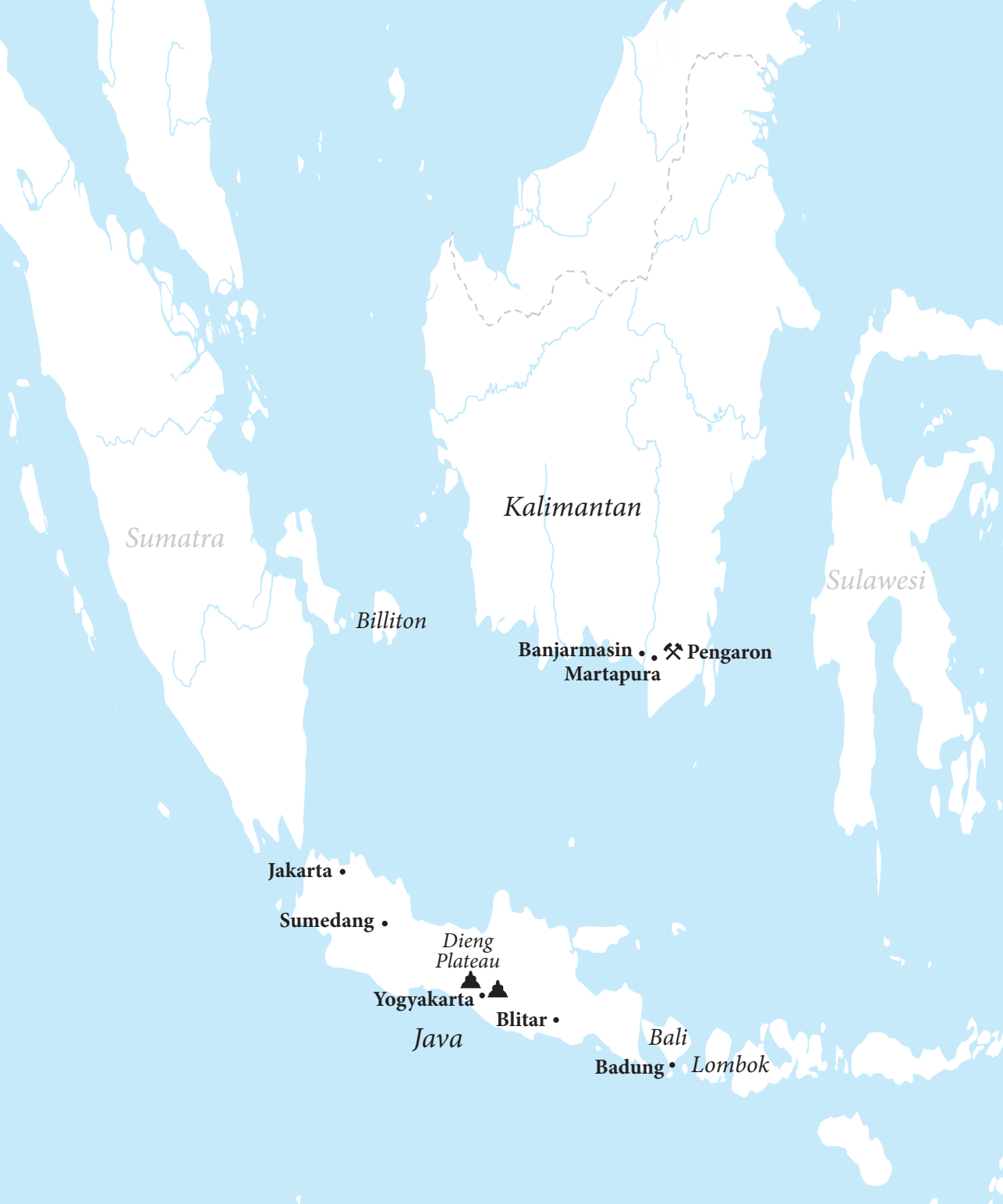




INDONESIA



Sumatra

Kalimantan

Sulawesi

Billiton

Banjarmasin • • ⚡ Pengaron  
Martapura

Jakarta •

Sumedang •

Dieng  
Plateau

Yogyakarta •

Blitar •

Java

Bali

Badung • Lombok

- Town
- ▲ Temple
- ⚡ Mine

Scale 1:18.000.000 Gall-Peters Projection



# The Provenance of a Silver Vajrasattva and the Loudon Family

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Provenance research into various colonial objects, as undertaken in the Pilot Project Provenance Research on Objects of the Colonial Era (PPROCE), endeavours to map the entire lifetime of an object, from its creation to its present existence. The aim of such investigations is often to determine whether an object has changed hands unlawfully.

In the mid-nineteen-eighties, the anthropologist Igor Kopytoff pointed out that a biographical approach to objects – with the idea that, like people, objects have a life story – provides insights into the social relationships and historical social contexts in which their production, exchange and use, and hence the giving of meaning to an object took place.<sup>1</sup> Such an approach reveals something about the meaning of the object, and also about the functioning of those societies and the relationships of people in which those meanings came into being.

Research into the provenance of colonial heritage consequently offers more insights than the answer to that one question about the legality of the acquisition alone. At the same time, it has its limitations – certainly when it focuses exclusively on historical source material. After all, the sources on which people have traditionally largely relied in order to map that provenance were produced by Europeans; they are writ-

< Fig. 1  
*Vajrasattva*, East Java, c. 975-c. 1025. Silver statuette with a bronze pedestal, 13,5 x 7,7 x 6,5 cm. Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam, inv. no. AK-RAK-1970-2.

ten colonial sources, such as letters exchanged between collectors about their collecting activities, documentation from museums founded in Europe and literature penned by European academics. As a result, such research presents a predominantly European perspective that may leave other insights neglected.

By focusing on a small, silver *vajrasattva* from Java, now in the collection of the Rijksmuseum in Amsterdam (fig. 1), I want to show how much historical provenance research into this figurine tells us about its colonial collectors, about the meaning of collecting within a particular social group and about the development of knowledge in Western society about the colonized population's cultures, and how that perspective ignores other points of view.

