

# **TOPONYMY AND HISTORICAL RECONSTRUCTION: TRACING THE LEGACY OF PURA BATAN DAU UNTAL- UNTAL THROUGH ECOLOGICAL MEMORY**

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## **Abstract**

The history of Balinese temples is often difficult to document because many lack purana, or traditional written chronicles. This absence can sometimes lead people to question the historical roots of these sacred sites. My study addresses this challenge by reconstructing the story of Pura Batan Dau in Untal-Untal through the lens of toponymy, the study of place names. Specifically, I explore how the name "Batan Dau" serves as a vital link to the Dau tree, a local plant that has largely faded from the community's collective memory. By comparing this to other nature-based naming traditions in Bali, this research redefines Pura Batan Dau as a living archive of the region's ancient farming landscapes and its evolving spiritual life. Ultimately, this work shows that studying place names can bridge the gap between the past and present, helping us create new purana grounded in both nature and history to preserve our heritage amidst a rapidly changing world.

**Keywords** – *Toponymy, Historical Reconstruction, Pura Batan Dau, Ecological Memory, Purana*

## **Introduction**

In the study of Balinese temple history, the *purana* (sacred chronicle) is traditionally regarded as the primary authority for historical verification. However, many temples do not possess such documents; often, these chronicles are only written centuries after a temple was first established. While a purana is important for formal legitimacy, its absence does not mean a temple's history cannot be traced or understood.

To reconstruct the past, historians must look for alternative sources that provide fresh perspectives in historical writing (historiography). Based on the methodology of Ida Bagus Sidemen, temple history can be reconstructed by examining several key indicators: physical sites, symbols of worship, legends, myths, and oral traditions. These elements provide a foundation for documenting temples that lack traditional records. This interdisciplinary approach—specifically using toponymy (the study of place names)—forms the basis for reconstructing the history of Pura Batan Dau in Untal-Untal.

## **Methodology**

This study utilizes toponymy as the primary methodology to reconstruct the temple's history. Toponymy is the scientific study of place names, treating a name not merely as a label but as a living archive that preserves a community's collective memory regarding its original

landscape and spiritual origins. By analyzing the linguistic roots of a name, historians can trace the transition from ancient nature-based reverence to formal religious worship, even when traditional written records are missing.

Furthermore, this approach allows for a deeper understanding of how the environment influenced local spiritual identities. By examining the relationship between specific place names and the surrounding ecosystem, this research identifies the historical continuity between ancient traditions and modern theology. Ultimately, toponymy provides a factual and academic foundation for building a historical narrative, ensuring that the legacy of a sacred site is documented through its connection to the land and its people.

## Finding and Discussion

### Overview of Pura Batan Dau

Pura Batan Dau is one of four primary temples maintained by the Banjar Adat Untal-Untal, a traditional community of approximately 30 households. Alongside Pura Kebon, Pura Ental Gading, and Pura Bhagawan Penyarikan (Sedahan Banjar), this temple forms the spiritual core of the village. In addition to these communal sites, residents maintain private mrajan (family shrines) and sanggah gede (extended family shrines) within their homes.

Situated at the northernmost edge of the Banjar, Pura Batan Dau occupies a unique and symbolic location directly opposite the Protestant Christian Church of Bali (GKPB) Untal-Untal. This face-to-face orientation serves as an iconic symbol of the village's social fabric, where Hindu and Christian residents—often sharing common ancestral lineages—coexist in harmony.

The temple is also known as Pura Pesimpangan Gunung Agung, Batur, lan Petitenget, a name deeply rooted in Balinese philosophy. Its architecture adheres to the *Tri Mandala* concept, organizing the sacred space into three zones: the *Utama* (inner), *Madya* (middle), and *Nista* (outer) *Mandala*.

