A NEW TEMPLE AND AN OLD MYTH

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The New Temple of the title of this study is the Pita Maha, a remarkably ‘modern’ association of Balinese artists, set up for purposes of quality control and orderly marketing in 1936; the Old Myth refers mainly to the well-known stories of origin for the new art which began to flourish around Ubud in Gianyar some five years earlier; the whole title is meant to evoke both the time and place of Bali in the thirties through allusion to the academic article by Gregory Bateson, An Old Temple and a New Myth, and as well to the earliest discussion of the new art by W.F. Stutterheim, A New Shoot on an Old Stem. I cannot deny that there is also a temptation to spread some confusion about what is either ‘old’ or ‘new’. There are further resonances. Claire Holt’s Living Traditions chapter in her book on Indonesian art subtitled Continuities and Change maintains the idea of a persistence of the past through current events, while James A. Boon’s rereading of the relics of Between-the-wars-Bali is reminder of the adventure involved in trying to interpret anything at all