

Adventures in Russian

With Jimitri's "Dictionary of Doukhoborese"

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"The Doukhobor Book of Animals" - that is how our **Животная Книга** is occasionally misrepresented in some locations on the Internet! If you want to see for yourself, just type "*Животная Книга*", into Google Translate and translate it into English. However, this mis-translation also sometimes appears in some search engines and on various websites dealing with Doukhobor topics.

This is not surprising of course, as the Standard Russian (SR) word "*животное*" means "animal". Some of the Kootenay-Boundary Doukhobor Baby Boomers among us may remember Stephen Petko and other Russian school teachers putting us through the paces of basic Russian vocabulary - *домашние животные* (domestic animals), *дикие животные* - wild animals.

So, how then did our Doukhobor ancestors come up with the term **Животная Книга** ?

Here, we again have to go into the past and take a look at the language usage that existed in Russia a few centuries ago, when the early Doukhobors were still formulating their beliefs and developing their own unique cultural identity. At that time, as it turns out, the word "*животное*" *did* have a usage with the meaning "*живое*" ("living"), at least in some of the regional Russian dialects. This can be verified in the four-volume Explanatory Dictionary of the Living Great Russian Language (*Толковый словарь живого великорусского языка*), commonly known as Dahl's Explanatory Dictionary (*Толковый словарь Даля*) by Vladimir Ivanovich Dal' (mentioned in the last column), which even has a reference (Vol.1, page 540) to the specific term, "*Животная Книга*", with an interesting, rather enigmatic definition presented. Although the connotation provided by Dal' is not fully in line with the true meaning of the Doukhobor term, it is quite possible that there is some etymological connection¹ between the reference in Dal's 19th century work, and the Doukhobor usage of the same term, as handed down for over three centuries...

So, that at least generally explains *how* it came about that Doukhobors came to use this archaic term, that survives to this day. But, in order to fully understand its intended meaning, we need to take a look at *why* our ancestors even came up with this name in the first place...

"*Он шёл, прошёл молодой юноша...*" is one of the oldest and most authentic hymns in our Doukhobor repertoire. Its melody certainly has an "ancient" feel about it, and no wonder, as it was likely composed nearly four centuries ago, during the time of one of our earliest known forebears, a leader and teacher known as Danilo Filipov. The lyrics of this hymn also sound quite archaic, although they have been adjusted over the years to a more contemporary Russian usage. They are also somewhat allegorical in their style, but their true meaning has a very important significance that touches on the very essence of our Doukhobor understanding.

¹ It is also possible that Dal' was actually aware of the Doukhobor usage of this term and presented his own interpretation of their intended meaning for it. The fascinating existence of this possibility is provoked by the fact that Dal' was born in the town of Lugansky Zavod (today, Luhansk, Ukraine), in what was then (and is again, recently) referred to as Novorossiya, since the majority of the residents were migratory ethnic Russians - and this is in the very heart of the region where the earliest appearance of the Spiritual Christians/Children of God (later to be called Doukhobors) took place, and where the initial Doukhobor community (in the provinces of Ekaterinoslav and Kharkov) had begun to develop by the mid-1700s. By the time that Dal' was compiling his Dictionary, however, most Doukhobor adherents had congregated in the Milky Waters area, and by the time he published his Dictionary in 1863-66, they had already been exiled from there to Transcaucasia. It's possible that the remnants of the Doukhobor presence still remaining in the areas where Dal' was gathering his data, may well have manifested ideas resembling the somewhat convoluted (at least from today's Doukhobor point of view) definition of the term, "*Животная Книга*", as it's given in the Dal' Dictionary... We also know that Dal' was certainly aware of the Doukhobors, as he includes them in his Dictionary (Vol. 1, page 504), but provides a rather unsympathetic definition, more in line with the Orthodox Church perspective, which viewed them as heretics.

That is why, until just a few years ago, this hymn was quite regularly sung at funerals and other occasions led by the psalm singers. Various elders - such as the late William E. Kootnekoff, John K. Novokshonoff, and Eli A. Popoff - frequently commented on the special connection of this hymn to the very origins of our Doukhobor movement. The late Dr. Kenneth Peacock, in his classic work, "Songs of the Doukhobors" (see especially pages 57-60), also notes this significance in his landmark study of Doukhobor hymnody.

