

INTRODUCTION

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This special issue of the journal *Folklore: Electronic Journal of Folklore* consists of two volumes (67 & 68) and is dedicated to traditional singing with a special focus on older Finnic oral song tradition. The idea for this issue was prompted by the conference *Regilaulu teisenemised ja piirid* ('Transformations and Borders of *Regilaul*') held in Tartu on 26 and 27 November 2014. This conference, organised by the Estonian Folklore Archives of the Estonian Literary Museum, was the eighth in the series of conferences dedicated to the older Finnic song tradition, the first one of which was held in 2000. This year also marked the beginning of publishing a series of article collections on runosongs (Jaago & Valk 2000; Jaago & Sarv 2001; Sarv 2004; Lintrop 2006; Sarv 2012; Oras & Kalkun & Sarv 2014). Most of the articles in the series were written on the basis of the presentations given at these conferences.

Furthermore, the first decade of the 2000s witnessed the enhancing of cooperation among runosong researchers from Estonia and Finland in preparing runosong databases (<http://skvr.fi/> and <http://www.folklore.ee/regilaul/>) and in digital corpus-based research. The cooperation has a long history because the Finnic oral singing culture, which can be traced back to a distant past, has survived in the lived tradition in some areas to this day, has been accumulated into rich source corpora over the past few centuries, and has been an important research object of Finnish, Karelian, and Estonian folklore studies and ethnomusicology throughout the 19th and 20th centuries, bringing together researchers across country borders. This journal issue features studies by the Finnish and Estonian researchers who participated in the conference in 2014.

Next to particular ways of thinking, imagery, and language use characteristic of older oral singing cultures, the Finnic singing tradition is defined by having specific poetic features – special alliteration, parallelism, and trochaic tetrametre (see articles by Kallio, Sarv, Ross & Lohk, Kõmmus & Särg in this issue). Among Finnic peoples, the singing tradition and short forms of folklore in Kalevala metre or Finnic trochaic tetrametre have been recorded from Karelians, Finns, Ingrians, Votians, and Estonians. The alliteration and parallelism typical of

the Finnic poetic tradition are represented also in Vepsian singing culture. Owing to the long history and geographical range of the singing culture and the influences exerted by the neighbouring cultures, its poetic features are far from being homogeneous. Among others, the poetic metre as an indicator of the singing style differs considerably from the Karelian tradition with more clearly established metric regularities to the metric transitional forms, for example, in the songs of western and southern regions of Estonia (Sarv 2015; see also Kallio in this issue, pp. 19–20).

The regional variability of the Finnic oral singing tradition, and even more so the ideological meanings attributed to it from the modernisation period until today, are the reasons why terminology on the subject is inconsistent across different Finnic peoples and within the same language. Both in Finland and Estonia, terminology has recently become an object of lively discussion (Kallio & Frog 2017; Oras & Kalkun & Sarv 2014: 9–10). Another issue is that the (historically evolved) semantic fields of the terms in different Finnic languages do not completely overlap with those in the English linguistic space. Regardless of the fact that the terms derived from the title of Elias Lönnrot's national epic *Kalevala* have been justifiably problematised and deconstructed, they still appear useful in English discourse, helping English speakers recognise and emotionally relate with the old Finnic song tradition. In the current journal issue, the parallel term of Finnish origin, **runosong**, has been used (in English-language discourse, so far, also, 'runic' and 'rune' have been applied). Here the term designates the Finnic song culture as a whole, whereas the concept indicates both the flexibility of the shared poetic features of the singing culture and its variability across geographical regions and in different historical contexts of use. In their discussions of Estonian and Seto runosongs in the English language in the past few decades, Estonian researchers have applied, in addition to 'runosong', terms adopted from the terminology of oral tradition in academic use – *regilaul* (*regi*-song, in which *regi* derives from a Low Saxon word for 'circle' or 'circle game') and *leelo* (a term derived from a song's chorus), respectively. These native terms also include the word *leu'dd* in Marko Jouste's article, which signifies the Skolt Sami branch of the Eastern Sami individual song tradition beyond the border of the runosong area.

