



**Endangered Archives Programme Pilot Project/ EAP1145 “Documentary Heritage of the  
Traditional Protestant  
Communities in Bulgaria” (2018-2019)**

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## **SURVEY REPORT**

This survey report describes the EAP11145 research that was undertaken from October 2018 until August 2019. It is a pilot project that was led by Magdalena Slavkova as principal applicant and investigator and involved three more researchers, Mila Maeva, Yelis Erolova and Plamena Stoyanova. The survey provides information about the existence of various old and unknown materials as photographs, manuscripts, letters, booklets, song books, brochures. Some of them are in vulnerable conditions. The chronological frame of the photograph and text materials is from the second half of the 19th century to the 1990s. We were primarily interested in the state of Protestant personal, family and church archives, the historical data contained therein and all copies we can digitise and include in the collection. The survey was conducted in several steps. Firstly, meetings with religious ministers from different denominations were organised in order information about the location of materials, their number and condition to be received by the EAP team. Before visiting various locations around the country, the staff did desk research and acquired additional information about historical background of the materials and contacted the owners. Thirdly, team conducted surveys in various places: in the capital city Sofia and the cities of Varna, Shumen and Ruse in Northeast Bulgaria. In Northwest Bulgaria, we did researches in the towns of Montana, Lom and Berkovitsa and their nearby villages. In South Bulgaria, we visited cities of Plovdiv and Stara Zagora, and towns of Bansko, Samokov, Asenovgrad, Sliven, Yambol, Karnobat and their nearby villages. Finally, team interviewed the owners of collections, requested approval to digitalise the examples and did 1146 tiff images of old and unknown materials that contain important information about the history and culture of Evangelical missions in the Bulgarian lands. Trainings about the

EAP standards for digitalisation and listings of acquired information were made at the working meetings organised during the project. All digitised materials are described in spreadsheets. All public facts and names were additionally verified.

### **Historical background of the early Protestant missions in Bulgaria**

Protestant missionary workers started coming to the Ottoman Empire as early as the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The propaganda is a continuation of the work that English and American missionaries began in the Middle East at the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. After the successful missions among Muslims and Jews, the evangelisation among the Greeks in the Ottoman Empire, Christians in Syria and Palestine had started. Preachers focused their attention to the East lands aiming at distribution the Bible and knowledge among the ‘uninitiated’ nations and communities. The missionaries are Methodists, Congregationalists, Baptists, and Adventists, who were among the first to start preaching. Since the opening of Robert’s College in Istanbul, missionaries of this Protestant institution had spread all over the Empire. At the beginning of their activity, they emphasised on the educational and charity activities and then to the religious and ideological propaganda because at that time different nations, among which Bulgarians themselves, struggled for church autonomy (Orthodox Christianity is traditional and main religion in Bulgaria today) and state independence.

The most active had been the British and Foreign Bible Society established in 1804. Evangelisation activities also began to do the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions the Oriental Church and the Missionary Society of the Methodist Episcopal Church. The two groups of Protestants share their activity in Bulgarian lands. The American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions the Oriental Church should carry out a missionary work in the lands south of the ‘Stara Planina’ Mountain along with the territory of present day Macedonia and Albania, and Serbia, and the Methodists worked in the North Bulgaria with Dobrudzha and Romania. In 1875 the Bulgarian Evangelical Society was established, which is results of a period of successful evangelical propaganda of West and American missionary workers. It was the first organised initiative of Bulgarian Evangelical Christians. After the Russo-Turkish War, an autonomous Bulgarian state was created in 1878. Then, the Pentecostalism spread in the 1920s, whose religious



ideas brought the American missionaries of Russian origin who created the first societies in Southeast Bulgaria.

### **Mission of the Evangelical Episcopal Methodist Church**

In 1857 the Americans Wesley Prettyman and Dr. Albert Long were sent as missionaries to work with locals and settled in Shumen, Northeast Bulgaria. On December 24<sup>th</sup>, 1859, Dr. Albert Long held Methodist worship in Bulgarian in the city of Veliko Tarnovo in North Bulgaria. The first Bulgarian converted from Orthodox Christianity to Evangelicalism was Gavrel Iliev from Svishtov with whom the Methodist missionaries worked with. In the period 1860s-1870s the missionaries Dr. Albert Long and Dr. Elias Riggs along with Bulgarian national revivalists Petko Slaveykov, and Khristodul Sichan-Nikolov worked on a complete translation of the Bible in the modern Bulgarian language, which was printed in 1871 in Tsarigrad (today Istanbul).

The first churches and communities were established in North Bulgaria in the second half of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th century: Veliko Tarnovo, Shumen, Ruse, Varna, Svishtov, Sofia, Sevlievo, Vidin, Lom, Khotantsa (Ruse region), Voyvodovo (Vratsa region), etc. Two schools were established - the American Girl's High School in Lovech and the Men's High School in Svishtov. The Methodist Church and its religious schools initially attracted a number of representatives of the urban intelligentsia, highly educated families with good financial capability, former Orthodox Christians and priests, and subsequently members of certain rural communities. At the beginning of the 20th century, missionary activity was carried out among Bulgarian Orthodox Christians, but also among Armenians (Ruse, Varna, Shumen, and Sofia), Turks (Shumen), and probably among some Gypsies/Roma in Lom and its nearby villages of Golintsi and Kovachitsa. Methodist Evangelicalism has been spread deeply over that time among Bulgarians and Armenians, as many of them have been included in cross-border religious networks. Some Bulgarian Methodists received their education abroad - Germany, Switzerland, England and other countries; as well as they marry Methodists from other countries, mainly from Germany and Switzerland.

During the socialist regime (1944-1989), the freedom of religious belief and the practice of religious rituals were restricted. Some of the Protestant families and church societies have purposely destroyed their photograph and documentary materials due to fear of imprisonment. Some of the

Evangelical preachers and ministers were sentenced at the so-called “Pastors’ trial” and were sent to prison. Many prominent Methodist pastors were also affected as they were convicted of espionage and evicted with their families in different rural areas of the country. Believers continued to gather mainly in their houses in the so-called ‘home churches’. Another form of secretly performing religious sermons and prayers by Methodists but also by all other churches and societies are made on the occasion of a birthday or other family holiday. Some of the believers went also to mountain walking, which they combined with religious sermon.