It is quite sad, therefore, that most Doukhobors of younger generations are not familiar with this hymn at all, and even more so, that most of our people are no longer aware of the crucial message it contains. This historical lapse is now evidenced in a variety of effects in the Doukhobor society of today, including the widespread "re-conversion" to other denominations, both Christian and non-Christian, but that is a topic too large for the scope of this column. What we can try to do here, however, is to take a closer look at how the use and interpretation of language (be it Standard Russian, Doukhoborese, English, or any other) can lead to the distortion, and even complete loss, of the understanding of the Doukhobor essence!..

Put very simply, the lyrics of the hymn allegorically retell the story of the activities and ideas that were initiated by Danilo Filipov, who had started his life preaching from the Scriptures, but came to realize that the Bible and various other Church trappings were more of a hindrance than a help to living a truly "Christian" life, that is, one that was based on the actual teachings of Jesus. So Danilo "threw the Bible into the sea" and proclaimed that a true Christian should no longer rely on words written on a dead piece of parchment, but should seek guidance from "the Voice within", that would constitute a "Living Book" - written on the hearts of the true followers of Jesus and manifested in their daily life.

Thus, when our early Doukhobor predecessors were asked, "How can you live without the Holy Book?", they would reply, "We have a *Living Book* that gives us guidance in our lives." By this they meant that that piece of God's Spirit in every human being - that we call the inner voice, or the soul, or our conscience - should be the source of the wisdom, inspiration and motivation to direct our lives. This of course made most of the established Church traditions unnecessary, and this was the primary characteristic of Doukhobor understanding, that caused the Church establishment to condemn the adherents of this understanding as heretics, Ikonobortsi, Doukhobortsi, etc. In other words, the term "**Животная Книга**" ("*Living Book*"), is part of the very essence of what and who we are as Doukhobors!..

It would be nearly impossible to fully understand what "Doukhobor" means without first understanding what "Living Book" means. Much useful material for gaining that understanding is contained in the earliest Doukhobor psalms, especially in the so-called "Question and Answer" psalms, which were originally not "psalms" at all, but merely the transcripts of conversations between Church investigators and various Doukhobor representatives in the earlier period of Doukhobor activity. The Doukhobors took these transcripts, memorized them, and proceeded to recite them as if they were psalms, and so they became "psalms". In a sense this process is applicable to all psalms, as they were all at one time someone's expressed thoughts or discussions or sermons or writings. Because of their special wisdom or spiritual or ethical or moral insights, they were considered as important ideas that could be used as a guidance for life, and so they became "psalms".

In time, the Doukhobors also acquired quite a repertoire of these psalms, as well as hymns, myths and legends, and with time, this repertoire itself began to be called the "Living Book". So, from quite early on, the actual meaning of the term, "Living Book", began to undergo a subtle but very significant change. Some of the Doukhobors psalms were actually adapted from the Bible, and this made it even easier to begin to look at the "living Book" as an alternative "Bible", in stark contradiction to its original meaning!.. However, Doukhobors continued to shun the printed word, carrying all of their repertoire orally, right up until the beginning of the 20th century. But then, in 1909, much of the contents of the "*Living Book*" was compiled by a scholar, and *published*, an act that would change the Doukhobors in very profound ways. Something that we can take a look at in the next column...

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In the last column, we looked at how our own Doukhoborese expression, "*Животная Книга*", ("Living Book") represents a fundamental concept regarding our very identity as Doukhobors: in plain words, Doukhobors, when living up to the tenets of their own life-concepts, *are* the "Living Book". In other words, by manifesting, in their day-to-day life, the Eternal Truths that they learn from the "Voice Within", Doukhobors, as a community of human beings, represent a true "Living Book", in which "the collective voice of the people is the voice of God" - "*Глас народа, глас Бога*" - a fundamental Doukhobor saying.

Over the centuries, mainly through the misinterpretation of outside observers and scholars, this pivotal understanding of the Doukhobor "Living Book" began to take on a different meaning - as that of an actual book, albeit one that was not printed but merely maintained in the oral memorization traditions of the Doukhobor people. In time, most of the Doukhobors themselves also began to accept this misunderstanding, as it was much easier to visualize a "book" that looked like a published book, then to try and encompass the more difficult concept of *a way of life that represented a "Living Book"!*..

However (as mentioned last time), the most decisive factor in this gradual process of erosion, was the actual publication of the Doukhobor psalms as a printed and bound book. Beginning in the late 1890s, V.D. Bonch-Bruevich, who was a friend of Leo Tolstoy and an avid ethnographer, devoted several years to a study of the Doukhobors. As part of his research, he compiled as much as he could gather of the Doukhobor oral repertoire of psalms and other materials, and in 1909 he published it as a book, which he named "*Животная Книга Духоборцев*" ("The Living Book of the Doukhobors").

