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Intertextual and Semiotic Analysis of Theological Concepts in Old Balinese Inscriptions: A Theo-Epigraphic Study

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ABSTRACT

This study explores the theological concepts embedded in Old Balinese inscriptions through a theo-epigraphic approach, combining intertextual and semiotic analyses. The research focuses on inscriptions from the 8th to 11th centuries, written in Pra-Nagari and Old Balinese scripts, which reflect the syncretic religious landscape of early Bali, blending indigenous animistic beliefs with Hinduism and Buddhism. Despite extensive scholarly work on these inscriptions, the theological dimensions have been largely overlooked. This study addresses this gap by examining key theological concepts such as *dharmā*, *nirvāṇa/mokṣa*, and *saṅkanparaniŋ dumadi*, and their symbolic representations in the inscriptions. The findings reveal a dynamic interplay between local ancestral worship and external religious influences, highlighting how these inscriptions served as intertextual documents that preserved and reinterpreted theological ideas. The semiotic analysis uncovers the symbolic meanings of scripts and texts, emphasizing their role in conveying religious and political authority. The study also identifies the continuity of pre-Hindu traditions, such as ancestor worship and nature veneration, within the framework of Hinduism and Buddhism. By integrating theological inquiry with epigraphic analysis, this research provides a nuanced understanding of the religious and cultural exchanges that shaped early Balinese society, contributing to the preservation and appreciation of Balinese cultural heritage. The findings offer insights into the broader academic discourse on religious syncretism and the adaptation of external influences in local contexts.

Keywords: Old Balinese Inscriptions; Theological Concepts; Theo-Epigraphy; Intertextuality; Semiotics; Hinduism; Buddhism; Balinese Spirituality

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1. Introduction

This paper explores the influence of Hindu-Buddhist cultural practices on ancient Balinese society, particularly focusing on ancestor worship, divine kingship, and the continuity of megalithic traditions. By analyzing theological concepts embedded in Old Balinese inscriptions, this study examines how indigenous beliefs were not only preserved but also transformed through the integration of external religious influences. Specifically, it investigates how theological ideas such as *dharmā*, *mokṣa/nirvāṇa*, and *saṅkanparaniŋ dumadi* were articulated through inscriptions and how these expressions reflect the syncretic religious landscape of early Bali.

Bali's entry into its historical period is marked by a rich heritage of inscriptions, with the earliest records dating back to the 8th century using the Pra-Nagari script and followed by the use of the Old Balinese script from the 9th century onward. These inscriptions, inscribed on clay tablets and copper plates, serve as vital historical and cultural artifacts. The Pra-Nagari script, exemplified in the Yé Té Mantra inscription, was primarily used to inscribe Buddhist teachings, which were placed at the base of Buddhist stupas as offerings. In contrast, Old Balinese inscriptions, written on copper plates, encompass a broader range of content, including religious beliefs in *Bhatāra-Bhātari*, Buddhism, Shaivism, as well as regulations on economic, social, and bureaucratic matters [1,2]. These inscriptions provide a window into early Balinese society's theological, cultural, and political landscape, reflecting the island's unique syncretic traditions that blended indigenous animistic beliefs with the influences of Hinduism and Buddhism.

Although these inscriptions reflect strong Indian influences through the introduction of Hinduism and Buddhism, ancient Balinese customs such as ancestor worship and ritual reverence for the divine remained deeply embedded in the cultural fabric [3]. Rather than adopting Indian religious traditions wholesale, early Balinese society engaged in a selective and creative process of adaptation. These external religious traditions were critically examined and adapted to align with Bali's indigenous belief system, particularly the veneration of ancestral spirits and the ideology of divine kingship. This process of adaptation and syncretism is evident in the inscriptions from the Singhamandawa period and the Warmadewa Dynasty, which contain rich theological content and references to foundational concepts such as cosmic order, liberation, and the metaphysics of creation. These inscriptions serve as crucial primary sources for understanding the theological and philosophical discourses that shaped early Balinese society.

Despite the extensive scholarly work on Old Balinese inscriptions by researchers such as Goris [4], Ardika [5], and Astra [6], there remains a significant gap in the study of the theological concepts embedded within these texts. While these scholars have explored various aspects of Balinese society, including bureaucracy, economy, and customs, the theological dimensions of the inscriptions have been largely overlooked. The scarcity of research on Hindu theology in these inscriptions, emphasizes the need for deeper exploration. The inscriptions are rooted in Hindu legal guidelines and Vedic teachings [7], yet the specific theological concepts and texts that underpin these inscriptions remain underexamined. Additionally, previous studies have not adequately addressed the symbolic significance of the scripts themselves, particularly concerning divinity, as seen in the Yé Té Mantra inscription.

The existing body of research on Old Balinese inscriptions has primarily focused on historical, linguistic, and socio-economic aspects, leaving the theological and semiotic dimensions underexplored. While scholars such as Acri [8], Fox [9], and Ardhana and Wijaya [3] have examined the integration of Hinduism and Buddhism with indigenous Balinese beliefs, there has been limited focus on how these theological concepts are encoded in the inscriptions themselves. Furthermore, the use of intertextual and semiotic approaches to analyze these inscriptions remains underexplored. This study seeks to address these gaps by employing a theo-epigraphic approach, integrating the study of inscriptions with theological inquiry, and applying the theories of intertextuality [10] and semiotics [11] to uncover the intricate relationship between text, symbol, and theology in Old Balinese inscriptions.

This study introduces a novel approach by combining theo-epigraphy with intertextual and semiotic analyses to explore the theological concepts in Old Balinese inscriptions. While previous research has focused on the historical and linguistic aspects of these inscriptions, this study

delves into the theological and symbolic dimensions, offering a more nuanced understanding of how religious beliefs and practices were communicated through text. By examining the inscriptions through the lenses of intertextuality and semiotics, this research reveals how the inscriptions draw upon and reinterpret earlier theological concepts from both local and external traditions. This approach not only highlights the dynamic interplay between indigenous Balinese beliefs and the influences of Hinduism and Buddhism but also uncovers the symbolic meanings embedded in the scripts and texts themselves. The study also addresses the symbolic use of scripts concerning divinity, a topic that has been largely overlooked in previous research.

This study aims to bridge the gap in the existing literature by exploring the theological concepts in Old Balinese inscriptions through a theo-epigraphic approach, combined with intertextual and semiotic analyses. By doing so, it seeks to uncover the complex interplay of indigenous beliefs and external religious influences that defined the theological landscape of early Bali, while also contributing to the preservation and appreciation of Balinese cultural heritage.

This research holds significant value for several reasons. First, it contributes to the growing body of knowledge on Old Balinese inscriptions by shedding light on their theological dimensions, which have been underexplored in previous studies. By uncovering the theological concepts embedded in these inscriptions, the study provides a deeper understanding of the religious and cultural exchanges that shaped early Balinese society. Second, the application of intertextual and semiotic analyses offers a new methodological framework for studying epigraphic materials, which can be applied to other ancient texts and inscriptions. Third, this research has important implications for the preservation and appreciation of Balinese cultural heritage. By fostering a deeper understanding of the theological roots of Balinese culture, the study encourages the younger generation to appreciate and preserve their ancestral heritage, promoting cultural continuity and respect for traditional values. Finally, the study's findings can contribute to broader academic discussions on the syncretism of religious traditions and the adaptation of external influences in local contexts, offering insights that are relevant to the study of other cultures and historical periods.

