

**ENCOUNTERS WITH EVIL: CHRISTIANITY AND THE  
RESPONSE TO SORCERY AMONG THE MAISIN OF  
PAPUA NEW GUINEA**

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**I**

Scholars writing about Melanesian societies often assume that sorcery and Christianity are incompatible. When I began my research among the Maisin of Papua New Guinea, who have long been Christians, I was a little surprised that they accepted sorcery as a reality. I was most surprised, however, that many Maisin thought Europeans shared their commonsense notions about sorcery. As proof, I was told of how European doctors at town hospitals could recognize 'village sickness' and send those inflicted with it back to be cared for by local healers (Barker 1989). Village elders also said that in the past the missionaries had taught them ways to control sorcery and the discord in the village that gave rise to it.

My contention in this paper is that Maisin have good reason to think Europeans know something about sorcery, for Europeans, especially missionaries, played a major if indirect role in forming present-day attitudes towards sorcery in Maisin society. During the high period of missionary activity, between 1901 and 1950, Anglican missionaries and the Maisin collaborated against sorcerers on several occasions. Despite their agreement that sorcerers represented evil, the two parties arrived with very different notions of evil and its treatment, and so these dramatic occasions did not lead to sustained cooperation. But there was an important exception to this. In 1932, a man called Maikin travelled to the village of Wanigela, the seat of the district mission station, to detect and expose sorcerers. Maikin claimed that his amazing ability was a gift of the Christian God, although he had not been baptized. The missionary likened him to an apostle of Christ. The elder Maisin today remember him as a mixture of saviour and sorcerer. Maikin has come to epitomize for Maisin the ambiguous nature of sorcery in a Christian age.

This paper examines these encounters, especially those involving Maikin. It studies how through such encounters Maisin and their missionaries gradually reshaped the Maisin's understanding of sorcery and, beyond that, the nature and justification of evil (cf. Burridge 1985; Parkin 1985). I begin by examining sorcery ideology in Maisin society at the time of my fieldwork in the early 1980s, and the stories that surrounded Maikin some fifty years after his mission to Wanigela. I then turn to the historical record to show how these memories developed as a mutual construction of the Maisin and missionaries as they, separately and together, battled the evil of sorcery. The essay concludes with some observations on the relation between the experience of sorcery and Christianity in Maisin society.

## II

In 1982 about 1200 Maisin speaking people lived in eight villages along the southern shores of Collingwood Bay on the eastern edge of Oro Province in Papua New Guinea. The area was isolated. There were no roads and few coastal boats. The main access in and out was via small planes at a grass airstrip at Wanigela, a church and hospital post a few kilometres to the north of Maisin territory. Maisin villages, with their clean earth paths and plazas, thatched houses and rows of greying outrigger canoes, had a pleasing pristine appearance. The local economy still rested primarily on subsistence activities — swidden horticulture, fishing, hunting, and gathering — and regular exchanges. People addressed each other by kinship terms and gardened the lands of their patrilineages. Men built their houses in the hamlets of their fathers and women moved to the hamlets of their husbands.

Despite the 'traditional' appearance of the villages, Maisin society and culture had been profoundly influenced by almost a century of contact with the outside world (Barker 1985a, 1987). Europeans began to parley and trade with the Maisin and their neighbours after 1890. At the beginning of 1901, the newly arrived Resident Magistrate for the district led a team of policemen into the largest Maisin village, Uiaku, and effectively imposed colonial rule by shooting dead three warriors. A few months later, Anglican missionaries purchased land in the centre of Uiaku and built a school, church, and houses for Solomon Islander teacher-evangelists who became the Maisin's first Christian teachers. Only a handful of Europeans — mostly missionaries — ever lived in the Collingwood Bay area, and very rarely in the Maisin villages. The work of the church and administration was conducted mostly by Melanesian teachers and village constables under the infrequent supervision of Europeans at the non-Maisin villages of Wanigela and Tufi respectively. All the same, the Maisin readily accepted the new colonial order. By 1920 most of the younger people had been baptized and young men routinely worked as labourers in distant plantations and mines. Most able-bodied men were indentured into service on the Australian side during the Japanese invasion.

The legacy of the past eighty years of association with European institutions was apparent in Uiaku and other Maisin villages in 1982. Virtually all the Maisin were Anglican Christians, who had attended village schools and who strongly supported their clergy, themselves Papua New Guineans. Village committees that had been first introduced by the mission had established a central place in the ordering of political affairs. Most importantly, about a third of the population had made its way up through the church and government education system to land important jobs in the urban areas; their remittances formed the chief source of cash in the local economy (see Carrier and Carrier 1989).

The Maisin thus experienced colonialism in a paradoxical way. On the one hand, they eagerly embraced the opportunities opened up by the government and mission and eventually, through extensive out-migration, did very well. On the other hand, they saw little of the European world in Collingwood Bay. The Anglican Mission was always understaffed and economically strapped; partly because of this it was one of the first missions in Papua New Guinea to localize its staff (Collingwood Bay has had only indigenous clergy since the mid-1970s). The population was small and there were few economic resources; consequently, the government staff at Tufi on the north end of the bay never included more than a handful of Europeans. Although Maisin embraced the new ways, they did so within local means and cultural terms (see Barker 1985b). There were

thus striking cultural continuities in an area with long contact. These 'traditions' tended to mask change, including their own internal transformations (cf. Carrier and Carrier 1987).

I had come to study religious change and so I was especially interested in learning about the Maisin's understandings of and attitudes towards sorcery. I found that people were very willing to talk about sorcery — they found it as fascinating as I did — but only at first as a thing of the past. Before the people became a Christian community (*ekelesia*, from *ecclesia*, 'the church'), they told me, there were plenty of men practicing sorcery, particularly the elders of the Dadumu patri-clan who had an inherited right to use 'poisons' (Barker 1983:17–18). One of my informants explained that the 'poison men' of the past were very respected and feared by other villagers. Everyone knew who they were.

