

THE DISTRIBUTION OF SPIRIT POSSESSION AND TRANCE IN MICRONESIA

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This article is a regional descriptive survey, including both the extant literature and contemporary interviews. Analysis of the data is left to a later study. Possession belief combined with trance behavior is the overwhelming pattern from the earliest recordings by the Spanish to contemporary interviews by the authors. The Marianas are the noteworthy exception, with trance and possession frequently occurring separately. The historical and contemporary record of possession-trance is strong for Chuuk, weak for the Marshalls. In most areas, possession-trance changed from the older official, on-demand mediumship to a more spontaneous and individualized response to personal stress, although Palau continues to have both types. Whether official or involuntary, the possession-trance that was once reported of males and females is now virtually monopolized by females, mostly girls and young women. The authors conclude that possession-trance in Micronesia is old, is widespread, is changing with time, and has become an almost exclusively female gender role, but it definitely continues today.

The Question

THIS ARTICLE ORIGINATED with a more limited study, an examination of possession cases from Chuuk State in the Federated States of Micronesia (Dobbin and Hezel 1995).¹ Even today spirits are a ubiquitous presence in

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Chuuk (formerly Truk), and one cannot live there long without hearing reports of persons possessed by them. Here is one sample, altered slightly to protect anonymity, that is typical of the more than fifty case histories we have collected on Chuuk:

The first incident happened when all the family was sitting down to eat. As they sat down, M. rose and ran outside. She returned and said she been visited by two women--her mother's spirit and her aunt's. Just as the family members crossed themselves to begin eating, M. shouted, fell back off her seat and lost consciousness. She awoke and started to scream. An uncle who was knowledgeable in Chuuk medicine was called. When M. saw his arrival, she struggled to escape. She was so strong that her older brothers could barely keep her down. The uncle saw the spirits of the mother and the aunt "on her" and explained that they were angry and wanted to take M. away. He knew why the spirits came: there were bad feelings between the oldest sister and a brother. For his medicine, the uncle chewed certain leaves, perfumed them and washed M.'s body with them. While he was bringing out the medicine, the spirits left and M. calmed down. Since the uncle had already brought the brother with him, he and the oldest sister were reconciled. The bad feelings were caused by a land dispute. M. had another three incidents after this, all within a month. Each time M. would cry and take on the expressions of the dead mother--both in voice and in facial expressions. M. said in her mother's voice, "I want to take her (M.) away because you don't love her." After each incident, M. is so drained that she sleeps for a day and one night. Afterward she doesn't remember anything of what happened. (Hezel and Hung 1989)

In searching the older literature to see if possession-trance was new or continued an older pattern, we found that the literature of a century ago recorded possession-trance (Bollig 1927; Girschner 1912-1913; Kubary 1878), but it was more highly institutionalized in distinct status bearers, male and female, called *wáánaanú*, who were possessed by lineage ancestors and were in the service of the living lineage as mediums.² Contemporary possession-trance, in contrast, had become nearly monopolized by females, and, we concluded, although still in the service of family or lineage, it was now stimulated or triggered not by demands from lineage members, but by the personal stress experienced by the possessed individual (Dobbin and Hezel 1995).

The literature search for older references to possession in Chuuk led us into other areas of Micronesia where entranced mediums were also reported, and we began to hear about contemporary cases of possession from other islands in Micronesia. From Yap came reports of women who habitually communicated with the spirits; in one such history, the woman went into a seizure, throwing herself on the ground, shaking all over, displaying unusual strength, and talking gibberish, before relatives and friends would gather to hear the voices of the spirit in her. On Palau, one woman, from a family once well known for its spirit mediums, would shake and tremble, then deliver messages in the voice of the spirits. Without much effort, we found ourselves with possession-trance accounts for almost every region within Micronesia. Such reports led us to broaden the geographical scope of our original study (Dobbin and Hezel 1995).

Our general purpose in this article is to describe spirit possession across Micronesia. More specifically, we ask three questions. First, how widespread is spirit possession across Micronesia? Second, how far back in history can it be traced? Third, what changes in form and function can be traced from earliest records to the present? These are all descriptive goals, although we know that even simple description implicitly involves some analysis and explanation of the occurrence of spirit possession. In sum, we will try to determine the precise geographical distribution and historical time-depth of Micronesian spirit possession so as to obtain an overview of this phenomenon throughout the region.

Working Definitions and Assumptions

Micronesia is a venerable old term that permits us the convenience of lumping together the hundreds of atolls and islands spread over roughly five million square kilometers of the Pacific and located mostly north of the equator and sandwiched between Polynesia and Melanesia. Micronesia today encompasses all of the former Trust Territory of the Pacific Islands--now politically identified as the Republic of the Marshall Islands, the Federated States of Micronesia (Kosrae, Pohnpei, Chuuk, and Yap States), the Republic of Palau, and the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands--in addition to Guam, Kiribati (Gilberts), and Nauru. It includes the two Polynesian outliers of Kapingamarangi and Nukuoro. Micronesia is certainly not a homogenous culture area, although its peoples speak related but often mutually unintelligible languages within the Austronesian language family. Without arguing for or against the validity of the term Micronesia, we assume here the validity of distinguishing Micronesia from Melanesia and Polynesia.

Spirit possession on Chuuk is almost always accompanied by trance or trancelike behavior; we also found this overwhelmingly true for all of Micronesia except the Marianas. Consequently, our descriptions of spirit possession are mostly of possession and trance. Following Bourguignon (1968), we assumed a valid analytic distinction between trance and possession.³ Trance is the empirically observed behavior, while possession is one of many possible interpretations of that behavior. We stress that the distinction is analytic because the actual observers and participants in possession-trance episodes may not bother to distinguish neatly between behavior and interpretation. We use trance as the popular term for a complex of behaviors called altered states of consciousness (ASC). Many terms are available; we selected trance and ASC only because these terms lack the implicitly negative interpretation of a psychological label such as dissociation. To observers, behaviors such as a changed voice, facial contortions, and bodily convulsions are often indications of a change in the persona of the human host and are frequently associated with crazy, hysterical, and delirious behavior.⁴

What mental health workers have labeled hysteria or dissociation, most local observers would term possession by the spirits or by the devil. Each region, as we will see later in detail, has its own criteria for determining whether an episode is possession. On Chuuk the signs were obvious: voice changes and mannerisms that recall a deceased family member. While most of these particular symptoms appear to be universal in the region, others can vary with the cultural area. Our criteria for possession, therefore, depend entirely on the judgment or interpretation of the culture. By way of summary, possession is defined as the belief that an outside spirit has taken control of at least some of the bodily and/or mental functions of the human host. If the spirits merely influence the thinking and behavior of the host without speaking through the host, this is not usually regarded as possession although it may in fact be an initial step leading to possession.

The original reports in Spanish, German, and English are a hodgepodge of overlapping terms and labels for the practitioners who use possession-trance. Translations into English only compound the problem.⁵ We did not try to sort out and delineate the diverse and contradictory uses of terms like diviner, healer, medium, oracle, or priest, but whenever available we used the indigenous term. We kept the labels given in the sources; where an English term was needed, we frequently used "medium" to indicate the official, on-demand type of possession-trance.

Sources of Data

We relied on two data sources. First were the case reports based on our interviews with observers of the possession episodes and, whenever possi-

ble, interviews with the entranced persons themselves. Sometimes the reports were secondhand rather than drawn from actual observations or participation. We stress that these are generally only reports and not observations, although Hezel has had the serendipitous opportunity of observing an episode or two. The negative element in the use of reported sources is, of course, the simple fact that they are not actual observations. The positive element is that the patterns in the reports probably indicate a selective cultural memory that serves to distinguish what are thought to be the essential features of possession from the less consequential.⁶

The second data source was published literature on Micronesia, written accounts that were unevenly spread over the centuries. The rich early description of Micronesian religions by the Jesuit priest Cantova (1722) initially led us to believe that the Spanish interest in missionization and religion would yield extensive materials on the native religions, but Cantova proved an exception and Spanish sources produced but a few scattered references. Mention of possession and trance in the writings of the early explorers is rare. References are more common by the time of the nineteenth-century European naval voyages of d'Urville, Duperry, Kotzebue, Freycinet, and Lütke, but accounts of these voyages still offer little information on religion and on possession. Sea captains, merchants, and even beachcombers fill the gap between the naval voyages of the early nineteenth century and the German period at the end of the last century. The German period (circa 1888-1914), in contrast, produced a rich corpus of reports and studies with extensive references to possession and trance. The missionaries from this period produced in-depth studies of the traditional religions that often became the most complete source on the old religion before intensive missionization. Laurentius Bollig (1927) for Chuuk and August Erdland (1914) for the Marshalls are the best examples. The German South Seas Expedition of 1908-1910, although more concerned with material culture, collated much of this earlier information on religion. The volumes produced by the South Seas Expedition are an invaluable source, even if they are not entirely clear regarding who saw what, owing in part to the posthumous use of original field notes by the final editors.

