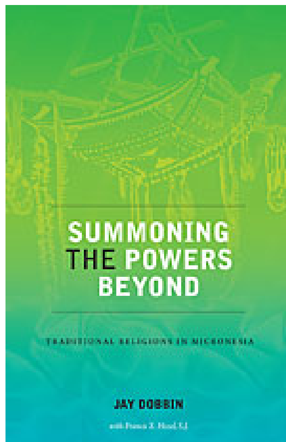

Summoning the Powers Beyond: Traditional Religions in Micronesia

Review by JAMES SELLMANN

Summoning the Powers Beyond: Traditional Religions in Micronesia by Jay Dobbin. Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2011. 294 pp. $55.00.

Summoning the Powers Beyond is a very much welcomed addition to the growing body of literature concerning Micronesia. It will be of interest to both those who study the Pacific, and students of religion. The author, Jay Dobbin, is a Roman Catholic priest who holds doctoral degrees in anthropology and theology. The title page and author's note recognize the contributions made by Francis X. Hezel, S.J., and the former director of the Micronesian Seminar. The book contains ten chapters, thirty-six pages of notes, sixteen pages of bibliography, and an eleven page index. A few figures and a photograph are provided.

The first chapter, "Introductory Issues," is subdivided into 6 sections. The first section, entitled "Micronesia as a Separate Cultural Area," begins with the question of whether or not to treat Micronesia as a single region given its large expanse of ocean with different environments, its range of linguistic diversity, and the archaeological evidence regarding its various settlement patterns. Dobbin argues that despite the "great cultural diversity, there is also a sufficient degree of cultural similarity to allow us to speak of Micronesian religion or religions" (p. 3). In the second section, "The Need for this Work," Dobbin briefly reviews previous studies that focused on Micronesia, noting that James G. Frazer's work, *The Belief in Immortality and the Worship of the Dead*, vol. 3: *The Belief among the Micronesians* (1924) is the only previous book length study of the subject. In the next section, "A Working Definition of Religion," while Dobbin is well aware of the trap of trying to impose a universal definition of religion on any particular tradition or set of practices, he cannot resist the lure of providing his own working definition. Here he is heavily influenced by the functionalism of Erwin Goodenough and especially Clifford Geertz' definition that religion is a cultural symbolic system of meaning. In the fourth section, entitled "Sources," after pointing out the impossibility of conducting any ethnographic study of the pre-Christian religious practices in Micronesia, Dobbin focuses on the written sources from the Nineteenth Century and post-World War II era. Four are significant: the Hamburg South Sea Expedition of 1908-1910 reports; the *Anthropos* publications by German Roman Catholic missionaries; the Coordinated Investigation of Micronesian Anthropology (CIMA) reports, and the American Board of Commissioners of the Foreign Missions (ABCFM) publications and reports. In subsequent chapters he discusses each of these sources in greater detail. In the "Methods" section, Dobbin deploys a three pronged approach, namely oral history to see how the living descendants interpreted the practices of their ancestors, linguistics to provide the meaning of key terms and trace historical-cultural origins for settlement patterns, and archaeology to

uncover material culture and complete the chronology. In the final section, "The Plan of the Volume," he outlines the remaining chapters. The reoccurrence of the above noted elements gives the diverse chapters an organic unity. Two other recurring themes that provide continuity and coherence to the work include Dobbin's comments on Christian ideas such as morality and the afterlife, and the points of contact between divine and human agents.

