

BRIGITTA HAUSER-SCHÄUBLIN

# The diversion of the village gods

## A criminal turn in the biography of Balinese copperplate inscriptions

Dedicated to the people of Julah<sup>1</sup>

*Introduction: Heirlooms, theft and the art market*

The Balinese copperplate<sup>2</sup> inscriptions labelled ‘Sembiran’ (Goris 1954) allow a fascinating glimpse into the life of a community called Julah on the north coast of Bali between the tenth and twelfth centuries. What makes these inscriptions, *prasasti*, even more fascinating is the fact that to this day there is a village there with the same name. There are many indications that the ancient Julah is the predecessor of the present one. For an anthropologist interested in historical questions, these 20 copperplates with inscriptions in Sanskrit, Old Balinese and Old

<sup>1</sup> I am grateful to the *klian adat* (*penyarikan adat*, the village official in charge of *adat*), I Ketut Sidemen, and I Wayan Terang. The latter was my main research partner and village head (*kepala desa*) of Julah during some of the years when I regularly visited the village. The major and most exciting part of the recent biography of the copperplates has been documented solely by I Wayan Terang. He had written for me a detailed account in Bahasa Indonesia of the recovery of these invaluable items since I was not in Julah at that time. The story recounted in this article about the recovery of the copperplates is a summary of his report. I am the author of all other parts of the article and am responsible for any misinterpretations it may contain.

<sup>2</sup> In the many texts written about the early inscriptions the plates are described as being made of ‘copper’ or ‘bronze’. Bronze is an alloy of copper and tin, although the composition of the metals used to create these plates is unclear. I could not find any chemical analyses of the plates, nor could I find any account of whether the hundreds of plates found so far differ in composition. For reasons of simplicity, I use the term ‘copperplates’ since this term was established by Brandes in 1890 for the Sembiran inscriptions.

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Javanese<sup>3</sup> are objects of knowledge, a key to the past of a coastal community and to Bali in general that would otherwise have remained in impenetrable darkness. During the studies I carried out in Julah and neighbouring Sembiran between 1997 and 2005, I investigated traces of continuity and change that link today's villages to the past as described in the *prasasti* which are still kept in Julah and Sembiran.<sup>4</sup> Today, these copperplate inscriptions are venerated as sacred heirlooms. They are referred to as *pratima* (sacred material representations of gods) and addressed as Ida Bhatara (deified ancestors or gods) who have a distinct agency. They are taken out of their hiding places and ritually cleansed by senior members of the *kerama desa* (*kubayan* in Julah and *pemangku* in Sembiran) during temple festivals when they are worshipped.

Over the past 10 years, reports in local newspapers of burglaries of temples all over Bali have increased. Many villagers are afraid of these mostly nightly raids of their sanctuaries. In most cases, the thieves have never been captured and the cherished sacred heirlooms have disappeared. Meanwhile, apart from guards, many villages have set up patrols at night, and most of them have tried to protect their *pratima* by constructing a shrine on a high pole (up to three metres high), by hiding them outside the village, or by installing a strongbox. In spite of these measures, however, the raids have continued. Local people have predominantly identified non-Balinese, mostly assumed to be Javanese, as the burglars since – as I was told many times – no Hindu-Balinese would ever dare to commit such a sacrilege. To my knowledge there is no statistical data on the origin of the thieves. However, the destiny of the stolen goods is clear: the undertow of the international art market, after having emptied the heirloom stocks of households, sucks from temples everything that is considered antique and precious.

Julah and Sembiran have been the targets of such attacks as well. Over the years, several break-ins at the main temple of Julah as well as of Sembiran have taken place, and a number of sacred heirlooms were stolen. Each of these thefts was a tragedy for the villagers, especially for the ritual specialists of the *kerama desa* and priests. What made things even worse, in the case of Sembiran, is that one night a tightly wrapped bundle of old *keris* was stolen from the most sacred part of the main temple building (*bale agung*). When representatives of the *kerama desa* reported the theft to the police, they were asked to give a detailed description of the *keris*. However, it turned out that for decades (if not for generations) nobody had ever dared to open the bundle and to inspect the individual *keris*. Therefore, the victims of the theft were

<sup>3</sup> On the relationship between these different languages and the way they were used, see Creese 1998; Rubinstein 2000:5-10.

<sup>4</sup> The research was supported by the German Research Association, Bonn, and sponsored by LIPI and Universitas Udayana in Denpasar. I am indebted to my sponsor and colleague Prof. Dr. I Wayan Ardika for a productive cooperation which resulted in a joint publication (Hauser-Schäublin and Ardika 2008).

unable to give any description and had to leave the police station ashamed and filled with impotent anger. Many investigations by the police are non-starters for similar reasons, mainly because the godly insignia are never inspected with a curious eye but rather venerated with the head bowed.

One day when I was back in Germany, I received a phone call from I Wayan Terang. He reported the theft of the *prasasti*. Although some people had heard dogs barking that night, nobody had been aware of what was going on. The villagers were shocked the next morning to find that the shrine in which they had installed a strongbox for the *prasasti* had been broken open and the contents stolen. The signal gong was immediately beaten, announcing that a catastrophe had befallen the village. In contrast to many other villages, Julah's village temple may only be entered after its ritual opening just before a temple festival starts. To set foot in the temple without a ritual occasion already represented a pollution of the temple. But of course, even worse, the highly cherished Ida Bhatara had been removed by force.

These events, and especially the way in which the stolen copperplate inscriptions changed their cultural context and their meaning according to their actors, made me think about the versatile properties these artefacts have – and, as I will show in this article, already had before. In the following, I therefore analyse the agency these artefacts have developed through time according to the changing and sometimes competing social contexts in which they are circulated or embedded. As I show, the *prasasti* cannot be separated from the social milieu, particularly of the persons who directly or indirectly interacted with them (and vice versa). Both constitute an entity of relationships, an entity that is liable to change. Furthermore, beyond the context of this mutual relationship between 'persons' and 'things', these inscribed copperplates have no meaning and no value (Appadurai 1986b:5). Drawing on both Appadurai's (1986) and Gell's (1998) work, I attempt to write a biography of these *prasasti* consisting of five main stages: 1) the *prasasti* as objects of historical knowledge about their origin; 2) from legal documents to divinities; 3) the theft of the *pratima* and a search by spiritual means; 4) the police hunt and the recovery of the stolen goods; and 5) ambiguity between *pratima* and *corpus delicti*. The last part of this article consists of an interview with the thief and a report on his fatal end.

### *Multiple identities*

First of all, it is important to note that the usual Western dichotomy of 'persons' and 'things' (Gell 1998) does not apply to *prasasti*, since the *prasasti* have been able to move people as much as the people have moved the *prasasti*. The *prasasti* have always displayed an agency equalling that of humans. Moreover,

the inhabitants of Julah and Sembiran address and treat them as Ida Bhatara, as deified beings or even gods, whose agency is even greater than that of humans. Indeed, these deified beings are perceived as being able to exercise influence over people in a positive or negative way (in the case of misbehaviour). However, this is only one perspective, one held by the inhabitants, in particular the ritual experts of both villages. For others – outsiders – the same copperplate inscriptions have a predominantly monetary value. This is the reason why these sacred heirlooms were stolen. Through the act of theft, they became a commodity intended for a special form of exchange, that is, sale to a dealer with access to the international art market (Kersel 2008). Thus, the *prasasti* were moved from one context to another, thereby changing their meaning and the nature of what constitutes their value.

