The origins of Balinese legong

Introduction

In this paper I discuss the origin of the Balinese dance genre of legong. I date this from the late nineteenth century, with the dance achieving its definitive form in the period 1916-1932. These conclusions are at odds with the most common history told for legong, according to which it first appeared in the earliest years of the nineteenth century.

The genre

Legong is a secular (balih-balihan) Balinese dance genre. Though originally associated with the palace, legong has long been performed in villages, especially at temple ceremonies, as well as at Balinese festivals of the arts. Since the 1920s, abridged versions of legong dances have featured in concerts organized for tourists and in overseas tours by Balinese orchestras. Indeed, the dance has become culturally emblematic, and its image is used to advertise Bali to the world. Traditionally, the dancers are three young girls; the servant (condong), who dances a prelude, and two legong. All wear elaborate costumes of gilded cloth with ornate accessories and frangipani-crowned headdresses. The core

1 Proyek pemeliharaan 1971. Like all Balinese dances, legong is an offering to the gods. It is ‘secular’ in that it is not one of the dance forms permitted in the inner yards of the temple. Though it is performed at temple ceremonies, the performance takes place immediately outside the temple, as is also the case with many of the other entertainments. The controversial three-part classification adopted in 1971 was motivated by a desire to prevent the commercialization of ritual dances as tourist fare. Fluid distinctions were drawn between wali (sacred), bebali (ceremonial) and balih-balihan (secular) dances and genres. Constructed from the base balih (that which is watched), balih-balihan can be rendered as ‘spectacle’ or ‘performance’.
2 The dance is referred to as legong keraton. ‘Keraton’ is a Javanese term for palace. (The Balinese equivalent is ‘purul’, but the dance is not called ‘legong purul’.) The dance acquired its Javanese tag in the 1930s (Dibia and Ballinger 2004:77), when Balinese legong was first performed in Java.
3 Nowadays, the condong’s prelude is typically seen only with legong Lasem. In this particular dance, she also returns at the end in the role of a raven. Some other legong dances introduce the
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repertoire consists of about 15 dances (some of which are now lost), ranging in their longest versions from 30 to 60 minutes. Some of these are narrative, while others are abstract or general representations of nature, birds, insects, or plants. Those that involve narratives are, nevertheless, highly stylized, and the presentation of the drama is always secondary to the beauty of the dance. The genre is regarded as a treasury of the movements for Balinese women’s dance, and no dancer’s training is complete if she lacks a solid grounding in legong. The dance is accompanied by a gamelan of 25 or more players. Though the legong dance remains popular in areas of traditional strength, and despite efforts to revive it, it is generally in decline (Davies 2006).

Mythical origins of legong

Two folk tales about the origins of legong are recorded (Rembang et al. 1974/75; Bandem 1983a). One adapts the familiar story of how the god Siwa turned his wife, Giri Putri, into the cursed Durga, a corpse-eating witch. To test his wife’s faithfulness, Siwa feigns mortal illness and sends Giri Putri to earth to fetch cow’s milk that could cure him. (In some versions, the request is for bull’s butter!) There, she is approached by a handsome cowherd – Siwa in disguise – who asks for sex in return for the medicinal milk. Giri Putri tries to evade the request but eventually has no alternative but to submit. Two daughters are born from this union. Giri Putri returns to heaven, but is denounced for her act by the god Gana. Siwa curses her, forcing her to take the form of Durga and banishing her to earth as a grave-dweller. Meanwhile, the daughters are commanded to remain on earth and to become gods of dancing. Legong originated with them.

The second tale concerns Japatuhan (God Japa). While they were still newlyweds, his wife Ratnaningrat passed away. Because of his deep love for her, Japatuhan took the decision not to bury Ratnaningrat’s corpse. This was forbidden, however, by the village regulations. Japatuhan’s suffering was intense and his only desire was to meet his wife again. Then, a voice from the sky told him he could see his wife in heaven if he followed its directions. Japatuhan did all

witch-like Rangda or Durga characters. Some dances – in particular, legong Kuntul – may include more than the usual two legong dancers.

4 The gamelan best suited for legong is the pelegongan or the closely related semar pegulingan, which are noted for their sweet, soft sound. By the mid-1930s, many pelegongan and semar pegulingan were melted down to be recast as gamelan gong kebyar (Seebass 1996). In 1975, pelegongan orchestras were found in ‘only a few villages’ (Rembang et al. 1974/75), and only a ‘handful’ of semar pegulingan survived to the 1990s (Tenzer 1991). Semar pegulingan have since become more common but are vastly outnumbered by the more popular gong kebyar ensemble. Legong is often accompanied by gong kebyar, but Balinese experts regard its different tuning and heavy, serious tone as far from ideal for the genre.