In Chapter Two, "Overview of the Micronesian Religions," Dobbin provides some generalizations by discussing seven permeating topics: spirits; shrines, taboos, religious leaders, change, cosmology and rituals. By way of an introduction, Dobbin points out that some of the early visitors claimed there was no religion in Micronesia because it lacked the lavish trappings of European, or even Polynesian practices. Generally speaking Micronesians describe a number of different gods and goddesses who reside in various regions of the physical and cultural world. The vault of heaven is described variously as the upper rafters of a thatched meeting house, or the upper half of a clam or coconut shell. There is a family of high sky gods, such as Olofat (Wonofáát), Luuk (Nuuk), or Anulap (Énúúnap), who are distant but not disengaged from human affairs. Then there is the class of gods, mostly the forces of nature, who reside in the sky, on the island, reef, sea, or in the nether regions below the sea, sometimes described as a paradise. This second group of gods includes the cultural heroes who bring (divine) technology to the people, and the patron gods who control food and the arts, such as the breadfruit, pandanus, fishing, navigation, warfare, healing and so on. "There is great variation, if not contradiction, in the genealogies of the gods and goddesses, many of whom are begotten by a divine being and a human or animal, especially an eel or whale" (p. 15). A trickster god is a common theme. He is Olofat (Wonofáát) to the Chuukic-speaking islands and is sometimes a troublemaker. Na Areau is a trickster and a creator god in Kiribati; Letao is the name of the trickster god in the Marshall Islands. "Many of the islands have another category of spirits; these are more like goblins, ogres, trolls and nasty spirits hiding in the jungle or on the reef" (p.15).

The spirits of the ancestors are by far the most important and the greatest in number. There is an approach-avoidance tendency in dealing with the ancestor's spirit because it may be fickle or the dearly departed relative had an ambiguous character such that the spirit could be harmful or it might be a benefit. Dobbin briefly struggles with the question of whether or not people's behavior in this life influences their after-life. He argues that the people who violated the community rules and taboos will not find an ancestral spirit to help their spirits ascend to the sky world. He points out that there are a few cases of apotheosis, such as Marespa, a Ulithian child who was worshiped beyond his own clan. Dobbin also notes that there was the rare belief in a dual-soul, that is, the belief that each person had both a good and a bad soul, found in the Chuuk lagoon, the Mortlocks, and Yap.

There are no temples in Micronesia, but there are "shrines outdoors or indoors where the ancestors or the gods were remembered and presented offerings" (p. 17). The shrines are larger in the West, in Yap and Palau, smaller in Chuuk and Pohnpei, and non-existent in Kiribati and the eastern isles in general.

Dobbin conjectures that taboos, in general, may be a cultural universal, while noting that taboos vary greatly across Micronesia. He seems to accept a divide between the sacred and the profane that did not exist in the traditional belief systems when he is compelled to note that the taboos also had practical or political concerns related to them. In Yap, he claims that taboos were used to signify social and political status as much as or more so than the sacred. I would note that there was and still is no sharp distinction between the sacred and the profane in Micronesian belief systems, traditional or modern. The sacred character of natural objects, such as stones,

places, certain animals and people, provide more examples of the Micronesian mix of profane sacredness. The correlative character of the sacred and the profane in Micronesia is related to non-dual thinking discussed below. Later, Dobbin struggles with the political character of some religious practices as if a theocracy were not possible in the relatively small island communities of Micronesia.

Religious leaders existed on the high islands of Yap, Chuuk Lagoon, Pohnpei and Kosrae; they had priests "and for lack of a better word, sorcerers" (p. 18). Low atolls did not have religious leaders per se.

Dobbin suggests that the ancient religions were changing and for the most part, but not in all cases, were declining already when Christian missionaries began to arrive, noting that possessed and entranced mediums continue to play a role without an official status that the old religions gave them. Possession and trance were used for divination and healing purposes throughout the region.

Very briefly in discussing Micronesian cosmology, Dobbin mentions that in Kiribati and Nauru the universe was pictured to be a large Tridacna clam pried open with the shell forming the heavens above and the earth below. He mentions the Pohnpeian metaphor of the universe as a huge meeting house, and the Chuuk image of the universe as a globe containing many layers of sky world, the island-sea world, and an earthlike realm under the sea. Rituals served to unite humans and spirits within the cosmos. Rites for war, sickness and especially death were common. Rituals for success in fishing and farming were employed, and used to establish social or political status. There was also an exchange or trading rite (*sawei*) between Yap and the Carolinian atolls. As it does throughout most of the Pacific, dance accompanied all major rituals. He concludes the chapter stating:

> Beneath the magical symbolic veneer are concepts of relationships and responsibilities to nature and to the social entity. I fail to see the evidence for the statement so often made by early traders, government officials, and missionaries that the old religion was any more a product of slavish fear than the hellfire and condemnation by the premodern [sic] fundamentalists of either Protestantism or Catholicism (p. 21).

