established by archaeology, Pohnpei appears to have priority. Pohnpei's megalithic Nan Madol was in the earliest stages of development when there is little archaeological evidence of construction in the Chuuk Lagoon. The great walls and enclosures of Kosrae's Lelu were marking their zenith of construction when Nan Madol was mostly abandoned. Yet there is nothing in the archaeological record that would preclude an invading or migrant group, such as proposed in the story of Isohkelekel, from having a decisive role in the fall of the Saudeleur dynasty at Nan Madol or a key role in the rise of the Nahnmwarkis.

The physical similarities and differences between Nan Madol and Lelu do not preclude the influence of one over the other:[21] Nan Madol is composed of about ninety artificial islands, but Lelu compounds are built up and across an existing island off the main coast of Kosrae. Some of the excavated artifacts found at one site are not found at the other.

Although both sites use basalt stone for walls, platforms, and enclosures, the walls of Nan Madol are much more obviously of long basalt "logs"—stacked basalt prismatic stone. They are prismatic, meaning that they have several faces, either through natural processes or through the quarrying process. The tightly fitted basalt logs of Nan Madol stand in contrast to the Lelu walls, where the basalt logs were more loosely fitted and the gaps filled in with other stones.

The Nan Madol tombs are rectangular platforms covered over with basalt logs, but the Lelu tombs are sunk into the foundations and in the form of truncated pyramids.

The use of these two magnificent sites differed, although the archaeological evidence only reflects what early researchers such as Hambruch and Sarfert learned from interviews. Both Nan Madol and Lelu were royal sites for the Saudeleur or *tokosra,* their tombs, their court, and their attending priesthoods, but Lelu had surrounding compounds for commoners.

Cordy summarizes this comparison: "Based on the evidence just discussed, I would suggest that although the two sites of Lelu and Nan Madol have similarities, their differences greatly outweigh the similarities" (1993, 269). In short, the superficial similarities are not acceptable evidence for claiming that one site influenced the other.

Ethnographic Evidence

This evidence comes from a variety of sources, but all those sources—local oral historians, foreign observers, trained ethnographers, and gifted amateurs—deal with the same basic material of ethnography: *stories,* whether legends, myths, or just memories of what happened. In the previous chapter about Pohnpei, I have already outlined some of the problems inherent in these sources. In the case of "origins," especially those related to Kosrae, the ethnographic evidence comes from three legends of Kosrae, Pohnpei, and the Chuuk Lagoon.[22]

According to the Kosraean legend, at the request of a Pohnpeian chief at war with another island chief, the Kosraean *tokosra* sent or allowed a relief force to sail for Pohnpei. The leader was *Nepartak* and the story was told in 1909 to both Krämer and Sarfert as the "War against Pohnpei" (Sarfert 1920, 376–377).

The Pohnpei legend has different versions, not all of which agree with one another. The stories, which seem to involve Kosrae, were recorded by Hambruch (1932), by Luelen Bernart before and after World War II (1977), and by Silten (1951). Critical to all these versions is the identification of the Pohnpeian word *Katau* with the island of Kosrae. The story from Hambruch and Bernart goes like this: During the reign of the Saudeleurs at Nan Madol, a man named Isohkelekel landed with some 333 companions from *Katau*. At first, Isohkelekel and his people lived in peace, but eventually Isohkelekel led his men in battle against the Saudeleurs, defeated them, and with the help of the god *Luhk* and the high priest (*Soukisen Leng*) of Wene, established a new, decentralized polity with Isohkelekel as ruler of the former area around Nan Madol under the title of Nahnmwarki. The fall of the Saudeleur dynasty was due to the reigning Saudeleurs imprisoning of the god *Nahnsapwe*. *Nahnsapwe* fled to *Katau* and there had an affair with an elderly lady. The offspring was Isohkelekel, who eventually returned to Pohnpei to defeat the Saudeleurs.

In the Pohnpeian stories, *Nepartak* of Kosrae appears as *Nanpartak,* who rallied the retreating troops of Isohkelekel.

If one equates *Katau* (Pohnpeian) and *Kachaw* (Chuukic) with Kosrae, then the Chuuk Lagoon legend also links together these three high islands—and perhaps even distant Yap. In the Chuuk legends, the creator goddess *Ligopup* lived on *Kachaw* (Krämer 1932, 348–358). Of her descendants, the oldest brother came to rule Chuuk (*Sowukachaw*), a second brother ruled Pohnpei (*Sowufoonupi,* "Lord of Pohnpei"), and the youngest was *Sowuyap* ("Lord of Yap"). The equation of *Katau/Kachaw* with Kosrae is the obvious underpinning of origins in Kosrae.

Linguistic Evidence

The linguistic evidence for the identification of *Katau* with Kosrae was not seriously challenged until Ward Goodenough's publication in 1986 (*Sky World and This World: The Place of Kachaw in Micronesian Cosmology*). If linguistic-related publications subsequent to the Goodenough article are any indication, Goodenough's challenge has been generally regarded as doctrine.[23] Still, not everyone has accepted that the Chuuk and Pohnpeian legends fail to provide valid evidence of Kosrae's cultural influence in Micronesia.

Ross Cordy's 1993 volume about Lelu and Goodenough's 1986 article have become the classic positions for Kosrae on Micronesian origins. Either position has important implications for the origins of religion in Micronesia.

Cordy in actuality forwards no argument for the continued identification of *Katau* with Kosrae; he simply restates it: "Indeed the power of the *Tokosra* was great enough in 1500 AD to be renowned on Ponape. His aid was requested against the Saudeleurs. And he apparently sent out, or at least gave blessings to, an invasion force headed by Isokelekel" (1993, 258). He also writes that "This Trukese story of *Sowukachaw,* however, reflects another form of Kosraean adventurism that developed from the unification of Kosrae. Over the years, dissatisfied nobles attempted coups, most of which failed. They in turn fled abroad with their followers. Kosraeans, in sum, became involved in the affairs of many other Micronesian societies during this period of development on Kosrae" (275).

Goodenough's position proposes a five-part argument. First is the negation of Kosrae as a legitimate cognate of the Pohnpeian or Chuuk terms (*Katau/Kachaw*). Second, he argues that *Katau* and *Iap* were terms known to the navigators of old, but that they were in the category of mythic islands to the eastern horizon and the western horizon, although *Iap* could also refer to the real island of Yap. Third, he denies that the old

navigators had any knowledge of the sailing directions to the actual island of Kosrae as opposed to mythic island of *Katau*. Fourth, the similar myths of common origins, he also argues, are due to the exchange of ideas stimulated by Western influence in the nineteenth century. Fifth, he expands his argument to make *Katau/Kachaw* a mystic sky world associated with a cult focusing on basalt stone. In short, he has replaced the legendary connections between Kosrae, Pohnpei, and Chuuk with an eastern-Micronesian cult of sky gods and the focal symbol of basalt monuments: His sky god cult would embrace the Chuuk Lagoon, the Mortlocks, Pohnpei, Kosrae, the Marshalls, and Kiribati.[24]

The evaluation of Goodenough and Cody regarding the place of Kosrae in Micronesian origin depends essentially on one's position regarding the identification of *Katau/Kachaw* as Kosrae. I am not a linguist, but Goodenough has argued the noncognate position in detail. Cordy, on the other hand, accepts the equivalency of the legendary *Katau* and Kosrae, as did almost everyone from Kubary to Goodenough himself (Goodenough and Sugita 1980). It seems to me that the legends of Kosrae, Pohnpei, and Chuuk cannot now be interpreted as an arguable position for Kosraean origins. If textbooks continue to maintain that *Katau/Kachaw* [2] Kosrae, they are most probably based on a faulty assumption. As for Goodenough's proposed sky god cult with basalt stones or structures as a focal symbol, I am not certain there is sufficient solid evidence to verify this cult, which has all the promise of establishing cultic connections among the islands and atolls of eastern Micronesia.

The Importance of this Controversy

No description of the connections among the regions of eastern Micronesia, it seems to me, will ever be able to trace origins to Kosrae. Even before Goodenough's seminal article there were serious questions as to whether Isohkelekel and the invaders of Pohnpei had not come from the Marshalls (Fischer et al. 1977) and whether the Pohnpeian *Katau* was indeed a reference to Kosrae (William McGarry, personal communication). Goodenough, however, put to rest the simple identification. Hence, the demise of the great Pohnpeian secular and religious center at Nan Madol should not be attributed to Kosraean invaders. If the rise of more secularized and decentralized polities under the Nahnmwarkis marked a radical albeit gradual change in the religious dimension of Pohnpeian life, it did not come from Kosrae. Neither did the ancestors of the Chuuk war and ritual leaders, the *itang,* come from Kosrae. As a matter of fact, the axis of religious origins was shifted from Kosrae to Pohnpei and the Chuukic-speaking islands. Some of the same clan names for the Marshalls, Kosrae, Pohnpei, the

Mortlocks, and the Chuuk Lagoon do demonstrate, however, that in periods of the legendary past, there were connections in eastern Micronesia. The cognate clan names highlight these islands of eastern Micronesia as one major source for religious similarities in Micronesia.[25] In other words, if the simple identification of Chuuk Lagoon and Pohnpeian origins could once be traced to Kosrae, the common clan names still offer strong evidence that there were, sometime in the distant past, common origins for eastern Micronesia. This is a critically important point, for, if in the nineteenth century the old religions of Micronesia appeared so disparate, linguistics does indeed point to ancient common origins.

It must be noted, however, that whatever the sources of the old religions of Kosrae, the Chuuk Lagoon, and Pohnpei, the picture of religion in these regions does not change. One can understand the old religion of each region without recourse to traditions of ancient origins. Still, questions of ancient origins are not irrelevant, especially as national identities in the twenty-first century seek their foundations in the past.[26] The controversy about Kosraean influence in Micronesian origins, therefore, is no lesson in academic obscurantism. This case study is one clue to the origins of Micronesia as a region and its religion.

For all the controversy about Kosrae's relationship to Pohnpei or Chuuk, the unique features of the old Kosraean religion are not in question.

The Kosraean data, however skimpy and controversial, are an important part of the Micronesian mosaic of religious similarity and diversity because they evidence a feature hinted at on Yap and debatable on Pohnpei: political and religious centralization. Nowhere else in Micronesia do the priestly hierarchies play such a prominent role in both religion and politics. Second, and as a corollary of the first feature, nowhere else in Micronesia was there a clearer example of such a close, supporting relationship between the rural and the centralized cult in the old religion. It is perhaps no accident of history that today no other island in Micronesia has a comparably highly centralized religious structure with such political influence.[27]

What is emphasized in other Micronesian regions but not on Kosrae? Ancestor veneration was certainly a part of old Kosrae, as evidenced in the working of the diviner or *tol* or in the veneration accorded the tombs of the deceased *tokosra,* but ancestor veneration was not described as part of daily life in the way that it was elsewhere in Micronesia. Furthermore, almost nothing, comparatively speaking, is recorded about the cosmos in which the spirit and human worlds interacted. This is in stark contrast with the Chuukic islands, Yap, the Marshalls, and Kiribati. Finally, there is little description of how religion worked at the family level, whether

nuclear or extended family. Sarfert writes at length about the feudal social structure of Kosrae and how both the gods and rituals related to the social structure. One could say that Sarfert writes about religion at the level of the land units—local to royal—but little about the commoner's religion. Whether these elements were genuinely missing in Kosrae religion or, as is far more likely, were not recorded because of the limited ethnographic evidence, they are major features missing in the Kosraean cultural inventory that are prominent elsewhere in Micronesia.

Chapter 6

The Religion of the Marshall Islands

Every region in Micronesia has notable evidential problems regarding its old religion. For Kosrae, the problem arises from the limitations of a single source, Ernst Sarfert, interviewing a few informants about a religion long dead and only dimly remembered. For Pohnpei, the problems flow from the nature of the traditions and oral histories used as historical or ethnographic data. For the Chuukic-speaking islands, the major problem is sifting through an enormous quantity of evidence to find the patterns of belief and practice that stretch across the breadth of Micronesia, from the Mortlocks and the Chuuk Lagoon to Tobi, just north of New Guinea.

For the Marshalls, three evidential problems merge to create a unique challenge in describing the old religion. The first problem is the scant source material on Marshallese traditional religion. There is only one major early work on the religion, which came from longtime resident and Catholic missionary in the Marshalls, August Erdland (1914).[1] German colonial official C. Knappe published an article on the religious views of the Marshallese (1888); this is the only other publication devoted entirely to the old religion there. The earliest eyewitness records about Marshallese religion come from Adalbert Chamisso's report of the Russian expedition's stay in 1819, but later reports have not always corroborated Chamisso's information, which came through the eyes of a Woleai native who had lived in the Marshalls for some years (Chamisso 1986). Krämer's report from his fieldwork under the Hamburg South Seas Expedition was finished by Hans Nevermann and published in 1938, almost a quarter of a century after Krämer's fieldwork; moreover, much of Krämer and Nevermann was merely a reworking of earlier printed reports. Mythology, on the other hand, was well researched by Davenport (1952, 1953) and later by Chambers (1972), McArthur (1995), and Tobin (2002).

The second problem is that, upon examination of other accounts—including both shorter, earlier reports and later reports done after World War II—one can quickly see that these reports, including Erdland's major

work, do not agree on the meaning of key vocabulary items about the gods and the spirit world. This confusion about terminology is not just material for a scholarly footnote. It means that a clear picture of the Marshallese spirit world is close to impossible. From the ethnographic data, some patterns do emerge about the spirit world, about human destiny within the mythic cosmos, and about the rituals, but the patterns are quite general. The contemporary religious vocabulary is of little help because it has an overlay of Christian belief that is difficult to separate.[2] In short, terminology is the stumbling block to a coherent, unified summary of Marshallese religion.

The evidence concerning religious vocabulary is contradictory and fragmented. The result is something like a partially complete mosaic or jigsaw puzzle in which the pieces do not quite fit together for a connected picture. Perhaps the fragmentary and confusing evidence simply reflects the equally fragmented social and political structure of the old Marshalls. In the final analysis, the reasons for the inconsistent and patchy evidence are simply not known.

The third major problem is that this terminological confusion creates difficulty in understanding the mythology in which much of the old religious vocabulary is embedded. Marshallese myth, while rich in quantity and in detail, is conflicting. This valuable corpus of data is quite unlike the mythology of Pohnpei and more difficult to organize. Pohnpeian mythology is already organized and systematized into linear sequences of events by Pohnpeian oral historians; Marshallese mythology is not. Regardless of the difficulties, however, Marshallese mythology remains the place to delve for an explanation of the old beliefs about spirits, the cosmos, and human destiny.

In this chapter, I propose what appears to me as the one overarching concept that can link together Marshallese religious terms, the key myths, and the spirit world with human affairs: power. Focusing on the idea of power does not reconcile all the confusing data, but it does give some order to the old religion.[3] After presenting this concept, I will flesh out the idea with additional detail about the spirit world, about the Marshallese picture of the cosmos, and about the ritual links between spirit and human.[4]

Power in Marshallese Religion

The Marshallese spirits, wrote Erdland, are associated with "almost anything that has to do with power." (1914). Although Erdland's assertion is almost a truism for religions across the globe, the power and its relationship to the sacred—which is a dominant theme through ethnography and

mythology—is perhaps the sole dominant theme in the old Marshallese religion. Power in any context can be conceptualized as an attribute (e.g., "He has power") or as a relationship. Thought of as a relationship, power does not reside in any particular person but in the relationship between interacting agents. It appears to me that Marshallese myths and legends conceptualize power as a series of relationships—that is, between humans and the gods, between chiefs and the gods, and between humans and nature.

Power and the Sacred in Nature

Like other Micronesian and Pacific cultures, Marshallese religion found power in people's relationships to nature, and because of this, nature itself became sacred. Almost anything in the immediate physical environment—trees, bushes, lagoons or other seaside spots, rocks, fish, sharks, octopuses, and crabs—could be channels of power between the spirit world and humans. Often these sacred foci of power were called *ekjab,* a word with a range of meanings too broad to be glossed in a single word or phrase. An *ekjab* could sometimes be spirit-given knowledge of natural landmarks with which navigators could effectively move about the atolls. One example was a whirlpool in the ocean believed to be an "ancient signpost" (Carucci 1980, 124). Sometimes the *ekjab* were special markers. A case in point was the large basalt stone on the atoll of Namu, which was rolled into the sea by a missionary who thought it was an "idol" (Pollock 1976, 93–94). Many such *ekjab* are still pointed out by contemporary Marshallese from Kwajalein Atoll (Carucci 1997). Definitions and descriptions of the *ekjab* are many and conflicting—for Erdland they were beings who surround the atolls and were humans transformed into stone (1914, 238); for Knappe they were embodied in every natural object (1888, 7)—but all have in common the concept of *ekjab* as the foci of spirit-given power for humans. They were the places where the spirit world, nature, and humans met.

If the *ekjab* were points on the folk map of the Marshalls—places, natural features, even humans—then they were also sacred and powerful because they arose out of the totality of the Marshallese cosmos, a cosmos created by the power of a sky god. According to one account, the god *Lowa* created the islands by simply saying, "*Lowa* and the islands." *Lowa* also created the reefs in a similar fashion simply by saying, "*Lowa* and the reefs" (Tobin 2002, 11–12).[5]

Power and the Sacred in Chiefs

There was and still is an evident belief in the sacredness of chiefs (*irooj*).[6] They are sacred because their power derives from the divine, from the goddesses who are the mothers of the chiefly clans.[7] Two Marshallese

myths serve to establish this divine and female origin; these are the "charter myths" of chiefly power. The first is about *Liwatounmour* (literally, "woman of life-giving land," Walsh 2003, 120), and the second is about her sister *Loktanur,* the star-goddess, and her son. The two sisters, according to legend, had other sisters as well, although the number and names of these siblings vary according to the version of the legend.[8] All of the Marshallese clans, especially the chiefly clans, are reputed to come from these divine sisters. The *Loktanur* myth underscores the prerogative of the female line in chiefly succession. Both myths are true to the extent that chiefly power was and still is the lived-out reality of the myths: The chiefs were believed to be descended from the divine, their clan was determined by divine precept, and the chiefly line is, to this day, still traced through the female side.

There really is no recorded myth about *Liwatounmour,* other than the detail that she and a sister came from *Uap* or *Ep* in the west.[9] They landed first on Kwajalein, and *Liwatounmour* went to Namu. Believing a basalt stone to be an incarnation of the goddess or her dwelling place, she remained there to be worshipped. According to the story, she and her sister were the founders of all the clans (*jowi*) in the Marshall Islands (Tobin 2002, 54ff.; Pollock 1976). Contemporary royalty in the Marshalls can still be traced back ten generations to the divine foundress, *Liwatounmour* (McArthur 1995, 319). Still, the myths about the star-goddess *Loktanur* are better remembered and are considered more important in the contemporary reinterpretation of ancient stories about the chief deities (Capelle, personal communication).

Like the myths of *Liwatounmour,* the *Loktanur* story establishes the Marshallese belief in tracing chiefly rank through the female line. In the *Loktanur* myth, there was a family on the atoll of Ailinglaplap (Ailinglapalap) with ten or more brothers, all of whom wanted to be the *irooj*.[10] They decided to have a canoe race, the winner of which would be granted the title *irooj* as a reward. *Loktanur,* the star-being and mother of the brothers, came down from the heavens to watch the race. The sons were paddling their canoes because as yet there were no sails.[11] The eldest son, *Tumur* (identified with Antares), did not want to take his mother along on the race because of her heavy luggage, nor did the other sons. Only the good-hearted youngest son, *Jebro* (Pleiades), agreed to *Loktanur*'s presence. In the mother's bundles were a sail, a mast, and all the necessary tackle to create an innovative sail rigging. She showed *Jebro* how to set up the sail and rigging, and their canoe quickly raced ahead of the older sons—except for *Tumur,* who saw their craft gaining on him. He commandeered *Jebro*'s craft, but *Loktanur* had told *Jebro* to keep back some of

the tackle, and thus *Tumur* could not make the new sail work. *Jebro* and *Loktanur* paddled furiously and were the first to make land, but they hid themselves. After *Tumur* landed and the other brothers proclaimed him as *irooj, Jebro* stepped out with his mother and was proclaimed the true *irooj*.[12] Thus was the female descent line established as the pattern for the chiefs. Matrilineal descent is the key element, not age or family ranking or even some human maneuver like a test (the race) or proclamation. In this sense, a chief is born, not made.

In a recent reinterpretation of the *Loktanur* story, former president of the Marshall Islands and paramount chief (*irooj laplap*) Amata Kabua portrayed himself in the image of *Jebro* and *Loktanur* during an important festival (McArthur 1995, 258–274). The festival clearly put the contemporary chief in the "sacred" traditions of the star-goddess and her younger son.

Power in Divining

The ancient Marshallese believed that divination was one of the celestial gifts to humankind, making it akin to canoe building, sailing, and tattooing.[13] The Namu myth speaks not only about the origin of the matrilineal clans but also about the origin of divining (McArthur 1995, 273). The simplest technique (*bubu*) was that of knotting coconut or pandanus leaf strands and interpreting the number of knots. It was mechanical, but it required considerable memorization of the proper knot sequences and their meanings. Despite its apparent simplicity, *bubu* could not be performed by everybody. Other techniques were probably used, but the record speaks only of *bubu* and one alternative using tossed pebbles. In the past there was a figure in the Marshalls who was famous for this divining, the *ri-bubu,* but early writers Knappe and Erdland told only about a general sort of religious figure called the *ri-kanan* or *ri-kanij,*[14] who performed a strange ritual of stretching out prone on the ground and sticking out his tongue in order to absorb the power of the sun (Erdland 1914, 332). For the contemporary Marshalls, the general titles are broken down into specialties:

- Diviner *ri-bubu*
- Sorcerer *ri-anijnij*
- Magician *ri-ekapal*
- Medicine maker *ri-uno*
- Storyteller *ri-bwebwenato*[15]

Certainly the sorcerers, magicians, and medicine makers—people with extraordinary power and connection to the spirit world—were in this sense leaders or specialists in the old religion. According to Erdland, the

combined magician-sorcerer-soothsayer-master of ceremonies (*läadökdök*) stood as the "third rank" in Marshallese society, below the high and lower ranked chiefs (1914, 343).

One should not be surprised to find Marshallese *bubu* divination more than merely a mechanical technique but a source of religious power. In the Chuuk Lagoon and on the atolls of central Micronesia, even after World War II, anthropologists found coconut leaf divination with its patron god, spirit names for the knots, and even a "spirit place" where the knot diviner might consult the spirits.[16] Erdland classified the Marshallese *bubu* as "magic" (1914, 332). What is significant in the Marshallese case is recent evidence from McArthur's informants (1995) that divination (*bubu*) is still considered a power closely connected to myth and spirit powers, despite heavy influence from missionaries.

The grounding or "charter" deity of divination is *Lijenenbwe* of Namu, the "matriarch of divination" (McArthur 1995, 320) and oldest sister of *Loktanur,* who, according to Marshallese myth, gave her sons knowledge divination.[17] According to McArthur's informants, divination indicates the power of uncovering what deception hides, just as the divination of *Lijenenbwe*'s sons uncovers the deception of the god *Letao* (McArthur 1995, 303). What is also significant is the incorporation of divination into a contemporary Christian context:

> Most contemporary Marshall Islanders feel that divination is a good thing, not something evil, but something compatible with Christianity for flushing out "Satan's evils" such as magic and sorcery that continue to be perpetrated. It was revealed to me on more than one occasion that new forms of divination have developed: instead of using the pandanus leafs and esoteric knowledge, many perform personal rites with the Christian Bible by opening up to just the right passage to unveil a truth or what course of action they should take. I have also witnessed divination applied to land-tenure negotiations and in criminal court cases unbeknownst to the American judges (McArthur 1995, 305).[18]

It seems to me that the contemporary reinterpretation of divination, which Erdland saw as "magic" and not religious ritual, is a belief and ritual that goes back to the old Marshallese religion.

Power in the Example of *Letao* the Trickster

Letao the trickster can be seen as a god (*anij*) with a power that the Marshallese, as improbable as it may seem, actually admire: the power of subversion. *Letao* is admired for his ability to veil or hide the truth,

according to contemporary Marshallese, but his powers of deception are regarded as less powerful than that of divination, because the latter reveals what the former aims to hide (McArthur 1995, 302–303). Tricksters in other cultures often show an ability to disguise their real identity and desires (Babcock, as quoted in McArthur 1995, 359). There is no reason why an amoral and asocial divinity cannot be admired and at the same time serve as an example of inverted values.[19] The continued popularity of *Letao* may arise not only from the entertainment value of his stories but also from his perceived value as part of the wisdom of the past continuing into the present. *Letao* was a Micronesian-wide figure, albeit under different names, and his stories are similar from culture to culture (Lessa 1961); this may be a clue to his important function as a reverse role model of island values. He was sly, clever, and crafty, but he also had a slice of human frailty despite his heavenly origins. He was a liminal being: He was born of the gods and a human, was able to do good and evil, and could be both demonic and clownish.[20] He was the one prominent Marshallese divinity who was on the threshold between the two worlds of the human and the divine.

Marshallese Concepts of Power and the Old Religion

The Marshallese concept of the sacredness of power flows from the key role of three (and perhaps more) goddesses. Power was given to humans in their divinely ordained chiefs, in status through the female line, in divination, and even the trickery of *Letao*. The longest recorded narrative of Marshallese myth about the "Beginning of this world" commences with mostly male gods or semidivine males, but it quickly changes to an emphasis on female deities and spirits and "the woman" who does so much for humans (Tobin 2002, 11ff.). The Marshallese emphasis on the femininity of divine power was not unusual in Micronesia, where most of the cultures are matrilineal in structure.

The Spirit World

If one strips away the lively narrative of myths such as the *Loktanur* race or the *Letao* stories, the bare features of the spirit world reveal the familiar Micronesian lumping together of spirits, gods, ghosts, ancestors, and goblins under one word—in this case, *anij*. *Anij* is the all-embracing term for the spirit population of the cosmos, just as *énú* is for the Chuukic-speaking world and *eni* is for the Pohnpeians. But the overall classification of the Marshallese spirits can be split into as few as four or as many as seven main classifications.

The Sky Deities

In most cases, the sky deities did their work at the begin-time of Marshallese myth and are remote from their human creation. On the other hand, a figure like *Jebro* can be reinterpreted, as he has been on Ujelang, as returning again and again in the annual cycle of the appearance of the Pleiades at Christmas. The sky gods and patron spirits are united in a genealogy of who begat whom, but the genealogies in the western and eastern atoll chains (Ralik and Ratak respectively) are quite different (see Erdland 1914 and Krämer and Nevermann 1938, 238ff.).

The Heroes and Patron Deities

A good example is *Lewoj,* one of two heavenly figures bringing the gift of tattooing to humans (Tobin 2002, 12). In myth, these *anij* were sometimes of spirit and human ancestry. Patron deities would also include personal guardian spirits and guardian spirits of the chiefs and their clans (Erdland 1914, 86). Clan guardian spirits did not, however, receive the prominence they did on neighboring Pohnpei.

The Ancestor Spirits

Erdland (1914) recorded that some of the deceased could return to their human descendants and be placated by offerings of food, but the overall impression from his early record is that the spirits of the dead were more feared than loved. Typical is the story of a youth who died, but upon his return the people to whom he appeared became sick (Tobin 2002, 186). To be sure, there are stories about helpful ancestors, such as the woman from the spirit island of *Eb* who made a chief happy (Erdland 1914, 227). Still, the overall positive, helpful function for the ancestor spirits, such as that found in Kiribati and on the Chuukic-speaking islands, was not prominent in the old Marshallese religion.

Whether or not the deceased became helpful ancestor spirits or even returned to the living at all was determined by the journey to the other world (sometimes called the "after world"). The period immediately after death and burial was, as in much of Micronesia, a time of ambiguity, which could be dangerous to both the deceased and to the assembled mourners. However, after six days, the soul-like entity within the dead body rose, became aware of death, and began its journey to *Eoereak,* "the island of the dead," via Nadikdik (Knox Island) near Mili Atoll (Erdland 1914, 248). Those already on *Eoereak* could see the spirit coming in the form of a sailing canoe.[21] If the canoe was large, this was a spirit that lived on and would appear to people; if the canoe was small, the spirit would not appear to the living and would die. In sum, all that comes from the

early records and to a lesser extent from the myths and stories is that there is a soul-like entity within the living body, which after burial rose and journeyed to the island of the dead where it would either die or return and appear to the living.

Nature Spirits

The nature spirits include the *nonieb*—"little people" or dwarflike bush spirits that are akin to the Hawaiian *menehune*.[22] They also include the *anij in mar*—literally, "gods of plants, bushes and flowers" (Walsh, personal communication, 2004).

Evil Spirits

In this category are hosts of anonymous, evildoing, harm-causing spirits, the most prominent of which were the *mejenkwad,* the flying female spirits (ogresses, often described as cannibalistic).

Anonymous Spirits

From Erdland (1914) to Tobin (2002), Marshallese myth and legend is replete with unnamed spirits. These spirits are often outwitted, intimidated, or are simpleminded (Erdland 1914, 233ff.). These are "slice of life" spirits who present human idiosyncrasies and weakness in spirit form.

Manifestations

Ekjab is not a separate classification of spirits but in fact a medium that spirits used to reveal themselves to living humans. *Ekjab* is a broad and almost untranslatable category, which could include manifestations of the *anij,* nature, transformed humans, or almost anything else associated with the supernatural. The basalt pillar of the clan-creating *Liwatounmour* was an *ekjab;* the tree on Majuro that embodied *Jemeliut,* the brother of trickster *Letao,* was also an *ekjab* (Knappe 1888, 10).

Jitob was another overlapping category of the spirit world, a modality stressing the invisibility of spirits such as *Letao* the trickster, *Kobange* the god of thunder, and *Irojerilik,* god of increase and good souls (Knappe 1888, 3–5).

The Marshallese Cosmos

There were two mythological pictures of the Marshallese cosmos, and they appear to depict the Marshalls as the geographic crossroads of the clamshell cosmos of its southern neighbors in Kiribati and the bowl-shaped "vault of the heavens" from the Chuukic-speaking islands to the north.

The myth of cosmic origins from the god *Lowa* was the most prominent in the western atolls (Ralik).[23] After the creation of islands, reefs, birds, and plants, *Lowa* created the four gods of the cardinal directions, who became the four post-men that held up the heavens.[24] These gods, constituting four of the six "great gods" of the Marshalls, were very prominent in petitions within Marshallese ritual (Krämer and Nevermann 1938). The post-men eventually collapsed and the heavens fell at the four points on the horizon, thus creating the vault above the sea and islands, a vault that resembled the inverted bowl of the Chuukic-speaking islands:

> In the beginning there were four posts. They remained there. And the post in the east fell down and made the sky in the east. And it was given the name *Lokomraan*. It remained a short while, and the post in the south fell down to make the sky in the south. Its name was *Lorok*. A short while later, the post in the north fell down to make the sky in the north. Its name was *LajibwiNamun*. It remained a short while, and the post in the west fell down to make the sky in the west. Its name was *Iroojrilik* (from 1975 in Tobin 2002, 11).

This act seems to keep the heavens above the vault but leaves the space between the heavens and the sea ambiguous. Depending on the myth selected, there was either a hole in the heavens that allowed traffic between heavenly beings and the islands, or there was a tree (pandanus) or pole between the heavens and the islands. One story states that the gods who emerged from a boil on *Lowa* fell from the sky to earth. One of the "worm" supernaturals who emerged from *Lowa* was *Wullep,* whose dwelling was a mythic island called *Ep* (Erdland 1914, 213).[25] There is nothing recorded about any world under the sea.

The high-activity plane of the cosmos was the surface of the sea and the islands. The dead journeyed to a mythical island rather than up to the heavens or to a world under the sea. Even the sky god *Letao* came from Kiribati, received his magic potion from a sea turtle goddess, traveled to various islands, and returned to Kiribati to die. The actions of the patron deities took place on earth: the gifts of divining, of sailing, and of tattooing.

In another myth, the first creation was the prying open of a giant clamshell, similar to the Kiribati creation story. There seem to be two major Micronesian pictures of the cosmos: the inverted bowl and the pried-open clamshell. The significance of these two different views may be, as mentioned earlier, that the Marshallese pictures of the universe are a mixture of the Kiribati-Polynesian elements and elements from deeper

within Micronesia. It also may be that the two major pictures reflect the different mythology of the two chains of Marshallese atolls, the Ralik and Ratak.[26]

There are other features of the Marshallese cosmos that were unique. The four post-men or gods of the four cardinal directions assume a ritual importance that is not found elsewhere in Micronesia (Erdland 1914, 285, 308). The boundaries of the horizon, signified by sunrise and sunset, expanded more and more over the time of cosmic beginnings (310–311). The meaning of this symbol is a mystery, but as Marshallese navigators gained knowledge of the Micronesian islands, their knowledge of the horizon boundaries probably expanded, and the expanding horizon may express this tradition. But certainly, as Marshallese gained experience with the world beyond the atolls, their myths expanded to embrace the bigger world (one story of *Letao* has him making a trip to America). As elsewhere in Micronesia, and perhaps across the globe, the picture of the cosmos was the physical stage where the interaction between gods, spirits, and humans took place.

Marshallese Ritual

The old Marshallese rituals were not showy, at least by comparison with the Polynesian and Hawaiian rituals. They were rather subtle, and outsiders could easily miss the religious dimension of important ceremonies. Sometimes myth offers the only key to the religious nature of ritual.

Life-Crisis Rituals

Erdland recorded no religious ritual pertaining to pregnancy and birth; the throwing of the male baby's umbilical into the sea (so that he will be a good fisherman) and placing the girl's in a pandanus tree (so that she will like to weave pandanus leaves) has no ritual associated with it (1914, 124). Unlike in the Chuukic-speaking islands, the umbilical cord was not buried and did not symbolize the matrilineal claim to the land. Later, after World War II, Alexander Spoehr observed that "pregnant women are thought to be particularly susceptible to illness caused by ghosts of the dead and are careful to keep a lantern burning at night; a female relative usually sleeps close by in the same room" (1949, 206). There was formerly, as Erdland recorded, a "discharge" ritual (magic, as he describes it) a few days after the first full moon following a birth (1914, 125–126). A fire was lit in an "oven" (really a shallow pit), and in it was placed the "bud" of a new growth on a coconut palm. An old woman took the bud and singed the infant's hair with it; she then put water on the fire and dug out

the ashes in the pit and put into the "oven" a clamshell and a snail. The symbolic meaning of the about-to-blossom coconut palm bud appears to point to the prospect of the baby growing and blossoming; an accompanying "magic formula" expressed hopes for the baby's health and prosperity, and the parents fasted from all food until sunset.

Today there is the *kemem,* the celebration of an infant's first birthday (McArthur 1995, 246; Hezel 2001, 76), but early reports do not record the *kemem*.

Formerly, only the daughters of chiefs had puberty ceremonies, although the Marshalls shared the pan-Pacific features of menstrual huts and ritual isolation.[27]

Erdland described an elaborate funeral and burial ritual that was only for chiefs or highly ranked persons. By comparison, commoners had little or no ritual surrounding their death and burial. The *eoreak,* or final rite of the contemporary burial ceremony, is the final stage of mourning (six days after burial). Attending relations put stones on the grave, "smoothing" it over. In fact, *eoreak* literally means "to smooth out." Symbolically, this "smoothing out" of the stones means the easing of tensions that threaten to divide the people of the community (Hezel 2001, 99). An interesting point is that the *eoreak* is intended to help not only those present at the moment of ritual but also anyone who attends to the funeral. One member from each family presents a basket of clean white coral rocks to place around the gravesite (Walsh, personal communication, 2004). This ritual may well be a recent innovation, because before World War I only the chiefs were buried on land; commoners were unceremoniously "buried" at sea. Moreover, according to Erdland, *Eoreak* (*Eoerök*) was the final mystic island destination of the deceased spirits (1914).[28]

None of the older sources give a description of death and funeral ritual for the Marshallese commoner. "Common natives are buried without ceremony," wrote Erdland, but he did give a detailed description of death and funeral ritual of Marshallese chiefs (1914, 324ff.). It was a ritual process laced with "magic formulas, prohibitions (taboos), and beliefs about the spirits."

For the deceased chiefs, death chants ("lamentations") continued for two days and nights after death, during which "magical formulas" were said. On the morning of the third day, the body was taken to the burial place where dancing was performed in the chief's honor, and the body was wrapped in mats and carried six times around the grave as the "sorcerer" called out the number for each circumambulation; on the sixth circling, the corpse was put in the grave, the head facing north so that the evil-causing *Lajibwi Namun,* the heavenly post-man or holder of the vault of heaven in the north, could not harm the soul.[29] Then a high relative of the chief

called out, "Give him a companion," and if the other relatives did not succeed in appeasing the relative who called out, an adult was killed and buried near the chief. But if the high relative was appeased, a large canoe was broken up, placed on top of the body, and covered over with stones and sand.[30] After burial, the mourning lasted for six days and nights, accompanied by a series of taboos, including one that prohibited the gravediggers from having sex or being seen on the lagoon side of the islet (the side where the chief had lived). The punishment for violating this religious sanction was that the sky gods *Lewoj* and *Laneej* would eat the souls of the guilty parties (Tobin 2002, 12). Even as late as the 1990s, the places where chiefs were buried were off-limits to anyone other than the descendants of the deceased chiefs (Carucci 1997).

Honoring the Ancestors

Only occasional or rare comments are on record about how extended families honored their dead. A piece of food was sometimes offered to the dead, but whether that was out of fear or reverence is still in question. The destiny of some of the departed to return and be seen or even possess living kin was well known. Yet legends and stories focus on the return of evildoing spirits like the *mejenkwaad,* the flying spirits of deceased women (Tobin 2002). The atolls where chiefs are buried are still considered sacred or tabooed places, and the living chiefs are known to come to these places to honor their ancestors (Carucci 1997).

Divining

Bubu—divining by interpreting the knots in plaited coconut fronds—might appear to an outside observer as the mechanical Marshallese technique of tarot cards or rolling dice. The outsider may not see the religious belief behind the practice. As noted earlier, both the old myths and contemporary belief agree that divining is a gift from the gods. It was a religious power used to reveal the unknown. It was commonly used to uncover deception and lies.[31] The confirming myth for the continued contemporary belief in divining is that of *Lijenenbwe.*

Breadfruit and Pandanus Ritual

Pandanus and breadfruit have always been of utmost importance to the Marshallese, similar to breadfruit in Chuuk or taro in Yap. Today, however, when more than 90 percent of the Marshallese diet comes from imported sources (Walsh 2003), neither pandanus nor breadfruit is a significant staple any longer. Despite a decrease of importance at mealtime, the traditional starches do remain a prestige food for festivals. What is remarkable is that after almost a century and a half of missionaries and a

change to imported food, the old pandanus and breadfruit rituals—as first described by Erdland are still remembered. In general, these rituals are performed to invoke the gods for the increased growth of crops. They are also performed at harvest times, including times of offering to the chiefs and the distribution of the first crop. Smaller rituals, not well documented or remembered, marked the making of preserved breadfruit and pandanus "flour." Oddly enough, there exists little old or recent record of fishing rituals, usually so important in Micronesian cultures.

