

AMIR MOHTASHEMI



Ambika (Devi) Confronts Shumbha

Number 45 from a Devimahatmya series

Punjab Hills, Guler, ca. 1780

Ink and opaque watercolor on paper

Folio 20 x 29 cm

Painting 15.8 x 25.5 cm

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Provenance: Christie's London, 2013.

Continuing the story of the Goddess' exploits after dispatching Nishumbha, Ambika finally confronts Shumbha. Ambika is the embodiment of the female powers of a large number of gods, a combination essential to kill a series of powerful demons. She becomes the separate female counterparts of these gods and shortly after Nishumbha is killed, all of these manifestations return into the body of the single goddess. Against Shumbha Ambika stands alone. The artist has created a charming device to depict this. Not only does she hold some of the attributes of these gods, but also a few of their heads and hands, which pop up from her shoulders. Observing from left to right, we see the six-headed Karttikeya, the four-headed Brahma, a Shiva covered with light blue-gray ash from the cremation ground and the blue-skinned Vishnu. Between her arms we also find the man-lion Narasimha and the boar Varaha (two of Vishnu's incarnations) on her right and another head and hands (Kali?) to her left. She now can confront the last of her assailants, the all-powerful king of the Daityas Shumbha.

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. This story of Devi's final fight against Shumbha is told in Adhyaya V (13), pp. 309-10.

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