

# Introduction

The title of this volume, *Powers, Plumes and Piglets*, points to the major categories of religious phenomena treated by its authors. The *Powers* range from creator gods to mythic ancestors, the spirits of the dead and magical 'heat'. *Plumes* highlight the colorful world of rite and symbol which sustains life through close interrelationship with these powers. *Piglets* mark the strong bond between the spiritual realm and the practical activities of gardening, raising animals, trading and accumulating traditional wealth.

A standard text for students of Melanesian religion for many years has been *Gods, Ghosts and Men in Melanesia* by Meggitt and Lawrence (O.U.P., 1965). The articles collected in that volume concentrate on the beliefs and practices typical of specific societies such as the Kyaka, the Mae Enga or the Ngaing. In their introduction Meggitt and Lawrence provide students with a broad definition of Melanesian Religion and its relationship to the environment, the socio-economic system and the world view of the people.

The present volume is not intended to duplicate the work of Meggitt and Lawrence, but to offer specific examples of types of religious phenomena in Melanesia. Many of these examples are presented as local descriptions which the student may wish to interpret in a particular way. Other examples are analyzed in depth according to a variety of approaches. Accordingly the contents of the book are divided into *Religious Phenomena* and *Interpreting Religious Phenomena*. The examples in the second part of the book provide alternative models for interpreting religious data from this part of the world.

As a guide to the many types of religious phenomena cited or treated by the authors in this volume it seems appropriate to present an introductory classification of the basic phenomena. Such a survey will enable students to view at a glance the range and kinds of phenomena typical of Melanesian religions. Not all phenomena appear in each clan of Melanesia; nor are all of equal importance; but most of them are common to many Melanesian societies. Such a

classification is also of value for comparing patterns and categories of religious phenomena in other tribal or non-tribal religions. The categories employed in this classification are common to several disciplines. Those categories and classifications included, however, will be representative rather than exhaustive.

## Beliefs

### Spiritual Beings and Powers

#### *Creator Gods/Heroes*

Belief in a powerful deity who once created the world, the earth or major portions of the environment is found in parts of Melanesia. In some cases, as with Tawa of the Wassisi (van Hees) this deity has retired into the background as a high god who no longer regulates life. Other figures such as Tudava of the Trobriands (Lacey) transform specific clan territories and their creative influence is confined to a specific location.

#### *Divine Rulers*

Some deities of Melanesia are concerned primarily with the task of ruling, regulating and determining the life of society, albeit, often from a distant vantage point in the sky (Lacey) or a mountain. The name of this deity is often not revealed to the people. *Nanaranga awine* of the Manam (Franks), for example, is not the name of the deity but an expression meaning 'bigman god'. The Spirit living in the cave of the Huli (Gayala) is designated 'The One we Worship' by the elders of the clan. Among the Mekeo (Stephen) A'asia, who established the social rather than the physical order, continues to preside over the world of the spirits and direct human life through the social structures he has ordained.

#### *Dema Deities*

It is characteristic of *dema* deities that their death in the primordial era was a creative process. From their body, or parts thereof, natural phenomena such as plants, animals or rocks, are brought into being. The essence of the past deity or demi-god usually persists in these phenomena. In some cases, as with Toitama (Flannery) the joints of the god's dead body are consumed by the first humans who thereupon multiply rapidly. His spiritual essence lives on in the tribe; at a communal feast the worshippers reenact the eating of his body and participate in his power. Not all scholars would differentiate between *dema* deities and Culture Heroes.

#### *Culture Heroes and Founders*

Culture heroes and clan founders are common in the myths and legends of Melanesia. These divine or semi-divine ancestral figures

discover or introduce significant components of society or culture. Clan identity, clan totems, sacred symbols, rituals, special skills, fire and similar features of tribal culture are believed to originate with these great hero ancestors of the distant past. In his article on *Heroes, Journeys and Change*, Lacey explores the role and significance of these figures in the oral traditions of several Melanesian societies.

