

## INTRODUCTION

This volume is the result of the ART AND RELIGIONS IN PRE-ISLAMIC CENTRAL ASIA conference organised by the Polish Institute of World Art Studies on 24–26 October 2016 at the Manggha Museum of Japanese Art and Technology in Krakow. It includes texts from a broad range of topics broached at the conference. Some of the papers are devoted to intercultural relations between Central Asian countries and Greece, Rome and Iran, while other texts are related to the interpretation of rituals and rock art, as well as Gandhar's art.<sup>1)</sup>

The first part of the volume includes papers concentrating on relations between the ancient West and East. Kenneth Lymer by reviewing archaeological material from ancient Greece and the Early Nomads of Central Asia considers the connections between griffin imagery and material culture in society. The author describes griffin motifs appearing across cultures. The connections between the ancient Western World and Central Asia is also tackled in Robert Schulz's paper, who explains Dionysian cult persisting within the Sāsānian Realm on the basis of the archaeological findings from the wide extent of the Roman Empire. The ancient relations between 'two worlds' is also the topic of a paper by Mikhail Treister, who describes Hel-

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<sup>1)</sup> The Academic Committee preparing the conference was composed of the following professors: Piotr Balcerowicz (Warsaw University, Polish Institute of World Art Studies), Barbara Kaim (Warsaw University), Jerzy Malinowski (president of the Polish Institute of World Art Studies, Nicolaus Copernicus University in Toruń), Marek Mejor (Warsaw University) Andrzej Rozwadowski (Adam Mickiewicz University in Poznan, Polish Institute of World Art Studies and scientific secretary of the conference. Karolina Krzywicka (Asia and Pacific Museum in Warsaw).

lenistic phalerae (round medallions worn as a kind of reward or decoration) made of silver and found in the 2nd-1st centuries BC nomadic burials in the vast territory of Eurasia.

Another topic considered by the authors in our volume concerns rock art. Malahat Farajova analyses faunal remains, rock carvings and different artefacts found in archaeological sites in Gobustan as well as the plain of Mazandaran and describes a reconstruction of the Western Shore of the Caspian Sea landscape at the End of Upper Pleistocene and Holocene. Anna Augustinová in turn, describes the petroglyphs in Surkhanddarya Province (south Uzbekistan). The author calls them 'new petroglyphs', because they were recently discovered; nevertheless, the time of their creation dates back to the period of the Late Bronze and Early Iron Age. The numerous patterns include animals, human figures, chariots and some geometric motifs. All of them, as Augustinová writes, are 'an inseparable part of the cultural landscape, which was created and used by the inhabitants in the past'. The subject of 'rock art' is also considered by Irina Shvets in her paper about the 'sun-ray head' figures in the rock art of Central Asia. The author proves that these figures can be evidence for a specific form of prehistoric religion—shamanism. Similar theses appear in an article by Marina Kilunovskaya on the various compositions of petroglyphs in Tuva. The author claims that the rock art from this region indicates the 'presence of certain mythological representations, and reflects the oldest cults leading to the forming of shamanism'. Viktor Novozhenov and Marina Bedelbayeva in their joint paper also describe petroglyphs in the vast expanses of Saryarka—the steppes of Kazakhstan. The authors indicate that these prehistoric rock drawings demonstrate a highly developed 'spiritual culture of the ancient population of Central Kazakhstan'.

Two separate papers deal with the art of Gandhara. A joint article by Satomi Hiyama and Robert Arlt examines a discovery of two stucco heads excavated in the Gandharan region. Thanks to the authors' research, the sculptures can be identified as *vidūṣaka*—an important character of classic South-Asian theatre. The 'heads' prove the existence of *vidūṣaka* in both the theatrical and visual traditions in India and east Turkestan. Monika Zin in turn, considers the iconography of the Wandering Ascetics (Parivrājaka, Nirgrantha and Ājīvika), concentrating on details from the 'Representations of the Parinirvāṇa Cycle in the Art of Gandhara and Kucha'.

Our volume ends with a paper by Piotr Balcerowicz concerning different aspects relating to the author's research conducted on the pre-Islamic art of Afghanistan and Pakistan. The essay raises, *inter alia*, the issue of protecting monuments, which in the described regions are currently at risk of destruction due to the unstable political situation.

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