

Editor's Column

I am deeply grateful to the readers of *Oral Tradition*—and even more to the authors of the articles in these pages—for their patience in awaiting the appearance of this long-overdue volume. Rather than an excuse, I offer an assurance that the journal is taking steps to increase our efficiency and improve our ability to review and publish work in a timely fashion. The most important of these steps is the appointment of a new Managing Editor, Ben Gregson, and, beginning with the next issue, a new co-Editor, Dr. Justin Arft. With the help of these scholars, we hope to return to a more frequent cadence of publication. In the meantime, I hope that the quality of the research presented here justifies the long wait.

I take this opportunity to offer my sincere thanks to Dr. Daniel Frim, who served as Managing Editor from 2019 to 2024, and who saw five issues through to publication in that time. Dr. Frim joined the journal while still a graduate student and stayed on until after the completion of his degree. His depth of expertise across several fields has been critical to the success of *Oral Tradition* over the past several years. As Dr. Frim moves on to the next step in his scholarly career, I am pleased to welcome Ben Gregson, whose own expertise and skill are already on display in these pages.

The contents of the current issue fall into two sections. The first comprises five articles on a wide range of traditions. Lameen Souag opens the issue with her study of a previously undocumented folktale from northwestern Africa, finding in the several recorded instances of this tale the material for fascinating observations on its transmission, structure, and function. Tuomas Tammisto then presents an overview of another never-before-documented tradition, the *tandaning* or “songs of lament” sung by the Wide Bay Mergen of Papua New Guinea. Andrew Alter and D. R. Purohit shift our attention to the Indian subcontinent with their examination of ritualized performances of stories from the *Mahābhārata* in Garhwal, showing how the orality and aurality of such performances are shaped by Hindu metaphysics. Monire Akbarpouran explores the effect of changing social circumstances on Turkish-speaking *ashiqs* in contemporary Iran. Rounding out this first section of the issue, Martin Worthington takes readers back to the Bronze Age by analyzing traces of the interaction of orality and literacy in Babylonian and Assyrian cuneiform documents.

The issue concludes with a short cluster of essays unified by their focus on South Slavic oral traditions, which, thanks in part to the work of Milman Parry and Albert Lord, occupy a prominent position in the history of the study of oral poetry. Dorian Jurić’s investigation of the conceptual geography informing the epic songs of Ahmed Čaušević, an important informant for the 19th-century collector Luka Marjanović, reveals the ways in which a scholarly imperative to normalize and “rationalize” can distort the workings of tradition. Epic singing has long dominated discussions of South Slavic oral poetry, but Ana Vukmanović broadens our perspective by centering lyric songs from across the South Slavic language area, finding in these songs recurring utopian moments that contest prevailing social realities. Blaž Zabel concludes this section, and the issue as a whole, by revisiting a key moment in the intellectual history of the so-called “oral theory,” correcting a widely-held view of the influence exercised by Matija Murko on Milman Parry and Albert Lord.

Taken as a whole, Volume 37 of *Oral Tradition* offers a wide array of studies collectively illustrating the richness and variety of the world's oral traditions. Let me state again my hope that readers will find this volume well worth the wait.

David F. Elmer
Editor, *Oral Tradition*