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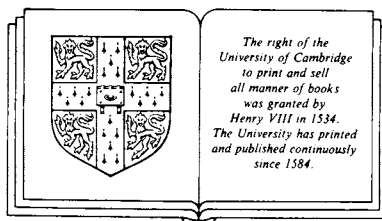
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Cambridge University Press
Cambridge
New York Port Chester Melbourne Sydney

Cambridge University Press
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PUBLISHED BY THE PRESS SYNDICATE OF THE UNIVERSITY OF CAMBRIDGE
The Pitt Building, Trumpington Street, Cambridge, United Kingdom

CAMBRIDGE UNIVERSITY PRESS
The Edinburgh Building, Cambridge CB2 2RU, UK
40 West 20th Street, New York NY 10011-4211, USA
477 Williamstown Road, Port Melbourne, VIC 3207, Australia
Ruiz de Alarcón 13, 28014 Madrid, Spain
Dock House, The Waterfront, Cape Town 8001, South Africa

<http://www.cambridge.org>

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First published 1991
First paperback edition 2004

National Library of Australia cataloguing-in-publication data:

Trompf, G. W.
Melanesian religion.
Includes index.
ISBN 0 521 38306 4 hardback
1. Melanesia — Religion. 2. Christianity
— Melanesia — History. 3. Cargo movement.
I. Title.
299.92

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

Library of Congress cataloguing-in-publication data:

Trompf, G. W.
Melanesian religion.
Includes bibliographical references and index.
I. Melanesia — Religion. I. Title.
BL2620. M4T76 1990 299'.92 90-2291

ISBN 0 521 38306 4 hardback
ISBN 0 521 60748 5 paperback

CONTENTS

List of plates	<i>vi</i>
List of maps and tables	<i>vii</i>
Preface	<i>ix</i>
PART 1 THE OLD TIME	
<hr/>	
1 Melanesian traditional religions: an overview	7
2 Death and the after-life in traditional belief and practice	34
3 The logic of retribution	51
4 Magic, sorcery and healing	78
5 Dream, vision and trance in traditional and changing Melanesia (with Remi Dembari)	105
PART 2 THE NEW TIME	
<hr/>	
6 The coming and the consequences of the missionaries	141
7 The Catholic missions: a case history (with Theo Aerts)	163
8 The interpretation of cargo cults	188
9 Independent churches	212
10 Secularization for Melanesia?	241
11 Melanesian and Pacific theology	260
 Select Bibliography	 274
Index	277

PLATES

Plates are located following page 132

Wahgi spirit stones

(Photographed by the author, at Fatima Museum, central highlands, New Guinea)

Vlisso, god of war and hunting, from the Yuat River, Sepik River region, New Guinea
 (Plate from *Oceanic Art: masks and sculptures from New Guinea* © Unesco 1968.
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Roviana war god, from New Georgia, western Solomons

(Photo courtesy of Bishop David Pratt)

Abelam *haus tambaran* ('spirit house'), from the east Sepik River region, New Guinea
 (Photo courtesy of Antony Forge)

View of a Melanesian 'temple', in the Biak-Numfor region, west New Guinea (now Irian Jaya), taken from a nineteenth century Dutch lithograph

Interior of an Elema *eravo*, from the Papuan Gulf area, in which the *gope* boards are visible

(Photo by Frank Hurley, from the Australian Museum Collection, negative V.4784)

Asmat shield, from the south coast of west New Guinea (now Irian Jaya)

(Photo by Robert Mitton, courtesy of George and Lil Mitton)

Fuyughe war clubs, with pineapple-shaped carved stone heads, from the Papuan highlands

(Photo by the author)

Silas Eto, the Christian Fellowship Church prophet, in his ceremonial robes, at Madou, New Georgia, western Solomons

(Photo by the author)

John Teosin, the Hehela leader, in front of his house on Buka Island, off Bougainville, New Guinea

(Photo by the author)

MAPS AND TABLES

	<i>page</i>
Maps	
Map 1 Location of traditional Melanesian cultures: New Guinea and outlying islands	3
Map 2 Location of traditional Melanesian cultures: the Solomons, Vanuatu, Fiji, New Caledonia	5
Map 3 Missionary impact on Papua New Guinea by 1971	139
Tables	
5.1 Melpa-Tumbuka dream interpretations	110
5.2 Educational attainments of (Tainyandawari-Binandere) dream survey respondents	114
5.3 Tainyandawari-Binandere dream interpretations	115
9.1 One scheme of salvation in the Yali movement	231

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[More information](#)

For Sharon, Carolyn, Sasha, and Leilani
toujours les tropiques!