They used to be bad, but the Maisin respected them. They were frightened of them. When he sits (*sic*) down you must be quiet, don't make fun, don't break a coconut, don't walk beside or behind him. A big man! A bad man stays! He could be a good man. He would help the people and work with them.

The sorcerers were fundamentally important in the old society, for they provided a way for village elders to control and punish wrong-doers.<sup>1</sup> If someone stole food from the gardens or committed adultery, the angered villagers could quietly go to a sorcerer and ask his help in revenge, by destroying their enemy's crops, causing him or his relatives sickness, or even killing him. Because the sorcerers were known, a stricken but contrite victim of their magic could find them and ask for the sorcery to be lifted. The missionaries and government officers spoke against sorcery and so the people gave it up. Some sorcerers destroyed their magical apparatus upon conversion. Others had to be convinced by a stint in the government gaol. Now things were much easier and people could talk openly in the village and walk around at night.

So I was told. But it did not take long to discover that sorcery continued to be a central and living concern to the Maisin in the 1980s. Each time a relatively vigorous adult or young person died, I heard rumours of secret machinations and mystical acts of revenge. I attended a drawn out series of village meetings held to discuss the illness of a middle-aged woman who everyone was convinced had been ensorcelled (she eventually died). During these meetings, the councillor of Uiaku told me that he saw as one of his primary tasks the need to convince all villagers to give up their sorcery, but it was a losing battle. Towards the end of my fieldwork, I asked about 100 villagers to give accounts of the deaths of relatives and found that, even in the case of relatively well-educated people, they attributed most deaths to sorcery (Barker 1989).

When asked about the continuation of sorcery, several informants said that there were important differences between the present practices and those of the past.<sup>2</sup> Formerly, sorcerers used only magical materials that they had inherited from their fathers: powders in lime pots, stones, and so forth. The use of such 'hot' magic required them to give up 'cold' foods, abstain from sex, and, the ultimate in antisocial behaviour, refuse to share their lime pots with others while sitting around chewing betelnut.<sup>3</sup> All of these restrictions made sorcerers fairly visible. When the old generation gave up their poisons, young men took to buying new-fangled potions from outside the area and to calling upon spirit familiars to strike enemies. The new sorcerers became very hard to detect. As one elder said, rather laconically, '[The village sorcerers] all died out, so it is better. It is good and bad now. We don't know if people bring in sorcery from the outside. . . You don't know who makes you sick'.

Burridge (1979:125) notes that 'most people do not like sorcerers.' If the Maisin have not been able to rid themselves of sorcerers, it has not been for lack of trying. Going through the archives, I have counted six occasions before the Second World War in which the Maisin attempted to purge sorcery from Uiaku. The first occurred in 1903, less than two years after the founding of the mission. And attempts occur today. Two years before I arrived in Uiaku, a man called Moses came down from the mountains behind the Maisin villages. He stopped in each coastal village to point out houses occupied by sorcerers. He was allowed to do this work in all of the Maisin villages except Uiaku, where a prominent church councillor stopped him for fear that people might consider Moses to be a type of god or a prophet who might turn them away from the church. After he swept through the area, Moses gathered the sorcery materials he had collected and took them up into the hills where, it is said, he buried them. Such men, who often combine their ability to see sorcery with an ability to heal, have regularly appeared on the Collingwood Bay coast since at least 1916 and probably long before that.

The most famous among the Maisin is Maikin. He was born in Uiaku, the son of a war leader who was the chief ally of the Europeans when they arrived in the area in the 1890s (see Barker 1987). After a series of visions, in the late 1920s and early 1930s, Maikin gathered a group of followers and began to purge coastal villages of sorcery materials. He died soon after he began this work, but his kinsmen continued to practice the healing ritual he established.

Villagers tell several stories concerning Maikin. The most important of these places his origins in the pre-colonial past. Here is a summary:

After Maikin was born, his mother died. She was on her way to the world of the spirits when she was stopped by a python. It took her to its village, brought her back to life, and married her. She gave birth to a spirit boy she called Maikin. As Maikin grew up, he played with the other spirit children but wondered about his earthly relatives. His mother told him of how she had left Uiaku behind and Maikin decided to visit the village. His father stopped him on his first attempt. The next time Maikin came as a python himself. The human Maikin saw him and was alarmed, so he and his brothers took their spears and killed the snake, throwing its body into a pond. After night fell, the snake pulled the spears out from its body and crawled back to its home in the mountains.

About this time, the human Maikin's elder sister went mad and began to have visions and hear voices. The spirit Maikin spoke to her and told her that he would soon arrive in the village and curl up on the upper rafter of her house. The next morning, she looked up and saw a snake of many colours stretching the entire length of the house. Her husband went and brought Maikin's human brothers, who carefully took the snake down and placed him on a mat in the centre of the village. Maikin spoke to the people through his sister. As evening approached, he had them carry him to the edge of the bush. There he became a man. He told them about dealing with many kinds of diseases. The people made a big feast and gave much wealth and food to Maikin, which he took back with him to the mountain. Maikin brought peace to the village and he taught his people how to heal sickness.

