

AMIR MOHTASHEMI



Ambika (Devi) fights Nishumbha

Number 42 from a Devimahatmya series

Punjab Hills, Guler, ca. 1780

Ink and opaque watercolor on paper

Folio 20 x 29 cm

Painting 16.5 x 25.5 cm

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In the *Devimahatmya* the demon Shumbha tries to get the lovely goddess Ambika to become his wife and she challenges him and his brother Nishumbha to war. The demon army confronts her and there are a number of battles. After killing terrible demons in her many forms, here Ambika mounted on her lion is actively fighting powerful Nishumbha. Weapons fly back and forth creating a pattern in the space between the warring figures. Her arrows with their curved heads deflect the more common kind of Nishumbha while she manages to send many discuses, faintly outlined as doughnut shapes, towards her demon foe. Ambika's weapons reflect those of the gods, whose *shaktis* or female powers she embodies. She holds Brahma's *lota* or pot, Vishnu's *gada* and *shankha*, his club and conch, Shiva's *parashu* and *trishula*, axe and trident, as well as a sword and bow and arrow.

For a discussion of the text and translations in both Italian and English see: Alessandro Passi (ed.), *Devi-Mahatmya: Il ms. 4510 della Biblioteca Civica "Vincenzo Joppi" di Udine*, Udine: Società Indologica "Luigi Pio Tessitori," 2008. The story is told in *Adhyaya V* (12), pp. 306-08.

There is an incomplete set of paintings dating from the same period in the Chandigarh Museum, which have similar compositions and uncolored borders. There are also similar drawings in the Metropolitan Museum in New York and other museums in Brooklyn, Cincinnati, and Los Angeles.

Text by Robert J. Del Bontà.