### *Nature Spirits*

Spirits, who are neither deities nor recent dead, are believed to inhabit trees, lakes, forests or other parts of nature. These spirits are regularly called *masalai* (Pidgin) and vary considerably in power and interests, though they tend to be mischievous or evil. Kelfene (Trompf), who inhabits lakes or streams, is attracted by menstrual blood or by little children. He is capable of swallowing humans in the waters he inhabits. On occasion these spirits will assume human form to seduce or injure real humans. Other spirits, such as Sofungro (Crockett), attempt to steal the soul of a child in the womb and so prevent delivery. It is generally considered dangerous, therefore, to travel beyond the ordered territory of the clan into the bush world where such spirits abound.

### *Clan Dead (Tumbuna)*

The individual spirits of the recent departed are regularly distinguished from the clan dead as a totality (the *tumbuna*). This community of ancestors participates in various ways in the social and ritual life of the living. These ancestral spirits enjoy the display of wealth at pig-kills or marriages and are pleased by the aroma of the feasts or sacrifices in their honour, the essence of which they imbibe through the aroma or blood. Their anger can cause bad seasons or communal sickness; their goodwill can ensure prosperity and health. To a greater or smaller degree this belief obtains in all the clans discussed in this volume.

Among the Gari (Prendeville) the ancestors were believed to journey from the land of the dead to visit the great spirit Masobaga enthroned in his canoe during a night of vigil and celebration. The ancestral spirits are believed to be present among the skulls and images of the Sope house in the Solomon Islands; through their presence, power (mana) and prosperity are mediated to the living (Tuza).

In his discussion of *Tambu*, the traditional sacred shell money of the Tolai, Tovaninara describes the close relationship of the spirits of the dead with sacred money. This money is the guarantee of contact with the spirits. In the Iniat Society of the Tolai (Tovaninara) these ancestral spirits are closely identified with the masked *tubuan* dancers. The presence of the ancestors is mediated through masks in a number of Melanesian societies; in the ritual the mask becomes the ancestor.

### *Recent Dead*

It is a widespread belief in Melanesian religion that after death the spirit of the deceased lives on to influence the living. These spirits are often prone to injure the living but on occasions can be kind or protective. The presence of such spirits is apparent in the stirring of the wind, the flash of a firefly, the swaying of a suspended vine and the call of a bird or an unusual noise in the night. Esau Tuza describes examples of how these spirits manifested their presence in his community, and the ways employed to draw or repel them. Examples of benevolent recent dead are found among the Wassisi (van Hees) who claim, "My dead father is with me and looks after me wherever I go. He gives me strength and protects me."

### *Supernatural Power*

The supernatural power associated with many sacred objects, places, persons or acts is neither the deity nor the spirit as such, though they may be involved in the background. The *isapu* employed in Mekeo magic (Stephen) illustrates this phenomenon. "*Isapu*, like heat, radiates from an object and one only has to touch or even come close to an object heavily charged with it to be 'burnt'." This is the power which the magician or sorcerer must possess or control to be successful. The spirits, however, have even more potent *isapu* than the magician.

This phenomenon is similar to that of *mana* as identified by Codrington. Tuza quotes Codrington's famous description of this impersonal power or influence: "It is present in the atmosphere of life, attaches itself to persons or things, and is manifested by results which can only be ascribed to its operations." Tuza maintains that in the Solomon Islands this sacred energy is considered a salutary power. It is not the physical force that fells a tree, but that mysterious power which directs the tree to avoid hitting the passer-by. The great warrior, the wise healer or the sacred ritual expert have *mana* which benefits the community. The *mana* of such people persists even after death; as spirits they are not the source of *mana* but continue to use *mana* to influence the world of the living. The secret source of a person's *mana* may be revealed to another, especially at the point of dying. *Mana* was thought to be localized in sacred objects or places; the skull of a dead chief or the stones of a fertility rite could be highly charged with this type of supernatural energy and therefore dangerous to the ordinary person.

### **Human Beings**

The wide range of Melanesian beliefs about the nature and role of human beings in their various relationships with society, spirits, deities and the environment are too numerous to list here. The following examples of beliefs about the human soul and the human condition are offered as a representative selection derived from the articles in this volume.

### *Body-Soul*

Common to most tribes of Melanesia is the belief that each human being possesses a soul or spirit which can leave the body and return. Soul travel may happen during dreams or periods of illness. The soul of a Manam shamaness may journey to the land of the dead in search of the soul of a dying member of her clan (Franks).