The man who told me the longest version of this story accompanied Maikin as a boy on his greatest triumph, exposing the sorcerers in Wanigela. He recalled that the men beat their drums while Maikin danced with a cane ring of shells in one hand and a feathered spear in the other. The ring transmitted messages to Maikin, enabling him to point his

spear towards hidden sorcery 'poisons'. Even when people tried to hide their poisons in the bush, Maikin found them. There was a basket of rain-making magic in part of the village and the Wanigelans tried to stop Maikin from taking it because they feared that if he did an enormous storm would break out. This indeed happened. But Maikin told them not to worry, for the rain would soon stop. While he was passing the last house of Wanigela on his way home, Maikin pointed his spear at the black cloud and, with a gesture, split it down the centre and broke it up. Father Thompson, the district missionary, my informant recalled, witnessed these miraculous events.<sup>4</sup>

A member of Maikin's clan, named after the healer, was about 10 years old when his namesake died. For him as for others, the response of Europeans to Maikin validated the claims of the visionary's power. He told this story:

Maikin went up through the centre of a big wind. He passed into a second wind until he came to a place where there was no wind at all. When he was up in the sky, a big man told him to fast and to begin his work. He never saw his face. From there, he knew about the wind and the stars. Later the village constable took Maikin to see the patrol officers then visiting Uiaku. He decorated himself, took his spear and cane ring, and went to the rest house. The government gave him some smoke and they told stories. They said, "The people always talk about you. So we want to know how the sun works. Then we will ask about the moon and stars." Maikin replied, "God made everything in the world. He also made the sun. There is a man who looks after the sun. When the first 6 months go by, the man uses a big flat piece of cement to cover half of the sun. Then we have the wet season; the place is cold and it rains. Then he uncovers the sun; the place becomes hot and everything dries up. God looks after the sun and this is what happens." The Government said, "Maikin, that is true. We won't ask further questions about the moon and stars because you understand these things".<sup>5</sup>

My informant assured me that Maikin's power came from God, even though he had not been baptized. After he began his work, Maikin declared that one of his sons would carry it on after his death and the other would enter the mission.<sup>6</sup> Throughout the Maikin story one sees the combination of indigenous and Christian themes.

Purging the villages was the most dramatic of Maikin's actions, but his healing work was his legacy (forms of it are still practiced) and also a source of controversy. Maikin's healing power was enormous. Simply touching sick people with his limestick, Maikin made them well: 'Just like Jesus,' my informant continued. And he could see the sins that led to illness: he saw thefts and tracked down the stolen money or food with his ring and spear. He could hear what people said in other villages. He helped hunters find pigs in the bush. The missionaries and government officers knew what he was doing and trusted him. At first all of the people were getting better, the elder continued, 'That work was good, but temptation came to Maikin and he did bad things.' He began to use his power over spirits to kill people who did things he did not like. He became feared, a sorcerer. The Holy Spirit entered into the missionaries and they recognized that Maikin was doing a bad thing and turned against him. Shortly after his purge at Wanigela, Maikin was killed by another sorcerer.

As I went around the Maisin villages, I found that few people aside from the close relatives and descendants of Maikin would speak of him. It was evident to me that they knew who I was talking about, but also that they were afraid to talk. As I collected data on deaths, I found that a large number were attributed to him, even of people who must have died long after he did. People were probably afraid to talk in part because they did not

want to stir up old problems. But Maikin also remains a present reality. Two healers I spoke to hinted broadly that they were frequently in contact with the spirit of Maikin, and snake deities formed a major source of their powers. A power for good, perhaps, but also potentially for evil. A few months after I arrived in Uiaku, I spotted an old drum hanging in a tree, cracking as it weathered under rain and sun. It was Maikin's drum. The man who had stored it had so often been accused of using the drum to summon Maikin's spirit to stricken others that he had decided to crucify it as a demonstration of his innocence.<sup>7</sup>

Maikin represents the quandary the Maisin have long found themselves in. To defeat evil, one needs a powerful healer, himself able to battle the sorcerers on their own ground. Yet once he defeats the sorcerers, what is there to prevent him from himself becoming one? At the same time, Maikin's remarkable success at detecting sorcery, his ability to harness a power that the Europeans recognized as coming from God, provides the suggestion of a solution — for God's power is available to everyone. Maikin, in short, has become a paradigm for thinking and talking about sorcery.<sup>8</sup> As we shall see, it is a paradigm to which the colonial Europeans, particularly the missionaries, contributed and which partly informs the Maisin's present understanding of the relationship between Christian teachings and sorcery.

### III

How is it that the Maisin's convictions about sorcery have survived 80 years of Christian instruction? An important part of the answer is that the Maisin have gradually incorporated Christian teachings as they understand them into their notions of sorcery. The sorcery which plagues them today is not the same as known by their forebears and much of this has to do with their encounters with missionaries. Because the story of Maikin's campaign marks a turning point in the nature of sorcery in the Maisin historical imagination, I take it as a paradigm of this change in meaning and understanding. In the rest of this essay, I will turn from the ethnographic present to the historical past as documented in mission and government archives. I want to explore the past significance, for Maisin and their missionaries, of this event and others similar to it.

In order to do so, I will structure my analysis into four sections: (1) a brief chronology of the recorded and remembered attempts of Maisin and missionaries to control sorcerers; (2) the distinct ways Maisin and missionaries rationalized ideas about sorcery and what needed to be done about it; (3) the practical agreement between Maisin and missionaries that the communities would be better off without sorcery and their manipulations of each other in their attempts to achieve that end; and (4) the importance of Maikin as a figure who successfully combined indigenous and missionary themes and, for a brief moment, pointed towards the possibility of ridding the local communities of evil within a new Christian order.

#### A CHRONOLOGY OF ATTEMPTS TO CONTROL SORCERY IN UIAKU VILLAGE

Although older Maisin speak mostly of Maikin when remembering sorcery purges, archival records reveal a series of such attempts involving a larger number of villagers, several missionaries, and, on one occasion, a patrol officer. The first instance dates from 1903. Shortly after he established a station in Uiaku in 1901, Percy John Money, a lay missionary, complained to mission correspondents that the Maisin 'believe in the efficacy of charms to

the most absurd degree and so afraid are they of those that are attributed with power for evil that men will not go anywhere alone, even by day, for fear of being bewitched' (Money 1904). Money ridiculed this fear, as did the Solomon Island teacher posted at the station.<sup>9</sup> To Money's great surprise, the villagers voluntarily surrendered sorcery materials to the missionaries to be burned in a great heap (Money 1903). Money saw this as acceptance of the mission and a step towards conversion, but it seems more likely that the people saw the presence of the powerful new figure in their midst as an opportunity to rid themselves of sorcerers. But it didn't work, and within a year Money was complaining again about 'charms' in the village.<sup>10</sup>

