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## The Reception of Christianity on Ponape

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This paper describes and analyzes the process of the reception of Christianity on Ponape Island, Micronesia. In 1852 American Protestant missionaries arrived on Ponape to begin their mission work. Thereafter, Christianity was gradually accepted by commoners who, for various reasons, were suffering from confusion. The principal causes of this confusion were that firstly the number of whaling ships visiting Ponape, and via which some Western goods were imported, decreased along with the gradual decline of the whaling industry in the Pacific; and secondly the smallpox epidemic of 1854 reduced the native population by half. Unlike the commoners, the chiefs were opposed to Christianity, the dogma of which refused their practice of polygamy as well as the feudalistic authority granted to them. Nevertheless, most Ponapean chiefs had been converted to Christianity by 1886, as the native Christians gradually gained in political power.

Traditional Ponapean society was based on chieftainship with ranks, and was able to assimilate Christianity through its traditional institutions. The church organization was formed hierarchically. It placed the Christian God at the top, and then, in descending order, Christ, foreign missionaries, ministers, preachers, deacons, and finally the laymen. By putting the paramount chiefs above the ministers, the congregation was grafted onto the traditional authority system. The paramount chief (*Nahnmwarki*) was regarded as the father of all his subjects. The Christian God was also addressed as "our Heavenly Father". The *Nahnmwarki* is to his subjects what the Western God is to mortals. In that way the new forms of social stratification could be connected easily to indigenous society.

Many Ponapeans identified the traditional supreme deity and the clan gods with the Christian God. Traditional spirits harmful to the people were regarded as the Evil Spirit or the biblical Satan. Thus the people thought that the existence of the traditional spirits was authorized by Christianity. The Christian God was incorporated into the Ponapean pantheon, and Ponapeans succeeded in manipulating Christianity to serve the preservation of the existing order on the island.

Ponapean society responded to the new situations according to its existing values and institutions. Therefore, belief in the traditional gods and spirits remained important in native life, as did the authority of the *Nahnmwarki* and traditional political systems.

**Keywords:** ethnohistory, missionization, traditional religion, chieftainship, Ponape.

## INTRODUCTION

This paper describes and analyzes the process of the reception of Christianity on Ponape, Micronesia. More particularly, it deals with the period from 1852, when mission activities were started by Protestant missionaries, up to 1886, immediately before the beginning of Spanish rule. Among other things I attempt to clarify how Ponapeans perceived the foreign Christian mission activities and how they responded to this influence.

The primary works referred to in this paper have all been published. They have mainly been taken from the articles contained in *The Friend* and *The Missionary Herald* (cited hereafter as *MH*).

## TRADITIONAL PONAPEAN SOCIETY

### Chieftainship

According to local legend, in early times Ponape was tyrannized by the Sau Deleur dynasty. The ancient ruins of Nan Madol are said to have once been the seat of Sau Deleur rule. Later the hero Isokelekel, who is said to have sailed from Kosrae Island to Ponape, overthrew the Sau Deleur dynasty and called himself

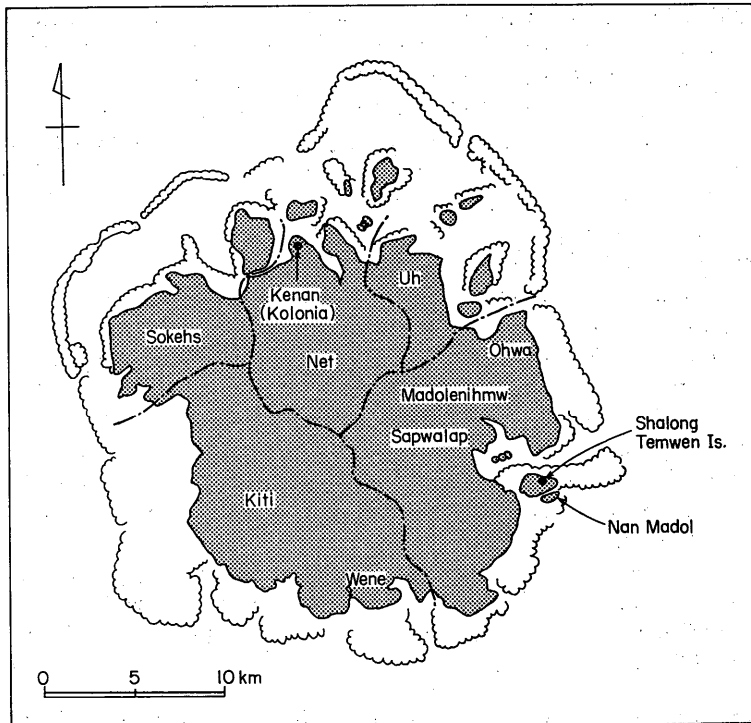


Figure 1. Ponape Island

*Nahnmwarki*. However, Isokelekel's son, Nahnlepenien, totally disregarded the customs and traditions of Ponape, even to the extent of violating the incest taboo with his paternal aunt. Nevertheless, Isokelekel generously forgave his son and granted him the title of *Nahnken*. Later, Ponape was divided into several administrative regions, the boundaries of which are said to have fluctuated. In the early 19th century, when initial contact was made with Western society, there were five chiefdoms (*wehi*) on Ponape: Madolenihmw, Uh, Kiti, Net and Sokehs. These political units continue to this day, although they are now called "municipalities". In many academic documents, a chiefdom is often referred to as a "tribe":

Each of these chiefdoms had two sets of ranked titles: one headed by *Nahnmwarki* and the other by *Nahnken*. Those who possessed the first through twelfth titles in each of these lines played important roles both politically and socially. Anthropologists often use an A line for the *Nahnmwarki* line and a B line for the *Nahnken* line, calling individual titles A1, A2, A3... and B1, B2, B3 and so on, in order of descending ranks. In this notation system, A1 refers to the *Nahnmwarki* and B1 means the *Nahnken*. *Nahnmwarki* is often called "king" and the *Nahnken* "minister". In some cases, the twelve chiefs of the *Nahnmwarki* line [A1-A12] are collectively called "royalty", whereas those of the *Nahnken* line [B1-B12] are called "nobility". In yet other cases, the 24 chiefs are together called "nobility". All the other islanders constitute "commoners (*aramas mwahl*)". In addition to the 24 important titles of these two lines, there were many others. (Now, almost all adult men residing on Ponape have titles.) The status of a woman corresponded to that of her husband.

All chiefdoms were divided into a number of *kousapw* (sections), each of which was controlled by a section chief (*soumas en kousapw*) assigned by the *Nahnmwarki*. Each section consisted of an aggregation of several extended families (*peneinei*).

Higher-ranking titles of the *Nahnmwarki* and *Nahnken* lines were held by members of specific matrilineal clans (*dipw* or *sou*), respectively. (These title-holding clans differed from one chiefdom to another.) In principle the ranking of title-holders in each of these lines was determined in accordance with the genealogical seniority within the clan, based on the order of birth. Ideally, the pattern was that when a vacancy occurred in any of the titles by reason of death, for example, all men of lower titles moved up one place in the line of titles affected. However, martial exploits as well as tributes presented on feast days served as important factors in obtaining promotions in the title system (particularly, lower titles). Therefore, political status was not only ascribed but also achieved. In both the *Nahnmwarki* and *Nahnken* lines, people competed rigorously to attain promotion, but there is no record of conflict between these two lines.

Being the successor to Isokelekel, the *Nahnmwarki* was regarded as the source of all authority and sacredness, qualities which people personally endeavored to increase by acquiring higher titles and thus approaching the *Nahnmwarki*. The *Nahnmwarki* governed the chiefdom, consulting the *Nahnken*, other higher-ranking title-holders, and section chiefs. However, the *Nahnmwarki* was so sacred that he

was bound by many taboos. He was not allowed to appear before the general public or converse directly with them. Therefore, it was the *Nahnken* who was engaged directly in politics on behalf of the *Nahnmwarki*. It was true that the *Nahnken* was also a sacred being, but Ponapeans believed that he, unlike the *Nahnmwarki*, was never defiled by his contact with the secular world. The *Nahnken* also restricted the *Nahnmwarki*'s abuse of authority, thereby becoming a protector of the commoners.

Thus the politics on Ponape were based on the sharing of roles between the *Nahnmwarki* (and the chiefs of the *Nahnmwarki* line) and the *Nahnken* (and the chiefs of the *Nahnken* line), or mutual complementation of functions between the two lines. Marriage between the clans, the members of which held the titles of the *Nahnmwarki* and *Nahnken* lines, was encouraged. Men of these clans were encouraged to marry their fathers' sisters' daughters. Since descent and succession are matrilineal on Ponape, a child born of a man belonging to the A line clan and a woman of the B line clan belonged to the clan of the *Nahnken* line. Conversely, a child born of a man belonging to the B line clan and a woman of the A line clan belonged to the clan of the *Nahnmwarki* line. In other words, a son of the *Nahnmwarki* could become the *Nahnken*, but was not allowed to succeed his father's title of *Nahnmwarki*. If, however, this cross cousin marriage was carried out in the lower generations, it was possible for a son of the *Nahnken* (or the *Nahnmwarki*'s paternal grandson) to become the *Nahnmwarki*. Through marriage between the two lines, the *Nahnmwarki* and *Nahnken* were frequently related by blood. Sometimes, the latter was an actual son of the former. Besides, as stated earlier, the oral tradition concerning the origin of the *Nahnmwarki* chieftainship tells us that the first *Nahnken* was an actual son of the *Nahnmwarki*.