The majority of articles in this journal issue shed light on the border areas and various transitional processes of the runosong, analysing either the lexical or imagery usage, poetic and musical devices of the songs, the oral or written expression of the (re)creators of the tradition, or discourses reflecting the ideologies of different times. Since a defining feature of the runosong is the unique poetic metre, song genres with poetic features partly overlapping with the runosong, but 'not yet' or 'no longer' in Finnic trochaic tetrametre, constitute an extensive and vastly diverse border area of the runosong. The

first group includes the so-called earlier vocal genres which are characterised by parallelism and alliteration and which were probably in use before the development of the specific Finnic metre. These genres have undergone several transformations, adopting the characteristics of newer music and poetics with flexibility common to solo genres (Pärtlas, Kõmmus & Särg, cf. Jouste). The second group consists of a variety of hybrid forms which have developed in the oral tradition under the influence of other, mainly end-rhymed singing cultures (Kõmmus & Särg) or which have been consciously shaped in written learned creation on the example of oral poetry (Kallio). Next to other song genres, the runosong shares common features in contents and form – but also differences stemming from genre specifics – with Finnic short forms of folklore (Sarv). The boundaries of the phenomena of the oral tradition tend to be inherently fluid and absorb the influences of each other. However, in the modernisation period the communities practised simultaneously singing styles that were remarkably different in contents, poetic form, and language – such as runosongs and written hymns, translated into Estonian by German clerics in the eighteenth century (Ross & Lohk).

Modernisation of the society introduced hybrid forms of the runosong and end-rhymed singing style, and eventually brought along the withdrawal of the former, but in parallel with these events, another major transformation process took place – the ‘domestication’ of the runosong in modern literary culture. The educated elite employed the runosong structure to formulate a completely different ideology (Kallio), adapted oral poetry to conform to the middle class ways of thinking (Hämäläinen) and demonstrated live runo singing on stage as the exotic Other (Kalkun). Performers of the runosong also participated in the process, describing their individual and community practices from an ambivalent participant-observer position (Oras). Next to the meanings assigned to the runosong by nationalism, it acquired additional meanings in the twentieth century, of which the impact of Soviet ideology on collecting and studying *regilaul* in Estonia (Saarlo) is discussed in this journal issue. The creators of runosongs themselves have ‘documented’ the transformation of their tangible and intangible culture for centuries. It has continued to inspire researchers to search for information on the former beliefs, practices, and material reality (Lintrop, Kama) hidden in the poetic imagery of the song verses by relying on other cultures or archaeological finds.

The first article, “Literary Kalevala-Metre and Hybrid Poetics in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Century Finland” by **Kati Kallio**, delves into the Finnish-language repertoire by early authors, which reveals attempts to oppose to the structural features of ‘ungodly’ singing culture in different periods, or vice versa, to use these in their religious or vernacular creation. The article offers the readers a chance to participate in the process of analysing highly varied

poetic forms which allow multiple interpretations and have emerged largely as a result of the intuitive use of the poetic features of oral tradition. **Kristiina Ross** and **Ahti Lohk** discuss early Estonian-language hymnal poetry in their article “Words, Forms, and Phrases in Estonian Folksongs and Hymns”. A lexical and grammatical comparison of two eighteenth-century poetic forms which existed side by side – oral folksongs and written hymns – reveals their essential differences proceeding from the different cultural context, ways of conceptualisation, music, and language use of the songs. Compared to the sources of Kallo’s article, the Estonian hymns clearly indicate a limited familiarity of local German-speaking authors with the linguistic and cultural codes of Estonians.

In her article “Towards a Typology of Parallelism in Estonian Poetic Folklore”, **Mari Sarv** introduces the current situation in the discussion on parallelism in runosongs and, comparing runosongs, proverbs, sayings, and riddles, proposes an original model for identifying the types of parallelism on the basis of semantic relations between parallel elements (words or phrases) in grammatically parallel units. Her approach is based on the idea of a coherent system of poetic devices in which the use of parallelism and euphonic means are closely related. The article “Star Bride Marries a Cook: The Changing Processes in the Oral Singing Tradition and in Folk Song Collecting on the Western Estonian Island of Hiiumaa” by **Helen Kõmmus** and **Taive Särg** gives a detailed overview of the archival representations of the older oral singing tradition, the *regilaul*, earlier vocal genres and transitional forms of Hiiumaa Island, and discusses the ideological, local, and personal factors influencing their creation. In the second part of the article (vol. 68), the authors will take a closer look at the songs of the region, giving examples of unique hybrid forms characteristic of Hiiumaa Island, which have developed as a result of a longer coexistence of different styles.