Their traditional religious world view and practices "…served as an explanation and meaningful regulative symbol for the islanders" (p. 21).

Chapter Three, "The Religion of the Chuukic-Speaking Islands," is the longest essay in the book, and Dobbin gives two good reasons for its length. First, the Chuukic-speaking peoples reside in an arc of islands that spans most of Micronesia, covering some 1,600 miles, and there are more written sources relating to this part of the region. Dobbin focuses on three key concepts, namely *énú* (spirits, gods, demons or souls); r*oong* (spirit knowledge) and *sowu* (experts who possess *roong*). These concepts relate to other key terms that are discussed in detail, namely the possessed mediums (wáátawa) who help predict the future and guide community members on the path of the ancestors; hanging shrines (*faar*); the breadfruit caller (*sowuyótoomey*); and the war strategist and defender of traditions (*itang*). After reviewing the major sources in more detail, he discusses the spirits in all their various manifestations from high sky gods to earth bound spirits, helpful and harmful spirits, local gods and spirits, and ancestor spirits who played different roles. He devotes a few pages to discussing the "transformations into a good ancestor and the voyage to the sky world" (pp. 36-38). After describing the Chuuk cosmos in detail, he analyzes the divine human relationships and how the spirit knowledge (*roong*) is conveyed to the specialists, experts or masters (*sowu*). Dobbin describes the Chuuk healing process and the three types of medical

experts, sorcerer, diviner, and healer, and other experts such as the master builders, the breadfruit caller, the *itang*, and spirit mediums in detail. He thoroughly analyzes the possessed spirit mediums, describing how a person became a medium and the roles they played in different island groups. The chapter concludes with a discussion of "Chuuk Nativist Movements" in the Mortlocks where there was a "return" to the old dances and practices in 1895 and 1903.

Chapter Four, entitled "The Religion of Pohnpei," opens with a discussion of the written sources, some of which were written by Pohnpeians themselves. Dobbin discusses issues of accuracy related to oral histories that arise from these written documents. The chapter focuses on an analysis of the common themes in the sources that underlie the beliefs and agreements about the structural aspects of the past religion. As a modern scholar, Dobbin wants to generalize across the whole island of Pohnpei, but the sources are so localized to linage and district that they *appear* to be inconsistent, if not contradictory. Rather than accepting the sources and the tradition for what they are in their particularity and uniqueness, he seeks to unify them into a cohesive body of knowledge, which tells us as much or more about the academic study of religion than it tells us about the past Micronesian traditions and practices. He seeks unity in the face of decentralization, a major theme of the religion and the political history of Pohnpei. He outlines seven shared motifs: 1-2) linear historical change; 3) a foreign origin; 4) gods and humans work together; 5) humans interact with high, sky gods; 6) decentralization; and 7) ritual. He identifies five features of the old religions: 1) sacred stones and landmarks; 2) ritual centers at Nan Madol, Salapwuk and Wene; 3) hierarchical priesthood; 4) plant and animal sacrifices; and 5) divining and healing rituals. The rest of the chapter unpacks these features with detailed analysis, ending with a comprehensive examination of divining and healing. Although the old divination practices faded away, nevertheless, lay healers who practiced along with the traditional priests have persevered to today. He concludes, along with Roger Ward, that traditional healing practices have been reinterpreted as working in accord with both hospital and church. The Pohnpeians ability to integrate and correlate traditional healing practices alongside of and into hospital medicine leaves open the possibility that they also integrated traditional religious beliefs into their church going practices. The ability to integrate disparate and foreign ideas into their belief system is a noted hallmark of Micronesian and especially Pohnpeian traditional practices and beliefs.

