BALI

Ancient Rites in the Digital Age

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Dedication

This book is dedicated to the people of Bali, who gave me the opportunity to document a variety of their ritual activities; to lovers of Balinese culture; to my parents, Ida Bagus Raka Suamba and Ida Ayu Putri, who gave me the freedom to choose my path in life; and to my wife A.A.A.N. Putri Sumartini and our three children Ida Bagus Ngurah Primarta, Ida Ayu Agung Adriani and Ida Bagus Angga Triadi.

The ritual purification rite *malasti* by the sea, usually held before dawn to avoid the harsh sunlight on the beach. Those coming from afar set out in the middle of the night.

The *mamukur* ritual, in which the souls of the deceased are purified in the process of becoming deities which will be worshipped by their descendants. These rites are believed to be the same as were carried out for kings in earlier times.

Hundreds of villagers set out through the rice fields for a holy spring near the bathing pools at the Tirta Gangga gardens of the royal house of Karangasem, for purification rites ahead of the *usaba kapat* at Pura Puseh temple in Ababi village, Abang.

(page 8-9) Gebogan offerings: Pura Agung Mas Mereteng, Bresela, Payangan, Gianyar, 2014.
The offerings on the temple’s *balé agung* pavilion are *gebogan*, composed of fruit, cakes, and small *canang* offerings. In front of the pavilion, a woman prepares other offerings.

*Rejang* dancers light incense before a procession around sacred sites in the village accompanied by *kidung*, the singing of holy songs.
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by Prof. Dr. I Wayan Ardika

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Bali is known as ‘the island of the gods’, or ‘the island of a thousand temples’. This branding reflects the practice of the Balinese people to conduct a great many ritual ceremonies. Rituals in Bali can be classified into five categories: *Dewa yadnya* (rites for God and his manifestations), *Rsi yadna* (rites for priests), *Pitra yadnya* (rites for the ancestors), *Manusa yadnya* (rites of passage or life-cycle ceremonies) and *Buta yadnya* (rites for the underworld or demons/bad spirits). *Yadnya* is a Sanskrit word meaning ‘sacrifice’. The Balinese believe that God created the world by making sacrifices. Therefore, human beings have a debt (*rna*) to God. Indeed, the Balinese feel that human beings have three existential debts: to God (*Dewa rna*), to the priesthood (*Rsi rna*), and to the ancestors (*Pitra rna*). Human beings must pay debts by making sacrifices or offering to God, priests, and ancestors.

*Dewa yadnya*, the rituals dedicated to God and his manifestations, are expressed in ceremonies called *ngusaba* [often shorted to ‘*usaba*’ – Ed.], which take place on the anniversary of a particular temple. The word *ngusaba* is derived from the Sanskrit word *utsawa* which means ‘offering’. The term *ngusaba* is usually used in the mountainous villages of Karangasem, Bangli, and Gianyar regencies.

*Ngusaba nini* is practiced in the village of Sebatu, Tegallalang, Gianyar and also other villages in Bali. ‘*Nini*’ refers to the rice goddess, and this rite is concerned with fertility and the growth of newly planted rice, as well as prosperity, purification, and protection.

It is interesting to note the tolerance between Hindu Balinese and Balinese Muslims, as seen at the *usaba dangsil* at the Pura Puseh Merita, Kubu, Karangasem and during the temple festival of Pura Langgar, Bunitin, Bangli. Another instance of tolerance and harmony is that between Hindu Balinese and Kong Hu Cu (Chinese Confucians) at the temple festivals at Besakih, Batur, and other important temples in Bali. These are examples of the multiculturalism that exists among the Hindu, Muslim, and Chinese communities in Bali.

*Rsi yadnya* are rites dedicated to the priesthood. *Madwijati* (‘second birth’) is a key ritual during the consecration of a Brahmana to become a high priest. *Rsi yadnya* also includes the initiation (*madiksa*) of a temple priest. The role of priests is very important in leading rituals in Bali. Therefore the Hindu Balinese also make offerings for the priests themselves.
Pitra yadnya or death rituals are addressed to the ancestors. Cremation or ngaben is a complex of rites for the ancestors of Hindu Balinese. The aim of cremation is to free the soul of the deceased to join the Brahman (God). At the same time, the physical body of the deceased is returned to the material universe.