Data from the Japanese colonial period (1914-1945) are sparse owing to the relative paucity of materials in English. We made use of what we could find but probably missed some evidence from materials that were not translated. The postwar invasion by American anthropologists evinced a burst of ethnographies and information about religion, much like the German period. By the mid-1970s, however, the output of anthropological studies had diminished and little was written about religion, to say nothing of possession and trance, with Lothar Käser's "Der Begriff Seele bei den Insulaner von Truk" (1977) and Catherine Lutz's *Unnatural Emotions* (1988) being

the exceptions. A summary of the data is included in an appendix to this article.

It is true, on the one hand, that many historical references are based on fleeting contact and made by men more interested in flora, fauna, and commercial opportunities than religion. On the other hand, the region produced some early ethnographies with insightful perceptions of human behavior. German scientist Karl Semper was administering a precursor of the Rorschach and the Thematic Apperception Test on Palau in the 1850s and Polish-born naturalist Jan Kubary wrote lengthy articles on the religions of Micronesia while collecting museum samples for the German trading firm Godeffroy and Son of Hamburg. Even from the standpoint of modern anthropology, there is a fair amount of good ethnographic detail and description of early Micronesian spirit possession. The detail, as might be expected, has its limitations. The descriptions of the trance episodes are all too sketchy, and early sources provide little information on the age and sex of spirit mediums in most places.

Organization of the Evidence for Possession

In the remainder of this article we will review what is known of spirit possession, island group by island group. In each section, representing a cultural or subcultural area within Micronesia, we will attempt to present a brief overview of possession, as it existed in the past and its present status, compiled from the published evidence and our field interviews.

Using our earlier study of Chuuk possession-trance as a model (Dobbin and Hezel 1995), we expected to find two types of possessed hosts. On Chuuk the possessed trancers called *wáánaanú* served as family and clan links to the ancestors. The alternative was possession or trance by a person who falls into the episode involuntarily and is not understood to be a special status holder. Recent Chuukese cases and the post-World War II ethnographies, however, indicate that the social position of the *wáánaanú* has disappeared although the behavior survives. The recent cases showed the same body of spirit beliefs, possession interpretation, and trance behavior, but possession was more spontaneous and uncontrolled, responding to personal stress. In our earlier study, we noted that recently females almost monopolize the possession-trance, which a century ago had been open to males and females (Dobbin and Hezel 1995). Today possession-trance works as a way of airing and resolving family disputes and other sources of personal, individual tension. In this study, using the Chuuk study as a model, we explore whether similar phenomena, beliefs, and changes are taking place elsewhere in Micronesia. Hence, on the basis of the Chuuk material, we typed the older form as the "on-demand" or "official" type and called the recent type

“involuntary.” It should be noted, first of all, that these types are institutionalized to the extent that they are culturally sanctioned behavior and, secondly, that the types are often at the opposite end of a range of possession types.

Southwest Islands of Palau

Extending some 375 miles southwest of Palau are four atolls of Carolinian-speaking peoples that are sometimes known as the Southwest Islands of Palau. A part of the Republic of Palau today, these islands are either uninhabited or sparsely populated, since most of their inhabitants have migrated to Palau. During the German period, both Kubary and members of the German South Seas Expedition observed and recorded possession-trance ceremonies. These ceremonies were performed by specialists, that is, distinct status holders, and were of the type we have 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’ ” (Kubary 1889:85). Kubary, however, was quite skeptical about the performance and doubted whether he had seen a genuinely native version of the ceremony. Later writers merely quote Kubary and add nothing new about Sonsorol (e.g., Eilers 1935:72-73).

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 toward 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, our translation)

German colonial administrator Georg Fritz had observed a similar episode shortly after the turn of the century, describing the “priests” as clearly in a

trance or ecstatic state (1907). The shipwrecked American sailor Horace Holden may have seen a similar performance back in the 1830s but his description is vague (Holden [1836] 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 Ana and Merir, in contrast, German expedition members heard that healers rather than diviners subjected themselves to possession-trance. Eilers relates that there were once men on Pulo Ana to whom the ancestor spirit Maretasai appeared and, upon payment of a gift, healed the sick (1935:246). The possessed healer shook violently as he spoke. Sarfert described a similar possession-trance healing ritual on nearby Merir (*ibid.*: 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 (Eilers 1936:106-108). 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 Kramer stayed in one of the houses and 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 (*ibid.*:106-107).⁷ An altar stood in the spare room; here the priests became entranced as the god Rugeiren took possession of them. Rugeiren was believed to descend by means of the spirit boat and to 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.

We have no evidence of any form of possession-trance in the southwest islands today, although one informant claimed that the Tobians living on Palau "know about possession." From contemporary Tobi itself there is only one case--and that an analogous one. Anthropologist Peter Black has described the case history of one man who was believed to have become a ghost; Black thought the case to be a "functional equivalent" of possession (1985:288).

Palau

Very early reports about Palau attest to mediums in the service of the local chiefs, but association with possession-trance is documented only later. Cap-

tain Edward Barnard, an American shipwrecked on Palau in 1832, wrote of being taken to the residence of the “chief priestess” who was consulted by the chiefs about important decisions (Martin 1980:20). Seated behind a curtain of mats, she was asked questions and after five minutes responded with a favorable answer: the chiefs were permitted to help the stranded sailors. For her services she received payment in glass beads (*ibid.*). Barnard relates that she was also sought out for healing (*ibid.*:29). In the 1870s German scientist Karl Semper witnessed a similar divination ritual, likewise performed for the benefit of the chiefs and conducted behind a curtain of mats, but Semper added that the “priestess” spoke in a falsetto voice ([1873] 1982: 216). On a second occasion and before a different “priestess,” he again heard the priestess speaking in a changed voice--in a “loud high voice like a ventriloquist”--and putting forth a “deluge of words.” She was one “in whom the gods were accustomed to enter,” commented Semper (*ibid.*:254).

The possession rituals of the spirit medium, stimulated by the rapid chewing and spitting of betelnut, were responses to petitions from the chiefs or from community individuals, accompanied by offerings of money or betelnut. The spirit medium responded, with legs and arms trembling and face distorted, speaking in the voice of a spirit (*chelid*), often for hours at a time. Sometimes the mediums spoke from behind a curtain “so that one can only hear the disguised voice”; at other times they performed directly in front of those who asked for their help (Kubary [1888] 1967:22). Ceremonies usually took place at the residence of the spirit medium, which was considered the *chelid*'s temple. Sometimes a small shrine to the *chelid* was built near the community house, or *bai*. Hanging from the rafters of one such community house Kubary found a large wooden box, which he compared to the spirit boat associated with possession in the southwest islands and in Chuuk.

Spirit mediums, known as *kerong*, were an important institution in early Palauan society. The status of spirit medium was open to both male and female, regardless of the gender of the spirit served. If, however, a young man was chosen as the medium for a female spirit, the man was treated like a woman in nearly all respects, that is, he dressed as a woman, performed women's work in the taro patch, and may have adopted the sexual behavior of a female, as Kubary alludes ([1888] 1967:21). In a brief but detailed picture of the call to become one of these spirit mediums, Kubary wrote that a candidate tries to “appear as unnatural as possible, yawns while running around and performing nonsensical actions” (*ibid.*:19). Success in doing this signified that a spirit, or *chelid*, has selected the individual as its instrument and was taking up residence in him or her. As this was happening, the spirit medium began to adopt gestures that were identified with the specific spirit. Each subsequent possession frenzy was seen as a confirmation of the special status of the medium, until eventually the lineage heads in the community

formally recognized the candidate as a *kerong* by presenting to the medium an offering of betelnut for the possessing spirit.

If the earlier accounts from Wilson, Barnard, and Semper about "priests," "priestesses," and "prophetesses" can be identified with the *kerong* of Kubary's description, then the dominant function of the medium was as an oracle, especially in connection with the political decision making of the chiefs. *Kerong* were also consulted about sickness and healing, in order to "calm down the spirit of the sick person" (Kubary 1873:224) or to ask the *chelid* why the sick person was afflicted (Kubary [1888] 1967:203). Later reports during the German occupation confirmed the political role of the *kerong* (Born 1907). Indeed, the political power of the *kerong* had become so formidable that early in this century the chiefs aligned themselves with the German colonial administration in an attempt to suppress the *kerong* (Vidich 1952:27; Shuster 1982:62-65; Hezel 1995:117-120).

Most of the post-World War II ethnographies describe *kerong* (e.g., Barnett 1949; Force 1958; Vidich 1949, 1952), but it is often difficult to determine if the authors were merely repackaging Kubary, drawing on the memory culture of their informants, or giving an account of contemporary practice. Palauan Felix Yaoch's paper on Modekngai, the nativist religious movement, is the only postwar writing to describe an actual observation of a seance (1966). Yaoch thinks there has been a recent revival of possession-trance, especially among families with a long association with Modekngai (pers. com., November 1993). In recent years a few individuals, most of them women, are known to have practiced spirit possession to assist those seeking their help. Although much rarer now than formerly, *kerong* possession appears to be having a resurgence in one or two parts of Babeldaob even as this is written.