Erdland's 1914 description of crop rituals does not always agree with post–World War II accounts, but both old and new emphasize the invocation of the gods of the four cardinal directions, the heavenly post-men who once held up the vault of the heavens. The earliest report of invoking the gods of the cardinal directions may come from Knappe (1888). What is strange is that his report states that the gods were invoked not for crop ritual but for weather observations (Erdland 1914, 182). The earliest and most detailed report of pandanus and breadfruit ritual is from Erdland, which he strangely puts under the heading of veneration of spiritual beings.[32] This ritual was a first fruits offering to the gods of the four directions. It could also be interpreted as a redistribution ritual.

According to Erdland, the time of the pandanus ritual was set by the chief, and all the men of the atoll gathered at the end of the island, bringing raw food that they themselves cooked (1914, 316ff.). The first part of the ritual was the folding of palm leaf in the shape of a bird. The palm-leaf bird was then put on the ground and a set of verses was said over the bird, declaring that this bird is the one that the spirits of *Eb* (in the west) have sent eastward to eat the food of the atoll.[33] Somewhat later, the leader pierced a pandanus fruit and carried it to the west, praying as follows:[34]

> Pandanus of the god in the west, *Lawalleb* [*Wullep*],
> Take it westward, take it westward,
> Lay it outside in front of the hut of *Lawalleb!* (1914, 317)

He then repeated the ritual, invoking in turn the gods of the east, south, and north. Finally, a pandanus is buried with the following prayer: "Pandanus for growth, throw it there, so that they take and bury it, that the ground of this island be fruitful."

The second part of this elaborate ritual was a cluster of smaller rituals of divination, the launching of a miniature canoe, and a gathering at the house of a sorceress. The divination (*bubu*) selected the men who would go to a "place of sacrifice" or "of fire," either in the open or under a tree. The men prepared a fire to cool the special foods they brought; all women

were excluded. From that food, some of the inedible parts were taken to make a tiny canoe, *Wullep*'s canoe (*wa an Wulleb*), which was launched to sail westward.[35]

Two days later, the men returned to the place of sacrifice bringing food—fish and breadfruit—for the women and then went to the hut of a ritual leader (*kijmenlan*). There a fire was already started, and the women outside were adorning themselves with "ornaments." When they were finished, the leader (sorcerer/sorceress) let out six shrieks, and on the sixth cry the women rushed into the hut, where the leader (perhaps entranced) kicked the pandanus and invoked the gods of the cardinal directions.

During the meal that terminated the ritual, women were allowed to eat raw pandanus fruit, which was forbidden to them during the rest of the year.

Although the ritual was undoubtedly elaborate and focused on ripe pandanus with invocations to the gods of the four compass directions, many of Erdland's details are puzzling. The meaning behind the segregation of male and female, the lifting of ritual prohibitions, the coming together of men and women, and the gender of the leaders is not explained. In this old description, one can at least say the gender of participants was a significant detail, and perhaps the roles by males and females reflects the Marshallese tracing of clans and chiefs through the female line.

Tobin's account of the pandanus and breadfruit ritual was recorded in 1975 and is included within a long myth about "the beginning of this world" (2002, 11ff.); both pandanus and breadfruit rituals are also included within the story of the work of a culture-heroine, simply called "the woman."[36] It was "the woman" who gave the ritual to hasten the ripening of pandanus and breadfruit, having first taken command of the winds and separated the winds of north, south, east, and west. In this long myth, she first gave the ritual for breadfruit and then for pandanus.

The breadfruit ceremony began with the woman's order to gather the breadfruit in a pile and to choose men to walk about, just before dawn, crying out "*Ni-mi-to O-O-O*" again and again. The call is rather odd, first because it is in an ancient or ritual language, and second because it means "Coconut, come here." The coconut produces nuts all year around, and the ritual participants (at the woman's command) wanted breadfruit to produce like the coconuts (Tobin 2002, 18).

When the chosen men came to the pile of breadfruit, they called out to four men to come from the four directions and take a breadfruit to put down in the east, west, north, and south about six feet from the pile. Each man said (changing the name of the direction and the god of that direction),

> Breadfruit of *Kijmelan*[37] over there—in the [east, south, north, or west]
> I take it to the [east, south, north, or west]
> I place it outside the house of [*Lokomraan, Lorok, LajibwiNamun, Iroojrilik*]. (Tobin 2002, 18ff.).

Finally the men cried out loudly, "It is permitted! It is permitted!" When the gathered people heard this, they rushed up to the pile and took some breadfruit; now they were free to pick the ripening breadfruit.

The concluding command by "the woman" was, "She told them that if they did any big work [presumably, harvesting and preparing of breadfruit and pandanus], they should take time to pray and remember their suffering and their happiness because it came to pass" (Tobin 2002, 20). This command, together with the separating of the four winds, is both the beginning and end of the ritual. Although this final command might sound like a Christian overlay, it is significant to note that Marshallese storytellers put these rituals in the category of prayer, not of magic. Within the culture, there is no rigid dichotomy between religion and magic.

Recorded in the 1990s is another description of the pandanus ritual very similar to Tobin's record from Kwajalein Atoll (Carucci 1997, 226ff.). Without repeating all the detail from Erdland and Tobin, the ritual pattern is identical. There is a gathering of the people before dawn, announced by men calling the "*Ni-mi-to O-O-O.*" The gathering takes place around a pile of pandanus or breadfruit. There follows the invocation of the four gods of east, west, north, and south. Finally, the taboo or prohibition against harvesting or eating the raw crop is lifted.

The above summary of the ritual pattern verifies the wealth of detail recorded over a century of evidence. Together with the descriptions of breadfruit ritual among the Chuukic-speaking peoples, the Marshallese record is one of the most remarkable Micronesian statements of ritual continuity. If Pohnpei shows the best evidence of ritual change and evolution, then the breadfruit rituals of the Marshalls and the Chuukic islands show the best evidence of the opposite. But the uniqueness of the Marshallese ritual—unlike its southern neighbors, the I-Kiribati, and its more northern neighbors, the Pohnpeians and Chuukese—is the emphasis on the gods of the four directions, the gods of the four winds.

Food and Feasting as Religious Ritual

No one doubts that food itself, the distribution and sharing of food, and the accumulation and sharing of large amounts of food (feasting) are strong features of contemporary Marshallese values and behavior. Nor does anyone doubt, as far as I know, that the contemporary Marshallese value is

rooted in tradition. The question at hand is, however, whether this cultural and customary value is more than just an artifact of custom and can be justifiably called a part of Marshallese religion either now or in the past.[38]

Any answer based on evidence depends on the acceptance of one of two rather generalized definitions of religion. If one can agree with Geertz (1966) that religion is one out of several meaning "systems" distinguished by their unique use of symbols, then Marshallese food ceremony is probably religious. But if one demands that food belief and ritual appeal to some superhuman beings, a superhuman intervention, or something distinctly and discreetly different than ordinary eating and sharing of food, then any food presentation, sharing, and distribution—regardless of the geographic or cultural location—is not religious. The no-man's-land of those two extremes is to construct an in-between category of beliefs and ritual that carries with it an aura of the sacred or religious—something akin to the Western practice of grace before meals (even elevated to an atmosphere similar to the US holiday of Thanksgiving).[39] I argue here that the presentation of food and feasting is frequently religious because of its inclusion within religious ritual and its association with sacred symbols.

First, food presentation and distribution (this would include feasting) gain their religious character from the religious context. The food brought to a contemporary funeral, for example, gains an aura of the religious or the sacred from mourning and funeral ritual. In the Marshallese case, the offering and distributing of food is, moreover, elevated to a special symbol when the food is a traditional staple, such as breadfruit or fish that come from the donor's own land (*wato*) (Walsh, personal communication, 2004).

Second, food was and still is a core symbol of Marshallese kinship and power, as can be seen in the belief regarding chiefs (McArthur 1995, 438). A chief maintained his power by sharing food and by giving feasts: "The greatest gesture of respect a chief or anyone can make in the Marshall Islands is to share food" (155). As recently as a feast by the first president of the Republic of the Marshall Islands, who was also a paramount chief (*irooj laplap*), the people commented that he was kind: "He feeds his people." And they put his financing of the feast on a level with the mythological star-god, *Jebro:* "Amata rises in the east [and] he makes the surface calm, he loves people . . . he is chief Amata . . . he is chief Amata . . . Amata is chief " (270). In this case, the feasting is religious by its association with religious belief and myth (*Loktanur* and *Jebro*) and with the sacred character of Marshallese chiefs.

The notion that food ritual can gain its religious dimension from the ritual context or from mythological associations is not unusual, as Goodenough clearly describes in his ethnography of pre-Christian religious

tradition in the Chuuk Lagoon (2002). In fact, I would hazard to say that most food ritual in Micronesia derives from contexts and associations similar to the Marshallese case. Rituals of food sharing and feasting that are unequivocally religious are rare in Micronesia. The Pohnpeian feasting to the gods during the great smallpox epidemic was exceptional, even in terms of Pohnpeian ritual (see Hanlon 1988, 105–110).

Tattooing as Religious Ritual

In the Marshalls, the identifying mark of the sacred (*monmon*) is that it comes from the gods; in other words, the establishing element of the sacred is in mythology. The stories of the sky god *Lowa* and the sending of the gods *Lewoj* and *Lanij* from heaven to earth to teach tattooing form the mythological basis for its sacredness.[40] When a new tattooing house was to be built, a long divination was performed that lasted multiple days. Sacrifices were even made to the gods of tattooing. Sacrifices of food were placed on the sacred stones representing *Lewoj* and *Lanij*. Numerous taboos were in effect during the actual tattooing: For example, no women were to be present when a male was being tattooed (Spennemann 1993, 127, 132–134). The chiefs played an important, even exclusive role as the performers of the tattooing. It was as though the sacred gift of the gods was mediated through the sacred person of a chief (*irooj*).[41]

Certainly tattooing was also a status-affirming ritual. Only chiefs received facial tattoos, women and men received different markings, and only the well-off could afford the gifts and offerings. It follows that the more tattoos one had, the richer or more powerful that recipient must have been. Tattooing is a Pacific-wide feature. Myths across Micronesia describe the divine origin of any status or rank symbol, like the title system on Pohnpei. Although tattooing and titles are different symbol sets, functionally they are the same: They are both sacred and secular status markers.

Tattooing disappeared quickly from the Marshalls due to contact with the Western powers and due to early missionization. In Europe and the United States, branding or tattooing was a punishment for released prisoners or military deserters. Tattooing was forbidden to the ancient Hebrews (Lev. 19:28) and was hence contrary to the Bible according to the early missionaries.[42] Other islands in Micronesia maintained tattooing until after World War II and conversion to Christianity. There is no record about anything replacing the traditional role of Marshallese tattooing, but it did not die without a struggle. Earlier missionaries recorded that entire communities would sometimes travel to non-Christian atolls in order to receive tattoos. Today the only tattoos seen in the Marshalls are distinctively Western patterns, more often than not done in a US studio.

Chapter 7

The Old Religion of Yap

The Mythic and the Real Yap

In the myths of the Chuukic-speaking islands and of Pohnpei, Yap was a prominent source of island founders, men of wisdom, and powerful magicians. Whether those myths, which identify this island (*Yap* or *Iap*) as located to the west, referred to the real high island of Yap or some mystic island is not always certain. The mystic *Yap* in the west was matched in Chuukic and Pohnpeian myth by a mystic island to the east, called *Katau* or *Kachaw.* The Yapese themselves call their own cluster of tightly proximate high islands Wa'ab (Waqab).[1] Yap myth has reciprocated by locating sources of the cosmic forces and events on Wa'ab as coming from places near Chuuk and Pohnpei.[2] Yap thus loomed larger than life in Micronesian mythology. Certainly part of the reason arose from the *sawei,* the exchange system between Wa'ab and the atolls to the east. For 1,300 years, Wa'ab exchanged goods with its eastern Chuukic-speaking neighbors, especially with Ulithi (Descantes 1998). Eventually, this developed into an exchange of prestige items stretching all the way east to Namonuito Atoll, with Ulithi Atoll as the intermediary and all the atolls in this chain acknowledging a dependency relationship on Yap. This real exchange is verified by the archaeological record, especially by pottery from Yap found on the atoll. The material exchange in turn was fortified by myth of the superior magic of the Yap priests and magicians that threatened the atolls with typhoon and doom.[3] Thus, there is substantial evidence for the long arm of Yapese power. Whatever its real relationship with the rest of Micronesia was, it became legitimized by religion and strengthened by the mythology that attributed great mystic power to Yap. The prehistoric and historic Wa'ab was elevated to the status of one of those Micronesian places that is at once real, legendary, and mystical.

The Sources

Earlier reports from the nineteenth century are not extensive, in stark contrast to neighboring Palau, but the ethnographic sources for Yap are

surprisingly good for the twentieth century, which was the critical time for the abandonment of the old religion. Still, the old religion of Yap was in serious decline by the time ethnographically oriented missionaries and the Hamburg Expedition of 1908–1910 reached the islands. Wilhelm Müller, a member of the Hamburg Expedition, wrote two volumes (1917 and 1918) on the basis of his 1909–1910 fieldwork on Yap; these volumes are the earliest major ethnography about the islands. Müller's main problems were that, by 1910, the old religion was already very close to forgotten—even by the priests in charge of the main shrines, or *taliiw*—and that the myths about the gods varied greatly from district to district. For the Capuchin missionary Sixtus Walleser, the problem was somewhat different. In his case, it was the reticence of the Yapese to say much about their beliefs: "As a proof of his good will he [the Yapese] will refer the researcher to other persons, who, he says, are better informed. If you do find someone who is willing to talk, you get tales and stories in vast quantities; but after you have written until you get finger cramps you end up knowing as much about essential matters as when you started" (1967, 2).[4]

After World War II, the religious relationship between Yap and the Chuukic-speaking atolls was clarified by both ethnographers and archaeologists (Alkire, Hunter-Anderson, and Descantes). Sherwood Lingenfelter interviewed one of the last shrine priests and was able to show the role of the priests in setting the ritual calendar.

Organizing the Features of the Old Religion

Although Yap proper is linguistically not closely related to other Micronesian languages, its old religion shows both unique and Micronesian-wide features. Within a familiar structure of the cosmos and its spirits is a class of gods and goddesses not well documented elsewhere in Micronesia: the crop or vegetation deities. Each of these deities was bound to a shrine, and these shrines were served by their own hierarchies of priests. This feature deserves special emphasis, as does the calendar of rituals controlled by the same groups of priests. A second feature worthy of attention was the Yap emphasis on rituals of taboo (or ritual purity), and although taboo-conscious religion was common in Polynesia, it was not strong elsewhere in Micronesia. It may well be that at one time both Pohnpei and Kosrae had priests who set the ritual calendar and maintained it with elaborate ceremonies. Within Micronesia, however, only Yap had strong evidence of calendar-based ceremonies. Finally, it is difficult to pinpoint the flow of religious concepts and practices between various Micronesian areas.

The most notable exceptions are the widely scattered Chuukic-speaking islands. Interestingly, Yap has both archaeology and legend that connect its old religion with that of the Chuukic atolls to the east.

The Cosmos and Spirits of Old Yap Religion

The Cosmos and the Creator Gods

The old Yapese had a generic and all-embracing word for gods and spirits: *kan*. Included in this broad category were the sky gods, or perhaps more precisely, the deities of primordial creation. Most of the gods of Micronesia came into an already created universe. This is not so for Yap, or at least for some of Müller's informants in 1910. *Gavur li yel yel* was the name of the being who hovered in some higher region without light and who created the cosmos of four tiers (*tael*). These tiers were as follows:

1. The unnamed tier, which *Gavur* alone occupied.
2. The sky layer and home of the gods (*Tharami*). In Yap myth, there is no vault above earth and above the highest heaven. Spirits moved from heaven to earth and back on a thread (Walleser 1967, 11).
3. The earth itself (*Donop*).
4. The underworld or the world-under-the sea (*Ar*). The bottom of the sea (*sath*) is at the top of *Ar,* but the sea is not singled out as a separate tier (Müller 1917, 504ff.).

Gavur li yel yel next created the sun and moon to light up this four-storied cosmos.[5] He created this cosmos and the first gods in two ways: either by his hand (with dirt, water, and breath) or by *mam,* which informant Tätse described as "just like thinking" (1917, 505). He then created the oldest and chief of the gods, *Yanolop,* with the hand-and-dirt method; *Yanolop* in turn, by means of *mam,* created four males and one female deity. The female, *Matsugulop,* was rather active and mated with the four males. Their offspring in turn mated with each other and produced another generation of sky gods. Many of the names are dialectical variants or cognates of the Chuukic pantheon.

Table 1 looks neat and relatively simple, but Müller came up with different versions from different informants. According to one of his lead informants, *Yälfaath* the Small was the son of *Lugälan* (1917, 506), but a few pages later, in describing the special position of *Yälfaath* and *Lugälan,* he cites *Yälfaath* the Small as *Yälfaath*'s son. Müller refers to the texts of myths in his second volume and cautions, "It would be misleading if one were to attempt to bring together all these individual passages into

Table 1. The Genealogy of the Gods

Underlined names indicate important deities in the creation process.

Gavur li yel yel

1. Creates four layers of cosmos.
2. Creates chief god, *Yanolop.*
3. *Yanolop* creates four male gods and one female: *Lugälan*, *Yälfaath* (the Elder), *Sälan, Susugots, Matsugulop* (female).
4. *Matsugulop* mates with her four brothers and an unknown male and bears *Yälfaath* (the Small), *Teranog, Tsilap & Tarai, Dänen, Lug.*
5. *Yanolop* (or *Gavur li yel yel*) creates *Solal,* god of the world-under-the-sea.
6. *Gavur li yel yel* creates the lesser gods of the world-under-the-sea: *Thafonots, Pisulog, Lugesath, Maltomai, Gusenei* (female).
7. In a pattern like *Yanolop* creating the sky gods, *Gusenei* mates with her four brothers and their offspring intermarry with each other.

a unified picture; they are not parts of an original whole that have been preserved in the memory of one person or another" (1918). Walleser has *Yälfaath* the Small as the son of *Yälfaath* (1967, 8), as has Beauclair (1967, 29). These variations should come as no surprise to any student of mythology or comparative religion. Lessa's volumes, *Tales from Ulithi Atoll* (1961) and *More Tales from Ulithi Atoll* (1980), are classic witnesses to this variation for Micronesia.

Those familiar with the Chuukic pantheon can easily see that the "big three" of Chuuk mythology—*Enúúnap, Luk,* and *Olifat*—were also part of the Yap pantheon. However, only *Enúúnap* functioned like his Yap counterpart, *Yanolop,* in that they were both chief gods of the pantheon. The cognate Yap name for the trickster-culture hero of the Chuukic continuum, *Olifat,* is *Yälfaath,* and he becomes a rather respectable deity on Yap.[6] The trickster element, however, surfaces with *Yälfaath* the Small, and some of the same myths from the Chuukic isles about *Olifat* are reported for *Yälfaath* the Small. The same pattern of an "Elder" god and a "Younger" one with the same name is also reported for Kiribati, notably in the case of *Nareau* the Elder and *Nareau* the Younger. One is a creator god and the other is a trickster (see Grimble 1972).

The rather abstract *Gavur li yel yel* is a unique figure in Micronesia, not only as a creator without a preexisting cosmos but also in his methods of creating this cosmos. The Yap cosmos, with its four layers, was much like the universe-as-inverted-dome found in the Chuukic islands, but there seems to be no vault of the heavens. Also, the layers of the sky world were reduced from nine to one or perhaps two, and the sea (between the world-under and earth) was apparently not seen as a separate layer (*tael*).[7]

The sky tier (*tael*), where the gods live, was laid out like Yap itself, with a stream running through the middle and a series of paths leading to the dwellings or men's houses of the gods. Depending on what version is consulted, either a trapdoor, a tree, or a thread led from the sky world to earth. The trapdoor between earth and *Solal*'s underworld was not at the bottom of the sea, as in Chuuk, but instead was on earth somewhere between the Chuuk Lagoon and Losap. At the north side of the sky layer was the men's house where *Lug* brought up to *Yanolop* for judgment the souls he had netted.

Yälfaath and *Lugälan* seem to have been the only sky gods regularly invoked by the Yapese.[8] As patron of canoe building, *Lugälan* was offered the sacrifice (*mäybil*) of an unripe coconut (Müller 1917, 517). *Yälfaath* was the patron of the religious experts (*tamaarong*)[9] and the culture hero who invented the sail for the heavenly *Matotsig*.[10] When a sail was left folded on a canoe in Yap, a betel nut was put in the folds and this prayer recited:

> Here is the betel quid
> As your food, *LiMatotsig*
> Now you ask *Yälfaath*
> And *Lugälan,* now watch
> This sail here, now cause to go away.
> The rain over this sail here,
> And open the things
> Of this land here for us (Müller 1917, 518).

Other gods may have not been invoked in prayer, but their stories were still remembered. In this story told to Müller by Ruepong, an old Yap priest, *Yälfaath* the Small was a bawdy deity, hardly the type one would want to pray to:

> Daniman, called Susugots in the east, had a huge penis. Once he shoved under his foreskin a thousand coconuts from the food of the inhabitants of heaven and hid them there. *Yelafath* [*Yälfaath*] came to him in women's clothing and asked him to have coitus. After some hesitation, he pushed back the foreskin and let the coconuts fall. *Yelafath* kicked the penis, which through erection had become a long pole, gathered up the nuts, and hurried away (Müller 1917, 316).

Yälfaath the Elder, on the other hand, was important as the creator of human beings. While *Gavur li yel yel* created the gods using either the

aforementioned hand-and-dirt technique or the *mam* method, *Yälfaath* created humans with the hand-and-dirt method only.[11] According to Inez de Beauclair, writing in 1967, the only sky god still worshipped in the district of Gagil was *Yälfaath* (1967, 28).

The question arises as to how this combination of deities came about. Did the Yapese model influence the Chuukic-speaking islands or did the Chuukic isles influence the Yapese pantheon? Beauclair argued for a Yapese origin for the gods common to both: "The mythology of Yap . . . has priority over that of the rest of the western Caroline islands. . . . Whatever comes from Yap, is not just a 'version'" (1967, 30). Certainly in the nineteenth century, when the ritualized trade exchange (*sawei*) was still active, the Chuukic mythology and legend supported the priority of Yap (see Lessa 1950a and 1961).[12] Yap was said to dominate because its more powerful magicians could do serious damage to the outer islanders.[13] On the other hand, Yap accepted the help and knowledge of the outer island canoe builders and navigators, and their work was steeped in prayers to the Chuukic gods. Moreover, on linguistic grounds the common deities would seem to be Chuukic names, such as *Yanolop, Yälfaath,* and *Lugälan.* At least one of the gods, *Yälfaath* the Small, was much like the trickster spirit found throughout the Chuukic-speaking chain of atolls, down through the Marshalls and Kiribati, far beyond any claimed dominance by Yap. Still, Yap was, throughout Micronesia, one of those mysterious sources of culture and myth, much like *Katau/Kachaw* to the east. Thus, the evidence for the direction of diffusion is ambiguous at best. It is impossible to categorically determine with any real confidence that the common elements of these religions originated in Yap.

Thagith, the Ancestor Spirits

The Yapese tale of human creation is as follows: *Yälfaath* created the original human pair, and the man was called Ganan (*gaanong,* meaning clan) and the woman Nik (*nik,* meaning totem or the taboo food of the clan). The next day, *Yälfaath* created another couple and then decided that if he had to do this every day, there would not be many humans, so he gave the previously sexless humans the penis and the vagina. *Yälfaath* came back a few days later and taught them agriculture so that they could eat. After that, the god retired to heaven and the humans spread out from *Nutsig,* "probably first to Yap," said Tätse.

There were additional connections between humans and the sky gods. *Lug* flew about netting those destined to die. The netted souls were then brought for judgment to *Yanolop*'s heavenly clubhouse. What happened at that judgment varies from informant to informant. To understand the

Yapese concept of judgment after death, however, one must first look at the Yapese concept of soul.

The Human Soul: Before and After Death

Yapese, like the people of the Chuuk Lagoon and the Mortlocks, affirmed a belief in two souls in each living person (Müller 1917, 523).[14] The two souls, said Ruepong, were *yaan ni yam* and *yaan ni fos (*sometimes *yafos)*. These can be translated as "the one-that-dies" and "the one-that-lives," respectively. The accompanying legend states that it took a year for anyone to recognize that the person was dead, and in the meantime the soul-that-lives wandered about the earth. *Lug* and a divine friend would eat the soul-that-dies, and no more was heard from it. The wandering soul-that-lives returned from its traveling through the agency of a prayer of incantation called the *ma'log*. The *ma'log* induced the soul to Gatsam,[15] where it might either stay or ascend to heaven. The similarities with the Chuukic beliefs are noteworthy:

- Belief in two souls.
- Belief in a soul that lives and one that dies (both similar and different because, for the Chuukese, the two souls are the "good and bad" souls).
- Ambiguity regarding the good/living soul: It might be helpful or harmful.
- Death marked the transition of the good/living soul into a special kind of spirit. This transformed soul was the focus of the ritual and belief that formerly would have been called "ancestor worship." In Yapese, the transformed living soul was called *thagith* or (rarely) *kan,* and in the Chuukic-speaking islands, some variation of *énú* or *énúúyaramas* (a similarity inasmuch as both cultures have distinguishing terms for spirits of deceased humans).
- Both the Yapese and Chuukic good/living souls become the focus of cult at the lowest level of social organization—the nuclear, extended family, the lineage, or even the village.

According to the Yapese priest Ruepong, different living souls went to different places in the "afterlife." Ordinary people went one place, chiefs to another, and priests and religious experts (*tamaarong*) to yet a third. Warriors who died in battle and women who died in childbirth also had their own respective resting places. There seem to be at least five separate locations in the afterlife (Müller 1917, 524–525). This high number of possible resting places begs the question of whether or not everybody

went to heaven. On this point, Müller found that Ruepong contradicted himself. At first the priest said that everybody went to heaven, but he later indicated special places for chiefs, warriors, *tamaarong,* and women who died in childbirth (532–533). And some, such as the fishing ritualist (*tamaarong*) and those who died at sea, went to the world-under-the-sea. However, he goes on to say that there were in fact other souls that did not leave earth at all, thus never making it to any sort of heaven. These souls remained in the place called Gatsam. Grave goods were given at burial to help the soul make it to heaven—or at least to Gatsam. This is one of the clearest examples recorded in Micronesia of grave goods as tokens to help the soul in journey to the abode of the deceased. Müller's description is not clear as to whether the watchman, *Rumang,* guarded both the gate to the heavens and the gate to the world-under-the-sea or only the latter (524). In any case, if the souls-that-live had money with them, *Rumang* let them pass. *Rumang* also did some judging before any soul came before *Yanolop*. Ruepong gave the example of a woman who had done something bad on earth: *Rumang* pushed her into the water where she was held fast by a sticky substance on a rock.[16] Elsewhere the souls were described as taken by *Lug* to *Yanolop*'s clubhouse, where *Yanolop* separated the good and the bad. But, as Müller remarks, good and bad here should not be understood in a moral sense. When informant Tätse described the word "bad," his examples included people with diseases—ringworm, no nose, serious wounds, elephantiasis—as well as women who died in childbirth.[17]

The god of the world-under also got into the death and judgment act, but apparently only for those destined for his world-under-the-sea (*Ar*). The world-under god, *Solal,* had no tree whose falling leaves determined the number to die each day, as had the heavenly *Yanolop,* but *Solal* did have a ball of coconut cord a hundred fathoms long. At night, *mam* (the "just thinking" mode of creating things) spontaneously tied knots in the rope. In the morning, *Solal* had the ball unrolled and held tight. Those knots that came untied were the souls that stayed in heaven; those whose knots remained knotted became the new citizens of the world-under-the-sea (Müller 1917, 517–519, 522).

The souls-that-live (*yafos*) who returned to their earthly dwellings were called *thagith*. They could remain invisibly in their former residence or take the form of a mouse, starling, or firefly (Müller 1917, 524; Walleser 1967, 36). The *thagith* were given bits of food by their living descendants. They often had no special dwelling should they return to the house, unless it was their old betel bag, which was hung in the house and considered the place where they stayed. If their old house was destroyed or knocked down, a small shrine was built for them on the old stone platform of the

house. Some of these are the "spirit houses" photographed by Müller. They look like little houses standing on stilts or a high foundation, with "sacred" objects inside or next to them. Müller found one such shrine that had been in the family for eleven generations. This shrine, *tafen e vonod*,[18] contained two decayed wooden boxes "of Central Caroline origin," some ray spines, a betel nut pounder, a shell horn, and some shell money.

One interesting concept associated with the *thagith* was possession or trance. Some individuals "specialized" in being possessed by the ancestor *thagith* and were known as *pon thagith*. They carried out their ritual in a state of trance or altered state of consciousness (Walleser 1967, 36; Müller 1917, 375ff.).[19] *Pon thagith* literally means "caller of ancestor spirits," and they were regarded as the servants of the *thagith,* whom they "called" down to possess them (Walleser 1967, 37). In this sense, the *pon thagith* were mediums. Although *thagith* referred to the ancestor spirits, not all those who exhibited signs of trance and who were believed to be "possessed" were mediums for the ancestors. There were also other mediums who foretold when people would die (Müller 1917, 610). Some *pon thagith* were even inspired to compose dance songs. A man named Dogiem was famous in Müller's time as a gifted and inspired composer, possessed by a god named *Matapig*. Apparently the Yapese were not bothered that the inspired words were largely meaningless to both Dogiem and themselves. He was widely recognized as a medium; fishermen even brought him offerings when heading out on a fishing trip.

Sometimes the function of possessed mediums remained within the family. There was one case that spoke of a father and son; the possessing spirit (*kan*) of the father was the god *Lug* and the son was aptly possessed by a son of *Lug*.[20] The son developed a large following amongst the people. They came to him in cases of illness, and he received payment for his prophecies and revelations (Müller 1917, 610, 611). After he received his payments, he would call on his patron spirit. Then the *kan* spoke through him, giving the causes of illness and remedies.

Behind the family house was a spirit house called the *tothoothup,* where offerings were brought. Various offerings were found inside the tiny house, including clothing mats, shell money, bird feathers, and most notably, a carved wooden bowl shaped and colored like a canoe without an outrigger. Some of the contents were disappointing to Müller—specifically ray spines, pieces of glass, and two modern Japanese plates. He ultimately wrote of the possessed son as "psychopathic" (1917, 612). The son may have been one of the most famous spirit mediums, but there were also many other *pon thagith* on Yap before World War II. There is evidence that this practice has survived the Christianization of Yap and remains to

the present day, although the *pon thagith* of today are few in number and working in a quiet manner.

The Gods of the Crops and the *Taliiw* Shrines

There was yet another category of spirits on Yap: the *kan* of the *taliiw. Taliiw* was the precinct of a shrine, with the shrine itself on a platform, where a small house with offerings to the local god was built and where the shrine god was believed to live.[21] Within the shrine precinct there might be a separate hut for the priest in charge of the place. These *kan* were the spirits of the sacred or taboo places, and they were also the patrons of the major food sources: taro, breadfruit, bananas, coconut, and yams. According to Yap's elaborate, highly detailed mythology, they appeared sometime after the creation of the first humans. To summarize the legend as succinctly as possible, one goddess (*kan*), *Margigi,* mated with a human who died soon thereafter. [22] Some humans came to believe that *Margigi* interfered with their kite flying.[23] So they netted her and took her to the chief of Tomil, Kitimil, whom she married. *Margigi*'s father-in-law came to live with them and literally ate them out of house and home. Now, when Kitimil was out looking for more food for his voracious father-in-law, he placed a mousetrap in the sugarcane field. Unbeknownst to him, his father-in-law had transformed himself into a mouse and later was captured in the trap, which eventually killed him. *Margigi* then predicted that there would be a great storm, so she and Kitimil went to the highest mountain on Yap and built a seven-story house. The house saved them, but the storm wiped out everybody on Yap except one man from Tomil.

After the flood, *Margigi* had seven children. The seven children became the "vegetation" gods or the deities of the shrines (*taliiw kan*) (table 2). Along with the sky or creator gods and the ancestor spirits, these sons and the daughters of *Margigi* became the third category of spirits in Yapese belief. Unfortunately, it is no longer possible to see the precise relationship of each shrine deity to individual crops. What is well known, however, is that seven or eight localities became the places where the crop deities (*taliiw kan*) lived and where rituals were performed to honor and appease them. Priests who maintained the sacred precincts (*taliiw*) also lived there, and these locales are the same spots where sacrifices were offered to the *taliiw kan.*[24] We also know that the priests and traditions of the *taliiw kan* were critically important in maintaining the social structure of Yap, especially symbolized in the taboo system governing who might eat with whom. Little if anything was recorded about the evolution of this *taliiw kan* system with its priests, sacred places, and eating taboos. Müller could see in 1909–1910 that some of the key shrines or *taliiw* were all but

TABLE 2. The *Taliiw Kan*

Name of *Kan*	Location of Shrines	Patron of Which Crops	Rituals and Comment
Uezrei (probably spelled today as *Uthrei*)	Weloy District, in villages of Dugor, Pingoi, Vul, Alog	Yams and sweet potatoes	
Yanolop and his sister or daughter, *Lionan*	Gagil District, in Numrui, near Gachpar	Bananas were one of the most frequent offerings in ritual to *Yanolop*	He had other houses on Yap and went to Tol in the Chuuk Lagoon and to Masoliol, an unidentified island east of Pohnpei. He was the most widely known of *taliiw kan,* according to Müller. He, like other *taliiw kan,* was "loaned" to other districts.
Margigi and her mother, *Maduvul*	Tomil District, in Teb	Breadfruit and taro (Müller 1917:34)	Müller claimed this was the religious center of Yap. She was considered the greatest of the *taliiw,* because here was the abode of the grandmother of the 7 *taliiw kan*. The staff of priests at this shrine were called *polui* and were the highest ranking hierarchy of priests on Yap (1917, 563).
Nul (many different names for this god)	Map District, in Toru. Worship limited to Maki and Muru	Coconuts and betelnut (Müller 1917:34)	
Averig or *Ewreg*	Fanif District	Yams	Only female of the 7 (Müller 1917, 568).
Tamir	*MalsaiMaloai*	?	Note the reappearance of a cognate of the mythical *Tumur*—the firstborn of *Loktanur,* the star mother of the gods, according to the Marshallese and Pohnpeian myths.
Ath or *Anoth* (smoke)	Gilman District	Breadfruit	Least important of the *taliiw kan*. Worship extended to island of Ngulu, where he was patron of breadfruit.

Source: Based on Müller (1917)

abandoned and that the older priests were confused, self-contradictory, and forgetful of the traditions linked to their shrine and patron god (*kan*). Most distressing is how little the younger priests knew, even then, about the traditions and rituals. After World War II, some of the system was remembered, but there is little evidence that it was still functioning as a shrine-focused crop fertility system with priests, sacrifices, and offerings.[25]

As for the *taliiw* sites themselves and the rituals performed there, Müller left the most extensive, firsthand observations. He had one of the four remaining Teb priests (*polui*), Giltemaw, showing him around the shrine complex there (1917, 563). Giltemaw gave Müller a tour of places forbidden to ordinary Yapese. The physical appearance of the place was not magnificent or impressive. The gravesite of *Madavul,* the grandmother of the shrine gods (*taliiw kan*), was a rectangular surface with head-size stones and some shell money atop the stones. A mud wall and a thicket surrounded a second *taliiw* at Teb. Inside were "fish," which were actually cracked stones roughly three meters long. It was believed that the fish would cause an earthquake if their heads were touched.[26] Various other stones were associated with the myth of the flood. In reality, the collection of stones within the mud-walled compound was a natural feature, a reminder of the old Yapese beliefs, especially those linked to the great deluge.[27] During the tour, Giltemaw led Müller to a stone table on which Giltemaw claimed he alone of the island's highest ranking priests could perform the *machmaach* (roughly translated as "magic") to make someone die or become sick (Müller 1917, 565).

The most elaborate rituals of the old religion took place at shrines such as the one high priest Giltemaw showed Müller. Unfortunately, the rich detail collected by Müller is often fragmentary. In order to show a ritual from the early twentieth century, I have put together what Müller gathered from three of his best informants, all of whom were high-ranking priests: Giltemaw of Teb, Ruepong of Gagil, and Tätse of Ngulu. Together they show the shrine rituals as emphasizing personal purity, human and crop fertility, and the redistribution of the crops.

In the Tamil District, certain ceremonies for the *taliiw kan* were performed only every two years. During this time the priests went into seclusion for a hundred days, mourning for the death of *Madavul,* the mother of *Margigi,* who in turn was the mother of all the major shrines (*taliiw*). During this period of seclusion, the priest chewed no betel and smoked no tobacco. He might eat yams but not taro. Also during the beginning of the mourning period, villagers repaired the fences of the *taliiw* site. The repair of shrines was done on order of the local chief, in return for magical ritual or amulets made by the priests. Part of the priests' work included the crop

and fertility rituals. The human fertility was symbolized with an "obscene dance performed by women of the lower class" (Müller 1917, 565–566).

The most elaborate rituals described for the crop shrine spirits were those that covered the ritual calendar for the shrine of *Yanolop* near Gachpar in Gagil. Perhaps this was because one of Müller's informants was Ruepong, the high priest of this *taliiw,* and because Müller personally witnessed ritual at this *taliiw.* One of the uniquely Yapese rituals was the "loaning" of the shrine god to a lower ranking village or shrine; in this case, the god *Yanolop* of Gachpar was loaned to another *taliiw* in the southern part of the island. At the end of the seven days, when *Yanolop* was believed to be present in the southern shrine, bananas were prepared in pits and brought to the *taliiw,* while the local shrine priest[28] offered a sacrificial gift (*mäybil*) to the *kan* then present in their *taliiw.* The priest took the gift for him, but only after *Yanolop* had eaten the soul (*yaan*) of the offering.[29] The priest next went with some of the village elders back to Gachpar, where *Yanolop* was returned to the high priest Ruepong, who waited with his local elders to receive *Yanolop* back to the shrine. The chief of Gachpar then distributed the food brought from the south, "probably a disguised tribute to Gachpar for having furnished its protective god for a week" (1917, 539–540). The following day the priest from the south led a fishing expedition and a feast followed on the day after. Once again there was the distribution of food by the chief of Gachpar, with Ruepong, the high priest, receiving a sacrificial offering (*mäybil*) for *Yanolop*. On the tenth day of the month, there was another large fishing expedition followed by a feast; this time the southern priest presided as the official distributor of the food, while Ruepong and the war chief of Gachpar provided the food. On this day, *Yanolop* was moved to yet another village. He finally went to another minor *taliiw,* and so the celebrations for *Yanolop* during this month were finished.