Many Solomon Islanders believe in two souls or spirits (Tuza). Harmony between them assures prosperity and health; their departure signals death. The first of these, the *pota zosa*, is the 'walking spirit', which is free to visit the world of the spirits during sleep. The second, the *pota kokua*, resides permanently in the heart and at death departs through the nostrils. Relatives try to prevent this departure by placing a hand over the nose. In a few societies the soul of the ancestor is believed to return and be reborn in a child of the clan (Trompf).

### *Hot-Cold*

To be hot in Melanesia usually means to be charged with supernatural, magical or special power (such as *mana*). This is true of humans as well as objects. Stephen describes in detail how the Mekeo magician seeks to generate this heat in his body so as to increase the efficacy of his rituals. He may therefore avoid specific food, places or activities appropriate for ordinary people. Foods like ginger would be eaten to intensify this inner heat.

Among the Makru-Mansuku heat is believed to be located especially in the male genitals (Crockett). This heat builds up in the man after performing magic rituals, such as hunting rites. Before intercourse with his bride, the groom has to 'cool off' so as not to block conception or cause injury to the child.

### *Fertility-Infertility*

Fertility is a process which can be stimulated or stemmed by the appropriate rites. Among tribes such as the Makru-Mansuku conception is thought to occur when the 'water' of the man mixes with the blood of the woman. Frequent intercourse is needed until the father has 'worked' each part of the baby. Once the baby is created and foetal movements are felt, intercourse is forbidden. Infertility in women is not considered normal; it is thought to be caused by the woman performing magical rites or, in other clans, by the interference of spirits.

Many Melanesian societies believe that there is a strong connection between the sexual intercourse of humans and the fertility of their gardens or herds. Among the Makru-Mansuku the 'spirit' or power (*smel*) generated by the act of intercourse can interfere with the growth of crops or the outcome of war. Such intercourse is therefore taboo in the gardens or on crisis occasions. In other areas intercourse in the garden is considered a stimulus to the fertility of the crops.

### *Illness-Health*

Health is the expected norm for all humans, young or old; it results from a harmony of spiritual powers with the physical and the social order. Illness is due to the intrusion of an alien force. Kolandi identifies three major causes of illness which appear to be typical of many areas of Melanesia. The first is illness caused by poison (sorcery) directed at a person by a sorcerer, witch or enemy. The poison initiated by the appropriate magic penetrates the body and brings sickness. The second variety is produced by ancestral or bush spirits implanting a sickness in the individual. The third is caused by the negative powers generated when an individual violates a clan law or taboo. The offence produces an unhealthy reaction within the offender. In most cases appropriate ritual acts are needed to cure the sickness and restore harmony to the clan.

### **Afterlife**

#### *Death-Life*

For the Melanesian life is lived with a high consciousness of death. Death itself is "the most important event in a person's career"; it is the beginning of a new life as an ancestor. Trompf explores the significance of this feature of the Melanesian world view in depth. In Melanesia the dead are ever present among the living; the dead are part of the clan. Death myths, rites of passage, corpses on public display, infant mortality, sickness and war are constant reminders of the pervasive nature of death and the world of the dead in the human life-cycle.

#### *Land of the Dead*

While in many clans the dead have a continuous or periodic presence among the living, there is also a common belief in some distant land for the dead. Among the Gari speaking people, ancestors come from their home across the sea to participate in the Festival of the Seventh Month (Prendeville). Franks records the myth of a man who visited the land of the dead and returned; he was forced to return because the living are taboo in the land of the dead, but not *vice versa*!

Among the Manam, as with many other societies, this place is one of happiness, peace and celebration (Franks). The entire clan of the departed is reunited in a land free from fear and trouble. In some societies it is believed that those who were wicked in life or suffered a violent end are forced to live in the bush or some less comfortable place and forbidden entry to the land of peace with their forebears (Trompf).

#### *Journey of the Soul*

Franks describes a Manam belief in the journey of the soul to the land of the dead. His description is typical of such beliefs. After the

proper rites are performed the soul travels on a dangerous road from which it must not deviate. Upon arrival at the other world the soul must pass a number of tests and offer the appropriate payment before entry. Trompf quotes an account of the journey of the soul on a great serpent to the land of Tum. Those who fall from the serpent turn into fish. Those who survive the ride and display the correct tattoo marks to the old woman at the entrance to Tum can enter into bliss.

