

A Gold Finial from Java at Yale University Art Gallery: Its Narrative Theme and Possible Relationship to King Airlangga

A beautiful gold finial, a masterpiece of goldsmithing, is among the gold objects from Indonesia on display in the Indo-Pacific art section of Yale University Art Gallery (YUAG). This article seeks to reconstruct the original context of this object. It is argued that the finial dates from the eleventh century and, together with two pieces in the storage of the same museum, once formed the top part of a royal object, possibly a parasol. Hidden between the delicate scroll work of this 9.7 cm high finial, a number of human-like figures can be discerned. It is proposed that they refer to two episodes from the *Arjunawiwāha*, an eleventh-century Old Javanese text thought to have been created on the occasion of King Airlangga's marriage, and that the upper scene, that is somewhat hidden in the curve of the finial, may have had special meaning in this context.

Keywords: Java; gold; ritual objects; *Arjunawiwāha*; narrative art; Airlangga.