5 In the usual version of this story, one or both of the children are sons and legong is not mentioned – for an example, see Eiseman 1990, I:320-1.
that was instructed and finally arrived in heaven. He asked for his wife and the inhabitants of heaven invited him to look for her. At first he did not believe it when he discovered that Ratnaningrat had the form of a pig and was placed in a pigsty together with other pigs. As a gift of the gods of heaven, Ratnaningrat was given her human form as of old. Japatuhan asked them to permit him and his wife to return to earth. This request was granted. In heaven, Ratnaningrat had studied dancing with the angels and been taught legong. When she returned to the world, she taught legong to the people of her village.

Some proposals regarding the historical origins of legong

In the most detailed indigenous discussion of legong, Rembang et al. (1974/75:5) propose three further accounts of the origins of legong. The favoured one, in postulating an ancient origin for legong, is speculative:

It seems if we are not to excessively grope our way in the dark, we should point to Puri Semarapura in Klungkung as the source of the creation of the first legong dance, because it was also there that the gamelan semar pegulingan was created upon the completion of the building of Puri Semarapura. Although the development of the art of legong is not mentioned in history, yet we can be certain that the art of legong was created at the time of the reign of the most famous Dalem Baturenggong, who developed the entire region. It isn’t out of the question that artists from the palace at that time were ordered to compose a type of dance with energetic, dynamic movements beautiful enough to be appropriate to the character of a king. And the name that is encoded in the matter links Baturenggong with legong, so that the connection was already standard in the writings of authors of this early period. Dalem Baturenggong reigned in the sixteenth century.6

The second account derives from an unnamed Western ethnologist who identified the mountain kingdom of Kintamani as the most powerful prior to the rise of Bangli. In the palace was a slave woman of Chinese descent named Lee Khong. She closely studied all the beautiful movements of the sacred dance sanghyang, which is performed by two young girls while possessed. She arranged the most beautiful of these movements into a single non-trance dance. The king and the people of the area took delight in this dance, which was danced for the first time by Lee Khong and later was called the Leekhong dance. As it spread over a long time, it came to be known as legong.

There were historical ties between Bali and China (Eiseman 1990, II:114-28), as witnessed by the importance of Chinese coins in Balinese ritual. One story performed by the giant puppets of barong landung is that of Kang Chi We, which concerns the Chinese wife of the sixth-century ruler of a town near Kintamani. As well, one of the old legong dances, which now is sadly lost, was

6 Translations from Indonesian, such as this one, are by the author.
titled ‘Raja Cina’ (the King of China) and also dealt with the story of Kang Chi We.7 And when I interviewed the famous legong teacher, Sang Ayu Ketut Muklen,8 who was trained in Bedulu in the 1930s, she did not hesitate in declaring that legong had come from China. Nevertheless, there are other etymologies for the word ‘legong’. Rembang et al. (1974/75:1) note that the word comes from the roots ‘leg’ and ‘gong’. In Balinese, terms such as ‘ileg’, ‘elog’, ‘oleg’, ‘igel’, ‘egol’, ‘ogel’, ‘gelgel’, and ‘legleg’ all convey or imply the meaning of a dance. ‘Leg’ refers to a dance movement that is loose and elastic and ‘gong’ means ‘gamelan’, so ‘legong’ means dance and gamelan, or dance accompanied by gamelan. And, arguing against Kintamani as the source of legong, there is far more concrete evidence linking it to the regency of Gianyar, as we shall see.

The third suggestion was foreshadowed in the story of Lee Khong. It is that legong derived from the improvised temple trance dance sanghyang, which is performed by prepubescent girls. In favour of this view is the fact that the two terms are often combined when referring to versions of the temple dance, as in sanghyang legong or legong dedari. Many authors identify sanghyang dances, especially sanghyang dedari, in which the entranced dancers stand on the shoulders of men who carry them around the temple, as the source of movements found in legong.9

Although it probably is true that legong was influenced at one time by movements found in sanghyang dedari, this influence is comparatively slight and could not possibly count as a major source of legong. The problem is not just that sanghyang is a sacred, abstract dance improvised by girls in a trance, whereas legong is a secular, often narrative, thoroughly choreographed dance genre performed by conscious dancers. It is that, by comparison, legong is so much richer, more complex, and more sophisticated than sanghyang dedari that it far outreaches any influence it might once have received from that source. Inevitably, young girls with closed eyes standing on men’s shoulders are limited in the leg and head movements they can perform, whereas these, along with narrative gestures and neck and eye movements, are integral to legong.

Moreover, many of the similarities apparent between legong and sanghyang have arisen from influences heading in the reverse direction. Sanghyang dancers are costumed like legong dancers, they make movements found in legong, and they are accompanied by similar kinds of gamelan and musical works related to the semar pegulingan repertoire, but all this derives from the influence of legong on sanghyang, not vice versa (Bandem and DeBoer 1995). Originally, sanghyang dancers dressed in simple, white costumes and were accompanied by vocal chanting. They adopted simple legong costumes in the 1930s (Covarrubias 1999; Spies and De Zoete 2002). As Colin McPhee (1948:204) noted:

7 Interview with Agung Rai of Saba, 16-7-2003.
8 Interview with Sang Ayu Ketut Muklen, 6-7-2003.
9 For example, see Covarrubias 1999; Spies and De Zoete 2002; Sudana 1977; Wartini 1978; Bandem 1983b; Ballinger 1995; and Racki 1998.
Though the chants that lull dancers into unconsciousness are sung in a slow, almost dreamlike manner, once the dancers have fallen in trance the music changes [...] In recent times the *gamelan* is used instead. While *sanghyang* societies boast their dancers are not trained, but enabled to dance through possession by the gods, this is not always the case. Rehearsals do take place; a few steps and positions recalling the *légong* style are practiced by the little girls for the *sanghyang dedari*. Margaret Mead notes that in the village in which she lived, after visiting a *légong* performance the little *sanghyang* dancers added to their repertoire new steps which they had copied from the *légong*.

