



Powers, Plumes and Piglets

Phenomena of
Melanesian Religion

edited by
Norman C. Habel

Australian Association for the Study of Religions



Carole Cusack
1999

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Preface

Most of the articles in this volume were written for a workshop on Melanesian Religions held at the Melanesian Institute, Goroka, Papua New Guinea in May 1978. The workshop was sponsored by the Charles Strong Memorial Trust and the Melanesian Institute in cooperation with the Australian Association for the Study of Religions.

The participants of the workshop were a combination of Melanesians from various professions, expatriates living and working in Melanesia and a small number of academics from the University of Papua New Guinea and Australia. This combination of participants led to a healthy interaction of ideas and enabled the clarification of many features of the articles discussed.

The aim of the conference was one of mutual education in the field of Melanesian Religion. The goal was to consider representative examples of the various types of religious phenomena found in Melanesia and a selection of approaches to the interpretation of such phenomena. It was hoped that the resultant material would be a valuable synopsis of such phenomena and suitable as a textbook. In fact, many of the articles which were contributed were more original than expected and the materials included reflected examples and interpretations of many rites and customs which have been ignored or given scant attention to date. Some of the articles of the conference have been printed in *Point* and *Catalyst*, publications of the Melanesian Institute.

Much of this original material is of a descriptive nature with a relatively small amount of critical analysis or interpretation. But that in no way minimizes its value. Other articles from the pens of scholars present are of an analytical nature, representative of diverse approaches to the study of the phenomena. Accordingly we have divided the material into two main groups, broadly classified as descriptive and analytical, thereby facilitating the educational use of the book. The categories into which the materials are divided reflect the major focus of the articles involved in each case and are

consistent with recent classification language used in several disciplines.

I would like to thank the Charles Strong Trust for its substantial contribution toward the promotion of the Writer's Workshop at Goroka and the production of this book. I would also like to express my appreciation to the Melanesian Institute for hosting the Workshop and, in particular, to two of its staff, Wendy Flannery and Jim Knight, for their assistance in the collection and preparation of articles in this volume. Thanks are also in order to various people who assisted in the editing of this volume, specifically Clair Woods-Elliott, Garry Trompf of the University of Sydney, and Victor Hayes the Publications Chairman of the Australian Association for the Study of Religions under whose auspices this book will appear.

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