Thus, the first part of the ritual shows the *taliiw kan* to be the focus of a fertility cult dedicated to the increase of the food they eat; the later rituals emphasize the redistribution function of the ritual. The food came from the ordinary people, with a share for the gods and their priests, shares for the chiefs, and finally redistribution shares to the people. No cost-benefit study is needed to see that the people bore the burden. There is perhaps a measure of truth in Walleser's somewhat sarcastic evaluation of the shrine priests as tools of the chiefs (1967, 21). What is remarkable and unique about the crop deities was the mutual exchange between the shrines. Rank was maintained by the "loaning" of *kan* to lower ranked shrines,[30] but the exchange does show a unity to Yapese religion unlike that of other Micronesian religions. The closest parallel would be Kosrae,

with its centralized priesthoods at Lelu and the rural priesthoods. The Yapese exchange of ritual and gods, however, achieved a high degree of unity without centralization.

The Nature Spirits and Patron Deities

As elsewhere in Micronesia, there were many kinds of spirits whose haunts were geographically limited: those that lived in trees and bushes, those that lived in the earth, or those that wandered about the uninhabited areas of Yap. Traditional Yap had special names for all of them; they were generally malicious, although like the *taliiw kan,* they too are called *kan.*[31] The nature spirits were most likely very important to the daily life of the ordinary person. Although the high or creator gods were invoked in prayer and with offerings, the nature spirits were to be feared and guarded against when going outside the house, when cutting down a tree, when tending to taro patches, and in all activities during which humans came in contact with the physical environment. It is small wonder, then, that if the world-at-hand was filled with danger, protection was needed. The protection insurance against the evil or mischievous spirits was the job of the *tamaarong*—not as priest or prophet but more akin to a magician who provided the rituals, the protective amulets, and special words to ward off the evil.

A Residual Group of Spirits

Some spirits do not fit into the categories of creator gods or the crop gods (*taliiw kan*), the ancestor spirits (*thagith*) or even the nature-bound spirits. One was a spirit that haunted the men's clubhouses at the village of Dugor in the Weloy District. There was also a pregnancy spirit that had to enter a woman's body in order for her to become pregnant. Yet another unclassifiable *kan* induced otherwise honest people to steal. According to Müller, there was a great variety of these "other" spirits that populated the Yap cosmos (1917, 597–603).

The Taboo Systems

Müller was the chief reporter of the crop deities' calendared rituals, but Walleser is the chief source for the system of prohibitions or taboos associated with shrines and gods. Both, as well as the post–World War II anthropologists, identified the old Yap religion as a religion much concerned with ritual purity as symbolized in a host of taboos. Thus, Müller calls the *taliiw* shrines "taboo places," and Jensen in his dictionary followed suit by calling *taliiw* a sacred place, a taboo place, or a cemetery (1977, 66). The

crop shrine ritual and doctrine was much concerned with the taboos that marked the ritual purity of its priests. Free males maintained their purity through a system of "eating classes" and the separation of men from women and children. For both men and women, however, there was also the concern for purity or freedom from defilement by physical proximity to dead bodies. Walleser neatly ties up the rank and purity rules as follows:

1. The eating system: dietary and commensality rules for men. Separation of men, women and children.
2. The seclusion rules for women at first menstruation, during pregnancy and birth.
3. The purity rules against defilement by proximity to the dead (1967, 1).

Each of these three sets of rules is worth examining because they bear both significant similarities and differences to rules in other parts of Micronesia. In general, however, it is safe to say that Yap religion showed a greater concern with purity and pollution than its Chuukic-speaking and Palauan neighbors.

Tabgul and the Eating Rules

The Yapese seemed not to have used any word for "taboo" itself, but instead used pairs of opposing concepts such as purity (*tabgul*) and pollution (*ta'ey*). The objective of the eating rules and practices was to achieve and maintain purity (*tabgul*) of free or high-caste males. Other latent objectives were probably also at work or implied, such as male domination and preservation of an age-ranking hierarchy, but latent objectives or functions are notoriously difficult to verify.

Looking at the eating rules from the emic or insider's view, several concepts emerge as critical to eating rules as a system. The system was formalized by initiation ritual (*dowach*)[32] into the eating classes (*yoogum*) and maintained by formalized ritual practices of exclusive eating and recognition of upward promotion in the ranks. Membership in the *yoogum* determined only which free or nonserf males ate with whom.[33] Hence, belonging to a *yoogum* class meant not eating with women, children, and low-caste individuals.

There are several characteristics of this ranking system that made them religious.[34] First of all, the gods (*kan*) were believed to have handed down the prohibition rules and to send disease to those women and children who violated them. Second, when the eating ranks (*yoogum*) gathered, a priest (*tamaarong* or *paqtäliiw*) blessed the food, but more importantly, the

paqtäliiw, or high priests, were members of the highest ranking *yoogum* (Walleser 1967, 24). Third, every year a specific day was set aside and dedicated to the gods, at which time the *yoogum* members had a feast with their eating mates (27–28).[35]

On a cost-benefit basis, membership in the *yoogum* was a win-win status. Without membership in a *yoogum,* one was a nobody; the *kan* did not demand membership, but Yapese culture certainly did. Membership put the individual male on the mobility ladder of traditional Yap: One could move up the eating ranks (although how is not indicated in the literature). Membership in the lowest rank brought no added obligations, but it gave members the right to eat with their own rank and the next rank above (see Walleser 1967, 25–26). Membership in the higher ranks, however, brought greater prestige—but also additional burdens such as offering food hospitality to visitors.

Whether or not it is possible to classify the *yoogum* as part of the religion, it can at least be said that it was religiously sanctioned. It was an example of religion in the service of a rather nonegalitarian social system. Perhaps here more than elsewhere, religion served this purpose, since Yap was the closest culture in Micronesia to having a caste system.[36]

Ritual Seclusion of Women

Women faced an additional set of rules, demanded not by their physical sex but by cultural gender roles. These gender roles were comparable to the restrictions placed on women throughout Micronesia. First was the seclusion during menstruation. Second were the practices during pregnancy and birth. The religious dimension of these two groups of ritual taboos for women can be seen only within the broader concepts of

- Purity (separation of purity and pollution) and
- Gender roles (the separation of male and female).

Some of the visible religious dimension of gender roles can be seen especially in Yap pregnancy and birth customs. The diviner or priest (*tamaarong*) came to a woman at set times to offer prayers and procedures to counteract the dangerous situation of pregnancy and birth. In the fourth or fifth month of pregnancy, the *tamaarong* was present, and the husband said, "Here is a gift for you, so that you will remove every danger from her and from the child and see that no painful illness sets in" (Walleser 1967, 29). At the beginning of labor pains, the *tamaarong* was again fetched, this time to "call to the child to come out." When the

child was born, mother and child were taken to the birth and menstruation hut (*dapael*), and the husband maintained something of a religiously sanctioned holiday (*madnam*) during which he did no work. The holiday might last for months; its length was determined by the *tamaarong* consulted at the time of birth.

Death, Burial, and Ritual Pollution

The third set of purity or taboo rules, if summed up, was simple: The living must be away from death and dead bodies as soon as possible. The sequence in death, mourning,[37] and burial was as follows: After death, the body was washed, turmeric was rubbed over it,[38] and the orifices were plugged. Unless the septum was plugged, the soul could not enter the clubhouse in heaven (Müller 1917, 268). Wailing lasted up until burial. Before the burial, the brothers and sisters of the deceased gave traditional shell money (*yaer*) to the clan members, and the clan members reciprocated in turn. On the day of burial, the body was taken from the house as quickly as possible "so that the spirit of the departed will not be able to return" (Fr. Eusebius, as quoted in Müller 1917, 270). Until three days after death, the next-of-kin stayed with the body, and for three days after burial the kinfolk remained, mourning in what Walleser called something of a holiday (*madnam*).[39] Next, the kin retreated for almost a month of mourning in temporary huts built for them (Walleser 1967, 13). On the fifth, seventh, or ninth day after burial (Müller 1917, 273), a religious expert (a special *tamaarong*) was brought to the secluded hut to perform a ritual called the "sending away" (*ma'log*). He lit a fire and held a thick bamboo stick in it as he recited a formula, part of which was in Ulithian. "At the moment the bamboo breaks with a loud crack, the soul goes to Gatsam," Müller reported (273–274).[40] The old Yap burial was thus both a ritual to help the deceased on its journey and also an expression of death as polluting the living. Low-class or landless people, who were further polluted by their proximity to the dead, did the grave digging and lowering of the body into the grave. The place of burial was called an off-limits or taboo place, a *taliiw*.[41] Men and women were separated at the mourning and lamentations and also lived in separate huts during the monthlong seclusion of the next-of-kin.[42]

There are many other small symbols in the old culture that also emphasized not only the separation of the sexes, of landed families and the landless, of young and old, but also ritual taboos that symbolized religion as a quest for purity and avoidance of pollution (Müller, Walleser, and Lingenfelter are the best sources on this).

The Ritual Experts or Specialists

What is known of the old religion of Yap offers a rare in-depth picture of Micronesian priests. Priests are clearly recorded for two other islands in Micronesia—Kosrae and Pohnpei—but what Sarfert and Hambruch of the Hamburg Expedition recorded was that the priests and their rituals in those places were long dead. On Yap, however, Müller interviewed priests and watched their ritual during 1909 and 1910; in fact, his main informants on religion were high priests from some of the most important shrines on Yap. Later, in the 1950s, Lingenfelter interviewed one of the last shrine priests in the islands. The most generic term for a religious expert of any sort was *tamaarong,* which could refer to any religious expert or specialist on Yap proper. *Tamaarong* is almost impossible to gloss or translate precisely because the word refers to all kinds of religious specialists, including what outsiders might call a priest, magician, sorcerer, conjurer, or diviner. Still, Yapese themselves distinguished the different kinds of *tamaarong:*

- *Tamaarong ni paqtäliiw:* This phrase, or just *paqtäliiw,* was and still is consistently used to describe those experts who maintained the main shrines of the gods of the crops (these main shrines were dedicated to the goddess *Margigi* or her offspring). The priests lived at the shrines (*taliiw*) and conducted ritual offerings or sacrifices at the shrines to gain the favor of the god (*kan*) believed to dwell at the shrine. The main shrines set their own lunar calendar and were supported by a hierarchy of priests. The office of *paqtäliiw* was hereditary, ordinarily from father to son. "He is not so much a priest for the average mortals; rather, he is to represent the supreme chiefs before the *kan,*" and that is why he was also described as the "sacrificer" at the shrine (Walleser 1967, 21ff.).[43]
- *Tamaarong ni ga'* or *gainini:* The phrase or single word either identified the chief priest at one of the shrines (Walleser 1967, 21ff.; Müller 1917, 529) or the specialist in the weather ritual.
- *Matieg:* The priest who assisted the high priest (*tamaarong ni ga'*). When offerings or sacrifices were made to the shrine god, the priest of this second rank accepted the gift and gave it to the high priest. Even when the chiefs made offerings, they were not made directly to the high priest but to the *matieg* (Müller 1917, 323). The *matieg* was also a specialist in fishing ritual (364).
- *Polui:* The priests of the shrine at Teb in Tomil. Because the Teb shrine honored both the mother (*Margigi*) and also the grandmother of the crop deities, the *polui* shrine priests were considered among the highest ranked on Yap.

The above categories show *tamaarong* clearly set apart from the "common" *tamaarong* (Müller 1917, 319). They were guardians of ritual traditions for good crops and fishing; their rituals were determined by the annual cycle of the crops; they were the mediators between the chiefs and people of Yap and the gods of the crops. Although Müller had the high priest of the Gachpar shrine and the ranking *polui* of Teb as his interviewees, the shrine rituals he described are written in a piecemeal fashion. Thus, in the next section of this chapter, I have taken an example of one ritual from the south of Yap, collated from Müller and amplified by Lingenfelter's interviews after World War II with one of the last shrine priests.

The nonpriestly or "common *tamaarong*" is another group of *tamaarong* that was not attached to any of the great shrines but instead worked with the occasional ad hoc problems. In general, they offered immediate protection against mean spirits and mean people. There was, for example, a *tamaarong* who chased off the tree spirits if one wanted to chop down the tree; another could request the goddess *Yilimis* to put her lovemaking power into action; and yet another could invoke the god *Lugälan* to prevent anything bad happening during a dance. These *tamaarong* used both ritual and verbal formulas to accomplish their desired goals. The ritual actions were often called *machmaach* and the ritual words called *piig*. Sometimes *machmaach* was and still is called magic. Here again one faces the grand problem of neatly separating magic from religion. Both concepts deal with something or someone endowed with power beyond the ordinary, but if the classic distinction from Frazer is used as the key distinguishing feature, magic forces the spirits into action and religion merely begs the spirits for help. This distinction, however, is often difficult to maintain, especially in the old religion of Yap. The Yap *tamaarong* sometimes prayed and humbly begged the spirits to go into action for their clients. The Yapese culture of old was like so many other cultures in Micronesia: People did not believe that the *machmaach* would automatically bring about the desired effect. If one *machmaach* failed, then a different *tamaarong* was sought.

The *tamaarong* of Yap, therefore, can be placed on a continuum: At one end is ritual and the accompanying words, which are expected to immediately gain the desired results or protection. At the other end are prayers and offerings to the spirits in the hopes that the desired results will be granted. Therefore, it follows that most of the continuum is a blend of immediate demands on the spirits and hopeful prayers and offerings to the spirits. The old religion of Yap was filled with the ritual and words that were someplace in between forcing and begging the spirits. Even the shrine priests were recorded as performing *machmaach*.

On Yap one of the major distinguishing features between priests and "common" *tamaarong* was how they acquired their power. The shrine priests inherited the shrine where the god lived. In a sense, the power came with the place. The nonpriestly or "common" *tamaarong* had no inherited power; theirs was a learned power, even if it was learned from their fathers. Both specialists had connections to the spirit world, even to high gods like *Lugälan,* but the ordinary *tamaarong* gained his power by learning from other *tamaarong,* and there was no guarantee that he would learn the right *machmaach* or the right *piig.* The faculty to make *machmaach* for a narrow range of life's problems was the success criterion for the ordinary *tamaarong.* The *machmaach* might take the form of some bundle of protective materials charged with spirit power by the *tamaarong,* small amulets carried in one's personal handbag, or a stick image of the patrons of sailing placed on the prow of a canoe (Müller 1917). Müller has a variety of drawings and photographs of these *machmaach* amulets, but precious little about how the *tamaarong* gained the power to *machmaach* was recorded. Early missionaries and the Hamburg Expedition noted this lack of information about the source of *tamaarong* power.[44] All that is known is that most *tamaarong* learned the secret materials and words from others, but it is known that knowledge of these powers could also be purchased, although at a high price. Nevertheless, for the majority of the population, the making of *machmaach* and the precise formulas of *piig* were secrets.

Diviners

Certain Yap *tamaarong* specialized in divining by means of the ubiquitous Micronesian technique of reading the sequence of knots made in a piece of a leaf of coconut palm, but it could also be done by an experienced nonspecialist (Müller 1917, 374). The religious foundation of the knot divining (*bei* or *wei*) was the belief that the cosmos was filled with spirits (*kan*), and if bad luck hit a person, the first recourse was knot divining to identify the guilty spirit (Walleser 1967, 46). Most early ethnographies from across Micronesia gave the elaborate sequence of knots, but equally important, on Yap at least, was the question proposed to the spirits controlling the sequence. The question frequently was not a clear-cut prediction of the unknown. The question often asked was vague or covered wide latitude. A sample question might have been, "Will tomorrow be a good day for fishing?" The knot sequence could simply reveal that tomorrow would "not be favorable." For added assurance of the odds of going out fishing, the knot diviner might be asked the same question another time; another experienced diviner might be called for a third asking of the same question (Müller 1917, 374ff.). The steps of knot divining were first to ask

the question, then to read the sequence or number of knots on each folding of the coconuts, and finally to interpret the meaning of the knot sequence. There was a variation, as well, in which the diviner would throw small rocks on the ground. This ritual was, as Müller remarked, "a glimpse into the future," but that glimpse was really just considered a calculation of the "odds" of something happening.

In reviewing this wide range and assortment of Yap *tamaarong,* I cannot help but ask the same question I posed for the old ritual centers and priests on Pohnpei: Why did they die out or at least fall into serious decline before any type of intense missionization? On Pohnpei, one can see the critical event of the great smallpox epidemic and a missionary-physician whose vaccinations worked when the old Pohnpeian ritual failed. On Yap, there is no critical event like the Pohnpeian smallpox epidemic. At the beginning of the twentieth century, neither Protestant nor Catholic missionaries had made many Yapese converts, but the old shrines and their priests had already disappeared or were in serious decline. Another puzzle is why the nonpriestly *tamaarong* survived longer than the priests and their shrines. In the Marshalls, on Pohnpei, and on the Chuukic islands, the involvement of spirits with the causes and cures for illness might be an important relationship to the continued belief in spirit-empowered experts, but the early ethnographies of Yap do not point to a strong tradition of spirit-caused illness and spirit-given "medicine." Even in the twenty-first century, Yapese have told me on several occasions that if they needed a traditional healer, they would seek out one from to the colony of Chuukic-speaking islanders on Yap proper. I believe that a key element involved in the proposed question is the difference between religion in the service of the chiefs and religion in the service of ordinary people. All the pre–World War I ethnographers (mainly Müller, Walleser, and Salesius) repeatedly observed that the shrine priests served the chiefs. As foreign ships, colonial governments, and traders such as "His Majesty" O'Keefe[45] offered alternative power to that of the chiefs, the chiefs were weakened in power; and thus any position that required a symbiotic relationship with the chiefs was also weakened—in this case, that of the shrine priests.[46] The nonpriestly *tamaarong,* on the other hand, continued to serve the immediate needs of the ordinary people with or without the chiefs and with or without the foreigners.

The Ritual Calendars as Integrating Symbols

By World War I, many Yap shrine priests had a poor memory of the ritual calendars. During my first visit to Yap in 1990, I could not see nor hear anything of the shrines described by Müller. In 2002 and again in 2003,

Yapese interviewees repeatedly told me that taboo rules were not observed, and the shrines were abandoned and being bulldozed over. I despaired of finding the key or focal symbols that could put together the mass of ethnographic data about the old religion. Then I reread two articles by Sherwood Lingenfelter, and his evidence on the ritual calendars of the great shrines was enlightening for me in my situation. Shortly after World War II, Lingenfelter found new evidence from two informants who had experienced the old calendric rituals in the Rull District. One of his informants was a priest who tried to perform the calendar-based rituals in the late 1940s (1979, 432n3).

With this new evidence to supplement the older descriptions of Müller (1917), Lingenfelter was able to show how the seemingly disparate symbols of the eating classes, taboo restrictions, and the *taliiw* shrines, together with priests and *tamaarong,* were all integrated around the ritual calendar in the district of Rull.[47]

Behind the integrated symbolism of the calendar were the key Yapese beliefs about binary oppositions of superior and inferior, as shown in table 3.

The Rull calendar of ritual and taboos began in the lunar month of *Monyibwuo*[48] with the announcement of initiation to the eating ranks, "one hundred days to initiation" (Lingenfelter 1979, 420). From that point on, the candidates observed abstinence or separation from women, from things dead, from those in contact with the dead (the low-caste people), and from other pollutants.

The next month, *Wagaeygaey,* was also a month of preparation, completing the planting of the yam gardens.[49] The eating-class candidates held themselves aloof from this work.

In the following month of *Tafgif,* the communities cleaned their yards and prepared the pathways along which the priests from the shrines at Pemgoy and Alog would pass. Cooking firewood was collected to last during the next sacred month of *Makan.* Low-caste villagers came and repaired

Table 3. Yapese beliefs about binary oppositions of superior and inferior

Superior	Inferior
tabgul (purity)	*ta'ay* (pollution)
kan (spirits)	*girdi* (human)
pum'on (male)	*pin* (female)
pum'on (mature male)	*pagael* (young male)
pilung (those who speak)	*pimilangay* (those who obey)

Source: Lingenfelter 1979; 1977, 332–336.

the roof of the spirit house. Low-caste villagers from Gitam cleaned the ancestral graves of their Rull overlords and cooked food for their overlords. Their high-caste counterparts, in something of a rite of reversal, came to Gitam with food offerings for their ancestors. One basket of food was placed on each grave. The food was later eaten by the people of Gitam.

The sacred month of *Makan,* the beginning of the New Year, was set by the disappearance of the constellation Pleiades.[50] Priests in Dugor opened the door of their spirit house and announced taboos on certain foods and restrictions on loud noises such as singing and dancing. At the end of *Makan,* the same priest solemnly closed the door. The most important events of the month, however, took place at the *taliiw* shrines of Pemgoy and Alog. The Pemgoy priests began nine days of seclusion, during which they received food from the villagers, part of which was offered to the spirit. In general, for the elderly, titled males, for the priests, and for the initiates into the eating classes, *Makan* was a time of seclusion, fasting, and learning. Initiates remained at the community house for the entire month, receiving instruction and information from the elders.

During *Makan,* the priests of Pemgoy and Alog gathered together as *puruy*—a council of priests—at the shrine at Towol. There they were fed and given food to offer to the spirits. They performed a rather complicated ritual, described here as Lingenfelter learned it from his priest informant:

> At daybreak, the men of the pure eating ranks, excepting the novices, gathered at the sacred place from the various houses where they had spent the last few days in isolation. The priest had prepared for this occasion numerous *marfaaw'* (neck cords worn only by women) from very wide pieces of hibiscus. These necklaces had been dyed black with a mixture made from the earth from a taro pit and the leaves of the *galad* tree, boiled together in a clay pot.
>
> The priest took his place at his stone backrest and the paramount chief came before him and sat down. There was no talking as the chief gave the priest an offering of shell. The priest then placed a special neck cord over his head and chanted. After he finished, all the men present sat around the chief and extended their right hands under his. The chief presented a shell offering to remove the danger of sickness and grant long life. The priest then placed a large bundle of neck cords in the hand of the chief, chanted over them, and the ritual was complete. No one talked until the chief said to the priest *"Bay um bing e wo'rodad"* ("Open the road for us"). The high priest took his sacred paraphernalia, his assistants took the shell offerings, and they returned to Pemgoy and Alog. The ritual ended before sunrise and the men returned to seclusion (1979, 425).

In the last ten days of *Makan,* titled men (those already in the eating-class ranks) joined the candidates in the place of seclusion, where they participated in a rather peculiar divining ritual—divination by fire. The chiefs of the villages brought in spirit offerings and a bundle of shell, cloth, and bamboo. A chief lit the bundle and a magician examined the explosion sounds and the ashes to determine if Rull would have well-being during the coming year. The rite was repeated the next day, and on the third day of divining the magician tied up a monitor lizard in a dried palm leaf and torched the packet. The magician examined the reactions of the lizard and then gave the final word to the chief about Rull's future.

On the first day of the following month, *Rir,* the eating-class candidates were welcomed as new members, accompanied by an exchange of gifts. After having heard the outcome of the divination by fire, the new members returned to their homes. At the end of *Rir,* the chiefs summoned both the old and new membership to prepare food for the guests, chiefs from the south of Yap who came to hear the results of the fire divination. "From this point onward," wrote Lingenfelter, the Rull chiefs had a "full complement of ranked men" at their disposal to support the chiefly plans and activities (1979, 429).

The importance of the Rull ritual is that it shows the integration of religious and social symbols within the framework of the calendar. Nowhere else in Micronesia is there the comparably rich data about the role of the ritual calendars.

Ritual prohibitions or taboos were central to the old religion of Yap and played a more important role there than in any other Micronesian society. These ritual restrictions were most apparent in three areas of life:

- Eating: Primarily, there were restrictions dealing with who eats with whom. As explained to me, these rules or taboos organized Yap society according to age and sex.
- Separation from gender pollution: The sequestering of menstruating and pregnant women in the menstrual hut, or "blood" hut (*dapael*), affirmed the Yap belief in the danger present in women. Prohibition from sexual intercourse for men at work (e.g., fishing, building) and for priests before and during public ritual was the most obvious pollution taboo for men.
- Separation from the pollution of death: Contact with the dead was believed to render those in close proximity impure. Thus the relatives of the deceased retreated to a separate hut, away from the house of the dead kin, and remained there in seclusion for up to three months. The digging and placing of the body in the grave was

> to be carried out by the landless villagers beholden to the family of the deceased. They were considered ritually impure because of their proximity to the dead. In this way, Yap society maintained the caste-like distinction between the landowners (high caste) and the landless (low caste). Again as explained to me, death pollution and the role of the lower caste in it was one of the most important symbols of social organization.

The taboo system, therefore, showed the religious dimension of the social structure. It was a society organized according to the binary oppositions of gender, age, and land.

The Yap gods and spirits fall into the pattern found throughout Micronesia: sky deities, patron spirits, assorted nature spirits, and the ancestor spirits. However, Yap offers the clearest record in Micronesia of emphasis on crop ritual, which was tied together with the patron spirits as protectors of the different crops. These patron spirits were revered at shrines and religious centers that were attended to by hierarchies of priests whose rituals were carried out according to calendars. There are hints of a similar pattern of rituals, shrines, and the priesthoods on Pohnpei and Kosrae.

The power of the old shrine priests cannot be measured, but they are remembered as one category of leaders—together with the high chief, the talking chief, the chief of the young men—who were the "foundation of Yap traditional power" (Al Fanechigiy, personal communication, 2002).

The myth of Yap was similar to that of Palau in the charter myth about the great flood. On Yap, *Margigi* was saved from the flood, and her children became the patron spirits of the crops and of the major shrines. This was the charter myth for the Yap calendars, priesthoods, and sacred shrines. It was a "charter" myth because it justified the ritual calendar of taboos, offerings, and shrine priests, which in turn gave ritual sanctions to the Yap social structure. On Palau, the myth of *Milad* and her children was the charter myth of the political organization into four paramount states.

From all the evidence available, it is reasonably certain that Yap was a hub of exchange in western Micronesia. The exchange of goods and ideas with the Chuukic atolls of central Micronesia, and perhaps even with Pohnpei and the Marshalls, is evidenced in the archaeology, the historic records, and the mythology. Yap shared with Palau and much of Micronesia the charter myth of the "mother of the stars," who brought inventions, skills, and social structure. Yet there is little evidence of a strong religious influence from Palau, despite the frequent sea voyages there to quarry the prestigious stone money. Yap legend does record, however, that

the other traditional "money" (*yaer*—made with shells and beads) came from Mapia, just north of New Guinea. Even discounting any identification of Yap proper (Wa'ab) with the mythological *Iap* or *Yap* or real contact with the westernmost Micronesian island of Mapia, Yap offers the best evidence of regular and historic evidence of exchange with other regions. There is a clear pattern of long-range exchange of not only prestigious valuables but also of religious concepts such as the sky gods and special shrines for the Chuukic deities. The Yap language may be without a related language in Micronesia, but the old Yap religion was definitely similar to others in Micronesia.

Chapter 8

The Religion of Palau

The challenge of attempting to describe the religion of Palau (Belau) is that, as in most other island groups in the Micronesia region, there was never a political or religious unity to the Palau Islands. To write about the "religion of Palau" is something of an anachronism. As a matter of fact, to write about "the religion" of any country is to write at a level of generalization that bypasses individual and small group variations. With those limitations in mind, I will try to build a coherent picture of the religion from fragments of evidence.

The shifting political alliances that developed into the two regional powers of Melekeok and Koror (Oreor) came late in the eighteenth century, and the religion reflected this. Myths and legends, the gods and spirits, and the rituals varied considerably from region to region within Palau. Even the ethnographic accounts of Palauan religion, often made on the basis of one or two districts, are not in agreement. The religion of Palau evolved in such a way that the different stages or elements were never systematized into a single coherent unity.

Another challenge comes from the fact that religion is tightly interwoven with politics and with the power struggles between clans, between villages, between districts, and between confederations. Perhaps all religion is in one way or another tied to politics and power, but Palau is a leading example within Micronesia.

The sources are some of the best for Micronesia in time depth, quantity, and quality. Other sources for Micronesia may be earlier (e.g., Cantova regarding Ulithi in 1721), but as a whole the Palauan records are of excellent quality. There are over two hundred years of Western reports about the culture and religion of Palau; no region in Micronesia other than the Marianas shows records with such time depth. The best sources from the nineteenth century are Semper 1873, Tetens 1958, and especially Kubary 1873, 1885, and 1888. From the early twentieth century, the best sources are Krämer 1926 and 1929a, Valencia 1940, and Salvador Walleser 1971 (not to be confused with Sixtus Walleser, who wrote about Yap). Of the several studies during the Japanese period, Hijikata's (1995) is the most

detailed, but certainly the best source before World War II is Kubary's "The Religion of the Palauan Islanders" (1888). After World War II, the CIMA study of Homer Barnett (1949) has the most material on the old religion, but much of the description is "memory culture." Because the old religion was so closely tied to the political structure of the Palauan Islands, most of the studies on kinship and politics will have a word here and there about the religious underpinning of the social organization. The only recent studies dealing with religion are Richard Parmentier's *The Sacred Remains: Myth, History, and Polity in Palau* (1987) and Machiko Aoyagi (1987 and 2002) on the Modekngei religion.

Despite the wealth of source material, Kubary in 1871 and Krämer in 1910 faced an already declining religion, the chorus of many early Micronesian ethnographers. Older traditions and beliefs were poorly remembered, even when Wilson's ship, the *Antelope,* was wrecked off shore in 1783, and certainly when trader Andrew Cheyne and itinerant scholar Karl Semper were there in the 1860s.

THE CHARTER MYTHS OF *LATMIKAIK*, *CHUAB*, AND *MILAD*

There is no way of comprehending Palauan religion without first understanding the three charter myths. These myths set forth not only the Palauan beliefs about the gods and the cosmos but also beliefs about the social structure.[1]

The story of *Latmikiak* begins with an already existent but unpopulated Palau.[2] *Ucheliangl* ("the foremost of heaven"), a preexisting sky god, first made land to rise from beneath the sea: "Let a land arise. Let a land arise." And so land arose between Angaur (Ngeaur) and Peleliu (Beliliou). Then a gigantic clam arose.[3] The clam was called *Latmikaik,* and because it was pregnant it swelled larger and larger until *Ucheliangl* ordered the sea to shake it up in order for it to give birth. *Latmikaik*'s offspring were fish, and these fish children could live both on land and in the sea. *Ucheliangl* then ordered *Latmikaik* to tell her children to build a rock pile up to the top of the sea and then above the sea. Her children followed her orders. She then had them kick the pile, which collapsed and became the Rock Islands (Chelbacheb) from Angaur all the way to Babeldaob. *Ucheliangl*'s next order was to pile the stones so that *Latmikaik*'s children would have a path to travel up to Babeldaob.

The story reveals several key points about how Palauans viewed their origins and how they viewed their cosmos. The vertical structure of the cosmos in this myth is of the place beneath the sea, the sea, and the heavens. However, the heavens in these myths, Parmentier insists, are not

the region above the earth but the Palauan archipelago from the Rock Islands in the south to Babeldaob in the north.[4] As the fish children of *Latmikaik* traveled up the path to Babeldaob, the vertical structure of the cosmos shifts to a horizontal emphasis up from the south, north to . The movement of *Latmikaik*'s children is thus the first migration of Palauan prehistory. During this migration fire is discovered, and carpentry and measurement are learned from gods working underwater. The migration of *Latmikaik* marks the beginning of the archaic era of Palau. From the viewpoint of religion, the myth is the story of the creative actions of the sky god, *Ucheliangl,* and the cosmic migration from the world-under-the-sea to Palau. Unlike the creation myth from Kiribati, the action is not the separation of light from darkness but movement from beneath the sea to the soil of Palau. The key metaphor is the path and the journey, which continues in the next two stories.

Chuab was a daughter of *Latmikaik*. She had four or five children. *Ucheliangl* ordered her to make a journey from beneath the sea to the land in order to create the councils of chiefs. *Ucheliangl* said, "Now one of your [*Latmikaik*'s] children will come out of the sea to Ngeaur [Angaur]. Her name is *Chuab*. Her task is to create chiefly councils." Then, *Ucheliangl* said to *Chuab,* "People today are very lawless, and without chiefly councils they will never become law-abiding" (Parmentier 1987, 137–138). *Chuab* in turn ordered her children to carry out the mission to create the chiefly councils. As *Chuab*'s children traveled up north in the archipelago, they did create chiefs and councils. *Ucheliangl* also sent messenger gods, the *ruchel,* to carry out the same mission, but neither of the two missions was successful in creating a stable, law-abiding government. The gods watched the lawlessness of the people, and so they said to *Ucheliangl,* "We should plan to wipe out the entire human race (*klechad*), so that a different race of people can rise up who will obey the law" (Parmentier 1987, 157).

Milad is the third goddess in the mythology leading up to the new era. The myths about her are many and in multiple versions that cannot be reconciled. What follows is a quick summary of one myth in one version recorded by Semper (1873, 194–195). The "celestial dwellers" of the story are the *ruchel* gods who were so important in the transition from the archaic era of *Latmikaik* and *Chuab*. The old woman is *Milad*. While she is variously described as a *chelid* (god) or married to a *ruchel* (messenger god), her children are the humans who populate the new Palau.[5]

> One day, as the story goes, one of the chiefs went up to heaven, from where the gods looked down every night with their twinkling eyes, the stars. He stole the eye of the celestial residents. When he brought it back

> to Palau, they made their money from it. This is the same money we use today. Because it comes from the gods, we revere it so much. That's why you people from the West can't imitate it, though you've often tried to do so. We can easily see how it differs from the real money of the gods.
>
> The robbery enraged the gods. They decided to get revenge and descended to earth. They immediately went to the village where the stolen eye was hidden. Here, they assumed the form of ordinary men and asked for hospitality at the huts. But the people there were most inhospitable. They refused to give them food and drink. Only a woman living by herself in a small house treated them well and served them the best she had, taro and fish. Before the gods left, they told her to build a bamboo raft before the next full moon. She obeyed them. A frightful storm and rain came on that night; the ocean rose ever higher, flooded the islands, washed away the hills, and destroyed the people's houses. They were at a loss as to how to save themselves, and they all died in the constantly rising waters. But the kindly old woman was raised up on the raft on which she slept and drifted for quite a distance until her hair was caught in the branches of a tree high atop the hill at Ngeremlengui. Here she lay, as the water ebbed. The celestial dwellers then came and looked for their ward. But they found her dead. They summoned one of their women from heaven. She entered the dead body and revived it. Those men begat five children upon her. They then ascended to heaven and the real god inside the woman's body also left in order to return home. These five children populated the islands anew. All of us who live here now are descended from them (Semper 1873, 194–195; see also Parmentier 1987, 161–162).

In most of the other versions, there are only four children and these become the four leading villages/districts of the new, postflood Palau; they are Imiungs, Melekeok, Imelik, and Koror. The four villages played a powerful role in the new era and became, in the mythic metaphor, "the four corner posts" of the new Palau. The metaphor of the four brothers and sisters is a statement of one of the three key relationships in Palauan society. These relationships are sibling-sibling, parent-child, and husband-wife (Parmentier 1987, 171).

In summary, the three charter myths show two eras in the evolution of Palauan social structure, the archaic and the new, in which three beings or goddesses—*Latmikaik, Chuab,* and *Milad*—closely interact with the sky gods to produce the polity of Palau. In these myths, the gods prepare Palau for human habitation, having failed to create order with their messenger gods (*ruchel*) or with the children of *Chuab*. The end result is a

Palau populated by human beings with power and dominance resting in the four aforementioned village/district complexes: Imiungs, Melekeok, Imelik, and Koror.

The Cosmos with Its Gods and Spirits

The Cosmos

The spirit world of Palau was so involved in earthly politics that there is not much detail about where the gods came from or how most of the universe came to be. In Palauan mythology, the universe already exists, is dark, and is populated with some gods. As with almost all the cosmologies of Micronesia, creation is not ex nihilo.[6] Creation myths are common in Micronesian mythology, but on Palau the myths focus on the archipelago and establishing a population or political system. As for a picture of the cosmos or universe, Palauan belief was similar to that found throughout Micronesia: The heavens are an inverted bowl, with the stars, sun, and moon within the bowl. In the sea, there are the islands whose roots go down to the sea floor. At sunset, the sun plunges beneath the horizon, passes down to the other side of the cosmos, and the next morning rises above the horizon and climbs up the vault of the heavens.[7] Between the vault of the heavens and earth is an upper world that is the exact duplicate of earth. A stairway or bridge leads to this upper world, but the most elaborate mythological descriptions are about the long voyage on earth to real and well-known idyllic isles to the south.[8] Not much is recorded about heaven, presumably because the gods are so involved with work on earth. In fact, one really cannot make the distinction between heaven or sky gods and earthbound gods, as one can easily do for the Chuukic continuum. With the possible exception of the sun and moon deities and *Ucheliangl,*[9] the cosmos of gods, spirits, and even deceased humans consists of what is close at hand: the islands, the earth, the sea, the weather, and the human need for immediate help. Even the important patron of war and battle, *Horekim* (*orrekim,* "the rainbow"),[10] is generally described as a god active in the affairs of men at war, not a remote god in a remote place.

The charter myths of *Latmikaik, Chuab,* and *Milad* have already introduced key ideas about the Palauan cosmos and gods. But those ideas are only part of the whole cosmos and the complete description of the spirit world. The complete cosmos is the familiar three-tiered universe of the sky world, earth and sea, and the world-beneath-the-sea, but no other mythology in Micronesia gives more emphasis to the world-beneath-the-sea than does Palauan myth. Even the first creatures on Palau come from beneath

the sea. Uniquely, active sky gods such as the creator god *Ucheliangl* and his *ruchel* divinities are exceptions in Palauan mythology. In this cosmos, the field of action is most often the earth and the world-beneath-the-sea.

The Gods and Spirits

There are two widespread patterns in Micronesia for naming spirits or gods. The first, used in the Chuukic-speaking continuum and Pohnpei, is to lump all spirits and gods together with one term (*énú* or *ani*) and then use adjectives or descriptions to show the differences. The second pattern is to split the spirit world into different terms for deceased ancestors and for the gods without a human origin. Of course, there are blendings and combinations, but one way or another, either through distinct terms or adjectives, Micronesians distinguished between the spirits of the dead and the gods. For Palau, there is no recorded belief that supernatural spirits of the cosmos were ever lumped together in a single category. Palauans made a clear distinction between the *bladek* and the *chelid*—the ancestor spirits and the gods, respectively. Kubary thought that these two terms indicate the two different halves of the old Palauan religion (1888, 7).[11]

Some promotion of the *bladek* did take place, however, when the political fortunes of a family rose to control a village or territory or when a family *bladek* was a widely admired hero. The *bladek,* or household spirit, was "bumped up" to become a village or areawide god, and so the household *bladek* became *chelid.* After the transforming rituals of funeral and mourning, a little shrine of sorts might be set up in a separate part of the house. Sometimes this was the deceased's betel nut bag (it had more than betel nut, often including personal charms and medicines) simply hung from the rafters.[12] The head of the household offered food and flowers to this "shrine."