Similar comments apply to the observation that *légong* was influenced by the drama form *gambuh*. It is very likely that *légong* took from *gambuh* many of the stylized narrative gestures and stances that it employs, and *gambuh* supplied many of the melodies that are central in *légong* dances despite the fact that the *gamelan* for *gambuh* is quite different from that for *légong*, but those who created *légong* extended and developed these initial borrowings to such a degree that they were transformed into something new and distinctive. And again, the situation is muddied by the fact that influence operates on a two-way street.

**The received history of *légong***

One story of *légong*’s origins has come to eclipse all others, though it is not mentioned in Rembang et al. 1974/75 or by earlier writers. It appeared in an unpublished thesis in Indonesian in 1977 (Sudana 1977) but achieved a more prominent form in publications in Indonesian (Bandem 1983a; Ballinger 1995) and English (Bandem and DeBoer 1995; Bandem 1983b; Moerdowo 1983). For example, Dr Made Bandem’s (1983a) influential encyclopaedia of Balinese dance repeats the mythical stories found in Rembang et al. (1974/75), but he replaces their other suggestions – that the dance originated long ago in the court of Klungkung or that it is to be traced to a Chinese in Kintamani – with the new theory. So dominant has it become, if one now searches the internet, the same paragraph-long summary of the story crops up constantly. And when interviewed by the author in 2003 and 2005, some of the most famous *légong* teachers and experts relayed the same story, which was also presented

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10 Among those who note the connection are Spies and De Zoete 2002; Wartini 1978; Bandem 1983b; and Ballinger 1995.


12 These were Ni Ketut Arini Alit, who was taught by her uncle I Wayan Rindi; Gusti Ayu Raka Astiti, who learned *légong* from I Wayan Rindi; Anak Agung Oka Dalem, dance director of the...
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The now pre-eminent theory of the origins of legong derives from *Babad Dalem Sukawati*, which records the history of the kingdom of that region. The King of Sukawati, I Dewa Agung Made Karna, whose dates are 1775-1825, meditated for 40 days and nights at the site of Pura (temple) Yogan Agung (also known as Pura Payogan Ciwa Agung) in Ketewel, which is adjacent to the village of Sukawati. In his dream or trance, he saw two dancing celestial angels dressed in gold and wearing headdresses. Subsequently, he had the temple built at the site and taught the court musicians and dancers what he had seen. The four dances in the repertoire are highly sacred and imbued with considerable spiritual power. They have a fixed choreography and are accompanied by a *semar pegulingan* orchestra. In them, the two dancers wear facemasks (*topeng*). There are nine masks in total, but only seven are danced. The wooden masks are coloured (blue, green, white, brown, cerise) and their design is simple. In some versions of the tale, Karna carved the masks personally, or had them made (Bandem 1983b; Bandem and DeBoer 1995), but in others they existed before his dream, either having come to Bali from eastern Java in the fourteenth century (Sudana 1977; Moerdowo 1983; Dibia 2003) or having been carved in Bali in the early sixteenth century (Sudana 1977). In any case, they are in the Javanese style, being held by a flange gripped in the dancer’s mouth. According to most accounts, prior to Karna’s dream no one knew how the masks were to be danced; according to another, they were formerly performed without *gamelan* accompaniment (Sudana 1977).

The dance genre is known variously as *topeng sanghyang*, *sanghyang legong*, *topeng legong*, *legong ratu dari*, and *legong dedari*. *Topeng sanghyang* is still danced in the Ketewel temple annually, according to the Balinese 210-day calendar, beginning with the festival of Buda Klion Pagerwesi. The Ketewel group also sometimes performs in temple ceremonies at other important sites (such as at the mother temple at Besakih or the Pura Campuhan in Ubud) and the dances are performed elsewhere in the Ketewel area if their magical power is needed to protect the local people from pestilence or disaster. The dances are regarded as so holy that, for a long time, they were not to be witnessed by tourists.

