



## EDITORS' FOREWORD

**Catriona Kelly**

Trinity College, University of Cambridge  
Cambridge, UK  
ck616@cam.ac.uk

**Albert Baiburin**

Peter the Great Museum of Anthropology and Ethnography (Kunstkamera), RAS  
3 Universitetskaya Emb., St Petersburg, Russia  
European University at St Petersburg  
6/1A Gagarinskaya Str., St Petersburg, Russia  
abaiburin@gmail.com

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While the surrounding world remains as dislocated as before (with war in the Near East as well as the former USSR), in this issue, we revert to our usual contents: a Forum, articles and reviews. In their discussion of the role of IT in the academic world, the participants in the Forum (or some of them) express an unusual and refreshing inclination not simply to complain about the inexorable rise of chatbots and electronic compilation programmes and their putative civilisational impact, but also to use the tools of anthropological analysis in order to understand the social and intellectual processes that accompany the spread of AI. They also share their experience of using AI as a route to critical thinking (what is wrong with the texts that ChatGPT produces, and why?) For their part, the authors of the articles on the anthropology of bureaucracy which are also included in this number investigate an aspect of social experience that is often the source of loud complaint and frustration. Pushing beyond the customary irritation felt by those exposed to “street-level bureaucrats”, they focus on the processes by which officials in a variety of what is now known as “public-facing” roles carry out the classifications, and make the decisions, that they consider essential to their work. While the authors of the articles are representatives of Russian academic tradition, their work draws extensively on studies of bureaucracy by anthropologists and sociologists from the wider world, and many of the situations which are discussed (for example, the work of emergency services dispatchers and call centre employees) will be familiar from experience in other countries as well.

To round off the number, we publish two reviews that are directly related to the subjects addressed in the Forum and articles. The issues of authenticity and the determination of authorship are incisively addressed in Anna Gerasimova's discussion of a monograph on Russian essay mills, while Anna Altukhova considers Mirjam Galley's study of Russian children's homes and boarding schools, an area also subject to the decisions about welfare resourcing and social intervention (or its absence) that the articles about bureaucrat choices survey.

The year 2024 marks exactly two decades since the first ever issue of *Antropologicheskij forum*, and, indeed, the first ever number in English, which at that point neatly reproduced the original issue, but which, as the content of the Russian issues expands, has included a selection of thematically-linked materials taken from the four issues that are now published per year. A great deal has happened over that twenty years, by no means all of it positive. Our original commitment to international dialogue and the peaceful exchange of views across borders has come under severe strain. However, we remain dedicated to our original objectives, and optimistic that in the course of the next 20 years, they will once again be easier to realise.

As always, we express our gratitude to Ralph Cleminson for his translations from Russian, and to the editorial staff, particularly Olga Boitsova and Aleksandra Zakharova, for their work on conveying the material into English-language print.

*Albert Baiburin  
Catriona Kelly*