Foreword

With this book I aim to do two things. First, for the benefit of the people of Chuuk as well as students of religion and Micronesian culture, I attempt to pull together and make available in English the somewhat scattered published accounts (largely in German) along with my own, as yet unpublished, information about religious beliefs and ritual practices in pre-Christian Chuuk. Second, I present these materials in a way that seeks to document and illustrate a particular approach, a functional one, to understanding the kinds of human concerns that give rise to religious behavior.

My approach is described at some length in Chapter 1. To see how it applies in the case of Chuuk, readers need to be aware of how traditional Chuukese society was organized and how it structured social relationships. How any society structures such relationships creates a web of expectations, challenges, and worries for its members. People everywhere need both private and institutional ways of confronting and managing these challenges and worries. Doing this, I argue, is from a functional standpoint what religion is fundamentally about. Simply to describe traditional beliefs and rituals without the relevant social background information would leave the reader without any feeling for what were the emotional concerns, engendered by life in Chuukese society, that ritual practices helped people address.

This book is organized accordingly into several parts: a theoretical introduction (Chapter 1), the necessary background information about Chuuk and the ways in which members of Chuukese society experienced themselves and their fellows (Chapters 2–6), the world view and over-all set of beliefs providing the intellectual framework within which ritual practices were formulated and understood (Chapters 7–11), the various bodies of ritual practices (Chapters 12–22), and a concluding summary that pulls together how the rituals described appear to relate to the emotional concerns that growing up and living in Chuuk tended to create. I make no apology for some chapters being very short and others being quite long, a function of the material under discussion. In regard to placement of text citations, those appearing

within a paragraph and enclosed by the period ending the sentence refer to the immediately preceding material. Those appearing at the end of a paragraph and not enclosed by the last period refer to all of the material in that paragraph.

Most of the names of Chuuk's gods and spirits are descriptive of their attributes (a list of names is given in Appendix I). I have therefore translated them into English in order to convey to readers unfamiliar with Chuuk's language a feeling for what these gods signify to Chuuk's people. For the benefit of those who speak Chuukese or who wish authentication of what I am saying, I have included the Chuukese words for things described. I have also included Chuukese text material and chants in the original as well as in translation. A brief guide to the Chuukese language is provided in Appendix A and a glossary of Chuukese words used in the text in Appendix I.

RECONSTRUCTING PRE-CHRISTIAN RELIGIOUS TRADITIONS IN CHUUK

When I first went to Chuuk in 1947, there were some elderly men and women who had been young adults when traditional religious rituals were still fully practiced. Christian missionaries first came to Chuuk in 1879, when a mission station was established in Mwáán district on Wééné (Moen) Island by the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions (Krämer 1932:37). The Americans were replaced in 1907 by German missionaries from the Liebenzell Mission, which established stations on Tonowas (Dublon), Wútéét (Udot), and Toon (Tol). Roman Catholic mission stations were established in 1912–14 by German members of the Capuchin order. Under Japanese administration after World War I, Spanish Jesuits replaced the German Catholic missionaries. They, in turn, were replaced by American Jesuits after World War II. The Liebenzell missionaries continued through the Japanese and American administrations. After World War II, some American protestant missionaries returned to Chuuk, as well. Pre-Christian ritual continued to be praticed by many of Chuuk's people through the first two decades of the twentieth century. By the end of World War II, however, nearly everyone professed to be Christian, at least nominally, though some of the traditional rituals continued to be done privately, such as those relating to spirit mediums, divination, diagnosis and treatment of sickness, and housebuilding and other crafts. Warfare and associated ritual ceased after the establishment of the German colonial admininstration in 1903, but political priests (*itang*) continued to be active in other contexts.

My first stay in Chuuk in 1947 was thus at a time when some but not all pre-Christian rituals were still being practiced. When I returned for further ethnographic study in 1964–5, fewer of the old rituals were practiced and by fewer people. Concern with the spirits of deceased relatives, however, continued to be strong. Lothar Käser (1977) was able to get excellent information relating to rituals conducted by spirit mediums when he undertook ethnography on Toon in 1972–4.