The *prasasti* could be described as having already had a double identity or status (or, as we will see later, multiple statuses/identities) before the actual theft. Apart from being appreciated and treated as sacred heirlooms and deified beings, conceptually they already belonged to the category of prized antiquities circulating on the art market in the minds of those who were eager to have them in their collections, as well as those who knew that they were a source for making money. According to Appadurai (1986b:13-4), one could speak therefore of a ‘commodity candidacy’ of the *prasasti* even before external actors appropriated them by force and transferred them onto the track leading to the international black market for antiquities.

Villages throughout Bali try to protect their sacred treasures, considered as inalienable possessions, by installing strongboxes, constructing shrines on extremely high poles, increasing the height of temple walls, and locking the doors. These attempts show that local people in Bali are well aware of the additional potential, the ‘commodity candidacy’, of their cherished heirlooms. The villagers of Julah and Sembiran are no exception. People’s efforts aim at safeguarding the irreplaceable valuables, keeping them within the hereditary context and protecting them from being transferred to other channels of circulation beyond their control. Appadurai calls this process ‘enclaving’. In fact, the enclaving of *prasasti* is not a new process: the villagers have always tried to protect their sacred heirlooms from appropriation by external actors, be they regional lords or pirates, albeit for different reasons.

By contrast, the theft constitutes a ‘diversion’ (Appadurai 1986b:22), that is, an intentional disembedding of these *pratima* from their restricted area of circulation, their basic inalienability, and redirecting them to flows of commodities which are driven by hundreds of thousands of actors all over the world, art dealers and collectors. All of these actors are linked in one way or the other to the black market of cultural property (Mackenzie 2005). As the story of the theft and the recovery of the *prasasti* will show, in this case the diversion was not irreversible. Instead, the candidate commodities on the path to the black

market were redirected to their earlier context and were transformed again.

The *prasasti* cannot be only regarded in their sheer materiality (plates of 'copper') with (what is nowadays) almost illegible characters on them. The materiality and quality or properties of these *prasasti* were (and are) perceived and interpreted differently according to those dealing with them. Appadurai emphasizes the peculiarities of knowledge that accompanies these 'things', especially when they enter long-distance transcultural flows. This also applies to the different social and cultural contexts the *prasasti* have passed through over the past nine to ten centuries. Appadurai (1986b:41) differentiates between the knowledge of production that is read into a 'thing' and the knowledge associated with its appropriate 'consumption'. For example, the inhabitants of Julah and Sembiran view their Ida Bhatara's origin as a kind of incarnation of divinities rather than the result of a handicraft process (the work of a smith). Since they were unaware of the meaning of the text written on them, they also did not know about the social and political context in which the copperplates originated. Instead, the copperplates are venerated and regularly revitalized through a ritual 'bathing', anointing and adorning performed by senior members of the *kerama desa*.

The thief, however, saw them as simply material, profane goods – handicrafts – and he did not worry much about who had produced them or how they were produced and for what purpose. Neither did he bother about the villagers and what the theft would mean to them. His knowledge was dominated by what he had learned about the international consumption of such objects, namely that such copperplates (like other 'antiquities') are 'authentic' and can be sold on the black market at a respectable price.

A potential buyer ('consumer') has yet another kind of knowledge. For the buyer, the origin of these antiquities – blurred by the thief and subsequent middlemen by wiping out (white-washing) the name of the place where they were appropriated and how they entered the flow of the international art market – is located somewhere in a distant past and a remote place; such antiquities are seen as having an aura of mysticism (Wiener 2007) rather than of crime (Prott 2009).

It is obvious that the *prasasti* have passed through a variety of social arenas (Appadurai 1986b:15) in the course of their life so far. Accordingly, the significance actors attribute to these 'things' has undergone change. Gell (1998:13) has introduced the Piercean notion of a 'natural sign' as an 'index' to the anthropology of art. The index as 'the visible, physical "thing"' permits one to deal with the cognitive operations which he calls 'the abduction of agency' (Gell 1998:13). What he tries to explain with these terms is, as far as I understand them, that the *prasasti*, for example, have a special 'physiognomy' which evokes different associations or readings in different human actors (a smile is associated with friendly behaviour, and so on); these processes are

the 'cognitive operations'. They constitute the relationship between humans and 'things' or material concretizations, a relationship in which both become actors. Therefore, in the case of the *prasasti*, the understandings (and interest) which the (human) actors have of these copperplate inscriptions with regard to their origin, their manufacture, their assumed destination, or even how they have reached the actual recipient are diverse. They depend on the relationship and the attitude of the human actor to the 'thing' actor. Thus, a worn-out copperplate may index an exotic antiquity to the art collector, a source of money making to the seller, and the visitation of a primordial divinity to members of the ritual community.

With these theoretical considerations to aid analysis of the different stages in the life of the *prasasti*, I now turn to the biography of the *prasasti* in so far as we are able to reconstruct it, or have witnessed and performed as actors ourselves.

*Stage one: The prasasti as objects of historical knowledge about their origin*

To write about the copperplate inscriptions implies a certain attitude towards these cultural documents which, for our purposes, are primarily objects of knowledge. It would be wrong to suggest that the scholarly writing of their biography represents a neutral position. These inscriptions constituted the starting point for my fieldwork in Sembiran. They 'indexed' a unique source of historical knowledge (Soedjatmoko 2006; Vickers 1990) which I wanted to investigate by plotting trajectories from the present to as far back as possible (Hauser-Schäublin 2008:9-70), in spite of the dramatic ecological, economic, and political changes that have taken place since then (Hauser-Schäublin and Ardika 2008).

The so-called 'Sembiran inscriptions' consist of 20 inscribed copperplates containing six royal edicts issued between the tenth and the twelfth centuries; they were first translated by Goris.<sup>5</sup> It was Liefrinck, the Dutch Controleur of Bali, who 'discovered' the copperplates in Sembiran (Brandes 1890:17). It took Liefrinck a whole year to convince the villagers to lend him the copperplates in order to produce copies (rubblings by using Chinese paper), a procedure which apparently was quite difficult since some of the plates are bent. Brandes (1890) made transcriptions in Latin characters of the inscriptions.

<sup>5</sup> Goris (1954) classified them as follows: 'no. 104 Sembiran A I', dated *saka* 844 (AD 922), 'no. 201 Sembiran B', dated *saka* 873 (AD 951), 'no. 209 Sembiran A II', dated *saka* 897 (AD 975), 'no. 351 Sembiran A III', dated *saka* 938 (AD 1016), 'no. 409 Sembiran A IV', dated *saka* 987 (AD 1065), and 'no. 621 Sembiran C', dated *saka* 1103 (AD 1181). These inscriptions have been translated by I Wayan Ardika and Ni Luh Sutjiati Beratha (*Sembiran inscriptions* 2008:229-94); see also Ardika and Beratha 1996, 1998.