2. Review of Literature

This section explores the conceptual and theoretical foundations that guide this study. The key concepts, intertextuality, semiotics, and theo-epigraphy, are examined both in their role as theoretical frameworks and their specific applications to the analysis of Old Balinese inscriptions. These frameworks are essential for unpacking the symbolic, textual, and theological layers embedded in ancient epigraphic materials.

2.1. Intertextuality

The concept of intertextuality was first developed by Julia Kristeva in the 1960s, building on the dialogic theories of Mikhail Bakhtin. Kristeva posits that texts are never isolated creations; rather, they are woven from a network of prior texts, discourses, and cultural narratives [10]. In this view, meaning is generated through the interrelation of texts, past and present, canonical and vernacular. Intertextuality emphasizes the fluid boundaries between texts, foregrounding their embeddedness within broader ideological and theological traditions.

In the context of this study, intertextuality is applied to trace the influence of Indian theological traditions especially Vedic, Shaivite, and Buddhist on Old Balinese inscriptions. These inscriptions do not merely imitate their Indian predecessors but reinterpret and localize them within the Balinese cultural and religious setting. For instance, concepts such as *dharmā, mokṣa/nirvāṇa*, and *ātmasiddhadéva*ta are drawn from transregional religious texts but adapted to reflect indigenous cosmological perspectives. By using an intertextual approach, this study reveals how Old Balinese inscriptions function as sites of theological negotiation, where imported ideas merge with ancestral beliefs to form a unique spiritual discourse.

2.2. Semiotics

Semiotics, the study of signs and their meanings, is pivotal in decoding the symbolic content embedded in Old Balinese inscriptions. The semiotic approach taken in this study draws primarily on the work of Michael Riffaterre, who emphasized the interpretive process through which readers derive meaning from textual and symbolic cues.

Riffaterre introduced concepts such as hypogram and syllepsis to explain how literary and religious texts generate layered, non-literal meanings through associations and codes within a cultural matrix [11].

In the case of Old Balinese inscriptions, semiotics allows for an interpretive reading of script forms, mantras, divine names, and spatial references. Symbols such as the sacred syllable *Oṁ* or references to geographical sanctuaries like mountains and rivers, are not merely descriptive but serve as semiotic signifiers of divine presence, spiritual hierarchy, and cosmological order. Through semiotic analysis, we uncover the inscriptions' use of religious iconography and lexical symbolism to articulate theological doctrines. This approach helps to interpret how seemingly static textual elements were, in fact, powerful communicative tools in ritual and governance.

2.3. Theo-Epigraphic Framework

The theo-epigraphic approach represents a multidisciplinary framework that combines theology, history, and epigraphy to investigate the sacred dimensions of ancient inscriptions. As defined by Hayashi, theo-epigraphy involves reading inscriptions not merely as legal or administrative documents but as manifestations of theological belief systems, embedded in ritual practice and sacred authority [12]. This framework is especially suitable for analyzing Old Balinese inscriptions, which are rich in religious symbolism and theological references. Unlike conventional epigraphy that often emphasizes dating and lineage, theo-epigraphy seeks to uncover how divine concepts are encoded in the language, structure, and purpose of inscriptions. In this study, theo-epigraphy serves as an umbrella framework that accommodates both intertextual and semiotic analyses. It allows us to understand how the theological ideas of *dharmā, mokṣa/nirvāṇa, saṅkanparaniŋ dumadi*, and *dévarāja* were not only expressed but also legitimized through epigraphic media.

Furthermore, the theo-epigraphic framework provides insight into how inscriptions operated as tools of spiritual governance. They functioned as theological instruments used by ruling elites to reinforce divine sanction, regulate religious practice, and maintain social order. As such, the framework aligns theological exegesis with material culture, offering a holistic interpretation of religious authority in premodern Balinese society. The distinction between these three components is essential: intertextuality is used to trace the continuity and adaptation of religious narratives; semiotics helps unpack the inscriptions' symbolic layers; and theo-epigraphy integrates these methods within a broader understanding of how sacred texts shaped, and were shaped by, their socio-political and ritual contexts.

3. Materials and Methods

3.1. Research Design

This research employs a qualitative approach, focusing on theo-epigraphic analysis. This approach combines theological studies with epigraphy, utilizing inscriptions as the primary source for understanding the development of religious concepts during the Old Balinese period [12]. Through this approach, the study is expected to provide a comprehensive overview of the theological concepts in Old Bali and their contribution to the religious history of Bali.

3.2. Data Collection

Data was collected through a literature review by digitizing and analyzing inscription documents in museums, libraries, and national archives. The primary data used in this research are Old Balinese inscriptions from the 8th to the 11th centuries **(Table 1)**, which include the Singhamandawa period and the Warmadewa Dynasty. These inscriptions were written in the Pra-Nagari and Old Balinese scripts and contained information about the society's social structure, religion, and beliefs. In addition to inscriptions, this research is supported by *lontar* manuscripts containing the teachings of Shaivism and Buddhism. These *lontar* manuscripts serve as essential sources to complement and enrich the inscription data, particularly regarding the religious teachings that developed during that period [4–6,13–16].

3.3. Data Analysis

This study's data analysis uses a descriptive-analytic method, referring to the theory of intertextuality [10] and semiotics [11]. The focus is on understanding the theological concepts in the inscriptions and *lontar* manuscripts. This method aims to explore the deeper meanings of the reli-

Table 1. Inscriptions used as data source.