The approaches on structural phenomena and major song corpora are followed by case studies and analyses of individual performers-creators. **Liina Saarlo** in her article “*Regilaul* in the Political Whirlpool: On Collecting *Regilaul* in Northeast Estonia in the Second Half of the 1950s” observes the changing status of the runosong in Estonian folklore studies during the first decades of the Soviet occupation. Against this background, she discusses the representations of the repertoire recorded in the 1950s in Ida-Virumaa County, the most ‘classical’ runosong area in Estonia, in the archives, and in *Vana Kannel* (“The Old Psalter”), the academic publication of Estonian *regilaul* by parishes. **Janika Oras** in her article “Mari and Marie: Performativity and Creativity of Two Estonian Singers in the Late Nineteenth Century” analyses differences in the performativity of two outstanding female singers, shaped by the changing of song repertoire and performance situations alongside the modernisation of the society, their belonging to different generations of performers, and their

different relationship with literary culture. In her article “Emotional Transpositions: Interpreting Oral Lyric Poetry”, **Niina Hämäläinen** searches for clues to understand the popular lyrical runosong text *Armahan kulku* (“The beloved’s walk”) by Elias Lönnrot, analysing the oral sources that the text is based on and the views and attitudes guiding their literary rendition. The author has also observed the receptions of Lönnrot’s text at different times, which, in turn, demonstrate changes in the concept of romantic love and gender ideologies.

The first two articles of the next journal issue, volume 68, will observe Seto culture from different perspectives. **Andreas Kalkun**, in his article “Introducing Setos on Stage: On the Early Performances of Seto Singing Culture”, paints a colourful picture of the appropriation of Seto culture by the entrepreneurial and creative local elite of the neighbouring areas of the Seto region, who aspired to participate in the ‘entertainment business’ by staging exoticism of the late nineteenth century. The Estonians who performed as ‘Setos’, and the reception of these staged performances, form a peculiar mix of romantic national ideas on the one hand, and colonialist attitudes towards the exotic Others on the other hand.

Of the two music-related articles, both of which investigate solo genres, the first one by **Žanna Pärtlas**, titled “On the Relict Scales and Melodic Structures in the Seto Shepherd Tune *Kar’ahääl*”, will continue on the Seto theme. The author shows the extensive variation of the musical scales of herding songs, which have survived in the oral tradition until the present day. This rich variability seems to point to the early musical thinking characterised by the contrasting of pitch levels, the intervallic relations of which are not yet settled. The results of the analysis have inspired the author to improve the existing theories on the processes of scale formation. The article “Historical Skolt Sami Music and Two Types of Melodic Structures in *Leu’dd* Tradition” by **Marko Jouste** discusses the individual *leu’dd* song tradition that is central to the Skolt Sami culture. Jouste introduces the model of fragmentary phrase structure, characteristic of the earlier *leu’dd*, and demonstrates how the living song tradition has incorporated melodies and other musical features from the neighbouring cultures while preserving its main characteristics and identity.

In his article “Where Do Songs Come From? An Attempt to Explain Some Verses of *Regilaul*”, **Aado Lintrop** directs his attention to the former magic function of objects depicted in verses about singing skills. These objects bestowed the singer with the power to recreate and perform long epic texts. The religious background of the imagery in Estonian *regilaul* is discussed by pointing out parallels with several shamanic cultures. The article titled “How Old Is Runosong? Dating the Motifs of Burial-Related Folk Songs by Using Archaeological Material” by **Pikne Kama** approaches the Estonian singing tradition from an archaeologist’s perspective, searching for manifestations of period-specific

tangible culture and burial practices behind the poetic images of songs related to death and burial.

This brief introduction demonstrates the broad thematic spectrum of the approaches to Finnic and Sami singing cultures in the two volumes of this special issue. The readers will hopefully find fresh ideas and inspiration to continue the discussion on the boundaries and points of convergence, stability, and transformations of oral poetic traditions. Finally, I would like to extend my heartfelt gratitude to the dedicated and cooperative authors of this issue, proficient peer reviewers, and the excellent editorial team of the journal.

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