## The Silver Vajrasattva and the Loudon Family

The silver *vajrasattva* is not a large piece: the figurine, which is now dated to the late tenth or early eleventh century CE,<sup>2</sup> is only 13,5 centimetres tall and is mounted loosely, but secured by a pin, on a beautifully tooled bronze base. The Buddhist *vajrasattva* is a *bodhisattva*, which is someone who seeks 'bodhi', awareness or awakening. The little figure sits on a lotus throne and wears a loincloth around its hips, while its arms,

ankles, ears and neck are adorned with jewels. The hair, in which a tiara has been placed, is gathered up. The eyes are lowered as though they are looking at the right hand which is held before the heart. The left hand rests on the hip.

Iconographically, a vajrasattva is usually depicted with a *vajra* (bolt of lightning) in its right hand and a *ghanta* (bell) in its left. This is not the case here. As we note later in the article, various reasons have been put forward for their

absence over time; it may have to do with the changing art-historical and cultural-historical meanings that the figurine has undergone in a Western context.

There is no consensus about the original function of figurines of this kind: some scholars believe that they were used for private devotion,<sup>3</sup> others maintain that they were for use in monasteries and temples.<sup>4</sup> It is also unclear why countless figurines like



Fig. 2  
*Ghanta*, handbell  
 or priest's bell,  
 Central Java,  
 c. 800-c. 900.  
 Bronze, 18,5 x 8 cm.  
 Rijksmuseum,  
 Amsterdam,  
 inv. no. AK-MAK-314.

this one were removed from social intercourse and often ended up below ground. It has been suggested that the objects may have been buried during wars between 1500 and 1800, but too many of them have been found in too wide a variety of places for this to be true.<sup>5</sup> Pauline Lunsingh Scheurleer in 2005, then head of Asian Art at the Rijksmuseum, believed that the objects may have been interred over the course of time as *pusaka*, sacred heirlooms of ancestors, but we cannot be certain about that either.<sup>6</sup>

The first documented reference, securely traceable to this figurine, dates from 1919, when the Dutch archaeologist N.J. Krom (1883-1945) described the collection of antique Javanese statuettes owned by the engineer and oil magnate Hugo Loudon (1860-1941) in Wassenaar in an article in the magazine *Nederlandsch-Indië Oud en Nieuw*. Krom mentioned that the vajrasattva was in this collection, as was an antique Javanese handbell or *ghanta*,<sup>7</sup> renowned at that time, now also in the Rijksmuseum (fig. 2).<sup>8</sup>

Krom maintained that Hugo (fig. 3) had acquired his collection from his uncle Alexander Loudon Jr (1822-1868).<sup>9</sup> This 'Alex' was named after his father (Hugo's grandfather) Alexander Loudon (1789-1839), a Scot who had travelled with Thomas S. Raffles to Java in 1811 during the British rule. There, Alex married a Dutchwoman, Susanna G. 'Santje' Valck (1801-1828), and they made their permanent home in the colony, which had meanwhile reverted to the Dutch. Alex Jr and his younger brother, James Loudon (Hugo's father, 1824-1900), went on to forge impressive careers in the Dutch colonial service thanks to their parents' Dutch-English networks and their Dutch schooling. Just before his untimely death, Alex Jr (fig. 4) was appointed vice-president of the Council of the Dutch East Indies in Batavia (present-day Jakarta) and James (fig. 5) became governor-general between 1872 and 1875.



Fig. 3  
Portrait of  
Hugo Loudon, 1909,  
by Philipp Alexius  
de Laszlo.  
Private collection.  
Oil on canvas,  
92 x 73 cm.

Photograph:  
RKD – Netherlands  
Institute for Art  
History/IB, image  
no. 1800119604

Fig. 4  
Tomb of Alexander  
Loudon Jr in former  
Batavia, present-day  
Jakarta (now in the  
Museum Taman  
Prasasti).  
Photograph: author





Fig. 5  
Portrait of  
James Loudon,  
Governor-General  
1872-85, by Andries  
van den Berg.

Oil on canvas,  
134.5 x 97.5 cm.  
Amsterdam,  
Rijksmuseum,  
inv. no. SK-A-3807.

Fig. 6  
Impression of the  
Loudon family  
Archives in the  
National Archives  
in The Hague.  
Photograph: author



The Loudons were members of the European elite in colonial Indonesia, who often surrounded themselves with Indonesian antiquities and ethnographic objects.<sup>10</sup> Alex Loudon Jr also appears to have been a collector: from the minutes of the Batavian Society of Arts and Sciences, the scholarly society that had been founded in the colonial capital in 1778, we know that between 1861 and 1863 he had gifted five stone 'Hindu statues' and a manuscript from the regent of Sumedang about the history of the Preanger to the society's museum.<sup>11</sup> Perhaps he had been inspired by his uncle, Frans Gerardus Valck (1799-1842), resident of Yogyakarta from 1831 to 1841. During that time Valck had amassed a famous collection of antique figurines, bells, bracelets and the like,<sup>12</sup> and from historical sources we know that Alex's brothers, like James, had spent a lot of time in their uncle's house.<sup>13</sup>

We do not, though, know from the surviving archives precisely how or what Alex Loudon collected. There is no clear mention of Indonesian antique collections or collecting in letters in the family archives (fig. 6). The Dutch archaeologist A.J. Bernet Kempers (1906-1992), and later Pauline Lunsingh Scheurleer, suggested that the photographer Isidore van Kinsbergen (1821-1905) collected objects for Alex Loudon Jr.<sup>14</sup> Van Kinsbergen was a collector as well as a photographer. In 1864, for example, when he travelled to the Dieng Plateau in Central Java to take photographs of the ancient ruins there, Van Kinsbergen and his unnamed Indonesian assistants not only looked at buildings but also unearthed objects (fig. 7). It is certain that Alex Loudon Jr and Van Kinsbergen knew one another well.<sup>15</sup>

There is also the possibility that Alex Loudon Jr acquired antiquities by way of his timber production forest in Blitar, on East Java. Loudon had acquired the exploitation rights after the death of his younger brother,

William B. Loudon (1827-1864), and we know from William that previously he (or his employees) had 'found' a stone Ganesha in that forest, which eventually found its way into the collection of the museum in Batavia.<sup>16</sup> However we do not know whether Alex Loudon Jr, like his younger brother, also found objects in the forest. It is equally unclear whether Van Kinsbergen provided Loudon with objects, or Frans Valck inspired his nephew Alex or provided him with objects.

