

***Sbornik: Dukhoborcheskikh Psalmov, Stikhov i Pesen (A Collection: Doukhobor Psalms, Hymns and Songs)***. Edited by Peter Legebokoff and Anna Markova (Grand Forks, B.C.: Soyuz Dukhovnik Obshin Khrista (Union of Spiritual Communities of Christ), 1978. Pp. 752. c. \$8.00 paper, \$12.00 cloth. Available from USCC Central Office, Box 760, Grand Forks, B.C.)

***Book of Life of Doukhobors***. Recorded and edited by Vladimir Bonch-Bruevich Translated by Victor Buyniak (Blaine Lake, Sask.: Doukhobor Societies of Saskatchewan Project, 1979. Pp. x1 + 320. \$11.95 cloth. Available from Book of Life, c/o Sam George Stupnikoff, Box 96, Blaine Lake, Sask.)

F. M. Mealing

---

Volume 3, Number 1, 1981

URI: <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/1081058ar>

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.7202/1081058ar>

[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. (1981). Review of [*Sbornik: Dukhoborcheskikh Psalmov, Stikhov i Pesen (A Collection: Doukhobor Psalms, Hymns and Songs)*]. Edited by Peter Legebokoff and Anna Markova (Grand Forks, B.C.: Soyuz Dukhovnik Obshin Khrista (Union of Spiritual Communities of Christ), 1978. Pp. 752. c. \$8.00 paper, \$12.00 cloth. Available from USCC Central Office, Box 760, Grand Forks, B.C.) / *Book of Life of Doukhobors*. Recorded and edited by Vladimir Bonch-Bruevich Translated by Victor Buyniak (Blaine Lake, Sask.: Doukhobor Societies of Saskatchewan Project, 1979. Pp. x1 + 320. \$11.95 cloth. Available from Book of Life, c/o Sam George Stupnikoff, Box 96, Blaine Lake, Sask.]. *Ethnologies*, 3(1), 87–89. <https://doi.org/10.7202/1081058ar>

---

Tous droits réservés © Ethnologies, Université Laval, 1981

This document is protected by copyright law. Use of the services of Érudit (including reproduction) is subject to its terms and conditions, which can be viewed online.

<https://apropos.erudit.org/en/users/policy-on-use/>

---

érudit

This article is disseminated and preserved by Érudit.

Érudit is a non-profit inter-university consortium of the Université de Montréal, Université Laval, and the Université du Québec à Montréal. Its mission is to promote and disseminate research.

<https://www.erudit.org/en/>

renseigne pas toujours adéquatement le lecteur. Par exemple, la légende des feux follets n'est sûrement pas "née" à Beauport en 1660. L'incident qu'on rapporte au sujet du meunier Voil atteste tout simplement la présence de ces êtres surnaturels dans l'univers fantastique collectif de l'époque.

Ces mêmes traits de l'imaginaire collectif auront frappé l'esprit des responsables de cette collection, qui les auront ensuite interprétés et développés sous forme d'albums en regard de leurs propres normes esthétiques et pédagogiques. L'élément traditionnel se trouve ici fort éloigné de ce qu'on pourrait appeler son "épicerie"; il est présent comme un écho à l'intérieur d'une norme culturelle différente. Reste à évaluer l'efficacité de la série: la légende y est-elle encore assez vigoureuse pour générer une impression significative dans l'esprit des enfants-lecteurs ou rejoindra-t-elle sans s'en démarquer le réservoir hétéroclite de belles images qui peuplent le monde du livre pour enfants? La folkloriste inclinerait ici en faveur de la seconde possibilité, mais la vraie réponse n'appartient encore qu'aux enfants eux-mêmes.

Vivian Labrie  
Institut québécois de recherche  
sur la culture  
Québec

**Sbornik: Dukhoborcheskikh Psalmov, Stikhov i Pesen (A Collection: Doukhobor Psalmos, Hymns and Songs)**  
*Edited by Peter Legebokoff and Anna Markova*  
(Grand Forks, B.C.: Soyuz Dukhovnik Obshin Khrista (Union of Spiritual Communities of Christ), 1978. Pp. 752. c. \$8.00 paper, \$12.00 cloth. Available from USCC Central Office, Box 760, Grand Forks, B.C.)

**Book of Life of Doukhobors**  
*Recorded and edited by Vladimir Bonch-Bruevich*  
*Translated by Victor Buyniak*  
(Blaine Lake, Sask.: Doukhobor Societies of Saskatchewan Project, 1979.  
Pp. x1 + 320. \$11.95 cloth. Available from Book of Life, c/o Sam George Stupnikoff, Box 96, Blaine Lake, Sask.)

*Napishite vo serdtsakh, vozvestite vo ustkah* (Write upon the heart, reveal from the mouth)

For the larger part of their existence, the Russian Pacifist sectarians called Doukhobors have maintained their core religious lore only in oral form. Such lore remained difficult of access in times of persecution and prejudice – direct or apprehended – and those few scholars of the 19th century such as Novitsky or Grellet were able to record little of Doukhobor expression.

The first sympathetic observer to bring the methods of folklore research to Doukhobor hymnody was Vladimir Bonch-Bruevich (who later became Lenin's personal secretary and appears to have been the source of the Soviet policy of the 1920s that accorded special status to sectarians, who were seen not only as fellows in the struggle against the Czarist state, but also as exemplars of alternate social organization). At the time of the emigration of many zealous Doukhobors to Canada, Bonch-Bruevich was recommended to the Quaker Relief committee by Tolstoyans, and agreed to their request that he accompany a group of Doukhobors from Batoum to Manitoba. In Canada, he resolved to collect as much as possible of the body of tradition named the *Book of Life*, and to record this material. With material he and others collected in Russia in hand, he spent further months in Canada accumulating a large body of texts. Returning to St. Petersburg, he added material and annotated this body with reference

to other Russian comparative materials, publishing *Zhivotnaia Kniga Dukhobortsev* (*From the Book of Life of the Doukhobors*) there in 1908. Till recently, it has been unavailable, though a few copies still circulate of an electrotype facsimile edition published through Regehr's Printing of Winnipeg in 1954, apparently sponsored by Doukhobors. I know of no plans to reissue the Russian edition at this time.