Based on that marriage system and the legend, *Nahnken* was regarded as a son of the *Nahnmwarki*, even if they had no consanguineal relationship. This fictitious kin relationship was not limited to the *Nahnmwarki* and *Nahnken* alone, but was extended to the entire lines. In the Ponapean language, the *Nahnmwarki* line title holders are termed *oloiso* (Royal or Honored Men) and those belonging to the *Nahnken* line *serihso* (Royal or Honored Children). In the pre-colonial period all land of the chiefdom was owned by the *Nahnmwarki* and *Nahnken*. In return for the use of land, people were obliged to hold feasts (*kamadipw*) dedicating their harvested crops to the *Nahnmwarki*, the *Nahnken* and even to section chiefs. The tribute was distributed on the spot, in accordance with the ranks of those receiving it. Since feasts provided an important opportunity for people to elevate their political status by acquiring higher titles, as described earlier, all the islanders were eager to present superior offerings at the feast.

### Traditional Religion

The traditional religion of the Ponapeans has undergone a remarkable change owing to their contact with Westerners, or more precisely, under the influence of Christianization. It has become virtually impossible to accurately reconstruct the

indigenous religion as originally practised. The following is a description of the traditional religion of Ponape, in accordance with a report by S. H. Riesenbergs [RIESENBERG 1968: 43-44, 58-60]. It is reported that the chief's authority was secured by his protective spirits (*eni*). Every chief had one or more such spirits, which may have been ancestral ghosts (*eni aramas*) and clan deities (*enihwos*). When the *Nahnmwarki* and other chiefs were offended by disrespectful subjects, their ancestral ghosts were also infuriated. This is because the mood of the chief and his protective ghosts was always the same. Even if the chiefs did not notice the disrespectful behavior the ancestral ghosts were aware of it. The angry protective spirits had the power to bring special illnesses to those who undermined the authority of the chief. To cure such a disease, the guilty person was required to hold a feast to apologize to the chief and propitiate his protective spirit.

It is said that Nahnku, who had the title of *Nahnken* of Kiti in the mid-19th century, was protected by the spirit of his father, once *Nahnmwarki*, who was capable of producing instant supernatural punishment. For this reason, Nahnku reportedly had perfect control over his subjects' behavior. Also, senior men of individual kin groups (clans-families) were capable of controlling young people with the help of the group's ancestral ghosts and with the power of the clan deity.

The protective spirit of a commoner was usually the spirit of the most recently deceased ancestor, which was called a "human ghost" (*eni aramas*). By contrast, the ancestral ghost of the *Nahnmwarki* or high chief was called a "great ghost" (*eni lapalap*). Riesenbergs interpreted this as indicating the divinization process from ghosts to gods (*enihwos*). He further presumed that this evolution was paralleled and accompanied by the development of tribes from clans and paramount rulers from clan heads.

Gods were capable of making people ill, whether they were their descendants or not. However, ancestral ghosts were capable of making only their descendants ill. Accordingly, the *Nahnmwarki*, who was not only the chief of his own clan but also controlled all the members of the clans belonging to his tribe, was capable of granting supernatural sanctions to all the tribesmen of his subjects, whereas the ordinary senior men of a kinship unit (clan-family) had authority over members of that unit only.

It is reported that the Sau Deleur dynasty had specialized priests. There is an oral tradition that under the *Nahnmwarki* chieftainship, which came into being later, a third line made up of priests existed, in addition to the *Nahnmwarki* and *Nahnken* lines. In this line of priests, *Nahlaimw* was ranked highest followed by *Nahnapas*, who was then followed by priests of a lower rank, as in the other two lines. They say that the highest ranking priests were all from the clan to which the *Nahnken* belonged. During Spanish times the *Nahnmwarki* of Madolenihmw fitted the titles of priests into the present B line (for example, *Nahlaimw* was placed in the second position of the *Nahnken* line [B2], and *Nahnapas* in the fourth position [B4]). This measure is regarded as having been taken since priestly duties became obsolete after Christianization. Other chiefdoms copied this scheme. The chiefs of the *Nahnken* line

and higher priests are said to have come from the same clan, and together were called "Royal Children". It is almost certain that *Nahlaimw* was promoted to the title of *Nahnken* after the *Nahnken*'s death. Therefore, whether or not the "Royal Children" consisted of one line or was divided into two lines, it is believed that the then "Royal Children" functioned much the same as the B line of today.

This concludes the summary of the traditional religion of the Ponapeans as described by Riesenbergr. From this one can imagine how firmly the chieftainship was supported by the indigenous religion. The chief was positioned between the gods and ancestral ghosts and human beings. He represented these gods and ancestral ghosts to human beings, and to gods and ancestral ghosts he represented the human beings.

### CONTACT WITH THE WEST BEFORE MISSIONARY WORK<sup>1)</sup>

It was in the late 1820s that the Ponapeans began to have frequent contacts with Western society. After the discovery of "on-the-line" and "off-Japan" sperm whaling grounds, around 1820, an increasing number of British and American whaling ships began to call at Pacific islands for provisions and recreation. Because of its fine harbors and an abundant supply of foods, Ponape became a major whaling center in Micronesia, together with Kosrae.

From 1834 to 1840 a total of about 50 whalers stopped at Ponape. In the 1840s the numbers increased. In the early 1850s, about 30 whalers visited the island every year. And in the 1854-55 shipping season the number reached a peak of 40. As the number of calling whalers increased, those Westerners who disliked the hard work aboard their ship deserted to live on the island. With only a few exceptions, these white deserters were put under the protection of the chiefs. Their greatest achievement was the introduction of various Western products into the Ponapean society by means of trading with visiting European ships. The beachcombers served as intermediaries between the islanders and visiting Westerners, supervising trade, organizing the islanders into labor groups, and helping the Ponapeans to recognize the value of Western artifacts and techniques.

The Western products which were brought into the Ponapean society—particularly, tobacco, clothes, iron tools, muskets and ammunition—were quickly accepted by the Ponapeans and became necessities. Due to the obvious superiority of Western goods, the Ponapeans abandoned many traditional techniques, and the Ponapean society became increasingly dependent on the West for supplying products. Thus, contact with the West caused a drastic change in the material culture of Ponape, but it had little influence on the political and social organization of the island.

In several of the insular societies in the Pacific, for example Hawaii and Tahiti, the kingdoms were united by the muskets introduced by the West under the guidance and cooperation of beachcombers who had become military aides. However, this

1) For details, refer to Nakayama [1985] and Zelenietz and Kravitz [1974].

was not the case on Ponape, because the beachcombers residing on Ponape observed the rules and conditions of the island community and rarely attempted to alter or improve the society and culture of Ponape. It is presumed that the population of Ponape continued to decrease after the first contact with Westerners who introduced new diseases to the islanders. The smallpox epidemic of 1854, in particular, instantly halved the population (*vide infra*). Since many subjects died of this disease, the chiefs' prestige declined markedly, and the chieftainship itself was faced with a serious crisis. The chiefs were afraid of the total annihilation of the islanders. Thus Western influence on the Ponapean political system was derived not from guns, whose introduction into Ponape was greatly helped by the beachcombers, but from the diseases brought about by the beachcombers and whaling crews.

The beachcombers played an important role in Western trade from the late-1830s to the mid-1850s, the period in which the whaling industry prospered in the Pacific. Thereafter, the islanders themselves began to engage in the same foreign trade, independent of the beachcombers. The whaling ships that called on Ponape were gradually replaced by trading vessels and Western trading stations were established on the island. As a result, the beachcombers and their roles began to decrease. By 1870, the *raison d'être* of beachcombers was virtually gone, and their prosperity came to an end (Table 1). A fact about beachcombers that should not be forgotten is that their behavior which embodied Western civilization planted doubt in mind of the Ponapeans about their indigenous ideas.

The Ponapean society adhered to clan totemism. The clansmen regarded totem animals as sacred and observed the taboo to not eat them. For example, fresh-water eels were the totem of a powerful clan and the members of other clans observed the taboo as well. In fact, almost all Ponapeans avoided eating this species of eel. One of the first beachcombers on Ponape, named O'Connell, once with a friend, ate these eels secretly. They went back to their residences leaving behind mounds of eel bones

Table 1. Beachcomber Population on Ponape

| year    | population    | source                       |
|---------|---------------|------------------------------|
| 1835/36 | 25            | Campbell [1967: 134]         |
| 1836    | about 40      | Blake [1924: 18]             |
| 1839    | upwards of 30 | Blake [1924: 668]            |
| 1841    | 50            | Maude [1968: 145]            |
| 1841    | 40-50         | Riesenberg [1968: 4]         |
| 1842    | about 60      | Shineberg [1971: 156]        |
| 1850    | about 150     | <i>The Friend</i> [1850: 68] |
| 1852    | 60-80         | Riesenberg [1968: 4]         |
| 1855    | 60-70         | Riesenberg [1968: 4]         |
| 1855    | 25            | O'Brien [1971: 55]           |
| 1857    | 25-30         | <i>The Friend</i> [1858: 18] |
| 1871    | 12            | Mahlmann [1918: 57]          |



which some islanders found. This caused a great sensation amongst Ponapean society. The people cried about the sacred eels which had been killed. They fell to their knees and rolled on the floor, beating their breasts. This continued for two or three days until the eel bones were buried under order of the chiefs which at last put an end to the clamor [RIESENBERG 1972: 138]. Thereafter, the islanders viewed O'Connell and his friend with suspicion, but took no action whatever against them.

