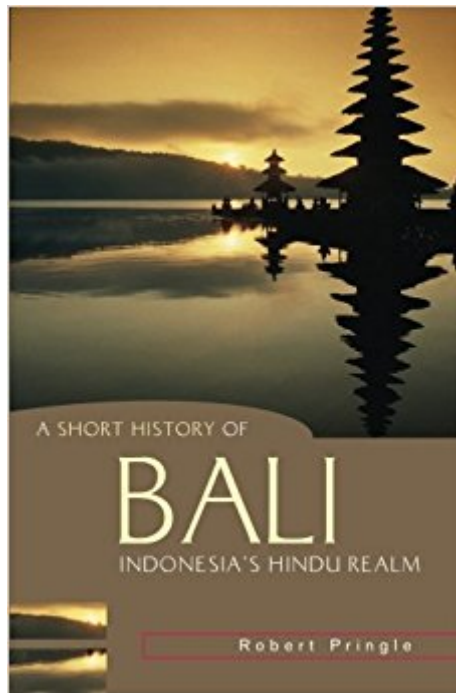


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A Short History Of Bali: Indonesia's Hindu Realm (A Short History Of Asia Series)



Synopsis

Covering the history of Bali from before the Bronze Age to the presidency of Megawati Sukarnoputri, this examination highlights the ethnic dynamics of the island and its place in modern Indonesia. Included is an analysis of the arrival of Indian culture, early European contact, and the complex legacies of Dutch control. Also explored are the island's contemporary economic progress and the environmental problems generated by population growth and massive tourist development.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

I am Balinese, so I am delighted that there is a history of Bali. It is strange that this is one of the very few to be published. Up to now, the history of my island has mostly had to be pieced together from books on other topics. I have also made an attempt at a comprehensive history on my own web site. We cover much the same ground. Robert Pringle writes in a clear, easy style and covers a large sweep in 231 pages - from Java Man 1.5 million years ago (no evidence he made it to Bali) to August 2003, when the first death sentence was passed on Amrozi, one of the terrorists responsible for the Bali bomb. It is not dry and academic - he talks about visits to Bali with his wife and historical sites. This gives the book a nice, personal touch. It would be a good read on holiday. He starts by describing the geographical aspects of Bali and places the island in the context of South East Asia (a term not invented until the Second World War). He quotes the anthropologist Clifford Geertz, who called Bali "this snug, little amphitheater." He places history in context and sets out details of our unique social system. Information on pre-Majapahit Bali, that is the period before 1343, is limited.

There are not many records. Pringle sets out what is known or can be deduced. He discusses early Indian influences, which came from trading links. The rulers of the day adopted many aspects as politically useful. There are stone and copper inscriptions, which give the names of early kings and throw light on their social and political concerns. This is interesting background for those visiting the archaeological sites. The Majapahit conquest of 1343 is, for many, the start of Balinese history. Majapahit has become a code word for Bali's Golden Age. Court poets wrote about it. Much of it may just have been poetry. The Dutch also nurtured their own myths about it and they have been faithfully trotted out in the books. Pringle is illuminating. Bali is famous for its bright colours, vibrant forms and dramatic, emphatic rhythms. We Balinese tend to attribute these to the Majapahit Empire, but Pringle thinks that it is likely that these characteristics, which distinguish us from the Javanese, on the neighbouring island, date back to Old Bali. Eventually nine independent kingdoms emerged. The Dutch, active in Java and elsewhere in the Archipelago from the 16th century, were not too interested in Bali, which was lucky for Bali, but in 1849, they conquered the northern half of the island and the rest was defeated by 1908. There was a lot of bloodshed. They arrived with a guilty conscience. Pringle sets out well the consequences of colonial rule. He is not biased as many books are on this subject. This is one of the best accounts I have read. He comprehensively sets out the advent of Westerners and tourism from 1902-1942. There is not much that is new here, but it is a good summary for those new to the subject. Many of the artistic advances of the time took place in my village, Ubud. He is brief on the Japanese Occupation from 1942-1945. Perhaps a bit more on this period would have been interesting. The Indonesian Revolution culminated in independence in 1949 with Indonesia's first President, Sukarno, who was half-Balinese. The left-leaning Sukarno liked Bali and brought many famous people here. Pringle obviously delights in naming them. I remember that time. It was difficult for ordinary people, like me, and 1965-66 was the worst when there was an alleged communist coup, which was brutally suppressed by Suharto, and thousands were killed. Estimates range from 82,000 to more than 1 million throughout Indonesia. Pringle raises interesting questions and attempts to answer them: Why did it happen? Was it inevitable? Suharto became President until 1998. Pringle deals with that time adequately. For Bali, the story was mostly about tourism and questions surrounding it, like the preservation of Balinese culture. He mentions some things I did not know - which is always interesting - like the fact that Karl Marx said in 1853 that Hinduism then being practised in Bali must have been similar to that which supported despotism in India before British rule. He corrects assumptions that are often just repeated from one book to another. He points out that there is no evidence that the aboriginal Bali Aga people pre-dated the Hindus from the Javanese kingdom of Majapahit to Bali. Most guides and many others say they did.