Fortunately, ethnographic study by Augustin Krämer (1932) in 1906–7 and by the missionary Lurentius Bollig (1927) in 1912–14 provides a great deal of valuable information. Armed with selected translations of their work, I was able to review what they reported with two elderly men on Romónum Island, when I was there in 1947. They confirmed much of the information provided by the German ethnographers, clarifying and correcting some of it and adding modestly to it. I was able to get valuable information about rituals relating to crafts, spirit mediums, and the lore of political priests in 1964–5. For this last kind of lore, however, Romónum Island, where I concentrated my work, was not an important center.

Ethnographic reports of the Thilenius Expedition of 1908–10 from neighboring atolls also provided useful information. They filled in gaps in what was reported from Chuuk, provided variant accounts of the same myths, helped to put the range of variation in accounts from Chuuk itself into clearer perspective, and even made it possible to detect on occasion some probable errors in what had been reported from Chuuk. I must stress, however, that this is an account of religious tradition among the people of Chuuk lagoon and does not attempt to describe such tradition for the neighboring atolls in what is now Chuuk State in the Federated States of Micronesia. I have endeavored to indicate all sources of information in the account I have put together here.

On many matters there is considerable discrepancy in different individual accounts and understandings of things. Readers must be aware that there were no canons as to correctness, different local variants of lore and ritual practice and competing schools of specialists providing contradictions in the record. I do not, therefore, present this account as culturally "correct," if, indeed, there can be such a thing, but as exemplifying pre-Christian religious tradition.

It could be dangerous for political priests, masters of knot divination, and other ritual specialists to reveal the specifics of their knowledge to unauthorized persons. It was my policy in my ethnographic work not to ask for such specifics when I encountered reluctance to give them. It was not my object to learn everything I would need to know to be a practitioner, myself, of any ritual speciality, but rather to get enough information to see what was involved and how it was organized, what the general principles were. Some sample

spells, for example, provide information as to the general nature of their content. A few sample set pieces of political priestly rhetoric serve the same purpose. Some examples of spells and rhetorical poetics were published by the German ethnographers. I have endeavored, where possible, to render them in the phonemic orthography of the *Trukese-English Dictionary* (Goodenough and Sugita 1980) and to upgrade the translations and interpretations insofar as my own knowledge of Chuukese has permitted me. I hope that Chuuk's people will forgive me any errors I have made in doing this.

Out of respect for the people of Chuuk, I have departed from the widespread anthropological use of the "ethnographic present" and have put the entire account in the past tense. I am, after all, describing things of the past, things that were important in the cultural heritage of Chuuk's people but that do not characterize them as they have been living their lives through most of the twentieth century. Readers should understand that there is a vast difference between a hundred years ago and now.

Now, Chuuk's people are active participants in the Protestant and Catholic Christian churches, which play significant roles in their lives. I have not studied their modern religious life in these churches or the ways in which they have accommodated their traditional beliefs and practices to Christianity[1] I shall say nothing about it in this book, which is devoted entirely to putting together a portrait of the traditional religious life.

Finally, I must emphasize that this account is not made purely for the sake of contributing to the anthropological record of the world's many cultures. I make it as a contribution to the people of Chuuk, as an attempt to help preserve in writing a significant part of their heritage in which their future generations can take pleasure and pride. I hope, moreover, that it will stimulate people in Chuuk to correct and expand upon the record of tradition as I have tried to present it here.

NOTE

1. Accommodation of local religious traditions with imported global ones, such as Islam, Buddhism, and Christianity, as illustrated by Geertz (1960), Reina (1966), Tambiah 1970), and Bowen (1993), is an important topic for study. Although I have reported on it briefly (W. Goodenough 1992), it is a matter that merits serious investigation in Chuuk.