He was surprised when he read that the royal edicts on these copperplates were addressed not to Sembiran but to Julah, although they all were kept in Sembiran at that time. However, when they visited the villages in 1965, Goris and Poeger noted that the copperplates had been divided between Julah and Sembiran, each village holding 10 plates. No one seems to remember when or how this division took place (see Ardika 1991:219); it must have occurred sometime between 1880 and 1960, probably around 1900.

Thus, it was through these Western actors, who all arrived in the colonial context, that the *prasasti* became objects of historical knowledge.

The historical knowledge extracted from the *prasasti* can be summarized as follows. These royal edicts were issued by a series of kings whose seat seems to have been somewhere inland, probably near the Batur caldera.<sup>6</sup> These edicts are explicitly addressed to the villagers of Julah. In the earliest inscription (*saka* 844<sup>7</sup>), Julah's environment is described as prosperous with irrigated rice fields, water buffaloes, and forests nearby. The *prasasti* (in the original texts also called *pandaksayanña* or *pangraksayanña*) indicate that Julah was an important harbour settlement at that time. According to the seasonally shifting trade winds, ships from or to India and China anchored at Julah, then a fortified village, *kuta*. As Meenakshisundararajan (2009:168) has pointed out, a remarkable change in the structure of Asian maritime trade took place around AD 1000: the change from pre-emporia trade to emporia trade.<sup>8</sup> Julah was also a trading centre for goods brought by ships from abroad and which were transported inland (and vice versa). The first text (written in Old Javanese and Old Balinese with many Sanskrit words) reveals that Julah had been a highly stratified and complex society. People of different social standing (*candla* or caste) such as Brahmana, nobles (*gusti*), foreigners, *juru kling*, and members of a merchant guild, *banigrama*,<sup>9</sup> were then living in Julah. There were priests

<sup>6</sup> Hauser-Schäublin 2008. Reuter (2002:92) locates one of the royal sites, called Singhamandawa in King Ugrasena's edict (AD 922), on a hilltop near Sukawana.

<sup>7</sup> This date corresponds to AD 922. The *saka* calendar is 78 years behind the standard Western calendar.

<sup>8</sup> The same author characterizes the change as follows: 'Whereas in the phase of pre-emporia trade goods were shipped directly from the place of origin to that of final consumption, the rise of emporia [...] implied new practices of re-export, such as breaking bulk or assorting shipments according to the demands of various ports of call' (Meenakshisundararajan 2009:168). Meenakshisundararajan (2009:168) relates this change in trading pattern to the rise of the Cholas in South India, the Khmer empire of Cambodia, the empire of Champa in today's Vietnam, and China under the Song dynasty. Wisseman Christie (1999) has dealt more specifically with intermaritime trade related to Java and Bali between the tenth and the thirteenth centuries.

<sup>9</sup> On the South Indian merchant guilds, among them one named *manigramam* which seems to be identical with the one, *banigrama*, mentioned in the Sembiran inscription, see Kulke et al. 2009. Karashima (2009:136) describes the *manigramam* as a group of traders descended from Vanika-grāma in Kaverippumpattinam (South India) which merged with another organization of foreign merchants (which also comprised Jews, Muslims and Christians) called *anjuvannam* in the twelfth century.

and hermits (*bhiksu*) of different sects (among them Siwa and Buda, with titles such as *pendeta*, *mpungku cewasogata*, and *rsi*) living nearby.

The twelfth-century inscription makes it clear that Julah was part of a mandalic state, '*Balidwipamandala*', or one of seven states '*sapthanagara*'. To what this '*Balidwipamandala*' or '*sapthanagara*' alludes is not yet clear. As Kulke (2009) has shown in his recent masterly publication, the period of time covered by these inscriptions is an era of far-reaching and intense intermaritime relations.<sup>10</sup> More concretely, with regard to the Indonesian archipelago, the major agents in this area were the Chola Empire, Srivijaya and China. There were also Arab traders from the Middle East. The Cholas and Srivijaya also competed with each other for alliances with the Chinese court.

As the royal edicts indicate, Julah, already an important port on the route of the spice trade one thousand years earlier,<sup>11</sup> must have periodically suffered from plundering by 'pirates'. Kulke's work, however, sheds new light on these raids, which several times – according to the inscriptions – left Julah almost completely devastated. Srivijaya, and especially the South Indian Cholas, tried (and indeed succeeded) to gain control over the intermaritime trade routes between Southeast Asia, India and China. The Cholas raided 14 flourishing port cities on the Malay Peninsula and in Sumatra in 1025 (Kulke 2009:9), and some others probably earlier and others later (Sen 2009:68). G.W. Spencer (1976) even called it a 'politics of plunder' (see Meenakshisundararajan 2009:171). It can safely be assumed – though to my knowledge no ports in Bali are explicitly mentioned – that Julah (as well as other ports and settlements along Bali's north coast) became deeply involved in these turbulences.

Several royal edicts refer to reports by surviving inhabitants of Julah that their fortified settlement had been devastated and looted. Those who survived had fled to the mountains. The king was apparently very much interested in having a well-functioning harbour, since he ordered the refugees to return to the coast and restore the fortified settlement.<sup>12</sup> In exchange, he

<sup>10</sup> In the late tenth century three powerful dynasties rose to power: the Fatimids in Egypt (AD 969), the Song in China (AD 960) and the Cholas (AD 985); through their interaction, they substantially influenced the future of Southeast Asia (Kulke 2009:2).

<sup>11</sup> Ardika's long-term excavations in the coastal area between Julah, Pacung, Bangkah, and Sembiran have revealed evidence of regular contact between India and Bali that are one thousand years earlier than the era documented by the copperplate inscriptions. The most important data yielded by Ardika's excavations, apart from the many goods of Indian origin found in graves (Ardika et al. 1997), are certainly the skeletons of people who were of Indian origin (Lansing et al. 2004; Ardika 2008; Schultz 2008). This proves that the goods traded between India and Bali were not the result of indirect but rather of direct contact by Indians travelling as far as Bali more than 2,000 years ago. In several respects, we can therefore assume continuity in trade relations for a period between the first century BC and the twelfth century AD (Ardika 2008).