As stated earlier, the prestige of Ponapean chiefs was supported by the indigenous religion, and an infringement or insult meant illness or death as punishment. On the other hand, the beachcomber totally disregarded the chiefs' authority by digging out yams owned by the Ponapeans without permission and selling them to visiting whalers. However, no bad consequences resulted from his misconduct. The Ponapeans had begun to understand that whites live in a different cultural milieu and have different behavioral patterns from theirs. Observing that whites remained intact even if they violated the taboos of the island, the Ponapeans realized that Westerners were controlled by deities different from their own.

The recognition of the existence of different religious ideologies evolved into respect for Western religion, which was prompted by the introduction of fine Western products. As early as 1835, as Campbell expressed with reference to Ponapean thinking;

Their [Ponapeans'] God cannot be the same as the God of the white man, (for whose attainments they have the highest respect,) who so far surpasses them in knowledge; whose understanding is so superior to theirs, and who can do so many wonderful things [CAMPBELL 1967: 130].

Of course, the Ponapeans would not quickly abandon their traditional religion. Nevertheless, the role of the beachcombers was by no means small, in that they gave the islanders the opportunity to reflect on their belief in their traditional religion and acknowledge the religion of Western society. Missionaries severely criticized beachcombers as a source of evil conduct which would eventually corrupt the islanders. Ironically, however, these beachcombers were the ones who laid the ground in the conversion of the islanders to Christianity which was, after all, the ultimate objective of the missionaries.

## **FROM THE START OF MISSIONARY WORK TO CONVERSION (1852-1886)**

### **Activities of Missionaries**

#### **BACKGROUND OF THE MISSION OF PROTESTANTISM**

In the United States, evangelization was encouraged from the late-18th century to the early-19th century. In 1810, the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions was organized by the Congregational Church as the first missionary organization with the clear-cut objective of encouraging evangelism abroad. In 1820, the American Board sent a missionary party to Hawaii. Supported by the high

chiefs and later by the king, propagation in Hawaii was free of obstacles. In 1850, the Hawaiian Missionary Society was established, which made it possible to dispatch overseas missions from Hawaii.

Meanwhile, the rumour that heretical Micronesian islanders engaged in unsavory businesses catering to American sailors reached New England, the location of most homeports of the American whalers calling on the Micronesian islands. The American Board felt an urgent need to take steps to cope with the situation. The Hawaiian Missionary Society anticipated that an overseas mission in the western islands would enliven their mission activities in Hawaii [WETMORE 1886: 3]. As a consequence, the two organizations decided to begin a joint mission in Micronesia.<sup>2)</sup>

#### START OF THE MISSION

On September 6, 1852, two missionary couples, Rev. and Mrs. Albert Sturges and Dr. and Mrs. Luther Gulick, and their Hawaiian assistants, Mr. and Mrs. Kaaikaula, landed on Ponape from Hawaii by the Schooner *Caroline*, a sailing ship specially chartered for this voyage.<sup>3)</sup> Guided by George May, a Portuguese beachcomber who had resided on Ponape for 17 years, the ship entered the Madolenihmw harbor, and the mission group met the *Nahnmwarki* of Madolenihmw. When May, who served as interpreter, explained the various benefits which would be gained from the missionaries' stay on the island, especially an increase in visits of foreign ships, the *Nahnmwarki* approved their stay on the island.

After spending several days in Madolenihmw, the missionaries, guided again by May, visited Kiti, another possible construction site for mission station. They paid a visit to the *Nahnmwarki* of Kiti, to discover that the *Nahnmwarki* was bedridden due to palsy. When the missionaries presented a gift and told him the purpose of their visit, he suggested that they negotiate with the *Nahnken*. *Nahnku*, the *Nahnken* of Kiti was young, having not yet reached the age of 30. He accepted their gift, and offered coconut toddy to the visitors. The missionaries, however, refused the offer, and explained their attitude toward alcohol and tobacco. As a result of the discussion the *Nahnken* agreed to accept the missionaries on Ponape. He promised to provide the land and commodities required, and guaranteed to protect them.

On Ponape, Kiti and Madolenihmw had fine natural harbors surrounded by reefs. These harbors were important ports of call for many foreign ships. The missionaries considered which location would be the most convenient for their first settlement, and finally decided on Kiti for the following reasons: Firstly, the *Nahnken* was the only person who had the power to control Kiti, while in Madolenihmw three

2) Before the arrival of Protestant missionaries, a French Catholic Father was engaged in missionary work on Ponape from 1837 to 1838. However, his efforts were, in the end, failure, having left little influence on traditional Ponapean society. For details, refer to Yzendoorn [1927: 117-120].

3) Sturges was engaged in missionary work on Ponape for more than 30 years, until 1885. Gulick did his work on Ponape until 1859, and then moved to the Marshall Islands. For details of Gulick's life, see Jewett [1895]. Kaaikaula died on Ponape in 1859.

chiefs—the *Nahnmwarki*, *Nahnken* and *Wasahi* [A2]—who, in competition, shared the power; secondly, the *Nahnken* of Kiti had a friendly attitude toward whites, and banned the general production of coconut toddy. [*MH* (CLARK) 1853: 88]. Thus, the missionaries decided to live in Kiti. They promised the chiefs of Madolenihmw that one missionary couple would be moving to this area as soon as practicable.

The first Sunday public worship on Ponape was conducted in the house of James Cook, a beachcomber residing in Kiti. This attracted 12 whites and about 100 islanders. Cook generously lent his house to the missionaries, for he had no plans to reside in it at that time. The *Nahnken* permitted them to use the feast house as well until a church was constructed. Before long, with the help of the islanders, the missionaries' houses were completed and various activities, such as preaching, teaching and healing the sick were begun. By late 1852, the missionary work in Kiti was proceeding smoothly. In 1853, Gulick visited Madolenihmw to discuss construction of a church with the *Nahnmwarki*. Gulick obtained permission to stay from the *Nahnmwarki*, who transferred the land on Temwen Island to him for the church. Gulick named the place Shalong Point, and moved there with his wife in June. This marked the beginning of mission efforts in two chiefdoms: Kiti and Madolenihmw.

At first, the chiefs welcomed the missionaries. This was because they were able to entertain the probability of material benefits in return for the assignment of land to the missionaries and for the construction of their houses, and also because they looked forward to an increase in trade earnings from the inevitable rise in the number of visiting ships due to the missionaries' stay on the island. To the chiefs, the missionaries were foreigners no different from the beachcombers. From the viewpoint of the missionaries, almost all the beachcombers on Ponape were a totally different brand of human being. Their lifestyle and value system were in sharp contrast with their own. The corrupt, disorderly, dissipated lives of the beachcombers who had an seemingly unquenchable thirst for alcohol was something that the missionaries found intolerable. *Nahnken* of Kiti offered coconut toddy to the missionaries when they first met which was a custom acquired from his contact with the beachcombers. And the missionaries firmly rejected the offer.

Right from the beginning, the missionaries began to use the symbols of alcohol and tobacco to set themselves apart from other foreigners in the islanders' eyes. The message was simple and clear: we are different people with a different purpose [MARSHALL and MARSHALL 1976: 151].

As already mentioned, the beachcombers on Ponape were under the protection of the chiefs. The chiefs guaranteed their safety in the island society, and the beachcombers worked as intermediaries or interpreters during the course of trade negotiations conducted by the chiefs. By contrast, the missionaries refused to be placed under the protection of the chiefs thereby submitting to the chiefs' authority, and instead endeavored to remain independent from the chieftainship system.

Soon after Gulick moved to Shalong in Madolenihmw, the *Nahnmwarki* asked

him to pay regular tributes. He also summoned Gulick to feasts, with the intention of his assimilation into the indigenous society. Gulick knew the *Nahnmwarki's* true motivation from the beginning.

Yesterday word came for me and the natives living on Shalong to go to Na Island and feast him!! I believe I am looked on as the petty chief of Shalong, and it was no doubt an effort to link me into the Nonabe [Ponape] system. I of course did not obey ... [quoted in O'BRIEN 1971: 54].

The *Nahnmwarki*, in an attempt to establish his property rights to the canoe house constructed by Gulick, requested permission to store the *Nahnmwarki's* canoe there.

I of course declined permission ... because I disliked giving him any opportunity to feel the ownership in my property, which would have been an immediate consequence [quoted in O'BRIEN 1971: 54].

Gulick refused to be assimilated into Ponapean society, and rejected any duty to submit to the *Nahnmwarki* and pay tribute to him. Thus, the missionaries tried to set themselves apart from chiefly authority and even endeavored to obtain a superior position. It did not take long for the chiefs to come to understand that the missionaries did not assent to their authority. Once the chiefs understood the intention of the missionaries, they began to refrain from extending assistance and on some occasions even took overt measures against the church's mission activities.

