

## INTRODUCTION

This volume, devoted to imagery of animals in the art of Western and South Asia, is an attempt to answer the question of what stands behind the necessity or willingness to use depictions of animal to express human feelings and ideas. Texts written by seven Polish authors dealing with various aspects of Asian art investigate the themes of animal motifs occurring both in ancient and modern times in China, Korea, Japan and India.

Bogna Łakomska uses examples of jade figurines and shell mosaics to present the meaning of animal motifs in Neolithic China. The author signals various social and political practices that influenced the acquisition of knowledge about animals, and thus discovering their role not only in human life, but also in the world in general.

Agnieszka Staszczuk focuses on Goat-headed deities in ancient Indian sculpture. She refers mainly to works from the art centre in Mathura in northern India, due to the richness of its representations and the unquestionable ability to set trends in the religious iconography of ancient India.

Dorota Kamińska-Jones, in turn, discusses the multiple roles of dogs in India – culture, art and the colonial context. The author points out that dogs have an ambivalent status in Indian culture. On the one hand they can be wonderful beings, companions of the ascetics, and on the other hand they are often viewed as unclean creatures that should not be kept in homes. The author treats this issue from a historical as well as topical perspective.

Zuzanna Krzysztofik deals with the theme of animal motifs in the furniture and decor of a traditional Korean house. Based on the example of an element of visual culture, the researcher discusses the mutual influence of Taoism and Neo-Confucianism in the Joseon era.

Katarzyna Zapolska presents meanings of Confucian values hidden under depictions of birds in Chinese textiles from the Qing Dynasty. The author tries to decode a message which is not always direct and simple.

Monika Jankiewicz-Brzostowska presents some selected mages of animals in the satire of the two most important military conflicts that Japan experienced in the Meiji period: the Sino-Japanese and the Russo-Japanese wars. The examples come from the oeuvre of Kobayashi Kiyochika.

The final text by Magdalena Furmanik-Kowalska concerns insect motifs in contemporary Chinese, Korean and Japanese art. The author tries to answer whether these small animals are treated as the main subject of the artists' works or as mere tools to achieve a relevant artistic expression.