The first Goguryeo fortress excavated in South Korea was Guui-dong Fort, which was investigated in 1977. At the time, South Korean archaeologists had already identified ten such fortress sites in South Korea and considered the nature of those fortresses, relying on archaeological evidence. The earliest phase of Goguryeo fortress construction in South Korea can now be dated to the fifth century. The Goguryeo fortresses of South Korea were characterized by the use of stone-piled tombs near Nara, Japan. A fifth article examines the relationship between royal authority and local administration in the Baekje Kingdom, based on items of material culture excavated in Korea’s Jeolla Province region. The remaining two articles take Buddhist painting as their subject, one presenting a detailed study of a sixteenth-century Korean court-style painting of a Buddhist arhat—better known in English by the Chinese term luohan (羅漢; Kr. 나한)—now in the collection of the Los Angeles County Museum of Art, and one explaining the Buddhist Suryakusae ritual (日月神) and the use and meaning of paintings associated with that ritual.

In “Development of Goguryeo Tomb Murals,” Ahn Hwi-Joon discusses the earliest paintings found in Korea, the tomb murals of the ancient Goguryeo Kingdom. Those murals provide a vivid pictorial account of Goguryeo history and culture, just as they also offer insight into the distinct characteristics of early Korean painting and provide a window into Goguryeo society, shedding light on shifts in religious belief and on cultural exchanges with other countries. Murals first appeared in Goguryeo tombs around the fourth century; they continued to be produced until the collapse of the dynasty in 668. Such mural tombs were concentrated in Pyeongyang (平壤), in Tonggu (同固), Ch. Jilin province in China. The murals exhibit distinct regional characteristics, just as they show changes in theme and style over time; they can be classified into early (fourth to fifth century), middle (fifth to sixth century), and late (sixth to seventh century) periods accordingly. The authors, even crude, style of the early phase gradually became more refined and polished in later years, embodying the power and dynamism characteristic of Goguryeo art. Early murals typically featured genre scenes and portraits of the tomb occupant and his wife as well as hunting and procession scenes. Narrative scenes of daily life depicting episodes in the life of the deceased couple replaced the portraits as the primary theme in the middle period, and hunting and procession scenes disappeared. The late Goguryeo period saw genre paintings abandoned in favor of representations of the Four Directional Deities, reflecting the growing influence of Taoism. The figures depicted in these murals exhibit a higher level of artistic excellence than those of the earlier period. Landscapes began to appear in tomb murals no later than the early fifth century, developing a more sophisticated style during the middle and late periods and evolving an elevated sense of naturalism.

The first Goguryeo fortress excavated in South Korea was Gungi-dong Fort, which was investigated in 1977. At the time, South Korean archaeologists could not envision the presence of Goguryeo sites in South Korea, so the excavation team tentatively concluded that the structural remains were associated with a Baekje tomb. However, the Gungi-dong site came to be reinterpreted as the remains of a Goguryeo fortress after the discovery of a distinctive Goguryeo-style jar during the 1998 excavation of the Mongchon Earthen Fortress ( 몽촌토성, i.e., Seoul. Subsequent field surveys beginning in the early 1990s resulted in the further discovery of the remains of Goguryeo fortresses in the Seoul region and northern areas of Gyegonggi Province; to date, approximately ten such fortress sites have been fully excavated. In “The Structure and Characteristics of Goguryeo Fortresses in South Korea,” Yang Sieun conducts a comprehensive examination of Goguryeo fortress sites excavated in South Korea and considers the nature of those fortresses, relying on archaeological evidence. The earliest phase of Goguryeo fortress construction in South Korea can now be dated to the fifth century. The Goguryeo fortresses of South Korea were characterized by the use of stone-piled tombs near Nara, Japan; their ideal topographical conditions thus permitted them to block north-south transportation routes, giving them control of trade and the movement of people.