The rituals surrounding death reveal much about the Palauan view of the transformations and transferences that occur at that time. The rituals varied from region to region and depended on the title or rank of the deceased, but they could be grand indeed, especially when compared with death ritual in other Micronesian cultures. The key religious symbol of the funeral was a divination performed to assess the cause of the death, then a number of ceremonies acknowledging transformation into *bladek,* and the official transfer of the deceased's title. The mourning and burial ritual was and still is highly expressive of Palauan beliefs and social structure.[13] From the description given later in this chapter, one can easily see that the Palauan ritual is quite different from other Micronesian mourning and burial rituals. In the Chuukic-speaking islands, for example, emphasis was on the transformation of the spirit of the living into a potentially beneficent spirit, an ancestor to be reverenced and appealed to as protector and

guardian of the living kin. This belief was also present in traditional Palau, but the emphasis—at least in the case of titled persons—was on the transfer of wealth and titles of power.

The *bladek* were the focus of a family cult, with the leading male (*rubak*) as the one who gave honors to them. The *bladek* would reside in a small shrine, which could be a box or shelf in a special part of the main house, a betel nut bag hanging from the side-beams, or sometimes a miniature house might be built next to the family house.[14] In any case, this shrine was the place to offer tokens such as food or flowers.[15] The household shrines, however, do not appear to be the place from which the spirits descended on the living to possess them or speak through them, as in the case of the Chuukic peoples. Curiously enough, though, an offering platform much like the Chuukic *faar* (the hanging platform, sometimes in the shape of a double-hulled miniature canoe) does appear, but it is in the community house (*bai*), and as a place for offerings to the territorial or political gods, the *chelid,* not to the family ancestors (Kubary 1888, 23).

But the *bladek* were only part of the Palauan religion. Problems could arise that could not be solved at the level of the *bladek,* and so more powerful spirits had to be sought out. These more powerful spirits were the *chelid,* and their priests were the possessed persons known as the *korong.*

The Spirits and Gods Called *Chelid*

Chelid, like *bladek,* is a generic term to cover a category of gods; it encompasses all those divinities that are not *bladek*. Early descriptions show the *chelid* as one of two types, or perhaps one should say they perform one of two functions.[16] First, they could be the gods (protectors) of clans, village, and groups of villages; these were the territorial gods very much involved in the politics of the clans and villages. Their importance waxed and waned with the political and military success of clans and villages. Gods "went" beyond the confines of a single village, if that village was successful in conquering other villages. The indices of this fluctuating political power can be seen in practices surrounding the territorial *chelid.* One village might "marry" its god to another village in order to make them somehow more related (Kubary 1888, 19). When a village was abandoned, the upright stone symbol of the village god was taken by the inhabitants to the new site, which was called "carrying the god" (Parmentier 1987, 218).[17]

Undoubtedly, one of the main political strengths of the *chelid* was that they were regularly consulted through the divination of the *chelid* priests: "The territorial gods become most important in the consultations of the chieftains, and no sovereign will dare to undertake something without asking the *korong* for advice. Therefore, every political transaction begins with

a visit to the *korong,* if one is at hand" (Kubary 1888, 28). The *korong* were the inspired priests of the *chelid;* they functioned as diviners for the chiefs under the guise of being possessed by their patron *chelid* and often through the means of a self-induced trance.[18] Kubary, who first saw them in action in 1871, had good reason to note the power of the *chelid* through their chosen *korong*. He was living in the district (or state) of Melekeok and under the protection of the highest chief, the Reklai. In fact, the Reklai was so taken with the power of the new foreigner that he designated him with the recognized title of "friend."[19] Kubary wanted to go south into the territory of the Ibedul of Koror, but the Reklai was worried that the Polish-born ethnographer would be killed, like Andrew Cheyne in 1866, and thus bring the wrath of the English upon Melekeok. So the *chelid* were summoned (Kubary 1873, 198). Divination determined that Koror had been greatly offended by Kubary and had designs on his life. On the advice of Reklai, therefore, Kubary cut a piece of his clothing into four pieces and sacrificed it to various *chelid*. The priest of Adololok of Peleliu told Kubary that he should be calm and worry no more. The *korong* of the Ngiwal god, *Irungor,* said he was "favorable" to the "friend" of the Reklai of Melekeok. Kubary headed out for Koror with an armed escort. Kubary's own experience demonstrates graphically the political use of the *chelid* and their spokespersons.

In certain villages, the village itself was ruled directly by the *chelid* and his *korong,* who became the leading chief. Thus, the power of the *chelid* in political affairs was both directly and indirectly significant. Kubary thought that in Koror the leading chief, the Ibedul, and his subordinate chiefs owed a large part of the respect they received to these protective *chelid*. Indeed, the *chelid* were more feared than the leading chief (Kubary 1873). It takes no great leap of imagination to see that the *chelid*—really their *korong*—were a potential power threat to the political leaders. Krämer thought that the ranking of the *chelid* as number twenty on the list of chiefs (*rubak*) in some places represented attempts to check the power of the *chelid* and their mouthpieces.

A second sort of Palauan *chelid* was tied to nature rather than politics: These were the great and small *chelid* of the earth and the sea. These gods may have had a greater impact on the daily life of the Palauans than the political gods, and in this sense they were quite similar to the patron gods elsewhere in Micronesia. The house builder, for example, had to master both the technicalities of construction and the rituals to appease the god of the trees to be felled.[20] As Kubary noted,

> The religion of the people is founded on the *kalits* [*chelid*] that can be either useful or harmful to them in their activities. Their imagination

> populates the sea, forest and earth with countless *kalits;* and whenever they wish to undertake something, be it catching a fish or felling a tree, they must first appease the deities or protect themselves from their subsequent anger. This can be achieved only through certain formulas and incantations (1888, 28).

The names and functions of some of these many nature gods are known, but recorded details are scant at best. The gods of the earth, to cite one example, were *Remesegau, Udibong,* and *Gobilbagei.* This trio, living about one foot deep in the soil, is in charge of the surface of the earth. When the soil is cultivated, they must be invoked (Krämer 1926, 339–340). At least one taro ritual involving these earth deities is recorded, and considering the importance of taro in traditional Palau, this increase or fertility ritual must have been far more important than the rarely mentioned names of the three earth deities would indicate.

The *Ruchel* or Messenger Gods

In addition to the political and nature *chelid* are the *ruchel,* variously described as "messenger gods" (Parmentier 1987, 154), demigods (Josephs 1990, 296), or "the recent male gods" associated with settlement of the islands (Kubary 1888, 18). The *ruchel* were different, according to Kubary's early report, because they are a group of deities that relate to a particular period in Palauan myth. This period, as mentioned before, is between the archaic period represented by the myths of *Latmikaik* and *Chuab* and the new Palauan order represented by the myths of *Milad,* the flood, and *Milad*'s children (Parmentier 1987, 154). They are outsiders who migrated to Palau and who brought with them the social innovation of the title system and the technological innovation of sailing. Unlike the journeys of *Latmikaik* and *Chuab*'s children from south to north, the *ruchel* worked their way from the north to the south, through Babeldaob, replacing the indigenous rulers (Kubary 1873, 221–222). Viewed from the main stories of Palauan tradition, the *ruchel* terminate the archaic structure and clear the way for a new political structure based on the four "corner-post" leadership of the four main districts as symbolized in the four children of *Milad.* What emerges, then, is an oral history of the steps leading to the sociopolitical structure of Palau at about the late eighteenth century:

1. The period of cosmic origins; the origin of the Palauan Islands and their first inhabitants.
2. The period of archaic beginning symbolized in the story of *Latmikaik*.

3. The period of archaic political structure symbolized in the story of *Chuab*.
4. The transitional period of the *ruchel:* destruction of the old political structure.
5. The new structure of the four main sections of Babeldaob, symbolized by the four children of *Milad*.

In this sense, with the mythological stages seen as a kind of unwritten political charter, the gods and their stories explain where the social ordering came from. And in this sense the political ideology of Palau is given a religious underpinning.

Yet another meaning of the *ruchel* could be that they are reappearing gods. One of Parmentier's informants once explained the *ruchel* as working like colonial agents; Parmentier explained in detail this interpretation:

- The *ruchel* are of foreign origin.
- They possess more power than the local people.
- They came with good intentions but soon exploited the people and usurped local power.
- They are later replaced by new migrant groups, such as the waves of English, Spanish, German, Japanese, and American powers.

Parmentier concludes that these new foreign powers are only a continuation of the pattern well established in the mythology of the *ruchel* (1987, 55).[21]

Palauan Gods Compared to Gods Elsewhere in Micronesia

First, Palau shares with the rest of Micronesia a well-developed set of beliefs and practices about respect and veneration of the ancestors; but, like its Yap neighbors and unlike the Chuukic-speaking neighbors, Palauans view the ancestors more as the source of wealth, status, and power than as protective kin-based guardians. The trance-possession ritual in Palau is associated with the clan, village, and district gods (*chelid*), not with the family spirits (*bladek*).

Second, unlike its atoll neighbors, many of the important myths are about political or territorial gods.

Third, nature gods are a common feature throughout Micronesia, including Palau.

Fourth, like some of the sky gods in Micronesia, the Palauan "high" gods (Parmentier) are active in the cosmic and creation stories of tradition, but they appear distant from the daily affairs of keeping up the taro patches and fishing and making a living. *Latmikaik*'s two sons are the

lords of heaven (*Ucheliangl,* "first in heaven") and of the lower world (*Ucheldatk,*[22] "first in the lower world"). *Ucheliangl* is the father of all the *chelid,* something akin to *Enúúnap* of the Chuukic world; it is *Ucheliangl* who sends the great flood. He is, however, outside the daily needs of people. He appears to be so remote that Krämer thought Palauans were not clear as to whether the various gods were subordinate to him or whether they were just manifestations of him (1926, 337).

Fifth, the Palauans gave prominence to the rainbow god who was also patron of war, *Horekim.* This god was important in the war rituals of the young men's clubs and in ritual head-hunting.[23] Elsewhere in Micronesia, there is good evidence of warfare in the Chuuk Lagoon, the Marshalls, and Kiribati, but only in Chuuk and the Mortlocks is there also record of fighting and warfare taking on a religious dimension.

Interaction between Humans and Spirits

Three specialists or leaders stand out in the record: the father or leading male of the extended family, the often ecstatic *korong,* and a number of minor figures specializing largely in divination production of protective or evildoing amulets. These examples of rituals and ritual specialists, if taken together, bring into the fore the full range of Palauan spirits, as well as the political and earthy focus of Palauan religion.

The Father or Head of the Extended Family

Just as the spirit world splits into the *bladek* and the *chelid,* so too those who serve them. The father or leading male of the extended family (considered a chief or *rubak*) venerated the *bladek,* his ancestors, and also the *chelid* of his clan; but the mouthpiece of the *chelid* was primarily the *korong.* A variety of magicians, fortune-tellers, and amulet makers might appeal to the *chelid* in incantations, but the *korong* spoke as the *chelid* and were even referred to as *chelid.*

Not much is known or recorded about the role of the father as leader in the veneration of the ancestors. Possibly this is because the ritual was simple and taken for granted. By the time of Krämer, about 1910, some family household heads no longer had the little shrine or place of offering for the resident *bladek*.[24] Occasionally, when the ancestor was a chief of high rank and importance, a miniature *bai* or shrine would be built next to the house. The concept of a household shrine to the ancestor spirits is widespread throughout Micronesia, although in varying shapes and sizes. In general, one could say that with rare exceptions (e.g., the spirit houses of the Palauan *chelid* and the shrines on Tobi), Micronesians rarely built

large buildings as houses of worship.[25] On Yap, the spirit house might be at some distance from the living quarters, because of fear of pollution from the corpse. The people of Kiribati kept bones—especially the skulls of their ancestors—in their homes and meeting houses: They talked to them and offered them food and even cigarettes. The household shrine is a widespread occurrence in Micronesia. The record shows that Palau not only had the household shrines but also spirit houses. These were usually small, but in some cases they were full-sized houses resembling the community *bai,* associated with the burial place of a high-titled person. These structures were often connected to the god who was the patron of a *korong*. The places where the *korong* conducted their séances were usually in rooms of their own home, in a special building next to their own home, or in these large, *bai*-like spirit houses dedicated to the various deities.

Spirit Mediums (*Korong*)

More is known about the actions of the *korong* than the ancestor veneration of the fathers, possibly because the flashy, ecstatic behavior of the inspired *korong* more easily caught the attention of early Europeans. It would be valuable to have some date of when the *korong* disappeared, but the only hints come from Krämer, who noted that the last high priest of the deity *Medegei* at Rungul died in 1910 (1929a, 231). The Krämers also found an old dilapidated "ghost-house," a spirit house where the *korong* once conducted business. Somehow the work of the divination function of the *korong* continued, although the *korong* himself was gone: "The old divinatory arrangement was still existent. However, the priest himself . . . had been banished by the [German] administration" (Hellwig 1927, 200). There is no mention of *korong* by Hijikata during the Japanese period. It is not clear that any of the anthropologists after World War II recorded anything but "memory culture" about the *korong*. The trancelike behavior of the *korong*, however, appears to have transferred over to or was revived by the nativist movement of Modekngei. This is a most interesting parallel with the Chuuk spirit medium (*wáánaanú*), whose status as kin-based mouthpiece of the ancestor spirits disappeared but whose possession-trance continues to the present without the official status of spirit medium and in a more free and open access to the spirit.

Kubary, who himself used the services of *korong*, has the best description of this now vanished personage. He saw the *korong* as essentially the communication vehicle of the *chelid* and as a "powerfully developed priestly institution." The initiation into the status of *korong* was apparently free and open but subject to confirmation by the people: "Every *kalit*

. . . can establish himself in anyone he wishes and speak through him." Kubary's description continues:

> Every such revelation [of the *chelid* to a human medium], even the person himself is called *odo*. If this manifestation is only temporary—for a *kalit* [*chelid*] searches out his instrument for a long time before making permanent use of him—then the appellation sticks. But if it comes to a decision, then the chosen is called a *korong* if male, or *korong el dul* if female. In theory, the *kalit* [*chelid*] is perfectly free in his choice and priesthood is not inherited. After the death of a *korong,* the deity is unrepresented for a time until his *odo* suddenly manifests itself in some other person. The person then tries to appear as unnatural as possible, yawns, runs around and performs nonsensical actions. The people laugh at this at first, until the attention of the population has been sufficiently directed to the person chosen. Because the actions of the prospective priest include gestures that are particularly characteristic of the specific deity, the neighborhood is seldom in doubt as to the meaning of the manifestation; and after some time and thorough deliberations among the family heads, the person is requested to take his proper place in the state. Most usually this place is a prominent one and gives the person chosen powerful influence over the whole community (1888, 19).[26]

The "calling" of the *korong,* therefore, was culturally demonstrated in the bizarre behavior (in the later descriptions of *korong* performances, it is clear that the behavior is a real or feigned trance that is interpreted as possession by the *chelid*) and finally confirmed by the chiefs, perhaps in the council of the chiefs. Kubary is the best source on this because, as a guest of the Reklai of Melekeok, he saw a *korong* at work on his own behalf. As already noted, the Reklai was concerned about the safety of Kubary and summoned the *korong* to them. Reklai put a piece of cloth (the cloth that Kubary had offered in sacrifice to the *chelid*) in the "handbasket" of the *kalit* and said, "My friend and I are poor as rats. We lack things for the ship is not here; may this trifle incline you towards us." The *korong* picked up the cloth and cried out, "Here is food for the Gobak aramogou." The *korong* calmed the fears of Reklai (Kubary 1873, 201). The *korong* then began his session with the *chelid:* "He [the *korong*] went back to his place and began to groan, a sign that the god wished to speak through him. He spoke in a loud, resounding voice, and all the chiefs listened attentively. He grew angry at Koror, and assured us that no one would dare attack me" (Kubary 1873, 201).

What Kubary found strange in the situation was that another *korong* present, who seemed to outrank the performing *korong,* did not take Reklai's offering of cloth from Kubary's shirt. The nonperforming *korong* said that the friendship between Reklai and Kubary and the care for the *chelid* was his "food." He added that both *korong* were the property of the *chelid*.[27]

The very next day, Reklai and Kubary were at the Reklai's house and they talked to the house gods. Reklai then offered Kubary some "Palauan money," taken right off the necklace his wife was wearing. "Here is Kubary's money," he said, and those assembled gazed as he placed the "money" in Kubary's handbasket.[28] The significance of the entire episode clearly shows the work of the *korong* in the service of the high chief, the political role of the *korong,* and the exchange with the family *bladek*—the twin elements of the old Palauan religion, according to Kubary. In this incident, the *korong* confirms with the voice of the *chelid* the bond between Reklai and the foreigner. The gift of Palauan money or valuables then reconfirms the divinely approved "friendship" between Reklai and Kubary.[29] The episode conferred on Kubary a publicly acknowledged status, that of "friend" of the paramount chief. At the time of this episode (1871), chiefs of both competing alliances, Melekeok and Koror, sought out foreigners for a connection to the arms and trade goods of the Western powers. Here the connection to the Western power and trade goods was made through a connection to the gods. In taking the handbag with offered cloth, the *chelid* via the *korong* acknowledged an economic medium, if you will, in the person of Kubary. The religious connection to the gods solemnized the connection to the European power source.

Kubary was a keen observer and saw that in séances the *korong* often stimulated the trance state by the rapid chewing of betel nut, which is even today recognized as a mild stimulant. In fact, the symbolic recognition of *korong* status was an offering of betel nut for the possessing *chelid*. Kubary also noted that the *korong* could answer the petitions made to his *chelid* in different ways: (1) In a trance state, the *korong* becomes the *chelid* in voice and person and dialogues with the petitioner; (2) the *korong* might speak directly to the petitioners, although in a highly agitated state; or (3) he might speak as the *chelid,* but from behind a curtain and only to his human wife. What follows is Kubary's description of the first type of séance:

> Most first receive payment, consisting of betelnut in lesser cases and of money in more important ones; sometimes this payment is of very high value. Then the *korong* gives some sort of sign which the company

> understands—a cough or a yawn—all of which signifies the arrival of the god. For example, the priest of the *Augel Kalit* [*chelid*], who sits close to the entrance, quickly touches the door covering and says "Enter!" Then he suddenly transforms his appearance into that of an old man. His right leg and arm tremble nervously, his left eye is closed, the right somewhat open, the entire face distorted in a senile grin. "What do you want of me?" he asked the petitioner who has the pleasure of negotiating with the *kalith* [*chelid*] eye to eye. Sometimes a conversation like this lasts for hours, during which the *kalith* busily helps himself to betelnut. As I could see from personal experience, the art of playing the *Augel* is no easy one. The man must have a really strong will to be able to maintain a trembling motion in one half of his body for an extended period of time, and yet not fall out of his role during the sometimes very important conversation. By no means does he lack belief in his profession, although I do not doubt for a moment that the human in him is not without influence on the supernatural (1888, 20–21).

While the *korong* were a political force of importance in Kubary's day, as "property" of the *chelid* they were bound to fade away just as the old gods did. As Roland and Maryanne Force observed in the 1960s and again in 1972, the *chelid* were by then ignored by most Palauans.[30] This fact may account for Homer Barnett's portrait of the Palauan religion as involving only the *bladek,* with no reference to the *chelid* (1949 and 1961).

In the last quarter of the nineteenth century, however, the *korong* were still political powers to be reckoned with. Sometimes they supplanted the leading political chiefs, as in the case of the seven villages ruled by the *korong* in a sort of theocracy; sometimes they were needed to confirm and bolster the authority of the chiefs; sometimes they jockeyed for power with chiefs; and sometimes they lost in the power play and were ranked low in the chiefly system. They obtained and held power because they often monopolized the cultural supply and demand for divining and ascertaining the future; their service made some wealthy, and the payment for their service, *tenget,* is today the word for "taxes" (Force and Force 1972).[31]

Yet even before the fall of the *chelid,* the *korong*'s status was subject to change: "Tenure in the rank of *korong* is always an unstable matter" (Kubary 1888, 20). The *korong* remained leaders only so long as the god remained with them. Alas, Kubary did not record how the chiefs and the people recognized that the *chelid* had departed. Considering that the trance or trancelike state was a sign of the presence of the god, the departure of the god might have been failure to induce a trace state, or perhaps the signal was failure to regularly predict the future.

One cannot help but notice that, however politically powerful the *korong* once was, his role was very limited: He was a diviner and a medium of the *chelid*—but only of certain *chelid*.[32] In addition to the priests, wrote Kubary, there are "countless magicians, seers, conjurers, and the fortune tellers, who have been peacefully accepted by the priests who hold sway" (1888, 39). Only divination (*manglil*), for example, could establish what *chelid* was causing the problem, such as sickness. This type of divination, which was a separate profession, was a "secret . . . which is rigorously preserved in a family and the practice of which is lucrative since those seeking information pay for the inquiry" (24). There were many methods of divination. One example, the breaking of nuts, practiced only by male soothsayers, was very often used for diseases, before a military expedition, or for a fishing expedition of the chieftain. The nut was split and information deduced from the nature of the break (25). Of the other religious functionaries of the old religion, little is known other than that they were many and of various kinds.

Divination might in turn lead to sacrifices to an angry *chelid*. The *chelid* was asked by the diviner what he wished. The *chelid* might ask for a pig or a turtle, so the petitioner gets the animal and goes with the sick person to the place where the *chelid* lives. According to Kubary, a small house, called *katigil,* is carved to represent a shrine and the family takes the shrine to where the *chelid* lives. The *katigil* is hung and a sacrificial animal slaughtered and eaten. If the sick person recovers, the result is of course attributed to the *chelid*. Dances could also be demanded by the *chelid*. If a suffering woman was pregnant for the first time, the *chelid* might demand a performance that lasted for three dances but which entailed a month of preparation and great expense (1888, 26–27).

Other Palauan professions, although not immediately religious, required knowledge of the gods and chants associated with their work. The house builders are one example. They had to possess not only the technical carpentry skill of the work but also the magic power (*golay*) to drive gods from the trees so they did not harm the wood cutters. If the builder built a house and he was not satisfied with the payment, he called on the tree god (*chelid a gargar*) to avenge him and make the house inhabitants sick. The same was true of fishing. The *koreomel,* or "master fisherman," had to know the incantations for fishing before he got his master's title. Before fishing parties went out to catch sharks in the open sea beyond the reef, the master officiated as intercessor with the sea gods (Kubary 1889, 127–132).

These, then, were the human connecting points with the *bladek* and *chelid*. I have the impression that much if not most of the old Palauan religion was involved in discovering the future impact of political decisions,

economic decisions, even the daily decisions needed in making a living. Even in the elaborate rituals surrounding funerals, to be described next, divination of the future is critical to the ritual. When one puts all of this together with the average person's ability to also use "homemade" divination—that done by stripping and knotting bamboo leaves—one sees that there is almost no aspect of life for which the old Palauans failed to find some guidance about the unknown.

Rituals: Pregnancy and Birth, Death, and Warfare

Pregnancy and Birth

During pregnancy, an old lady was invited to the house; she was the *gobadil* or "conjuror" who would do the "conjuration of the child" in an attempt to discover the sex, health, and other details about the fetus in the womb. On neighboring Yap, the priest came at definite times after the sixth month. The Palauan *gobadil* said prayers over the pregnant woman and waved a *sis* (*Cordilyne fruticosa,* or ti plant) leaf over the pregnant woman. She gave the leaf to the pregnant woman, who in turn squeezed it over a bowl of water and then drank the liquid. The *gobadil* repeated this ritual almost every day, morning and night.

While a woman was pregnant, a routine of taboos was in effect: At meetings, the woman sat aside from others; she ate no fat, no pork, only roast taro so as not to insult the *chelid*.

At various times after birth, the mother was given bowls of medicine to drink. It is safe to assume that in times past, the medicine was a combination of natural ingredients whose preparation and administration was accompanied by chants. The medicines are still offered to the mother by her kinswomen, but there is no mention in recent publications that a diviner such as the *gobadil* came daily during pregnancy or that the "medicines" were prepared by specialists, accompanied by chants.[33]

In general, the postbirth ceremonies served to validate the marriage and acknowledge the child within the family and clan (Force and Force 1972, 27). The religious dimension has largely disappeared, although informants told me that someone who is known to be in contact with the gods and spirits is sometimes still invited to the ceremonies.

Death, Burial, and Mourning Ritual

The ritual use of *sis* leaves symbolically connected the pregnancy/birth ritual and that of the funeral. In fact, a key segment of the funeral and mourning is called *sis*. The portion of the elaborate ritual that calls for divination with the *sis* plant was and perhaps still is the clearest and

strongest religious element in the Palauan funeral. The ritual as a whole was dominated by the responsibilities of the kin, the village, and the clan; these responsibilities determined both the more secular rubrics as well as the religious ones. The most important responsibilities varied according to the sex, marital status, title or rank of the deceased, and according to the transfer of the title and the settlement of the estate. In the past, offerings to the family spirits (*bladek*) and the *chelid* played a more important role than recently; but the *sis* divination is still sometimes observed.[34]

Palauans of old believed that the spirit of the person separated from the physical body at death. Like many peoples of Micronesia, the Palauans believed that the spirit was not simply a nonmaterial entity; it was a mirror image of the body. Thus, the ghost of the deceased could be seen as it was in life.[35] The separation from the body created an ambiguous or even dangerous situation.[36] Part of the funeral was to insure that the spirit became a helpful family ancestor spirit; part was also to find out the name of the evil spirit that caused the death and lingered near the living (Parmentier 1988, 286).[37]

The final destination of the soul is reached only after a long journey, a feature shared by many Micronesian and Polynesian cultures. The soul's journey from Babeldaob was to Malakal (Ngemelachel) to bathe in a spring there, and from there the soul went to the southernmost tip of Peleliu and to the Ngarameded Rock on the southern coast of Bitang Island.[38] The soul jumped off the rock and swam to Angaur, whence the soul flew to a beach in the southwest, Ngedelog or Ngadolog, which is the beach of the departed spirits.[39] The soul, however, must first cross a bridge, guarded by an old woman, and if the soul's ears are not pierced the woman throws the soul off the bridge. There was lots of dancing and feasting on this beach, but Kubary insisted that life there was a continuation of life on earth, and "it has no effect on man's way of living" (1888, 4). Some living people could see these spirits dancing. One myth tells of a man who wanted to see his wife's soul and with the help of a magician sees his departed wife, but when he tries to embrace and take her, she changes to a bird and he unwittingly kills her (Krämer 1929a, 65–66).

At the funeral, the bier of the deceased was placed at the entrance to the *bai*. The body was either put in a coffin or sewed up in mats. The women who washed and sewed up the body—in fact all who touched it—had to live in seclusion for ten days; they were *meai* (tabooed or unclean). Meanwhile, in the house of the deceased, women sang laments and later made a lot of noise to drive away the evil spirits. A banquet followed, and after the meal the *rubak* of the deceased's village came bringing plaited young coconut fronds and taro for the *deliakldui*—the transfer of title

from the deceased.[40] Whoever brought the bundle of coconut fronds then walked around the body reciting a formula, and in this manner the deceased's title was transferred to the bundle and then the bundle attached to wall of the *blai*.[41] The *deliakl* bundle was kept on the lowest sticks or beams of the *blai* for about nine days, until the grave was covered with stones. As the mourning period progressed, the bundle was daily moved up to the third side-beam, then to the fourth, then the fifth (Palau Society of Historians 1998a, 12). Sometime after the burial an *ogaro* might be held, with its wild and sometimes obscene songs and dances presented by a friendly *blai* or *rubak* or women of high rank (11). A distribution of Palauan valuables (money) and taro was made sometime during the mourning period, and some of the taro was left for a local god.

Early on the third day of mourning, a meal of raw taro was presented for the spirit of the deceased by a "friend," who was more than a close chum but a "friend" by customary law.[42]

On the fourth day came one of the most important events in the burial and morning: the oracle of the flowers, the *sis,* when the spirit was asked the cause of his death.

Two women went into the bush to collect red *sis* leaves on which they rubbed oil and turmeric; they added other flowers and wrapped the bouquet into a mat. After dark, the *sis* was taken out of the mat and placed in the house. A woman mourner invoked the spirit of the deceased and begged it to enter the *sis* and to reveal the cause of its demise. She held the *sis* bundle as all present called out the possible cause of death and which *chelid* were responsible for the death. If the spirit did not like the person holding the *sis,* the *sis* did not move, and the bundle was passed to the next person and so on. If all present failed to get the *sis* to shake, a woman mourner with the gift of seeing the spirits might be called in. She looked at the bundle and saw the spirit of the departed approaching it. But if the *sis* moved, shook, or fell when the cause of death was called out, this was the sign that the correct cause had been reached. The female mourners cried, *"Korniy, korniy"* (Kubary 1885, 10). If the relatives were satisfied, they consumed the sacrifices and went to bed, but the chief mourner stayed with the *sis*. Afterwards the *sis* bundle was taken outside and put in a basket along with the deceased clothes and *tet* basket.[43] This was done so that the spirit might begin its journey to Angaur on the fifth day. The spirit would take the shadow or "soul" of these items and thus be well received in the country of the dead. In a sense, the betel nut bag was a grave good. There is some evidence that money was placed on the bier as grave goods to help the soul get where it was going—in this case, over the bridge to the Elysian beach.[44]

On day five, a coconut was ceremonially broken, signifying the end of the tabooed (*meae*) seclusion period for those who touched the dead body. If the deceased was a chief, there might also be a hundred-day mourning period, the *taur,* which forbade all noise about the grave and some form of seclusion for relatives.[45]

Sometime after burial, a hut was constructed over the grave, *blil a debul,* and some persons stood guard in the hut, which after nine days was taken down and stones placed on the grave.[46] The funeral was over for all but those mourners who were required to be in seclusion for up to a hundred days (although there were breaks when they were "off taboo," so to speak) and for the new titleholder. Sometimes the title was immediately transferred when the coconut frond bundle was taken from the dead body and placed on the wall of the house, or sometimes it was held by the senior women for awhile. In any case, the new titleholder could not assume responsibilities or exercise his authority without first undergoing a period of confinement, during which other leaders might teach him the requirements of his new status. Furthermore, before the new officeholder could use the power of his title, women had to prepare special foods for ceremonial distribution. In certain districts such as Melekeok, Koror, and Imeilong, the title was made legitimate by the recipient retracing an ancestral migration route in a symbolic journey (Parmentier 1987, 69).

It is impossible to weigh what was more important in a Palauan funeral—bidding the deceased farewell, sending the soul on its journey to the beach of dancing and feasting, or transferring the title to a new recipient. Whether the funeral in any society was mainly for the benefit of the deceased or for the living is a question asked long ago by Emile Durkheim, who came down firmly on the side of funerals for the group, to maintain and affirm its solidarity. Palauan funerals, at least in their solicitude for the transfer of the title, are for the group. It is no surprise that Palauans were not particularly concerned with the transformation of the soul from *deleb* into the *bladek*. While the *bladek* are honored by their living kin, the record implies little interaction between them and their living relations. If one wanted to know one's destiny, needed help in making decisions, or desired a peek into the future, one went to the *chelid* through their *korong* or other diviners. Unlike the Chuuk spirits, who liked to return to their old earthly haunts and often helped their living kin, the Palau spirits did not like to return to earth. Although honored in their former houses, they were not the ones who took possession of their living descendants.

The Rituals of Head-Hunting

Warfare with head-hunting is described by Kubary based on his experiences in Melekeok beginning in 1871. By that time, the hegemony of power had

shifted to the alliances headed by Melekeok and Koror. In 1883, Captain Bridge of the *Espiegle* had brokered a peace treaty between the two belligerents, but the struggle for power continued. When Kubary was in Melekeok in 1871, as noted earlier, the chiefs there were worried about his safety on a planned trip to Koror. War parties were still on the prowl, and Kubary was told that a man was killed, some years earlier, and his head taken by the Koror people; his whole body had to be ransomed by his Melekeok family (1889, 131). *Horekim* or *Iraria,* the patron god of war, was a *chelid* who taught humans how to make and use the spear and promised luck in making war.[47] Kubary recorded that *Horekim* was invoked by those who made new spears in anticipation of a skirmish. The warrior hung the new spear in his house and called to *Iraria* (since it was taboo to pronounce the name *Horekim*) for help. The warrior would wait for the sound of a little gecko or an insect as the omen that *Horekim* would give help. In taking a head, the warrior looked up and said "*Horekim,* I proclaim to you, I take here a large container" (1888, 30).[48]

The religious dimension of warfare and head-hunting, however, was more than an individual warrior praying for good luck. An elaborate set of seclusions and dances preceded the departure of a war party (Kubary 1873). Before the warriors entered their village (presumably coming from their men's clubhouse), they "strengthened" themselves with turmeric rubbed on the skin and with coconut leaves round their necks, hands, and feet. As soon as they entered the *bai* of the chiefs, they came under the force of taboo (*meaek*) and were shut in, in some places as long as a month. At the same time, a shrine was built for a priest, the lower part of which became his house where he too was shut in.

Early in the morning, the priest blew the horn greeting the morning star. Each time the priest sounded his horn, the secluded warriors replied, each with his mussel trumpet. The houses of the village also answered. Then, after each signal by the priest, the *Horuidel* performed sacred dances dedicated to the divinity of *Ngarupesang.* Women came to let the secluded *Horuidel* process to the sea. After ritual at the sea, they returned and were again sequestered under taboo. The end of the period of seclusion was announced when the priest once again blew his shell horn.

The Sacred Stones: Archaeology and Religion

The extensive surface scatter of monoliths, stone platforms, and sculptured figurines should have much to say about the old religion, but in fact they are rather silent without the oral tradition or mythology that identified the meaning of the stones. Many are markers in stone of what the gods did on Palau. In this regard, they are much like the revered stones of Pohnpei:

They are signs and symbols of the oral or mythical history of the country. As on Pohnpei, some of these markers can be associated with events of the recent past. They are considered sacred stones. Most are external signs that are only a reminder of the past.[49]

Three ethnographers have described these stones in detail (Krämer, Hijikata, and Parmentier), but still the stones tell little not already known from myth or ethnography. In general, there are six kinds of stone monuments that might be related to the old religion.

First are the markers of where the gods acted in Palauan prehistory. For example, the large volcanic plug in the Ngerebesek forest, about fifty feet high, is called by villagers the "house of *Milad,*" or the "cave of *Milad,*" an external sign, says Parmentier, of the story of *Milad.* At the same site, a stone table and the black ash on the cave table is cited by the villagers as the spot where *Milad* cooked taro (Parmentier 1987, 167–168). There seems to be no belief that the gods were incarnate in such reminders of the past (164).

Second are the images of the gods (Krämer 1926, 336). One stone was regarded as *Milad*'s body turned to stone; Kubary said it could be seen in his day (1873, 222), as quoted in Parmentier (1987, 168).

Third are the monoliths outside the *bai,* which were considered the "seats" of the gods and were moved—carrying the god—when the village was abandoned or threatened (Parmentier 1987, 218).

Fourth are the platforms or tables made of two standing stones and another stone set atop them. These may or may not be what Parmentier calls ceremonial display tables (1987, 32). He offers little more explanation of how and why they are "ceremonial." These manmade tables are large and imposing, but they too tell us little or nothing about the old religion.

Fifth are the anthropomorphic and sex symbols carved in stone. Hijikata studied these extensively and sketched many (1995). What is most interesting is that recorded Palauan traditional stories are not erotic as are the carvings. On the other hand, the panels on the gables of some *bai* are covered with erotic art.[50] One picture portrays a woman, her legs spread and ready for sex. That these phallic and sex symbols had a religious import is doubtful. Taking the simplest answer, they were erotic art to match the activities of some *bai,* specifically the sexual affairs of the clubhouse men and their "hostesses."

Sixth are the upright pillars on the earthen stepped terraces. If the use of the terraces is poorly understood or at least highly controversial, so are these columns. No one in the literature is suggesting that the terraces were religious in function, like some sort of a gigantic earthen variation on the sacred platforms or *marae* in Polynesia. Archaeologists have proposed that the terraces were village sites, defensive positions, or agricultural

terraces for growing dryland taro (Lucking 1984). So, neither the terraces nor the stone pillars on them reveal anything about religion; in fact, they were even a mystery to the Palauans as recorded by early visitors—only a "reminder of the past."

The archaeology of Palau, although valuable in reconstructing the cultural past, has little to add to the ethnographic and oral tradition about religion.

The overall picture of Palauan religion is a religion focused on the soil of Palau and not in the heavens. The focus is, moreover, on the confirmation of political and socioeconomic status, as the rituals of pregnancy, birth, and death illustrate, as do the workings of the *chelid* and their *korong*. The veneration of the ancestors is important but not as a source of guidance and advice for the family. The mythology of Palau, especially that of *Latmikaik, Chuab,* and *Milad* and her children, is a political charter for the modern social structure of Palau—the title system, chiefs, councils of chiefs, and the role of the four children or main districts of Babeldaob. Although there is a distinction between the ancestor spirits (*bladek*) and the gods (*chelid*), the distinction blurs as ancestors are promoted to gods, notably in the case of heroes. Likewise the distinction between clan, lineage, village, and district gods is as flexible as the political alliances were.

Palau certainly shares with its Micronesian neighbors a religious structure of the ancestor spirits and the gods, but it is difficult to find a clear distinction between the high or sky gods, the patron gods who work mainly on earth, and the nature spirits bound to specific places on land and sea—a structure found elsewhere in Micronesia. Palau had a similar-looking cosmos of heavens above, earth below, and a world-beneath-the-sea. The Palau Archipelago itself is either built up out of the coral of the sea or pulled from the sea—a creation story found elsewhere—but the tridecked universe really does not play much of a role, even in the mythology.

There are, moreover, two fascinating similarities between mythology in Palau and in other parts of Micronesia. The *Milad* story, important as one of the main foundation myths of Palau, is remarkably similar to the story of Yap's great flood, and the similarity seems to go beyond the worldwide generic version of a great flood. Variations on the *Milad* and Yap *Margigi* stories are found throughout Micronesia, even as far away as the Marshalls. In addition, Isohkelekel of Pohnpeian and Kosraean oral history turns up on Palau. Ugelkeklau appears in a Palauan story as the leader of a migration of people from the east (Krämer 1929a, 188–189).

Most Palauan ritual comes to focus on divination. Divination was terribly important to the Palauans of old. They seem to have wanted a divining mechanism for all areas of life where doubt and uncertainty were present.

They used any variable in nature as a means of divining: the clouds, the configuration of broken nuts, of trees, spider webs, spear lengths, patterns of rolled-up thread, the different patterns in split betel nut, coconut leaves, clay pipes, screams of owls, bird behavior, cracks in coconut leaves put on a fire, perforations made on *sis* leaf stems, and coconut leaf nerves or veins—and there are more (Kubary 1888, 24ff.).

Although the language is different from most others in Micronesia and the recorded contacts with other island groups are not as extensive as that of, say, the Chuukic-speaking atolls, Palau is not a cultural isolate, certainly not in religion. The beliefs and practices of Palauan religion might, at a quick and superficial glance, look very different from the rest of Micronesia, but upon closer look, Palau shares with Micronesia similar myths, ecstatic religious diviners, concepts surrounding the transformation of the dead spirit to a household ancestor spirit, gods who interact with their human creatures and who aid them, and a similar picture of the cosmos as the stage where gods, spirits, humans, and the forces of the natural environment met.