The only thing we know for certain is that in 1919 Hugo Loudon stated that he had inherited his collection of Javanese antiquities from his uncle, Alex Loudon Jr, who had died more than half a century earlier in Batavia. Where did the vajrasattva go after it had come into Alex Loudon Jr's hands and what did the collection mean to the family?

It is possible that after his relatively early death in 1868, Alex Loudon Jr left all or part of his collection, which may have contained the vajrasattva, to (among others?) his brother James Loudon. An inventory drawn up around 1916 suggests that this may have been the case. James died in 1900. When his wife, Louise de Stuers (1835-1915, fig. 8), died fifteen years later, an inventory was made of the contents of their mansion in The Hague. It shows that the interior reflected a long history of a distinguished life in colonial Indonesia as well as in Europe. Alongside paintings by Hague Romantics like Weissenbruch and Schelfhout, an enormous collection of Delftware (inherited twenty years earlier from James's other brother John Francis Loudon (1821-1895, fig. 9), first administrator of Billiton (Belitung), a statue



Fig. 7  
The point of a lance  
and a bronze bell  
from Tjiboeroej,  
Limbangan.  
Photograph of  
objects that were  
collected by Isidore  
van Kinsbergen  
on Java between  
October 1863 and  
April 1864.  
Stichting Nationaal  
Museum van Wereld-  
culturen, inv. no.  
RV-1403-3790-39.



from the Borobudur (near Yogyakarta) in the garden and antique colonial furniture, probably from Louise's family, there were also 'twenty-six Hindu statues' (on payment of 130 guilders) and an 'Indonesian bell' (valued at five guilders) in the 'upper salon' (fig. 10).<sup>17</sup>

The 'Indonesian bell' in the inventory may have been the famous ghanta. If so, it makes it more likely that the vajrasattva was among the unspecified twenty-six statuettes (described by a journalist in 1916 as an 'entire collection of Buddha statuettes in bronze, gold and silver').<sup>18</sup> In his article written in 1919, after all, Krom stated that the ghanta and the vajrasattva were part of the same collection that had come from Alex Loudon Jr. This would mean that James had inherited not only the collection of Delftware from his brother John Francis (a collection which would be donated to the Rijksmuseum by the heirs), but also (part of?) his brother Alex's collection of Javanese antiquities.

This may have been how Hugo acquired his uncle Alex's collection: as an inheritance from his mother, Louise. It is in any event certain that he inherited part of the interior described in the inventory,<sup>19</sup> because various historical chairs bearing the arms of the Hooft and Van den Graeff families, and a painting from Louise Loudon-de Stuers's inventory, could be found in Hugo's house in Wassenaar in 1937. If the vajrasattva followed a similar route, the object had been cherished by the family for at least two generations as a precious inheritance and a tangible reminder of the family history in colonial Indonesia and in the Netherlands.

### Collecting in the Colony in the Last Half of the Nineteenth Century

In short, we cannot conclude from historical sources how, what, when and why Alex Loudon Jr collected.

We can get a rough idea if we look at what other historical sources tell us about the context of collecting by Europeans in colonial Indonesia in the same period. When the colonial authorities, probably prompted by legal and constitutional considerations,<sup>20</sup> began to record archaeological finds more systematically in the course of the nineteenth century, we can get a clearer image of what kind of objects and how many of them were found on Java and how they were collected.

After the middle of the nineteenth century, the period when Alex Loudon Jr was collecting, reports of similar discoveries increased. There could have been several reasons for this. At that time the population of Java was growing. More land had to be developed for agriculture than before. The Dutch

*Fig. 8*  
Portrait of Louise Loudon-de Stuers, 1909, by Philipp Alexius de Laszlo. Oil on canvas, 75 x 55 cm. Private collection. Photograph: RKD – Netherlands Institute for Art History/IB, image no. 1800016812



colonial government encouraged the cultivation of land: commercial farming became more and more important.<sup>21</sup> Secondly, by contrast, a great deal of infrastructure was being developed by the colonial government in this period. During the excavations this entailed, farmers and workers found many antiquities, especially in Central and East Java.<sup>22</sup> And thirdly, financial rewards for the finds meant that more objects could be collected by European private individuals and the museum in Batavia. Collecting antiquarian objects was a business. The Batavian Society paid the finder if it decided to include the object in its collections. Before long there were networks of travelling dealers who earned their living from selling antiquities to European collectors: they were the so-called *langganans* or

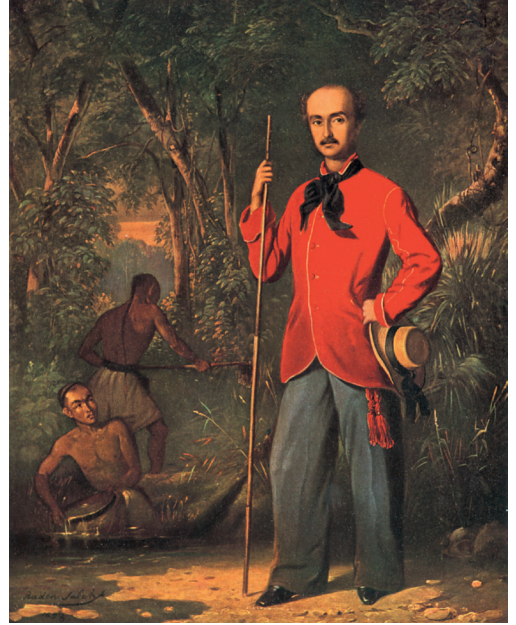


Fig. 9  
Portrait of John Francis Loudon, by Raden Saleh, portrayed on the island of Billiton (Belitung), with Chinese workers employed by the Billiton Maatschappij co-founded by Loudon searching for tin in the background, 1855. Material unknown, 87 x 71 cm. Private collection. Photograph: LM Publishers