In “Origins of Early Goguryeo Stone-piled Tombs and the Formation of a Proto-Goguryeo Society,” Yeo Hokyu considers the formation of a Proto-Goguryeo society by examining the origins of Goguryeo stone-piled tombs. Professor Yeo analyzes the relationship between the stone-piled tombs and the indigenous communities of the region in order to determine whether the core group of Proto-Goguryeo was composed of migrants or by a consolidation of indigenous communities that traditionally resided in the region. Bronze culture predominated in the eastern regions of the Tianshan Mountain Range until the early to mid-third century BCE. The full-scale adoption of iron culture in that region took place toward the end of the third century BCE, a period that also witnessed the migration of displaced communities due to the many battles during China’s Warring States period (战国時代, 475 – 221 BCE). Early Goguryeo stone-piled tombs began to appear about this time, with limited distribution in the middle and upper reaches of the Amnok River (安綏江) also called the Yalu River, using the Chinese pronunciation of the same characters—which was the birthplace of the Goguryeo state. The roots of Goguryeo society can be found in the population group that began to construct stone-piled tombs in association with the adoption of iron culture; this group is believed to have split from the “Maek” group—people that resided in the eastern region of the Tianshan Mountain Range. The Proto-Goguryeo communities emerged out of the “Yemaek” people through many stages of fissuring, and came to be called “Guryeo” (高麗) group. In this sense, they can be referred to as the “Guryeo ethnic group” (고려족)—separate from the neighboring “Yemaek” communities—and the society that developed from this group can be regarded as the Proto-Goguryeo society that laid the foundation for the Goguryeo state. The discovery in the 1960s of the Takamatsuzuka Tomb (高麗太祖墓) in the
Japanese village of Asuka, Nara Prefecture, confirmed for the first time the existence in Japan of mural tombs—a type of tomb different in lineage from decorated tombs—sparking debate in Japan and abroad about the sociopolitical background and the socio-cultural conditions that might have led to the construction of a continental-style mural tomb in Nara. Meanwhile, another mural tomb was discovered in the region in 1983: the Kitora Tomb (基待塚古墳). The discovery of these tombs also caused much excitement in Korea, as they suggested a connection with the culture of Korea’s Three Kingdoms period, particularly that of the Goguryeo Kingdom. In “The Murals of Takamatsuzuka and Kitora Tombs in Japan and Their Relationship to Goguryeo Culture,” Jeon Hotae offers a detailed look at the Takamatsuzuka and Kitora tombs and examines historical and cultural sources that shed light on the possible link between Goguryeo tomb murals and the two Japanese mural tombs. In themes, composition, and technique, the murals in the Takamatsuzuka and Kitora tombs reflect the influence of Tang culture on the Goguryeo tradition, which, in turn influenced the Japanese tradition; even so, the murals also introduce features of mural composition unseen in Goguryeo or Tang tomb murals, as they were produced at a time when Japan was beginning to establish a cultural identity of its own. Both tomb structure and mural styles suggest the strong possibility that the people who constructed the two tombs and painted the murals were descendants of Goguryeo immigrants. It is also probable that the interred were government officials of Goguryeo descent. From many points of view, the Takamatsuzuka and Kitora tombs can be classified as Goguryeo-Japanese-style mural tombs; they provide insight into how the descendants of Goguryeo immigrants understood and responded to the tasks of the day.

In “The Material Culture of the Royal City Identified in the Peripheral Regions of Baekje,“ Kwon Ohyoung explores relationships between the Baekje Kingdom’s central authority and its peripheral regions. As the ancient Baekje Kingdom grew and relationships were established between the center and the periphery, individuals known as wanggyeongin (王子人) were dispatched from the capital to local regions. Living mainly in mountain fortresses, whose construction, maintenance, and management they oversaw, the wanggyeongin formed the core of the Baekje regional administration. From the perspective of the Baekje rulers, it must have been of key importance to have the local elite submit to the system of direct control by the Baekje center. Focusing on the Uncjo (高句麗, 475 – 538) and Sabi (縄文時代, 538 – 660) periods, when the Baekje capital was based in Gongju (宮池) and Buyeo (武城), respectively, this article identifies the legacy of the wanggyeongin in the Honam (忠南) region (i.e., today’s Jeolla Province region in the southwest) in order to examine the process and nature of the assimilation of the region into Baekje society. The article goes on to examine the material culture of the wanggyeongin through study of the artifacts produced for the early Joseon period. Once Neo-Confucianism had been firmly established as the underlying ideology of the Joseon social order, however, this ritual was performed less frequently under state sponsorship but remained popular among the general public. This article reconstructs the structure and arrangement of the Suryukjae ritual through examination of related Buddhist paintings in the collection of the National Museum of Korea. An examination of those paintings from the National Museum collection that relate to each step of the Suryukjae ritual deepens understanding of the ritual itself and the related artworks. The Suryukjae ritual is both a religious ceremony and a majestic artistic performance with a structured narrative. In this ritual, Buddhist paintings helped participants visualize the mutual exchanges between the invisible spirits and deities.