Chapter 9

The Religion of Kiribati and Nauru

On the southern flank of Micronesia and spreading across the equator is the Republic of Kiribati, a string of atolls and coral islands including the Gilbert, Phoenix, and Line Islands and the raised coral island of Banaba (Ocean Island). Nauru, to the west of Banaba, is an independent republic. There are legends and oral traditions that tell of the origins of the people of these atolls. In the case of Kiribati, perhaps they came from Samoa.[1] In the case of Banaba, the people are believed to have traveled from an island in the west, often identified with the mythical *Matang* (Grimble 1972, 33). The oral histories of Kiribati and Banaba are interwoven with each other and with those of Samoa. There are even stories of migrations to and from Samoa. Nauru's origins are unknown, although its mythology and deities were similar to those of Kiribati. While they are not Polynesian in their social structure or religion and show greater affinities with the diffused atoll chiefdoms of the Marshalls and Chuukic world, the cosmic myths of Kiribati, Banaba, and Nauru are clearly Polynesian.

Not surprisingly, what is known about Kiribati comes from colonial officials, missionaries, and early expeditions. The officials were district officers in the British Colonial Service: Arthur Grimble and Harry Maude. The missionary was Father Ernst Sabatier. They knew each other and respected each other's knowledge, and together they published most of what is known about the old religion. The indefatigable Paul Hambruch of the Hamburg Expedition spent about two months on Nauru, producing two hefty volumes (1914 and 1915),[2] although these did not appear without blistering criticism from the local missionary and linguist, Alois Kayser (1917–1918, 328ff.). Still, little was recorded about the old religions of Nauru and Kiribati.

Most of the data gathered by Grimble, Maude, and Sabatier came from the elders of the Kiribati kinship groups, who carefully guarded the genealogies and oral histories of their ancestors. The reader will most likely find the genealogies recorded by Grimble and Maude to be very

complicated. This is because each atoll had its own ancestor genealogy, and there were often different versions of stories about the same ancestors. Kiribati and Banaba, to add to the complexity, had similar origin and populating myths, but they are attributed to different cosmic creators. Some of the legendary genealogies, Maude found, were dying with the elders due to both the elders' hesitation to reveal the secrets to outsiders and their own children's lack of interest in these traditions (Maude and Maude 1994). The collected works of Grimble and the Maudes emphasize the importance of myths and legends of the genealogies in the life of the Kiribati, and these myths and genealogies are in turn important to understanding the old religion.[3]

Kiribati and Banaban Religion

The Cosmic Origins of Kiribati and Banaba

Sabatier called the cosmic myths the "windows" to the belief and history of the people of Kiribati. On the Kiribati atoll, the myths went back to *Nareau,* "the first of things" (1977, 32).[4] "In the beginning, there were only three beings, *Nareau* the Father, *Nareau* the Seeker (the son), and *Nareau* the Younger."[5] According to Sabatier, *Nareau* the Father is the creator god, *Nareau* the Seeker becomes the trickster god, and *Nareau* the Younger disappears from the mythic scene.[6] The state of the cosmos at that time is described as *to bo ma te maki,* translated as "the darkness and the cleaving together" (Grimble 1972, 39). The picture of the "cleaving together" reflected the image of the cosmos as a gigantic Tridacna clamshell that *Nareau* the Father must pry open to separate the light from the darkness. Grimble called this narrative of the separation of light and dark "the sundering," a theme similar to Polynesian myth. After breaking open various shells, he came to a fifth shell, which he again broke through but here found a thick darkness, which he took hold of and flung to the east. Through this hole he saw the sun, and the dry land of Samoa appeared. *Nareau* then commanded various beings to lift up the heavens, which were still touching the earth. Finally he called *Riki,* who began work on the task. He was helped by four women who grew roots and became strong trees to support the heavens that *Riki* was raising. *Riki* sweated under the work, and the sweat became the sea. Finally, *Riki* separated the clam into the heavens above and earth below. *Nareau* rewarded him by putting him in the sky, where he can be seen in the Milky Way. *Riki*'s legs, broken off by *Nareau,* became the eels of the sea. *Nareau* went to the heavens with *Riki,* but only after leaving behind two kinds of beings: men (humans) and spirits. The spirits fell on the island of *Matang* and

the men stayed on Samoa, for "all real men come from Samoa" (Sabatier 1977, 34).

There are references in the Kiribati mythology to parts of this cosmos that seem to reflect the northern Micronesia cosmos. One example is that there are layers of sky within the vault of the heavens. At the horizon, there is a wall to hold in the limits of the sea called the "hidden places of heaven" (Grimble 1972, 200). The sun and moon journeyed down along this wall and through the world-under-the-sea. The world-under-the-sea was a mirror image of earth, with a population of humans and their deceased ancestors, the *anti*.[7] It might be that two different pictures of the cosmos—the clamshell and the inverted bowl as the vault of heaven—have blended together over time and with the movement of peoples.

Within this Kiribati cosmos, the organizing metaphor was that of the giant ancestor tree, which linked the creator divinities to the generations of chiefs and warriors who migrated from Samoa. Cosmic gods formed the crown of the tree, and their human descendants or particular atolls were the branches. The tree itself was rooted in places of origin. There were several of these cosmic, genealogical trees, the most prestigious being "The Tree of Samoa," which traced the genealogy of those who migrated from Samoa. Parts of the tree are legendary, but as Maude said, there is nothing more certain in the traditions of Kiribati than the Samoan origins (Sabatier 1977, 358n14).

Grimble and the Maudes found the cosmic and genealogical myths to be very important to the people—so important that they were hidden from outsiders. They were the record of links between kin, the atolls, and the gods. The myths recorded the cosmic origins of the islands and were heavily ritualized by the people. The mythic gods recapitulated in their own journeys, matings, and wars those of the human Kiribati. The myths were acted out in the atoll rituals, and in this sense they were alive in the lives of the people. As the rituals have disappeared with the advance of Christian missionization, the myths are now kept alive in memories and in the textbooks of the schoolchildren.[8]

The concept of the cosmos in Kiribati shows strong similarities with the Marshallese creation myth. Recall that in Kiribati the basic metaphor is of a gigantic clamshell, which the cosmic creator god, *Nareau,* pried open with the help of some of the extraordinary beings at the Kiribati begin-time, and that *Nareau* ordered four posts to hold open the clamshell. The Marshallese myth tells almost the same story—that of the sky god *Wullep,* living in a shell, sending down to earth the four post-men or gods of the four cardinal directions to hold up the vault of the heavens (Erdland 1914, 309; Tobin 2002, 11ff.). One element of the Kiribati legend is that

as the cosmic deities began to multiply, they mated among themselves and with the humans whom they had created. In Kiribati legends, the clans of the atolls trace themselves back to this divine origin. Again, the comparison with the contiguous Marshall Islands is noteworthy. The Marshallese paramount chiefs (*irooj laplap*) were descended from the star-goddess whose marker was the basalt monolith on the atoll of Namu (Erdland 1914; Pollock 1976). There were also, as already mentioned, many variations on the Kiribati origin myth. One from the atoll of Onotoa has the sun as the creator, from whose head a swelling grew that burst and from which *Nareau* the Son emerged. This version directly parallels the creation myth of the Marshalls, where boils from *Wullep* break and bring forth the culture-bearing gods (Sabatier 1977, 36; Erdland 1914). These variations show how the cultural patterns shift between Polynesian elements (the separating of light and darkness) and Micronesian elements (the boils on the high gods).

The Banaban creation story was very different. While Banaba is separated from the rest of Kiribati by only about 250 miles and shares the same language (Grimble 1972, 52), its creation legend is not linked to Samoa.[9] In this myth, the creator was *Auriaria,* a god from Banaba, which is the navel of the cosmos. *Auriaria* raised the heavens and then moved on to Samoa, where he created the "Tree of Samoa." The Samoans were thus created by *Auriaria* of Banaba. The "Tree of Samoa" floated to Tarawa (an atoll in Kiribati), where it produced a new tree. And so the Banaban colony on Samoa migrated to Tarawa. *Auriaria,* in turn, migrated to Beru, where he married into *Nareau*'s family and eventually moved back to Banaba (52–53). The Banaban myth thus claims origins that are independent of Kiribati.

The Link Between Myth and History

The *Nareau* creation myth is illustrative of a key characteristic of Kiribati myth—a connection that leads to the legends and history of the Kiribati past and particularly the link to Samoan origins. In the genealogies, the great migration from Samoa is approximated at twenty-five or thirty generations back, or about seven hundred years ago (Grimble 1989, 46). In the genealogy of the high chiefs of Tarawa, as summarized by Grimble, *Nareau* the Father made Tarawa and then Samoa (83–85). *Nareau* the Son, in turn, created two types of humans: the Breed of the North (Tarawa and Beru) and the Breed of the South. A descendant of the mythic *Nareau* made three voyages to Samoa, and yet another returned to Tarawa and married a Tarawa woman. Then came three rulers of Tarawa—Kirata I, II, and III—and following these were twenty-two generations down to the

living adult descendants in 1920. At first glance, this and other genealogies do not appear as an element of Kiribati or Banaban religion. However, genealogies were regularly part and parcel of legends that link the present humans back to the gods.

The Creator Gods and Goddesses

The creator deities such as *Nareau, Auriaria,* and *Riki* cannot be described as aloof from human affairs or distant in the belief and rituals of the people. They were appealed to in ritual and prayer. Associated with the creator gods and goddesses were deities who were part of the observed world, such as the Milky Way and the stars or the sun and the moon. In the pandanus ritual described later, for example, the deities of the sun, moon, and the eel *Riki* were all called forth to take the offerings of the first fruits of the pandanus (Grimble 1989, 16). In yet another ritual, performed when famine was upon the community, the elder of the community set the day when offerings would be brought to the community house (*maneaba*), but only after a monolith about six feet high had been set up there. The monolith represented *Tabakea,* the god who appeared as a turtle.[10] The elder put a portion of the offerings in front of the stone and prayed: "Our offering food, thou, *Tabakea.* Our offering the food, thou, *Auriaria, Nei Tewenai, Riki.* Uphold our prosperity; tread away the drought, the hunger, the death. Continue to prosper these children, continue to get our food. Sun-o, Moon-o! Continue to get our food! Prosperity and peace" (19).

Other high gods were the bringers of culture, but none appeared more prominent than *Bue,* the son of the sun god. According to myth, his human mother was accustomed to bathe at sunrise, and the sun grew to love her. He sent one of his rays, which impregnated her (Grimble 1972, 132ff.). Eventually, *Bue* wanted to see his father in the east and set out until he arrived at the side of heaven where the sun was about to rise.[11] *Bue* gave his sun father a hard time as he rose from the depths. The sun asked for the name of his mother and then asked what *Bue*'s request was. *Bue* answered "cleverness and knowledge," and so the sun gave *Bue* the art of making the ceremonial and community center, the *maneaba,* the magic for controlling the winds and making rain, how to protect children and the health of people, and the art of composing dance chants (233–234). The story of *Bue* ends on Beru and Nikunau, where his children reside to the present day, building *maneaba* of the high chiefs with the skills given by the sun god (136). In at least the 1920s, the *maneaba* there were still called the "enclosure of the Sun and Moon," and the senior male was called the "Sun in the *maneaba*" (208).[12]

Death and Human Destiny

Kiribati islanders carefully distinguished among the spirits, or *anti.* There were the high gods (also called *atua*) such as *Nareau* and *Auriaria,* but also the deceased ancestors, "the human spirits," or *antimaomata* (Grimble 1989, 353). Therefore, as *anti,* human ancestors were also deserving of honors, worship, and even offerings.

Like so many other Micronesians, the Kiribati expressed a certain ambiguity regarding the spirits of the deceased. At death, relatives and neighbors swept around the house of the deceased, urging the spirit to get away from the place. After burial and the decomposition of the corpse, they might put the skull in the house and talk to it, give it offerings, or blow cigarette smoke into it in case it wanted to smoke. Prayers were also said, begging the deceased not to return: "Whatever your daily happenings and bad days, my wise brother, do not come back" (Grimble 1989, 67). If a cricket chirped repeatedly at the person's former dwelling, it was believed that the spirit of the deceased was speaking to its living relatives. "Small pieces of food would be thrown without any magic formula towards the sound. . . . The spirit . . . would be addressed with familiar and affectionate words for returning to visit its people" (78).

The behavior of the living regarding the deceased appears to be contradictory or at least inconsistent. Another way of phrasing the Kiribati behavior is to call it ambiguous: The living were not sure whether the spirit of the deceased would be helpful or harmful. After the death and before burial, the living presumably searched for signs to resolve this ambiguity. The search for signs, while found throughout Micronesia, was most notable in Chuuk, where kinfolk waited for the deceased to take possession of a living kinsperson. On the Kiribati atolls, the record shows mostly negative symbols (sweeping the ground clean of the deceased spirit) and the result when the ambiguity was resolved in favor of the deceased (the skull cult).

During the funeral rite, the body was laid out for three days and buried on the fourth (Grimble 1989, 308ff.).[13] People gathered about the corpse as it was rubbed with oil and perfume. For three evenings after death, people processed around the village, beating the ground to frighten the soul and urge it to stay away from the body (Sabatier 1977, 44). It was believed that the spirit of the dead person watched everything from a distance away in the village. In preparation for burial, everything that was in contact with the dead was burned. The grave was then dug within the village or sometimes underneath a house (Grimble 1989, 308ff.).

Kiribati burial is difficult to describe because it varied significantly from atoll to atoll. At a place called Tautam in the northern Gilberts, on the third

day after death, the *tabeatu* ceremony was enacted to lift the head from the corpse (Grimble 1989, 65).[14] If the dead man was buried without the *tabeatu* ritual, the spirit could return, especially in dreams, to haunt his family and could even be compelled by his enemies to strangulate family members (77). On Banaba, the corpse was seldom buried but was rubbed with coconut oil until the body was rubbed to pieces; the pieces were thrown into the sea and the skull and small bones put in a basket and hung from the roof.

The Kiribati ancestor ritual focused on the skulls, and these could be seen in outdoor shrines dedicated to the gods such as *Auriaria*. A stone column (*boua*) was erected in the center of a square or circle of coral slabs, with the skulls and other bones placed within the rock enclosure. On the coral slabs, offerings were made to the god and to the ancestor spirits. In times of crisis, the headman of the kin group would call an assembly. At sunrise on the appointed day, the group would gather, facing east, in a semicircle around the shrine, placing offerings on the stones and then eating a meal together. The headman might recite this prayer:

> Our offering of food, Kaieti-o! Help us.
> Keep hold on our safety; tread away the war;
> strike them, pierce them, string their eyes together;
> we are not lost, we are not deserted; safety
> and peace; safety (Grimble 1972, 195–196).

The journey of the deceased was to the mythic island of *Matang* via the island of *Bouru* and then perhaps also to the world-under-the-sea. On the way, the spirit had to pass two tests or trials. First, in the middle of the sea, the spirit's way was blocked by an old hag, the daughter of *Nakaa;* then *Nakaa* herself blocked the way to *Matang* or *Bouru*.[15] The hag looked for tattooing marks; if she found them, she let the spirit pass and, touching their eyes, gave the "vision of the spirits" so that the spirit of the deceased could see the way clearly. For those without tattoo markings, she tore out the pupils of the eyes and ate them, and they could never make it to *Matang* or *Bouru*. Some said she eventually restored the sight she destroyed and sent away the spirit in peace. At the gate to *Bouru* sat *Nakaa,* who took the spirit over his knees and searched the heart for evil (Grimble 1972, 87ff.). Different versions give different tests. One test was to avoid being crushed by two great stones bashing together.[16] On Banaba, people played a game of heads or tails to learn the fate of the spirit when it met the swinging boulders (Sabatier 1977, 45).

However anxious the Kiribati were to be rid of the deceased spirit, they nevertheless believed the ancestor *anti* and the high gods could be

reached through the intermediary of the skulls. When the family needed something, the senior living member would take the skull, anoint it with perfumed oil, and hang wreaths of flowers on it. Food or a cigarette was offered to the ancestor. After noon, the senior male in the family would take the skull down from its shelf and bring it close to his cheek so he could whisper to the spirit the request he was making on behalf of his family. On other occasions of need, the entire kin group might gather in the *maneaba,* and once again an individual would whisper the request into the skull's ear. Sometimes the communication with the spirits of the ancestors was made through the omnibus religious specialist and medium, the *ibonga,* who would whisper into the skull's ear,

> O-o! I shall call him, Toaakai
> from his land, from his land; he arrives, for
> he arrives in our *maneaba,* for he arrives (Grimble 1972, 202–203).

The final groups of spirits in the Kiribati cosmos were evil spirits. These could be spirits such as *Nakaa,* the guardian of the gate to *Bouru* and *Matang,* or evil spirits associated with places in nature, such as trees or bushes.

Rituals Great and Small

The largest rituals recorded by Grimble are those for the pandanus crop (1972, 21ff.). This was the staple of the Kiribati atolls, and therefore it demanded greater and more prominent rituals. The ritual for a good pandanus harvest was still being performed into the 1920s, and thus early Western visitors were able to witness and document it. Only three kin groups had the right to perform the elaborate ritual of appeal to the sun and moon gods. It took place between July and September, when the trade winds bring rain needed for the pandanus crop, which was to be harvested in October. The ceremonies took part in two stages over approximately two weeks. The description below sounds rather prosaic, but the intricacy of the ritual was in the lead performer's use of silence, the direction he was facing, and the poise of his body gestures. The time was at sunset, when the moon and sun were both visible. In the first stage, the lead performer stuck a pole into the ground with pandanus branches and decorated with feathers of the frigate bird, the bird of the sun. He then chanted a prayer three times. Next came a second prayer, again three times, and the first stage was finished. In the second stage a week later, he intoned prayers and incantations before the symbolic tree of the sun three times, saying that

the sun "prepares the way for the young pandanus bloom and the opening pandanus bloom." The "magic" tree of the sun might remain there after the increase rituals, and people requesting fertility of the womb, good health or long life, and good luck in love would come to place their petitions before the sun tree.

After the September or October harvest, it was forbidden to use the harvested pandanus until the first fruits had been offered at the sacred monolith for the patron god of the local community, which was surrounded by the skulls and bones of the ancestors. Again, the hour of the ritual was at sunset, precisely when both the sun and the moon were visible. The offering was a ball of sweet food made from coconut toddy and the dried pandanus flour. And again, the entire community accompanied the leader with their offering, and all were seated with backs to the sunset and facing the monolith.[17] After placing the gift on one of the stones, the leader threw his head back to gaze at the sun, laid his open-palm hands on the ground, and chanted, "This is your food Sun and Moon . . . this is your food, even the first bloom of the magic tree in the twilight. Prosperity and peace. Prosperous indeed are we-o-o-o!" (Grimble 1989, 15–16).[18] He never took his eyes off the sun as he took a piece of the sweet food and placed it on a stone in front of the monolith. He passed the food back to a man behind him, who, in complete silence, distributed small bits of the food to the assembly. Then the leader swallowed his piece and the assembly did likewise. Before leaving the monolith and bones of the ancestors, the leader anointed the skulls with oil. Any member could do likewise to the skull of his choice.

This first fruits ritual as performed on the atoll of Marakei is a good sample of how the Kiribati brought together several key symbolic elements within a single ritual performance. In this case, the elements are the assembled community and their spokesman, the offerings of the first fruits of the pandanus to the sun and moon, and the skulls of the ancestors.

Another rather spectacular ritual was the "calling" of the porpoises by a kin group on Butaritari. Certain individuals had the power to bring the porpoises to shore where this favorite seafood could be captured. When the occasion demanded the "calling," the high chief asked one of the callers to bring the porpoises to shore. The caller then went to his hut and fell asleep; his spirit left his body and dove down under the sea where the porpoises live. The porpoises appeared to the caller in human form. The caller persuaded the chief of the porpoises to let some of them accompany him back to the shore of the atoll; the porpoises then shed their human bodies and went with the caller. With his spirit back in his body, the caller invited his kin group (*utu*) to ornament themselves for a celebration to welcome

"their friends." He waded in the water and welcomed the porpoises; he entreated them to dance on shore, at which point the entire community got into the water, each one fondling a chosen porpoise. Grimble witnessed such a "calling" and the slaughter that followed.

"Calling" is actually a Pacific-wide ritual to invoke or summon the spirits. In Kiribati, the porpoises were called; in the Hawaiian Islands, sharks were called. In the Chuukic-speaking islands, the spirits of the breadfruit were called from their home in the south to fructify the breadfruit blossoms.[19]

The calling ritual, also a ritual for a good harvest, is an interesting Pacific example of ritual also found in the shamanism of northern Asia, Europe, and America. The classic shamanism is the flight of the spirit or soul of the shaman to the place where food or help is to be found. The shaman induces the game to return with him as friends and brothers (Eliade 1964). The flight of the soul or spirit from the performer's body is, however, relatively rare in the Pacific.

Although male puberty ceremonies were rare if not absent in Micronesia, both Kiribati and Banaba had a ritual seclusion of youths during their teens. Male youths were sequestered from the rest of the community or village and for the entire adolescence—years long in the case of Kiribati—and underwent a series of trials. In Kiribati the candidate endured incisions on his body and the forced hardships associated with living in a tiny hut separated from the rest of the community (Grimble 1972, 75ff.). The trials were tests to see if the boy was ready to be a Kiribati warrior. On Banaba, the religious dimension of the transition out of adolescence to manhood was more obvious. On the raised coral cliffs along the shoreline, male youths built a stone wall on the ocean side, on top of which they leveled the soil to make a raised platform. Here the boys played and slept. No women were allowed on the platform (Grimble 1989, 37–38; Maude and Maude 1932). During this period, the boys learned and practiced magic. Each morning during his seclusion on the platform, each individual boy would rise at sunrise and, facing east, would take a coconut filled with seawater and wash with it. Facing the sun was the essence of this quiet ritual between the young body and the rising sun. "From the sun came the essential principles of health and strength, which made him a good warrior" (39).

The Kiribati cycle of ritual was also filled with small rituals such as the making of medicines with herbs and chants, the making of protective amulets, and the performing of magical rites to harm or protect an individual.[20] The ritual of Kiribati was not just magic: It also contained, as the pandanus ritual shows, prayerful words, gestures, and offerings to the gods.

Kiribati and the Dance

Kiribati dance was not ritual worship as it is in contemporary Yap. However, like the dance of Yap, as well as in the Chuukic world, it still had a deeply religious element. While Sabatier includes Kiribati dance in his chapter on "Beliefs, Religion and Superstition" (1977, 64ff.) and calles it a magic ceremony, Kiribati dance was religious, even if only because the dancers invoked the gods, including *Nareau* the Father, for inspiration.[21] One rite took place before sunrise when an instructor touched the candidate's tongue and said, "Touching the tongue that will create, the tongue that will speak for the world, the tongue of a true son of *Nareau*." The formula was three times repeated on each of three days. Three other rites followed; the fourth was an obvious appeal to the gods: "May they come, may they direct me, for yea they will come to enlighten me near my fire. *Tuangai, Bo-rikai, Kaetai,* instruct me, come to this place and guide me."[22]

Performers

The performers of Kiribati ritual were often the leaders of the kin group (*utu*), who were also the ceremonial heads (*uea*) of the *maneaba;* the word *uea* is also used for an atoll chief, who could also be a ritual leader. The all-purpose medium, the *ibonga,* does not appear to have had a strong role in Kiribati life. He was quite similar to mediums and religious experts throughout Micronesia. He could be, as Sabatier noted, a "splendid charlatan. . . . A speculator in and monopolizer of things supernatural. . . . He is soothsayer, magician, divine, doctor, prophet, miracle-worker and also charlatan" (1977, 59). Sabatier goes on to describe the performance of the *ibonga* under trance and possessed by *Auriaria*.[23] Sorcery, or evil magic, was practiced in Kiribati of old, but there is no mention of who performed the ritual. Unfortunately, there is no way of learning what was more important in the lives of the people: the magiclike ritual of the *ibonga* or the prayerful, beseeching ritual led by leaders of the kin groups, the ceremonial leaders of the *maneaba,* and the chiefs. Certainly the two leading researchers, Grimble and Maude, found evidence of both magic and religion: guaranteed-to-work formulas and procedures, as well as prayerful requests to the supernatural powers.

The Religion of Nauru

Nauru is geographically isolated from most of Micronesia. Pacific currents to the south of the equator put it within sailing range of Banaba and Kiribati. Its old religion shared a great deal with Kiribati: the gods, the cosmos, and the ritual. Linguistically, it seems not to be related to any language

within Micronesia or outside of Micronesia.[24] Phosphate mining before and after the world wars brought this raised coral atoll into the international limelight and, at one time after World War II, its per capita income from phosphate mining made it one of the richest nations in the world.

The main written sources for the old religion of Nauru are Paul Hambruch's two hefty volumes (1914 and 1915) produced after less than a two-month stay on the island. As noted before, these publications were not received well by the longtime resident missionary and linguist, Father Alois Kayser. Unfortunately, Kayser's publication on the inhabitants of Nauru (1917–1918) does not yield much data on the religion. The record after World War II says precious little about the old religion, probably because there was little to observe after conversion to Christianity (Petite-Skinner 1981). Already in 1910, Hambruch could invoke the familiar refrain that the old religion was in serious decline. His main informant on religion was a specialist or master of dealings in the supernatural, a man he termed "a great sorcerer" (1914, 273).

The Cosmos and Creator Gods

The cosmos for the Nauruans of old was similar to that of the Kiribati in that it featured the clamshell metaphor, with a god that organized the opening of the shell to separate light and darkness; the ending of the story, however, is very different. In the beginning, *Areop Enap* (literally, the "big spider") was the only living being in an already-created cosmos.[25] There was only air and sea, with *Areop* wandering about in the limitless space. One day he found a Tridacna shell and tried to pry it open. He finally succeeded in opening it, only to find that he could see nothing because of the darkness, nor could he stand erect because the shell was barely open. He found two triton shell horns that he put under his arm while he slept in order to give them magical powers. He asked the first shell to open the second shell, and so it did. Taking the shell horn outside, he placed it in the western part of the giant Tridacna shell; he made it into the moon. With the little light in the giant shell of the cosmos, *Areop Enap* looked about and saw a large caterpillar, *Riki*. He asked it to raise the top of the shell higher. This *Riki* did, with his sweat becoming the salt water of the sea. *Riki* raised the shell, and the upper part became the vault of heaven. *Areop* again pulled out a being that was inside the shell and put it in the eastern part of the heavens; it became the sun. The lower half of the giant Tridacna shell became the earth.

Coming to stony land, *Areop* asked the names of the stones, and each replied with a name; these became the first people. Included in these stones turned into people were names of gods and beings known from Kiribati

myth. *Nareau* the Younger or *Nareau* the Traveler was one—the trickster god of Micronesian fame—called here *Areop it eonin.* The Kiribati guardian of the entrance to the islands of bliss, *Nakaa,* appears in this list of stones turned into people as *Naga.*[26] Finally, *Areop Enap* went to another land and saw people under a tree. He wanted to know who they were, so he created a little bird to get their names. These were all gods; some, such as *TaBuerik* and *Auuirieria,* were also gods in Kiribati. Then *Areop Enap* returned to the stones he had made into people; they were quarreling about who would be the leader. *Areop Enap* ordered them to keep the peace and said no one was above anyone else; only he was the chief. He took them to Taraua (Tarawa), the end of the world, and ordered them to stay there and hold up the vault of the heavens. Then he gave the god *Naga* a big basket filled with the beautiful and the good, but when some of the sentinels in the abode of the souls opened the basket, all they found was wicked and evil. Goodness was lost forever, and "men will not find it until they reach the abode of the souls" (Hambruch 1914, 273ff.).

This myth of the creation of the cosmos and its inhabitants is very close to that of the Kiribati story. What is different here is the ending of a cosmos that was once pure beauty and goodness with the birth of evil and suffering. It is the old Greek myth of Pandora's Box in a Pacific setting. On the other hand, the Nauruan creation myth still featured the common Micronesian pattern of a radical change in the situation on earth. On Palau and Yap, the radical change took the form of a great flood and the coming of new gods and the first humans; here the change was created by *Naga's* basket, which released evil (Hambruch 1914, 382ff.).

There are other versions of the myth as well. One is about an old magician (*amen mueaeo*) who was in touch with the spirits (*eani*). He predicted unhappiness, disease, and famine, and after he died his head became the fruitful coconut. This is, of course, the widespread myth of the face in the three holes of the husked coconut. This myth, like the ones about *Areop,* tells of the change from goodness to evil and suffering. The Nauru creation myth thus brings out the fall from goodness to evil in a way other Micronesian myths do not. The Palauan and Yap myths about the flood are stories about destruction and the beginning of a new era, but they do not see the change as one from pure goodness and beauty to suffering and evil. Hence, the Nauruan myth has a moral character to it not found in other Micronesian creation myths.

The Other Nauruan Deities

The Nauruan word *ean* is most likely another of those wide-reaching classifications that could include the creator gods, sky gods, patron deities,

nature sprites and demons, and, of course, the spirits of the ancestors. In addition to the cosmic creator gods, Hambruch also found a group of "protective" deities. The names are often the same as those on Kiribati or with some cognate name. In this category are the patrons of warriors, patrons for the battle, patrons against disease, and patrons for those drifting at sea (1914, 206ff.). One of these deities was *Areop it eonin,* the trickster god. The creator god and the trickster as a son or brother represent a widespread pattern across Micronesia, but the case here is an interesting comparison with the Marshalls, where *Letao* the Trickster receives his power from a turtle goddess in Kiribati.[27] In the Nauruan story, the turtle god *Dabage* delivers *Areop it eonin* from a boil on her skin. The same elements in the Marshallese, Kiribati, and Nauruan stories are mixed together, not an unusual feature of folklore.

Death and Human Destiny

Just as the Nauruans had a religious explanation as to how evil came into the world, they had a religious story and accompanying beliefs regarding the rewarding of good and punishing evil in the journey to the afterlife. As soon as a person died, he or she was immediately transformed into a spirit (*eani*) and began the journey to *ebwiyeye,* which literally means "echo." *Ebwiyeye* is described as a pinnacle with sharp edges. The spirit of the deceased had to crawl and wiggle under the pinnacle without getting hurt: "It is the road you must take, there is not another one" (Petite-Skinner 1981, 71ff.). It could be taken only in one direction: toward the sunrise. Above the stone, there was a little tree that had a key role since it would catch and hang anyone who behaved improperly during his life. "It is a great shame for him [the spirit of the deceased] because all the dead will see him and will know that he did something wrong," said the old people. Indeed, this particular pinnacle acted as a tribunal that judged the dead and punished those who deserved the worst punishment: shame. After this passage and this judgment, the spirit went to the land of the dead, which is the horizon, or as the Nauruans say, "where the sea and the sky meet." The spirit would then sail in an outrigger canoe, led by the frigate bird.[28]

Links between the Spirits and the Living Relatives

Hambruch's main informant on religion, Auuiyeda, put it this way: "There are no gods on Nauru save the souls of the dead" (1914, 275ff.). Auuiyeda then went on to give Hambruch a dozen spirits or gods—including *Areop* the creator, *Auuirieria* the rainbow, *Areop* the Younger, and *TaBuerik*. Some of these deities were the spirits that inhabited features of the local landscape, such as a large block of coral on the beach, a cave, or one of

the trees. There was a stone, for example, called *ataiaunin,* that caused passersby to drop what they were carrying. Hambruch has an illustration of this stone, with its circular depression on top, where the passersby left sacrificial gifts of fruit and fish, lest they be harmed by the spirit.

TaBuerik was believed to live in a stone, placed in the vicinity of each house. Offerings of food were placed atop the stone, and *TaBuerik* thus became the protecting deity of that house (Hambruch 1914, 208–209). Almost all of the household monuments to *TaBuerik* were destroyed during World War II; by the 1970s only one remained. This last remaining offering stone was once thought to house the spirit *TaBuerik* (Petite-Skinner 1981, 73). Found within the homes was a "sacrificial altar" next to one of the main pillars, where food was offered. The skulls of the ancestors might also have been placed there.

There were several human intermediaries with the world of the supernatural. It is safe to presume that the senior male of each household made the offerings at the household shrine.[29] Hambruch quotes one authority who related that an "enchanter," *amen mueaeo,* used to make sacrifices on the old stone pillars in front of the family dwellings (1914, 200, 210). As an intermediary between the *eani,* he called and whistled until the right spirit arrived. The *amen mueaeo* then answered questions put to the spirits. The sacrifice was a young green coconut, burned on the site.

Some of the "enchanters" moved into the intermediary role because their ancestors were believed to have been speaking to them. "The inhabitants [of Nauru]," said Auuiyeda, "are very attentive to these spirit souls in their hearts (literally, entrails)." Some people believed that they could see the spirits of their ancestors, and some were sure that the enchanters were possessed by the spirit, that the spirit spoke through this human intermediary (Hambruch 1914, 274ff.). Half a century later, the enchanter was no longer mentioned, but two experts in matters supernatural were identified (Petite-Skinner 1981, 204–205).

The *mayayo* was the healer or medicine person. The mixture of plants used by the *mayayo* was not accompanied by any spell (Petite-Skinner 1981, 204–205). In fact, the medicinal mixture was not a secret; what prevented others from using it was ownership. The recipe was owned by the *mayayo,* and to use it would be stealing. Also, the concoction was often learned through a dream and from a deceased relative, sometimes a relative of both the healer and the client. "This kind of communication (dream-message) puts the MAYAYO in contact with the other world, the world of the dead, which is always more powerful than the world of the living" (205). The *mayayo* could also see and predict the future; *mayayo* in the recent past, for example, were believed to have predicted the flu

epidemic of 1919 and also the deportation of the Nauruans during the Second World War (208). Petite-Skinner attributes this broad scope of the *mayayo*'s work to the Nauruan belief that health and sickness involve the "whole person," including the relationship of the client to the community.

The *mayayo* was not considered a magician, but another person was: the *itsibemin*. The *itsibemin* picked up where the *mayayo* left off—in other words, with the more serious cases, which called for "strong participation of the spirits and magical action or curses" (Petite-Skinner 1981, 209). Little was recorded about the work of the *itsibemin,* but one suspects that the *itsibemin* or perhaps the *amen mueaeo* was the performer of the magical rituals and maker of magical amulets described in the old reports (Hambruch 1914, 273–274). The magicians of old used souvenirs of a deceased relative, such as a bone or tooth, along with feathers of the frigate bird to ward off spells. At the time of Hambruch's visit, there were still "professional magicians" working with magical powers that permitted them to do both good and evil. They had great confidence, wrote Hambruch, in their magic words and formulas.

The final Nauruan intermediary with the spirit world was the frigate bird, a bird that figures in the beliefs and myths and symbols of other Micronesian cultures. On Nauru, the frigate bird was the messenger of the gods and the bringer of taro. The bird had a similar role in the western Pacific. Auuiyeda was reluctant to talk about the frigate bird, but he gave Hambruch the following: "The frigate bird is one that you will notice particularly; formerly it was highly regarded, for people believe that a spirit inhabits the body. If you can catch a frigate bird when a person dies, this bird will take the soul of the deceased, and it will receive the name of the dead" (1914, 282).

Belief in the powers of this messenger of the gods continued up until recently, and perhaps it can even be seen today in a game between teams to get the frigate birds to come down and be captured by team members. "The Frigate bird game is not only a game between humans but a game between spirits. . . . Before, there was EANI in Frigate Birds, now the magic men are dead, so there is no more EANI in frigate birds. The Frigate Bird was the friend of the human because it was the spirit of the ancestors" (Petite-Skinner 1981, 162). Each team had its own chants through which its members relied on the spirits to bring the frigate bird down to them to help (163–164). The Nauruan games with the frigate bird are a not-so-rare example of games connected to the gods or spirits.[30]

The old religions of these southernmost parts of Micronesia—Kiribati, Banaba, and Nauru—were like the island and atoll inhabitants to the north: the Marshalls, Pohnpei, and the Chuukic-speaking atolls. Their medicine

was similar; the practitioners used natural ingredients, but chants or a connection to the spirit world was still needed. The *sowusáfey,* the Chuukese practitioner of medicine, looks very much like the Kiribati *ibonga* and the Nauruan *mayayo*. The role of the ancestor spirits was strong on the atolls and islands of the south. Like the pantheon of other Micronesian regions, the gods or spirits could be divided into creator gods, patron gods, nature spirits, and the spirits of the deceased, including some spirits of natural locations. The working of the ancestral cult on Kiribati and Nauru was strong in belief and ritual, but the creation deities had names that were more Polynesian than Micronesian, and the same can be said for the mythology.

Their legends or oral histories compare with the oral histories of Pohnpei. On Pohnpei, it is the title system that links the present titleholders to the legendary past; on Kiribati, however, it was the human link to the generations connected with the migration from Samoa. Pohnpei and Kiribati are, I think, the closest Micronesian examples of oral history and not just mythology from the begin-time of the cosmos. Both the Kiribati and the Pohnpeians use their oral histories to ground their present social structure and culture in the deeds of their forefathers. What received the greatest attention in the traditions of Kiribati from Samoa were the many generations, which now make up the links going back to the gods and goddess who intermarried with humans. The remembrance of these twenty-two to twenty-nine generations on Kiribati is more important than that found in the genealogies of other Micronesian oral histories. Calculating a generation as twenty years, the traditions linked to genealogies can go back to AD 1500. The religion of the Micronesian atolls and islands across the equator—Kiribati, Banaba, and Nauru—compare well with their Micronesian neighbors, and, if I might hazard a broad generalization, compare better with Micronesian religions than with Polynesian ones.

Chapter 10

Conclusions

In chapter 2, I attempted to present a general overview of Micronesian religions. However useful such an overview may be, it omits the significant differences between island regions. For that reason, the overview is followed by chapters offering a detailed description of religious practices and beliefs in each island group. In this final chapter, I hope to summarize the unique features of each region, review the common patterns across Micronesia, and finally to offer a view of the old Micronesian religions as "gentle religions."

Unique Features

The regional differences within Micronesia may be explained in a number of ways. These differences may result, of course, from the simple fact that a given feature is found only in this or that region and nowhere else. On the other hand, what appear as differences may simply be due to an error in reporting—something that is impossible to verify but is nonetheless likely to have occurred. Another explanation may lie in the variation of importance of a rite or belief from place to place; the feature may be present elsewhere but not to the extent found in one or another particular region.[1]

Kiribati and Nauru

Even though male puberty rituals are seldom found in Micronesia and elaborate ones are almost nonexistent, males in Kiribati began training to be warriors while still children. The training involved an elaborate series of ritual trials that had to be accomplished to bring a boy from the end of his childhood to his status as warrior. An entire period of a male's life, essentially his adolescence, became the transition or liminal phase of this rite of passage between childhood and the adult warrior. On Banaba, young males went through a similar isolation from the community, but it was accompanied by devotions and meditations facing the rising sun.

Kiribati religion flattened the ranks of the spirits to just two sets of spirits: (1) those of the sky gods, the cosmic creators, and (2) those of the named clan leaders, both from the distant past as well as the recently

deceased, commemorated in the cult of the skulls. Kiribati and nearby Banaba are the only Micronesian regions to emphasize ritual invoking the power of the sun, the moon, and their deities.

