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## INTRODUCTION

The 11th volume of *Art of the Orient* is devoted to the South Asian art and culture. The yearbook consists of ten articles written by scholars from Europe and India.

The paper by Agnieszka Staszczyk aims to provide evidence for the use of one of the most widespread and significant gestures in ancient Indian art. The author explains that the Abhaya gesture, for the creation of iconographic types of individual deities, could also be useful because the cult images at their base created an image of a supernatural being that, having no original material form, suddenly received it.

Dorota Kamińska-Jones, in turn, discusses the importance of the body in Indian culture, analysing different approaches such as upanishadic, dharmashastra or the magic tradition. On this basis, she provides examples of how this is directly reflected in a variety of objects of visual art.

Patrick Felix Krüger focuses on divine beings represented in the miniatures illustrating the Kalpasūtra, one of the most important sources of the Jina legend. The author attempts to answer the question of how motifs from the subject area of the transcendent or the “divine” can be depicted.

Savita Kumari deals with the analysis of selected paintings from the illustrated manuscript *Sihr ul-Bayan* (The Enchanting Story), dating back to the later Mughal period and currently in the National Museum in New Delhi. The author shows how these paintings followed established Mughal conventions while subtly absorbing European influences.

Ulf Jäger’s paper presents the theme of swords and daggers on the wall paintings of Kucha in the 1st and 2nd Indo-Iranian styles. The author claims that all these depictions painted in Buddhist caves most likely date to the time when these types of weapons had found their most easterly distribution between 480 and 550 CE – i.e., when Kucha was dependent on the power of the Hephthalites.

Nikita Rathore describes artistic representations of birds and animals in the Paramara temples of India. The author shows that some species gained importance due to their association with divinities. In Hindu mythology, gods take the form of an animal or appear as partly animal. In Buddhism, animals became an integral part of Buddhist Jatakas and in Jainism; all the Jinas have symbols of animals.

The article by Roshini Roy Festus concerns architecture; specifically, the history, design and construction of Neoclassical masterpiece that is St. Andrew's Kirk in Madras. The author pays special attention to the fact that St. Andrew's Church is a hallmark of Scottish Presbyterian identity in the Indian subcontinent. This is not only testament to the increasing wealth and power of the British East India Company but also a mute monument to the numerous nameless people who toiled for those whose names have been recorded and remembered.

Magdalena Guziejko's paper concentrates on one specific object which belonged to Tipu Sultan and has been placed in the Victoria and Albert Museum. The author analyses this object in terms of contested heritage, because the instrument commonly called "Tipu's Tiger", as well as the person it was commissioned for, have been the subject of disputes to the present day. The piece belongs to the Victoria and Albert Museum; however, this situation has been questioned by currently active decolonization movements.

Zuzanna Rozwadowska's article is dedicated to a group of *pustaka* manuscripts located in four Polish institutions: The Asia and Pacific Museum, the National Ethnographic Museum in Warsaw, the National Ethnographic Museum in Poznan, and the University Library in Poznan. The author analyses the importance of the manuscripts for Batak society considering their language, script, content, and magical meaning.

The final article by Anna Dzierżyc-Horniak concerns contemporary Indonesian artist – Arahmaiani Feisal and her artistic practice analysed from the perspective of Joseph Beuys' "social sculpture". The author of the paper is of the opinion that Arahmaiani "places the human being at the centre of the relationship with nature, initiating actions that go beyond the modernist understanding of art and that are both personal and political (social)."