To a European observer, one of the most compelling aspects of the religious event called Wogosia is that it is a community performance or entertainment in several episodes, performed primarily for and with unseen supernatural entities which are physically present and, in a sense, participating right along with the human celebrants. These Supernaturals of the Inhabited Land can never be perceived directly by human senses, but their existence is assumed because it is also believed that no life, including human life, would exist were it not for some kind of supernatural life-giving and life-sustaining forces. These supernatural forces that underlie life—sometimes understood as impersonal energy, sometimes as sensible beings—are responsive to human entreaties. In short, the celebration of Wogosia is concerned with the mystical qualities of life and their continuity.

At the turn of this century, before European and Asian diseases had decimated many Solomon Islands populations and before Christian teaching had met with much success, Wogosia was celebrated throughout a part of the eastern Solomonos, namely San Cristobal Island and the smaller islands, Santa Ana (locally, Orasha), Santa Catalina, and possibly others. There was considerable variation among the traditional cultures of the eastern Solomons, where dialects of five languages were, and still are, spoken. Yet, Wogosia transcended these local cultural and linguistic differences and appears to have been celebrated, in some form or another, by all societies in the area. Since the end of World War II, however, the people of Santa Catalina Island, including the few Christians among them, have been the only ones to continue the Wogosia tradition, which they do with sincerity, enthusiasm, and pride.

In earlier times one of the notable features of the Wogosia was that it was a moving or progressive celebration. The ceremony commenced in the community of Haunuru on the south coast of San Cristobal Island from where it traveled to other communities in the eastern Solomons, each some distance removed, in a generally easterly direction. Traditionally, Santa Catalina Island received Wogosia from Makonokoro, a community (no longer extant) located on the southeastern coast of San Cristobal. After its celebration on Santa Catalina Island, the rite was, and still is, passed on to nearby Santa Ana Island, even though the latter no longer celebrates Wogosia. The observances on Santa Catalina and Santa Ana Islands were the final ones in the annual cycle. On Santa Catalina Island itself this west-to-east movement is still an important directional aspect of the celebration.

Given the fact that one segment of the rite is devoted to cleansing and purifying the population and the dwelling areas, Wogosia in its former geographic
entirety was a ritualized, eastward-moving sweeping-up, so to speak, of the whole region. It was as if all the accumulated pollution and contamination of the previous year were being swept into the vast emptiness of the south Pacific Ocean. East is also the direction of the rising sun and, metaphorically, of birth and renewal.

The underlying myth of the Santa Catalina Wogosia is that when the island was physically formed (for which there is no detailed description or mythical explanation), it was totally barren, incapable of supporting life of any kind. But then the Supernaturals of the Inhabited Land transformed the barrenness by endowing soils with fertility for gardens and orchards, infusing the dwelling areas with life-sustaining power for humans to live and reproduce, and stock

ing the fringing reefs and adjacent ocean areas with an abundance of marine life.

Humans were created elsewhere by separate and unrelated supernatural processes, and in due course they came to dwell on Santa Catalina as they did on other islands in the region. Through Wogosia the life-giving and life-sustaining powers of land and sea on Santa Catalina are renewed each year by ritually cleansing the island and its populace of the accumulated contamination that diminish and inhibit the forces of fecundity. So, this rite of renewal could also well be termed a rite of purification.

Another explicit theme in Wogosia is that of restoring communal amity. Still another purposive theme incorporated within the Wogosia on Santa Catalina is a first-fruit ritual for the canarium almond, which comes into bearing at just this time of year.

The lunar month in which Wogosia is celebrated also has that name, and it usually begins around the middle of our month of May. At the beginning of the month, there is a prologue of sorts which, in effect, is an announcement to the honored supernaturals that preparations for the main event are underway. The main Wogosia observance takes place two or three weeks later in one long day, beginning about midnight and continuing until the following evening.

The Wogosia supernaturals are myriad in number, and while they are assumed to be sentient, they are not seen as actual supernatural beings, gods, or deities. They are more like unseen mystical forces. Yet, a very few have personal names and are perceived as possessing very specific powers. Even when the few personal names are called out, it is assumed that the myriad as a whole is being invoked.