The conversion of the Maisin proceeded at a leisurely pace under the first two district missionaries in the Collingwood Bay region. Things changed rapidly with the arrival of the energetic Reverend J.E.J. Fisher in 1914. A believer in 'muscular Christianity', Fisher was not afraid to strong arm his flock into model Christian behaviour. Indeed, he once described himself as the 'warden of the coast' (Fisher 1915). He made the Maisin his special project, visiting them weekly from Wanigela. Between 1914 and 1916, Fisher presided over a series of mass baptisms in the Yavaisi River beside Uiaku during which the bulk of the younger Maisin population took new names and declared their allegiance to Christ.<sup>11</sup> Shortly before one mass baptism was to take place in late 1916, Fisher was told by one of his mission teachers that many Maisin men were practicing sorcery, using special lime pots. He immediately set off for the Maisin villages and demanded that the 'poison' lime pots be handed over to him. Fisher destroyed 33 at a public gathering in Uiaku which was followed by a dance. He noted in the Wanigela log book (Dec. 12, 1916): 'For some years those lime-pots have been a source of worry to the people the owners of them professing to possess power there ... to heal and to kill.' In 1921, Fisher again made a special trip to Uiaku and took down the names of 84 men who the mission teachers said were still using the magic lime pots. Fisher organized a village meeting at which the lime pots were emptied out and broken. Then the men who had used the pots shared a pot of 'cold' food, food that they had fasted from in order to protect their magical 'strength'.<sup>12</sup> The people broke clubs to signify village peace. Still, Fisher was not satisfied: 'many things which ought to have been produced were not forthcoming and J.F. is to take further action on next visit,' he jotted in his notes (Wanigela Log Book, April 25, 1921).

In later publication, James Benson (1955) recalled being told at this time by Fisher that the Maisin believed they had gained their lime pot powers through an ancestress who had formed a relationship with a snake deity. The first part of the Maikin myth I recorded in the 1980s clearly refers to this event. Snake spirits and the use of lime pots in healing were also found in the better known 'Baigona Cult', first reported from Cape Nelson in 1911 (King 1913; Williams 1928).

After the 'snake cult' had been suppressed, things remained quiet in the Collingwood Bay area for some time. Bishop Henry Newton (1925) was pleased to observe that when emissaries of the 'Taro Cult', which was sweeping through the Northern District at the time, arrived in Wanigela the people refused to have anything to do with them.<sup>13</sup> This seemed to be proof that the people had finally accepted Christian teachings.

In 1932, Maikin, whom the Europeans knew as Kitore, came to the attention of the district missionary when he made his trip to Wanigela and successfully exposed its sorcerers. The Reverend A.J. Thompson was as impressed as the local people with Maikin's accomplishment, and he wrote with some sadness of the healer's death about a year later. In the following years some of Maikin's followers spread his methods eastward

where they became mingled with more millenarian expectations. As the movement mutated, becoming the 'Asisi' or 'spirit cult', the Mission voiced strong opposition, but mostly towards non-Maisin people (Wetherell 1977:191).

A village man once remarked rather ruefully to me that while it was possible, if dangerous, to destroy a sorcerer's lime pot or throw his sorcery stones into the bush, men intent on continuing their evil could easily make new pots and find new stones. And so in 1936 the Maisin once again voluntarily turned over another cache of 'charms' to another missionary. The missionary called in a patrol officer who determined that most of the 'charms' were harmless garden magic. But he found that the Maisin were very frightened of one man's magic and so he arrested this man on suspicion of practicing sorcery.

The final interaction between Maisin and missionaries over sorcery occurred in the late 1940s, when Father David Hand, who later became the first Archbishop of the Anglican Church of Papua New Guinea, was asked to handle and destroy some sorcery material. One Maisin woman, who worked at the University of Papua New Guinea, recalled that as a little girl she saw Father Hand standing outside a village house in Uiaku holding a bundle of sorcery materials high above his head, condemning its evil.

#### SORCERY, MISFORTUNE, AND EVIL: TWO VIEWS

Europeans mustered two kinds of arguments against sorcery. The first was that belief in sorcery was fantastic and ridiculous and had no basis in reality (cf. Forman 1982:96). Percy Money, for example, reported that soon after he built the station at Uiaku he spent much of his time telling Maisin that their faith in magic was misplaced (Money 1904). This ontological argument had no noticeable impact upon the Maisin; they may not have understood it. Yet the missionaries continually discovered that teaching about 'reality', ridicule of sorcery beliefs, and suppression did not have the desired effect. In 1929, the Reverend S.R.M. Gill, who worked further up the northwest coast, gave his fellow missionaries the following example of the tenacity of sorcery beliefs:

Once when I was talking to a Mamba christian [sic] (a young man) about this ... belief, I remarked that they would grow out of it. He said, "Have those who have been Christians longer than we down at the other end of the Mission stopped believing in this?" and without waiting for a reply, he burst out "I tell you NO! They all believe that too! I know! I have listened to those who come here to visit, I have listened to them as they talked!" He then mentioned one of the teachers ... and told me that this teacher had an enemy at Boianai whom he feared in this way (Gill 1929).

With hindsight, it seems obvious that Gill and his young companion were talking past each other. For Gill, sorcery was a belief, a way of thinking about reality which could be revised or discarded for better ways of conceptualization. But sorcerers and spirits for Papuans were not beliefs, they were actualities that might help you and could very well kill you. The notion that sorcery is an illusion, a discardable belief, was, in short, a non-starter.