## **Myths and Legends**

Among the types of sacred stories included in this collection of religious phenomena from Melanesia, myths and legends predominate. For our purposes here we classify myths as narratives dealing with the creative events of the primordial which charter present reality. Legends are stories about the remembered ancestors of the past. Flannery explores the nature of Melanesian myth and demonstrates her approach in the interpretation of a Baktaman clan myth.

### **Creation Myths**

Myths dealing with the creation of the cosmos are not common in Melanesia and none are cited in this collection. Creation of specific territories, however, is a frequent theme. The creative deeds of Tudava in producing the island of Kitava are typical (Lacey).

### **Death Myths**

A Manam death myth recorded by Franks is typical of the reversal of rebirth pattern found in death myths of other cultures. Originally humans could shed their body and be reborn as young people. This process is reversed by the interference of a decisive passion or accident. In the Manam example the woman resumes her old body out of compassion for her weeping grandchild who could no longer recognize her grandmother. Thereafter all humans die. In the Tolai example cited by Flannery the process of rejuvenation is halted by the unwillingness of a son to light a fire and keep the mother warm after she had shed her old skin.

Another type of death myth involves an act of rejection or disobedience directed toward a deity. The myth describing the curse of Sau given by Trompf illustrates this type. By rejecting the sexual advances of Sau the primordial ancestress brought the curse of fighting and death upon mankind.

### **First Human Myths**

Myths which describe the origin of the first humans and their relationship to the land are frequent in Melanesia. Many of these are

myths which charter the existence of a particular clan in a specific clan territory. The Baktaman myth analyzed by Flannery is a good example. The first humans were autochthonous, that is, they emerged from the ground. A mythical grandfather also emerged and established their space, clan identity and food supply. A similar myth of the first humans emerging from earth is cited by Lacey. After Tudava and other humans arose from the earth he classified men according to specific totems and established the islands for them to inhabit.

### **Culture Myths**

Many Melanesian myths and legends deal with the origin of culture, whether it be fire, artefacts, rituals, customs, skills, social order or magic. The story of Pandakusa (Lacey) involves a culture hero who discovers the sacred *sangai* and apparently finds the initiation rite in which this plant plays a vital role. On his journeys he also discovers the skills and knowledge required to exchange pigs and develop tribal prosperity. Lacey's exploration of this narrative demonstrates the significance of such oral accounts for understanding the processes of cultural change and exchange in past Melanesian society. The figures of *To Kabinana* and *To Purgo* from the Tolai Myths (Flannery) engage in numerous exploits which produce cultural and social features.

Myths or legends which charter magic rites and practices are important in the daily life of many clans. For example, the myth of Yenkle about the origin of fire (Gesch) is the basis for all magic spells used to alleviate burns and pains.

### **Cargo Myths**

Cargo myths which charter the origin and existence of hidden cargo are important forces in the development of cargo cults. Flannery cites an interesting example of how the biblical stories of the creation, fall and flood are transformed in the development of just such a cargo myth.

## **Social Structures**

### **Sacred Space**

#### *Permanent Shrines*

The sacred cave (*gebeanda*) described by Gayalu is a fine illustration of the phenomenon of sacred space associated with a particular place of divine manifestation. He describes this cave as a very dangerous place which no ordinary person is allowed to enter or approach. Deep in the cave an unnamed deity dwells alone. Inside the cave ritual huts, sacred plants and sacred stones are located.



Only appointed ritual mediators are capable of entering this space charged, as it is, with frightening alien power.

### *Temporary Shrines*

In many Melanesian rituals a shrine may remain dormant until the appropriate festival occasion. The former sacred space is then refurbished and the shrine activated for the occasion. This is true, for example, of the *ero more* shrine among the Numai (Knight). Nilles and others (cited by Knight) emphasize the presence of ancestral spirits in these shrines at pig-kill festivals. They reside especially in the sacred stones or pole within the shrine.

Some temporary shrines are constructed for a specific ritual celebration. The sacred canoe of the Gari (Prendeville) was built with meticulous care by the bigmen to house the great spirit Masobaga during the festival. This decorated canoe was paraded along the beach and finally located on a rock from which the spirit would sail across the sea back to the land of the dead. Elsewhere in the Solomon Islands a sope shrine was constructed to house the bones and skulls of past ancestors (Tuza). The presence of the spirits is mediated through the skulls, the structure of the shrine, its location and the ritual of recalling the ancestors. The sacredness of the shrine is emphasized by the taboo against viewing the building sideways. If one dares to look, it must be face on!