The main places of veneration are the sacred canoe houses (ghat) especially one named Waisgini, which are located on the beach at some distance from the dwelling areas, and several old walled cemeteries which are no longer used for burials. The Waisgini canoe house is the oldest of several, and it stands next to the main path which leads from the seashore inland through the orchards and into the main garden area located on the high ground at the center of the island. The Waisgini path, as it is called, is the main portal for the island. It is also seen as more or less bisecting the island, each half being associated with one of the two matriarchal descent categories (called moietyes by ethnologists) into which the population of Santa Catalina is divided. These hereditary moietyes are named Atawa and Anwwea. Atawa persons are supposed to be oriented toward activities of the sea, Anwwea persons, toward the land; appropriately, the main responsibility for the Wogosia is supposed to rest with the latter. It is a fact that all of the ritual leaders are Anwwea men, but both moietyes share equally in providing the labor and food for the celebration.

Waisgini canoe house, the old walled cemeteries, and the main path leading to the agricultural heart of the island all signify the original settlement of humans on the island—those who were able to live here only because the Supernaturals of the Inhabited Land made it possible for them to do so. Thus, the Wogosia also recognizes the pioneer forebears, whose names are not remembered now, but whose former existence is represented by the stone walled enclosures where they were interred.

PROLOGUE TO WOGOSIA

Some weeks before the main event the prologue takes place. An offering of either of two common species of reef fish (notable not because they are good to eat, but because they are always abundant) is burned at an altar in the Waisgini canoe house. A new fire must be made for the burning. During the offering the man performing the ritual not only calls the deities' attention to it, but also asks them to make fair weather and good fishing until Wogosia is completed. The interval between the initiating offering and the main celebration is called The Reef Fishing (Roroa). This offering is repeated at the other canoe houses, although these repetitions are not considered to be required.

The fish for the offering and enough fish for a small ritual meal for men only are obtained the day before in a communal fish drive along the fringing reef. Following the offering, all men congregate at their respective canoe houses, and yam soup, prepared by the women in the dwellings, is delivered to the back entries. (Women are never permitted to enter a canoe house or pass along the beach in front of one.) First, a small offering of soup is made to the deities by pouring it on the hot coals in a sacred hearth, which has also been lighted with new fire. All offerings to the supernaturals must be burned or vaporized, in contrast to food for humans which is consumed, either steamed in earth ovens or roasted over coals.

Fish for the men are roasted on a secural hearth in each canoe house. Coconut cream, which is not suitable for the deities, is then added to the yam soup, and the men squat down around a single pot in front of the canoe house and drink it. Following this ritual meal for both supernaturals and men, all dip nets are brought from the dwellings to the canoe houses as another signal to the supernaturals that preparations for the main celebration are underway. At this time, too, the canoe houses, always sacred and hedged in with many restrictions, become even more tightly enveloped in an aura of restricted sanctity.

The main celebration, which should hold during the last phase of the moon of the Wogosia month, is still about ten days away. During this period there is a crescendo of preparatory activities and the festive mood of the people brightens. The tone and mood of Wogosia is supposed to be happy, joyous, lighthearted. Men fish; coconuts are picked, firewood is gathered and stacked to dry; and women remove from storage the remnants of last year's canarium almond harvest. The nuts are shelled and macerated for mixing into the special festive puddings. These are the usual preliminaries for any major feast at which special puddings are served. The puddings are served along with some form of animal protein. At Wogosia only fish are consumed because pigs are thought to be like humans: residents that depend upon the fertility of the soil, and beneficiaries of the rite. Fish, on the other hand, are like fruits and tubers: they depend directly upon the forces of fertility. On the last day before the Wogosia observances the special yarn tubers, which are just ripening (ordinary...
staple yams have already matured), are dug up and brought down to the dwellings where they are cooked in earth ovens (Fig. 3). Late in the day the feast puddings will be made by mashing the cooked yam tubers with coconut cream and macerated canarium almonds.

During the day a deputation of boys is sent to the orchards to pick large amounts of areca nut and pepper leaves, the two botanical ingredients for the stimulant/ intoxicant called betel. Betel in this region consists of three basic ingredients: the nut of the areca palm (*Areca catechu*), leaves of a pepper (*Piper betle*), and slaked lime. (In other regions, such as India, betel includes various spices.) The areca nut and pepper leaf are chewed together (or mixed with a special mortar and pestle if the preparer has no teeth) into a quid, then lime is gradually added. The lime releases the active ingredients of the mixture (hence it is called an alkaloid) which are absorbed into the blood through the inner tissues of the mouth. During Wogosia more betel will be consumed than on any other day of the year.