A few cases of involuntary possession have also been recorded in recent years. Hezel's field notes mention two young girls who rather suddenly and involuntarily burst into a violent trancelike state; they spoke in changed voices and were considered by onlookers to be possessed (Hezel 1993-1994). These two cases, in which possession was triggered by family tensions, are probably of the involuntary type found so commonly in Chuuk.

In short, the record for Palau documents a long history for the official type of possession-trance in the person of the *kerong*. Remnants of this type of possession continue today. The evidence from early sources is very weak for the existence of a spontaneous, involuntary type existing before the present. Yet, such cases are to be found today and suggest the possibility of an evolution of possession from voluntary to involuntary, as in Chuuk.

Yap Proper

In the nineteenth-century sources on Yap there is only one brief mention of spirit possession. An article compiled from reports by Alfred Tetens and Jan Kubary stated that the islanders “had inspired priests whom they question as an oracle for advice and they place offerings before them during the questioning” (Tetens and Kubary 1873:96).⁸ Later, in the early twentieth century, Wilhelm Müller of the German South Seas Expedition and Capuchin missionary Sixtus Walleser supplied some of the missing detail.

Müller and Walleser agree that Yap belief encompassed a variety of spirits as well as a variety of specialists serving those spirits. Sorcerers and magicians of various kinds were called *tameron*, one of which was thought to be able to exorcise those possessed by the *kan* (glossed by Müller as “demons” [1917:366]). The “spirit callers” of the departed ancestors, as this type of *tamer-on* is termed, are referred to by Yapese as *pong-zagiz* (Walleser 1913:1057). These spirit callers were clearly official status holders and the position could be hereditary. Müller found one family where both father and son were possessed by the spirit Lug, although the son also served other spirits as well. At least some spirit callers were channels of healing. One of them, in return for gifts bestowed on him by a client, called upon the spirit Lug, who reportedly spoke through his mouth and revealed the nature of the client’s illness and the kind of medicine that could cure it (Müller 1917:377).

Associated with the *kan* and the *pong-zagiz* were spirit houses and bowls carved in the shape of a miniature boat in which petitioners left their offerings. Müller examined the contents of one of these bowls and, to his disappointment, found nothing more exotic than a few stingray spines, shards of glass, and two small modern Japanese plates (1917:377).

According to Walleser, there were many *pong-zagiz* on Yap, in addition to others who seemed to be practicing possession-trance with an eye to becoming known as spirit callers. “Even women, who otherwise have no importance, understand *zagiz*-calling well and practice it diligently,” Walleser wrote (1913:1057). In the eyes of Müller these “others” were not diviners or prophets. “Persons who are possessed without having the gift of prophecy are extraordinarily numerous,” he wrote. “There are several in every district. Most of them are probably epileptics” (Müller 1917:377). Elsewhere Müller describes one of these marginal possession cases: that of a song composer, Dogiem, who may not be a *pong-zagiz* but is cryptically called a “medium.” The spirit first came upon Dogiem when he was a young man. “When the *kan* came to him . . . he was alone in the clubhouse and was practicing an obscene . . . dance, and he became like a madman. This condition lasted for

a month and then he knew the song. Even now an inner impulse sometimes drives him to wander through the village on moonlit nights and to shriek loudly" (ibid.). Apparently Dogiem functioned like a *pong-zagiz* for some Yapese setting out on a long fishing trip came to him and offered a young coconut for the *kan* (ibid.:378).

Between the first decade of the twentieth century and the present, we found nothing in the literature beyond a cursory note from memory culture. The five cases within recent memory, however, do hint at continuity with the past, although possibly only as a survival. In 1993 Hezel recorded four cases of a medium or spirit caller similar to the pattern depicted by Walleser and Müller. In one case the possessed woman was "regarded by people as a medium who had facility in conversing with spirits"; in another the possessed woman was believed to be able to foretell the future, to be "psychic" (Hezel 1993-1994). In yet another, the woman would go through a "seizure" before the spirit communicated: "She would throw herself on the ground, shaking all over, and her family would attempt to restrain her. . . . When the communication with the spirit began, she would speak what sounded like gibberish but was thought to be a special spirit language. . . . It appears she did not choose the time, but was attendant on the movements of the spirit to determine time and place. . . . Her reputation was widespread in Yap. Everyone knew that she was obtaining powerful information from the spirit" (ibid.). The fourth woman experienced a change in voice when going into a seizure, and she "was said to be able to converse with the spirits" (ibid.). It is not coincidental that the date of birth for all four is before World War II, between 1900 and 1930. Although it is not always clear from the brief case histories whether the host spoke in the voice of the spirit or the spirit simply spoke to her, there are strong similarities with the old spirit callers. The last surviving spirit caller is a woman from Fanif, now in her seventies, who practiced in her spirit shrine up until the 1950s when she was converted to Catholicism (Apollo Thall, pers. com., November 1993).

Instances of involuntary possession in modern times seem to be rare. A twenty-six-year-old female from a family with no reputation for producing mediums or for honoring the old spirits was possessed in 1992 (Hezel 1993-1994).

In Yap, then, the evidence from the turn of the century is strong for the official possession-trance medium, the spirit callers or *pong-zagiz*. Besides the spirit callers, who engaged in classic possession, there was at that time another marginal category: "those who had *kan* in the head" (Müller 1917: 378); this may or may not have entailed full trance-possession. These included amateur or aspiring *pong-zagiz*, inspired musicians, and perhaps

even the mentally ill. Later cases of older women show similarity and continuity with the spirit mediums of old, with just a single case of involuntary possession.

The Central Carolines

The Central Carolines are a string of low-lying coral atolls that stretch almost eight hundred miles from Ngulu, southeast of Yap, to the westernmost outliers of Chuuk. The inhabitants of the dozen and a half inhabited islands all speak mutually intelligible dialects of a closely related language chain and share a basic culture. There was and still is considerable interchange between the islands.

The oldest record of possession-trance in the Central Carolines comes from Ulithi, the dominant atoll in the chain. 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” ([1889] 1958:92).

The Russian naval explorer Frédéric Lütke, who visited some of these islands in 1827, described a type of possession and exorcism on Woleai that differs from what is reported of other parts of Micronesia. A few individuals, wrote Lütke, enjoyed the prerogative of seeing and hearing “Hannoulape” (i.e., Anulap, the main spirit) and making known his commands; but “apart from that, they enjoy no particular consideration or privilege” (1836:187-188). 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 exorcist⁹ 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 Anulap through the agency of any of their children who died at an early age. It appears that individuals with a propensity for mediumship emerged from the general population and, once recognized, were sought out by others for divining Anulap’s will.

Lütke, however, makes a point of mentioning that these mediums had no special privileges (*ibid.*).

Anthropologist William Lessa's historical detective work, building on the German ethnographical studies, may take the record further back in history. Even though possession-trance mediums had all but disappeared after World War II when he did his fieldwork in Ulithi, Lessa was able to find the remnants of a cult to an infant named Marespa, born about 1839:

The child [Marespa] was born in Mogemog, and died after a week. His soul remained there and from then on spoke through the mouth of his father, who sat and walked as if in a sleep. It could be clearly distinguished when Ramal [the father] and when Merasepa spoke. If the latter was speaking, Ramal spoke in a falsetto voice like a baby, but always in distinct words. . . . Ramal had to drink coconut oil and eat mint leaves in order to fall into a trance. In this condition he was an oracle to be questioned in matters of disease, approaching typhoons, and so on. (Müller 1917, as quoted in Lessa 1976:68)

The possessed father was also the first missionary for the cult of Marespa, taking it to Ngulu and Palau. The German South Seas Expedition in 1910 found the cult still extant on Ulithi, Ngulu, Palau, and even in the southwest outliers of Palau, some seven hundred miles southwest of Ulithi. The chief of Ngulu told a German ethnographer in 1910 that years before, when Marespa's father came to that island, the people asked him "to leave Marespa there with them," which he did for a payment of turmeric, turtle shell, and belts. Then a man named Uaethog ate oil and mint leaves, just as Marespa's father did to induce trance, and Marespa "went to him" (Müller 1917:375-376). Kramer found Marespa still honored on Elato and Lamotrek in 1909 (1937:139), but by the time William Alkire did his original fieldwork there in the early 1960s, Marespa and his medium were only a memory (1965:114). In fact, Alkire had to reconstruct laboriously from his informants' recollections the role of the Lamotrek mediums. Of the three mediums specifically remembered, all were examples of a specific type of medium (*waliyalus*)--that kind of mediumship in which the spirits enter into a marriage relationship with an unmarried woman (*ibid.*:117-118).