BOVENSALON

No.	Gaden.
720 Schilderij. Familie Lindanus.	1000.—
721 Twaalf terra cotta beelden.	300.—
722 Eikenhouten turfkat.	60.—
723 Lesenaar met ijeren beslag op eikenhouten voet.	100.—
724 Ijeren geldkistje.	5.—
725 Ivoren ingelegd handwerkdoozje.	15.—
726 Zes stoeljes met tapisserie: de wapens van de Graef en Hooft.	4800.—
727 Grootte ijerenhouten kast op kruisvoet.	150.—
728 Zesentwintig hindoubbeeldjes.	130.—
729 Bronzen bakje.	50.—
730 Indische bel.	5.—
731 Van de Venne, Boerendans.	150.—
732 Vier wandlusters. Koper.	60.—
733 Twee terra cotta beelden van V. d. Wall.	200.—
734 Duitsch kruikje met deksel.	25.—
735 Keulsch kruikje zonder deksel.	20.—
736 Steenen kruikje met zilver montuur en wapen.	40.—
737 Vijzelte. 1631.	10.—
738 Koperen dubbele kandelaar.	20.—
739 Engelsch tafelklokje.	125.—

Fig. 10  
Page from the inventory of the household effects of Louise Loudon-de Stuers, with references to 'hindoubbeeldjes' and an 'Indische bel', 1915-16. Haarlem, Noord-Hollands Archief, Rijksmuseum and legal predecessors in Amsterdam (476), inv. no. 1082.



Fig. 11  
 Javanese sellers of  
 antiques in Batavia,  
 present-day Jakarta,  
 nineteen-thirties.  
 Private collection  
 Ploos van Amstel,  
 Gouda.

*kelontongs* (hawkers, fig. 11). Among other things, they profited from impoverished Javanese families who offered their family heirlooms for sale.<sup>23</sup> Commissioner-General Leonard du Bus de Gisignies (1780-1849), for example, remarked that European ladies were able to obtain jewellery for a song from members of the court of the sultan of Yogyakarta, who had been ruined financially by the Java War (1825-30).<sup>24</sup> Finally, we must acknowledge the fact that after the middle of the nineteenth century awareness of

the cultural (and financial) value of such antiquities, leading to the colonial legislation regarding Indonesian antiquities in this period,<sup>25</sup> caused Europeans to start collecting more and more, and more objects surfaced. There were even Europeans who unscrupulously dug in proven archaeological sites like the Borobudur or the Prambanan Temple near Yogyakarta in search of gold and silver objects.<sup>26</sup> Smaller metal antiquities like the vajrasattva were mainly encountered in sacred places like these.<sup>27</sup>

To Alex Jr's uncle, Frans Valck, collecting seems to have been a way of displaying his own insights and worldly wisdom in a hitherto largely unknown area, and in so doing gaining prestige: 'Among the bronze statues in my collection are many which I have not found depicted anywhere before', wrote Valck in 1840 in an article about his collection, stressing his unique knowledge and objects.<sup>28</sup> His expertise and stature were endorsed by others. The linguist C.J. van der Vlis (1813-1842), for instance, wrote that Valck 'occupies a prominent place' as an expert and collector 'in the interest of the arts'.<sup>29</sup> Valck and Van der Vlis did not doubt the legitimacy of collecting. To them it was a scholarly activity to show that the current Javanese population 'once stood on a tier of civilization, arts, sciences, and above all of mechanics, which far exceeds our imagination and comprehension'. Collecting was necessary because the Javanese population is 'little concerned with the promotion of scientific knowledge',<sup>30</sup> it is only 'immersed in deep ... ignorance'.<sup>31</sup>

We gain little more than this rough impression of private collecting in a colonial context between the middle and the end of the nineteenth century from European archive material. In the best cases the locations of the finds and the finders of the objects sent to the Batavian Society were mentioned, so this information has survived. However, this did not always happen.<sup>32</sup> And despite the fact that after 1840 more and more found objects ended up in the museum of the Batavian Society, countless objects like the Loudon family's vajrasattva remained in private ownership, constantly changing hands. Not only were collections like these rarely described in detail, the geographical and social provenance and circumstances of the objects were not recorded.<sup>33</sup> Alex Loudon Jr's uncle, Frans Valck, did talk about the objects he had collected and where they came from, but mainly in general terms:

'they come from various regions'. In order to be a little more specific, he added that 'they were unearthed in this Residence, the Kadoe, and Ledok, ... in the more easterly Residences of Madioen and Kedirie'.<sup>34</sup> Valck went on to say that the objects were mainly found there by Javanese agricultural workers while working their land, felling a forest or digging wells.<sup>35</sup> It was no more precise than that.

Collectors like Valck or Loudon collected with a feeling for the culture and history, but with the colonial distance to the population that was normal at the time. Rarely was attention paid to the contemporary significance of the objects for the Javanese. In the best of cases, the focus on the people of Indonesia was restricted to the names of the finders. More often, the population of that time was dismissed, as Valck did, by characterizing the Javanese as 'ignorant' and alienated from the heritage of their ancestors. A 'colonial gaze', in which people and places were reduced to a decorative background, typifies this approach by colonial collectors.

In short, apart from this general outline of the collecting of antiquities by Europeans in the colonies, in which socio-historical context we can place Alex Loudon's collecting, nothing is known about how, where or why the vajrasattva came into Western hands and what meaning the object has had for the Javanese population over the centuries. In fact, we are not even sure from historical documentation whether the vajrasattva actually ever was in Alex Loudon Jr's hands.

### **The Vajrasattva and the Dutch Appreciation of Asian Art, 1915-70**

Most of what we know about the vajrasattva can be related to the rise of Western art-historical interest in Asian arts and cultures around the end of the nineteenth century. It was with good reason that Krom

found Hugo Loudon's collection of Javanese figurines so worthwhile that he described it in the magazine *Nederlandsch-Indië Oud en Nieuw* in 1919. Krom stressed that the collection had to be understood as *art* and was not a collection of rarities from all kinds of origins. It was not, he wrote, a 'mishmash, thrown together by chance ... a confused mass'. The Loudon Collection was 'a whole, of very good, in part excellent, products of Hindu-Javanese bronze art'.<sup>36</sup> The vajrasattva in the collection was 'worked with the greatest care' where the artist had done his utmost 'in all respects ... to give the best and richest he was capable of'.<sup>37</sup> Krom's judgement mirrored a broader trend: during this period, for the first time, objects like the vajrasattva, which had previously been publicly exhibited alongside utensils and modern works of art from the colony as impressions of colonial societies, were considered separately and exhibited as 'art'.