Of course, this publication forever reinforced the mistaken notion that the original meaning of the term, "*Животная Книга*", was actually referring to a book. Bonch-Bruevich himself realized that the Doukhobor concept of the "Living Book" was somewhat more profound than what was merely the simple and most obvious interpretation of the term, and he discusses this briefly in his preface to the published book (see p. 1, in the original 1909 edition, or in the facsimile reprint of 1954). However, a thorough discussion of Bonch-Bruevich's study of the Doukhobors, and the philosophical implications of the 1909 book and his other publications, is very long overdue, but is far beyond the scope of this column. Nevertheless, the way in which language can be interpreted and misinterpreted is very much a part of that discussion, and it's also very much a part of this series about our Doukhoborese dialect.

Aside from these matters of misinterpretation, the 1909 publication of the "*Животная Книга Духоборцев*" caused some other types of serious damage to the integrity of Doukhobor liturgical materials, and to the authentic understanding of Doukhobor life-concepts. Over the centuries, throughout the various regions of the vast Russian Empire that Doukhobors were appearing (or being exiled to), they continued to acquire new adherents from various backgrounds. These new adherents brought along their own ideas about Christian interpretations, as well as some of their own psalms, which included some that were taken almost verbatim from the Old and New Testaments of the Bible. In many cases, these new liturgical materials did not fully conform to the authentic views of the original Doukhobor life-concepts, and in some cases even contradicted them. However, despite the efforts of Doukhobor leaders¹ and elders over the years, these non-Doukhobor materials continued to be utilized and accepted as part of the Doukhobor liturgical repertoire. This historical problem with the interpolation of inauthentic materials also spills

¹ A particularly comprehensive effort was made by Peter V. Verigin, just prior to his death in 1924, in which he extensively annotated an actual copy of the 1909 edition of the Bonch-Bruevich book, indicating psalms that were authentically Doukhobor, those that weren't and should be omitted from the Doukhobor repertoire, and those that required some revision. This annotated copy was then passed on to a group of elders who were instructed to implement the leader's suggestions. One of those elders was Nikolay M. Plotnikoff, who would later be the last President of the CCUB. In the 1950s, he still had this annotated book in his possession and showed it to the late Eli A. Popoff. Unfortunately, its present whereabouts is unknown.

over into the realm of hymns, and although it is discussed somewhat in the Sbornik (published in 1978 by the USCC, and edited by the late Peter P. Legebokoff and Anna P. Markova - see pp.8-9, etc.), it has not received anywhere near the serious attention that it deserves. Again (and alas!), it is also too large an issue to be handled in this column.

However, returning to the matter of the 1909 publication of the "**Животная Книга Духоборцев**", there is yet one more aspect that needs to be noted: and that is that the 1909 publication *did not include all of the authentic materials in the Doukhobor liturgical repertoire - some were omitted!* (This was likely not intentional and is not a reflection on Bonch-Bruevich - considering the circumstances he was working in at the time², it is quite remarkable that he was able to make his compilation as comprehensive as it was, and he must be commended as a very dedicated and meticulous scholar! His work may have altered our Doukhobor destiny in some potentially fateful ways, but it has also preserved a record of many aspects of Doukhobor tradition and ideological understanding that may otherwise have been lost forever!)

Despite the above listed serious deficiencies in Bonch-Bruevich's 1909 publication, once that book appeared on the scene, all of its content, authentic or not, complete or not, began to be cast in stone!.. It began to be regarded as a comprehensive and iconic compendium of Doukhobor liturgy, the definitive work on the content of the Doukhobor "Living Book". There was almost no concern or even awareness (except for those noted above - by Doukhobor leaders and the editors of the Sbornik) about any of the misrepresentations that it contained, be they the fundamental distortion of the original meaning of the term "Living Book", omissions of some legitimate Doukhobor materials, inclusion of materials of questionable Doukhobor authenticity, misquoted terms, inaccurate transcriptions, unfathomable archaic terms, etc.

By the 1950s, copies of the 1909 edition of "**Животная Книга Духоборцев**" had become so rare as to be almost non-existent. At the same time, the close-knit, Doukhobor communal lifestyle and oral traditions that had preserved all that liturgy for centuries had become dispersed and dissipated, and there was a fear that much of it would be lost to coming generations. Thus, at the initiative of some Doukhobor activists from within the "Independent" segment, a facsimile edition was re-published in Winnipeg in 1954. Copies of that 1954 edition, while quite rare today, are still attainable if the effort is made.