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13 Sudana (1977) dates Karna’s rule in the 1400s, but this is not now accepted.
14 I do not know when each of these terms for the dance first came into use. To avoid confusion, I refer to the genre as *topeng sanghyang*, though *topeng legong* is no less commonly used.
15 Moerdowo claims in his book of 1983 that they had never been seen by tourists.
Undeniably, there are many similarities between the *topeng sanghyang* dances and the *legong* genre. The costumes are alike, though the *topeng sanghyang* dancers wear a white shirt (as do dancers in *gambuh*), the sarong is of gold silk rather than *prada* cloth, and the *oncer*, a decorative belt dangling from the hips, is mainly white rather than gold. Some of the dance steps and movements are the same. In many cases, the movements are smaller and the lower body is quieter than in most styles of *legong*, but some of the *andir* dances of Tista, Tabanan regency (of which more later) and the *legong* dances of Saba are comparable in this respect, and this may testify to their common antiquity. Meanwhile, the musical accompaniment is in the same general style as *legong*.

The differences between *topeng sanghyang* and *legong* are far more striking than the similarities, however, as was also the case with *sanghyang dedari*. As noted, *topeng sanghyang* is a highly sacred, spiritually powerful, abstract dance, whereas *legong* is an entertainment that sometimes includes earthly narrative themes concerning love, abduction, war, sibling rivalry, and mayhem among the gods. Also, where the dancers of *topeng sanghyang* often appear to be in a trance condition,\(^{16}\) this seems never to be the case in *legong*. In the music, there is little in common melodically, the patterns and structures of *topeng sanghyang* are less complex and ornate, and the aggressive *batel* sections found in *legong* are entirely absent.\(^{17}\) Whereas most *legong* dances in their complete versions are complexly articulated structures of 30 to 60 minutes, the *topeng sanghyang* dances are of 10 minutes or less. The dance movements also are very different. Of more than 100 *legong* positions and attitudes (*agent*), link movements between positions (*abah tangkis*), postures, strides and foot movements (*tandang*), facial expressions (*tangkep*), movements of the head and neck (*guluwangsul*), and shoulder, hip, hand, finger, and fan movements, only a comparatively small number occur in *topeng sanghyang*,\(^{18}\) and most of these are equally common in all other Balinese women’s dance genres. Some of the most characteristic movements of *legong* are absent. For example, because the dances are abstract, there are no narrative gestures or stances in *topeng sanghyang* and no use of props such as leaves or bows and arrows. And again, because of the masks worn in *topeng sanghyang*, the eye movements, facial expressions, and many head and neck movements of *legong* are missing or not visible. As well, *topeng sanghyang*

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\(^{16}\) Dibia 2003. Like the dancers of *sanghyang dedari*, those preparing for *topeng sanghyang* repeatedly ‘wash’ their hands and faces in the smoke of incense. In the story of Karna’s dream, the first dancers of *topeng sanghyang* were recruited from performers of *sanghyang dedari* (Ballinger 1995). Spies and De Zoete (2002:72-3) describe a *sanghyang dedari* dance in Ketewel.

\(^{17}\) Several *topeng sanghyang* pieces, along with excerpts from *legong Lasem* can be heard on *Music of Bali: Gamelan Semar Pegulingan from the Village of Ketewel* (Lyrichord Discs, LYRCD 7408). The liner notes perpetuate the view that *legong* originated with Karna.

\(^{18}\) These include *ngembat*, *nerudut*, *gulu gangsul*, *myalud*, *ngekes*, *ngelukan*, *ngepik*, *ngcect*, *tayung*, *nukel*, *negol*, *ngunda*, *tanjek panjang*, and *milpil*. Occasionally the dancers interact in the ‘kissing’ movement, *pengipuk*, that is also found in *legong*. 
The origins of Balinese legong does not include fans, while the use of these is prominent and distinctive in legong. In general, the movements in topeng sanghyang are less full and more constrained, with the dancers often rooted to the spot.

Moreover, where there are similarities with legong, it is also important to recall a point made in connection with sanghyang dedari: these may be as likely to result from the influence of legong on topeng sanghyang as vice versa. The dance expert Arini Alit described the elements of topeng sanghyang as occurring in a variety of other dances – ‘I could see this is from here, that from there’ – and she certainly did not assume that topeng sanghyang was always the original source.

One common factor between topeng sanghyang and the legong genre is the use of young girls as dancers. In certain sacred dances, including sanghyang dedari and topeng sanghyang, the dancers must be ‘pure’, which is to say prepubescent. The same sometimes is claimed as a requirement for legong dancers, and a film shot in 1933 by Henry de la Falaise is titled Legong: Dance of the Virgins. It is not (or is no longer) true, however, that legong dancers are expected to be virgins. The historical preference for young dancers in this genre has a rather different explanation, and this again separates legong from topeng sanghyang and sanghyang dedari, as I now explain.