<sup>12</sup> It was certainly not the settlement of the villagers that was fortified but probably the warehouses where the merchants' stock was kept and the area where trading took place.



lowered taxes and granted them some special rights.<sup>13</sup>

Thus, from what we can conjecture about the coming into being of the *prasasti* and the context in which they were produced and used, we can say that they were legal documents, contracts between the ruler and the political and religious leaders of a village that was an important port for intermaritime trade and, therefore, a source of wealth. With regard to the materiality of the *prasasti*, the origin of the metal (copper, probably mixed with tin) – in what form, how and by whom it was traded to Bali – is still open to question. The metal was processed and the plates were produced by smiths who were certainly local craftsmen (see also Wisseman Christie 1999:229; Ardika and Beratha 1996:20-1). What we can gather about the materiality of the plates is that they were incised while the surface was still malleable. The royal edicts were written during audiences held on market days near the royal palace (whose names do not allow an unequivocal geographical identification today). Whether these edicts were written directly on the copperplates during the meetings or only later transferred to them, we do not know. From a technical point of view, it is safe to assume the latter. The *prasasti* thus constituted a material link between the centre of power – which is the king – and the periphery – the harbour village of Julah.

These inscribed plates also apparently served as a source of knowledge and power for the villagers, which could be used to prove that they were under the protection of the king, for example, if tax functionaries tried to overreach themselves (see, for example, *prasasti saka* 897). It can be assumed that these edicts were read on fixed dates (similar to the fixed dates today when the *prasasti* are ritually cleansed, although without being read) to recall the duties and rights granted.

#### *Stage two: From legal documents to divinities*

Beyond the last copperplate inscription dated AD 1181, the early history of Julah until the beginning of colonial times disappears in the dark of the past.<sup>14</sup>

<sup>13</sup> I cannot go into details about the elaborate contents of these inscriptions here, but see Hauser-Schäublin and Ardika 2008:229-94.

<sup>14</sup> The most recent copperplate inscriptions in Bali date back to the fourteenth century (see also Goris 1941). There are other types of sources that allow glimpses into the past, such as archaeological and ethnohistorical investigations that allow some historical conclusions (for attempts to shed light on Julah's past, see Hauser-Schäublin and Ardika 2008). Moreover, there are a large number of palm-leaf manuscripts. However, these, in contrast to those made of copper, are ephemeral and need replacement at regular intervals (copying). The contents of such documents can of course be more easily changed or rather adapted to changing social and political conditions. Therefore, a historical dating of palm-leaf manuscripts is difficult in most cases; see also Soedjatmoko 2006; Creese 1991.

As objects of historical knowledge, therefore, these 20 plates are of immeasurable value. The *prasasti* (as part of a very large number of copperplate inscriptions so far identified in Bali) testify to the long history of complex societies in Bali, the significance of intermaritime trade, the network of long-distance relationships this tiny island was part of and, of course, the strong influences from India. Over time, kingdoms to which Julah (as well as other villages along the north coast) belonged changed substantially, alternating with periods in which the villages were completely independent (Hauser-Schäublin 2004). In spite of the dramatic changes with regard to ecology, political organization and culture that must have taken place between the eleventh and the twentieth centuries on the north coast, the *prasasti* were still kept in Julah's neighbouring village of Sembiran in the late twentieth century. However, corresponding with these fundamental social and political changes, the *prasasti* lost their character as legal documents; they were no longer read to recall the conditions of the village's relationship with the centre of power.

In one of the edicts the ruler admonishes the inhabitants of Julah to carefully store the copperplates. It seems that they faithfully continued the practice of ceremonially taking them down, inspecting them, and showing reverence to them – even after their content had lost its significance and after there were no longer economic and political ties that bound Julah to a ruler in the mountains.<sup>15</sup> The treatment of the copperplates seems to have become more elaborate: the plates became divine symbols, like statues and other royal regalia such as a crown and signet rings, kept as sacred heirlooms in the temple. Thus, they were ritually bathed with sanctified water from particular temples. This water was then sprinkled on the congregation. The sipping of this water by the followers symbolized a communion with the divinities and the holy sites where the water came from.

In the mid-nineteenth century, the village elders in Sembiran did not know that these 20 copperplates had inscriptions that were nearly one thousand years old. Liefrinck (1934:323) noted with surprise when he visited the village that all the inhabitants were illiterate. According to Liefrinck, no oral tradition existed there about the origin or the former use of these *prasasti*. The priest (*mangku gede*) of the village temple was in charge of them and he did not dare to keep them in his house or in the village. Instead, the *prasasti* were kept outside the village in a densely forested ravine. They were wrapped in white cloth and hidden in a small cave in a rock. Once a year, he reported, on the occasion of the major festival of the village temple, they were ritually taken out and escorted by bearers with ceremonial lances to the temple. The *pratima* remained in the temple during the festival and the members of the village association presented offerings to them. When the festival ended at mid-

<sup>15</sup> There are no data available as to when the kingdom's seat in the mountains dissolved or when it was moved to the south of Bali; see also Reuter 2002:303-8.

night, they were immediately brought back to the site in the 'wilderness'.<sup>16</sup>

Oral traditions also tell of repeated plundering of Julah in the centuries immediately prior to Dutch colonial control.<sup>17</sup> In the early nineteenth century the inhabitants of Julah were again living up in the mountain settlement of Upit (not far from Sembiran).<sup>18</sup> While the refugees lived there, they held their monthly meetings at *tilem* (moonless night) in the village temple of Sembiran together with the *krama desa* (village association) of Sembiran. Sembiran had its own meeting, only a day later (*patipanten*). The refugees celebrated all important rituals held in Sembiran, and all copperplates were in the custody of Sembiran.<sup>19</sup>

Today, the inhabitants of both villages still consider and treat the copperplates as Ida Bhatara, as deified ancestors. At the same time, most of the villagers now know that the copperplates bear ancient inscriptions. The two types of knowledge are not perceived as conflicting. In Julah, the copperplates are ritually cleansed during several annual temple festivals. In Sembiran, they are still kept in the cave Lieftrinck described and ritually escorted to the temple for the annual festival and venerated there. Their veneration contributes to the well-being and prosperity of people, animals and crops.

### *Stage three: The theft of the pratima and a search by spiritual means*

Over time, cultural and historical knowledge about the *prasasti* entered worldwide circulation. Moreover, these cultural products, which Western scholars considered primarily as profane material 'things', indexed their potential as

<sup>16</sup> Lieftrinck also reported that other sacred treasures were kept in the small cave: 150 pieces of metal (coins), two heavy gold rings and a signet ring with an elephant imprinted on it. Additionally, golden instruments for preparing betel nut for chewing, as well as arm and foot rings were kept there too (Lieftrinck quoted in Brandes 1890:18-24). Except for some metal coins and bars, all the golden ornaments and tools have disappeared.

<sup>17</sup> This plundering apparently had a different social and economic background from that of the era of the *prasasti* document (Kleinen and Osseweijer 2010).

<sup>18</sup> Today Upit is called Batu Gambir; many Muslim immigrants live there. Upit is the name of an area in which a sacred well is located. Upit is probably identical with 'Wwit' as mentioned in the *prasasti* dated *saka* 897. Archaeological evidence seems to support a long settlement history there (Tim Jurusan Arkeologi 2005).

