

Chapter 4. *Banua* or *Negara*? The Culture of Land in South Bali

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Land has always been a critical resource in the successive political economies of south Bali, and not surprisingly, it has also been deeply embedded in a rich matrix of cultural meanings.¹ This was evident to the earliest foreign observers—‘There is a ... correlation of the ... people with ... the land’ (Covarrubias 1994: 11, see also pp. 59, 84)—and has remained so until relatively recently. In the past generation, however, land has been relocated substantially from this matrix of meaning into something increasingly resembling the universal capitalist commodity hidden in the misleading term ‘real estate’, with all the attendant emptying-out of traditional meaning. This has happened primarily through its massive revaluation and inflation as a primary resource in an economy dominated by tourism as well as systematic attempts by the National Government, aided and abetted by foreign agencies, to ‘free’ it from the bonds of traditional forms of tenure and make it available to the widest possible market.

This process has been further aided at a more subtle psycho-cultural level by the phenomenological effects of various technologies that have progressively diluted and obscured the once-powerful and awe-inspiring daily (and particularly nightly) experience of landscape. Roads have connected places, such as the mountains or distant kingdoms, once awesome for their sheer remoteness. Motor vehicles have reduced distances of days to a matter of hours and their omnipresent noise, smell and sheer mechanical power have annulled much of the direct sensory experience of landscape, which was integral to the knowledge of previous generations. Kerosene lamps, battery-powered torches and more recently electric lighting penetrate the veil of darkness that once obscured the *sekala* (natural world), allowing people to glimpse the *niskala* (supernatural world) beyond. Radio, television and electronic amplification have pushed aside the sounds of bamboo rustling in the wind, the fading notes of a distant gamelan or even the stately creak of an ancient Dutch bicycle. People born since about 1970 have little or no experience of the landscape unmediated by these technologies, and when I ask them for directions they reply in terms of gas stations and hotels rather than *waringin* trees or temples.

I have discussed elsewhere some political-economic aspects of land in south Bali (MacRae 2003). The purpose of this chapter is to consider the matrix of meaning and customary practices in which land was and to some extent still is embedded. As with the political-economic dimension, from which they can never be entirely separated, these occur in the context of concrete historical processes.

The land has always been there, a primary element of human experience, and successive cultural and political orders have made their own sense and inscribed their own meanings on it. Some recent transformations of these have been touched on above, but the primary axis around which this discussion revolves is the extent to which 'traditional' ideas and practices to do with land might usefully be seen in terms of ancient, pre-Indic forms, common to a degree throughout the Austronesian world and evident especially in the Bali Aga forms described by Reuter (this volume).

The Cultural Landscape of South Bali

The south-central quarter of Bali is a wedge of land, sloping down and out from the central mountains, steeply at first, then flattening onto a coastal plain several kilometres wide. The soil is predominantly volcanic ash (*paras*), fertile and soft, allowing the rivers flowing down from the mountains to cut deep gorges, dividing the land into long tapering radial strips. In these gorges are remnants of the original rainforest that once covered most of the island while the strips between, some little more than ridges, others relatively flat and a kilometre or more wide, are terraced, irrigated and planted with rice and secondary crops such as sweet potato, interspersed with rows of coconut palms.

This landscape is divided, in traditional Balinese thinking, into two primary categories: wild forest (*alas* or [BI] *hutan*) and land that has been brought into human cultivation and ritual order (Boon 1977: 99).² *Alas* is inhabited by all manner of unseen (*niskala*) beings that are potentially disruptive and even dangerous to human life. When it is occupied by humans, the forest is cut, social and spatial institutions are established and ritual processes initiated to maintain harmony between human and *niskala* inhabitants.³

A well-known origin story in this part of Bali concerns Rsi Markandeya, a holy man from East Java, who came, with followers, to establish a community in the wilderness of Bali. They began cutting (*marabas*) forest by the River Wos at Campuan near Ubud, but were attacked by wild animals and diseases and the expedition was abandoned. Back in Java, Markandeya, received supernatural advice that he had neglected to establish the proper ritual relationships with the *niskala* inhabitants of the place. He tried again, this time taking appropriate ritual precautions, the most important of which was the burial of five elemental metals (*panca datu*) in the soil of the new land. This time he was to be rewarded with success. They cleared the forest, divided the land into dry and irrigated fields and established the primary institutions of social, ritual and economic organisation—*banjar*, *desa* and *subak*.⁴ *Banjar* is the local community organisation oriented to essential social tasks, especially the disposal of the dead. *Subak* is the organisation responsible for the collective management of irrigation water, essential to material subsistence. *Desa* is the organisation responsible for