Among others, Armenian Evangelists manage to maintain their faith during socialism. The church in Varna is the first Armenian Church established in Bulgaria. In the words of Bedros Altunyan, the pastors who served in that society were Abrakham Amirkhanianz, Khovanes Avedarian, Sarkis Consulian, Norayr Melidonian, and, until the closure of the church in 1962, Garo Altunyan. In 1993 the church was restored by Bedros Altunyan. He helped the Bulgarian Evangelical Methodist Church to be opened as well. At the end of the communist period in 1989, only three church buildings were opened - Shumen, Ruse and the village of Khotantsa (Ruse region). Since 1991, many churches have been restored - Sofia, Botevgrad, Pleven, Mizia, Trustenik, Voyvodovo, Lovech, Sevlievo, Veliko Turnovo, Lyaskovets, Ruse, Svishtov, Hotantsa, Tsenovo, Shumen, Varna, Aksakovo, Osenovo, Dolni Chiflik, Trastikovo, Staro Oryahovo, Dobrich, Straldzha and Burgas. Methodist followers have become members of different ethnic communities: Turkish-speaking Roma/Gypsies – Varna and Burgas; Dobrich; Shumen; Romanian-speaking Rudari – villages of Staro Oryahovo, Dolni Chiflik; and Armenians in the cities of Varna and Ruse.

### **Evangelical Congregational Mission**

Since the 1850s, the Evangelical Congregationalists have begun their missionary activities in South Bulgaria, then Eastern Rumelia. A number of Congregational (also called simply ‘Evangelists’) churches were established in the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Between 1860s and 1890s several societies and churches were opened - Sofia, Plovdiv, Bansko, village of Merichleri, Yambol, Panagyurishte, village of Kamenna reka, Khaskovo, Burgas, Sliven, Stara Zagora, Kyustendil, Asenovgrad, Apriltsi, Ikhtiman, village Ludzhene, village Popovitsa, Mariyno (today Dimitrovgrad), Pirdop, Kostenets, Dupnitsa, Stob, Dolna Banya, etc. The Evangelical Church in Bansko has quite an interesting history. It was established in 1868 during the Ottoman period.

Charles Morse from the US was the first missionary who had been sent to work among Bulgarians. He started to work with 18 families who broke away from the Orthodox Church. After his departure, persecutions started against the Evangelists. The first services were held in the houses of P. Ushev and M. Petkanchin, who were the first Evangelists in Bansko. On 15<sup>th</sup> August 1871 the Evangelical Council ordained preacher Ivan Tonzhorov from Samokov, who was the first pastor of the Church. Due to some difficulties between the Orthodox and the Evangelical Churches, many Evangelical Christians were harassed. Therefore the Ottoman government allowed the Evangelicals to establish a separate community (which existed until 1912) under its own mayor. The longest serving Evangelical mayor was Nikola Furnadzhiev.

In the 1860s, men's and girls' high schools were established in Plovdiv and Stara Zagora, later merged into the Evangelical Theological Seminary in Samokov in 1871/1872, moved to Sofia after that in 1921. In 1888, the Union of Evangelical Congregationalist Churches was established, which closed in 1949 after the establishment of the communist regime. The Congregationalist preachers also were sentenced to different years of imprisonment, still their relatives and followers continued to gather at home religious services. During the socialist period, according to the field data, an attempt for uniting of Evangelical Episcopal Methodist and Congregationalist Churches was made as common religious songbooks were issued. Today, Evangelical Congregational denomination includes many churches located in Sofia and in various localities in South Bulgaria. The Armenians in Sofia and in Plovdiv hold their worship in the Congregational churches. The Congregational Church has its followers among the Roma/Gypsy minority in Bulgaria as well – city of Sofia, towns of Svilengrad, Asenovgrad and Dobrinishte, Akhmatovo village (Plovdiv), Dalgodeltsi village (Montana region), Gradets village (Sliven district), and others.

### **Research findings**

Archives of Methodist and Congregational churches are not placed in one place and are scattered in various private and church collections. There have been attempts to systematise and describe the materials of each of the denominations, but this for both of them has not been completed yet. Some of the local churches have rich collections, such as Evangelical church in Bansko and Methodist church in Sofia, which we found out during the survey.





Within the research, contacts were made with pastor Mihail Stefanov of the Episcopal Methodist Church ‘Dr. Albert Long’ in Sofia, pastor Bogomir Iliev of the Methodist Church in Ruse, pastor Bozhidar Simeonov of the Methodist Church in Shumen, Pastor Bedros Altunyan - Chairman of Evangelical Armenian Churches in Bulgaria and a former Superintendent of the Methodist Church in Bulgaria, currently preaching at the Armenian Church in Ruse and Varna; Mrs. Varta Mikhran – a member of the Armenian Evangelical Church in Varna; Nerses Ketikian - Armenian pastor in Varna and Ruse. They provided us with private and church photographic collections that give information about the leaders of the religious community from the beginning of the Protestant missions in Bulgaria among Bulgarians and Armenians until the early 1990s; on church architecture; on the level of education and profession of the leaders and members of local Methodist societies; on the socio-cultural organisation of the members of church communities; on the religious customs; on the social contacts between Methodists in Bulgaria and abroad. The copied materials of the Methodist mission (4 folders with collections containing 151 digital images of photographs; clippings of ‘Zornitsa’ newspaper; copies of certificates from Malta Protestant College; copy of first pages of the New Testament translation from 1867; a dedication from P. Danov to his friend P. Vassilev from 1888 [Petar Danov was a Methodist preacher, who received his education in the US, but later became creator of his own religious-philosophical movement with followers to this day] and others) are classified in the following collections:

**EAP1145\_Sofia\_EMEC (104 items);**

**EAP1145\_Shumen\_MetChurch\_Popov (31 items);**

**EAP1145\_Varna\_EMEC\_Altunian (11 items);**

**EAP1145\_Varna\_ArmenEvang\_Mikhran (5 items).**

During fieldwork, materials on the history and spread of the Congregational Evangelicalism were found in the cities of Sofia, Plovdiv, and towns of Bansko, Samokov and Asenovgrad. The archive of the Methodist Church ‘Dr. Albert Long’ contains photographs from the so-called ‘South Mission’ of the Congregational Church. An interview with pastor Danail Ignatov from the First Evangelical Church in Sofia was done. He gave us general picture of the state of the Congregational

archives in Bulgaria and in particular, for archives of the Sofia church and the Evangelical Museum. Both contain portraits, letters, books, manuscripts and some of the materials are systemised and exposed in the hall of Evangelical Museum. In Bansko, a research in the archive of the Evangelical Church ‘Slovoto’ was done and an interview with pastor Dimitar Karlev was conducted in July 2019, where there are a lot of old photographs related to the culture of first Evangelical families in Bulgaria converted to Protestantism. In Samokov, an interview with the local pastor Ilia Beyazov was held and consultations with specialists from the History museum were also done. In Asenovgrad, contacts were made with followers of the local Congregational church. They provided part of their family photographic collections representing their lives and religious holidays in the past. In Plovdiv, an interview with the leader of the Congregational mission among Armenians, Mr. Khrant Keshishyan, was held. Digitised materials are classified in the following collections (7 folders containing 83 digital images of photo albums and single photographs of Evangelical families; portraits of prominent preachers and pastors; pictures of church buildings and religious life of Evangelists; photographs of the Samokov Theological Seminary and its students; a message for holding joint annual conference and summer school for Methodist and Congregational pastors from 1920 and others):