Bonch-Bruevich's text is an excellent compilation. All materials appear to be direct transcriptions, for while some obvious editing of the housekeeping variety is present, some omissions, corruptions, and other problematic textual elements are conserved. The text thus gives an excellent portrait of the state of the body of lore extant c. 1900. It is this objective precision, however, which renders the text ambivalent in the eyes of devout Doukhobors, who criticize the inclusion of corruptions, the entire project undertaken by an outsider of unreadable motives, and – most crucially – the reduction of the 'living word' of speech to dead letters in print, to be discussed more below. At the same time, the Psalm tradition of Doukhobors is under pressure from the richness of North American cultural materials: musically it is difficult, conceptually it is subtle, and, for at least two generations, there has been little intellectual involvement by most Doukhobors with their prime religious resource – the community has in effect been coasting on the momentum of its religious tradition. As a result, fewer and fewer people appreciate the Psalms, or use them as a social, religious, and personal resource.

In the early 1800s, the leader Kapustin established choral colleges that performed Psalms in a sort of circuit-riding manner, thereby coordinating tune and song texts, and ensuring, through an oral process, reasonable standardization of tradition – and hence of social and religious styles – in the Russian villages.

Recently one major Doukhobor organization, the Union of Spiritual Communities of Christ (commonly, if broadly, labelled "the Orthodox") has sought to achieve a similar end through the use of print.

In 1977 Peter Legebokoff, a scholarly Doukhobor of notable knowledge and experience, was commissioned by the USCC executive through its Sunday-School Committee to begin assembling an authoritative collection of Doukhobor Psalms, Hymns, and a few culturally weighted secular songs. Some of the Psalm texts had been revised over the course of years or, in some cases, by Committee and other persons of authority in the USCC community. (I am not able at this time to identify such adaptations, though I know that in at least one case adaptation involves a simple clarification of vocabulary.) In this work, Legebokoff was assisted and supplemented by Mrs. Anna Markova, mother of the present leader of the Orthodox group and herself a person of great experience and judgement in the transmission and exposition of Doukhobor tradition. It may be assumed that some aspects of the revision will reflect contemporary Doukhobor and specifically USCC approaches to Doukhobor tradition. The collection is already well accepted as a standard text for reference purposes and as a guide for some performance. Its presentation is sound if unremarkable; most Psalm texts are presented either in clause form (appropriate to the Catachetical genre) or usually in uninflected block paragraphs. The latter format tends to obliterate their poetic structure but is otherwise unobtrusive and has been normal for the recording or presentation of Doukhobor Psalms for over a century. Hymns and secular songs are presented in inflected verses. All texts are ascribed to authors where these are known, and there are annotations of varying detail, usually minimal. The apparatus includes detail-

ed indices including identification of Psalms with melodies, a short critical and historical introduction, a general afterword, and a useful glossary for obscure or archaic words or phrases. In sum, it is a text of remarkable scholarship presented in an impressively substantial format.

In 1974 a group drawn from the Doukhobors Societies of Saskatchewan (Independent Doukhobors) proposed a translation of the Bonch-Bruevich text, aiming "to preserve and extend the philosophical heritage and surmount the linguistic barrier for the younger generation" (*Foreword*). The result is *The Book of Life of Doukhobors*, a translation of the Bonch-Bruevich text, published late in 1979. Unfortunately there were, I understand, strong differences of opinion within the Committee as to when and how the translation should be published: the outcome was the publication of the book by the original deadline, but the translation, by Dr. Victor Buyniak of the University of Saskatchewan (Saskatoon) is in the first rough draft. It accordingly suffers from minor errors in translation and annotation, lack of any supporting apparatus beyond a brief index, and numerous infelicities of vocabulary and usage, a result that is fair neither to Bonch-Bruevich, Dr. Buyniak, the early informants, nor to the aims of the original Committee. The book is thus a severe disappointment, unattractive from a literary viewpoint and requiring most cautious application as a cultural document; on the other hand, it is the only reasonably available compendium of Doukhobor Psalms, and thus must serve till some other hand

takes up the task of finding the best English form from some magnificent but challenging Russian texts.

The books are little known among Western scholars, and have received a mixed reception among the people at whom they were primarily aimed, at least here in the West Kootenays. Most of my friends and acquaintances familiar with *The Book of Life* hold it a sad failure in doing justice to the Doukhobor texts, though this rejection also tends to take in Bonch-Bruevich as a non-Doukhobor. The *Sbornik* is seen by many USCC Doukhobors to be a major cultural resource and milestone, but by many other Doukhobors as a collection suspect on account of its USCC identity and hence, possible bias. Some young Doukhobors within and without the USCC also see the *Sbornik* as a gravestone rather than as a milestone. A departure from the Doukhobor primacy of the Oral, it is thus a sign of doctrinal decay. For the folklorist at least, though, both texts are invaluable aids, and even those aspects that weaken them according to one or another view also supply us with information on current social forces and values. One might devoutly wish for some wider forum of review, so that distinct groups might take heart from the efforts and achievement of their fellows and more energetically and carefully present the value and beauty of their own cultural treasures.

F.M. Mealing  
Institute for Doukhobor Studies  
Selkirk College  
Castlegar, B.C.