Late in the afternoon, the leaders order two more important ritual preparations to be made. A group of young boys is directed to retrieve a collection of ten or so shell trumpets from their storage place at Waisignini, wash them, try them out (Fig. 4), and then place them on a stone platform near the canoe house. At the same time a group of about a dozen young women is summoned. A leader whispers a spell over a bush knife (Fig. 5) and hands it to one of the women who cuts a beater about three feet long out of the stem of a dead coconut frond. Each of the other women proceeds to make a pair of such beaters for herself. The finished beaters are also stacked neatly near Waisignini canoe house. The woman who was singled out first carries one beater to the beach and amidst shouts of encouragement throws it into the sea (Fig. 6). The beater will float back to shore in a short time, and this symbolizes the arrival of Wogosia rite (some say the duties themselves) from the island of San Cristobal. The beaters will be used in the opening episode of the rite. After sunse, the island goes to sleep.

FIG. 4. Young boys wash and warm up the trumpet shells.

FIG. 5. A ritual leader puts a spell into a bush knife which will be used to cut beaters. Men supervise religious rituals in Santa Catalina. They also deal with clearing the land, tend the tree crops, do most of the fishing, and, formerly, fought to protect the community and for personnel prestige.

FIG. 6. At dusk a young woman throws a beater into the sea. It will soon wash up on the beach, symbolizing the arrival of Wogosia from San Cristobal Island.
FIG. 7. The shell trumpet choir blasts off in the middle of the night. The supernaturals have arrived. Wogosis is underway.

FIG. 8. Kneeling with their beaters, young women wait to pound the dwelling areas.

early, or tries to, knowing the day of the Wogosis will be long and arduous, albeit exhilarating and just plain fun.

**EPISODE ONE AND FIRST INTERMISSION**

In the middle of the night some young men quietly arise, go to where the shell trumpets were placed, remove the largest one, and take it to one of the ritual leaders who utters a spell over it. Meanwhile, other young men have awakened and are gathered at Wa’isini canoe house, each with one of the other shell trumpets. All of a sudden, the midnight silence is shattered as the group commences to play (Fig. 7). This is the signal that Wogosis has begun. The largest trumpet, with the deepest tone, blasts off with a short motif; the other trumpets answer. This call-and-answer refrain signifies the actual presence of the Wogosis supernaturals—they are present, they are participating, and the notes of the trumpet choir are their evanescent manifestation.

A few people come to Wa’isini to watch, but most remain in their dwellings. Meanwhile, the young women have picked up their beaters and, kneeling with bowed heads, they form a silent line near the beach, facing inland (Fig. 8). At a signal the line rushes forward beating the ground all around, through all the dwelling areas, up the connecting paths to the next village, and so throughout all the living spaces of the island. The choir of shell trumpets leisurely follows. As the beaters pass each house, smelly slop (representing pollution) and hot coals (representing last year’s fire) are tossed out on them. All the while, the choir of trumpets continues its call-and-answer motif, and the blowers also receive some of the filth and embers that are being hurled from the houses. If someone is ill, he or she is seated on the ground outside, so the beaters can flail the earth around the person. All the living areas of Santa Catalina are thus thrashed, as the movement, referred to as "up island," continues in a generally easterly direction which the rite traditionally would have traversed from its starting point at Hauanuu.

The beating ends on a sandy beach above the last settlement, which normally is a women’s latrine area and deemed to be a suitable place for the filth and contamination to be driven out to sea. Here the young women throw their beaters into the water, seize the shell trumpets from the men, and rush out into the shallows,
blowing the trumpets out across the strait that separates Santa Catalina from Santa Ana. This switch occurs without loss of a single note or beat. This is the end of episode one, the purification of the living areas.

In the dwellings all fires have been extinguished, and new fires have been kindled. Some do this with matches, while others insist on making new fire with a traditional fire plough (from which “rubbing two sticks together” is derived). During the next few hours the entire population gradually drifts to a stretch of clean sandy beach way up island. Adults are dressed in their newest and best. They have brought snacks, carried in the ceremonial baskets saved from boys’ initiation ceremonies (see Davenport 1981), and drinking coconuts, because water is forbidden (it might cause rain). Young children carry toys appropriate to their gender—miniature shields and spears by boys, fancy baskets and plaited work by girls. Small fires are lit, children sing ditties sung only on this occasion, and generous amounts of the materials for betel are handed around among the adults (Fig. 9). As the community waits for dawn, the atmosphere is gay, convivial, even hilarious. This is the first intermission.