**EAP1145\_Bansko\_ECC (47 items);**

**EAP1145\_Asenovgrad\_ECC\_Dafcheva (8 items);**

**EAP1145\_Asenovgrad\_ECC\_Alagyozova (11 items);**

**EAP1145\_Asenovgrad\_ECC\_Pavlova (9 items);**

**EAP1145\_Plovdiv\_ArmenEvang\_Keshishyan (4 items);**

**EAP1145\_Samokov\_HistoryMuseum (2 items);**

**EAP1145\_Samokov\_ECC (2 items).**

### **Evangelical Baptist Mission**

In the 1960s and 1970s of the 19<sup>th</sup> century the German Baptists started their missionary work in the Bulgarian lands arriving as booksellers from the British and Foreign Bible Society. They plead the Ottoman government and were allowed to settle in Tulcha in 1866, close to the village of Katalui near the Danube River. All three are immigrants from Russia expelled because of their Protestant



beliefs. The first Baptist church on the territory of present-day Bulgaria is established in Kazanlak, Central Bulgaria. In 1867 in the town of Kazanlak a Bulgarian Stefan Kurdov heard about the Bible message from Armenian Evangelists in Constantinople (today Istanbul). He started studying this new teaching and as a result took the decision to follow Christ. The Baptists started intensive evangelisation work in Skopje (present-day Republic of North Macedonia), Kazanlak, Lom, Ruse and Sofia (Bulgaria). Among the missionary workers were J. Klundt (in Skopje) and M. Herringer (in Lom). Herringer moved to Ruse in Northeast Bulgaria, home to two other German families - Herbold and Krzosa. Herringer and Herbold work as book distributors and Krzosa headed the warehouse of the British Bible Society. These three families set up a branch in Ruse of the church in Bucharest. Ivan Kargel, presbyter of the St. Petersburg Baptist Church, had prominent work for the church in Ruse, where arrived in 1880. In the late 1980s the families of Trayko Poretsov and Spas Stefanov moved to Sofia and founded a Baptist church there.

Despite the obvious merits of the Protestant missionaries in 19<sup>th</sup> century for the cultural development of the Bulgarians, their propaganda work has been regarded with suspicion and hostility by many people in the society. There were fears that preachers would divide the Bulgarians at this crucial moment in the creation of the nation and united it around church-national struggles. On the other hand, the Bulgarian people associated their Orthodox affiliation with the historical memory and formed an identity based on the centuries-old religion. The Baptist church began publishing two monthly journals - 'Evangelist' and 'Bratsko slovo'. In 1908 the Baptists created their Union, and in 1909 a Union of United Evangelical Churches, which includes Congregationalists, Methodists and Baptists had been established.

The Evangelical Baptist mission was successful among Gypsies (Roma) and Jews in Northwest Bulgaria. The first Romani Baptist church in Bulgaria opened doors in 1930 in a small village in Northwest Bulgaria, where Gypsies of the Rešetari group (sieve-makers) live. The church was built with the financial support of Austrian Baptists from the Danube mission. The Gypsies used to gather for services in their homes ever since the beginning of the century led by the Gypsy preacher Petar Punchev. In 1923 he was officially ordained as pastor by the Union of Bulgarian Evangelical Baptist Churches. During that period some of the Gospels were translated into Romany language – 'E Isus-Xristoskoro Džiipe thai Meribe e Sfjatone Lukestar' by Bernard Gilliat-Smith into the Erlii

dialect (B. Gilliat-Smith, 1912), ‘Somnal evangelie (lil) Matejatar’ into the Kalajdzii’ dialect (A. Atanasakiev, 1932) etc. Some of the Gypsies from the town of Montana were also converted to Evangelical Baptism and were sent to study abroad as Baro Boev, who became pastor of the local society. In the region of Lom and Montana some Jews became part of the Evangelical societies and members of the Spiritual boards of the churches.

### **Research findings**

Surveys were conducted among the members of the Baptist community in Varna, where a life story interview was held with the already deceased pastor Bozhidar Igov and with the preacher Simeon Neichev. S. Neichev from Varna provided a photographic collection of all the Baptist pastors in the history of the Varna Baptist Church. Consultations with pastors Theodor Angelov and Theodor Oprenov were done in Sofia, who gave us significant information for the history of the Baptist mission in Bulgaria and for the state of the Baptist archives. Interviews with Natsol Zaykov and Lyuben Traykov from Lom were also done, which informed us for the establishment of Romani Baptist societies and for the role of the Romani pastors. We found out two notebook collections with Evangelical songs in Bulgarian and Romany languages. First of it is a collection of 80 Evangelical songs (among which are: ‘Ne boi se malo stado’; ‘Ande Devlesko brok’; ‘Ai tu so ka kere!’; ‘Dnite letiat!’ and so on). Only part of the collection is preserved (pages 91-264). Many pages of the notebook are torn and lost. The composer is Todor Petrov Erinkin (conductor of the church choir and pastor) from the First Gypsy/Romani Baptist Church in ‘Mladenovo’ quarter (former village Golintsi), Lom. Creator of the song signed in some cases in the collection both as composer and shepherd. Probably he created some of the songs during his working days as shepherd. In other cases, the author of the songs wrote that at the time he created the song he worked as a worker who made bricks in different villages outside his native place. Song 64, for example, ‘Ne boi se!’ is dedicated to the Evangelical converts who have been persecuted by the official authority. In the collection, one-and two-voices songs prevail. The choir is mixed, but women are preferentially singing. The melodic line of the songs is simple. Second collection contains 21 Evangelical songs in Romany language among which are: ‘Av pasha Isus’; ‘Ashun ko Del akarel tu’, etc.



Interviews were conducted with relatives of Baro Boev, and with Kamelia and Joël Chiron who gave us interesting ethnographic data for the history and culture of the Ferdinand (today Montana) Baptist movement and for the Romani Baptist church in particular (established as mixed Bulgarian-Gypsy religious society during socialism). We have 11 folders with 273 tiff images related to the history of Evangelical Baptist Church, among which we have pictures, booklet, text documents and notebooks with songs in Bulgarian and Romany. We have 1 folder related to the culture of Jewish Baptists in Northwest Bulgaria.