Nauruans flattened the pantheon even more drastically, with the greatest emphasis given to the familial ancestors. Household shrines to the ancestors, next to the central house post, and the stone offering places outside the homes were the focal points of respect rituals for the ancestors. Cosmic creator gods seemed to be remembered in name only (Petit-Skinner 1981, 73ff.). The gods and goddesses, however unimportant in the daily life of the Nauruans of old, were much like those of Kiribati, showing a distinct Polynesian influence. As one looks at the same motifs in the myths, one might be tempted to speculate on the cultural origins of the Micronesians south of the equator, but all that can be said with certainty is that the divinities of the south show more Polynesian affinities than in the rest of Micronesia. Hambruch concluded that the religious views of the Nauruans were "an amalgamation of the old and the new, of the Polynesian pantheon and Christianity (1914, 273)."

The Marshalls

The Marshallese charter myths—those describing the works of the gods for the Marshallese—speak about gifts given directly from the heavens, such as sailing, canoe construction, tattooing, and the matrilineal-based chiefs. The Marshallese, on the other hand, do not speak of any of their cultural features coming from *Katau, Yap,* or Pohnpei. To them, cultural blessings came directly down from heaven.

The counterpart of the Marshallese deity *Letao* has been described as a pure trickster in Ulithi and the central Chuukic atolls. In the Marshalls, too, he is mostly trickster, although now and again he is pictured as doing a kind deed. *Letao* is an ambiguous figure. In most of the stories, he is the model of what not to do, a negative morality model. As trickster, however, *Letao* is viewed by contemporary Marshallese as a positive example in the art of deliberate deception. The Marshallese and their myths are pragmatic; they understand that the day can be won by subterfuge and concealment. *Letao,* then, is the personification of one type of power, as interpreted by Marshallese; he appears as a mythological Machiavelli, concealment and power being the underlying theme. This belief sets the Marshallese *Letao* apart from his counterparts, the other tricksters of Micronesian mythology.

Pohnpei

Pohnpei has the best-preserved record of oral histories about the change and evolution of religion. The Kiribati people may be able to name their many generations of leaders, but these are not records of how the religion

changed over time. Pohnpei is the only island that records major shifts—from autonomous priestly centers to an attempt at centralization of religion and politics, followed by a new polity where priestly status titles and ritual performances to the gods were secularized or preempted by the secular powers. The ritual slaying of a turtle and the sacrifice of its entrails to the sacred eels is one of the very few documented cases of the sacrifices of animals in Micronesia.

While other regions of Micronesia had priests or religious functionaries who were politically powerful, only Pohnpei evidenced priests who were also the chiefs of their districts. In the case of the high priest of Wene, his status and those of his college of priests did not die out; instead, the governing part of their status was absorbed into the status of the chiefly and noble lines of the polity that evolved after the fall of the Saudeleur dynasty. Today, the secularized paramount chiefs of Pohnpei retain the religious titles of the old priesthoods.

Chuuk

The neighboring high islands of the Chuuk Lagoon and the Chuukic-speaking atolls are geographically dispersed across Micronesia. Throughout this broad area, there is little evidence of any religious organization above the level of the lineage or extended family. Each lineage had its own assortment of *sowu,* or "masters" of various religious and nonreligious specialties. To distinguish the specialties may be fruitless, however, since the crafts, skills, and arts—such as healing, canoe building, navigating, dancing, and weaving—were all spirit-given knowledge, upon which people had to depend to complement their own human talent, skill, and artistry.

In no other region was the role of the military strategist as well developed as in the Chuukese warrior-priest, the *itang.* It might be, however, that in the central Caroline atolls, the navigators were the functional equivalents of the *itang,* as Eric Metzgar argues.

No other region gave such a prominent place to the possession and trance medium, which people referred to as the "canoe of the spirit" (*wáánaanú*). One might say that nowhere else in Micronesia was the dominant form of religion so clearly ecstatic.

Kosrae

Kosrae once had a grand ritual center, Lelu, similar to Nan Madol on Pohnpei. Several scholars have speculated on the connections between these two religious centers, but oral histories indicate that Nan Madol was all but abandoned by the 1820s, precisely the time when Lelu was reaching the zenith of its construction. Despite surface similarities, then, the cultic centers and the religious rituals were very different.

Another difference between the two religious centers is that Pohnpei maintained relatively autonomous districts that were never completely under the control of the Saudeleur chiefs at Nan Madol. Indeed, two of these relatively autonomous districts, along with the legendary Isohkelekel, are instrumental in the doom and destruction of the dynasty. But on Kosrae, the limited record shows Lelu much more clearly as a centralized polity, with the various priesthoods outside of Lelu coming to the capital to crown the king (*tokosra*). As a matter of fact, Kosrae is the best Micronesian example of the mutual relationship between a centralized priesthood working in tandem with the rural-dwelling priesthood in other parts of the island. A similar relationship was found on Yap, where the priests of the important ritual centers (*taliiw*) loaned out their deities to other centers and where the priests went to centers other than their own when the specialized agricultural rituals were being performed. For all the cooperation on Yap between district priests and shrines, however, they did not have the unified political and religious structure of old Kosrae.

Yap

Since the religion was already in decline at the time of Müller's research in 1909–1910, many of the old priests were unable to remember much about the specialized religion and myths of their own shrines. Two of them, however, could remember how a calendar was set by the priests at the main shrines. It is known that priestly centers on other islands—such as Palau and Kosrae—set the agricultural-based calendars, but Yap offers the only detailed record of shrine priests setting a calendar. The last known local priest to preside over a ritual center was attempting to revive or maintain the calendar-based ritual even after World War II.

Ritual prohibitions and taboos played a more central role in Yap than in any other island group in the region. The difference between Yap and other islands is most marked in the set of taboos that were set up to guard against pollution at the time of death. Taboos against contact with menstruating women were common throughout the area, but the elaborate prohibitions surrounding death were distinctive of Yap.

Yap is also the best example in Micronesia for the continued presence of sacred dancing—sacred in the sense that it is worship and religious ritual. Even today, dance has been incorporated into the rituals of the Roman Catholic Church, especially at Christmas and Easter.

Palau

Palauan religions of old are some of the best examples of ecstatic religion *competing* with the secular powers. The shamanic or ecstatic behavior of the Palauan medium (*korong*) is seen as emanating from direct contact

with the spirits or gods. The Palauan *korong* moved in and out of trance behavior and a more staid ritual behavior typical of priests. The *korong* once served as official oracles to the chiefs, and some gave answers to the chiefs in a perfectly lucid manner. Although entranced mediums are common in Micronesia, the Palauan *korong* was unusual in both their private practice and their public office as oracles to the chiefs. In private practice, their status could and did challenge higher ranking chiefs; in certain villages, they spoke for the god that was believed to rule the village.[2] As the court oracles, they helped to legitimate the actions of the chief.

Palauan ritual, like that of the Marshalls, is pragmatic, but nowhere else do the funeral ceremonies call for the direct intervention of the spirit to acknowledge the transfer of power—in this case, the title of the deceased.

The Patterns in Micronesian Religions

As one steps back from the fine details of these religious practices and beliefs to catch a broader view, what emerges is not just a cluster of distinct regional religions but religious features clustered in distinct patterns. These patterns cannot be identified as Melanesian or as Polynesian, despite the fact that the southern regions—Kiribati and Nauru—claim Polynesian origins. Rather than give these common characteristics a regional name, let us review them here.

Spirits

The various types of spirits are most often lumped together by Micronesians under a single term, such as the Kiribati *anti,* the Pohnpeian *eni,* Chuukic *énú,* and Yapese *kan.* If any distinction is regularly made, it is between the spirits of deceased humans transformed into heavenly human spirits and the spirits who were never human. The Kiribati *anti* is a good example. *Anti* is the term for the great cosmic creator, *Nareau,* and his heavenly cohorts such as *Riki* the eel, but the deceased kin are *antimaomata* (literally, "human spirit"). For the purpose of analysis, I have found it helpful to divide the spirits into four types: (1) the sky deities, (2) the sky gods or their progeny working as patron or helping deities, (3) the ancestor spirits, and (4) a host of nature spirits, often localized to a certain place. These four types are just a tool to sort out the large pantheon from region to region.

One example of a sky deity that assumed various identities and functions is *Luk* (variants: *Lukeileng* and *Nuuk*), one of the sky gods found in much of Micronesia. Generally a son of one of the creator sky gods, he is found throughout the Chuukic-speaking islands, sometimes as a sky god, sometimes as a patron god. As a sky god he inherits heaven from his

father, *Enúúnap,* and becomes Lord of the Heavens, the messenger of his father. According to Cantova's 1721 description, the earliest in the area, he plays this role. Two centuries later, the Hamburg Expedition reported him still the sky god and right-hand man of his father throughout the Chuukic-speaking islands, but on Ulithi he also was found to be a patron god, the builder of the first canoe. On Pohnpei he appears as a helping god, very much involved with Pohnpeians in directing the changes and future in Pohnpeian politics and power.[3] In Pohnpeian mythology he is also something of a womanizer, but he is certainly not the god of death, as he becomes on Yap. There he flies about the sky with a net snaring up the requisite number of Yapese to die each day. No other deity seems to so portray the similarities and differences in Micronesian religion. On the fringes of Micronesia—the Marshalls, Kiribati, and Palau—*Luk* does not appear, although some of the myths associated with him in central Micronesia are ascribed to gods with different names.

The four-type schema of spirit types is found across Micronesia—and it well may be a Pacific or worldwide pattern—but the emphasis given each type varies from region to region. Kiribati and the Chuukic islands, for example, focus heavily on the deceased kin transformed into a divine-like spirit. In Kiribati this takes the form of reverence for the ancestor skulls, while the Chuukic islands had spirit shrines from which the ancestors descended to possess a chosen living kinsperson. The ancestors on Pohnpei, on the other hand, were respected, honored, and called upon for help, even for cures and healing, but they were insignificant compared with the sky and patron gods that worked with Pohnpeians of old to make Pohnpei what it is today. In places such as Pohnpei, the ancestor veneration is not prominent enough to be called "ancestor worship."

The Cosmos

Two representations of the cosmos, perhaps three, were used in Micronesia to show the place of everything and everybody. Along the southern borders of Micronesia—Kiribati, Nauru, and the Marshalls—the picture is either of a clamshell, which is pried open to separate the heavens and the earth/sea with light (an action picture that Grimble called the "sundering" and that is similar to Polynesian descriptions), or of a center pole or corner poles that hold up the vault of heavens. The latter is the common mythological image in the Marshalls and Kiribati, and it too has Polynesian affinities.

Elsewhere in Micronesia, the cosmos is something of a globe that is flattened on the bottom. Essentially, the cosmos is horizontally layered within the vault of the heavens, starting from the focal plane of human activity on the islands. Above the sea and islands in the sea is the vault of

the heavens, reaching from horizon to horizon in the shape of an inverted bowl. The earth projects from the top of the sea but is grounded in the bottom of the sea. Below the bottom of the sea is the world-under-the-sea, with people and land, just like the world at the top of the sea. The sun goes down on the western horizon and then passes through the world-under-the sea to rise on the eastern horizon. Whether the cosmos below the horizon is another round bowl, like the inverted bowl of the heavens, is not known for certain. Only Hijikata recorded a round globe; a Puluwat islander in 1910 drew a picture of the cosmos in which the world-under looks flat.

Earlier writers saw these differing pictures of the cosmos as the clues to origins and as clues on the diffusion of myth and religious ideas from Southeast Asia, Melanesia, and Polynesia. Yet the search for origins and connections is a hopeless search. Myth and oral histories cannot give the precise, empirical data that archaeology might offer through pottery distribution, for instance. Why things happened—or more accurately in the case of Micronesia, what *let* things happen—is the remarkable movement of people across the Western Pacific. If Micronesia was alive with outriggers crossing the open sea or leapfrogging from atoll to atoll, it may be supposed that these outriggers brought new ideas in and out. This exchange can be seen in the mélange of religious ideas and terminology that Yap shared with its Chuukic-speaking neighbors. The conditions were ripe, even before Hawai'i was first settled, for Micronesians to share and exchange with one another, and this certainly accounts for some of the religious similarities and patterns in the islands.

What is equally remarkable about the depictions of the Micronesian cosmos is that they are so ordered and organized, perhaps most organized in the two regions that were least politically structured. One might have expected the most elaborate cosmologies to derive from the great priestly centers with hierarchically organized guardians of tradition, such as those on Yap or Pohnpei. These would seem to be the most likely candidates for the theological organization of a complex world picture. However, the opposite is true. The most complex cosmologies come from regions where the social structure was not highly complex. In the Chuuk regions, social structure rarely went beyond the level of the lineage or extended family, except for short-lived alliances. On the Kiribati atolls, social structure was measured along the lines of one's great-great grandparents. Yet it is precisely these two regions whose mythology developed the most elaborate and integrated picture of the universe.

I have already noted that the meaning of these cosmologies to the islanders is not available to us, whether from mythology or oral histories. The Micronesian religions were practical and based on survival and

subsistence. The cosmologies, on the contrary, present a highly speculative picture of how spirits and people, heavens, seas, and earth hang together. If these cosmologies seem out of place in a religious symbol set that emphasized action or ritual rather than the word, one should remember that the cosmologies were once embedded in myths that were the lore of the storyteller, acted and lived out in ritual. Now they are museum pieces, showpieces taken out of context. The elaborate cosmology has lost its power to convey meaning.

Ritual

There is no single ritual or performance that is characteristic of all Micronesia. There are, however, five ritual patterns common to most of Micronesia, and once again the reader will find these five patterns of greater or lesser importance from region to region. The patterns are as follows:

1. Divination, often achieved through trance behavior and an interpretation of possession by the spirits.
2. Healing and curing.
3. Death as a rite of passage.
4. Intensification rites for good crops and good fishing.
5. Dancing.

These patterns are so general that they probably also feature prominently in other parts of the Pacific, but in each pattern there is, I think, a particular Micronesian twist.

Divination

Divination of many kinds was known in Micronesia. The knotting of strands from young coconut palms to seek in a predetermined sequence of knots an answer for a question put to the spirits or the expert was the most common form of divination. It was every amateur's way of finding answers to the unknown. Its peculiar Pacific touch is the use of palm fronds. Although the divination itself is not particularly religious, the spirits were often seen as guiding the outcome.

The more obviously religious type of divination involves trance (altered states of consciousness) in which a spirit is believed to take possession of the diviner. The peculiarly Micronesian twist is that both the behavior (trance) and the interpretation (possession) continue today, albeit in a more restricted island range and with important new interpretations.[4] The trance and possession diviners are old in Micronesian history. The oldest record is from the Marianas in 1602, and documentation continues

through the German period, the Japanese period, and from World War II down to the present.

Medium beliefs and practices traveled across Micronesia. The spread of the Marespa cult from Ulithi is not an anomaly. Natives of Houk (Pulusuk) knew about spirit beliefs in Saipan; the Polynesian outlier Kapingamarangi was heavily influenced by Woleaian practice; and islanders from the central Caroline atolls could compare the strength of their possession-trance with that from the Chuuk Lagoon.[5]

Healing and Curing

Healing and curing, as seen in the oral traditions and early historical records, has been one of the prominent functions of Micronesian religion. Healing as a work of religion is Pacific-wide, but once again Micronesia shows its own unique characteristics. The best evidence comes from Pohnpei and the Chuukic islands.[6] Chuukese and Pohnpeian healing has already been discussed in the regional summaries and needs no additional analysis or description. Suffice it to say that ultimately the source of all healing—diagnosis of the spirit-caused ailment and the physical ingredients and chanted formulas or payers—was bestowed by spirits, either through an elder kinsperson who initially received the knowledge from dreams or from a trance and possession episode.

The persistence of traditional healing even to the present can be explained in a number of ways. Hospital medicine often is either not available or considered just an expensive pill, while local medicine often brings with it the moral support of relatives and neighbors. Moreover, local medicine fits into a still-strong faith and belief system of interaction with the spirit world.

In general, traditional healing emphasizes the forces of kinship with both the living and deceased ancestors. The peculiarly Micronesian feature of healing is its complete system of medicine, as Mahony discovered. Even if not all Micronesians would articulate what Mahoney described, they know what has to be done in the preliminary diagnostic, consulting diagnostic, cure, and continued protection—with the aid of the spirits at each stage.

Death as a Rite of Passage

Evidence for what Micronesians believed about death and how they ritualized those beliefs is found just about everywhere throughout the region, although once again the evidence is weak for the Marshalls, Kosrae, and Nauru. The core of their belief is that there is an ambiguous transitional period between death and the final destiny of the human spirit or soul.

This period, called the liminal phase, as well as the periods before and after (separation and reintegration) are what might be called a rite of passage. Such rituals emphasize the transitional phase and are quite common the world over. To Micronesians, the important ritual is not praise songs for the dead, paying last respects to the body, or consoling the bereaved. For them the important thing is to watch the body and its surroundings after death. In fact, the ritual is intended to actively speed the spirit on its way, while establishing the proper conditions so that the spirit may return to its home should it become lonely for friends and relatives. The spirit is believed to hover around its body for a short time after death, possibly causing mischief for the living. On the other hand, it could eventually become a helpful spirit, descending from the heavens to earth to come to the aid of its relatives.

The Kiribati people gather around the place of death brushing and sweeping the place, so that the spirit might not remain long in their vicinity. Chuukese would throw the deceased person's clothing, baskets, mats, and other possessions on the grave and torch the pile so that the soul might climb on the column of smoke up to the heavens. In the Chuukic islands, the relatives would gather in the boathouse, hoping that the spirit of the deceased would descend from the hanging spirit shrine and possess a living relative, who would then become the "canoe of the spirit," the diviner of the lineage who would maintain the link with the ancestors of old to learn valuable information and make predictions. Should the spirit of the deceased turn out to be malevolent, then rituals to drive the spirit out and away from the place were employed.

In Palau, this transition ritual is more concerned with the transfer of titles of power and rank. Leading women of the deceased's clan gather and bundle ti leaves, which are placed in the middle of their circle. A women picks up the bundle as the others shout out the possible causes of death. Once the cause of death is identified, the women can move on to the transfer of the deceased's title. In Palau, there was much less ritual concerned with the transformation of the deceased person into a family ancestor spirit.

In Yap, there was a pollution taboo in contact with the dead. Close relatives moved away from the body as soon as possible, and some went into seclusion for months. Fear of pollution kept the kin away from the body, although they shared with other Micronesians a belief that after death, the soul of the deceased could be transformed into a spirit. It can be argued, on the other hand, that the seclusion of the kin and their long mourning periods was, in both Palau and Yap, a liminal period between death and the final state of the deceased as spirit.

Intensification Rituals

Intensification rituals, as they are so awkwardly categorized, are found throughout Micronesia. It is strange indeed that William Lessa could have described the Micronesians as having no ritual dealing with agriculture; in fact they are everywhere, from the little rituals when things are not going right in the taro patches (Palau) to the elaborate rites for the blossoming of the breadfruit (Chuuk) or the complicated ritual for a good pandanus crop (Kiribati, Marshalls). The most elaborate described are those on Puluwat and those performed by the high priests at the major Pohnpeian ritual centers. On Yap, Müller thought that the children of goddess *Margigi* became the foundation for priestly ritual centers, where the intensification rituals were performed in conjunction with the calendar created by the local priests. On Pohnpei, oral historian Bernart Luelen described rather briefly the calendar work of the old priestly centers, which set the times for their agricultural rituals.

Dancing

Dancing, as already shown, was a prominent feature of Micronesian religion. It was considered inspired by the spirits and it also expressed in performance the praise and worship of the gods. The inspiration by the gods came through the vehicle of trance and possession, as least as it is recorded for the Chuukic islands. At the opposite extreme, dancing, accompanied by trancelike behavior, was sometimes also the symbol for protest against the missionaries or against the regime. One has to look a long way to find such a focal symbol for good entertainment, protest, ecstatic worship, and human love. Much has been written about the mythological symbols of Micronesian religion, but Micronesian dance still begs for analysis.[7]

Sacred Places

Early explorers were disappointed not to find temples in Micronesia. As impressive as the great megalithic structures at Nan Madol on Pohnpei or Lelu on Kosrae were, it was probably difficult to see them as religious centers.[8] The ritual structures in these two places were open-air platforms. Even where offerings were placed in honor of the spirits on gigantic ceremonial platforms, westerners never saw grand rituals performed there as they did in Polynesia and especially Hawai'i.

Still, there really are no temples or large shines—in the Western meaning of the words—in most of Micronesia. There are small shrines in the dwellings or community houses—compact receptacles for offerings tucked away in the corner or located next to the main support pole of the houses or perhaps stuck in the beams of a wall. These are found nearly

everywhere, from the Mortlocks (Chuuk) to Palau. The household shrines can range in design from the hanging miniature double-hulled canoes to simple suspended platforms for offerings. As one moves from the Ulithi area to Palau, one finds shrines in the form of miniature houses, most of them too small for an adult to enter. Some of these were raised over the burial sites of distinguished community figures or dedicated to a famous spirit such as the Ulithian baby *Marespa*. In Yap, whenever a dwelling platform was abandoned, a small hut was constructed on the platform to keep the ancestor spirits (*kan*) properly housed and cared for. In Yap were also found, atop the tabooed or sacred platforms, huts for the priest and his patron *kan*. In Palau, the séances of the possessed or entranced mediums could be held in a special room of the dwelling or in a hut next to the house, both of which were large enough to accommodate the medium and clients. Sometimes the mediums (*korong*) built large, two-storied buildings (in the shape of the traditional community centers, or *bai*) to house their patron divinities. Tobi offered another example of a full-sized house with room enough for an altar.

On other islands, sacred rocks were the site of rituals—a place for offerings and even a place where the skulls of the ancestors might be kept. Such stone monuments were found on Fais, on Namu in the Marshalls as the incarnation of founder clan goddesses, and in Kiribati, where they were horizontal stones or coral slabs where offerings were made to the sun deities. On Pohnpei, natural stone formations or natural features were described by oral historians as the markers where the gods worked with humans to shape the history of Pohnpei. One such natural stone is described as the rock where deities and humans started to build up the island.[9] With the exceptions of Nan Madol and Lelu, Micronesians were not much interested in what we would call temples. Most of the platforms of the sacred priestly centers of Yap, the *taliiw,* were in bad need of repair each year, and the stones that commemorated the great deities struck Müller, in 1910, as quite unimpressive.[10]

Persons Serving the Sacred Places

Priests were to be found in many parts of Micronesia, but nowhere were they more prominent than on Pohnpei. The two most distinguished priestly titles, according to myth and oral histories, were *Soumwen Leng* of Salapwuk and *Soukisen Leng* of Wene; the former brought titles and stratification to Pohnpei with the help of the god *Daukatau,* while the latter worked with the legendary Isohkelekel to bring down the Saudeleurs and, with the guidance of *Luk,* set up the new polity. The Saudeleurs themselves, who oversaw the cultic site at Nan Madol for centuries, were

originally priests as well as rulers. A hierarchical priesthood, about which little is known but which may have shared features with those on Pohnpei, also functioned on Kosrae. Yap, too, had its priests serving the local shrines.

Then too, there were the less-exalted religious figures who served a community rather than a cult center or shrine as such. The many ethnographers from before World War II who designated the religious specialists on small atolls as priests were not far off the mark. The leaders of the breadfruit ceremonies on Chuuk and Puluwat could certainly be called priests. The breadfruit callers, although lacking cult centers and hierarchical ranks, served their island as leaders of prayers and rituals to bring good harvests.

Most of the other religious specialists of Micronesia may not have been the leaders of grand and elaborate ritual, but they did not work alone. The Ulithian weather "magicians" worked as a team when faced with approaching typhoons. The Satawal mediums gathered the entire atoll population to support rites of divining and curing. The mediums in the Chuukic islands were at the service of the extended family or the lineage. The experts in healing received their knowledge from their elders or in dreams from the ancestor spirits, but their ritual was the gathering, concocting, and applying of "medicine," which included a chant or formula with the kin present. The masters of canoe building, from the Chuuk Lagoon to Yap, had to have both technical knowledge and a spirit-given knowledge; the rituals they practiced were short but were nonetheless maintained throughout the project. The religious leaders and specialists of Micronesia—whether priests, mediums, magicians, oracles, or conjurers—all demonstrated a communal dimension to their work.

Morality and Human Destiny

The last word has yet to be written about the relationship of religious morality and the rewards and punishments given for human behavior. Some reports say Micronesians believed that rewards and punishments in the afterlife were based on behavior when alive. Yet the ethnographic evidence certainly shows that the entrance to the sky world or the isle of bliss is repeatedly marked by a seemingly irrelevant trial or test. Pohnpeian myth maintains that when the recently deceased reached the swinging bridge to paradise, they had to sing. Poor singers were dumped off the bridge into the pit of no return. In Kiribati, the dead had to pass through a barrier with two large swinging stones bashing against each other.

The anthropologists Burrows and Spiro, based on their postwar research on Ifalik (Ifaluk), claimed that morality there was not "sanctioned" by religious rewards and punishments; morality and ethics were rewarded by the chiefs, not the spirits and gods and not by the promise

of a delayed reward or punishment after death. They thought the people of Ifalik to be highly moral, but their morality was not grounded in a religious belief system. This is a position that has been echoed by other observers dating back to some of the earliest records on island life. The myths of irrelevant tests and trials en route to the heavens or the island of bliss that are so well documented in the literature lend strong support to this position.

The Gentle Religions

The old religions of Micronesia hold much to commend themselves to modern readers, whether Micronesian or not. Even prominent Christian missionaries have seen the old religion as a helpful preparatory phase in the message to the new religion. On the crowded stage of religions across the globe, those of preindustrial, premissionized Micronesia may be justly described as "gentle religions."

Ritual cannibalism was rare.[11] As a matter of fact, one of the few positive achievements acknowledged of the hated Saudeleur dynasty of Pohnpei was ridding the island of cannibals. Throughout the islands, cannibalism was regarded as uncivilized, if not outright demonic. In Marshallese folklore, for instance, an ogre or evil spirit was often depicted as a cannibalistic flying woman. There was very little ritual sacrifice of any living beings, not to speak of humans, in Micronesian religious practice; the sacrifice of a turtle to the sacred eels of Pohnpei at Nan Madol is quite exceptional in both Pohnpeian oral history and in Micronesian religion as a whole.

There were no prolonged fasts and similar feats of religious denial. Abstinence from certain foods under certain limited conditions was common as a ritual demand, but one could hardly call this punishing. Men, as is common the world over, had to abstain from sex before and during important affairs. Although women were considered dangerous and polluting, that did not prevent females from becoming high chiefs (in the Marshalls), from receiving the jealously guarded and esteemed rank of navigator (in the central Chuukic-speaking atolls), from acting as mediums and official oracles, or from being leaders in healing and the making of medicine. There were indeed the ubiquitous menstrual huts, segregated from the main dwellings, but this was a time and a place when women learned their rights in control of the family and the land. Perhaps the moderation in ritual prohibitions regarding women is a reflection of the predominantly matrilineal structure of Micronesia.

Micronesian religion in general was not one of excessive ritual and religiously sanctioned taboos. The religious claims for the sacredness of

the Marshallese kings with associated taboos, a kind of "divine right of kings" in the Pacific, is unusual in Micronesia. Yap seems to have had the most religious sanctions, but the degree of emphasis on taboo found there is an anomaly in Micronesia.

Witchcraft was absent.[12] The concept came into the Micronesian vocabularies from missionaries, who often labeled the local religion as witchcraft. There was and still is sorcery, but it was apparently not strong and may not have even existed in some places. Much of the sorcery in the Chuukic islands was really protection or insurance against harm and was often aimed at turning back against the enemy whatever spirit powers he was thought to have been employing.

With the exception of healing and curing, I doubt that Micronesian religious institutions effectively ameliorated the human condition. Yet, as seen from the perspective of the believing population, religious ritual was at bottom a human appeal to the spirit world for a bountiful harvest, a good catch, fair winds, and fine sailing. Of course, it did not always work as hoped and intended. From all I can read in the old material gathered by early ethnographers, the Micronesians did far more praying than acting out and chanting magic formulae.[13] These religions and their rituals were realistic; Micronesians knew that nobody on these islands controlled nature. Ulithians, for example, who have within historical record experienced death and destruction from typhoons, must have known that for all the dancing by a line of weather "magicians," the storm might still hit. That is probably why the weather "magicians" prayed that the gods spare Ulithi this terrible punishment. To the extent that prayer is more realistic than magic, given the odds of averting destruction, it is a "gentler" way of trying to cope with the unknowns of natural forces.

Micronesian religions also figure as gentle religions because they are not salvation religions wherein delayed gratification by intense and prolonged fasts or bodily torture by knife cuts or whippings eventually merits bliss. I think it is accurate to call the religions of Micronesia religions of life, inasmuch as they are focused on the practicalities and necessities of daily living. Nowhere was this more apparent than in the elaborate ritual for good crops and the therapies associated with spirit-given powers to heal and cure. The distribution and sharing in the bounty of good food was also part and parcel of many religious rituals. Religious ritual certainly reinforced the belief that the proper response to bounty is distribution, not accumulation.

Micronesian religions also appear as gentle religions in their devotion to the beauty of the arts, especially the dance, the beauty of a magnificently crafted outrigger canoe, and the artistry of tattooing and weaving.

All of these fine arts called on the spirit world to inspire and guide the human apprentices, but dancing and canoe building are the most obvious and prominent as religious symbols. Certain dances were believed sacred since they were performed in praise or worship of the deities, while the construction of a canoe was marked with religious ritual and taboos on all the islands from Yap to the Marshalls. In elevating some of the artistry and creativity and skill of the Micronesians to the status of "from the spirits," the islanders have followed a pattern as old as recorded history, one similar to the inspiration of the muses and the divine patrons of the arts in classical Greece. The gentle nature of Micronesian religion is a considerable achievement in a world that has sacralized torture, death, cannibalism, and mass human sacrifices.

Postscript

Whenever my friends and relatives asked me what I was writing about, I only had to reply "the old, pre-Christian religions of Micronesia," and immediately the discussion came to a crashing halt. Personally, I remain convinced that the work of bringing together the many scattered records about old Micronesian religion is useful—even downright pragmatic. I see one after another Micronesian state or republic trying to ground its teaching and textbooks in its own cultural heritage. Whatever the present belief system or religion embraced by people of an island, it is impossible, or at least counterproductive, to excise any reference to old beliefs and rituals. Religion is too much a part of contemporary society and was probably at least as important in premodern, pre-Christian Micronesia. Folklore, without an appreciation of the beliefs that brought it into being and sustained it, is a museum piece unworthy of today's students. It is my hope that this work will help Micronesians, in some small way, appreciate a bit more deeply an important aspect of their traditional culture, one that permeated everything else. In doing so, they will also be recapturing their past.

NOTES

Chapter 1: Introductory Issues

1. The contemporary political entities are the Republic of Palau, the Federated States of Micronesia, the Commonwealth of the Northern Marianas, the Territory of Guam, the Republic of the Marshall Islands, the Republic of Nauru, and the Republic of Kiribati. Mapia, an island just off the shore of Papua (formerly Irian Jaya in western New Guinea), has Micronesian speakers, but the island itself is now part of Indonesia.
2. That there was and still is a chain of Chuukic- (formerly Trukic-) speaking people from Tobi in the west to the Mortlockese in the east is not in question. What is difficult to agree on are meaningful terms to describe this link between islands across Micronesia. Although I originally used "the Chuukic-speaking Continuum" to refer to this group, here I will use the terms "Chuukic-speaking islands" or "Chuukic people."
3. The archaeological evidence is too complicated to be summarized here. The best readings are Kirch (2000) and Bellwood (1979).
4. A strong case for cultural similarity in the region has recently been made in Glenn Petersen's *Traditional Micronesian Societies* (2009).
5. These are Lothar Käser's unpublished doctoral dissertation, "Der Begriff Seele bei den Insulanern von Truk" (1977), and Ward Goodenough's *Under Heaven's Brow* (2002). A third book, Frazer's *The Belief in Immortality and the Worship of the Dead,* vol. 3: *The Belief among the Micronesians* (1924), is drawn entirely from existing ethnographic sources.
6. This absence of religion as a CIMA topic of investigation is confirmed in the fiftieth anniversary publication documenting the CIMA work, while the publication itself (Kiste and Marshall 1999), the definitive report on fifty years of American anthropology in Micronesia, has no chapter on religion.
7. During 1899–1914, Germany controlled all of the islands that would later be occupied by the Japanese and then by the Americans as trust territories. Kiribati (the Gilbert Islands), Banaba (Ocean Island), and eventually Nauru were British protectorates or colonies.
8. The expedition spent its first year in the German colonies of Melanesia, but almost all the published expedition reports are about Micronesia. Because of World War I, much of the work was not published until long after the war. The expedition was funded by the Hamburg Museum and approved

by the German government, so it is known variously as the Hamburg or the German South Sea Expedition, and sometimes it is referred to as the Thilenius South Sea Expedition (Thilenius was the general editor). The multivolume publication is known as the *Ergebnisse der Südsee-Expedition 1908–1910;* in this work, I use the abbreviation ESE.

9. See, for example, Hanlon (1988) on Pohnpei and Burrows and Spiro (1953) on Ifalik.
10. Swain and Trompf's *Religions of Oceania* (1995) has precious little on Micronesia; the same can be said for Hans Nevermann's *Die Religionen der Südsee und Australiens* (1968), which devotes a skimpy 9 pages out of 312 to Micronesia.
11. Quoted in W. Goodenough 1988, 118.
12. The classic substantive definition is from Melford Spiro (whose first fieldwork was on the Carolinian atoll of Ifalik): Religion is "an institution consisting of culturally patterned interaction with culturally postulated superhuman beings" (1966, 96). This substantive definition has a long ancestry. Tylor, in the late nineteenth century, defined religion as "a belief in spiritual beings" (1889, 424). This is a definition that anthropologist Anthony Wallace views as "still a respectable minimum definition of religion" (1966, 5). Wallace expands on the "respectable minimum" in this way: "*Religion is a set of rituals, rationalized by myth, which mobilizes supernatural powers for the purpose of achieving or preventing transformations of state in man and nature*" (italics his, 127). By and large, anthropologists have avoided Durkheim's dichotomy between the sacred and the profane as the defining trait of religion. Nor have they embraced Ninian Smart's suggestion to avoid a single criterion for the definition of religion and see that all religion will have *some* of the features of the following "bundle" of characteristics: the doctrinal, narrative, ethical, ritual, experiential, and social/institutional (2000, 8–10). Most anthropologists, American and British at least, tend to favor a substantive definition like Spiro's or the more expansive functional one of Geertz.
13. Geertz' full definition of religion is "(1) a system of symbols which acts to (2) establish powerful, persuasive, and long-lasting moods and motivations in men by (3) formulating conceptions of a general order of existence and (4) clothing these conceptions with such an aura of factuality that (5) these moods and motivations seem uniquely realistic" (1966, 4).
14. On the universal need for meaning, the substantive-definition and the functional-definition proponents agree (Spiro 1966, 85ff.).
15. I use the term "society" to mean "a group or groups interacting within given socioeconomic boundaries." "Culture," on the other hand, comprises the material and immaterial artifacts of a group. Thus, within the socioeconomic

boundaries of the United States and its citizens overseas there is interaction shared through common laws, formal schooling procedures, respect for the separation of church and state, and so on. Society and culture need not be coterminous.

16. I will return to the possible meanings of the sacred later. Suffice it to say here that the sacred may have nothing to do with the supernatural and that it is not always the opposite of "the profane."
17. It is often quite difficult from those reports to distinguish what was memory culture and what was still in practice at the time. This difficulty is especially apparent in places where the island had only recently converted to Christianity. Burrows and Spiro's CIMA report on Ifalik (1953) is a good example: The authors had difficulty in determining whether described beliefs about the spirits were still current or only a memory of preconversion belief.
18. For turn-of-the-century German research, the publication dates are often decades after the actual fieldwork. World War I is one of the main reasons for this disparity.
19. For the Japanese Mandated Islands of Micronesia, the works of artist-turned-ethnographer Hisakatsu Hijikata are the exception. Between 1929 and 1944, he spent seven years on Satawal and another seven years in Palau. Fortunately, these works, previously unavailable to non-Japanese readers, have been recently published in translation (Hijikata 1995 and 1997). In the Gilberts (Kiribati) and Nauru, two British colonial officers produced extensive ethnographic reports and publications between the world wars. The first was Arthur Grimble, whose many reports on the British Colony of the Gilberts are among the few ethnographic records for the period. Because of his efforts, the published detail about the Micronesian myths of the Gilberts is unparalleled. One of his successors as a colonial officer was Harry Maude, a university-trained anthropologist, who was a major force in the collecting and publishing of Gilbertese oral histories. Without Grimble and Maude, the ethnographic record of Kiribati would be a vacuum, with the notable exception of the work of their colleague and friend, Father Ernst Sabatier.
20. Many of these are based on research done before World War I, such as Bollig on Chuuk or Erdland on the Marshalls, even though the publication dates are much later.
21. The reports, newsletters, and diaries of the Boston-based Protestant missionaries (collectively referred to as ABCFM for the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions) are not particularly useful for ethnography. These missionaries were not interested in describing the old ways of the peoples they worked with. On the other hand, their descriptions of the problems in converting the "heathens" offer valuable insights into the struggle between the old religions and the new one (see, for instance, Hanlon 1984).

22. See Hellwig (1927). Hellwig kept the diary of the expedition, which includes a map of where the expedition's ship, *Peiho,* landed and how many days were spent at each site.
23. See Rainer Buschmann (1996).
24. The works based on field notes but written by researchers who never touched on Micronesian soil are those of Anneliese Eilers, Hans Damm, and Hans Nevermann. This comment is not meant to denigrate their work; without their editing of handwritten field notes, modern anthropology would have nothing from the period.
25. Hambruch had spent an earlier, undetermined period on Nauru as a contracted researcher studying the blight in the coconut palms.
26. One does not find this same interest in ethnography in the early Protestant missionaries. Luther Gulick on Pohnpei is the exception. However, one can find interesting ethnographic tidbits in their reports to the American Board of Foreign Missions (ABCFM 1852–1909) or in their publication, *The Friend.*
27. CIMA is the Coordinated Investigation of Micronesian Anthropology. See Kiste and Marshall (1999, 26ff.) for the details of this research between 1947 and 1949. Unlike the reports of the German expedition, the CIMA reports were published close on the heels of the fieldwork and devoted little space to work done before them.

Chapter 2: Overview of the Micronesian Religions

1. See, for instance, Father Cantova's Woleaian castaways who had drifted to Guam (Cantova 1721) and Chamisso's Woleaian informant, Kadu (Chamisso 1986 [1838])
2. The dialectical variations for these three gods vary considerably.
3. On Yap, curiously, *Wonofáát* becomes the chief god, outranking even the Great Spirit *Enúúnap*.
4. The word "underworld" in Western language is an ambiguous or bad place—something akin to hell. The world under the sea in Chuukic cosmology has no such evil connotation.
5. The full-blown *sawei* system, with tribute coming island by island from the east (Puluwat) to Yap, has not been carried out in over a century, but parts of the system, as Alkire observes, continue to be mutual support subsystems.