Lessa found that on Ulithi until recent times many people were selected by Marespa to be his *wasoma*, or mediums (1950:20). Those who were habitually possessed could lay claim to the title of *wasoma*; 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 informants' recollection in order to reconstruct a picture of possession-trance, spirit mediums, and the Marespa cult on Ulithi: "Today there is no one living who has been possessed by Marespa, yet in the recent past there were many such persons" (ibid.: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 Faraulep 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). It is noteworthy in Hambruch's brief comment that possession occurred in ordinary people ("*gewöhnlichen Menschen*"), whom Hambruch and his editors do not identify as mediums.

On Puluwat, one of the easternmost atolls of the area, however, the German ethnologist Sarfert found evidence for the survival of possession-trance, of both the on-demand and involuntary types. One boy on Puluwat, who was said frequently to be possessed by a spirit of the dead, "prophesied" the arrival of the South Seas Expedition's steamer (Damm and Sarfert 1935:200). There were two variations on possession-trance, according to Sarfert. In some cases, like that of the boy, the human host trembled, talked rapidly, but spoke comprehensibly; in other cases the host spoke unintelligibly in epilepticlike 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 (ibid.:200-201).

The Central Carolines had a long tradition of spirit callers and mediums, the historical record shows. 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 of whom, 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 about 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 mediumship is no longer practiced (Dobbin 1993-1994). On Lamotrek and Ifalik (and we assume on other islands) the spirit callers were usually possessed by deceased kin. An important exception is the possession cult that grew up around the apotheosized infant Marespa and spread to nearly every part of the Central Carolines.

Anthropologists working in the region shortly after the war continued to

record possessions. Burrows and Spiro witnessed possession-trance episodes on Ifalik during the 1940s, and they agree on the main ethnographic detail. Spirits did not possess at random, according to Burrows and Spiro, but sought out someone in their own matrilineage. There might be several possessed persons of either sex in a single matrilineage, 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 on the office to a trainee designated by the possessing spirit.

The behavior, as recorded by Burrows, was similar to spirit possession in other places. One youth described how the spirit once descended on him and he began shaking from head to foot, singing in a high pitch (Burrows 1949:193). Elsewhere Burrows and Spiro write that possession was marked by "a kind of convulsive seizure . . . in which there seems to be a high degree of dissociation, which may last for quite a long time" (1953:239). One possessed man, "unquestionably in an altered state" in Burrows's view, afterwards claimed amnesia (1949:193). The authors thought fermented coconut toddy played some role in stimulating the possession-trance. They likewise noted how infectious the episodes might be, with onlookers also becoming possessed.

Later anthropologists like Lutz and Rubinstein, working in the area during the late 1970s and 1980s apparently found a radical decline in possession practiced by the spirit callers or official mediums, and they did not record any activity on the part of the *tamon alusuia*. All of the possession cases Lutz described on Ifalik in the early 1980s were involuntary and haphazard, much like the postwar cases documented in Chuuk. Rubinstein reports that on Fais the official spirit callers were still rather common in 1975, but the younger generation, under the influence of Christianity, was discrediting this institution. He witnessed at least one episode of involuntary possession during his stay on Fais: a middle-aged woman, known to be having family problems, who began shaking violently and claimed that she was possessed by her dead husband (Rubinstein, pers. com., October 1993).

If we look at the Central Carolines as a whole, the evidence is strong for possession-trance of both the on-demand and the involuntary types continuing from at least the late nineteenth century to well after World War II. The possessing spirits were generally the spirits of deceased kin and less frequently divinized personages brought from other islands (as in the case of

Marespa). The work of the on-demand mediums was in diagnosing sickness, in healing and revealing new remedies, and even in creative inspiration. In the involuntary cases of possession-trance, possession was often considered the cause of a sickness or an affliction. Compared with the on-demand mediums, the behavior appears more clearly to be a genuine altered state of consciousness and not a simple change of voice. There is some indication that possession-trance was on the wane by the time of the South Seas Expedition in 1908-1910.

The Mariana Islands

The picture of possession-trance in the Marianas is much murkier than in other places. The Marianas were the first island group in Micronesia to be intensely missionized and colonized, and hence the indigenous culture is heavily overlaid with Philippine, Spanish, and even Mexican beliefs. Moreover, the early Spanish records about possession and trance are exceptionally skimpy; we have only two brief and highly ambiguous sources. Because the beliefs and practices of seagoing Carolinian migrants, who settled in Saipan as early as 1815, have been commingled with those of indigenous Chamorros, interpretations of the little evidence we possess are liable to be mistaken. In general, we can say that Chamorro traditions, whether early in the Spanish period (1521-1898) or in recent years, do not present a strong and unequivocal record of indigenous possession-trance. There is, however, a long-standing record of spirit-caused trance without possession.

The early Spanish record for possession and trance comes almost entirely from either the Franciscan priest Juan Pobre de Zamora's account of a seven-month stay in 1601 (Driver [1602] 1989) or from Francisco Garcia's biography of the early Jesuit missionary Diego Luis de Sanvitores ([1683] 1985).

Juan Pobre, a Franciscan friar who lived in the Marianas for several months after his shipwreck in 1601, described the workings of the Chamorro religious leaders, the *macanas*, who he reported could heal, bring rain, and foretell the future:

He [the devil] appears to some indios, especially to these macanas who are most intimate with him, in the guise of one of their ancestors whose skull the macana has in his house and, because he has not performed well the ceremonies the devil has required of him, the devil abuses them, often leaving them weak and exhausted. At times he threatens them by saying: "Because you do not see to it that I am respected, and because you do not respect the skull and

because you permit people to go up into your house, I will make sure that you drown. Do not go out to fish today or tomorrow because your boat will capsize. You will not be lucky fishing, nor in your plantings, because you have not done what I have commanded you to do." Then, between eleven and twelve o'clock at night, they will usually go about the village raving and shouting. The indios who have been awakened then recognize the illness that has struck the ill-fated one. (Driver [1602] 1989:22-23)

The passage is difficult to interpret. On the one hand, the *macanas* described by Brother Juan seem to have had only experiences, perhaps apparitions, of the skull's spirit--something short of possession. The displeased spirit then beat the poor *macana* and turned him stark raving mad, in what might be called trance or a form of hysteria.¹⁰ On the other hand, what Juan Pobre described may have been possession after all, for Garcia quotes Sanvitores regarding "Anites or evil spirits who try even against their will, to possess the poor Christian natives with their own fears and mistreatment" (Garcia [1683] 1985:75).

Garcia, our second early Spanish source, also wrote about the *macanas*, whom he described as prophets and impostors who invoke the dead; the devil, he reported, appeared to them in the forms of their parents and ancestors (ibid.:50-51). Elsewhere he described a "demonic" boy who was brought to the padres and was successfully exorcised by them after a year and a half of being "the devil's habitation" (ibid.:57). Sanvitores found a woman on Saipan he described as possessed of a devil; indeed, it seemed to Sanvitores that the whole village was possessed (ibid.:87-88). There is a distinct possibility that the Christian missionary Sanvitores read possession into the happening. That is all the evidence from early Spanish sources; later reports about the *macanas* merely paraphrase Garcia (e.g., Le Gobien 1700).

The next independent record, written more than two hundred years later, consists of a short observation by Saipan District Officer Georg Fritz in the first decade of the twentieth century. Fritz seems to describe something short of possession: "In Garapan lives a woman who communicates with the *anite* [spirits]. Her father is also acquainted with one. The woman's husband has observed how she walked into the forest at night and talked with ghosts" ([1904] 1986:90). Garapan was the residence of many Carolinians, so the woman could have been Chamorro or Carolinian. Thus Fritz's note brings us to the post-World War II period with only three certain facts: some possessions were recorded, a wild and berserk behavior was observed in the *macanas*, and people communicated with the spirits. From what we

know of the outer islands from whence the Carolinian population migrated, these details for the Saipan-based Carolinian population would be expected.

Accounts for the Chamorro populations after the war continue the themes of spirit communication and some trancelike behavior not associated with possession. On Saipan in the 1940s, Alexander Spoehr found what he termed a well-defined cultural pattern of “hysterias” that were believed to be spirit-caused (1954:203-205). Spoehr wrote that Chamorros, when afflicted by spirits, sought out their own medicine people, the *suruhanu*, to apply their pharmacopoeia of herbs, plants, and various medicines, but they also sought treatment from Carolinian healers, who were regarded as even more effective (ibid.:206). Dobbin’s interviews in 1993 confirmed Spoehr’s description of the Carolinian healers but added that the healers were possessed, often moving into a frenzied trance state during the healing session itself (Dobbin 1993-1994).