They are classified as followed:

**EAP1145\_Sofia\_Bapts\_TAngelov (19 items);**

**EAP1145\_Sofia\_Bapts\_TOprenov (10 items);**

**EAP1145\_Varna\_BaptChurch\_Neychev (8 items);**

**EAP1145\_Berkovitsa\_Baptists\_RKamenova (5 items);**

**EAP1145\_Berkovitsa\_Bapts\_KKamenova-Chiron (29 items);**

**EAP1145\_Gabrovnitsa\_Bapts\_EBoev (6 items);**

**EAP1145\_Lom\_Bapts\_LTraikov (13 items);**

**EAP1145\_Lom\_Bapts\_PIVanov (6 items);**

**EAP1145\_LomMladenovo\_EBC1 (132 items);**

**EAP1145\_Montana\_Baptists\_PAsova – (26 items);**

**EAP1145\_Montana\_BCN\_VMunelski – (19 items).**

### **Seventh-Day Adventist Church**

The Seventh-day Adventist church is distinguished by its observance of Saturday and by its emphasis on the Second Coming ('Adventus', from Latin) of Jesus Christ. The denomination is established in the US in the 1860s in the time when in Bulgarian lands had been created first

Evangelical societies and churches. In Bulgaria, Adventist Church became popular during the 20th century. For the first time in Bulgaria (Northeast Dobrudzha) the ideas of Adventism were brought by settled German Adventists who came from the Crimean Peninsula in 1891. Five years later in Ruse was baptised, a Bulgarian Jew, Jacob Grinberg, who converted from Baptism and became the first Adventist. Bulgarian Adventist coming from the US. E. Popov along with J. Grinberg preached among locals. Adventist church in Sofia is organised in 1912. According to some other data, Adventist missionaries entered Bulgaria in 1914, with the arrival of German preachers coming from Romania. In 1915 religious missionaries reported that there were 3 churches and 56 members. In 1937 there were 970 members and the denomination had acquired two church buildings but the Second World War brought organised efforts to an end. As other religious societies, Adventists were subject to political repression during the socialist regime. In November 1990 the Seventh-day Adventist Church was officially recognised by the Bulgarian state.

There are three groups of Adventists. The largest one is the Seventh-day Adventist Church, while the other two are supporters of split-stream groups. These are the Seventh-day Adventist Churches Union and the Seventh-day Adventist Church - a reformed movement. Adventists have a 'Khristiyanska Misal' Magazine, which is published in Bulgarian, Theological college and Publishing House. Among the members of the Adventist Churches in Bulgaria there are Bulgarians, Turks, Armenians and Gypsies (Roma). The prayers and preaches are made in Bulgarian, Turkish, Romany, Russian but the in mixed churches preaches are in Bulgarian language.

### **Research findings**

During the survey we focused on the historical development of the denomination in the country and its cultural influences on local population. It covers several big Adventist communities in Ruse, Shumen, Varna, Sofia, Stara Zagora and Plovdiv. The digitised images in the frameworks of the project are from four main cities of Ruse, Varna, Stara Zagora and Shumen. A part of the photos are from the town of Varbitsa and from Lisi vrah village, East Bulgaria.

*Church in Varna.* In the autumn of 1923 the first Adventist church was opened in Varna. On July 28<sup>th</sup>, 1924, the first Advent baptism took place, and by the end of the year, a total of 9 people were baptised. Changes occurred during the communist era, when many people gathered in private homes. After the changes in 1989, the number of believers in the church gradually increased and in

1991-1992 the number of believers increased to 400 people. This implies the creation of two societies. The ethnic composition of the church is heterogeneous. It includes Bulgarians, Gypsies/Roma and Armenians. In recent years, with the increase of immigrants in Bulgaria, Russians and Germans, both temporarily or permanently settled in the city, have been included in the regular worship services as well. Four collections have been digitised so far – these of pastor Mihail Kontarov (partly); pastor Rachko Yabandzhiev (thanks to the support of his daughter Elena Karova), an active members of the church; these of Stanka Margaritova and Zhana Stefanova. The collections are in poor condition because they are kept in the owners' houses and are not arranged chronologically or thematically. They include photographs that give information about community life (religious gatherings, prayers, excursions) and rituals such as baptisms and weddings. The materials date from 1920s to 1990s. Zhana Stefanova's collection includes photographs that represent the lives of Adventists in Moldova, but were not digitised within this project. Some of which are related to the community of Bessarabian Bulgarians, also Adventists. The one of the most interesting research was made namely among Adventist believers with Bulgarian origin from Bessarabia, Ukraine and Moldova. They became Adventists in their countries of origin but came to Bulgaria on different reasons – political situation in the USSR or marriage, as in the case of Zhana Stefanova.

*Church in Shumen.* There are quite conflicting information about the foundation of the church in Shumen. According to some interlocutors, the church was founded in 1918, and according to others, in 1921 or in 1924. The number of members increased gradually over the years, with Armenians being an active part. In the 1960s, a Turkish-speaking Adventist church began operating there, with members were between 12 to 20 people. During socialism, the church in Shumen was an attractive center for believers from surrounding villages and smaller towns. Some of the pastors who served there have been interned in Sofia. However, their intensive work helped for creation of stable communities of believers. The church society there has its own building. In the 2019 survey period, the ethnic composition of the church is heterogeneous. It includes Bulgarians, Gypsies/Roma and Turks. Only three collections have been digitised – these of Adriana Angelova, Genoveva Peneva and Slavka Ilieva. The collections are in poor condition because they are kept in the owners' houses and are not arranged chronologically or thematically. These include photographs that give information about community life (religious gatherings, prayers, excursions) and rituals such as

baptisms, funerals and weddings. The materials date from 1910s to 1990s and most of them are in poor condition because they are yellowed, torn, with spots.

*Church in Ruse.* In 1891, the first Advent immigrants from Crimea settled in Sarugol, North Dobrudzha. In 1892, the preacher G. Wagner also arrived. He first visited Ruse. In 1896, Conradi visited Dobrudzha and for the first time came to Ruse, where worked with members of the Baptist church and started to work with Jacob Grimberg, a Baptist, who was a bookseller of the British Bible Society. Meanwhile, former Baptist priest A. Seefried, a preacher in the village of Kubadin, was charged with the care of believers in Ruse. As a result of the ministry of G. Wagner and A. Seefried, the Advent message was introduced to, and subsequently accepted by Angel Takov, the second Adventist in Bulgaria. In 1908 the society of the Seventh-day Adventist Church in Ruse was formed. The Adventist church managed to build stable communities in the surrounding villages such as Bozhurovo and small towns such as Tutrakan. During socialism, believers were persecuted. The ethnic composition of the church is heterogeneous. It includes Bulgarians, Gypsies/Roma and Turks. Most believers are newly converted, though not small in number are those who are hereditary Adventists.

Within the project, two digital collections have been created – these of Ivan Stefanov and Stefka Stefanova. Most of the materials of collections are in poor condition, yellow, torn, and stained. They include photographs and documents that provide information about community life (religious gatherings, prayers, excursions) and rituals such as baptisms and weddings. The materials date from 1920s to 1990s, showing the continuity of different generations of Adventist believers.