Chapter 3: The Chuukic-Speaking Islands

1. See Ward Goodenough's outline of the languages within the Chuukic (formerly Trukic) in Goodenough and Sugita (1980 and 1990). Quackenbush (1968) concludes that the Chuukic chain has 80 percent cognate links.
2. While the islands are spread over a 1,600-mile arc, the islanders were in frequent contact with each other and their non-Chuukic neighbors. They

were and still are great sailors, navigators, and traders, using one of the world's finest oceangoing outrigger canoes. This feature has obvious implications for the exchange and spread of religious beliefs and practices.

3. The best recent summary of Chuukic social organization is in Goodenough (2002), although the author focuses mostly on the Chuuk Lagoon.
4. "Emic" and "etic" are anthropological terms. "Emic" designates the insider's viewpoint, the viewpoint of the people under study. "Etic" is the outsider's viewpoint, often the viewpoint of the Western observer or anthropologist. A simple example is *énú*. The emic term for what outsiders would call gods, spirits, and ghosts is *énú*.
5. For the sake of clarity and simplicity, the orthography and spelling used throughout this chapter for Chuukic languages and dialects is that of the Goodenough and Sugita (1990) dictionary.
6. The other is Roger Ward's dissertation on healing on Pohnpei (1977).
7. *Énú* is found in a variety of cognate words across the Chuuk Continuum—*anu, yalu, yalius, ari*—reflecting the dialects and languages of the Chuuk world (as well as the curious orthographies of the researchers).
8. The Woleai native Kadu, who accompanied Kotzebue and Chamisso in 1817, said that three gods were worshipped in the sky: *Aluelap, Lugelang,* and *Olifat;* but that it was the goddess *Ligopup,* together with *Aluelap,* who created the world (Chamisso 1986, 287). The total number of "heavenly residents" was given as seven (290). Father Cantova (1721) records the same divisions of gods and spirits, while singling out *Aluelap, Lugelang,* and *Olifat*.
9. Only certain of the gods were classified as "sky gods" (Goodenough 2002). Other gods and goddesses might also live in the sky, but their work was mostly on earth. Sometimes the record is inconsistent and one does not know if a particular deity is a sky god or an earthbound one.
10. Like *Enúúnap, Nuuk* is found across the Chuukic spectrum. On Tobi, *Nuuk* is *Rugieren,* and like *Nuuk* elsewhere he is the son of the "great spirit" [*Enúúnap*] and the father of *Wonofáát* by an earthly mother (Eilers 1936, 106–107).
11. Lessa calls him "pure trickster," which may be true for Ulithi, where Lessa recorded his data. But in a few Chuukic myths and certainly in other areas (e.g., *Letao* of the Marshalls), he is also like a culture hero who comes to earth to help humans and bring culture to them, under such forms as fire, tattooing, canoe building, and sailing. Many of the stories about *Wonofáát* are found across Micronesia—even in non-Chuukic places such as Yap, the Marshalls, and Kiribati, but under a different name. In Polynesia, the trickster god is Maui. In fact, the trickster figure is found across the globe under different guises.

12. The version given here was recorded by French explorer Freycinet, according to the myth given to him by Don Luis Torres of Guam (Freycinet 1929, 108–111), as translated and quoted by Lessa (1961, 82–84).
13. In many ways, *Wonofáát* is the foil of *Nuuk*. *Nuuk* is the tattletale of the family. He descends to earth to watch over humans and report back their activities to *Enúúnap,* who in turn sends wind and rains for bad behavior through *Sowunóón,* god of the deep sea and the land under the sea. Typhoons are yet another punishment for bad behavior (Kubary 1880, 259; Burrows 1949, 175).
14. The only major work not to give *Nuuk* the limelight is Laurentius Bollig's description of religion in the Chuuk Lagoon. After long descriptions of *Enúúnap* and *Wonofáát,* he mentions in passing one of the gods, *Nugeilang* [*Nuukeileng*] (1927, 7). Krämer mentions that *Nuukeileng* is well known farther in the island circle, implying that *Nuuk* was not well known in the Chuuk Lagoon and the Mortlocks (1932, 490). Krämer's remark is significant: It is a hint about the variations along the Chuukic continuum in knowledge of and devotion to the gods. Roger Mitchell's study of mythology from the eastern end of the Chuukic area never mentions *Nuukeileng* or *Nuuk* in his review of "pagan mythology" (1967, 144ff.), lending credence to the notion that *Nuuk* is less important in the eastern Carolines.
15. This is the Chuuk version of a widespread myth from the Marshalls to Yap.
16. *Enúúset* (spelled *Anusad* in some sources) is not found in the Goodenough and Sugita dictionary (1980), but it literally means "sea god" or "god of the sea."
17. The modest friar, Laurentius Bollig, writes that the prayers "leave nothing to be desired in ardor and passion" (1927, 11). The friar was obviously not amused by this much-sought-after goddess, whom he described as "the protectoress of lechery, the Venus of the Chuuk people."
18. Breadfruit callers were considered so important that sometimes their bones and larynxes were preserved (Mahony 1970, 164). Krämer saw one such mummy on Toloas (Tonoas) in 1910; this dead *sowuyótoomey* was known by name and had died a year earlier (1932, 500–501).
19. The Puluwat word simply means, according to Elbert, a kind of eel (1972, 325).
20. Father Lorenz (Laurentius) Bollig was a Capuchin Franciscan missionary assigned to Chuuk from 1912 until early 1919. His work was seminal for the later works of Goodenough and Käser.
21. *Énú* and *ngúún* can both mean "spirit," but the words are not coterminous. *Ngúún* can also mean one's shadow or reflection, but no Chuuk speaker would refer to his or her shadow as *énú*.
22. Gladwin claimed to have seen the footprint in the dirt at a funeral (Gladwin and Sarason 1953).

23. Käser extends the spirit-double concept to things, animals, and even to locations, so that the spirit islands are geographic doubles of earth islands.
24. *Soope* as a category of spirits includes mostly spirits of the dead but can also include, for example, the *enúúset*, the sea or reef spirits, and one subcategory of sea spirits, the *chéénúkken* or "saltwater" spirits (Käser 1977, 222).
25. Ledidi can refer to either the temporary resting place of the good souls, located on one of the lower layers of sky, or the final resting place in the top layer of the sky.
26. Lessa was not the only one to find memories of the cult on Ulithi, where Marespa was born. Kubary in the late nineteenth century, the German expedition of 1910 (including Müller on Yap), and even the American researcher Eric Metzgar in the 1970s found evidence of the cult in other places.
27. Earlier burials might have been at sea, although sometimes the body of a beloved infant or prominent individual might be preserved in the house. For older descriptions of the funeral and mourning, see Bollig (1927, 15–19); Goodenough (2002, 134–141); Gladwin and Sarason (1953, 156ff.); and Lessa (1950a, 249–255 and 1966b, 112–114). Hezel (2001, 91ff.) gives a good account of how the funerals have changed in the last half century or so.
28. In Micronesia, grave goods are rarely given or buried with the body for the purpose of helping the soul or spirit gain entrance into the sky world.
29. The drinking of the body drippings is also noted in Melanesia (Trompf and Swain 1995, 156).
30. Hans Damm even recorded a sketch of the universe drawn by a Puluwat islander (Damm et al. 1935, 190), in addition to the descriptions in Bollig (1927) and other sources.
31. The mythology cannot give a complete picture of the social structure and religion of old Chuuk. For a review of the problems with using myth to see what a now defunct culture was like, see Lessa's *Discoverer-of-the-Sun: Mythology as a Reflection of Culture* (1966a).
32. In the Polynesian isles of Tuamotus, the cosmos has twelve layers or tiers in the sky; five or six layers are found in Melanesia (see Westervelt 1998).
33. Bollig, as noted above, placed this way station on another level of the heavens.
34. At least one description of Pacific cosmologies calls those of Polynesia and Micronesia "vertical" cosmologies that go up into the heavens and down beneath the sea, while the Melanesian cosmos is termed "horizontal" since it is bounded by the land one knew about (Trompf and Swain 1995).
35. To my knowledge, there is only a single mention of clan heavens (Tolerton and Rauch 1949, 183–185).
36. Hijikata (1997) on Satawal recorded *lang* as extending below the horizon and becoming another bowl or vault that "contained" both the deep sea and

the world beneath the sea. This appears to be the only example of *lang* both above and below the horizon.

37. *Sowu* is used widely, not just for specialties dealing with religion but also for soldiers, sailors, chiefs, and patron ancestors—even for fornicators (see Goodenough and Sugita 1980).
38. *Roong* seems to be a uniquely Chuukic concept in Micronesia. People on Chuukic-speaking islands as well as in the rest of Micronesia apply the term *manaman* to sacred or effective power, but for Chuukic people, *roong* is the spirit knowledge that may be converted into *manaman*.
39. Mahony lists three classifications of spirit powers: (1) action of spirits due largely to individual behavior, (2) spirits activated by sorcery, and (3) spirits associated with symptoms (1970 47ff.). I doubt that he intended this to be an exhaustive list but probably one related to sickness and medicine.
40. See also Goodenough 2002, 228ff.
41. The *wáátawa* was sometimes called the *sowuyawarawar* or *wáánaanú*.
42. To cite one example, the navigator (*pénú)* displays a combination of technical skills and *roong* knowledge culminating in the apprentice navigator's "consecration" and signified in the mandatory ritual performed by the master navigator (Metzgar 1991).
43. Ritual specialists in Micronesia sometimes called out the names of their deceased colleagues in prayer or made offerings to them.
44. Boat races also accompanied the breadfruit festival honoring *Sinlanka* on nearby Kosrae (Sarfert 1919). On the other hand, the account of the elaborate breadfruit ritual on Chuukic-speaking Puluwat does not include any mention of boats or races.
45. Sarfert, whose material was published in Damm et al. (1935), interviewed both the leaders of the ritual and a German trader who knew of the last performance of the ritual on the island years before. His description is worth giving in full as an example of breadfruit ritual, as well as an illustration of the detail that the German expedition was able to uncover in just a few days on the island.
46. Damm called this circle of ritual associates with the priest the *atomei,* the same term that he used for the breadfruit calling ritual itself.
47. The wearing of these knotted young coconut fronds is a widespread Micronesian symbol of a festive or ritual event. Dancers, especially males, wear them for public performances; the *sowu* associated with the weather wear them when performing their magic or prayers. Turmeric is also a symbol of a special occasion. Dancers still are rubbed in turmeric, as were the warriors of old.
48. Literally, the word means "rainbow." *Enúún Mwárisi* means "Rainbow Spirit." Some accounts regard *Enúún Mwárisi* and *Resiim* as the same god, while others treat them as separate spirits (Goodenough 2002, 106).

49. *Semenkóóror* is one of the more important gods in the Chuukic-speaking islands and performs various roles in different legends. In the Mortlocks, he is the grandson of *Enúúnap,* son of *Nuuk,* and brother of the infamous trickster and culture hero, *Wonofáát. Semenkóóror* is a helpful god, the god of determining what is right and wrong (Goodenough 2002, 96), commander of the sun and moon (Girschner 1912–13), and father of wisdom and bringer of skills to humankind (Bollig 1927).
50. *Enúúsooso* is a god of war or a spirit causing death, according to Goodenough and Sugita (1980, 67), and the *sooyénú* is the effigy used for sorcery in war or battle (155).
51 The "one who is in the sky" is *Enúúnap*. "Miraculous power" is *manaman,* a variant of the Pacific-wide word for power, holy or sacred, *mana*. For "so-and-so" the name of the enemy *itang* was inserted.
52. Elbert (1971, 220) notes that an *itang* was knowledgeable in five subjects: war, magic, meetings, navigation, and breadfruit.
53. The sources suggest that *itang* was and still is, first of all, an individual. It is also a role—that is, the expected behavior of someone regardless of status, like the spirit power many of the chiefs of old possessed. Third, it is a secretive, esoteric, and highly metaphorical vocabulary.
54. *Wáánaanú* (literally "vehicle of the spirit") is also frequently used, like *wáátawa,* to refer to a spirit medium.
55. The *wáátawa* was transformed from an institutionalized status into a more private and spontaneous behavior during the twentieth century. The only recorded observations made during the Japanese period are those of Hijikata (1997, 219ff.) on Satawal, where the *wáátawa* seemed to still have a recognized, institutionalized status. Some of the anthropologists of the CIMA team (e.g., Spiro and Burrows) saw trance episodes in the late 1940s, but it is not certain that the entranced persons still held a recognized status within the communities.
56. Status of any kind was never very "showy" in Chuuk; the status in the political structure as well as the religious was not surrounded by symbols of rank and position. Political and religious status in Polynesia, by contrast, was marked by brilliant robes, temples, eating and touching taboos, and what might be called "high church" ritual of the royal court.
57. Bollig's observations were made shortly before World War I. Goodenough (1963, 132–133) discovered the same occasions for spirit possession after World War II, but he does not state whether his information came from the memory culture of his informants or from their knowledge of events still going on.
58. The closest contender would probably be Kiribati, with its shrines and offerings to the ancestors and the honored skulls of deceased kin in homes and meeting houses (Grimble 1972 and 1989; Sabatier 1977).

59. Goodenough (2002, 176) notes that double-hulled canoes were not used in Chuuk at the time of first contact with Europeans, but they may have been employed at one time in the past, as they were in other parts of the region—notably Kiribati.
60. The *faar* is sometimes called the *nááñ*. Krämer (1932, 334) developed an elaborate interpretation to explain the difference, and Damm and Sarfert (1935, 201ff.) later followed him with an equally complex explanation of the differences.
61. The phenomenon is surely what anthropologists and psychologists would call an altered state of consciousness (ASC) or trance. The Chuuk *wáátawa* fits very neatly into this widely observed behavioral pattern. ASC is also a widely understood behavior pattern that has both clearly defined characteristics and does not carry all the judgmental baggage of "dissociation."
62. *Merik* is a word still used today for some sort of a "high" such as can be had when smoking a cigarette or chewing betel nut.

Chapter 4: The Religion of Pohnpei

1. Rufino Mauricio (1993, 78) used in his analysis eighty-nine of the more than four hundred stories that Hambruch collected. He refers to the Hambruch data as the Kehoe brothers' version of the history of Pohnpei because those two brothers were Hambruch's main informants. This is an important detail because none of stories in the collection of oral histories claims to be a history or *poadoapoad* for the entire island. Both the Kehoe brothers' version and those of Luelen and Silten are personal family histories. F. W. Christian's observations and record are earlier (1899) but lack the professional ethnographic approach to Pohnpei found in Hambruch's work.
2. Since the *soupoad* dealt with that part of Pohnpeian tradition (*sarawien Pohnpei*) that was considered sacred, he was believed to have supernatural power (*manaman*) (Mauricio 1993, 89–91).
3. See Hanlon (1988, chapter 1) and Mauricio (1993); Glenn Petersen's views on Pohnpeian oral history are summarized in his *Lost in the Weeds* (1990).
4. The motif of foreign origin is common in myth and legend throughout Polynesia and Micronesia. The myths of origin for the Marshall Islands, however, are a notable exception.
5. Glenn Petersen's *Lost in the Weeds* (1990) is probably the best monograph on the political tendency for decentralization. See also Petersen 1985 and 1986.
6. By way of example, Ohlsihpa and Ohlsohpa, the founders of the Nan Madol ritual and the Saudeleur dynasty according to Luelen (1977), are not even mentioned in the oral histories recorded by Paul Hambruch in 1910.
7. According to Hambruch, "The firmament is held up by *Man kio, Kio, Ki en puel* and a fourth being whose name they no longer know. They divide

sky itself into four zones. *Nan epon en tsap* corresponds to the north; *Ni kap an lan,* to the west; *Nan Eira,* to the south; and *Lemazielan,* to the east. Heaven and earth were one. Then the god *Tau Katau* separated them from each other, because he wanted to possess heaven for himself alone" (1936a, 156–157). The four beings are comparable to the four post-men or -women in the Marshallese and Kiribati cosmos.

8. Mauricio offers a ground plan of the traditional *nahs* and meanings of all the features, which he thinks reflect traditional religious beliefs. It seems to me that the first and main post, symbol of *Daukatau* and *Nan Sapwe,* is followed by four other main posts, reflecting perhaps the four beings holding up the sky. There are also three floor levels, the highest being for the paramount chief: "*Enihlap* (Great Deity) is represented by the paramount chiefs when they are seated here" (1993, 415ff.). The cosmic significance of the traditional *nahs* bears additional study and interviewing.
9. Some dead persons could make it to one of the layers of heaven, even the third heaven (Bernart 1977, 92–93).
10. As enclosed area shrines, the *merei* are quite similar to the walled and open shrines in Polynesia, especially those in the Hawaiian Islands known as *heiau*.
11. Mauricio's list is drawn from his own interviews of oral historians and from earlier sources such as Christian (1899), Hambruch (1936a and b), and Bernart (1977). Hambruch, it should be noted, often depended on the work of the stranded beachcomber James O'Connell (1972), who lived on Pohnpei in the 1830s.
12. *Luhk* was often equated with *Daukatau* (Mauricio 1993, 480). The same name appears in *Lukeileng,* the war god, and in *Luhken Leng,* the master speaker of ancient times, but neither *Lukeileng* nor *Luhken Leng* was considered *enihwos*. In fact, tradition notes that *Luhken Leng* was buried and worshipped as a clan deity (481). These non-*enihwos* gods sound like cognates of the Chuukic god, *Luk* or *Lukeileng*.
13. It is unclear why Hanlon limits *eni aramas* to deceased commoners. It may well be that other terms cover titled people, such as *enilapalap* for the spirits of deceased Nahnmwarki (Rehg 1979, 9).
14. By way of parallel, see the Marshallese mythology of ogres, vampires, and flying cannibalistic spirits (Tobin 2002).
15. Every living person had his personal guardian spirit (of his ancestors), *ani tsilepa* [*eni silepe*], who would destroy the magic of sorcerers by countermagic (Hambruch 1936a, 115).
16. The Nahnmwarki of Kitti to this day retains the priestly title of the old priest-chief, the Soukisen Leng.
17. Mauricio's interviews at one Wene ritual site indicate that as late as the 1950s, rituals "involving worship of ancestral spirits were secretly performed

at the site" (1993, 302), but his interpretation is that this was the work of individuals and not a community, as the Wene ritual had been before the twentieth century.

18. The title is glossed as "master of lighting the earthly rock oven" by Mauricio (1993, 190), although the gloss leaves the word *leng* (*lahng* or "heaven") without meaning. It might better be translated as "master of the heavenly earth oven."
19. Mauricio arrived at this figure using the average reign of the last six *Soumwen Leng*—eight years—multiplied by the traditional eighty as the number of titleholders. However, if the average reign is set higher, at twenty or twenty-five, then the *Soumwen Leng* may go back 1,500 to 2,000 years. Evidence for human habitation on Pohnpei goes back to the beginning of the Christian era or perhaps 500 BC (1993, 200).
20. "Pohnpei" is sometimes translated as "upon a stone altar," but it could simply mean "upon a pile of rocks."
21. *Soumwen Leng* may have set the calendar by some means of astronomical observation. He was reputed to have predicted "the endless night," which was most likely an eclipse.
22. *Sakau* is a mildly narcotic drink from the crushed roots of *Piper methysticum*, which is found widely in Polynesia, where the drink may be made from powdered roots. In Polynesia the name is kava. Until recently, *sakau* or *seka* was drunk only on Pohnpei and Kosrae. Now the cultivation and drinking of *sakau* has spread to other Micronesian islands, including Guam. Only on Pohnpei, however, does the drinking still carry ritual overtones.
23. The modern spelling is *rahmedel;* it means a ritual offering of *sakau* to the gods (Mauricio 1993, 243).
24. On Pohnpei (as on Yap), there was at least a terminological distinction between the priest (*samworo*) and a magician or sorcerer (*sounwinahni*). I say "terminological distinction" because in ritual performance, these Pohnpeian and Yapese priests worked like magicians.
25. *Lahngapap* is third heaven, where the high gods (*enihwos*) lived (Bernart 1977, 92–94; Mauricio 1993, 301).
26. *Soukisen Leng* means "the master of part of heaven." The title is sometimes abbreviated as *Soukisen,* or "The Master of Part" (Bernart 1977, 146–147). Mauricio glosses the title as "master of distributing the heavenly power" (1993, 190).
27. Descriptions are found in Fischer et al. (1977a, 94) and Mauricio (1993, 292).
28. This rite later was adopted by the Nahnmwarki of Kitti, whose successors kept the priestly title of *Soukisen Leng*. One newly promoted Nahnmwarki bungled the words and instead proclaimed himself as the god *Nahnsapwe*. His long reign was attributed to this slip of the tongue (Mauricio 1993, 311).

29. This is quite the opposite of the pattern of the Kosrae priests. On Kosrae, some priests lived in the capital to serve the "king" (*tokosra*), but most in these rural-based priesthoods marched into the capital to perform their rites only on important occasions.
30. Little is known about the process whereby the old priestly titles were absorbed into the system of two lines of royal titles. There is probably no single point in time where the priesthoods ceased or when the priestly titles lost their ritual function. Many of the old priests were involved with the preparation and offering of *sakau*; this continued in the new system under the Nahnmwarki and Nahnken.
31. In Bernart's history, "ceremony" is the equivalent of religion, not just a single ritual.
32. This is Hanlon's term (1988, 15), and he sums up the variations of the turtle-eel sacrifice (233n46). Masao Hadley refers to this ceremony as the *Pwohng Lapalap* (1980, 13). Luther Gulick, an American missionary writing in 1854, described the *Pwohng Lapalap* at Nan Madol.
33 The dynasty name means, literally, "the Lord of Deleur." The location of Deleur is somewhat mysterious, but it seems to refer to the area of the modern chiefdom of Madolenihmw, especially the megalithic construction on Temwen Island. Unlike priestly titles, which became absorbed by the secular title system, Saudeleur as a title died out with the last member of the dynasty.
34. Mauricio has speculated on the dates for the Saudeleurs. He takes the traditional number of Saudeleurs as eleven and the known successors of the Saudeleurs (Nahnmwarkis of Madolenihmw) as twelve up to the known death date of Luhken Kesik (1836), and assuming an average reign of twenty-five years for each Saudeleur and Nahnmwarki, he comes up with AD 1160 as the start of the reign of the first Saudeleur (1993, 163).
35. The main source for information about the priests comes from Hambruch and Bernart, but it is often difficult to determine if ritual was specific to the individual center or was performed at all or many of the centers.
36. Today there are five such chiefdoms, but they are still known as *wehi:* quite literally, "turtles."
37. Such is the thesis of Rufino Mauricio (1993). Tradition certainly attests to an older ritual focused on land and crops; it also certainly attests to the dog-eel and turtle-eel sacrifices at Nan Madol. But the existence of the second "worship," that of the sea, is not as clear and straightforward in the oral traditions.
38. The two terms, Nahnisohnsapw and Nahnusuhnsapw, are debated terms. Again I quote an explanatory footnote from Hanlon to summarize the debate: "Masao Hadley (1980, 14) identifies Nahnisohnsapw as the chief deity of the Saudeleurs; I believe he is quite correct in so doing.

Hambruch (1936b, 92) refers incorrectly to the turtle offered to Nahn Samwohl as Nanusungsap" (1988, 232n45). Mauricio (1993, 213) refers to Nahnisohnsapw as a place of sacrificial offering at Nan Madol.

39. The third title in the Nahnmwarki's line.
40. The extent to which the Saudeleurs ruled all of Pohnpei is open to debate. The two ritual centers in what is now the state of Kitti—Salapwuk and Wene—remained relatively autonomous. Perhaps they offered tribute as nominal recognition. Even the extent to which powerful secular chiefdoms like that for Ahnd Atoll and Palikir were controlled by the Saudeleurs is questionable (See Petersen 1990).
41. A good example is the priest with the title *Kiroun Aip*. He was the priest who announced the statements of the high priests with the use of a drum (*aip*). His title is still conferred today, but without priestly or ritual function and without a drum. In fact, no one has seen a traditional drum on Pohnpei in decades.
42. How old is divining? If one uses Mauricio's extrapolations based on archaeological dates for the two cultic centers at Wene and Nan Madol and on oral traditions about the remembered number of rulers or priests at these two sites, the priests go back at least a thousand years and perhaps much longer (See the opening paragraphs of this chapter). The earliest record from an outside observer is that from James O'Connell (shipwrecked on Pohnpei in the 1830s).
43. Hambruch's *uar en ani* (canoe of the spirit) is not the same as *ounani* (*winahni,* spells or magical formulae). The *soun-winahni* is the expert in spells and sacred (magical) chants. Readers might note that the same phrase in Chuuk—"canoe of the spirit"—is used to refer to the trance state together with possession interpretation.
44. Saul Riesenberg (1948, 415) recorded continued belief in this personal guardian spirit and cites the sea god, *Nahnsahwinsed*, as one of the evil spirits the guardian was supposed to counter.
45. Hambruch also recorded details of such possessed mediums: "He [*Isopahu*] also chose people whom he occasionally possessed, which are called *Tenuar* [*tehnwar*]; when we celebrate a festival, then we put up a sleeping mat roll, the *mol*. The *Tenuar* must go in there. Then *Isobau* possesses him. Next we must hand him a cup with kava. He then speaks to us and tells us what we should do" (1936a, 109).
46. Luelen Bernart was born in 1886 and thus would have known as a boy the German period (1899 to 1914); hence, he would have remembered oral traditions from the same period as those of Hambruch's informants of 1910.
47. These various methods of divining were collectively known in Pohnpeian as *kosetipw*.
48. See Riesenberg 1948, 409; and 1968, 58, 106, 159.

49. The Chuuk Lagoon and Pohnpei are the only areas where the local or traditional healing has been studied in depth, although both of the book-length works are unpublished doctoral dissertations (Mahony 1970 for Chuuk and Ward 1977 for Pohnpei). Saul Riesenberg's article, "Magic and Medicine in Pohnpei" (1948), although short, is packed with detail. Given the early missionary letters, reports of German colonial officials, and the publications of the Hamburg Expedition of 1908–1910, in addition to the oral history of Luelen Bernart, the best record in Micronesia on traditional healing and the adaptation to Christian and Western concepts is to be found for the Chuuk Lagoon and Pohnpei.
50. As described by Hambruch, the priests consulted the women as diviners: "Healing is practiced by the priests. But there are also women experienced in it, whom they consult" (1936a, 173). This offers a hint of an interesting relationship between the priests and lay people; unfortunately, little else is known about this relationship.
51. The best account of the epidemic and its impact on the old religion is Hanlon (1988), especially chapter 4, entitled "God versus Gods," which draws heavily on the Boston-based missionary records, especially those of Luther Gulick.
52. This tradition is another small clue as to the religious nature of Pohnpeian and even Micronesian feasting, although surely not all feasting was religious.
53. This section on the causes of illness relies on Ward (1977, 58ff.), but it does not catch the detail and nuances of belief that Ward recorded.
54. Riesenberg described *Nahnsahwinsed* and the mangrove sickness symptoms and medicine (1948, 416, 418). He noted that in one case, the diagnosis of mangrove sickness came through a dream, apparently to the curer. Riesenberg gives a detailed account of the ingredients of the medicine, its preparation (pounding and squeezing of juice), and its application (drunk by the healer and then given to the patient four times a day for four days).

Chapter 5: The Religion of Kosrae

1. There are two sets of English translations available for Sarfert's work: the Human Relations Area File (HRAF) translation made during World War II and the one by Elizabeth A. Murphy (1983) that was commissioned by the Pacific Studies program at the University of Hawai'i at Mānoa. Neither translation was published. The Murphy volume is used often here because it is a better translation. Any citations in this chapter are from the German original by Sarfert.
2. Lesson's description of what he observed during the visit of the French ship *Coquille* has been translated into English, as has the account of the visit of the Russian naval ship *Seniavine* under Frederic Lütke. These and other accounts of early visits to Kosrae are found in Ritter and Ritter 1982.

3. Lütke noted that *Sitel Nosrunsrap* had two wives, *Kajoua-sin-lianga* and *Kajoua-sin-nionfou.* The first is most likely the popular and powerful goddess *Sinlanka,* who was described in detail eighty-three years later by Ernst Sarfert of the Hamburg South Seas Expedition. Lütke also listed the children of *Sitel Nosrunsrap* as *Rin, Aourieri, Naitouolen,* and *Seouapin.*
4. *Seka,* or *sakau,* is a drink made from the roots of *Piper methysticum,* called kava in Polynesia. It was pounded and drunk in elaborate ceremonies described by the French and Russian explorers. Sarfert described the importance of *seka* in the priestly Kosraean ritual.
5. *Sipe* is a title within the old Kosraean title system.
6. This god is most probably the "son" of *Nosrunsrap* and *Sinlanka* mentioned by Lütke as "Seouapin." Some other of the children mentioned by Lütke may also be the same deities given by Sarfert. The question arises again if *Yap* was a mythical island or the real islands of Yap.
7. *Sikaus* was important enough to have his own priesthood, which worked in Lelu as an oracle for the *tokosra,* but almost nothing else is known about the deity himself.
8. See Cordy 1993, 31–49. How religion and the priestly hierarchy fit into the Kosrae feudal structure is shown in the rural priesthoods, which on occasion showed their loyalty to the *tokosra* by coming to Lelu and performing rituals. The *tokosra* in turn appointed some priests and elevated them to high-titled rank.
9. See Cordy 1993, 37, 49, charts 4 and 7. A good example, given by Sarfert, was when Aoa Nelepaluk I (who reigned from 1837 to 1854) gave a priest first the title of *Selem* and later invested him with chiefly rank and a land parcel because the priest had overseen for two months the making of banana fibers for weaving the *tokosra* clothes. Since that time the title of *Selem,* which had been only a priestly rank, was considered both a priestly and chiefly title (Sarfert 1920, 338). Sarfert's royal informant said some priests were appointed by the *tokosra:* "They belonged to him," as the *tokosra* told Sarfert (355).
10. Oracles and diviners were much the same. An "oracle," as used here, was an official diviner of a titleholder.
11. The main categories of spirits across Micronesia are sky or high gods, patron gods, ancestor gods/spirits, and nature spirits (as located in a tree, on the reef, or beneath a rock).
12. "Mila in *jipan*" is the term used by Sarfert (1920). *Jipan* is the Kosraean word for the Marshalls, and perhaps Mila meant Mili in the Marshalls.
13. *Anutnut* is the word Sarfert also translated as "magic" (1920, 419), *anut* being the word for "spirit."
14. Sarfert was told by his informant, the *tokosra,* that some of the royal tomb enclosures in Lelu were not real tombs but something of a decoy for a body-

consuming spirit. A false sarcophagus that was supposed to hold the wrapped body of the *tokosra* was placed in the tomb, but the actual body was buried elsewhere to deceive the cannibalistic spirit (1919, 247–248). It may have also been that the mausoleum-like enclosures were only temporary burial areas; the bones were eventually removed and sunk off a nearby reef. See, for instance, Cordy's description of missionary Gulick's description of the burial and reburial of a favorite daughter of the *tokosra* in 1852 (Cordy 1993, 73).

15. The 1896 notebook, according to Sarfert, had *Sinlanka* married to her brother *Nosrunsrap;* her other brother's name was *Sitel* (1920, 407). But elsewhere, *Sitel Nosrunsrap* appears as the name of a single deity (409).
16. These were called *imon ale,* or "taboo houses," and the priests were called *tomon anut,* or "keepers of the spirit"(Sarfert 1920, 398). They were likely the same as the *imon anut,* or "spirit houses" (406).
17. These rebuilt and new houses on stone platforms are characteristic Micronesian (and perhaps Polynesian) structures for worship and offerings: a permanent stone platform on which was built either a house for the serving priests or a spirit house for the gods. This was certainly the structure on Yap and perhaps also that for Pohnpei (albeit on a larger, megalithic scale).
18. Compare this with the ritual platforms (*taliiw*) of Yap. The ritual platforms there were called "taboo places" and had a hut for the priest and a house for the shrine spirit.
19. This practice parallels the ritual placing of *sakau* leaves, branches, and roots before the paramount chiefs on Pohnpei.
20. The meaning of this inclusion of a ritual test for young males and followed by instruction in the martial arts, given by a priest, is difficult to ascertain. It does not show signs of the liminal or transition phase of male puberty ritual. Perhaps it was a recognition of candidates for future titles.
21. Most details here are drawn from Cordy 1993, 266–267; Ayres and Mauricio 1997; and Mauricio 1993.
22. All given here were recorded by the Hamburg Expedition personnel: Krämer (1932), Hambruch (1932 and 1936a and b), and Sarfert (1919 and 1920).
23. For an example of linguists adopting Goodenough's position, see Marck, "Proto-Micronesian Terms for the Physical Environment" (1994, 307).
24. Goodenough's position of 1986 is repeated in his more recent and much expanded *Under Heaven's Brow* (2002).
25. The other major source, it will be argued later, is the ritual trade network of Chuukic-speaking atolls from Puluwat to Ulithi and non-Chuukic Yap, known as the *sawei* (Descantes 1998).
26. See, for instance, Walsh 2003 and McArthur 1995.
27. For all practical purposes, the Protestant Church of the Boston-based missionaries replaced the monarchy and old religion—or at least filled the

vacuum created by the disappearing political and religious structure of the old religion. As late as the negotiations for incorporation within the Federated States of Micronesia, the Kosraeans held out for the provision of an established church (the Congregational Church).

Chapter 6: The Religion of the Marshall Islands

1. Both armchair ethnologist Sir James Frazer (1924) and the Hamburg South Seas Expedition report by Krämer and Nevermann (1938) recognized their debt to Erdland. Erdland spent over ten years in the Marshalls as a missionary who knew the language and even published the first dictionary (1906). Like Sarfert on Kosrae, Erdland described a traditional religion that was already in eclipse, although traces of the old practice and belief system could still be observed in his day.
2. See the word list of the *Marshallese-English Dictionary* (Abo et al. 1976). The Micronesian dictionaries in this series (the PALI Language texts) generally contain little of the early and probably now archaic vocabulary of the old religions.
3. This "order" is superimposed on the data for the benefit of the reader. Power is an important theme in the old religion, but that does not mean the Marshallese themselves use the theme of power to link together the scattered pieces of the old religion.
4. For the spelling and orthography of religious vocabulary, spirits, gods, myths, and places, I have standardized on the basis of Tobin (2002) and Abo et al. (1976). The reason is that Tobin has the most complete list of words related to the old religion; moreover, his typescript was edited by linguist Bryon Bender, who was also one of the authors of the *Marshallese Dictionary* (Abo et al. 1976).
5. There are alternate translations of *Lowa*'s commands. In Leach (1956, as quoted in Walsh 2003, 61), "'*Mmmmmm,*' he said, and islands arose out of the water"; in Erdland (1914), the creator says, "Let it be."
6. See Pollock (1976), Carucci (1997), and Stone (2001).
7. This reasoning is, as Walsh (2003, 120) has rightly observed, circular: The *irooj* have power so they must be sacred; they are sacred because they have so much power.
8. Pollock (1976) refers to a sister named *Lijileijet;* McArthur (1995, 319ff.) mentions a sister by the name of *Lijenenbwe;* Erdland (1914, 345) adds yet another sister, *Lirebrebju.*
9. Earlier writers identified this island with Yap, but now *Uap* or *Ep* is thought to be more of a mythic and mystical island in the west (See Goodenough 1986; Tobin 2002, 54).

10. Some variation of the star mother and the two sons is perhaps the most widespread myth in Micronesia. It certainly is found on Pohnpei and all the way to Yap. Nowhere, however, does the myth establish social structure the way it does in the Marshalls.
11. Creator god *Lowa* had already sent *Lewoj* and *Lomtol* to Bikini to build the first canoe according to heavenly specifications.
12. On the atoll of Ujelang, *Jebro* lives on in a Christian community as a figure of Jesus incarnate. Just as Antares (*Tumur*) disappears and Pleiades (*Jebro*) appears in the sky about the time of Christmas, so the islanders believe that Pleiades is Jesus come to Wujlan (Carucci 1980).
13. Phillip McArthur argues that contemporary Marshallese believe in three kinds of power: chiefly, knowing what others do not, and subversion-lies (1995, 273).
14. In Marshallese, the prefix *ri* indicates a status: literally, the "person who" does this or that. It is used for the religious specialists, like the *ri-kanij,* whose title literally means the "person who" deals with the "*anij*" (spirits).
15 Storyteller might be an inadequate translation, for these keepers of myth and tradition kept alive the stories of the gods and spirits and also the stories with moral values. See Tobin (2002) and McArthur (1995) for the religious dimension of the *ri-bwebwenato*.
16. See Lessa (1959); see also Goodenough, whose informant gave him the information in 1947 (2002, 185). Lessa claimed that the German physician Max Girschner (1912–1913) gave the most complete description of the coconut divining and named its patron as a sky god called *Supwunnumen*.
17. The name literally means woman (*li*) from/of (*jen*) the (*en*) divination knot (*bwe*) (McArthur 1995, 294).
18. The old evidence for Marshallese divination as religious power is not strong. As McArthur admits, *Lijenenbwe* is not well known and not often mentioned apart from his contemporary informants (1995, 294).
19. *Letao* is no devil, nor is he the embodiment of evil. Even though he has been called a *timon* (loan word meaning "demon"), Lokrap of Ebon told Buckingham, "Some Marshallese think he is a devil, but he is not a real devil." Apparently, concluded Buckingham, "he is one who rewards good and punished evil people" (1947, 2).
20. There is no denying that *Letao* is good entertainment. He inherited his craftiness from a relative (*Lijbake*, the turtle from Kiribati), and after hopping into bed with relatives, he returned to Kiribati where he died a sudden death. Between drinking *Lijbake*'s magic concoction and his death, *Letao* was pure adventure.

21. If the soul-like entity appears, it looks like a canoe. Thus, when someone is possessed by another spirit, Erdland writes elsewhere, a canoe is seen coming into the head of the possessed person.
22. C. Knappe calls this category "goblins" (1888, 230, 239, 238).
23. In the *Lowa* story, *Lowa* was an uncreated *anij* who lived alone in the sea. As in all of Micronesia, with the possible exception of Yap, part of the cosmos (the sea in this case) existed prior to the creative acts of the creator god.
24. In the Kiribati cosmos created by *Nareau* the Elder, these were four goddesses that were trees holding up the heavens, the upper half of the cosmic clamshell.
25. The theme of gods symbolized as worms, serpents, or caterpillars was common in the mythology of Kiribati and Nauru. But the cosmos they lived in was different. The Marshallese "worm" supernatural, *Wulleb,* fell to earth from the vault of heaven. The Kiribati creator god, *Nareau*, asked a serpentlike being, *Riki,* to help him pry open the great cosmic clamshell. *Riki* succeeded, his sweat becoming the sea. As a reward, *Nareau* sent him to the sky as the serpentlike Milky Way.
26. Again by way of comparison, in Marshallese myth, the inverted bowl picture dominates with little reference to the clamshell picture; in the Kiribati myth, the clamshell image predominates, with some reference to the inverted bowl picture.
27. Krämer and Nevermann (1938) write of a male puberty ritual, but the events do not describe the transition from childhood to puberty.
28. Erdland (1914, 171) gives this proverb about *eoreak* as a place, the final destination of the deceased: "If you keep this from me, we shall only see each other again in *Eoerök*. If you do not grant my request, we will part and speak to each other only in the other world (*Eoereak*)."
29. This invocation is a good example of the role of the four cardinal-direction gods in Marshallese ritual. In the pandanus and breadfruit ritual, all four were invoked and the evil potential of the god of the north was not mentioned. But in the myth recorded by Tobin in 1951, the "north man" killed people (2002, 48).
30. Erdland did not explain precisely how the high relative who called "Give him a companion" was appeased. His ten years in the Marshall were early in the twentieth century, when German colonial control of the Marshalls was at its height. He must have recorded human sacrifice from reports about the past or perhaps on remote atolls.
31. McArthur's informants believed that knowledge through divination was more powerful than the power of deception because it revealed what deception hides (1995, 302).