<sup>19</sup> Both villages have, as my ethnohistorical research shows (Hauser-Schäublin 2008), a shared past. Even today they describe their relationship in terms of cousins; intermarriage is prohibited among them. These joint meetings of Sembiran and Julah ceased when the refugees from Julah decided that it was safe enough to live near the coast again. They returned to the coastal area probably in the late nineteenth century and constructed the village at the site where it stands today. Only some time after Julah had resettled the coastal site did the two villages divide the plates. Since then, 10 are kept in Sembiran and 10 in Julah. Although the division of the copperplates – then certainly a highly ritual procedure that must have taken place during the major temple festival – is not remembered, the return to the coastal settlement is still celebrated annually (Hauser-Schäublin 2008:18).

rare antiquities to institutions and individuals who were interested in collecting them. Therefore, the *prasasti* started new multiple 'careers' and forged new networks of potential actors all over the world, coexisting with local actors to whom they indexed different things.

In the second half of the twentieth century the villagers became aware that their sacred heirlooms were objects of desire for outsiders. The inalienability of the *pratima* existed only from the villagers' perspective. For outsiders – art collectors and their suppliers – *prasasti* were commodities whose price was even higher if they were antique and originated in a 'sacred cultural context'. As a consequence, the members of Julah's *kerama desa* installed a strongbox in a shrine to prevent theft, that is, diversion from the religious context. At the same time, the pressure of the continuously growing international art market increased, since the supply of cultural valuables, which local people had sold more or less voluntarily in the earlier decades, had dried up.

The story of the theft of the *pratima* begins, as I Wayan Terang's report documents, on 29 August 2002. He had just come back from the provincial capital, Denpasar, when he, as the village head (*kepala desa*), was informed that the *prasasti* had disappeared. When he hastened to the temple, he was asked by temple officials to get tracker dogs. Through a villager who lived in Denpasar, they managed to get into contact with the police there. However, the policemen said that after 10 hours, the smell of the perpetrator could no longer be identified by the dogs, and since the exact time the thief had broken into the temple was unknown, there was probably no point in using such dogs. The villagers were not satisfied with this answer. Wayan therefore immediately set off for Denpasar, and he returned late at night with three policemen and two tracker dogs. They spent several hours searching the hall in the temple from where the thief had stolen the *pratima*, while hundreds of villagers and policemen from the district office watched them. No trace was found. The villagers gave the policemen some payment for their efforts and the expenses they had incurred in providing the dogs. On 30 August, Wayan went on his own initiative to Banyuwangi in East Java to meet with a 'paranormal', that is, a seer. This person told him that three people had been involved in the theft: one Balinese of Islamic faith and two outsiders. The goods (*pratima*) were still in the hands of the Balinese, but within nine days they would be sold to a Westerner. However, Wayan was disappointed when he returned back home since some of the crucial questions he had posed had remained unanswered. On the next day, accompanied by two other village officials, he went to East Bali near the Gunung Agung to consult another 'paranormal'. This person, an elderly woman, said that there were three people, none of them members of Julah village, who were involved in the theft.<sup>20</sup> She said that they had broken

<sup>20</sup> After a theft that had taken place a couple of years before, rumours had spread that members of their own village were involved in the theft. This almost led to a break-up of the village.

in from the eastern side of the temple and left with the stolen goods from the western side. The spiritual advisor admonished them to be patient since they would recover the sacred heirlooms; they needed to ask for the gods' blessings. The three men from Julah were disappointed when they left her. Back home, they decided to go to Tianyar to visit yet another 'paranormal'. This person was said to possess a kind of crystal ball through which it should be possible to see the thief. They went there on 8 September and were able to have a look at the crystal ball, but the facial features were blurred. They were disappointed. They had only received some holy water which should 'bind' or 'tie' the thief so that he would be unable to sell the stolen goods.

On 13 September, I Wayan Terang went with the same two men to Candi Kuning near Lake Beratan to consult a Muslim 'paranormal'. This man came to Julah himself on one of the following nights and stayed until midnight. He told the villagers that within nine days the perpetrator would turn himself in. Yet the nine days elapsed without any result, and the villagers had already spent a substantial amount of money in their efforts to track down the thief. Nevertheless, during the meeting of the village/temple association, the leaders announced that any further search for the *pratima* had to be paid for by the individuals themselves, but those who managed to recapture the sacred heirlooms would be reimbursed by the *desa adat*. They further informed the villagers that some of the temple shrines and racks in front of them where offerings were deposited had to be pulled down and newly rebuilt.

On Sunday 10 November another villager in the company of a policeman from the district office came to see I Wayan Terang. They told him that they had heard of the capture of a thief originating from a neighbouring village<sup>21</sup> by the police in Kintamani district. In this district, he had been accused of breaking into several temples. I Wayan Terang decided to leave immediately for Kintamani, taking with him other men and also a policeman from his own sub-district (Tejakula). When they arrived there, the men learned that the thief had already been handed over to the police of the district capital (Bangli). Correspondingly, they proceeded to Bangli accompanied by policemen from Kintamani; they arrived in Bangli late in the afternoon. A heated discussion ensued, because the policemen claimed that no such thief was in custody. However, finally the group was given the name of a 64-year-old man from one of Julah's neighbouring villages who was remanded in custody in Bangli. They were allowed to meet and question him.<sup>22</sup> He finally admitted to having broken into the temple and also to having taken off with a small wooden box, assuming that some precious antiquities were in it. Not far from Julah, the prisoner explained, he opened the box and realized that there were

<sup>21</sup> In order to protect the village's reputation, the name of the village is not given.

<sup>22</sup> As it turned out, the policemen used other means apart from words to make him answer their questions.

10 sheets of 'iron' in it, each covered with Balinese characters. He also admitted that these goods were no longer in Bali but had been transported to the house of a man in an East Javanese village.

*Stage four: The police hunt and the recovery of the stolen goods*

The group departed late at night. On their way back home, they decided to leave the next day for Java in order to prevent the sale of these valuables. They went to Singaraja, the capital of their own district (Buleleng), and informed the police there of their plans. One policeman from Buleleng and three policemen from Tejakula accompanied them when they left Singaraja at 10 o'clock in the morning. Before departure, they had prayed and asked for the blessing of the divinities who resided in Julah's temple. They arrived at about 10:30 at night at the police station at Bondowoso, East Java. They explained what had happened and asked for support and authorization to inspect the house in the village where the valuables were thought to be kept.

The three men from Julah, three policemen from Tejakula, one policeman from Buleleng, and four policemen from Bondowoso arrived at the house at one o'clock at night. They met three women in the village whom they interrogated and one man who just came out of a house armed with a sickle. Since the police in Bondowoso had warned them of heightened tensions in the area, they decided to take some precautions. When they approached the house, they surrounded it; some men crouched at the sides, some at the back and some in the front. The policemen had their weapons ready for firing. In the meantime, many men and women, all armed with sickles, had approached them. When the police rushed into the building which the thief had pointed out, they could not find the *prasasti*, but fortunately they found the man whom the thief had named as an accomplice. However, this man, as the subsequent interrogation at the police station in Bondowoso showed,<sup>23</sup> did not know the whereabouts of the hiding place.<sup>24</sup>

Wayan, still afraid that the valuables were somewhere close by and could therefore be handed over to a middleman for sale, urged one of the policeman from Tejakula to call the police in Bangli and ask them to bring the thief to the phone so that his accomplice could talk to him and inquire where he had hidden the copperplates. This finally happened and the thief informed his Javanese partner that he had hidden the antiquities in a cow barn. At about 3 o'clock in the morning, the group, accompanied by other policemen, returned to the scene of action. Since they feared the worst from the angry

<sup>23</sup> The interrogation was transferred to the police station since the situation with the armed villagers around was about to escalate.