*Church in Stara Zagora.* The work of attracting believers to the Seventh-day Adventist Church began in the 1920s. A religious group gradually began to be created. By the beginning of 1937 the church had 54 members. During the socialist period, the sermons were organised in the church building but were constantly monitored by state security services. Because of the hard political pressure and fear of imprisonment, the biggest part of church documents and photos were destroyed. In the 2019 survey period, the ethnic composition of the church is heterogeneous. It includes both Bulgarians and Gypsies/Roma. Only one collection was digitised within the project – that of Todor Stoyanov. The collection is in poor condition because it is kept in the owners' flat and is not arranged chronologically or thematically. The materials date from 1930s to 1990s and most of them are in poor condition because they are yellowed, torn, with spots.





Collections from Sofia and Plovdiv, where most of the Adventist believers are currently concentrated, have not yet been digitised. Although housed there, they contain material for already smaller other communities. The collections include church archives and family photos varying from **10 to 200 items each**. The owners and responsible persons are ready to contribute with these materials for the next phase of a Major project. Among the collections left out of the scope of this project are collections of Armenians and Roma. Contacts were also established with Adventists, whose roots are among the large communities in Ukraine, settling in Bulgaria in the 1940s. They also promised to provide pictures for digitisation each of them varying between **10 and 100 items**. Contacts were also made with Adventist reformers, who are also poorly known and quite closed communities but we expect to digitise at least **80 items** from them.

As a result we have 10 folders with 251 digital images related to the history and culture of Seventh-day Adventist Church:

- EAP1145\_Varna\_Advent\_Karova (49 items);**
- EAP1145\_Varna\_Advent\_Kontarov (9 items);**
- EAP1145\_Varna\_Advent\_Margaritova (21 items);**
- EAP1145\_Varna\_Advent\_Stefanova (29 items);**
- EAP1145\_Shumen\_Advent\_Angelova (3 items);**
- EAP1145\_Shumen\_Advent\_Genoveva (11 items);**
- EAP1145\_Shumen\_Advent\_Slavka (31 items);**
- EAP1145\_Ruse\_Advent\_Ivan (8 items);**
- EAP1145\_Ruse\_Advent\_Stefka (30 items);**
- EAP1145\_StZagora\_Advent\_TStoyanov (60 items).**

### **Evangelical Pentecostal Mission**

The Evangelical Pentecostalism is the one of the most spread non-Orthodox Christian religious movement. The first Pentecostal missionaries came to work in Bulgaria in 1920. They were Ivan Voronaev and Dionisii Zaplishnii (according to some other data, the missionary workers were three and the third one was Kolshovskii). Both of them were Russian migrants from the United States. However, the wife of Dionisii Zaplishnii – Olga was Bulgarian, born in the city of Burgas. In May 1920 a ship with missionaries traveled to Istanbul among which were Ivan Voronaev, Dionisii and Olga Zaplishnii. Olga and Dionisii had decided to remain in Burgas. In Burgas actually were created the first Pentecostal churches. Dionisii Zaplishnii and Ivan Voronaev helped for the establishment of many Pentecostal communities in different towns in Southeast Bulgaria in that time. In 1928 the Union of Evangelical Pentecostal Churches in Bulgaria was founded. In the end of 1920s in North Bulgaria a Tinchevist movement was created by Stoyan Tinchev. It split from the Pentecostal movement. The members observe non-hierarchical rules and religious conservatism. Tinchevists believe that the religious services must be organised in simple way at home and not to be registrated as an organised church. They also believe that God dislikes images and they do not take photographs. The only pictures they have are portrait photos made for documents and wedding photos. The communist period suppressed all religious movements in the country, due to the official propaganda of atheism, but Pentecostal societies survived in the form of ‘home churches’ and even manage to gain new followers. They gain followers not only among ethnic Bulgarians, but among Gypsy/Roma population as well.

### **Research findings**

Survey was focused on the Evangelical Pentecostal Churches in Stara Zagora; Yambol and village of Kukorevo; towns of Sliven, Karnobat and Samokov. We have some pictures from Sofia as well. The research was conducted among ethnic Bulgarians, Armenians and Gypsies (Roma) believers. Most of the digitised pictures were stored in old albums, boxes or envelopes. Many of them were in bad conditions, not well sorted and without enough information about the believers who were depicted. There is an actual risk of losing information about the real events and history of the people who we can see on the photos. The positive moment in this situation is the fact that some of the witnesses of the Pentecostal Church history are still alive and able to recognise, describe and even

correct the information, gathered earlier from some other researchers. However, if we want to use the full potential of knowledge of these old believers, we need to act fast, so we could collect all materials and information about their past.

*Church in Yambol.* The Church in Yambol was founded officially in 1929, when Todor Hristov from Yambol and a group of believers applied for admission at the regular Church annual meeting in Sliven (a town situated not far from Yambol) to the Union of Evangelical Pentecostal Churches. After that the first religious meetings were held in the houses of Todor Hristov and Enyo Iliev. Gradually the church earned the trust of people and the neighborhood where pastor Todor Hristov lived was called ‘The Godly neighborhood’. In 1930 Zhelyazko Vrachev was elected pastor of the church. After that the Church grew and continued to be active even during the communist period in Bulgaria, despite the fact that by that time all religious practices were banned. Even though the church has tried to keep some documents of its existence safe, there are a lot of forgotten stories, especially of the earliest period of its activity. That is why this research was focused on finding the missing part of the beginning. We had the chance to meet the son of Todor Hristov (the first leader of the Church) – Stefan Hristov, who provide some of the pictures, describe them, give a precious information about its father’s story and his own life. Since Stefan Hristov is already in his 80ties, and his health is fragile at the moment, the interview and the pictures were chance to preserve important information about the first years of the Pentecostal church. The collected pictures from him are 9. The other representative of the same generation as Stefan Hristov I had the chance to met was Kiril Dzhinov. He comes from a family of old believers and was active member of the Pentecostal church all his life. The collected pictures from him are 24. They were stored in album. The author of the most of official pictures of Yambol Church during the socialistic period – Stefan Angelov also provides the research with 17 rare pictures. They were stored in a box. There are also 4 pictures provided by Yancho Yanchev, as a representative of the young generation in the Church, during the socialism. They were stored in an envelope. And at the end but not at least we managed to digitise some documents and pictures that were collected and stored by different people who worked at the Evangelical Pentecostal Church in Yambol. Among the discovered items were also the founding protocol of the Church from 1926 and the list of the first believers with detailed data about them, up to the 1939, as well as many pictures from the history of the church – 92 items. The items from the Church were stored in albums, but some of the written information about them was

not quite correct. The particularisation required the help of some of old members. Since the church is quite big and with long traditions, it provides opportunities for at least **500 more pictures** to be digitised.