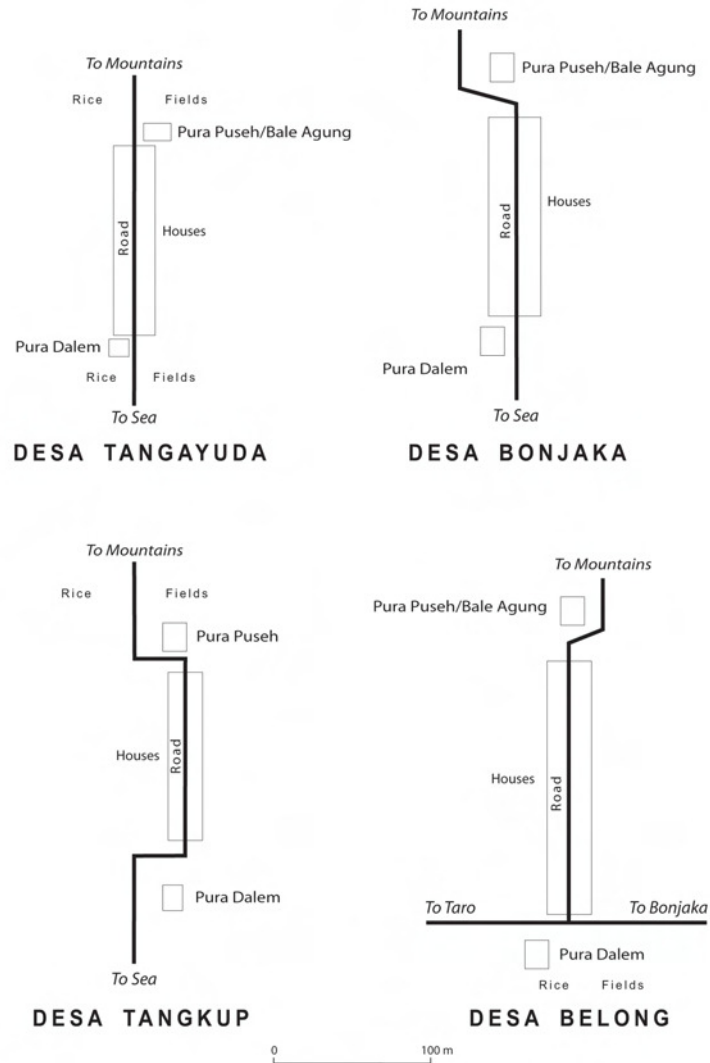
the maintenance of ritual harmony between human and *niskala* communities in a particular spatial/ecological zone.⁵

While it can be argued that *banjar* is the primary secular social unit (Guernonprez 1991), *desa* is the primary spatial and ritual unit (commonly, but somewhat misleadingly, translated as ‘village’)—binding local community to local landscape through collective responsibility to local deities.⁶ Land is understood to belong to these deities. Humans occupy and use it on what may be described as a leasehold basis, perpetual but subject to the regular performance of collective ritual obligations. It is the *desa*, rather than individuals, which is party to this arrangement with the gods, and individual households maintain their right to occupy *desa* land (*tanah ayahan desa*) by contributing to collective ritual obligations (Boon 1977: 100-2; Covarrubias 1994: 59,84; Reuter 2002b; Stuart-Fox 2002: 42-4; Warren 1993: 38-42). These obligations take the primary form of maintaining two (or more) main temples and performing in them regular ceremonies, which the various deities associated with the *desa* are invited to visit and are then plied with offerings of music, dance, food, flowers, incense and sacrificial animals.

The two main temples are the *pura puseh* (‘navel’, ‘centre’ or ‘origin’ temple) and the *pura dalem* (temple of the ‘great deity’ of death). The *pura puseh* is associated with the origins of the *desa*, in the form of founding ancestors and life-giving water from the mountains, and is located ideally and usually towards the uphill (*kaja*) end of the *desa* territory. It usually contains, in its middle courtyard (*jaba tengah*), a pavilion known as *bale agung* (great pavilion), in which all the gods of the *desa* assemble periodically. The *pura dalem* is associated with the spirits of the dead, but not yet fully purified and deified members of the *desa*. It is located ideally and usually near the graveyard and cremation ground (*setra*) at the downhill (*kelod*) end of the *desa* territory.⁷

The walled compounds (*pekarangan*) occupied by households of the *desa* are strung along either side of the uphill-downhill road (and sometimes parallel secondary streets) between these two temples. Each house yard is occupied by a household (or set of related households) in perpetuity but subject to prescribed contributions to collective ritual (*ayahan*, literally ‘work’). Such land (*pekarangan desa* or *karang ayahan desa*) might not be bought or sold.⁸ Spatially, each house yard replicates the fundamental uphill-downhill orientation of the *desa* itself.⁹ *Desa* are bounded laterally (east-west in this part of Bali) by the untamed space of the parallel river gorges and in the uphill-downhill direction by a neutral zone of cultivated land, which is owned by individuals and managed by *subak*.