The missionaries believed that the traditional culture of Ponape in general was not reconcilable with Christianity. The American Board, based on Puritanical philosophy, showed a stringent attitude toward drinking and smoking. The missionaries rigorously opposed the use of *sakau* (*kava*), the traditional sacred drink which was believed to represent the authority of the chiefs and which was used as a means of communicating with the spirits.

#### PREVALENCE OF SMALLPOX AND ITS CONSEQUENCES

In February 1854, the whaleship Delta entered Kiti harbor. The call of this ship eventually had an immeasurable influence on Ponapean society. This ship had two smallpox patients aboard. In order to prevent possible infection of the islanders, the two patients were moved to an uninhabited islet in the harbor. The two subsequently died of the disease and several islanders immediately rushed to the islet to plunder their clothes. Being informed of the fact, Sturges, the missionary, urgently instructed the *Nahnken* to isolate the plunderers and burn the stolen clothes. But his suggestion was in vain.

The disease began to spread among the islanders: by May the island became disease-infested. Some beachcombers who had been antagonistic to the church, in collusion with native priests, initiated the rumor that the spread of smallpox was triggered by a conspiracy among the missionaries. Many islanders, believing the

rumor, turned antagonistic toward the missionaries. Even when the missionaries tried to provide medical treatment to improve the situation, the islanders did not understand them and refused treatment.

In everyday conversation, the islanders began to ask such questions as, "Where is the disease most prevalent?" and "How many people have died of the disease?" The epidemic became the only subject of conversation for the islanders. After seeing so many people infected with the disease and die one after the other, the islanders began to visit the missionaries for inoculation. The *Nahnken* of Kiti was inoculated in August. After that he was infected with the disease, but he did not suffer much because of the inoculation. After this, the number of islanders accepting inoculation increased.

In September, the smallpox epidemic ended. The population of the Kiti tribe, which stood at 2,156 in May 1854, had declined to 1,039 by October of the same year. The population of Ponape Island as a whole was estimated at around 10,000 before the outbreak of smallpox, but was reduced to half after its dissipation. As about 75% of the survivors were past middle-age, there were few reports of new births. [MH (STURGES) 1855: 131-132]

Regarding the influence the abrupt population decrease from the smallpox epidemic had on the islanders, Sturges wrote:

Since the sickness, there is a settled feeling that the race is soon to disappear.... They have a recklessness wholly unknown before [MH 1855: 131].

Under these circumstances, the islanders were unusually excited about titles. Gulick wrote in his diary on October 14, 1854:

So many chiefs have died of late that mere boys are brought near to the throne; and in some tribes they sit upon it. It is difficult to find enough of royal blood to fill the vacancies; hence slaves [commoners] must be taken [MH 1855: 229].

Meanwhile, all the islanders began to seek titles, causing chaos. In addition, new titles were created, so it was rather difficult to find untitled islanders.

And notwithstanding all this [chiefs'] yielding to the demands of low natives, many are dissatisfied, and are going to other tribes, hoping to improve their condition. This often happens; as certain persons are nothing in some tribes, while by shifting to others they become high chiefs. This loss of subjects is quite disgraceful, as well as inconvenient; and the fear of it keeps rulers in perfect bondage [MH (GULICK) 1855: 229].

Toward the end of 1854, a war broke out between Kiti and Madolenihmw. Sturges went to Madolenihmw to persuade the chiefs to put an end to the war. The chiefs told Sturges that those who held the real power were youngsters both in Madolenihmw and Kiti and that the chiefs were in fact unable to suppress them

[CRAWFORD and CRAWFORD 1967: 71].

Thus, the unprecedented death toll caused by the smallpox epidemic had a number of serious effects on traditional Ponapean society. First, the power of the chiefs was reduced. Tributes naturally decreased, since the chiefs lost many of their subjects because of the epidemic. Second, islanders' behavior became freer. Since so many islanders had died, commoners rose to the higher ranks in the island's hierarchical system and they were given opportunities to acquire land. Hence, many commoners began to demand titles and land. If their demands were not met, they joined the chief of another tribe. The chiefs eventually found this type of activity unmanageable. Third, the success of the inoculations against smallpox made the islanders realize the merit of the missionaries, and the islanders' attitude toward them became friendlier. They began to trust in the missionaries' abilities and sincerity.

Interest in reading and writing as well as in the teaching of Christ grew. When smallpox became prevalent, the Ponapean priests tried to calm the angry spirit, but despite their efforts, it was soon clear that the island deity was ineffective against a disease originating in a foreign country. This situation gradually formed a basis on which the islanders began to accept Christianity.

#### GROWTH OF THE MISSIONARIES' INFLUENCE

By 1855, the upheaval involving all the islanders had come to an end. Leadership had begun to be restored to the chiefs, and life gradually returned to normal. The dispute between Kiti and Madolenihmw was peacefully settled in April, 1855, when the chiefs representing both sides reached a ceasefire agreement.

By that time, the missionaries had become so proficient in the Ponapean language that interpreters were no longer needed. At schools managed by the mission stations, reading and writing of the Ponapean language was included in the curriculum, in addition to the English language. Communication between the islanders and the missionaries was smooth, with the latter using the Ponapean language. The Ponapean language contains certain honorific words: the people use different words when talking to commoners and to chiefs. If they were to use the words meant for commoners when talking to or about a chief, it would be a direct insult to the chief. The islanders had talked to the missionaries in the words for commoners. However, when the missionaries gained the trust of several chiefs because of the successful inoculations, the people began to show their respect to the missionaries by using honorific words [*MH* (STURGES) 1856: 162].

The missionaries' plans for educating the islanders were accelerated remarkably by the introduction of a printing press, in 1856. The orthography for the Ponapean language was established, making it possible to print primers, narratives from the Bible and hymns in the Ponapean language [ALDEN 1944]. Prior to that, the school attendance rate of the Ponapeans had been decreasing because the novelty had worn off and there were not enough reading materials. (In fact, virtually all the readers had been written by the missionaries' wives.) The emergence of printed matters on Ponape again stimulated interest in the school.

The number of beachcombers on Ponape decreased rapidly after reaching a peak in 1850. In Kiti, where 12 whites attended the first public worship on Ponape in 1852, the number of foreigners residing in the chiefdom had decreased to only 4 by 1858 [*MH* (STURGES) 1860: 35]. As the population of beachcombers decreased their influence on the islanders also lessened. The whaleship Northern Light, which called on Ponape in 1857, refused to trade with the whites but instead performed their transactions directly with the Ponapeans. This form of trade was an innovation on Ponape, where the whites had been indispensable intermediaries in trade with the West [*The FRIEND* 1858: 5]. Thereafter, the islanders themselves began to engage in direct trade with foreign ships.

When differences arose with the captains of foreign vessels, the islanders began to visit the missionaries for advice or to inquire about prices for traded goods. This reflected the Ponapeans' trust in the missionaries more than in other Westerners [*MH* (GULICK) 1858: 176]. The diminishing influence of the beachcombers on the islanders eventually elevated the missionaries' position.

In 1859, Sturges wrote that few ships called on Ponape. Under these circumstances some of islanders who until that time would not approach the missionaries began to visit their houses for the purpose of trade [*MH* 1860: 35]. There they obtained clothes and other articles in exchange for food [*MH* (STURGES) 1860: 290]. The decrease in the number of foreign vessels and whaling ships calling on Ponape helped to substantially increase the importance of the missionaries, who now provided the Ponapeans with Western goods, thus replacing the beachcombers.

O'Brien analyzed this situation in the following way: The missionaries were able to substitute exchange goods more to their liking, such as readers and clothes, and by doing so succeeded in dispelling the influence of foreigners other than themselves to a considerable extent. The expansion of their influence on the indigenous society raised the level of acceptance of missionary teachings, for those who wished to gain profit from the contact with the West, whether spiritual or material, had no other alternatives [O'BRIEN 1971: 55].

By the late-1850s the influence of the missionaries had obviously increased. Sturges wrote in 1859 that the frequency of feasts held by the islanders for their chiefs was on the decline. Feasts for chiefs were an important occupation of the Ponapean people, who believed that they were required by the spirits of their deceased chiefs. However, as the commoners lost much of their dread of those departed spirits they were less compelled to hold feasts [*MH* 1860: 35]. The missionaries endeavored to persuade the people to abolish these feasts, believing that they consumed excessive food, labor and time, which could be put to better use by learning about Christianity.<sup>4)</sup>

The missionaries endeavored not only to eliminate the beachcombers' influence on the indigenous society but also to convert the chiefs. This was because they anticipated that in a chieftainship-based society, such as Ponape Island, the conversion of chiefs to Christianity would certainly facilitate missionary work, since the chiefs had far-reaching the influence on their subjects. However, in all of Ponapean

society, the introduction of Christianity created the largest conflict with the chiefs.

It will be readily perceived that the chiefs must have complete control over their people through their superstitious fears; nor is it strange that they are so slow to receive our doctrines as to the spirit world, since it would completely undermine this power over their subjects [*MH* (STURGES) 1860: 35].

Christian doctrine did not permit polygamy nor many other of the chiefs' prerogatives. The chiefs were also frustrated with the Christian teaching that commoners as well as they could go to the heaven after their death.

In the missionaries' eyes, the commoners seemed to be bound by the authority of the chiefs and deprived of their freedom to act as they wished.