In summarizing the evidence from the Marianas, we find in the very early Spanish records some indication of the involuntary type of possession. Trance behavior, although not explicitly described, can be assumed to have accompanied the possession (as in the case of Garcia’s description of the boy possessed for a year and a half), since the Christian Spaniards would have looked for the distinctive signs of European demonic possession. The only on-demand type of possession-trance came from the contemporary Carolinian community on Saipan; the details match a pattern found throughout the Carolines. Thus we have two traditions among the Chamorros: one is of involuntary possession-trance and the other is of trance without possession. Trance behavior without accompanying possession belief is not found elsewhere in Micronesia.

Chuuk

The evidence for possession-trance in Chuuk is extensive and spans a time-depth of at least a century. 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’ [*awarawar*] 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” (Kubary 1878:258).

Later, during German rule in the Carolines, the colonial physician Girschner and two missionaries verified Kubary’s description of possession

occurring to a recognized status holder, the *wáátawa* or *wáánaanú*, who is regarded as the vehicle of an ancestral spirit during a trance state.

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. First one, then another spirit speaks, for anyone can, if he wants to, receive and 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. (Girschner 1912-1913:191-192)

From the German period we also have Father Laurentius Bollig's description of a Micronesian possession-trance medium, probably the most extensive in the literature (1927:60-64). He described the *wáánaanú* role as grounded in Chuukese beliefs about spirits, the soul after death, and medicine; the *wáánaanú* were often the channels through which spirits bestowed new medicines (*safei*) and the chants that accompanied them. Bollig also observed the relationship between the medium and the social unit, probably the lineage, which he called the "tribe" (ibid.:31). In the lineage meeting houses of that time hung the *far* or *náán*, a double-hulled miniature canoe that was considered the dwelling place of the spirit who would, in turn, descend on the *wáánaanú* in order to give the family group answers to their questions. When someone in the lineage died, according to Bollig, the group would gather and hope that the deceased spirit would settle in the *far* and choose one of its living members as *wáánaanú*. The *wáánaanú* were, therefore, something like lineage mediums, maintaining contact with the deceased of the lineage in order to guide the living through the future. Bollig counted over ninety spirit mediums on the tiny island of Fefan with a total population of less than two thousand.

Hambruch, who visited the outer island of Nama with the South Seas Expedition, observed the same linkage with the lineage. On Nama, the spirit of the dead, empowered by Anulap (Great Spirit), often enters into a living person amid groaning and convulsions and speaks about matters of importance to the chief and his family (Kramer 1935:154). It was the chief who called upon the spirit, although the latter usually spoke through someone

else in the chiefs 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 thence this time' (ibid.: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" (ibid.:144).

These mediums, theoretically at least, could be either male or female. Bollig wrote that any man, woman, girl, or boy could be called by the spirits (1927:60), while another missionary claimed that the mediums "are usually males, but there are also some isolated females" (Anonymous 1915:8). Much later, Frank Mahony, who appears to have been recording recollections of things past, wrote that each lineage ideally wanted to have a male and a female medium (1970: 137).

After World War II, however, the long and rich descriptions of the *wáánaanú* disappear. By that time mediums were "being neglected and forgotten" (Mahony 1970:139). Gladwin and Samson described possession as rare (1953:166), and Mitchell's informants told him the institution of the spirit medium was on the decline and a medium was not always necessary for communication with deceased kin (1975:89-90). Other literature from the period (e.g., Caughey 1977) seems to be based largely on memory culture--that is, recollections of the way *wáánaanú* once functioned. But the phenomenon of spirit possession, which was described in the literature from the 1950s to the 1970s as rare, moribund, or in decline, underwent a resurgence from the 1970s on and is still widely discussed and witnessed today.

As we have described in detail elsewhere (Dobbin and Hezel 1995), the status-person formerly known as the *wáánaanú* has disappeared, but the behavior and the interpretation of possession and trance continue, albeit with a somewhat changed function. The contemporary cases of possession-trance involve almost exclusively women, especially young women, seeking an outlet for personal problems that are usually related to their families. The description at the beginning of this article is one such case. In these recent cases of spirit possession, which we described as "involuntary," the person is not given the recognized status of *wáánaanú* and does not move into trance "on demand," so to speak. Yet we found that, like the *wáánaanú* of old, many of these cases are in service of the family or the lineage; they frequently lead to family meetings to discuss the problem that a spirit ancestor has revealed through a living descendant.¹¹

Of the fifty cases originally collected by Hezel and Hung in 1989, only

three older women, whose possession-trance episodes predate World War II, seem to have once been recognized as *wáánaanú*. Clearly, then, the *wáánaanú* has disappeared but the trance behavior and the possession interpretation continue. Many of the recent possession-trance cases were treated with Chuukese medicine as well as with Christian rituals such as aspersions with holy water. In some cases a specialist in medicine (*sousafei*) was sought out. Part of the function of the medicine is diagnostic, that is, to determine what spirit is present and whether it is good or bad. In short, the work of the *wáánaanú* continues, but in a complex that includes the entranced person, the possessing spirit, Chuukese medicine, and often the Chuukese healer.

Nowhere in Micronesia have we found the contemporary evidence for involuntary possession-trance as strong as in Chuuk.¹² Without a doubt, Chuuk offers the best record in Micronesia for early and contemporary possession-trance and the strongest clues regarding the continuity between old and new functions of spirit possession.

Pohnpei

Possession-trance has deep roots in Pohnpeian history and legend. Cultic priests of an earlier age were said to have put themselves into a hypnotic trance and, as *wer en ani* ("vehicles of the spirit"), answered questions in the mode of a public oracle, but these priests had died out by the time of Paul Hambruch's fieldwork for the German expedition (Hambruch and Eilers 1936:130-131). Mediums (*soun-katiani*) who habitually succumbed to possession-trance states were also reported in the last century but died out sometime after World War II. The involuntary and spontaneous type of possession-trance also has its roots in the past, but it continues to the present. The term *katiani*, which Pohnpeians usually equate with spirit possession, seems to be an umbrella term for possession-trance, whether by priests, mediums, or ordinary people.

The general picture for Pohnpei, then, is the standard one for Micronesia: official and on-demand possession-trance has disappeared, but the involuntary type continues. What is distinctive on Pohnpei are the oral histories and legends that may trace possession-trance back centuries earlier, even to the 1600s.

The first European record of Pohnpei possession-trance comes from James O'Connell, an Irish seaman who was stranded there sometime about 1830 and found his way into a titled family. O'Connell witnessed at least two possession-trance episodes, which he passed off as so much "mummery" ([1836] 1972: 144-145, 154-156). Later observers were able to place O'Connell's descriptions in a more scientific light. Paul Hambruch thought that

O'Connell saw a curing ceremony (*winani*) in which the priest attempted to find out what ancestor spirit was causing the suffering (1932:38). The other instance was, according to Hambruch's reading, a medium caught up in a possession episode (*ibid.*:33), although Riesenbergs thought the second episode was an example of "feigned madness" (O'Connell [1836] 1972:156). Missionary Luther Gulick, in an 1853 letter, described the curing ceremony in greater detail: "When a priest has taken *ava*, or *joko* [kava] . . . the particular spirit active in causing the sickness, is supposed to enter him, and from the spirit proceeds the sickness and all the unusual contortions of countenance etc, and all the priest says are utterances of the spirit" (quoted in O'Brien 1979:46). This is an interesting twist on the relationship of possession-trance to sickness, if we read Gulick correctly. Generally in Micronesia possession can be either a manifestation of illness or a method of divining the cause of an illness in someone else; here the priest submits to possession by the same spirit believed to be causing the illness in another in order to effect the remedy in the victim.

Evidently, kava and ritual possession by the priests were employed by Pohnpeian priests for a variety of divining needs.

Whenever it is supposed necessary to have communication from the spirit, [k]ava is given to a priest; and sometimes he is during the process hidden from view by a mat set up around him. Immediately on swallowing the *ava*, he commences rubbing his legs & body with many long drawn sighs, & curious contortions of the muscles of the face. Soon he sputters, & begins to utter words which are supposed to come from the spirit desired. Questions are often asked for the spirit to answer, & these queries are generally so framed as only to require monosyllabic responses. (Gulick 1854)

Fellow missionaries Doane and Sturges also witnessed a possession seance, this time by the "ancient god . . . *Isiopau* [Isopahu]," who was announced as having arrived from *Pasit*, 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, etc., 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. (Sturges 1856)

This description represents one of the few examples from Micronesia of what might be called possession-contagion and is surely a case of the involuntary type, although the onlookers were probably delighted that the spirit had also struck them.

The possessed priests who are so prominent in the nineteenth-century accounts all but disappear in the twentieth century. The oral histories by Bernart (1977) and Silten (1951) provide two testimonies to this change. Although Luelen Bernart put on paper between 1934 and 1946 the oral histories preserved by his family, he was born in 1886 and thus would have known the German period as a boy. The generalities in which he wrote of spirit possession suggest that his descriptions were drawn from a time long past. He 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" (Bernart 1977:93). The Silten typescript 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).