The main sanctuary (*Utama Mandala*) features a central worship altar comprising a Padmasana, Palinggih Gedong, Bale Pangaruman, and Palinggih Anglurah. The site also preserves a sacred well and a Palinggih Beji (water shrine) in the western corner, supported by various facilities that facilitate ritual processions. The temple's primary ceremony, the odalan, is celebrated every six months on the day of Budha Cemeng Klawu. This general description invites a deeper inquiry: is the temple we see today the result of a long historical journey? The following section explores the rich and evolving history of Pura Batan Dau.

### The Etymology of the Temple

The history of Pura Batan Dau is inextricably linked to the social evolution of Untal-Untal. Long before its current development, Untal-Untal was a vast expanse of fertile farmland where life and religion revolved around agriculture. For the early Hindu inhabitants, ritual practices were deeply rooted in expressing gratitude for the abundance of nature.

The name Batan Dau follows a common Balinese toponymic pattern where a temple is named after its natural surroundings—specifically, a tree. A comparable example is Pura

Purancak in Jembrana; as noted by Fred B. Eiseman in *Bali: Sekala and Niskala*, its name derives from Batan Ancak, meaning "under an Ancak tree." Similarly, Pura Batan Dau signifies a temple situated beneath a grove of Dau trees.

While the Dau tree is no longer a common sight in Untal-Untal today, historical records confirm the area's lush past. In his work *Serat Salib dalam Lintas Bali*, I Nyoman Wijaya recounts the arrival of Christianity in the region and describes a landscape dominated by massive kepuh and waru trees. These giants were regarded as tenget (sacred or spiritually charged), leading the community to pay them deep homage.

This reverence gave rise to tree-based worship that eventually evolved into a formal shrine. This transition reflects the continuity of ancient animistic traditions that harmoniously merged with Hindu teachings. This milestone marks the true historical beginning of Pura Batan Dau.

There is a profound lesson here for the present day: earlier generations sought a spiritual union with nature, viewing an altar (palinggih) as a way to offer back the blessings they received from the earth. By upholding this spirit of honoring nature within contemporary rituals, the people of Untal-Untal continue to champion a vision of religion that remains connected to its ecological roots.

This connection to the natural landscape raises an important question: what underlies the designation of Pura Batan Dau as the spiritual junction for Mount Agung, Mount Batur, and Petitenget? The following section provides the answer.

### **The Concept of *Pasir-Wukir* (Sea-Mountain)**

This section explores the work of Agastia, who highlights the profound significance of mountains and the sea in Balinese Hindu tradition. This concept, known as Sagara-Giri or Pasir-Wukir, is reflected in the placement of Bali's most sacred temples, both Sad Kahyangan and Dang Kahyangan, which are almost always situated near the peaks or the coast. Agastia further supports this view by citing Old Javanese literature, which frequently draws spiritual inspiration from these two natural features.

Scholars like Tjok Rai Sudharta explain this through the concept of Sakti. In this tradition, the mountain represents the worship of Goddess Parvati (the power of Lord Shiva), while the sea represents the majesty of Lord Varuna. This is not merely dogmatic worship; it is a practical acknowledgment that the mountains and the sea are the primary sources of life—and potentially disaster—if their ecological balance is not preserved.

In daily life, the Balinese use the mountains and the sea as a spiritual qibla, or point of orientation. Devotees do not always need to travel to these distant locations to pray. Instead, they establish specialized altars—known as pangayatan or panyawangan—to serve as spiritual conduits for remote worship.

The specific focal points vary by region; while many worship Mount Agung as Bali's highest peak, others focus on Mount Batur or Mount Raung. Similarly, coastal worship may be directed toward specific areas, such as Panyiwian Masceti. This philosophical foundation of Sagara-Giri explains why Pura Batan Dau is identified as a spiritual junction for Mount Agung, Mount Batur, and Petitenget.

## Conclusions

A purana is often regarded as the most authentic evidence of the establishment of a temple. This line of reasoning must be re-examined, as not all temples possess one, which can create the impression that temples without a purana are ahistorical. Historical reconstruction, including that of temples, should take into account alternative sources that can be used to study history, and even offer new perspectives in historical writing. This article demonstrates how toponymy can serve as a basis for understanding and reconstructing the history of temple.

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