Hugo Loudon actively promoted this art-historical development. He was able to do this because of the wealth he had amassed, gained from being one of the founders of Koninklijke Olie, which later became Royal Dutch Shell, and cultural baggage. His cultural outlook contributed to his interest in Asian art and collecting activities. He and his brothers were formed by a life and family history in both Indonesia and the Netherlands: his brother John Loudon (1866-1955, fig. 12), for example, a diplomat and the Dutch Minister of Foreign Affairs between 1913 and 1918, gave his copy of the Javanese drama *Minta raga* to the writer Frederik van Eeden (1860-1932) as a gift.<sup>38</sup>

In 1918, four years after the possible acquisition of his collection of Javanese antiquities, Hugo Loudon joined the board of the Vereeniging van Vrienden der Aziatische Kunst (Society of Friends of Asian Art, the present-day Royal Asian Art Society of the Netherlands) which was set up in that year. He donated a couple of thousand guilders



for purchases<sup>39</sup> and in 1922 entered the vajrasattva and the ghanta along with five other statuettes for an exhibition staged by the society, which was still in its infancy. For the first time in the Netherlands this exhibition made a distinction between art and ethnographica.<sup>40</sup>

The catalogue showed what was understood in the Netherlands as art from Indonesia: centuries-old Hindu and Buddhist statues from Java like the vajrasattva, modern Balinese wood carvings (like the palace doors which had been removed by the artist W.O.J. Nieuwenkamp (1874-1950) during the *puputan* in Badung) and sculpture.<sup>41</sup> Islam, the dominant religion on Java and Sumatra since the

Fig. 12  
Portrait of John Loudon, 1920, by Philipp Alexius de Laszlo. Drawing, dimensions unknown. Private collection. Photograph: RKD – Netherlands Institute for Art History/IB image no. 1B00119607

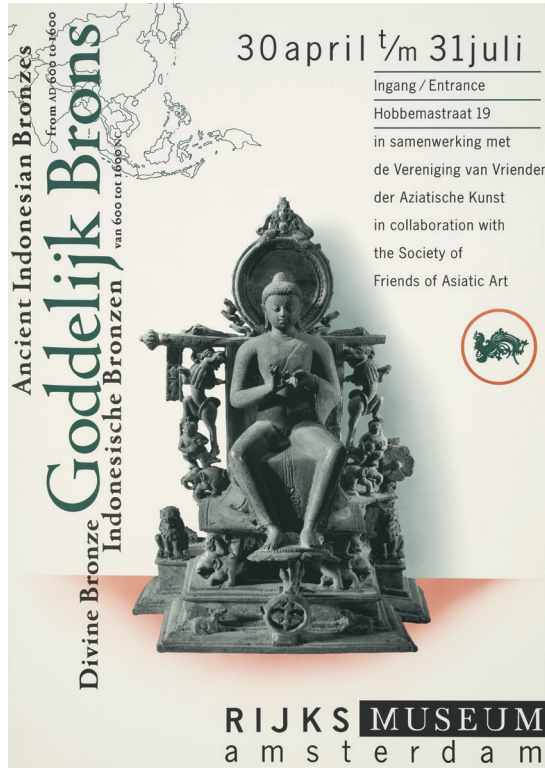
sixteenth century, was conspicuously absent from the exhibition. This was common practice in the Dutch view of Indonesian culture and history: for a long time, Islam was largely marginalized for politico-cultural reasons and condemned as having an ‘influence that has killed art for centuries’.<sup>42</sup>

As a result of the exhibition the figurine rose further in art-historical prestige. In 1926, the vajrasattva was included in W.F. Stutterheim’s reference work *Cultuurgeschiedenis van Java in beeld* and ten years later, in 1936, it was exhibited again. There were even cast copies in circulation which would ultimately find their way into the collections of Dutch museums like the Amsterdam Tropenmuseum.<sup>43</sup> In 1947 H.F.E. Visser, a member of the board of the Society of Friends of Asian Art, said that the vajrasattva and a statue of Avalokiteshvara, likewise from Loudon’s collection, were ‘the most beautiful and important silver “Hindu-Javanese” figures in Western collections’.<sup>44</sup> The uniqueness and originality of the figurines cited by Visser and Krom made them art in their eyes. From being seen just as an example of ‘old monuments’,<sup>45</sup> remnants of earlier art and science – in other words heritage – in Valck’s time, the vajrasattva had become autonomous art that had even become part of the Dutch canon of Javanese antique sculpture.

There may also have been a connection between Western art-historical appreciation and the time and place that Western scholars assigned to the figurine’s origin. From 1919 until well into the twentieth century, the origin of the statuette was regarded as Central Java around the eighth century CE. Later East Java was proposed. The dating shifted, too: after 1985, some time between the tenth and eleventh century CE became more accepted as the date of its creation. Central Javanese and East Javanese styles became dominant one after the other, so this

determination should perhaps be regarded not so much as an indication of where the figurine was found, but rather more as a reference to the period in which it was made and in which a particular art-historical style was prevalent.<sup>46</sup> No stylistic underpinning for this change in origin or recognition that the statuette had previously been classified differently is given in the art-historical descriptions of the piece. This shift may well lie in the fact that these Javanese styles were described differently. Remarkably, the Western art connoisseurs who treated the figure, such as Stutterheim and Krom in the nineteen-twenties, regarded the East Javanese style after the tenth century CE as ‘more Javanese’ and ‘more indigenous’, because it was supposedly less influenced by Indian art.<sup>47</sup> In Western eyes, was this style perhaps ‘more authentic’, ‘more special’ and ‘more original’ than the different style in an earlier period? This line of reasoning may have influenced the ongoing discourse about the piece, in which the idea that it belonged to the East Javanese style gave it greater cachet. Even in the nineteen-eighties, archaeologist A.J. Bernet Kempers was still arguing that the figurine, lacking the attributes of the ghanta and vajra, had to be a special Javanese representational form of vajrasattva.<sup>48</sup> A few years later, the art historians Susan L. Huntington and John C. Huntington argued that the statue’s tall pedestal was perhaps ‘an indigenous Javanese innovation’.<sup>49</sup> These remarks appear to have reinforced the ‘(more) authentic’ Javanese character of the object. Bernet Kempers’s view was soon called into question: in 1992 the art historian Jan Fontein maintained that the missing attributes were cast separately and had simply been lost.<sup>50</sup> Further research is needed to establish exactly which art-historical factors played a role in the changed attribution of the vajrasattva, but in terms of the





