



Inv. no. 14/1981

“A FEMALE HERMIT IS ENTERTAINED BY A MUSICIAN”

INDIA; BEGINNING OF THE 18TH CENTURY

A holy woman – perhaps a Sufi, perhaps a Hindu yogi – is listening attentively to another woman playing the zither. The painting is from the late Mughal period, when night scenes were especially popular.

Not only holy men, but also holy women are found throughout Sufi history. One of the most famous is Rabia al-Adawia from Basra (717-801), who expressed the main tenants of Sufism in a simple verse: “O God, if I worship You for fear of Hell, then burn me in Hell; and if I worship You in hope of Paradise, then bar me from Paradise. But if I worship You for Your own sake, do not let me fail to see Your eternal beauty!”