

*Spirit Wrestlers Voices: Doukhobor Pioneers' Strategies for Living.* By Koozma Tarasoff. (Legas Publishing, Ottawa, 2002. Pp. xvi + 480, illustr. photographs, graphics, diagrams, maps, ISBN 1-896031-12-9, hardcover. CD-ROM to accompany, but not available at time of review.)

F. Mark Mealing

Volume 25, Number 2, 2003

Language and Culture / Langue et culture

URI: <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/008063ar>

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.7202/008063ar>

[See table of contents](#)

Publisher(s)

Association Canadienne d'Ethnologie et de Folklore

ISSN

1481-5974 (print)

1708-0401 (digital)

[Explore this journal](#)

Cite this review

Mealing, F. M. (2003). Review of [*Spirit Wrestlers Voices: Doukhobor Pioneers' Strategies for Living.* By Koozma Tarasoff. (Legas Publishing, Ottawa, 2002. Pp. xvi + 480, illustr. photographs, graphics, diagrams, maps, ISBN 1-896031-12-9, hardcover. CD-ROM to accompany, but not available at time of review.)]. *Ethnologies*, 25(2), 258–260. <https://doi.org/10.7202/008063ar>

Overall, if one is looking for an entertaining story of an influential figure in East Coast country music, this is a good book. Hector's vocal presence throughout makes personal memories and stories much more effective than they would be as told from a distance. Fawcett clearly went in-depth with her interviews and research and pieced the information together in a way that is readable and is an all-round history of Hector. While it would have been beneficial to have a more structured context from Fawcett, as well as some analysis from an author who is very involved with the man, his music, and the community, it is a good start for those who want to learn more about George Hector and country music in New-Brunswick.

Gillian Turnbull  
University of Alberta  
Edmonton

---

***Spirit Wrestlers Voices: Doukhobor Pioneers' Strategies for Living.*** By Koozma Tarasoff. (Legas Publishing, Ottawa, 2002. Pp. xvi + 480, illustr. photographs, graphics, diagrams, maps, ISBN 1-896031-12-9, hardcover. CD-ROM to accompany, but not available at time of review.)

Forty years ago, Koozma Tarasoff published a three-volume study, *In Search of Brotherhood*. This is not a well-known work; it was a mimeographed samizdat in an edition of ten copies. In 1969, he wrote *A Pictorial History of the Doukhobors*; in 1977, for the then National Museum of Man, he wrote *Traditional Doukhobor Folkways: An Ethnographic and Biographic Record of Prescribed Behaviour*; and in 1982, *Plakun Trava — The Doukhobors*. He has also written and edited a great range of other materials in the field of Doukhobor Studies.

There is a cliché in Academe: all scholars have only one book, which starts with their dissertations and repeats the same ideas forever. Of course there is an element of truth in this, although it has at least two heads. The second head is a small one some scholars are incapable of advancing beyond their initial insight. But the great first head is the depth of knowledge a wise scholar will choose about an inexhaustible subject. I choose to consider Tarasoff to be a wise scholar. Early in his career he responded to the life of his own tradition as a critic and

advocate, and he and Doukhobor tradition have continued the dialogue fruitfully ever since. Doukhobors, a Russian Pacifist sect, have lived in Canada for more than a century, not always comfortably, and the general public are not well informed about this distinctive and remarkable community. That ignorance has always been one of Tarasoff's primary concerns; *Spirit Wrestlers* (the title is a translation of the Russian term "Doukhobortsi") is his most recent work against ignorance.

The organization of *Spirit Wrestlers* is *sui generis*, perhaps influenced by the self-referential and tangent-seeking qualities of contemporary multimedia, and particularly the forms of the Internet. The book opens with a skeletal overview of Doukhobor history, particularly in Canada, ethnography and scholarship. Tarasoff then presents the heart of the book, many short biographical essays recalling the renaissance literary form of the Character. The model for this chapter is probably *Toil and Peaceful Life*, a superb biographical monograph of Doukhobor pioneer narratives and portraits published in 1977 by Marjorie Malloff and Peter Ogloff. These essays, arranged in no obvious system, are sometimes prepared by the author and sometimes by relatives, acquaintances or other informal biographers, thus creating a diagnostic range of perceptions and understandings more useful (if more elusive) than a single viewpoint. These are further illustrated by historical photographs, snapshots and portraits, sometimes with images of works of art and craft, or with sidebars of epigrams, poems, songs, and supplemental scholarly notes. The cumulative weight offers the ideals of endurance; individual material, social, creative and spiritual achievement; and the crafting of personality and of a vital society.

The third chapter is a collection of historic and contemporary photographic images, the latter usually in colour, epitomizing the iconography of Doukhobor culture so thoroughly presented in *A Pictorial History*, though lacking the same detailed annotation. The last chapter, an essay on cultural principles with a strong personal view, summarizes Doukhobor ideology under headings of pacifism, labour, cooperation, craft, cleanliness, hospitality, mediation and spirituality, and concluding with an appeal against mass ideology. There are also extensive appendices; an essay against stereotypes of Doukhobors; a brief glossary of Doukhobor and Russian terms of ideological and ethnographic significance, of village and place names (advancing our knowledge of their names, locations and populations), and of historical figures; an English text of the essential Doukhobor Psalm "Be Devout"; and an

excellent chronicle. There is also a selected bibliography and a good index, rather concentrated upon names of individuals and organizations.

As a physical object, *Spirit Wrestlers* is attractively proportioned. While the binding is of the appalling glued Perfect® variety, it is at least in gatherings and will be durable enough. The layout and graphics are clear and unintrusive, with excellent colour reproduction and registration, and type fonts are generally effective. While I did not proofread exhaustively, I can note that errors are vanishingly few (one lost footnote reference on page 361).

This book is of broad interest obviously to Immigrant, Slavic and Doukhobor Studies scholars. To the Canadian community at large, it is a broad view that informs as it opposes bias and prejudice, still issues for Doukhobors, with a very powerful assemblage of positive images in words and graphics. For the Doukhobor community, it is also something new, the first deliberately overwhelming multiple object in praise of Doukhobor Culture in Canada. It is, after all, significant in North American society to arrive, not only in the marketplace, the schools, the courts and the nation, but also upon coffee tables. This is not only a captivating popular book founded upon long and broad scholarship, it is also a cultural trophy achieved in a proper Doukhobor manner, with honest labour and without strife.

## References

- Tarasoff, Koozma. 1963. *In Search of Brotherhood (3 vols.)*. Vancouver.  
 ———. *A Pictorial History of the Doukhobors*. 1969. Saskatoon, Western Producer/Prairie Books.  
 ———. 1977. *Traditional Doukhobor Folkways. An Ethnographic and Biographic Record of Prescribed Behaviour*. Canadian Centre for Folk Culture Studies, Mercury Series Paper # 20, Ottawa, National Museum of Canada.  
 ———. *Plakun Trava - The Doukhobors*. 1982. Grand Forks (BC), Mir Publishing Company.  
 Malloff, Marjorie and Peter Ogloff. 1977. "Toil And Peaceful Life/Portraits of Doukhobors, British Columbia". *Sound Heritage* VI (5), Victoria, Provincial Archives.

F. Mark Mealing  
 Kaslo, B.C.

---