Humanity here is a soft and viscid mass, with just enough of consistency to resist all separation into parts, but not enough to assume an independent shape and bearing. We are obliged to work upon the whole, the mass as such, because we cannot find an individual. In fact, there is no such thing here as individual action, or individual responsibility [*MH* (STURGES) 1855: 28].

However, as stated earlier, the population decrease after the breakout of smallpox brought about a weakening of the chiefs' authority and a relative increase in the freedom of the commoners, and the drop in the beachcomber population brought about the increased influence of the missionaries. Cracks, as it were, began to form in the "viscid mass" to which Sturges referred. It was in such a situation that the missionaries began to redouble their efforts among the commoners in their missionary work.

Rev. and Mrs. Doane<sup>5)</sup>, who arrived on Ponape in 1855, moved to the northern part of the island the following year to start missionary work in Sokehs. At that time the people of Sokehs took a great interest in the mission station; many people gathered at the station for Sunday worships. The paramount chief of the tribe, *Wasahi*,<sup>6)</sup> had a favorable attitude toward the church, for he believed that the arrival of the missionary would in turn increase the number of calling foreign ships, which would, in turn, bring great profits to his tribe through trade.<sup>7)</sup> Several days after the Doanes moved to Sokehs, *Wasahi* was drinking coconut toddy with some of his

4) Later the missionaries became aware of the significance of feasts in Ponapean culture and incorporated them into their church system [COALE 1951: 75-76]. For example, in a ceremony for the completion of a church in Kiti in 1863 a Ponapean-style feast was held, although the use of *sakau* was prohibited. [*MH* (STURGES) 1864: 241].

5) Doane was engaged in missionary activity on Ponape for a total of 20 years, from 1855 to 1890.

6) The *Wasahi* is positioned in the second highest rank of the A line [A2] after the *Nahnmwarki* in other chiefdoms, but in Sokehs at that time there was no *Nahnmwarki* title so that the *Wasahi* served as the paramount chief. It was in the German period that the title of the *Nahnmwarki* was established in Sokehs.



intimate associates. He offered it to Doane as well. When Doane taught the chief the necessity of abstinence from drink, *Wasahi* suddenly threw the coconut toddy bottles aside, and sent some of his subjects to the distillery to demolish the structure. Despite the efforts of the missionary, the captains of foreign ships tempted *Wasahi* with seductive words, telling him not to follow the teachings of the missionary and emphasizing that being drunk is a brave, manly act.

Witnessing the situation, Doane wrote,

If he [*Wasahi*] will be truly firm, and this is but the first-fruit of a good work God is working in his heart, then may I feel that the kingdom of heaven is not far from this people; for the influence he will exert will be far-reaching and important. I trust it will not be many days ere I shall be fully settled in my own little home; then I shall begin to work more among the common people, for it is they who most gladly receive the gospel [*MH* 1856: 378].

In the meantime, the missionary work in Kiti continued to go smoothly with the support of a *Nahnken* named Nahnku. However, the *Nahnken* was not wholly converted to Christianity. For example, when his wife became seriously ill, he temporarily lost interest in Christianity by resorting to traditional rites. From this situation, Sturges learned an important lesson:

It is not safe to put trust in princes [the *Nahnken*]. I have been expecting God would convert him, and thus bring about a great change among his people; but He sees it is better to have the work begin among the common people, and we renounce all human reliance, trusting to the silent, slow working of the truth among the mass [*MH* 1860: 136].

Thus, the missionaries endeavored to teach Christianity to the commoners. Gradually, Christianity began to spread among the masses.

#### ACQUISITION OF FOLLOWERS

In November 1860, when more than eight years had passed since the beginning of the missionary work, Sturges accepted three islanders as converts for the first time on Ponape, and baptized them. In 1861, the members numbered 12 in Kiti, and 6 in Madolenihmw.

The number of converts increased abruptly in only four years since the three islanders were converted near the end of 1860, numbering 154 by the end of 1864. By that time Ponape Island had 6 churches. Prayers and meetings were held regularly in other venues as well [*MH* (STURGES) 1865: 202–203]. Emerson, who visited Ponape from Hawaii in 1865 to observe the missionary work in Micronesia, reported that about half of the people on Ponape were on the Lord's side, and he thought that

7) Until that time most ships entered the harbors of Madolenihmw and Kiti in the southern part of Ponape Island; only a few called at Sokehs harbor.

there was a strong and encouraging movement in the right direction [MH 1866: 135].

Hezekiah (often noted as Ejekaia), the *Wasahi* of Madolenihmw, was the second chief [A2] who followed the *Nahnmwarki* in the *Nahnmwarki* line. This *Wasahi*, who had an interest in Christianity, requested Sturges in late-1863 to dispatch a native teacher to Ohwa, where he resided. In response to the request, David and his wife Sarah assumed the responsibility. One night, Jesus Christ appeared in the *Wasahi*'s dream and told him that his gods were not true gods; that he must join the missionaries, dig up his *kava* and serve the Christian God of heaven [MH (STURGES) 1865: 199].

The *Wasahi*'s act of digging up the *sakau* and converting to Christianity was a defilement of the traditional politics and religion. The chiefs raised strong objections to the *Wasahi*'s conversion, and threatened that they would confiscate his title and land. However, these threats did not change the *Wasahi*'s mind.

The conflict between the *Nahnmwarki* and the *Wasahi* escalated in 1867. The *Nahnmwarki* finally confiscated the land "owned" by the *Wasahi*. Sturges encouraged the *Wasahi* to fight against the *Nahnmwarki* resolutely, and the *Wasahi* demanded reversion of his land. When the *Nahnmwarki* refused the demand, the *Wasahi* requested the support of the Christians in other tribes. The show of support for the *Wasahi* was so strong that the *Nahnmwarki* recognized that he was in the weaker position and consented to the reversion of the land. Thus, a crisis among the converts was avoided. [MH (STURGES) 1868: 158].

The *Nahnken* of Kiti exercised his influence to assist the activities of the missionaries in every possible way, although he sometimes acted contrary to the intention of the missionaries. In January 1864, the *Nahnken* and his wife were converted. However, only for a short time after their conversion did the missionaries' work proceed smoothly in Kiti, as the *Nahnken* died in April of the same year, only three months after his becoming Christian.

His successor, Nahnawahn Mwudok, was antagonistic to the church. After he assumed office of the *Nahnken* of Kiti, a drunken revelry was held almost every day. In February 1865, the *Nahnken*, under the influence of alcohol, set fire to the church, and the missionary station was totally destroyed. Although the people were afraid that further violence by the *Nahnken* and his followers would continue nothing more happened that night. On the following day, the Christians of other tribes rushed to the site in large groups in order to prevent further attacks.

In August of the same year the *Nahnken* forced the two wives of his deceased brother into his harem. One of them, guided by a friend, escaped. However, the widow and her friend were both killed by the infuriated *Nahnken*. The *Nahnken* threatened the supporters of Christianity among the islanders with death, and out of fear the people began to stay away from church.

Doane, who had left Ponape in 1857, resumed missionary work on the island in 1865, stressing the importance of educating the people. In Kiti, where the mission station had been destroyed by the fire set by the *Nahnken*, another building was

constructed for the mission station and school. In 1867, however, Sturges moved to Ohwa, Madolenihmw, leaving control of the mission station of Kiti under a native deacon. After Sturges left Kiti, the *Nahnken* transferred the house and mission premises which had been "owned" by Sturges to a notorious American trader, Ben Pease.

Fear of the *Nahnken* of Kiti gradually dissipated, although he still indulged in drinking. It was becoming clear that more and more Christians were exercising their rights against the *Nahnken* in certain instances, and the cruelty of the *Nahnken* began to diminish. By 1866, the converted Ponapeans who had been named the "Missionary Party" were discussing the idea of organizing some kind of union or Christian Party for protection against an attack by the non-Christian chiefs. Although the authority of each chief did not extend to other tribes, the converts were beginning to organize a union which would cover the whole island, transcending the borders among the tribes.

A new way of thinking that "the common people were made for something more than to feast their chiefs and die like the brutes, as they had always been told" [quoted in CRAWFORD and CRAWFORD 1967: 155] grew in the minds of the islanders. The chiefs' responses to this movement were varied. For example, the *Wasahi* of Madolenihmw tried to exert his own leadership in the new movement. By contrast, the *Nahnwarki* of Madolenihmw and the *Nahnken* of Kiti objected to it and thought that they must fight against it. The "king" of Sokehs (presumably, the *Wasahi*, who was the paramount chief of Sokehs) was caught in the middle.

The "king" of Sokehs had a great interest in Christianity, as evidenced by his frequent worship in the church. In 1869, a conflict arose between Doane, the missionary, and the "king" of Sokehs. Doane did not allow the "king" to pray or to talk during the church meetings, as the "king" practiced polygamy. The "king" was offended by the fact that he was not allowed to play a leading role at church meetings, despite his holding the highest title, while lower-ranking people who had been converted to Christianity could do so. The "king" wished to assume the position of supreme head both in the chieftdom and church. He could by no means consent to subordinates holding higher positions than his. Dissatisfied with the denial of the king's authority by the missionary, the "king" of Sokehs indulged in drinking, and abducted a daughter of a Christian islander and made her one of his wives [MH (DOANE) 1870: 283-284]. Thus, the "king" of Sokehs, while being attracted to Christianity, was not converted after all, for he could not abandon his authority.