It is true that, in the past, legong dancers usually retired early, but this often went along with their marrying. McPhee (1948:195) writes: ‘At the age of ten, with the approach of adolescence, [legong] dancers have become “too heavy”. Their haunting, sexless charm, their swift, miniature virtuosity suddenly vanishes. The club looks about for new dancers, and as these become expert, the older ones retire. They never appear again, unless as members of the operetta company. But no girl dances after marriage, except perhaps as one of the group of ritual dancers in the temple.’ Covarrubias (1999) gives 12 or 13 as the age of retirement, and Spies and De Zoete (2002:229-30) say 13 or 14, though they footnote the case of a ‘superannuated’ seventeen-year-old dancer. Wartini, writing in 1978, noted that the dancers are replaced at 16. Since then, it has been common for good legong dancers to prolong their performing

19 The topeng sanghyang dancers hold a wad of cloth woven through the fingers of one hand. This is used not as a fan but in order to prevent the dancers from directly touching the masks as they adjust them.
20 Interview with Ketut Arini Alit, 2-7-2003.
21 Interview with Ketut Arini Alit, 2-7-2003.
22 Sudana 1977; Bandem and DeBoer 1995; Dibia 2004. Moreover, those who teach topeng sanghyang and assist the young dancers at temple ceremonies must be unmarried former dancers (Sudana 1977).
23 For example, see Bandem and DeBoer 1995; Bandem 1983b. Though Bandem (1983b) suggests the same is not required for legong dancers of tourist concerts.
24 The filmmakers made up the story and were in Bali for only a short time. Among other things, the film has the high-caste father approving of his daughter’s plan to marry a low-caste male, whereas this would have been unacceptable at the time.
careers, dancing not only for tourists but also in the temple. In general, during the 1990s and even now, many married legong dancers with young children perform into their twenties and beyond, while teachers can be much older. Sang Ayu Ketut Muklen of Pejeng remains active as a teacher in her mid-80s.

The main reason for using young dancers in legong is not because they must be pure (that is, virgins) but, instead, because of the need to shape and form their bodies to the required positions and degree of flexibility (Dibia 2004:15, 113). Old dancers lack the beauty of form and face, and lose the necessary flexibility and stamina, it is thought. In the mid-1980s, Cokorda Istri Ratih Iryani (known less formally as Cok Ratih), a dancer then in her early twenties, said: ‘When I get older and weaker people will not want to see me. Later when I look older and people do not like to see my face I may dance the dances where you wear masks. Here everyone is an expert and everyone can criticize, and a poor dancer is openly criticized and told to leave. Dancers can be criticized also just for not being beautiful, though it’s not their fault and they can dance very well’ (quoted in Mabbett 1985:134). But nowadays, legong dancers can remain active to the age of 40 (Dibia 2004:16), and it is interesting to note that, 20 years on and despite her prediction, Cok Ratih continues to perform legong.

No doubt these changes reflect altered marriage patterns, changes in the roles of and attitudes toward women, moves toward professionalization in the arts, and so on. Also relevant, though, is the decline of the system in which upcoming generations of legong dancers are trained to be ready to replace the current generation of dancers (Davies 2006). Dancers of about ten years of age continue to be widely regarded by experts as the most preferable for legong, however.25

Andir

Unlike the abbreviated history of legong found on websites and tourist guides, scholarly histories acknowledge that another dance genre,26 andir, mediated between the creation of topeng sanghyang and the development of the modern form of legong. Nevertheless, by beginning with and focusing on the Karna dream tale, they push the date of legong’s origin back to the early nineteenth century. So we get the following: ‘Records indicate that Legong was already an established art form by 1811’ (Dibia and Ballinger 2004:76). Yet, as I have argued above, even if legong drew on the dance heritage that included sanghyang gedari, topeng sanghyang and gambuh, it stands sufficiently far from each of these that it must be treated as distinct from them. The telescoping

25 Interviews with Anak Agung Gede Oka Dalem, 6-7-2003; Wayan Dibia, 12-7-2003; and Sang Ayu Ketut Muklen, 6-7-2003.
26 Such as Bandem 1983a, 1983b; Bandem and DeBoer 1995; Dibia and Ballinger 2004.
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of the historical record that is invited by the received view distorts this fact.\textsuperscript{27} The key to locating legong’s origins is to unravel the genealogies and timelines of the musicians and choreographers who were the leading protagonists. As a preliminary to that, I discuss the dance genre andir,\textsuperscript{28} which bridges the gap between topeng sanghyang and legong.

It is widely agreed that andir, a dance for handsome boys without masks, was created by I Gusti Ngurah Jelantik of Blahbatuh.\textsuperscript{29} The dance is said to be in the style of topeng sanghyang (Sudana 1977; Bandem 1983b) and the time of its creation is given as the mid-nineteenth century.\textsuperscript{30} The dance is described as simpler and slower than today’s legong and as very beautiful (Bandem and De Boer 1995).

The dance became famous throughout Bali (Moerdowo 1983) and was strong in Sukawati until at least 1887 (Wartini 1978) and in Blahbatuh to 1906 (Bandem 1983a). The musician, I Wayan Lotring, who was born in 1898, studied the dance in Blahbatuh (Bandem 1983a), presumably after 1906, as did I Nyoman Kaler, who was born in 1892. And I Wayan Rindi, who was born in 1916,\textsuperscript{31} and who became a famous dancer and teacher of both legong and andir (see Spies and De Zoete 2002; Bandem and DeBoer 1995), must have been taught the dance around 1925. According to Padmini (1983), andir was exported from Badung (Denpasar) northwest to the nearby regency of Tabanan in 1928. By the 1930s, the dance must have been extremely rare elsewhere, however, and it is regarded as extinguished with Rindi’s death in 1975 (Bandem and DeBoer 1995; Ballinger 1995).