Figure 1: Typical *Desa* layouts



Land Tenure

While household land is held in trust by the *desa*, articulating the ritual-economic relationship between humans and gods, there are also other kinds of collectively held land. *Laba pura* is productive land reserved for the material support of particular temples. Many *desa* and temples also have land (*tanah bukti*) reserved for the support of *desa* officials (*klian*, *bendesa*) or temple priests (*pemangku*). Streets, pathways and other public spaces including *setra* are collective property and are maintained by *banjar*, as are local community halls (*bale banjar*).

Productive land, on the other hand, is generally privately owned, a right established initially by clearing and cultivation, later by capture and redistribution by local rulers and currently by sale and purchase.

Across this mosaic of *desa* and agricultural land are overlaid the historical designs and ambitions of a series of ruling elites, many of them descended from noble warriors of the Hindu-Javanese empire of Majapahit whose forces invaded Bali in the 14th century. They brought with them more hierarchical modes of social and political organization, which were also inscribed onto the landscape. A proportion of *desa* in this part of Bali thus have, superimposed on the linear/axial spatial organisation described above, a centric, *mandala* form, focused on a central crossroads, where rulers built *puri* (palaces), markets and temples. In most of these *desa*, the *bale agung* has been relocated to a *pura desa* in this central complex.¹⁰

As well as appropriating and reconfiguring the ritual (or *niskala*) landscape of *desa*, new or invading *puri* took control of substantial areas of productive land, which they allowed their subject populations to continue to cultivate through various arrangements. The most distinctive and widely used in this part of Bali was a system known as *pecatu* or *tanah ayahan puri*, by which land was made available to farmers for their subsistence in exchange not for a portion of the crop but for certain services to the *puri*. The nature of *pecatu* has been the subject of considerable debate since the attempts of the first Dutch administrators to make sense of it (Gunning and van der Heiden 1926; de Kat Angelino 1921). The debate essentially concerns the extent to which it was a system of forced labour, of patronage or a variation on traditional *desa* obligations (Boon 1977: 56; Geertz 1980: 176; Hobart et al 1996: 55; Schulte-Nordholt 1996: 60; Warren 1993: 63). It is my impression that the divergence of interpretations probably reflects as much local differences of practice and terminology as it does the relative correctness of the authors. What is significant here is that it is a system in which rights to productive land are exchanged for labour obligations. As a result, just as residential land was occupied subject to ritual obligations to the gods via the *desa*, use of much productive land became increasingly subject to corresponding obligations to *puri*.¹¹

Trans-local Organisation

It is unclear what, if any forms of socio-spatial organisation larger than *desa* existed in this part of Bali before or independent of the multiplication and expansion of *puri* in the 18th century. On the one hand it is reasonable to expect that 'ritual domains' along the lines of the Bali Aga *banua* described by Reuter (this volume) might have existed, but on the other, the evidence of local oral history suggests that the settlement of much of the area coincided with rather than predated *puri* expansion.

The anthropological record is also somewhat ambiguous on this subject. While the Dutch scholarly colonial orthodoxy that 'the village forms a closed, self-contained unit' (Goris 1984: 79) has long since fallen from favour, subsequent writers continued to take for granted the village as the natural unit of analysis.¹² This focus has been at the expense of recognising modes of organisation beyond and between villages. The existence of such modes of organisation is, however, evident in the literature. This evidence includes:

1. Seasonal migrations of *barong* and performing art troupes between villages and/or temples (Lansing 1983; Mead 1970).
2. The formation of links between villages through temples (Bateson 1970; Boon 1977: 100).
3. Groups of 'mother-daughter' villages in East Karangasem and Batur-Kintamani areas (Boon 1997: 104-5; Covarrubias 1994: 58, Goris 1969: 107-8, 1984: 96, Stuart-Fox 2002: 49-51).
4. Royal patronage of local temples and systems of 'state temples' at central, uphill and seaward extremities of kingdoms.
5. The travels of Rsi Markandeya (Howe 1980: 13, Stuart-Fox 2002: 261-3) or other mytho-historical connections (Boon 1977: 100).
6. Market networks (Hobart 1979: 69-74).

Despite such widespread evidence, the implications have not been pursued systematically with the exceptions of Lansing's (1991) work on water temples, Schulte-Nordholt's (1988a, 1991a, 1991b) on pre-colonial state temples, and Reuter's (1998, 2002a) more recent work on Bali Aga *banua*. None of these refer to the ordinary villages and temples of south Bali. Recent ethnographic evidence, however, indicates traces of *banua*-like forms, especially the further one moves uphill from the *puri* centres of Ubud, Tegallalang and Payangan, towards the more unequivocally Bali Aga areas documented by Reuter.¹³

For example, Desa Sabtu, according to local tradition never subject to *puri* control, is the centre of a network of some five *desa* linked by reciprocal ritual ties. They are not, however, referred to as a named collective entity. The ritual cycle in these *desa* is, as in mountain *banua*, tied to the old lunar calendar (*sasih*) rather than the Hindu-Javanese one (*wuku*). On the other hand, they utilise the services of Brahman high priests (*pendeta*) in some of their rituals, which is evidence of influence from the Majapahit lowlands.