In June 1870, the US naval cruiser *Jamestown* was sent to Micronesia with the objective of investigating the murder of a Hawaiian missionary in the Gilberts, and the sale of the church premises of Kiti, Ponape Island, to a foreign trader. The Captain, Cmdr, N. J. Truxton ordered the "king" of Sokehs to free the woman he had abducted, and also ordered the *Nahnken* of Kiti to promise the reversion of the church premises he had sold to the trader. The problems suffered by the missionaries were all resolved by the visit of the *Jamestown*. The Ponapean people observed the

activities of the missionaries being publicly acknowledged and protected by the US naval cruiser.

#### GROWTH OF THE CHRISTIAN POPULATION AND CONVERSION OF CHIEFS

The *Wasahi* of Madolenihmw, named Hezekiah, who had consistently adhered to Christianity, disregarding the *Nahmwarki*'s opposition, had been regarded as the leader of Christians. He died in 1872. It was expected that the Christian Party would be weakened without the support of the high chief, *Wasahi*. To make matters worse, the man who was to succeed him in title was non-Christian. He was against Christianity and often forced the Christians to carry out traditional rituals. The converts were afraid that a very difficult situation would emerge if he became *Wasahi*.

To deal with the situation, Sturges summoned the Christians to a meeting at which one of them was elected "civil head" of the Christian Party, to succeed Hezekiah. A few days later the *Nahmwarki* appointed not the "heathen" chief but the chief of the Christian Party as the new *Wasahi* [MH (STURGES) 1873: 230]. This meant that the Christian Party had grown to such an extent that even the *Nahmwarki* could not ignore it. The *Nahmwarki* recognized his disadvantageous position and refrained from lording his authority over the Christians in his region. Since the representative of the Christian Party assumed the office of *Wasahi*, the Christians no longer had to directly oppose the chieftainship system, which made it possible for Christianity and the traditional chieftainship to coexist peacefully.

In 1873, Sturges wrote that the Christians had control over more than half the residents and land of Madolenihmw. Nevertheless, he thought that the "want of *authority* and *ownership*", or the absence of the system of private property, still remained an obstacle to his missionary work.

Wives, children, lands, property, belong to everybody and to nobody. In this state of things, there is and can be but little desire to improve or acquire [MH (STURGES) 1874: 253].

The missionaries then tried to reform the traditional society of Ponape, believing that such a society was not suitable for Christians. Sturges thought that the only existing laws of Ponapean society were the customs and desires of its chiefs, and that these chiefs pursued profits depending on their personal wishes. He recommended that the islanders elect a respectable person as "sheriff" from each one of the seven districts of Madolenihmw. A "law-maker" also was elected from each district. These seven law-makers and a group of high chiefs constituted a legislature.

One of the laws enacted by this legislature was the so-called Homestead Law under which land was given to every islander provided that the person build a house in which they would live on the land.

This law is the most radical of any they need, as it strikes at the root of the

great evil here,—a kind of socialism, quite destructive to all our efforts to fix them as to place or property [*MH* (STURGES) 1874: 253].

The Christians of Madolenihmw established a “civil government”, although they were still bound by the traditional chieftainship. It seems that court trials were held in each district regarding matters concerning the district. In the Sapwalap district of Madolenihmw, for example, all the problems not related to the church, including labor on the land, personal disputes as well as those involving neighbors, were brought before the *Wasahi*, who served as the “head of the republic” and made the final decision [*MH* (STURGES) 1874: 210].

On the other hand, in Kiti where Christianity lost its support by an influential person after the death of the *Nahnken* in 1864, the introduction of democracy was difficult. However, it succeeded to a certain extent in the northern part of the island. In 1876, a missionary by the name of Logan<sup>8)</sup> reported on the police situation in Kenan (now called Kolonia) as summarized as follows: About two months ago, a person was killed in a quarrel which involved drinking. The islanders held a meeting in Kenan, which was attended by almost all the high chiefs of two tribes (Sokehs and Net) as well as by many common people. At this meeting, the chiefs appointed a force of about fifty men for the purpose of maintaining order on the island, and initiated a movement against drinking. This police force, headed by a high chief, constantly observed the manufacturing of coconut toddy and kept a close check against abuse. The force was doing good work in arresting all who were guilty of adultery, stealing, fighting and so on. This was the first move ever taken in the northern portion of the island for the maintenance of law and order [*MH* (LOGAN) 1876: 310–311].

The missionary experiment in democracy eventually ended in failure. This was also true of land reforms. The authority of the chiefs, which was based on giving people land and titles and receiving tributes in return, was still surviving in the 1870s. Christianity was accepted only within the framework of the political system of the Ponapean people [HEZEL 1983: 246–247].

In the early 1870s, the German firm of Godeffroy & Son opened a station on Ponape. By this time, a change had occurred in the economy of the island. Earlier traders severely opposed the missionaries, with regard to the sale of tobacco, rum and guns. However, by that time it had become more profitable for the traders to sell clothing and household utensils rather than tobacco and rum. Since the purchasers of the clothing and utensils were converted islanders, the traders no longer regarded the church as an obstacle to their business. Furthermore, captains of the trading ships promised that they would provide the missionaries with their best possible assistance, believing that the church was civilizing the islanders and making a great contribution to their business [*MH* (DOANE) 1873: 229].

Wood, who visited Ponape in 1873, was the kind of person who would not engage

8) Logan stayed on Ponape as a missionary from 1874 until 1879, and then moved to the Mortlock Islands. For details of his missionary work, see Logan [1884].

**Table 2.** Church Membership on Ponape

| year | No. of church | membership | source                       |
|------|---------------|------------|------------------------------|
| 1860 |               | 3          | <i>MH</i> [1861: 368]        |
| 1861 | 2             | 18         | <i>The Friend</i> [1861: 67] |
| 1864 | 6             | 154        | <i>MH</i> [1865: 202-203]    |
| 1865 |               | 170        | Judd [1920: 48]              |
| 1867 |               | 161        | Bartlett [1872: 66]          |
| 1870 |               | 250        | Judd [1920: 49]              |
| 1873 | 8             | hundreds   | <i>MH</i> [1874: 126]        |
| 1876 | 13            | over 500   | <i>MH</i> [1877: 205]        |
| 1886 | 13            | 451        | Wetmore [1886: 17]           |

in trade with the islanders on the Sabbath. He wrote that the number of immoral beachcombers had decreased drastically, and that now a new style of white men resided on the island to trade legitimately with the islanders. These new whites lived in good houses (though built in native fashion), were honest, had a decent lifestyle, and worked for German firms located in Sydney and Samoa [WOOD 1875: 161]. At around 1880, it is said that three major trading firms were doing business on Ponape. The church also welcomed the business activities of these traders.

In 1876, Sturges visited the church which had recently been completed in Wene, where the *Nahnmwarki* of Kiti resided. In the same year a church was constructed on Temwen Island, where the *Nahnmwarki* of Madolenihmw was residing. Some of the high chiefs of Madolenihmw had long objected to missionary work, and even now some were still opposed to it. However, the *Nahnmwarki*'s attitude toward Christianity was softening to such an extent that he began to attend Sunday meetings at a church some distance away. In response to Sturges' recommendation to build a church near his home for increased convenience, the *Nahnmwarki* had a church constructed on Temwen [*MH* (STURGES) 1877: 214-215]. Thus, the *Nahnmwarkis*, the paramount chiefs of the chiefdom states, began to have an interest in Christianity at long last.

As of 1886, there were 13 churches on Ponape, and 451 people were admitted as Christians [WETMORE 1886: 17] (Table 2). By the end of the same year four out of the five paramount chiefs of Ponape were baptized. In the one remaining chiefdom, the chief who was to become paramount in the future was working for the Master [*MH* (DOANE) 1887: 224]. Thus, immediately before Spanish colonial rule, Christianity was accepted by most of the paramount chiefs of Ponape, and peaceful coexistence between Christianity and the traditional chieftainship was established.

## PROCESS OF CONVERSION—CHIEFTAINSHIP AND CHRISTIANITY—

### Process of Accepting Christianity

In this section, the process of the acceptance of Christianity will be briefly described from the viewpoint of the Ponapeans.

Before the arrival of the Protestant missionaries, the Ponapeans' faith in their traditional religion had already been diminishing due to the influence of the beachcombers as well as the overwhelming superiority of Western civilization. This trend was further strengthened by the smallpox epidemic. In 1855 Gulick wrote that the Ponapeans in general were indifferent to their traditional religion [*MH* 1856: 281]. This was why they began to find interest in Christianity.

From their first contact with the West, the islanders desired to obtain good Western artifacts which were first acquired through the beachcombers. However, as the number of beachcombers and of calling whalers decreased, the role of missionaries increased as a source of Western products. Whereas the chiefs were still using the beachcombers in their trade with foreigners, the commoners were approaching the missionaries as the easiest way to obtain Western goods. The sudden decrease of the island population after the spread of smallpox and the resultant weakening of the chiefs' power to control their subjects, encouraged this behaviour among the commoners.