Had the interaction between Maisin and the Europeans over sorcery remained at this level there would be little to write about, for their ideas were mutually incomprehensible. But both sides were determined to attack and rid the local villages of sorcery. Administration officers saw sorcery beliefs as impediments to government order, and missionaries generally agreed. Not only did would-be sorcerers commit crimes by threatening others with sickness and death and by accepting 'bribes', the month-long dances



and rituals promoted by healers to purge villages of illness seriously competed with administration efforts to put the people to work on copra plantations and in rebuilding their villages. But, closer to the villagers, missionaries also regarded sorcery as an evil, one that had to be taken very seriously. This second argument, that sorcery was evil and should be given up, was indeed heard and has formed the basis of an ongoing dialogue between indigenous and Christian views of evil and the nature of redemption.

The missionaries' drew upon Anglican teachings on the nature of sin and salvation in forming their notions of evil. They were, of course, anxious to bring these teachings to the Maisin. In order to do so, they and later their converts had to confront and struggle with indigenous notions of evil, especially as these were embodied in the sorcerer. The shared cause of ending sorcery, then, entailed a dialogue between the two religious traditions. I want briefly to outline the differences between the Maisins' and missionaries' perceptions of evil.

As Burrridge has observed, the sorcerer is the epitome of evil for many Melanesian peoples (Burrridge 1960:59-71, 1979:124-30). The sorcerer is someone who is singular, secretive, and non-reciprocal: who stands apart from the morality that governs people's lives to prey upon them, divide them, drain their energies and wealth for his own purposes or in spite, and eventually kill them. He is an individual in a collective society where individuality poses a distinct threat to morality.

The sorcerer's evil, however, is not without its justification. We can detect a certain theodicy. The Maisin told me that most of the sorcerer's victims in some way 'had it coming to them.' This kind of reasoning also seems to have been common in the past, when sorcerers are said to have exercised legitimate power. The victim (or some close relative) had made some 'mistake' that had angered the sorcerer. The most common mistakes included theft, adultery, and boastful behaviour. Most 'mistakes' strained or broke common moral values. One should not put oneself above others, for example, by owning more than they do, and one should meet exchange obligations. But mistakes that might anger a sorcerer were unavoidable, especially for men seeking status in the community. If a delict became public, there were ways of making amends or protecting oneself behind one's kinsmen. But there was no protection ultimately from the sorcerer, who was extremely sensitive to everyone's shortcomings but his own, and who was able to prey on his victims with near impunity. And as everyone has some guilt, has done something that others might feel was amoral, every person had reason to fear sorcery when they fall ill.

The Maisin's assumptions about evil were similar to those found in other subsistence societies (Burrridge 1985:158-59). They located evil in particular persons outside the moral community — 'out there'. Evil was not without justification: evil attracts evil. Misfortunes indicated that people were failing to live up to moral standards; they were setting themselves up for sorcerers. Sickness and death were symptoms of the moral condition. The process of healing, which in Maikin's work involved the exposure of sorcerers, exorcized evil from the moral order, made the community healthy. It is not without significance that the Maisin chose to translate the Christian concept of 'salvation' with the word *jebuga*, 'healthy'.

By contrast, drawing upon a Christian conception of sin, the missionaries understood sorcery beliefs not only as an embodiment of evil but as an indication of a more fundamental corruption. Men 'who claimed and were believed to have extraordinary power' victimized the people by 'Blackmail, sorcery, necromancy, and clairvoyancy' (King 1913). But it was the social system, without hope of salvation from a power greater than men and the ancestral spirits, that left the people open to victimization. Purging sorcerers, the missionaries

believed, was only a first step in a much longer process of conversion. As the faith of new Christians strengthened, they would be able to face sorcerers without fear because they would know that God was stronger than any spirit or man. They would recognize that many of the ways of their ancestors went against God's will and needed to be transformed. More importantly, they would gain a sense of sin — the realization that evil is not just in extrinsic structures but is also an intrinsic condition of individuals. Each individual could then directly address their sins, the evil that is intrinsic to the human condition (cf. Burridge 1985:158–59).<sup>14</sup>

These premises are apparent in many mission publications. Thompson from Wanigela with Millicent Herring (Anonymous n.d.:179), for example, contrasted heathen and Christian beliefs in a textbook entitled *Our Friends the Papuans*. 'What a Heathen Papuan Believes about Spirits' included: 'I believe that my neighbour or even my dearest friend may, by sorcery or witchcraft, be planning to cause me sickness or death. Therefore, if one of my family dies I may bring about the death of one of his family.' In contrast, 'a Christian Papuan Believes about God'

that sometimes we refuse to obey His laws; we want to go our own way, and so wander away from Him. In spite of our disobedience God still loves us ... I believe that this loving God made ... all this wonderful earth, so that no evil spirits can be there, and therefore, I have nothing of which to be afraid.

Although the Maisin and the missionaries understood the nature of the sorcerer in very different ways, they were united in the practical aim of destroying sorcery in the villages. The missionaries saw this as a first step towards conversion, turning toward a new set of beliefs and moral commitments. The Maisin, on the other hand, wanted to purge and purify the moral order, but not necessarily to abandon it. From their point of view, sorcery was a reality that could be destroyed; ridding themselves of sorcery did not change the nature of reality, did not mean a new way of understanding the world, it simply made the world an easier place to live in. When one examines closely the incidents outlined in the chronology, one finds evidence that each side tried to manipulate the other in terms of its own definition of the situation.

### THE PRACTICAL GOAL: DESTROYING SORCERY

For the missionaries, the simplest approach to ending sorcery was the direct one: demanding and destroying sorcery materials. This is apparently what Fisher did in 1916 and 1921. His actions demonstrated, as far as the missionary was concerned, the vast superiority of God's power over that of magicians. It was also an exercise in church discipline, one that he felt was needed if new Christians were to learn the true faith. Most Anglican missionaries, however, did not feel comfortable with such an authoritarian style. Writing about the widespread Baigona Cult, of which the 'snake cult' was possibly an offshoot, the veteran missionary, Copland King (1913) suggested that while the evil of sorcery beliefs must be stamped out before the first steps towards Christianity could be taken, it was not clear what the missionaries should do. He noted that even converts did not see magic as being all of a piece, as an impediment to Christianity. There was a catechumen he knew, for example, who had a gift for healing but did not follow Baigona (the Tufi version of the snake cult) and did not demand payment for his services; and other Christians insisted that there was no harm in magical means for securing pigs or taro harvests.