The artists of Banjar Carik of the village of Tista, Tabanan regency, insist today that they perform andir, not legong, though girls rather than boys dance.\textsuperscript{32}

\textsuperscript{27} For similar complaints and a deep skepticism regarding histories of Balinese dance, whether written by Balinese or by Westerners, see Hobart 2007. He is no doubt correct in his views that the purpose of the Babad Blahbatuh (which I refer to as the Babad Dalem Sukawati) was ‘to pre-empt and marginalize rival accounts’ and that attributing the discovery to the prince, Made Karna, rather than to his musicians and dancers is ‘a conventional hagiographic narrative device’ (Hobart 2007:113). This more extreme claim – ‘The use of history to elucidate dance in Bali tells us more about the preoccupations of the authors than what might, or might not, have happened’ (Hobart 2007:112) – if true, would damn not only those he criticizes but also his own account, however. For a well-known description of the attitude of Balinese to their past, including the construction of history as a way of serving a present socio-political purpose, see Bateson 1970.

\textsuperscript{28} The dance is also known as nandir and as sanghyang nandir.

\textsuperscript{29} Moerdowo (1983) identifies Wayan Batubulan as co-creator of the dance, though he is not mentioned in other sources. Sudana (1977) claims that the dance was requested by I Dewa Manggis, the king of Gianyar, but he is the only one to do so and here plainly confuses the origins of andir with those of legong.

\textsuperscript{30} Wartini 1978; Bandem and DeBoer 1995; Dibia and Ballinger 2004.

\textsuperscript{31} Arini Alit, Rindi’s niece, could not recall his date of birth, but Wayan Merti, Rindi’s daughter, told Ed Herbst it was 1916 (personal communication).

\textsuperscript{32} The author commissioned a performance of andir Bapang and andir Lasem on 14 June 2005, and the views were expressed then.
Their repertoire includes the dances Lasem, Bapang, Kuntul, and Prabangsa, and is accompanied by a gamelan semar pegulingan that dates to 1937. Prabangsa, which derives its story from the ancient calonarang drama, begins rather like a legong dance, with condong followed by two legong, but degenerates into 30 minutes of mayhem with the arrival of the witch Rangda. The dancers become entranced and attack Rangda with knives, as do onlookers. The one-hour andir version of Lasem is close — in costumes, music, and choreography — to the legong dance of the same name, but the condong’s music differs, for instance, and the closing section (pekaad) uses a melody associated in legong with a different dance, Jobog. Meanwhile, in the performance I witnessed, the bird that fights with the prince was a boy wearing a bird mask (topeng jatayu) and an elaborate costume. The general verdict of scholars seems to be that the dances from Tista are not an authentic representation of andir as it existed formerly. They are closer to legong than to anything else, but they also possess many distinctive elements that go beyond the usual regional variants for legong.

The creation of legong

We cannot be sure what andir was like, but we can be confident that it provided the main source of legong. I Dewa Manggis, the king of Gianyar, commissioned a dance based on andir for girls. The adaptation was made by the dancer Anak Agung Rai Perit and the musician I Dewa Ketut Belacing. Moerdowo (1983) gives the date of the dance’s creation as 1802 and Sudana (1977) suggests 1811, which is also given by I Gusti Gede Raka of Saba (Bandem 1983b) and in Dibia and Ballinger (2004), but this is far too early if Perit played the role usually attributed to him. Perit and Duaja taught I Nyoman Kaler, a dance titled ‘Nandir’ is found also in Sebatu, but it bears no historical relation to the genre discussed here. It originated in the late 1970s, when a traditional but lost form that accompanied the barong dance and that was associated with black magic was ‘recreated’ at the request of the French ethnomusicologist Jacques Brunet (Masmini 1986). The dance originating in 1978 has kebyar-style movements, costumes, and music that can have little in common with the lost, sacred dance.
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who was born in 1892, and Perit and Belacing taught I Gusti Jelantik of Saba, who was born in 1895, and I Wayan Lotring of Kuta (Bandem 1983a), who was born in 1898. Perit and Belacing taught in Peliatan in 1890 (Wartini 1978), and in many places in Badung (such as Kedaton, Pedungan, Kaliungu) from 1893. Writing in 1952, John Coast (1953:61) claims that Perit and Belacing, ‘forty years ago, had raised Legong dancing to its most perfect classical form’. Also, Wartini (1978) says Ni Gusti Biang Sengog (Belacing’s sister-in-law) continued teaching legong in Peliatan after the deaths of Perit and Belacing. Wartini, who gives Sengog’s performing years as 1890-1916, thus implies the deaths occurred after 1916. I Wayan Rindi, who was born in 1916, was taught in Sukawati by Perit and Belacing when they were very old and bedridden, and this is likely to be about 1925. Realistically, the main protagonists could not have been born prior to about 1835, and perhaps not until decades later than this.

A more plausible date for the creation of legong – not long after 1887 – is proposed by Wartini (1978). Padmini (1983) makes the date more precise; she gives 1889. Both these writers give the years according to the Içaka/Saka calendar, which begins in the Gregorian year of 78 CE, so the years given are 1809 and 1811. And notice that this fits with the date of 1811 suggested by Sudana (1977) and I Gusti Gede Raka of Saba (Bandem 1983b), if we suppose they used the Içaka calendar without explicitly indicating this. The date of 1889 for the origin of legong is further recommended if we focus not only on what is known of the lives of Perit and Belacing but also on I Dewa Manggis

40 Interview with Agung Rai of Saba, 16-7-2003.
41 Sudana 1977; Wartini 1978; Padmini 1983. Padmini (1983) reports the Lontar Prakempa as describing how, following the defeat of the kingdom of Gianyar by Klungkung in 1890, the artists, dancers, and musicians centered on (the regency of) Gianyar (which includes the village of Sukawati) were exiled to the island of Nusa Penida by the king of Klungkung. The King of Badung, who wanted to promote the arts, was given permission by the king of Klungkung to move the Gianyar artists to Badung, where they taught gambuh and other arts. These artists included Rai Perit, Ketut Belacing, Wayan Sabda (dancer), Wayan Goya (dancer), I Gusti Ketut Rencong (musician), and Tukrukan (puppeteer). They taught for a long time, so that Badung became recognized as a centre of artistic excellence. News of this reached the king of Tabanan, who asked the king of Badung to send dance teachers and musicians to build the arts in his area. This was done swiftly and successfully. The new generation of serious dancers included I Made Kumba, whose students introduced andir, among other dances, to the region about 1928.
42 Indeed, she returned from retirement to prepare the dancers of the Peliatan group for their overseas tour of 1952-1953 (Coast 1953).
43 The claim in Ballinger 1995 that legong did not reach Peliatan until 1930 is unwarranted.
44 Interview with Ketut Arini Alit, 2-7-2003.
45 This calendar is of Indian/Hindu-Buddhist origin and is believed to have been established by King Kanishka.
46 Some Balinese authors make clear which calendar they use. Contemporary ones who do not make this explicit use the Gregorian calendar. But others writing in the 1970s and early 1980s may use the Içaka calendar without explicitly saying so. Where this escapes notice, Balinese history is ‘pushed back’ 78 years. In the case of legong, dating errors of this kind compound the possibility of confusion by making the date of origin seem to coincide with the period of Karna’s rule.
of Gianyar, who commissioned the dance from them. ‘Dewa Manggis’ is a title, not a name. The Dewa Manggis, king of Gianyar who died in 1847, was succeeded by one whose rule extended to 1891 and who had a known predilection for girls. The former Dewa Manggis could not have suggested that andir be reconfigured as legong, given that andir originated in the middle of the nineteenth century. And the timeline of the latter Dewa Manggis meshes with those of Perit and Belacing, whose reputations could have been forged by 1889, while they lived beyond this by more than 36 years.

So, we have the date of legong’s creation: 1889, more or less, and not in the early nineteenth century. And, as Coast (1953) suggests, the dance was changed and improved into the twentieth century. It seems reasonable to propose that the definitive version of legong came only when the kondong’s part was added to the ensemble. Nowadays it is common for the kondong to dance only in legong Lasem, but in the past she introduced all the legong dances. The kondong was used in the dramatic forms of gambuh, arja, wayang wong, and calonarang, in which she sang or spoke in the ancient Javanese language of Kawi, acting variously as narrator, translator, and commentator (Wiratini 1991; Ruspayati 1994). Accordingly, it was decided to add her to legong and her music was taken from the kondong music of the calonarang. In the early days she would speak in Kawi, inviting the legong dancers to perform and relating the story of the dance, but for a long time now her role, like that of the two legong, has been silent.

When did the kondong join the legong dance? According to Kaler, the kondong was added in Sukawati in 1910 (Rembang et al 1974/75; Sudana 1977). In 1916 in Peliatan, the kondong is identified as Anak Agung Anom (Wartini 1978). A photograph of Rindi from 1925 shows him as kondong flanked by two girl legong (Ballinger 1995). He was famous for the role (Spies and De Zoete 2002) and danced at Kelandis in Badung. Moerdowo (1983) records that legong was exported in 1927 from Saba to Keramas, south of Gianyar, where the kondong role was added. From there the dance went to Bedulu, which is where Sang Ayu Ketut Muklen was taught about 1928. In Saba, the kondong was not introduced until 1930 (Ballinger 1995) by I Gusti Bagus Jelantik, and the first dancer of the role was still alive there in 2003. Ida Bagus Boda, a teacher in Badung, created the kondong role in 1932 (Bandem 1983b). Probably not all these dates

47 Wiener 1995. An anonymous referee suggests that one motive for casting the dance for girls was to avoid the risk of the ruler’s assassination by close-performing male dancers.
48 Interview with Agung Rai of Saba, 16-7-2003.
49 A two-minute video clip (http://australiansscreen.com.au/titles/dance-eyes/clip1/) of about 1932 shows Rindi dancing kondong with Sadri and Cawan as legong. (The soundtrack uses unrelated gong kebyar music.) According to Ed Herbst (personal communication), the threesome were of great renown in Kelandis, Lebah, Pagan, and Belaluan in the late 1930s and early 1940s, and taught all over Bali.
50 Interview with Agung Rai of Saba, 16-7-2003.
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are accurate, but we can fairly surmise that the condong role was introduced at different times in different places over the period 1910-1930.