The priests had disappeared by 1910, according to Hambruch, and little is heard about the spirit mediums after 1945. In 1947, anthropologist Saul Riesenbergr found only a single man on Pohnpei who knew how to divine with a kava cup while possessed (1968:109). Although Riesenbergr recorded various other cases of mediums undergoing trance-possession, some involved in curing rituals, these were but distant memories of past personages and rituals (1949:409; 1968:58, 106, 159). By the time anthropologist Roger Ward entered the field in the mid-1970s, spirit possession had become a relatively common occurrence once again, but the possessions were mostly found in adolescents, women, and low-status adults (Ward 1977:19, 229). The transition to involuntary possession on Pohnpei, mirroring what was happening in Chuuk and other islands, was taking place.

We have cases histories of seven recent involuntary type possessions on Pohnpei; one comes from an émigré Mortlockese family and the rest are Pohnpeians (Hezel 1993-1994; Dobbin 1993-1994). All six Pohnpeian cases are women, most in their teens or early twenties; in five of these cases family problems were associated with the onset of the episodes. Behavioral manifestations included changed facial and eye expression, voice changes (recognized as deceased relatives), physical collapse, bodily contortions, babbling,

and thrashing movements. All of this left us with a pronounced sense of the general history of possession-trance on Pohnpei: the official mediums who belonged to one of the priestly lines and served as oracles have vanished along with other “professional” spirit mediums, but they have been replaced in our own day by chance victims of low status.

Nothing that the German ethnographer Anneliese Eilers wrote about possession on nearby Ngatik, Mokil, or Pingelap differs from Pohnpei, except that she found far less detail in the outer islands. On Mokil she found that people still remembered a spirit house (*um eni*) where the priest, *ne nau*, was asked questions regarding the future, but she made no mention of possession or trance with respect to this house (Eilers 1934:380).

Jane Hurd, who collected oral histories from Pingelap, traced the history of possession of one legendary spirit, Isoahpahu, 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 (*ibid.*:43, 98). Hurd recorded the stories of Isoahpahu seeking out new mediums, but included nothing on the mediums themselves, their ritual, or their behavior.

Kosrae

Not surprisingly, documentation from Kosrae is skimpy. It is remarkable that any record exists after a half century of depopulation through disease accompanied by intense missionization and conversion. There is but one relevant report from Russian explorer Lütke’s 1827 visit to Kosrae and some memory culture accounts of possession-trance from the German South Seas Expedition. What Lütke saw was the ritual use of *seka* (kava), described in this account of a ritual in honor of the Kosrae demigod Sitel-Nazuenziap:

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, which he continually pressed against his knees. His eyes were troubled, he kept turning his head, sometimes hissing in a strange manner, sometimes hiccuping and sometimes rattling and spitting, as they ordinarily do when they drink *seka*. He pronounced broken and inarticulate words, among which one could sometimes hear “uosse Litske” (that is what they generally called me). The whole thing seemed to be an imitation of the state of a man drunk with *seka*, and I thought for a long time that he really

was. . . . He ran in the street moving the wand in all directions, and all those who found themselves in his way dispersed in a hurry. At the end of a half an hour or so, he came back carrying the wand like a gun posed for a bayonette charge, entered the house by the side door, lowering his body as if in secret and, after having replaced the wand, came to sit with us as if nothing had happened. (Ritter and Ritter 1982:130-131)

What seems totally out of place to anyone who has seen people drinking kava is the wild and frenzied behavior of the man in Lütke's description; kava is soporific. Lütke himself was not certain what the ceremony meant, but Ernst Sarfert with the German South Seas Expedition used the recollections of his informants in 1910 to interpret the passage.

Sarfert took the ritual to be a description of the Kosraean *tol* at work. The *tol*, according to Sarfert, was a professional medium, who summoned the spirits of the dead for information, but he *was* not one of the *tomon anut*, or official priests. "During the dealing with the spirits, the *tol* found themselves possessed: in this situation, the spirit of the deceased entered into them and produced a type of ecstasy, along with convulsive trembling of the entire body and utterance of inarticulate sounds. The *tol* could induce this state at will. Afterwards they reported to the questioner the spirit's statement, its wishes, and its prophecies" (Sarfert 1919:413-414). Sarfert's informants told him of another human-become-god, Silkiak, who also possessed his chosen medium, but not with the ecstasy and convulsions that the *tol* ordinarily underwent; Silkiak made his presence known by a loud whistling and the *tol* "conducted himself quite calmly" (*ibid.*:414). Sarfert admits that he never personally witnessed the *tol* ritual, and we are left to wonder when these ceremonies were last performed on Kosrae.

The little we have from Lütke coupled with detail from Sarfert's informants tells of two sets of religious specialists on nineteenth-century Kosrae: priests and mediums (although Sarfert tells of one medium who was accorded the status of priest). The mediums observed by Lütke went into an ecstatic trance associated with the drinking of *seka*, but there were others who received the possessing spirit in relative calm and apparently without *seka*. This variation is not surprising considering the cross-cultural evidence of trance states produced by the opposite extremes of hyperactivity and profound inactivity (Ludwig 1968; Henney 1968, 1974).

There is no clear indigenous evidence, old or recent, for the spontaneous type of involuntary possession-trance except for the case of one female Kosraean teenager attending school on Palau. During an episode that lasted twenty minutes, the girl's voice changed to that of a male, she babbled and

dribbled saliva, and she moved and groaned as though having intercourse. She was abnormally powerful and threw a strong male bystander against the window. After a Chuukese student administered local medicine, she quieted down. This sole instance of possession could possibly be attributed to non-Kosraean influences, however, since she was attending school abroad and her healers used Chuukese “medicine” (Hezel 1993-1994).

Polynesian Settlements

Not far from Pohnpei are two islands inhabited by Polynesian-speaking peoples: Kapingamarangi and Nukuoro. On Nukuoro in the nineteenth century, Kubary found neither the possession nor the trance he had earlier described for the Mortlocks or Palau. On Kapingamarangi in 1947, Kenneth Emory found possession-trance of both the on-demand and the involuntary types, but the situation is problematic because of the influence of mediums who were descendants of castaways from Woleai (Emory 1965:200). Those possessed by the Woleaian gods were not dignified with the name for local priest, *ariki*, but were simply called “those concerned with medicine.” Possession by a spirit (*aitu*) is called *hotupe* and happened to men and women. The practice of voluntarily inducing possession was said to be of Woleaian origin (ibid.:312-313). Emory, who witnessed and filmed several episodes of involuntary possession on Kapingamarangi, described the behavior as epilepticlike and hysterical. A psychologist on Emory’s team interpreted one of the possession cases, that of a young woman suffering from her husband’s neglect, as an attempt to attract sympathetic attention for her plight (ibid.:317).

In the late 1940s Emory found possession by evil spirits “a fairly common phenomenon” (ibid.:316); two decades later Michael Lieber would say the same about Kapingamarangi migrants living on Pohnpei (1968:126). Lieber’s Comments on the origin of involuntary possession in Porakiet are congruent with the judgments made by others elsewhere in Micronesia: “The incidence of *hotupe*, possession, has corresponded in all cases with previous anxiety of the victim stemming from familial or marital problems, and seems to be one of the institutionalized means of coping with them or resolving them” (1968: 129).

Marshall Islands

The record of possession-trance for the Marshalls is an anomaly for Micronesia, for there is no unequivocal evidence of possession-trance, past or present, in this area. None of the early writers of the German period mention it: neither August Erdland’s ethnography (1914) nor Kramer and

Nevermann's volume for the German South Seas Expedition (1938). None of the anthropologists in the field shortly after World War II mention it--not Jack Tobin (1954), Alexander Spoehr (1949), Robert Kiste (1974), or Leonard Mason (1954). Erdland found the traditional religion already in decay by 1914, but still recorded many examples of interaction and communication with spirits. He recorded that some spirits steal human souls and other spirits are seen sailing by canoe into their victim and must be exorcised by a magician (Erdland 1914:312, 314). Although this account might seem to suggest possession, it could refer to mere "spirit encounter" since there is no mention of trance. There are a few contemporary hints of possession, perhaps even possession-trance, in the Marshalls, but these too are dubious. Marshall Islanders do know stories and legends about possession that sound remarkably similar to those from nearby Chuuk. For example, female spirits or demons like to possess pregnant women and even cause their death. The *Marshallese-English Dictionary* lists terms for possession by demons and by good and bad spirits (Abo et al. 1976), but how the vocabulary and stories relate to past and present real occurrences is uncertain.