No	Period/King's Name/Year	Materials/Scripts /Language	Code and Name of Inscription
1.	**Yé Té Mantra Inscription** (800–882 M)	Clay/Pre-Nagari Script /Sanskrit	A. Mantra lima baris B.1 Mantra enam baris B.2 Mantra enam baris C. Mantra tujuh baris
2.	**Singhamandawa Period** (SA) (882–995 M)	Copper Plate/ Old Balinese Script/ Old Balinese Language	SA1). Prasasti Sukawana A1 (804 S) SA2). Prasasti Bebetin A1 (818 S) SA3). Prasasti Trunyan AI (833 S) SA4). Prasasti Trunyan B (813 S) SA5). Prasasti Trunyan C (833 S) SA6). Prasasti Bangli, Pura Kehen A (836 S) SA7). Prasasti Gobleg, Pura Desa I (836 S) SA8). Prasasti Angsari A
3.	**Warmadewa Dynasty Period** 1) Sri Késari Warmadéwa (KW)	Stone/ Nāgarī and Old Balinese Script/ Sanskrit Language	KW1). Prasasti Blanjong (835 S)
	2) Sang Ratu Sri Ugraséna (U) (915–942 M)	Copper Plate/ Old Balinese Script/ Old Balinese Language	U1). Prasasti Srokadan (837 S) U2). Prasasti Babahan I (839 S) U3). Prasasti Sembiran A I (844 S) U4). Prasasti Pengotan AI (846 S) U5) .Prasasti Batunya AI (855 S) U6). Prasasti Dausa, Pura Bukit Indrakila AI (857 S) U7). Prasasti Serai AI (858 S) U8). Prasasti Dausa, Pura Bukit Indrakila B I (864 S) U9). Prasasti Gobleg, Pura Batur A
	3) Sang Ratu Śrī Haji Tabanéndra Warmadéwa with her consort Śrī Subhadrika Dharmadéwī (TW) (955–967 M)	Copper Plate/ Old Balinese Script/ Old Balinese Language	TW1). Prasasti Kintamani A (899 S)
	4) Sang Ratu (Śrī) Candrabhayasingha Warmmadéwa (CW)	Copper Plate/ Old Balinese Script/ Old Balinese Language	CW1). Prasasti Manukaya (882 S)
	5) Sang Ratu Śrī Janasādhu Warmadéwa (JW) (975 M)	Copper Plate/ Old Balinese Script/ Old Balinese Language	JW1). Prasasti Sembiran A II (897 S)
	6) Śrī Mahāraja Śrī Wijaya Mahādéwī (WM) (983 M)	Copper Plate/ Old Balinese Script/ Old Balinese Language	WM1). Prasasti Gobleg, Pura Desa II (905 S)
	7) Śrī Guṇapriyadharmapatnī with her husband Śrī Dharmodayana Warmadéwa (GD) (989–1011 M).	Copper plate, stone/ Old Balinese script/ Old Javanese language	GD1). Prasasti Bebetin A II (911 S) GD2). Prasasti Serai A II (915 S) GD3). Prasasti Buwahan A (916 S) GD4). Prasasti Sading A (923 S) GD5). Prasasti Batur, Pura Abang A (933 S) GD6). Prasasti Gunung Penulisan A (933 S) GD7). Prasasti Gunung Penulisan B (933 S)
	8) Sang Ratu Śrī Sang Ājñadéwī (SSA) (1016 M)	Copper Plate/ Old Balinese Script/ Old Javanese Language	SSA1). Prasasti Sembiran A III (938 S)
	9) Paduka Haji Śrī Dharmawangśa wardhana Marakatapangkaja sthānottunggadéwa (DM) (1022–1025 M)	Copper Plate/ Old Balinese Script/ Old Javanese Language	DM1). Prasasti Batuan (944 S) DM2). Prasasti Sawan AI/Bila I (945 S) DM3). Prasasti Kesian (945 S) DM4). Prasasti Buwahan B (947 S) DM5). Prasasti Bangli, Pura Kehen B) DM6). Prasasti Ujung (962 S)

Table 1. *Cont.*

No	Period/King's Name/Year	Materials/Scripts /Language	Code and Name of Inscription
	10) Pāduka Haji Anak Wungśu (AW) (1049–1077 M)	Copper Plate/ Old Balinese Script/ Old Javanese Language	AW1). Prasasti Trunyan AII (971 S) AW2). Prasasti Sukawana A II (976 S) AW3). Prasasti Pandak Bandung (Tabanan) (993 S) AW4). Prasasti Pura Pamrajan Raja Purana Klungkung A (Br. Sangguhan) (994 S) AW5). Prasasti Pura Pamrajan Raja Purana Klungkung B (Banjar Sangguhan) (994 S) AW6). Prasasti Pura Pamrajan Raja Purana Klungkung C (Banjar Sangguhan) (994 S)

gious and social texts found in the inscriptions.

Epigraphic analysis involves identifying and translating the Pra-Nagari and Old Balinese scripts on the inscriptions. This process involves understanding the historical and cultural context and interpreting the religious symbols contained in the texts. A comparative analysis is conducted between the inscriptions and the teachings of Shaivism and Buddhism in the *lontar* manuscripts. This analysis aims to understand how syncretism between ancestral beliefs and these religious teachings occurred and was practiced.

Data validation is performed through source triangulation. The data from the inscriptions are compared and confirmed with the *lontar* manuscripts and secondary sources from previous relevant studies. It is done to ensure the accuracy and consistency of the data in understanding the theological developments during the Old Balinese period.

The final step is the theological interpretation of key concepts found, such as *dharma, saṅkanparaniŋ dumadi, ātmasiddhadévata,* and *nirvaṇa or mokṣa*. This interpretation focuses on how the people of Old Bali integrated ancestral beliefs with Shaivism and Buddhism and the implications of this integration for their daily religious practices.

4. Results

The investigation of several Old Balinese inscriptions revealed that Balinese society entered its historical period by introducing the Pra-Nagari and Old Balinese scripts in the 8th/9th centuries, which brought the influence of Buddhism and Shaivism (**Table 2**). These scripts, developments of the Brahmi script, were used to represent theological concepts during the Old Balinese period, serving both as symbols of divinity and for writing about the belief in ancestors/Bhatāra-Bhātari, the names of gods with local titles, and the teachings of Shaivism and Buddhism.

Table 2. Names of gods with local titles, Buddhism, and Shaivism deities.

No	Local Theology	Name	Code, Page, Line of Inscription
a.	Names of Gods with Local Titles through the Mention of Their Sacred Places	*1. hyaŋ api*	SA1, iib line 3. SA2, ib line 2, 4; iib line 3; iiia line 5. SA3, iiia line 4. SA6 line 4, 9, 13, 17. SA8. U5, iiia line 2–3. U6, ib line 2, 6; iib line 4. TW5, ia line 6. GD3, ii line 2, 7, 8, 9, 12; iii line 9.
		2. hyaŋ tanda	SA1, iib line 4. SA6, line 14. U6, iib line 5. GD2, ivb line 2.
		3. bhaṭāra di turuñan	SA3, iia line 1. SA4, ib line 5. SA5, line 4; iiia line 1, iiib line 2.
		4. sang hyang di turuñan	SA3, iia line 2; iia line 4; iib line 1, 5; iiia line 1, 2, 4; iiib line 2, 3, 5. SA4, iia line 1, 4; iib line 5; iiia line 1, 2, 4; iiib line 2, 4, 5.
		5. saŋ hyaŋ i turuñan	GD3, iv line 9. GD5, va line 2.
		6. guha maṅurug jalāliṅga	SA3, iib line 4. SA4, iib line 4.
		7. hyaŋ karimama	SA6, line 2, 4, 6, 17.
		8. hyaŋ saranti	SA6, line 16.
		9. hyaŋ tahinuni	U9, ib line 3, 5.
		10. bhaṭāra i baturan	DM1, ib line 5; iva line 4; ivb line 1–2.