What the missionaries hoped above all was that the converts would voluntarily renounce and destroy their magical 'charms', especially those which might be used to harm people. In a later, and possibly inventive, reconstruction of Fisher's confrontation with the lime pot sorcerers, Benson (1955) portrayed a number of young Wanigelan/Christians as the heroes of the hour. Benson tells a story of a sinister sorcerer in Uiaku, called Borega or Soveru, who confronts the missionary and tells him that it is easy for a whiteman to take away the lime pots for the magic will not hurt him. At this point, Stephen Maiorot, later to become a priest, steps forward and says that he and Gregory Awui (who would also become a priest), will themselves take and destroy the lime pots. Stephen says to Borega: 'it is useless for you to bluster and talk like that about your own strength. I am a Christian. I belong to God. God is my Father, and quite able to take care of me, so that nothing you ever do or say can ever hurt me' (Benson 1955:12). The next day, Stephen, Gregory, and another young convert, Bernard, take the pots and destroy them. When the young men return to Wanigela, the people are sure that they will soon die. And, eventually, Bernard finds his arm swelling, just as Borega said it would, and dies. Stephen later tells Benson: 'We ... said we were very sorry that our brother Bernard was not strong. He was a good boy and he did want to love Jesus, and all good things. But he was not so sure; and he allowed the devil to get into his heart' (1955:12). The climax of the tale follows soon after, when the Bishop arrives at Wanigela, holds a meeting for people from the whole district in which they all agree to surrender their sorcery materials. In a particular dramatic way, the men of Wanigela then bring out their lime pots and smash them on the ground. In an end note, Benson says that the evil sorcerer, Borega, died in grace soon after confronting the young Christians. He had a sore bandaged by Fisher. In a dream, he saw Jesus and soon after the sore was healed. And so he felt that he had been told to become a Christian (although he apparently died before baptism could be done). This story may have been meant more for the consumption of European readers than for Papuans. Neither oral tradition nor historical record support it.<sup>15</sup>

The Maisin clearly wanted to rid themselves of sorcery, and they tried to do so as a group on several occasions. The surrendering of sorcery materials was a sort of renouncement; but not what the missionaries really wanted. Yet few individuals were personally willing to handle the dangerous sorcery materials and take the risk of later retaliation from angered sorcerers. Within their own society, the Maisin turned to a few powerful men, those who themselves had access to divine powers, to expose and stop sorcerers. The snake cult probably began with such an effort, and Maikin was another example. But, as we have already seen in the case of Maikin, there was always a real danger that the strong man would turn his power to amoral ends once he had defeated potential competitors.

I am speculating, but I think that it is entirely possible that the Maisin at times saw Europeans, especially missionaries, as possible strong men who, themselves outside of the moral order and in contact with a very powerful god, might be able to wipe out the sorcerers without setting up something worse. In an interview with me in 1982, Bishop David Hand told me that he remembered that when the Maisin people brought sorcery materials in front of him in the late 1940s, he challenged them to overcome their fears and destroy the material. They would not. He complained that often the local people would egg him on to take a stronger role than he wished.

If this analysis is correct, it hints at a certain irony in the conjuncture of expectations and actions against sorcerers and sorcery. Both sides thought they were bringing something

evil to an end. But while the Europeans hoped that the purges in which they played a leading part would mark the beginnings of a new perception of reality, for Maisin they had the effect of reaffirming the received moral arrangements. And when sickness resumed, the enduring reality of sorcery itself was reconfirmed. Things were at a stalemate. This is where Maikin came in.

### MAIKIN'S SORCERY PURGE AS A 'MISSIONARY OCCASION'

Missionaries, BurrIDGE (1978:19-20) says in his eloquent essay on 'Missionary Occasions', intervene to create moments in which converts become acutely aware of the sinful ways of the past, reject them and positively affirm new ways and new moral discriminations. The transformations that occur on such occasions may be personal. But if they are to be lasting, they must be reflected in larger social arrangements. And if they are ever to get underway, there must be a desire on the part of the new Christians for such thoroughgoing transformations: for, in theological terms, 'metanoias'.

At least a few of the early Anglican missionaries saw the religious movements that swept along the northeast coast of Papua as an sign that the people were ready for such transformations. The Reverend Copland King, for example, wrote of the 'Baigona or Snake-Craft cult' in 1913: 'we may see that the natives are willing to consider a new religion. They are not hide-bound ... Their ceremonies and ideas inherited from their ancestors are not so satisfactory to them that they are unwilling to receive light'. The atmosphere leading to the religious outburst provided an opportunity for teaching, and, potentially, a change of heart. It could be the basis of what BurrIDGE (1978) has called a 'missionary occasion'. And, in fact, the rates of Christian baptisms leaped in some areas after the excitement from a local version of one of the 'cults' died down (Wetherell 1977:198-99).

King and his colleagues, however, saw little that was good in the actions of the cult leaders. It seemed to the missionaries that these men at best misled the people and at worst victimized them. Fisher, for example, viewed all of the men engaged in the 'snake cult' in Uiaku around 1920 as sorcerers, regardless of whether they used their powers for good or for evil. But Maikin was different. Unlike other cult leaders, who never appeared as individuals in the archival records and have disappeared from the Maisin's historical memory, Maikin impressed missionaries and Maisin alike. I have already outlined how he appears to Maisin today. It is time to look at the archival record for the opinion of contemporary Europeans.