Chapter Five, "The Religion of Kosrae," opens with a review of the early accounts of the religion. Dobbin notes that the 1824 visit and record by Rene Lesson, and especially the more detailed 1835 visit and record by the Russian naval captain Frederic Lütke are confirmed and explained by Ernst Sarfert's 1910 reports. Sarfert had the good fortune to meet three elders who knew some English and proved to be good informants about the old ways. Most of the rest of the chapter is an analytical summary of Sarfert's report. Like Pohnpei and Yap, Kosrae had a priesthood, but they are not alike in that Kosrae appears to have had a greater island wide homogeneity of belief. Three gods in particular were served by a group of priests: Sinlanka, the breadfruit goddess and her husband, Nosrunsrap, god of thunder, and Sikaus, associated with many taboo places. The priests served as a link between the gods and the feudal structure. The *epan* festivals are described in detail by Sarfert, but their meaning was not recorded.

Sacred places were also important on Kosrae, especially the megalithic residence of the *tokosra* (king) at Lelu. The chapter concludes with a discussion of Kosrae's connections with other islands, especially Pohnpei and Chuuk. After reviewing the archaeological evidence for a settlement pattern, Dobbin agrees with Ross Cordy that there are more differences between the megalithic structures at Nan Madol and Lelu than similarities. It may be possible that Isohkelekel

invaded Pohnpei from Kosrae, but the question of origins is not settled by the archaeological evidence. The ethnographic evidence regarding the origins offers three different legends from Kosrae, Chuuk and Pohnpei that equate the Pohnpeian "Katau" and the Chuukic "Kachaw" with Kosrae. After reviewing the linguistic evidence Dobbin sides with Ward Goodenough's argument against the cognate relationship breaking any linguistic link between Kosrae and Katau/Kachaw. "The importance of this controversy" is the subtitle of the concluding section. He argues that the ancient origins, or rather the lack of solid evidence for such origins, does not impact our ability to study the religions, noting that Kosraean centralization of both religious and political authority fill out the mosaic of Micronesian traditions.

"The Religion of the Marshall Islands," Chapter Six, begins with a discussion of the scant and conflicted evidence available that describes the old religion which is not in agreement concerning key terms further complicating an already complex mythology. To lend coherence to the disparate materials, Dobbin focuses on the role of power. He proposes that because people, especially Marshallese in this case, "found power in people's relationships to nature, and because of this, nature itself became sacred" (p. 123). Objects full of sacred power are called *ekjab*, a term with many meanings. The goddess begot the chiefly clans so they too are sacred. Divination is also a gift from the gods and has sacred power; along with other specialists: diviner (*re-bubu*), sorcerer (*ri-anijnij*), magician (*ri-ekapla*), Medicine maker (*ri-uno*), and storyteller (*ri-bwebwenato*). Letao the trickster god (*anij*-the generic term for spirit or god) is analyzed for his power of subversion. Dobbin analyzes the spirits and gods into seven categories: Sky deities, heroes and patron deities, ancestor spirits, nature spirits, evil spirits, anonymous spirits and manifestations. Lowa (pronounced Ralik in the western atolls) created the islands, reefs, birds, plants and so on and established the gods of the four directions who held up the vault of heaven. "As elsewhere in Micronesia, and perhaps across the globe, the picture of the cosmos was the physical stage where the interaction between gods, spirits, and humans took place" (p. 131). Ritual in the Marshall Islands was subtle and easily missed. There were rites for various life-crises, for honoring the ancestors, for divination, and for the breadfruit and pandanus harvests. Food and feasting are briefly discussed as sacred ritual and the chapter ends with another brief discussion of tattooing as a traditional Marshallese religious ritual.

Chapter Seven, entitled "The Old Religion of Yap," opens with a discussion of the mythological Yap or Iap as a sacred island on the western horizon and its possible relation to the physical island of Yap or Wa'ab (Waqab), the seat of an ancient tribute and exchange (*sawei*) system with the atolls to the east for over 1,300 years. Dobbin claims that the 20th Century sources are good, and "the old religion of Yap was in serious decline by the time ethnographically oriented missionaries and the Hamburg Expedition of 1908-1910 reached the islands" (p. 140). Yapese religion exhibited two unique features, the presence of crop and vegetation deities tied to specific shrines and served by their own hierarchies of priests, and an emphasis on rituals of purification or taboo. Furthermore, Dobbin proposes that only Yap had calendar-based rituals in Micronesia. In a section on "The Cosmos and The Spirits" of the old Yap religion, he reviews a tiered cosmos created by Gavur li yel yel. Gavur creates the pantheon, beginning with Yanolop, chief of the gods, who in turn created four male gods and one female goddess who mated, and they created the other sky gods. These deities are linguistically related to the Chuukic gods.