Table 2. *Cont.*

No	Local Theology	Name	Code, Page, Line of Inscription
		11. bhaṭāra punta hyaŋ	U3, iiib, line 4. U7, iia line 6. DM1, via line 6; vib line 1. AW2, iva line 1. AW4, iiib line 2, 3.
		12. ulan di bukit cintamani	SA1, ib line 1.
		13. ida hyaŋ di bukit tuṅgal	SA7, ib line 2; iia line 3. WM1, iia line 6; iib line 4.
		14. saŋ hyaŋ wukir kulit byu	GD5, vib line 1.
		15. kamulan	AW4, iib line 2–3.
b.	Names of Gods with Local Titles	1. *saŋ hyaŋ dharmma riŋ ṅāntakuñjarapāda*	AW3, line 2; iia line 1.
		2. *bhaṭāra da tonta*	SA3, ib line 3; SA4, ib line 3; iib line 1, 2.
		3. *saŋ hyaŋ kaki saṅsara*	DM3, line 3.
		4. *hyaŋ agasti mahārṣi*	DM1, via line 6; vib line 1. AW2, iva line 1–2. AW3, vb line 3. AW4, iiib line 3.
c.	The Cult of *Dévarāja*	*1. saŋ ratu saŋ siddha dévatā saŋ lumah di ai(r) madatu*	TW5, ia line 2.
		2. saŋ ratu saŋ lumāh di bvaḥ raṅga	JW1, iva line 3.
		3. haji saŋ lumaḥ riŋ nūsa dva	GD3, i line 4, 6.
		4. pāduka haji saŋ siddha dévata lumah riŋ ṅér vka, iŋ ṅér paku	DM1, ib line 4; iia line 1.
		5. haji saŋ lumaḥ riŋ ṅér madatu	DM1, iiib line 3.
		6. haji saŋ lumaḥ iŋ ṅér tāga	DM1, iva line 1.
		7. bhaṭāra bañu vka	DM6, ib line 5; iiia line 1.
		8. bhaṭārī saŋ lumaḥ iŋ burvan, bhaṭāra dévatā saŋ lumah ri bañu vka	AW2, iiia line 5. AW3, line 1–2. AW4, ib line 2. AW5, ib line 2. AW6, line 1–2.
		9. prabhu lumāḥ iŋ sénāmukha maṅaran dyaḥ jaśa, dyaḥ manali, dyaḥ citta	AW3, line 2–3.
		10. paduka haji iŋ dharmma marajaŋ	AW3, vib line 2–3.
d.	Saugata	1. *tathāgata*	A. line 2. B.1 line 3. B.2 line 2
		2. *sarwwa tathāgata*	C. line 1–2, 5–6
		3. aksara suci *oṁ*	B.2 line 5
		4. ajaran *dharmā*	A. line 1; B.1. line 1; B.2. line 1.
		5. *hyaŋ vihara*	U2, ib line 5. U9, ib line 5. AW4, iib line 2.
e.	Vaishnava	1. Vaishnava adherent group: *anak banua di tambliṅan makahajumpuŋ, jumpuŋ wiṣṇawa*	U9 line 2
		2. hariḥ	DM1, vib line 2. AW2 iva line 2.
f.	Saiwa	1. *bhaṭāra punta hyaŋ* 2. *hyaŋ agasti mahārṣi* 3. For *Devata*, the East is Satya, the South is Dharma, the West is Kala, the North is Mretyu, the Southeast is Krodha, the Southwest is Kama, the Northwest is Iśwara, and the Northeast is Hariḥ. 4. *Yajñamanakasa: Dharmā, Ūrddha-Madhah, Rawi, Śaśi, Kṣiti, Jala, Pawaṇa, Hutāsāna, Ahoratri, Sandyādwāya, Yakṣa, Rakṣasa, Piśaca, Prétāsura, Garuḍa, Gandharwa, Grahā, Nakṣatra, Kinnara, Gaṇa, Ahoraga.*	

Table 2. *Cont.*

No	Local Theology	Name	Code, Page, Line of Inscription
		5. *Catwaring Lokapāla: Indra Yama Kuwéra, Basawa* (pada Prasasti Batuan). *Caṭwāring Lokapala: Yama, Bāruṇa, Kuwéra, Bāsawa*. 6. Son of *Déwatā: Pañca Kusika, Nandī Śwara, Mahākāla.* 7. *Sadwināyaka: Durggadéwi, Catūrastra, Ananta Suréndra, Ananta Kala Mṛtyu, Gana Bhuta, Rajabhūta*.	
	Gods' Nature	*... kita prasiddha rumakṣa bhūmi rahyaŋ ta ri bali, ṅuniwéḥ sakwéhniŋ rācadani mwaŋ gṛha sarbwa dharmā saka saṅga déniŋ bhūmi sakakuśa déniŋ méru kita maśuk ri sarwwa maśarira, dūra darśana, kita tumon adoh, mwaŋ apaṛ ring prabhatabajani hyaŋ déwa pasamohanta anantasakti pratiṣtha, sakala watāmana, ...* You dominate the earth in Bali, including the authority over all places and various sacred buildings that support the earth under the protection of Meru. You are the deities who possess supreme power that permeates and becomes the essence of every creation. You are the faithful witness, *dūra darśana*, seeing the far and the near in day and night. Ancestors and all gods have unlimited power and can see what is to come.	DM1, via line 6, vib line 1–6, viia line-4. AW2 iva line 1–5, ivb line 1. AW3, vb line 3–5, via line 1–5, vib line 1–3. AW4, iiib line 3–6.

The inscriptions mention various names of gods with local titles through sacred places, the cult of Dévarāja, Saugata, Vaishnava, and Saiwa deities. The theological foundation in Balinese script emphasizes a system of experience, feeling, and believing in reality (kaśūnyatan) to achieve a state of heniŋ and create a harmonious relationship between the macrocosm and the microcosm. Human life is accompanied by ceremonies or rituals, reflecting the caution of Balinese people in achieving harmony with the tangible world and the mystical realm related to Ida Sang Hyang Widhi Wasa (Supreme God). Ritual events (**Table 3**) include those related to the human life cycle, such as marburuktanahan (funeral), marhantuaŋña (commemoration ceremony), and kambaligi/kambaligya (purification), alongside ceremonies like prayascitta, caru, and pasanga. Through these rituals, ancient Balinese society aimed to grasp and convey ideas transcending the physical world, reaching into the divine realm.

In Old Balinese copper inscriptions from the Warmadewa Dynasty period, the script indicates belief in ancestors, especially the dévarāja cult, and mentions of kamulan. The dévarāja cult refers to a deified king, symbolizing magical powers derived from gods or viewing the king as an incarnation of a god who merges with his deity upon death. Although Indian culture influenced Bali, local cultural elements remain visible, reflected in community social systems, motifs of squatting human figures, and megalithic statues used in religious ceremonies. Additionally, terms like kamulan, hyaŋ, da hyaŋ, ra hyaŋ, saŋ hyaŋ, and bhaṭāra referred to sacred places and deities, showing a blend of ancestral and Hindu-Buddhist beliefs. Sacred places in hills, such as Ulan temple on Cintamani Hill and Ida Hyang on Bukit Tunggal, continued the megalithic tradition. Old Balinese inscriptions also reference Buddhist leaders and sites like Hyang Wihāra, the Oṁ symbol indicating divine representation and Buddhist influence, and teachings of dharmā and mokṣa.

Table 3. Ceremony and its community.