Some 1993 interviewees on Majuro felt that spirit possession did occur in the past and offered as evidence the existence of a Marshallese term for a possessed person, *mijin kwar*. They maintained that possession might still be found on the distant atolls away from the population centers of Majuro and Ebeye, and some vaguely recalled hearing of possession occurring to women, especially those who were pregnant or who had recently lost a child. These women showed extraordinary strength and were prescient. There was an unconfirmed report of one female teenager who was repeatedly possessed during her years at high school and who would get a glassy look in her eyes and start yelling things like "He's coming, he's coming" (Hezel 1993-1994). Nevertheless, the existence of spirit possession in the Marshalls remains disputed.

Kiribati

Arthur Grimble, a British colonial administrator in the 1920s and 1930s, wrote much about the Kiribati spirit world and human communication with it but never seems to have reported any possession or trance. A longtime missionary from the same period, Ernest Sabatier, however, clearly documented possession-trance, both official and involuntary. The official variety, according to Sabatier, appeared in the figure of the *ibonga*, whom Father Sabatier variously described as soothsayer, magician, divine, doctor, prophet, miracle-worker, and charlatan (Sabatier [1939] 1977:59). The *ibonga*

formed a close relationship with the *anti*, the gods and spirits of the deceased; they alternately acted as a translator of the spirit's wishes and as one possessed by the spirit: "Sometimes he [the *anti*] moves into the *ibonga's* body and then the witch doctor will go into a trance. His muscles stiffen, his stomach swells and his eyes become as large as coconuts. People have seen this, so who can deny it?" (*ibid.*:60). Sabatier gave several detailed descriptions of the showmanship of the *ibonga*, including fire-eating. His one description of an involuntary case of possession takes on the appearance of a struggle between the possessing *anti* within the hard, swollen belly of a thirteen-year-old girl and the missionary attempting to exorcise the spirit (*ibid.*:78).

Sabatier's involuntary case from the 1930s compares well with records of two contemporary cases, a female and a male. The female, in her early twenties when the episode occurred, stared at the informant with strange and sparkling eyes (Hezel 1993–1994). She had not eaten for two weeks because every time she tried, she was racked with convulsions. She then began thrashing around and rolling on the ground. At one point she threw a male to the ground with one arm and showed prodigious strength all the while she remained in this state. She would scream, "They are here." Finally, villagers surrounded her and beat her with palm fronds dipped in holy water, after which she quieted down, although people reported that a clearly visible red streak ran up her arm.

The male, about fifty, had gone through a bad time with his village about land rights. He became sick and was taken to the hospital, where he began going into fits. A woman massaged him in hopes of curing him, and she noticed a strange mark on his back, indicating that he was possessed. When the mark was detected, he shouted, "The army is coming." This was interpreted as a reference to the host of spirits that were coming to take possession of him. People gathered to pray over him and he screamed, fell to the ground, and thrashed with his arms extended like a turtle, before he suddenly quieted down.

Our informant said that there are common features of involuntary spirit possession in Kiribati: the possessing spirits are thought to be plural;¹³ they are seen as descending on the victim; the spirit will leave some physical mark on the body, like the red streak on the woman's arm; and expulsion is accomplished by holy water or local magic (Hezel 1993–1994).

Nauru

Paul Hambruch of the German South Seas Expedition spent six weeks on Nauru in 1910 and recorded both involuntary and on-demand possession-

trance. Almost all Hambruch's information about religion came from a single informant, Auuiyeda, who was apparently recalling at least some customs that had already disappeared.¹⁴ Hambruch claimed the islanders had no gods, only the spirits of their ancestors, on whom they relied for a wide variety of help. Islanders, according to Auuiyeda, would "call" to their ancestors for help in sickness, pregnancy, or even a fight. When men and women saw the spirits who had been called, they acted like wizards or sorcerers, shouting and yelling "Ai! Ai! Ai!" Those hearing the shouting would come and ask the ancestors for information about, for instance, fishing prospects for the next day (Hambruch 1914:274-276). If the information was correct, the sorcerer or the "truthsayer" was later given gifts. Hambruch claimed that in addition to the men and women who were professional mediums (*Zauberer[innen]* in German), there were others who worked with the secrets of black and white magic and still others with "extraordinary qualities" who were possessed by the ancestors. The mediums, added Hambruch, used formulas known only to themselves, manipulated certain relics, and "achieved the desired results through some sort of hypnosis and suggestion" (1915:263-264, our translation).

The ancestral spirits were customarily honored in the houses as the patrons of the living and were given food and drink at the center pole of the house; by the time of Hambruch's visit, however, Catholic families had put up holy pictures or a holy water font on this sacred spot. The description is probably the clearest statement in Micronesia of a household cult, complete with household spirits, shrine, and ritual: "The souls of the dead members of a house are the guardian and house spirits of the family; now and then they may enter into family members, who then are the vehicle of the spirit and the agent of his will; offerings will be made to that spirit at the center pole of the house; every clan [*Sippe* in German] has its own guardian spirit" (Hambruch 1915:262, our translation).

Certainly Nauru once had professional, on-demand mediums who used possession, although the case for trance is less clear. If we read Hambruch correctly, there were also spontaneous outbursts of possession-trance. It is less clear just where the family members who became vehicles of their ancestors fitted into the schema of possession. They seemed to represent a halfway point between the professional mediums and the spontaneous outbursts, but their possession episodes were within the bounds of cultural expectations.

The Nauru story, then, is somewhat unique in Micronesia because of the focus on the household cult.¹⁵ Also interesting is the place of the frigate bird, which, as elsewhere in the Pacific, was thought to be a spirit bird--the incarnation of the dead (Hambruch 1914:281; 1915:263).

Conclusions

Although our main purpose in this article was merely to describe the geographic distribution and historical depth of spirit possession in Micronesia, a number of conclusions emerge from the data we have gathered.

1. Spirit possession seems to have been found in every island group in Micronesia. Even for the Marianas and the Marshalls, where documentation is weakest, fragmentary evidence suggests, though it does not prove, the practice of spirit possession. Possession is a deep-rooted feature of pre-contact cultures in the area, one recorded from the early nineteenth century on by successive waves of European visitors and verified, for the most part, by German anthropologists in the early part of this century.

2. Spirit possession in traditional times was performed by recognized mediums who voluntarily underwent a trance state. In some places, such as Palau, Pohnpei, and Yap, this trance state was induced with the aid of locally available pharmacological agents like betelnut, kava, and coconut toddy. The mediums were generally adults of either sex who were publicly acknowledged spirit callers. The status of the mediums varied from island to island. In Pohnpei and Kosrae, some of the spirit mediums were cult priests in the local religions; in other places like Palau and Yap, the mediums constituted an independent high-status class with a strong following in the local community and sometimes even from beyond. In Chuuk and Nauru, in contrast, mediums were chosen from within the lineage to serve its own needs and seldom functioned outside this small circle.

3. Spirit possession was practiced as a means of obtaining important information from spirits, usually ancestral spirits but sometimes local deities. Often the purpose was to effect healing in an individual by learning what spirit-borne afflictions the sick person was suffering from so that appropriate cures could be sought. Possession was, therefore, treated as a powerful diagnostic instrument in healing. It was also commonly employed as a method of divining all things unknown, including what would happen in the future, and in this respect sometimes functioned as an official oracle that assisted chiefs and title holders in their decision making. The information sought was of various types and might include such things as good fishing sites, techniques related to special skills such as crafting a canoe, and themes for creative activities such as dance and song composition.

4. Throughout Micronesia the medium was referred to as the "vehicle of the spirit." In many places this concept of traffic between the two worlds, that of the living and that of spirits, was expressed in the imagery of a model canoe that was kept in the meeting house, spirit house, or place where the Possession occurred.

5. Spirit possession ideation and beliefs traveled extensively over the vast expanse of Micronesia. The people of Pulusuk knew about spirit beliefs in Saipan; Kapingamarangi was heavily influenced by Woleaian practices and belief regarding trance-possession. The Marespa cult that had its beginnings in Ulithi ranged throughout much of Micronesia during the last century.

6. Traditional spirit possession seems to have been on the decline by the beginning of the century, as German ethnographers of the early 1900s showed. It had already disappeared on many islands and would gradually fade away on others up to and after World War II. Today voluntary spirit possession performed by spirit callers is virtually extinct, although there are hints of a resurgence in Palau, one of the strongholds of official possession.

7. A new and less institutionalized form of spirit possession has begun to appear in many parts of Micronesia, even as the older forms fall into disuse. This new type of trance-possession is sporadic, unintentional, and befalls the uninitiated and those who have no standing as mediums. This new form of possession occurs most commonly to younger women, often in response to personal or family tension. The pattern described by the authors for modern-day possession in Chuuk seems to fit most of the other island groups just as well, although possession may not be as common there.

We can conclude, then, that possession-trance in Micronesia: (1) is widespread, (2) is old, (3) changes with time, (4) is now a largely female gender role, but (5) definitely continues today. Hence, spirit possession is yet another instance of "continuity and change" in the island societies of Micronesia.