It should be noted, however, that ever since the original 1909 publication, and even as the 1954 reprinting was being carried out, *no effort to address the initial deficiencies and adverse effects* of the publication of a so-called "Doukhobor Living Book" had in fact been made! As explained, the only significant initiative in this regard (by the leader, Peter V. Verigin) was not followed up with action as intended. Thus, the large-quantity 1954 reprinting of the "**Животная Книга Духоборцев**" had the effect of even more solidly casting in stone the notion that this was the definitive and irreproachable reference work for gaining an understanding of the Doukhobor liturgy and religious ideology !..

Thus, all those existing deficiencies and misrepresentations continued to have their undesirable effects, wherein an increasingly large proportion of people of Doukhobor origin began to drift away from authentic Doukhobor understanding and either assimilate into surrounding society or adhere to some other religious denomination or movement.

All of these serious issues were infinitely exacerbated with the appearance of a translated version of the "**Животная Книга Духоборцев**" in 1978 (ironically in the same year as the publication of the USCC Sbornik!) - which will be discussed in the next column, the last of the three devoted to this topic.

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² V.D. Bonch-Bruevich accompanied the last of the four shiploads carrying Doukhobor immigrants in 1899, and stayed on the prairies (in very Spartan, pioneering conditions) with the new settlers for about a year to carry on his research. Upon his return to Russia, he continued his study of the Doukhobors, publishing a prolific variety of materials as he went along, including an amazing bibliography of primary Doukhobor materials - an extensive list of psalms, letters, etc. (1900), the letters of the Doukhobor leader, P.V. Verigin (1902), and the Животная Книга Духоборцев (1909). It should also be remembered that he was researching a group of mainly illiterate people, who were in the midst of a historic upheaval and migration, with much suffering and hardship for all; and, there were no "tape-recorders", computers, and other modern devices at his disposal!..

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In the last two columns, we've taken somewhat of a diversion. While the earlier columns examined various aspects of the actual Doukhobor Russian dialect - Doukhoborese (D'ese), these three installments (No's 25, 26 and 27) have focused on the way in which language affects our understanding; specifically (in this case), the manner in which the iconic D'ese term, "*Животная Книга*", with all of its critical implications for our Doukhobor ideology and identity, originally appeared, and how it has been subsequently widely misunderstood, misinterpreted and mis-translated.

This Column (No. 27) will conclude the "diversion", but should first clarify a somewhat misleading implication made in Column No. 26, as quoted here: "... ever since the original 1909 publication, and even as the 1954 reprinting was being carried out, *no effort to address the initial deficiencies and adverse effects* of the publication of a so-called "Doukhobor Living Book" had in fact been made!"

While this is generally true (with the exception of Peter V. Verigin's concerns and annotations, as noted in an earlier paragraph in No. 26), a more accurate statement would include the fact that there actually *were* some internal Doukhobor discussions over the years, about the authenticity and comprehensiveness of Bonch-Bruevich's 1909 publication. Also, in a more formal way, a USCC "*Стихарник*" Committee was initiated in the 1940s to look at all aspects of compiling and publishing a "Hymn Book", that would include all of the essential psalms, hymns and folksongs in the Doukhobor repertoire. John J. Verigin and the USCC elders were well aware that the traditional Doukhobor oral culture was quickly disappearing, and that the authentic Doukhobor cultural and liturgical repertoire was also in critical danger of being lost.

Furthermore, in order to fill the gap, Doukhobors of all factions had since the 1920s resorted to using a variety of non-Doukhobor published "hymn/song book" resources, primarily from two sources - other Christian denominations, especially various Russian Baptist and Evangelical movements, and (mainly for folk songs) Soviet and Russian expatriate publications. Understandably, while a few appropriate items were thus acquired, this process also contributed to the further "pollution" of the authentic Doukhobor repertoire with materials that sometimes directly contradicted fundamental Doukhobor understanding.

The USCC "Hymn Book" Committee would sporadically carry on its work for two decades, eventually culminating in the 1978 publication of the "*Сборник*". Although the process of comprehensively examining and "editing" the Doukhobor repertoire had not been fully completed, as envisioned, it was felt that the publication could no longer be delayed, and the editors were instructed to at least state the origins (where known) of each item included, otherwise keeping the annotations to a minimum. The "*Сборник*" continues to be a primary resource in widespread use to this day.

