

# Asian Art Museum At-a-Glance: The Demon King Ravana Riding a Mythical Bird

## The Ramayana: The Demon King Ravana

The Ramayana, the epic story of Prince Rama, recounts his trials as he tries to rescue his wife, Sita. This statue depicts the antagonist, Ravana (Balinese: Rawana), on his mount, the bird-like Wilmana. The demon king kidnaps Sita, taking her to his island kingdom of Langka. Uniquely, in the Indonesian version of this Hindu story Ravana rides his mount instead of a chariot when he kidnaps Sita.



The demon king Ravana riding a mythical bird, approx. 1850–1900. Indonesia; Northern Bali. Colors and gold on wood. Acquisition made possible by the Connoisseurs' Council and the estate of K. Hart Smith, 2010.18.2. ©Asian Art Museum, San Francisco.



## Hinduism in Southeast Asia

Hinduism originated in northern India and moved to Southeast Asia through maritime trade. More than 1,000 years ago, evidence of Hinduism existed in much of Southeast Asia. Though Hinduism is still popular in Southeast Asia, the Indonesian island of Bali is the only place in this vast region where a form of it is dominant even today. One of the ways Hinduism spread was through the telling of the Ramayana, a 1,000-year-old Indian epic.



### Observe

This is the demon Ravana from the Ramayana. In this Hindu epic Ravana kidnaps the wife of the hero-prince Rama. The Ramayana is in great part about Rama's adventures to try and rescue his wife, Sita. How does the artist tell you Ravana is a fierce demon?

### Interpret

Ravana is considered a demon in India, but a hero in other areas like Southeast Asia and Sri Lanka. This sculpture of Ravana decorated the palace of a Balinese king. Why do you think this king chose to put an image of Ravana on his palace?

### Connect

Name a well-known epic or story from your culture. Are there public examples where people can see those characters represented in art? How is your example similar to or different from this sculpture of Ravana?

What art do you associate with powerful people in your community? What does that art tell you about its owner?