**EPISODE TWO**

Near dawn older men ready javelins, clubs, and shields they have brought for episode two, a mock invasion of the island. Spells are spoken into the weapons, into mixses of water and ashes or sand which are smeared on faces, into leaves which are tucked in the back of their belts (Fig. 10). The leaders divide the men evenly into two groups, one to move up the beach and play the invaders, the other to stay nearby and defend the inhabited portion of the island. A line is drawn in the sand to indicate where the close fighting should occur and several of the leaders take up positions by it as referees.

As the first light of dawn appears the invaders come into sight. They taunt, posture, and gesture. Out on the exposed reef representatives from each side move along as if they were scouting the situation. Inshore, in the shallow water, two groups of young boys begin to
FIG. 11. The fight is joined.

FIG. 12. A fighter falls unconscious, and the fight is over.
imitate their elders on the beach. All this evokes memories of thirty years and more before, when the danger of attack from across the water was a real and constant threat. In the Wogosia, however, the mock invasion and defense is also supposed to be an opportunity for the participants to vent pent-up hostilities, to clear the mind of grudges. So, any fighter who does harbor a grudge against someone will try his best to get even now.

Gradually, the two forces engage, first by throwing their javelins, which are parried and thrown back with flourish (Fig. 11). In the shallow water the young boys, who closed their encounter first, tussle with each other. Ashore, the good fighters move warily, quietly, and efficiently, while the poor fighters rush around noisily and in all directions. There are whoops and yelps as fighters think they have scored or suffered a near miss. The referees watch the action carefully, but at a safe distance. (One of the referees was severely wounded several years before.) Finally, one young man falls (Fig. 12). He has not been wounded, however, but is unconscious—fainted from excitement and exhaustion. The referees step in and call the fight finished.

By the time the men have caught their wind, it is daylight. Some young women, wearing garments over their ears, have stretched a vine, high as they can hold it, where the fighting line had been drawn in the sand. All the assembled people, fighters and observers, pass under the vine, two by two or alternately, Anwea and Atawa. Obviously, this lighthearted ending of episode two signifies not only a successful defense of the island, but the establishment of harmony and unity between individuals and the moieties that should prevail during the remainder of Wogosia. As with the first episode, women are the principals in the finale of the second episode.

Soon the trumpet choir starts up again at Waisigini, but with a different call-and-answer motif (one for night, another for day). Relays of players will keep the choir playing all day long, until Wogosia is over. This period is also a second intermission during which each household enjoys a sumptuous holiday meal and preparations for the final ritual episodes of Wogosia are made. After eating with their individual households, the young women who were conspicuous in the initial cleansing ritual and the amity ceremony leave for the main garden area. On the way, they drop the gardenias they had put over their ears at a special stone, as an indication that their roles have changed, but they are still under the taboo against drinking water. They work leisurely all day cutting banana leaves, fringing them, and collecting small amounts of fine orange clay. Later, costumes will be made of these materials for use in the grand finale of the rite.

Two young men, one Anwea and one Atawa, go off to the orchards where they will climb in tandem up a straight canarium tree that has some early nuts. The nut-bearing branches are carefully, one might say respectfully, lowered to the ground, which is not the way the crop is normally harvested. These nuts will be added to special puddings that will be burned at the canoe houses as first-fruit offerings to the Wogosia supernaturals. This ritual will release the crop for picking as it matures.

As the men look for a likely tree to climb, the young women gathering banana leaves, out of sight but within hearing, shout rude insults and sing bawdy songs that mock the young men. This kind of behavior would never be tolerated in normal social contexts.

Later, at Waisigini, men gather a short distance inland with weapons. The shell trumpet choir intensifies its call-and-answer refrain (Fig. 13), and the armed men attack each other as if an internal feud had erupted. This is the first scene of the third and final episode of Wogosia. In the course of the melee the feuds encounter the young women who are returning to the villages with banana leaves and clay, and they scatter them with ugly threats. All the women around take cover, which was the traditional way when fighting broke out within a village. There is another brief, vigorous encounter on the beach in front of Waisigini canoe house as more armed men join the mock fray (Fig. 14). Tempers begin to flare, and the ritual leaders stop the mock fight. To mark the end of this scene, the trumpet choir picks up the tempo and plays with great vigor and spirit, the players swinging their bodies and hips to the beat.