Cremation or ngaben has two main forms: sawa wedana and swatha. Sawa wedana is cremation with the corpse, and swatha is a cremation without the corpse, using a symbol of the deceased. In present times, people in Bali tend to practice group cremation or ngaben masal [or ngaben ngirit – Ed.] to economize on the high cost of the rituals. On the other hand, some elites in Bali tend to carry out glamorous and expensive cremations as an expression of the high status of the family.

The rites of passage for aristocratic families in Bali usually start before the baby is born, in a ceremony known as magedong-gedongan. There is a series of ceremonies after the baby is born, including when the umbilical cord of the baby dries and falls out (kepus pungsed), 42 days after birth (tutug kambuhan), 105 days (telu bulanan) and 210 days (otonan) after the baby is born, and then in adolescence (tutug kelih), tooth-filling (matatah), and marriage (nganten). Each of these stages is considered a somewhat dangerous magical transition, and thus each is conducted with special offerings.

The tooth-filing or matatah (mapandes) ceremony takes place when a young person reaches adulthood, as a way of curbing one’s desires or bad habits. After tooth-filing, a young person is expected to be well-mannered and behave properly.

Marriage rituals are very important in Balinese society. When someone marries, his status will change and he begins to be a member of the customary village or desa adat/pakraman.

Buta yadnya rituals are dedicated to the underworld or bad spirits. The Balinese give offerings to the underworld at the same time as they give offerings to the gods, in order to make the world balanced and harmonious.

The Balinese tend to divide rituals into three categories: nista, madya, and utama. These are equivalent to small/low, medium, and big/high. Rituals in Bali are very much related to the concept of desa kala patra, meaning place (desa), time (kala) and conditions (patra). Thus, rituals or ceremonies vary greatly according to
these factors. The Balinese are aware of, and tend to accept, the differences or pluralism of rituals and rites in every part of Bali.

Every major ceremony in Bali consists of five components: offerings (banten), song (kidung), incantations (mantra), music (gamelan), and dance (igel-igelan/sasolahan). These art forms were created for religious purposes. Performing music or dance is considered a form of devotion (ngayah) in Balinese society.

Traditional dances in Bali are seen as three sorts: wali, bebali, and balih-baliihan. Wali (sacred dances/arts) performed during temple ceremonies include Rejang, Sanghyang, and Baris.

Bebali refers to semi-sacred dances or arts. These are presented during certain ceremonies such as temple festivals and cremations. Bebali performances include Wayang/shadow puppet theatre, Topeng/mask dance, and Gambuh. Gambuh is considered the source of all classical dances in Bali. In the past, Gambuh was a court dance and performed in a palace or puri. Most puri in Bali have a balé pagambuhan, a pavilion for performing Gambuh. A Gambuh performance was considered a medium between the king and his family with public or community.

Balih-baliihan refers to dances conceived for entertainment. These dances include most forms of Legong, as well as Joged, Janger, Arja, and Drama Gong. Balih-baliihan are normally performed in the jabaan or outer yard of the temple.

The Barong and Rangda in Balinese dance embody the concept of binary opposition or rwa bhineda. Barong is a symbol of truth or good, and Rangda is symbolic of evil and destruction. These two energies always exist in the world and cannot be eliminated.

It should be noted that wali (sacred dance) and bebali (semi-sacred dances) nowadays are also performed for tourists. In other words, a process of commodification or commercialization now occurs with sacred Balinese dances such as Sanghyang and Barong dance. The tourism industry is now becoming a new patron of Balinese dance, replacing the role of royal courts in former times.
The tourism industry has a positive impact on Balinese culture in that it encourages the Balinese people to preserve their traditional arts, which have deep roots in their ritual life. The Balinese are aware of this resource, and often draw on it to revitalize their arts. For example, traditional textiles such as geringsing, rangrang, and endek are being revived. Traditional motifs of geringsing are now being used as endek motifs, or vice versa; and endek and rangrang motifs are appearing in new fashions.