<sup>24</sup> The beating-up of the man did not result in any further information.

villagers, the police from Bondowoso held their pistols ready to fire and ordered the villagers to hold up their hands. The policemen accompanied the accomplice to the cow barn. I Wayan followed, although the local people had threatened during the earlier visit to kill him if he turned up again. As soon as he entered the barn and saw a bundle wrapped in white cloth and covered with plastic above the head of a calf, he collapsed and began sobbing. Several local women rushed forward to console him and led him out of the barn saying, 'Sir [*bapak tinggi*], don't cry any longer, otherwise people will think that something is wrong.' Some other people started to cry as well. The villagers then recognized that there had been a good reason why the policemen and the Balinese came in the middle of the night to their village and were searching one of their houses; they were sorry for the distrust they had displayed earlier. At about 5 o'clock in the morning, the group left the village and reached Banyuwangi at dawn. They took one of the first ferries to Bali without even taking a rest. On the other side of the strait there was a man from Julah already waiting for them.

*Stage five: Ambiguity between pratima and corpus delicti*

At about 11 o'clock in the morning of 12 November 2002, they arrived at the police station in Singaraja. They were told that the stolen goods had been recovered thanks to the police searching a house. The *corpus delicti* were therefore first to be left with the police. However, the delegates from Julah implored the officials in charge to let them take back their sacred goods to the temple immediately. After their wish was granted, they left and arrived at 2 o'clock in the afternoon at the regional temple of Ponjok Batu<sup>25</sup> where they stopped and discussed how to proceed. Two and a half hours later, about 40 members of the village association (*kerama adat*) arrived in order to ritually escort (*mendak*) the *prasasti* back to the temple. When the procession arrived at the school building on the main road just outside the village, Jero Kubayan Garsim, one of the ritual leaders, took over the sacred goods and carried them on his shoulder, while other ritual elders had brought offerings to welcome the Ida Bhatara back home. At the main entrance of the temple (*kuri agung*), other ritual elders welcomed them; they were all waiting for Jero Sidemen, the (elected) *penyarikan desa adat*. He had not yet arrived in the village because he worked as a teacher in Singaraja. Therefore his representative, Jero Rasta, took over the *penyarikan's* role. After some discussion, it was decided that the *prasasti* should be ritually seated (*linggih*) in the temple before the sun set. If there was an obstacle (meaning: if a death had occurred and the village

<sup>25</sup> The temple of Ponjok Batu, situated above the cliffs right on the edge of the sea, is the most important sea sanctuary of Julah.

was therefore unclean, *sebel*) in the village, the *prasasti* had to be placed in the forecourt and the *kerama desa* had to perform a vigil there.<sup>26</sup> At 6 o'clock in the evening, Jero Penyarikan finally arrived and proceeded directly to the shrine (*bale pepyasaan*) in the mountainward western corner of the temple where the senior ritual leaders (*jro kedulu*), the policemen from Tejakula and hundreds of villagers had already assembled. Jero Penyarikan asked a policeman about how the stolen goods had been recovered. While this uniformed policeman was recounting the whole story he fell into a trance (he actually lost consciousness) and had to be revived with sanctified water. This trance was taken as an indication that the gods acknowledged the reunification with the material manifestation of Ida Bhatara and were present in the temple again. Only when the policeman had recovered consciousness did Jero Penyarikan distribute sanctified water to the community. He also changed the decision taken earlier and determined that the *prasasti* should be seated in the depository (*gedong simpen*) in the forecourt of the temple. Any taboos linked to 'obstacles' were lifted until the ritual process of reintegrating the *prasasti* into the temple – and therefore the transformation of 'antiquities' back into *pratima* – was completed. During this whole period, 20 members of the *kerama desa* were appointed to hold a vigil every night.

On 14 November, the policemen from Tejakula sent a message that the *pratima* were needed as *corpus delicti* to confront the thief's accomplice from Java. Once again, the *penyarikan* was still teaching and the senior ritual leader did not dare to allow the *pratima* to be carried off. Finally the *penyarikan* arrived and after some discussion the *pratima* were sent to Tejakula, accompanied by about 15 senior members of the *kerama desa*. They only spent half an hour there while the suspect from Java was confronted with the *corpus delicti*; they then returned home with their valuables. The *prasasti* were placed at the same site as before.

A couple of months later, on 24 April 2003, the police of Tejakula again invited representatives of Julah to a meeting. They wanted the *corpus delicti* to be sent to Bangli where the thief was held in custody. However, the representatives hesitated because they did not dare to consent. On 27 April, they held a meeting in Julah in order to discuss the issue with all members of the *kerama desa*. They decided to send the *pratima* to Bangli if necessary. However, beforehand, an oath had to be taken and offerings had to be brought to the temple. On 5 May, the *pratima* were sent to Bangli in the company of about 20 representatives from Julah. There, the thief was confronted with the *pratima* and all the delegates from Julah were able to see his face. Before they went back home, they inquired how they could circumvent another presentation of their highly

<sup>26</sup> In contrast to many other villages in Bali, the village temple remains closed if a death has occurred; for a certain period of time after the death, nobody is allowed to enter the temple and all rituals are postponed.



valued sacred heirlooms as *corpus delicti* since the *pratima* needed to be ritually cleansed every time they were brought back. They were advised to meet the head of the district of Buleleng (*bupati*) and discuss the matter with him.

On 1 July 2003, the final cleansing and revitalization ritual of the *prasasti* together with all other sacred heirlooms took place in the village temple. This ritual performed during one of the most important annual temple festivals was accompanied by a great number of offerings (including animals). The *pratima*, as Jero Penyarikan Sidemen explained while we viewed the video that had been commissioned as documentation, were dipped into five vessels of sanctified water each originating from a different temple and thoroughly rubbed.<sup>27</sup> Several journalists, even from the national TV station, arrived to witness this event and inquired about the story of the theft and the recovery of the *prasasti*. Through this ritual, the copperplates became deified beings (*Ida Bhatara*) again and were not supposed to leave the temple again.

### Comment

In looking back at this detective story, the extent to which these material objects triggered human actions becomes clear: how people and representatives of institutions who would otherwise never have met were brought together, and the different meanings these things indexed to them. An example of this is the attitude of the villagers in East Java, who were prepared to beat up or even kill the group, including the policemen, who had invaded their village in search of the stolen goods. Another example is during the process of prosecution when the *prasasti* became *corpus delicti* – a legal document in a completely new sense – with which the perpetrators had to be confronted.