Meanwhile, in the privacy of a nearby women's beach area, the young women who had gathered banana leaves and clay strip off their clothes, and older women
Fig. 16. Two ritual leaders rap for attention on the back wall of Waisigini canoe house.

Fig. 15. A mother helps her daughter into her leaf disguise.

Fig. 17. Two celebrants shout out, "Wogosia goes, Wogosia comes back...”

Fig. 18. The line of young women in their leaf disguises shout to pelt the ritual leaders with pebbles at Waisigini canoe house.

Fig. 19. The warms fading light is clearly visible across the separating strait.

Smear them evenly with the clay and help them put on their banana leaf costumes (Fig. 15). These costumes are really disguises since they cover the head and face, as well as the body. The women are deliberately covering all parts of their bodies which might be recognized. Up until only a few years earlier, females of all ages were virtually no clothing at all, so the covering of the entire body was a much more salient ritual reversal of normality than it is nowadays when most women wear skirts most of the time.

Near sunset there is a noticeable increase in anticipation as everyone congregates near the Waisigini canoe house. Suddenly, two of the ritual leaders rush into the canoe house from the beach, and two more mount a low wall outside the back of the sacred structure. The two pairs begin to vigorously rap on the rear thatch wall with poles to attract the attention of the onlookers (Fig. 16). They start shouting, but not in unison, “Wogosia goes; Wogosia comes back; Miss Wild (referring to bonito fish); Miss Changing Octopus; The Ship’s Wake (referring to valuable flotsam); Mr. Fiber (as for making fishing lines and nets); Mr. Greens (food that restores health and vigor); Big Man Rapani (one of the few named supernaturals who looks after all fruit trees); Mr. Tuber (referring to all yams); Ten (indicating the garfish, a delicious eating fish which is counted by tens); Big Man Maupua (a named supernatural who is supposed to cause good weather for crops); Firewood (which is as necessary for preparing food as foodstuff);" again they shout, "Wogosia goes, Wogosia comes back. Wogosia iagara” (thought to come from an ancient language; the meaning is lost, but suggests a magical spell) (Fig. 17). Other men jump up on a nearby wall, shout a few names, then jump down. The trumpet choir continues to play as loudly and vigorously as it can. Onlookers call out deity names or just shout.

While this exercised cacophony is developing, the young girls in their leaf disguises have assembled in a line a short distance away, facing the rear of the canoe house. Each young woman carries a pebble, and at a signal they all pelt the leaders who have been calling out the various deities (Fig. 18). This is supposed to attract the attention of the supernaturals away from the ritual leaders. On signal again, the young women break and run up island, shouting and screaming. The supernaturals are supposed to pursue them. The assembled crowd of observers follows, some running, some walking. Bringing up the rear is the trumpet choir, blasting with all its might, the players swinging their bodies to the beat. At the uppermost women’s latrine area again, the young women plunge into the shallow sea, throw off their banana leaf costumes, quickly wash the clay off their bodies, and put on cloth skirts which are carried out to them by older women. Bringing the clay down from the garden areas and washing it off in the sea represents ridding the garden areas of pollution, especially pollution that was introduced into the garden areas from the seashore areas. By the time the trumpet choir has arrived, the young women have cleansed themselves and dressed. They rush ashore and seize the shell trumpets from the male players, and go back out into the shallows, without missing a beat. The young women blow the trumpets toward Santa Ana island which, in the warm fading light is clearly visible across the separating strait.

Observers on the beach commence shouting things like “Go Wogosia, go off to Nafinuato [the former receiving village on Santa Ana], go to the Santa Cruz Islands [located a hundred miles further east], and take the sickness, the filth, and the pollution with you.”

With this, Wogosia is over.

Wogosia
FIG. 19. The final scene of Wogosia: young women have seized the shell trumpets from the men and are “blowing” the supernaturals off toward Nafinuatogo, Santa Ana Island. In reality Wogosia is as much about these young women and the fact that continuity rests so heavily upon them as it is about the supernaturals.

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