Maikin, first came to the attention of the missionaries and government officers in 1932. The Maisin had learned much more about the symbols of Christianity. The district was under the leadership of a much more liberal and tolerant missionary than Fisher. The Reverend A.J.A. Thompson was not present at Wanigela when Maikin made his famous visit, but he was most impressed with what he later heard about it.<sup>16</sup>

Frederick Bogara's father of Uiaku came to Wanigela with a retinue in ceremonial dress ostensibly to interview the Priest in the first instance. The Priest being at Dogura, the visitor sought out Abraham a prominent Church Councillor and greeted him and the Church at Wanigela through him. With his retinue and in company with the Government Councillors and V.C. he then visited each village in the neighbourhood in turn seeking baravu purapurana "sorcery materials". His method of search was as follows:- Whilst his followers were drumming he stood before each house and sniffed. Some houses he passed over without a remark but in each house where he indicated the presence of the purapura it was found by the

Councillors who went up at his bidding. One man noting the method took the precaution of removing the purapura from his house and hiding it in the forest but this availed him nothing. The nose of the detective ... led him to the spot where it was hidden and it was discovered. The substances were mostly in corked bottles, and all were thrown into the sea. The reason given for this search was, in the man's own words – "It is not good that we should be trying to injure one-another or to cause death and so I am come to help you to put an end to this practice". The local people were very much impressed (quoted in Light 1933).

Six months after this event Thompson had the opportunity to interview Maikin (Kitore). The cult leader told the priest that he had at one time followed Baigona – the 'snake cult' – but was now convinced that its teachings were false. His new powers of detecting evil came to him one night in a vision.

One night whilst lying down he had a vision in which the wind came to him and spoke to him. The wind took him up and carried him abroad and showed him two paths - one leading to GOD and the other to Satan. Adam appeared to him and spoke to him. Adam told him that he – Adam – had been brought into being by the wind. The wind left him and he went on with his work (Wanigela Log Book, 10 July 1932).

Maikin had already given one of his sons to the Mission, and Thompson suspected that Frederick had taught his father much about the Faith.

Maikin (Kitore) appeared to regard his powers as a gift from God to himself only: he could not pass the gift on and would lose it if he were to accept payment for his services. He told Thompson,

The exercise of this gift is undertaken only after preparation. From the patient's presence I retire to a quiet place and call upon GOD to give me strength for the work. When I feel the power working I return to the patient and take him by the hand. Healing is not effected in every case but when belief in me exists the healing is quite definite (*ibid.*).

An old man, Maikin died soon after this interview, with his last words insisting to his people that they not think he was killed by sorcery. Touched by the man's charisma, Thompson wrote, 'I still have the feeling that God was with him in a real sense, and who shall say that he is not now with God? The story of his life might have been taken from the Acts of the Apostles' (Thompson 1933:166).

This seems an extraordinary statement from a missionary. But the event at Wanigela in 1932 was extraordinary. Although Thompson had not been there, hearing about it and talking to Maikin had a powerful effect upon him. It was an encounter that seems to have opened up new possibilities for missionary and healer alike. It was the most critical of a series of missionary occasions that had the potential of mutually transforming missionary and healer. Although he was not a Christian, Maikin did what the missionaries had wanted Christians to do all along: he put his faith in the power of God and overcame the earthly power of sorcerers. And, although he rejected the reality of indigenous magic, Thompson found himself convinced that the healer really was infused with the power of God, a power which Maikin exercised in a non-Western fashion. The 'metanoia' was a mutual one in which the missionary transformed 'himself in relation to the transformation of the other' and began 'to appreciate that the steps towards the perfect social order do not necessarily include a replication of his ... own native environment' (Burridge 1978:20).

That the missionaries were open to the possibility of such a transformation is indicated in the formation of a committee appointed by the Bishop in the late 1920s 'to enquire into the interrelationship between native ideas and Christianity'. The committee reported on Maikin and the movement that emerged from his work. They pondered Thompson's admiration for the healer, but evidently reached no conclusion and so the opportunity for a change in the church passed. One wonders what might have happened had Maikin not died so soon after the Wanigela 'miracle'. Would Thompson have changed his mind? Or would the missionary have made greater efforts to convince his superiors to modify their attitudes towards traditional healers?

Maikin evidently made a greater impact upon the Maisin, in no small part because, as both documented and oral accounts stress, he seemed to have won the united admiration and support of the Europeans. For a moment Maikin combined the power of healing with the authority of the mission (represented in Abraham, the church councillor) and the government (represented in the village constable). The historical record shows Maikin attempting to draw upon the powers promised by the mission to deal with a 'traditional' problem, that of the sorcerer. Like all healers, he acted somewhat apart from the moral order, became an 'individual' in Burrige's (1979) sense, and so took on some of the dangerous aspects of the sorcerer himself. But, unlike the sorcerers and healers of the past, he showed how individuals could also defeat sorcery by relating themselves to a greater power available to all Christians. An amalgam of the old and the new, Maikin stood and continues to stand as a symbol of hope against evil.

#### IV

Sorcery remains a living reality to the Maisin in the 1980s, but it is not quite what it used to be. Maisin still maintain that the sorcerer attacks those who make 'mistakes', but, after decades of exposure to Western legal institutions and Church teachings, the sorcerer is as likely to be regarded as a criminal as an arm of moral authority (Barker 1989). Sorcerers are more secretive than they used to be, although they always worked secretly. And they are more often outsiders because, so the Maisin say, the people have given up their traditional forms of sorcery and those who now practice most purchase their poisons or call in their spirits from outside of the community. One can clearly detect the structures of the old theodicy, assumptions about evil and justification; but the theodicy has been adjusted to the transformed conditions of Maisin life. As the moral universe of the Maisin has widened beyond the villages, their theodicy too has had to widen and strain. Sorcery has become less satisfying an explanation for many of the evils that now afflict Maisin life.