In nearby Pujung (Talepud), Leo Howe (1980: 13-27) reports a similar blend of lowland and highland customs, as well as local oral traditions including a version of the Rsi Markandeya story, which link Talepud to nearby *desa*. Unfortunately, he gives little detail of contemporary practices of trans-*desa* organisation. According to my inquiries in Pujung in 1996, however, it is the centre of a group of nine ritually linked *desa* but these are not referred to as a *banua*. *Pendeta* do not officiate at temple rituals here and the ritual cycle is tied

neither to the lunar nor *wuku* calendars, but to the local cycle of the traditional rice crop. The form and seating arrangements of *desa* meetings likewise appear to be a fusion of elements characteristic of mountain and lowland forms. Local opinion, however, sees it more as the transplantation of the forms of their village of origin in Karangasem (East Bali), forms that are themselves more consistent with those Reuter characterises as Bali Aga.

Immediately downhill of Pujung and Sebatu are a number of small *desa* (e.g. Kebon, Tangkup, Cebok), which have no *bale agung* of their own but share that of the older village from which they originated (e.g. Kedisan)—a mode of relationship consistent with processes of linkage in both the mountains and East Bali (Reuter 2002: 38-41; Stuart-Fox 2002: 46-51). At roughly the same elevation and a couple of ridge/valley systems to the west, near Payangan, is yet another group of eight *desa*, linked to a shared temple, known as Pura Banua, in Desa Bukian. Unlike the category of Bali Aga temples of the same name (*pura banua*), this Pura Banua is not understood as the centre of a ritual domain so much as a regional temple with a unique history. According to local oral narratives, its origin lies not in a ritual alliance but a defensive one, at the time of the Payangan wars of 1843, with the temple being a place of assembly in times of crisis. However, the term and metaphor of *banua* was chosen, which suggests familiarity with the concept, and, as Reuter (2002: 80) notes, this area is one of the few *puri*-dominated areas with strong ritual links to Bali Aga temples.¹⁴

The evidence of all of these examples consists merely of traces of various kinds, and there is no evidence of systematic organisation or a sense of collective identity as in the mountain *banua*. David Stuart-Fox (2002: 46-51), writing of similar but different groupings of villages further east in Bali, reminds us, however, that no matter how ancient and timeless they may appear, all these groupings of villages are the result of concrete historical processes. I would suggest furthermore that it is to these processes that we need look if we are to understand their contemporary forms; a point to which we will return later.

If we look further downhill, where the political and ritual dominance of *puri* increases there is progressively less evidence of such forms or of 'ritual domains' (*banua*) other than pre-colonial 'kingdoms' (*negara*). This would suggest that *banua* are either a form distinctive to the mountain regions for some reason, or that they have been eliminated or obscured in the areas subject to Majapahit *puri* domination. There remains, however, the evidence listed above, even in relatively downhill areas, of elements of inter-*desa* organisation, articulated through links between temples. Are they *negara* or *banua* or something else? The remainder of this paper considers this question by summarising and examining my own ethnographic evidence of a more substantial network of linkages in the upper Wos Valley.