No	Types and Equipment of Ceremonies	Name of Ceremony/Offering	Community	Code, Page, Line, Inscription
a.	Commemoration ceremony	*paṅambaligi*	*karāman i viŋkaŋ raŋu air hawaŋ*	GD5, va line 2
		paṅambaligya	*karāman i viŋkaŋ raŋu air hawaŋ*	GD5, vb line 5
			śīma marajaŋ	AW3, iva line 4
		paṅulumbigyan	*puruṣākāra i bañu rara*	AW4, iib line 3
		pakambaligi	*karaman i vujuŋ hyaŋ/juŋ hyaŋ*	DM6, iia line 1
		parburuktanahan	*sattra, hyaṅāpi di parcanigayan*	U6, iib line 1
			anak mabvatthaji di buru	U7, iia line 2
			kuta di banva bharu	SA2, ib line 3
				SA2, iiia line 2
			vanua di simpat bunut	SA6, line 11
		buruktanahña	*banva di julah*	U3, iib line 6
		parvuruktanahan	*vanua di saduṅan*	U1, i line 10
			banva di julah	U3, iib line 6
			sattra, hyaṅāpi di parcanigayan	U6, iib line 1
		marburuktanahen	*partapānān satra di katahan buru, cintamani*	SA1, iia line 5
		marhantu	*kuta di banva bharu*	SA2, iiia line 4,5
			banua di air tabar	SA7, iia line 2
			vanua di saduṅan	U1, ii line 2
			banva di julah	U3, iiia line 3
			sattra, hyaṅāpi di parcanigayan	U6, iib line 4
			anak mabvatthaji di buru	U7, iia line 4
			mabvatthaji di buru	GD2, iva line 5,6
		marhantuaŋ	*partapanan di ptung, buvunan*	U2, ib line 6
		marhantuaŋña	*banva di julah*	SA1, iib line 3
			(tidak ditemukan nama komunitas)	SA8 line 9
b.	Ceremonies and ceremonial equipment at Sacred Buildings and Residences	*caru*	*banua di turuñan*	SA4, iia line 5
				SA5, iiia line 3
				SA5, iiia line 5
			banua di air tabar	SA7, iia line 3 (caru prapanna)
			karāmān i vingkaŋ raŋu bvahan	GD3, ii Line 9
				GD3, ii Line 12
			karāmān i baturan	DM1, ib line 5 (caru pamuja)
				DM1, ivb line 1 (manghanakna caru ring pomahan)
				DM1, ivb line 2
			karaman i vujuŋ hyaŋ/juŋ hyaŋ	DM6, iib line 2
		prayaścitta	*karaman i vujuŋ hyaŋ/juŋ hyaŋ*	DM6, iib line 1
		mahābanten	*karāmān i baturan*	DM1, iia line 3
			karāman i bila	DM2 iia line 2
			karaman i vujuŋ hyaŋ/juŋ hyaŋ	DM6, iib line 1

Table 3. *Cont.*

No	Types and Equipment of Ceremonies	Name of Ceremony/Offering	Community	Code, Page, Line, Inscription
		sambar	*banva di julah*	SA1, iia line 3
				SA1, vib line 3
			kuta di banva bharu	SA2, iib line 2
			vanua di simpat bunut	SA6, line 8
			banva di julah	U3, iia line 1
			banva di bantiran	GD4, va, line 1
			karāman i vingkaŋ raṇu air hawaŋ	GD5, ivb line 4
				GD5, ivb line 5
				GD5, va line 2
			karāmān i baturan	DM1, iia line 5
				DM1, iiib, line 6
			śīma marajaŋ	AW3, iib line 3
			-	SA8
		kasambaran	*banva di bantiran*	GD4, ivb, line 6
		pasaṅa	*karāmān i baturan*	DM1, iiib, line 6
			karāman i viṅkaŋ raṇu air havaŋ	GD5, iiia line 2
			karāmān i baturan	DM1, iiia line 3 DM1, iva line 2
		pasaṅayan	*karāman i viṅkaŋ raṇu air havaŋ*	GD5, va line 3
		apasaṅayan	*karāman i viṅkaŋ raṇu air havaŋ*	GD5, vb line 3
		masaṅa	*vanua di simpat bunut*	SA6, line 8
			karāman i viṅkaŋ raṇu air havaŋ	GD5, va line 3
		savuŋ	*banva di julah*	U3, iib line 1
			karāman i viṅkaŋ raṇu air havaŋ	GD5, va line 4
			karāmān i baturan	DM1, iib line 1
			karāman i bila	DM2, iiia line 5
			karaman i vujuŋ hyaŋ/juŋ hyaŋ	DM6, iia line 5
			karāman i cintamani	AW2, iiib line 2
			śīma marajang	AW3, iva line 2
		pasavuŋ	*karāman i viṅkaŋ raṇu air havaŋ*	GD5, iiia line 2
		aspaspan	*śīma marajaŋ*	AW3, iiia line 1

5. Discussions

5.1. Theo-Epigraphic Perspectives: Sacred Spaces, Divine Authority, and Ritual Practices

The investigation of several Old Balinese inscriptions revealed that Balinese society entered its historical period by introducing the Pra-Nagari and Old Balinese scripts in the 8th/9th centuries, which brought the influence of Buddhism and Shaivism. These two scripts are developments of the Brahmi script [6,17,18]. The theological foundation in Balinese script emphasizes a system of experience, feeling, and believing in reality (*kaśūnyatan*) in achieving a state of *heniŋ* and creating a harmonious relationship between the macrocosm and the microcosm. Humans are creations

of God that are whole in body, mind, and will. God is the center and the main goal in human life, which is then formulated into the concept of *saṅkan paran dumadi*. This trait has led to the recognition of ancient Balinese society as a deeply religious community, as their spiritual perspective shaped everyday activities. This is due to the strong connection between the ancient Balinese people and their natural environment. Nature played a crucial role in shaping both the historical mindset and daily practices of ancient Balinese society [19]. Thus, nature profoundly affects how Balinese people think, even in their livelihoods, where nature is believed to embody God and has an inseparable relationship with themselves. It caused ancient Balinese society to treat nature well.

Human life is always accompanied by ceremonies or rituals (**Table 3**), which reflect the caution of Balinese people in achieving harmony in the relationship between humans and the tangible world, as well as harmony with the mystical realm or that related to Ida Sang Hyang Widhi Wasa (Supreme God). Various ritual events in ancient Balinese culture include rituals related to the life cycle of humans, such as *marburuktanahan* (funeral), *marhantuaŋña* (Commemoration ceremony), and *kambaligi* or *kambaligya* (purification). Additionally, psychologically, this represents the anticipation of the Balinese people towards negative occurrences by conducting ceremonies such as *prayascitta, caru,* and *pasanga*, accompanied by *pasawung,* through offerings of *saji-saji, mahābanten*, and others.

Through these rituals, ancient Balinese society aimed to grasp and convey ideas that transcended the physical world, reaching into the realm of the divine. These symbols embody and reflect their understanding of divinity [20,21]. In this way, ancient Balinese society grew closer to their God. In ancient Balinese inscriptions made of copper from the Warmadewa Dynasty period, the script is still found to indicate belief in ancestors, especially the *dévarāja* cult, and mentions of *kamulan*. The *dévarāja* cult refers to a deified king, a form of respect for a deceased king. The king was worshipped as a divine symbol, believed to possess magical powers granted by the gods, or the king is viewed as an incarnation of a god, who, upon death, is believed to merge with his revered deity. This cult practice is rooted in the pre-Hindu ancestor worship period, which was central to megalithic traditions [5,22].

Aside from being found in Bali and Indonesia, such cults are also said to have similarities with those in Southeast Asia and the Pacific. Their purpose is to maintain a good relationship between the living and the spirit world, ensuring the safety and well-being [23–29]. Although Indian culture, stemming from Hinduism and Buddhism, has influenced Bali, local cultural elements remain visible in Balinese culture. It is reflected in the social system of the community. The motif of a squatting human figure, believed to originate from pre-Hindu traditions, is still very dominant in religious ceremonies of ancient Balinese society and continues to the present. Megalithic statues found at several temples in Bali are considered sacred and used as mediums for worship [30].