He also corrects a common misunderstanding about caste and explains that the term, which is always applied, is arguably inappropriate for what is no more than a status distinction. It was largely a product of colonial rule. Pringle brings issues right up to date. I am pleased to say that he loves Bali and thinks that there is every reason to believe that we Balinese will surmount our present challenges. He thinks Bali will remain a literally wonder-full place to experience. Read this book. I recommend it. It is interesting from many points of view. It will be an excellent introduction to anyone visiting Bali. Murni

Like Geoffrey Robinson's "Dark side of paradise", this book is one of the very few I read more than once and that I had to buy again because I gave my copy away. Pringle explains in his preface that he discovered that no history of Bali had yet been written and subsequently set out to fill in that gap. The book is very thoroughly documented which inevitably led Pringle to Leiden, Holland where the most important sources of Indonesian history are to be found, so apparently he masters the Dutch language which is quite remarkable. Being a Dutchman myself and having studied topics of Dutch colonial history in the same places, I can only be impressed by the skills of Pringle and Robinson. For the episode of transition from Sukarno to Suharto and the atrocities that came with it, Pringle relied - as he acknowledges - heavily on Robinson's studies. The book gives a nicely written account of the Balinese ancient and recent history up to the 'Kuta bombing'. The book is a must for anyone interested in Indonesian history. It should be on the shelf of all Balinese and therefore deserves to be translated into Indonesian. It is always a sad discovery that these people don't know their own past. The joke says that Suharto taught his people his story. Pringle mentions a document that is considered by the Balinese as their ancient constitution. What he does not relate is that a copy of it is kept by a Dutch institution and that the Balinese Minister of culture recently suggested that it would be given back to the people who morally own it: the Balinese. The Dutch curator agreed that the Balinese are entitled to it but added: "If your offspring will come here in 300 years time they will still find it here and can study it; if I give it back it will not even take 5 years to disappear".

Robert Pringle, former U.S. ambassador to Indonesia, provides a fair and balanced overview of the social and political history of Bali. Mention Bali and most people think Paradise. While the island's beauty, unique culture, and friendliness cannot be denied, neither can its history...slavery up until the late 1800's, mass suicides in the face of Dutch invasions, the fratricide of the 1960's which resulted in the killing of 1000's - still a taboo subject among the Balinese. This is a short and easy

read for anyone interested in the real Bali.

I spent two weeks diving in the Tulamben region and after touring around a bit I saw the beautiful side of Bali away from the usual scenes of partying, with which I had long associated Bali. I became curious about the culture and background of these lovely local people, and this book very well explained their history and transition to adapt to the 21st century.

Excellent overview of Balinese history. Great choice for those rainy hours spent reading on the veranda. Our travels about the island were very much enhanced by having some knowledge of the history of the region.

Great condition! Exactly what I was looking for!

Sent to my son per his request. He thought book was very good. I cannot give you much more feedback - but sent promptly and arrived in good condition. Thanks, Ben Herb

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