The ideas and fears Maisin have of sorcerers today are deeply infused with Christian teachings. Like Maikin, healers in the early 1980s claimed that their powers to detect and heal sickness came ultimately from God. A local priest confirmed that healers were blessed with a 'special gift' from God. Yet, it is common knowledge that faith in Christ will save any person from the harm inflicted by sorcerers; one does not have to turn to a healer. Several individuals told me of how such faith had carried them through an attack, and one man described actually confronting and facing down the sorcerer. In demonstrating their faith, these people were following the example set by Maikin. One can be a Christian and believe in the reality of sorcery. One can be an upright moral person, generous and helpful, respectful to neighbours, and steadfast against envious enemies. The evil of sorcery will never harm such persons. But, as the church has long taught, it is an easy thing, for

Christians as much as others, to succumb to the sin of temptation, as did Maikin, to use their gifts to cause harm or to fall into the sin of doubt and indifference, and thus become vulnerable to evil.

The Maisin's encounter with Christian missionaries has not rid them of sorcery. But neither has it left their sense of sorcery unchanged. The Maisin have become Christians, but they are not like most Western secularized believers, doubtful that evil is ever personified as a 'witch' or a 'sorcerer'. The Maisin have formed their understanding of Christianity and indigenous religious ideas through a long, often frustrating but very creative interaction with Christian outsiders. For them, Christianity has never been a closed system or a final destination. As Burrridge (1985:168) says, 'Christianity is awkward in these respects: it involves a new consciousness which is never static in itself; it always makes for changes in the socio-cultural ambience'.

### ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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### NOTES

1. The legitimate use of sorcery, often with the backing of leaders, has been reported from several traditional societies (e.g., Hau'ofa 1981; Malinowski 1926; Zelenietz 1981).
2. Despite such statements, many villagers are convinced that the old forms of sorcery linger on, that not everyone threw their poisons away upon conversion. My survey of misfortunes showed more attributions of sickness to spirit sorcery, especially among women (see Barker 1989). But interpretation is complicated because informants were not always consistent in their diagnoses and many claim to not be able to tell the difference between 'poison' and 'spirit' sorcery in individual cases. Although exact changes in sorcery ideas are difficult to trace, the shift from legitimate to illegal sorcery and the increasing reliance upon Christian ideas for protection are well documented in the archives and oral traditions and supported by studies of other Melanesian societies (e.g., Tonkinson 1981).
3. Betel nut is the small fruit of the areca palm. Chewed with the leaves and fruit of the betel plant and a little shell lime, it provides a mild stimulant for social occasions; because of this, it is often called 'Papuan beer'. Pots to hold the shell lime are made from dried gourds and vary in size and ornamentation, as do the lime spatulas. Maisin associate large lime pots with high rank and with sorcery.
4. As we shall see, Thompson was absent during this visit.
5. Maikin told Thompson, the missionary at Wanigela, a more extended version of his journey into heaven, one which involved God and Satan (see below). My informant possessed a copy of Wetherell's history of the Anglican mission in which the Thompson interview is summarized and this may have influenced

- his memory of the history (1977:191). The Resident Magistrate of the time also reported on Maikin's activities, which he regarded with some suspicion. Humphries had a 'quiet talk' with Maikin, which may be the source of the present-day story, in which the healer 'asked me to tell him how the world began "because he wanted to pass the information on to his people"' (Patrol Reports, Tufi, 9-20 June 1932).
6. The elder son died soon after his father. Frederick Bogara, the younger son, served for many years as a teacher-evangelist in the mission. He died in Uiaku in 1985.
  7. The drum now resides in the National Museum of Papua New Guinea in Port Moresby.
  8. It is important to be clear about what is being argued here. Maikin does not represent a 'solution' to the problem of sorcery, a way for Maisin to cope in changing conditions. He embodies not only hopes and aspirations but the contradictions in the Maisins' thinking about evil.
  9. Melanesian teachers could be very brave in dealing with sorcerers (see Wetherell 1977:112), but it is unlikely that they did not believe in sorcery. Certainly, the clergy working in Uiaku at the time of my fieldwork accepted sorcery as a reality, although they were convinced that faith in God could overcome it.
  10. The destruction of magical paraphernalia in early stages of conversion has been a common feature in Melanesian Christianity (Forman 1982:91; Huber 1988:151-52).
  11. One of these is described in Robson 1916. Older Maisin sometimes refer to the Yavaisi as the 'river Jordan' in memory of these events.
  12. This event was remembered in 1983 by some Maisin elders, although they associated it with a different missionary (Barker 1983:17).
  13. The so-called Taro Cult originated among the Orokaiva in the 1920s. It primarily involved rites to promote garden fertility and health. Some variants, not in the Collingwood Bay area, developed some 'cargo cult' ideas (see Williams 1928). Maikin told Thompson that earlier in his career he had been influenced by 'Oroda', a variant of the Taro movement, but had given it up after hearing a missionary complain about it (Wanigela Log Book, 10 July 1932). A healing seance I witnessed in 1983, however, resembled those described for the Taro Cult. When singing her 'spirit songs', for instance, the healer frequently called out 'Oroda! Oroda!'
  14. These premises are also apparent in Benson's (1955) story of three new Christians from Wanigela confronting a Uiaku sorcerer related below.
  15. The story evidently grew out of the lime pot incidents in Uiaku, but Fisher makes no mention of anyone other than himself destroying pots in the mission log book; nor does Bernard's death appear. The names of the sorcerer do not appear in any genealogies I collect and Maisin claim not to recognize them. I suspect that the story is based on a composite of experiences and inventions. Borega's conversion and statement just before his death is reminiscent of Maikin's as reported by Thompson (see below).
  16. It is, of course, of interest that the Maisin today remember him as a witness of Maikin's visit to Wanigela. This forms an important part of Maikin's legitimation.

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# ERRATA *Oceania* 61:1

On the cover:

Francesca = Francesca

1030 = 1930