Although influenced by the Hindu system of deity sculptures, the art of sculpture in Bali remains rooted in elements of ancestor worship, commonly referred to as *Bhatāra-Bhātari* statues. Its characteristics include being depicted with two hands and sometimes with four, complete with attributes. The two backhands hold divine attributes, while the two front hands hold a sphere, a flower bud, or a blooming flower. It is evidence that the original cultural ideas were not entirely dissolved by foreign cultural influences, especially in the concept of the release of the soul or the attainment of *nirvāṇa/mokṣa*, introduced by Shaivism and Buddhism [31]. The sculpting of Buddha statues is based on the figure of Buddha and the concept of Buddha's *parinirvāṇa* in the form of *Tathāgata* or *Sarwwa Tathāgata*, with his hand gesture (*mudra*) in a meditative pose to overcome *māra* in order to reach *nirvāṇa*. Over time, the *mudra* concept is also found in the text *Kakawin* Nilacandra (XLII:1–15), a 20th-century *kakawin* composed by Made Degung from Sibetan, Karangasem, which is rich in the theological concept of the unity of Shiva and Buddha. The concept of *mudra* explains the nine *mudra*s of the gods (*Dewata Nawasanga*), which function as guardians of all the directions [32]. Meanwhile, the sculpting in Shaiva and Vaiṣṇava traditions emphasizes the concept of the supreme power of the deities in creating, preserving, and dissolving the world and its contents. The *dévarāja* concept is based on the belief in the gods' supreme power in protecting the kingdom and the concept of the soul's release and unification with the deity it worships.

5.2. Intertextual and Semiotic Dimensions of Old Balinese Theology

Ancestor worship aligns with the development of Hindu culture in Indonesia. The importance of ancestor worship is evident in the *lontar* text of *Singha Langghyala Parwa*. This Siwa-Buddha text explains how Maharaja Utsawati wished to learn about his ancestors' story. This worship is carried out by enhancing intellectual abilities so that future descendants always remember and are devoted to their ancestors. In addition to belief and devotion to ancestors, finding a primary teacher is crucial. It is seen when the teacher Bhagawan Ramaloka truthfully tells Maharaja Utsawati about his ancestors, who were followers of Shaiva and Buddha teachings. This process underwent acculturation and enculturation according to the cultural environment of the archipelago. The belief in mountains as the realm of spirits, initially represented as tiered terraces, aligns with the Hindu cultural element that views mountains, particularly Mount Mahameru, as the realm of the gods, which was then symbolized by structures such as *meru*, temples, or *prasada*. It gave rise to the concept that mountains are not only the realm of spirits but also the realm of the gods. In further stages, through certain religious ceremonies, the sacred spirits of ancestors can reach the same place and be worshipped together in one shrine with the gods, commonly referred to as *Ātmasiddhadéwata*, which are enshrined in specific places [22,33].

The term *kamulan*, found in Old Balinese inscriptions, is interpreted as a sacred place for ancestor worship. Based on its meaning, the word *kamulan* is derived from the word *mula*, with the root word *mul* from Sanskrit, meaning "root," "beginning," "foundation," or "essence" [34]. The word *mula* receives the prefix {ka-an}, forming *kamulan*, a place of ancestor worship. A similar term appears in the Sri Kahulunan Inscription, dated to the year 842 AD, which mentions *kamulan i bhumi sambhara buddhara*, associated with Borobudur Temple as a *kamulan* building, a place of worship for the royal family, particularly the Sailendra Dynasty [35].

The inscription of Klungkung A, issued by King Anak Wungsu and now stored in Banjar Celepik, Tojan, Klungkung, on sheet 1b, mentions *ṅuniweḥ wnaṅānuhanaŋ lmaḥ iŋ sima, sala, hyaŋ vihara, patapān, siluŋluŋ, kakluṅan, kamulan...* It translates to "especially permitted to open agricultural land in Sima, Sala, Hyang Wihara, Hermitages, Silunglung, Kaklungan, Kamulan ..." [36]. Rata has yet to confirm the form of the *kamulan* structure mentioned in the Anak Wungsu inscription. However, the *kamulan* referred to is undoubtedly a sacred place. The *kamulan* mentioned here is believed to be the Gunung Kawi temple complex in Tampaksiring, Gianyar. Previously, Ekawana [37] suggested that the *kamulan* in the inscription was linked to sacred buildings where the ancestors who founded the village were worshipped. This *kamulan* building is assumed to have evolved into the *saṅgaḥ kamulan*.

In ancient Balinese times, the terms *lumaḥ* and *siddhadéwata* were used to describe sacred spirits' sanctification (pendharmāan). The word *lumaḥ* comes from *laḥ*, meaning "to sleep" or "to rest." Thus, *lumaḥ* means "to lay down" or "to enshrine." The Batuan inscription, dated 994 Saka, written in ancient Javanese script and language and issued by King Marakata, mentions the representatives of Baturan Village who reported to the king about the deceased king, who had been sanctified or enshrined (*didharmākan*) at *ér vka*. The people of Baturan Village were tasked with maintaining the garden of the deceased king located at ér paku and conducting ceremonies at the Baturan temple. Realizing the burden of this task, they were exempted from certain taxes. Regarding *ér vka*, some suggest it refers to Yeh Mangening Temple; *ér* means "water," and in the local language, it is called *yéh*, while *vka* means "child," known locally as *ceniŋ*, hence Yeh Cening, later becoming Yeh Mangening. If this assumption is correct, the Mangening Temple is the temple where King Udayana was enshrined, dating back to the 10th century [38].

In addition to the term *kamulan* for sacred places of ancestor worship, other terms found in Old Balinese inscriptions include *hyaŋ, da hyaŋ, ra hyaŋ, saŋ hyaŋ,* and *bhaṭāra*, used to refer to names. Later developments saw the term *hyaŋ* evolve into *saṅhyaŋ, parhyaṅan, kahyaṅan, marhyaŋ*, and others, used to name sacred places of worship dedicated to the Almighty God, often associated with temples [37,39].

The Old Balinese inscribed script recorded beliefs in *Bhatāra-Bhātari*, ancestors, and natural forces. It is evident in the Singhamandawa and Warmadewa Dynasty's inscriptions, which mention sacred places or deities by lo-

cal names. The names of deities are not mentioned directly but are referred to by the sacred places where they are enshrined or by their visible manifestations. The mention of deities by local names and various appellations is evidence of the existence of ancestor worship, which had been present since previous times but within the framework of Hinduism [5,40,41].

Sacred places in the hills, such as Ulan temple on Cintamani Hill, Ida Hyang on Bukit Tunggal, and Sang Hyang Wukir Kulit Byu, seem to be part of the continued megalithic tradition during this period and persisted until the Singhamandawa period. The belief that high places like hills and mountains are sacred, revered as places for the spirits of ancestors during prehistoric times, is evidenced by the discovery of various worship media made from large stones, known as megalithic. After the influence of Hindu-Buddhist culture in the 8th/9th centuries, Bali began its historical period, marked by written evidence such as inscriptions. Nevertheless, high places like hills and sacred mountains continued, even taking on new forms, reinforced by stories of gods residing on mountain peaks [42]. These gods were even believed to be ancestral spirits' origin and final resting place [43].