## **Sacred Persons**

### *Shamans*

Franks includes an example of a dream woman or shamaness from Manam whose soul can enter the land of the dead via trance in an effort to retrieve the soul of a dying person. Her position is hereditary, her rites involve the community of mourners in the company of the dying individual and her services are expensive.

### *Mediators (Priests)*

The *gebeali* of the Begeanda rite illustrates the role of a ritual mediator or priest; he is specially appointed by the worshipping community to represent its needs before a deity residing in a sacred cave (Gayalu). This mediator alone may enter the dangerous sacred space inside the cave. His offerings of oil, kina shells, red paint and piglets are overtures of worship from the community in time of crisis. Gayalu, in the first chapter below, has provided the best example of a Melanesian priesthood known to date and adds previously undocumented material to our knowledge of the Huli. A similar mediator who presides over the pig-kill festival of the Numai is the *bonawageyal*, literally, "the man of the good pigs" (Knight). He offers prayers to the sun deity on behalf of the worshippers and enters the sacred hut to kill a pig some time prior to the festival so as to promote the increase of the herd for the forthcoming feast.

### *Mediators (Diviners)*

Whereas priest mediators represent the people through ritual to the deity or clan ancestors, other mediators are specialists in obtaining messages from the ancestors or divining their will. Kolandi describes the *haga-ye* who is marked as a potential 'mediator with the spirits of the dead' by virtue of signs such as violent trembling, apparent madness and speaking in strange tongues, signs which are typical of the initiatory sickness of shamans in other cultures. After initiation and training under an established *haga-ye* he becomes a two-way channel of communication with the dead. He is identified as a 'true friend and confidant of the spirits'.

The *haga-ye* is called upon to explore the cause of illness, for example, when the normal means of the ritual healer have failed and the cause is thought to lie with the spirits. A Roro diviner mentioned by Trompf uses ritual sleep to obtain explanations for an illness from those ancestors who are attempting to steal the soul of the sick person.

### *Sacral Chiefs*

Among the leading figures of Melanesian tribal societies mention should be made of the peace chief (*lopia fa'anaiau*) among the Mekeo (Stephen). As the senior chief he is responsible for maintaining law and order. He is the centre of all ceremonial life of the group and the guardian of its lands and resources. He has a ceremonial chief, a war leader, a war magician and a sorcerer within the social structure under his jurisdiction. The peace chief is to be the embodiment of benevolent authority above the sordid processes of tribal intrigue.

### *Sorcerers*

Sorcerers of Melanesia are ritual experts said to work *poison* on individuals, thereby causing sores, sickness or death. They have the ritual skills to decrease or destroy the life forces of another person. Among the Mekeo (Stephen) for example, sorcerers may kill children by drying up their mother's milk or kill women by making them bleed to death. The sorcerer is, nevertheless, a major social institution in many clans of Melanesia. While his powers are destructive, his role as an agent of punishment or death may be seen as a necessary part of the social order. Stephen speaks of the sorcerer as the recognised political henchman of the peace chief among the Mekeo.

### *Healers (Traditional Doctors)*

The practitioner of traditional medicine in the Kiripia area is identified by Kolandi as *opipi-ye*. Each candidate is trained as an apprentice to an established *opipi-ye*. He is a specialist in cases of illness caused by *poison*. Illnesses caused by the spirits are the task of another specialist mediator who can communicate with the dead.

The *opipi-ye* uses traditional methods to interpret the symptoms brought on by *poisen*; traditional herbs are manufactured in the bush to effect the cure. Complete recovery is dependent on a subsequent ritual purging of all the *poisen* in the person's system.

### *Magicians*

Magicians are the ritual experts in directing supernatural power such as *mana*. Some magic can be performed by ordinary members of the community. Among the Wassisi love magic can be worked on a bride-to-be by her future husband (van Hees). There are, however, many specialists in the ritual promotion, control of or protection against supernatural power. Among the Mekeo there is a war magician who can direct deadly powers against the enemy. Mekeo magicians, according to Stephen, undergo disciplined preparation before handling these powers. Their ritual techniques may also involve making contact with a spirit who will direct supernatural power towards or against a person, place or object.