PREFACE

This is the first introductory monograph specifically devoted to Melanesian religions. Hans Nevermann and others have surveyed Oceanic religions more generally, John Parratt has written of Papuan traditional beliefs and rituals more particularly, and there exist a number of edited symposia (those of Peter Lawrence and Mervyn Meggitt, Norman Habel, Ennio Mantovani, and others) which present case studies from a variety of Melanesian quarters. Most of these limit their focus to indigenous 'pre-contact' or 'pre-Christian' religious life, as do a few works on single themes documented from a wide range of Melanesian cultures. In this study, by contrast, I attempt to encompass both primal traditions and more recent adjustments in the one synoptic study. Fortunately there already exist useful introductory books on the planting of Christian missions and on the emergence of the so-called 'cargo cults'. It thus seems high time to reflect on Melanesian religious activity as a whole, assessing the persistence of time-inured values, explaining the relative willingness to adopt or accept radical change, and making more sense of the journey from archaic warrior cultures to modern black theology.

To achieve this, I have drawn together materials which I have previously published in journals or presented as conference papers. I give thanks, and grateful acknowledgement, to Sione Latukefu, Norman Habel and the editors of *Religious Traditions*, *Oceania*, *Point* and *Mission Review* for their kind permission to republish articles in revised form. In the case of the chapter on Dreams (in Part 1), I am thankful to Remi Dembari for being able to include his hitherto unpublished researches (undertaken when he was my student at the University of Papua New Guinea), and also to Father Theo Aerts, MSC, for permission to use our co-authored article on the Catholic Missions (in Part 2).

The book falls into two halves: the first covers the traditional scene and the second, changing Melanesia. The reader will be conducted in the first half from simpler, less methodologically sophisticated surveys to chapters in which

X PREFACE

more difficult theoretical and analytical problems are raised. These first five chapters contain certain observations which look ahead to the second half of the book; while the materials on changing Melanesia, in the second half, although intelligible as an independent cluster, can best be understood in the light of traditional factors. Again, this second half deepens analytically as the chapters proceed, from some rather basic historical accounts of the Christian missions to more complex assessments of indigenous responses to Christianity and colonialism. A greater variety of mission histories could have been treated, admittedly, and a more straightforward account given of the different types of cargo cultism, but that would have been to enlarge the book beyond acceptable bounds, and also to duplicate what is still readily available in my other writings and edited collections.

Readers should also appreciate at the outset that this book keeps the technicalities of anthropological analysis to a minimum. To reckon with the significance of the intricacies of kinship systems and totemic relationships, or the fine details as to the social recipients and economic distribution of ceremonial exchanges or even, for that matter, demographic details as to the size of settlements, cultic participation or engagement in war and trade, the reader is advised to consult individual ethnographers or anthropological works concentrated on these matters: all this simply cannot be provided within the scope of a general textbook. The whole subject of this book is so broad and complex that it has hardly been possible to consider all the relevant cultures, movements and sectional histories in any exhaustive way. It stands as an introductory work, dependent rather more on processes of judicious selection and thematic analysis than on encyclopaedic coverage. So many additional details and points of interest will have to await other publications.

The ethnographic information in the following pages derives mainly from Papua New Guinea, where most scholarly research on Melanesia has been undertaken. Other quarters, however, have certainly not been neglected. I have tried to strike a balance between illustrating religious life from as wide a range of the region's societies as possible and the need to provide readers with a necessary sense of continuity. To secure the latter, I keep returning throughout the book to a select number of cultures. The selection process has been largely determined by my own fieldwork in a variety of coastal, highland and island contexts in Papua New Guinea and in the western Solomon Islands. Suffice it to say that virtually all the societies referred to in the following pages are stateless and segmented into tribes, clans or lineages. At the time they became known to the outside world, they all occupied relatively small territories, whether landlocked valleys, islands, coastal swamp and plain, or hinterland hills. The small-scale nature of these societies made for relative egalitarianism (though various chiefdoms and more hierarchical arrangements are to be found), and for some variety in social structures and marriage patterns (matrilinearity not being uncommon, and both endogamy and polyandry occasionally present).

Of the scholars who have been especially encouraging in the production of this work I name the late Peter Lawrence of the University of Sydney, Ennio Mantovani of the Melanesian Institute and Noel King of the University of California (whose book *African Cosmos* is laid out along fairly similar lines to my own). I pay homage to my former colleagues at the University of Papua New Guinea, especially Carl Loeliger and Willington Jojoga, for many consultations over the years. I must also thank Stuart Lawrence for suggesting this production, Margaret Gilet for committing it so carefully and patiently to disk, Peter Johnson for the maps, Roderic Campbell for his perfectionism as editor, and both Lucy Davey and Irene Rolles for their computer skills right at the end of the process. As always, too, not a sentence could have been written, or would have been worth writing, without Bobbie's loving support.

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