Dobbin finished the chapter analyzing the record regarding "the human soul before and after death," and the different afterlives of common people as opposed to various leaders or experts. The *pon thagith* or "caller of ancestor spirits" went into trance possession and the

practice remains within families to this day. "The Gods of the Crops and the *Taliiw* Shrines" are examined thoroughly. Because taboos played an important role in Yap, "the Taboo System" is analyzed completely in three areas, namely the eating rules, the seclusion of women, and purity prohibitions. The hierarchy of priests, the ritual experts, and the diviners' roles in the old religion are discussed and analyzed. Finally "The Ritual Calendars as Integrating Symbols" are analyzed for their binary classification around purity (*tabgul*) and pollution (*ta'ay*).

In Chapter Eight, "The Religion of Palau," Dobbin again opens with universal speculations that all generalizations about "the religion" of a people will naturally leave out individual and group variations, and that the generalizations are difficult to come by because Palau (Belau) lacked a unified political and religious structure. He presents the three charter myths of the goddesses Latmikaik, Chuab and Milad to expose key elements of the creation story that relate to the social structure's important siblings, parent-child and husband-wife relations. "The Cosmos with its Gods and Spirits" presents the tiered universe replete with sky gods, island gods and gods from the under-the-sea-realm. There is a distinction drawn between the *bladek* or ancestor spirits and the *chelid* or gods. As the family gained more village power their ancestral *bladek* were able to ascend to the status of *chelid*. Priests called *korong*, went into trance and functioned as diviners for the chiefs to contact the *chelid,* not the ancestors in the case of Palau. There was also a class of messenger or reappearing gods called *ruchel.* Three specialists or leaders are discussed in the subsection entitled "Interaction between Humans and Spirits," namely the *rubak*, the male head or chief of the extended family who concerns himself with the ancestors; the *korong* mediums who speak for the *chelid*; and a host of other figures who produce protective or harmful amulets. Dobbin then turns to discuss pregnancy and birth rituals. He describes in detail death, burial and mourning rituals, fitting with one of the unifying themes of the book by focusing on the soul's transformation from being a *deleb* into a spirit or *bladek* in the afterlife. The chapter concludes with a section entitled "The Sacred Stones: Archaeology and Religion," that analyzes six kinds of stone monuments and relates them to Palauan myths, but Dobbin concludes that archaeology does not provide any new information about the religion. He finishes the chapter with a compact summary of the old religion again striving to fit its uniqueness into a generalized pattern for all of Micronesia.

"The Religions of Kiribati and Nauru," Chapter Nine, provides a brief summary of the old ways in these island nations. Kiribati covers a large expanse of ocean including the Gilbert, Phoenix and Line Islands, and Banaba (Ocean Island). Famous for its phosphate, Nauru is a single island nation. The myths and oral histories of Kiribati and Nauru are Polynesian in character, while the social structure and religion are similar to the Marshalls and Chuuk. After briefly reviewing the source materials left by British Colonial Service officers Arthur Grimble and Harry Maude; missionary Ernst Sabatier, and Paul Hambruch's two volumes based on the two month visit of the Hamburg Expedition, Dobbin is again confronted with a plethora of diverse, conflicting and inconsistent stories from the various islands and lineages. The creation myth shows elements of both Polynesian and Micronesian influences. The high sky god, Nareau, the Father, must pry open a primordial clam that leads to opening other primordial clams until the sun and Samoa appear. Riki is commissioned by Nareau to raise the vault of the heavens. Four women grow supporting trees that hold up the heavens. Riki's sweat becomes the ocean water; his legs become eels. Riki and Nareau ascend into the Milky Way as stars. They leave spirits behind on Matang island and humans on Samoa. Similar to the Marshallese creation myths, the gods mate with the humans they create and the lineages of the chief clans are procreated. Dobbin proposes that there is a "link between myth and history" in the family