This notion also seems to have influenced the construction of sacred places on hills, as well as the use of the terms *saŋ hyaŋ* and *bhaṭāra*, both for ancestral spirits and for Hindu and Buddhist gods in Bali [26–29]. One conclusion that can be drawn from this discussion is that although Hindu-Buddhist influence had advanced and deepened in Bali during the Singhamandawa period, prehistorical beliefs such as ancestor worship and nature worship remained intact. This is evidenced in Old Balinese inscriptions, which contain names of local deities, as previously mentioned. Hindu deity names, on the other hand, began to appear in the 11th century [4,5,41]. In Old Balinese inscriptions from the Warmadewa Dynasty period, the use of script to indicate ancestor worship, particularly the *dévarāja* cult, can still be found.

In the Yé Té Mantra inscription, the script is used as a symbol of God, evidenced by the presence of the *Oṁ* symbol written in Pra-Nagari script, found on a clay seal at the Pegulingan Temple Site in Tampaksiring, Gianyar (B.2, line 5) [13]. Old Balinese copperplate inscriptions from the Warmadewa Dynasty period also reference Buddhist religious leaders and sacred Buddhist sites such as Hyang Wihāra.

According to Kern, in Buddhism, the *Oṁ* syllable is recited by a yogi before entering *samādhi*. The preparation begins with reciting *praṇava* or the sacred syllable *Oṁ*, regarded as Brahma's word, to purify the soul with goodwill, compassion, joy, and serenity. Cultivating this kind of inner atmosphere is called *bhāvanā* by both Hindus and Mahayana Buddhists, while southern Buddhists refer to it as *Brahmavihāra* or Brahma's meditation. This is also known as the inner essence or soul state of Śakyamuni. The sacred word of Brahma or *Praṇava* is also known as Lokéśwara. Lokéśwara is *Brahmaswarūpin*, meaning Brahma in both nature and essence. Lokéśwara is equivalent to Matsyéndra or Waruna, and Waruna himself is Śiwa [44].

In the Yé Té Mantra inscription, the Tathāgata and Sarwwa Tathāgata are mentioned (A. line 2; B.1 line 3; B.2 line 2; C. lines 1, 2, 6). Based on the reading of texts containing Buddhist teachings, such as *Saŋ Hyaŋ Kamahāyanikan*, explanations of these concepts can be found, including in the visualization or depiction of Buddhist deities and explanations of *dharmā* teachings (A. line 1; B.1. line 1; B.2. line 1) [45].

The Yé Té Mantra inscription mentions that the Tathāgata removes all suffering with his divine light. *Dharmā* (A. line 1; B.1. line 1; B.2. line 1) is described as the origin or cause of all occurrences and, simultaneously, the cause of the destruction of suffering. As explained in the inscription, humans need to gain understanding by cultivating their thoughts, feelings, and souls to comprehend the teachings of dharmā to calm their minds and spirits. As taught by the Tathāgata, humans must learn how to achieve happiness and eliminate the causes of suffering [46]. The Tathāgata taught that anything outside the ultimate truth is *māyā* 'illusion'. Thus, a devout follower of the religion must seek the path and take action to free themselves from the entanglements of *māyā*. The state of being freed from the traps of *māyā* is known as *mokṣa/nirvāṇa* [2,45,47].

During the reign of Sang Ratu Śrī Ugraséna, the Gobleg inscription from Pura Batur A mentions a community in Tamblingan that followed the Vaishnava doctrine, with the phrase: "*ada pnaḥ anak banua di tambliṅan makahajumpuŋ, jumpuŋ wiṣṇawa*" (U5, 1b line 1–2). This expression indicates the presence of Vaishnava fol-

lowers, although no further elaboration is provided on this matter. In the explanation of *sapatha*, found in the Baturan inscription issued by King Marakata in 944 Saka, one of the names of the god Vishnu is mentioned as part of the *dikpālaka* deities, who rule the northeastern direction, known as *Hariḥ*. *Hariḥ* is part of this inscription's Sadaśiwa Tattwa (DM1, vib line 1–2; AW1, iva line 2). During the reign of King Anak Wungsu, the Sukawana AII inscription also mentions Hariḥ, another name for Vishnu, as a *dikpālaka* deity ruling the northeastern direction and also as part of *Sadaśiwa Tattwa* (AW1, iva line 2).

In addition to being mentioned in inscriptions, worship media in the form of statues have also been found in Bali. These include statues such as the one found at Pura Petapan, Lembean Village, Kintamani-Bangli, which bears similarities to the Cibuaya Vishnu statue believed to date back to the 6th/7th century [5,48]. Other statues of Vishnu have been found at Pura Gelang Agung, Dusun Buangga, Petang-Badung, dating to the 12th/13th centuries, as well as a Vishnu statue at Pura Samuan Tiga, Bedulu Village, Blahbatuh-Gianyar, and a Narasingha statue at Pura Bajra Narasingha Murti, Pejeng Tengah Village, Tampaksiring-Gianyar [49,50].

In the Batuan and Sukawana AII inscriptions, Pandak Bandung (Tabanan) and Pura Pamrajan Raja Purana Klungkung A (Br. Sangguhan), an explanation of *sapatha* is found, which contains *Siwa Tattwa* teachings. These teachings can be traced in texts such as *Tattwa Jñana, Bhuvaṇa Kośa, Vṛhaspati Tattwa,* and *Kakawin Arjuna Vivāha* [51]. *Śiwa Tattwa* is the doctrine of truth, essence, and the actual reality of Śiwa (Shiva), or the reality of Lord Śiwa [52]. This description reveals the nature and omnipotence of Lord Śiwa, who governs the land of Bali, oversees all places and sacred buildings, and supports the earth beneath Mount Meru. Lord Śiwa permeates and becomes the soul of all beings, serving as a witness to all occurrences in the universe, particularly in Bali. Śiwa possesses the attribute *dūradarśaṇa*, the ability to see far and near, both day and night, and has unlimited power, including foreknowledge of future events [51,53].

This explanation of *Siwa Tattwa* is contextualized with the application of Hindu law, which the king deliberately included to ensure that future rulers and the people adhered to the provisions contained in the inscriptions. Numerous violations occurred, prompting the inclusion of the *sapatha* (oath or curse), which was a plea to the gods. According to Ardika et al. [54], the *sapatha* was considered a moral sanction against violators. Through this *sapatha*, the ancient Balinese kings established a system of oversight or surveillance wherein all members of society became their self-monitors to prevent violations [54]. Those who dared to violate the inscription's contents were severely punished by the deities who ruled over the eight cardinal directions, the rulers of the lower, middle, and upper realms, and other beings according to the people's beliefs. In their lifetime, they would experience suffering and hardship [4]. Their entire family would face misery, all efforts and endeavors would fail, and death would soon claim them. After death, they would be tortured and become cinders at the bottom of the fiery hell pit (*tambra gomuka*). They would be repeatedly reincarnated as disgusting animals [15]. This description is also based on the *pañca śraddha*, the five fundamental beliefs of Hindus: belief in the existence of God, belief in the existence of *Ātman* (the soul) in every being, belief in the law of cause and effect (*karmaphala*), belief in reincarnation (*punarbhava*), and belief in *mokṣa/ nirvāṇa* [55,56].