The local government of Bali also plays a role in preserving cultural traditions through its annual Bali Arts Festival (Pesta Kesenian Bali). The aim of the Bali Arts Festival is to preserve and develop the arts. Traditional heritages tend to be contested between regencies in Bali. During the Bali Arts Festival, each regency presents a display of its unique cultural forms, particularly in the performing arts. This event can be seen as a medium of contestation and preservation of Balinese arts and culture in general.

The Balinese people enthusiastically use modern technology in their ancient rituals. Loud speakers, video cameras, and modern information technology are used to communicate and document ceremonies and temple festivals.

New ritual elements now appear in Balinese society, such as Durga and Ganesha puja and Agni hotra (rites for the fire god Agni). These Indian influences, seen as coming from an ancient source, are thought to enrich and enhance Balinese culture in general.

In the digital era, Balinese ritual is dynamic and thriving, practiced by the Balinese as a part of their daily lives. In Bali, there is no day without offerings. The uniqueness of these rites and traditions are markers of Balinese ethnic identity, of which the people of Bali are justly proud.

Prof. Dr. I Wayan Ardika
Bali’s ever-thickening urban sprawl has not eroded its ancient rites; it has merely blocked the view. Visitors are offered pre-packaged glimpses of the old culture in performances created specially for tourists. But even if a visitor happens to stumble across an authentic ritual, its meaning will probably remain obscure because of the great visual density and complexity. This book helps make sense of some of these rituals, and records events rarely seen.

Bali: Ancient Rites in the Digital Age is a personal portfolio of work by the photographer Ida Bagus Putra Adnyana between 2004 and 2015. As a Balinese from a Brahmana priestly family, I.B. Putra Adnyana brings insider knowledge of his subject, and he is often granted special access. Thus he is able to photograph with the greatest possible intimacy.

The images here offer a close view of rituals that few people have seen, often in remote villages of the island. They cover rites of passage and the rituals of death as well as those devoted to the gods, to the lower spirits, and the initiation of priests. The rites take place in temple courtyards and village lanes, in homes, in rice fields, on city streets, and by the sea. All these rituals arise from an agrarian culture with deep roots in Hinduism, Buddhism, animism, and the veneration of ancestors. It is remarkable that these rituals are as vital as ever today, in the midst of modern Indonesia.

In compiling this album, I.B. Putra Adnyana has selected photographs that document rituals or offerings that many Balinese have never seen. He hopes that it will serve as a reminder to the Balinese people of the great beauty and durability of their culture in its many expressions, even as modern life and reforming ideas put pressure on an ancient way of life. For non-Balinese, it is a rare glimpse into a world they are not likely to see as tourists. Even as Bali becomes crowded with garish new buildings and traffic-impacted roads, the photographer wishes to show us that these images, too, are a picture of modern Bali.

Danced in the inner courtyard of the temple by pre-adolescent girls. This ritual dance, performed only on prescribed occasions, is thought to be the inspiration for the very popular classical *Legong kraton*, which dates from the 17th century. The masks are reminiscent of Javanese topeng in style. Unlike most masks, which are held in place with a string or strip of rubber, these have a piece of wood on the back which the dancer clamps in her teeth.
A photographer is like a hunter, and to hunt in the world of Balinese ritual is to confront a jungle that is constantly moving. People in fabulous dress swarm everywhere, usually carrying something mysterious. The scene is crowded with offerings, banners, billows of incense smoke, and the coming and going of fantastic animal effigies. Women move about telling people what to do, what to fetch, what to move from this place to that. People call to each other over the sound of loudspeakers, gongs, kul-kul drums, and sometimes several gamelan orchestras playing at once.

In the midst of all this, the photographer-hunter must track his target. It is not enough just to be a first-rate photographer. One must know what’s going on, and what’s about to happen. One must know the pace and narrative of the ritual, must know what the climax is, and be ready to catch it when it suddenly erupts in the midst of this beautiful, holy confusion, while other photographers are still changing their batteries.

Ida Bagus Putra Adnyana is a master of the hunt. He has grown up on Balinese ritual, and he approaches the ritual jungle from the inside. Even so, the prey is elusive. His target is the exceptional moment that comes suddenly—the significant gesture [pp.78-79], the magical transfer [p. 69], the ignition of trance [pp.84-85], or the appearance of a rainbow [pp.174-175].