At first the chiefs welcomed the missionaries as a supply source of Western goods. However, after they became aware that the acceptance of Christianity would deprive them of their many prerogatives, they changed their stance and took an antagonistic attitude toward the missionaries. Under the traditional chieftainship, people competed severely to secure promotions and increase their authority and power. With the growth of the missionaries' influence there emerged chiefs who attempted to gain political advantages by making the best use of the power of the missionaries and the steadily-growing Christian Party. The Christian Party, having received strong support from the influential chiefs, was no longer bothered by conflict between the traditional chieftainship and Christianity. Instead it prospered.

The chiefs opposing Christianity were faced with difficulties. They were aware that the Christian Party had become so powerful that they could no longer control it. Also, as evidenced by the visit of the US naval cruiser, the work of the missionaries was supported by the overwhelming military capacity of the West. Counterattack was virtually impossible. Thus, the non-Christian chiefs were driven into a corner. The only way out was their own conversion.

It was true that the traditional chiefs were facing an impasse. However, they would not have converted easily if Christianity had intended a total destruction of the chieftainship. Now, let us examine how Christianity was related to the chieftainship.

### **Chieftainship and Church Organization**

First, how did the missionaries look at the chieftainship? Secretary Rufus Anderson of the American Board described Board's view in the following manner: It is not the purpose of our missionary work to reproduce the social and religious forms of American civilization in "heathen" lands, although Western systems may be eventually introduced as a result of Gospel-missions. The object of Gospel-missions is to proclaim salvation for immortal souls through repentance and faith in the Lord

Jesus. Therefore it is not the fault of the American mission that in Hawaii constitutional monarchy was established instead of a republic [PHILLIPS 1969: 253].

The missionaries who worked on Ponape did oppose immoral, "heathen" customs, such as polygamy and the use of *sakau*, which were incidental to chieftainship, as well as abuse of the chiefs' authority; and they did promote the development of individualism and the respect for private property among the islanders. However, they had no intention of destroying the chieftainship *per se*. On the contrary, they valued the chieftainship to a certain extent. For example, Doane stated that on an island such as Ponape it was essential to have kings and chiefs, the rulers of the land, on one's side [MH 1870: 285].

According to Hezel, more often than not the missionaries' complaints were directed at a lack of chiefly authority rather than its excess. Despite their own democratic preferences, they acknowledged many times in their letters the need that the people had for decisive leadership and firm direction from their chiefs, if they were ever to improve their lives [HEZEL 1983: 316].

In fact, the republic system promoted by the missionaries could not have come into existence without *Wasahi*, one of the high chiefs, and it was realized in the form of integration with the chieftainship.

Here, it is worthwhile to describe how the modern Ponapeans regard the church organization and their traditional chieftainship. This is based on the author's observations of present religious activities. Today, in the Protestant church on Ponape, there are three offices: ministers (*wahnpoaron*), preachers (*sounpadahk*) and deacons (*sounkohwa*). Pious Christians wish to be finally promoted to the position of minister, for which they make considerable efforts. The Ponapeans regard the church as a kind of rank system in which "God is positioned atop, then followed by Jesus Christ, [foreign] missionary, minister, preacher and deacon, in this order" [ARAKAWA 1983: 11].

As stated earlier, the indigenous social and political system of Ponape is chieftainship based on rank. Even today, ministers and lower-rank Christians pay special respect to the *Nahnmwarki* and *Nahnken* at events held in the church. (For example, a special seating order for the paramount chiefs has been established in the church; and the best foods are offered to them in "love feasts", *vide infra*.)

Thus, the islanders look at the church system within the framework of their traditional chieftainship system. Since the church had the same basic structure as that of the Ponapean chieftainship, it was successfully grafted onto the traditional system of the Ponapeans, by placing the *Nahnmwarki* and *Nahnken* above the ministers. Another factor which made the chieftainship receptive to Christianity seems to be the fact that the Christian God is looked on as "father".

As stated earlier, the *Nahnken* was always regarded as the son of the *Nahnmwarki* in the traditional Ponapean political system. This fictitious kin relationship was extended to two entire lines. Like the *Nahnken* in the oral tradition of the origin of the *Nahnmwarki* chieftainship, those belonging to the *Nahnken* line were allowed to violate many behavioral standards which commoners were required to observe.



For example, a person of the *Nahnken* line could joke with people of the *Nahnmwarki* line, or behave mischievously toward them. Being "father", the *Nahnmwarki* was required to be lenient regarding such behavior of his "son".

On present-day Ponape there is a notion that the commoners offend the *Nahnmwarki* by disobedience, laziness or by always doing bad things. The *Nahnmwarki*, on the other hand, regards all the inhabitants in his chiefdom (=municipality) as his own "children", deals with them with great love and generosity, and extends assistance to those who suffer difficulties [HUGHES 1970: 166, 183]. The Ponapean's image of the *Nahnmwarki* is that of a lenient "father" who leads people and who guides them in the right direction. It is probably not necessary to describe the Christian God in detail. It would be sufficient to say that men are all sinful and could be saved only by the mercy of "Our Heavenly Father". Therefore, the equation "*Nahnmwarki*: subjects=father: children (sons)" corresponds to the equation "Western God: mortals=father: children".

Here, it must be remembered that in the traditional chieftainship the chief was positioned in between the gods/ghosts and the mortals, and that he represented the gods/ghosts to mortals, and mortals to the gods/ghosts. The *Nahnmwarki* was regarded by the people as an embodiment of divinity and chieftainship, as if he were a god disguised as a human being. He was not only a human being but a god as well.<sup>9)</sup> In other words, the *Nahnmwarki* was perceived in either of the two relationships, "[god: *Nahnmwarki*]: [subjects]" or "[god]: [*Nahnmwarki*: subjects]".

In Christianity, on the other hand, Jesus Christ is "the son of God" and at the same time "God the Son". In this way the position of the *Nahnmwarki* on Ponape corresponds well to that of Jesus Christ. The term "*Nahnmwarki*" is generally used by the Ponapeans to denote the supreme head of an independent state. For instance, a British king is described as "the *Nahnmwarki* of the United Kingdom". Likewise, the Ponapeans believe that "Jesus Christ is the *Nahnmwarki* of the world" [IWAMURA 1980: 152], probably on the basis of the above.

There are other cases in which the church system incorporates some of the elements of chieftainship. For example, in the feast house (*nahs*) where chiefs are feasted a group of men sit opposite a group of women across a central, ground-level area, whereas in a church men and women are seated separately across an aisle. This seating position in church was determined by the islanders when the Christian mission was first started on Ponape. Furthermore, the custom of having feasts (*kamadipw*) for the chiefs is transformed into the so-called "love feast (*kamadipw sarawi*)", which today is held immediately after Sunday worship at least once a month in Ponapean churches.

Also, the Ponapeans seem to believe that donations to the church have the same meaning as tributes to the chiefs. Even today, the people present the best of their yams and pigs to the *Nahnmwarki* and high chiefs in order to acquire higher titles,

9) Shimizu [1982] also pointed out that the *Nahnmwarki* acts as a mediator between gods and human beings.

while they themselves are contented with poor meals. According to one informant, Christian teachings such as "Give, and it shall be given unto you" have become grounds for the justification of tributes presented to the *Nahnmwarki*. In this respect as well, Christianity and chieftainship have a mutually-reinforcing relationship.

### The Christian "God" and the Traditional Deity/Spirit

It is appropriate here to touch on the relationship between Christianity and the traditional religion of the Ponapeans.

The American missionaries who worked on Ponape did not seek the complete destruction of the traditional religious system. Rather, they appreciated the "heathenism" on Ponape to some extent, as they did the traditional chieftainship. For example, Gulick stated the following shortly after he began missionary work on Ponape:

Theirs is heathenism in one of its most spiritual forms: we, therefore, have comparatively little difficulty in teaching them God's spirituality; and I think also that we have much less difficulty than many missionaries in teaching the propriety and necessity of spiritual worship [*MH* 1856: 280-281].

Having been engaged in missionary work for 25 years on Ponape, Sturges stressed clearly the necessity to re-evaluate the traditional religion of Ponape:

It is to our great advantage that we recognize the religious faith of these people. Paganism is infinitely more cultivatable than atheism. The heathen who sees God in everything is a much more hopeful subject for the missionary than one who sees no need of a God. We do well to study the religious thoughts and habits of these people. We ought never to attack their beliefs or worship. It will not compromise us nor our religion to recognize them as fellow religionists. It will pay to be on friendly terms with their priests. ... We gain nothing by weakening the heathen's veneration for deity. We gain him over for the service of the true God by simply showing who God is and where he can be found [quoted in CRAWFORD and CRAWFORD 1967: 74-75].

In another context he also remarked that:

The Christian missionary's job is not to sweep away heathenism and build something entirely new in its place, but to mend up the religion already there. Conserve the much that is good in it and build up on it as a foundation. They abhor murder, adultery, stealing and lying as we do, and they have something of an idea of deity. Do not try to break down and discredit their sense of religion, but show them the true God, as we see Him, where and how He may be found and how He may be worshiped and truly served [quoted in CRAWFORD and CRAWFORD 1967: 220].