To create social order and attain liberation, sacred sites were built in Old Balinese inscriptions as places of worship for Ida Sang Hyang Widhi Wasa and His manifestations. Religious teachings and their enrichment were realized through the construction of hermitages and retreats, which monks from the Saiwasogata group maintained. These were managed by a particular official in charge of the hermitages, known as Samgat Tapa Haji. The principle of realizing the divinity within oneself guided all activities of ancient Balinese society as a form of devotion to Ida Sang Hyang Widhi Wasa. This principle fostered an awareness of the divine, recognizing God's existence and omnipotence as the universe's creator, who permeates and fills the cosmos. Ida Sang Hyang Widhi Wasa is omniscient, capable of seeing both near and far, hearing both distant and nearby sounds, and knowing all actions regardless of distance [53]. Additionally, efforts were made to cultivate a sense of brotherhood and harmony by establishing adjacent places of worship. For instance, at the Goa Gajah site, there were places of worship for followers of Saiwa and Saogata. Similarly, in Manukaya Village, a stupa stood

alongside the Tirta Empul, symbolizing the equal status of these two religions and allowing them to coexist harmoniously [44,57].

The findings present a rich intersection of theological and historical dimensions that can be examined through intertextuality and semiotics. This analysis draws on these theoretical frameworks. Kristeva's concept [10] of intertextuality posits that all texts are inherently interconnected, drawing influence from and referencing one another. In this study, exploring Old Balinese theological concepts reveals a profound intertextual relationship between indigenous Balinese beliefs and the later influences of Buddhism and Shaivism. The Old Balinese theological framework did not emerge in isolation but evolved through a dynamic exchange between native ancestor worship and the subsequent introduction of Buddhism and Shaivism. The findings point to a syncretism of religious ideas, as evidenced by references to "belief in ancestors and the gods of Buddhism and Shaivism." Texts like inscriptions and lontar manuscripts are repositories of earlier belief systems while integrating new theological influences. The inscriptions from this period act as intertextual documents, preserving local religious traditions while incorporating elements from Buddhism and Shaivism. Concepts such as "*dharmā, saṅkanparaniŋ dumadi, ātmasiddhadévata, and nirvaṇa/mokṣa*" highlight the convergence of these diverse theological ideas with ancestral practices. These inscriptions function as a textual site where different religious ideologies intersect and influence each other. Additionally, the lontar manuscripts serve as reservoirs of theological knowledge, bridging multiple cultural and historical periods. These texts likely contain traces of Old Balinese theology interwoven with Buddhist and Shaivite teachings, illustrating how these belief systems evolved through textual interweaving.

Applying Riffaterre's semiotic theory [11], which emphasizes how meaning is decoded through a network of signs, offers more profound insights into the Old Balinese inscriptions. These inscriptions function as encoded messages, representing theological and spiritual beliefs. For instance, the "Yé Té Mantra inscription" and others carry symbolic significance, with terms like "dharmā" and "mokṣa" serving as signs within broader religious frameworks, embedding these concepts in the local cultural context. The shift from prehistoric Balinese ancestral worship to the more complex systems of Buddhism and Shaivism marks a significant transformation in the semiotic system. The introduction of Pra-Nagari and Old Balinese scripts in the 8th and 9th centuries provided new tools to express and record evolving theological ideas. The theological terms found in these inscriptions, such as *ātmasiddhadévata* and *nirvaṇa*, are part of a more extensive semiotic network, connecting to broader religious discourses. For example, although rooted in Buddhist philosophy, *nirvaṇa* reflects localized interpretations intertwined with Balinese spirituality. Additionally, inscriptions from the Singhamandawa Period and the Warmadewa Dynasty represent more than theological content; they also serve as semiotic expressions of political power. These royal inscriptions helped legitimize the dynasties' rule by incorporating specific theological concepts, highlighting the connection between religious authority and political sovereignty.

6. Conclusions

This study has provided a comprehensive exploration of the theological concepts embedded in Old Balinese inscriptions through a theo-epigraphic approach, integrating intertextual and semiotic analyses. The findings reveal the intricate interplay between indigenous Balinese beliefs and the external influences of Hinduism and Buddhism, highlighting the syncretic nature of early Balinese religious practices. The inscriptions, dating from the 8th to the 11th centuries, serve as vital primary sources that document the theological and philosophical discourses of the time, reflecting a society deeply rooted in spiritual and religious traditions.

The research underscores the significance of key theological concepts such as *dharmā*, *nirvaṇa/mokṣa*, and *saṅkanparaniŋ dumadi*, which were encoded in the inscriptions and *lontar* manuscripts. These terms are not merely doctrinal references but function as signs in the semiotic sense proposed by Riffaterre. They carry hypogrammatic significance, evoking layers of intertextual resonance from Hindu-Buddhist cosmology and local Balinese spirituality. For instance, the presence of the *Oṁ* symbol in the Yé Té Mantra inscription operates not only as a sacred syllable but also as a semiotic portal to divine presence, conveying both metaphysical and sociopolitical implications. By

applying Riffaterre's semiotic framework, this study deciphers how theological meanings were embedded within specific linguistic, symbolic, and spatial configurations. The inscriptions become more than textual records, they are encoded theological artifacts that reflect belief systems through symbolic saturation (names, titles, topography, and ritual acts), all functioning as signs that both conceal and reveal deeper truths. This semiotic depth helps explain how religious ideology was communicated to different layers of society, from priests to commoners.

Furthermore, the findings demonstrate the continuity of pre-Hindu traditions, such as ancestor worship and nature veneration, within the evolving religious landscape of Bali. The *dévarāja* cult and the concept of *kamulan* as sacred places for ancestor worship exemplify how local beliefs were preserved and adapted within the framework of Hinduism and Buddhism. The inscriptions also reveal the political dimensions of theology, as rulers used religious concepts to legitimize their authority and maintain social order.

Finally, insights from this study may also inform the interpretation of symbolic expressions in contemporary institutional branding. For example, universities, especially those grounded in cultural heritage and local wisdom can draw inspiration from the semiotic potency of sacred symbols to develop visual identities (e.g., logos) that reflect philosophical depth and cultural authenticity. Just as Old Balinese inscriptions encoded theological authority, modern academic institutions may harness similar symbolic richness to enhance global appeal, positioning themselves as unique and culturally resonant centers of learning in the international arena.

By employing intertextual and semiotic analyses, this study has uncovered the layered meanings within the inscriptions, offering new insights into the theological and cultural exchanges that shaped early Balinese society. The research contributes to the broader understanding of religious syncretism and the adaptation of external influences in local contexts, while also emphasizing the importance of preserving and appreciating Balinese cultural heritage. Future studies could further explore the theological dimensions of other epigraphic materials and their implications for the religious history of Southeast Asia.

Author Contributions

Conceptualization, A.A.G.A.G. and I.N.R.; methodology, A.A.G.A.G. and I.N.R.; validation, A.A.G.A.G., I.N.R.; formal analysis, A.A.G.A.G., L.P.; investigation, A.A.G.A.G., I.N.R., L.P.; resources, L.P.; data curation, A.A.G.A.G., L.P., and N.N.B.; writing—original draft preparation, A.A.G.A.G.; writing—review and editing, N.N.B.; visualization, N.R.; supervision, N.R.; project administration, A.A.G.A.G.; funding acquisition, A.A.G.A.G., I.N.R., L.P., and N.N.B. All authors have read and agreed to the published version of the manuscript.

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Data Availability Statement

The data that support the findings of this study are available from the corresponding author, Anak Agung Gde Alit Geria, upon reasonable request.

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Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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