APPENDIX:
SUMMARY OF THE EVIDENCE

This graphical summary is fraught with difficulties, the most serious being the lack of clarity and definition in the original sources. It should not be used independently of the narrative in this article. Each category (time period, reference to possession and trance, type of possessed person) pigeonholes the data with a precision and clarity often lacking in the sources.

Time Period is split into the earliest sources (often published years or even decades after the accounts they record) and those after World War II only for convenience, although the split reflects the scarcity of Japanese sources and the intensification of anthropological research. Unfortunately, many of the postwar sources rely on memory culture, that is, informants' recollections of things past and no longer part of the living culture. Sometimes it was difficult to sort out "memory culture" references (see narrative for source documentation). Perhaps the time dimension should have been split into three periods to include the florescence of ethnography during the German period, but here again the German data (especially those of the South Seas Expedition of 1908-1910) often only synthesized evidence found in earlier works,

Reference to Possession and Trance uses the schema adopted by Bourguignon (1968), which sees the phenomenon of trance as occurring with or without possession, belief, and possession belief as occurring sometimes without accompanying trance.

The categories for *Type of Possessed Person* are likewise problematic. "Official," as pointed out in the narrative, summarizes a societal recognition of possession-trance as a distinct status or position in the social structure. "Involuntary" indicates a situation where the possession-trance is culturally understood but is not accorded that distinct status. Sometimes, as in the case of Palau, candidates first experience the "involuntary" trance, which is perhaps later recognized by the community as a distinct status. Thus "involuntary" and "official" often form more a continuum of societal recognition than two discrete types.

Island/Atoll Group	Time Period	Reference to Possession (P) and Trance (T)	Type of Possessed Person
South of Palau	Holden [1836] 1975? or Kubary 1889 post-WWII	P T NA	official
Palau	Keate 1788	Perhaps medium without P or T	official
	Semper [1873] 1982 post-WWII	P T P T	official official & involuntary

(continued)

Island/Atoll Group	Time Period	Reference to Possession (P) and Trance (T)	Type of Possessed Person
Yap proper	Tetens & Kubary 1873?	PT	official
	post-WWII	PT	official & involuntary
Yap State, Carolinian speaking	Freycinet 1829	PT	official?
	post-WWII	PT	official & involuntary
Marianas	Pobre de Zamora (Driver [1602] 1989, 1983)	T only?	involuntary
	Le Gobien 1700	PT, but with Filipinos	involuntary
	post-WWII: among Carolinians	PT	official & involuntary
	doubtful among Chamorros	T only? P only?	involuntary
Chuuk State	Kubary 1878	PT	official
	Bollig 1927	PT	official; perhaps involuntary
Pohnpei	post-WWII	PT	official? involuntary
	O'Connell [1836] 1972	PT	official
	Sturges 1856	PT	official & involuntary
Kosrae	post-WWII	PT	official & involuntary
	Lütke 1836; Ritter & Ritter 1982	T only	official?
	Sarfert 1919	PT	official; involuntary?
Polynesian settlements	post-WWII	PT	involuntary
	earliest	NA	
Marshall Islands	Erdland 1914	P only or mere encounter	involuntary
	post-WWII	PT?	involuntary
Kiribati	Sabatier [1939] 1977	PT	official & involuntary
	post-WWII	PT	involuntary
Nauru	Hambruch 1914, 1915	I T	official & involuntary
	post-WWII	NA	

NOTES

1. The bibliographic search for the Chuuk study and this expanded one was assisted by Rose Hanson and Jeffery Murray of the University of Maryland on Guam.

2. Terminological purists might prefer to distinguish between mediumship and possession. Thus when spirits *speak* to a human and that person conveys the message to others, it is mediumship. Possession is the belief that an outside spirit has taken control of at least some of the bodily and/or mental functions of the human host. In this strict sense of the word, if the host simply receives information from a spirit, even one located within the human body, it is not possession. We prefer a broader use of possession and mediumship, because we think it reflects the wide variety of spirit communication beliefs in Micronesia beliefs that the Micronesians themselves do not distinguish as possession or mediumship, whatever the indigenous terms. In many possession-trance episodes, the same individual during the same episode may act as a spokesperson for the spirits (medium) and later have the spirit itself speak through his or her mouth (possession). In Micronesia, a radical behavioral change, such as a voice change and display of unusual physical strength, indicates to believers that the persona is now that of the spirit, that the person is possessed. When possessed persons occupy a distinct status within the social structure, we call them mediums. In Chuuk the *wáánaanú* was a medium; contemporary possessees, however, are not given distinct status and are thus not mediums. Occasionally the word *wáánaanú* is used to describe the contemporary possessee, but it is used more like a verb to describe what is happening.

3. As Bourguignon also noted in her world survey (1968), possession can occur without trance and trance can occur without possession. Where we found only trance or only possession, we thought these to be isolated cases of incomplete description, with the notable exception of the Northern Marianas and Guam.

4. We used Arnold Ludwig's schedule of behavioral symptoms for ASC to indicate presence or absence of trance (1968:77-83); we list here only the main headings: (1) alterations in thinking, (2) disturbed time sense, (3) loss of control, (4) change in emotional expression, (5) body-image change, (6) perceptual distortions, (7) change in meaning or significance, (8) sense of the ineffable, (9) feelings of rejuvenation, and (10) hypersuggestibility.

5. We tried to use original sources, although sometimes only an English translation was still extant (e.g., apparently the case with Anonymous 1915). When quoting more than a phrase written in German or French, we used existing translations and have noted this in the bibliography. Where no accurate translation existed, we included our own, as in the case of Eilers 1936 and Hambruch 1914, 1915. Frequently, the translations were distributed through the Human Relations Area Files (HRAF) at Yale but were translated in the 1940s under the auspices of the U.S. Navy.

6. Of course, we see possession-trance reports through the cultural and time-period lens of the observers, be they Protestant or Catholic missionaries, naval captains, merchants, or professional American anthropologists. The historical quality of the older sources is admirably reviewed by Lessa (1962). For the later sources, especially those from the German period, we think writers must be evaluated on a case-by-case basis, and that task is a volume in itself. Only with *The Book of Luelen* and the Silten Manuscript from Pohnpei do we have the local "lens," prior to filtering by Western and Japanese sources.

7. A watercolor by Elizabeth Krämer of a spirit boat from Fais is found in Krämer 1937.
8. The adjective “inspired” is frequently used by German writers to describe possessed individuals. Sometimes they compare the “inspired priest(ess)” with the Greek oracles. It seems reasonable to assume that the adjective references possession or trance or both; they were writing at a time when classical Latin and Greek training would have easily suggested the similarities.
9. The French is *conjurateur*, which could be translated as conjurer, incantor, or exorcist.
10. Cunningham interprets this same passage to mean that the devil possessed those who did not obey the *macana* (1992:101). We cannot find possession so clearly indicated here; moreover, Brother Juan seems to say that it is the *macanas* themselves who go berserk. Nor can we agree with Laura Thompson, who, using this same passage, concludes that the *macana* treated or exorcised other people who were possessed (1945:25).
11. In our earlier publication on possession-trance in Chuuk (Dobbin and Hezel 1995), we address the differences in psychocultural dynamics between the older and the contemporary possession-trance.
12. We can certainly say that we have more contemporary records of possession-trance from Chuuk than from any other Micronesian area. Apart from the Marianas, however, Chuuk State (lagoon and outer islands) is the largest population in Micronesia, so the disproportionately large number of recorded cases may be a function of the large population. But even in reports from before the First World War, islanders from the Central Carolines said possession was not as common there as in Chuuk. We cautiously conclude that possession-trance, at least in recent years, is more common in Chuuk than elsewhere in Micronesia.
13. In his prepublication review of this article, Bernd Lambert wrote: “Contrary to what the authors were told, mediums are normally possessed by single spirits, not by groups. The most powerful and feared spirits nowadays have at best a vague relationship to the old pagan deities. Perhaps the best known is George, who is said to have been introduced from Fiji by way of Tuvalu. Mediumship can supposedly be taught, like many other kinds of esoteric knowledge and skills. The man who cried out that an army was entering his body was probably influenced by Mark 5:9, although the Kiribati Bible uses *Rekeon*, ‘legion,’ in this verse rather than the usual word for ‘army,’ *te taanga*.”
14. Hambruch also used a work produced by a physician, Kretschmar, who had spent a year on the island in 1912-1913. We did not have access to Kretschmar’s work, but, as quoted by Hambruch, he agrees with Hambruch that there was on-demand, professional possession-trance.
15. Aloys Kayser, then a missionary on Nauru, did a scathing review of Hambruch’s work and understanding of the language (Kayser 1917-1918). About the subtleties of the language, wrote Kayser, Hambruch knew “almost nothing,” especially about the more difficult questions concerning the mediums (ibid.:315). Kayser objected to Hambruch’s failure to distinguish between the soul as medium and a spirit as medium, but did not challenge the existence of possession-trance (ibid.:331).

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