genealogies, which he contends "were regularly part and parcel of legends that link the present humans back to the gods" (p. 193). The high gods were not distant and were appealed to in prayer and ritual. Dobbin dedicates a few pages to describing the plight of the human soul at death and its destiny in the afterlife as it journeys to the spirit island Matang and possibly on to the world-under-the-sea. In the section "Rituals Great and Small," Dobbin reviews many of the large rites such as calling the pandanus crop, calling the porpoises, and puberty rites, and a host of smaller rituals for preparing medicines, charms to protect and harm and so on. In turning to "The Religion of Nauru" he notes the similarities and differences with Kiribati myth. Here Areop Enap (literally the great spider) opens the clam shell with the aid of Riki, as a large caterpillar, creating the heavens above and earth below, separating light and dark, order and chaos. The Nauru story ends with a focus on how the once good creation became sullied and polluted, and evil was released.

Dobbin does not mention that the "great spider" is also the name of an "early begin-time" god across Micronesia, especially in Palau. He focuses on the moral character of the Nauru myth, that he describes as "the fall from goodness to evil" that is "not found in other Micronesian creation myths" (p. 201). He links the moral element of the myths to rewarding the good and punishing the bad in the afterlife. At death a person immediately becomes a spirit (*eani*) and journeys to *ebwiyeye* (literally meaning "echo", i.e. the realm of residual energy) to pass a pinnacle that in some sense judges, rewards or punishes them before the spirit sails away in an outrigger canoe led by a frigate bird. In the concluding section, "Links between the Spirits and the Living Relatives," Dobbin relates how even the high gods are manifested in natural objects and connected to the chief lineages. There were different intermediaries who dealt with the supernatural. The enchanter, *amen mueaeo*, made offerings at the stone pillars in front of the family dwellings and whistled until the right spirit arrived. The healer, *mayayo*, produced medicine from herbs with chants and prayers. The magician, *itsibemin*, was called upon when "strong participation of the spirits and magical action or curses" are needed. The frigate bird was also an intermediary and a guide for the dearly departed. Dobbin concludes noting that "both the Kiribati and the Pohnpeians use their oral histories to ground their present social structure and culture in the deeds of their forefathers" (p. 203).

The final tenth chapter, "Conclusions," offers a summary of the unique features of each island group, reviewing the common patterns across Micronesia, while highlighting the difference. He argues that Micronesian religions be classified as "gentle religions," on the following grounds. Firstly, they did not practice cannibalism, and ritual sacrifice of living creatures, let alone humans, was rare. Secondly, their practices did not require prolonged fasts or feats of religious denial, nor were there excessive, costly rituals or taboos. Thirdly, an undefined "witchcraft" was absent and sorcery was "not strong" (p. 220), such magic was reserved for healing and curing. "To the extent that prayer is more realistic than magic, given the odds of averting destruction, it is a 'gentler' way of trying to cope with the unknowns of natural forces" (p. 220). Dobbin also finds gentility in the fact that Micronesian religions are not salvation religions that usually require some "bodily torture by knife cuts or whippings" and delayed gratification. He makes an accurate observation, in my view, when he claims that Micronesian religions are "religions of life, inasmuch as they are focused on the practicalities and necessities of daily living" (p. 220). Finally the religions focus on the beauty of the arts, especially dance.

Conclusions

Jay Dobbin reflects on the interaction of Christianity and the old religions. One oversight is the lack of any information about contact with Indonesia and Asia. Being aware the role of theocracy in Asia, and that religion is intimately tied to politics in Asian cultures, the author and readers would be more sensitive to the religious nature of Micronesian political order. It is clear that other Asian cultural elements dispersed into the Pacific such as the so-called swan maiden tale of transformation or the universe being created from the body of a primordial giant. Both stories were recorded in the *Vedas*. The divine character and origin of the ruling clan is another Asian idea that clearly impacted Pacific and Micronesian peoples.