The 'Ritual Domain' of the Wos Valley

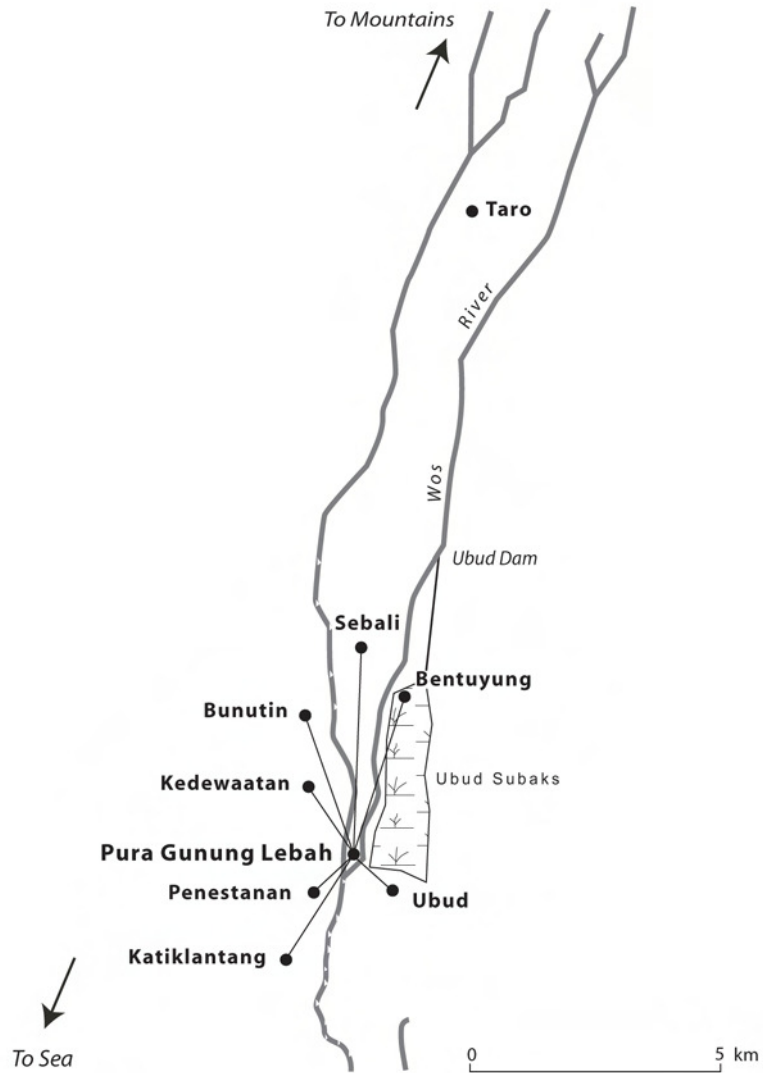
Village temples ... are linked together in a given area by hereditary ties or because of allegiance to a princely house or to that of a Brahmana high priest. Thus to the head temple on the day of its yearly festival will come the members and the priests from a number of tributary temples round about, bearing their gods in procession, accompanied by their gamelan orchestras, with spears and banners and all ceremonial regalia, and bringing also the Barong and the Rangda. (Jane Belo 1949: 40)

At Campuan, in the gorge just west of Ubud, above a fork in the River Wos, is the temple Pura Gunung Lebah. The name means literally 'low mountain', 'below the mountain' or 'the mountain below'. It is held in local lore to be especially sacred but it does not fit unambiguously into the conventional scheme of local temples. It is specific neither to *desa* nor to any one clearly defined group. The *ayahan* is performed by a group of *subak* around Ubud and the people of Banjar Taman Kelod, working on behalf of Puri Ubud.¹⁵ Its major *palingih* (sitting-places for visiting deities) are two pagoda-like towers (*meru*)—a seven-tiered one for the resident deity of Gunung Lebah and a five-tiered one for Bhatari Sri Batur (the goddess of Mt/Lake Batur).

At the beginning of anniversary ceremonies (*odalan*), processions arrive from Ubud and from a circle of villages approximately centred on the temple. These people bring their *barong* (gods in the form of large animal puppets) and other sacred objects, most of which were made, donated by, or in some other way connected to the *puri*. In explaining their relationship with the temple, they refer to these connections and also to Rsi Markandeya and his travel up the Wos Valley.

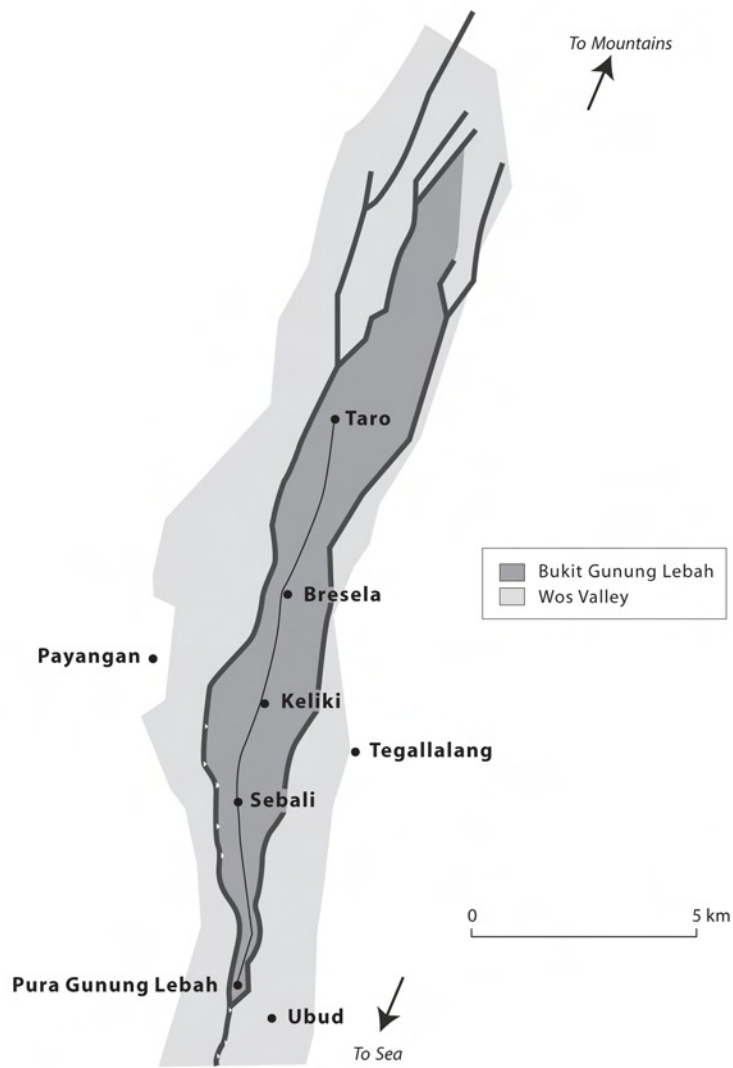
Pura Gunung Lebah has a range of associations and meanings, constituted in different ways. It is (a) the *pura masceti* (regional irrigation temple) for a group of *subak*, (b) a royal temple of the *puri*, and is associated (c) with a group of villages, including Ubud, and their *barong*, (d) with the travels of Rsi Markandeya, (e) with the Wos Valley as far as Taro, and is finally (f) a visiting place (*pasimpangan*) for the goddess of Mt/Lake Batur. These connections are articulated through the temple but are not organised around a single consistent set of ideas. They are constituted variously through more or less defined groups of people, through the static form of land and the dynamic of flowing water and through hazily remembered mythologies and the regular visits of gods.¹⁶