### **Sacred Objects**

A wide range of sacred objects serve as symbols and mediums of the sacred within the religious contexts considered in this volume. Sacred flutes (Knight) and masks (ToVaninara) announce the presence of the ancestors in the ritual experience. Stones (Stephen) and skulls (Tuza) are charged with dangerous sacred power and must be handled with professional care by ritual experts. Poles (Knight) and images (Karun) concentrate the presence of the sacred at the ritual centre of the sacred space.

ToVaninara explores shell-money (*tambu*) as the pivotal religious object and symbol of the Tolai sacred world. He demonstrates how such a symbol links the spiritual presence of the ancestors with the material concerns of the community through a series of ritual events. *Tambu* guarantees the success of ritual, social exchange and the economy. He contends, in short, that *tambu* is the true traditional religion of the Tolais. Shell money is not the filthy lucre of the Western civilization, but a supreme symbol of the sacred.

The process of preparing a sacred symbol for ritual use is elaborated by Karun in his article on the famous Malangan wood carvings. In this example the sacred object is chosen, secluded, carved and located within the sacred space by a series of ritual acts. At each step of the process the sacredness of the carving is intensified and guaranteed. Through the object the presence of the sacred is mediated to the devotee.

## **Rituals**

The articles collected in this volume include a wide array of rituals,

ranging from complex festivals to individual rites of washing or naming. Our synopsis will focus on the major categories.

## **Rites of Passage**

### *Birth Rites*

The birth ritual of the Makru-Mansuku as outlined by Crockett involves the stages of separation, threshold and incorporation common to rites of passage. At the onset of labour the mother is isolated in a birth hut where married women care for her. Appropriate rituals to ease delivery, ward off evil spirits, or invoke the ancestors are part of the threshold period. Taboos, disposal of the placenta and name-giving are other important aspects of this phase. Reincorporation into society is marked by public washings, entry to the family house, a birth announcement and return to the garden with the newborn child.

### *Initiation Rites*

Numerous studies on Melanesian male initiation rites are available. The article by Cheryl Camp, however, is a valuable example of a female initiation rite from the Neigrie area. Many aspects of the ritual parallel those of the birth ritual described by Crockett. At the onset of her first menstruation the girl is separated from the community and located in a small hut within the village space. This separation is marked by hair cutting and washings. During her threshold period food taboos obtain and skincutting is performed. Ordeals, education in the ways of married life, wealth exchange are rites typical of this period. Eventually the menstruation hut is burnt together with the girl's severed hair and the sticks of food which had been stuck into the top of the hut to please the ancestors. After her second menstruation the girl is free from taboos and is treated with the dignity due an eligible woman.

### *Marriage Rites*

Van Hees describes the traditional marriage of the Wassisi which was arranged by the father of the boy to be married. By contrast, marriage among the Tebare and other tribes involved extensive ritual courtship. Among the Wassisi, as elsewhere, the brideprice payment was a central feature of the ritual process. Purification and ordeals with nettles preceded the spectacular adornment of the woman as a bride. Wealth exchange, feasting and related rituals emphasized the unification of clans as part of the marriage event. The final ritual announcing the new status of the pair as married involved the adornment of the boy with a man's penis sheath and the removal of the girl's attire for her to walk naked as a married woman. The pair then went bush to begin their marriage.

### *Death Rites*

According to Franks' analysis of the rites among the Manam the

separation process involves the gathering of the friends and relatives who assist the shamaness in retrieving the soul of the dying person from the world of the dead. Ritual caressing, wailing and prayer mark the end of the separation. In the threshold period the body is dead but the soul is present with the living. The grave is dug, the body dressed and food prepared for the imminent journey of the soul to the land of the dead. The burial sets the soul on its journey. The incorporation of the soul into the world of the dead is linked with a feast that lasts for some weeks after the burial. An additional feast may be demanded some months later if a relative dreams that the soul has lost its way en route. In other Melanesian societies the final celebration of entry into the land of the dead is held several years after the burial. Additional features of death ritual are given in Trompf's article.