We are often misled in the study of other religions by our own expectations, assumptions and beliefs. Do we all think in the same logical manner; does the law of the excluded middle (that a statement is either true or false without any gray area in between) or the law of non-contradiction (that a statement cannot be both true and false at the same time) apply in other cultures' logical processes; do some cultures use a non-dual, correlative thinking that accepts the gray middle and even out-right contradiction? If my previous arguments and observations hold that the peoples of Micronesia use non-dual, correlative thinking, then we should not expect a high degree of linear-logical coherence.[1] What some people may consider to be an inconsistency or a contradiction, others will celebrate as a diverse and complex world-view. In discussing the binary opposites in Palau, Dobbin comes close to Micronesian thinking in general. The binary opposites are another way of talking about the non-dual, correlative thinking in Palau and in Micronesia in general. However, he glosses over the comparison of the binary opposites with most of Micronesia, and when the correlative thinking clearly emerges in Polynesian influenced myths of Kiribati, no comparison with Palau's binary thinking is made. Because there was no Micronesian Homer who would systematize the myths, and because non-dual thinking does not stress sequential order, embracing dynamic change and transformation, it is not surprising that the myths and legends of Micronesia are diverse, complex, inconsistent, and even contradictory. What was important was the manner in which the story provided meaning in a particular context for a particular people at that time. Trying to make the story fit a grand narrative was not a concern in Micronesia. Rather beliefs and practices were highly pragmatic and expected to solve or resolve a particular problem between clan members or between the group and the environment. They were religions of daily life as Dobbin noted in his conclusion, but this idea was not well integrated throughout the book. Micronesian myths were not expected to form a coherent story that was independent of time, place, people and a specific purpose. By overlooking the non-dual, correlative thinking that informs Micronesian cultures, Dobbin has missed an important aspect of their religions and the way they ordered their social and natural worlds.

In almost every chapter the author claims that the old religions and traditions were "long dead" or in a state of "serious decline" by the end of the Nineteenth Century. Because culture and religion are dynamic, and cultural change is a defining element of Micronesian religions, is it safe to claim the old traditions are dead and gone? To the extent that the immaterial attitudes and beliefs of a people and their culture remain in their spoken languages--and the languages of Micronesia are, for the most part, still intact, at least for the next generation or two--, would it not be safer to say that the traditional religious practices were transformed to accommodate

[1] James Sellmann. 2006. "Non-dual Philosophy in Micronesia," *Dreadlocks Vaka Vuku Special Issue: Proceedings for the Pacific Epistemologies Conference 2006*, Suva, Fiji, 30-37.

trading and living with the missionaries? Despite the claim that the old traditions are "dead," Dobbin offers a number of examples of traditional practices being integrated into modern life. The strongest example of the living tradition in modern society is his favorite area of study, namely, medium-trance and possession. Ancestor veneration is alive and well in Micronesia, as it is in most of the world. As Dobbin notes in the conclusion, cited above, modern life is rooted in the lineages of the ancestors. The healing arts offer other examples of traditional practices that are still used today, and those healing practices are not as divorced from the old religions as the missionary priests may want to believe. As Dobbin pointed out himself, some of the reconciliation aspects of the *sakau* ritual have been incorporated into Roman Catholic confession practices on Pohnpei. Given the integrated role of religion and political order in traditional society, the desire to integrate religion and politics is alive and well in Micronesia today. If the traditional religions "died," then aspects of them have been reincarnated or born again in a modern context.

Because change is a defining trait of Micronesian cultures and all cultures for that matter, the use of the word "traditional" has been called into question in recent years. I will give Dobbin some "interpretative charity" and assume it is merely a shorthand expression for "the past." The word "tradition" carries a sense of authority and orthodox correctness that may or may not be warranted given the dynamic character of culture and beliefs.

Finally the word "cult" is over used in the book. "Cult" carries a negative connotation associated with secret practices usually implying some evil power or false god. In a number of instances the word "cult" is apparently used to mean "ritual" as in the expression "cultic center" being used to refer to a "ritual center," or it is used to mean "a religion." However, the word cult does not carry the connotation of religion or ritual in general to the average reader.

Overall the book is a welcomed addition to the literature about Micronesia. It will be of interest to students of religion, Pacific history and anthropology. To the extent that the present is dependent on the past, and a peoples' future is generated out of their past and present circumstances, *Summoning the Powers Beyond* provides a comprehensive overview that opens avenues to future developments for the study of social and religious order in Micronesia.