Figure 2: The Pura Gunung Lebah network



Many of the *desa* connected to Pura Gunung Lebah are themselves linked in similar ways to others around Ubud and eventually to others all the way up the Wos Valley. The net result of these linkages may be described as a network of villages and temples within a more or less defined region. This network takes the form not of a single grid but of several imperfectly overlapping ones constituted variously in the dimensions of topography, hydrology, irrigation, mythology, history, *barong* migrations and temple connections. The following sections summarise these 'layers' of linkage.

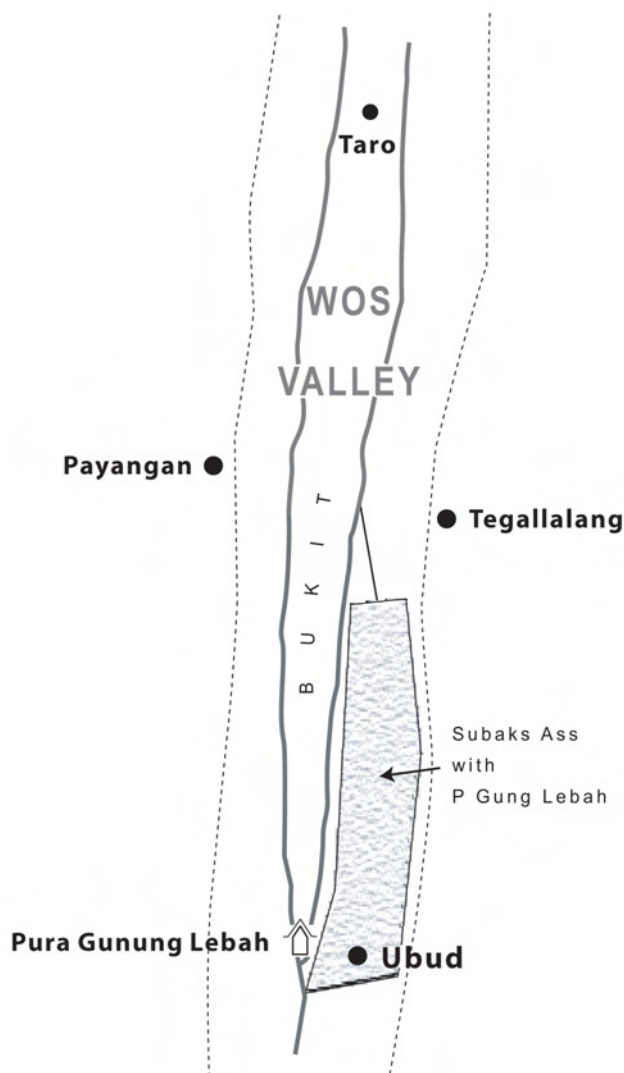
Figure 3: The Wos Valley



Irrigation

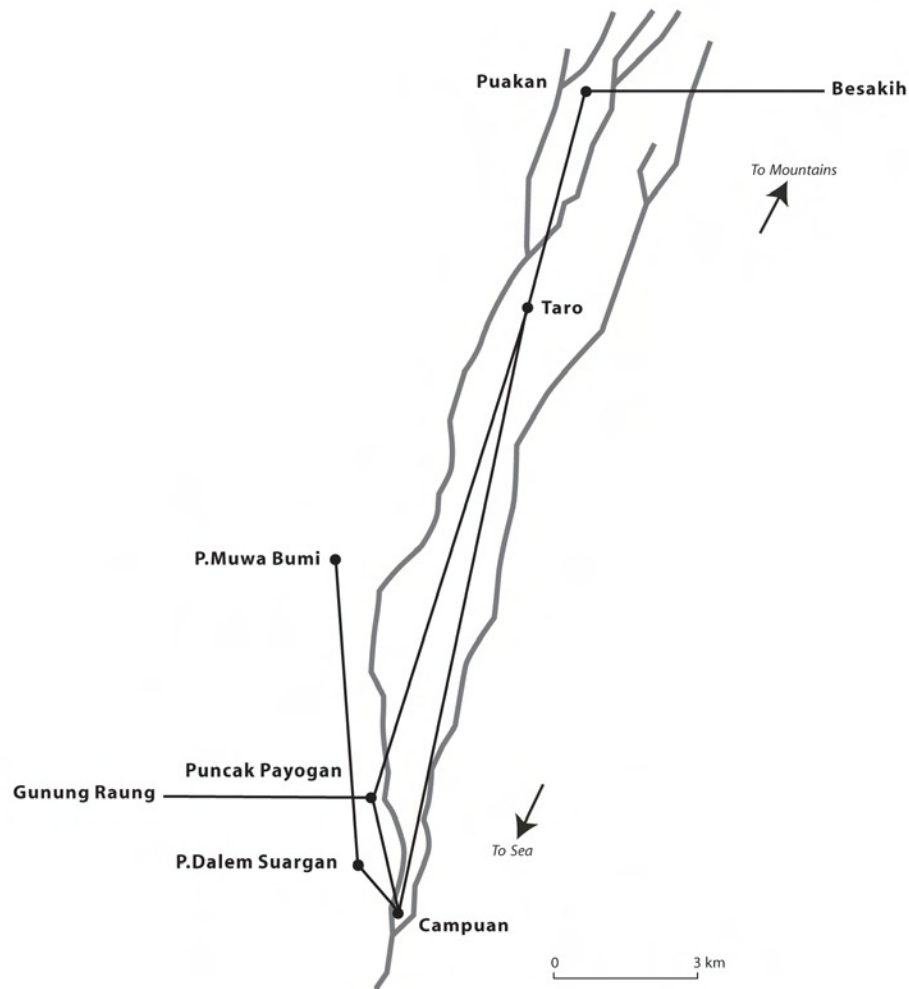
Pura Gunung Lebah sits on the lower end of a ridge (*bukit*). This narrow ridge, never more than two kilometres across, runs uphill, between two deep, forested ravines in which flow the east and west arms of the Wos, until it flattens out onto the plateau flanking the crater of Gunung Batur. On either side of this double valley run the parallel ridge roads through the major villages and court centres of Peliatan-Tegallalang-Pujung and Sayan-Kedewatan-Payangan.

Figure 4: The Upper Wos Valley: irrigation



Along the central ridge are a series of villages strung along a narrow road. The gradient is gentle and easily traversed and the distances between settlements are generally no more than a kilometre. The intermediate *sawah* (irrigated rice fields) are traditionally worked by families of both, or even other, villages, and there are few obstacles to up-down-*bukit* travel. Irrigation and *sawah* ownership tend to cross village boundaries and collective maintenance and management of the irrigation system necessitates a degree of cooperation between upstream-downstream neighbours.

Figure 5: The Upper Wos Valley: Rsi Markandeya's journey



Balinese irrigation is gravity-fed and flows from mountain lakes and springs. Because of the depth of the river gorges, water is channelled from sources far upstream of the fields it irrigates and can be used only within the valley in which it originates. This basic hydrological form configures irrigation, like the land itself, into a set of long, narrow systems that depend on cooperation between upstream and downstream users of the system.¹⁷

Within the Wos Valley, the rice fields along the *bukit* from Bankiangsidem to above Taro are irrigated from dams on the two inner arms of the Wos. Although these *subak* are within the area associated with Pura Gunung Lebah, they do not relate to it as their *pura masceti*. Conversely, the primary congregation of the temple in its function as *pura masceti* are *subak*, which are physically located

outside the *bukit* but draw their water from a dam on the Wos. Land and irrigation are separated ritually and the area served by Pura Gunung Lebah in its function as an irrigation temple does not correspond physically with the area with which it is connected in other ways.