The photographs in this collection reflect a wide range of Balinese religious ceremonies. They cover the spectrum of rituals called panca yadnya—the five main categories of religious ceremonies that order Balinese life. These comprise the many rites of passage, rituals devoted to the deities, those addressed to the ground spirits and lower forces in human nature, the complex rituals associated with death, and those concerned with the priesthood. In all these, I. B. Putra Adnyana keeps close to the heart of the ritual.

It is remarkable that all the photographs here were all taken within the past few years. Many are believed to have taken place for centuries. Some, such as those in Trunyan, Kintamani [pp.172-173] feel as old as the earth.
This is not to say that rituals do not change in style. Balinese custom offers a choice of scale for rituals—small, medium, and large, with many gradations in between—but the trend in the digital age is to make it as grand as possible. This is particularly so among aristocratic houses (puri), with Puri Ubud a champion of ritual grandeur. Weddings and cremations are opportunities for the wealthy to put on a big display [p.130], but temple festivals, too, are becoming more lavish [pp.74-75]. There is a new concern for visual impact. It is the fashion now for people to dress uniformly—everyone in white for big temple festivals, for example, or all the palace women in the same color kebaya jacket at family rituals. Temples (pura) are themselves subject to exuberant and costly renovation.

Some say that this religious extravagance is the response of Balinese to their recent prosperity: that ritual entails sacrifice and that one should feel the burden a bit. Others call it pride, with all the ambivalence of the term. Interestingly, there are some who dare to dispense with the flourishes. I. B. Putra Adnyana tells of a venerated high priest of Sanur with a very deep understanding of sacred writings who, when his wife died, buried her with the simplest of ceremonies. Unlike in the usual lavish death rituals for the aristocracy, her body was carried to the graveyard with little more than a woven mat.

It is perhaps in search of this simpler essence that I. B. Putra Adnyana is also a hunter of the archaic in Balinese ritual. This leads him to parts of Bali where the old agrarian culture is still strong. The village of Tenganan Pegringsingan in Karangasem, despite its fame and its gracious welcome to visitors, has been extraordinarily successful in preserving its unique rites and customs. I. B. Putra Adnyana is especially fascinated by its coming-of-age rites truna nyoman [p.49], parts of which are conducted in secrecy, out of the sight of even the people of Tenganan.

Selumbung village, also in Karangasem, holds a unique rite during its usaba celebrations. I. B. Putra Adnyana says, “We watched the ritual makenak-kenak which went from three in the afternoon until dusk. For over three hours, people moved around the main courtyard of the temple, dancing the palanquins of the
Women leaving the temple with their offerings after prayers at Pura Kehen, an important state temple of the Bangli kingdom dating from the 11th century.
gods, dancing the Rangda, dancing the Barong, sometimes slashing their arms with keris daggers without showing any effect. With the continuous cloud of incense smoke, the mood was very deep, and the camera almost never stopped shooting.”

Perhaps the most hair-raising of these ancient rites is the rare performance of the betara brutuk in Trunyan village on the shores of Lake Batur in Kintamani. This long fertility rite is described by the Trunyan scholar James Danandjaja as a “sacred pantomime” and by another observer as being like “speeding hyenas in a gladiator pit.” I. B. Putra Adnyana says that he had heard of the betara brutuk since he was a schoolboy, but only in 2014 was he able to photograph the rite.

This collection opens with a section on offerings, “the medium of ritual,” and closes with a kaleidoscope of sacred dance, with much attention given to the Baris and Rejang dances, whose great variety demands representation. In photographing dance, the hunter is searching for the iconic gesture, the instant when a movement is completed—or the moment when suddenly the divine feels present [p.165].