Important part of research result in Yambol region it appeared to be the discovered documents among Gypsy/Roma believers. Thanks to the recent research it became clear that the first Gypsy believers joined Pentecostal Church from the very first days of its foundation. The information that was gained from interviews was confirmed by the list of the official member protocols of the Pentecostal Church in Yambol from 1929. According to the interviews and some pictures, Pentecostal church continues to gain followers among the minority during the socialism. Most of the time, Roma believers were gathering secretly in their neighbourhood, but they were in connection and received different kind of support from the Yambol Pentecostal church. The documents and memories proved that Evangelical believes among Roma were not something new among the minority, but for many of them it was tradition for several generations before 1989. That means that Roma Evangelists are an integral part of the Pentecostal cultural heritage of this region. Unfortunately, there is a real threat for these memories and documents to be lost and forgotten, since all of the already found ones were in very bad condition. Most of them were stored in different envelopes without order and dates. It was hard for the families not only to find where they were, but to remember in which year they were taken. The other problem is that Roma in socialistic period, and especially before 1944, did not used to have that many pictures as ethnic Bulgarians. Those few they had from these decades are not well stored and described. There is an objective danger this significant part of the Evangelical Bulgarian history to be lost before it was properly researched and copied. We did 10 images of pictures belonged to Anna Shabanova, the daughter of the first and the most popular Roma Evangelist in Yambol – pastor Shaban. 16 pictures were digitalised from the family archive of the pastor Dinko Marinov, who is from Roma origin and is preaching in his own Church in the so-called ‘Gypsy neighborhood’ in Yambol. The Roma believers in Yambol provide opportunity for at least **100 more pictures** to be digitised.

*Church in village Kukorevo.* Village of Kukorevo is located in Yambol region. The pictures that were copied there belong to Roma believers as well. The first believers among Roma people in Kukorevo are from late 1950s, but they did not have their own church in village until the political changes in 1989. The Church in Kukorevo was officially founded in 1991. Before that Roma people

had the support from the Yambol Pentecostal Church and other Roma believers in Yambol. They have their leaders like 'brother' Shaban, or 'sister' Duda, who were one of first believers among Roma. The fact that they did not have their own church it does not mean that they were not active. Just like their brothers and sisters from Yambol, they gather together in someone's houses where they pray, support each other, sing and preach. Some of people, who can tell many stories about that time, are still alive. Most of their children are also believers and they keep the traditions, documents and pictures from that time. The scanned pictures from Kukorevo belong to Atanas Georgiev, one of the dedicated believers in the village. They are 26 and were stored in album without specific order and description. The village provides opportunity for at least **50 more pictures** to be digitised.

*Church in Stara Zagora.* In Stara Zagora we had the chance to met pastor Yordan Manev, who was already 80 years old, but very active and full of memories of his long life dedicated to the faith in God, with all the positive and negative (especially during the communism) experiences. The digitised pictures of him are 35 pictures and those of his wife Nedyalka Maneva are 21, but they were only small part of the possibilities for gathering more text documents and pictures in Stara Zagora. The pictures were stored in boxes without order. It would be nearly impossible to describe the exact events pictured on them without the memories of the owner. In Stara Zagora we can do more than **200 pictures** and documents.

Messiah Christian Church is founded in 1991 in Stara Zagora and belongs to the Evangelical Pentecostal community in Bulgaria. There we conducted an interview with Tanya Petkova, who informed us for the culture of the Tinchevists. She is pastor along with her husband in the Messiah Christian Church but she is from a family of Tinchevist (Pentecostal) believers and was born in Pleven. She not follows the Tinchevist idea and is member and leader of the Messiah Church but respects the documentary heritage of her family. We think there is potential more than **120 pictures and text documents** to be digitised from Tinchevists in Bulgaria.

*Churches in Karnobat and Sliven.* Photos of the Bulgarian Evangelical Pentecostal church's members from the village of Krumovogradishte, Karnobat region and photos of Karnobat Pentecostal Church were digitised and gave us interesting information about the culture and history of first Pentecostal believers. The collection from Karnobat contains 24 digital images are from

1940s to 1980s. The Karnobat Pentecostal Church keeps a collection of Evangelical songs for children issued in 1909 in Samokov and we hope we can digitise it in Major project.

The history of Sliven church is related to the famous pastor Agop Kuriyan, born in 1881 in Odrin. He had studied in the Robert College in Tsarigrad, today Istanbul. Agop Kuriyan was originated from an Armenian family who were adherents of the Evangelical Congregationalist Church. His wife, Arshaluis Kuriyan, was born in Tsarigrad. Her family was converted to Evangelicalism (Congregationalism). She had graduated from Robert College in Tsarigrad, where she met her husband Agop. Agop worked in English factory as a mechanic of steam engines. During the persecutions of the Armenians in the Ottoman Empire, most of their relatives migrated to the US. Agop, his wife and their children settled in the town of Sliven in 1915, where he was offered a work in the Stefanovi's factory. Agop and his wife Arshaluis became members of the local Congregationalist Church, where he was ordained as deacon. When arrived in 1920 the Russian Pentecostal missionaries Voronaev, Zaplishnii and Kolshovskii, they organised a Pentecostal group of believers among which were Agop and his wife and some other Bulgarians from the town of Sliven. Agop created a home Pentecostal church, which was the first Pentecostal church in this town. Before Agop's conversion to Pentecostalism, he used to go to the cinema but after that he stopped because he believed it was a sin. The family of Agop and Arshaluis had five children. We did interview with two of their grandchildren, Emilia and Sonya Kuriyan. We also conducted interview with Vesselin Enchev, pastor of the Pentecostal Church in Sliven for many years like his father before him (Todor Enchev). The family of Todor and Stela Enchevi devoted their life to work for Pentecostal church. Stela was married to Todor in 1942. Todor had studied at the Theological Seminary of Samokov, Bulgaria and at the Seminary of Danzig (Gdansk), Poland. As family devoted their life to Pentecostal missionary work, they did Evangelical activities intensively in South Bulgaria. Important contribution for the development of the Pentecostalism in Bulgaria was the interviews with Tanya Petrova and Atanas Atanasov from the Sofia Pentecostal Bible College. We did 13 tiff images from the collection of T. Petrova. Specifically for Sliven and Karnobat Pentecostal societies, there is a potential for digitalisation of more than **400 photos and text documents**.

*Churches in Samokov.* A survey on Pentecostal Evangelists from the Roma neighborhood of Samokov (approx. 10 000 Roma reside there) was held as well. Interviews with the local pastors



were conducted, and very important meeting was realised with Mrs. Violeta Hristova, the first converted Roma from Islam to Evangelical Christianity in 1979. Mrs. Hristova from Samokov has a limited number of photographic materials before and after the evangelisation of her family in the late 1970s and in the early 1980s. In Samokov however, there is a potential for digitalisation of more than **50 photos**.

