

Large crowd watches huge cremation tower at funeral for high-ranked Balinese

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A large crowd watches a golden cremation tower at the July 23, 1986 funeral for a high-ranked Balinese related to Ubud royalty. The several story high cremation tower has nine roof tiers indicating Brahman or priest status, uplifted wings (symbolizing the bird god Garuda) on each side, and four sculpted faces representing underworld beings on the lower front. The tower, designed to represent the cosmos, is used to transport the Brahman's corpse to the cremation grounds where it is transferred into the hollow bull figure for burning. The tower is then burned afterwards. Balinese cremation towers and figures are very expensive to produce. They make public statements about how high in status the deceased's family assert themselves to be. Centuries ago, Bali adopted a streamlined version of the Indian Hindu caste system. During many present daily interactions, ancestral caste differences may be ignored as unimportant, but funerals dramatize families' claims to social status. Many Balinese will go into debt or even sell farm land to sponsor important relatives' funerals.



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