The story also shows how the ‘enclaved’ objects were diverted and started to enter channels leading to an impenetrable worldwide black market for art from where there would be hardly any chance of return. The recovery of the copperplates, however, also demonstrates how the process of diversion was reversed and how the villagers achieved a re-enclaving when they succeeded in keeping their valuables for themselves and were no longer compelled to present them as evidence. In fact, what the ritual elders of Julah wanted to achieve (and finally succeeded in achieving) was to break off the circulation of the *prasasti* as a commodity. They no longer wanted to have them circulated between different institutions as material things as if the *pratima* were comparable to other stolen goods such as a motorbike, chair or wallet. By contrast, the *prasasti* needed to be given back the status they had before as inalienable

<sup>27</sup> The sanctified water (*tirtha*) came from Pura Ulun Danu Batur (Kintamani), Pura Jati (Kintamani), Pura Ponjok Batu, the holy well at Upit (the earlier refugee settlement), and the well near the shore in Julah territory.

valuables and as gods, as Ida Bhatara or *pratima*. This change in status – the process of re-enclaving – was finally achieved when the divinities entered the policeman who fell into a trance and through the final cleansing ritual.

*Glimpses into the thief's biography and motives*

I visited Julah again in September 2003, two months after the reintegration of the *prasasti* among the temple's other *pratima*.<sup>28</sup> While I was there, I carried out further investigation about the theft. Accompanied by I Wayan Terang, I tried to meet the culprit who was in custody at that time in Bangli in order to learn more about his life. The prison warden did not allow us to meet him. However, the warden himself was willing to talk about the inmate. He described him as a harmless man whose belief in the Balinese gods had become 'thin', who had converted to Islam and was now fasting (it was Ramadan). After divorcing his first wife, he had married a (Muslim) woman from Java; this woman had not visited him since his incarceration. The warden further explained that this man's economic situation had worsened over the years, because of which he had begun to break into temples, hoping to find jewellery; he was apparently surprised to find copperplates in the box in which he had assumed golden ornaments were kept. The prison warden informed us that the one-year prison sentence would soon be over, and that the man would then have to face another trial in Buleleng.

In 2004, when I again visited Julah, I learned that in the meantime the same man had been sentenced in Buleleng district and was kept in prison in Singaraja. Thanks to I Wayan Terang, I was at last able to meet this man in prison and talk to him in the visitors' room. This room, an open space leading into a kind of courtyard, was filled with loud music, men walking around, some of whom were painting the wall; a female visitor with a small child on her arm came into the room and was soon joined by an inmate. Another woman entered; she too was met by a man and they started chatting. These meetings took place in the same room where I Wayan Terang, my husband and I were also sitting trying to communicate in a rather informal way with the thief.<sup>29</sup> What irritated me when we greeted each other was the

<sup>28</sup> Another *pratima* had been stolen earlier (in 1997): a golden crown said to be a royal gift to Julah's temple a time long ago. In fact, the original crown had been stolen in the 1970s and the exemplar recently stolen was a replacement. But since it had already undergone all the rituals of cleansing and reintegration, it was treated like an original. After the theft (never solved), another replacement was commissioned. This exemplar was sanctified and integrated into the temple's sacred heirlooms during the same temple festival as the *prasasti*.

<sup>29</sup> I have to add that the thief apparently did not perceive this interview as 'informal'. I Wayan Terang was clearly recognizable as a state official since he wore his official dress. In retrospect I think that the thief reacted to our questions in the same way as he did when he was interrogated by the police or the judge.

quick glance this man threw at the thin gold necklace I wore. He fixed on it intensely, then diverted his eyes only to fix on it again and again throughout our talk. The prisoner reiterated what he had apparently already told the judges, namely that he had admitted his wrongful deed and was sorry for it; that he could not explain from his present perspective how he could have done something wrong like committing a theft. He told his story briefly:

'I [here he gave his Hindu-Balinese name and not his Muslim name which he had adopted upon conversion] am a native of XY village.<sup>30</sup> I was born on 1 September 1952. I have five siblings. All of them are married. I went to school in this village and later in Singaraja where I successfully completed SMN, the Economic School, in 1970. I married for the first time in 1974. I have four children and three grandchildren. But the children rarely come to see me, perhaps once a month. Earlier in my life I was a person responsible for *adat* [*kelian adat*] in my village. I was *klian adat* from 1992 to 1999. In 1999 I gave it up. In 1998 I married once again, a woman from Java.'

I then began to ask him questions:

BHS: As *klian adat* you were responsible for the customary life of the village, all rituals and temples included. What about your belief at that time? Was it already thin?

A: There was no question of a thin belief. Religion is religion, be it Hinduism or Islam. Indeed, how could I commit such a thing?

BHS: Thus, you still believed in the power of the gods in those days?

A: I still believe in them ...

BHS: ...although you converted to Islam?

A: I still hold them in high esteem. I simply cannot understand how I was able to commit such a thing. I believe in them. I never wanted to do harm to another village.

BHS: When did you think of appropriating sacred goods from another village in order to sell them?

A: 'Sacred goods' (Indonesian: *barang sakral*) – we call them antique goods (Indonesian: *barang antik*). But as I said, I cannot explain how I was able to commit such a bad thing. I never planned a theft. I never had contact with anybody in this regard; I swear that I thought I could find gold, nothing else. I did not think of anything else.

BHS: Usually there is a certain social milieu which favours such deeds.

A: No, not in my case. I alone had these ideas. I was confused. I knew about the international art market [which I had mentioned before the actual interview] with its extraordinary prices. But I did not know where and to whom such things could be sold.

<sup>30</sup> Although this man did not object to being photographed and to the interview being taped, I shall – in contrast to Indonesian custom – refrain from calling him by his personal name or naming his village.

BHS: But in order to sell them one needs connections.

A: Yes. But when I had these goods I was confused because I did not know what to do with them.

BHS: Did you ever meet somebody to whom you could have sold these goods?

A: Not once, up to the present I have never met any such person.

BHS: When did you break into a temple for the first time?

A: Only after I had given up the office of *klian adat*. It was in Ceningan (Dausa), near the village I come from. My father was a village head (*kepala desa*) from the year 1955 and also *bendesa adat*. He was a rich man. But how could he have become so rich? I cannot understand it; I still cannot understand it.

BHS: If we do something bad for the first time, usually a certain feeling sets in which we never forget.

A: I cannot remember. It was as if the devil had entered me. I did not feel anything. I forgot myself, like a drunken man...

BHS: What did you steal in Dausa?

A: A *keris*.

BHS: Did you sell it?

A: No, it was returned to the village.

BHS: And the *keris* from Sembiran?

A: I don't know anything about them. [...]

BHS: Therefore, all antique goods have been returned to the places from where you took them?

A: Yes, all of them.

BHS: What did you feel when you broke into the temple of Julah and found the *prasasti*?

A: I have already told you, it was as if I was drunk, I forgot myself. Afterwards I felt sorry about it.

BHS: Do you still own land in your village?

A: No, all has gone, except the lot where my house is.

BHS: Why has all the land gone? Did you sell it?