As a result we have 20 folders with 388 digital images dedicated to the culture and history of Pentecostal societies. The digitised materials are classified as follows:

- EAP1145\_Yambol\_Pentcstal\_SHristov (9 items);**
- EAP1145\_Yambol\_Pentcstal\_KDzhinov (24 items);**
- EAP1145\_Yambol\_Pentcstal\_SAngelov (17 items);**
- EAP1145\_Yambol\_Pentcstal\_YYanchev (4 items);**
- EAP1145\_Yambol\_Pentcstal\_EPC (92 items);**
- EAP1145\_Yambol\_Pentcstal\_AShabanova (10 items);**
- EAP1145\_Yambol\_Pentcstal\_DMarinov (16 items);**
- EAP1145\_Kukorevo\_Pentcstal\_AGeorgiev (26 items);**
- EAP1145\_Karnobat\_Ptcstals\_IIMitev (24 items);**
- EAP1145\_StZagora\_Pentcstals\_YManev (35 items);**
- EAP1145\_StZagora\_Ptcstals\_NManeva (21 items);**
  
- EAP1145\_StZagora\_Ptcstals\_ARaykov (2 items);**
  
- EAP1145\_StZagora\_Tinchevists\_TPetkova (21 items);**
  
- EAP1145\_Sliven\_EPC (18 items);**
  
- EAP1145\_Sliven\_Ptcstals\_VEnchev (9 items);**
  
- EAP1145\_Sliven\_Ptcstals\_AStoyanova (7 items);**
  
- EAP1145\_Sliven\_Ptcstals\_KhKuriyan (14 items);**
  
- EAP1145\_Sliven\_Ptcstals\_SKuriyan (21 items);**



**EAP1145\_Sofia\_Ptcstals\_TPetrova (13 items);**

**EAP1145\_Samokov\_RomEvang\_Hristova (5 items).**

## **RESEARCH PERSPECTIVES OF MAJOR PROJECT**

**Evangelical Methodist Episcopal Church ‘Dr. Albert Long’ (EMEC).** The provided materials are digitised as found. They contain photographs from the second half of 19<sup>th</sup> century to the 1970s that are glued to paper pages. Typewritten and handwritten explanatory text in Bulgarian is attached to each photograph. The physical condition of the photographs is good; the quality is medium and poor. The paper pages are classified by numbers, topic and cities. Each number is relevant to certain city. All paper pages are stored in 5 big plastic folders, but they are not always arranged in sequence. Within the project implementation the materials from 1 plastic folder were digitised. The folders are stored in the church archive. This archive is very important to be digitised and preserved because is unique by its content. It contains information about the history of the Methodist (North Mission) and Congregation (South Mission) Communities from their formation to the recent past, as well as the missionary work among Bulgarians, Armenians and Roma. It has potential for more than **220 photos and text documents.**

**Evangelical Congregational Church in Samokov.** The church has small but valuable archive documents, books and photographs. They are stored in the cabinet in the building of the church. Two photographs were provided for digitisation. Their physical condition was good, poor and medium quality. They were stored in an envelope. Other non-digitised books and documents are very old and not properly stored. The Bible, the first translated published issue from 1871, Istanbul, laid out on a stand in the worship room. Its physical condition is good; the colour of the pages became yellow. The religious songbook, published in 1923, in Sofia, was torn and stuck with a sell tape, still it is used in the religious service. The archived marriage certificates are two types: permission marriage certificate and marriage certificate. They were issued before 1944. There are empty blanks and copies of the marriage certificates of the believers. The appointed pastor there allows their digitisation after covering with white paper the personal data of the married people.



**History Museum Archive in Samokov.** The archive materials of the History Museum in Samokov are stored in different buildings. Still they are in process of description; they are not digitised or published. So, still they are not available for widespread use by visitors. During my visit 2 available photographs were provided for digitisation. Still, they are not officially classified. Also, 2 photo albums of the graduates of the American Science Theological School (the First Religious School) in Samokov from the 1920s are available. They are published by the printing house of the school and they cannot be found anywhere else.

**Evangelical Congregational Church ‘Slovoto’ in Bansko and the Evangelical Museum in Sofia.** All photos and documents are digitised and listed as they were found. They are placed in plastic bags in the church’s office in Bansko with no special order and are not systematised. We did 47 digital images from the church archive. We did conversions with pastors from the First Evangelical Church in Sofia and visited the Museum. From both places, there are potential for more than **600 materials, valuable photos and text documents.**

**All family collections** were digitised as found. They were not classified and arranged. They were stored in paper boxes or in the cabinets. Their physical condition is good and bad – some the materials are torn and folded; the quality of some materials is good, but others is the quality of others is poor because of appearance of stains. It should be noted that in the oral history of the Methodist and Congregational believers, a great place has the memory of repressions during the socialist period. In this regard, very important biographical interviews were conducted with the pastors Bogomir Iliev from Ruse, Bozhidar Simeonov from Shumen and Bozhidar Igov from Varna, whose fathers were imprisoned. The hidden correspondence between Pastor Simeon Popov, while he was imprisoned, and his wife, Elsie Gisler-Popova, of Swiss origin, is preserved by their son Bozhidar Simeonov. For security reasons the letters were translated into German and sent to Mrs. Popova’s relatives in Switzerland during Socialist period in Bulgaria. Now, the letters returned back are located in Shumen Bulgaria and their physical condition is bad. During the communist regime the believers from other churches were also persecuted. Important information we received from pastor Theodor Angelov, who told us the story of his father imprisoned during that period and provided us with some old photos. Due to the constant searches of the homes of Protestant family from different denominations, many of the photographs were destroyed purposely by some families. Also, state security seized some of the documents of the Adventist churches. Because of this some

the believers are very suspicious to outsiders because of the negative stereotypes toward them as ‘sectarians’ and because of the attitude of the State towards them during communism. The personal contacts with pastors who are young and educated people were very useful to do the study. They know the oldest and precious members of the religious communities, organised meetings and explained them the main goals of the project. As a result, people were very open to cooperate with us.

During survey we contacted with people who are elders of their churches and whose relatives are among the founders of the churches. They have other valuable photos they are ready to provide. Furthermore, despite the fact that some communities are keeping their pictures or archives, these documents most of the time are purely stored in bad condition, or just with unrecognisable images of people and events that nobody can explain. When we talk about Roma believers, we cannot relay that much on documents and pictures as it is among ethnic Bulgarians. Those who exist are not easily accessible, and some of them inevitably will be lost forever. The real events among Roma believers tend to become easily stories and legends which, makes orientation about the dates and specific facts harder.

