

Editor's Column

The first number of volume 14 opens with a new emphasis for *Oral Tradition*. Devoted entirely to Jewish traditions, it examines the interplay of orality and text across the centuries from the foundation of sacred writings (and sayings) through to the present day.

The initial group of essays focuses on the Oral Torah, a problematic term that has received many contradictory explanations. Martin Jaffee sets the scene for this exchange, outlining the collective presentation in three sections. After a brief orientation to Rabbinic literature aimed at the diverse readership of *Oral Tradition*, he considers the symbolic value of orally transmitted learning in Rabbinic culture and moves toward a juxtaposition of current studies in oral tradition with extant Rabbinic texts.

Three colleagues then explore some of the specific directions that Jaffee maps out. Steven Fraade explains how literary composition and oral performance—Written and Oral Torahs—are not mutually exclusive but necessarily interactive. For his part, Yaakov Elman argues in favor of the oral composition and transmission of the Babylonian Talmud. Finally, Elizabeth Shanks Alexander explains how methodologies evolved in studies of other oral traditions can help to solve otherwise puzzling problems in the transmission and stability of the Mishnah.

Partnered to this small symposium is a rich and magisterial essay by Dan Ben-Amos on “Jewish Folk Literature.” Taking as his subject nothing less than the broad and heterogeneous expanse of Jewish folklore from the Biblical period to the present, Ben-Amos patiently and carefully unravels a Gordian knot of research and scholarship, providing hundreds of references to sources in a variety of languages. This essay should prove a *locus classicus* for folklorists, literary specialists, and comparatists for many years to come, and we are proud to be publishing it in *Oral Tradition*.

Let me also take a moment to welcome aboard John Zemke, Associate Professor of Romance Languages, as assistant editor. A specialist in Hispanic and particularly in Sephardic oral traditions, Professor Zemke has been of enormous help in preparing the present issue and will be playing a prominent role in the editing of the journal from this point forward.

Forthcoming issues, primarily in the “miscellaneous” mode for the next year, will feature articles on areas as divergent as Coptic, Black English, ancient Greek, Persian romance, medieval English and French,

Japanese, Native American, Celtic folklore, and Toni Morrison's *Paradise*. In the works is a special issue on Contemporary Criticism and Studies in Oral Tradition (Mark Amodio, editor).

As ever, we welcome your submissions and your subscriptions with equal and genuine enthusiasm, and look forward to new and exciting developments within our shared field.

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