A: No, I was a gambler, cockfights. I also had children whom I sent to school [spending money on school fees]. All of them could go to school and get a professional education.

BHS: But formerly you were a peasant?

A: Yes, in my home village and also in Java.

BHS: Yes, but in XY village the soil is good, coffee and cacao can easily be grown. Do you own land in Java?

A: Yes, my wife owns land. It is the same type of land; it is fertile.

BHS: Do you ever consider going back to your home village?

A: It is possible.

BHS: Probably the performance of rituals will be a precondition to settle there again?

A: According to the Hindu religion, somebody who returns to his home village has to undergo a ceremony called *prescita*. This ceremony is also held for those who have converted to Islam and then convert back to Hinduism.

BHS: Do you consider yourself a Muslim?

A: Yes, I am still a Muslim.

BHS: Did you convert to Islam because you wanted to marry a Muslim woman?

A: No, although she is a Muslim she never asked me to convert. [...]

BHS: You told me that in earlier times you were a gambler. Perhaps that is similar to being addicted to alcohol. Did you gamble in your own village?

A: Yes, in my village. I also drank alcohol.

BHS: For how long will you be in prison?

A: For another year. I came here seven months ago.

BHS: That is, you came directly from Bangli.

BHS: When you appropriated the antique goods from Julah, did you first take them to your own village?

A: No, I took them to the village of a friend of mine, not too far away from my own village.

BHS: Did your friend know about what you did?

A: Yes. He had accompanied me before. I met him in Java.

BHS: Therefore there were two of you who broke into the temple?

A: There were three of us.

BHS: Did the others know about how the valuables were to be sold?

A: No, they did not know anything.

BHS: Have your accomplices already been caught?

A: Yes, one of them [the man was captured during the search in Java].

BHS: Has he ever sold any antiquities?

A: No.

BHS: How did these Javanese come to Bali? I wonder why they were not afraid to come to another province.

A: They just came by ordinary bus. But, as I said, I cannot understand how things could happen the way they did; how I could associate myself with these other men. I never wanted to have antiquities, only gold. I came across these antique goods only accidentally.

BHS: But how could you go to Dausa and Julah [both rather poor villages] if you did not have something particular in mind? Did you know that antiquities were kept there?

A: We just tried.

BHS: And what about in your own village? Did you ever try something there too?

A: No, I did not dare to.

BHS: And when your sentence is over, where will you go, to Java?

A: Perhaps. My wife would like to come here. My children are living here, two boys and two girls, and another girl in Java; she is four years old.

BHS: But if you own only a house lot and no fields in your native village, what would you live on?

A: All my children are working. My two sons work in a workshop for motorbikes. One of my daughters is a seamstress, and the other is a shop assistant.

BHS: Does that mean that your children will support you?

A: Yes, my children have visited me and have begged me to come back to them; they cried. So I will stay here and not return to Java.

BHS: It is a good thing when children are so attached to their father.

A: Yes, I am lucky in this respect. My elder brother and his children have also asked me to stay here. I myself have begged them to be allowed to return.

BHS: Do you still have a shrine for your ancestors (*sanggah*) at home where you pray?

A: Yes, of course. I still pay homage to them.

BHS: If you return to your village, will this be possible without any difficulties?

A: When I return I will ask for pardon. I will present offerings to the village, I am ready to face sanctions. I have a large family there; I will not be alone. I have sold all the land my father once owned. He was a rich man. Today, all my brothers are well off. They will not let me down.

This life history, as far as the interview allows us to sketch it, illuminates two aspects that are important for understanding the thief's motives: he is (or was) a gambler who is greedy for wealth, to appropriate it as quickly as possible. He had gambled away all his property, mainly land he had inherited from his father. At the same time, he asks himself how his father had managed to become a rich man. The way he repeatedly mentions his father's wealth suggests that he assumes his father possessed some (magical) knowledge of how to become rich – knowledge he did not pass on to his son.

The other issue is his conversion to Islam. He does not explain the reasons for this major change; he even denies that he had converted after he met a Muslim woman from Java whom he was going to marry. His conversion – he had been a ritual specialist in Hindu-Balinese religion in his own village – cannot be understood fully since he does not give any explanation in this regard. But it is evident that without such a turning-away from the religion in which he had been socialized, he would have been unable to carry out break-ins into temples. The term this man uses for describing the stolen objects corresponds with his conversion. He emphasizes that he had not stolen sacred heirlooms (which in fact were village gods); instead he insists on using the term antique goods. This shows that these 'antiquities' index something profane for him: a category of commodities which can be sold at a respectable price. But at the same time, he denies any connection to dealers or the black market for art. In contrast to his accomplices, he apparently had kept silent about these sales avenues and their middlemen during the trial. In spite of his insistence on the

*prasasti* being commodities, and his repeated confession of the wrong he had committed (theft of other people's property), he claims that he still maintains a (Hindu) shrine for his ancestors in his home village and worships them there.

*Postscript: The fatal end*

When I visited Bali again in 2006, I came across a newspaper report (*Bali Post*, 26-7-2006) which runs as follows (my translation):

Dozens of members of village X [name of the village mentioned], Kintamani sub-district, reported to the district police in Bangli. They insisted on meeting the head of the police in Bangli [...]. They thanked him for the accomplishment of the police in apprehending the thief, a native of their own village [here the full name of this man and his village of origin are given], of their *pratima*, shooting him twice in his legs. The villagers explained that they were not yet satisfied with the legal measures taken so far. The culprit had already stolen the *pratima* four times from their temple and he had been convicted for this crime only once; that is, during one and the same trial. When he got out of prison he broke in again: thus in total he had broken into their temple four times since 2001. The villagers asked the head of the police not to be too lenient with the culprit. The punishment would need to correspond with the severity of the crime committed. If the judicial apparatus was not able to impose a heavy penalty, the police should hand him over to them. They could then have him judged by the people so that the punishment would match the severity of his deeds.

The villagers further asked to be allowed to meet the culprit, who was in hospital in Bangli [due to his bullet wounds], in person. The head of the police finally agreed and allowed the villagers to meet the culprit, but only one at a time under police supervision.

The head of the police had complied with this wish of the villagers in order to keep them calm and make them trust the legal procedures. He also promised to make sure that the thief would be heavily punished. He made it clear that it was impossible for him to hand the culprit over to the people and their own justice since the police had to follow the rule of law [...].

In September 2010, I called I Wayan Terang from Europe and inquired about the whereabouts of the thief. He told me that he had died about two years earlier. Shortly after he had been released from prison he once more broke into a temple. He was caught by the police and shot dead during the skirmish.

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Ritual elders (*kubayan*) cleansing the *prasasti* in the village temple, Julah (photo: by the author)



The stolen *prasasti* were hidden in a cow barn in an East Javanese village (photo: I Wayan Terang)



The 10 copperplates owned by Julah after their recovery (photo: I Wayan Terang)



The policeman fell in trance when he started to give account of the hunt for the stolen *prasasti* and their recovery to the *klian adat* (right) in Julah's village temple (photo: I Wayan Terang)