In the perspective of the continuation of this study and the digitisation of photographic and document unpublished materials, giving information about the Protestant cultural heritage, history and community organisation, at risk of destruction or disappearance are still available: Approx. 50 items (photographs and songbooks), owned by the Methodist Pastor Bozhidar Igov in Ruse; Approx. 70 items (photographs, a religious songbook, published in Beirut, Lebanon in 1991), owned by members of the Armenian community in Varna, Shumen and Plovdiv; Approx. 200 items (photographs), owned by members of the Congregational community in Asenovgrad; Approx. 100 items (photographs, a religious songbook from 1923, marriage certificates issued by the church before 1944, the first translation of the Bible in Bulgarian in 1871), owned by the Congregation Church, History Museum (photograph albums; only written request of their digitisation and publishing is necessary to be submitted); Approx. 220 items (photographs, songs), owned by EMEC ‘Dr. Albert Long’, Sofia; Approx. 500 items owned by Bansko Evangelical Church and Approx. 100 pictures and materials from the First Evangelical Church in Sofia and Evangelical Museum; For the Baptist, Adventist and Pentecostal societies we expect to digitise more than 100 pictures from the Romani Baptist societies in Northeast Bulgaria; approx. 200 more pictures and documents

from the Pentecostal churches in Stara Zagora; Approx. 120 more documents and portrait photos from Tinchevists in North Bulgaria; Approx. more than 400 pictures and text documents of the Adventist churches in Sofia and Plovdiv; Approx. more than 1050 pictures and text materials for the Pentecostal societies in Yambol, Sliven, Karnobat, Burgas, etc.

### **APPENDIX: Documentary heritage of the traditional Protestant communities in Bulgaria/ EAP 1145**

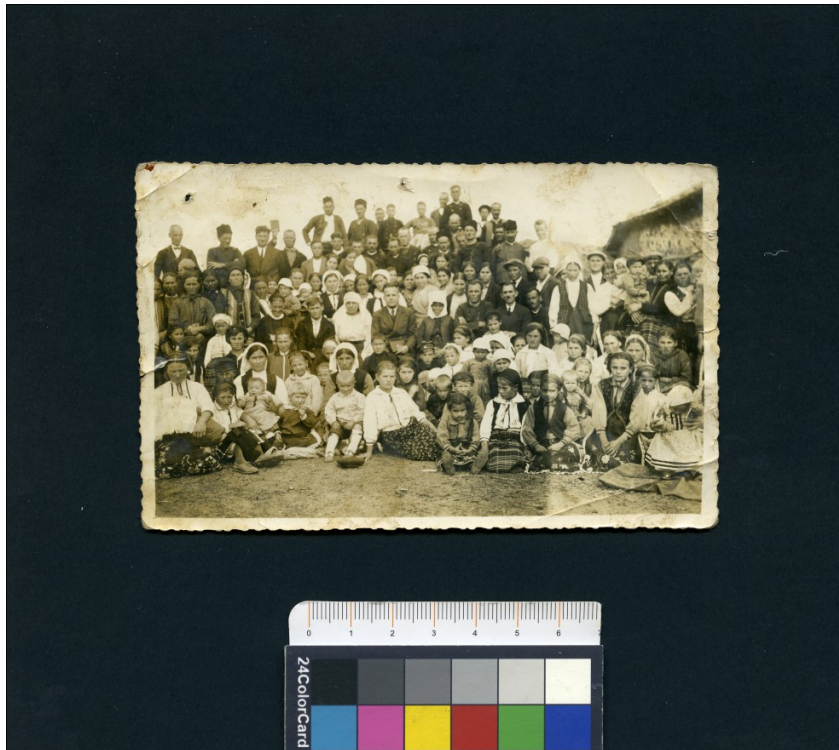


**Pic.1. Photo of Nikolcho Boedzhiev's Evangelical (Congregational) family, early 20th century, town of Samokov, Southwest Bulgaria.**



**Pic.2. This photo presents one of the first Seventh-day Adventist society in Varna, Northeast Bulgaria, 1920s.**

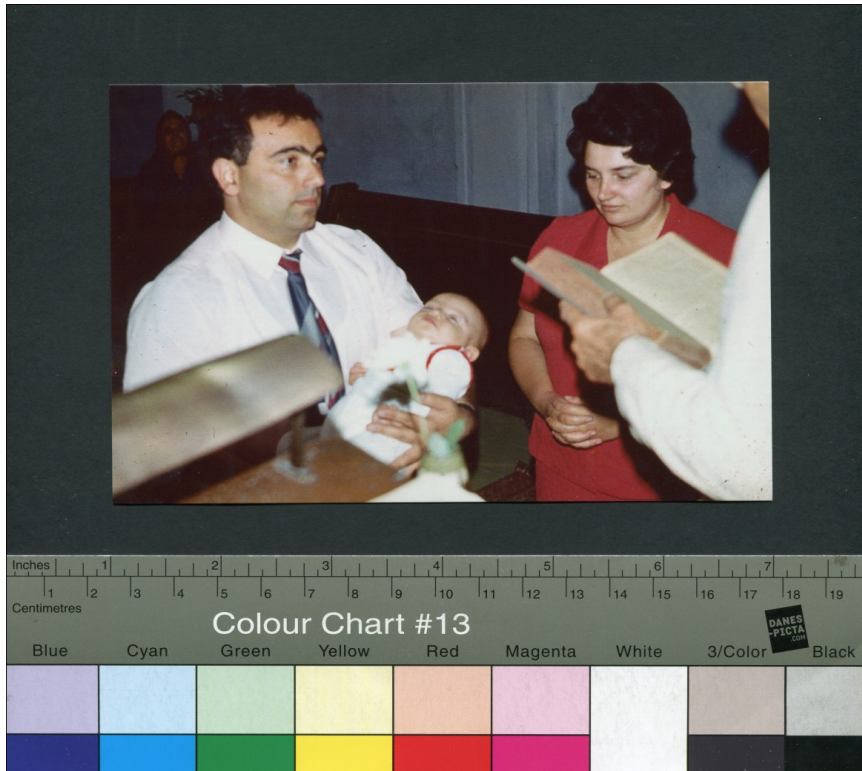




**Pic.3. Photo of the Bulgarian Evangelical Pentecostal society from the village of Krumovgradishte, Karnobat region, Southeast Bulgaria, 1930s.**



**Pic. 4. Photo of the Armenian Pentecostal family of Kuriyan. Town of Sliven, South Bulgaria, 1940s.**



**Pic. 5. Blessing of a newborn in a Evangelical Methodist Church, Northeast Bulgaria, 1960s.**





**Pic. 6. Photo of archive of the Evangelical Episcopal Methodist Church ‘Dr. Albert Long’ in Sofia, February 2019.**



**Pic. 7. Fieldwork in Montana region, Northwest Bulgaria. Interview with Romani Baptist believer and digitalisation of her photographic collection, May 2019.**