important exhibitions of Javanese art in the Western world in the twentieth century. In 1954, for example, it featured in the exhibition ‘Oosterse schatten’ in the Rijksmuseum, and in the newspaper *Trouw* in 1988 the statuette was described as one of the icons for the ‘Goddelijk Brons; Indonesische Bronzen van 600 tot 1600’ exhibition staged by the Rijksmuseum in collaboration with the Society of Friends of Asian Arts, which was celebrating its seventieth anniversary (figs. 13, 14). Only a few years later, the vajrasattva went on a long tour through the United States: first appearing in the travelling exhibition ‘Leaves from the Bodhi Tree: the Art of Pala India (8th-12th centuries) and its International Legacy’ between 1989 and 1990, before featuring a year later in the American exhibition ‘The Sculpture of Indonesia’ which was subsequently brought to the

Netherlands by Lunsingh Scheurleer as ‘Het goddelijk gezicht van Indonesië’ and staged in the Nieuwe Kerk in early 1992 (fig. 15).

In short, the art-historical appreciation of the vajrasattva at the beginning of twentieth century shows how Dutch, overwhelmingly male, scholars, with their interpretations and rejections of other possible opinions, determined the place of the vajrasattva in a Western ‘art culture’ system, with accompanying classifications and hierarchies, and how that appears to have made itself felt well into the twentieth century and probably also into the twenty-first.<sup>54</sup>

### Conclusion

The provenance of the vajrasattva, reconstructed here on the basis of historical source material, and with the different meanings accompanying it, has demonstrated what information research like this can reveal and what

Fig. 14  
Pamphlet of the  
*Goddelijk Brons:  
Indonesische  
Bronzen van 600  
tot 1600* exhibition,  
Rijksmuseum, 1988.  
Amsterdam,  
Rijksmuseum, inv. no.  
RP-P-08-100.770.  
Photograph:  
Vincent van Baar





knowledge has remained hidden. The statuette's collecting history showed how members of the European elite like Frans Valck and Alex Loudon Jr collected within Dutch colonial, socio-cultural relationships and contexts. The varying contexts and relationships alongside the changed meanings of the vajrasattva unveiled how objects such as this shaped prestige and status within certain social groups, how family memories could crystallize in objects, how the scholarly interest in such objects developed and what all this has to say about the functioning of the colonial society and Dutch society as a whole. The development of the meaning of the vajrasattva from family property and heritage to art, for example, made clear that it was not exclusively, but mainly colonizers who determined the past, what was science and art and who had authority. However, the meanings of and the practices surrounding the object for the Javanese population, then and now,

remained unknown, as does the role of that same population in colonial collecting and their knowledge and agency. Other disciplines such as anthropology or Javanese literature might be able to offer a viewpoint on this. Nevertheless, as long as it is mainly Western historical source material that continues to be used in provenance research, a one-sided viewpoint will dominate and, as in this article, the insight we gain will almost exclusively be into the functioning of a still dominant group, the European colonial elite. The Loudon family, with its powerful position within Dutch and colonial industry, mining and politics, is a prime example of this.

*Fig. 15*  
Impression of  
*Het goddelijk gezicht*  
*van Indonesië:*  
*Meesterwerken der*  
*beeldhouwkunst*  
*700-1600* exhibition,  
Nieuwe Kerk,  
Amsterdam, 1992.  
Photograph:  
Fridtjof Versnel,  
Architectenbureau  
Jowa Amsterdam

ABSTRACT

Using historical source material to reconstruct the origin and collecting history of a statuette of a vajrasattva owned by the Loudon family, now in the possession of the Rijksmuseum, gives us insights into the function of such objects within particular social groups such as the European colonial elite in Indonesia (to which the Loudon family belonged), the functioning of Dutch (colonial) society and the development of cultural knowledge about the colonized population. This is, however, a limited perspective. It ignores other points of view: it largely excludes the knowledge and insights of the local population, the meanings the object has had for them in the past and present, and people's agency in these European collecting and knowledge production processes.

NOTES

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- 1 Igor Kopytoff, 'The Cultural Biography of Things: Commoditization as Process', in Arjun Appadurai (ed.), *The Social Life of Things: Commodities in Cultural Perspective*, Cambridge/New York 1986, pp. 64-91.
- 2 Amsterdam, Rijksmuseum, inv. no. AK-RAK-1970-2, see <http://hdl.handle.net/10934/RMO001.COLLECT.2048>.
- 3 Stichting Nationaal Museum van Wereldculturen, inv. no. TM-4854-1.
- 4 J.H. van Brakel, *Budaya Indonesia: Kunst en cultuur in Indonesië*, exh. cat. Amsterdam (Tropenmuseum) 1987, p. 82.
- 5 Pauline Lunsingh Scheurleer, 'Oudheidkundige vondsten op Java', *Aziatische Kunst* 35 (2005), no. 4, pp. 4-13, esp. p. 8.
- 6 Lunsingh Scheurleer 2005 (note 5), p. 10.
- 7 Amsterdam, Rijksmuseum, inv. no. AK-MAK-314.
- 8 N.J. Krom, 'Hindoe-Javaansche bronzen: De collectie-Loudon', *Nederlandsch-Indië, Oud en Nieuw* 3 (1919), pp. 383-95.
- 9 Susan Legêne, 'Tagging Borobudur: Heritage Education and the Colonial Past