In the meanwhile, until 1978, the USCC (as well as the other Doukhobor factions) got by with the use of make-shift mimeographed booklets and leaflets for use by choirs, youth groups and Sunday Meetings for Children. Notable exceptions were two largely individual efforts: the book-sized "*Чернов Стихарник*", compiled in the 1940s by brothers Mike and Paul Chernoff, and the well-bound, pocket-sized compendium of hymns and folk songs compiled and published by N.N. Kalmakoff, originally in the 1950s under the auspices of the Independent Doukhobors, and reprinted in various editions by the compiler right into the 1990s. Also (as stated in No.26), in 1954, Independent Doukhobors reprinted¹ the 1909 "*Животная Книга Духоборцев*".

¹ Incorrectly referred to as a "facsimile reprint" in No. 26, it was actually a re-typeset version that reproduced the exact text of the 1909 edition, with no additions or subtractions.

In addition to all of the inadequacies and implications of that 1909 edition (as described in No. 26), the 1954 reprinting did tend to perpetuate the misleading notion that the "*Животная Книга Духоборцев*" was nothing more than an actual printed book. However, the 1954 edition played a useful role in reminding the Doukhobors of their extensive cultural repertoire and profound historical and ideological legacy. It's even possible that the appearance of the 1954 edition did help to stimulate some of the discussions about the meaning of Doukhoborism that took place in the following decades, particularly among younger Doukhobors across all factions. These discussions were mainly stimulated by the rise of formal education among the younger generations; older generations tended to rely on the longstanding custom of leaving matters of interpretation to the traditional leaders...

In these discussions the youth encountered a vexing problem. With their advanced levels of formal education in the English language and their everyday function in an English-speaking society, they were quickly losing grasp of their heritage D'se language, and their ability to adequately comprehend the true meaning of the words in the psalms and hymns that they were reciting and singing. Translation seemed to be an obvious solution to this problem, but it quickly became clear that translating Doukhobor materials was not going to be as simple a task as one might assume. Nevertheless, beginning in the 1950s, various private and group undertakings to translate individual items from the Doukhobor repertoire were made, and those continue to this day, with very mixed results and effects.

The largest such undertaking resulted in the 1978 publication of an English translation of the complete text of the 1909 edition of "*Животная Книга Духоборцев*". This project was initiated among the Independent Doukhobors of the Saskatoon region, and was carried out with the help of government grants, plentiful in the 1970s, a decade in which Canadian "multiculturalism" was officially recognized. Professor V.O. Buyniak of the University of Saskatchewan was hired to do the translation, which was then also examined by Doukhobor elders and a special committee. As part of that process, Sam G. Stupnikoff, Coordinator of the project, wrote to the USCC to solicit their participation and support.

In response to that invitation, USCC Honourary Chairman, John J. Verigin, called together a meeting of the ISKRA Editorial Board, the remaining members of the USCC "Hymn Book" Committee, and other knowledgeable individuals, who examined the sample manuscript that had been sent and decided that it would not be in USCC interests to take part in the project. The reasons for the decision included the urgent time schedule that S. Stupnikoff had indicated, the quality of the existing translations, and the complexity of the task that was involved. Furthermore, the USCC was on the verge of publishing its own "*Sbornik*", and also was still maintaining an official policy of "carrying on in Russian", a policy it was vigorously pursuing and supporting with various ambitious programs of study, in its own Russian language schools, in Russian instruction in the local public schools and in special teacher and student Russian-language study programs in Russia (then the USSR).

Upon the publication of the Stupnikoff project, it became even more evident that the resultant "Book of Life" was even more problematic than originally assessed. For one thing, the very title was grotesquely mis-translated! "Book of Life" would be the translation of "*Книга жизни*" - other books with this title actually do exist among other groups, but none of them have anything to do with the Doukhobor "Living Book"! Thus, the USCC has never officially endorsed, promoted or sold S. Stupnikoff's "Book of Life", and has never recommended it as an authentic resource for Doukhobor understanding.

And so, we are left with the astonishing (shocking?) fact that something that is so much at the very core of our Doukhobor understanding and ideology, has been left hanging, so to speak! Very few of the materials gathered by Bonch-Bruevich over a century ago have ever been given any significant study! The crying need for such study has been there all along, and is more evident than ever today, when we look at the recent Festival theme and some of the remarkable speeches by young people, or when we see the ever more blatant encroachments on true Doukhobor understanding taking place all around us, and even in letters to our longstanding journal, ISKRA!..

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