How then did the Ponapeans look at the Christian "God"? At the time when

the Christian mission was started on Ponape, the people regarded the Christian "God" within the framework of their traditional religion. This is evidenced by the fact that the beachcombers translated Christian "God" into "spirits of foreign lands (*eni en wai*)" [*MH* (GULICK) 1856: 290; BLISS 1906: 43]. One high chief had an understanding that "one of the spirits was identical with God, and another was identical with Jesus Christ" [*MH* (GULICK) 1856: 282]. Even today many Ponapeans regard the Christian "God" in the same way as they look at the Ponapean sky god, Daukatau<sup>10</sup> and clan gods.

R. L. Ward reported that one informant said, "Before the missionaries came, we knew God by the name of Daukatau....He sat above the post behind which the *Nahnmwarki* sits in the feast house, watching over and punishing any offense against him; today God watches over the high chiefs" [WARD 1977: 272]. Thus, the Ponapeans of today believe that the Christian "God" protects and supports the *Nahnmwarki*. They think that their belief in family spirits supporting the hierarchical social system corresponds with the Judaeo-Christian idea of a moral God [WARD 1977: 274].

The missionaries used the Ten Commandments as the basis for teaching Christian morals; moral teachings, such as observance of the Sabbath, were readily accepted by the Ponapeans as "new taboos". These teachings soon replaced equally strict traditional taboos, and fitted easily into the old socio-religious structure [JIMMY 1972: 55].

Even after the acceptance of Christianity the Ponapeans' faith in their indigenous deities was not easily destroyed. A Ponapean minister remarked on the process of the reception of Christianity that the Ponapean spirits were regarded as the evil spirits described in the Bible. Christian teachings were only "grafted" onto their old structure of order. The acceptance of the Christian "God" did not automatically mean the fall of their ancient deities. The old deities were not rejected but replaced [JIMMY 1972: 54].

In 1855, when Gulick was engaged in service, a young Ponapean shot himself and died, in a house next door to the church. The youth had been participating in the service immediately before his death, and was dressed in all his finery. The cause of the suicide was unknown. Gulick spoke of it as being prompted by some evil spirit. After Gulick left the site, people's opinions were divided: one was to propitiate the evil spirit to prevent tragedy from occurring to the other islanders, and the other was to pray to the Christian God to restrain this spirit [*MH* 1856: 281]. As early as this stage of the mission there was a movement to juxtapose Christian faith with the concept of traditional evil spirits, as shown by the second opinion.

Regarding the present status on Ponape, Ward reported that the people's faith

10) In the traditional religion of Ponape, Daukatau or Nahnsapwe was the paramount god. The Ponapeans say that Daukatau was the god of thunder, and that his child, born of a woman residing on Kosrae, was Isokelekel, who became the first *Nahnmwarki* of Madolenihmw.

in traditional spirits has been straightened out, in that many spirits living on land and in the sea, except for the spirits of the dead, are represented by the mangrove demon, Nahnsahwised, which is regarded by the people as the Ponapean Satan. While the Christian God controls the realm of the living, Nahnsahwised acts as the Lord over the realm of the dead. Ward stresses that the adoption of the specific spirit, Nahnsahwised, at the expense of other spirits is not only an adaption to the dualistic world view of Christianity, but also has made it possible to retain the traditional beliefs of the Ponapeans by elaborating on them [WARD 1977: 274-275].

Thus, the Christian "God" was accepted by the Ponapean people as "*Koht*" (a borrowed word from the English "God"). At the same time the traditional spirits of Ponape were "sanctioned" by the Bible, as it were, by being regarded as the evil spirits which appear therein. There was no need to purge the traditional spirits from the people's belief system which made it possible for them to coexist with the Christian "God".

Ward, who studied medical beliefs and practices on Ponape, noted that present-day Ponapeans appeal to the power of the Christian "God" to strengthen the efficacy of their medicine, whereas they appeal to the power of their lineages' spirits to protect themselves from a rival's magic or to return sorcery to the rival. In other words, the Ponapeans have faith both in the Christian "God" and in the spirits of their lineages. They compartmentalize them rather than systematize them [WARD 1977: 277].<sup>11)</sup>

As the church system was grafted onto the traditional chieftainship, the Christian "God" has been accepted into the world of the traditional deities as the supreme God.

## CONCLUSION

During the period when the beachcombers played an active role in Ponapean society, the Ponapeans allowed them to assimilate into the island society and to be engaged in trade under the control of the native chiefs, with only some exceptions. Production on the island largely depended on the labor force of the islanders; without their voluntary cooperation, the Westerners' efforts at trade could not have been carried out. This positive role the islanders played in the area of trade is often overlooked.

11) The author studied the Protestant area of Madolenihmw. Prof. Akitoshi Shimizu of Hiroshima University, who conducted his fieldwork in the Catholic area of Kiti, suggested that "In Kiti the traditional *enis*, both good and evil, are still alive; and the equation "God : Satan :: God (Christian) : spirit (traditional)" does not seem to be established [SHIMIZU 1985, pers. comm.]." As is well known, the degree of tolerance toward traditional religion differs between Protestant and Catholic sects. It should be noted that Kiti is an area where a slightly different dialect from those of the other regions of Ponape is spoken. Further research is required to discover whether the Catholic area of Kiti should be discussed taking into consideration the differences between the two religious sects and the regional differences in terms of culture as well as of language.

The Ponapean's conversion to Christianity was by no means because of coercion by the missionaries. It came as a result of a complex process involving struggles among the Ponapeans for political hegemony and the interaction among the Ponapeans, missionaries, beachcombers and traders. Therefore, the acceptance of Christianity at that time was not based on a full understanding of Christian dogmas by the Ponapeans. It was rather an act selected to meet the political and economic objectives of the islanders. The conversion could not have taken place unless the people thought that it would be beneficial to them in their efforts to deal with the ever-changing environment (cf. HANLON 1984). For this reason, some Protestants were converted to Catholicism as soon as the Spanish took control in order to approach the Spanish government. This developed into what seemed a "religious war" between the two sects, but in fact was a "political war".

Among the many influences derived from contact with the West, the *introduction of Western products* and the *population decrease caused by the smallpox epidemic* affected Ponapean society most significantly. The social changes that occurred during the period dealt with in this paper were part of the process of adaptation to such developments by Ponapean society.

Ponapean chiefs often treated beachcombers as their "adopted sons" and incorporated them into the traditional social system in order to promote trade. The Ponapeans received Christianity in the form that fitted into their socio-cultural structure (chieftainship). As a result, the Ponapean chieftainship was basically maintained as it was, although some alterations were made. The adaptability of the chieftainship at this time was fully revealed under later colonial rule. Particularly, under the post-war American administration, great reforms were made politically and economically. One was the introduction of a democratic political system based on elections, and the other was the spread of a cash economy accompanied by huge financial aid from the U.S. government. These reforms and the Ponapeans' response to them have already been referred to by Hughes [1970], Dahlquist [1974] and Fischer [1974].

I have also discussed briefly in another paper the process of the chieftainships' adaptation to these developments; so reiteration is not necessary here [NAKAYAMA 1986]. In any case, the chieftainship of Ponape revealed a surprising adaptability to change through its rank system. As described by James O'Connell, a beachcomber who resided on Ponape in the early 1830s, the people of Ponape essentially had an enterprising spirit [RIESENBERG 1972: 173], and the Ponapean chieftainship adapted itself beautifully to any new situation.

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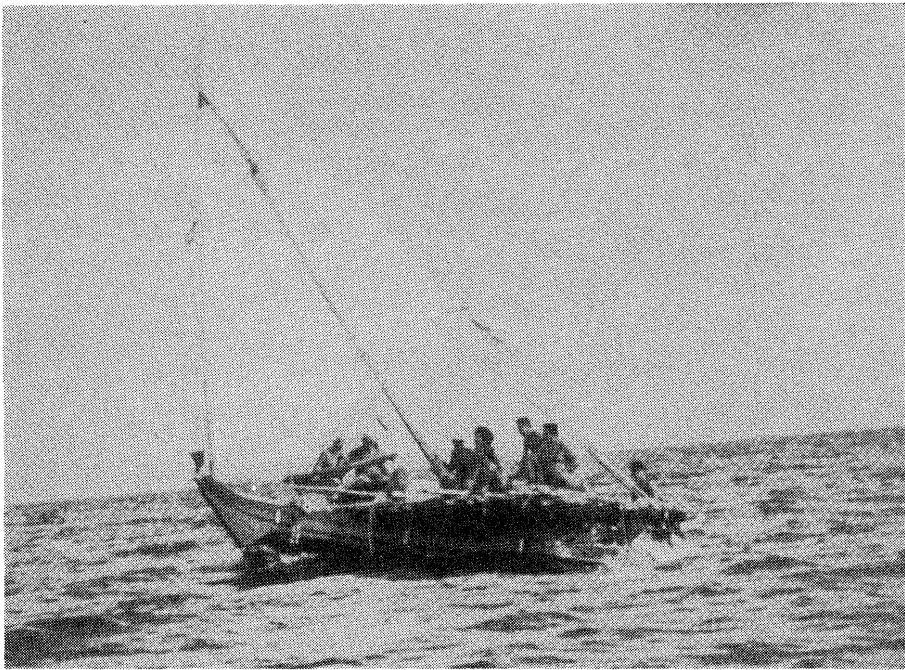
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# Chapter VI

## Micronesian Studies in Japan



Canoe Voyaging off Satawal Island