- in Onsite and Online Museum Collections', in Carla van Boxtel et al. (eds.), *Sensitive Pasts: Questioning Heritage in Education*, New York 2016, pp. 108-29, esp. p. 112.
- 10 Caroline Drieënhuizen, *Koloniale collecties, Nederlands aanzien: de Europese elite van Nederlands-Indië belicht door haar verzamelingen, 1811-1957*, Amsterdam (PhD thesis University of Amsterdam) 2012.
- 11 *Notulen van de Algemeene en Bestuursvergaderingen van het Bataviaasch Genootschap van Kunsten en Wetenschappen* 1 (1864): Report on the society's activities between the meeting of 16 November 1861 and the meeting of 27 March 1863, p. 163; *Notulen ... Bataviaasch Genootschap ...* 6 (1869), meeting of 1 December 1868, p. 76. The Preanger (Parahyangan) is a mountainous region on West Java.
- 12 This collection would go on to form the basis of the collection of antiquities of the museum of the Batavian Society (the present Museum Nasional Indonesia). See Hans Groot, *Van Batavia naar Weltevreden: het Bataviaasch Genootschap van Kunsten en Wetenschappen, 1778-1867*, Leiden (open access e-book Brill) 2009 (*Verhandelingen van het Koninklijk Instituut voor Taal-, Land- en Volkenkunde* 243), pp. 311-14.
- 13 James Loudon, *Eer en fortuin: leven in Nederlands-Indië, 1824-1900. Autobiografie van gouverneur-generaal James Loudon* (H. Boels & J. de Jong eds.), Amsterdam 2003.
- 14 Lunsingh Scheurleer 2005 (note 5), p. 13, note 3.
- 15 At that time, they were both members of the Batavian Society and part of the Dutch trade mission to Thailand (Siam) in February 1862; Alex Loudon Jr went along as general secretary and Van Kinsbergen was appointed to take photographs. They were described as 'bon viveurs' who enjoyed 'een geestig grapje' (a witty joke), see 'I. van Kinsbergen', *Bataviaasch Nieuwsblad*, 30 August 1901; Groot 2009 (note 12), p. 454.

- 16 The Hague, National Archives (NL-HANA), Archives of the Ministry of Colonies, accession number 2.10.36.22, inv. no. 901, Register of Civil Servants, 1836-1936, fol. 412; *Notulen ... Bataviaasch Genootschap ...* 10 (1873), p. xxvii.
- 17 Haarlem, Noord-Hollands Archief (NL-HlMNH), Rijksmuseum and legal predecessors in Amsterdam, accession number 476, inv. no. 1082. A collection of ceramics by the heirs of Mrs A.J.M. Loudon-de Stuers, 1915-1916.
- 18 'geheele verzameling Boeddha-beeldjes in brons, goud en zilver'. Gonne Smit, 'De collectie Loudon', *Elseviers Geïllustreerd Maandschrift* 26 (April 1916), pp. 1-20, esp. p. 13.
- 19 The painting is a group portrait of members of the Van der Lindt family from Dordrecht dating from around 1570. For the reference to the painting in Hugo Loudon's house, see W. Bax, *Het protestantisme in het bisdom Luik en vooral te Maastricht, 1505-1557*, vol. 2, 's-Gravenhage 1937, p. 111.
- 20 Krom 1919 (note 8), p. 6.
- 21 John Miksic, *Old Javanese Gold*, Singapore 1989.
- 22 Lunsingh Scheurleer 2005 (note 5), p. 5.
- 23 Pauline Lunsingh Scheurleer, 'Collecting Javanese Antiquities: The Appropriation of a Newly Discovered Hindu-Buddhist Civilization', in Pieter ter Keurs (ed.), *Colonial Collections Revisited*, Leiden 2007, pp. 71-114, esp. p. 77.
- 24 Peter Carey, *The Power of Prophecy: Prince Dipanagara and the End of an Old Order in Java, 1785-1855*, Leiden 2007, p. 549, note 135.
- 25 After 1840, antiquities were no longer allowed to be exported from Java without the permission of the governor-general. The local authorities were also forced to make inventories of antiquities, see Groot 2009 (note 12), p. 308. Furthermore, from 1865 they had to be reported to the Dutch-Indonesian Government: finders reported their discoveries to the local colonial authorities, which then sent the objects to Batavia. The finds found their way to the Batavian Society by way of the governor-general. It was then decided whether the items should remain in Batavia or be sent to the anthropological museum in Leiden. See Lunsingh Scheurleer 2005 (note 5), pp. 4-5.
- 26 Lunsingh Scheurleer 2007 (note 23), pp. 76-77.
- 27 Lunsingh Scheurleer 2007 (note 23), p. 83.
- 28 'Onder de bronzen beelden, welke zich in mijne verzameling bevinden, zijn er onderscheidene, welke ik nergens vroeger heb afgebeeld gevonden.' Frans G. Valck, 'Gedachten over de ruïnen van de Hindoesche godsdienst, welke op Java gevonden worden', *Tijdschrift voor Nederlandsch Indië* 3 (1840), pp. 177-203, esp. p. 199.
- 29 'eene voorname plaats bekleedt'; 'in het belang der wetenschappen'. Leiden, University Library, Van der Vlis Collection (D H 389), inv. no. 3, 'Korte geschiedkundige opgave van het onderzoek aangaande de Hindoesche oudheden op Java'.
- 30 'eenmaal op een trap van beschaving, kunsten, wetenschappen, en vooral van werktuigkunde hebben gestaan, die onze verbeelding en bevatting ver overtreft'; 'aan het bevorderen van wetenschappelijke kennis weinig gelegen laat leggen [sic]'. Idem.
- 31 'diepe onkunde ... gedompeld is'. Valck 1840 (note 28), pp. 202-03.
- 32 The names of the finders and sometimes also the circumstances in which the finds took place can regularly be found in the minutes of the Batavian Society: 'gevonden door den Javaan Sosot in den grond bij het bewerken van een sagoveld in de dessa Kandangan' (found by the Javanese Sosot in the ground while tilling a sago field in the village of Kandangan; Board meeting minutes 23 January 1863, *Notulen ... Bataviaasch Genootschap ...* 1 (1864), p. 68); 'gevonden door den inlander Kassim van de dessa Berkoh' (found by the native Kassim from the village of Berkoh; Board meeting minutes 11 May 1865, *Notulen ... Bataviaasch Genootschap ...* 3 (1866) p. 52); 'gevonden door een inlander van de dessa Karang Endep' (found by a native from the village of Karang Endep; Board meeting 27 November 1866, *Notulen ... Bataviaasch Genootschap ...* 4 (1867) p. 256).
- 33 Lunsingh Scheurleer 2007 (note 23); Pauline Lunsingh Scheurleer, 'The Well-known Javanese Statue in the Tropenmuseum, Amsterdam, and its Place in Javanese Sculpture', *Artibus Asiae* 68, (2008), no. 2, pp. 287-332, esp. p. 288; Drieënhuizen 2012 (note 10); Caroline Drieënhuizen, 'Being "European" in Colonial Indonesia: Collectors and Collections between Yogyakarta, Berlin, Dresden and Vienna in the Late Nineteenth Century', *Bijdragen en Mededelingen Betreffende de Geschiedenis der Nederlanden* 134 (2019), no. 3, pp. 21-46.