### **Rites of Renewal/Reconstitution**

Several of the major rituals described in this collection are concerned with the process of periodic restoration of the life forces of the social and natural order. The annual Festival of the Seventh Month, the turning point of the Gari calendar, has similarities with seasonal New Year rituals of other ancient cultures. Typical to this ritual process of renewal are:

- acts of preparation
- rites of purification
- ritual acts of disorder
- rites of revitalization
- communal celebration.

Preparation for the Festival of the Seventh Month involved calendar reckoning, invitations to other clans and the accumulation of foodstuffs. Purification involved both the purging of evil spirits and the ritual confession of personal faults from the past year. The removal of all traces of the past evil forces was thereby accomplished. Acts of disorder were exemplified in ritualized hostility and public displays of obscenity. In this liminal period acts were performed which would have been taboo or inappropriate at normal times. Revitalization was achieved through the advent of the ancestors and the power giving presence of the great spirit Masobaga in the midst of the community. His canoe journey among the people renewed *mana* in the social and natural order. Communal celebrations accompanied the decorated canoe as the crowd carrying the canoe along the beach devoured food during the gala procession.

The *bona gende* pig-kill festival of the Nemai is interpreted by Knight in a similar manner. Such pig-kill festivals are to be distinguished from the act of killing a pig for feasts or sacrifice at other ritual occasions such as marriages or burials. In the pig-kill festival the release of life involved in the killing of hundreds or thousands of pigs

meant the revitalization of the clan and renewed relations with the ancestors.

### **Rites for Directing Power (Magic)**

Rites which are generally designated magic are analyzed by both Gesch and Stephen and mentioned by many of the other writers in the book. Gesch seeks to put in a good word for magic and its world view. So-called magical rites belong to the class of those sacred rituals which involve the direction of hidden power or powers. Four main categories are apparent in this type of ritual.

- (i) *Increase rites* in which the performer seeks to attract, direct or increase life power in a given situation. Such rites are believed to increase the fertility of the fields, the fighting and hunting capacity of the warrior or the skill of an artisan, etc.
- (ii) *Sorcery or Decrease rites* have the reverse effect; they are directed against another person or situation to decrease life power. Such rites direct negative power to produce a curse, sickness, death or the fall of an enemy in battle (Stephen).
- (iii) *Atropaic rites* are designed to ward off the negative effects of sorcery or the evil power of spirits.
- (iv) *Healing rites* are employed to overcome the power of *poisen* or spirits which have affected a person or situation. For example, when complications occur at the time of delivery the Makru father must perform such rites (Crockett).

A magic rite is performed by an individual who knows the secret formula of the ritual. This formula will normally include a traditional spell incorporating powerful words, a symbolic action which is associated with or symbolizes the desired effect of the rite and a substance or object invested with power. By using the correct formula a specific power within the total power system of their world can be directed to the desired end. If a ritual is performed in a manner consistent with the laws of this power system, then it taps the desired power and is efficacious.

### **Rites of Divination**

In many of the articles cited rites of divination are mentioned in which the ritual expert seeks a message, answer or sign from the spirit world. Gesch argues that magic is more than a set of rites; it is a complex process by which a society interprets certain events happening in their world. He calls this a process of discernment.

Within this total process specific rites occur which can be identified as rites of divination. Ritual techniques are demanded to discern who or what power has caused a sickness, disorder or death. A good example of this kind of divination procedure is given by Kolandi. The expert in the Kiripea area extends his spear through a fence and calls on the responsible ancestral spirit to reply

by releasing his hold on the spear when the correct name of the spirit has been announced by the family reciting the names of the deceased. Trompf cites an example of a Middle Wahgi rite in which the expert prods a series of sweet potatoes with a sharp stick, posing a series of alternatives with each prod, and deciding on the answers by the toughness of a given tuber.

## **Religious Systems**

The focus of this introduction has been on specific religious phenomena; they belong, however, to sacred symbol systems in the clans where they originate. Traditional beliefs about ancestors or powers, social structures appropriate for the sacred context, ordained ritual processes and ancient symbols are integrated into systems which enable the devotees to experience sacred reality as interpreted by their world view. Tuza explores this reality from the perspective of a Solomon Islander, Karun from the vantage point of the New Irelander and ToVaninara from the heritage of the Tolai. They offer personal insights into the complex symbol systems of the sacred world of Melanesian Religious phenomena.