The Two Rosetos is greatly enhanced by the inclusion of numerous texts. Part Two, "Rosetan Folklore," is comprised of folktales (annotated with tale type numbers, motif numbers, and bibliography of Italian texts), folksongs (again, with Italian bibliographic references), and interviews (concerning the yearly cycle, games, and storytelling). A selected bibliography is divided into sections on Italian-American folklore; social, economic, and political aspects of the Italian-Americans; and autobiography and fiction.

This work is an important contribution to study, but should not be considered the final word in Italian-American folklore. It is a special and fascinating case of acculturation in slow motion. Other Italian-American communities, such as that in San Francisco, offer the folklorist the opportunity to examine a very different kind of immigrant experience. Similarly, intensive studies of these other Italian-American communities would increase the meaning and usefulness of Bianco's work.

Review Editor's note: Though folklorists and folklore students may be well aware of Bianco's work, the book has not received any critical attention in review form.


Reviewed by Christopher Vecsey

In the first part of his graceful narrative, John A. Hostetler recounts the history of the Hutterites from their Anabaptist origins in 16th-century Germany and Austria, through their migrations to Moravia and Russia, to their move to North America in 1874, and their subsequent growth. He follows with a sympathetic and thorough description of contemporary Hutterite life.

Hutterite Society is an expanded and improved version of The Hutterites in North America, by Hostetler and Gertrude Enders Huntington (1967); both works grew from a research project sponsored by the U.S. Office of Education from 1962 to 1965. Anthropologist Hostetler has spent 15 years doing research, visiting the numerous Hutterite communities from South Dakota to Alberta.

What interests Hostetler and others who have studied the Hutterites is their success in communal living. In the last 100 years, while other communal societies—including the Shakers—have faltered, the Hutterites have increased from 400 to over 22,000 members, from three to 225 colonies. Their practically self-sufficient prosperity stands as proof that communalism can work.

Such is the meaning that the hutterites hold for secular outsiders. The meaning is different for the Hutterites themselves. They regard each of their
colonies as an ark, floating through a sea of damned souls. Only those on the ark will gain eternal salvation; the Hutterites say: "You either are in the ark or you are not in the ark."

The meaning of life to each Hutterite is the community. It creates the person and is the only instrument of salvation; outside the colony no salvation is possible. Only by surrendering one's individuality, by submitting to the will and the hierarchical order of the colony, by submerging one's identity into that of the group, can the person overcome carnal human nature and find communion with the Christian God.

As Christians, the Hutterites share in much of Christian theology, cosmology, anthropology, and scripture. Nevertheless, they have created for themselves a distinct meaning through a cumulative process of incorporating their past into their daily existence. Just as they are materially self-sufficient, they provide their own meaning of life by recording their own history and drawing their own meaning from it. They run an almost watertight ark.

Through education, hymns, sermons, prayers, sayings, and chronicles of their past they socialize their children and reinforce their values and beliefs, their meaning. It is a literate culture which prizes penmanship and bookbinding skills for copying past texts for future use. It is a culture whose relics consist of words, written and oral. It is a culture whose past nourishes its insular existence.

In the 16th century the Hutterites already recorded their doctrines, sermons, letters, accounts of martyrdom, and disciplinary regulations. By the late 17th century they had completed the great chronicle of their history, the Geschichtsbuch, which included records of over 2000 martyred Hutterites and many deathbed sayings of Hutterite leaders. This work, still extant at Bon Homme, South Dakota, and a smaller chronicle, constitute the primary source of Hostetler's Hutterite history.

The chronicles contain common themes: pacifism, persecution and torture, migration, faith, community, and martyrdom. Especially important are the accounts of martyrs, for they demonstrate the saintliness of Hutterite ancestors and reinforce the belief that the outside world is evil. The contemporary Hutterites recognize the fact that persecution helps to strengthen the community; therefore, they dwell on the martyrdoms in detail, including the deaths caused by U. S. military officials when Hutterite pacifism during World War I brought American jingoism to its uglier moments. The Hutterites' hagiography helps join them to the history and meaning of the early Christian church, the period from which they derive their communal ideals.

Their sermons repeat the stories of the chronicles and interpret Christian scriptures from the Hutterite point of view, using the sermons of their forefathers as inspirations and guides. Contemporary Hutterite preachers often repeat the old sermons verbatim, allowing the meaning of the past to speak directly.
In addition, the past speaks through the recording and recitation of their leaders' dying words. Jakob Hutter, martyred in 1536, told the people who named themselves for him: "Resign yourselves to tribulation and trial." Michael Waldner, the visionary who re-established the Russian communes through his dreams and prophecies and helped in the move to North America, told his followers from his deathbed to fear God, be faithful, honest, and obedient, and to guard against strife and disunity. The genre of deathbed sayings serves a didactic function, as do the chronicles and sermons.

It is in the group recitation of hymns and prayers, however, that the Hutterite ideal of merging the one into the whole is best realized. They share their words as they share their property and history, each person's voice blending into that of the group. The spirited songs repeat Hutterite values of self-surrender, communal living, and unity; they narrate Hutterite history, particularly their persecutions and faith, and thus they unite the singers with the Hutterite past as well as with the present community. Some of the hymns contain over 100 stanzas and the lyrics vary little from colony to colony. They recite a strongly defined oral tradition.

Hostetler, from the related Old Amish background, treats his Hutterite subjects with sympathy, using their chronicles and their interpretations in recounting their history. Thereby he perpetuates their traditions, helping to spread them to the secular public.

In so doing, however, he perpetuates their biases and antagonisms, sometimes uncritically. In particular, his repetition of anti-Jesuit slurs seems unfair, even in the context of Jesuit persecution of the Hutterites. Nevertheless, Hostetler's greatest strength is that he records the Hutterite material with the barest minimum of extraneous theory. He lets the Hutterites speak for themselves.

Indeed, he is at his weakest when he attempts to apply the theories of others to the Hutterite material. Specifically, his use of Benjamin Whorf's dubious hypothesis ("language equals culture") leads Hostetler to claim a Germanic thought pattern for the Hutterites, a premise that lends itself to easy ridicule since he himself shows that Hutterite thought derives from its own traditions, not from the broader German context. Equally inappropriate is his use of Mircea Eliade's controversial hypotheses regarding primitive religions while describing Hutterite ritual life. Hutterites would hardly recognize themselves in these passages.

Fortunately, these lapses constitute a small and inessential part of his book. For the most part, his reverence for his subjects represents an approach worthy of imitation.