32. Erdland's description is one of the longest and most detailed descriptions of ritual in Micronesia, matched only by Girschner's description of Chuukic knot divination, Hambruch's description of the Pohnpeian turtle-eel sacrifice, and Sarfert's description of breadfruit calling on Puluwat.
33. Recall that the god dwelling in the west is *Wullep* and his island is *Eb*. Elsewhere in Erdland, the post-man, god of the cardinal direction of the west, is *Iroojrilik*. It would seem that traditions varied, and the important part of this pandanus ritual was the invocation of a deity from each of the four directions.
34. From Erdland it is difficult to figure out which ritual specialist was performing this ritual and other rituals. The problem is compounded in English translations (e.g., that by HRAF), where the specialist is first called a master of ceremonies and later a sorcerer.
35. The launching of "toy" canoes was part of the breadfruit ritual in the Mortlocks and the Chuuk Lagoon, although only Krämer (1932 and 1938) described these as religious ritual.
36. The widely accepted anthropological term for those spirits, deities, and semideities (part divine and part human or animal) is culture-hero/heroine. They might be called "the bringers of culture," which, in the Marshallese case, includes bringing to humans the know-how for making outrigger canoes, for making sails, for bringing fire, tattooing, and even the social structure of chiefly rights traced through the female line. *Letao*, the Marshallese trickster, was one such culture bringer.
37 Neither Tobin nor his informant translate or explain the word "*Kijmalan*." Erdland also used *kijmalan* but as the term for a ritual specialist (1914, 318).
38. The offering of food to the ancestor spirits or rituals associated with crops and with fishing are certainly religious, but here I am discussing the religious dimension of humans sharing food with one another.
39. "Feasting" is not a common word in America for American special holidays. There is a feast on Thanksgiving Day or on Christmas Day, but not feasting. American usage of "feast" stresses, I think, the element of abundance, although other elements are present, such as thanks for the abundance and sharing in the abundance. In Micronesia and the Marshalls, it seems as though the sharing is the most important element.
40. See Tobin 2002, 49–50, for this myth; see also Erdland 1914 and Krämer and Neverman 1938.
41. Walsh even considers the *irooj* as priests, largely because of the mythic basis and their exclusive right to tattoo others (2003, 121).
42. Aside from the biblical prohibition, missionaries probably understood correctly that tattooing was not just a status-affirming ceremony but also a religious event (see Spennemann 1993, 1, 174).

Chapter 7: The Old Religion of Yap

1. Yap proper is today divided into ten districts, each called a "municipality." The contemporary districts or municipalities are almost the same as the districts in about AD 1900. Most of the old shrines and holy places, however, are identified by the villages within each district—for example, the village of Teb in the municipality of Tamil, where one of the great *taliiw* (shrines) was located.
2. Müller's informant Tätse identified the land of human creation as *Nutsig,* an island north of Nuguor (Nukuoro) and south of the route to Falupai, "presumably," wrote Müller, Ngatik (Sapwuahfik), near Pohnpei (1917, 529). From the high priest of *Yanolop*'s shrine in Gachpar, Müller learned that the god *Yanolop* went to Tol in the Chuuk Lagoon and an island called Masoliol, which was farther east than Pohnpei (531).
3. See Descantes (1998) and Hunter-Anderson and Zan (1996) for the archaeological evidence of this exchange. For the supporting mythology, see Müller (1917) and Lessa (1961).
4. This hesitancy to divulge all for the investigator is widespread, certainly in Micronesia. For Pohnpei, see Glenn Petersen's *Lost in the Weeds* (1990); for Chuuk, this reserve is highlighted in the expression, "Give some, but keep some" (Eugenia Samuel, personal communication, 2002). Maude noted a similar secretiveness on the part of Kiribati elders, with the result that treasured traditions would ever so silently die with those elders (1963).
5. Müller (1917, 505) got this information from one of his main informants, Tätse, a chief from Ngulu. Although Ngulu is but fifty miles from the Yap Islands, its culture is a combination of the Chuukic and the Yapese. So, to what extent *Gavur li yel yel* is genuinely "Yapese" is problematic. On the other hand, there is great variation from district to district on the main islands for most features of the old religion. Müller's informant from Gachpar, the old priest Ruepong, knew nothing of *Gavur li yel yel.* Nor did the Ulithians living in that district (512). However, an old war chief whose information differed greatly from that of Tätse also knew of a *Gavur li yel yel,* and the words *yel yel* were also the words for the belt and the sword of the Orion constellation (1917, 477).
6. One could view the situation of the two *Yälfaath*s in different ways. For Beauclair (1967), *Yälfaath* the Small diffuses from Yap into the eastern Chuukic-speaking isles as the trickster, but *Yälfaath* the Elder does not diffuse beyond Yap. Beauclair's opinion is somewhat popular on Wa'ab; it is the old myth of the priority of Yap over the outer atolls surfacing in a new and "modern" form.
7. Here again Müller's informants did not agree, and one did designate the sea as a separate *tael* (1917).

8. Certain occupations such as that of navigator invoked other gods, but there is not much evidence of this. See the section on ritual experts later in this chapter.
9. *Tamaarong is* difficult to gloss. Jensen (1977, 66) defines *tamaarong* as "magician" or "expert." Müller parenthetically noted that they were sorcerers, not priests (1917, 352). We might conclude that *tamaarong* was and is the general term for religious leaders or specialists—whether they be priests, diviners, or magicians.
10. *Matotsig* (or *Li* [female prefix] *Matotsig*) is an example of Yap divinities linked to contemporary culture. The story goes like this: *Yälfaath* made a canoe for *LiMatotsig,* but *Lugälan* was jealous so he made her a set of sails. This is culturally logical, because traditionally Yapese women made the sails. When a canoe was beached and the sail rolled up, an offering was made to *Lug* and *LiMatotsig. Yälfaath* is not invoked in the prayer of this miniritual.
11. This looks suspiciously like the molding from clay in Genesis, but creation (especially of humans) with mud is widespread across the globe. Among Native Americans, for example, the "stuff" of human creation was seeds or mud (Leach 1956, 260).
12. There are many interpretations of what the *sawei* was. At a minimum it was an exchange and trading relationship between certain villages in Gagil and the Chuukic-speaking atolls east to Puluwat. In this relationship, the Yap municipalities were regarded by both sides as the "fathers" and the outer islanders as the "children." How much real dominance by Yap was involved is debatable.
13. In the 1960s, the Yapese tried to reassert their "relationship" when Ulithi received lease rents for a U.S. Coast Guard Loran Station. Gagil wanted a share of the money. Ulithi refused. Shortly after the refusal, two typhoons hit Ulithi and a Gagil ritual specialist (*tamaarong*) claimed credit for the storms. According to Alkire (1981, 7), rumor had it that Ulithi sent a "tribute" of traditional goods to Gagil but no share of the rent money.
14. Müller's main informant was Ruepong, the "high priest" at Teb in the Tamil District, but others interviewed by Müller had no recollection of this belief, and Walleser (1967) makes no mention of a double soul. Hence, this means the evidence is "single attribution" without corroboration or even a weak piece of evidence. Yet if one were to eliminate all "single-source attribution" in Micronesian anthropology, a great percentage of Micronesian data would disappear.
15. This is a place in Teb, which Müller visited. Müller wrote, "This is the abode of the departed souls" (1917, 523), but he probably meant the *temporary* abode of the departed before they go to heaven or the underworld (524).
16. Ulithi, noted Lessa (1950a), also located the destination of the bad soul in a mass of sticky stuff.

17. Note that Tätse's designation as "bad" for women who died in childbirth is quite the opposite of the priest Ruepong, who says they go to heaven. In addition, it is interesting to compare Tätse's example of ringworm with Bollig's description of the Chuukic *itang* as often having ringworm and using the decaying flesh as a demonstration of their power.
18. There may be two meanings or two glosses for this word. Müller's *vonod* [*banood*] is described as a "ritual cache" by Hunter-Anderson (1983, 51) and elsewhere as a "sacred cache," like a shell horn used in ritual. In photo 29, Hunter-Anderson identifies a cluster of objects on the ground near a ritual place as a *banood*—it contained whale bone(s?), a triton shell horn, and a *Cassis* shell horn (1983, 46). Müller glossed *tafen e vunod* as an "amulet house." *Tafen* is probably spelled today as *tafean* ("his place" or "his home" in Jensen 1977, 66). *Vunod* is also Müller's word for charm or amulet. Jensen (1977, 4) calls the *banood* "repository of magic power." It seems to me, therefore, that the *banood* was a cache of ritual or sacred objects, which may or may not have been in a small hutlike shrine (*tafean*) located on an abandoned house platform or perhaps at a shrine attended by a religious expert.
19 For Walleser, the *pon thagith* were an integral part of the family respect and cult for the ancestors, the *thagith* (1967, 36ff). On the other hand, Müller mentions the *thagith* in passing (1917, 524) but then describes Yap possession in a separate section (1917, 609ff). He does not associate possession with the *thagith,* but rather with the more generic phrase, the *kan,* or with the cult regarding the deceased Ulithi child, *Marespa*. In other words, possession and trance are for Walleser associated with the family ancestors; for Müller they are mediums but without bonds to the family ancestors. If one wants to reconcile the two views, the Yap case is like the Chuukic one where the individual could be possessed by an ancestor of the linage or village or also could be a medium possessed by any spirit.
20. *Kan* is the broadest term for spirits and can refer to the spirit possessing an entranced living spirit; it also can refer to the crop guardians, called *taliiw* spirits by Walleser and vegetation demons by Müller. The word can even refer to sky gods such as *Lug*. The *thagith* were also *kan*.
21. The *taliiw* is a particular shrine dedicated to the crop deities who are the children of *Margigi*. The common gloss for *taliiw* as shrine is "taboo place," and it is off limits to all but the priests. Today there is little to see at the shrines, but they still carry the awe of a sacred or tabooed location. Of the dozen or so Yapese who took me to the sites, not one would come with me into the area. Associated with the old shrine was a grove of trees, but these were difficult to identify because of the heavy undergrowth. Such sacred groves, reminiscent of the sacred groves of ancient Greece, seem to be found only on Yap.

22. *Margigi*, as noted earlier, was both a deity and a star being. The myth of the star mother and two of her star sons is found across Micronesia, most notably in the Marshalls where the mother was *Loktanur*, the oldest son *Tumur* (Antares), and the younger son *Jebro* (Pleiades). On Yap the cognate of *Tumur* appears as the constellation *Dumur* and Pleiades the constellation *Margigi* (see Müller 1917, plate 70). Apparently, then, the same star myth got scrambled as it moved from place to place in Micronesia.
23. Kite flying in Micronesia was both sport and either religious ritual or associated with ritual occasions. Other such games included the Chuuk toy boat races in breadfruit ritual and the flying of frigate birds on Nauru.
24. The priests who maintained the *taliiw* shrines and made offerings to the *kan* of the *taliiw* were called *paqtäliiw.* For additional detail, see the section on ritual experts later in this chapter.
25. See Lingenfelter (1979), whose findings are reviewed in this chapter in the section on the Yap calendar.
26. Perhaps a folklorist would note the instances where fish under the earth and sea were associated with earthquakes, as they were here and in Japan.
27. The remembrance of natural features as markers or signs of old traditions is also found in the oral histories of Pohnpei and the myths of the Marshall Islands.
28. Müller gives his rank as *matieg*, which is a lesser ranking priest. In the English HRAF translation, a vocabulary list is included and *matieg* is described as an assistant to the high priest, a fishing sorcerer. The English translation is clearly a misuse of the word "sorcerer" (one who causes evil by supernatural or spirit-aided means).
29. This is a rather widespread Micronesian interpretation of what happened to offerings and sacrifices: The god or spirit ate the soul of the offering, which was left to rot or was eaten by the shrine attendants.
30. I have never heard or read of precisely what physical symbol, if any, was carried from shrine to shrine.
31. See Walleser 1967, 37, and Müller 1917, 597ff.
32. Egan claims that *dowach* today has two meanings: the initiation ceremony of entering one of the eating classes (*yoogum*) or "the state of having entered one of the high ranking *tabgul* eating classes" (1998, 379). Because the practices of male commensality have today largely disappeared, it is not easy to clarify the practices of old, much less to clarify the old terminology.
33. Yap is the only society in Micronesia with anything approaching a clearly defined caste system. The weakened system has not disappeared with the decline of the old religion and with the advances of modernization. How the castes are labeled varies greatly. The terms for the two ranks are *mälingeay* (or *pimilngay*) and *piiluung* (Jensen 1977, 160, 92); Müller called

them "slave caste" and "high caste," but there seem to have been several intermediary "castes." The most visible sign of placement in one or the other caste was either ownership or the right to land or living and working on the land of others. There is some evidence that caste was not rigid but—in the distant past at least—was determined by success or failure in battle. The slave caste label appears today as too harsh a designation. A better term might be "serf" or "landless." Regardless, the ranking was religiously legitimated (see Lingenfelter 1979 and 1977, 332–333).

34. Pater Salesius, a Capuchin Catholic missionary on Yap, thought the eating classes and associated taboos were not religious. I am not surprised that his view differs from Müller, Walleser, and Lingenfelter; after all, Salesius was highly negative and unsympathetic about the old religion and Yap culture in general (1906).
35. There was a similar feast for women and one for children. Apparently, however, the women's feast, or *togum,* was based on age, not membership in an eating rank or the rank of the husband (Walleser 1967, 28).
36. Strictly speaking, there is no social mobility up or down the ranks in a caste system. Here the caste division was between the lower-ranking castes and the higher-ranking ones. Within the higher ones, there was mobility through *yoogum* membership. In this regard, the Yap social structure, as sanctioned by the *taliiw kan* religion, was both an ascribed and achieved status society.
37. Müller repeatedly uses *moau* as the word for a ritual seclusion. The modern meaning (*mawaa*w) is simply "mourning for the dead" (Jensen 1977, 165).
38 Turmeric (*Curcuma*) is a Micronesian-grown aromatic cosmetic of yellow to red color, depending on the source island. It was and still is used on occasions of solemnity when traditional attire is used, such as at dances or feasts or funerals. Because it is grown on only certain islands, it became a highly valued trade item.
39. This was perhaps something like a wake in other cultures, where there is general levity, joking, and drinking.
40 Gatsam is a flat, open area in the district of Tomil; the location was believed to be a staging place for the deceased on their journey to heaven or returning to earth. Some souls, for reasons unaccounted for, became trapped in Gatsam (Müller 1917, 319).
41. Today there are cemeteries near the villages; in Müller's day, the dead were buried in an isolated place on the family estate or in an uninhabited area. Both the *taliiw* as burial places and as shrine locations were off-limits and thus taboo places. But the shrines were also sacred places—hence the modern meaning of *taliiw* as "holy place," :taboo place," or "cemetery" (Jensen 1977, 66).

42. See the table in the next section, where Lingenfelter defines "female as a binary opposition to male," thus causing ritual pollution.
43. Müller wrote that there is no generic title for priest, and *paqtäliiw* refers to all those entitled to enter the shrine precincts (*taliiw*), which were normally off-limits or taboo places (1917, 323). At certain times of the year, unidentified people would enter the precincts to clear the brush, rebuild the fences and repair the house of the god (*kan*) and the priest's dwelling. Müller, however, repeatedly refers to the *tamaarong* of the main shrines as a "priest" (Priester).
44. Müller 1917, 364; Salesius 1906, 119; Walleser 1967, 1–2.
45. Giltemaw, one of the last four high priests (*polui*) of Teb, had served on one of O'Keefe's trading ships and thus conversed with Müller in English (Müller 1917).
46. See Hezel (1983) and Hanlon's (1988) descriptions of the influence of outsiders on the Pohnpeian chiefs. The Palauan case of interaction with the foreign powers is also instructive: On Palau, the leading chiefs co-opted the power (literally, the firepower) of the foreigners and increased their own visible power.
47. This description of the ritual calendar summarizes Lingenfelter's description and analysis (1979).
48. The cognate in the modern twelve-month calendar is *Munyabwog*, or June; *Tafgif* is *Tafgiif* or July, *Makan* is *Maakaan* or August, and in the modern solar calendar, *Rir* becomes *Rür* or October (Pugram et al. 2001, 52ff.). Each major shrine of old set its own calendar.
49. As described by Müller, the calendars of the main *taliiw* shrines were based on the seasons for the planting, harvesting, and distributing of crops.
50. According to Lingenfelter, at some shrines the appearance of the Pleiades marked the beginning of the new year. Across Micronesia, the constellations of the Pleiades and Antares were important markers in the calendars, mythology, and ritual of the islanders.

Chapter 8: The Religion of Palau

1. There are numerous variants in Kubary, Krämer, Semper, and Parmentier. I have used those from Semper 1873 or Parmentier 1987. Such selection does not do justice to the rich data available through comparing of the different versions.
2. Most of this summary is taken from Parmentier (1987, 129ff.).
3. It is not clear in Parmentier's version if the clam is preexistent or was created by *Ucheliangl*. The clam is not a common creation symbol elsewhere in Micronesia except in Kiribati, where *Nareau* separates the heavens and earth by prying open a giant clam. Parmentier cites a parallel Vanuatu story of a clam that arises from the sea (1987, 131n2).

4. Parmentier argues that the Palauan word for heaven is in Proto-Austronesian related to the Chuukic word for the heavens, *lang* (1987, 131). His contention that the heavens are really the earth is similar to the Chuukic identification for the heavens as also referring to earthbound locations where the spirits resided, as proposed by Käser (1977) and Goodenough (2002).
5. *Chelid* is a generic word for "god"; *ruchel* are gods with a special mission: They are heavenly messengers.
6. The one exception may be Yap, if one can accept Müller's claim for Yap belief in a god who creates the heavens, the earth, the sea, and the world-beneath-the-sea by "just thinking" (1917).
7. This description comes from Hijikata Hisakatsu (1997, 270ff.). It is much the same as his description of the universe of the Chuukic-speaking Satawal Islanders, with whom he lived for eight years. The view of the cosmos is one of the major similarities between Palauan religion and that of their neighbors.
8. Parmentier challenges this interpretation, which is found both in Hijikata and Krämer. According to Parmentier, myth has *Ucheliangl* commanding that a bridge be built from the surface beneath the sea up to Babeldaob, which is heaven. The interpretation is unique but does reinforce two important features. First, the Micronesian cosmos includes not an underworld (some sort of a Hades or hell), but a world-under-the-sea. Second, the Palauan universe emphasized the sea and land, rather than some heaven above the earth (1987, 137).
9. Parmentier repeatedly describes *Ucheliangl* as a "high god" but says nothing about who else belongs to this category. Krämer, it seems to me, comes nearer to the truth when he proposes that *Ucheliangl* may be a general term for a group of gods or that *Ucheliangl* may be manifest in a variety of forms mistakenly identified as separate gods (1926, 339).
10. This term appears to be a cognate of the Chuuk word for the patron god of warriors and the word for "rainbow" (*Resiim*). The Yap cognate (*ragim*), however, means only "rainbow."
11. Kubary recorded that the soul in a living body, the *adalbengel,* is called *deleb* after death (1888, 1). He does not describe any transformation of the living soul to *deleb*. *Deleb* in the old religion becomes the generic term for spirits of the dead; *bladek,* on the other hand, are one's own ancestor spirits, the family spirits (see Josephs 1990, 21, 71, 91).
12. Kubary describes the *reakl* as a desklike contrivance for offerings put on the cross beams or in a corner (1888, 6). In the Josephs dictionary, the word means only beams used for storage (1990, 282).
13. On the contemporary beliefs and practices, see Hezel (2001); the most extensive early records are from Kubary (1888 and 1889) and Krämer (1926), whose description is based on a funeral he witnessed in 1910.

14. Earl Jernigan (1973) gives descriptions and details about these miniature houses or shrines, which at least until recently have been built by the same persons who carved the storyboards. The *Ulengang* was decorated much like a miniature *bai* except that it did not have a decorated front. "The smaller *blil a chelid* incorporate also a *bai*-like structure. Most of these have representations of the *chelid* or its associated animal" (1973, 76).
15. Whether such offerings are to be considered "sacrifice" depends on the prerequisites for sacrifice. If the core of sacrifice is something given to the gods and at least believed to be consumed by the spirits, then this is an example of sacrifice. The belief elsewhere (Yap and Chuuk) was that the soul of the offering was eaten by the spirits, so it did not matter if a human ate the offering. If, on the other hand, the core of sacrifice is the destruction of an animal, then this Palauan example, by dint of definition from the outside world, does not rank with the Western concept of sacrifice. Animals were sometimes killed as a sacrifice to the angry *chelid,* but there is little record of this practice (Kubary 1888, 27).
16. The distinction is based on Kubary (1888). However useful the distinction is for classification, it seems to be an imposed distinction, not one that the Palauans made.
17. This stone was probably the *kingall,* which was viewed as the seat of the *chelid*. Parmentier was told of one such "seat of the god" that was carried from the village by a men's club in order to protect it from destruction by the German authorities (1987, 218).
18 Were the *korong* really priests or "just" diviners? I follow the usage from Kubary to Parmentier in identifying the *korong* as priests. I do so because they had a certain recognized status in service of the political structure; they maintained shrines to the divine on the occasion of the needs of the village or district about such critical questions as "war or peace." As far as I know, the *korong* were not the possessors and guardians of a canonical corpus of beliefs and practices, nor did they learn an elaborate cycle of rituals. On the other hand, they were not free-lance dabblers in the occult; theirs was a recognized status and one in service of the group. For Kubary, who had seen more than his share of priests in Poland and Germany and magicians throughout the Pacific, the *korong* was a "powerfully developed priestly institution" whereby the *chelid* communicated with humans (1888, 19).
19. "Friend" was not a sentimental attachment but a status of high standing. The "friend" would, for example, have special duties and obligations upon the death of his patron. If Reklai was impressed by Kubary, it may have had to do with the already established pattern in Palauan politics that foreigners could help or hinder the political security and ambitions of their Palauan patron.

20. Now and again the old religions of Micronesia have been called animistic, centered on a belief that the things and elements of nature are themselves the gods or spirits. In examining beliefs such as those surrounding the work of the Palauan house or canoe builder or of someone walking through the woods, I am not certain Palauans or other Micronesians personified the trees. They did, however, believe that the spirit of the tree must be appeased or apologized to.
21. In Palau, as elsewhere in the Austronesian world, there is a connection "between the notion of foreign provenance and the idea of sacred power" (Parmentier 1987, 38–39); Parmentier cites as evidence, among others, Sahlins (1985, 82).
22. Is *datk* the earth or islands, or is it the land beneath the sea? Joseph's dictionary says *datk* means "earth as opposed to heaven" (1990, 68), but Krämer described three levels of the cosmos: above, below (earth), and the lower world (*datk*) (1926, 336).
23. Head-hunting was supposedly eliminated by a peace treaty between the leading power alliances under British auspices in 1883 (Hezel 1983, 280–281).
24. Based on their fieldwork of the 1960s and a return visit in 1972, the Forces observed that some Palauans still kept a portion of the house as *eleng,* but that the word now usually refers to a closet or small room where valuables are kept to keep them from being stolen (Force and Force 1972, 106).
25. On Tobi, the chief lodged the Hamburg Expedition members in large-dimension houses of worship, the only such dwelling-size structure recorded in Micronesia. Paul Hambruch lived in one "shrine," eight by five meters and with a height of eight meters. In the one occupied by the Krämers, a ceremony took place in front of a kind of altar with a great "ghost-canoe" hanging overhead (Hellwig 1927, 200).
26. Krämer's description of the *korong* (1926, 341) is almost a sentence-by-sentence paraphrase of Kubary. My description here is likewise drawn mostly from Kubary for the simple reason that he and perhaps Karl Semper are among the few whose records are eyewitness accounts. In fact, I doubt that there is any more detailed eyewitness description of ritual possession in all the old reports from Micronesia.
27. The nonperforming *korong* was speaking for the god *Melek*.
28. The "handbasket" is today sometimes called the "betel basket" because it now has all the ingredients for preparing betel for chewing. Formerly, this handbag contained personal items such as protective amulets. It was such a personal effect that sometimes it was hung in the house of a deceased person and was regarded as the dwelling place of that person's spirit; it was one of the potential places where the living leader of the group might place offerings to the ancestors.

29. No one of status in nineteenth-century Palau was without Palauan "money," which was not so much a currency of exchange as a symbol of status and rank. Kubary calculated that his "money" was worth four thousand pieces of taro according to Samoan prices, or about a hundred dollars—no small sum at that time.
30. "Except for the revivalism of the Modekngei religion, the old gods are by and large ignored, supplanted by new deities of Christian faith or modern technology" (Force and Force 1972, 106n16).
31. "The local priest (*korong*) or spokesman of a god could be a powerful political agent, since these religious functionaries control the system of prophecy (*omengelil*) and tribute (*tenget*) offered to the god" (Parmentier 1987, 74). Parmentier makes reference to Andrew Cheyne experiencing this (74ff.). He may exaggerate the control over prophecy exercised by the *korong* because there were—and I am told there still are—people who specialize in divining, and they were there even in the days of Kubary.
32. *Korong* might be male or female. In fact, Krämer found the office of priestess to be especially powerful because certain *chelid* revealed themselves only to women. He adds the curious note that these priestesses were considered sacred by the old folk, but such was not the case with the male priests (1926, 343).
33. See, for example, the publications on birth traditions recorded by the Palau Society of Historians (1997, 1998b). In the earlier and fuller volume, there is no mention of any appeal to the gods or spirits (1997, 31ff.). The description of a funeral in the same publication by the Palau Society of Historians describes the continuing use of a diviner and a conjuration ceremony (39ff.).
34. Most of the detail for death, burial, and mourning is taken from Krämer and brought up to date by Parmentier (1988). Others such as Kubary give additional detail that is noted in the in-text citations. As Parmentier notes, the old and recent evidence—eyewitness sources—for the funeral and mourning date back to 1783 and into the postwar period with descriptions from Barnett (1949), DeVerne Reed Smith (1988) and Parmentier himself (1988, 307n2). As such, the Palauan funeral and mourning ritual is probably the best eyewitness account of any religious ritual in Micronesia.
35. Compare this with Käser's description of the soul belief in the Chuuk Lagoon (1977).
36. Ambiguity concerning the spirit of the deceased is a widely held Micronesian belief. I would say that Palauan belief—the reaction of ambiguity regarding the deceased immediately after death—is functionally the equivalent of the dual soul concept found in old beliefs of the Yap and Chuukic people.

37. Two words are used in the literature to refer to the spirits of deceased persons: *bladek* and *deleb*. Both Kubary and Krämer claimed that the *deleb* became a *bladek s*ometime after death (Kubary 1888, 1). Separation of body and soul made the spirit or soul a *deleb*. During the postdeath ceremonies, the *deleb* becomes or is recognized as a *bladek*.
38. The Palauan journey of the soul is similar to that for Yap. The similarity may well be of recent origin, when both Yapese and Palauans were working in the German phosphate operations on Angaur.
39. The image of "jumping off" into the final destination of the soul is found elsewhere in Micronesia and Polynesia.
40. *Deliakldui* can mean either a coconut frond or a group of fronds tied together as a symbol of power. It can also mean the title of a village chief or family head (Josephs 1990, 84).
41. *Blai* is another of those words with a broad range of meaning. It can mean either the house itself—in this case, probably the house of the deceased or the members of the family (see Josephs 1990, 21).
42. Kubary observed that before dawn of the third day, the *gelel a ajalej*—food for the spirit—is placed in front of the house in the form of a great heap of taro. Then the legal friend of the deceased may come and get it (1885, 5).
43. This is really a handbag woven out of coconut fronds, which is still used to hold ingredients for chewing betel. In the past it might also hold items that were sacred or dear to the individual, such as amulets. In this use, the Palauan handbag is like the medicine bundle of the American Plains Indians.
44. By and large, grave goods—defined as offerings to help the soul make it to the land of bliss—were lacking or unimportant in Micronesia.
45. There are some hair-splitting distinctions here. The house of death is *taur,* and so cooking is forbidden in the house, according to Kubary (1885, 5). However, Josephs defines *taur* as a mourning period for chiefs (1990, 316). The fact is that the record is most probably only about the funerals for titled people. Funerals for commoners may have been considerably less elaborate.
46. Kubary noted that a child and an oil lamp stay there for several nights and food is placed in the hut (1885, 5–7, 9).
47. *Orrekim* is the contemporary word for "rainbow" and is the modern spelling of Kubary's god, *Horekim*. In Chuuk, there is a similar connection between the god of war and the rainbow.
48. Here "container" refers to a large pottery container in which coconut syrup was kept; the enemy's blood is the syrup dedicated to *Horekim* (Kubary 1888, 30).
49. Palauans refer to their stones and monuments in this way. Thus, they are sacred (*meang el bad*), are external signs (*olangch*), or are reminders of the past (*ngeschel a cherachar*). See Parmentier (1987, 311ff.).

50. See the colored drawings of the *bai* carvings done by Elizabeth Krämer at the end of volume 5 of the Palau segment of *Ergebnisse der Südsee Expedition* (Krämer 1929b).

Chapter 9: The Religion of Kiribati and Nauru

1. Origins are difficult to pinpoint for most Micronesian regions, but for Kiribati the oral histories are consistent and strong: The people came from Samoa. Although they may not have been the first inhabitants of the atolls, they became the dominant culture, with only hints in the mythology that there had been a group before them, described as small and Negroid, like the Negritos of Malaysia and the Philippines.
2. Hambruch had spent some time on Nauru before joining the Hamburg Expedition; he was analyzing poor production of island coconut palms.
3. The best works on myths are Grimble 1972 and Grimble 1989 (the footnotes with commentaries on Grimble's works are by Harry Maude). See also Maude and Maude 1994.
4. There are many variations on this myth. Sabatier has taken the version recorded by Grimble on the atoll of Abemama. For the original, see Grimble 1972, 39ff.
5. The meaning of *Nareau* is "spider," a meaning that was retained and developed in the Nauruan mythology. While the spider as mythological being was not common in Micronesia, it was also found on Palau on meeting house (*bai*) carvings. See later in this chapter the section on the religion of Nauru, where two gods appear as the "Old Spider" and the "Young Spider."
6. Compare the myths for Kiribati of *Nareau* the Seeker with the Chuukic *Olifat* (*Wonofáát*) the trickster and *Enúúnap* the creator. The father-son or older-younger duo appears in Yap as *Yelafad* the younger (trickster) and *Yelafad* (the creator) (Müller 1917, 315–316, and 1918, 316–317).
7. The deceased Kiribati journeyed via mythical atolls until they reached another mythic isle, *Matang;* in other myths, they went to the edge of the horizon, whence they continued to the world-under-the-sea.
8. The process of preserving myths and legends in school textbooks is going on in other Micronesian regions. This process, as I have seen it in the recent textbooks, is welcomed by the parents of elementary and high school students. The parents want to see the old traditions passed on to their children. It remains to be seen, however, whether this process of remythologizing education will endure without the framework of the storytellers, the chants and songs, and the ritual that once accompanied the mythologies.
9. It is noteworthy that the myth of nearby Banaba contains an origin separate from Kiribati, while more distant Nauru has many cultural and religious parallels—perhaps borrowings—from Kiribati.

10. The turtle appeared as a goddess from Kiribati in Marshallese myth and is associated with the powers given to *Letao* the Trickster.
11. See Lessa 1961 for similar myths about father and son in Chuukic mythology.
12. Although these huge and magnificently designed community centers were for gatherings of all sorts, many ceremonies of a religious nature, especially those honoring the sun god, were performed in the *maneaba* (Grimble 1972; Maude 1994, 220–221).
13. Three to four days after death (with notable exceptions) was the Micronesian time when the spirit left the land of the living on its journey to the life after. During or at the end of this period, the deceased spirit was transformed into a godlike spirit (*antiaomata*).
14. Compare this with ritual on Yap to separate the head of a priest or magician from his buried body.
15. For Butaritari and Makin, the island of the deceased is *Matang;* for other atolls, *Bouru* is the island (Grimble 1972, 90). Still other atolls say the place of the deceased is called *Mone* and is located beyond the western horizon (87), in the depths of the sea, or even in the world-beneath-the-sea (1989, 32 and 355).
16. The Kiribati belief combines two Micronesian destinies for human beings: a judgment on the "evil heart" and a series of tests: tattooing, getting past the banging boulders. The test of the banging boulders is found also in Chuuk.
17. The stones around the monolith are described elsewhere as forming a square; here they are a circle.
18. The source quoted here does not identify who this leader was. He was not described as the diviner and medium, the *ibonga.* The leader may have been a chief or headman.
19. Which English word is used to translate the various terms for "calling" will lean the reader toward either a magical or a religious understanding of this ritual. "Calling" or "summoning" can imply ritual, which forces the powers to come; "invoking," however, better implies prayer and beseeching.
20. See Sabatier (1977, 60–61) for a good description of medicine, the *ibonga,* the gods, and the experience of Robert Louis Stevenson.
21. Grimble once officially rebutted the accusations of some Protestant missionaries who wanted the Kiribati dances banned because they were immoral. Grimble's reply (1989) is a brilliant defense of the "rights of pagans."
22. An endnote by the translator indicates that the words are not names but mean "instruct me, come to this place and guide me" (Maude 1977, 359n5).
23. This is not the only example in Micronesia where gods—not ancestor or nature spirits—possess the living. The generalization that only spirits possess persons is not correct for Micronesia.

24. According to Bender, Nauruan is generally classified as a Micronesian language, but no close affinities have thus far been established with languages inside and outside Micronesia (1971, 426–427).
25. In Nauru myth, there are two spider gods, *Areop enap* and *Areop it eonin*. They are parallel to the three Kiribati gods: *Nareau* the Father, *Nareau* the Son, and *Nareau* the Trickster.
26. In an interesting contrast, the *akejab* of the Marshalls are often natural markers—stones and natural features in the sea such as whirlpools—that were once human beings.
27. Yap mythology is the clearest other example of a father being a creator god and the son being a trickster, both with the same name.
28. Note the similarity of this metaphor with that of the Marshallese soul/spirit in a short or long canoe, voyaging to the island of the dead. The Nauruan abode of the dead as at the end of the horizon shows one more variant on where the dead go: another island, the heavens, the world-beneath-the-sea, or to the end of the horizon. I think the basic image in this Nauruan myth is a widespread, even worldwide image of the dead going into the western sunset.
29. The clearest parallel is Palau, where the head of the extended family kept a shrine to the ancestors and there made offerings of food.
30. Krämer, for example, argued that the toy outriggers and the race associated with the Chuuk breadfruit ritual were interpreted as a race to bring the breadfruit spirits from the mythic south to the islands (1932). Flying kites on Yap and elsewhere in the Pacific was also a game associated with the spirit world.

Chapter 10: Conclusions

1. Research can be muddled by poor methodology or the blind-eyed bias of the anthropologist. I trust readers will point out to me any instances they find of the muddied ethnographic waters.
2. On the surface, the Palauan case looks like the priest-chiefs of old Pohnpei. In the Palauan case, however, the medium ruled *for* the god (a theocracy) and not as a representative of the gods—a fine distinction indeed.
3. According to Pohnpeian myth, upon his appearance in a canoe in the sky, the high priest of Wene climbed up into the canoe and discussed plans for Pohnpei's future. Together, *Luk* and the high priest of Wene set down the new polity of autonomous chiefdoms led by twin lines of royalty and nobility, all of which remains in force today.
4. Hezel and I have already examined divination with trance and possession for the Chuuk Lagoon and then broadened our query to see where in the literature or in our interviews we could find possession and/or trance (Dobbin and Hezel 1995 and 1996).

5. For the evidence, see Dobbin and Hezel 1996, 47.
6. Although examples of the intertwining of healing and religion can be found throughout Micronesia, research on curing and healing in Micronesia has produced only two doctoral dissertations: Frank Mahony, "A Truk Theory of Medicine" (1970) and Roger Ward, "Pohnpeian Healing" (1977). Thanks to the fieldwork of Mahony and Ward, excellent evidence exists for those two regions. See Peter Black (1999) on psychological and medical anthropology in Micronesia.
7. To its credit, the Hamburg Expedition of 1908–1910 published several volumes dedicated to myth, poems, and dance songs. None of these have been published in English.
8. The raised platforms of Polynesia, especially those in Hawai'i, are often called temples, although the basalt-lined platforms of Nan Madol and Kosrae are on a grander scale.
9. This stone is believed to be the platform or altar from which Pohnpei received its name: *pohn,* literally "upon,'" and *pei,* a word that could mean "stone," "pile of stones," or "altar."
10. Ward Goodenough proposed a Micronesian sky god cult associated with basalt monuments as the sacred symbols. His thesis called into question some presumed associations, such as the Pohnpeian and Chuukic *Katau* as the equivalent of Kosrae, but for lack of evidence, the proposed association of basalt monuments and a sky god cult is not compelling.
11. Only in Kiribati is cannibalism actually documented. Harry Maude wrote, "Oral tradition is too explicit for there to be any doubt . . . that the Gilbertese were formerly cannibals, mainly for ritualistic reasons or as an ultimate expression of contempt or hatred" (Sabatier 1977, 364n21).
12. Sabatier occasionally uses the phrase but seems to mean just the dirty tricks of the *ibonga,* the Kiribati sorcerer, magician, and diviner (1977, 339).
13. Kiribati could be an exception here. Grimble (1972 and 1989) and Sabatier (1977) stress the magical formulas and ritual repetitions in Kiribati religion.

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INDEX

Xxxxxxx xxxxx xxxxxx xxx xxx
xxxxxx xxxx xxxxx xxx

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Jay Dobbin is a Roman Catholic priest with doctoral degrees in theology and anthropology. Between short stints of parish work and teaching theology, he has spent years teaching undergraduate anthropology at the University of Maryland and pursuing research on altered states of consciousness and trance-dancing ritual in the British West Indies. His Caribbean fieldwork, published in 1986 as *The Jombee Dance of Monterrat,* studied altered states in religious ritual. Later he worked with Francis X. Hezel, director of Micronesian Seminar, on two published studies, tracing the role of trance in the old religions of the area and analyzing spirit possession and trance phenomena throughout contemporary Micronesia. He has also published on social issues, such as drugs and heavy emigration, as they affect Micronesia today. At present he is retired and doing parish work in Montana.

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