Rsi Markandeya

Throughout the Wos Valley, the Markandeya story is trundled out routinely in response to questions about the foundation of local villages and temples. The details vary and village people frequently refer to Puri Ubud or to published versions for the ‘complete’ or ‘correct’ story.¹⁸

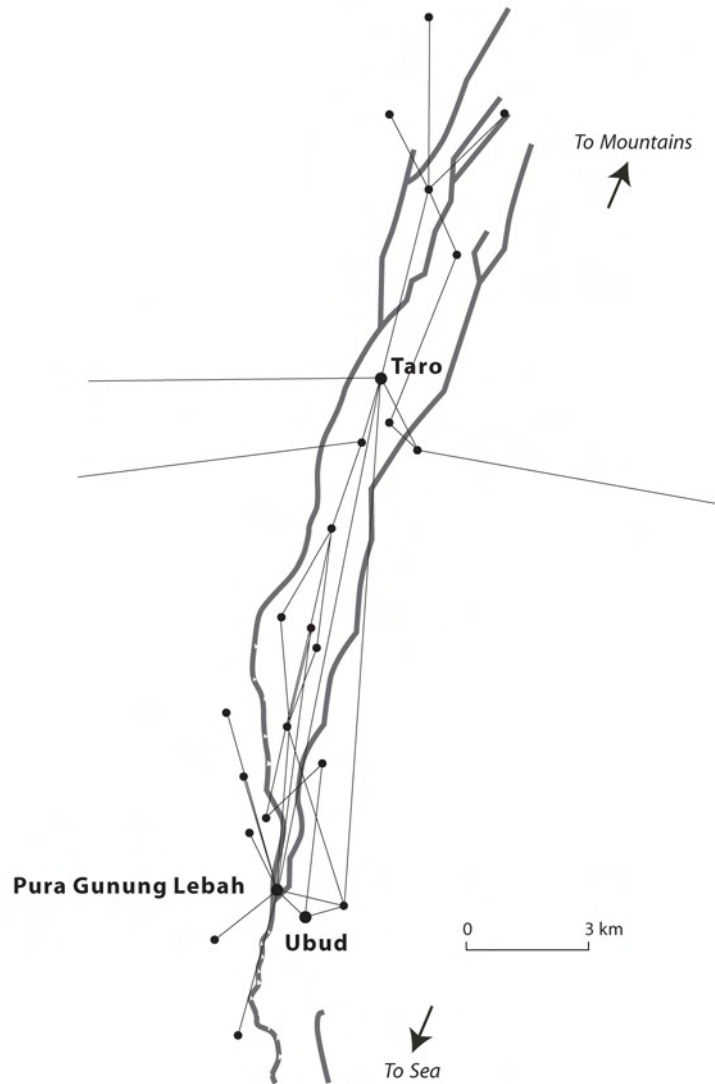
Although not all the places mentioned in these stories are confined, even in the most parochial versions, to the *bukit*, the story serves to identify the poles of Campuan and Taro and an axis between them and to identify these with the foundations of Balinese civilisation. To its inhabitants, this area is known by such names as Ujung Taro, Bukit Taro, Gunung Taro, Gunung Raung or Bukit Gunung Lebah and is replete with material evidence of Rsi Markandeya’s exploits, mostly in the form of temples.

The Migratory Habits of Barong

Barong, ‘at once the most familiar and the most obscure’ figures in Balinese tradition (Spies and de Zoete 1973: 93) are known to everyone but understood only in contradictory ways by relatively few people.¹⁹ They are essentially creatures of place, associated with *desa* and their territories, which they patrol seasonally to prevent the entry of unwanted influences. As Mead (1970) observed, they are subject also to a season of migration during which they might wander promiscuously performing as their will or habit takes them. They also practice a third, more regulated kind of migration: mutual visiting, along with other sacred objects (*pretima*), at temple ceremonies. It is through these visits that contemporary ritual links between villages in the Wos Valley are most readily traced.

For example, at the *odalan* of Pura Jemeng in Sebali, in addition to three *barong* from local temples, others are (usually) brought from Keliki, Lungsiakan, Ubud and Bentuyung. Likewise, reciprocally, the resident *barong* at Pura Jemeng attends *odalan* at the home temples of all these *barong* and at Pura Gunung Lebah. Keliki is immediately up-*bukit* of Sebali, with which it has close historical links. Some of these *barong* also travel, along with others from the area, to Pura Sabang Dahat, on the lonely plateau above Puakan. Every Manis Galungan, many *barong*, mostly from Bukit Taro/Gunung Lebah, present themselves at this temple and report to other local temples before making their own ways back down the *bukit*.²⁰ For the month after Galungan, reciprocal visiting continues between *barong* in the area.

Figure 6: The Upper Wos Valley: *barong* migrations



Most other *desa* have similar networks of related villages and temples which, can be traced by the travels of their *barong*. Taken together, the dominant pattern of connection is along the *kaja-kelod* axis within the *bukit*, but there are also some trans-*bukit* links to Ubud and others to apparently random temples elsewhere.