- 34 '[ze] zijn van onderscheidene streken herkomst'; 'in deze Residentie, de Kadoe, en Ledok, ... in de meer oostelijke Residentiën Madioen en Kediri, zijn [zij] opgegraven'. Valck 1840 (note 28), p. 198.
- 35 Valck 1840 (note 28), pp. 196-97.
- 36 'mengelmoes, door het toeval bijeen- geworpen'; 'verwarde massa'; 'een geheel, en dat van zeer goede, ten deele voortreffelijke, voortbrengselen der Hindoe- Javaansche bronskunst'. Krom 1919 (note 8), pp. 384-85.
- 37 'met de grootste zorg bewerkt'. Krom 1919 (note 8), p. 394.
- 38 Frederik van Eeden, *Dagboek 1878-1923* (H.W. van Tricht, ed.), Culemborg 1971, vol. 2, p. 1458.
- 39 Renée Steenbergen, 'De Vereniging van Vrienden der Aziatische Kunst in het interbellum: deftige verzamelaars, rijke donateurs en Indische fortuinen', *Aziatische Kunst* 38 (2008), no. 3, pp. 3-16, esp. p. 9.
- 40 'Tentoonstelling van Indische beeldhouw- kunst', *Haagsche Courant*, 2 September 1922; *Vereeniging van Vrienden der Aziatische Kunst. Catalogus der tentoonstelling van Indische beeldhouwkunst in het Gemeente-museum te 's-Gravenhage*, exh. cat. (Gemeentemuseum) 1922 (no page numbers).
- 41 *Catalogus der Tentoonstelling van Indische beeldhouwkunst*. A *puputan* is a ritual in which a defeated monarch, together with his family and entourage, chooses to commit suicide collectively in front of the approaching enemy.
- 42 'eeuwenlange kunstdoodenden invloed'. See P.J. Veth, G.A. Wilken and H.C. Klinkert, *Catalogus der afdeling Nederlandsche Koloniën van de internationale koloniale en uitvoerhandel tentoonstelling (van 1 Mei tot ult°. October 1883) te Amsterdam*, exh. cat. Leiden 1883. See also Mirjam Shatanawi, *Making and Unmaking Indonesian Islam: Legacies of Colonialism in Museums*, Amsterdam (PhD thesis University of Amsterdam) 2022.
- 43 Stichting Nationaal Museum van Wereld- culturen, inv. no. TM-2960-156.
- 44 H.F.E. Visser, *Asiatic Art in Private Collec- tions*, Amsterdam/New York 1948, p. 79.
- 45 Leiden, University Library, Van der Vlis Collection (D H 389), inv. no. 3, 'Korte geschiedkundige ...'.
- 46 R. Soekmono, 'Indonesische architectuur van de Klassieke Periode: een kort over- zicht', in Jan Fontein (ed.), *Het goddelijk gezicht van Indonesië: Meesterwerken der beeldhouwkunst 700-1600*, Zwolle 1992 (published to accompany the exhibition of the same name in Nieuwe Kerk, Amster- dam), pp. 76-95, esp. p. 80.
- 47 W.F. Stutterheim, *Cultuurgeschiedenis van Java in beeld*, Weltevreden 1926, p. vi; N.J. Krom, *Inleiding tot de Hindoe-Javaansche kunst*, Den Haag 1920, vol. 2, p. 7; Van Brakel 1987 (note 4), pp. 49, 82.
- 48 A.J. Bernet Kempers, 'Alexander Loudon en zijn collectie Oudjavaanse metaalkunst', *Mededelingenblad van de Vereniging van Vrienden der Aziatische Kunst* 15 (1985), no. 5, pp. 6-15, esp. pp. 8-9.
- 49 Susan L. Huntington and John C. Huntington, *Leaves from the Bodhi Tree: The Art of Pāla India (8th-12th Centuries) and its International Legacy*, exh. cat. Dayton (Ohio) (The Dayton Art Institute) etc. 1990, p. 243.
- 50 Fontein 1992 (note 46), p. 223.
- 51 'Veiling Mak van Waay', *Algemeen Handels- blad*, 25 June 1953.
- 52 Amsterdam, Rijksmuseum Archive, Mak van Waay sale catalogue; prices in it written by an unknown hand.
- 53 Amsterdam, Rijksmuseum, inventory card AK-RAK-1970-2; Rijksmuseum Invoice Archive. Several of the other artefacts from Rieff were acquired by the Society of Friends of Asian Art and are now also in the Rijksmuseum in Amsterdam: a Kuvera/Jambahala, inv. no. AK-MAK-1201; a Padmapani, inv. no. AK-MAK-1203; and a Chunda, inv. no. AK-MAK-1202 (this object was originally also from the Loudon Collection and bought by Rieff in 1953).
- 54 James Clifford, *The Predicament of Culture: Twentieth-Century Ethnography, Literature, and Art*, Harvard 1988, p. 224; Legêne 2016 (note 9), p. 120.