

AMIR MOHTASHEMI



Hanuman Burns Lanka or Lanka Dahan

From the Sundara Kanda, Book 5 of the Ramayana

Punjab Hills, Himachal Pradesh, Kangra, circa 1830-40

Ink, opaque watercolour, and gold on paper

Approx. 34cm high, 46.5cm wide

Provenance: Private UK Collection

Stock no.: A4253

In this painting, reading from the top left, we see a scene of *Lanka Dahan* from the Hindu epic, the Ramayana. Sent as an ambassador to Lanka where Rama's wife Sita has been kidnapped by demon king Ravana, Hanuman is seen imprisoned and bound. Having wrapped Hanuman's tail with cloth, the rakshasas, or demons, march Hanuman with some pomp through a gate. One even beats a drum, leading the procession, as another one threatens him with a weapon. The demons then set Hanuman's tail alight in an effort to kill him. To their surprise he escapes and jumps from building to building, setting the entire city on fire with his tail.

The demons are quite varied in appearance underscoring the fact that all demons do not look alike. One sees the panic of the *rakshasas*, leaping from their homes or burning in them. They first throw up their arms watching Hanuman fly about and then try to save their belongings by handing them out of windows. At the bottom right a *rakshasi*, a demoness, holds her child on her hip and directs the saving of her valuables.

The fort appears to be made of gold, underscoring the wealth and power of Ravana, the king of the demons. The geometrical shapes of the architecture create interesting stage sets for the action making the story quite readable. The flames blow in the wind and Hanuman leaps from the terrace, kicking over a thin tower, adding interesting movement to the composition.

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