In compiling this album, Ida Bagus Putra Adnyana has selected photographs that have special importance to him personally. He shares with the reader the fruits of his hunt, as a reminder of the great beauty, variety, and endurance of the Balinese way of engaging with the invisible world.
OFFERINGS

The medium of Balinese ritual
The beautiful clutter in a Balinese ceremony is offerings, called banten—a symbolic vocabulary of the visible and invisible worlds. The Balinese make offerings to a great variety of deities and ground spirits, to energies of place and important natural features such as mountains, lakes, springs, and the sea. Offerings are composed of materials gathered from the environment of a rural society: rice in various forms, fruits, flowers, a great variety of leaves, and often the meat of sacrificial animals. Other ingredients may include cotton thread, Chinese coins, cloth, resins, particular metals, scented woods, and sometimes surprising modern things such as bottled soda.

All these materials must be gathered fresh and fashioned into components that will make up larger compositions. Containers are formed from fresh palm leaves, cut and pinned together with bamboo slivers (modern women prefer staples). These are then filled with the requisite ingredients and assembled into myriad complex arrangements, each one associated with a particular deity or spirit. The symbolism of offerings is esoteric, related to the eleven cardinal points of the cosmos and their associated colors, numbers, deities, and magical powers.

The variety of offerings is almost infinite. Depending on the scale of the ceremony, it may take days, weeks, or even months to prepare all the offerings. This labor is shared by the members of the family or community holding the ritual. Men take charge of the sacrificial meats. Women excel in the art of cutting and pinning palm leaves, creating the containers and lovely festoons that create the glorious bulk of Balinese offerings.

Offerings are composed according to strict rules, all varying a bit from one village to the next. This knowledge is an oral tradition, held by priests and master offering-makers (tukang banten), who are most often older women. The priests know what offerings are required; the women know how to actually make them.

After the banten have been consecrated and offered to the gods, they are taken home and the edible parts are shared with family members and guests.

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(page 24-25) **Dangsil**: Pura Puseh, Sukawana, Kintamani, Bangli, 2014.
Hundreds of tall dangsil offerings, nearly two and a half meters high, during the usaba festival at the Pura Puseh temple in this old mountain village.

(opposite) **Usaba dangsil / usaba pepek**: Pura Puseh Sibetan, Sibetan, Karangasem, 2011.
A four-month long usaba dangsil temple festival, preceded by an usaba pepek on 15 July at Pura Puseh Sibetan temple and concluding on 12 November with a usaba at Pura Panti Mumbul temple in Sibetan village.
Offerings of babi guling (spit-roasted pig) at Pura Dalem. Nearly 700 roast pigs are offered at the usaba dalem temple festival in the month of Sasih Kasa. Every household raises one pig for this ceremony.
(left) *Banten Tegen-tegenan*: Pura Gunung Raung, Taro, Tegallalang, Gianyar, 2012. Hanging offerings of baby bananas, fruit, and rice cakes with marigolds and palm leaf festoons, decorating the ceiling of the *bale agung* and other temple pavilions.
Banten tegeh: Pura Dalem, Budekeling, Karangasem, 2014.
Tall offerings higher than two meters on a turned wooden base (dulang) and built of rice cakes with a crown of flowers and palm leaves. Some are adorned with silver.
Dangsil offerings being carried around a temple. Although these are more slender than the dangsil of Sukawana, the women need the aid of slings to carry them. The bases are carved, reflecting Sebatu’s renown as a village of woodcarvers.
These tall *dangsil* offerings are over two meters high. The base is formed of bamboo, into which is inserted a bamboo cylinder covered in palm leaves. The spine is a sugarcane stalk (*tebu*) decorated with sculpted rice cakes, with ornamental palm leaves and flowers on top. The *dangsil* offering is associated with the Shivite lingam, a fertility symbol.
During the usaba puseh temple festival, penek offerings are paraded around the temple, first three times, then some days later only once.
Unusually, in some villages men carry certain offerings (banten tegen-tegenan) on a bamboo pole hung with garden produce, saté, steamed rice packets (tipat), and batik cloth. Variations may be very elaborate. These are offered during the festival for Betari Sri, the rice goddess, at Pura Puseh, Taro Klod, and in nearby villages.
The photographer finds that the people of Sebatu, well known for their expertise in handicrafts, are unusually creative in decorating their offerings. These are offered during the festival for Betari Sri, the rice goddess, at Pura Puseh, Sebatu.