We can now draw the conclusion: The dance genre of legong came into existence at the close of the nineteenth century and underwent further alteration over the following 30 or more years, at which time it emerged in its modern guise as the dance that remains familiar today. It was directly influenced by and no doubt reflected much of the character of andir, which sadly is now lost. As well and unsurprisingly, it drew on the wider heritage of Balinese dance – sanghyang dedari, topeng sanghyang, gambuh, calonarang – in terms of costume, movement, music, and drama. It is important to note, however, that the ‘official’ histories of these probably are no less in need of critical interrogation than is that of legong.
This is not the end of the story, of course. All Balinese art forms seem to be in a constant state of evolution and legong is no exception. From the earliest days, there have been local styles and variants in legong, and these have persisted to recent times (Davies 2006). Inevitably, teachers and their pupils inflect the dance in a given area with their personalities. As well, it is said that Lotring adapted and developed the music for legong in the 1920s and 1930s. And from McPhee’s (1948) detailed description of the choreography of the condong’s dance and more generally of legong Lasem, it is plain that these have changed. Moreover, just as legong’s sources were subsequently influenced by legong, legong also has been influenced by dance forms that postdated it. ‘We have seen that kebyar developed from legong […] It should be noticed as well that kebyar’s influence also extended backward, affecting its sources. In 1932, Ida Bagus Boda of Kaliungu, Badung Province, re-choreographed the pengawit [opening] section of the legong in a style heavily influenced by kebyar. Subsequently, the body of the dance was also elaborated. These changes were adopted quickly everywhere’ (Bandem and DeBoer 1995:141). Concern is regularly expressed nowadays by older teachers about the continuing kebyarization of legong, with the result that the style of movement loses its softness and elegance and becomes quicker, more aggressive, and more angular. Finally, the advent of mass tourism, beginning in the late 1970s, and the consequent growth of tourist performances, many of which feature a legong dance, has led to many changes, most of which are viewed negatively by Balinese dance experts. In particular, the elision of whole sections and the focus on only one legong dance, Lasem, along with a general lowering of performance standards, is deplored (Davies 2006). In other words, legong has developed and changed over the past 80 years, and not always for the better. In this it is like other ‘traditional’ dance and drama forms, most of which, like legong, are now in serious decline.

Playing with words

I have suggested that legong appeared as a distinct Balinese dance genre in the late nineteenth century and, in doing so, have challenged the most widely reported view, which traces the dance to the beginning of the nineteenth century. But isn’t this mere semantics, word play? The word ‘legong’ is used in connection with earlier forms and most experts readily identify topeng sanghyang of Ketewel and the andir dances of Tista as forms of legong, so long as the question is carefully worded. For that matter, they also regard leko, a later genre, often
accompanied by wood or bamboo ensembles, as a form of legong. Isn’t it arbitrary and misleading to distinguish the ‘real’ legong from these alternatives?

I take the point. It is important to acknowledge andir (both the historical version, whatever that was like, and the variety that still survives) and leko as legong’s close relatives. But there is a basis, nevertheless, for resisting the inclination to confirm the integrity of traditional art forms by claiming for them a pedigree more ancient than can be justified. Legong has a distinctive appearance and character that it achieved only in the early twentieth century, with the addition of the condong. And what legong has in common with sanghyang dedari and topeng sanghyang is a heritage of movements found in most genres of Balinese women’s dance/drama. The tie with these is not much closer than that to gambuh, for instance, and the significance of the similarities is hard to evaluate anyway, given that the older forms appear to have been influenced by legong. And besides, acknowledgment and proper respect should go to the artists responsible for legong’s creation and development, though like all Balinese artists we can be sure they leaned heavily on the achievements of their predecessors. They were Anak Aung Rai Perit, I Dewa Ketut Belacing, and perhaps also I Dewa Made Bambang Duaja, not I Dewa Agung Made Karna.

Leko, which survives in Sibanggede, near Denpasar, and in Jembrana in the northwest, is a village social dance in which men from the audience join in with the dancers (paibing-ibingan). As a prelude to this, a legong dance is usually performed. In the past, most leko dancers were retired legong performers. For further discussion of leko, see Spies and De Zoete 2003; Rasmi 1980; Bandem and DeBoer 1995; Bandem 1983a; Karta 1986; Suryani 1986; and Ballinger 1995.

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