

No doubt my enthusiasm for the rich, heterogeneous historical material, has been (and still is) an important factor for attempting to write such a book at all. But what really drove me to my desk were all those Balinese who told me what they know about 'their' temple, 'their' history and that of others – those people with whom I had lengthy discussions about innumerable details and the larger regional relations and historical contexts and about my interpretations of them. They entrusted their knowledge to me with request to publish and thereby preserve it. They stand in the vortex of rapid, all-encompassing cultural change and look on powerlessly as their cultural heritage and their past irretrievably 'speeds away'.

This transitoriness is connected with the type of sources I employed: the temple grounds, their spatial organization, and the style and composition of their altars and shrines, to which gods or divine ancestors or other Balinese sanctuaries they were dedicated – their local representation, so to speak. In the course of renovations, most temples today undergo significant alteration, above all by the addition of concrete and glazed ceramic tiles. This hinders the legibility of the temple as an historical structure. Renovations therefore mean a loss of history, in the sense that its evidence – the most important material for this study – are so radically changed that their architectural 'historicity' is taken from them.

I would like to add a further remark, one I resolved not to pass over in silence as is usually done, and because it is essential for the understanding of the present study:

This book contains the practices and conditions of scholarship, in the sense that it analyzes the temples and their rituals, especially with regard to their spatial, architectural, historical and sociological aspects, and it interprets the results in this context.

Anthropology forms an inseparable part of the Western, rationalistic-materialistic conception of the world. The type and composition of the studies undertaken within its scope mean that anthropology also contributes indirectly to the verification of this conception of the world. In its self-comprehension, however, anthropology proceeds from a principal openness – by definition, rejecting prejudices which might surface in the study of foreign groups and pleading for thick descriptions and understanding. But all these claims and demands end at the point where a culture reaches the threshold to the transcendental. What lies beyond – and in Bali we find an extremely thin, veil-like border which shifts constantly and may open at any time – anthropology a priori treats with the reticent arrogance of one who knows better: "To ask, as I once did, a man who has been Rangda whether he thinks she is real is to leave oneself open to the suspicion of idiocy" (Geertz 1973a:118).

'Religion' is generally portrayed by anthropology as a mirror-like wall reflecting various images of the culture in which it is found. For generations, anthropologists have accustomed themselves to dissecting it and analyzing it on all possible levels and by all methods available: