

**A Dappled People:  
Jewish, Roma, and Romanian Evangelicals Challenging Nationalism in Interwar  
Romania**

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## Abbreviations

ALA	Areopagus Centre for Christian Education and Contemporary Culture, Library Archive (Timișoara, Romania)
ANR	Arhivele Naționale ale României, Bucharest, Romania
ANRM	Arhivele Naționale ale Republicii Moldova
AZS	Biserica Adventistă de Ziua a Șaptea din România/ The Seventh Day Adventist Church
BOR	Biserica Ortodoxa Română (Romanian Orthodox Church)
BCU	“Lucian Blaga” Central University Library, Cluj, Romania
CNSAS	Centrul Național pentru Studierea Arhivele Securității (Center for the Study of the Former Secret Police Archives), Bucharest, Romania
DGJ	Direcția Generală al Jandarmeriei Archival Fond, ANR
DGP	Direcția Generală al Poliției Archival Fond, ANR
DIM	Danish Israel Mission Archives, Lystrup, Denmark
HC	<i>The Hebrew Christian</i>
IHCA	International Hebrew Christian Alliance
LSPCJ	London Society for the Promotion of Christianity among the Jews
MAE	Ministerul de Afacere Externe (Minister of External Affairs), Bucharest, Romania
NIM	Norwegian Israel Mission
OSA	Open Society Archives, Budapest, Hungary
PCRA	Pentecostal and Charismatic Research Archive, University of Southern California Digital Library
SBHLA	Southern Baptist Historical Library and Archives, Nashville, Tennessee, USA
SIM	Swedish Israel Mission Archives, Uppsala, Sweden
TT	<i>Trusting and Toiling</i>

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## **Abstract**

**Iemima Ploscariu**

### **A Dappled People: Jewish, Roma, and Romanian Evangelicals in Interwar Romania**

Following World War I, Baptists, Brethren, Pentecostals, and Seventh-day Adventists, were among the largest evangelical groups living in the territories of Transylvania, Bessarabia, and Bukovina, annexed to the Kingdom of Romania through the peace treaties. These religious minorities grew exponentially, first among ethnic minorities, and then among ethnic Romanians. Jewish and Roma minorities in Romania, already experiencing discrimination due to the expansion of racist and eugenic policies across Europe, forged ties with these denominations, which also suffered discrimination in the new Romania. Their diverse ethnic, class, and gender composition made them counter-cultural. Soon, these diverse evangelicals, who put faith above the nation, managed to establish themselves as influential religious minorities within Romania, enjoying strong ties with co-religionists abroad and ethnic minority co-religionists within the country.

Romanian leaders perceived this evangelical minority as endangering the construction of a strong post-war national identity. The international and inter-ethnic connections of evangelicals threatened Romania's territorial borders, state sovereignty, and the influence of the Romanian Orthodox Church, which was seen as a unifying institution central to Romanian national identity. By 1940, state authorities outlawed the non-conformist evangelical groups and deported some adherents to the ghettos in Transnistria along with exiled Jews and Roma.

Through the study of country-wide demographics, specific Jewish and Roma churches, their struggle through music for legitimacy and space, and their endurance during the Holocaust/Pojarmos, the lived religion of interwar Romanian evangelicals entangles assumptions of national identities and religion. These diverse groups enrich the current discourse on minorities in twentieth century Europe, through the way they challenged established religion and constructed new identities that crossed boundaries of language, gender, social class, and ethnicity.

Glory be to God for dappled things –  
For skies of couple-colour as a brindled cow;  
For rose-moles all in stipple upon trout that swim;  
Fresh-firecoal chestnut-falls; finches' wings;  
Landscape plotted and pieced – fold, fallow, and plough;  
And áll trádes, their gear and tackle and trim.

All things counter, original, spare, strange;  
Whatever is fickle, freckled (who knows how?)  
With swift, slow; sweet, sour; adazzle, dim;  
He fathers-forth whose beauty is past change:  
Praise him.

-*Pied Beauty*, Gerard Manley Hopkins (1918)

## Introduction

On 14 June 1925 a Romanian police agent identified as “Ş.S.”, part of the interwar secret police service *Siguranța*, stepped into the building at 2 Gărei street in the city of Chișinău. His assignment was to monitor and report on the activity of the “sectarian” group which met there. The building served as the prayer house for the *Comunitatea Creștinilor Evangeliști-Baptiști* [Evangelical Baptist Christian Community], and on that particular day they held a celebratory service inaugurating the care-home for their community. An impressive four hundred people were in attendance. The Siguranța officer gave a detailed account of the morning and evening services, the sermon themes, the preachers’ names and addresses, and the “well organized” choir and orchestra. He was struck by the attentiveness of the audience and the seriousness with which they examined the New Testament books they held in their hands. Most extraordinary, however, was the mix of people. He encountered a “dappled” world- *o lume impestrițată*- of “Romanians, Russians, Jews, English, Greeks, etc.”<sup>1</sup> The agent had entered a strange world, both in the mix of people present and in their unusual religious actions. Though fascinating, they appeared suspicious, and potentially dangerous, in their radical diversity.

After World War I, Romanian statesmen faced the difficult task of uniting diverse peoples and varying administrative systems across the regions newly acquired by Romania. As part of the peace treaties, the Romanian state received the territories of Bessarabia, Transylvania,

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<sup>1</sup> ANRM 679-1- 4840, f. 281. The agent mistook American Southern Baptist Foreign Mission Board Representative Everett Gill for an Englishman.

the Banat, southern Dobrogea, and Bukovina. Transylvania in the west, along with the Banat, and Bukovina had been part of the Astro-Hungarian empire and Bessarabia in the east part of the Russian empire. Each was previously under different administrative systems and consisted of large populations of ethnic minorities: Hungarians, Jews, Serbs, Ukrainians and others. Leaders of the newly enlarged Romania, now referred to as Greater Romania [România Mare], were concerned that urban educated ethnic minorities monopolized cultural and economic resources at the expense of the Romanian bourgeoisie and the peasant majority.

The ensuing Romanianization policies for unifying the regions and lifting the ethnic majority population into positions of authority included universal male suffrage that gave Romanian males the right to vote, radical land reform,<sup>2</sup> regulations on ethnic composition of the military,<sup>3</sup> primary and secondary school reform, and parameters for religious practice and conversion, among others. The land reform broke the semi-feudal system, giving the majority of Romanian peasants their own land. Access to the military became increasingly limited to ethnic Romanians, especially the higher ranks. School reform increased the number of village schools, slowly increasing the literacy rate of the majority Romanian peasant population.<sup>4</sup> These were all attempts to bring Romanian language, culture, and ethnic majority Romanians into places of political or social authority and economic predominance.<sup>5</sup>

The push for Romanianization of - making thoroughly “Romanian”- all institutions occurred throughout the interwar period and intensified with the anti-Semitic legislation leading to and passed during World War II. However, as Ștefan Ionescu aptly describes it, “[Romanianization] never constituted a clear-cut or consistent policy but was characterized by contradictions, ambiguities, economic problems, rivalries, conflicts, and tactical delays,”

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<sup>2</sup> Niculae Cristea, “Study on the Preparation and Implementation of the Land Reform in Romania (1918 - 1921),” *Journal of Academic Research in Economics* 6/2 (June 2014): 282-302.

<sup>3</sup> Grant Harward “Purifying the Ranks: Ethnic and Minority Policy in the Romanian Armed Forces during the Second World War,” *Studies in Ethnicity and Nationalism* 13/2 (2013): 158-178.

<sup>4</sup> Valentin Maier, Dragoș Sdrobiș, “100 Years of Romanian Education: Failures and Achievements,” *Revista Transilvania* 3 (March 2019): 47-49; Arnold Planton, “Literacy rate in Interwar Romania (1930),”

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Literacy\\_in\\_Romania#/media/File:Romania\\_1930\\_literacy\\_EN.svg](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Literacy_in_Romania#/media/File:Romania_1930_literacy_EN.svg) (accessed 12 April 2021).

<sup>5</sup> For a detailed description of government unification policies in the different regions see Irina Livezeanu, *Cultural Politics in Greater Romania: Regionalism, Nation Building, & Ethnic Struggle, 1918-1930* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2000).

especially as it was applied differently in each region.<sup>6</sup> The short-lived interwar governments meant policies changed often with each new party in power.<sup>7</sup> The intense regional identities in Greater Romania made unification difficult and gave “romanianization” a slightly different definition depending on where any particular statesman was from. Those from Transylvania, Bukovina, or Banat, all previously part of Austro-Hungary, resented the centralization and control of Bucharest, which as the capital of the previous and post-World War I Kingdom of Romania. Bucharest politicians pursued policies that often benefitted their region at the expense of other regions. However, the growing influence of right wing politicians or cultural figures and the rise of fascist para-military groups like the Legion of the Archangel Michael resulted in increased antagonism directed towards ethnic and religious minorities across the different regions. The general context of East-Central Europe was one of fluctuating politics and social and economic uncertainty, leaving people unsure of what would happen at the start of the 1920s, as they both recovered from the damages of war and faced novel identities formed or imposed upon them by the newly created states.

Religion was considered a particularly important element for national unification in Romania. The laws on religion restricted the activity of smaller religious groups in order to ensure the dominant church, the Romanian Orthodox Church (Biserica Ortodoxă Română, hereafter BOR), retained cultural and political authority. BOR’s drop from 93% of the population prior to 1912 to 73% raised justifiable concerns.<sup>8</sup> Many influential Romanian intellectuals and politicians from across the political spectrum saw BOR as an important symbol of the Romanian nation and protector of its traditions. BOR leaders were senators and others held various ministerial positions influencing policies of consolidation, especially in regards to religious practice.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Ionescu refers to these pre-war policies as proto-Romanianization. Ștefan Cristian Ionescu, *Jewish Resistance to “Romanianization,” 1940-44* (Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), 29.

<sup>7</sup> Henry L. Roberts, *Rumania: Political Problems of an Agrarian State* (Archon Books, 1969).

<sup>8</sup> Sorin Negruți, “The Evolution of the Religious Structure in Romania since 1859 to the Present Day,” *Revista Română de Statistică* 6 (2014): 40.

<sup>9</sup> Lucian Leustean, “‘For the Glory of Romanians’: Orthodoxy and Nationalism in Greater Romania, 1918–1945,” *Nationalities Papers* 35/4 (2007): 717–742. Patriarch Miron Cristea was Prime Minister February 1938 to March 1939, Archbishop Florian Roxin a senator, Bishop Grigorie Comșa a deputy in parliament in 1920 and subdirector of the Ministry of Religious Denominations and Arts from 1920 to 1925, Nicolae Colan Minister of Religious Denominations in 1938.

The newly acquired territories of Transylvania, Bessarabia, and Bukovina had a large number of new evangelical Christian denominations, seen as heretical by BOR and labelled sectarian by the state. Though many of their members were ethnic Romanians, their adherence to “foreign faiths” and their large percent of ethnic minority members made them sources of “contamination” of Orthodox society and of undermining Romanianization policies. The state had three major categories for religious groups: denominations (recognized by the Romanian government’s Ministry of Religious Denominations with full rights), religious associations (allowed limited activity), and illegal sects. The denominations recognized by law were BOR, the Greek Catholic/Uniate, Roman Catholic, Lutheran, Reformed Churches, Judaism, and Islam. Religious associations were in a precarious position; the government often rescinded their rights depending on who was in office, hoping to pacify BOR (or Greek Catholic majority leaders in Transylvania) and to maintain control over the expanding religious scene. However, the government at times temporarily promoted Baptists or Adventists to the status of denomination if the state faced too much pressure from abroad.<sup>10</sup>

The present study focuses on Baptists, Brethren, Pentecostals, and Seventh-day Adventists, the four largest and best documented of evangelical groups in Romania. Their legal status fluctuated from sect to religious association to denomination and back to illegal sect throughout the interwar period depending on who was in government. They began to grow exponentially, first among the German and Hungarian minorities in Romania in the first decade of the twentieth century, and then among ethnic Romanians, challenging the dominant Romanian Orthodox Church’s (BOR) religious but also cultural position. Baptists went from 634 members in 1893 to over 60,000 in the 1930s.<sup>11</sup> In Transylvania, in the regions of Wallachia and Moldova comprising the old Kingdom of Romania, and in Bukovina, the ethnic minority churches planted the seeds for the evangelical movement. In Bessarabia, however, scholarship diverges, and points more to the role of autochthonous evangelical movements.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> For a detailed analysis of this legislation and power struggles see Iemima Ploscariu, “Transnational, National, and Ecumenical Convergences: The Baptist, Anglican, and Orthodox Reactions to the Romanian 1938 Religion Law,” *Journal of Religion in Europe* 12/1 (November 2019): 49-77.

<sup>11</sup> Alexa Popovici, *Istoria Bapțiștilor din România* (Oradea: Făclia, 2007), 48, 285, 294, 538.

<sup>12</sup> For example see Albert W. Wardin, *On the Edge Baptists and Other Free Church Evangelicals in Tsarist Russia, 1855-1917* (Oregon Wipf & Stock, 2013) and Heather Coleman, *Russian Baptists and Spiritual Revolution 1905-1929* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2005) who present more autochthonous evangelical beginnings, versus Sergei Zhuk, *Russia’s Lost Reformation: Peasants,*

In the early post-World War I years the Baptists, Brethren, and Adventists set up their own seminaries, printing houses, orphanages, clinics, and musical education (the Pentecostals began to build theirs in the 1930s). They held yearly regional or nation-wide congresses with co-religionists from abroad. Each had its own union, with a leadership committee elected by pastors from across the country. These unions represented their churches before government authorities, administered state-issued licenses for preaching, and re-distributed funds.<sup>13</sup> All four groups self-identified as evangelical during this period despite different practices and traditions. The Adventists observe different dietary and sabbath traditions than the other three. The Pentecostals place a strong focus on the Holy Spirit in their theology and practice glossolalia (speaking in tongues). The Brethren, connected to the international Plymouth Brethren communities, have no minister; each community appoints its own church elders. They had slight and larger theological differences, but they all held to the basic tenets of Christian belief and were derived from the sixteenth century Protestant Reformation. Jewish and Roma minorities in Romania, already experiencing discrimination due to the expansion of racist and eugenic policies across Europe, forged ties with the evangelical denominations. Soon, the latter managed to establish themselves as growing influential religious minorities within Romania, enjoying strong ties with co-religionists abroad and ethnic minority co-religionists within the country.

As a result of these ties, Romanian leaders came to perceive the evangelical minority as endangering the construction of a strong post-war Romanian national identity. They believed the international and inter-ethnic connections of evangelicals might encourage secessionist groups (such as the Hungarians in Transylvania, the Serbians in the Banat, and the Ukrainians in Bukovina or southern Bessarabia) and threaten Romania's territorial national borders, as well as challenge and lessen the dominant status of the Orthodox Romanian ethnic majority. Romanian leaders identified BOR as a unifying institution, central to Romanian national identity, and made substantial efforts to promote this role for the Orthodox Church. This was especially evident in the xenophobic rallying cries of the fascist Legionnaire movement for a pure Orthodox Romanian state, a movement which gained popularity across Romania and among a high number

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*Millennialism, and Radical Sects in Southern Russia and Ukraine, 1830–1917* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 2004), who argues for a stronger German influence on these groups.

<sup>13</sup> Their institutional developments are detailed in Iemima Ploscariu, "Pieties of the Nation: Romanian neo-protestants in the interwar struggle for religious and national identity," MA thesis (Budapest: Central European University, 2015).

of BOR priests.<sup>14</sup> Evangelical men and women challenged this conceptualization of “Romanianess” through their ethnically, linguistically, socially diverse congregations.

They capitalized on the diversity in their communities, not imposing ethnic national or linguistic limits. This is contrary to what major religious institutions and states in the region were doing at the time. State governments were intent on solidifying national communities, due to the vulnerability of their borders and to secure the recognition of their sovereignty, but I argue these groups showed an alternative to ethnic homogenization.<sup>15</sup> Besides bridging linguistic and ethnic divides, evangelicals were also crossing class and gender barriers as we see in chapters one and two of this thesis. Their diversity and radical inclusivity was a clear contrast to established religion (BOR), making them a source of both fascination and of suspicion.

The thesis unpacks this allure and distrust and argues for the counter-cultural interwar identity of these communities, so different from anything else at the time and from the image they present today. It does so first by breaking down their social and geographic composition in chapter one. Chapter two provides a case study of the intriguingly diverse Jewish Christian evangelical community led by Lev Averbuch in Chişinău and their vocal stance against the growing anti-Semitism and ultra-nationalism in Europe. The third chapter brings the birth of Roma evangelical churches into the larger story of evangelicals and the openness that drew Roma to these churches, using the first Roma Baptist Church in Arad city as a starting point of analysis. Chapter four adopts anthropological devices to show the groups’ quest for legitimization and for creating space for themselves in Romanian culture and society through music. Music featured prominently in both the Chişinău and in the Arad communities of chapter two and three. As all four chapters show, these groups were under constant surveillance by local police and agents of the Romanian interwar secret police, the Siguranţa.<sup>16</sup>

By 1940, state authorities outlawed all “sectarian” groups and deported some adherents to the ghettos in Transnistria along with exiled Jews and Roma. Chapter five concludes the thesis

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<sup>14</sup> Roland Clark, *Holy Legionary Youth: Fascist Activism in Interwar Romania* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2015).

<sup>15</sup> For a recent study on minorities and nation-building in the region see Sabrina P. Ramet, *Interwar East Central Europe, 1918-1941 The Failure of Democracy-Building, the Fate of Minorities* (Milton: Taylor & Francis Group, 2020).

<sup>16</sup> Siguranţa was the name of the secret police in Romania, which became the Securitate during the communist governments. For more on the organization’s history see Paul Ştefănescu, *Istoria serviciilor secrete române* (Oradea: Aion, 2003).

by analysing how the interwar perceptions of and policies toward evangelicals escalated into anti-sectarian policies and legislation. It also investigates the groups' responses in the midst of harsh repression.

The sources are comprised mostly of documents from the National Archives of Romania and from the Republic of Moldova in the form of Siguranța (Romanian Secret Police) reports. They present constructed narratives of the evangelicals as suspicious, anti-national, and treasonous sectarians. They also give intimate information not available in other primary sources. The second most used sources are denominational newsletters which reveal how the groups constructed their own identity and how they wished to be seen. Together they offer valuable information on how each side understood conversion, religious identities, and national identities. The focus of the thesis may seem to be on the 1930s due to the census data, the only one taken during interwar period, and chapter three's description of the birth of Roma evangelicalism in Romania. However, primary sources from throughout the 1920s are used in chapters one, two, and four to show development of multi-ethnic evangelical identities.

The thesis aggregates the often contrasting images to create a new narrative that challenges views of evangelical groups as exclusive, closed communities or solely as martyrs, allowing for an image of interwar Romanian society and its ethnic/religious/national identities as more nuanced and entangled. Sources such as conversion testimonies, police reports and native missionary literature bring out important themes of “cross-cultural literacy, close confessional relationships and public consumption of religion.”<sup>17</sup> It is important to note that the greater emphasis in the thesis on the Jewish communities versus that of the Roma is due to the dearth of sources available on the Roma. The history of the evangelical Roma communities is brought in wherever sources allow.

The present study fills important gaps in current literature. Major studies on religious minorities in Romania focus on the Uniate Church (the Catholic Church following the Byzantine rite or the Greek Catholic Church) and only briefly mention evangelicals, making this study crucial to a better understanding of religious politics in Greater Romania.<sup>18</sup> Current works which

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<sup>17</sup> Ellie Schainker, *Confessions of the Shtetl* (California: Stanford University Press, 2017), 103.

<sup>18</sup> Keith Hitchens, *Orthodoxy and Nationality: Andreiu Saguna and the Rumanians of Transylvania, 1846-1873* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1977); Dieter Brandes, Vasile Grăjdian, and Olga Lukács, *Scurtă istorie a bisericilor și comunităților religioase din Transilvania* (Cluj-Napoca: Presa Universitară Clujeană, 2008).



focus on evangelicals mostly approach their study from an anthropological or sociological perspective, while the present work blends multiple disciplinary approaches and provides the neglected historical analysis of these groups.<sup>19</sup> Jewish Studies and Roma Studies examined neo-Protestants within the Jewish and Roma ethnic groups but mostly neglected the interwar period.<sup>20</sup> The research on the hostile relationship between evangelicals and the Romanian state, such as Dorin Dobrinicu's work, analyzes the state as actor,<sup>21</sup> while others focus on the Romanian Orthodox Church,<sup>22</sup> or cultural elites,<sup>23</sup> but do not bring the various actors together. This thesis addresses both peasant and elite, turning the focus from state or BOR actors towards "everyday" evangelicals, precisely in the 1920s and 1930s.

Roland Clark's recent book has an excellent chapter on the "repenters" (the English translation of *Pocăiți* used colloquially in Romania for evangelicals), and is one of the few English-language sources to provide an analysis of these specific groups in Romania.<sup>24</sup> However the focus of his book remains on BOR, and the evangelicals are analysed within the context of BOR revival and missionizing attempts. The present study focuses specifically on the neglected inter-ethnic element of evangelical communities, important to understanding BOR's reaction to them as laid out in Clark or Dobrinicu's works. Valuable works such as Irina Livezeanu's pioneering *Cultural Politics in Greater Romania: Regionalism, Nation Building, & Ethnic Struggle, 1918-1930* places politics and ethnic identity at the forefront of culture, but barely addresses religion. The stories in this thesis contribute to an even more entangled reconstruction of interwar national and religious communities to build on valuable works such as those by Clark and Livezeanu. The multi-ethnic characteristic and complex ethnic and national identities of

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<sup>19</sup> David Thurfjell, *Faith and Revivalism in a Nordic Romani Community: Pentecostalism Amongst the Kaale Roma of Sweden and Finland* (London: IB Tauris, 2013); Catherine Wanner, *Communities of the Converted: Ukrainians and Global Evangelism* (NY: Cornell University Press, 2007).

<sup>20</sup> Kai Kjaer-Hansen, *Joseph Rabinowitz and the Messianic Movement: The Herzl of Jewish Christianity* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995); László Foszto, *Ritual Revitalisation after Socialism: Community, Personhood, and Conversion among Roma in a Transylvanian Village* (Berlin: LIT Verlag, 2007).

<sup>21</sup> Dorin Dobrinicu, "Religie și putere în România. Politica statului față de confesiunile (neo) protestante, 1919-1944," *Studia Politica. Romanian Political Science Review* 7/3 (2007): 583-602.

<sup>22</sup> Gheorghe Modoran, "Naționalismul interbelic- factor ideologic al intoleranței religioase," *TheoRēm* 3/2 (2008): 118-139.

<sup>23</sup> Roland Clark, "Orthodoxy and nation-building: Nichifor Crainic and religious nationalism in 1920s Romania," *Nationalities Papers* 40/4 (2012): 525-543.

<sup>24</sup> Roland Clark, *Sectarianism and Renewal in 1920s Romania: The Limits of Orthodoxy and Nation-Building* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2021), 101-123.

these groups during a crucial period of national consolidation (in both Romania and Europe at large) is the major contribution of this thesis, the element not analysed in previous literature.

The third chapter on Credința [Faith] Church increases understanding of Roma interwar social development, contributing to the field of Roma studies, and particularly complementing the works of Elena Marushiakova, Veselin Popov, and Viorel Achim, who provide excellent histories of interwar Eastern European Roma, but do not address the advent of the Roma evangelical churches at this time.<sup>25</sup> I use the name Roma rather than Gypsy/Țigan in the majority of the study to avoid present negative connotations of “Gypsy.” I am aware, however, that the name Rom(a) was first used in the interwar period in power struggles among Romanian Roma leaders such as Lazurica, and it too is not free of political exploitation.<sup>26</sup>

In the area of Holocaust study, the research builds upon Achim’s collection of documents on neo-Protestants during the Holocaust in Romania. To his work I add essential historical analysis on how these religious minorities, through their diversity, challenged contemporary conceptions of Romanian national identity. This led to them being temporarily targeted by similar ethnic cleansing procedures as Jews and Roma, unlike co-religionists anywhere else in Europe. The final chapter contributes to such excellent works as those of Ionuț Biliuța, Diana Dumitru, and Vladimir Solonari in the discourse on the Holocaust in Romania. These historians briefly mention the evangelicals as targets of Antonescu’s “cleansing” policies in their works, but this study goes deeper into who these “sectarians” were, why they were targeted, and how they experienced World War II in different regions.<sup>27</sup>

My research especially brings out the complexity of identities, religious-national-ethnic, and experiences that secondary literature doesn’t address in regards to religious minorities. Ellie Schinker begins to do this in her work on Jewish converts in Imperial Russia. She identifies what she calls “a minority of radical boundary crossers” who “undermined state investment in

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<sup>25</sup> Elena Marushiakova, *Dynamics of National Identity and Transnational Identities in the Process of European Integration* (Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars, 2008); Viorel Achim, *Țiganii în istoria României* (Bucharest: Ed. Enciclopedică, 1998); Achim (ed.), *Politica regimului Antonescu față de cultele neoprotestante: documente* (Iași: Polirom, 2013).

<sup>26</sup> Petre Matei, “Rom sau Țigan,” 57-66.

<sup>27</sup> Ionuț Biliuța, “‘Christianizing’ Transnistria: Romanian Orthodox Clergy As Beneficiaries, Perpetrators, and Rescuers During the Holocaust,” *Holocaust and Genocide Studies* 34/1 (2020): 18-44; Vladimir Solonari, *Purifying the Nation: Population Exchange and Ethnic Cleansing in Nazi-Allied Romania* (Washington, D.C.: Woodrow Wilson Center Press, 2010); Diana Dumitru, *The State, Antisemitism and Collaborationism in the Holocaust* (Cambridge University Press, 2016).

ethno-confessional clarity, who crossed a host of boundaries- confessional, political, and linguistic- and held ambiguous religious identities.”<sup>28</sup> However, the present work extends her analysis geographically and temporally.

Like Schainker, I move beyond analyzing the motivation behind conversion, and instead show these groups’ self-perception, how they constructed new identities and communities, how they were perceived by the state or BOR authorities and what this all reveals about the tension between lived versus state religion and local versus national or ethnic identities. The final chapter reveals how this tension led to separate communities as evangelicals were affected by the discourse and policies for ethnic/religious/ linguistic boundaries, reflective of the wider tendencies across Europe and globally.

Within religious studies, the present study follows Heather Coleman’s approach to conversion as a change in belief systems based on various combinations of relationships, which unsettle identities of self, nation, community, and reveal the permeability and fluidity of such borders.<sup>29</sup> Conversion “marked the start of a complicated experiment with new forms of identity and belonging” and “communal empowerment.”<sup>30</sup> The present study also engages with the role of faith and belief as factors influencing conversion especially with the surge in religious activity in Romania after World War I and the personal stories and lived experience of intimate cross-confessional interactions. It therefore brings to the forefront the marginalized “converts of conviction,” those who converted due to a spiritual experience or encounter, as defined in the volume on Jewish converts edited by David Ruderman.<sup>31</sup>

Unlike previous studies that focused on conversion of Jews to the dominant religions (specifically Roman Catholic and Greek Orthodox), the case here of interwar Romania brings to the forefront the appeal of evangelical, non-conformist groups across different Jewish

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<sup>28</sup> Schainker, *Confessions of the Shtetl*, 10, 200-201.

<sup>29</sup> Heather Coleman, *Russian Baptists and Spiritual Revolution 1905-1929* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2005).

<sup>30</sup> Schainker defines conversion as “a social encounter with the peoples and institutions of neighboring confessional communities” that results in a change of beliefs and prior religious affiliations, influenced by “local conditions, social spaces, and networks.” Schainker, *Confessions of the Shtetl*, 5-6; Schainker, “Jewish Conversion in an Imperial Context: Confessional Choice and Multiple Baptisms in Nineteenth-Century Russia,” *Jewish Social Studies: History, Culture, Society* 20/1 (Fall 2013): 1-4.

<sup>31</sup> David Ruderman, “Introduction,” *Converts of Conviction* (Berlin: DeGruyter, 2018): 1-3.

communities.<sup>32</sup> Both Sergei Zhuk and Ellie Schainker identified growing Jewish interest in these and other Protestant denominations in the “evangelical and revolutionary ferment in the southern provinces [of Imperial Russia] in the last decades of the nineteenth century,” an interest that continued into the twentieth century across eastern parts of Europe.<sup>33</sup> Jews and others joined these evangelicals despite the repression faced by such groups and this thesis provides the historical background of ethnic diversity and openness to account for this.

Often the state authorities gave legal recognition to ethnic minority evangelicals such as the German Baptists, while persecuting Romanian Baptists. It was acceptable for “foreign” minorities to be associated with these foreign faiths but ethnic majority individuals were labeled “sectarians” for joining them. These religious groups “introduced religious choice... destabiliz[ed] inherited religion and...treaded on Christian evangelical turf that further undermined the Orthodox Church and [Romanian] cultural hegemony, and sowed countercultural and subversive political ideas in the countryside.”<sup>34</sup> In a similar vein to Keith Jones and Ian Randall who argue for the counter-cultural element of European Baptist churches, the current work provides analyses of this counter-cultural element in evangelical communities across Romania.<sup>35</sup>

Some Romanian politicians or BOR leaders saw the evangelicals as influential on a global scale with the potential to provide ways to escape oppression via emigration to the United Kingdom or North America, but this was not a guarantee and western co-religionists’ influence on religious policy was limited. Such dangerous affiliations with “foreign organizations” and

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<sup>32</sup> The community of Catholics in San Nicandro, southern Italy, who converted to Judaism during the interwar period provide an interesting reversal in John A. Davis, *The Jews of Nicandro* (New Haven, CT: Yale, 2010). My thanks to Tomasz Kamusella for drawing my attention to this.

<sup>33</sup> Sergei Zhuk, “In Search of the Millenium: The Convergence of Jews and Ukrainian Evangelical Peasants in Late Imperial Russia,” *Holy Dissent: Jewish and Christian Mystics in Eastern Europe*, ed. Glenn Dynner (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2011); Zhuk, *Russia’s Lost Reformation: Peasants, Millennialism, and Radical Sects in Southern Russia and Ukraine, 1830–1917* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University 2004), 348-363; Schainker, *Confessions of the Shtetl*, 200-229; Theodor Dunkelgrün and Paweł Maciejko, *Bastards and Believers: Jewish Converts and Conversion from the Bible to the Present* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2020).

<sup>34</sup> Schainker, *Confessions of the Shtetl*, 202, 205.

<sup>35</sup> Keith G. Jones and Ian M. Randall, *Counter-Cultural Communities: Baptist Life in Twentieth-Century Europe* (Milton Keynes: Paternoster, 2008).

taking on more minority statuses, reveal the intimate and complicated bond of faith and identity beyond that of the nation or ethnic group.<sup>36</sup>

The so considered “conversion” of Romanians, who were previously Orthodox, to these “sectarian” groups also fits into recent discourse on the role of religion in modernity and the construction of the modern self.<sup>37</sup> These individuals from the majority ethnic population considered themselves more or truly Christian, rather than “converts” to a different religion. They thus challenged the presumed ties between established religion, in this case East European Orthodox Christianity as understood and practiced by BOR, and national identity.

The vocabulary used in Jewish, Roma, and Romanian sources is “born-again” or “repentance” rather than “conversion.” Brigit Meyer defines conversion as a distancing from the past that transforms social relations in the community of origin.<sup>38</sup> While the latter is true- social relations are transformed- “conversion” does not always mean a distancing from the past, but rather a re-conceptualization of it, a new way of interpreting and seeing one’s past. Roma from the village of Fântânele described their adoption of Pentecostal faith through the word *pocăință* or repentance and did not use the word conversion.<sup>39</sup> Likewise, Averbuch’s group identified the same concept through the Hebrew word *teshuva*. These concepts are analyzed more thoroughly in chapters two and three. I use the word conversion for ease of reading, but I attempt to use it sparingly since it was rarely in the vocabulary of the characters under study.

Another important term to clarify is “evangelical.” There is some scholarly and lay controversy over the appropriate term for these groups. In Romania, “evangelical” often referred to the German Evangelical Lutheran Church, or to the Romanian Evangelical Church founded by Tudor Popescu in the 1920s. The common label “neo-Protestant” only came into use during the communist regimes in Romania- a name given to them by the authorities. Likewise, anthropologist Sînziana Preda shows that “in the collective mentality, Romanians refer to the

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<sup>36</sup> Christopher M. Clark, *The Politics of Conversion: Missionary Protestantism and the Jews in Prussia 1728-1941* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995).

<sup>37</sup> Lewis Ray Rambo, *Understanding Religious Conversion* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2014); Bruce R. Berglund and Brian Porter-Szűcs, *Christianity and Modernity in Eastern Europe* (Budapest: Central European University Press, 2013); Gauri Viswanathan, *Outside the Fold: Conversion, Modernity, and Belief* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2001).

<sup>38</sup> Brigit Meyer, “‘Make a Complete Break with the Past’: Memory and Post-colonial Modernity in Ghanaian Pentecostalist Discourse,” *Journal of Religion in Africa* 28/3 (1998): 316-349.

<sup>39</sup> Nataniel Bițis, “De la marginalitate la normativitate. Convertirea unei comunități roma la Penticostalism,” *Revista Româna de Sociologie* 28/3-4 (2017): 260.

members of these churches as ‘repenters’ (in Romanian *pocăiți*); they are distinguished from other Christian groups by the practice of adult baptism.<sup>40</sup> However, the name “repenters/ *pocăiți*” does not appear regularly as a self-identifying term among group members in the sources I came across.

I therefore use the label “evangelical.” All the groups- Baptist, Brethren, Pentecostal, and even Seventh-day Adventists- identified as such in their publications from the period. They all follow David Bebbington’s classic definition of evangelical: Bible is held as authoritative truth; focus remains on Christ’s atoning work on the cross; conversion is necessary; and the gospel is expressed through actions.<sup>41</sup> By using this term, the study engages with recent scholarly work on evangelical history such as Stuart Mathieson on British evangelicals’ surprisingly robust engagement in Victorian era science or Kristin Kobes du Mez on the history of American evangelicals’ culture of masculinity.<sup>42</sup> My work engages with these scholars to show the complexity of evangelical groups in a different cultural and historical setting.

The present study digs deeper into the lived religion of these evangelicals, to focus more on their practices in comparison with their theology, and what this reveals about their involvement in society. As described by Heather Coleman, lived religion focuses on the “centrality of words, images, objects and spaces to the ways in which Christians of various denominations have lived out their faith.”<sup>43</sup> Chapter two in particular engages with the concept of lived religion, examining in detail the various social activities of Averbuch’s group in Chișinău. By adopting the cultural, anthropologically-inspired aspect of the “lived religion” approach, I was drawn to see the importance of music for these communities. Chapter 4 of the thesis provides a unique approach to analyzing how these groups sought to create space and

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<sup>40</sup> Sînziana Preda, “Making a Covenant with the Lord Jesus: The Appeal of ‘Repentance’ in Roma Communities in Post-Communist Romania,” *Journal of Ethnography and Folklore* 1-2 (2018): 277-278. Roland Clark uses “repenters” in his recent book, as mentioned previously.

<sup>41</sup> David W. Bebbington, *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain: A History from the 1730s to the 1980s* (London: Unwin Hyman, 1989), 2–17.

<sup>42</sup> Stuart Mathieson, *Evangelicals and the Philosophy of Science. The Victoria Institute, 1865-1939* (Andover: Routledge Ltd, 2020); Kristin Kobes du Mez, *Jesus and John Wayne: How White Evangelicals Corrupted a Faith and Fractured a Nation* (Liveright Publishing Corp, 2021).

<sup>43</sup> “Introduction,” *Orthodox Christianity in Imperial Russia: A Source Book on Lived Religion*, ed. Heather J. Coleman (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2014), 12. For more on lived religion see also Paul Werth, “Lived Orthodoxy and Confessional Diversity: The Last Decade on Religion in Modern Russia,” *Kritika* 12/4 (Fall 2011): 849-865.

legitimacy for themselves in Romanian society specifically through their overt emphasis on music.

Space is defined according to political geographer Doreen Massey as “the product of the intricacies and complexities, the intertwinings...of relations, from the unimaginably cosmic to the intimately tiny,” and is not confined to physical boundaries or geography.<sup>44</sup> Conversion was a transformation of this space- both physical and internal- resulting in new interactions with the community around them and modern understanding of their own selves.<sup>45</sup> Romanian interwar society included a battle for religious space, as the dominant Romanian Orthodox Church interacted with the growing communities of evangelicals. This created “confessional turf war” on the local level and an attempt to “police the borders of religious community,” through laws previously mentioned regulating where, when, and how many could attend religious gatherings.<sup>46</sup> As Schainker identifies in her work, “religious communities were knowledgeable of and enmeshed in each other’s practices, taboos, family relations, and social networks. Such knowledge and access could breed intimacy and sociability, but they could also breed hostility and rivalries when conversions subverted disciplinary power and tacit boundaries...In this way intimacy and intimidation were two sides of the coin...”<sup>47</sup> These occurred in specific geographic, but also social, cultural, economic spaces.

Music was one way in which evangelicals tried to encourage more intimacy and alleviate the tensions created in such spaces. Chapter four shows how they used the performative aspect of music to cross confessional boundaries.<sup>48</sup> However, the evangelicals also seemed to be “constructing new identities *against* the world rather than *within* it.”<sup>49</sup> Evangelicals were trying to create space for themselves in Romanian culture and society, while challenging much of what

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<sup>44</sup> Doreen Massey, “Philosophy and politics of spatiality: some considerations,” *Geographische Zeitschrift* 87 (1999): 8.

<sup>45</sup> Giuseppe Marcocci, *Space and Conversion in Global Perspective* (Leiden: Brill, 2015), 5.

<sup>46</sup> Schainker, *Confessions of the Shtetl*, 126.

<sup>47</sup> Schainker, *Confessions of the Shtetl*, 156.

<sup>48</sup> For more on the concept of crossing faith boundaries see Duane J. Corpis, *Crossing the Boundaries of Belief: Geographies of Religious Conversion in Southern Germany, 1648-1800* (University of Virginia Press, 2014).

<sup>49</sup> R. Chris Davis, *Hungarian Religion, Romanian Blood A Minority's Struggle for National Belonging, 1920-1945* (Madison, Wisconsin: University of Wisconsin Press, 2019), xii.

that society was promulgating at the time about religious, national, and ethnic identity. One of the best ways in which they did this was through the noninstitutionalized action of music.<sup>50</sup>

The study also contributes significantly to nationalism and religious studies by integrating the often-neglected case of religious minorities. Rogers Brubaker argues for the limits of intertwining religion and nationalism and points to Christianity's history of being used to both promote and challenge nationalist discourses, but he does not include the element of religious minorities, despite his previous work on ethno-national tensions in Transylvania.<sup>51</sup> Romanian, Jewish, and Roma evangelical, ethnic, and religious minorities offer rich non-conformist examples of double or triple minorities identifying themselves first by religion and showing ambivalence to national identity. Brian Porter and more recently Maria Falina and John Connelly, address questions of national/religious identity and how governments exploited the national questions in Eastern Europe.<sup>52</sup> The present work engages with these studies by providing the previously neglected case studies of Arad and Chişinău. The Roma and Jews in these cases saw themselves as Romanian citizens, but also as thoroughly Jewish or Roma, and above all as evangelical. They point to an intricate engagement with national, religious, ethnic identities that defied government categories and social expectations of being Romanian and Orthodox.

Employing Miroslav Hroch's definition of nation as a social group integrated by objective relationships, the study examines individual actors as well as institutions and the social and political context influencing them.<sup>53</sup> As such, the concepts of inclusion and marginalization, used to identify the public and state reaction to evangelicals, are defined as an individual or group's access to or exclusion from political and social institutions dependent on the social,

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<sup>50</sup> Because social movements start as outsiders to existing orders, they tend to use noninstitutionalized action (protest marches, blockades, leaflets, and petitions) to exert pressure. Frank W. Geels, and Bram Verhees, "Cultural Legitimacy and Framing Struggles in Innovation Journeys: A Cultural-Performative Perspective and a Case Study of Dutch Nuclear Energy (1945–1986)," *Technological Forecasting & Social Change* 78/6 (2011): 914.

<sup>51</sup> Rogers Brubaker, "Religion and Nationalism: Four Approaches," *Nations and Nationalism* 18/1 (2012): 2–20.

<sup>52</sup> Brian Porter, *When Nationalism Began to Hate: Imagining Modern Politics in Nineteenth-Century Poland* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002); Maria Falina, "Religious Diversity and Equality in Interwar Yugoslavia," *Studies in Religion/Sciences Religieuses* 20/10 (2021): 1-21; John Connelly, *From Peoples into Nations: A History of Eastern Europe* (Princeton University Press, 2020).

<sup>53</sup> Miroslav Hroch, "From National Movement to the Fully-formed Nation: The Nation-building Process in Europe," in Gopal Balakrishnan, ed. *Mapping the Nation* (New York: Verso, 1996), 78-97.



political and economic contexts, and are used as concepts by which to compare the restrictions placed on these denominations, and their reactions, especially in the final chapter.

Historian R. Chris Davis in his work on the categorization of ethnic and religious identity of the Csangos during World War II by the Romanian government claims that “questions of national belonging, ethnic origin, and race were seminal and an omnipresent part of lived reality,” for many communities and individuals in east-central Europe.<sup>54</sup> However, the communities analysed in this study reveal these questions were secondary to religious identity, becoming more important only as enforced by local and state authorities. The study complements Davis’s own work on the Csangos in Romania, who maintained their faith despite their seemingly fluid national identity.

The present work contributes to the recent discourse on everyday nationalism and national indifference. According to J. Paul Goode, everyday nationalism constitutes social practices and is the “pervasively unnoticed nationalism that persists in the background.”<sup>55</sup> In this way, evangelicals adapted Romanian, Roma, or Jewish folk music, had photos of the king in their homes, and the royal hymn in their songbooks as examples of their everyday nationalism. Like scholars using these concepts, the present study challenges approaches to nationalism focused on the elite and provides further examples of how nationalizing projects failed to instill a completely homogenous Orthodox Christian, Romanian speaking population or how strong local opposition was to such projects.<sup>56</sup>

The concept of national indifference has also opened up new ways of investigating these concepts.<sup>57</sup> Tara Zahra argues that the concept went by various names in the past: “regionalism, cosmopolitanism, Catholicism, socialism, localism, bilingualism, intermarriage, opportunism...”

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<sup>54</sup> Davis, *Hungarian Religion, Romanian Blood*, xi.

<sup>55</sup> J. Paul Goode, “Guest Editor’s Introduction: ‘Everyday Nationalism in World Politics: Agents, Contexts, and Scale,’” *Nationalities Papers* 48/6 (2020): 976-979.

<sup>56</sup> Michael Skey and Marco Antonsich (eds.), *Everyday Nationhood: Theorising Culture, Identity and Belonging after Banal Nationalism* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017). Brubaker has done something similar with the concept of everyday ethnicity in Roger Brubaker, Margit Feischmidt, Jon Fox, and Liana Grancea, *Nationalist Politics and Everyday Ethnicity in a Transylvania Town* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2006). On non-territorial autonomy see Federica Prina, “Nonterritorial Autonomy and Minority (Dis)Empowerment: Past, Present, and Future,” *Nationalities Papers* 48/3 (2020): 425-434.

<sup>57</sup> Maarten van Ginderachter and Jon Fox, *National Indifference and the History of Nationalism in Modern Europe* (London: Routledge, 2019), 249.

but that it has always been present.<sup>58</sup> It is especially observable in tumultuously contested border regions, such as Transylvania and Bessarabia.<sup>59</sup> Though the present study falls into this scholarly debate renegotiating the nationalism framework, the word “indifference” is not appropriate. The case of the Roma Baptists in Arad clearly identified as Roma but without any statements of national affiliations. On the other hand, Averbuch and the Jewish Christians spoke strongly against nationalism, and as such were not indifferent but actively opposed.

Through such characters as Lev Averbuch, Dumitru Lingurar, Nina Tarleva, Moses Richter, and Ioan Chișmorie, to name just a few, these communities come to life in the pages that follow. Their pursuit of communities that included such diverse people, languages, and social backgrounds at a time of strong national consolidation reveals a grass roots desire for something different than romanianization policies the government was pursuing. Expanding Siguranța Agent Ș.S.’s observations in Chișinău in 1925, the evidence diligently collected from over seven different archives in at least four different countries, presents an intimate look at these groups and individuals. From the formation and exponential growth of their communities to their resilience and failures under wartime repression, we see them bridge all sorts of barriers and provide a better understanding of the intricacy and entanglement of interwar European communities and identities.

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<sup>58</sup> Tara Zahra, “Imagined Noncommunities: National Indifference as a Category of Analysis,” *Slavic Review* 69/1 (2010): 96.

<sup>59</sup> Dmitry Tartakovsky, “Parallel Ruptures: Jews of Bessarabia and Transnistria between Romanian Nationalism and Soviet Communism, 1918-1940,” PhD Dissertation (University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, 2009); Andrei Cusco, “Russians, Romanians, or Neither? Mobilization of Ethnicity and “National Indifference” in Early 20th-Century Bessarabia,” *Kritika: Explorations in Russian and Eurasian History* 20/1 (2019): 7-38; James Bjork, *Neither German nor Pole: Catholicism and National Indifference in a Central European Borderland, 1890–1914* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan, 2009).

## **Chapter 1 Mapping the Evangelicals: A Social History**

Baptists, Brethren, Pentecostals, and Seventh-day Adventists in interwar Romania ranged across the social spectrum. They were farmers, local government officials, and shop clerks. The diversity in social status and occupation among members of these evangelical groups reflects their small but growing impact and appeal across boundaries of class, gender, language, and ethnicity. One could encounter a Hungarian tailor, a Romanian tanner, a Bulgarian engineer, a Jewish bookbinder, and a Roma railroad worker all worshipping together in these religious communities. It was relatively easy to start a community. With just a handful of people meeting in a house, they would grow with the help of the denominational Unions in Romania or with financial and spiritual support from abroad.

Using census records, confessional newsletters, police reports from the Romanian National Archives (ANR) and the National Archives of the Republic of Moldova (ANRM), the chapter examines the composition of these groups, including their numeric and ethnically-diverse presence, as it developed in the interwar years. Such an analysis reveals how evangelicals fit into Greater Romanian society as it was being constructed and why, due to the breadth of their social presence, they were considered a threat by Romanian state and ecclesiastical authorities. Examining where they lived, how they made their living, and how this differed across regions provides an important backdrop to understanding the impact of these groups at the local level, and of religious minorities more broadly on society and on policies of state-consolidation. Though some experienced discrimination in employment or land and property acquisition because of their religion, others managed to obtain important social and economic positions in Greater Romania.

The following analyzes these communities and individual members by region as listed in the 1930 census: Oltenia, Muntenia, Dobrogea, Moldova, Bessarabia, Bukovina, Transylvania, Banat, and Crișana-Maramureș. The regions in the south and south-east (Oltenia, Muntenia, Moldova) were poorer, as was the former Russian region of Bessarabia. The regions of Banat, Bukovina and Transylvania that formerly belonged to the Austro-Hungarian empire had previously better infrastructure and the population had been less economically disadvantaged than in the other regions of Romania. The Banat, Bukovina, and Transylvania also had more lenient legislation regarding religious minorities, allowing evangelicals more avenues for social and financial advancement in Austro-Hungarian lands.

In this chapter, the section for each region begins with an analysis of the rural scene for evangelicals in each sub-county within the region followed by their development and composition in the cities of each county: the gender, class, ethnicity of those who brought the new religious confessions and of those who adopted them. As census data was only compiled for Adventists and Baptists, the analysis will focus on their numbers and bring in the Brethren and Pentecostal data when available. The figures provided are symbolic, as movement of individuals across regions and between religious groups occurred frequently. They nevertheless, reveal their part in bridging the rural-urban divide in Romania, and the individual stories added to the figures show their great social, ethnic, linguistic diversity.

### **Regional Social Composition**

Statesmen of Greater Romania in 1918 sought to overcome socialist theorist Constantin Dobrogeanu-Gherea's pre-war characterization of Romania as dominated by neo-serfdom and suffering from an "abyss between urban and rural."<sup>60</sup> According to the 1930 census (the only census conducted in Greater Romania), of over 18 million registered inhabitants, approximately 14.5 million lived in rural areas as did almost 11 out of 13 million Orthodox believers.<sup>61</sup> With the memory of the 1907 peasant revolt still poignant in society and the return of soldiers to their villages after the war expecting a better situation, the question regarding the peasantry remained a major concern for the government. Local and state authorities did not expect so many of those returning home to bring with them these new faiths. The figures for evangelicals mirrored the nationwide rural to urban ratio with the majority of adherents living in villages. The category of "other" meant smaller religious groups with too few members to constitute a separate category. "Aconfessionals" or of no religion also made up less than .1%. Evangelicals were sometimes wrongfully assigned to this category by local authorities in order to curtail their activities.

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<sup>60</sup> Constantin Dobrogeanu-Gherea, *Neoiobăgia* (Bucharest: Librăria SOCEC, 1910), 5 in Kenneth Jowitt, *Social Change in Romania, 1860-1940: A Debate on Development in a European Nation* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1978), 1.

<sup>61</sup> Out of a total population of 18,057,028 the rural figure was 14,405,989 and the urban 3,651,039. As the only census between 1912 and 1941, it provides vital information, despite its many limitations. Results were used to create reform programs and national consolidation projects. The census was also a result of international pressure from the League of Nations and the Geneva Conference (1928) to establish norms for global economic statistics.

**Table 1: Population by Religion 1930<sup>62</sup>**

	<b>Rural</b>	<b>Urban</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>Percent of Total Population</b>
<b>Orthodox</b>	10,884,262	2,223,965	13,108,227	73%
<b>7<sup>th</sup>-Day Adventist</b>	12,984	3,118	16,102	.01%
<b>Baptist</b>	55,525	5,037	60,562	.4%
<b>Other Religions</b>	6,009	1,425	7,434	.04%
<b>Undeclared</b>	2,149	4,537	6,686	.04%

The remaining 36% included Roman Catholics, Greek Catholics, Reformed/ Calvinist, Lutherans, Unitarians, Jews, Muslims, and aconfessionals and had their own categories in the census. Evangelicals were sometimes wrongfully labelled aconfessional or of “no religion.” Pentecostals, though grouped with “other religions” or “undeclared” in the census, had substantial figures for their communities eight years later (see table 2 below), including valuable gender statistics. They show a balance of men and women in Pentecostal churches, with slightly more rural males and more urban females in their congregations, perhaps due to increased exposure and higher education for females in urban areas.

**Table 2: Romanian Pentecostal Population 1938<sup>63</sup>**

	<b>Rural</b>	<b>Urban</b>	<b>Total</b>
<b>Men</b>	3092	577	3669
<b>Women</b>	3004	597	3601
<b>Total</b>	6096	1174	7270

What seem like obvious demographics, of rural to urban ratios, become entangled on closer analysis of regions and specific cities, of evangelical leaders versus lay members, their exposure to ethnic minority communities, and the way in which they were affected by or influenced the different reforms of the time.

<sup>62</sup> Sabin Manuila, *Recensământul General al Populației României din 29 Decembrie 1930* (Bucharest: Institutul Central de Statistică, 1938), 24, 47-49.

<sup>63</sup> Ciprian Bălăban, *Istoria Bisericii Pentecostale din România (1922-1989): instituție și harisme* (Oradea: Editura Scriptum, 2016), 21.

**Map 1: Administrative Map of Greater Romania, counties and regions 1935<sup>64</sup>**



**Table 3: Adventists and Baptists in 1930 Census by Region<sup>65</sup>**

Region	Adventists	Baptists	Percent of Total Regional Population
<b>Oltenia</b>	695	82	< 0.1%
<b>Muntenia</b>	5,396	1,157	0.1
<b>Dobrogea</b>	561	1,234	0.2
<b>Moldova</b>	2,077	254	< 0.1
<b>Bessarabia</b>	1,927	18,861	0.7
<b>Bucovina</b>	918	1,145	0.1
<b>Transilvania</b>	2,933	10,286	0.3
<b>Banat</b>	143	6,770	0.7
<b>Crișana-Maramureș</b>	1,452	20,773	1.5

### *Oltenia*

The region of Oltenia, in southern Romania, was one of the poorest areas in the country with a large rural population. It had the smallest population of evangelicals in the interwar

<sup>64</sup> In 1930 census, Sălaj county was part of Transilvania. Spiridon Manoliu, “Romania’s Counties 1935,” 11 January 2008, Public Domain, (accessed 23 August 2021), <https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/6/69/Romania1935judete.jpg>.

<sup>65</sup> Manuila, *Recensământul*, 30.

period (and still today), yet even these communities included some ethnic minorities. 581 out of 695 Adventists were registered in villages. By contrast 34 out of 82 Baptists in Oltenia lived in rural areas, making their urban population proportionately higher than their rural population.

**Table 4: Rural Oltenia 1930<sup>66</sup>**

County	Adventists	Baptists
Dolj	326	13
Gorj	35	-
Mehedinți	134	17
Romanați	45	1
Vâlcea	41	3
Total	581	34

Dolj county had the highest rural population of Adventists, followed by Mehedinți county, due to the exposure of local teachers, such as Nicolae Mateiaș from Tencănu village, to this faith. His contact with an Adventist from Bucharest in 1921, convinced Mateiaș to adopt the new religious confession, which he then shared with neighbors. Villagers also attended Adventist gatherings in the county’s capital city of Craiova until their rural faith communities were organized by the Adventist Union.<sup>67</sup>

Unlike other regions, where evangelical teachings came through demobilized soldiers returning to their native villages, in Oltenia a few educated individuals serving as state employees (teachers, mayors) adopted these faiths from believers in the larger cities of Craiova or Turnu-Severin. Due to their influential position in the village, they influenced locals to join the new faiths. An exception is the case of Ilie Bănete, former mayor of Negomir, who came into contact with Brethren teaching in 1918 while a prisoner of war and began the first Brethren *adunare* (congregation, literally “meeting” or “gathering”) in Gorj county in 1927.<sup>68</sup> Brethren leaders from Budieni village, Gorj county, included the grandson of the former economist of Lainici Monestary, Mayor Ion Stamatoiu, former BOR (Biserica Ortodoxă Română) cantors, and

<sup>66</sup> Manuila, *Recensământul*, 47. They figure as less than 0.1% in each county.

<sup>67</sup> Dumitru Popa, *Pagini din Istoria Bisericii Adventiste de Ziua a Saptea din România vol. II 1921-1936* (Bucharest: Editura Viață și Sănătate, 2013), 222. This entailed official approval from the Ministry of Religious Denominations for them to meet in a specific location and for whoever delivered the sermons to be authorized as a preacher by the same Ministry.

<sup>68</sup> Bogdan Emanuel Răduț, “Comunitatea Creștinilor după Evanghelie: 100 Ani în Oltenia și 90 ani la Craiova,” *Oltenia: Studii, Documente, Cercetări* 4/2, *Arhivele Naționale Serviciul Județean Dolj* (Craiova: Sitech, 2014), 119.

others from the Orthodox reform movement Oastea Domnului.<sup>69</sup> With no Baptists and the smallest number of Adventists, Brethren teachings more quickly took root in rural Gorj county. These *Olteni* (people from Oltenia) were individuals from the growing middle class, often devout Orthodox believers, rather than predominantly peasants as feared by BOR leaders and state authorities, as was indeed the case in other regions of the country.<sup>70</sup>

Adventists gained a foothold in the region in 1914, while Baptists were overwhelmed trying to fill the needs of their rural communities in the western and eastern borders of Romania. Brethren, in much smaller numbers across the country (and internationally), gained some members in rural areas where there were few evangelicals. With Craiova as the largest city in Oltenia, most missionary efforts began and spread from there resulting in three times the number of rural Adventists in Dolj county as in Mehedinți. However, the minimal presence of German, Hungarian, or Russian minorities accounts for the slow spread of these new confessions in the rest of Oltenia as did the region's lower literacy rate (a substantial barrier for religious communities which prioritized individual Bible reading).

The urban evangelical population of Oltenia was concentrated in Craiova city, Dolj county. Adventist Petre Păunescu was an engineer in Bucharest, but originally from Craiova.<sup>71</sup> Baptists in Craiova, though only numbering twenty-five in 1930, had an interesting congregation. Despite the region's characteristically homogenous ethnic composition, German settlers founded the Baptist community, but their first church in Craiova in 1927 was a result of missionary intervention by Nicolae Sava (originally from Bucharest).<sup>72</sup> Early members Thomas and Ioan Klöss owned a painting business in the city and hired fellow Baptists.<sup>73</sup> The group included a former BOR anti-sectarian missionary of the Oltenia Orthodox Episcopate, Ion Popescu Zamora-

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<sup>69</sup> Răduț, "100 Ani în Oltenia," 119. Oastea Domnului was a reform movement within BOR started by Iosif Trifa in Transylvania in the early 1920s. Roland Clark, *Sectarianism and Renewal*, 143-167.

<sup>70</sup> The Brethren prove another exception. Farmer and British Bible Society colporter Stan Segărceanu first brought Brethren teachings to Oltenia and did so rurally in Goicea Mare, Dolj county, rather than in Oltenia's cities. Răduț, "100 Ani în Oltenia," 111.

<sup>71</sup> Dumitru Popa, vol. II, 134-135, 222; Claud Conrad, *1945 Yearbook of the Seventh-day Adventist Denomination* (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1945), 201, <http://documents.adventistarchives.org/Yearbooks/YB1945.pdf> (accessed 11 July 2018); ANR, DGP 2350, folder 62/1942, file 44; *Recensământul 1930*, 49.

<sup>72</sup> Alexa Popovici, *Istoria Bapțiștilor din România* (Oradea: Făclia, 2007), 125; Ioan Klöss, "Deschidere de adunare," *Farul Mântuirii* 8/5 (March 1927): 12.

<sup>73</sup> They advertised themselves as "zugravi-vopsitori și pictori de firme," on Craioviței Street No. 47, Craiova, in *Farul Mântuirii* 4/13-14 (July 1923): 17. Ioan Klöss became the pastor of the church in 1936, following Nicolae Sava's departure to minister a church in Iași. *Farul Creștin* 5/2 (January 1937): 7.



a once famous hypnotizer and spiritist, who held “psycho-experimental” sessions.<sup>74</sup> Though he and his wife left the Baptists after three years, the attraction these new religious groups had for those seeking a more radical spiritual experience is evident.<sup>75</sup> The Brethren in Craiova included businessmen and land owners; it is unclear what role the Pentecostals (mostly former Adventists and Baptists) played in the city after the establishment of their congregation in 1930.<sup>76</sup>

Adventists had a greater following across Oltenia perhaps due to the ethnic Romanian background of their pioneering members in the region. But even these were rural teachers or other state functionaries, rather than peasants. Baptists were proportionally larger in the cities. While in other regions the ethnic minority churches were the impetus for expansion of the new beliefs, in Craiova city it distanced the majority population until the arrival of an ethnic Romanian pastor. Oltenia in the interwar period did not have a majority peasant evangelical population, though this would change after World War II. Nevertheless, they were still quite diverse in their occupations, a diversity which would only increase as we look at the other regions.

### *Muntenia*

The mid-east regions of Muntenia and Oltenia constituted the historical Romanian principality of Wallachia which, along with Moldova, were considered a bastion of “Romanianess.” Muntenia in particular held important economic towns and the capital city of Bucharest. The Adventists were again predominant with members making their living off agricultural work as vine growers and ploughmen.<sup>77</sup> In Brăila county, Adventist occupations ranged from teacher to stonemason, while Baptists were mill owners (who also employed Baptists as millners and mechanics) and railroad workers (*Căile Ferate Române*, [Romanian

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<sup>74</sup> “Pocăința lui P. Zamora,” *Farul Creștin* 4/21 (November 1936), 7. Zamora is a fascinating figure. He was baptized by Sava in Craiova on 20 September 1936 along with Olga Tănăsescu, whom he married on 6 December 1936, also officiated by Sava. *Farul Creștin* 5/2 (January 1937): 7.

<sup>75</sup> *Farul Creștin* 7/22 (June 1939): 7.

<sup>76</sup> Răduț, “100 Ani în Oltenia,” 116; Bălăban, 22; Dumitru Popa, vol. II, 222. By 1940 Pentecostals included Teodor Macarie, Ion Bălașa, Nicolae Udrescu, Eva Gheț, Romulica Morar, Ana Păușan. These met in Bălașa’s house on 19 Gheorghe Coșbuc Street, Craiova and were put on trial for illegal meetings in 1942. ANR, DGP 2350, folder 62/1942, file 52.

<sup>77</sup> ANR, DGP 2349, folder 40/1931, file 140, 191.

Railroad] hereafter CFR).<sup>78</sup> Argeş county had the fewest rural evangelicals, perhaps due to the area's connection with the royal family in Curtea de Argeş town and with Piteşti city as a representative seat for the Ministry of National Defense.<sup>79</sup> In Ialomiţa county rural Baptists ranged from the former village drunk to the blacksmith or stave maker (*dogar*).<sup>80</sup> Pentecostal pioneer and CFR worker Solomon Borlovan moved from rural Transylvania to rural Prahova county, but was most influential in spreading Pentecostalism among urban Baptists in Brăila and Galaţi.<sup>81</sup> He was another example of how rural preachers influenced urban believers.

**Table 5: Rural Muntenia 1930<sup>82</sup>**

County	Adventists	Baptists
Argeş	40	-
Brăila	262	54
Buzău	196	11
Dâmboviţa	424	1
Ialomiţa	85	68
Ilfov	91	54
Muscel	87	7
Olt	81	8
Prahova	674	138
Râmnicu-Sărat	213	1
Teleorman	1958	87
Vlaşca	322	15

In Muntenia's larger cities Baptists were almost equal to Adventist members or at times surpassed them. Bucharest, as expected, had the largest urban neo-Protestant population in Romania with 576 Adventists and 566 Baptists in 1930, in comparison to their relatively small rural presence in Ilfov county as a whole.<sup>83</sup> The capital city's first Romanian Baptists held

<sup>78</sup> Dumitru Popa, vol. II, 81-82. Nicolae Georghişă was a carpenter (*tâmplar*) who became a colporter and then an Adventist pastor. Mihai Ciucă, *Bapţiştii din Brăilă: un veac de mărturie 1918-2018* (Cluj: Risoprint, 2017), 24, 56-57. Petrescu was originally from Dobrogea and along with Costache Dobre were hired by Sezonov in Braila after their discharge from the army in 1918.

<sup>79</sup> Primăria Municipiului Piteşti, "Cercul Militar Piteşti," <http://www.centrul-cultural-pitesti.ro/file-de-istorie-37/> (accessed 2 November 2020).

<sup>80</sup> Popovici, *Istoria Bapţiştilor*, 451.

<sup>81</sup> Bălăban, 22.

<sup>82</sup> Manuila, *Recensământul*, 47. Adventists and Baptists together figure between 0.2 and <0.1% in each county except in Teleorman county where together they compose 0.7% of the county population- still under 1%.

<sup>83</sup> *Ibid*, 49-50.

white-collar jobs, owned shops, were tradesmen or craftsmen, often in close proximity to the German minority.<sup>84</sup> Constantin Adorian, the first Romanian Baptist minister in the Regat (the territory of the prewar Kingdom of Romania), with suspected paternal Saxon heritage, was the grandson of an Orthodox priest, completed primary education at the Lutheran Evangelical School and enrolled in the Catholic high school, eventually working as a druggist.<sup>85</sup> Jean Staneschi, influential Baptist musician and pastor, received his PhD from the Academia de Inalte Studii Comerciale și Industriale [Academy of Advanced Commercial and Industrial Studies, today ASE] and his father ran a boot making shop that hired fellow Baptists.<sup>86</sup> Jean's wife, Olga Dimitrova was a Bulgarian Baptist medical physician.<sup>87</sup> However, the interwar period saw an increase in blue-collar workers among these groups in the city.

Nicolae Sava was instrumental in creating a new community of working-class Baptists in Bucharest. He, along with his mother-in-law Paraschiva Sandu, and other Baptists (including Constantin Adorian) bought land in 1924 in the Ferentari Valley. Due to difficulties in reaching the Baptist church building on 29 Berzei street, they held services in Sava's small house. Karl Strobel, pastor at the Bucharest German Baptist Church, donated his plot of land for a church to be built in the Ferentari district, while Baptist merchants (Vasile Moiş and Vasile Şarlota) donated the funds for construction. The community was composed of believers relocating from rural areas, who felt more comfortable in Ferentari than at Berzei street where the atmosphere was described as more urbanized and city-like.<sup>88</sup> Another church was set up in 1928 in the Colentina district of Bucharest by unskilled laborers who came from the western region of Transylvania.<sup>89</sup> A Transylvanian migrant himself, Ioan Branea pastored the Colentina church for

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<sup>84</sup> *Farul Mântuirii* 10/16 (September 1929): 16.

<sup>85</sup> Daniel Marius Mariş, Teodor-Ioan Colda, *Constantin Adorian: Un Lider Baptist Român Vizionar* (Arad: Carmel Print, 2015), 31.

<sup>86</sup> "Aviz," *Farul Mântuirii* 6/7 (April 1925): 8; "Mica publicitate," *Farul Mântuirii* 11/23 (December 1930): 8. In 1929 a church is started in his shop on Apele Minerale Street in Popovici vol.II, 200-201; Ciucă, *Baptiştii din Brăilă*, 42-43. Other sources claim he held a doctorate in economic sciences from the University of Vienna. Mariş and Colda, *Constantin Adorian*, 47.

<sup>87</sup> Mariş and Colda, *Constantin Adorian*, 46; Olga Staneschi, "Alcoolul în lumina medicini," *Farul Mântuirii* 11/1-2 (January 1930): 6-8.

<sup>88</sup> Popovici, 436-437. This church also had a German pastor, Victor Gohrung, ordained in 1930 by Adorian and Johannes Fleischer. Adorian attended the Baptist Seminary in Hamburg with Fleischer from 1909-1911. Mariş and Colda, *Constantin Adorian*, 37.

<sup>89</sup> Popovici, 437-438.

a time; he worked twenty years in a Bucharest business where a Jewish inspector gave him his first New Testament.<sup>90</sup>

Adventists in Bucharest were also a mix of Romanians, Germans, Armenians, and other nationalities, with leaders largely in the liberal professions.<sup>91</sup> Petre Paulini and Evanghelie Pascu were medics and Ștefan Demetrescu was a lawyer.<sup>92</sup> The over one thousand evangelicals in Bucharest included military officers as well as bus ticket salesmen and became increasingly diverse in regards to social status and occupation, resulting in more communities founded, each with its unique blend of ethnic and social composition.<sup>93</sup>

After Bucharest, Brăila city had the second largest population of urban Baptists in the Muntenia region. Adam Sezonov, perhaps the wealthiest Baptist of the interwar period, owned a vegetable oil factory bearing his name in Brăila, which produced 4.5 percent of the country's edible oil and seven percent of the national production of rapeseed oil by 1940. The factory offered training and a workplace for co-religionists.<sup>94</sup> Sezonov also gave considerable funds to bailout the Baptist publication, *Farul Mântuirii*, when it faced economic difficulties.<sup>95</sup> In 1929 he was awarded the medal for "Meritul Industrial" [Commercial and Industrial Merit] and in 1930 was decorated by the King with the order of "Coroana României" [the Crown of Romania]. Adam's brothers, Baptist industrialists Iacob and Andrei Sezonov, likewise received "Coroana României."<sup>96</sup> Though the Brăila church included factory owners and workers, the majority of members were clearly from the rising middle class.<sup>97</sup> Sezonov's Ukrainian heritage

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<sup>90</sup> Branea attended Adventist meetings and then Brethren meetings before remaining in the Baptist confession. Popovici, 106, 114.

<sup>91</sup> An individual named G. Goldfinger, possibly a Jewish convert to AZS, is also listed among the members in 1905 in Dumitru Popa, vol. II, 121; <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5P8bEJoBSCk> 57:00.

<sup>92</sup> Dumitru Popa, vol. II, 80, 121, 144.

<sup>93</sup> ANR, DGP 2349, folder 40/1931, file 134; Dumitru Popa, vol. II, 504-505.

<sup>94</sup> *Farul Mântuirii* 5/8 (April 1923), 12 locates the factory on 5 Transilvaniei Street, Brăila. N.I. "Conferința Cercului România Veche," *Farul Mântuirii* 6/21 (1 November 1925), 6; *Monitorul Oficial* nr. 52 (3 March 1941), pp.1098-1099 in Ciucă, *Bapțiștii din Brăila*, 21.

<sup>95</sup> His other donations included 400,000 Lei to build the Baptist prayer house in Chișinău, 300,000 Lei to the Regat Baptist administrative circle, 1000 lei to the widow of Baptist pioneer Vasile Berbecar, and he covered the building expenses for the Brăila prayer house. "Un mare filantrop," *Farul Mântuirii* 13/ 1 (January 1932): 5-6.

<sup>96</sup> "Informațiuni," *Farul Mântuirii* 11/6 (March 1930): 7.

<sup>97</sup> Ciucă, *Bapțiștii din Brăila*, 106.

and close proximity to Bessarabia meant the church often hosted preachers of other ethnicities like Marcu Tarlev, Andrei Ivanov, and Lev Averbuch.<sup>98</sup>

In Prahova county, the city of Ploiești had 100 Adventists and 16 Baptists as blue-collar workers and tradesmen. Brethren in the city were tradesmen and shopowners.<sup>99</sup> A Siguranță report from 1926 claimed that there were Adventists and Baptists in almost all villages in Prahova county, led by foreign workers from the oil factories.<sup>100</sup> This could have been a mistaken reference to Sezonov. However, Prahova had less than half the number of rural Adventists as Teleorman county and curiously there is yet no evidence of as much police concern in the latter county bordering Bulgaria.

The cities of Buzău and Târgoviște had small Adventist communities, but no Baptists (reflective of their small rural presence in these counties). Nevertheless, rural believers again proved important leaders in urban areas. Baptist Vasile Gașpar from Greceanca village, Buzău county, became pastor in Brăila and later in Bucharest. Though he vacillated between Baptism, Pentecostalism, and Seventh-day Adventism, he figures prominently in both Baptist and Pentecostal histories.<sup>101</sup>

In Argeș county, very few evangelicals lived in the cities (as in the Argeș countryside): six total in Pitești city. Armenians Toma, Dumitru, and Tache Alsan, the first Adventists in Romania, were influential merchants in Pitești prior to WWI. Due to financial difficulties brought about by their religious observance, they moved to Bucharest, thus significantly diminishing the local Adventist population.<sup>102</sup> The cities of Câmpulung (Muscel county) and Slatina (Olt county) had more Baptists, compared to majority Adventist rural figures in these counties, again pointing to a greater attraction in cities to Baptist churches.

Overall, Baptist communities were proportionally higher in urban Muntenia, despite some cities having more Adventists. The latter had significantly more rural members, who made their living off the land as well as other trades. The region included more rural believers as railroad

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<sup>98</sup> Ciucă, *Bapțiștii din Brăila*, 13, 36.

<sup>99</sup> Răduț, “100 Ani în Oltenia și 90 ani la Craiova,” 116;

<sup>100</sup> ANR, DGP 2349, folder 19/1926, file 33. Foreign could also refer to the Transylvanians who had come to work in the region. Popovici, 448.

<sup>101</sup> Popovici, 530; Bălăban, 22; Ciucă, *Bapțiștii din Brăila*, 63-66.

<sup>102</sup> Toma Aslan, an engineer by profession in Pitești, took over his father’s merchant business of importing fabric from England. Gheorghe Modoran, “Istoria bisericii Adventiste din România,” Biserica Adventistă de Ziua a Șaptea Popa Tatu, 15 June 2018, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5P8bEJoBSCk>, 45:00.

workers and an increase in male believers as unskilled laborers and factory workers in Bucharest and other Muntenia cities. Rural Romanian believers from Transylvania came in search of work and contributed to the growth of the region’s urban churches. The ethnic diversity of the Muntenia communities in the larger cities of Bucharest and Brăila existed to an even greater degree in other regions.

### *Dobrogea*

**Table 6: Rural Dobrogea 1930**<sup>103</sup>

County	Adventists	Baptists
Caliacra	54	10
Constanța	121	709
Durostor	166	-
Tulcea	-	320

Bordered by the Black Sea to the east and Bulgaria to the south, Dobrogea had important port cities and a growing rural Baptist population. Constanța county, recorded over 200 urban believers concentrated in the cities of Mangalia (100 Baptists) and Constanța (92 Adventists and 43 Baptists).<sup>104</sup> As we will see even more so in the Bukovina region, the faiths spread from rural believers to the cities. The church in Constanța city, for example, was started by Dumitru Baban, from Arabagii village, with Transylvanian and Banat Baptists seeking work in the region. The congregation included a local doctor.<sup>105</sup> Adventist pastors in Constanța included former village secretaries.<sup>106</sup> Despite Cerna Vodă being the birthplace of Romanian Baptist churches in Dobrogea prior to World War I, the only Baptist family in the city by 1930 was that of the cooper Nicolae Teodorescu. Radu Tașcă and other Baptists from Transylvania came to work on the construction of a bridge over the Danube prior to WWI and founded the first ethnic Romanian Baptist church in Dobrogea, but with their departure Baptist numbers dwindled.<sup>107</sup> It

<sup>103</sup> Manuila, *Recensământul*, 48. Together they still figure at less than 1% of each county’s population.

<sup>104</sup> *Farul Creștin* 6/21 (May 1938): 5; Mangalia also had a strong German Baptist presence. J. Rauschenberger, “Jahrbuch 1936 der Vereinigung der deutschen Baptistengemeinden in Rumänien,” (Cernăuți: Litotype, Leo Birnbaum & Co., 1937), 10 (from archives compiled by Leon Grenaderov from Tulcea under care of Aurel Gacea, Erwin Issler and Herbert Klukas).

<sup>105</sup> Popovici, 453-454.

<sup>106</sup> Dumitru Popa, vol.II, 113.

<sup>107</sup> Ghiță Marian, “Istoria bisericii baptiste în Dobrogea- 90 de ani ” unpublished manuscript (no date); Popovici, 100.

seems communities' numeric presence changed significantly with the movement of members—decreasing in some areas but increasing on the whole.

In Durostor county, Baptists, with no rural members, had a small urban presence in Silistria (which also claimed one Adventist) and in Ostrov. Musician Eric Gabe, who spent part of his childhood in the Jewish community in Silistria, joined the Bucharest German Baptist Church and later the Chişinău Jewish Christian Community led by Lev Averbuch. Gabe's father was a school teacher in Rădăuţi city, but relocated after World War I to Silistria.<sup>108</sup> Movement for education and employment contributed to the mixing of these new faith communities.

Tulcea county had the second largest rural population of evangelicals in Dobrogea; all were Baptists in 1930 and also largely composed of Transylvanian migrant labourers.<sup>109</sup> Though their urban presence was significantly smaller, it remained higher than the Adventists. At Cataloi and afterwards in Tulcea, Germans and Russians were the first to start evangelical churches in the old Romanian principalities. The Baptists in Cataloi refrained from missionary work, resulting in fewer urban members; their presence, nonetheless, temporarily prevented Adventist groups from taking root rurally. In Tulcea city the Russian-speaking Sezonov family attended the Baptist church at the beginning of the twentieth century; by 1920 the Sezonovs moved further west and the church struggled with its predominant Russian-language sermons in a city with few remaining Russian speakers.<sup>110</sup> In 1942 there were also 68 Baptists in the leprosy colony in Tichileşti village, near Isaccea city, contributing to the county's rural evangelical population.<sup>111</sup> As in Muntenia, the churches of Dobrogea had a strong presence of ethnic minorities as well as of migrant Romanian workers coming from western regions. The majority were farmers or unskilled laborers with some professionals and tradesmen.

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<sup>108</sup> Eric Gabe, "The Hebrew Christian Movement in Kishineff," *Hebrew Christian* 63/4 (December 1990-February 1991): 117-118.

<sup>109</sup> Popovici, 94, 457.

<sup>110</sup> Adam moved to Braila along with two of his brothers. Another brother moved to Rămincu Sărat in 1918. Lucaşa studied temporarily at the Superior School of Commerce in Brăila, was ordained in 1929 as pastor of the Baptist church in Arad-Pârneava, and completed seminary in Louisville, Kentucky. Ciucă, *Bapţiştii din Brăila*, 17-20, 30. Nica Neţa, "Ordinarea de pastor în Arad," *Farul Mântuirii* 10/9 (May 1929): 6. Neţa called his ordination the grandest Baptist manifestation in the country. "O despărţire," *Farul Mântuirii* 10/20 (November 1929): 6. He was also Romanian Baptist World Alliance correspondent 1934-1939. "Stiri si informaţiuni," *Farul Creştin* 2/20 (October 1934): 7; Daniel Mitrofan, *Biserica Baptistă Betel din Tulcea* (Centrul de istorie şi apologetică, 2002), 6, 26.

<sup>111</sup> More on the leprosy colony can be found in Popovici, 455-456, 458. Isaccea had a small number of Adventists.

**Table 7: Rural Moldova 1930<sup>112</sup>**

County	Adventists	Baptists
Bacău	271	1
Baia	40	1
Botoșani	230	44
Covurlui	128	30
Dorohoi	114	70
Fălciu	96	2
Iași	142	18
Neamț	83	5
Putna	24	3
Roman	64	-
Tecuci	68	-
Tutova	80	-
Vaslui	161	-

In the Moldova region of north-east Romania Adventists far outnumbered Baptists in rural and most urban settings. In rural areas, Bacău county had the most Adventists, followed by Botoșani county. These were some of the smallest communities in Romania, as even in Oltenia one county reached over 300 members. Rural Adventists included landowners such as the Zaitcu family in Dorohoi county, with 12 hectares of land, agriculturalists in Tecuci county, and carpenters in Vaslui county.<sup>113</sup> Rural Baptists and Brethren included railroad workers, bakers, and bootmakers, as well as farmers, while Pentecostals were mostly recorded as ploughmen and housewives.<sup>114</sup>

Moldovian cities had four times more Adventists than Baptists, reflective of the small number of Baptists in the region. Botoșani city with the largest population of Adventists in the region, included CFR workers.<sup>115</sup> Despite their almost miniscule rural presence, Baptists still appear in a number of cities. Galați city, Covurlui county, had almost equal numbers of

<sup>112</sup> Manuila, *Recensământul*, 49. In each county Adventists and Baptists figure less than 1% of the population.

<sup>113</sup> ANR, DGP 2349, folder 40/1931, file 76, 145, 146, 107.

<sup>114</sup> In 1921 CFR worker Rotaru was expelled from the village because of his Baptist faith and fled to rural Tulcea county, Dobrogea joining the Baptist community there. Popovici, 456; ANR, DGP 2349, folder 40/1931, file 64; Ibid, folder 37/1932, file 8. Vasile Bel, "Ailenei Toader," <https://istoriebaptistablogul.blogspot.ie/2017/11/ailenei-toader-1916-1977-din-botosani.html> (accessed 18 July 2018).

<sup>115</sup> ANR, DGP 2349, folder 40/1931, file 12.



Adventists and Baptists. These included factory workers, like Pastor Nicolae Einhorn originally from Bessarabia,<sup>116</sup> state functionaries, blacksmiths, and engineers.<sup>117</sup> Baptist Pavel T. Corotcov represented the motor company Ruston and Hornsby Ltd. Lincoln at 15 Beldiman street, Galați, who marketed themselves as providing the best diesel motors, mill stones, and milling machinery.<sup>118</sup>

The low numbers in Dorohoi and Mihăileni may be due to the former shtetl character of these cities and their large Jewish populations. By contrast, Darabani city in Dorohoi county had a significant population of Adventists (69), tied with the region's capital city of Iași. The latter had a small poorly organized Baptist community until the arrival of Nicolae Sava in 1936 as a missionary of the Baptist Union.<sup>119</sup> In 1938, Isaac Feinstein, baptized by a Brethren congregation, relocated to Iași and increased connections between the different Protestant and evangelical groups, Orthodox reform movements, and the Jewish community in Iași.<sup>120</sup>

Adjud, Putna county, was one of the few cities to have more Baptists than Adventists in the region. The urban populations, apart from Galați, seemed to have either Adventists or Baptists, but seldom both, reflecting the restrictive religious space of the region. At least ten cities in Moldova had no Adventists or Baptists in 1930, though by 1940 Adventist photographer Ștefan Neculai (originally from rural Muntenia) was registered in Vaslui City, which had previously registered no evangelicals.<sup>121</sup>

Overall, believers in Moldova were a mix of rural tradesmen and urban factory workers. The majority of Pentecostals in this region were farmers, similar to co-religionists in western regions. The growth of many of their Moldovian communities were initiated by believers moving to the region from Bessarabia, Bukovina, or from other parts of the Regat (rather than predominantly Transylvanians as in Muntenia). According to Baptist historian Alexa Popovici,

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<sup>116</sup> He worked in the "Titan" factory in Galați. ANR, DGP 2349, folder 33/1928, file 5.

<sup>117</sup> ANR, DGP 2349, folder 40/1931, files 136, 152.

<sup>118</sup> They offered free consultations for fellow Baptists. *Farul Mântuirii* 9/12 (June 1928): 8.

<sup>119</sup> *Farul Creștin* 5/2 (January 1937): 7; Popovici, 530-531.

<sup>120</sup> The Church of Scotland also had a base in Iași from 1841 working for the conversion of Jews to Christianity, but with limited success. Feinstein was born in Dorohoi, but completed his primary, secondary, and trade school in Bucharest. He was hired as merchant's commissioner during which time he came into contact with the Brethren community and was hired in 1928 by the Norwegian Israel Mission (NIM). Samoilă, *Eu știu că ei mă vor ucide*, 16, 26.

<sup>121</sup> Manuila, *Recensământul*, 52-53. ANR, DGP 2349, folder 40/1931, file 47-48.

the work in the Moldova region was very slow and with “unremarkable” results.<sup>122</sup> The Moldova region in particular revealed the social dominance of the Romanian Orthodox Church amidst the majority Romanian population.

### *Bessarabia*

**Table 8: Rural Bessarabia 1930**<sup>123</sup>

County	Adventists	Baptists
Bălți	90	2169
Cahul	67	1229
Cetatea-Albă	140	2908
Hotin	1233	7224
Ismail	32	1364
Lăpușna	88	559
Orhei	-	395
Soroca	101	983
Tighina	94	1303

Bessarabia proved one of the most complex regions for the implementation of postwar Greater Romania reforms due to its dense rural population, many ethnic minorities, the prevalence of the Russian language in administration, and low level of education across the region.<sup>124</sup> The region had the second largest rural population of evangelicals after Crișana-Maramureș and very ethnically diverse communities, of which Baptists far outnumbered any other evangelical group.<sup>125</sup> This was largely due to the influence of the strong Russian Baptist movement in the nineteenth century when the region was under Tsarist rule. Across rural Bessarabia, Bulgarian, Gagăuz, Romanian, Russian, Ruthenian, Ukrainian Adventists, Baptists, and Brethren were majority ploughmen.<sup>126</sup> In Bălți county some were shepherders (*cioban*) and

<sup>122</sup> Popovici, 838.

<sup>123</sup> Manuila, *Recensământul*, 48. They figure as less than 1% of the county population except in Cetatea-Albă (1%) and Hotin (2.2%). However, the percentages are closer to 1% than in the previous regions discussed- no county has under 0.2% of Adventist and Baptist population.

<sup>124</sup> For a detailed study of these reforms see Svetlana Suveica, *Basarabia in primul deceniu interbelic (1918-1928): modernizare prin reforme* (Chișinău: Pontos, 2010).

<sup>125</sup> “O scurtă istorie,” [https://baptist.org.md/ro/?page\\_id=893](https://baptist.org.md/ro/?page_id=893) (accessed 2 August 2018).

<sup>126</sup> ANR, DGP 2349, folder 40/1931, file 74, 106, 108, 112-114,135, 141-143, 144, 153, 191; “Din lumea religioasă,” *Farul Creștin* 6/27 (July 1938): 7; Baptist leader Nicolae Țapcov, described as a learned man, introduced Baptist doctrine to the majority Ukrainian village of Brânzenii Noi, Orhei county in 1926. According to a report from the local delegate of the Archbishopric of Chișinău, Țapcov came to the Baptist faith through Jewish Baptist Lev Averbuch. ANRM, 1135-2-1675, file 1-2.

in Tighina county there were Baptist carpenters and mayors.<sup>127</sup> Ismail county, with a more Romanianized population, included Baptist tailors and notaries, along with ploughmen.<sup>128</sup> Though the majority initially came from comfortable peasant households, younger generations sought their fortune in urban centers of the former Romanian principalities.<sup>129</sup>

A Baptist wedding announcement in Mălinești, Hotin (the Bessarabian county with the largest evangelical rural population) revealed the rather privileged status of some of these peasants. Four choirs and 800 wedding guests from the regions of Bukovina, Moldova, and Bessarabia in over 100 carriages were in attendance.<sup>130</sup> Likewise, preacher and ploughman Constantin Tafratov owned about four hectares of land in Chirsova village, Tighina, when the majority of peasants received one to three hectares through the land reform following the war.<sup>131</sup>

In urban Bessarabia, most cities had at least thirty Baptists, except for Leova, Cahul county where Adventists were a majority due to its proximity to the Moldova region with its higher percentage of Adventists.<sup>132</sup> Tighina (today Bender) city had 30 Baptists and no Adventists in 1930, but by 1941 Adventist tradesmen moved to the city from Piatra Neamț, Moldova.<sup>133</sup> Their move eastward during wartime was likely in search of work as Tighina was a strategic military city. Chilia-Nouă, Ismail county due to its position as a key port city had the most urban evangelicals in the region, which accounts for Ismail county having the largest urban population of evangelicals in Bessarabia, despite being the county with the fourth largest evangelical rural population.<sup>134</sup>

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<sup>127</sup> ANR, DGP 2349, folder 40/1931, file 113, 225; folder 38/1931, file 1.

<sup>128</sup> ANR, DGP 2349, folder 40/1931, file 110, 155; “O mărturisire mișcătoare,” *Farul Creștin* 6/7 (February 1938): 8. Notary Alexa Ermeniu’s father was an Orthodox bootmaker in the village.

<sup>129</sup> ANR, DGP 2349, folder 40/1931, file 138. Baptist Ilie Dișli, from Alexandria, Cetatea Albă, was a chauffeur’s assistant in Bucharest. His ethnicity is suspiciously left blank. His father’s name is Gherasim, but no mention is made of possible Jewish ethnicity.

<sup>130</sup> “De pe ogorul Evangheliei,” *Farul Creștin* 5/15 (August 1937): 7. The bride and groom were both originally from Bessarabia and graduates from the Baptist seminary in Bucharest.

<sup>131</sup> ANRM 679-1-4840, file 280; Suveica, *Basarabia in primul deceniu interbelic*, 120.

<sup>132</sup> The cities of Cahul, Vâlcov (Ismail), Călăraș-Târg (Lăpușna), Orhei, and Soroca claimed no urban Adventists or Baptists.

<sup>133</sup> ANR, DGP 2349, folder 40/1931, file 5-7.

<sup>134</sup> ANR, DGP 2349, folder 48/1935, file 11. Reni had a Brethren prayer house and a Jewish Christian congregation, a branch of the Norwegian Israel Mission led by Isaac Feinstein and visited by Averbuch and Baptist singer Dumitru Vrânceanu. For more on Ismail county see: <http://romaniainterbelica.memoria.ro/judete/ismail/> (accessed 31 July 2020).

Chişinău, the capital of Bessarabia in Lăpuşna county, held the second largest urban population of Baptists in the region numbering 139 and 13 Adventists, with a small but engaged Brethren congregation.<sup>135</sup> These were tailors, bootmakers, housewives, teachers, bookbinders, students of viticulture, machinists, stewards/waiters, and “workers,” described by police as being in average or good financial standing.<sup>136</sup> Baptists were composed of Romanians, Russians, Ukrainians, Jews, and Bulgarians. The large presence of Jews was particularly perplexing and troubling to authorities, some going so far as to exaggeratingly report that the majority of Baptist women were Jewish.<sup>137</sup>

Baptist leaders were extremely diverse in ethnicity and occupation: Lev Averbuch, trained at the Odessa Academy of Music and paid representative of the British organization Mildmay Mission to the Jews, Marcu Tarlev, an engineer from rural Tighina, Boris Buşila, a former medical student and son of an Orthodox priest from rural Hotin county, Tihon Hijnicov, Chişinău city hall functionary, Andrei Ivanov, a professor of religion, Samoil Goroholivski, an employee with the Secretary of Interior, and Anton Lebedenco, a bank employee at Banca Creditului Rus.<sup>138</sup> Deacon and choir director Mihail Belousov was previously a musician at the Orthodox Cathedral in Chişinău, along with former Russian imperial opera singer Dumitru I. Vrânceanu.<sup>139</sup> By contrast, Adventists in Chişinău were mostly Romanians and Russians or Ukrainians with a few Poles, Germans, and Găgăuzi, but no registered Jews.<sup>140</sup> Likewise, in the Brethren church, Swiss missionary Perret, on a visit to Chişinău in 1933, found very diverse congregations of mixed Jewish, Russian, and Romanian ethnicities.<sup>141</sup> Ethnic diversity in their churches was prevalent across the region.

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<sup>135</sup> ANRM, 679-1-5555, file 221.

<sup>136</sup> ANRM, 679- 1-5555, files 80-91, 176, 208; Ibid, 679-1-4840, files 218, 284, .

<sup>137</sup> ANRM 679- 1- 4840, file 7.

<sup>138</sup> “Botezuri-Isvoare,” *Farul Mântuirii* 6/20 (October 1925): 7; Erich Gabe, “The Hebrew Christian Movement in Kishineff,” *The Hebrew Christian* 61/4 (December 1988-February 1989): 102; ANRM 679-1-4840, file 33, 58, 83-84, 280. Buşilă completed the theological seminary in the city and two courses at the University of Odessa. Among his relatives were doctor Vladimir Buşilă in Bucharest and judge Petre Buşilă in Chişinău. Walter Craighead, “The Gospel in Bessarabia,” *Home and Foreign Fields* 19/4 (April 1935): 10-11.

<sup>139</sup> Alexandru Muntean, “Botezuri,” *Farul Mântuirii* 6/21 (November 1925): 8; “Dela uniune,” *Farul Creştin* 6/2 (January 1938): 2; Craighead, “Jubilee Tour of Good-will,” *Baptist and Reflector* 98 (6 October 1931): 1,4.

<sup>140</sup> At least in 1930. ANRM, 679-1-5555, file 104.

<sup>141</sup> Eliezer Macesaru, “Adunările Creştine după Evanghelie în Istoria Creştinismul la Români (1899-1989),” unpublished manuscript, <http://www.bcev.ro/istoric/> (accessed 11 January 2018).

Though the majority of Bessarabian rural believers lived off the land, there were some state functionaries and tradesmen. As ploughmen, they owned necessary agricultural tools not available to all farmers, but even poorer Bessarabians increasingly turned to these confessions.<sup>142</sup> The urban leaders mostly had white-collar jobs while lay members were tradesmen and workers. Nevertheless, the mix of ethnic background and social status among these groups is particularly striking in Bessarabia.

### *Bukovina*

**Table 9: Rural Bukovina 1930<sup>143</sup>**

County	Adventists	Baptists
Câmpulung	59	16
Cernăuți	420	163
Rădăuți	62	238
Storojineț	62	328
Suceava	112	146

The religious landscape of these groups in rural Bukovina also began with German minority churches, with Bukovina agricultural workers exposed to Baptist doctrine in Transylvania, as well as through the pioneering work of Polish bootmaker, Leopold Ducinschi in Pătrăuți de Jos, Storojineți county.<sup>144</sup> Thus, Storojineți had the largest rural population of Baptists in Bukovina, followed by Rădăuți county.<sup>145</sup> Mariana Hausleitner argues that the romanianization policies implemented after 1920 destroyed the multicultural fabric of the region as they attempted to advance Romanians into economic and administrative positions of authority, however these religious communities still maintained some of that previous diversity.<sup>146</sup> The new opportunities for ethnic Romanians drew Baptists and other evangelicals to Bukovina, but their rural predominance reveals ethnic minorities continued to be a stronger presence in urban

<sup>142</sup> ANRM 679-1-4840, file 181.

<sup>143</sup> Manuila, *Recensământul*, 48. All figure under 1% of the county population.

<sup>144</sup> Loghin Motrescu, *Istoria Bapțiștilor din Bucovina: De la 1911 până la 31.XII.1943* (1968), manuscript, 2-3, <https://centruldeistoriesiapologetica.wordpress.com/2009/04/22/baptistii-din-bucovina-de-loghin-motrescu-partea-i/> (accessed 23 July 2018); Dumitru Popa, vol. II, 257.

<sup>145</sup> Ilie Ciornei, Rădăuți pastor, was said to have advanced the work despite hardships in Bukovina. *Farul Creștin* 5/18 (September 1937): 7; Loghin Motrescu, “Ordinare,” *Farul Mântuirii* 7/5 (March 1925): 8.

<sup>146</sup> Mariana Hausleitner, *Die Rumänisierung der Bukowina: die Durchsetzung des nationalstaatlichen Anspruchs Grossrumäniens 1918-1944* (München: Oldenbourg, 2001).

areas into the 1930s. As well, Orthodox Romanians were prioritized in romanianization policies over “sectarians,” in the cities even if they were ethnic Romanians, which may account for evangelical settlement in rural rather than urban Bukovina.

The first Romanian leaders were all from rural areas. Dumitru Hodoroaba, from a peasant family in Pătrăuți de Jos, Storojineți county, worked for a time at Adam Sezonov’s factory in Brăila in order to start his own small oil business.<sup>147</sup> Vicovu de Sus village, Storojineț county also experienced an early rural Pentecostal community through returning soldiers Constantin Nișu (along with his wife Iustina, known as a prophetess); all were likely farmers.<sup>148</sup> Rural Suceava county included influential evangelical leaders Silvestru Ungureanu, Filaret Rotaru, and Eugen Bodor- the first two were exposed to Baptists and Pentecostals respectively while working in North America.<sup>149</sup> From Cernăuți county, “respected villager” Alexa Rusu was exposed to the Brethren faith while working in Iași, but finding no congregation on returning to Oprișeni village, Cernăuți county, he joined the Baptists.<sup>150</sup> This movement between groups was also common as previously mentioned due to their similar theology and practice. Overall, the majority of Bukovinian rural evangelicals were small farmers, as well as tailors and stonemasons, but these had connections with urban areas where they spread their faith among the majority ethnic populations.<sup>151</sup>

There were slightly more urban Baptists than Adventists (254 versus 203) spread across Bukovina, while the latter had larger urban churches except in Siret, Suceava, and Solca.<sup>152</sup> Suceava city held the largest urban concentration of Baptists (130) in the region as a result of Ungureanu’s initiatives. In other counties, however, rural congregations found it harder to penetrate the cities. A prime example was Storojineți county with only eight Baptists in Vijița city, despite the largest rural Baptist population in Bukovina. Cernăuți city, the capital of Bukovina

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<sup>147</sup> Motrescu, *Istoria Bapțiștilor din Bucovina*, 18-20.

<sup>148</sup> Bălăban, 15.

<sup>149</sup> Motrescu, *Istoria Bapțiștilor din Bucovina*, 17; “Botezuri,” *Farul Mântuirii* 7/18 (September 1925): 6, 22; *Farul Mântuirii* 7/13-14 (July 1925): 7. Grigore Chibici, a peasant from Ipotești, started the largest Baptist church in southern Bukovina in 1925. Bălăban, 16.

<sup>150</sup> Motrescu, *Istoria Bapțiștilor din Bucovina*, 22; “Știri diverse,” *Farul Creștin* 1/24 (December 1933): 7.

<sup>151</sup> ANR, DGP 2349, folder 40/1931, file 110; “Informațiuni,” *Farul Mântuirii* 7/15-16 (August 1925): 15.

<sup>152</sup> Manuila, *Recensământul*, 53; “Botezuri,” *Farul Mântuirii* 7/20 (October 1925): 6. Solca also had some of the earliest Romanian Pentecostal-type believers. Bălăban, 15.

had more Adventists but a growing population of urban Baptists, founded by the German minority and incorporating an increasing number of Ukrainians.<sup>153</sup> This collaboration was in contrast to the social tensions exacerbated by Bukovina politicians, such as Traian Brăileanu, who claimed nationalism was the sole principle of social cohesion.<sup>154</sup> This argument regarding nationalism would be challenged by evangelicals across Romania as the rest of this study will prove. However, it was specifically challenged by Moses Richter, of Jewish ethnicity from Chişinău, who worked for the Cernăuţi city German Baptist Church in the 1930s.

Though a small region, Bukovina had over 200 rural evangelicals in every county (except Câmpulung), with minimal urban numbers (except in Suceava). The majority were from peasant households with some tradesmen. The German minority exposed local Romanians to these new faiths, who quickly surpassed their German co-religionists in number by 1920.

### *Transylvania*

**Table 10: Rural Transylvania 1930<sup>155</sup>**

County	Adventists	Baptists
Alba	10	652
Braşov	123	83
Ciuc	66	91
Cluj	327	870
Făgăraş	224	109
Hunedoara	162	1768
Mureş	424	422
Năsăud	28	28
Odorhei	168	595
Sălaj	41	2791
Sibiu	21	280
Someş	96	408
Târnava-Mare	168	122
Târnava-Mică	205	458
Trei-Scaune	36	235

<sup>153</sup> Motrescu, *Istoria Bapţiştilor din Bucovina*, 2, 11; Daniel Heinz, “Church, Sect, and Government Control, a History of Seventh-Day Adventists in Austria, 1890-1975,” (1991). *Dissertations*. Andrews University.

<sup>154</sup> Hausleitner, “De la românizarea Bucovinei la Holocaust, 1918-1944,” *România şi Transnistria: Problema Holocaustului*, eds. Viorel Achim, Constantin Iordachi (Bucharest: Curtea Veche, 2004), 132-135, 144.

<sup>155</sup> Manuila, *Recensământul*, 50. Adventists and Baptists together figure as less than 1% of the county population.

Turda	156	274
Total	2255	9186

In the west, Transylvania was “Romania’s Prussia,” and was expected to provide the needed industry and trade stimulus for Greater Romania, but as the majority of these were run by minorities, the government under the Liberal Party sent ethnic Romanians from the Regat (the regions of Moldova, Munteni, Oltenia composing the pre-World War I Kingdom of Romania) to replace civil servants and even clergy. This was done to the consternation of Transylvanian Romanians who saw these as incompetent colonisers.<sup>156</sup> However, influential evangelicals in Transylvania were locals, since the government would hardly send Romanians with dubious affiliations, in this case “sectarians,” to regions already overwhelmed with minorities. The regionalist tensions, nevertheless, persisted to some extent among the evangelicals as well, reflecting the nationwide political and social regional frictions.<sup>157</sup>

In Transylvania, every county except Năsăud had over one hundred rural evangelicals, composed of Romanians, Hungarians, and Germans.<sup>158</sup> The largest population was in Sălaj county followed by Hunedoara county. The majority of these were farmers or tradesmen, as well as former gendarme captains.<sup>159</sup> Some owned considerable property.<sup>160</sup> In Alba and Turda counties others were managers for local millers or carpenters.<sup>161</sup> Cluj had the third largest Baptist rural population which included farmers and railroad workers.<sup>162</sup>

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<sup>156</sup> Florian Kühner-Wielach, “The Transylvanian promise,” *European Review of History* 23/4 (2016): 582-583; Kühner-Wielach, *Siebenbürgen ohne Siebenbürger*, 241–9. A similar thing occurred in 1941 in Bukovina. Stefan Ionescu, “‘Californian’ Colonists versus Local Profiteers? The Competition for Jewish Property During the Economic Colonization of Bukovina, 1941–1943,” *Yad Vashem Studies* 44/2 (2016): 121-145.

<sup>157</sup> “Congresul dela Timișoara,” *Lumina* 4/3 (1932):1-8; Grigorie Comsa, “Eruptia Vulcanului Baptist,” *Biserica și Școala* 56/45 (6 November 1932): 1-2.

<sup>158</sup> Bălăban, 55, 72-75. German Michael Thelmann from Dârlos, Sibiu county proposed a new Pentecostal organization similar to that of the Brethren

<sup>159</sup> ANR, DGP 2349, folder 40/1931, file 147. Teodor Pașca from Jibou, Sălaj County, graduated as a tailor of the School of Arts and Professions in Cehul Silvaniei. *Farul Mântuirii* 12/10 (July 1931): 6; “Din lumea religioasă,” *Farul Creștin* 6/18 (May 1938): 7; Craighead, “Jubilee Tour of Good-will,” *Baptist and Reflector* 98 (6 October 1931): 1. Pentecostal Gheorghe Grozoni was a skinner/tăbăcar in Bretea, Hunedoara county. Eugenia Boșneac, Interview with author, Oțelu Roșu, Romania, 7 July 2015.

<sup>160</sup> Baptist Ioan Demian leased a house on 4 Săliște street in Băita village, Hunedoara county, with a storage area ideal for prayer meetings (*adunare*), 6 rooms, kitchen, two cellars, barn, and one hectare garden. *Farul Mântuirii* 10/cover missing (1929), 7.

<sup>161</sup> *Farul Mântuirii* 10/20 (November 1929): 7; “Mulțumire,” *Farul Mântuirii* 12/10 (July 1931): 15.

<sup>162</sup> CFR manager Dumitru Harap from Năsăud, was baptized in Cluj county in 1931 and moved to Arad in 1938, showing the movement of individual believers around the region. Of the eight churches he helped



In Mureș county, with an almost balanced population of Baptists and Adventists, they were Hungarian and Romanian carpenters (*lemnar*) and agriculturists.<sup>163</sup> Members often had multiple occupations or specialties, such as the Baptist carpenter and choir director in Toplița-Română, Mureș.<sup>164</sup> In 1919 a small-scale previously mentioned reverse migration occurred with Transylvanian Baptists, mostly from villages in Bihor and Cluj, who went as unskilled laborers to Bucharest, tripling the Baptist church there. Baptist historian and minister Alexa Popovici called it a “braiding of material and spiritual situations,” as Transylvanians infused new energy into the capital city’s Baptist community.<sup>165</sup> They also were an example of how the different communities aided each other financially, often giving to their denomination’s Union treasury from where it was redistributed.

All Transylvanian cities had at least one Adventist or Baptist, though their numbers were smaller than urban communities in other regions. Urban Baptists outnumbered Adventists in every city but Ciuc, Făgăraș, Mureș, and Târnava-Mică (similar to rural figures). In Alba-Iulia and Brașov, Baptist leader Pavel Boșorogan was a former dance master and Brethren believers were former teachers.<sup>166</sup> The Alba-Iulia church also included two Roma families by 1931.<sup>167</sup>

Cluj city had the most urban evangelicals in Transylvania with 226 Baptists and 139 Adventists. Baptist leader Ioan Dan, originally from a peasant family in Turea, Cluj county, worked for the City of Cluj Hygiene Inspectorate examining all liquid products entering the county. He also served as one of the pastors in the Hungarian Baptist Church in Cluj and was decorated by King Michael with the “Crucea Meritul Sanitar” second class, through royal decree No.902 on 17 March 1930.<sup>168</sup> Hunedoara county had 120 Baptists spread across the cities of

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plant, one was the Roma church *Pregătirea* in Arad city. During the Antonescu regime Harap held clandestine meetings Sundays in his home from one to three o’clock in the morning. Liliana Samoilă, “Înaintași Credinței- Remember,” *Harul* 69 (July 1997): 6-7.

<sup>163</sup> ANR, DGP 2349, folder 40/1931, file 115, 156.

<sup>164</sup> *Farul Mântuirii* 5/9 (May 1924): 8.

<sup>165</sup> Popovici, 433.

<sup>166</sup> ANR, DGP 2349, folder 40/1931, file 38-39; Craighead, “Jubilee Tour of Good-will,” *Baptist and Reflector* 98 (6 October 1931): 1. Boșorogan worked as gatekeeper at Dacia Restaurant in the city during the 1940s. Romania Evangelica, “Istoric 2- Biserica Baptista Sfanta Treime Alba Iulia,” (23 November 2013), [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QP\\_hD\\_DkPLc](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QP_hD_DkPLc), 3:15 (accessed 2 November 2020).

<sup>167</sup> Pavel Boșorogan, “Evanghelia între Țigani,” *Glasul Evangheliei* 2/3 (March 1931): 1-2. The article is front page news in large bold lettering.

<sup>168</sup> Craighead, “Jubilee Tour of Good-will,” *Baptist and Reflector* 98 (6 October 1931): 1.

<https://istoriebaptistablogul.blogspot.ie/2017/09/ioan-dan-1898-1983.html>; Ioan Ungureanu, “O scrisoare deschisă,” *Farul Mântuirii* 11/7-8 (April 1930): 7.

Deva, Hațeg, Hunedoara, Orăștie, and Petroșeni, many originally from peasant families.<sup>169</sup> Ilie Mârza, the pastor in Deva, was exposed to the Baptist faith through a Hungarian gendarme in 1915, and was one of the first graduates of the Bucharest Seminary in 1924.<sup>170</sup> Max Henrik, originally a miner, was the Baptist pastor in Lupeni and was of Jewish origin, who pastored both the Romanian and Hungarian congregations in the city.<sup>171</sup>

Salaj county had smaller urban populations, despite being the Transylvanian county with the largest evangelical rural population. In the cities of Sibiu and Târgu-Mureș believers worked as factory mechanics and other blue collar jobs; Saxon Brethren and Hungarian Adventists in Bistrița and Sibiu constituted mechanics and tradesmen.<sup>172</sup> Târnava-Mică had the largest population of urban Adventists in Transylvania concentrated in Diciosanmartin, where the Adventist seminary was temporarily based, though Baptists were a majority in rural areas of the county.<sup>173</sup>

Evangelical village communities were more vibrant in Transylvania, with a much slower urban development. Here the influence of the Hungarian peasant preachers who started village churches in the previous century was evident and less so the German impetus as in other regions (though still present, especially among the Adventists). They were a mix of professions, with a representative number of tradesmen and farmers in rural areas. Urban members worked in factories, were state employees, and a surprising number were mechanics. Unlike other regions, every county and every city had an evangelical presence due to the openness to these groups under the previous Austro-Hungarian empire and their closer geographic proximity to the lands of the Protestant Reformation.

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<sup>169</sup> *Farul Mântuirii* 6/20 (October 1925): 8.

<sup>170</sup> I. Mârza, “Ceva despre rugăciune,” *Farul Mântuirii* 6/7 (April 1925): 3; Vasile Bel, “Ilie Mârza,” <https://istoriebaptistablogul.blogspot.com/2018/04/ilie-marza-1897-1986-deva.html> (accessed 2 August 2020).

<sup>171</sup> CNSAS D12378 vol.3, files 89, 117-118, 147; Popovici, 152.

<sup>172</sup> Dumitru Popa, vol.II, 219; ANR, DGP 2349, folder 40/1931, file 151, 154, 191. Hungarian Nazarene Iosif Albert worked as a machinist in the “Transilvania” factory.

<sup>173</sup> Manuila, *Recensământul*, 53-54.

**Table 11: Rural Banat 1930**<sup>174</sup>

County	Adventists	Baptists
Caraș	8	2893
Severin	29	1998
Timis-Torontal	28	1207

In rural Banat, bordering Serbia, Baptists far outnumbered Adventists. Rural Caraș county had the most Baptists and the fewest Adventists; these were shopowners, soldiers, drivers, bakers, beekeepers, and farmers.<sup>175</sup> They were likewise ethnically diverse, with Germans, Hungarians, Serbs, Romanians, and Roma members. Dognecea village was home to the second Roma Baptist Church in Romania.<sup>176</sup> The county housed the first Baptist orphanage based in Prilipeți, where Ioan Țunea, a baker from Bozovici village, served as treasurer.<sup>177</sup> Baptists in Caraș were entrepreneurial, setting up the “Cărășana” milk cooperative also in Prilipeți.<sup>178</sup> In Dalboset they kept over 1000 bee hives, had modern milking machines, and raised special breed chickens. They travelled to Yugoslavia for their pruning business, to research the most effective ovens for drying prunes. Baptist leader Ioan Cocuț claimed that a large part of commerce in the area was run by Baptists.<sup>179</sup>

Rural Severin county had Baptist landowners as well as small farming families in the mountains of Negoii village.<sup>180</sup> In rural Timiș county Baptists were mostly tradesmen like blacksmith Simion Bechira and shoemaker Arcade Ciuraș.<sup>181</sup> The presence of personal libraries

<sup>174</sup> Manuila, *Recensământul*, 50. Together they made up 1.7% of the population of Caraș and just over 1% of Severin, but only 0.3% of Timiș county.

<sup>175</sup> *Farul Mântuirii* 9/11 (June 1928): 8; *Farul Mântuirii* 9/18 (September 1928): 3; “Farul găsit în stradă,” *Farul Mântuirii* 10/ (1929), cover missing: 6.

<sup>176</sup> Popovici, 467.

<sup>177</sup> Serbarea de zece ani a orfelinatlui Baptist din Prilipeț, *Farul Creștin* 5/3 (February 1937): 5.

<sup>178</sup> *Farul Mântuirii* 13/3 (February 1932): 5.

<sup>179</sup> I. Cocuț, “Cursul biblic din Dalboșet,” *Farul Creștin* 5/2 (January 1937): 3.

<sup>180</sup> Police reports called Ioan Nucu from Spata Village a *bogătaș* [wealthy man]. ANR, DGP 2349, folder 40/1931, file 77; Gheorghe Debucean, “Frații din bierica Negoii,” *Farul Creștin* 6/7 (February 1938): 4.

<sup>181</sup> “Fr. Bechira Simion din Cechia,” *Farul Creștin* 4/3 (February 1936): 7; Olimpia Moraru, *Istoria Bisericii Baptiste din Valcani*, (Arad, 2016).

in many of these small rural households showed the emphasis placed on education, which equipped pastors to minister to a large number of village churches.<sup>182</sup>

The urban Baptist population in Banat was five times that of Adventists; each city in the region had a population of over 50 Baptists, making them a consistent urban presence. In Oravița city, Caraș county, with 81 Baptists and no Adventists, Baptists set up *Banca de credit agricol* [Agricultural Credit Bank], with director Nicolae Novac.<sup>183</sup> Novac previously ran Casa Cercuală where 1000 patients were treated over a three-month convalescence period. His banking endeavor was set up to help small land owners, peasants, and workers receive credit in an “inexpensive and humane way.” It was described as the only serious institution of its kind, and one which “illuminated the poor and unified the formidable peasant force, left uncultivated and unorganized.”<sup>184</sup> He was thus engaging in the prevailing populist discourse of the time on the important social role of the Romanian peasantry. Novac served as the executive secretary of the Baptist Community of Oravița city alongside its president, Ioan Suveț, and was a leading member in the Ploughman’s Party claiming to work “toward brotherly consolidation on economic and political terrain.”<sup>185</sup> This is but one more example of how Romanian evangelicals were entrepreneurial and were, in a limited scope, engaged in politics.

Timiș-Torontal county had the largest combined population in Banat of urban evangelicals, with Timișoara city as the largest urban population of both Baptists and Adventists of any city in Banat. Romanian Baptist pioneer Vasile Berbecar, from a miller family in the Romanian village of Iacobini, Vojvodina, Yugoslavia, was a shoemaker’s assistant, exposed to Baptist doctrine through the German Baptist church in Timișoara. He completed music courses and seminary in Hamburg, edited several Baptist newsletters and spearheaded Sunday School development among Romanians.<sup>186</sup> In 1923, Athanase Pascu, originally from Parța village,

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<sup>182</sup> Vasile Bel, “Scheusan, Aurel,” <https://istoriebaptistablogul.blogspot.ie/2017/08/scheusan-aurel-1894-1922-din-utvin.html> (accessed 24 July 2020); Aurel Scheușan, from a poor family in Utvin, Timiș, but with a sizable library, led 28 churches during WWI and died in 1922 due to a heart murmur.

<sup>183</sup> “Tuturor Fraților din Ardeal și Banat,” *Farul Mântuirii* 9/7 (April 1928): 16.

<sup>184</sup> *Farul Mânturii* 9/10 (May 1928): 6; “Din Banat,” *Farul Mântuirii* 9/12 (June 1928): 6; “Un gest frumos,” *Farul Mântuirii* 9/11 (June 1928): 8. Novac opened a branch in America as well. “Consiliul de administrație al Băncii de Credit Agricol societate anonimă, Oravița,” *Farul Mântuirii* 11/10 (June 1930): 14.

<sup>185</sup> “Informațiunii,” and “Un elegiu meritat,” *Farul Mântuirii* 13/3 (February 1932): 7, 8.

<sup>186</sup> Bel, “Vasile Berbecar,” <https://istoriebaptistablogul.blogspot.ie/2017/07/vasile-berbecar-1875-1931.html> (accessed 26 July 2020).

founded the first Romanian Baptist church in Timișoara separate from the German Church to reach a wider audience with services in Romanian. Well-educated and a good orator, Pascu was described as a “simple man who was not ashamed to wear his regional Banat costume, though he was often in contact with the city and had urban tendencies.”<sup>187</sup> Thus regional and rural identification with the land remained important for some of these believers. The Pentecostals also had a presence in Timișoara spreading from the Hungarian minority to other groups.<sup>188</sup>

The rural evangelical communities frequently initiated the urban congregations in Banat. Lipova city had one of the oldest Baptist churches in the county started by neighboring villagers.<sup>189</sup> In Reșița, Adam Petru, the first Baptist pastor of the city, came from a peasant family and was exposed to this faith as a prisoner of war in 1916.<sup>190</sup> Baptist historian Alexa Popovici claimed that the German and the Romanian Baptist communities started separately from one another in the Banat, though the former supported the latter. Banat had a majority of Baptists, due to the work of Baptist colporteurs starting as early as 1869.<sup>191</sup> Village churches were a mix of Romanians, Hungarians, Germans, Serbs, and other nationalities. Many were tradesmen in rural areas as well as innovative agricultural workers, while churches in the cities included bank owners, musicians, and workers relocating from rural areas.

### *Crișana-Maramureș*

**Table 12: Rural Crișana-Maramureș 1930<sup>192</sup>**

<b>County</b>	<b>Adventists</b>	<b>Baptists</b>
Arad	388	8512
Bihor	169	10461
Maramureș	669	218
Satu-Mare	22	335

<sup>187</sup> *Îndrumătorul Creștin* (July 1948): 11, <https://istoriebaptistablogul.blogspot.ie/2017/08/atanasie-pascu-1878-1947-din-parta.html> (accessed 24 July 2018).

<sup>188</sup> Alexandru Isbașa from Birchiș village, converted to Pentecostalism in 1927 through the Hungarian church. He became the pastor in 1947 of what is now the biggest Pentecostal church in Romania. Bălăban, 21.

<sup>189</sup> Manuila, *Recensământul*, 55; Popovici, 171.

<sup>190</sup> Vasile Bel, “Adam Petru,” <https://istoriebaptistablogul.blogspot.ie/2017/11/adam-petru-1896-1971-primul-pastor-din.html> (accessed 24 July 2018).

<sup>191</sup> Popovici, 155-157.

<sup>192</sup> Manuila, *Recensământul*, 50. They figured 2.6% in Arad and Bihor but less than 1% in the other counties.

The north-western region of Crișana-Maramureș had the most evangelicals in all of Romania. Missionary efforts by German and Hungarian settlers, expelled to what were previously the eastern parts of the Austro-Hungarian empire, and the success of the “peasant prophets” resulted in the flourishing of the Baptist communities in particular.<sup>193</sup> They were again a rural majority among evangelicals in three out of the four counties- most numerous in Bihor with significantly lower numbers in Maramureș and Satu-Mare. In Arad county several mayors became Baptist pastors. Polyglot Oprea Zaharia was president of the local Liberal Party and mayor of Chisindia,<sup>194</sup> while Teodor Sida was mayor in Buteni, originating from a prominent peasant family (*țărani fruntași ai satului*).<sup>195</sup> Other rural pastors were ploughmen while lay believers owned mills or sold milling machinery, such as Toma Slev in Ineu. Slev was president of the Baptist Youth Union in 1923 and husband to prolific writer Esfira Sezonov.<sup>196</sup> Believers also made a living as shoemakers, blacksmiths, stonemasons and even a former gendarme sergeant.<sup>197</sup>

In both Arad and Bihor county, there were a number of Baptist rural teachers. Gheorghe Slev (father of Toma Slev) is considered the first Romanian Baptist intellectual. A teacher who lost his position temporarily because of his faith, Slev was instrumental in translating foreign religious literature, putting together the Baptist hymnbook *Cântările Sionului* [Songs of Zion],

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<sup>193</sup> Joel Brady and Edin Hajdarpasic, “Religion and Ethnicity: Conflicting and converging identifications,” in (eds.) Irina Livezeanu and Árpád von Klimó, *The Routledge History of East Central Europe Since 1700* (Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge, 2017), 186; Istvan Gergely, “Revival Among Hungarian Baptists in Transylvania in the Period of the ‘peasant prophets,’” *Baptistic Theologies* 1/1 (Spring 2009): 58-63.

<sup>194</sup> Vasile Bel, “Oprea Zaharia,” <https://istoriebaptistablogul.blogspot.ie/2017/05/oprea-zaharia-1888-1974-pastor-si-primar.html>; <https://istoriebaptistablogul.blogspot.ie/2017/08/din-viata-lui-vasile-berbecar-de-ioan.html>, (accessed 25 July 2018). He spoke Romanian, German, Hungarian, and Serbian. The mayor of Dumbrava, Arad county was also a Baptist. “Botezuri,” *Farul Mântuirii* 7/19 (October 1925): 7.

<sup>195</sup> Sida learned German and Hungarian in the Austro-Hungarian army. As administrator (epitrop) of the local Orthodox Church, he had occasion to read the Bible in chirilic and procured his own Bibles in Romanian and Hungarian from a colporteur he met on a train. Vasile Bel, “Teodor Sida 1857-1935, Pastor și Primar,” <https://istoriebaptistablogul.blogspot.ie/2017/10/teodor-sida-1857-1935-pastor-si-primar.html> (accessed 25 July 2018).

<sup>196</sup> *Farul Mântuirii* 7/13-14 (July 1925): 15; “Informațiuni,” *Farul Mântuirii* 7/19 (October 1925): 8; Toma Slev, “Piuă Sistematică pentru Dubit Șube,” *Farul Mântuirii* 10/16 (September 1929): 16. Toma Macavei Slev was also a lawyer. Bel, “Bogata familie Slev,” <https://istoriebaptistablogul.blogspot.com/2018/07/bogata-familie-slev.html> (accessed 3 August 2018); <https://istoriebaptistablogul.blogspot.ie/2016/04/george-slav-primul-intelectual.html> (accessed 26 July 2018); *Farul Mântuirii* 1/1 (December, 1919): 5-6,

<sup>197</sup> *Farul Mântuirii* 8/7-8 (April 1927): 16; C. Mladin, “Stiri din lumea religioasă,” *Farul Mântuirii* 9/13 (July 1928): 7.

and editing several Baptist publications.<sup>198</sup> Baptists from Arad and Bihor contributed to the growth of churches in neighboring Transylvanian villages, where the majority of members were under the age of 30 and came from leading village families- the case across rural Crișana-Maramureș.<sup>199</sup>

Arad county was the scene of exponential growth of rural Pentecostal believers. In Păuliș, (then part of Timiș county), Gheorghe and Persida Bradin were small farmers who previously pastored the Baptist church in the village. Paul/Pavel Budean, originally from Comlăuș village, was an ordained Pentecostal pastor in the USA with influential relatives practicing law in Bucharest. Budean mentored Bradin and helped establish the first “official” Romanian Pentecostal church in Păuliș in 1922.<sup>200</sup>

The region’s cities had the largest urban populations of evangelicals in Romania after Bucharest. In Arad city, with 505 Baptists and 68 Adventists, Romanian Baptists were factory and railroad workers as well as state employees.<sup>201</sup> Baptist Florea Drăgan became manager of the Financial Services of Arad City Hall (*șeful Serviciului Financiar al Primăriei*).<sup>202</sup> As in the urban communities of Bucharest or Brăila, evangelicals in the city originated from the rising middle class.<sup>203</sup> However, Arad also had a growing number of Roma Baptist believers, 40 of which attended the Romanian Baptist Church in Arad, before starting their own church. One of the members, Dumitru Lingurar, attended the Baptist Seminary in Bucharest, and became a judge after World War II.<sup>204</sup>

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<sup>198</sup> Popovici, 206-214; *Farul Mântuirii* 1/1 (December, 1919): 5-6; Bel, “George Slăv,” <https://istoriebaptistablogul.blogspot.ie/2016/04/george-slav-primul-intelectual.html> (accessed 25 July 2020). A.F. was a teacher in Tulca, Bihor county. “Ecouri,” *Farul Mântuirii* 10/ (1929), cover missing: 6.

<sup>199</sup> “Un secol de credință,” <http://www.baptist-tm.ro/un-secol-de-credinta-baptista-in-cehei-judetul-salaj/> (accessed 25 July 2018).

<sup>200</sup> Bălăban, 19-23. The group was not recognized by the state.

<sup>201</sup> ANR, DGP 2349, folder 40/1931, file 191; Vasile Bel, “Gheorghe Cicirean,” <https://istoriebaptistablogul.blogspot.ie/2017/12/cicirean-gheorghe-1895-1984.html> (accessed 26 July 2018).

<sup>202</sup> “Cercul Studenților Bapțiști,” *Farul Mântuirii* 8/19-20 (October 1927): 7-8.

<sup>203</sup> This can be seen in photos from the South-eastern regional Baptist conference held in Arad in 1930. “Referatul României prezentat la conferința Regională de fr. Ion Dan,” *Farul Mântuirii* 11/21 (November 1930): 7-8.

<sup>204</sup> Craighead, “Jubilee Tour of Good-will,” *Baptist and Reflector* 98 (6 October 1931): 4; Popovici, 481; Ioan Bunaciu, *Istoria Bisericii Baptiste din Romania* (Oradea: Editura Făclia, 2006), 33; *Farul Creștin* 5/18 (September 1937): 6.

In Oradea city, Bihor county, Baptists held blue-collar jobs, were entrepreneurs as well as professionals. Petru Balc was a factory employee at Uzina Electrica and his father Gheorghe Balc, owned *Crișana*, the first Romanian nursery of American grapevines. Others were tailors, employees at a tool deposit (*sculerie*), weavers, cleaners, and wives of police officers.<sup>205</sup> Dr. Gheorghe Șimonca was a prominent lawyer in the city representing the Romanian Baptist Union in the Baptist World Alliance.<sup>206</sup>

Sighet city, Maramureș county followed the trend of other regions with Baptist urban predominance where otherwise Adventists constituted a rural majority. Both here and in Satu-Mare county the urban figures were small, with no registered evangelicals in Baia Sprie.<sup>207</sup> Rural believers in these areas were machinists, mill owners, and tradesmen.<sup>208</sup> They also previously served as epitrops and deacons in their local BOR parishes.<sup>209</sup> The low figures in these two counties was due to the strong presence of Greek Catholics and Orthodox Jewish or Hassidic communities in the region.<sup>210</sup>

Crișana-Maramureș's rural evangelicals were a mix of state employees, tradesmen, and families of high-standing in the villages, the latter influencing fellow villagers and contributing to Bihor having the largest population of rural evangelicals in Romania. The work of Hungarian Baptists in the nineteenth century and the relative freedom they experienced under the Austro-Hungarian empire allowed for the growth of these groups in the region.

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<sup>205</sup> ANR, DGP 2350, folder 232/1937, file 51; *Farul Mântuirii* 8/21-22 (November 1927): 16. The nursery was located at 101 Podgeria street. Ioan Cocuț, "Din Viață," *Farul Creștin* 6/31 (August 1938): 2.

<sup>206</sup> Craighead, "Jubilee Tour of Good-will," *Baptist and Reflector* 98 (6 October 1931): 1. From 1933-1934 he was president of the second branch of the Baptist Union. Ioan Bunaciu, *Istoria Bisericii Baptistice din România*, 52; "Știri și informațiuni," *Farul Creștin* 2/20 (October 1934): 7.

<sup>207</sup> Manuila, *Recensământul*, 55.

<sup>208</sup> Vasile Bel, "Nicolae Miclaus," <https://istoriebaptistablogul.blogspot.ie/2017/11/nicolae-miclaus-1897-1981-un-bun.html> (accessed 20 July 2018).

<sup>209</sup> Vasile Bel, "Grigore Cosma," <https://istoriebaptistablogul.blogspot.ie/2017/10/cosma-grigore-si-o-intamplare-din-viata.html>; <https://istoriebaptistablogul.blogspot.ie/2016/10/cosma-grigore-din-satul-rohia.html> (accessed 21 July 2018).

<sup>210</sup> Cristian Gojinescu, "Situția Demografică a Cultelor după 1918," *Etnosfera* 2 (2009): 26-32.



**Table 13: Baptist Ethnic Composition 1921<sup>211</sup>**

<b>Nationality</b>	<b>Churches</b>	<b>Ordained Pastors</b>	<b>Lay Pastors</b>	<b>Members</b>
<b>Romanian</b>	426	38	644	14,000
<b>Hungarian</b>	192	29	18	6,223
<b>German</b>	10	6	2	670
<b>Russian</b>	17	4	4	300
<b>Total</b>	645	77	668	21,193

Table 13, as published by ethnic Romanian Baptists, was meant to show how much the Baptist faith had grown among the majority population. It reveals a mix of ethnicities but is too simplistic, failing to take into account the mixed Hungarian and Romanian individuals, the Jewish Hungarians or Jewish Russians, the Moldovan believers who could have identified as Romanian or Russian, and failing to differentiate between Russians and Ukrainians, to name but a few. It was this mix of identities and backgrounds that made these religious groups so intriguing. The table also reveals the number of churches or communities as significantly higher in proportion to the number of ordained pastors. There were not enough trained ministers for the growing evangelical communities, resulting in many unofficial lay pastors taking up the mantle.

A cursory regional analysis shows individual evangelicals were from all walks of life. The majority lived in rural areas, working as tradesmen and small farmers. This contradicted Fascist paligenetic rhetoric increasingly dominating Romanian interwar nationalist ideology, which presented the peasant as unspoilt by foreigners and keeper of the purest form of Romanian identity.<sup>212</sup> Romanian Orthodox Church leaders were justifiably concerned to see these sects- “heretical splinter groups”- grow in the countryside where the majority of new members were Romanians. However, the overwhelming number of rural tradesmen seems to contradict the purported high percentage of peasant adherents in the interwar period.

Baptists had a large rural presence in the western and eastern border regions due to German, Hungarian, and Russian 19<sup>th</sup> century missionary initiatives; and they generally developed more quickly than Adventists in urban areas. This urban presence, seen as infiltrated by minorities at the expense of ethnic Romanians, made evangelicals targets of suspicion in the

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<sup>211</sup> Popovici, 537. For a map of the ethnic breakdown of each county please see the appendix.

<sup>212</sup> Marius Turda, “Conservative Palingenesis and Cultural Modernism in Early Twentieth-century Romania,” *Totalitarian Movements and Political Religions* 9/4 (2008): 441.

cities as well. Their higher levels of literacy, especially among those in the western regions who had been Baptists for longer, made them ideal for the growing middle class and the desperate need Romania had for a larger ethnic Romanian bourgeoisie.<sup>213</sup> While some were able to ascend the social ladder, their faith often hindered many from doing so during this period.

Most prevalent in regions with a history of religious freedom (Transylvania and Bukovina), and yet also in the former Russian province of Bessarabia, these were also diverse ethnic congregations. Even in the more homogenous former Romanian principalities of Wallachia and Moldova where Adventists dominated the evangelical scene, ethnic minorities were an important impetus for starting and encouraging the development of these communities, which became increasingly composed of and led by Romanians towards the end of the 1930s. The social standing or charisma of leaders also meant an increase in certain areas over others. Geographic migration of believers as well as movement from one denomination to another accounts for fluctuating figures. Overall, the image of these evangelicals is one of mixed ethnic and social standing and the transcending of ethnic, linguistic, social, and even gender barriers, seen more clearly in the chapters that follow.

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<sup>213</sup> Evangelicals attracted an emerging bourgeoisie only after evangelical individuals increasingly began to acquire and be associated with education, musical literacy, and some degree of financial success.

## Chapter 2 Fighting Nationalism: the Jewish Christians of Chişinău

The previous chapter unpacked the diverse ethnic and social backgrounds of evangelical groups to show how their diversity challenged Romanian state attempts at cultural and religious homogenization and how they challenge current historical understandings and conceptualization of religion, ethnicity, and nationalism in the interwar period. This chapter returns to the story of the particular community that baffled the Siguranța agent in the introduction to the thesis. It uses a thick history approach, focusing on this particular Chişinău evangelical community of mostly ethnic Jewish members in Bessarabia, and how their anti-national stance challenged BOR as the established religion. Their development amidst growing anti-Semitism and anti-Sectarianism in interwar Romania make this Jewish evangelical group particularly fascinating.

The Romanian 1899 census showed a Jewish population of 256,488 out of a total population of 5,956,690; of these 192,701 lived in cities, mostly in Bucharest and Iaşi.<sup>214</sup> By 1930 the number jumped to 728,115 Jews (4 percent of the population of around 18 million) with an urban Jewish population of 496,375, now mostly in Bucharest, Cernăuți, and Chişinău.<sup>215</sup> The large percent of urban Jews was used as an excuse for introducing debilitating Romanianization and anti-Semitic laws restricting Jewish activity in society, politics, and economy. However, the restrictive laws also led to increased efforts on behalf of churches to support local Jewish converts to Christianity.

The history of Christian mission among Jews in territories annexed to interwar Romania was filled with both ecumenical and polemical interactions. Missionary organizations stationed in the country spanned the spectrum of Christian denominations; most fruitful were those which received support from and partnered with local churches.<sup>216</sup> Jews who believed in Jesus as the Messiah, called Hebrew or Jewish Christians at the time, often interacted across denominational and theological delineations.<sup>217</sup>

Analyzing first the extent of mission among the Jews in Romania, this chapter will examine the leadership, member composition, organization, activities, theology, and

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<sup>214</sup> Census of Romania 1899 (1905), 50, 65, 74,

<sup>215</sup> *Recesământ* 1930, 45, 47.

<sup>216</sup> Glaser, "A Survey of Missions to the Jews in Continental Europe 1900 – 1950," PhD diss. Fuller Theological Seminary (1998), 232.

<sup>217</sup> Today they identify as Messianic Jews or Jewish Believers in Yeshua. For more on Messianic Judaism see: <https://jewsforjesus.org/jewish-resources/community/messianic-jews-a-brief-history/>.

relationships with other groups of interwar Chişinău's community of evangelical Jewish Christians to reveal how they challenge the monolithic image of interwar separate ethnic and religious communities. Though well-known and kept under strict surveillance by police at the time, this unique community is largely forgotten by historians and non-academics alike. Their activities and complex, fluid identities challenged the vision of Greater Romania's statesmen for clear ethno-religious boundaries and were thus considered a threat by authorities of the time. In their challenge to the established religion of BOR and critique of nationalism, they show a complexity of religious-national identities and experiences that current secondary literature doesn't address.

Anglican and Lutheran organizations were the earliest and most prominent groups working among Jews in Romania. Lutheran minister Rudolf Faltin worked in Kishinev (the Russian name for the city, today's Chisinau, the capital of the Republic of Moldova) since 1859 in what was then part of the Russian Empire, establishing an agricultural colony for converted Jews.<sup>218</sup> Another Lutheran organization, Norwegian Church Ministry to Israel (then Norwegian Israel Mission, NIM) started work in Galaţi, in the Romanian province of Moldova, in 1891 with Ragnvald and Regine Gjessing, who later relocated to Budapest. Otto von Harling continued the work in Galaţi, where he started a school for Jewish girls. Lutheran NIM worked closely with the Anglican Mission in Bucharest throughout the interwar period, including organizing a summer camp for Jewish school boys in Vulcan, near Braşov.<sup>219</sup>

The Anglican London Society for the Propagation of Christianity among the Jews (LSPCJ, later Church's Ministry Among the Jews) began work in Romania in 1841 with a permanent base in Bucharest in 1846. Their missionary John H. Adeney worked in Bucharest from 1900 and advanced education for Jewish pupils. Attendance at Adeney's two schools

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<sup>218</sup> Kai Kjaer-Hansen, *Joseph Rabinowitz and the Messianic Movement: The Herzl of Jewish Christianity* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1995); William Thomas Gidney, *The History of the London Society for Promoting Christianity amongst the Jews, from 1809 to 1908* (London: Society for Promoting Christianity amongst the Jews, 1908), 442-443; Ellie Schainker, "Jewish Conversion in an Imperial Context: Confessional Choice and Multiple Baptisms in Nineteenth-Century Russia," *Jewish Social Studies* 20/1 (Fall 2013): 6. Faltin mentions 300 Jews baptised in Chişinău during his time there in "The Lutheran Church in Kischeneu," *Trusting and Toiling* (monthly organ of Mildmay Mission to the Jews, hereafter *TT*) 10 (16 October 1899): 157.

<sup>219</sup> The town for the camp appears as Wolkendorf, its German name, in English sources. Magne Solheim, "Jewish Missions in Romania," *Mishkan* 14/1 (1991): 31-45; Otto von Harling, "Jewish Christian Fellowship," *Trusting and Toiling* 5 (15 May 1899): 73. Description of time at the camp, Bible studies, sports, Isaac Feinstein's leadership are found in Gabe, *HC* 63/3 (September- November 1990): 77-79.

reached over 800 students. The LSPCJ also had colporteur ministries in Galați and Iași.<sup>220</sup> Though Adeney was employed by the Anglican Church, he maintained close ties with Romanian Baptists and Brethren.<sup>221</sup> Mildmay Mission, with no denominational affiliation, was started in London in 1876 by John Wilkinson and expanded their field of activity across Europe, especially among Ashkenazi Jews.<sup>222</sup> They feature most prominently in this chapter because of their work in Chișinău. These missions provided spiritual and material support to local evangelicals, but as a result invited suspicion from the Romanian Orthodox Church (BOR) and secular authorities on grounds of foreign collaboration.

By contrast, mission to the Jews in the Orthodox or Catholic churches was sparse. It seems there were more missionary attempts within the Russian Orthodox Church led by Jewish converts.<sup>223</sup> For BOR, a law from 1819 entitled “Ritualul primirii jidovilor pentru botez” [Ordinance regarding the way in which the Yids can be accepted for baptism] served as the guideline for Jewish converts. These had to complete a series of tests prior to the start of catechism, which included tutoring by a priest, attending church services, and fasting. This was followed by a public examination, prior to baptism. Converts were required to publicly exclaim three times that they “forsake Satan” (interpreted as their Jewish religion and culture) - a traumatic rupture from their Jewish heritage.<sup>224</sup> BOR archimandrite Iuliu Scriban lamented the lack of mission among the Jews in the Orthodox Church and identified only a priest in Iași and the Orthodox theologian Gala Galaction (Grigorie Pișculescu) as engaging in this mission field

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<sup>220</sup> Also known as London Jews Society. Mihai Ciucă, “Demersuri misionare anglicane care îi vizau pe evreii din România: 1842-1941,” *Revista de Istorie a Evreilor din România* 3/19 (2018):186-199; Glaser, “A Survey of Missions,” 193-196.

<sup>221</sup> John Adeney, “Femei din Noul Testament,” trans. Esfira, *Farul Mântuirii* 6/13-14 (July 1925): 13-14. He greatly supported the work in Chișinău.

<sup>222</sup> Max Eisen, “Christian Missions to the Jews in North America and Great Britain,” *Jewish Social Studies* 10/1 (1948): 31-66.

<sup>223</sup> Eugenii Konstantinovich Smirnov, *A Short Account of the Historical Development and Present Position of Russian Orthodox Missions* (London: Rivingtons, 1903) in Schänker, *Confessions of the Shtetl*, 49, 78; Mikhail Agursky, “Conversion of Jews to Christianity in Russia,” *Soviet Jewish Affairs* 20/2-3 (1990): 69-84.

<sup>224</sup> Dumitru Vanca, “Practica liturgică a primirii în Biserica Ortodoxă a non-ortodocșilor: evaluări și perspective, probleme liturgice, practice și doctrinare,” *Revista Teologica* 94/2 (2012): 105; Ion Popa, *The Romanian Orthodox Church and the Holocaust* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2017), 24. This was the process for the baptism of “heretics” in general. As in Russian, the term “Jidan” seems to have gone from neutral to pejorative by the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. For more on the Russian case see John Klier, *Pogroms: anti-Jewish violence in modern Russian history* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004).

in Romania in the early 1920s.<sup>225</sup> Apparently, the illegal Orthodox branch known as Inochentists engaged in mission to the Jews through Moisei Ioan Savastieanovici, who was called Apostle or Baptizer of the Jews. Though suspected of Jewish heritage himself, there is no clear evidence of Jews joining the Inochentists.<sup>226</sup>

Attendance of, if not necessarily membership in, evangelical churches among Jews was an increasing phenomenon in mid-19<sup>th</sup> to mid-20<sup>th</sup> century Eastern Europe. Todd Endelman's study of Jewish converts in Warsaw identified overwhelming conversion to Protestantism in Poland and attributed it to a less "rigorous pre-baptismal examination" as well as to "militant" Anglican and Lutheran missionary work.<sup>227</sup> As previously mentioned, these Protestant organizations often worked with the growing evangelical churches in Romania.

Individuals and ethnic-minority churches supporting the growth of Romanian-run evangelical churches also had ties to Jewish mission. Francis Berney, the Swiss Brethren missionary to Bucharest from 1899 to 1909 and the founder of the first Brethren meeting house in Romania was previously the director of a school in Tunis (1893-1899) for the LSPCJ.<sup>228</sup> German-speaking Baptists in Bucharest supported the first Romanian Baptist Church in the Regat (former Romanian principalities of Wallachia and Moldova); their strong accent on mission to the Jews, inspired by the work of Franz Delitzsch and the Institutum Judaicum in Leipzig, was partially adopted by their Romanian co-religionists.

These new majority Romanian evangelical churches more readily accepted members without taking issue with an individual's ethnic background. The first Saturday in the week of prayer observed by Baptists at the start of each new year often listed work among the Jewish people as the prayer theme.<sup>229</sup> The Baptist publication *Farul Mântuirii* [Beacon of Salvation] printed news concerning Palestine and laws or events affecting Jews in other parts of the

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<sup>225</sup> Scriban, "Misiunea printre evrei," *Revista Teologică* 12/8 (August 1922): 192, [http://documente.bcuculuj.ro/web/bibdigit/periodice/revistateologica/1922/BCUCLUJ\\_FP\\_279893\\_1922\\_012\\_008.pdf](http://documente.bcuculuj.ro/web/bibdigit/periodice/revistateologica/1922/BCUCLUJ_FP_279893_1922_012_008.pdf) (accessed 12 November 2020).

<sup>226</sup> My thanks to James Kapaló for the information and a photo of Savastieanovici. For more on Inochentists see Kapaló, *Inochentism and Russian Orthodoxy: Narratives of Resistance* (London: Routledge, 2018).

<sup>227</sup> Todd Endelman, "Jewish Converts in Nineteenth-Century Warsaw: A Quantitative Analysis," *Jewish Social Studies* 4/1 (Autumn, 1997): 48.

<sup>228</sup> Bogdan Emanuel Răduț, "Comunitatea Creștinilor după Evanghelie: 100 Ani în Oltenia și 90 ani la Craiova," *Oltenia: Studii, Documente, Cercetări* 4/2 (Craiova: Sitech, 2014): 111.

<sup>229</sup> "Programul săptămânii de rugăciune universală: Lucrul Domnului la noi si printre Evrei," *Farul Creștin* 4/1 (January 1936): 8; *Farul Creștin* 5/1 (January 1937): 8.

world.<sup>230</sup> Even Tudor Popescu, founder of the Tudorists- officially titled the Romanian Evangelical Church- worked with a Jewish Christian to translate into Romanian John Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress*. Colporteurs of the LSPCJ reported cooperation with "Evangelical Christians" in evangelization, who lent their meeting halls, advertised meetings, and even followed up with guests who attended the services when possible.<sup>231</sup>

Thus far, there is no evidence of Adventist mission among the Jews, but the Baptists and Brethren had a growing number attend as members or visitors.<sup>232</sup> In 1928 one bold Baptist minister asked believers to repent of their persecution of Jews and of their collective failure to see Christ in those different from themselves.<sup>233</sup> It was this openness and little to no history of anti-Semitism in the new evangelical churches that made them more appealing to some Jews. This was in sharp contrast to the increase in Romanian students and rural priests associated with the anti-Semitic Legionaries of the Archangel Michael and anti-Semitic literature and legislation published by BOR priests. Jewish Christian Henry Ellison also maintained that Baptists had been closely connected to Jewish mission from the beginning. Ellison worked first in Bucharest with the Anglican mission and then was on staff for the London-based organization Mildmay Mission to the Jews in Cernăuți in 1938. There he and his wife were welcomed by both Jewish Christians and Romanian Baptists, who offered him their prayer house on Saturday evenings.<sup>234</sup>

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<sup>230</sup> "Știri Diverse," *Farul Mântuirii* 9/1 (January 1928): 15; *Farul Creștin* 6/5 (February 1938): 6; "Din lumea largă," *Farul Creștin* 6/44 (November 1938): 6; "Din lumea largă," *Farul Creștin* 6/46 (November 1938): 6.

<sup>231</sup> Danish Israel Mission Archives (DIM), Adeney, "Bucharest," *Bread cast upon the waters* 126 Missionary Report of London Society for Promoting Christianity amongst the Jews (Church Missions to the Jews, 1933-1934): 55.

<sup>232</sup> A Jewish young man from Warsaw living in Cernăuți was described by Mildmay worker Israel Schnapp as a former Seventh-day Adventist in "Encouragement in Cernăuți," *TT* 41/5 (May 1935): 57; Hill, "News from Cernăuți," *TT* 41/6 (June 1935): 73. The Pentecostals were at an infant stage of their development and recorded no Jewish or Roma believers. Richard Wurmbrand mentioned the difficulty for Jewish Christians to enter evangelical churches during the Antonescu regime. Roland Fleischer, "Begegnungen von Baptisten und Juden in Südosteuropa. Das Leben des Judenmissionars Moses Richter (1899-1967) - von Kischineff nach London," *Freikirchenforschung* 8 (Münster, 1998): 223. For Jews in rural Brethren assemblies see R. W. Hill, "Awakening in the Bukovina," *TT* 35/3 (March 1929): 36.

<sup>233</sup> However, they only mention gentile Christians as means by which many Jews can find Jesus as Messiah. Translated by I. Socaciu, "Săptămâna Universală de Rugăciune," *Farul Mântuirii* 9/23-24 (December 1928): 5.

<sup>234</sup> *Wahrheitszeuge* 26 (1937): 208 and *Tauferbote* 7/12 (1936): 5 in Fleischer, "Begegnungen," 224; "Personal and Miscellaneous," *TT* 44/11 (November 1938): 130; Henry Ellison, "Rumania," *TT* 45/1 (January 1939): 10.

Certain Jewish Christian leaders, affiliated with evangelicals, stand out in the interwar period: Lev Averbuch (1885-1941) in Chişinău, Moses Richter (1899-1967) in Cernăuţi, Isaac Feinstein (1904-1941) in Galaţi and Iaşi, and Henry Ellison (1903-1983) in Bucharest. Lev Yakovich Averbuch's work in Chişinău was the strongest connection between Jewish Christians and these churches, maintaining a similar theology and order of service to Baptists even after creating his own separate Jewish Christian community. His work served as a catalyst for similar congregations across Bessarabia and for a new vision of Jewish and Christian identity, one that challenged clear ethnic-national-religious categories.

### **The Importance of Chişinău**

The often forgotten capital of the former Russian and later Romanian territory of Bessarabia, the city of Chişinău (previously Kishinev) was an appropriate place for this multi-ethnic, inter-denominational work to thrive. It had a history of multi-confessionalism, with a surprisingly high number of Jewish conversions (20 percent) happening outside the dominant Russian Orthodox Church during the Russian Empire, in spite of benefits denied those who joined “schismatic Orthodox sects.”<sup>235</sup> Chişinău, along with Odessa, was considered a major scene for the spread of Evangelical Christian dissident/non-conformist groups in the southwestern corner of the Russian Empire (or today's Republic of Moldova and Ukraine). These groups paved the way for Kishinev (later Chişinău) to be the birthplace of the modern Jewish Christian/Messianic movement led by Joseph Rabinovich in 1884. Both he and later Averbuch were connected to the rapidly spreading Stundist peasant movement.<sup>236</sup>

The city was also synonymous with anti-Semitic violence before World War II. According to historian Steven Zipperstein, “Prior to Buchenwald and Auschwitz, no place-name

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<sup>235</sup> Prior to the Romanian administration, about forty-six percent of Kishinev's population was Jewish- a very high number. Steven Zipperstein, *Pogrom: Kishinev and the Tilt of History* (NY: Liveright Publishing, 2018), 27-55; Schainker, “Jewish Conversion in an Imperial Context,” 4, 6. In Alexander I's Passover Manifesto of 1817, also known as the edict on the Society of Israelite Christians, such Jewish converts “were denied the benefits of Christian status...because the state did not legally recognize baptisms performed by sects.”

<sup>236</sup> Stundism, a Protestant Christian reform movement largely influenced by German colonists, emerged in the late nineteenth century in the south-western part of the Russian Empire. It was viewed as sectarian and suppressed by the Russian Orthodox Church. Albert Wardin, *On the Edge: Baptists and Other Free Church Evangelicals in Tsarist Russia, 1855-1917* (Oregon: Wipf & Stock, 2014), 93-116.



evoked Jewish suffering more starkly than Kishinev.”<sup>237</sup> The 1903 pogrom remained imprinted in the memory of Jews and Gentiles alike and Kishinev became a rallying cry for a host of divergent views including Zionism, communism, and even accusations of Jewish international influence/manipulation.<sup>238</sup> These accusations would resurface against the Jewish community in the city after World War I, in the midst of Romanian nationalization policies.

The event remained important to the identity of the local Jewish Christian community as well. For example, in 1935 Lev Averbuch took a first time visitor from his congregation to see Aziatskaia street (today’s Romană street) where the majority of the pogrom violence occurred in 1903.<sup>239</sup> Though rather marginalized in geopolitics, the city held a firm place in Jewish collective memory and remained internationally associated with the plight of East European Jewry.

Bessarabia, and Chişinău in particular, became one of Greater Romania’s biggest challenges. It was considered the most backward region annexed by the newly enlarged Kingdom of Romania. This was due to its poverty, illiteracy, mix of ethnicities, and “russified” elites. The fluidity of and changing ethnic, national, or religious self-identification frustrated Romanian authorities who found it difficult to pin down whether a person was Romanian, Moldovan, Russian, Ukrainian, Gagauz, or from the myriad of other minorities. The continued existence of the Autonomous Moldavian Socialist Soviet Republic, Soviet Ukraine’s desire to annex certain parts of the region, and attempts spearheaded from Odessa to foment communist revolution, brought strict surveillance of the population and the institution of martial law in Bessarabia for most of the interwar period.<sup>240</sup>

Averbuch seems to have been the driving force behind the interwar religious movement among Jewish converts in Chişinău. Born on 31 July 1885 in Zhabokrich/ ז'בוקריץ'/Жабокрич, Podolia, a shtetl in what is today Ukraine, to a “well-to-do family,” Lev was one of eight children born to Haia and Iacov Averbuch.<sup>241</sup> Like other prominent Jewish Christians at the turn

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<sup>237</sup> Zipperstein, *Pogrom*, xiii.

<sup>238</sup> Zipperstein, *Pogrom*, 206-207.

<sup>239</sup> Gabe, *HC* 62/1 (March-May 1989): 8.

<sup>240</sup> Charles Upson Clark, *Bessarabia* (New York: Dodd, Mead & Company, 1927): [https://depts.washington.edu/cartah/text\\_archive/clark/mobile.html](https://depts.washington.edu/cartah/text_archive/clark/mobile.html); Dmitry Tartakovsky, “Parallel Ruptures: Jews of Bessarabia and Transnistria between Romanian Nationalism and Soviet Communism, 1918-1940,” PhD Dissertation (University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, 2009), 50, 342.

<sup>241</sup> ANRM, 679-1-4840, files 24-25, dated 24 April 1920. His brothers, Fisel and Natan lived in Argentina and his sisters, Rahil, Bunea, Rosea, and Janea lived in Odessa, while sister Ghenea lived in

of the twentieth century, he was influenced by the Haskalah- the Jewish enlightenment- and left his Orthodox Jewish upbringing to study chemistry and music in Odessa, where he formed his first of many orchestras.<sup>242</sup> After his discharge from the Russian army, he became a music teacher in Grodno (today's Hrodna, Belarus) where in 1908 he was given a New Testament (the language of the text is not mentioned) by a Russian Orthodox man who surprisingly told him to attend a Brethren meeting.<sup>243</sup> Here again is evidence of evangelicals being associated with a more open community even by Russian Orthodox believers.

Averbuch became what he termed a “true Israelite” in 1910 after studying the Jewish and Christian scriptures and following discussions with Russian school teacher Vladimir Marzinkovsky. Isaiah 53 and Daniel 9 (from the Tanach/ Jewish Old Testament) convinced him Jesus was the Jewish and Gentile Messiah, resulting in Averbuch's conversion.<sup>244</sup> He moved to Kovno (Kaunas) where he married German Jewish Baptist Maria Yakovna. They travelled around Russia and the Baltic countries, formed several choirs and spoke about their Christian faith without ties to any organization, even making a short trip to Kishinev in August 1913.<sup>245</sup> Lev also temporarily served as music director at “Dom Evangelia” Baptist Church pastored by William Fetler in St. Petersburg.<sup>246</sup> In 1913, he joined the English organization Mildmay

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Podolia. My thanks to Valentin Eitan for clarifying the name of the village in Podolia. All references to ANRM documents, unless otherwise stated, are courtesy of Natalia and Rabbi Shimon Pozdirca and Dumitru Lisnic.

<sup>242</sup> Other Haskalah influenced Jewish Christian leaders include Joseph Rabinovich, Rudolph Gurland, Christian Theophilus Lucky (Chaim Jedidjah Pollak), Peter Nuhim Gorodishche, and Leon Rosenberg. Gurland, Gorodishche, and Rosenberg all worked in Odessa at some point. *TT* 10 (15 October 1898); Valentin Eitan, “Пётр (нухим) городищ– верный до конца,” [Peter (Nukhim) Gorodish- Faithful to the End] <https://cis.jewsforjesus.org/pyotr-nuhim-gorodishh-vernyj-do-kontsa/?fbclid=IwAR0b9i151I36yPpBN6HKSel1ipEBb7XcKBFfVZfObcNRUH5fhlIHqd0P0tU> (accessed 14 November 2019).

<sup>243</sup> “Brethren” was likely referring broadly to evangelical believers and not to the specific Brethren denomination. Gabe, *HC* 61/4 (December 1988-February 1989): 101-103.

<sup>244</sup> Petition from Rosenberg to baptize “Leib Srul Averbukh” 6 October 1910. Courtesy of Valentin Eitan from the Odessa Oblast Archives; Police report from 1929 also gives Averbuch's year of conversion as 1910. ANRM 679-1-5555, files 86-87. He was also imprisoned in Grodno after his conversion, where the police chief was angry that he, a Jew, was preaching about Christ. Averbuch, “воспоминания прошлого- Для пользы настоящего,” (Memories of the past for the benefit of the present) *Благовестник (Binevestitorul)* 6/7-8 (July-August 1929):1.

<sup>245</sup> Nina Tarleva, “1913-1933,” *Благовестник* 10/3-4 (April 1933): 5-8.

<sup>246</sup> “From Leo Averbuch,” *The Friend of Russia* (May 1921): 12, courtesy of Mihai Ciucă.

Mission to the Jews at the invitation of director Samuel Wilkinson, for whom he would be working until 1937.<sup>247</sup>

It is unclear how Averbuch came to be stationed in Chişinău. In September 1917, while in Odessa, he wrote of feeling “drawn to other places and to a larger sphere for the ministry of the Gospel,” and was awaiting a decision from the mission. He may have desired to go to Moscow, where he described greater liberty in the Republic of Russia after the February Revolution of 1917, compared to previous Tsarist rule, and hoped that Jews of the Christian faith would no longer “suffer both from the oppression of the authorities and from the absence of Christian kindness among fellow-believers.”<sup>248</sup> At the start of 1918, the Averbuchs were indeed listed as working for Mildmay in Moscow; however, Romanian police registered their arrival in Romania sometime at the end of August 1918 through the Bendery/Tighina border crossing holding Ukrainian passports.<sup>249</sup> Their entrance as “Russian” Jews made them particularly suspicious to Romanian authorities.

The most plausible explanation seems to be that while visiting Baptist believers in Chişinău in the summer of 1918, he and Maria were prevented from returning due to the closing of Romania’s borders with Ukraine.<sup>250</sup> Thus, the Averbuchs were reassigned as Mildmay Mission missionaries to Chişinău. By 1919, Lev was working with the Baptists (both Romanian and Russian or Ukrainian)<sup>251</sup> in the city, who had rented Sommerville Hall, the prayer house Joseph Rabinovich used in his Jewish Christian gatherings in the 1890s. The Baptists placed the

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<sup>247</sup> *TT* 19/20 (15 October 1913), back cover. In the January 1914 issue of *Trusting and Toiling* Averbuch mentioned that he had been working in Jewish mission for just three months. Mildmay intended to send him to St Petersburg, but seems they were prevented by the outbreak of war. Averbuch, “At Batoum,” *TT* 20/3 (16 March 1914): 39-40. During the war he worked with the Red Cross and was stationed in Kiev. Leon Rosenberg, “The Work in Odessa,” *TT* 20/11 (16 November 1914): 149. Averbuch, “In a Russian Military Hospital,” *TT* 21/4 (15 April 1915): 30-31. The latter article mentions his wife (for the first time in 1915) holding prayer meetings and even getting arrested in Kiev. Gabe, *HC* 62/1 (March-May 1989): 8-10. By August 1916 the Averbuchs were back in Odessa and assisting with the Free Tea House for Jewish Refugees. Samuel Wilkinson, “New Recognition at Odessa,” *TT* 22/8 (15 August 1916): 60; “Abroad,” *TT* 23/8 (15 August 1917): 62.

<sup>248</sup> *TT* 23/9 (15 September 1917): 69.

<sup>249</sup> ANRM 679-1-4840, files 24-25. Letter from Averbuch to Mildmay director Samuel Wilkinson dated 8 July 1919 revealed they had been in Chişinău ten months in *TT* 25/8 (15 August 1919): 62.

<sup>250</sup> Report by Margit Berg and Olga Olausson, 1 December 1921, in Kjaer-Hansen, *Rabinowitz*, 218-219; Nina Tarleva, “1913-1933,” *Благовестник* 10/3-4 (April 1933): 5-8.

<sup>251</sup> These could have been Ukrainian as they were often called Russian- *ruşi* or *rusnaci*- in Bessarabia. Vasile Chiselită, “Interferențe Culturale Evreiești în muzica tradițională de dans din Basarabia și Bucovina,” *Anuarul Institutului de Etnografie și Folclor* 19 (2008): 210.

building at Averbuch's disposal without restrictions.<sup>252</sup> Norwegian missionaries visiting from Galați described a Sunday evening service very similar to Siguranța (secret police) reports; they mentioned a "full house" with "believers of all nationalities, Russians from the most varied parts, Bulgarians, R[o]manians, a couple of Serbs, and an American missionary couple..."<sup>253</sup> Historian Ellie Schainker claims the sect died out with the death of Rabinovich, but Averbuch's group reveals his legacy continued.<sup>254</sup> Lev's travels, multi-cultural and religiously diverse interaction, and Chișinău's history, social configuration, and geographic location worked well in creating the scene for a complex, modern challenge to contemporary understandings of religious and national/ethnic identities.

### **Averbuch and the Israelites of the New Testament**

Despite being a Mildmay employee, it is clear Averbuch served as pastor of the Baptist church at 20 Unirii street in Chișinău in 1918 along with pioneering Russian Baptists Andrei Ivanov, Tihon Hijneacov/Tikhon Khizhniakov, soon joined by Boris Bușilă.<sup>255</sup> Mildmay recognized the Baptist character of the community; as they saw it "Baptist in those regions stands for true conversion." However, they made clear Mildmay was not a Baptist organization despite Averbuch's denominational affiliation.<sup>256</sup> Baptists and Brethren faced restrictive legislation that hindered their own activity, often forbidden to hold services because of their supposed threat to state security.<sup>257</sup> Therefore, the Chișinău Baptists appealed to other mission

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<sup>252</sup> Other missionaries worked with the Baptist denomination such as Immanuel Altman in Libau/Liepāja, Latvia by arrangement with the Lettish Baptist Union. Stundists were increasingly synonymous with the Baptists. *TT* 25/8 (15 August 1919): 62.

<sup>253</sup> Report by Margit Berg and Olga Olaussen, 1 December 1921, in Kjaer-Hansen, *Rabinowitz*, 218-219.

<sup>254</sup> Schainker, *Confessions of the Shtetl*, 212.

<sup>255</sup> The street appears as Unirei, Cutuzova, Mescianskaia/Mescanelor/Мещанская. "Initially, it was called Meshchanskaya, at the end of the 19th century, it became known in honor of Mikhail Golenishchev-Kutuzov. In the interwar period, it was named Uni[rei], a little later this name was preserved for the southern section of the street, and the northern part (below the current boulevard Stefan cel Mare) was named after Vladimir Hertz, the first mayor of Chișinău after 1918." <http://oldchisinau.com/starye-karty-i-ulicy/istoriya-kishinyova-v-ulichnykh-tablichkakh/>, accessed 1 March 2019. The chapter will use the street name that appears most often in the documents, in this case Unirei/Hertza street. Hijneacov was mistakenly identified as Jewish by Siguranța agents- "preotul evreiesc al sectanților," [the Jewish priest of the sectarians]. ANRM 679-1-4840, pp. 1i, 4, 11-12, 30-31, 37. Letter from Averbuch, Bucharest, 4 October 1919 in *TT* 25/11 (November 1919): 86; *TT* 27/2 (February 1921): 19.

<sup>256</sup> Wilkinson, "From Kischineff to Chișinău," *TT* 31/8 (August 1925): 96.

<sup>257</sup> A detailed explanation of this legislation throughout the interwar period, which included only being able to meet if they had at least 50 male members, can be found in Marius Silveșan, "Evoluția legislației

organizations who had a longer history in Romania, and through the help of Adeney of the LSPCJ in Bucharest, Averbuch was able to obtain a license to preach across Bessarabia.<sup>258</sup> It seems he spent a considerable amount of time in Bucharest in 1919, perhaps to sort out these administrative issues and to build relationships with co-religionists in the capital.<sup>259</sup>

The congregation had Somerville Hall at 20 Unirei Street at their disposal until summer 1921 when the hall was sold as a private residence by the family of Joseph Rabinovich. They attempted to procure another premise that could also serve as a sewing school for Jewish girls, but were unable to obtain the required 6,000 Lei advance (half their yearly support from Mildmay).<sup>260</sup> Averbuch and the Baptists continued to meet at 26 Unirei street, which was opposite the police station, until the Baptists procured a separate building in 1922 at 2 Gareii street, and Unirei became the designated Mildmay Mission building.<sup>261</sup> At various times between 1918 and 1925 Averbuch, Bușilă and Marcu Tarlev are listed as living at 132 Schmidt street, another location where meetings and printing of publications occurred.<sup>262</sup>

Averbuch's mission building moved several times. In October 1922 the name Bethel became associated with the mission to the Jews branch of the Baptist work led by him, and all subsequent Mildmay rented buildings received this name.<sup>263</sup> For most of the interwar period the Mildmay Mission was located at 26 Unirei/10 Vladimir Hertza/Herța street,<sup>264</sup> while in April 1931 Averbuch's group acquired a separate location at 73 Haralambie street.<sup>265</sup> In 1934 Mildmay through Averbuch rented out 30-b Inzova/Mihai Voevod street as opposed to the slightly more

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religioase referitoare la bapțiștii din România în timpul regimului Antonescu," *Jurnalul Libertății de Conștiință* (November 2015): 271- 290.

<sup>258</sup> "Bessarabia," *TT* 27/9 (September 1921): 110; ANR, DGP 2349, f. 18/1921, pp. 10, 29: Authorization for Averbuch to hold conferences in Jewish centres in Bessarabia, 18 June 1921. ANRM, 679-1-5555, file 391, dated 17 June 1921.

<sup>259</sup> ANRM 679-1-4840, file 32.

<sup>260</sup> ANRM 153-1-unidentified folder, files 105, 108, 798; ANRM document courtesy of Natalia Pozdirca; *TT* 27/7 (July 1921): 74; "Bessarabia," *TT* 27/9 (September 1921): 110.

<sup>261</sup> *TT* 28/11 (November 1922): 135; ANRM 679-1-4840, file 169, 171-172, 232-237.

<sup>262</sup> ANRM 679- 1- 4840, files 37, 48, 54-57, 273. For 132 Schmidt/Шмцдомовская see files 80, 105, 106, 113 from same folder.

<sup>263</sup> "Matters in Eastern Europe," *TT* 28/9 (September 1922): 103. Mildmay Mission hall rented out just prior to September 1922 with a yearly rent of 3,600 lei. Contemplating adding another missionary worker in Chișinău dependent on financial possibilities of Mildmay.

<sup>264</sup> "Mr and Mrs Averbuch's send-off from Chișinău," *TT* 33/9 (September 1927): 110; ANRM 679-1-5555, file 72.

<sup>265</sup> ANRM 679-1-5555, file 156.

central but more expensive Hertza location.<sup>266</sup> The group's last location was listed as 90 Gheorghe Lazar/Petropavlovskaiia Street in 1937.<sup>267</sup> The moves were in part due to finances, landlords who wished to sell the property, or tension with police and religious (both BOR and Orthodox Jewish) authorities, who felt threatened by the group's ethnic composition and radical religious interpretations (statements from police and religious authorities on the dangerous nature of this group are detailed in the subsection "Reputation" later in this chapter and in chapter 5).<sup>268</sup> Many of the reasons for changing location must be inferred since the documents do not give exact reasons for each move. Despite the separate locations of the Russian/Romanian prayer house, the Jewish-Christian church, and the Mildmay Mission hall, these clearly worked together and assisted or attended each other's services and events throughout most of the interwar period.<sup>269</sup>

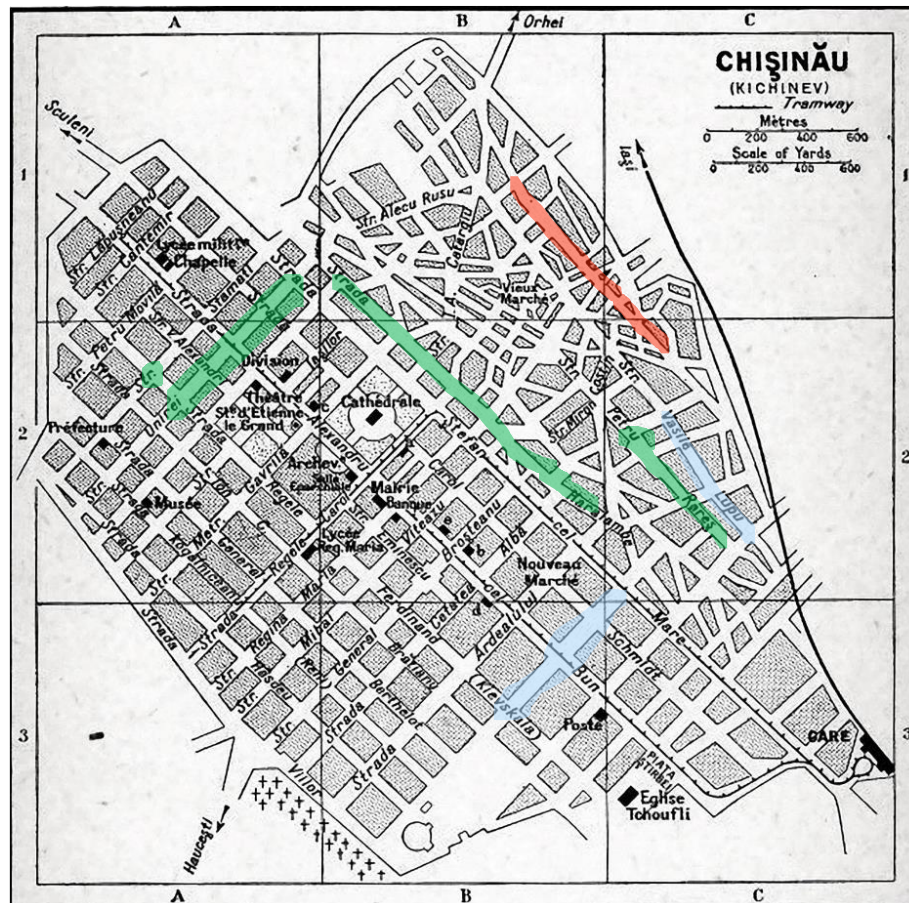
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<sup>266</sup> *TT* 40/6 (June 1934): 74-75; Averbuch, "Roumania," *TT* 41/1 (January 1935): 7. A less central location and hard to get an audience. Announcement of sermon topics in the papers and of the musical programs drew people, but not as many as at the previous location. ANRM 679-1-5555, file 272 (corner with Nikolaevskaia street, just one street away from the previous location).

<sup>267</sup> ANRM 679-1-5555, files 271, 277, 303, 307, 376. Swedish Israel Mission Archives (SIM), E48 1/12/1940-31/12/1941, Letter Averbuch to Pernow, 31 October 1940, courtesy of Kai Kjaer-Hansen.

<sup>268</sup> In 1923 the Baptists faced difficulties from authorities closing down their prayer house, but after "much trouble" received permission to hold two gatherings weekly on Fridays and Saturdays in *TT* 29/3 (March 1923): 36. After Wilkinson's visit to Chişinău, he decided due to lack of funds not to buy the location at Hertza street from the Jewish landlord Mr. Grossman at 600 pounds, but to rent it for another year. The work in Chişinău was already costing Mildmay "a considerable 800 pounds a year." *TT* 37/3 (March 1931): 43; Wilkinson, "Purchase of Bethel at Chişinău," *TT* 37/7 (July 1931): 84-85.

<sup>269</sup> The Mildmay sponsored hall was particularly aimed at Jews and was intimately linked with the Baptist congregation, composed of "Romanians, Moldovians, Bulgarians, Russians, and Germans," meeting at a different location. Wilkinson, "From Kischineff to Chişinău," *TT* 31/8 (August 1925): 96.



Chişinău, 1933<sup>270</sup>

The remainder of the chapter focuses on the identity and development of the group led by Averbuch, and the personalities of those intimately involved with his work in Chişinău: Maria Averbuch, Isaac Trachtman,<sup>271</sup> Nathan Feighin,<sup>272</sup> Nina and Marcu Tarlev, Solomon Ostrovsky, Samuel Ordinsky, Wulf Țahan, Moise and Ida Dreitschman, to name a few. The majority were Jewish converts.

In 1920 their weekly meetings usually took the form of Sunday morning services (with the Baptists) from 10am to noon with readings and sermons from the Old and New Testaments, and an evangelistic school for children from 12:30 to 5pm. Monday and Tuesday were gatherings for youths, Wednesday orchestra practice, Thursday prayer meeting, Friday choir

<sup>270</sup> “Plan of Chişinău 1933,” <http://oldchisinau.com/starye-karty-i-ulicy/starye-karty-kishinyova/plan-kishinyova-1933-goda/> (accessed 11 November 2020). The approximate locations for Averbuch’s meetings are highlighted in green, the Baptist halls in blue, and Aziatskaia street in red.

<sup>271</sup> Listed as a worker for Mildmay in *TT* (July 1923).

<sup>272</sup> Listed as a Mildmay assistant to the Averbuch’s in *TT* (February 1924).

practice, and another prayer meeting on Saturday followed by Shabbat school (Bible study) for Jewish adherents.<sup>273</sup> As local interest in their work grew and their community expanded Tuesday and Sunday evenings were evangelistic meetings, held at the Baptist prayer house, where Averbuch often preached, as were the young people's Monday night meetings. An embroidery group met every Monday and a women's tea and bible reading were held on Wednesdays. The Tuesday and Saturday meetings were said to be well attended by Jews.<sup>274</sup>

Saturday and Sundays were especially full days. Morning services were reserved for converts who could partake in communion, then a Sunday or a Shabbat school in the afternoon and the adult evangelistic meeting in the evening. Saturdays occasionally included a conversational hour from 4 to 5pm with explanations of Bible pictures via a projector or "magic lantern slides." The Shabbat school was particularly popular and attended by anywhere from 70 to 100 children each week.<sup>275</sup> Every day of the week there was something organized either at the Romanian/Russian prayer house or at the Jewish mission hall. Reports from Siguranța agents, who maintained vigilant surveillance of this very active group, reveal meetings were packed with anywhere between 100 to 400 attending and "only during seasons of frost and inclement weather did numbers dwindle."<sup>276</sup> Depending on the occasion and the audience, services were conducted in Russian, Yiddish, Hebrew, Romanian and occasionally in German or English depending on guests.<sup>277</sup>

In September 1925 the Ministry of Religious Denominations through orders 37557 and 5734 prohibited Averbuch (a Jew of Russian nationality) from being the pastor of a Baptist church in which a majority were non-Jewish members.<sup>278</sup> This was again, an attempt by state authorities to limit what they considered foreign influence on the majority Romanian population and maintain clear ethnic boundaries, in the hopes of making the "sectarians" die off without their "foreign" leadership.

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<sup>273</sup> ANRM 679-1-4840, file 54-57.

<sup>274</sup> Averbuch, "Work for God in Roumania," *TT* 28/3 (March 1922): 28. Averbuch, "Roumania," *TT* 31/1 (January 1925): 9. In 1926 they changed Tuesday meetings to a later hour since Jews would be free from work by that time. "Roumania," *TT* 33/1 (January 1927): 10.

<sup>275</sup> Averbuch, "Roumania," *TT* 32/1 (January 1926): 9; Ostrovsky, "Reverence," *TT* 33/7 (July 1927): 85.

<sup>276</sup> Averbuch, "Suffering in Bessarabia," *TT* 35/3 (March 1929): 37; ANRM 679-1-5555, files 106, 114, 323.

<sup>277</sup> Gabe, *HC* 64/2 (June- August 1991): 48; ANRM 679-1-5555, files 54, 303.

<sup>278</sup> "Notabilia," "The Situation in Chișinău," *TT* 31/11 (November 1925): 130, 135.



Nevertheless, Lev continued to preach often at the Baptist church in Chişinău. He based his work at Unirei/Hertza street, officially within the Mildmay Mission, to avoid difficulties with the authorities. Though he lost the title of pastor at the Baptist church, Averbuch's responsibilities did not diminish. In fact, the Averbuchs were often overworked and suffered health problems requiring short or longer furloughs.<sup>279</sup> They went on an eight-month furlough from June 1927 to March 1928 during which they travelled to America and the UK.<sup>280</sup> Solomon Ostrovsky, with the Mildmay London staff, but previously from Chişinău, came to hold down the fort until their return.<sup>281</sup> Afterwards, Averbuch wrote to Romanian Baptist Union leaders in Bucharest, greeting them as his "brothers and sisters," and recounted from his travels that many Jewish people were interested in the person of Jesus. Even in his absence from Chişinău, their meeting hall was packed. This justified the need for a larger hall where Averbuch hoped Jews and Gentiles would be open to a new understanding of Christianity.<sup>282</sup>

In late 1928/early 1929 plans were made to form a "Hebrew Christian Community" separate from both the Romanian/Russian Baptists and the Mildmay Mission, but still in collaboration with both. The address given by Averbuch for their location was on Hertza street; it seems they used the Mildmay building but were gathering money to fund their own "Tabernacle/Mishkan," each member contributing monthly to reach 3-400,000 lei (£400-500).<sup>283</sup> It wasn't until 1931 that they managed to rent a separate building which was called Mishkan on Haralambie street, in what Eric Gabe referred to as the old part of town, but closer to the Baptist

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<sup>279</sup> *TT* 29/9 (September 1923): 111; *TT* 30/7 (July 1924): 83; (August 1924): 87; (September 1924): 99. Neuralgia of the foot in *TT* 32/7 (July 1926): 95; *TT* 37/7 (July 1931): 82; *TT* 41/4 (April 1935): 50.

<sup>280</sup> They stayed with Maria's mother, who had to pay bail of 1,000 dollars to get them out of detention on Ellis Island. A Jewish border inspector saw their missionary credentials and marked them as suspicious. *TT* 33/5 (May 1927): 63; (July 1927): 79; Ostrovsky, "Mr. and Mrs. Averbuch's Send-off in Chişinău," *TT* 33/9 (September 1927): 110; Averbuch, "Witness under Detention," *TT* 33/10 (October 1927): 120. On 17 February he arrived in the UK and left for Chişinău on 16 March 1928. "Notabilia," *TT* 34/3 (March 1928): 31-32; (April 1928): 51.

<sup>281</sup> Ostrovsky was a Ukrainian Jewish refugee who converted after reading a New Testament given to him by Averbuch. On first reading it he claimed, "This is not a gentile book. This is ours!" He was baptized in Galaţi on 6 May 1922 by Averbuch before emigrating to Palestine. "Isaac Ostrovsky, 'This book is ours!'" <https://www.jewishtestimonies.com/en/isaac-ostrovsky-book/> (accessed 28 November 2019); Gershon Nerel, "A Pioneer and 'Watchman' in Eretz-Israel," *The Messianic and Hebrew Christian* 69/1 (March-May 1996): 5-8.

<sup>282</sup> Averbuch, "Către fraţi si surori în Christos din România," *Farul Mântuirii* 9/7 (April 1928): 11. Ostrovsky reported "overcrowded yet orderly meetings, Saturday after Saturday," in "Roumania," *TT* 34/1 (January 1928): 7.

<sup>283</sup> "An Independent Plan," *TT* 35/1 (January 1929): 12. Signed by Averbuch, Feig[h]in, Trachtman, Dreitschman, and Tarle[v].

hall. They took the name *Evreii Creștini Noului Testament și Evangheliștii* [Hebrew/Jewish Christians of the New Testament and Evangelists].<sup>284</sup> They were thus associating themselves with the theological principles of the *Biserica Evanghelist-Baptistă* (the Evangelical Baptist Church) in Chișinău while maintaining their Jewish identity. It was a radical reconceptualization of religious and ethnic identity, which challenged social norms and provided a third way or “third space” for Jews and all other ethnicities willing to accept this mix of ethnic and religious identities.

This new community was spearheaded by Averbuch, along with Nathan Feighin, Isaac Trachtman, Moise Dreitschman, and Marcu Tarlev and on 9 June 1929 Tarlev and Dreitschman were ordained pastor and deacon respectively of the new Jewish Christian church in Chișinău. The reason for ordaining Tarlev, a Bulgarian, pastor was perhaps to avoid further complications with the local police, for whom Averbuch as a “Russian” Jew was more suspicious, but it reflected the multi-cultural nature of their community. The president of the Romanian Baptist Union, Constantin Adorian and his wife, attended the ceremony and conveyed the blessing of the Union upon their work. As with the previously mentioned multi-lingual services that characterized them, Adorian gave a sermon in Romanian, Averbuch in Russian, and Feighin in Yiddish; singing was in all three languages “giving the feeling of the early Christians praising God in different languages but with one heart and mind.”<sup>285</sup>

In a letter to the Baptists in Bucharest, Averbuch explained the need for this group to join the International Hebrew Christian Alliance (IHCA).<sup>286</sup> The impetus may have come after Feighin attended an IHCA conference in Hamburg in July 1928.<sup>287</sup> With Averbuch’s help, the Jewish Christian groups in Bucharest and Galați formed similar connections to the IHCA.<sup>288</sup>

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<sup>284</sup> Tarlev and Dreitschman, as leaders, informed the police they had their own branch at 73 Haralambie Street separate from the Mildmay Mission at 10 Hertza street. ANRM 670-1-5555, file 156; Gabe, *Hebrew Christian* 64/2 (June 1991- August 1991): 48.

<sup>285</sup> “O mare serbare la Chișinău,” *Farul Mântuirii* 10/16 (September 1929):12. Writer mentioned that local Jews, who though still hardened to their message were not as hostile.

<sup>286</sup> Averbuch, “Caut pe frații mei,” *Farul Mântuirii* 10/16 (September 1929): 10-11. The IHCA was founded by Sir Leon Levinson in 1925. For more details see: Hugh J. Schonfield, *The History of Jewish Christianity from the First to the Twentieth Century* (London: Duckworth, 1936), 166-173. Today it is the International Messianic Jewish Alliance, <http://themija.org/history/> (accessed 15 March 2019).

<sup>287</sup> Kjaer-Hansen, 224.

<sup>288</sup> Magne Solheim, “Jewish Missions in Romania,” *Mishkan* 14/1 (1991): 38; Leslie Glaser, “A Survey of Missions to the Jews in Continental Europe 1900 – 1950,” PhD diss. Fuller Theological Seminary (1998): 210.

This allowed more protection for their congregation in the eyes of the authorities and better represented their desire for maintaining their Jewish heritage. However, they continued collaboration with Baptists, Brethren, Lutherans, and Anglicans; the strong fellowship despite theological differences was indeed remarkable.<sup>289</sup>

Between 1931 and 1937, the Jewish Christians of Chişinău had two buildings. *Bethel* (House of God) was the Mildmay mission building with events particularly for the unconverted, while *Mishkan* (Tabernacle) was the prayer house for baptized Jews and Gentiles. They alternated locations for their daily services and activities; Averbuch made a game out of it for the children in the congregation to guess the location of the next meeting.<sup>290</sup> Other property of the community included an orchard, burial ground, and rest home. Averbuch was instrumental in regaining the orchard and the burial ground- Machpelah- that belonged to Rabinovich's Israelites of the New Covenant.<sup>291</sup> A convalescent home called Menuchah, was also run by the community. This may have been the same rest home set up in conjunction with the Romanian/Russian Baptists in 1925 consisting of three rooms, a kitchen, and a bathroom.<sup>292</sup> These were crucial for a community ostracized by both BOR and Orthodox Jewish leaders, especially as these evangelicals, considered apostates, had difficulty procuring burial plots in cemeteries owned by either BOR or the Orthodox Jewish community.

### *The Role of Mildmay Mission to the Jews*

Since Mildmay provided important support for Averbuch and the Chişinău Jewish Christians a note on the extent of their influence is necessary.<sup>293</sup> In 1919 Mildmay communicated with the Averbuchs through Adeney in Bucharest to ensure information and funds would reach

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<sup>289</sup> Gabe, *HC* 63/2 (July- September 1990): 54-55.

<sup>290</sup> Gabe, *HC* 62/2 (June- August 1989): 48; Averbuch, "Rumania," *TT* 43/1 (January 1937): 8.

<sup>291</sup> Gabe, *HC* 62/2 (June- August 1989): 51; *Ibid*, 64/2 (June- August 1991): 48; Averbuch, "Roumania," *TT* 40/1 (January 1934): 7.

<sup>292</sup> Gabe, *HC* 64/2 (June- August 1991): 48; ANRM 679-1- 4840, files 247, 250, 254. June 1925, flyer for opening of rest home and Siguranța agent description of service attended by 400, where Averbuch, Hijneacov, Buşilă, and Everett Gill gave sermons. Rest home was built with the funds of Baptist Mihail Cosmopol.

<sup>293</sup> Mildmay had previous connections with Kishinev during Rabinovich's time. John Wilkinson, *Israel, My Glory* (London: Israel's Mission to the Jews, 1894), <https://archive.org/details/israelmyglory00wilkuoft/page/308>.

their intended destination.<sup>294</sup> They, therefore, had no issues working with other mission organizations.<sup>295</sup> Once the money and physical aid (mostly in the form of clothing) were delivered, Averbuch had “carefully laid down” guidelines (not elaborated in the mission report) by which to distribute the relief for Jews in Romania.<sup>296</sup> It seems Mildmay received consistent reports from Chişinău, but often published only brief notices that the work was prospering. Averbuch also passed on scarce updates on former Mildmay workers in the Soviet Union based on accounts from Odessa refugees in Chişinău.<sup>297</sup>

Throughout the 1920s there were attempts to invest more in buildings, education, and staff. The size of the meeting halls was always a problem due to the crowds. Mildmay provided a ventilator in 1930 for the crowded and hot summer days. With the crucial use of music in their outreach, Mildmay purchased a harmonium in 1923. Attempts were made to maintain a school for Jewish Christian children not accepted in Jewish schools or who when admitted were not treated well. Nathan Feighin and Nina Tarlev were hired as part-time educators, to support the Mildmay staff of the Averbuchs and Isaac Trachtman.<sup>298</sup> Funds were also sent from London specifically for the publication of tracts in Yiddish, Hebrew, Russian, and Romanian.<sup>299</sup>

Mildmay occasionally provided political pressure as well. When a 1928 law for religious denominations threatened the continued existence of Mildmay in Chişinău, director Samuel Wilkinson travelled to Bucharest and successfully secured new authorization for them to work in Romania. He was granted personal interviews with Minister of Interior Ion G. Duca, Ministry

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<sup>294</sup> *TT* 25/8 (15 August 1919): 62; 25/9 (15 September 1919): 68, 71. Wilkinson mentioned receiving several letters from the Averbuchs describing great difficulties in Chişinău but acknowledged great help from Adeney of the London Jews Society.

<sup>295</sup> Henry Ellison was on the Mildmay payroll but other missions, like the Svenska Israelsmission were also helping to cover his needs in *TT* 44/12 (December 1938): 150.

<sup>296</sup> Clothing was a main form of aid, (a large bale of second-hand clothing was sent from London), but also funds to cover firewood and food. Averbuch often felt more needed to be done and requested more relief money. *TT* 26/11 (November 1920): 109; Samuel Wilkinson, “Europe in Tatters,” *TT* 27/1 (January 1921): 5; “On Present Jewish Conditions and Relief Work,” *TT* (May 1921): 62; *TT* 28/3 (March 1922): 39; “Matters in Eastern Europe,” *TT* 28/9 (September 1922): 103, 111. News of peculiar trials from Averbuch was printed but the specifics undisclosed. The arrival of aid was sometimes delayed. *TT* 28/12 (December 1922): 151.

<sup>297</sup> “Personal and Miscellaneous,” *TT* 27/3 (March 1921): 39; “Current Notes,” *TT* 27/5 (May 1921): 50-51; Wilkinson, “In Eastern Europe Again,” (January 1922): 7-8.

<sup>298</sup> *TT* 31/7 (July 1925); *TT* 29/12 (December 1923): 158. Rev. J.E. Hughes was also listed as a Mildmay worker in Chişinău from March to May 1930- presumably a London staff member sent to help or scope out their situation. *TT* 36/3 (March 1930): 39; *TT* 36/5 (May 1930): 63.

<sup>299</sup> Money from Mildmay was used to print 50,000 tracts in 1919. *TT* 25/8 (15 August 1919): 62; *TT* 35/7 (July 1929): 87.

Secretary Buderescu (who signed the new authorization), Inspector General Zaharia Husarescu of the Siguranța of Bessarabia, and Superintendent Nicolai of the Siguranța in Chișinău. Archbishop Gurie Grosu assured Wilkinson that “God’s business will be effected quietly, quickly, and perfectly,” reflecting the desire of BOR ecclesiastics to keep away international attention, while leaving the ambiguous reference to God’s business open to interpretation.<sup>300</sup> Wilkinson made several visits to Chișinău which were publicized across the city by the Jewish Christians through flyers printed in Romanian, Russian, and Yiddish. He drew crowds of around 300, whom he surprised by speaking in Yiddish.<sup>301</sup>

Averbuch often requested more funds, but the Mildmay directors’ response was that, though they did not want to quench the “throb of life” in the Chișinău ministry, they also did not want to call “presumption faith” and risk falling into debt.<sup>302</sup> Though Mildmay was the major source of income for Averbuch, local funds to support the Jewish Christian community were also raised from individuals, the local Baptist Community, and from the sale of Gospels and other religious literature.<sup>303</sup> Mildmay encouraged and at times directed the use of money. However, Averbuch and other staff members in Chișinău knew the cultural context best, developing and implementing their own plans for the growth of the community.

## **Activities and Institutions**

### *Schools*

The previous section focused on the basic organization of the Jewish Christians, their locations and service schedules, while the following looks more closely at what activities they engaged in as a community. Averbuch and Nathan Feighin taught in some as yet unclear capacity at the Baptist primary school set up on Bender street in the early 1920s. In February

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<sup>300</sup> “Notabilia,” *TT* 34/10 (October 1928): 119; “The Work in Bessarabia,” *TT* 34/11 (November 1928): 131-132. Nicolae Balint, “Anii 50. Cazul Zaharia Husarescu, fost inspector general al Siguranței din Basarabia,” *Libraria. Studii și cercetări de bibliologie* 10 (2012), <http://www.diacronia.ro/ro/indexing/details/A19475/pdf>. Wilkinson refers to an Archbishop Stefan, but there was no such person in the BOR hierarchy. He could have met with Stefan of Bulgaria in Romania, but it is more likely he met with the Archbishop of Bessarabia and reported the wrong name. My thanks to Ionuț Biliuță for help with this.

<sup>301</sup> Averbuch, “Another Lays Hold of Strength,” *TT* 40/7 (July 1934): 82; ANRM, 679-1-5555, files 106, 114.

<sup>302</sup> “The work in Bessarabia, Is it the Lord’s time for Advance?” *TT* 31/6 (June 1925): 74-75.

<sup>303</sup> *TT* 29/2 (February 1923): 30.

1924 the school was shut down by police, who claimed its location and furniture were not registered (a common accusation to shut down “sectarian” prayer houses), but it seems Averbuch was instrumental in having it reopened.<sup>304</sup> A school was also run in Bethel for Jewish children, once the Jewish Christians formed their own congregation. This was an opportunity to cater specifically to the Jewish children of Chişinău. Here again Feighin offered free Hebrew and Yiddish language courses and tutoring in messianic prophecies from the Tanach. Along with Isaac Trachtman, he daily taught different groups of about 40 young people, ages five to twenty, to read Yiddish, Russian, and Romanian, using the New Testament as a textbook. The classes were evangelistically driven, beginning and ending with prayer, though the form and content of the prayers is unclear. It was popular enough that non-convert Jewish parents also sent their children to the school.<sup>305</sup>

The documents seem to imply that these schools were separate from the Shabbat and Sunday schools that took place both prior to and after the formation of a separate Jewish Christian community. By the 1930s, the focus of the work moved to the latter- religious teaching from Old and New Testaments in the Shabbat school (conducted in Hebrew and Yiddish) and the Sunday school (likely in Russian). Teaching was done in a rabbinic model similar to the *cheder*, the traditional primary school that taught Hebrew and Judaism.<sup>306</sup> Often up to 100 children would recite Bible verses and sing songs in Hebrew, Yiddish, Russian, Romanian, and German. During the summer months the work focused on children, providing outings free of charge to the orchard owned by the Jewish community.<sup>307</sup>

The work among women, both Jewish and Gentile, was led by Russian convert Nina Tarleva, who worked at a primary school part-time until being hired full time by Mildmay.<sup>308</sup> She invited Jewish girls to her home every Wednesday to have tea, read the Bible together, or do needlework.<sup>309</sup> Her husband Marcu became a Mildmay staff member in her place in 1929 due to unspecified “changed family circumstances,” the same year he was ordained as pastor of the

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<sup>304</sup> ANRM 679-1-4840, files 23, 68-69, 174i. Location in 1920 was reported as on the corner of Inzova and Teodorova street. ANRM 679-1-5555, file 54. Police report from March 1926 lists the school near Gării street.

<sup>305</sup> Ostrovsky, “Reverence,” *TT* 33/7 (July 1927): 85.

<sup>306</sup> Averbuch, “Roumania,” *TT* 32/1 (January 1926): 9; Ostrovsky, “Reverence,” *TT* 33/7 (July 1927): 85.

<sup>307</sup> Gabe, 62/2 (June- August 1989): 49-51; Averbuch, “Roumania-Bessarabia,” *TT* 35/1 (January 1929): 7; “Roumania,” *TT* 40/1 (January 1934): 7.

<sup>308</sup> Averbuch, “Roumania,” *TT* 32/1 (January 1926): 10; (January 1927): 10.

<sup>309</sup> Nina Tarlev, “Roumania,” *TT* 33/1 (January 1927); 10; “Roumania,” *TT* 34/1 (January 1928); 8.

Jewish Christian Community.<sup>310</sup> However she continued to organize meetings such as one on 24 February 1935 with eighty women present. Lasting from 7:00 to 10:00pm, testimonies were given by many Jews, Romanians, Russians from across the social spectrum: Sister Sophia Cherchez of “former Russian nobility” sang a Jewish and a Russian hymn and a local unnamed market woman gave her story of faith.

Nina also held a lantern lecture on women in the Bible.<sup>311</sup> This new technology was a great asset for the community and drew large crowds, especially during the Saturday evening lantern lectures.<sup>312</sup> Nina along with Maria Averbuch were involved in a number of activities making the community quite modern in its inclusion of women, along with its use of technology, its embrace of different ethnicities and languages, and its crossing of social divides.

Adult scripture memorization was also a part of community engagement, whereby the Bible chapter to be read during the week was chosen by Averbuch or Tarlev but the individual chose the verse to memorize and in their preferred language.<sup>313</sup> The openness with, and fluidity of, languages used reflected the situation in other evangelical congregations across Romania but nowhere does it seem to have been quite as diverse as in Chişinău, reflecting the unique character of the Jewish community in the city. The emphasis placed on studying the Bible, both for adults and children, points to the importance of text in these communities and towards a modern concept of complete adult literacy for individuals to read and interpret the Bible for themselves.

### *Literature*

Though the Bible (the Tanach/Old Testament and the New Testament) was used as *the* authoritative text, supplemental literature was printed to guide members in studying it and to spread their faith conviction and counter-cultural views. Between 1920 and 1924 Averbuch edited the magazine *Prietenul/Друз* [The Friend], publicizing it as a religious-moral-literary organ. Boris Buşilă was director of the paper until February 1922, when Marcu Tarlev took over

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<sup>310</sup> Tarlev, “Roumania-Bessarabia,” 35/1 (January 1929): 8. Nina may have been pregnant with their second or third child; they had four children: Daniil, Pavel, Mira (before 1933), and Veniamin. Dinu Poştarencu and Ilie Demerji, *Istoria satului Başcalia* (Chişinău: Gunivas, 2004), 137-138. Prayers for recovery of Tarlev family requested in *TT* 38/4 (April 1932): 51.

<sup>311</sup> Averbuch, “Work Amongst Women in Chişinău,” *TT* 41/3 (March 1935): 34.

<sup>312</sup> “The work in Bessarabia, Is it the Lord’s time for Advance?” *TT* 31/6 (June 1925): 74-75.

<sup>313</sup> Gabe, *HC* 62/2 (June - August 1989): 49-50.

as director, likely due to the increase in Bușilă's responsibilities with the Baptist church. The publication was meant to be "a true friend to all," regardless of nationality, religious confession, social class, intellectual level, aimed at old and young, men and women, peasant and professor.<sup>314</sup> This was distributed by members, even children, on the street, near synagogues, in taverns and restaurants across Chișinău. The publication included songs, poems, and articles about the Christian faith by converted Jews, Romanian and Russian Baptists, and even Orthodox priests Iulius Scriban and Dumitru Cornilescu (before he became Protestant). Maria Averbuch also contributed frequently.<sup>315</sup> A newspaper with the same name was edited by the virulent Chișinău anti-Semite Pavel Krushevan prior to WWI.<sup>316</sup> Averbuch deliberately used the same name for his paper to challenge previous attitudes and encourage rapport between Jews and Christians: "Now they see that *our Friend* [Jesus] is the true friend both of Jews and all others."<sup>317</sup> However, authorities banned the publication in 1923, for reasons yet unknown.<sup>318</sup>

The following year Averbuch began to edit the bi-monthly *Binevestitorul*/Благовестник/ מְבַשֵּׂר טוֹב [The Herald of Good News/Gospel Herald] in Romanian, Russian, and Yiddish.<sup>319</sup> Among the contributors to the publication were Marcu and Nina Tarlev, well-known Romanian pastors Constantin Adorian, Jean Staneschi, and the well-known Russian Evangelical leader Ivan Prokhanov.<sup>320</sup> Their community began to depend increasingly on this publication and other tracts and leaflets, as seen in the table below, due to legislation in 1934 restricting the import of literature from abroad.<sup>321</sup> Baptist and Brethren communities distributed *Binevestitorul* among Jews in their towns and cities, and Averbuch and other Jewish Christians also distributed Evangelical publications, particularly during market and holidays to reach a larger audience.<sup>322</sup>

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<sup>314</sup> Boris Bușilă, "Gânduri despre 'Prietenul,'" *Prietenul* 2 (November 1920): 1.

<sup>315</sup> Issues of *Prietenul* 1 (October 1920)-12 (December 1922), courtesy of Vasile Filat.

<sup>316</sup> For more on Krushevan as one of the authors of the "Protocols of the Elders of Zion" see Zipperstein, *Pogrom*, 145-177.

<sup>317</sup> *TT* 27/2 (February 1921): 19; Averbuch, "Work for God in Roumania," *TT* 28/3 (March 1922): 28.

<sup>318</sup> ANRM 679-1-4840, file 155. It was picked up again in the 1930s by Jewish Christian leader Isaac Feinstein in Galați and Iași. ANR, DGP 2349, folder 51/1930, file 27. Ministry of Interior directive forbidding *Prietenul* dated 7 March 1923, CNSAS, D6901 vol.1, f.66-70.

<sup>319</sup> *TT* 30/3 (March 1924):32; Gershon Nerel, "Zion in the Theology of L. Averbuch and S. Rohold," *Mishkan* 26 (1997): 55.

<sup>320</sup> *Binevestitorul* 11/3-4 (March-April 1934): 1-4, courtesy of Mihai Ciucă.

<sup>321</sup> Averbuch, "Roumania," *TT* 41/1 (January 1935): 7.

<sup>322</sup> Averbuch, "Roumania," *TT* 33/1 (January 1927): 10; "Roumania," 40/1 (January 1934): 7; ANRM 679-1-5555, file 377; ANR, DGP 2349, folder 51/1930, files 5-20.



### Literature Distribution by Mildmay affiliated Jewish Christians in Chişinău

	1924 <sup>323</sup>	1925 <sup>324</sup>	1926 <sup>325</sup>	1933 <sup>326</sup>	1934 <sup>327</sup>	1936 <sup>328</sup>
<b>Bibles</b>	527	719	657	110	78	65
<b>NT</b>	974	1164	884	169	149	183
<b>Gospels</b>	-	2031	2364	1724	1744	1163
<b>Pentateuchs</b>	-	65	-	-	-	-
<b>I, II Prophets</b>	-	125	135	-	-	-
<b>Hymn Books</b>	-	1325	490	-	-	-
<b>Religious books</b>	-	452	249	106	192	-
<b>Tracts and leaflets</b>	4,056	5887	13,770	18,191	57,256	100,553
<b>Magazines</b>	-	2128	1301	36234	32459	14878

Literature distribution and colportage was an important part of sharing their beliefs both in Chişinău and all across Bessarabia. Members of Averbuch's group took turns travelling as colporteurs. Trachtman visited fifteen places across Bessarabia and eastern Romania in just one month to distribute literature in Romanian, Russian, and Yiddish.<sup>329</sup> These colporteurs often aggravated police who had trouble keeping track of which groups and literature passed the censors and what was illegal proselytizing. Wulf Țahan from Averbuch's congregation was apprehended by gendarmes in Cimişlia, Tighina county on 14 June 1934 selling Baptist books without authorization.<sup>330</sup>

<sup>323</sup> This is the first year that an account of literature distribution from Chişinău is printed in *Trusting and Toiling*. A Gideons International branch was founded in Chişinău in 1924 and also distributed Bibles and other books and tracts. Averbuch received invitations from across Bessarabia due to Baptists giving out his paper. *TT* 30/2 (February 1924): 22; Averbuch, "Roumania," *TT* 31/1 (January 1925): 9.

<sup>324</sup> Averbuch, "Roumania," *TT* 32/1 (January 1926): 10.

<sup>325</sup> "Roumania," *TT* 33/1 (January 1927): 10.

<sup>326</sup> Averbuch, "Roumania," *TT* 40/1 (January 1934): 7.

<sup>327</sup> Averbuch, "Roumania," *TT* 41/1 (January 1935): 7.

<sup>328</sup> Averbuch, "Roumania," *TT* 43/1 (January 1937): 8.

<sup>329</sup> These were Manzâr/ Manzyr/ Lisne, Petrovka, Comrat, Romanovka/ Basarabeasca, Leova, Gantseşti, Lapuşna, Călăraş, Pîrliţa, Iaşi, Ungheni, Făleşti, Belzu, Țeleneşti, and Orhei. Averbuch, "Bessarabian Tour," *TT* 36/10 (October 1930): 117. Bendery/Tighina was another important city for distribution due to its proximity to the Dniester River, a tributary to the Black Sea. "Notabilia," 36/7 (July 1930): 78.

<sup>330</sup> ANR, DGP 2349, folder 43/1934, file 26.

Tracts confiscated by police included *Masena: Un adevărat israelit* (Masena: a true Israelite) and *Mai poate crede omul de azi in minuni* (Can the human of today still believe in miracles) by A. Splittgerber, edited by Dumitru Cornilescu, both published in Bucharest, by LSPCJ and the Baptist Evangelical society, respectively.<sup>331</sup> The cross-denominational work and rapport challenging BOR and other dominant religions comes again to the forefront through literature distribution.

Missionary organizations like Mildmay, LSPCJ, and Norwegian Israel Mission (NIM) began to depend less on colportage work in Romania and increased their cooperation with local evangelical groups in villages and towns, something Averbuch had already been doing. This further reveals how advanced Lev's approaches were. They also shifted their focus to communist youth, businessmen and intellectuals- those more assimilated, supposedly easier to reach- and increasingly printed literature in Romanian rather than Yiddish.<sup>332</sup> However, Averbuch's community continued to print Yiddish material as even assimilated Jewish converts identified Yiddish as their heart language.<sup>333</sup>

Though the number of whole Bibles distributed decreased from 1924 to 1936, distribution of single Gospels saw less of a decline, likely due to their smaller size and to the central place the Gospels- accounts of Jesus's teachings- hold within Christian theology. The 1936 increase in the number of tracts, leaflets, and magazines may be a result of visiting speakers, like Marzinkovsky, and an increase in conferences and evangelistic travels for Averbuch, Trachtman, and others.<sup>334</sup> It may also reflect they had less funds altogether and had to reevaluate what literature they could afford as well as which would be most effective.

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<sup>331</sup> ANRM 679-1-5555, files 127-155.

<sup>332</sup> International Missionary Council Report of the Committee on the Christian Approach to the Jews (IMCCAJ), "Minutes of the meetings of the International Missionary Council's International Committee on the Christian Approach to the Jews (1935)," unpublished manuscript in Glaser, 219.

<sup>333</sup> Although Richard Wurmbrand was in favour of Romanian rather than Yiddish literature, he considered the eve of Yom Kippur 1937 as the day of his "re-birth" when he unexpectedly prayed in Yiddish at an LSPCJ meeting he attended with Isaac Feinstein. Richard Wurmbrand, *Christ on the Jewish Road* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1975), 37.

<sup>334</sup> "Street work in Bessarabia," *TT* 42/9 (September 1936): 105-106; Averbuch, "Missionary Journey in Romania," *TT* 42/11 (November 1936): 131.

### *Travel as Social Space*

Although the work in Chişinău took priority, Averbuch's desire to reach other Jews across Bessarabia led him and members of his congregation both in the Baptist church and later in Bethel or Mishkan to travel. These travels included holding meetings, often with the help of local evangelical churches, and passing out literature in the Jewish parts of town. In the early 1920s he held what one police agent identified as a Baptist meeting in Bălţi in 1920 and others in the cities of Galaţi, Ismail, Cahul, and Bolgrad. Bălţi had a large Jewish population where Jewish Christians maintained strong ties with the Baptist church.<sup>335</sup> In the port city of Galaţi, many Ukrainian Jewish refugees en route to Palestine attended Averbuch's lectures.<sup>336</sup>

Meetings in Bolgrad in 1924 were packed and it was "difficult to breathe" even on Friday evenings when Jews would otherwise be in their homes for the Shabbat meal. Services that included sermons, singing, testimonies, were accompanied by individual discussions afterward to build rapport.<sup>337</sup> Sermon topics included the modern relevance of the Bible, the intellectual foundations of faith, the deity and humanity of Jesus, the fulfillment of Jewish prophecies in Jesus, and the vices of drinking alcohol.<sup>338</sup> These were similar to evangelical sermons and their increasingly modern emphasis on the individual, on personal reading and study of the Bible. They also reflected the strong influence of the Temperance movement on Romanian evangelical groups.

After 1925 despite continued invitations from Baptist churches across Bessarabia, Averbuch did not receive authorization to speak outside of Chişinău.<sup>339</sup> Evangelical leaders faced similar restrictions. However, the 1928 law on Religious Denominations allowed more freedom and Averbuch travelled again, speaking in the German church in Tarutino (30 June-1

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<sup>335</sup> 6-7 November 1920; ANRM, 679-1-4840, p. 59; Averbuch, "Roumania-Bessarabia," *TT* 35/1 (January 1929): 8. Averbuch stopped in Bălţi, Vereşti, Ploieşti, Galaţi, Reni to speak to Jews while on his way to Bucharest to renew his missionary identification papers. *TT* 38/12 (December 1932): 159.

<sup>336</sup> Letter from Averbuch, 25 April 1922, *TT* 28/5 (May 1922): 62; *TT* 28/6 (June 1922): 71. Some had lived temporarily in Chişinău, like Solomon Ostrovsky, and Averbuch may have been visiting to encourage them. "Isaac Ostrovsky," <https://www.jewishtestimonies.com/en/isaac-ostrovsky-book/> (accessed 15 March 2019).

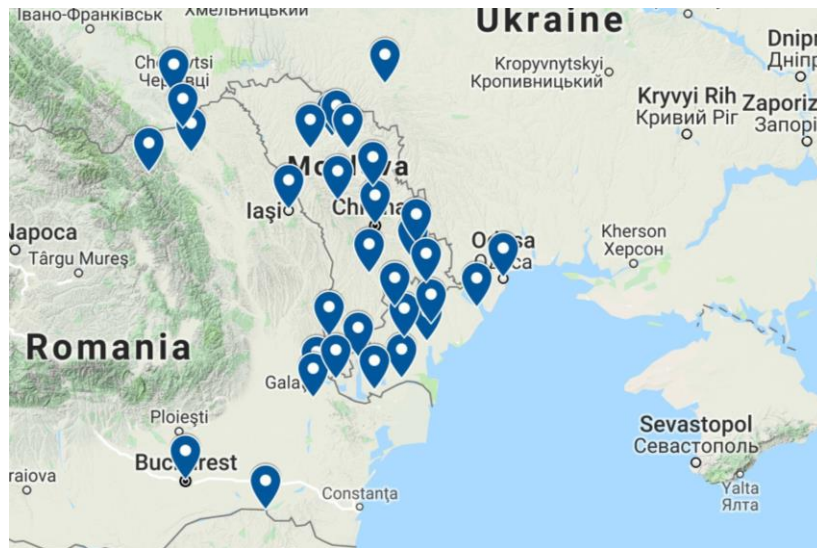
<sup>337</sup> Averbuch, "Stirred Up," *TT* 30/6 (June 1924): 64-65.

<sup>338</sup> Averbuch, "Silent before the Word of God," *TT* 36/5 (May 1930): 58; Averbuch, "Roumania," *TT* 41/1 (January 1935): 7; Trachtman, "Roumania," *TT* 42/1 (January 1936): 11.

<sup>339</sup> Averbuch, "Roumania," *TT* 32/1 (January 1926): 10.

July 1928), where one meeting lasted until 1:00 am.<sup>340</sup> Lutherans and Stundists in Sarata and in Arciz (today Арциз/Artsyz in Ukraine) heartily lent Averbuch their schools, church furniture, and even the town hall in 1930. Averbuch also spoke often in the Baptist church in Brăila, in close collaboration with Baptist industrialist Adam Sezonov.<sup>341</sup>

Reni was another location frequented for missions since NIM had a branch there supervised by Isaac Feinstein. In 1935 Averbuch, referred to as a “Baptist missionary” in the Siguranța report, along with Romanian soloist Dumitru Vrânceanu visited the prayer house Beth-Shalom of the Reni *evangeliștilor evrei* (Jewish Evangelists), where 200 attended. Averbuch and Feinstein preached while Vrânceanu and Lydia Spoerii Feinstein sang psalms.<sup>342</sup> In 1936, Averbuch and Feinstein also went to Chilia Nouă and to Ismail where they spoke at Baptist and Brethren prayer meetings.<sup>343</sup> In the city of Bendery/Tighina and nearby townships Trachtman visited families of Jewish Christians throughout the 1930s who attended their local Baptist churches.<sup>344</sup>



**Travels across Bessarabia**<sup>345</sup>

<sup>340</sup> On seeing the crowds, the German Baptists wanted to hire the town theatre for an unplanned third night of meetings. Averbuch, “Great Hunger,” *TT* 34/8 (August 1928): 101-102.

<sup>341</sup> “Matters for Praise and Prayer,” *TT* 39/5 (May 1933): 65.

<sup>342</sup> ANR, DGP 2349, folder 48/1935, file 11. Not clear if by psalms they meant hymns, or something equivalent to an Orthodox Jewish *zemirot*, or lyrics from the book of Psalms.

<sup>343</sup> Averbuch, “Missionary Journey in Romania,” *TT* 42/11 (November 1936): 131.

<sup>344</sup> Trachtman, “Mission Journeys in Rumania,” *TT* 41/9 (September 1935): 109-110; “Street work in Bessarabia,” *TT* 42/9 (September 1936): 105-106.

<sup>345</sup> Map data copyright 2019 GeoBasis DE/BKG.

Occasionally even Jewish community leaders rented out their buildings for the meetings, as in Tatarbuniar where almost 1000 attended.<sup>346</sup> In Manzâr, Trachtman was welcomed in the home of Orthodox Jews, and told Bible stories to children and young people on the street.<sup>347</sup> In Cahul, Averbuch had the help of a local rabbi, a subscriber to *Binevestitorul* whom he had met on the train, to hold meetings for Jewish youth.<sup>348</sup> Trachtman encountered various responses in his journeys through Bessarabian shtetls. In Floreşti, a teacher engaged in discussion on messianic prophecies and the Talmud and in Mărculeşti Jews eagerly read the New Testament. He was asked to hold meetings in Orhei; however, Jews in Căpraşti were afraid to be seen attending meetings.<sup>349</sup> In Voluntiri, he stayed at a Jewish hotel where he debated the deity of Jesus with local Jewish businessmen.<sup>350</sup> However, the large numbers that often turned up during meetings reveals the curiosity with which these Jewish Christians were viewed. Travel allowed them to interact with people and increase the space in which they functioned across the social, economic, or political spectrum. Their unusual message, plethora of music, and many festivals drew people in, some taking the controversial step of conversion. This proves higher levels of interaction between groups than is assumed today.

### **Members, Converts, True Jews**

During Averbuch and Tarlev's Passover visits to Jewish homes in 1934, one woman asked "What is this conversion of which they speak so often in the meetings? I love Jesus and believe in Him, but I do not understand conversion." Ultimately, the woman "was convinced and wished to be converted and freed from her sins."<sup>351</sup> As the article was translated into

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<sup>346</sup> In Tatarbuniar Averbuch faced opposition by the rabbi to use the theatre of the Jewish community but received approval to rent it out by the theatre managing committee. A Jew came up to Averbuch at the train station to say he had heard a great deal about him and invited Averbuch to his home-town in Cetatea-Albă/Akkermann. Averbuch, "Silent before the Word of God," *TT* 36/5 (May 1930): 58. For more on the Tatarbuniar rebellion see: Igor Casu, "Exporting Soviet Revolution: Tatarbuniar Rebellion in Romanian Bessarabia (1924)," *The International Journal of Intelligence, Security, and Public Affairs* (2020), DOI: 10.1080/23800992.2020.1839846.

<sup>347</sup> Trachtman, "Mission Journeys in Rumania," *TT* 41/9 (September 1935): 109-110.

<sup>348</sup> Averbuch, "Stirred Up," *TT* 30/6 (June 1924): 64-65.

<sup>349</sup> Trachtman, "Gospel Tour in Bessarabia," *TT* 37/8 (August 1931): 97-98. The tour included Cimişlia and Romanovka.

<sup>350</sup> Trachtman, "Mission Journeys in Rumania," *TT* 41/9 (September 1935), 109-110. Voluntiri is in the Cetatea Albă/Akkerman region: [http://volintiri.blogspot.com/2012/03/basarabia-1821-1848-populatia\\_17.html](http://volintiri.blogspot.com/2012/03/basarabia-1821-1848-populatia_17.html) (accessed 10 March 2019).

<sup>351</sup> Averbuch, "Special Meetings in Chişinău," *TT* 40/5 (May 1934): 58.

English, the original word Averbuch used could have been *pocait* (repented) or *tshuva* (return) rather than “converted.”<sup>352</sup> The former was the term often used by evangelicals, calling people to repent, earning them the moniker of *pocaiți* (repented ones). This matches Averbuch’s understanding of accepting Messiah Jesus as “true Judaism” rather than a new religion. Thus, many of the Chișinău converts may not have considered themselves converts, but as embracing a purer form of Judaism. Nevertheless, Orthodox Judaism considered them apostates.

As previously mentioned, the conversion of Jews to Christianity has often been approached instrumentally, but the fervor for religious reform across religions during the period along with the hostility these “sectarians” faced points to more nuanced motivations. One of the chief reasons given for their change of beliefs was “personal and non-coerced conviction after reading the scriptures.”<sup>353</sup> Another was a seemingly more egalitarian community among these new faith groups, what one Siguranța report from 1918 called “equality of the sexes.” A Jewish Baptist woman in Chișinău said she joined the Baptists because they did not consider her unclean like in the synagogue- while the synagogue deemed women unworthy, Baptists called them sisters. A police agent even reported that a majority of Baptist women were Jewish.<sup>354</sup> Membership rosters, however, show this was not the case.

From 1918 to 1928, curious Jews attended the Baptist meetings in Chișinău and became baptised members of the congregation.<sup>355</sup> Candidates would spend a number of weeks studying the Bible beforehand, examining mostly Baptist doctrines dealing with Jesus as the son of God, the Incarnation, the Trinity, and the Law of Moses.<sup>356</sup> After the establishment of a separate Jewish Christian community, those baptized joined either community or that of another evangelical group, while often attending services at both. It seems the annual average number of baptisms of Jews by Averbuch in Chișinău was around three, but also included gentiles.<sup>357</sup> In

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<sup>352</sup> According to Natalia Pozdirca, “For Jews, the word ‘return,’ a return to their faith (*tshuva*) is more acceptable, and the word ‘converted’ means to accept something unnatural. In Russian, these words make a big difference.” Personal communication 2 July 2019.

<sup>353</sup> ANRM 679-1-5555, files 86-87.

<sup>354</sup> ANRM 679-1-4840, files 6, 21.

<sup>355</sup> “The Situation at Chisinau,” *TT* 31/11 (November 1925):135.

<sup>356</sup> Averbuch, “Leaving All,” *TT* 32/3 (March 1926): 33-34. It is unclear whether they held an Arminian or Reformed theology. Romanian Baptists were Arminian but there seem to have been Brethren or even Anglican Reformed influences.

<sup>357</sup> *TT* 25/11 (November 1919): 86; “Personal and Miscellaneous,” *TT* 26/11 (November 1920): 119; Averbuch, “From Bessarabia,” *TT* 27/6 (June 1921): 70; “The Joyful Sound,” *TT* 30/2 (February 1924): 19; “The Situation in Chișinău,” *TT* 31/11 (November 1925): 135; “Roumania,” *TT* 32/1 (January 1926):

1919 Nina Tarleva, siblings Moise and Ida Dreitschman, and Olga, who later became Moise's wife, were baptised. Nina was Russian and previously Russian Orthodox while Olga was German Lutheran.<sup>358</sup> In 1920 engineer Marcu Tarlev was baptised, one year after his wife.<sup>359</sup> Both Isaac Trachtman and Solomon Ostrovsky converted in 1921 and Wulf Țahan in 1923.<sup>360</sup> Feighin was a secret believer prior to Averbuch's arrival but joined the community publicly after conversations with the latter.<sup>361</sup> All were baptised in the first years of the Averbuchs' ministry. Another influential convert was Moses Richter, baptized by Averbuch on 24 April 1924 in Chişinău.<sup>362</sup>

Richter became a missionary for the Bucharest German Baptist Church, stationed in Cernăuți, the capital of the Bukovina region, where he spoke on Sundays in German and Yiddish and on Wednesdays in the Romanian Baptist Hall.<sup>363</sup> Through him, Eric Gabe and his mother Stephany came in contact with Averbuch and attended the community in Chişinău. Gabe became another of the community's unofficial leaders in the years before the war. Jeanette Katz, Stephany's sister from Galați, along with her children, went to Chişinău to be baptized directly by Averbuch.<sup>364</sup>

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9-10; *TT* 33/11 (November 1927): 135; "Roumania," *TT* 34/1 (January 1928):7-8; *TT* 36/4 (April 1930): 50; "Roumania," 37/1 (January 1931): 8; *TT* 38/11 (November 1932): 139; "Roumania," 40/1 (January 1934): 7; "Roumania," *TT* 41/1 (January 1935): 7; "Roumania," *TT* 42/1 (January 1936): 10-11.

<sup>358</sup> Averbuch, "From Bessarabia," *TT* 27/6 (June 1921): 70; ANRM 679-1-5555, files 86-87.

<sup>359</sup> *TT* 41/7 (July 1935): 82.

<sup>360</sup> Ostrovsky, "Reverence," *TT* 33/7 (July 1927): 85; ANRM 679-1-5555, files 86-87. Year of "conversion" did not always correlate with year of baptism.

<sup>361</sup> Antonia Aniksdal, "Fra Galatz: Broder Nathan Feighin," *Missionsbald for Israel* 97/1 (January 1923): 5-10.

<sup>362</sup> He doesn't appear on the congregation roster in 1929 because he was at a seminary in Austria. Moses Richter was born in Chişinău on 25 December 1899 to a large Jewish family, and spoke Hebrew, Russian, Romanian, German, and English, with Yiddish as his heart language. His grandmother believed his birth on Christmas was bad luck and would lead to him becoming a Christian. Information based on letters between Fleischer, Eric Gabe, and Richter's widow Grete, in Fleischer, "Begegnungen," 216-217.

<sup>363</sup> Richter published in several German Baptist periodicals: *Täuferbote*, monthly periodical of the German-speaking Baptist Churches in the Danube Region published in Vienna and later Bucharest; *Der Wahrheitszeuge*, publication of the Bund der Baptistengemeinden, Kassel; *Sendbote*, publication of the German Baptists in North America (Cleveland, Ohio). Roland Fleischer, "Moses Richter," *Baptist Quarterly* 40/1 (2003): 49; "Begegnungen," 205-229; "Looking for Clues," *Baptist Quarterly*, 38/3 (1999): 139. Richter appears as a Mildmay worker for Cernăuți in *TT* 36/2 (February 1930): 26-27. It seems during director Samuel Wilkinson's visit to Cernăuți in 1931 he found it necessary to detach Richter from Mildmay. No further information was given. *TT* 37/7 (July 1931): 82. Police report from 22 April 1931 reveals that the Mildmay mission was sealed in Cernăuți, but Mildmay continued to have staff in the city after 1931. ANRM 679-1-5555, file 174.

<sup>364</sup> Gabe, *HC* 62/3 (September- November 1989): 71; 63/2 (July- September 1990): 49-55.

Gabe mentioned attending Bible studies first with Lutherans, and increasingly with Orthodox Reform movement Oastea Domnului members, Tudorists, Baptists, and Brethren. An interdenominational attitude after 1929 made the Chişinău community especially attractive to Jewish converts. Their fluidity of denominational affiliation and movement between evangelical religious groups depended on language, music, and the degree to which each local minister welcomed Jewish conversion.<sup>365</sup> Baptist and Brethren churches remained the most accepting.

Many said that their conversion happened within the context of prayer meetings in Chişinău. Praying aloud in public meetings was considered an important first step for new believers.<sup>366</sup> Averbuch brought others to faith during visits at the Anglican Mission in Bucharest or while he spoke at Baptist meetings, like the upper-class Jewish man who converted with his two children during the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary celebration of the Chişinău Baptist church.<sup>367</sup> Increasingly, of the many children attending the Shabbat and Sunday schools some started to seek baptism, having grown up in the community.<sup>368</sup> *Binevestitorul* also attracted converts. A Yeshiva student in Transylvania came across an issue of the magazine and started a study group with thirteen other students who came to believe Jesus was Messiah.<sup>369</sup> Attendees, if not actual converts, included Jewish communists as well, who were drawn in by the unique international character of their meetings.<sup>370</sup>

These converts often faced harassment from their families and the Orthodox Jewish community. The wives of Feighin, Ţahan, and of an unnamed member, likely Aron Wulf, were vehemently against their conversion. However, Mrs. Feighin and Sura-Lea Ţahan were baptised in 1924 and 1927 respectively.<sup>371</sup> Physical beatings of converts by family members often occurred.<sup>372</sup> Three young men baptized in 1927 were beaten by relatives, including Abram

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<sup>365</sup> Gabe, *HC* 63/1 (April 1990- June 1990):18-23.

<sup>366</sup> Averbuch, "Another Lays Hold of Strength," *TT* 40/7 (July 1934): 82; Ostrovsky, "Reverence," *TT* 33/7 (July 1927): 85.

<sup>367</sup> Averbuch, "Hearts Touched of God," *TT* 39/10 (October 1933): 120; "Conviction and Conversion," *TT* 41/6 (June 1935): 69.

<sup>368</sup> Averbuch, "Roumania," 40/1 (January 1934): 7.

<sup>369</sup> Averbuch, "Rumania," *TT* 43/1 (January 1937): 8.

<sup>370</sup> The reference could be to Richard Wurmbrand, who spent time in prison for communist activity. Maria Averbuch, "They Love Unknown," *TT* 43/4 (April 1937): 44, 50.

<sup>371</sup> Aniksdal, "Broder Nathan Feighin," *Missionsblad for Israel* 97/3 (March 1923): 52-53; Averbuch, "From Bessarabia," *TT* 27/6 (June 1921): 70; Averbuch, "Salvation and Song," *TT* 31/2 (February 1924): 25; ANRM 679-1-5555, files 86-87. It seems Aron Wulf's wife did not convert, at least by the 1929 membership roster.

<sup>372</sup> Averbuch, "Roumania," *TT* 42/1 (January 1936): 10-11.



Chiperșnit whose mother, Ester Rizca, violently interrupted their meetings and was only held back by the police she had brought.<sup>373</sup> Another young woman baptized by Averbuch went to study in France, but due to degenerative eyesight was forced to return home where her Jewish parents were against her conversion.<sup>374</sup> Chief Rabbi Tsirelson of Chișinău also tried to draw back converts from Averbuch's congregation.<sup>375</sup>

It is unclear who returned to Orthodox Judaism, but many found a supportive community with the Jewish Christians in Chișinău and a network of such communities across the country. Leon Schor and Asher Leisersohn were brought to their new faith through Moses Richter in Bucharest. They were baptized along with non-Jews in Chișinău, prior to fulfilling their military service. Russian and Romanian Baptists were encouraged by their pastors to show special love to the two new Jewish brothers, who would not have family to rejoice over them like the other candidates. Consequently, the Baptist Youth Union prepared tea the next day, sang hymns, and read scripture prior to seeing them to the train station.<sup>376</sup> Hospitality like this was common and made new converts feel welcomed.<sup>377</sup> Consistent contact and friendship over the years (even with non-converts) also encouraged new members. The first publisher of Averbuch's *Prietenul* in 1919 went bankrupt, but the Tarlevs kept in touch over the years and at 73 years old the man also came to believe Jesus was Messiah.<sup>378</sup>

Among the gentile members of Averbuch's community there was a Russian female doctor (who helped look after the sick coming to the mission), a former Russian aristocrat converted in Paris (formerly an anti-Semite), and a former member of the Russian Imperial

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<sup>373</sup> They lived at 26 Decebal street. Abram was 22 years old in 1929, a bootmaker, blind in one eye, living with his mother, a war widow, in a house they owned. Ester claimed her son was mentally unstable (*bolnav de creier*) and didn't listen to his mother. Siguranța agent claimed Abram was a known Baptist propagandist.

Ostrovsky "Storm Time," *TT* 34/3 (March 1928): 35.; There is a discrepancy on the year of his baptism with the 1929 membership roster listing it as 1928. ANRM 679-1-5555, files 86-87. It is unclear if Ester also joined her son as part of the congregation just a few months later in 1928. Ostrovsky, "Ingathered," *TT* 34/6 (June 1928): 69.

<sup>374</sup> "Roumania," *TT* 34/1 (January 1928): 7.

<sup>375</sup> Letter from Averbuch, Bucharest, 4 October 1919 in *TT* 25/11 (November 1919): 86.

<sup>376</sup> Averbuch, "Leaving All," *TT* 32/3 (March 1926): 33-34.

<sup>377</sup> Leon Levison, "News and Notes," *Hebrew Christian* 5/1 (April 1932): 7. The issue includes photos of the visit to Rabinovich's grave and an open-air Sunday school meeting.

<sup>378</sup> Averbuch, "Oh, Happy Day!" *TT* 38/11 (November 1932): 136-137.

Opera in St Petersburg. Their status reveals these were people of some social standing.<sup>379</sup> Tarlev's wayward eldest son, of Russian and Bulgarian descent, came back to the faith of his childhood after visiting an ill Averbuch.<sup>380</sup> With the growing hostility towards Jews, it is remarkable that in 1937 a young former Iron guard officer converted and accompanied his conversion account with a duet with Trachtman and a solo in Yiddish.<sup>381</sup>

A police report identified that in Chişinău, as in other parts of the country, Romanians joined the Baptists and also the Jewish Christians because BOR priests were thought to keep Bible interpretation for themselves and acted corruptly, while Averbuch helped his congregation understand the Bible.<sup>382</sup> This was a common reason given by former Orthodox church members who joined these new confessions in Romania. Gabe summed up the community as follows:

In Chişinău they were not extremists... While having services on the Shabbat, they did not displace Sunday services. While commemorating Jewish festivals, that did not exclude Christmas or Easter. While believing in the Holy Spirit that did not include senseless behavior. For this reason, the Hebrew Christian Community of Chişinău was able to attract and influence people of every walk of life.<sup>383</sup>

It was a radically different and modern religious experience- a welcoming community that stressed the love of God for all people with a message especially fitting the ethnically diverse border regions of Romania. These all served as strong motivations for new members, as did the much anticipated holiday services and special events.

### **Holy Days and Celebrations**

The Jewish and Christian holidays were the most well documented events of Averbuch's community: Rosh Hashanah, Purim, Pesach/Passover, Easter, Chanukah, and, in particular, Christmas. Meetings were especially crowded with more visitors than usual to observe and

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<sup>379</sup> Dumitru Vrânceanu is thought to be the opera singer mentioned. Letter from Averbuch, Bucharest, 4 October 1919 in *TT* 25/11 (November 1919): 86; "Roumania," 40/1 (January 1934): 7; Gabe, *HC* 62/2 (June- August 1989): 50.

<sup>380</sup> Averbuch, "Blessings in Trial," *TT* 43/5 (May 1937): 61.

<sup>381</sup> Maria Averbuch, "Thy Love Unknown," *TT* 43/4 (April 1937): 44.

<sup>382</sup> ANRM, 679-1-4840, files 6, 21.

<sup>383</sup> Gabe, *HC* 64/2 (June-August 1991): 50.

participate in the rich musical repertoire and the unique blend of Jewish and Christian teaching, as well as to see the “magic lantern” projector.

Rosh Hashanah as well as Shabbat Teshuva (repentance/returning) gatherings at the Baptist hall were attended by many Jews, majority male.<sup>384</sup> Sermon themes for this holiday often dealt with incorrect “worldly” celebration of holy days and that only Jesus as Messiah could bring forgiveness from sin, not the rituals prescribed by Rabbis. In 1936 they celebrated Rosh Hashanah at the new Mishkan location (the Tabernacle of the Jewish Christian Community), where many in the audience were Orthodox Jewish parents of children attending the Shabbat school.<sup>385</sup>

Meeting halls during Passover and Easter were again packed, with more men than women in attendance, many of whom joined the Bible studies during the week.<sup>386</sup> Lectures, tea meetings, and services held were filled with music.<sup>387</sup> On 12-16 April 1931 a Passover celebration for Jewish Christians from across the country (Bucharest, Chişinău, Cluj, and Reni) was organized in Galaţi by NIM missionaries, Isaac and Lydia Feinstein. 22 out of 40 participants were from Averbuch’s group.<sup>388</sup> Talks were given in French, German, Hungarian, Romanian, Russian, and Yiddish and singing in Romanian, Russian, and Yiddish.<sup>389</sup>

These festivals were occasions to encourage existing members and for visitors to be exposed to their non-conformist ideals and identity. For a picture of another multicultural Passover, in 1935 Averbuch spoke on “Is the Lord Jesus risen?” at the German Lutheran Club where the Russian Baptist choir had also been invited to sing. Sermons looked at the Christian meaning of Passover symbols and at Jesus as the Passover lamb.

Averbuch also regularly visited and often well received at the Chişinău synagogue during the Jewish holy days.<sup>390</sup> Purim, the celebration of the saving of the Jewish people through Queen

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<sup>384</sup> As opposed to the many female attendees remarked by police agents. *TT* 25/11 (November 1919): 86.

<sup>385</sup> Averbuch, “Chişinău,” *TT* 36/11 (November 1930): 135; “The Jewish Holy Days in Chişinău,” *TT* 42/11 (November 1936): 132.

<sup>386</sup> Averbuch, “From Bessarabia,” *TT* 27/6 (June 1921): 70.

<sup>387</sup> Letter from Averbuch, 25 April, *TT* 28/5 (May 1922): 62; “Chişinău,” *TT* 32/5 (May 1926): 57. At one Passover service the police took away a drunken Jewish man creating a disturbance, but who later became a regular attender.

<sup>388</sup> *Missionsblad* (1931): 113-114 in Kjaer-Hansen, 227.

<sup>389</sup> Elsie Boyd, “A Foregathering of Hebrew Christians from Old Roumania,” *Jewish Missionary Intelligence* (organ of Church Mission to the Jews) 21/6 (June 1931): 83-85.

<sup>390</sup> Averbuch, “Conviction and Conversion,” *TT* 41/6 (June 1935): 69.

Esther during the reign of Persian king Artaxerxes, was also observed by Averbuch's congregation. Averbuch commented on the great help offered by the gentile Christians during these festivals: "They work among Israel with much love," distributing invitation cards, serving Jewish guests tea, and learning to recite in Yiddish. Averbuch wanted guests to associate these unexpected actions of Romanians and Russians to their beliefs in Jesus: "The Jews were very pleased that the Go[y]im (gentiles) really love them through their love of Jesus."<sup>391</sup>

During Succoth and at Simchat Torah (celebrating God's teaching given to Moses), the choir and band performed, and children recited poems and Bible passages. Maria and Lev composed hymns including one dealing with the terrible results of alcohol to address the extensive drinking on Simchat Torah. Baptists were recorded as visiting from surrounding towns.<sup>392</sup> Their 1936 Simchat Torah celebration describes well the intertwining of Jewish and Christian themes. Singing was done in Hebrew with traditional festival flags but with the inscription *Yeshua Sar Haponim* (Jesus, the Angel of His Presence). Averbuch argued that Simchat Torah- rejoicing in God's law/teaching- should be a perpetual experience for true Jews, not just one day a year, and even more so for Jewish Christians who received Jesus and understood the full plan of God's teaching.<sup>393</sup>

Regarding Yom Kippur (Day of Atonement), listeners were exhorted not to attribute to it the label *Yomim Noraim* (Days of Fear) since God forgave their sins and "we Jewish Christians have through the sacrifice of the Messiah received a Yom Kippur once for all." Jesus's crucifixion was regarded as the final cover and payment for sin. The community named the days following the Jewish celebrations as Shabbos Breshith and Sonntag Breshith (Shabbat and Sunday beginning), identifying both Christian and Jewish days of rest.<sup>394</sup>

Christmas celebrations appeared most often in Averbuch's mission reports to Mildmay. Services were usually held daily during the week between Christmas and the New Year, locations alternating between the Baptist prayer house and the Mission hall and in 1936 between

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<sup>391</sup> Averbuch, "A Special Meeting in Kischineff," *TT* 29/4 (April 1923): 47-48; *TT* 31/5 (May 1925): 64; *TT* 39/4 (April 1933): 54.

<sup>392</sup> Averbuch, "Chişinău," *TT* 36/11 (November 1930): 135.

<sup>393</sup> The child leading the procession, fittingly named Moses to whom God first gave the Torah/law, carried Rabinovich's Bible. Averbuch, "The Jewish Holy Days in Chişinău," *TT* 42/11 (November 1936): 132.

<sup>394</sup> Averbuch, "The Jewish Holy Days in Chişinău," *TT* 42/11 (November 1936): 132; Averbuch, "Reaching Jews in Chişinău- Witness at a Funeral," *TT* 40/11 (November 1934): 132.

the Baptists, Bethel, and Mishkan. Sermons by multiple speakers were given, along with recitations, theatre performances on messianic prophecies, lantern slides, and of course musical performances with choir, bands, and orchestras. Sermons and singing were done in at least two languages (Russian and Yiddish) and frequently in more.<sup>395</sup> Tarlev spoke in Russian and Averbuch in Yiddish on the theological concept of the Incarnation- God becoming human in Jesus- while the choir sang in Hebrew, Yiddish, Romanian, and Russian.<sup>396</sup>

For Christmas 1936, the account of Jesus's birth was read in five languages: Averbuch read in Hebrew, Tarlev in Russian, Trachtman in Yiddish, an unnamed Romanian man in Romanian, and Eric Gabe in Italian. Then all sang "Glory to God in the Highest and on earth peace, good will toward men" in the same language they had given the reading. Afterwards, to the same melody, Averbuch and a Dr. Abramov sang "Mine house shall be a house of prayer for all people" in Hebrew. This was at the request of Abramov, who believed those words were being fulfilled at Bethel.<sup>397</sup> People from different nations were worshipping the God of Israel together, he claimed, though Abramov himself had not approached the baptismal font.

As a child in the *cheder*, Averbuch was taught that Christmas night was "the dark night" on which they were forbidden to read Scripture so as to not defile it. This perhaps influenced Averbuch's emphasis on Christmas activities aimed at children and specifically the recitation of texts from the Tanach. Children from the Shabbat school performed skits on why this gentile festival was also a joyous occasion for Jewish children, using Tanach scriptures to show that King David was a Jew and therefore, Jesus, as "Messiah ben David" (Anointed son of David), was also a Jew.<sup>398</sup> He was not just the God of the *goy* (short for the derogatory term *goyim* meaning gentiles).

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<sup>395</sup> Averbuch, "Salvation and Song," *TT* 31/2 (February 1924): 24-25; "Memorable Nights in Chişinău," *TT* 32/2 (February 1926): 21-22; "At the Turn of the Year," *TT* 43/2 (February 1937): 20-21; "Joy on Earth and Joy in Heaven," *TT* 36/2 (February 1930): 20-21.

<sup>396</sup> Averbuch, "Special meetings in Chişinău," *TT* 37/2 (February 1931): 25-26; "Great Meetings in Chişinău," *TT* 38/2 (February 1932): 23-24; "Turn of the Year in Chişinău," *TT* 39/2 (February 1933): 26-27; "Meetings Full of Power," *TT* 41/2 (February 1935): 21-22.

<sup>397</sup> Isaiah 56:7. Averbuch, "At the Turn of the Year," *TT* 43/2 (February 1937): 20-21. This multi-ethnic holiday worship can be seen six years earlier when on the second day of Christmas 1930 the Bethel choir and musicians were invited to a German Baptist colony 60km away and the German children repaid the visit the next day in Chişinău. Averbuch, "Special meetings in Chişinău," *TT* 37/2 (February 1931): 25-26.

<sup>398</sup> Averbuch, "Special meetings in Chişinău," *TT* 37/2 (February 1931): 25-26; Averbuch, "Great Meetings in Chişinău," *TT* 38/2 (February 1932): 23-24.

Indeed Christmas festivities, and the Christmas tree, especially attracted children, who came in numbers ranging from 200 to 800.<sup>399</sup> Police were often present to ensure safety and to monitor their activities, occasionally even turning some away because of the large numbers.<sup>400</sup> Averbuch tried to set age limits for the children's services in 1934 to avoid the crowds in their smaller location, but this was hard to enforce.<sup>401</sup>

Interestingly Chanukah celebrations were rarely mentioned. The most substantial description was that in 1932 where the Christmas tree at Bethel included eight Chanukah candles. However, these were described as subsumed in the glow of the Christmas tree "as the Maccabean victory was eclipsed" by the greater victory of Jesus bringing salvation from sin. The celebration was similar to Christmas services described above with a combined adult and children's choir and orchestra that sang Psalm 126 in Hebrew.<sup>402</sup> Averbuch spoke on Jesus as the child born at Christmas who is "Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Eternal Father, Prince of Peace," as described in the Tanach, Isaiah 9:6.<sup>403</sup>

Unlike other holidays directly related to the Tanach or to the New Testament, Averbuch perhaps thought Chanukah and the story of the Maccabees would take away from the central role of Jesus during the holidays. Likewise, the emphasis on Christmas rather than on Easter and Passover was perhaps a cautionary attempt to avoid blood libels and pogroms historically associated with the latter holidays.

New Year's Eve was another busy occasion for their congregation. It usually started with a service around 8:00 or 9:00pm, a time of prayer at midnight, an altar call, tea with new believers, and singing until 3:00am (sometimes 5:00am).<sup>404</sup> However, the celebrations often continued, as in 1925 when at 7:00am the Baptist Young People's Union caroled the sleeping Averbuchs who had arrived home just an hour before. They held services on New Year's day as

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<sup>399</sup> Around 400 children and adults came in 1925, 500 in 1929, 600 in 1930, 700 in 1931, 400 in 1934, 500 in 1937. Averbuch, "Salvation and Song," *TT* 31/2 (February 1924): 24-25; "Joy on Earth and Joy in Heaven," *TT* 36/2 (February 1930): 20-21; "Turn of the Year in Chişinău," *TT* 39/2 (February 1933): 26-27.

<sup>400</sup> Averbuch, "Memorable Nights in Chişinău," *TT* 32/2 (February 1926): 21-22; "A Great Watchnight Service," *TT* 35/2 (February 1929): 22-23.

<sup>401</sup> Averbuch, "Meetings Full of Power," *TT* 41/2 (February 1935): 21-22.

<sup>402</sup> The psalm deals with the nations seeing what God has done for the Jewish people:

<https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Psalm+126&version=OJB>.

<sup>403</sup> Averbuch, "Turn of the Year in Chişinău," *TT* 39/2 (February 1933): 26-27.

<sup>404</sup> Thirty-eight people responded to the altar call in 1926. "Memorable Nights in Chişinău," *TT* 32/2 (February 1926): 21-22.

well, making for an exhausting week.<sup>405</sup> Popularity of these services was evident as locals often queued for two hours to ensure a seat. New songs composed by Averbuch were sung by the choir accompanied by the orchestra.<sup>406</sup>

A clear connection with the evangelical movement is further emphasized through the group's participation in the annual World Evangelical Alliance Universal Week of Prayer. Prayer services were held with the Chişinău Baptists, alternating location throughout the week.<sup>407</sup> The religious holidays they chose to celebrate and the manner in which they celebrated revealed a complex identity that challenged the boundaries of established religious and ethnic communities.

### **Evangelical Jewish-Christian Identity**

Despite his identification with evangelical Christians Averbuch never hid or apologized for being a Jew. Averbuch and the Chişinău Jewish Christians accepted Jesus/Yeshua as the long awaited Jewish and gentile Messiah, the Son of God, and simultaneously God Himself. They believed the Christian Bible was first a Jewish text, written mostly by Jews, and Jesus was the rabbi that matched all messianic prophecies in the Tanach. The identity of Jesus as God, taking the form of a first century Jewish rabbi was central to their beliefs.

Upon meeting with a member of the synagogue choir on Alexandru cel Bun/Aleksandrovskaiia street Averbuch was greeted with “Shalom” and the familiar words of the Talmud, “If an Israelite sins, yet he remains an Israelite.” Averbuch insisted that since coming to believe in Jesus he had become a “true Israelite” and those who did not believe in Jesus were so in name only.<sup>408</sup> Returning from a three month furlough in 1931, the Averbuchs stopped in Berlin and Kaunas/Kovno where local Mildmay workers reported large crowds (from all political parties including Nazis) drawn by Averbuch speaking in Russian and Yiddish on “Are the Jews-Jews?”<sup>409</sup> He likely referred again to true Judaism as that which embraced Jesus as Messiah.

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<sup>405</sup> Averbuch, “Salvation and Song,” *TT* 31/2 (February 1924): 24-25; “Special meetings in Chişinău,” *TT* 37/2 (February 1931): 25-26; “Meetings Full of Power,” *TT* 41/2 (February 1935): 21-22.

<sup>406</sup> Averbuch, “Great Meetings in Chişinău,” *TT* 38/2 (February 1932): 23-24. Sermon texts included Hebrews 11:13, Isaiah 21:11, and James 4:13-14. Averbuch, “Joy on Earth and Joy in Heaven,” *TT* 36/2 (February 1930): 20-21; “Turn of the Year in Chişinău,” *TT* 39/2 (February 1933): 26-27.

<sup>407</sup> American Southern Baptist missionaries Walter Craighead and Everett Gill were also present. “Prayer Fellowship in Chişinău,” *TT* 43/2 (February 1937): 23-24.

<sup>408</sup> Gabe, *HC* 62/2 (June 1989- August 1989): 48; Averbuch, “An Ordinary Discussion,” *TT* 40/4 (April 1934): 44-45.

<sup>409</sup> Morogowsky and Laznik, “The Waters Stirred,” *TT* 37/10 (October 1931): 120.

However, Averbuch's eschatology included the belief that the entire Jewish people would be saved. He believed this was being done through different evangelical churches- with no history of anti-Semitism and which emphasized studying scripture. In a letter to Romanian Baptists in Bucharest, Averbuch and Feighin wrote:

We Jewish Christians in particular rejoice that God has revealed to us what our prophets foretold and that in Jesus Christ we have come to know the Saviour Messiah, who is a light to the Gentiles and the glory of Israel (Luke 2:32).<sup>410</sup>

They linked Jesus Christ directly to the Jewish prophets and believed it was through him that the gentiles came to worship the Jewish God Jehovah. They continued emphasizing their unity in Christ in the midst of their diversity:

We rejoice that we are one people of God- all believers in Christ from different nations and with different labels, who glorify God in the same spirit according to His word (Psalm 119:63). Please lift up prayers for the community of Jewish Christians in Chişinău.<sup>411</sup>

Their membership in Christian denominations meant many Jews refused to accept them either as true Jews or as sincere believers in Jesus as Messiah. To counter the accusation of apostates or mercenaries, the Chişinău Jewish Christians appropriated the name "Israelites of the New Covenant/Testament," the denomination-less legacy of Joseph Rabinovich, to provide a safe place for interested Jews.<sup>412</sup>

Eric Gabe wrote in his memoirs that the community in Chişinău provided him with spiritual equilibrium, and "release from a three-cornered battle" in his entangled identity as a Bukovina German, a Jew with observant grandparents, and yet a Christian. In Bucharest, Gabe attended the Choral Synagogue on Friday evening, the Sephardic synagogue on Saturday

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<sup>410</sup> Averbuch and Feighin, "Scrisoare," *Farul Mântuirii* 9/23-24 (December 1928): 16.

<sup>411</sup> Averbuch, "Caut pe frații mei," *Farul Mântuirii* 10/16 (September 1929): 10-11.

<sup>412</sup> 29-30 October 1932 they celebrated at Bethel, 10 Hertza Street, the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Rabinovich's work, with Leon Levison, president of IHCA in attendance. "Matters for Praise and Prayer," *TT* 38/11 (November 1932): 138; ANRM 679-1-5555, file 201. Even their stationary mentioned Rabinovich as the founder of their community. SIM, E48, Letter from Tarlev to Birger Pernow, 31 October 1940, courtesy of Kai Kjaer-Hansen.



morning and the Lutheran Church on Sunday, before being baptized in the German Baptist Church.<sup>413</sup> However, it was in Chişinău, where Hebrew was incorporated into the services that he found “to be a Christian became gradually and permanently compatible with being a Jew.” Singing traditional Lutheran songs like Bach’s “Dir, dir, Jehovah, will ich singen” at Bethel brought the German Bukovinian part of his heritage into harmony with his Jewishness and his belief in Jesus as Messiah.<sup>414</sup>

Averbuch, Trachtman, Ostrovsky and others relied on the books of the Jewish prophets in conjunction with the New Testament to explain their beliefs. The image in the book of Ezekiel, God replacing a heart of stone with a heart of flesh, was paralleled with the New Testament Gospel of John, chapter 3, where Jesus tells the Jewish religious leader Nicodemus what it means to be born-again, a concept stressed in evangelical theology. The Talmud, though occasionally used, remained heavily criticized for its negative portrayal of Jesus.<sup>415</sup> Other times Averbuch and fellow believers showed how influential rabbis, like Rashi, the medieval Tanach and Talmud commentator, applied the reference in Zechariah 12:10- “the one they had pierced”- to ‘Messiah ben Joseph,’ (Messiah son of Joseph, who was the earthly father of Jesus).<sup>416</sup> Averbuch used Proverbs 30:4 to prove that God can and does have a son.<sup>417</sup>

They also tried to dispel the negative image of Jesus so prevalent among Jews at the time. In Moses Richter’s first (spontaneous) open air meeting in Cernăuți listeners doubted he was Jewish so he switched to Yiddish. When they asked how a Jew so well versed in the Khumesh (Pentateuch) and in Rashi could believe in the Yoisel (crucifix), Richter replied, “Jesus is not a Yoisel but the Messiah. I believe in the living Messiah.”<sup>418</sup>

Gabe also claimed he became a Christian not to assimilate but because he had found in Jesus “a loving and living savior.”<sup>419</sup> His mother, Stephany Gabe wrote to her sister regarding

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<sup>413</sup> Gabe, *HC* 63/1 (April 1990- June 1990): 20.

<sup>414</sup> Gabe, *HC* 64/1 (March 1991- May 1991): 18.

<sup>415</sup> *TT* 41/8 (August 1935): 97; Trachtman, “Mission Journeys in Rumania,” *TT* 41/9 (September 1935): 109-110; “Street work in Bessarabia,” *TT* 42/9 (September 1936): 105-106.

<sup>416</sup> Ostrovsky, “Using the Messianic Prophecies,” *TT* 34/10 (October 1928): 123.

<sup>417</sup> Proverbs 30:4 (ESV edition): “Who has ascended to heaven and come down? Who has gathered the wind in his fists? Who has wrapped up the waters in a garment? Who has established all the ends of the earth? What is his name, and what is his son's name? Surely you know!” Gabe emphasized that he had not abandoned his faith in the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, but believed in Him all the more. Gabe, *HC* 63/4 (December 1990- February 1991): 118-119.

<sup>418</sup> Richter, “Desirous to Know,” *TT* 36/9 (September 1930): 107.

<sup>419</sup> Gabe, *HC* 64/1 (March- May 1991): 18.

Jesus, “If you find a good doctor, will you not recommend him to others?”<sup>420</sup> Averbuch associated the Succah (booth or tabernacle built during the Jewish festival of Succot to remember the forty years the Jewish people wandered in the desert), with Jesus as the Great High Priest “who set up the [permanent] Tabernacle (Succah) of David and in Whom every poor sinner can find refuge.”<sup>421</sup>

However, Averbuch, like Rabinovich before him, was opposed to Aliyah and immigration to Israel; he saw it as a dangerous substitute for the spiritual home in heaven with God.<sup>422</sup> Before the elections to the 19th Zionist Congress in August-September 1935, Averbuch published a warning very similar to Rabinovich: “Jewish brothers!...The key of Eretz Israel and of the happiness of all peoples is in the hand of Yeshua Hamashiah.”<sup>423</sup>

Averbuch held the view that Jewish Christians needed to remain in the Diaspora in order to spread knowledge about God throughout the world. He was greatly influenced in this by his mentor Vladimir Marzinkovsky.<sup>424</sup> In issues of *Binevestitorul* Averbuch advertised a small booklet called *Zionism without Zion* (in Yiddish), written by Marzinkovsky, where political Zionism was criticized.<sup>425</sup> The latter often came to speak in Chişinău to packed audiences that included BOR priests.<sup>426</sup> Apart from this there is no other evidence of Averbuch’s potential political leanings.

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<sup>420</sup> Gabe, *HC* 63/2 (July- September 1990): 50.

<sup>421</sup> Averbuch, “Missionary Journey in Romania,” *TT* 42/11 (November 1936): 131.

<sup>422</sup> Averbuch., “Report, Third International Hebrew Christian Conference, held at High Leigh, 1931,” *Hebrew Christian* 4 (1931): 112; Averbuch, “Zwei Kevarim,” *Hamevaser Tov* 11/7-8 (1934): 7-8, in Nerel, “Zion in the Theology of L. Averbuch and S. Rohold,” 54.

<sup>423</sup> “Zu di Wahlen zum 19 Zionistischen Kangress un zum Welt Kangress,” *Hamevaser Tov* 12/7-8 (1935): 11 in Nerel, “Zion in the Theology of L. Averbuch and S. Rohold,” 56.

<sup>424</sup> Marzinkovsky had been to Jerusalem for a longer period of time and lectured on the Bible in various countries. He was part of the YMCA based Russian Christian Student Movement, through which he had converted to evangelicalism, and spent time in Soviet prison for his outspoken faith. He appears quite frequently in the ANRM archives. Matthew Lee Miller, *The American YMCA and Russian Culture: The Preservation and Expansion of Orthodox Christianity, 1900-1940* (Lanham : Lexington Books, 2013), 134-150.

<sup>425</sup> “Vuhin Geht das Yidentum?” *Hamevaser Tov* 11/7-8 (1934): 4, in Nerel, 56-57.

<sup>426</sup> Averbuch, “Chişinău Campaign,” *TT* 42/2 (February 1936): 34; “Blessings Abound,” *TT* 37/7 (July 1931): 89. Police report states Marzinkovsky, “a Baptist preacher” is coming to the “community of Jewish evangelical Baptists” at 10 Hertza street, led by “President Averbuch.” 27 April-9 May 1931 he spoke at the German Cultural hall, the Chişinău city hall, and in cinemas. ANRM 679-1-5555, files 117, 119, 162, 171, 183. ANR, DGP vol. I, 2349, fol. 57/1931, file 11; Gabe, *HC* 62/1 (March-May 1989): 11; 62/2 (June- August 1989): 47.

Despite their focus on bringing together Judaism and Christianity, and their continued association with Jewish theology and communities, one of the major sermon themes at the Israelites of the New Testament was “God is love.” This attacked the prominent role of the nation in Romanian society and religion. A Siguranța police agent’s sermon notes from September and October 1918 claimed Averbuch preached that nationalism and the national church were against the true law left by Jesus, to love God and one’s neighbour as oneself.<sup>427</sup> Neighbour was defined as any human being regardless of nationality. Since nationalism excluded love of ethnic neighbours he argued it contradicted the precepts of the Bible: “God is love, and nationalism is against love thus against God.” Similar sermons by Averbuch and by others denouncing hatred and differentiation between nationalities were mentioned in police reports as late as 1936.<sup>428</sup> This teaching clearly reflected their multi-cultural/multi-ethnic congregation, but also made them targets of suspicion.

### **Reputation: Jewish and Christian Spaces**

Averbuch had a mixed reputation in Chișinău, respected and loved by some while hated and feared by others. His attention to social issues allowed him to break barriers in both Jewish and Romanian/Russian circles. In 1919, he worked for a short time as a teacher of religion (“evangelical Baptist”) at primary school nr.48 in Chișinău.<sup>429</sup> He collaborated with prominent Jewish individuals in the city to find cases of social need and as part of the Baptist Union Board in Bessarabia, he helped administer funds received from abroad for those suffering from famine in 1926.<sup>430</sup> Individuals and Jewish institutions sought to hire workmen and servants from those in their congregation.<sup>431</sup>

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<sup>427</sup> Based on Jesus’s teaching regarding the greatest commandment, combining Deuteronomy 6:4-7 and Leviticus 19:18.

<sup>428</sup> ANRM 679-1-4840, files 6, 16, 54-57, 197; Ibid, folder 5555, files 318, 321.

<sup>429</sup> ANRM 679-1-4840, file 32.

<sup>430</sup> Averbuch, “From Bessarabia,” *TT* 27/6 (June 1921): 70; ALA 31157, Averbuch, Belousov, Bușilă, Cozanopolo, “O scrisoare din Basarabia,” *Creștinul* 14/2 (February 1926): 16; Kjaer-Hansen, 222.

<sup>431</sup> Averbuch, “Roumania,” *TT* 39/1 (January 1933): 9; In a small village near Cernăuți, a Jewish woman came to faith in Jesus through a New Testament her mother-in-law hid in the attic years before. She composed songs out of her newfound joy and her husband’s response was “I don’t mind what she believes, as long as she remains like that.” Henry Ellison, “Mrs. Stone of Stream,” *TT* 45/10 (October 1939): 126-127.

He was also involved in prison ministry, where the chief of the local prison, a Jewish lawyer, allowed Averbuch to form a choir and organize Sunday school classes, even encouraging him to open a library in the prison, funded through entrance fees from public meetings.<sup>432</sup> Though prison ministry is seldom mentioned in the missionary or police reports, Averbuch visited prisons even in Iași in 1927 where a Polish-Jewish prisoner, Kojan, came to faith through a fellow inmate, a Baptist preacher imprisoned for spreading sectarian propaganda, and through a poem by Maria Averbuch published in *Binevestitorul*.<sup>433</sup> Moses Richter also started a prison ministry among Jewish inmates in Cernăuți.<sup>434</sup> Averbuch's personal experience with prison following his own change of faith likely influenced his prison reform outreach.<sup>435</sup>

Among Orthodox Jews there was a noticeable difference from the hostility encountered before the war when Jewish Christians were met with antagonistic cries of "Dog, apostate, how dare you go into a house which has a Mezuzah."<sup>436</sup> Though considered an apostate, good rapport existed between Averbuch and the majority of Jews in Chișinău. He rented a seat in the great synagogue, relinquished to him by his friend Dr. Abramov, with the approval of the synagogue authorities. He, occasionally joined by Tarlev or Trachtman, brought along the Christian Bible in Hebrew as well as evangelistic tracts. Theological disputes inevitably arose as Averbuch insisted on sharing his interpretation of the Jewish scriptures, but these remained cordial.<sup>437</sup> In Cernăuți, Rabbi Rosenbach often engaged Richter in public debate, but referred to him as a dear young man and supposedly argued that Jewish Christians needed to exist for the temple in Jerusalem to be rebuilt.<sup>438</sup>

During conversations about Jesus at the Chișinău Zionist synagogue on the first day of Passover, Jewish worshippers claimed, "If a missionary had come into a synagogue 25 years ago

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<sup>432</sup> *TT* 25/11 (November 1919): 86; Averbuch, "Evangelistic work among Russian prisoners," *TT* 25/12 (December 1919):102-103.

<sup>433</sup> Kojan took over the prison ministry once the Baptist minister was released. Ignatz Iriți, LSPCJ colporteur in Iași, and Averbuch supplied Kojan with religious literature for the prisoners. Averbuch, "The Prisoner," *TT* 33/4 (April 1927): 44-45.

<sup>434</sup> Richter, "Early Fruits of Grace," *TT* 36/4 (April 1930), 47.

<sup>435</sup> Averbuch, "воспоминания прошлого- Для пользы настоящего," *Благовестник* 6/7-8 (July-August 1929):1.

<sup>436</sup> DIM, Corn and Iritz, "A day with our Roumanian Colporteurs," *Jewish Missionary Intelligence* 21/9 (September 1931): 131-133.

<sup>437</sup> *TT* 25/8 (15 August 1919): 62; Averbuch, "Reaching Jews in Chișinău- In the Synagogue," *TT* 40/11 (November 1934): 131-132.

<sup>438</sup> Richter, "Czernowitz," *Tauferbote* 12 (December 1931): 14-15, courtesy of Roland Fleischer.

and spoken like this, he would have been beaten to death; but we love Mr. A[v]erbuch and listen to him with pleasure.”<sup>439</sup> He seemed to find friends across the spectrum of religious Judaism, both in Chişinău and across Bessarabia, even with his criticism of political Zionism. While holding meetings at the Baptist hall in Reni he stayed at the home of the local rabbi, whose daughter in Chişinău wrote favorably about Averbuch.<sup>440</sup> Not only did Averbuch visit synagogues, but the Chişinău Synagogue choir sang at Bethel in 1937.<sup>441</sup> However, some Jews were afraid to come to Bethel or to visit Averbuch outside the Jewish quarter.<sup>442</sup>

Historian Shulamit Magnus’s category of “good bad Jew” describes how the Jewish community may have viewed Averbuch’s straddling of both religious spaces. This label Magnus ascribes to converted Jews seen as good because of their advocacy for the Jewish community. However, she identifies Rabinovich as an “oppressive apostate” for his missionizing activity, which may have applied to Averbuch as well, despite his speaking out against anti-Semitism and his social work among Chişinău Jews.<sup>443</sup>

Averbuch and his group often encountered opposition in Jewish circles. *Unser Tsayt*, a Chişinău Yiddish newspaper, published a warning in 1927 after a Shabbat evening meeting at Bethel: “One by one and in groups children are being deceived, old and young are being misled...Jewish souls are being caught.”<sup>444</sup> In Călăraşi, Trachtman was physically threatened by Jewish leaders, while in Căuşani “fanatical Jews” followed him telling people not to buy his literature. He recounted the openness of Jewish gendarmes and atheist tailors, pointing to hostility occurring mostly among the Orthodox religious Jews.<sup>445</sup> In Siret, Richter encountered

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<sup>439</sup> Averbuch, “Roumania,” *TT* 31/1 (January 1925): 9; “Unique Occasion in a Synagogue,” *TT* 42/6 (June 1936): 68.

<sup>440</sup> Averbuch, “How They Need Him!” *TT* 35/8 (August 1929): 95-96.

<sup>441</sup> Averbuch, “Prayer Fellowship in Chişinău,” *TT* 43/2 (February 1937): 20-24.

<sup>442</sup> A rabbi from Transylvania, leader of the Misrachi movement (Orthodox section of the Zionists) visited Chişinău and thought Bethel was a synagogue, but after conversations with Averbuch was afraid to enter further than the lobby and find crosses displayed. He accepted a New Testament and invited Averbuch to visit him in Transylvania. *TT* 42/4 (April 1936): 51; Averbuch, “A Responsive Heart,” *TT* 42/5 (May 1936): 58; “Prayer Fellowship in Chişinău,” *TT* 43/2 (February 1937): 23-24.

<sup>443</sup> Shulamit S. Magnus, “Good bad Jews: converts, conversion, and boundary redrawing in modern Russian Jewry: notes toward a new category,” Susan A. Glenn and Naomi B. Sokoloff (eds.), *Boundaries of Jewish Identity* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2010): 132-160.

<sup>444</sup> “The Catching of Souls,” *TT* 33/10 (October 1927): 120-121. The Jewish press also called Rabinovich a “snake” who seduced Jewish souls into his sectarian net. Schinker, *Confessions of the Shtetl*, 224.

<sup>445</sup> Rabbi in Pirlîţa invited him to his home but opposed his message. Averbuch, “Bessarabian Tour,” *TT* 36/10 (October 1930): 117; *TT* 41/8 (August 1935): 97; Trachtman, “Mission Journeys in Rumania,” *TT* 41/9 (September 1935): 109-110.

something similar where Ruthenian evangelicals and Jewish socialists worked together to ensure Richter could hold lectures despite synagogue officials blocking the entrance into the hall.<sup>446</sup>

Although they possessed a license to distribute literature, a Jewish newsstand owner often reported Averbuch's group to the police.<sup>447</sup> Averbuch's name itself could evoke resentment revealing he was well known in the Jewish communities of Bessarabia.<sup>448</sup> In the Ismail synagogue he had a heated debate with the ritual slaughterer who, nevertheless, desired him success "only among the goyim." Following this encounter, Chief Rabbi Tzirelson printed an announcement in the Jewish weekly "Săptămâna" that no synagogues should allow Averbuch to preach.<sup>449</sup> Yet, according to Gabe's memoirs, when non-Jewish opponents tried to publish against Averbuch, certain Jewish editors refused to print it.<sup>450</sup>

The Chişinău Jewish Christians were quite memorable. In Bucharest, a Jewish man recognized Trachtman in a crowded market and asked him for literature, remembering him from meetings he attended years ago in Chişinău.<sup>451</sup> Averbuch and Trachtman were invited to Jewish weddings and attended Jewish cultural events.<sup>452</sup> At a lecture on Jewish writers in 1936, they challenged the statements made about Jesus, getting the speaker to admit that though Christians did not put Jesus' words into practice, that didn't make them any less true just as with Jews who failed to put into practice Moses's teachings.<sup>453</sup>

Many Jews attended the services and agreed with what was taught, but fell short of baptism. One such Jewish doctor, at a meeting of the Medical Association of Romania, spoke on the theme "Causation of the Demoralization of the Youth Today" saying the cause was that

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<sup>446</sup> Richter, "Steady Witness in Bukovina," *TT* 36/5 (May 1930): 59-60.

<sup>447</sup> Averbuch, "Roumania," *TT* 42/1 (January 1936): 11.

<sup>448</sup> A Jewish man angered at the tracts given to him in a restaurant claimed he had proven them to be lies in a debate with Averbuch. To which the latter confidentially revealed that he was in fact Averbuch and no such discussion had taken place. Averbuch, "Blessings Abound," *TT* 37/7 (July 1931): 89.

<sup>449</sup> Averbuch, "How They Need Him!" *TT* 35/8 (August 1929): 95-96; "Calatorie misionară," *Binevestitorul* 6/9-10 (September/October 1929): 1, courtesy of Valentin Eitan. For *Saptamana*: <http://beta.nli.org.il/en/journals/NNL-Journals001756847/NLI> (accessed 19 March 2019). The Chief Rabbi of Bucovina, Dr. Abraham Mark, also spoke strongly against Richter. Roland Fleischer, "Moses Richter," *Baptist Quarterly* 40/1 (2003):48.

<sup>450</sup> Gabe, *HC* 62/2 (June 1989- August 1989): 50-51.

<sup>451</sup> Trachtman, "Hearts Touched of God," *TT* 39/10 (October 1933): 120.

<sup>452</sup> Averbuch, "A Timely Gift," *TT* 38/5 (May 1932): 56; "Fresh Seasons of Grace," *TT* 42/10 (October 1936): 118. Trachtman visited the local headquarters of the Zionist Youth and engaged with them in conversation about the difference between the medieval false messiah Shabbatai Zevi and Jesus.

Trachtman, "Roumania," *TT* 39/1 (January 1933): 10.

<sup>453</sup> Averbuch, "Special Opportunities," *TT* 42/4 (April 1936): 47.

Christ was not truly followed.<sup>454</sup> Orthodox Jewish mothers requested their children be allowed to attend the Shabbat and Sunday schools or permitted their children to go on missionary excursions, though they themselves did not go.<sup>455</sup> There was therefore a mix of reactions among the different Jewish groups in Chişinău to Averbuch and his group, depending on an individual's connections to Jewish institutions or their involvement with social work.

The local authorities were surprisingly helpful, though the Romanian bureaucracy and changing laws on religion made their work difficult. The Mayor of Chişinău obtained permission for Averbuch to hold meetings in public halls, theatres, and the University. In Chilia-Nouă the gendarme chief advised Averbuch to rent out the largest hall in town for two evenings because the Baptist prayer house was too small and difficult to reach outside of town.<sup>456</sup> However, renewing his authorization to preach was sometimes required every three months, entailing time-consuming paperwork, costly trips to Bucharest, and other fees.<sup>457</sup> They were also not strangers to the Romanian judicial system. Feighin, Tarlev, Trachtman, Ţahan, and Averbuch were brought to court various times on accusations of illegal literature or disturbing the peace, but the judges acquitted them and often even requested Bibles.<sup>458</sup> Policemen were always at the gatherings to keep order as well as to report regularly on this strange group.<sup>459</sup> Police misconceptions in reports reveal a suspicious attitude toward the Chişinău Jewish Christians and consistent surveillance occurred throughout the interwar period to ensure they did not plot against state security.

Among Christian circles, however, both in Romania and internationally, Averbuch was overall appreciated. He traveled to Bucharest occasionally to help the LSPCJ missionary Adeney during Jewish festivals as early as 1919.<sup>460</sup> On a visit to Chişinău in 1935, Nils Rosef, national

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<sup>454</sup> *TT* 40/7 (July 1934): 86.

<sup>455</sup> Averbuch, "Special meetings in Chişinău," *TT* 37/2 (February 1931): 25-26; "Great Meetings in Chişinău," *TT* 38/2 (February 1932): 23-24.

<sup>456</sup> Due to the help of Russian Baptist advertising more than 1000 were present. Averbuch, "How They Need Him!" *TT* 35/8 (August 1929): 95-96.

<sup>457</sup> *TT* 25/11 (November 1919): 86; Averbuch, "Evangelistic work among Russian prisoners," *TT* 25/12 (December 1919): 102-103; MAE 15/ 1920-1926, 23 January 1923, courtesy of Marius Silveşan.

<sup>458</sup> "Before the Court," *TT* 31/6 (June 1925): 72; *TT* 42/6 (June 1936): 75; *TT* 33/1 (January 1927): 15; Averbuch, "Rumania," *TT* 43/1 (January 1937): 8. Court cases took place on 31 May and 13 June 1937 in Chişinău regarding distribution of Bethel Bulletin. *TT* 43/5 (May 1937): 62.

<sup>459</sup> Averbuch, "Roumania-Bessarabia," *TT* 35/1 (January 1929): 7.

<sup>460</sup> In August 1919 he mentioned living at the Mission School in Bucharest for a time. Averbuch, "From Bucharest," *TT* 25/10 (15 October 1919): 79; *TT* 25/11 (November 1919): 86.

secretary of the Norwegian Israel Mission (1934-1937), described Averbuch as “one of the most energetic missionaries in Jewish mission.”<sup>461</sup> Averbuch spoke at Baptist and Brethren meetings across Romania at the request of local Romanian and Russian/Ukrainian pastors.<sup>462</sup> He was invited to attend conferences with American Baptists such as Everett Gill and Walter Craighead, Baptist World Alliance leader J.H. Rushbrooke and Peter Deyneka, director of Russian Gospel Association (later Slavic Gospel Association).<sup>463</sup>

Considered a talented preacher and theologian by evangelicals, Averbuch took part in 1929 in a three-member committee organized by the Baptist industrialist Adam Sezonov to convince Ioan Bododea, former pastor of the Baptist Church in Braila, to see the error in embracing Pentecostal theology. Though unsuccessful, Averbuch published subsequent polemical articles against Pentecostals.<sup>464</sup> Despite a period of disagreement and tension between Averbuch and the Chişinău Baptists from 1930 to 1934, the reason for which is unclear, ties resumed and congregants participated in each other’s services.<sup>465</sup>

At the 25th anniversary of the Baptist Church in Chişinău, Averbuch was among the speakers, and a number of his congregation attended.<sup>466</sup> In fact, Walter Craighead claimed many in the crowd were Jews. When the Bucharest German Baptist Church celebrated its 80th anniversary in May 1936, Averbuch was again one of the speakers. Baptist publications reported that Averbuch delivered the main sermon, bringing greetings from his “Jewish Baptist Church” in Chişinău and from all Russian Bessarabian Baptist Churches (Judenchristliche Baptistengemeinde und die russischen Baptisten Bessarabiens).<sup>467</sup>

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<sup>461</sup> *Missionsblad for Israel* 109/12 (June 1935): 138 in Kjaer-Hansen, 228. Isaac Feinstein, Sophia Cerchez, Nina Tarleva, the Buşilăs, and Belousov were also in attendance on 22 March. “Заграничный гость,” [Overseas Guests] *Светилник* 3-4 (April 1935): 16.

<sup>462</sup> *TT* (January 1926):10.

<sup>463</sup> ANRM 679-1-4840, files 127-128; 679-1-5555, file 45; *TT* 26/8 (August 1920): 67; *TT* 43/5 (May 1937): 62.

<sup>464</sup> Averbuch, “Călătoria în America- Secta penticostalilor,” *Binevestitorul* 6/3-4 (March-April 1929): 6-7, courtesy of Mihai Ciucă. Ciucă, *Bapțiştii din Brăilă*, 62.

<sup>465</sup> Craighead claimed jealousy for leadership lead to the separation of the Jewish members from the Baptist Church, to which the majority of converted Jews previously belonged. Walter Craighead, “The Russian Way of Celebrating the Jewish Jubilee,” *Home and Foreign Fields* 20/5 (May 1936): 6.

<sup>466</sup> Boris Buşilă, “25-летний юбилей Кишиневской Общины,” *Светилник* 5-6 (1935):12-15. He spoke on 1 John 4:9-11. Averbuch, “Conviction and Conversion,” *TT* 41/6 (June 1935): 69.

<sup>467</sup> *Wahrheitszeuge* 32 (1936): 255; *Tauferbote* 7/6 (1936): 4 in Fleischer, ‘Begegnungen von Baptisten und Juden in Südosteuropa. Das Leben des Judenmissionars Moses Richter (1899-1967) - von Kischineff nach London’ in *Freikirchenforschung* 8 (Münster, 1998): 224.



Romanian Baptist editors printed a letter he wrote addressing the anti-Semitic elements among gentile believers and their hostility towards Jews who believe in Jesus as Messiah. “Let this not be the case among brothers and sisters in Romania- let us strive to love one another following the example of our Lord Jesus Christ. Then the Jews and the whole world will recognize us as His true disciples,” wrote Averbuch. The letter encouraged Romanian Baptists to identify and stop the creeping influence of antisemitism in their churches. He showed his bond with them by signing himself “Cel mai mic frate in Christos” (your youngest brother in Christ).<sup>468</sup>

The sustained collaboration with Baptists in particular was obvious and led Grigore Comșa, the Bishop of Arad, to write a scathing article against Averbuch, whom he called the “leader of the Baptist movement” in Bessarabia. Comșa falsely accused him of spreading the Baptist faith among Romanians to make them forsake their ancestral law, while he continued to keep the Jewish law.<sup>469</sup> Another virulent anti-Semitic BOR priest in Chișinău published a paper in Russian and Romanian inciting people to violence, claiming that Jesus recognized the Jews as “a wicked people, children of the devil, and scorpions.” However, on attending an Easter service at Bethel, Averbuch analyzed Romans 11 with the priest regarding the place of Jews in the history of God’s rescue plan for humanity, and told him what harm his actions were doing to the cause of spreading the Christian faith among Jews. Averbuch claimed this resulted in the priest’s change of heart.<sup>470</sup> Archimandrite Iuliu Scriban likewise appreciated Averbuch’s work especially commending his arguments against nationalist Judaism and Zionism as Biblically grounded.<sup>471</sup>

Averbuch’s influence on Moses Richter resulted in similar attitudes in Cernăuți where evangelicals had a good reputation among Jews. The window-front of the Baptist church displayed an open Hebrew Bible with a big poster beside it reading: “Jeshua Hamashiach (Jesus Messiah), who forgives our sins and will soon end the sufferings of Israel, is preached

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<sup>468</sup> Averbuch, “Către frați și surori în Christos din România,” *Farul Mântuirii* 9/7 (April 1928): 11.

<sup>469</sup> Averbuch did not observe strict Torah dietary or Shabbat laws nor did he command Jewish Christians to do so. Grigorie Comșa, “Baptismul în România: Convorbiri cu un predicator baptist,” *Biblioteca Creștinului Ortodox* 27-28 (Arad: Tiparul Tipografiei Diecezane, 1927): 10.

<sup>470</sup> Averbuch, “The Death of Hate and Birth of Love,” *TT* 40/7 (July 1934): 82-83.

<sup>471</sup> Scriban, “Misiunea printe evrei,” *Revista Teologica* 12/8 (August 1922): 193, [http://documente.bcucluj.ro/web/bibdigit/periodice/revistateologica/1922/BCUCLUJ\\_FP\\_279893\\_1922\\_012\\_008.pdf](http://documente.bcucluj.ro/web/bibdigit/periodice/revistateologica/1922/BCUCLUJ_FP_279893_1922_012_008.pdf) (accessed 12 November 2020).

here.”<sup>472</sup> The advertisements as well as the aesthetics of the evangelical meeting halls provided a more welcoming environment for Jews. Here local Jews refused to label Baptists as “Christians” because of the antisemitism associated with that label.<sup>473</sup> These were true Christians, Richter argued, because they did not encourage ultra-nationalist hatred. In Câmpulung Moldovenesc, Richter again encountered Jews favourable to evangelicals, claiming that the peasants with the red book (the Bible) were gentle and good Christians. In Pătrăuți, Jewish listeners encouraged Richter to go to places of pogroms in Bucovina where there was greater need for his message among the gentiles.<sup>474</sup> However, as previously mentioned, a Jew preaching this Christian message was not always welcome, either by Jews or gentiles.

### **Averbuch’s Farewell**

Gabe described Averbuch as blunt, strict, and uncompromising in his morals, alienating some he worked with, but that he had a deep desire to serve his fellow humans spurred by his convictions regarding the teachings and identity of the Jewish rabbi Jesus.<sup>475</sup> In July 1937, Mildmay surprisingly printed that they lost the services of Averbuch and that there were serious setbacks.<sup>476</sup> Mildmay had once claimed Averbuch’s work in Chişinău to be unparalleled in blessing, but now referred to it as a considerable expense.<sup>477</sup> In August 1937, the mission ceased operation in Chişinău, releasing Tarlev and Trachtman from their staff.<sup>478</sup> The latter, along with Ordinsky and Țahan continued the work, but Averbuch left Chişinău for London in July 1937 at the invitation of Isaac Davidson, director of the Barbican Mission to the Jews, which sponsored the work in Chişinău after Mildmay’s withdrawal.<sup>479</sup>

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<sup>472</sup> *Tauferbote* 3/8 (1932): 7 in Fleischer, “Judenchristliche Mitglieder in Baptistengemeinden im ‘Dritten Reich,’” 182.

<sup>473</sup> “Christians” were seen as dangerous for Jewish communities. Orthodox Jews referred to them as goy or gentile and were stereotypically seen as a means of tainting or drawing Jews from their faith.

<sup>474</sup> Richter, “Roumania,” *TT* 37/1 (January 1931): 9-10.

<sup>475</sup> Gabe, 62/2 (June 1989- August 1989): 50-51; “The Situation in Chişinău,” *TT* 31/11 (November 1925): 130, 135.

<sup>476</sup> *TT* 43/7 (July 1937), 86.

<sup>477</sup> Kjaer-Hansen, *Rabinowitz*, 222; *TT* 39/11 (November 1933): 138; *TT* 43/7 (July 1937): 86; (August 1937): 99.

<sup>478</sup> “Notabilia,” *TT* 43/8 (August 1937): 90, 99.

<sup>479</sup> ANRM 679-1-5555, files 400, 405.

Other sources reveal misunderstanding and slander as reasons for the Averbuch's move.<sup>480</sup> Averbuch also took a fall in April 1937 that caused internal injuries and initiated a steady decline in health until his death in July 1941.<sup>481</sup> He was buried in Abney Park Cemetery at Stoke Newington in North London. His tombstone reads: גואלי חי [My redeemer lives], Job 19:25, a Tanach messianic prophecy in Christian theology pointing to Jesus.<sup>482</sup> Maria Averbuch died in London on 3 February 1946.<sup>483</sup>

In the spring of 1938, Richter managed to also immigrate to England with the help of the IHCA American secretary Joseph Peltz. There he continued work among Jews and died on 14 February 1967 in London, a member of the Abbey Road Baptist Church.<sup>484</sup> Gabe and Tarlev managed to visit Averbuch in England in June 1939. While Gabe remained in England, eventually becoming an Anglican minister, Tarlev returned to his family in Chişinău and continued to pastor the congregation there.<sup>485</sup> Unfortunately, the war would almost completely wipe out this unique community. There currently exists, however, a congregation in Chişinău led by Rabbi Shimon Pozdirca, which consider themselves the spiritual descendants of Averbuch's group.<sup>486</sup>

In the Russian context, Schinker identified "Jews who found the means not so much to be Russian [or Romanian] but to make a positive status change that was still familiar, accessible, and local."<sup>487</sup> Such was the case for the Jewish Christians of Chişinău and the gentile members of their evangelical congregation. Inspired and spurred by, but also contributing to, the growth of evangelical/neo-Protestant groups in Romania, Averbuch and the others created a unique community that challenged the ethnic-religious boundaries in society. While honouring their

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<sup>480</sup> Abram Poljak, "Awerbuch," *Die Judenchristliche Gemeinde* 66 (May 1942): 12.

<sup>481</sup> *TT* 43/4 (April 1937), 50; Marie Awerbuch Letter, *Chosen People* 47/2 (November 1941):14.

Averbuch claimed he couldn't return to Romania in 1937 because the Romanian authorities refused to reissue him a Nansen pass. SIM, E48 (1/12/1940-31/12/1941) Averbuch to Pernow 31 October 1940, courtesy of Kai Kjaer-Hansen. Averbuch worked for Mildmay Mission to the Jews (which joined with Hebrew Christian Testimony to Israel (HCTI) and became what is today Messianic Testimony) and afterwards was sponsored by Barbican Mission to the Jews (today part of Christian Witness to Israel (CWI)). He also received support from the American Board of Mission to the Jews (now Chosen People Ministries). "Leon Awerbuch at Home with the Lord," *Chosen People* 47/4 (January 1942): 8-9.

<sup>482</sup> Gabe, *HC* 62/2 (June- August 1989): 51-52.

<sup>483</sup> "Mulum in Parvo," *TT* 48/5 (March 1946): 181.

<sup>484</sup> Gabe 63/2 (July-September 1990): 53; Fleischer, "Moses Richter," *Baptist Quarterly* 40/1 (2003): 49.

<sup>485</sup> Gabe, *Hebrew Christian* 64/2 (June- August 1991): 49-50.

<sup>486</sup> Bnei Brit Hadasha, <http://mashiahmd.com/> (accessed 18 November 2019).

<sup>487</sup> Schinker, "Jewish Conversion in an Imperial Context," 20.

Jewish heritage and pointing to the Jewish roots of Christianity through their activities and theology, they simultaneously criticized nationalism as they saw it developing.

The entangled and complex nature of religious and national identities that they present challenge the popular image of Greater Romania and the goal of its politicians for clear ethno-religious homogenous boundaries. Their fluid ethnic and linguistic identities provided, largely subconsciously or unintentionally, a new definition for what it meant to be Romanian- loyalty to the state authorities but not at the expense of ethnic exclusiveness. They were trying to create space for themselves by engaging with current conceptualizations of Romanianness while also challenging the importance placed on national identities. What they were doing was a radical contrast to established religion (both Jewish and Christian), which encouraged the homogeneity propagated by the government. Secondary literature has failed to recognize the uniqueness of this community, modern in the religious experience it offered. These individuals embraced technology, national ambiguity, and linguistic fluidity, breaking social and gender barriers as well. They refused to fit neatly into any one category.

### Chapter 3 “God loves us too”: the Roma Baptists Crossing Social Divides

On the other side of the country evangelicals were making headway among another sizable minority. In Arad city, in the region of Transylvania, Roma began to increasingly join the Baptist churches, where like Averbuch’s group they found a more inclusive community. This growth of Roma evangelicals occurred simultaneously with the expansion of Roma emancipation efforts in the country. The chapter examines the crucial growth of Roma evangelicals, especially the first Roma Baptist churches, within the context of the growing evangelical movement and the increasing emancipation efforts of Roma groups across Romania.

The establishment of the first Roma organizations and publications in Romania during the interwar period has received more recent scholarly attention through the works of Viorel Achim and Petre Matei, among others.<sup>488</sup> These interwar Roma groups, such as the *Asociația Generală a Țiganilor din România* (General Association of the Gypsies in Romania), the *Uniunea Generală a Romilor din România* (General Union of the Roma in Romania), and *Asociației Uniunea Generală a Romilor din România* (Association of the General Union of Roma in Romania), were set up in 1933 and 1934.<sup>489</sup> However, it was a time of escalating political and religious tensions among groups, with BOR pursuing social dominance and greater influence in the consolidation of Greater Romania. Within this context, the role of Roma in evangelical churches has been neglected. 1930/1931 was also the year the first Roma Baptist Church was established, seemingly the first Roma-led Protestant church in Romania. This study of the Roma in evangelical churches helps us understand the diversity of evangelicals and their draw among minorities in Romania. Unlike previous scholarship that focuses on Roma evangelicals after World War II, the chapter reveals how these early Roma Baptist churches opened the way for

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Parts of this chapter were published as “Faith Church: Roma Baptists Challenging Religious Barriers in Interwar Romania,” *Social Inclusion* 8/2 (June 2020): 316-326.

<sup>488</sup> Viorel Achim, “The Roma Organizations and their Relations with the Romanian Politics in the 1930s,” *Nouvelles Études d’Histoire* 12 (2010): 85-102; Petre Matei, “Raporturile dintre organizațiile țigănești interbelice și Biserica Ortodoxă Română,” in Vasile Ciobanu, Sorin Radu (eds.) *Partide politice și minorități naționale din România în secolul XX* vol. 5 (Sibiu, Techno Media, 2010), 159-173; Elena Marushiakova and Vesselin Popov, “Commencement of Roma Civic Emancipation,” *Studies in Arts and Humanities* 3/2 (2017): 32-55.

<sup>489</sup> For more on these organizations see Petre Matei, “Raporturile dintre organizațiile țigănești interbelice și Biserica Ortodoxă Română,” 159-173.

evangelical movements among the Roma, such as Pentecostalism, in the years following World War II.

### **The Orthodox and Catholic Competition for Roma souls**

The view of the Roma in interwar Romania is debated by scholars, especially in regards to how the dominant religious groups viewed them. Most current day scholars describe interwar attitudes as an anti-Romaism based on the ideology of the Roma as an inferior social class rather than driven by race or ethnicity. Though some eugenicists of the time, Iordache and Gheorghe Făcăoaru, Iuliu Moldovan, and Sabin Manuilă advocated the view of Roma as an inferior race, this was not the general view despite long existing marginalization.<sup>490</sup> The Romanian government adopted the latter view only after the start of World War II and with the influence of Nazi German racist ideology; by contrast the view of Jews in Romania did have a racial underpinning even before Nazi influence.<sup>491</sup>

A scene from Radu Jude's award-winning film *Aferim!* (2015) depicts well this difference in how Jews versus Roma were viewed in a scene between a gendarme and a priest in the mid-19th century Romanian region of Wallachia. The priest argues: "the gypsies are descended from Ham whom Noah cursed with dark skin...Gypsies are people, but Jews are not...The *jidovu* [kike] is descended from the ancient *jidovu* giants."<sup>492</sup> This was obviously not the belief of all BOR priests, but reflects views disseminated at the time by influential cultural figures. Perhaps because Roma worked as slaves on church land in the 18<sup>th</sup> to 19<sup>th</sup> centuries and due to the arguably more "favorable" view of Roma among BOR leaders, the latter were active in mission to the Roma, but not so among Romanian Jews.

Likewise, the number of Roma in the country, though small, was not negligible. The 1930 census claimed 262,501 self-identified Roma. Though officially only 1.5 percent of the population, other figures ran as high as 525,000.<sup>493</sup> BOR and the Uniate/Greek Catholic Church

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<sup>490</sup> Maria Bucur, *Eugenics and Modernization in Interwar Romania* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2002), 39, 97-98, 147, 225; Vladimir Solonari, *Purifying the Nation Population Exchange and Ethnic Cleansing in Nazi-Allied Romania* (Washington, D.C.: Woodrow Wilson Center Press, 2010).

<sup>491</sup> Viorel Achim, *The Roma in Romanian History* (Budapest: Central European University Press, 1998), 163-188.

<sup>492</sup> *Aferim!* Directed by Radu Jude, Romania: Kanopy and Big World Pictures, 2015. The dialogue in the film is based on writings by Creangă, Kogălniceanu, and other writers from the period conveying the views prevalent in society at the time.

<sup>493</sup> Achim, *Roma in Romanian History*, 145-161.

considered them an important group to win over in their fight for religious space. In Transylvania, the Greek Catholic/Uniate Church had been predominant among Romanians, seen as the preserver of Romanian culture during the years of Hungarian rule. With the annexation of Transylvania by Romania after World War I, both BOR and the Uniate Church saw themselves as the dominant religion- protector of the Romanian people and of Romanianess (language, culture, traditions, etc.).<sup>494</sup> But BOR maintained predominance because of its specific Romanian leadership (the Uniate Church had the Pope as the head of their church while for BOR it was the Romanian Patriarch) and the majority of Romanians across the newly formed Greater Romania subscribed to the Orthodox faith.

The first Roma organization (one which encompassed all Roma) was linked to BOR, founded in 1933 by Archimandrite Calinic I. Popp Serboianu and led by Gheorghe A. Lăzurică. BOR appointed Lăzurică as missionary to the Roma. He described his job as that of a special missionary tasked with making “Orthodox propaganda” among the Roma across Romania. He held conferences and sermons on the Orthodox Christian religion, entering into polemical debates in Transylvania and Bukovina with Roman Catholic or with Greek Catholic priests, Calvinists, and other Protestants.<sup>495</sup> However, as Petre Matei reveals, Serboianu converted to Catholicism, as did Lăzurică later. This made BOR afraid of losing ground among the Roma; BOR leaders did not want to relinquish any more of their social influence to the Greek Catholics, whose presence was quite strong in Transylvania.

Roma leaders used this competition to their advantage and as a way to fight against exploitation. In Saeș village, Târnava Mare county, the local BOR priest refused Roma villagers use of the church hall for celebrations because they did not agree to work church land unpaid. The Roma argued that they were Orthodox and had a right to the hall just as other church members. In March 1936 a group of seventy or eighty Roma protested at the city hall and

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<sup>494</sup> Sorin Mitu, *National Identity of Romanians in Transylvania* (Budapest: CEU Press, 2001); Lucian Boia, *History and Myth in Romanian Consciousness* (Budapest: CEU Press, 2001); Ivo Banac and Katherine Verdery, *National Character and National Ideology in Interwar Eastern Europe* (New Haven: Yale Center For International and Area Studies, 1995); Keith Hitchins, “Religion and Rumanian National Consciousness in Eighteenth-Century Transylvania,” *The Slavonic and East European Review* 57/2 (1979): 214-39; Hitchins, *Orthodoxy and Nationality: Andreiu Șaguna and the Rumanians of Transylvania, 1846-1873* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1977).

<sup>495</sup> “Mă războiam în Ardeal și Bucovina cu preoții romano-catolici, greco-catolici, calvini și protestanți,” G. A. Lăzurică, “Curente religioase la Romi,” *Țara Noastră. Ediție specială săptămânală pentru Romii din România* 1/2 (18 July 1937): 3-4 in Matei, “Raporturile,” 166.

threatened to convert, along with the whole local Roma community of 450, to the Greek Catholic Church. With the intervention of the police and the archpriest (*protopop*) the hall was put at the disposal of the Roma leaders and mass conversion was averted.<sup>496</sup> Interestingly, though BOR feared Greek Catholic influence among the Roma and evangelical proselytism among the Romanian peasants, they seemed unaware of or not concerned with the spread of evangelical faiths among the Roma. These stories reveal the transient nature of religious communities or identities during this period and point to how a national lens is not sufficient to analyze them when national categories were not their main form of identification at the local level, but rather their religious or even cultural affiliations.

Prior to World War I, such developments of evangelical proselytism among Roma were occurring across the border in Bulgaria. Jacob Klundt from Lom baptized Petar Punchev, the first Roma convert, in 1910 and started the first Roma Baptist church in Europe in Golintsi Village, what is today in the Mladenovo district of Lom, Bulgaria. They became an independent church from the one in Lom in 1921 and Punchev was ordained as pastor in October 1923. In 1927, the Golintsi Roma Baptists published an issue of a newspaper bearing the same name as the Bessarabian Baptist publication, *Svetilnic*, with an insert in Romani. After Punchev's death, the church was led by Petar Mincov, an ethnic Bulgarian.<sup>497</sup> Further developments of the Golintsi Roma Baptist community are detailed later in the chapter, but this brief pre-1930 history of the Bulgarian Roma Baptists provides crucial historical background for what occurred in Romania. Though the Romanian Roma Baptists had a later start, their numbers grew quickly with encouragement from the Baptist work occurring in Bulgaria.

### **The First Roma Baptist Church: Credința**

Some of the first Roma evangelicals in Greater Romania, were converted in the Baptist Church in the Șega suburb of Arad City, in the region of Transylvania.<sup>498</sup> The work among the

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<sup>496</sup> ANR, DGP 2349- 53/1936, files 5-8.

<sup>497</sup> Elena Marushiakova, Vesselin Popov, "The first Gypsy/Roma organisations, churches and newspapers," in Maja Kominko (ed.), *From Dust to Digital: Ten Years of the Endangered Archives Programme* (Cambridge: Open Book Publishers, 2015), 27; Albert Wardin, "The Baptists in Bulgaria," *Baptist Quarterly* 34/4 (1991):151. Wardin gives Punchev's year of death as 1924. Carl Füllbrandt, "Bethaus-Einweihung bei den Ziguenern in Bulgarien," *Täufer-Bote* 2/5 (May 1931): 6.

<sup>498</sup> For a map of the city see "Aradului verchi," <https://www.arad.zone/personalit%C4%83%C8%9Biar%C4%83dene-h%C4%83r%C8%9Bile-aradului-vechi/harta-aradului-la-1931>, (accessed 15 May 2019).



Roma in the area began around 1930 in the Checheci district of Arad, led by Baptist pastor Ioan Cocuț<sup>499</sup> and missionary Emil Jiva.<sup>500</sup> For a religious community based on each member being able to read the Bible for themselves, they remarked that illiteracy was the major obstacle to working with the Roma. Therefore, the American Southern Baptist Foreign Mission Board hired Cocuț's wife to hold a three month literacy course for the Roma in Checheci.<sup>501</sup>

In 1931, two Roma members at the Baptist church in the Șega district felt called to start a prayer house for Roma in one of their homes, with just 3-4 members attending. Soon they rented a larger house that was the property of an unidentified Jewish man, and founded Biserica Baptista Credința (Faith Baptist Church) in Arad-Șega. They remained at this same location until 1942. The initial members were Ilie Roman, Pavel Lugas, Iosif Bogovici, Petru Ghiura and Anton Lingurar. Historian Ioan Bunaciu claims they were baptized in 1932 in the Arad-Șega Baptist Church along with fifteen other Roma, but if the church was formed in 1931 it's likely most were already (baptized) members at the larger church.<sup>502</sup> For example, Dumitru Lingurar, Anton's son, was part of the Sunday school at the Arad-Șega Baptist Church and baptised in 1930 by Ioan Cocuț.<sup>503</sup>

American missionaries Walter and Hazel Craighead described the Roma Credința (Faith) Church, which they likely visited in the summer of 1932, as composed of twenty members and just as many waiting to receive baptism. The church's Sunday school, choir, and part of a brass band impressed them. "As we passed through the Gypsy section of the city, the Gypsies followed us to the meeting hall, so many that we had to arrange the meeting outside. There we saw and heard from the leader a literal fulfillment of Isaiah 35."<sup>504</sup> A rather uncommon scripture for a

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<sup>499</sup> Editor of the Baptist newspaper *Farul Creștin* (1933-1939) and Secretary of the Romanian Baptist Union from 1937-1939.

<sup>500</sup> Popovici, 467. For more on the Checheci area see Dan Demșea, "Cele două colonii sătești 'Checheci' din teritoriul extravilan al orașului Arad (secolele XVIII-XIX)," *Analele Aradului* 1/1 (2015): 94-108.

<sup>501</sup> Ioan Cocuț, "Second Gypsy Baptist Church of Europe," *Home and Foreign Fields* 20/7 (July 1936): 20.

<sup>502</sup> Ioan Bunaciu, *Istoria Biseriilor Baptiste din Romania* (Oradea: Editura Făclia, 2006), 33.

<sup>503</sup> "Early life of Dumitru Lingurar" unpublished manuscript (author and date unknown) courtesy of Corneliu Lingurar.

<sup>504</sup> W.E. Craighead, "Jubilee Tour of Good-will through Transylvania, Rumania," *Baptist and Reflector* 98 (6 October 1932): 4. Themes in Isaiah 35 are the wilderness transformed into a place of plenty and of the joy of believers (those recognizing God's rescue/redemption): "But only the redeemed will walk there, and those the Lord has rescued will return. They will enter Zion with singing; everlasting joy will crown their heads. Gladness and joy will overtake them, and sorrow and sighing will flee away," Isaiah

sermon, the passage selected reveals the Roma leader's advanced degree of Bible knowledge and some level of theological preparation. In October 1930, the Craigheads had also been in Arad for the Baptist Regional Conference and there was no mention of a Roma church in the city.<sup>505</sup> The testimony of the Bulgarian missionary among the Roma, Petar Mincov, at the conference in 1930 may have spurred Roma Baptists to start their own church on hearing of the Roma church in Golintsi.



**Credința Church members in 1932<sup>506</sup>**

In the following years Credința Church had two baptisms, reaching 30 members. The majority of new members were students from the Sunday school, led in 1932 by Emil Jiva, with around 35 local Roma children attending. In 1934 there were between eight and ten groups of students (not clear how many were in each group) with former students as teachers. On 25 June 1933, Jiva and Ioan Cocut held an evangelization meeting, which included Sunday school examinations for the children and youth. After a sermon and the song “Cu blândete și drag Isus ne chiamă” (Softly and Tenderly, Jesus is Calling), about twenty-eight students and other young people responded to the altar call and gave a confession of their new faith. Dumitru Lingurar (1913-2003) whose father Anton Lingurar was among the founding members, became the first

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35: 9b-10 (NIV). The literal fulfillment Craighead wrote of was the gladness and joy that overtook them and “spiritual wilderness” turned into a place of plenty.

<sup>505</sup> W.E. Craighead, “Baptists Parade in Europe,” *Baptist and Reflector* 97/3 (January 1931): 8.

<sup>506</sup> Craighead, “Jubilee Tour of Good-will through Transylvania, Rumania,” *Baptist and Reflector* 98 (6 October 1932): 1. Identified in the photo are Ioan Cocut (1), Dumitru Vranceanu (2), and Walter Craighead (4). The Roma lay leader (3) is perhaps Anton Lingurar.

Roma student at the Baptist seminary in Bucharest in 1934. However, due to the premature death of Anton Lingurar, Dumitru, as the oldest son in the family, gave up seminary studies and was employed by the Romanian Railroad Company (Căile Ferate Romane) to support his mother.<sup>507</sup>

Dumitru published an article on the short history of Credința Church in the Russian language newsletter *Svetilnic* of the Bessarabian Baptists in which he described that many parents of the Roma children attending the Sunday school soon followed their children to church and were baptised. Roma children may have found the Sunday school more welcoming than other institutions. He remarked on evident moral changes in the Roma community, identifying the Baptist faith with a superior moral and spiritual status. The call to repentance- *pocăință*- appeared in the publisher's introduction to Lingurar's article. Baptist, Brethren, and Pentecostal believers received the moniker of *pocăiți* or repenters because of their persistent call for *pocăință* [repentance]; they subsequently adopted *pocăiți* as a self-identifying term.

Although Lingurar did not use the term himself, he mentioned a turn away from sin, immorality, cursing, and violence among the Roma in Arad-Șega once they were exposed to the Good News- *Vestea Bună*- of the Bible.<sup>508</sup> He did not identify negative characteristics specifically to the Roma, but pointed to the role of Bible teaching in prompting change and providing the Roma community, its young people in particular, with avenues to advance socially through education. Cocuț claimed that one often saw Roma believers preaching in the streets of Arad with the New Testament in their hands, pointing to both their zealous new faith and their victory over illiteracy.<sup>509</sup>

It seems that due to the limited resources of the Roma lay leaders and to prevent difficulties with the local authorities regarding authorizations to meet, Credința remained under the auspices of the Baptist church in the Pârneava district of Arad, whose pastor was also the official pastor of Credința. These official pastors included Ioan Cocuț, David Dumitrașcu, and

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<sup>507</sup> "Early life of Dumitru Lingurar," unpublished manuscript (author and date unknown) courtesy of Corneliu Lingurar. Corneliu Lingurar, Email correspondence, 19 May 2019.

<sup>508</sup> Dumitru Lingurar, "Lucrul lui Dumnezeu printre țigani," *Svetilnic* 6/7 (1934), 2-3; "Țigani și Isus," *Farul Creștin* 1/14 (July 1933), 12.

<sup>509</sup> Ioan Cocuț, "Second Gipsy Baptist Church of Europe," *Home and Foreign Fields* 20/7 (July 1936): 20.

Alexa Popovici between 1931 and 1942.<sup>510</sup> However, Credința had its own Roma lay pastors who led the congregation.

Unfortunately, very little information is available on the history and development of this first Roma Church. Mention of it has not yet been discovered in the archives of the police and gendarmerie reports at the Romanian National Archives. Viorel Achim's collection of documents on the fate of neo-Protestant churches during the Antonescu regime also makes no mention of this group despite documents that include very detailed accounts of Baptist, Adventist, and Nazarene buildings and property in Arad city requisitioned by the state after the ban on religious associations in 1943.<sup>511</sup> There are however traces of their church activity in denominational newsletters.

In 1936, Credința members requested a small harmonium for their meetings. They mentioned poverty and lack of regular employment as a reason for members being unable to procure it themselves.<sup>512</sup> In December 1937 the church held a burial service for Sister I. Topor, a member at Credința, officiated by Nicolae Oncu, and assisted by Ioan Negrău, Ioan Teterian, Teodor Neța and Ioan Cimpoieș.<sup>513</sup> The Baptist Union newsletter published an appeal in November 1938 to help the members procure their own building since the rent at their current prayer house was very high. Donations were sent to Oncu, as Baptist Union treasurer, at 4 Blanduziei Street, in Arad.<sup>514</sup> However, due to increasingly restrictive legislation, local resentment of religious associations such as the Baptists, and likely limited finances, they did not succeed in purchasing their own land until 1945. The land and subsequent prayer house was situated at 24 Aprodul Purice street in Arad. They remained at this address at least until 2019.<sup>515</sup>

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<sup>510</sup> Popovici, 481.

<sup>511</sup> Viorel Achim, *Politica regimului Antonescu față de cultele neoprotestante: documente* (Bucharest: Polirom, 2013), 625-634, 836-841.

<sup>512</sup> "O Rugăminte," *Farul Creștin* 4/4 (February 1936): 7.

<sup>513</sup> "Din lumea religioasă," *Farul Creștin* 6/1 (January 1938), 7. Nicolae Oncu was Romanian Baptist Union treasurer from 1935-1937. Popovici, 928.

<sup>514</sup> "Din lumea religioasă," *Farul Creștin* 6/46 (November 1938): 7. In 1936 the group of thirty were paying five dollars a month. Cocuț, "Second Gypsy Baptist Church of Europe," *Home and Foreign Fields* 20/7 (July 1936): 20.

<sup>515</sup> "Biserici," <https://www.biserici.org/index.php?menu=BI&code=3622> (accessed 20 May 2019). The Google maps street view from 2014 shows the plaque on the wall of 24 Aprodul Purice reading "Biserica Creștină Baptistă Credința."



**Credința Baptist Church in 2014**<sup>516</sup>



**Credința Church in 2019**<sup>517</sup>

By 1942, and in the midst of repressive legislation against “sectarians,” Credința Church recorded over 100 members.<sup>518</sup> In 1945, they held one of their largest baptismal services with 25 candidates and in 1946 they formed a renowned choir led by Nicolae Moț from the Șega Baptist church. Due to internal disputes, some members likely joined the growing Pentecostal churches while others emigrated, and their numbers fell to 46 members in 2006.<sup>519</sup>

<sup>516</sup> “24 Aprodul Purice Street,” Google maps (accessed 23 May 2019).

<sup>517</sup> “24 Aprodul Purice street,” Google Maps,

<https://www.google.com/maps/place/Strada+Aprodul+Purice+24,+Arad/@46.1851964,21.2992693,3a,90y,25.01h,91.73t/data=!3m6!1e1!3m4!1skqGN4SuH75YdWejfOpS28A!2e0!7i13312!8i6656!4m5!3m4!1s0x4745985dc9833829:0xfb48874bd58ffc38!8m2!3d46.1851814!4d21.2994755> (accessed 18 January 2020). The church was renovated sometime between 2014 and 2019.

<sup>518</sup> Popovici, 481.

<sup>519</sup> Ioan Bunaciu, *Istoria Bisericilor Baptiste din Romania* (Oradea: Editura Făclia, 2006), 33.

## Roma in Other Evangelical Churches

It seems that the 1930s was the break through decade for Romanian Roma organizations, growing Roma self-awareness, as well as a greater attentiveness to Roma by political and religious groups. There are several other mentions of Roma joining evangelical churches across the country at that time. Their association with Baptist churches in particular in the Banat and Transylvanian regions is in stark contrast to the more distant and outsider missionary scene occurring in Bucharest. This was a result of more assimilated Roma in Transylvania and the Banat, regions historically more accepting of ethnic diversity, who though assimilated were still more likely to identify as Roma. While in Wallachia, assimilated Roma were less likely to retain their Roma heritage. Bucharest Baptists were therefore working among poor Roma who had not advanced socially. Roma in the western regions of the country, despite aggressive assimilationist policies of the Hapsburg Empire, included families that fared better economically and still associated themselves with the Roma community.<sup>520</sup> The heightened sense of opportunity among them accounts, in part, for the larger number of self-identifying Roma evangelicals in these regions.

In Dognecea village, Caraș County another predominantly Roma Baptist Church was established. Villagers sold limestone in the Almaș Valley in exchange for grains, and on one such trip in 1918 local Todor Corolan met Baptist pastor Dumitru Drăgilă from Prilipeț. Corolan invited Drăgilă to Dognecea and the latter began to hold meetings in Corolan's home, and later in the home of Ioan Moise between 1918 and 1920. In 1920 Drăgilă baptized the founding members of what would become the Baptist Church in Dognecea at "Lacul Mare" (the Big Lake): Todor Corolan, Matei Tismănaru, Lazar Dobre, and Ioan Moise. Popovici identifies Lazar Dobre as an ethnic Roma, converted while a soldier serving in World War I.<sup>521</sup> He also attended the Baptist seminary in Bucharest, but not until after World War II (from 1947 to 1951) at the age of forty. After seminary he served as pastor of the Dognecea church until authorities

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<sup>520</sup> Achim, *The Roma in Romanian History*, 145-161; Dan Draghia, "De la deschidere la reprimare și negare. Romii din România în perioada 1918-1989," 32.

<sup>521</sup> Popovici, 467, 481.

revoked his pastor authorization, the date of which is unknown, in an attempt to curtail evangelical activity.<sup>522</sup>



**Dognecea Baptist Church, 2018<sup>523</sup>**

In September 2018, the Dognecea church celebrated their 100-year anniversary, making them older than Credința Church. However, the mix of Roma and Romanians differentiated it from the latter, leaving Credința as the “first Roma Baptist church” in the collective memory of Romanian Baptists. Many Dognecea Roma Baptists later joined the churches in the nearby city of Reșița and the town of Bocșa. The church jubilee brochure made no mention of their Roma heritage, though Bunaciu claimed that in 2006 it held the highest percentage of ethnic Roma from any church within the Romanian Baptist Union.<sup>524</sup>

In Alba-Iulia city, Transylvania, two Roma families joined the Baptist church pastored by Pavel Boșorogan in 1930/1931.<sup>525</sup> Unfortunately, more information on these two families is not available. Another church in Lăpușnicul Mare, one of the largest churches in the Almaș Valley

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<sup>522</sup> Nelu Bâtea, “Istoricul începutului credinței Creștine baptiste în localitatea Dognecea,” *Biserica Creștină Baptistă Dognecea Jubileu Brochure* (2 September 2018), courtesy of Ovidiu Copăceanu;

<sup>523</sup> Bâtea, *Biserica Creștină Baptistă Dognecea*, courtesy of Ovidiu Copăceanu.

<sup>524</sup> Bâtea, “Istoricul începutului credinței Creștine baptiste în localitatea Dognecea,” *Biserica Creștină Baptistă Dognecea Jubileu Brochure* (2 September 2018), courtesy of Ovidiu Copăceanu; Bunaciu, *Istoria Bisericilor Baptiste din Romania*, 729; “Harul Bocsa,” <http://harulbocsa.uv.ro/dognecea.php> (accessed 20 May 2019).

<sup>525</sup> P. Boșorogan, “Evangelhia între Țigani,” *Glasul Evangheliei* 2/3 (March 1931): 1-2.

(today Caraș-Severin County in the Banat), was recorded as having Roma members and being financially disadvantaged. They nonetheless contributed over 30,000 Lei, a vast sum, to various activities in the Baptist Union.<sup>526</sup>

In Cuvin village, Arad County, the members' registry from 1951 lists Florița Tigan as born in 1899 in Covasint village, the date of baptism unlisted but believed to be before World War II.<sup>527</sup> Covasint and similar towns and villages in Arad County, such as Șiria had large Roma villages, but no mention is made of Roma members in the denominational histories, either because there were none or because they did not record the ethnicity of members to avoid interference from police authorities (or due to the fact that they honestly did not care and could not be bothered to document this).<sup>528</sup>

By the mid-1930s, there is also mention of Roma in the Baptist churches in Bucharest. The Anglican LSPCJ mission reported a group of converted Roma in an unnamed town, likely near Bucharest, who formed a choir and sang in a local evangelical church in 1933. Jewish Christians visiting the town joined the church service and remarked how their opinion of Roma as thieves and vagabonds was challenged.<sup>529</sup> An orchestra composed of Roma musicians from Bucharest played at a 1939 baptismal service of 45 people in Slobozia village, Cetatea Albă County in Bessarabia.<sup>530</sup> Roma believers also joined Lev Averbuch's Jewish Christian congregation in Chișinău during a Christmas gathering in 1934. Averbuch reported that they sang a song in Romani, adding to the already rich multilingual service.<sup>531</sup>

Apart from these, no other cities or villages reported Roma evangelical believers. This does not mean there were not any. The Roma were not on the Romanian evangelical radar until 1930, otherwise more attention would have been given to the development in Dognecea with

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<sup>526</sup> D. Hera, "Insemnări de pe câmpul misionar," *Farul Creștin* 5/15 (August 1937): 6. This was equivalent to 220 USD in 1936 and close to 4,020 USD today.  
<https://www.dollartimes.com/inflation/inflation.php?>

<sup>527</sup> Otniel Laurean Vereș, *Scurta monografie a Comunitatii Bisericii baptiste din zona Bihor* (Oradea: UEO 2007).

<sup>528</sup> Livius Ban, *De la ruina la glorie - istoricul bisericii din Șiria* (Arad: Carmel Print, 2004). Fănică Bârniș was pastor of Credința Church before passing away in April 2018. He also pastored the Roma Church in Sadova and produced a translation of the New Testament into the local Roma dialect after 1990. Emanuel Jurcoi, Personal correspondence, 19 February 2018.

<sup>529</sup> DIM, 126<sup>th</sup> Missionary Report of the London Society for Promoting Christianity amongst the Jews, *Bread cast upon the waters*, (London, 1933-1934): 56.

<sup>530</sup> *Farul Creștin* 7/39 (September 1939): 5.

<sup>531</sup> *TT* 41/2 (February 1935): 21-22.



Lazar Dobre in the 1920s. The ethnic Romanian evangelical churches were themselves very young and still developing in the first decade after World War I. We see this change in the second decade of the interwar period, in particular with the Roma.

### **Evangelical Mission among the Roma**

Increased attention to Roma in evangelical literature in the 1930s spurred a surge in missionary attempts toward Roma in the region. The German Baptist Union was especially active in Roma mission, led by Karl Füllbrandt in Vienna. Their monthly publication *Täufer-Bote* regularly published updates from the Mincovs, Georgi Stefanov, and Trifon Dimitrov, among others, working with Bulgarian Roma, as well as with Roma mission in Hungary and in Königsberg (Kaliningrad).<sup>532</sup>



**Trifon Dimitrov with a Roma family in Bulgaria**<sup>533</sup>

On 10-11 October 1930 Petar Mincov, missionary to Bulgarian Roma, and pastor at the Golintsi Roma church, spoke at the Baptist prayer house in Chişinău about his experience with the increase in Roma Baptists. Aid raised during the meeting reached 4000 Lei and the report on

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<sup>532</sup> *Täufer-Bote* from 1931-1942 courtesy of Roland Fleischer. Fantscho Adschoff, “Aus der Boten-Tasche,” *Täufer-Bote* 2/5 (May 1931): 7; Paul Spanring, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer and Arnold Koster: Two Distinct Voices in the Midst of Germany's Third Reich Turmoil* (Cambridge: The Lutterworth Press, 2014), 102-104.

<sup>533</sup> A.K., “О цыганах [About Gypsies],” *Светильник [Svetilnic]* 3-4 (1934): 17-18.

Mincov's visit claimed some Roma in attendance were converted (“*s-au pocăit*”) during his talks.<sup>534</sup> His talk influenced Pastor Boris Bușilă to start a prayer group and explore ways to reach the Roma across Bessarabia.

Prior to his visit to Chișinău, Mincov attended the Baptist World Alliance Southeast European Regional Conference held in Arad, 2-5 October 1930. There he spoke in detail about the founding of the first Roma Baptist community in Golintsi, Bulgaria, seemingly the first Roma Protestant church in Europe. The church was composed of about forty baptized members in 1930, whose lives he described as changed into “industrious, clean workers for the kingdom [of God].”<sup>535</sup> The members built their own prayer house, making 32,000 of their own bricks. Mincov's wife, Anna Mincova along with Georgi Stefanov produced a small hymnbook and the Gospel of Matthew in the Romani language, the latter of which was published by the British Foreign Bible Society.<sup>536</sup>



**Roma Baptist prayer house in Golintsi, Bulgaria**<sup>537</sup>

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<sup>534</sup> “Conferința din Basarabia,” Светильник 10-11 (1930): 2; Dumitru Lingurar, “Lucrul lui Dumnezeu printre țigani,” *Svetilnic* 6-7 (1934): 2-3.

<sup>535</sup> W.E. Craighead, “Baptists Parade in Europe,” *Baptist and Reflector* 97/3 (January 1931): 8; Karl Füllbrandt, “Bethaus-Einweihung bei den Ziguenern in Bulgarien,” *Täufer-Bote* 10 (October 1930): 3-5; Popovici, 554.

<sup>536</sup> “Stiri,” *Farul Creștin* 2/22 (November 1934): 7.

<sup>537</sup> “Глбоконазидательные дни в Кишиневе. для делегатов бессарабскх церквей от 7-12 октября 1934 г. [High-key days in Chisinau for delegates to Bessarabian churches. 7-12 October 1934],” Светильник 10-11 (1934): 13. It was inaugurated on 28 September 1930 and the plaques on the building read “Come unto me all you that labor and are heavy laden and I will give you rest,” (Jesus's words from Matthew 11:28) in Bulgarian and in Romani. Photo of “Gypsy Baptist Church in Bulgaria,” *Home and*

Stefanov, whose parents were previously nomadic Roma, settled in Golintsi and received theological training at the Baptist seminary in St Andră, Austria, the same school attended by Chişinău native Moses Richter, who worked as a missionary to the Jews with the Baptist Church in Cernăuţi city, Bukovina region. Stefanov was ordained as pastor at the Roma church in Golintsi after Mincov moved to work among Roma Muslims in Sofia. By 1934 the Golintsi Roma church had ninety members.<sup>538</sup> The earlier start in Bulgaria spurred the outreach to Roma in Romania.

The previously mentioned Baptist prayer group for Roma in Chişinău gathered once a week for prayer as well as to discuss opportunities for outreach. Members sold crafts, baked-goods, or flowers. Others donated money to raise funds for outreach initiatives, including travel expenses for preachers, renting out halls, or providing material aid for Roma they visited. On 7 March 1934, they held an event in Chişinău to encourage wider involvement. Everett Gill was among the speakers and recounted to listeners the encouraging example of a young Roma man attending the Bucharest Baptist seminary (referring to Dumitru Lingurar). Speakers read essays about the origin of the Roma, their traditions and beliefs, another about the work among Roma in Bulgaria. People recited poems and sang songs, including one song in a Romani dialect. Baptists who came from different places in Bessarabia said they witnessed conversion of Roma in their villages, but the report on the meeting failed to mention specific place names.<sup>539</sup>

The Bessarabian Baptists also occasionally published articles on the Roma in their newsletter *Svetilnic*. These often included unsubstantiated claims about Roma beliefs and traditions; however, *Svetilnic* was the only publication in Romania at the time that included an article written by a Roma Baptist. The article, published in 1934 is also the only available published account of the first Roma Baptist Church in Romania from the perspective of a Roma member of the church. The author was most likely Dumitru Lingurar, who studied at the Baptist seminary in Bucharest, received a law degree after World War II, and afterwards served as a

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*Foreign Fields* 15/11 (November 1931): 3; James Rushbrooke, "Items of Interest from Europe," *Home and Foreign Fields* 15/2 (February 1931): 13.

<sup>538</sup> Wardin, "The Baptists in Bulgaria," 153; Stefanoff, "Wie ich Zigeuner-Bibelbote wurde," *Täufer-Bote* 2/5 (May 1931): 8; *Täufer-Bote* 4/10 (October 1933): 7; *Täufer-Bote* 6/1 (January 1935): 6 in Fleischer, "Begegnungen," 217.

<sup>539</sup> A.K., "О цыганах [About Gypsies]," *СВЕТИЛЬНИК* 3-4 (1934): 17-18.

judge in Sannicoleaul Mare, a district in the Banat region. Brother Lingurar, as he identified himself at the end of the article, linked the improvement of the Roma community in Romania, and Arad in particular, with the growing evangelical religious movements.

Though the editors of *Svetilnic* continued to refer to Roma as *țigani* [gypsies], one article acknowledged that they called themselves *Rom(i)* (in Romanian) derived from *om* or “human/individual.” Editors called on readers to recognize their shared status as humans whom God loves and for whom He died through his sacrifice on the cross (“Dumnezeu îi iubește și să jertfit și pentru ei”).<sup>540</sup> Articles by or about British Roma evangelist Rodney “Gypsy” Smith (1860-1947) also began to appear in the 1930s Bucharest-based Baptist publication *Farul Creștin*.<sup>541</sup> However, the articles were sporadic and not directly linked to the Romanian Roma believers.

In Bucharest, the Baptist Women’s Missionary Association spearheaded the Roma Mission in 1934, led by Earl Hester, director of the Bucharest women’s seminary “James Memorial Training School” from 1930 to 1937. Hester visited Credința Church on 27-30 June 1933 and gave what could essentially be called a sermon on the topic “If Jesus had never come.”<sup>542</sup> That she as a woman was invited to speak in a Baptist Church, and to a majority Roma congregation, whose culture is also very patriarchal, reveals a more modern view of women’s role in the church at the time than previously thought, at least among Baptist Union leadership. The fact that she was American may have played a role, but the article did not mention either her sex or her nationality. This trip may have also influenced her to begin work with the Roma on the other side of the country in the capital city, where little was being done.

Hester and the Bucharest group saw their work as fulfilling part of the Great Commission, Jesus’s call to go to all people groups with the Gospel message; the Roma were considered an unreached, or poorly reached, group. They sent a circular to women’s missionary societies in Baptist churches across the country to support this ministry. In the first year, they

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<sup>540</sup> “Некоторые сведения о цыганах,” [Some information about Gypsies] Светильник 5 (1934): 13. The association of the label *țigan* with “unclean” or “untouchable” is present in Roma publications of the time. Lucian Nastașă, Andrea Varga, *Minorități etnoculturale. Mărturii documentare. Țigani din România (1919-1944)* (Cluj: Editura Centrul de Resurse pentru Diversitate Etnoculturală, 2001), 222.

<sup>541</sup> “Stiri Diverse,” *Farul Creștin* 2/15 (August 1934): 5; *Farul Creștin* 2/23 (December 1934), 7. For more on Smith see his autobiography: [http://www.biblebelievers.com/gypsy\\_smith/](http://www.biblebelievers.com/gypsy_smith/) (accessed 21 May 2019).

<sup>542</sup> “Țigani și Isus,” *Farul Creștin* 1/14 (July 1933): 12. Her name is rather unusual for a woman, but Earl, though usually a man’s name was her given name.

received 400 lei from America, 250 lei from Bucharest, 200 from Chişinău, 100 from Constanţa, and 100 from Alba Iulia. These cities remained some of the mission's main supporters in the following years. By December 1934 they raised the funds necessary to rent a room in Bucharest, the address of which was not printed.<sup>543</sup>

Since Hester also worked at the Baptist seminary, students (both male and female) were those most involved in outreach events in Bucharest. Seminary students Petru Truţa (Earl Hester's future husband) and Teodor Cenuşa along with some unnamed female students rented places in two districts to hold meetings for the Roma. The Buşilăs and Lidia Căldăraru from Bessarabia visited these meetings and reported to the "Committee on Mission among the Gypsies" in Chişinău the need for finances to pay the rent on the rooms in Bucharest and to buy firewood to heat the building in the winter.<sup>544</sup> Seminary student G. Jitariu spent his Christmas holiday working among Roma communities near Bucharest. He reported four people from different villages coming to faith and many attending the events in rural areas to hear the Gospel.<sup>545</sup> The students also visited Roma communities in other parts of the country, such as in Carăsau, Bihor County. Seminary student Petrică N. Popa and local Baptists were welcomed by a gate of woven acacia trees with the sign: "Bine aţi venit!" [Welcome!]. Popa spoke on the theme of God's love and they served lunch at the nearby Baptist church with, it seems, both Roma and local Baptist villagers.<sup>546</sup>

Though no evidence has yet surfaced of hostility among the Roma against these missionizing attempts, the students did encounter opposition from police authorities. A seminary student was arrested while preaching at one of the Roma evangelization meetings in Bucharest in 1937 and spent five days in jail.<sup>547</sup>

In 1936, the Baptist Union selected an eleven-member committee for mission among the Roma, making it officially part of the Union's work and not the sole responsibility of the Women's Missionary Association. Men from outside Bucharest were included in the committee

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<sup>543</sup> "Stiri si informatiuni," *Farul Creştin* 2/19 (October 1934): 7; "Stiri si informatiuni," *Farul Creştin* 2/24 (December 1934): 11.

<sup>544</sup> Boris Buşilă, "Misiunea între Țigani," *Svetilnic* 1-2 (January-February 1935): 2.

<sup>545</sup> "De pe ogorul Evangheliei," *Farul Creştin* 5/3 (February 1937): 7.

<sup>546</sup> "De pe ogorul Evangheliei," *Farul Creştin* 5/14 (July 1937): 7.

<sup>547</sup> The name of the student was not given. H.H. Muirhead, "God's Word in the Heart," *Home and Foreign Fields* 21/9 (September 1937): 7.

such as Dumitru Baban from Constanța, Boris Bușilă from Chișinău, and Emil Jiva from Arad.<sup>548</sup> The reasons for the formation of this committee are unclear, perhaps in hopes of extending missionizing efforts with the help of pastors who were involved in their local Roma communities already, such Bușilă and Jiva. Hester and the women's societies, along with the seminary students remained invested in the work, but nothing groundbreaking occurred among Bucharest Roma as it had in Arad. Of the three larger mission projects of the Baptist Union (the Roma community, Yugoslavia, and the leprosy colony in Tichilești, Tulcea County), the Roma mission received the least reportage.

From 1934 to 1936, the Baptist publication *Farul Creștin* printed requests for money for the Bucharest Roma mission; those interested could send donations to Earl Hester at 29 Berzei Street (the Baptist Seminary address).<sup>549</sup> Within a couple of months, donations reached a sum of 2,704 lei. The majority came from various Baptist groups in Bucharest but with sizeable donations from villages across the country (see appendix Table I).<sup>550</sup> In 1935, they raised a little less at 2,651 lei. The list of sponsors was completely different from the previous year, the largest amount coming from Tulcea County (see appendix Table II).<sup>551</sup> This was perhaps due to the influence of seminary student Teodor Cenușa, who worked with the Roma mission in Bucharest and who became pastor of the Baptist church in Tulcea in 1937.<sup>552</sup> Six separate donations came from Bessarabia, due in part to Bușilă's initiative, and even a lawyer, with no church affiliated to his name, donated forty lei.

It seemed like a promising start, but after January 1936 donations for Roma mission appear again only in the January and March 1939 issues of *Farul Creștin*.<sup>553</sup> The Baptist Union became embroiled in petitions for changing restrictive legislation diverting their attention from Roma mission. The loss of Earl Hester's leadership in mission efforts after her marriage to Petru

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<sup>548</sup> "Misiunea țigani," *Farul Creștin* 4/1 (January 1936): 6.

<sup>549</sup> "Stiri si informatiuni," *Farul Creștin* 2/19 (October 1934): 7; "Stiri si informatiuni," *Farul Creștin* 2/24 (December 1934): 11; "De pe ogorul evangheliei," *Farul Creștin* 4/8 (April 1936): 9. Boris Bușilă also put out a call in the Bessarabian Baptist paper: "Misiunea între Țigani," *Svetilnic* 1-2 (January-February 1935): 2.

<sup>550</sup> "Stiri si informatiuni," *Farul Creștin* 2/24 (December 1934): 11.

<sup>551</sup> "Misiunea țigani," *Farul Creștin* 4/1 (January 1936): 6.

<sup>552</sup> Popovici, 455.

<sup>553</sup> The First Baptist Church in Detroit, Michigan, USA sent 1,500 lei. Petru Truța, "Dela Societatea Misionară Baptistă," *Farul Creștin* 7/2 (January 1939): 7. Dumitru Moșilă from Constanța sent 40 lei. Petru Truța, "Dela Societatea Misionară Baptistă," *Farul Creștin* 7/10 (March 1939): 7.

Truta in May 1937 and their move to the United States also set back the work among Roma in Bucharest.<sup>554</sup> The Romanian Baptists in the capital lacked a leader to help support local Roma Baptists similar to Lingurar in Arad or Mincov and Georgi Stefanov in Golintsi, Bulgaria.

### **Roma Evangelical Identity**

Unfortunately, there is very little from the Roma themselves on why they joined these churches and on how they were treated by other Roma once they did so. For this we must rely on more recent anthropological research. Using both past and present studies, we see that overwhelmingly, social inclusion/advancement, trans-ethnic, multi-lingual congregations, and a lack of history of Roma prejudice in these new churches drew Roma to evangelicals. As analyzed above, Dumitru Lingurar conveyed social advancement and appealing new moral outlook as reasons for Roma becoming evangelical. Pavel Boşorogan's article from 1931 allows further insight regarding the equality these churches and their theology seemed to offer, as similarly argued by Jewish evangelicals in the previous chapter. Concerning the Roma in his Alba-Iulia congregation, Boşorogan wrote, "They are joyous that a place has been found for them also in the arms and on the shoulders of the Good Shepherd," and they believed that Jesus loved them the same as he did the king.<sup>555</sup> The Baptist faith allowed them to view themselves of equal value as that of King Carol before God.

Stefan Lipan's recent study of current migrant evangelical Romanian Roma in Belgium identifies this principle of an inclusive theology through the words of one of the Roma pastors: "God has chosen the entire Gypsy people from all around the globe. God has found his pleasure in us, the Gypsies, and that means the lowest stratum."<sup>556</sup> The theme of equality with surrounding people groups and within society comes up frequently in recent studies on Roma evangelicals. Johannes Ries's study of a contemporary largely Roma Pentecostal congregation in Transylvania draws this out through a quote from the church's Saxon pastor:

We are all very different. Here in this hall are sitting different races,  
different nations and different cultures. Brothers and sisters, we are

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<sup>554</sup> Earl Hester, "O scrisoare de plecare 24 April," *Farul Creştin* 5/10 (May 1937): 5, 7.

<sup>555</sup> P. Boşorogan, "Evangelhia între Țigani," *Glasul Evangheliei* 2/3 (March 1931): 1-2.

<sup>556</sup> Stefan Lipan, "The Interplay between Ethnic and Religious Frontiers: The Case of Repented Roma Migrants Living in a Belgian City," *The Romanian Journal of Society and Politics* 12/1 (June 2017): 64.

all very different. One of us might be a musician, another a mathematician or a doctor. Here are sitting poor and rich, strong and weak, thick and thin... We are all very different. But what connects us? There is something in us, which is common to all of us and which unites us: the desire to be with the Lord. And this desire makes us all equal.<sup>557</sup>

This is very similar to the description of Averbuch's congregation in the previous chapter and the unity of believers despite national, ethnic, class or gender differences.

Equality in the spiritual realm was linked to equality in the physical/social realm. Belief in access to the Bible for all and the required ritual of individual reading and study of the Bible in these churches resulted in increased literacy among Roma evangelicals and more opportunities for social integration.<sup>558</sup> Sînziana Preda identifies this focus on Bible study as a "guiding principle for inter-ethnic and interconfessional relations," since Bible passages, especially in the Pauline letters of the new Testament, encourage the diversity of Christian communities.<sup>559</sup> For some Roma these mixed "trans-ethnic" congregations offered important spaces for social inclusion.<sup>560</sup>

However, the persistence of separate Roma churches reveals the limits of conversion as an avenue of social integration.<sup>561</sup> Many Roma prefer to join majority Roma evangelical churches because they still experience marginalization in other churches but also to preserve elements of Roma culture, such as music or dress. Johannes Ries identifies how more traditional Roma groups use the development of separate Roma churches to express ethnic exclusiveness and refrain from mixing socially with those who are not Roma.<sup>562</sup> The case of Credința Church

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<sup>557</sup> Johannes Ries, "Romany/Gypsy Church or People of God? The Dynamics of Pentecostal Mission and Romani/Gypsy Ethnicity Management," Michael Stewart and Marton Rovid (eds.), *Multidisciplinary Approaches to Romani Studies* (Budapest: CEU Press, 2011): 274.

<sup>558</sup> Lőrinczi, "The Representation of the Self-Concepts Within the Adventist Romani Community from Etéd," 213.

<sup>559</sup> Sînziana Preda, "Making a Covenant with the Lord Jesus: The Appeal of 'Repentance' in Roma Communities in Post-Communist Romania," *Journal of Ethnography and Folklore* 1-2 (2018): 293.

<sup>560</sup> Johannes Ries, "Romany/Gypsy Church or People of God? The Dynamics of Pentecostal Mission and Romani/Gypsy Ethnicity Management," 278.

<sup>561</sup> Gheorghe Dejeu, "Social Integration Mechanism. Case Study: the Gypsy Community in the Village of Tinca, Bihor County," *Discourse as a Form of Multiculturalism in Literature and Communication: Social Sciences* (Târgu Mureș: Arhipelag XXI Press, 2015): 454-464.

<sup>562</sup> Johannes Ries, "Romany/Gypsy Church or People of God?" 278.



complicates this approach as members both sought social inclusion and opted for an ethnic exclusive church for missionizing purposes.

Recent anthropological studies analyse Roma conversion to these evangelical groups after the fall of communism in Romania, but their observations can help shed light on how interwar Roma may have seen their “conversion.” Similar to Averbuch and the Jewish Christians, Roma identify their change of confession as a “rediscovery” of their spirituality rather than moving to another religion,<sup>563</sup> and a continual process rather than a single event.<sup>564</sup> The problematic use of the word conversion appears again, since the Roma do not use the word “conversion” but refer rather to their *pocăință* or repentance.<sup>565</sup> Their new faith community influenced their perception of what László Fosztó calls their “moral personhood,” whereby evangelical Roma may consider themselves better than other Roma- “*țigani mai buni*” [better gypsies]- similar to Averbuch considering himself a “true Israelite” or a “real Jew” for believing in Jesus as Messiah.<sup>566</sup>

As Jewish Christians blended Jewish customs in their services, anthropologists point to the adoption of elements of Roma culture in some evangelical churches. Preda observes:

“Certain religious chants incorporate the tunes of traditional Roma songs, the collective prayer follows the pattern of funeral laments. The low relevance of written materials in Pentecostal rituals is in a fortunate compliance with the oral character of Roma culture and with the high level of illiteracy.”<sup>567</sup>

However, many of these observations deal particularly with the draw of the Pentecostal tradition, which seemed to draw in Roma adherents only after World War II. We do know however that Roma evangelicals in the interwar period incorporated some elements of Roma culture in their

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<sup>563</sup> Sînziana Preda, “Making a Covenant with the Lord Jesus,” 277.

<sup>564</sup> “Conversion is not a single event, but a process in which the moral personhood of the converted is redefined and socially recognized.” Fosztó, *Colecție de studii despre Romii din România*, (Cluj: Institutul pentru Studierea Problemelor Minorităților Naționale, 2009), 186.

<sup>565</sup> This refers to “a blend of experiences, ideas and feelings which hint at epiphany, metanoia, hierophany.” Preda, “Making a Covenant with the Lord Jesus,” 282.

<sup>566</sup> László Fosztó, *Colecție de studii despre Romii din România*, 168.

<sup>567</sup> Preda, “Making a Covenant with the Lord Jesus,” 297.

services, such as song in Romani dialects, mentioned previously and elaborated upon in the next chapter.

Though no evidence has yet surfaced of interwar Roma Adventists, Preda mentions a Roma man whose grandparents became Seventh-day Adventists, likely before World War II.<sup>568</sup> Tünde Lőrinczi's study of Roma in the Transylvanian village of Etéd focuses on current Gábor Roma who joined the Adventist Church in large numbers after 1989; he identifies an elitism, similar to what occurred during the interwar between Baptists and Pentecostals.<sup>569</sup> The Gábor Roma Adventists saw themselves as more intellectual than the Pentecostal Roma, who rely more on emotions and feelings- the "movement of the Holy Spirit" rather than on study of the Bible and strict observance of certain ceremonial laws within it. Interestingly, despite a lack of Jewish converts to Adventism, these Adventist Roma identify with Jews through the black hats worn by Gábor Roma males, their mutual affinity for business, keeping of Sabbath and Kosher laws, and as a people with whom they share a history of persecution and exclusion.<sup>570</sup>

Again it is difficult to know how these new believers were treated in their larger Roma community. What little evidence we do have reveals those who converted in the interwar period experienced ridicule from fellow Roma and were denigrated: "ne vorbesc de rău și mintesc împotriva noastră," [they speak ill of us and say lies about us].<sup>571</sup> After World War II, Sandu Livera from Fântânele village converted to Pentecostalism from a well off Roma Lăutari (musician) family known for their radio performances. This was considered very shameful for the family and the village. They ridiculed him saying he was crazy, that he had made their community a laughing stock: "te-ai prostit, ne-ai făcut de răs, ne-ai batjocorit prin pocăința ta..." [you are insane, you've made us a laughing stock, you've ridiculed us through your repentance].<sup>572</sup> For the Fântânele Roma community the change of faith among the Roma was seen as a cultural and economic uprooting. Many who converted had to give up their Lăutari musical careers or other business that usually took place on Sundays. Ostracization in the

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<sup>568</sup> Preda, "Making a Covenant with the Lord Jesus," 287.

<sup>569</sup> Roma and Hungarians called each other brothers in a True Believer Jehova's Witness congregation. Tünde Lőrinczi, "The Representation of the Self-Concepts Within the Adventist Romani Community from Etéd," *Acta Universitatis Sapientiae, Philologica* 5/2 (2013): 203-222.

<sup>570</sup> Lőrinczi, 217.

<sup>571</sup> P. Boșorogan, "Evangelhia între Țigani," *Glasul Evangheliei* 2/3 (March 1931): 1-2.

<sup>572</sup> Nataniel Bișis, "De la marginalitate la normativitate. Convertirea unei comunități rome la Penticostalism," *Revista Româna de Sociologie* 28/3-4 (2017): 261.

economic and social spheres of villages and small towns led many new evangelical Roma believers like Livera to relocate to large cities.<sup>573</sup> Something similar occurred among the Roma Baptists from Dognecea who moved to the nearby city of Reșița. However, Lórinzi's study shows that after 1989 evangelical Roma and Roma of other faiths in the same village claimed good rapport with one another.<sup>574</sup>

Though the surge of Roma Protestant and especially Pentecostal believers occurred with the Roma revival spread from France in the 1950s, this chapter reveals early conversion of Roma to non-Greek Orthodox churches in Romania prior to World War II. It is evidence of a new stage in Roma identity formation through engagement with a minority religious group that lacked a history of Roma prejudice as was present in the Romanian Orthodox Church. The Roma, like the Jewish minority in the previous chapter, felt a more welcoming and supportive community among these new evangelical churches.

The chapter reveals that the decision to start a Roma evangelical church, named *Credința*, was initiated by Baptist Roma themselves in Arad City. Ioan Cocuț took an active part in the development of *Credința* Church; however, the teachers of the Sunday school and the church founders were clearly from the Roma community. This spurred Romanian outreach and mission among the Roma in Bucharest, Chișinău, and Alba-Iulia, among other places. However, in these latter cities, the role of Roma in leadership was lacking and no lasting Roma church was founded as in Arad. Though little is known about the motivations and reactions of interwar Roma who joined evangelicals, the recent surge in Roma adopting Pentecostalism points to the more inclusive nature of these denominations. Their multi-cultural, multi-lingual services allowed Roma to engage on more equal social footing in society. Music, in particular, remained an important avenue by which they entered and engaged in the evangelical social space. The role of music in the lived religion of these non-conformist communities across interwar Romania is analysed in depth in the next chapter.

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<sup>573</sup> Bițis, "De la marginalitate la normativitate," 266.

<sup>574</sup> Lórinzi, 217-218.

## Chapter 4 Motley Repertoires and the Performative Power of Music

Preaching, singing, and playing the violin were the three gifts Lev Averbuch used as a troika to pull the sleigh of the Gospel and, as this chapter will prove, to overcome ethnic, social, and gender barriers.<sup>575</sup> Music in the construction of national identity as well as in resistance to such identities imposed from above is a valuable lens through which to analyze the complex ethnic and religious communities analyzed in the previous chapters. The study of music is often left to ethnologists/ethnomusicologists, but Carl Dahlhaus and subsequent historians confronted the discipline of history with the fact that “music is not an ahistorical canon of continuously performed instances of timeless beauty; it is the outcome of historical practices and events.”<sup>576</sup> Recent scholars, like Joep Leerssen, Marina Frolova-Walker, and Alexandra Wilson, heeded the call to analyze such historical practices and have addressed the previously neglected study of music in the development of national movements.<sup>577</sup>

Music plays a controversial role in the construction of religious and national identities, especially in the multi-ethnic regions of central and eastern Europe. Saxons in nineteenth century Transylvania used music to combat what they felt was a Hungarian nationalist agenda. They claimed superiority of German culture by creating a negative association of Hungarian music with Roma music.<sup>578</sup> During the same period, Janis Cimze’s (1814–1881) collection of choral songs for Latvians was criticized for including German and Russian melodies and as such not being “Latvian” enough.<sup>579</sup>

Emerging Jewish nationalism of the late nineteenth century and early twentieth century included the founding of the Society for Jewish Folk Music in St Petersburg in 1908. Composers

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<sup>575</sup> Gabe, “The Hebrew Christian Movement in Kishineff,” *HC* 62/1 (March -May 1989): 9.

<sup>576</sup> Joep Leerssen, “Romanticism, Music, Nationalism.” *Nations & Nationalism* 20, no. 4 (October 2014): 607.

<sup>577</sup> Marina Frolova-Walker, *Russian Music and Nationalism: From Glinka to Stalin* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2007); Leerssen, Joep. “Romanticism, Music, Nationalism.” *Nations & Nationalism* 20, no. 4 (October 2014): 621; Alexandra Wilson, *The Puccini Problem: Opera, Nationalism, and Modernity*. Cambridge Studies in Opera (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007).

<sup>578</sup> Marian Zăloagă, “Germans, Hungarians and the *Zigeunerkapelle*: performing national enmity in late nineteenth-century Transylvania,” *Patterns of Prejudice* 47/4-5, (2013): 387, 393. German Baptists in the east engaged differently with Roma than Saxons in the west. Presenting evangelicals as Other because of their music is also present in police reports but not in other accounts.

<sup>579</sup> Kevin C. Karnes, “A Garland of Songs for a Nation of Singers: An Episode in the History of Russia, the Herderian Tradition and the Rise of Baltic Nationalism,” *Journal of the Royal Musical Association* 130, Part 2 (2005): 197-235.

sought a Jewish national essence by means of music and by applying the theories of Ahad Ha'am or of Simon Dubnov.<sup>580</sup> In the present study, Lev Averbuch was caught between the different currents of Jewish national and religious identity; though opposed to nationalism he engaged with Jewish theological and cultural particulars expressed through his music. Vasile Chiseliță's study of Jewish music in Bessarabia and Bukovina reveals the unique hybridity between Jewish and Roma music in the mid to late nineteenth century, a fascinating topic in need of further study, which challenges previous conceptions of clear ethnic boundaries in music, further showing the boundary-crossing potential of music.<sup>581</sup>

As religious and national identities changed over time, music became an important avenue by which to express or contribute to these changes; music serves as a means of agency for individuals and groups that perform it. Marianne Kielian-Gilbert points to the performative value of music as act and action, which carries with it social commitments and the potential for cultural and social change, by both performers and listeners.<sup>582</sup> In interwar Romania, musical repertoire brought together the varying views of Romanian national identity held by evangelicals from different regions of the country to create a new evangelical identity.<sup>583</sup> They, therefore, challenged society's focus on national identity through their emphasis on religious identity, in which the performative aspect of music played a significant role and through which they bridged ethnic and other differences.<sup>584</sup>

Applying David McDonald's concept of "multiple repertoires of resistance" from his study among Palestinians, music of Romanian interwar evangelicals consciously challenged Romanian Orthodox social predominance, and ethnic, religious, and linguistic homogeneity. These "repertoires of resistance" shaped their interactions with the state authorities and with their neighbors. McDonald argues that "listening strategies produced popular imaginaries of

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<sup>580</sup> Klára Móricz, *Jewish Identities: Nationalism, Racism, and Utopianism in Twentieth-Century Music* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2008), 13, 17-18.

<sup>581</sup> Vasile Chiseliță, "Interferențe Culturale Everiești în Muzica Tradițională de dans din Basarabia și Bucovina," *Anuarul Institutului de Etnografie și Folclor Constantin Brăiloiu* 19 (2008): 210.

<sup>582</sup> Marianne Kielian-Gilbert, "Musical Bordering, Connecting Histories, Becoming Performative," *Music Theory Spectrum* 33/2 (Fall 2011): 206.

<sup>583</sup> David A. McDonald, *My Voice Is My Weapon: Music, Nationalism and the Poetics of Palestinian Resistance* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2013).

<sup>584</sup> Performative spaces are defined as lived spaces and spatial boundaries or in this case sound boundaries and spaces as well. Aditi Hunma, "Students make History Every Day just by Sitting on these Steps": Performative Spaces and Re-Genring in the South," *Education as Change* 22/1 (2018): 1.

resistance through the reception of protest songs.”<sup>585</sup> Likewise, evangelical music adopted by believers of these communities was sung communally in meeting houses (case de rugăciune/adunare), public locations, and privately at home or during family gatherings for encouragement in this type of “resistance” to cultural norms. This musical performativity served as a way to gain audibility- a presence- in the public sphere dominated by other groups and reveals a conscious effort to be seen and heard.

Music creates an image of these evangelical communities as a third space- a unique cultural domain that exists between structures of the nation-state and claims of groups to history.<sup>586</sup> Aditi Humna identifies the power of performative space itself as a third space, an “alternative to hegemonic imposition of meanings in mainstream spaces,” applicable to interwar evangelical musical actions.<sup>587</sup> Their ethnically mixed musical events in particular challenged the ethnic/linguistic/religious spaces and borders encouraged by creators of the modern nation-state. As they engaged in performing their music, either informally (during rehearsals or at home) or formally (during services or concerts), they expressed, continually developed, and sought to legitimize their transnational, multi-ethnic, non-conformist religious space and identity.<sup>588</sup>

On the other hand, Mattijs van de Port’s concept of the zone of wildness could especially be applied to Bessarabia with the confusion and violence occurring on the Romanian-Soviet Ukraine border in the years following World War I.<sup>589</sup> Bessarabia remained under martial law for most of the interwar period because Romanian authorities perceived it as just such an unruly and underdeveloped zone. With Bessarabia in mind, ethnomusicologist Philip Bohlman’s critique of the “tendency toward romanticizing third spaces, glorifying creative aspects of displacement and ignoring the tragic histories that zones of displacement continue to enforce” is

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<sup>585</sup> McDonald, *My Voice Is My Weapon*, 21.

<sup>586</sup> Homi Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (London: Routledge, 1994).

<sup>587</sup> Aditi Hunma, “Students make History Every Day just by Sitting on these Steps,” 4.

<sup>588</sup> “Legitimacy is, by definition, oriented towards other actors who need to be convinced that something is appropriate, right or desirable. Cultural action is therefore not only about sense-making by focal actors, but also about influencing attitudes, feelings, and opinions of other relevant actors on which focal actors are dependent; cultural change is a contested process, in which various social groups struggle to influence evolving discourses.” Frank. W. Geels, and Bram Verhees, “Cultural Legitimacy and Framing Struggles in Innovation Journeys: A Cultural-Performative Perspective and a Case Study of Dutch Nuclear Energy (1945–1986),” *Technological Forecasting & Social Change* 78/6 (2011): 913.

<sup>589</sup> Mattijs van de Port, *Gypsies, Wars and Other Instances of the Wild: Civilisation and Its Malcontents in a Serbian Town* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 1998).

particularly relevant.<sup>590</sup> This chapter analyzes the truly unique space created by interwar evangelicals through music which challenged ethnic barriers, especially in the borderlands of Bessarabia and Transylvania. However, to avoid the romanticizing that Bohlman criticizes, the last chapter of the dissertation presents how these communities were affected by racism and by ethnic cleansing and genocidal policies.

Music created community cohesion for evangelicals and was a means of drawing new members, which attracted both admiration and scorn from different segments of the population, at the local and national level. Ultimately, the concepts of assimilation, ethnic/religious identity, and transnational movement in interwar Romanian, Jewish, and Roma evangelical communities and the intricacies of these identities are understood better through the performativity of music.

### **Music in Romanian culture**

The interwar period saw significant strides in the general development of Romanian music. George Enescu rose to international fame with his opera *Oedipe*; Mihail Jora, Theodor Rogalski, Paul Constantinescu, Dinu Lipatti, and Constantin Brailoiu contributed famous ballets, rhapsodies, sonatas, choral pieces and other musical compositions.<sup>591</sup> These musicians created music within the context of debates begun in the previous century over “pure” Romanian folk music versus European influences (especially of the neoclassical or impressionist style).<sup>592</sup> The journal *Muzica*, of the Union of Composers and Musicologists in Romania, published a survey in 1920 to gauge the opinion of musicians in regards to this dichotomy.<sup>593</sup> Many attempted to bridge the two by inserting folk themes into their symphonies. Composer and musicologist Zeno Vancea argued against “purely autochthonous elements” in Romanian music as long as foreign elements were “transformed organically in accordance with [Romanian] psychological

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<sup>590</sup> Philip Bohlman, *The Music of European Nationalism* (California: ABC-CLIO, 2004), 268.

<sup>591</sup> Carmen Stoianov, Petru Stoianov, *Istoria muzicii românești* (Bucharest: Editura Fundației Românie de Mâine, 2005); Dan Pepelea, “Romanian Musical Neoclassicism- Gateway towards Universality,” *Bulletin of the Transylvania University of Brașov Series VIII: Performing Arts* 6 (55)/ 1 (2013): 41-46.

<sup>592</sup> Florinela Popa, “Aspects of Nationalist Propaganda in the Late Nineteenth-Century Romanian Musical Press,” *Nineteenth-Century Music Review* 14 (2017): 339–365.

<sup>593</sup> The Union was also founded in 1908, the same year as the St Petersburg Society for Jewish Folk Music. Valentina Sandu-Dediu, “Murky Times and Ideologised Music in the Romania of 1938-1944,” *Musicology Today: Journal of the National University of Music Bucharest*, 7/3 (27) (2016): 194; Liliana Clemansa, *Modernitate și avangardă: Muzica ante- și interbelică a secolului XX (1900–1940)* (Bucharest: Editura Fundației Culturale Române, 2002).

requirements and fused with its own national elements.”<sup>594</sup> What this organic process entailed is unclear, but Vancea applied to Romanian music the popular organicist ideology of Constantin Stere or Dimitrie Gusti. These were influenced by Titu Maiorescu’s philosophy of “forms without substance,” which was against the uncritical adoption of western models by eastern European countries.<sup>595</sup>

Interwar Romanian music also reflected society’s increasing anti-Semitism. The Romanian fascist Legion of the Archangel Michael used song, particularly music rooted in folk tradition, as a means of rallying supporters.<sup>596</sup> Music critic and composer Romeo Alexandrescu, himself part of the State Legationary Council for Music, called for Romanianization of music in 1940 to make all music in the country thoroughly “Romanian.” In an attempt to increase musical literacy and propagate “acceptable” musical forms, groups of musicians travelled across the country, distributing religious, folk, and classical choral music.<sup>597</sup>

Religious music was particularly important in the debates on Byzantine versus western music. According to music critic Alexandru I.D. Ștefănescu, Byzantine music of the Orthodox Church was “part of a religious and artistic unity that had deep roots in the spiritual life of the Romanian people.”<sup>598</sup> However, by 1933 music professor and conductor at the Cernăuți Conservatory George Onciul argued that polyphonic/choral rather than monophonic music (the chant associated with Byzantine) best fit the Romanian people based on their “ethnic origin, temperament, and race.” The popularization of polyphonic/harmonized, multi-voice music resulted in the rapid increase of church choirs across the country.<sup>599</sup> In Transylvania, musical

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<sup>594</sup> Costin Moisil, “Byzantium, Folklore, Race: National Church Music in Interwar Romania,” *Musicology Today: Journal of the National University of Music Bucharest*, 7/4 (28) (2016): 285.

<sup>595</sup> Manuela Boacță, “Peripheral Solutions to Peripheral Development: The Case of Early 20th Century Romania,” *Journal of World-systems Research* 11/ 1 (July 2005): 14-15; Henry L. Roberts, *Romania: Political Problems of an Agrarian State* (Archon Books, 1969), 144-145; Ion Matei Costinescu, “On Modernity and Technologies of Nation-Building in the Projects of the Bucharest Sociological School,” *Transylvania* 11-12 (2012): 79-87; Titu Maiorescu, *Critice* (Bucharest: Librăriei Socecu & Comp, 1874).

<sup>596</sup> Roland Clark, “Collective Singing in Romanian Fascism,” *Cultural and Social History* 10/2 (2013): 251-271.

<sup>597</sup> Romeo Alexandrescu, “Educarea muzicală a provinciei românești,” *Universul literar* (7 December 1940): 6 in Valentina Sandu-Dediu, “Murky Times and Ideologised Music in the Romania of 1938-1944,” 203, 206.

<sup>598</sup> Alexandru I. D. Ștefănescu, “Contribuții la istoria muzicii bisericești în România” *Sola verba* (Manastirea Neamt: Tiparnita Sfintei Manastiri Neamt, 1940), 31 in Costin Moisil, “Byzantium, Folklore, Race: National Church Music in Interwar Romania,” 281.

<sup>599</sup> Moisil, “Byzantium, Folklore, Race: National Church Music in Interwar Romania,” 285. For more on the debate concerning polyphonic music see Ivan Moody, “Some Aspects of the Polyphonic Treatment of



styles, such as polyphonic music of German settlers made their way from the thirteenth century onwards into “Romanian Catholic and Orthodox traditions, Hungarian Calvinist traditions, and Jewish Reform traditions.”<sup>600</sup> Though there was perhaps less “western” influence in Greek Orthodox music than in other Romanian music, it too saw various evolutions in response to the changing musical and religious landscape of Greater Romania.<sup>601</sup>

Adventist, Baptist, Brethren, and Pentecostal leaders appropriated the importance of music from Romanian culture in their communities and engaged, though marginally, in the discourse on native versus imported songs. Their use of music fits with Geels and Verhees’s concept of ‘cultural legitimacy,’ which is pursued by the group through collective sensemaking, discourse, and framing struggles.<sup>602</sup> This meant evangelicals joined the polyphonic bandwagon early on, due to heavy influence from German and other Protestant traditions. Lack of native composers also contributed to their dependence on translated music.<sup>603</sup> Though evangelical leaders and lay believers rarely engaged in the secular music scene, they successfully made themselves heard at the local level through the emphasis on music in their services. It was by performing this mix of local and inter/transnational, multi-lingual, trans-denominational music that these groups reveal their agency in attempts to show their faith and cross-ethnic communities as culturally legitimate.

The communal singing, choirs, orchestras, and brass bands drew in many curious visitors, such as future leaders with a musical background: Lev Averbuch, Moses Richter, Dumitru Vrânceanu, Petre Paulini, and Nicolae Jelescu.<sup>604</sup> Even an American missionary teaching at the Baptist seminary in Bucharest observed, “In Roumania there is much more emphasis put on church music than in the [American] South- yes, just about five times as much emphasis.”<sup>605</sup>

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Byzantine Chant in the Orthodox Church in Europe,” Rosy Moffa and Sabrina Saccomani (eds.), *Musica se extendit ad omnia* (Lucca: Libreria Musicale Italiana, 2007), 67-73.

<sup>600</sup> Franz Metz, *Die Kirchenmusik der Donauschwaben* (Sankt Augustin: Academia Verlag, 1996); Karl Teutsch, *Siebenburgen und das Banat: Zentren deutschen Musiklebens im Sudosten Europas* (Sankt Augustin: Academia Verlag, 1997) in Bohlman, *The Music of European Nationalism*, 256.

<sup>601</sup> For details see Carmen Stoianov, Petru Stoianov, *Istoria muzicii românești* (Bucharest: Editura Fundației România de Măine, 2005).

<sup>602</sup> Geels and Verhees, “Cultural Legitimacy and Framing Struggles in Innovation Journeys,” 910.

<sup>603</sup> However, the diversity of evangelical churches in their ethnic, linguistic, and historic-theological configuration explains their acceptance of translated songs.

<sup>604</sup> Fleischer, “Begegnungen,” 216; Nina Tarleva, “1913-1933,” *Благовестник* 10/3-4 (April 1933): 5-8.

<sup>605</sup> Dan T. Hurley, “A Worthy Program for Roumanian Baptists,” *Home and Foreign Fields* (August 1926): 18.

The remainder of the chapter unpacks this emphasis among Romanian evangelicals that rivaled even the American Southern Gospel music scene (recognized almost world-wide for producing and emphasizing music in their religious communities) to show how music was a vital part in their crossing ethnic, national, religious, gender, and social-economic barriers.

### **Filling a Spiritual Need**

A new faith and the concept of repentance (*poșăință* in Romanian or *teshuva* in Hebrew) stressed in their communities resulted in a new approach to sacred music among evangelicals. Ivan S. Prokhanov (1869–1935), a pioneer of the evangelical Baptist movement in Russia, who composed evangelical songs using Russian folk music, put forward guidelines for how to approach music in these new churches. These guidelines included 1) familiarity with the best foreign religious music, 2) creation of original hymns that connected the joyful message of the Gospel with a nation’s musical particularity, and 3) sound theological content in the words.<sup>606</sup> Prokhanov claimed, “The gospel movement, being a phenomenon of deeply spiritual significance in national life, should inevitably and naturally lead to the creation of a new trend in Russian spiritual music.”<sup>607</sup> He greatly influenced Baptists in Bessarabia, who adopted a similar view on religious music’s influence on local culture. The name of their monthly newsletter *Svetilnic* bore the name of one of his songs, the words and music of which appeared in several issues.<sup>608</sup>

The churches in the Regat/Old Kingdom of Romania and in the western regions of Romania were more influenced by German Protestant music, yet they too claimed a similar need. Dumitru Cornilescu, the translator of the 1921 Romanian Bible, the translation still used by evangelicals today, identified the need for something to sing as an expression of new faith convictions. Worldly songs (*cântece din lume*) were considered inappropriate and the group of

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<sup>606</sup> Кеше А.И. [Keshe A.I.], “Духовное пение и юбилей [Spiritual singing and jubilee],” Утренняя звезда [*Morning Star*] 7-8 (Petrograd, 1922), 21 in Евгений Гончаренко [Evgeny Goncharenko], “Музыкальные реформы М. Лютера и их следы в реформаторской деятельности И.С. Проханова [Musical reforms of M. Luther and their traces in the reform activities of I.S. Prokhanov],” *Богословские размышления* [Theological Reflections] 17 (2016): 265.

<sup>607</sup> Проханов, И.С. Предисловие. Гусли. [Prohanov, I. S. Predislovie. Gusli] (Leningrad, 1928), 7 in Евгений Гончаренко [Evgeny Goncharenko], 265.

<sup>608</sup> I.S. Prokhanov, “Светильник,” *Светильник* [Svetilnic/ Illuminator] 1 (January): 4. Fragment of issue. Year may be 1937. Song sheet appears also in *Svetilnic* 1/1-2 (1929): 4.

Romanian soldiers he mentored lamented the lack of “Christian” songs.<sup>609</sup> Cornilescu translated English hymns into Romanian out of, what he argued, was a need for everything to be renewed in the convert’s life, especially music.

Itinerant preachers were often met with requests for “o cântare nouă,” [a new song] in communities they visited. Members wrote down the lyrics in personal notebooks, and attempted to commit the melody to memory. As a result, music for the same lyrics differed across the country, and even among neighboring villages. In an attempt to bring some cohesion and meet the increasing demand for music in these congregations, evangelicals in Transylvania at the start of the twentieth century began to translate hymns into Romanian.<sup>610</sup> Converts with an education in music offered up original compositions. Songbooks were compiled and published to further encourage and facilitate congregational singing.

The debate on original compositions versus translations or native versus foreign music taking place in the larger Romanian music scene of the time was not a central issue for evangelicals since their communities were so diverse and their theological heritage also stemming from western Europe and America. The lack of evangelical composers in Romania made them rely heavily on translations to meet the growing need for new music in these churches.

Many of the translators remained anonymous, but Dumitru Cornilescu, Jean Staneschi, Vasile Moisescu, Petre Paulini and Stefan Demetrescu were among the most prominent. They translated songs from German Protestant hymnography including “Să fie cum dorește Domnul meu/ Was Gott tut, das ist wohlgetan/What my God ordains is right,” “Cetate tare-i Dumnezeu/ Ein fest Burg/ A Mighty Fortress is our God,” “Te-adorăm în fericire/Ode an die freude/Ode to Joy,” and “Mărire ție, Isus/Tochter Zion, freue dich/ Thine be the Glory.”

From England, songs by Isaac Watts and the Wesleys were popular: “E drept ca Isus a murit/At the Cross,” and “Tu iubire fără seamăn/ Love Divine, all loves excelling.” American translations included: “Când am pacea Domnului/When Peace like a River,” and “Isus viața

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<sup>609</sup> Iosif Țon, *Credința Adevărată* (Wheaton: Societatea Misionară Română, 1988), 57; Dumitru Cornilescu, *47 cântări creștinești cu note muzicale* (București: Societatea Evanghelică Română, 1922), 14 in Clark, “The Stork’s Nest,” 99. A similar argument was put forward by Mihai Brumar and Vasile Berbecar in their forward to *Cântările Evangheliei* (Budapest, 1913).

<sup>610</sup> Vasile Berbecar, “Să cânti cincizeci de ani!” *Farul Mântuirii* 10/Jubilee edition (December 1929): 12-13.

noastră/Battle Hymn of the Republic.”<sup>611</sup> These songs were chosen for their already international popularity and their “sing-ability,” how catchy the tune and words were.

One of the most well-known native evangelical composers was Ioan Chişmorie (1904-1973), who in 1937 published his first songbook *Cântările Armoniei* [Song of Harmony] containing 64 songs.<sup>612</sup> Songs included “Eu n-am plans [I didn’t cry],” “Tinerilor, veniți! [Come, Youth!],” composed for the 1927 Baptist Youth Congress in Buteni. Chişmorie played a crucial part in developing the conscious focus on music in evangelical culture as a means of communal bonding and gaining audibility in society, elaborated on later in the chapter.

In Chişinău, Lev and Maria Averbuch composed hymns for their community, often adapting new lyrics to Jewish melodies. For example, they sang “A great Sign is given unto us” to the Hassidic melody “My God, my Rock.” The familiar tune aimed to make participants more at ease and encourage them to join in singing. On other occasions Averbuch and Isaac Trachtman composed music using lyrics from other Jewish Christians to encourage the development and diversity of an evangelical Jewish voice in the music scene.<sup>613</sup> Even Jewish friends not official members in their community, like Dr. Abramov, composed songs for special occasions, such as the opening of their new meeting hall at 30 Mihai Voevod Street in 1934.<sup>614</sup>

At the Baptist churches in Cernăuți, Moses Richter composed many hymns, mostly in Yiddish, which were translated into Russian, Romanian, Hebrew, and English. In the late 1930s Eric Gabe also contributed original works to the Bucharest German Baptist Church and the Jewish Christian community in Chişinău.<sup>615</sup> Unfortunately, many of the songs by Jewish Christians were not included in mainstream Romanian evangelical music, and are almost completely forgotten today, unlike the songs of Chişmorie. This was due perhaps to the complexity of the melodies and dearth of Romanian translations. The Jewish evangelical songs

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<sup>611</sup> Vilmos Kis-Juhasz and Iulian Teodorescu, “Bazele inchinarii evanghelice- cazul evanghelicilor din Romania,” Dorin Dobrinicu and Danut Manastireanu (eds.), *Omni Evangelic: o explorare a comunitatilor protestante romanesti* (Bucharest: Polirom, 2018), 728-733. See also <http://www.romanianchristianmusic.50webs.com/PgTableA3Eng.html> (accessed 17 January 2020).

<sup>612</sup> Saintclaire Chişmorie, “Ioan Chişmorie Măderătanul Biografia 1904-1973,” (30 October 2014) [https://www.facebook.com/pg/ioanchismorie/about/?ref=page\\_internal](https://www.facebook.com/pg/ioanchismorie/about/?ref=page_internal) (accessed 30 July 2019).

<sup>613</sup> Averbuch, “Great Meetings in Chişinău,” *TT* 38/2 (February 1932): 23-24. While visiting the Anglican mission in Bucharest in 1933, Averbuch composed four new Jewish hymns. Averbuch, “Hearts Touched of God,” *TT* 39/10 (October 1933): 120.

<sup>614</sup> *TT* 40/6 (June 1934): 74-75.

<sup>615</sup> Fleischer, “Begegnungen von Baptisten und Juden,” 216; Gabe 63/2 (July-September 1990): 53.

were focused on a specifically Jewish audience and performability was geared toward that subculture. However, they too adopted internationally translated Protestant songs (this was easier than continually trying to compose something new) revealing a complex intertwining of cultures.

Evangelical hymnography often included songs by BOR composers, such as “A bătut la ușa ta cineva [Someone Knocked at your Door],” with words by Costache Ioanid and melody from the Orthodox revival movement *Oastea Domnului*.<sup>616</sup> Former Orthodox cantors in early evangelical churches adapted songs from BOR liturgy to sing with the whole congregation.<sup>617</sup> This was a unique bridge between the dominant faith group and these new denominations, used either because this music was also more easily accessible and familiar or in a conscious effort to appeal to Orthodox believers.

The lack of information on interwar Roma evangelical music requires drawing more from current anthropological studies, many of which focus on music, particularly Roma Pentecostal music.<sup>618</sup> Though the references to interwar Romanian Roma evangelicals are few, a high percentage mention music. Magdalena Slavovka argues that the more recent Pentecostal religious movement transformed through music the “identity categories and notions of Gypsy tradition, history, and contemporaneity.”<sup>619</sup> Roma evangelicals use music as a way to engage

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<sup>616</sup> Other examples are “Blândul păstor” and “Turmă blândă.” Dinu Horatiu Brici, “Muzica de cult a confesiunilor creștine din Transilvania- zona Clujului (Biserica Ortodoxa, cultele protestante și neoprotestante),” PhD Dissertation (Universitatea Lucian Blaga, Sibiu), 10-11.

<sup>617</sup> Popovici, 195-196.

<sup>618</sup> Ruy Llera Blanes, “Music as Discourse. Gypsy Pentecostal Music in Portugal and Spain,” *19th World Congress IAHR. Religion and Art Panel* (Tokyo, 2005) in Raluca Bianca Roman, “Body Limited: Belief and (Trans)Formations of the Body in a Pentecostal Roma Community,” *Annual Review of the Sociology of Religion*

(June 2017): 256-273; Barbara Rose Lange, *Holy Brotherhood: Romani Music in a Hungarian Pentecostal Church* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003).

<sup>619</sup> Magdalena Slavkova, “‘Singing and Dancing in the Spirit.’ Gypsy Pentecostal Music and Musicians,” *Axis Mundi- Journal of the Slovakian Association for the study of religions* 2 (2012): 36-46. For more on the transformative power of music among Roma evangelicals see B. R. Lange, *Holy Brotherhood. Romani Music in a Hungarian Pentecostal Church* (Oxford University Press 2003); Katalin Kovalcsik, “Gurbane as a representation of traditional identity and culture in an Oltenian Rudar community,” B. Sikimić and P. Hristov (eds.), *Kurban in the Balkans* (Belgrade, 2007): 109-137; Kovalcsik, “The dynamics of the musical identity of the Roma in Hungary: A theory of the racial/ethnic musical identity and the place of the Roma in it,” Elena Marushiakova (ed.), *Dynamics of national identity and transnational identities in the process of European integration* (Cambridge: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2008): 67-76; Ruy Llera Blanes, *Os Aleluias. Ciganos Evangelicos e Musica* (Lisbon: Imprensa de Ciencias Sociais, 2008); Kai Aberg, “The music of Pentecostal Kalé Roma in Finland,” David Thurffjell and Adrian Marsh (eds.), *Romani Pentecostalism: Gypsies and Charismatic Christianity* (Frankfurt: Peter Lang, 2014).

with fellow believers and to express their faith in a way that reflects their new identity as followers of Jesus, but an identity which does not diminish their Roma heritage. Music was an important means through which they were able to bridge their past and present. The recent emergence of Lăutari Gospel music- the insertion of elements of Lăutari music with Christian lyrics into evangelical hymnography- reveals a blend of the old and new identity similar to the approach taken to music by Jewish Christians, and Romanian evangelicals in general, in the interwar period.<sup>620</sup>

### *The Songbooks*

Songbooks helped make this music available to the lay people and reveal the importance of song and of congregational singing in creating evangelical identity, cohesion, and crossing different boundaries in society. *Cartea de cântări* (the songbook), became indispensable from an evangelical's faith, carried along to weekly prayer meetings and religious services along with their Bible. The importance of the songbook is seen for example in Victor Göhrung's pastoral ordination in Bucharest in 1930, when he was given a Bible and a songbook as gifts.<sup>621</sup> As a Baptist member he presumably had these items prior to ordination, but the gifts symbolized the importance these books held for him in his new leadership role and reminded those in attendance of the songbook's importance in the lives of all believers.

These books were printed in increasing quantities throughout the interwar period. The first Romanian Baptist songbook, edited by Gheorghe Şimonca and entitled *Cântările Sionului* [Songs of Zion], was printed in 1895 with 200 songs and saw up to twelve editions from 1922 to 1941. The Baptist Union reprinted them regularly as stocks were quickly bought up.<sup>622</sup> Other books which included both lyrics and music were *Harfa Coriştilor* [Choir's Harp], *Cântările Evangheliei* [Gospel Songs] (1913), *Sunetele Evangheliei* [Gospel Sounds] (1922), *Cântările Triumfului* [Songs of Triumph] (1925), and even one for children entitled *Harfa Copiilor*

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<sup>620</sup> Sînziana Preda, "Doamne unde te găsec acolo mă pocăiesc" *Istoria orală ale romilor neoprotestanți din România* (Timișoara: Editura de Vest, 2017), 24; Nataniel Bișis, "De la marginalitate la normativitate. Convertirea unei comunități rome la Penticostalism," *Revista Română de Sociologie* 28/3-4 (2017): 265.

<sup>621</sup> N. Ionescu, "Ordinare de păstor," *Farul Mântuirii* 12/1-2 (January 1931): 16.

<sup>622</sup> Popovici, *Istoria Bapțiștilor din România*, 195-198, 317-318. In 1941 the name of the main Baptist songbook was changed to *Cântările Evangheliei* [Songs of the Gospel] to avoid (unsuccessfully) difficulties with Antonescu's antisemitic government.

[Children's Harp] (1926).<sup>623</sup> These encouraged collective singing, what John Austin terms “performative utterances” that create systems of meaning for the community, which they sought to extend into the wider Romanian cultural and social space.<sup>624</sup>

Averbuch published a songbook before 1921 with Romanian songs and another entitled *Zion's Lieder* in Yiddish, targeting both language communities.<sup>625</sup> Other editions of his hymnbook appeared in 1925, 1927, and 1929. They contained many original and translated songs by Maria Averbuch, for the children of the Sunday and Sabbath Schools, such as “God's Precious Word I will never forsake.”<sup>626</sup> Though published in a more obscure Yiddish dialect, the Mildmay Mission considered adapting some songs for use in London because of their great success in Chişinău.<sup>627</sup> Messianic historian Gershon Nerel mentioned a 1931 edition of *Zion's Lieder* with twenty-nine hymns, mostly written by Lev and some by Maria.<sup>628</sup> Hymn number 8 from this edition was Fanny Crosby's “Safe in the arms of Jesus,” revealing their use of translated American hymns as well.<sup>629</sup>

Eric Gabe referred to a Hebrew pocket edition of nine hymns edited by Averbuch in 1932, which included songs translated from other languages or adapted from the Old Testament and the Siddur (Jewish Prayer book). These included “Comfort, Comfort ye my people,” “Praise the God of Abraham,” “You are our God,” Psalm 126 *Beshuv Adonay*, and the famous German hymn “*Tochter Zion, freue dich*” (set to the “Conquering Hero” from Handel's *Judas Maccabeaus*).<sup>630</sup> The pocket edition was unique, enabling easy transport and even spontaneous public singing, more evidence of a conscious performative effort through music to gain audibility in society.

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<sup>623</sup> Vasile Berbecar, “Cântul in bisericile noastre,” *Farul Mântuirii* 10/11 (June 1929): 5-6; Vasile Berbecar, “Să cânti cincizeci de ani!” *Farul Mântuirii* 10/Jubilee edition (December 1929): 12-13.

<sup>624</sup> Bergien, Rüdiger. “Activating the ‘Apparatchik’: Brigade Deployment in the SED Central Committee and Performative Communist Party Rule.” *Journal of Contemporary History* 47/4 (October 2012): 806.

<sup>625</sup> Gershon Nerel, “Zion in the Theology of L. Averbuch and S. Rohold,” *Mishkan* 26 (1997): 54-71.

<sup>626</sup> This was hymn number twelve in the 1929 edition. Maria sung this accompanied by the orchestra. Averbuch, “A Great Watchnight Service,” *TT* 35/2 (February 1929): 22-23.

<sup>627</sup> *TT* 33/8 (August 1927): 99.

<sup>628</sup> Nerel, “Zion in the Theology of L. Averbuch and S. Rohold,” 54-71; However, Nina Tarleva wrote of a 1932 edition with both music and lyrics, all translated by Maria, with the exception of two written by Lev. Nina Tarleva, “1913-1933,” *Благовестник* 10/3-4 (April 1933): 5-8; Gabe, “Hebrew Christian Movement in Kishineff,” *The Hebrew Christian* 62/1 (March -May 1989): 10-11.

<sup>629</sup> Averbuch, “Drawn of God,” *TT* 38/4 (April 1932): 46.

<sup>630</sup> Gabe, “The Hebrew Christian Movement in Kishineff,” *HC* 62/1 (March-May 1989): 10-11.

The Romanian Pentecostals had their own songbook just two years after the formation of their first congregation. On his return to Romania in 1924, Pavel Budean brought with him the first Romanian Pentecostal hymnbook, *Harfa Bisericii lui Dumnezeu* [Harp of God's Church], published by the Pentecostal Church of God in Detroit. This was followed in 1935 by *Harfa Corului Creștin* [Harp of the Christian Choir], with four part choral music.<sup>631</sup> The Brethren published *Cântările Betaniei* [Songs of Bethany], edited by Vasile Moisescu in 1938 with 147 songs. Unlike previous songbooks, Isaac Feinstein, Moses Richter, and Eric Gabe were all listed among the authors, showing Brethren musical collaboration with evangelical Jewish believers from Lutheran and Baptist churches.<sup>632</sup> The Brethren songbook also reveals an appropriation of Romanian folk music to evangelical lyrics.<sup>633</sup> By adopting these popular Romanian melodies, they again engaged with and attempted to create a space for themselves and their diverse repertoire in Romanian musical culture.

Petre Paulini, Stefan Demetrescu, and Nicolae Jelescu were the first to begin translations of German hymns for Adventists. These were first published individually in the Adventist periodical *Semnele Timpului* [Signs of the Times] in 1908 and then in the first Romanian Adventist songbook *Immuri Creștine* [Christian Hymns] in 1910, which saw ten editions during the interwar period.<sup>634</sup> The many editions point to music as a powerful tool among evangelicals for developing their identity, strengthening their communities, making their presence heard outside these religious communities, and crossing or even breaking different social, religious, ethnic barriers.

Music allowed for a crossing of denominational boundaries. Among themselves, Romanian evangelical churches shared over sixty percent of the same translated or original hymns, with slight lyrical or musical variations.<sup>635</sup> They all borrowed from renowned Romanian poet Iacob Negruzzi's (1842-1932) translations published sometime just before the turn of the

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<sup>631</sup> Kis-Juhasz and Teodorescu, "Bazele inchinarii evanghelice- cazul evanghelicilor din Romania," 742.

<sup>632</sup> "Cantarile Betaniei," (accessed 5 January 2021).

<sup>633</sup> Vasile Moisescu (ed.), *Cântările Betaniei* (Ploiești: Editura Betania, 1938), <https://vesteabuna.wordpress.com/2019/02/10/cantarile-betaniei-culegere-de-v-v-moisescu-1938-pdf/>. Kis-Juhasz and Teodorescu, "Bazele închinării evanghelice- cazul evanghelicilor din România," 742.

<sup>634</sup> Dumitru Popa, *Pașini din Istoria Bisericii Adventiste de Ziua a Șaptea din România 1936-1955* vol. 3 (Bucharest: Editura Viață și Sănătate, 2015), 359-362.

<sup>635</sup> Kis-Juhasz and Teodorescu, "Bazele inchinarii evanghelice- cazul evanghelicilor din Romania," Dorin Dobrinu and Danut Manastireanu (eds.), *Omul Evanghelic: o explorare a comunitatilor protestante romanesti* (Bucharest: Polirom, 2018), 739-740.



century in *Imnuri religioase* [Religious Hymns]. These included the popular songs “Ce bine e când frații [How good it is when Brothers meet],” “La a ta chemare [At Your Calling],” “Rămâi cu a Ta milă [Remain with Your Grace],” and “In stravechea carte sfânta [In the Old Holy Book].”<sup>636</sup> Some books included musical notes, others only lyrics, depending on publishing costs and the fact that the former would make for a much larger book difficult to carry.<sup>637</sup>

Overall, the insertion of the scriptures and theology into music and blending this with international Protestant translated hymns, Orthodox lyrics, and traditional Romanian music simultaneously strengthened Romanian evangelicals’ trans-national and national connections. The focus on music became increasingly a means by which to gain audibility for their new faith message in the public sphere. Music was an important form of their lived religion, an expression of their faith lived out from day to day. Along with congregational singing, this music, both new and old, “native” or “foreign,” local or international, was used by the many choirs, orchestras, and bands that came to be associated with evangelical communities challenging contemporary ideas of national religious music.

### **Musical Literacy: Communal Singing, Choirs, and Orchestras**

It was a conscious decision to use music to build up their communities. It was more versatile, engaging, and noticeable than Bible studies or other activities and provided unique agency, increasingly opening up various social opportunities for those who performed. Music always accompanied the reading of Scripture, prayer, and a sermon at weekly evangelical services, where collective singing proved to be a strong bonding activity.<sup>638</sup> One Baptist author claimed that not singing with others during meetings was a sure way to kill off the religious community.<sup>639</sup> Often the one leading the music during the meetings would read the words of the upcoming verse and the congregation would repeat in song, depending on availability of songbooks or if there was a large percentage of semi-literate members in attendance as in the many village congregations.<sup>640</sup> Young urban dwellers were particularly drawn to the communal

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<sup>636</sup> Dumitru Popa, vol. 3, 361; Kis-Juhász and Teodorescu, 743.

<sup>637</sup> Gheorghe Jurcovei from Lugoj published *Să cântăm Domnului* [Let’s Sing to the Lord] with over 100 songs, only ten of which included notes. *Farul Creștin* 5/18 (September 1937): 2.

<sup>638</sup> Dunca, *Amintiri din viața mea*, 15 in Handaric, 44, 49.

<sup>639</sup> ACLA unprocessed, “Cum poți omori o comunitate?” *Farul Mântuirii* 5/19-20 (October 1924): 6.

<sup>640</sup> Averbuch describes a young man leading the singing in Chișinău this way with the song “Jesus’ love is ours forever; It shall never cease, no never,” in “The Catching of Souls,” *TT* 33/10 (October 1927): 121.

singing.<sup>641</sup> Throughout the 1930s they increased their musical endeavors as they gained more knowledge and finances to do so.

While in Bessarabia, American missionary Walter Craighead remarked on the passion with which new converts embraced music with their new faith. A blind man was eager to learn to play a folding organ to assist the singing in his local church. An illiterate village convert went from village to village playing a guitar and repeating passages from the Bible he had memorized.<sup>642</sup> In Arad, the Roma from Credița Church sang gospel-themed songs in public across the city.<sup>643</sup>

With the exponential growth of evangelical churches, believers sought more advanced expression of their music. Musical literacy in various forms became essential for the majority of members. The theological seminaries for men and women offered music courses.<sup>644</sup> Missionaries at the Tichilești leprosy colony taught residents to read music and to sing choral and congregational songs.<sup>645</sup> In Chișinău, Dumitru Vrănceanu held courses on evangelical music, theory and practice.<sup>646</sup>

As early as 1918, Ioan Chișmorie attended music courses in Șiria and at the Timișoara Music Conservatory from 1922 to 1924.<sup>647</sup> Chișmorie was later known for travelling across Romania offering courses and helping churches start their own orchestras and choirs. One student who spent months under Chișmorie's teaching in the composer's village remembered doing field work during the day alongside their teacher and taking conductor lessons in the evenings.<sup>648</sup> Chișmorie contributed significantly to the development of evangelical music, and to creating space for people from all social classes to learn music. The time required for lessons or rehearsals point to the performative value of music as actions that encourage social commitments to bridge ethnic, linguistic, and even class boundaries. The increased agency that music offered

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<sup>641</sup> *TT* 32/6 (June 1926): 79; ANRM 679-1-4840, file 150.

<sup>642</sup> Walter Craighead, "The Gospel in Bessarabia," *Home and Foreign Fields* 19/4 (April 1935): 10.

<sup>643</sup> Ioan Cocuț, "Second Gypsy Baptist Church of Europe," *Home and Foreign Fields* 20/7 (July 1936): 20.

<sup>644</sup> Earl Hester, "Școala Baptistă de fete din București," *Farul Mântuirii* 11/6 (March 1930): 11.

<sup>645</sup> Vasile Dănoiu, "Scrisoare dela Frații leproși," *Farul Creștin* 6/1 (January 1938): 7.

<sup>646</sup> *Binevestitorul* 10/7-8 (August 1933): 4 in ANRM 679-1-5555, file 242.

<sup>647</sup> Saintclaire Chișmorie, "Ioan Chișmorie Măderătanul Biografia 1904-1973," (30 October 2014) [https://www.facebook.com/pg/ioanchismorie/about/?ref=page\\_internal](https://www.facebook.com/pg/ioanchismorie/about/?ref=page_internal) (accessed 30 July 2019).

<sup>648</sup> Florian Guler, "Desculti Homecoming," [https://groups.google.com/forum/#!topic/desculti-homecoming/\\_x27uLlqnmM](https://groups.google.com/forum/#!topic/desculti-homecoming/_x27uLlqnmM) (accessed 5 January 2021).

the individual- to create music and express themselves through it- also took the form of distributed agency, defined as “agency [that] goes beyond the individual; cognitive and calculative processes are distributed, and the task is performed by multiple human beings, objects, and technical systems.”<sup>649</sup> This is seen in the communal singing, choirs, bands, and orchestras that evangelical groups used to make themselves heard- physically and figuratively- in the wider social and cultural scene.

### *Choirs*

Choirs are a major part of Romanian churches today. The first Romanian Baptist choir was formed by Mihai Brumar in Curtici in 1899 followed by Vasile Berbecar’s choir in Buteni in 1900, when Transylvania was still part of Hungary.<sup>650</sup> Further east, Averbuch had an impressive record of forming choirs. His first was perhaps in Kovno (Kaunas), Lithuania composed of recent converts.<sup>651</sup> He conducted the choir of Eben-Ezer Church in St Petersburg pastored by W. A. Fetler and helped them form their first orchestra of mandolins and guitars. Averbuch organized choirs in Odessa, in Batum, and in 1913 in Chişinău/Kishinev during a short stop over on his way back to Odessa. During World War I he worked in the medical corps where he formed one choir of medics, another with the patients, a male choir of soldiers, and in 1917 a choir with believers of various evangelical communities.<sup>652</sup>

By 1921 the Averbuchs formed an adult choir and an orchestra at the Baptist Church in Chişinău, which sang in the City Hall and at the National Theatre, revealing a high degree of respect or acceptance in the city.<sup>653</sup> They also formed a children’s choir, one of its songs being Psalm 117 in Hebrew (interestingly one of the young female choir members played percussion). The two choirs sang together on special occasions, such as for the Easter and Passover

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<sup>649</sup> Christian Berndt and Marc Boeckler, “Performative Regional (Dis)Integration: Transnational Markets, Mobile Commodities, and Bordered North–South Differences,” *Environment and Planning A: Economy and Space* 43/5 (May 2011): 1059.

<sup>650</sup> Vasile Berbecar, “Cântul în bisericile noastre,” *Farul Mântuirii* 10/11 (June 1929): 5-6.

<sup>651</sup> Gabe, “The Hebrew Christian Movement,” *HC* 61/4 (December 1988-February 1989): 101-103.

<sup>652</sup> Gabe, *HC* 62/1 (March- May 1989): 8-10. He was discharged from the army because of an eye illness. Nina Tarleva, “1913-1933,” *Благовестник* 10/3-4 (April 1933): 5-8.

<sup>653</sup> *TT* 33/8 (August 1927): 99.

services.<sup>654</sup> It was through the work of these early musical pioneers, including Ioan Chișmorie, that choral music developed into such an essential part of Romanian evangelical communities.

To encourage more choirs, they held contests such as at the youth congress in Buteni, 28-30 August 1931. Two thousand people attended and Moses Richter was on the examination committee.<sup>655</sup> Young people were especially active in choirs. The Baptist youth celebration in Borlova, Severin County included poems and choral songs and the Iosif Youth Society held an Easter service at the Arad-Șega Baptist Church with solos and choir performances.<sup>656</sup> The police sometimes mistakenly called an otherwise normal church gathering a concert because of the prevalence of music during the service.<sup>657</sup>

### *Concerts*

Quite elaborate concerts were sometimes organized. The Psalmist Youth Society from Bucharest had a choir of sixty and an orchestra of twenty led by Titus Adorian, performing August Rücker's oratorio "Ieșirea din Egipt/Hinauf gen Jerusalem" translated into Romanian by Baptist musician Jean Staneschi. The concert lasted two hours with an audience of 700.<sup>658</sup> During a visit to Arad in February 1938 Dumitru Vrânceanu sang at the Șega Baptist church morning service and performed the same oratorio at the Red Evangelical Lutheran Church in the evening with the Baptist choir from Arad and the Baptist orchestra from Timișoara.<sup>659</sup>

On 6 January 1936 for Boboteaza (the Baptism of Christ in Eastern Orthodoxy and the Day of Epiphany in the Catholic liturgical calendar) a musical evening was organized at the Chișinău Conservatory in connection with the 250<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the births of Bach and Handel. Dumitru Vrânceanu again was the soloist, Eric Gabe, a student of philology and music in Bucharest, the pianist. Vladimir Marzinkovsky performed a violin solo and lectured on "Christ and Music" in Russian translated into Romanian. In it he claimed, "Christ is the Word of God

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<sup>654</sup> Gabe, *HC* 64/2 (June- August 1991): 48; Averbuch, "Conviction and Conversion," *TT* 41/6 (June 1935): 69.

<sup>655</sup> Ion Dan, "Congresul Uniunii Tineretului Baptist Român," *Farul Mântuirii* 12/10 (July 1931): 6; N. Ionescu, "Desbaterile Congresului Uniunii Tineretului Baptist," *Farul Mântuirii* 12/15 (September 1931): 13-14.

<sup>656</sup> "Din lumea religioasă," *Farul Creștin* 6/18 (May 1938): 7; *Farul Creștin* 7/24 (June 1939): 6.

<sup>657</sup> ANRM 679-1-5555, file 107.

<sup>658</sup> "Din București," *Farul Creștin* 1/12 (June 1933): 10.

<sup>659</sup> "Aviz important," *Farul Creștin* 6/8 (February 1938): 2; Dumitru Popa, vol.3, 366-367.

and His own son. We may also say He is God's own music for the world."<sup>660</sup> His talk drew a direct link between the words of the Bible, Jesus as the Word incarnate, and the music they had all come to enjoy. The evening lasted from eight o'clock until midnight and included two choirs from Averbuch's congregation, their orchestra, and another message by Julius Katz of the Berlin Hebrew Christian Community.<sup>661</sup> Such performances engaged both community insiders and curious visitors with their faith message in culturally symbolic spaces, like the National Theatre, and with classical music, like that of Bach and Handel. It also brought together ethnically, socially, and gender mixed congregations, and opened up cultural venues to people who in the past might otherwise not have attended a theatre.

### *Instruments*

The choirs, congregational singing, and concerts often included instruments. This was a novel and enticing way to build their communities. Such a wide dispersing of musical instruments among members regardless of age or financial ability was uncommon, providing instruments to many in both urban and rural areas who otherwise may not have had access to them. The extensive time required for learning to play and for rehearsals also presumably helped build community identity and was used to give themselves more public presence, although practice times are interestingly rarely mentioned. The focus in reports was on the final musical product.

The instruments adopted in these churches reflected engagement with local musical styles and influenced the songs chosen or the way they were performed. The accordion and guitar were introduced into the evangelical repertoire. Sunday school children as well as adults were taught guitar and mandolin and orchestras formed across the country.<sup>662</sup> Mandolins became increasingly popular; they were cheaper to procure and easier to learn than other string

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<sup>660</sup> Gabe, *HC* 62/2 (June - August 1989): 47; Averbuch, "Chişinău Campaign," *TT* 42/2 (February 1936): 34.

<sup>661</sup> Averbuch, "Fresh Seasons of Grace," *TT* 42/10 (October 1936): 118. Police reported on the musical evening attended by 200 with a 10 to 20 lei entrance fee. The goal of the evening according to the report was propaganda of Baptist faith among the Jews. ANRM 679-1-5555, file 314, 315. A week later at the Mildmay Mission, Mihai Voievod nr. 30, Chişinău, talks against anti-semitism and zionism were accompanied by the musical performances of Vrânceanu and Sofia Cerchez. CNSAS, D6901 vol. 3, pp. 158- 162.

<sup>662</sup> Averbuch, "Roumania," *TT* 32/1 (January 1926): 10; Dumitru Popa, vol.3, 372-373.

instruments.<sup>663</sup> Each community had a unique range of instruments depending on the musical talent of individual members, on finances, and on instruments available locally. The unusual assortment of mandolins, guitars, flute, and cello that composed the Chişinău orchestra required special musical arrangement.<sup>664</sup> A postcard photo shows the orchestra, choir, and children of the Jewish Christian community with Lev as the violinist, Tarlev with a mandolin, Maria Averbuch as choir member, and Isaac Trachtman as the cellist.<sup>665</sup> Members often played more than one instrument. Chişmorie was a pianist, trumpet, and accordion player as well as a good drummer and a choir and orchestra conductor.<sup>666</sup>



**Averbuch and the Chişinău choir and orchestra, 1927<sup>667</sup>**

Marching or brass bands and orchestras were so popular that pastors asked congregations to tone down their musical events to avoid antagonizing local authorities. One pastor identified

<sup>663</sup> “Chişinău,” *TT* 32/5 (May 1926): 57; “Memorable Nights in Chişinău,” *TT* 32/2 (February 1926): 21-22; CNSAS D12386, pp. 223-224.

<sup>664</sup> Gabe, *HC* 64/2 (June - August 1991): 48.

<sup>665</sup> Included in a letter from Averbuch to Swedish Israel Mission director Borger Pernow, 31 October 1940. SIM Archive, E48, 1/12/1940-31/12/1941, provided by Kai Kjaer-Hansen (15 August 2018).

<sup>666</sup> Saintclaire Chişmorie, “Ioan Chişmorie Măderătanul Biografia 1904-1973,” (30 October 2014) [https://www.facebook.com/pg/ioanchismorie/about/?ref=page\\_internal](https://www.facebook.com/pg/ioanchismorie/about/?ref=page_internal) (accessed 30 July 2019).

<sup>667</sup> Nathan Feighin is third from the right, Boris Buşilă fifth from the right in the top row, Nina Tarleva is at the far right below the cello wearing a hat and tie, Maria Averbuch is in white in the very centre and above her is Lev. “Memorable Nights in Chişinău,” *TT* 32/2 (February 1926): 21.

what he considered too much secular influence brought into church music through marching bands.<sup>668</sup> What constituted a proper religious song varied only slightly across evangelical denominations and across regions. Marching tunes, the preferred music of the brass bands, continued to be used with theologically accepted lyrics.

Musical solos during services were also popular. In Bucharest, Moses Richter sang accompanied by Eric Gabe on the organ.<sup>669</sup> Professor Charles Gabe, Eric's father converted through Averbuch in 1936, sang solos during services with his "beautiful bass voice."<sup>670</sup> Isaac Feinstein (originally from Dorohoi in the northeast) sang and his wife Lydia played the organ in the various churches they visited while working for the Norwegian Israel Mission in the southeast port city of Galați. Gabe referred to the Feinsteins as musical people, whom Averbuch often accompanied with his violin.<sup>671</sup> The organizers and musicians always included a sermon or Bible teaching focused on the Good News/Gospel of Jesus in their concerts and musical events.<sup>672</sup> Though music also usually entailed a Gospel message.

Ordinations, funerals, marriages, and baptisms, along with religious holidays, included elaborate musical formations to distinguish the occasions from weekly musical activities. In Ocna, Cernăuți county over 1000 people attended the ordination of a deacon with performances by four choirs and two orchestras.<sup>673</sup> The Sulița-Nouă Romanian choir sang at the ordination of an elder among the Russian Baptists in Hotin county, Bessarabia in a service led by Boriș Bușilă and Walter Craighead.<sup>674</sup>

At a funeral in Bouțari village in the Banat, a certain Brother Ieremia brought the musicians from neighboring Vaislova to play.<sup>675</sup> The choir from Clopotiva village sang at the first Baptist burial in the historic roman settlement of Sarmiseghetuza, Hunedoara county (in a plot provided by the Greek Catholic cemetery), which the mayor also attended.<sup>676</sup> The funeral of

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<sup>668</sup> Ioan Cocuț, "Scopul întrunirii noastre," and "Piedici în calea închinăciunii," *Farul Creștin* 6/34 (August 1938): 2.

<sup>669</sup> Gabe, *HC* 63/2 (July- September 1990): 52.

<sup>670</sup> Averbuch, "Fresh Seasons of Grace," *TT* 42/10 (October 1936): 118; Gabe, *HC* 62/2 (June- August 1989): 50.

<sup>671</sup> Gabe, *HC* 63/3 (September-November 1990): 80-81.

<sup>672</sup> Averbuch, "Missionary Journey in Romania," *TT* 42/11 (November 1936): 131.

<sup>673</sup> *Farul Creștin* 6/25 (June 1938): 6.

<sup>674</sup> *Farul Creștin* 7/21 (May 1939): 6.

<sup>675</sup> *Farul Creștin* 4/4 (February 1936): 7.

<sup>676</sup> "Din lumea religioasă," *Farul Creștin* 7/7 (February 1939): 7. In Regina Maria, Bihor county, at the burial of Florica Damșa the musicians from Ciumeghiu played. *Farul Creștin* 4/23 (December 1936): 7.

Ilie Erdos from Peștenița, Hunedoara county included choirs from Ostrov and Ciula Mare, as well as the orchestras from Clopotiva and Râu de Mori.<sup>677</sup> While at the burial of Ioan Florea the choirs of both the Hungarian and Romanian Baptist churches from Lupeni sang.<sup>678</sup>

As the examples show, these occasions brought not only local musical groups but also choirs and orchestras from churches farther away. Music especially during funerals attracted the attention of neighbors as musicians followed the casket from prayer house to cemetery playing at times across the width of the village or town. The funeral procession for a young girl from the Jewish Christian congregation in Chișinău turned into a choir joined by many visitors from the hospital.<sup>679</sup> This is evidence of a degree of successful entrance into public space, with even civil authorities occasionally joining the music.

Since evangelical weddings did not serve alcohol, music was the highlight of the celebration. On 3 January 1926, a marriage ceremony at the Chișinău Baptist prayer house between a choir member and a musician included two sermons (by Averbuch and Bușila) and the musical performances of the choir, of the orchestra, and of the Young People's Group who performed until midnight.<sup>680</sup> Romanian weddings were known for lively folk music and dancing, but the fact that evangelicals could party well without alcohol made them appreciated and a further source of curiosity for locals who heard the nice music devoid of boisterous guests.

Music also proved an impetus for conversion- the performances and the community feeling they produced awed onlookers and influenced them to join these new churches. Gavril Dunca attributed his Baptist faith to a Bible and a songbook given to him by a Baptist believer.<sup>681</sup> Joy for new believers was expressed also through song. A Jewish man from Orhei converted at a Monday evening Bible meeting in Chișinău and the congregation sang "Safe in the arms of Jesus" (song eight in *Zion's Lieder*) on his departure, entrusting their new brother both physically and spiritually into God's hands.<sup>682</sup>

Of course, music filled the much anticipated baptismal services of these new members such as at a multi-ethnic service in Dușești village, Bihor county where the local Hungarian

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<sup>677</sup> *Farul Creștin* 6/18 (May 1938): 7.

<sup>678</sup> *Farul Creștin* 7/22 (June 1939): 2.

<sup>679</sup> Averbuch, "Reaching Jews in Chișinău- Witness at a Funeral," *TT* 40/11 (November 1934): 132.

<sup>680</sup> "Memorable Nights in Chișinău," *TT* 32/2 (February 1926): 22.

<sup>681</sup> Gavril Dunca, *Amintiri din viața mea* (unpublished typewritten script, 1978), 15 in Claudiu Handaric, "The beginnings and growth of Baptist witness in Bicazu Ardelean," 44, 49.

<sup>682</sup> Averbuch, "Drawn of God," *TT* 38/4 (April 1932): 46.



Baptist choir sang.<sup>683</sup> At a village baptism in Bessarabia in 1931, part of the Bethel Jewish-Christian choir joined the Russian evangelicals at a baptism of 32 people.<sup>684</sup> Adult baptisms, one of the key features distinguishing these groups from traditional Christian churches, were the most musically imbued events (along with major Christian holidays of Easter and Christmas), often including a linguistically diverse repertoire.

### **Multi-ethnic, Multi-lingual**

Music was one of the most fascinating expressions of the diverse ethnicities and languages among Romania's interwar evangelicals. In Transylvania, despite historical ethnic tensions, Romanians and Hungarians, as well as Saxons and Serbians, would hold joint musical events. In Salonta, Bihor county, Romanian and Hungarian Baptists held combined services with solos, duets, and choral songs in both Romanian and Hungarian.<sup>685</sup> Again, the Romanian choir and the Hungarian choir from Oradea city along with their combined orchestras sang and played for British visitors in 1939.<sup>686</sup> In Braşov, the German Baptist Church fellowshiped with Romanians, Hungarians, and Jews, including Moses Richter visiting from Bukovina. Pastor Georg Teutsch described services enriched with Yiddish songs, likely brought or composed by Richter and sung by the local choir.<sup>687</sup> Roma believers played and sang in Romani and in Romanian (or Hungarian, Gagăuz, etc. depending what region they were from) at gatherings.

Ethnic German churches, though not as numerous, continued to influence Romanian churches, both in song and in multi-ethnic collaboration. German Baptist choirs, such as those from Căscioarele and Mangalia in Constanţa County visited neighboring Romanian evangelical churches.<sup>688</sup> German-language evangelical churches and their music were especially appealing to Jewish converts who spoke Yiddish, like Richter or Averbuch, or for Gabe who grew up speaking German in Hapsburg controlled Bukovina.<sup>689</sup> At both the German and Romanian

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<sup>683</sup> *Farul Creştin* 6/7 (February 1938): 7; "Botez," *Farul Creştin* 6/8 (February 1938): 6. A baptism in Simleul Silvaniei in 1937 had 1000 in attendance with Romanian and Hungarian choirs attending from nearby villages. CNSAS, D6902, vol.1, p. 61.

<sup>684</sup> Averbuch, "Blessings Abound," *TT* 37/7 (July 1931): 89.

<sup>685</sup> *Farul Creştin* 6/7 (February 1938): 7; "Botez," *Farul Creştin* 6/8 (February 1938): 6.

<sup>686</sup> "Vizita fraţilor din Anglia," *Farul Creştin* 7/34 (August 1939): 8.

<sup>687</sup> Friedrich Georg Teutsch, *Ein Leben Nur: Geschichte gläubig getaufter Christen, Baptisten Kronstadt* (Braşov, 2003), 55, 56. Courtesy of Mihai Ciucă.

<sup>688</sup> "Din lumea religioasă," *Farul Creştin* 6/18 (May 1938): 7; *Farul Creştin* 6/27 (July 1938): 5.

<sup>689</sup> Gabe, *HC* 63/1 (April 1990- June 1990):18-23; *Ibid*, 63/2 (July 1990- September 1990):49-55.

Baptist Churches in Cernăuți, Richter held lectures, often accompanied by Yiddish songs. Between 80 and 120 people attended these lectures at 3 Piața Ghica Voda/ Austriaplatz Baptist Church.<sup>690</sup>

Due to the more recent settlement of German colonists in Bessarabia in the nineteenth century their musical interaction was particularly evident in that region.<sup>691</sup> At a Romanian service in Chioselia-Mare, Cahul county, Bessarabia in 1937, German, Gagăuz, Bulgarian, and Russian believers delivered songs and poems.<sup>692</sup> The presence of Yiddish songs in German evangelical churches is especially striking. At a conference in the German colony of Tarutino, Moses Richter sang a Yiddish song with German Baptists from Brașov, Amalie Eisemann and Johannes Schlier, about Christ providing rescue.<sup>693</sup> Solomon Ostrovsky preached at a German Baptist church in an unnamed location where he also sang several Yiddish hymns.<sup>694</sup> The Jewish children from Averbuch's congregation visited a German church for Christmas in 1930, where they sang Christmas carols in at least four languages, including Romanian and Yiddish. The visit was reciprocated by children singing from the German church.<sup>695</sup> The evangelical links in Bucharest to Anglican and Lutheran churches (and these churches' international connections) encouraged this musical reciprocity.

Christmas time and children's services in Chișinău particularly contributed to multi-lingual musical expression with scripture, poetry, and songs such as "Glory to God in the Highest" and "Unto us a child is born," sung in Yiddish, Hebrew, Romanian, Russian, German, Bulgarian, Polish, Turkish, and a local Romani dialect.<sup>696</sup> Vranceanu, Russian vocalist Sofia Cerchez, and local musical families often performed; some walked 30 kilometers on foot to

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<sup>690</sup> Fleischer, "Begegnungen von Baptisten und Juden in Südosteuropa," 218-219. Averbuch was a guest speaker at one of these lectures on 8 November 1933 or 1934 and the ad mentioned he would play his violin accompanied by the harmonium.

<sup>691</sup> For more on this see Huey Burkett, *The German Settlements in Bessarabia: A Study of the German Immigration to, Successful Settlement in, and Ultimate Abandonment of Bessarabia* (NC: TIPS Technical Publishing, 2016).

<sup>692</sup> *Farul Creștin* 5/18 (September 1937): 6.

<sup>693</sup> Teutsch, *Ein Leben Nur*, 57.

<sup>694</sup> Ostrovsky, "Using the Messianic Prophecies," *TT* 34/10 (October 1928): 123.

<sup>695</sup> Averbuch, "Special Meetings in Chișinău," *TT* 37/2 (February 1931): 25-26.

<sup>696</sup> Averbuch, "Salvation and Song," *TT* 31/2 (February 1924): 24-25; "Memorable Nights in Chișinău," *TT* 32/2 (February 1926): 21-22.

participate, and even a small group of Roma believers sang in Romani. These events always took place in packed prayer halls.<sup>697</sup>

Christmas in 1935 Chişinău was especially musically and linguistically diverse. Along with singing in the above mentioned languages, the sermons were delivered by Marzinkovsky in Russian, Averbuch in Yiddish, and Tarlev in Romanian, with performances by the choir, the orchestra, and solos by Vrănceanu. The over 40 musicians then traveled to Tighina (Bender) and held a musical event in the town hall until midnight. From there they moved to the local Russian Baptist building to sing and pray until 5:00am. The police sub-prefect gave a long address of thanks, saying it was the first time he had experienced something so beautiful in Tighina.<sup>698</sup> Local authorities were usually suspicious of these groups, placed them under surveillance, and often harassed members (described in more detail in the next chapter). Therefore, the reaction of the sub-prefect again reveals the attraction of evangelical music and its boundary breaking potential.

The opening of the Baptist convalescent home next to the church on Gareii Street, Chişinău in 1925 had Russians, Ukrainians, Romanians, Jews, and Americans in attendance, numbering over 400, singing and listening to the choir and orchestra, as mentioned in the introduction of the thesis. They closed with the Romanian royal hymn to ward off police authorities suspicious of such a diverse gathering and to prove their loyalty to the state. The flyers for the event also emphasized there would be music by including a verse from the hymn “O Doamne Mare/How Great Thou Art.”<sup>699</sup>

Special visits like that of Mildmay Mission Director Samuel Wilkinson to Chişinău on 5-7 October 1928 produced music-filled gatherings. “Shall we gather at the River?” was sung in Yiddish, Russian, and English, with performances by Vrănceanu and local choirs.<sup>700</sup> Colportage trips made by Trachtman and others often climaxed with hours of singing in Romanian, Russian, Yiddish, or Turkish at the local evangelical prayer house as requested by those in attendance.<sup>701</sup>

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<sup>697</sup> Averbuch, “Meetings Full of Power,” *TT* 41/2 (February 1935): 21-22.

<sup>698</sup> Gabe, *HC* 62/2 (June- August 1989): 47; Averbuch, “Special Meetings in Bessarabia,” *TT* 42/3 (March 1936): 22-23.

<sup>699</sup> ANRM 679-1-4840, p. 247, 250. Sermons were given by Tihon Hijnacov, Averbuch, Buşila and Everett Gill, Mihail Cosmopol, Andrei Lebedenco, and Constantin Tafratov.

<sup>700</sup> “An Echo from Chişinău,” *TT* 35/1 (January 1929): 11; ANRM 679-1- 5555, file 306.

<sup>701</sup> Trachtmann, “Roumania,” *TT* 40/1 (January 1934): 8; Averbuch, “Stirred Up,” *TT* 30/6 (June 1924): 64-65.

One of the most popular hymns for these multi-ethnic congregations, was “Gott ist die Liebe/God is Love” by August Dietrich Rische (1819- 1906). Though originally a children’s song, it was already translated into many languages and sung at any occasion. Across Romania, it was sung in German, Hebrew, Hungarian, Polish, Romanian, Russian, and Turkish- in as many as nine languages at once, reflecting the diverse ethnic presence that could occur at one service.<sup>702</sup> Returning from a three-month furlough in 1931, the Averbuchs stopped in Berlin and Kaunas (Kovno) where both he and Maria sang- she in Yiddish, he in Romanian and in Hebrew- the song “God is Love.” They were joined by the crowds singing in German (Berlin) and in Russian (Kaunas).<sup>703</sup> Knowing Averbuch’s favorite sermon topic was the love of God and the danger nationalism posed to peaceful interactions at the local and international level, it is no surprise this song was often sung to emphasize his argument.

An interesting account from Eric Gabe further reveals the power of music to bridge religious and ethnic barriers and speaks to previously unimagined rapport between Jewish and Gentile communities in Romania. While living in Silistria (today in northeast Bulgaria) just after World War I, Gabe took part in the synagogue choir, which occasionally sang in the Christian church (presumably Orthodox) while the Christian choir reciprocated visits and sang in the synagogue. Christians would sing the Kadosh and Jews its equivalent in Romanian: “Sfânt, sfânt, sfânt Domnul Savaot,” [Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of Hosts].<sup>704</sup> The rabbi from Silistria allowed Gabe, even after the latter’s conversion to Christianity, to lead the synagogue choir in an original musical composition to Psalm 150, which Gabe claimed was quite popular in Chişinău.<sup>705</sup> Interestingly, with the emigration of most Jews from the city, the synagogue in

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<sup>702</sup> The Romanian translation is “Dumnezeu presfântul e mântuirea.” Averbuch, “Turn of the Year in Chişinău,” *TT* 39/2 (February 1933): 26-27; “Sing it O’er and O’er Again,” *TT* 30/4 (April 1924): 42; “Joy on Earth and Joy in Heaven,” *TT* 36/2 (February 1930): 20-21. A recent violin performance of the hymn from the Baptist Church in Tulca is available online: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UiFfdJNZiJs>.

<sup>703</sup> As the Averbuchs knew both German and Russian they may have purposely chosen to sing in other languages to provoke the audience to associate this familiar tune and message with the acceptance of different cultures and nations. It’s unclear why they didn’t sing in Lithuanian. Morogowsky and Laznik, “The Waters Stirred,” *TT* 37/10 (October 1931): 120; Averbuchs visited Berlin in July 1934 as well. Morogowsky, “Germany,” *TT* 41/1 (January 1935): 10.

<sup>704</sup> Gabe, *HC* 62/4 (December 1989- February 1990): 112.

<sup>705</sup> An ad was printed in a 1939 issue of *Binevestitorul* for Gabe’s music, including a choral piece, in three languages (Romanian, Hebrew, and English). Gabe remained good friends with the Silistria rabbi until the war cut off all possibilities of correspondence. Gabe, *HC* 63/4 (December 1990- February 1991): 118-119.

Silistria is today rented out as a prayer hall to evangelicals, showing continued sharing of religious space between Jews and evangelicals in the city.<sup>706</sup>

### **Instrumentality of Music**

Music as an important avenue for bridging cultural and linguistic barriers in these communities, was also used as an evangelistic tool and as a means of intentional community building. Geels and Verhees refer to the “cognitive deep structures” that form culture as “repertoires,” “fragmented and at times contradictory” which actors “mobilize in different ways.”<sup>707</sup> Evangelical agency and performativity is seen through their use of music as one of the best ways to create space for themselves in society and draw people to their meetings. Bessarabia is again a prime example of this.

In Chişinău, Averbuch’s musical abilities complemented his sermons and made his delivery of the Gospel message more powerful. Leon Levison, president of the International Hebrew Christian Alliance, said of him, “Le[v] Averbuch, is undoubtedly a prince among his missionary brethren...is himself a great musician, and has a gift of affecting others, both with his love for his master and his musical genius.”<sup>708</sup> In 1927 while detained on Ellis Island during his furlough in the USA, he played the violin and Maria the piano for fellow detainees, revealing the use of music as a coping mechanism and an evangelistic tool.<sup>709</sup>

Hymns were often printed on invitation cards distributed at the end of evangelistic meetings, for visitors to carry the song home with them. This way evangelical music entered the homes of those outside their religious community and provided ways for outsiders to learn and eventually participate more intentionally in the musical events.<sup>710</sup> In Pârjolteni, Lăpuşna county, Gheorghe Madan from Chişinău, held three nights of evangelizations, all filled with songs by the

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<sup>706</sup> Violeta Rozov, “Bulgaria’s Abandoned Synagogues,” June 2015 <https://www.vagabond.bg/travel/high-beam/item/3013-bulgaria-s-abandoned-synagogues.html> (accessed 2 August 2019).

<sup>707</sup> Frank. W. Geels and Bram Verhees, “Cultural Legitimacy and Framing Struggles in Innovation Journeys,” 912.

<sup>708</sup> Leon Levison, “President’s Report,” *The Hebrew Christian* (1933): 95; Kjaer-Hansen, *Joseph Rabinowitz and the Messianic Movement: The Herzl of Jewish Christianity* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995), 218-223.

<sup>709</sup> Averbuch, “Witness under Detention,” *TT* 33/10 (October 1927): 120.

<sup>710</sup> Averbuch, “Salvation and Song,” *TT* 31/2 (February 1924): 24-25.

local choir.<sup>711</sup> “God is Love/Gott ist die liebe,” was a popular song at these types of meetings. The words “He loves us all,” in the chorus of this hymn emphasized the equality of all people in the eyes of God, regardless of nationality.<sup>712</sup>

Music was an evangelistic tool transferable across subcultures. Especially in regards to mission among the Jews, the editors of Mildmay Mission’s *Trusting and Toiling* remarked, “Music has been in Chişinău a means owned of God to draw and to hold Jews under the sound of the Gospel.”<sup>713</sup> Nathan Feighin was previously a cantor of the synagogue in Căuşani village who came to the Christian faith through Averbuch. While visiting the Norwegian Israel Mission in Galaţi, Feighin sang exuberantly: “The great doctor who is near, the dear Lord Jesus,” a Christian song set to a Jewish melody. The Norwegian missionaries remarked that his eyes radiated awe: “He is a crazy Christian who uses every opportunity to testify and sing about Jesus.” While his visit encouraged them, they also used it to bring Jewish friends to enjoy Feighin’s “jubilant song” and his story of faith.<sup>714</sup>

Moses Richter described favorite hymns that drew Jews to their meetings in Siret, Suceava county.<sup>715</sup> Singing Yiddish hymns on train trips also drew curious Jewish travelers such as on Richter’s trip with the Cernăuţi Baptist choir to Pătrăuţi town. He used the opportunity to hand out invitations to the service at the local Baptist hall, where he and the choir gave a concert. Richter distributed Yiddish hymn sheets and Jewish guests from the audience felt comfortable enough to join the choir.<sup>716</sup> On a visit to Bucharest in 1924, Averbuch and his band sang and played on the train journey and at a Jewish restaurant, using music to draw a crowd and then give away Gospel tracts.<sup>717</sup>

These songs remained in the minds and hearts of those who heard or sang them. On a ship to Ismail city in 1935 two soldiers from Chişinău who attended the Sabbath school as children ran into Averbuch and fondly remembered the songs: “God is Love” and “Let the

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<sup>711</sup> *Farul Creştin* 6/7 (February 1938): 7.

<sup>712</sup> Averbuch, “Sing it O’er and O’er Again,” *TT* 30/4 (April 1924): 42.

<sup>713</sup> “Notabilia,” *TT* 34/3 (March 1928): 32.

<sup>714</sup> Antonia Aniksdal, “Fra Galatz: Broder Nathan Feighin,” *Missionsbald for Israel* 97/1 (January 1923): 5-6.

<sup>715</sup> “They all want to have it sung; it is so Jewish and the Jews like it.” He also enclosed a copy of the hymn by the editors of *Trusting and Toiling* failed to publish it or even the name of the song. Richter, “Steady Witness in Bukovina,” *TT* 36/5 (May 1930): 59-60.

<sup>716</sup> Richter, “At Siret and Pătrăuţi,” *TT* 36/10 (October 1930): 118.

<sup>717</sup> Averbuch, “Sing it O’er and O’er Again,” *TT* 30/4 (April 1924): 42.

blessed sunshine in.”<sup>718</sup> Understandably, a catchy tune and lyrics stuck with them more than a sermon. Music in various forms was an extremely effective tool for evangelization, for winning new adherents, and for creating space in the public sphere for their message to be heard. This was the case for Jewish evangelicals but especially for Roma believers, who would come to be the evangelical sub-group most associated with music during and after the communist regime.

Mission among Roma groups in Bulgaria, Finland, and Latvia during the interwar period also used music. Oskar Jalkio, affiliated with different Finnish Protestant churches, published a book on religious Roma songs in 1925.<sup>719</sup> In Latvia, Janis Leimanis, a Roma man himself, headed a Romani Lutheran parish in Riga in 1936 and formed a short-lived choir, though not religiously affiliated, for the society “Friend of Gypsies,” (1932-1933).<sup>720</sup>

Some scholars believe music is the reason so many Roma were drawn to evangelical and in particular Pentecostal services.<sup>721</sup> Roma have historically been associated with great musical talent, and as one Roma man exclaimed, “Gypsies are born with a gift from God: music!” revealing the perception of a divine link between Roma and music.<sup>722</sup>

However, the Lăutari or the Roma class of musicians view themselves as different from other Roma. “Honorable behavior” and “humility,” along with more formal attire- “the suit, coat, and tie worn on all occasions,” are the distinguishable features claimed amongst themselves. In elevating their own position they attributed to other Roma groups the negative qualities society at large credited to all Roma. Conversely, Lăutari or musicians were identified by other Roma groups as two-faced or as sell-outs, claiming they used their Roma heritage when it suited them for professional purposes but denied it when faced with marginalization in society.<sup>723</sup> While music proved a divisive social category among Roma, in evangelical churches music seemed to unite different Roma groups and other ethnicities.

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<sup>718</sup> Averbuch, “Seed Sown in Young Hearts,” *TT* (August 1935): 94.

<sup>719</sup> Raluca Bianca Roman, “From Christian mission to trans-national connections: Evangelism, emancipation and social mobilisation in the inter-war publications of the Finnish ‘Gypsy Mission,’” Gypsy Lore Society Annual Conference, University of Iceland, Reykjavik, 2019.

<sup>720</sup> Ieva Tihovska, “Jānis Leimanis and the ‘Awakening’ of Latvian Roma,” Gypsy Lore Society Annual Conference, University of Iceland, Reykjavik, 2019.

<sup>721</sup> David Thurfjell, “Pentecostalism and the Roma : cultural compatibility and ethno-genesis,” David Westerlund (ed.), *Global Pentecostalism: encounters with other religious traditions* (London: I.B. Tauris; 2009), 179–191.

<sup>722</sup> Margaret H. Beissinger, “Occupation and Ethnicity: Constructing Identity among Professional Romani (Gypsy) Musicians in Romania,” *Slavic Review* 60/1 (Spring, 2001): 32.

<sup>723</sup> Beissinger, “Occupation and Ethnicity,” 38-39.

Music served as an important tool to make space for themselves in society by gaining believers, but within their churches music was used to construct and strengthen their faith communities. It brought individual as well as group encouragement, was a means of corporate communion with God through song, and solidified the theological tenets of the communities as seen in the examples that follow. Groups often visited believers in remote places with music. Simion Cure played his violin to bring encouragement to believers in Negoii village whose mountaintop homes made getting to the Baptist meeting house difficult.<sup>724</sup> For Christmas and New Year's, choirs and brass bands, with permission from police authorities, caroled fellow members of their congregations at home.<sup>725</sup>

The Roma song "O del mulo amenge" [The Lord died for us] became a regular greeting among the Roma in Bulgaria, according to local Roma pastor Alexander Georgiev. Rather than saying the usual greeting of "peace" [*pace*] they used the lyrics, "O del mulo amenge."<sup>726</sup> Music was thus appropriated for salutations among Roma evangelicals as well.

Music served as a comfort in times of sadness as well as of joy. One Roma convert claimed all Roma had music in their blood because it was a way to deal with centuries of marginalization. After conversion, song became a way to praise God for inclusion into the family of believers.<sup>727</sup> However, the struggle for equality even in evangelical circles is observed in recent Roma songs like the one below:

Na dicîtu na dicîtu che omi calo  
Nu mai o Del prînjanel moro ilo  
Haida prala haida penyo co Isus  
Sode tu jives pe pu.  
[Do not look, do not look that I am black,  
God alone, God alone knows my heart.  
Come on brother come on sister to Jesus,  
As long as you live on the Earth.]<sup>728</sup>

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<sup>724</sup> Gheorghe Debucean, "Frații din biserică Negoii," *Farul Creștin* 6/7 (February 1938): 4.

<sup>725</sup> "Memorable Nights in Chișinău," *TT* 32/2 (February 1926): 21-22.

<sup>726</sup> Alexander Georgieff, "St. Andră, Österreich. Zigeuner-Weihnachtsfeier," *Täufer-Bote* 9/1 (January 1938): 4.

<sup>727</sup> Preda, *Doamne unde te gășesc acolo mă pocăiesc*, 24-25.

<sup>728</sup> László Fosztó, "Roma and the 'New Religions' in Europe," *Factsheets on Romani Culture, Project Education of Roma Children in Europe* (University of Graz: Council of Europe, 2019): 4.



Despite the unity that music brought, the prejudice against Roma persists. While accepted in the churches, outside their walls they still face various forms of prejudice even by fellow evangelical believers.<sup>729</sup>

Songs were important means by which to pass on encouraging theological truths regarding Jesus's care, God's provision, and the uniqueness of humans made in God's image. Moses Richter taught the Chişinău sabbath school's "God loves the little birds but He loves me yet more" to the German Baptist Churches in Braşov and Cernăuţi as well.<sup>730</sup> Maria Averbuch's words "Die Vegelach/ Das Feigele," set to a traditional Yiddish melody again used the imagery of birds to point to how God satisfies the longing for an eternal home.<sup>731</sup> In Bulgaria, the Roma Baptist Sunday school children in Golintzi sang "O kam pekla, mo gi tatarda" [A bright sunshine pours into my heart], to encourage others with the hope that faith in God provides.<sup>732</sup> Songs moved across geographic regions as musicians visited other churches for the encouragement of fellow believers.<sup>733</sup>

Lyrics often used Old Testament imagery to point to Jesus as Messiah/Savior. At Christmas celebrations Averbuch's congregation sang a Yiddish hymn "Stem of Jesse," that spoke of Jesus as the fulfillment of the promised descendent of Jesse (the father of King David).<sup>734</sup> At Passover, children told the story of the first Passover through Hebrew songs set to Yiddish melodies, and with the words changed to show Jesus as the ultimate Passover lamb/sacrifice. They were accompanied by the Mishkan choir and orchestra led by Marcu Tarlev in 1937, who seems to have taken over part of the musical responsibility of the community after Averbuch's illness and subsequent move to London.<sup>735</sup>

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<sup>729</sup> Beissinger, "Occupation and Ethnicity," 34; Preda, *Doamne unde te găsesc*, 90.

<sup>730</sup> The chorus in Yiddish reads: "Gott liebt die kleene Vegelach, im Inglick rettet er. En wenn die Vegelach er liebt, so liebt er mech noch mehr. O jo, er liebt, o jo, er liebt, ich wess gewiss, er liebt. En wenn die Veglach er Liebt, so liebt er mech noch mehr." Teutsch, *Ein Leben Nur*, 55-56. Courtesy of Mihai Ciucă. Richter, "Early Fruits of Grace," *TT* 36/4 (April 1930): 47.

<sup>731</sup> *Binevestitorul* 5-6 (1932): 2-3.

<sup>732</sup> Lydia Döllefeld, "Sonntagsschule im Zigeunerdorfe Golinzi, Bulgarien," *Täufer-Bote* 7/5 (May 1936): 7.

<sup>733</sup> Richter, "First Steps in Cernăuţi," *TT* 36/3 (March 1930): 34.

<sup>734</sup> "Memorable Nights in Chişinău," *TT* 32/2 (February 1926): 21-22.

<sup>735</sup> Trachtmann, "Special Meetings in Chişinău," *TT* 43/5 (May 1937): 57.

One of Averbuch's original hymns set to the tune of Techezaknah ("Be Strong") again identified Jesus as Messiah for the Jewish people and challenged the concept of Zion as related to the physical/geographic region of Palestine:

"We are contended to be Jews; we are going to Zion, home to our Father. Jesus the Messiah, He alone, helps us to be renewed and delivered from captivity."<sup>736</sup>

Averbuch clarified that when using "Zion" he referred to the place where God dwells (Ps 9:11), "The city of the Living God, the heavenly Jerusalem" (Heb. 12:22), not the current city located in Palestine. As such, he used music to challenge secular Zionism as a solution for the Jewish people.<sup>737</sup>

The theme of the Jewish savior was again stressed among Richter's compositions. In his song *Mashiach Yakar* [Precious Messiah], the first verse and chorus of the Yiddish original and its English translation are as follows:

*Main libster Meschiach ben Doved,  
Ich bin in dain Vaingorten greit  
Tsu arbeten nor far dain koved  
Mit moiech, mit harts un mit freid.*

My dearest Messiah, Son of David  
I am in your vineyard  
Ready to work only for your glory  
With mind, and heart and with joy.

*Chorus: Mach mutik main harts un main vilen,  
Derher main Gebet un main shir;  
Derloib mir dain gegenwart filen,*

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<sup>736</sup> "Mir zenen tsufriden/ Az mir zenen Yiden;/ Mir geyen ken Tsiyon/ Tsum Foter aheim./ Uns helfen banayen,/ Fin'm Goles bafrazen/ Yeshua Hamoshiach dos tit nor alein." Gabe, *HC* 62/2 (June - August 1989): 52. Gabe's translation.

<sup>737</sup> Nerel, "Zion in the Theology of L. Averbuch and S. Rohold," 54-71.

*Un enlech tsu veren mit dir.*

Encourage my heart and my will  
Harken to my prayer and my song  
Allow me to feel your presence  
And to be changed into your likeness.”<sup>738</sup>

Richter strategically did not mention Jesus/ Yeshua in the song, perhaps to avoid immediately alienating Jewish visitors yet still seeking to influence the Yiddish musical space. Jewish evangelicals, however, knew that in the song the title “Messiah, Son of David” referred to Jesus.

In an attempt to pacify local and state authorities and to prove their patriotism, many congregations began to include the Romanian royal hymn (*Imnul Regal*) in their repertoires. A Baptist youth gathering in Hotin county on the second day of Easter opened with the royal hymn and continued with choir songs, poems, and orchestra performances.<sup>739</sup> Some versions of the songbook *Cântările Sionului* also included the hymn “Trăiască Regele” [Long Live the King] to show Baptist love of king and country.<sup>740</sup> To further emphasize this, some groups held what they called “national-religious programs,” such as the Iași Baptist community’s celebration of Hero’s day with performances by a choir and orchestra- believers and guests attending from ten different districts.<sup>741</sup> These loyal associations were another strategy by which to create space in the Romanian public sphere. Despite such patriotic musical events, local and state government officials still viewed these groups with suspicion as evidence by the continued surveillance of these groups and the many police reports from the interwar period in the archives.

Siguranța agents were regularly sent to monitor these groups and make sure their music did not contain treasonous elements. They produced conflicting reports sometimes based on their interpretation of evangelical musical culture. One agent believed the songs sent to the state censors for approval were only a formality as the churches were using a host of other songs. He

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<sup>738</sup> Gabe’s translation. Gabe, *HC* 63/2 (July-September 1990): 53. A Hebrew translation of this song was included in the hymnbook of the Jerusalem Messianic Community (song number 139).

<sup>739</sup> “Din lumea religioasă,” *Farul Crestin* 6/19 (May 1938): 7.

<sup>740</sup> Ioan Ciuraș, Personal communication, Oțelu Roșu (10 April 2015). Ciuraș recalls how his father was told to rip the song out of his hymnal after WWII to avoid difficulties with the new communist government.

<sup>741</sup> *Farul Crestin* 6/25 (June 1938): 7.

remarked that their claim of being led by the Holy Spirit was an excuse to say or sing whatever they wanted.<sup>742</sup> On apprehending a clandestine Pentecostal meeting in 1938 in Hunedoara county, the police reported that the group was propagating the doctrine of their sect through song, which was indeed what they were doing.<sup>743</sup> In Reni, Bessarabia, another Siguranța report spoke disparagingly about the *Jidan* [kike] meetings (referring to Jewish Christian meetings) that drew people with their music.<sup>744</sup> In this case, the Jewish element was again used against evangelicals, this time in their musical meetings.

The issue of language proved controversial, especially in Bessarabia. As Philip Bohlman argues in his study of music and European nationalism, these “sectarian” churches came to be associated with “secret languages that empowered believers to compete successfully for Romania’s future,” and were believed to endanger the creation of modern Romania as a nation of Romanians.<sup>745</sup> Yiddish and Russian in Bessarabia or Hungarian in Transylvania and the Banat, considered revanchist and recalcitrant languages, were especially associated with evangelical meetings.<sup>746</sup> In 1922, Constantin Adorian tried to import a Romanian translation of the Hungarian Baptist hymnbook *Cântările Baptiste* but faced difficulties because one of the songs was set to the tune of the Hungarian national anthem.<sup>747</sup>

Even if the main sermon was given in Romanian- the state language- one agent argued that songs and other publications should also be exclusively in Romanian. He claimed the Russian language in Bessarabia was a powerful tool in the hands of sectarians, and that its replacement with Romanian would result in the death of sectarianism.<sup>748</sup> The versatility in language of these churches through song proved otherwise, especially as many rural Bessarabian churches conducted services in Romanian.

Another agent reported that even though the prayers at Averbuch’s congregation were mostly in Russian and in Hebrew (*evreiască*),<sup>749</sup> the children at the Baptist school were taught to

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<sup>742</sup> ANRM 679-1-4840, files 263-264. Undated, sometime in 1925.

<sup>743</sup> ANR, DGP 2350, 44/1938, file 23.

<sup>744</sup> ANR, DGP 2349, 51/1930, file 35.

<sup>745</sup> Bohlman, *The Music of European Nationalism*, 265.

<sup>746</sup> ANRM 679-1-5555, file 26.

<sup>747</sup> CNSAS, D6901 vol.1, file 53.

<sup>748</sup> ANRM 679-1-4840, file 263-264. Undated, sometime in 1925.

<sup>749</sup> The interchangeable use by Siguranta agents of the term *evreiasca* makes it unclear if the language was Yiddish or Hebrew- but prayers would likely have been in Hebrew.

sing only in Romanian and did not sing songs in Hebrew.<sup>750</sup> As previously observed, this was not always the case. However, music at the Mildmay Mission hall was indeed mostly in Russian or in Hebrew and Yiddish, but done in the “Baptist manner (*obiceiul baptist*),” according to another police agent.<sup>751</sup> What he meant is unclear, but reveals the secular perception of a specific “Baptist or evangelical” musical aesthetic different from the Orthodox liturgy.

Local reactions to evangelical music were usually positive. Other times, they were met with scorn, derision, or physical harm. Nina Tarleva and the children’s choir in Chişinău had maize thrown at them while singing “God is love” and distributing invitations to services in the Jewish sector of Chişinău.<sup>752</sup> Neighbors occasionally complained to the police about songs disturbing public peace.<sup>753</sup>

Police reports reveal restrictions on evangelical musical expression. For example, a 1928 report from Brăila instructed gendarmes that brass bands were only to be used in prayer houses or in 1935 they were allowed in funeral processions. Music at night was forbidden and choirs were only to perform in prayer houses.<sup>754</sup> In 1941, Baptist bands were forbidden because of their perceived anti-national propaganda and by 1943 a group caught singing Baptist songs in Reni was sent to court.<sup>755</sup> Even in 1949 after the founding of the Romanian People’s Republic, music of evangelicals was still seen as a threat by government agents who believed it captivated workers.<sup>756</sup>

Though often neglected in scholarly discourses on music, nationalism, and religion, these evangelical groups challenge interpretations of interwar religion and music that examine music solely from a religious or music history/ music theory perspective, or those that only see it through the lens of nationalism.<sup>757</sup> Analysing these groups through the lens of music provides an

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<sup>750</sup> ANRM 679-1-5555, file 54.

<sup>751</sup> ANRM 679-1-5555, file 26.

<sup>752</sup> Nina Tarlev, “Roumania,” *TT* 33/1 (January 1927): 10.

<sup>753</sup> One such example is in regards to a group of Brethren in 1938. CNSAS, D12386, file 214. Or of Teodor Istoc from Sac village in the Banat, playing Baptist songs through an open window. D13531 vol.1, file 71.

<sup>754</sup> CNSAS, D12378 vol.3, file 85; D12388 vol. 2, file 6; D9487 vol. 1, file 83.

<sup>755</sup> CNSAS, D6902 vol. 1, files 327, 440, 453.

<sup>756</sup> CNSAS, D6886, files 528.

<sup>757</sup> Examples of such studies are many of those still very valuable works cited in the introduction to this chapter.

intimate look at their lived religion outside the usual exploration of statistics or theology. They prove a complex and entangled segment of society that used music to create and express both their international and local identities. They saw themselves as enhancing the nation's musical repertoire contributing both original and translated hymns to Romanian music.

Songs translated or composed by Vasile Berbecar, Dumitru Cornilescu, Jean Staneschi, Ion Chişmorie, Vasile Moiescu and others became important pillars of evangelicals' identification and agency.<sup>758</sup> They filled a spiritual need for new songs that matched their new beliefs. Evangelicals also sought to create space for themselves in the majority Romanian ethnic community through their choice of aesthetics through song and the performative aspect of their music, incorporating new instruments and forming choirs and orchestras. Musical literacy in various forms became essential and was achieved through formal courses, music contests, or simply through regular attendance at services and engaging in communal singing.

Their often linguistically diverse music reflected the ethnically diverse composition of these new religious denominations. Music continued to bridge ethnic divides even during communism. This component is largely neglected in the study of these groups. The multilingual songs were for congregants also a reflection of the worship awaiting them in heaven- where they believed people would sing praises to God in all languages.

Music was instrumentalized both for evangelization (what their opponents considered proselytizing) but also for strengthening their communities. Unlike prayer, preaching, or conversion testimonies, music united individual believers with the religious community by singing together the words they read from the Bible, which served as the foundation of their new faith. This was particularly important for evangelical churches that did not have a history of congregational responses as part of a liturgy present in traditional Protestant Churches or in Catholic or Orthodox liturgy. The songs also strengthened theological teaching in these churches through their lyrics. The performative nature of music allowed them to spend more time together and solidify intercommunal bonds, while also creating space for themselves in Romanian society and culture.

The reactions their music-laden communities received were mixed. Police authorities lauded and at other times were suspicious of their music as antinational or a disturbance of the

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<sup>758</sup> ACLA unprocessed, Vasile Berbecar, "Cântul în bisericile noastre," *Farul Mânturirii* 10/11 (June 1929): 5.

peace. Among neighbors, their orchestras and bands were often welcome but occasionally seen as a nuisance and even met with derision. Despite the unifying potential of evangelical music and their contribution of songs to Romanian music, Romanian officials considered their international affiliations a danger to the nation. In an attempt to prevent further restrictive legislation and prove their loyalty, some evangelical leaders allowed the stifling influence of anti-Semitism to creep into their congregations. As the following chapter shows, their attempts at pacifying authorities proved fruitless and ethnic Romanian evangelicals became themselves targets of cleansing policies, but music remained an identity marker and means of evangelical social cohesion and of bringing down barriers.

## Chapter 5 “A Dangerous Bacteria”: Evangelicals and World War II

Having looked at the wider evangelical communities at the start of the thesis and then at the growth of ethnic minority Jewish and Roma believers in these communities, this last chapter will address how these groups experienced the escalation of religious and ethnic prejudice in the context of World War II and the Holocaust/Porajmos.<sup>759</sup> Continued surveillance of these groups and the many police reports from the interwar period in the archives, are evidence of the unsuccessful attempts at convincing authorities of their loyalty to the state through patriotic expressions in their musical events. These previously tolerated ethnic, religious, social boundary breakers of the interwar period were no longer tolerated in wartime when individuals were required even more to fit into distinct categories. This chapter gives voice and agency to the communities through individual stories that again do not fit into easy narratives. The war further aggravated the hostile reception of evangelicals whose complex ethnic and religious configurations in society, according to state rhetoric, seemed dangerously “contagious” among the Romanian (Orthodox) majority. The war thus proved a catalyst for these groups’ existence and a theatre in which their evolving identity challenged notions of religious-national allegiance and reconfigured the definition of the national enemy.

Romania remained a neutral country for the first year of World War II. On 26 June 1940, as a result of secret negotiations in the 1939 Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact, Romania lost Bessarabia and Northern Bukovina to the Soviet Union, while a month later, in August 1940, a large region from the middle of the country called Northern Transylvania, was ceded to Hungary. Discontent over the loss of these territories led to the appointment of General Ion Antonescu as Prime Minister on 4 September 1940. King Carol abdicated two days later and his son Michael became king of Romania, but Antonescu was given complete dictatorial power. Just ten days after his appointment, on 14 September 1940, Antonescu formed a coalition with the fascist paramilitary group the Iron Guard and created the National Legionary State. Romania subsequently joined the Axis powers in November 1940.

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<sup>759</sup> Jews themselves use the Hebrew term Shoah. Most Holocaust victims were Yiddish-speaking Jews and they referred to the Holocaust in Yiddish as the Katastrofe. Some Roma also refer to the genocide as the Pojarmos (the Devouring).



Previously, during the withdrawal of Romanian troops from Bessarabia and Northern Bukovina in June 1940, massacres of local Jews took place in some localities at the hands of retreating soldiers and local residents, such as in Dorohoi. Bessarabia and Northern Bukovina remained under Soviet occupation from July 1940 to June 1941. Once Germany terminated the German-Soviet Alliance by attacking its Soviet ally, these regions were re-occupied by Romanian troops. It was after the reconquest that ghettos were established in Chişinău, Cernăuţi, and other cities or towns, following the pattern of escalating ethnic cleansing and genocidal policies across Europe. The autumn of 1941 Romanian deportations began of the country's Jews to the newly acquired region of Transnistria, the wide strip of land between the Prut and the Bug rivers, east of Bessarabia. All nomadic, followed by some sedentary,<sup>760</sup> Roma from across the country were deported there starting in the summer of 1942. In Transnistria the deportees experienced horrific conditions and many died on route.



Map of Romania, 1942<sup>761</sup>

<sup>760</sup> These were Romanian administrative labels imposed on the Roma by the state.

<sup>761</sup> By Romania\_1942\_es.svg: \*Romania\_1942\_ru.svg: Anton Gutsunaevderivative work: Rowanwindwhistler (talk)derivative work: Furfur (talk) - This file was derived from: Romania 1942

The chapter will examine the experiences of individuals from these religious groups, including legislation affecting them, to trace the movement from interwar cultural/social marginalization in Romania to state-wide policy of suppression and evangelical responses to it. Unlike in other European countries, where their presence was more accepted, evangelical groups in Romania also became targets of cleansing procedures. Their prayer houses were closed, all their funds confiscated; they were forbidden to meet even in private homes, and they were threatened with mass deportation. It is true these groups faced varying degrees of restrictions across Europe, as often occurs during times of war.<sup>762</sup> However, only in Poland was there a similar degree of repression to what occurred in Romania during the war, though in Poland it was based on ethnicity at the hands of the occupying nazi administration primarily because they were Polish and not because they were Baptist.<sup>763</sup> This makes the case of Romanian evangelicals unique in the region at the time. Before bringing to light the wartime experiences of these marginalized groups in Romania, an analysis of their position within escalating interwar xenophobic nationalism is crucial.

Anti-Semitism was an important part of Romanian nationalism in the interwar period, where Jews were identified with the Bolshevik threat and with economic and demographic invasion due to their predominance in urban areas acquired by Romania after World War I.<sup>764</sup> Evangelicals, due to their connection to the Jewish minority, were also accused of being national traitors, communists, etc. Some Romanian evangelicals resorted to nationalist arguments in an

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es.svg.; CC BY 3.0, <https://commons.wikimedia.org/Bessarabia/index.php?curid=18543195>. Another map from 1942 shows Northern Transylvania as well: <https://Bessarabia.facinghistory.org/resource-library/image/map-romania-1942>.

<sup>762</sup> Keith G. Jones, and Ian M. Randall, *Counter-Cultural Communities: Baptist Life in Twentieth-Century Europe* (Milton Keynes: Paternoster, 2008); Frank M. Hasel, Barna Magyarosi, and Stefan Höschele, *Adventists and Military Service Biblical, Historical, and Ethical Perspectives* (Madrid: Safeliz, 2019); Jan Bank, and Lieve Gevers, *Churches and Religion in the Second World War* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2016); Lieve Gevers, and Jan Bank, *Religion under Siege* (Leuven: Peeters, 2007).

<sup>763</sup> Zbigniew Wierzychowski, "Broken and Scattered. Polish Baptists during World War II," *European Journal of Theology* 21/1 (2011): 35–46. Important collaboration between evangelicals and Jews is also present in Poland and Bulgaria. Parush Parushev, "Bulgarian Church Protection of Jews in World War II," *East-West Church Ministry Report* 17/4 (Fall 2009): <http://Bessarabia.eastwestreport.org/33-e-17-4/263-bulgarian-church-protection-of-jews-in-world-war-ii> (accessed 7 July 2021).

<sup>764</sup> Roland Clark, "From Elite Pamphleteers to Social Movement Protagonists: Antisemitic Activism in 1920s Romania," *Studies on National Movements* 4 (2019): <http://snm.nise.eu/index.php/studies/article/view/47>.

attempt at self-preservation and so the treatment of ethnic minority groups like Jews and Roma in evangelical churches varied.

Throughout the interwar period, police agents and BOR officials referred to the dangerous character of these groups, descriptions which only intensified during the war. Police, often perplexed by the varying denominations and different doctrinal (theological) language, produced biased and confusing reports. For example, the names Baptists, Adventists, evangelical Christians, Brethren, Nazarenes, Pocăiți (Repenters), Stundists, and others were used interchangeably in these reports.<sup>765</sup> Because they refused to join the dominant churches, these groups were seen as a social and national danger, creating disunity among the majority Romanian population.

They were portrayed as having a particular interest in converting soldiers in an attempt to “undo the army” and challenge the security of the Romanian state. For example, Lev and Maria Averbuch were accused of spreading propaganda against the “Christian Church” (meaning BOR) among soldiers. Their members’ meetings were identified in police reports as exclusive gatherings where dubious secrets were discussed.<sup>766</sup>

Averbuch’s strong presence in Baptist circles and the association of Jews with communism contributed to accusations of communist aspirations among these groups. Averbuch was falsely accused of being a member of the social revolutionary committee in Odessa due to his help of Jewish refugees from Soviet Ukraine and having previously lived there.<sup>767</sup> One agent claimed, “Averbuch declared to me that he wanted to go to Iași and Bucharest to make Bolshevik, Baptist, religious propaganda.”<sup>768</sup> Perhaps the agent could not resist the enticing though contradictory alliteration. In their police reports, agents took it for granted that evangelicals were “all socialist communists.”<sup>769</sup> In 1924 one claimed they preached Bolshevism on religious grounds, using Christ’s command to love your neighbor against the concept of

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<sup>765</sup> ANRM 679-1-4840, f. 4, 8, 9, 16, 18. Police reports from 1918 with a Siguranța agent calling Averbuch an Adventist propagandist.

<sup>766</sup> ANRM 679-1-4840, f. 9, 16, 46. A newspaper clipping claimed Tihon Hijnacov and Averbuch were “Baptist Adventists” trying to undo the army in *Basarabesc* 18 (11 October 1918).

<sup>767</sup> ANRM 679-1-5555, f.10; 679-1-4840, f. 48. For more on the history of Jewish and Bolshevik accusations see Paul Hanebrink, *A Specter Haunting Europe: The Myth of Judeo-Bolshevism* (MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2018).

<sup>768</sup> ANRM, 679-1-4840, f. 6 (18 September 1918).

<sup>769</sup> ANRM 679-1-4840, f. 4 .

nationality and national unity.<sup>770</sup> Authorities refused to recognize that official Romanian nationalism was itself based on or intimately linked to a manipulation of Christian doctrines through the prominent position of BOR in Romanian nationalist ideology.

Though not having a strong presence among the working class, agents insisted that the Baptist sect was composed of workers agitated by Russian and Jewish leaders, who encouraged them to join as “brothers in the fight.”<sup>771</sup> References to universal Christian brotherhood in Averbuch’s Chişinău publication *Prietenu/Drug* were interpreted as communist nuances.<sup>772</sup> Their converted Jewish leaders were also accused of seeking the destruction of Christian states and the establishment of a Jewish democratic state.<sup>773</sup> Baptism was a “true revolution” in the spirit of Bolshevism that would infect both the family and the state; sectarianism was deemed a dangerous bacteria.<sup>774</sup> Their teachings and practices were considered something foreign, infecting the majority ethnic Romanian population. This biological language was prevalent in eugenicist ideology of the time comparing the nation to a human body and “foreigners” to external threats that the body sought to eliminate. The language was similar to that used against all Jews in different European countries.<sup>775</sup>

In 1937, their churches were still regarded as fuel (*focar*) for the spread of subversive communist ideas and their trans-national character a threat to the interests of the Romanian people and ancestral faith. An army chaplain argued for severe curtailing of their activity and their deportation to less populated areas to ensure the protection of the Romanian nation.<sup>776</sup> The prejudice and misinformation fueled fear and more confusion and communist accusations would later influence Antonescu’s policies toward “sectarians” during the war. The general focus, however, remained on the Jewish population at large as the main targets of xenophobic nationalism.<sup>777</sup>

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<sup>770</sup> ANRM 679-1-4840, f. 197 (23 May 1924).

<sup>771</sup> ANRM 679-1-4840, f. 48, undated (between 1918-1920).

<sup>772</sup> ANRM 679-1-4840, f. 54-57 (28 November 1920).

<sup>773</sup> ANRM 679-1-4840, f. 8 (9 October 1918).

<sup>774</sup> ANRM 679-1-4840, f. 263-264.

<sup>775</sup> A great study of this is Maria Bucur, *Eugenics and Modernization in Interwar Romania* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2002) as well as the recent exhibition by Marius Turda, “Biopolitică și eugenism în România, 1920-1944,” (Bucharest: Muzeului Municipiului Bucureşti, 1 November 2019) <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cx06dUVCm4o> (accessed 6 July 2021).

<sup>776</sup> ANRM 679-1-5555, f.374.

<sup>777</sup> Leon Volovici, *Nationalist Ideology and Antisemitism: The Case of Romanian Intellectuals in the 1930s* (Oxford: Pergamon Press, 1991); Irina Livezeanu, *Cultural Politics in Greater Romania:*

The Roma had a different experience in regards to social marginalization. Petre Matei and Viorel Achim argue that although they were a separate ethnic category in the 1930 census, they were perceived and treated more like a social class. However, as social classes are economically based and one leaves by getting richer or poorer, historian Tomas Kamusella argues they were seen rather as an immutable or natural estate in which they were born and unable to leave.<sup>778</sup> They did not pose the same threat as the Jewish minority in the urban economic sphere. Some Roma leaders even sought an alliance with anti-Semitic leaders Ioan Zelea Codreanu, Octavian Goga, and A.C. Cuza.<sup>779</sup> Though prejudice against Roma existed, no evidence points to authorities attributing stereotypes or fears associated with Roma to evangelicals as they did with Jewish stereotypes. As mentioned in the chapter on the Roma Baptists, the police and BOR seemed unaware of the connection between Roma and evangelicals in Romania. They remained preoccupied with the puzzling Jewish element in evangelical churches. As anti-Semitism increased in Romanian society, evangelical believers too found themselves in a precarious position and responded in different ways.

### **Minorities Within the Churches**

The experience of Jewish Christians with the rise of anti-Semitism varied only slightly with in evangelical churches across Romanian regions. A Jewish couple from Bukovina said they had a number of friends among the “converted Romanians” who had given them a New Testament: “It is always a great joy to find Roumanians who show their love for the Jews and try to win them to Christ. Sad to say it is not the Church people who do so.”<sup>780</sup> They referred to the openness of evangelicals as compared to BOR.

Moses Richter, Jewish pastor (serving alongside the German pastor) at the Cernăuți German Baptist Church, remarked on the situation in November 1932: “At this time when so

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*Regionalism, Nation Building, and Ethnic Struggle, 1918-1930* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1994); Andrei Oișteanu, *Inventing the Jew. Antisemitic Stereotypes in Romanian and Other Central-East European Cultures* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2009); Brigitte Mihok (ed.), *Holocaust an der Peripherie. Judenpolitik und Judenmord in Rumänien und Transnistrien, 1940–1944* (Berlin: Metropol, 2009).

<sup>778</sup> Tomasz Kamusella, Personal correspondence, 7 September 2020.

<sup>779</sup> Petre Matei, “Romii în perioada interbelică. Percepții naționaliste,” *Spectrum: cercetări sociale despre romi*, eds. Toma Stéfania, Fosztó László, (Cluj Napoca: Editura Institutului pentru Studiarea Problemelor Minorităților Naționale: Kriterion, 2010), 15-40.

<sup>780</sup> Adeney, “Off the Track in Roumania,” *Jewish Missionary Intelligence* 20/4 (April 1930): 54.

many ‘Christians’ have been poisoned by false nationalism and try to be genuine Christians and Germans by hating the Jews, there are still Christians and Germans who fulfill God’s command: ‘Comfort ye, comfort ye my people, said your God. Speak ye comfortably to Jerusalem...’.<sup>781</sup> Richter, as a Baptist minister of Jewish ethnicity, encouraged his congregation to continue their support of Jewish neighbors. However, at times he also admonished Romanian evangelicals: “Tell me, dear brother and sister, how you love a Jew and I will tell you what sort of a Christian you are.”<sup>782</sup> As the most vulnerable and hated group in society at the time, Richter argued that true Christianity lay in showing love for the Jewish people. In 1933, Averbuch called for a global day of prayer against anti-Semitism, an event that messianic Jews in Chişinău recently instituted.<sup>783</sup>

Jewish convert Henry Ellison, working first in Bucharest with the London Jews Society and then for Mildmay Mission in Cernăuţi, mentioned anti-Semitic attitudes of gentile missionaries, but also seemed to justify them in a report given at the International Committee on the Christian Approach to the Jews in Vienna in 1937. He claimed “The Jew has done himself a very great disservice in not realizing that he is in large measure himself to blame for it.”<sup>784</sup> It is unclear where exactly their blame lay: religious, economic, social, political. However, in the same talk and in later publications he was distressed by the lack of public opposition on the part of evangelical churches to growing anti-Semitism.<sup>785</sup> He argued they should be more vocal in their opposition, but he failed to see the opposite effect such support might have, taking into consideration the marginalized status of evangelical churches.

Ellison remarked there was nevertheless concern for reaching the Jewish people in these churches. Baptists and Brethren held prayer meetings, lectures, and eagerly opened their churches to special outreach events for Jews. Their activity was clearly with the goal of

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<sup>781</sup> *Tauferbote* 3/11 (November 1932): 7.

<sup>782</sup> “Sage mir, lieber Bruder und Schwester, wie du einen Juden liebst, werde ich dir sagen, was für ein Christ du bist.” *Tauferbote* 3/8 (1932):4.

<sup>783</sup> Н. Поздырка [N. Pozdyrka], “Холокост. из Истории Мессиянского Движения Кишинёва [Kholokost. Iz Istorii mesianskogo dvizheniia Kishineva],” 14 July 2019

<https://Bessarabia.youtube.com/watch?v=ab5Mipr0PW0&feature=youtu.be> (accessed 26 March 2020).

<sup>784</sup> Ellison, “Report on Romania.” Paper presented at the International Missionary Council’s International Committee on the Christian Approach to the Jews, held on June 28-July 2, 1937 (Vienna, Austria), 3 in Mitchell Leslie Glaser, “A Survey of Missions to the Jews in Continental Europe 1900 – 1950,” diss. Fuller Theological Seminary (1998), 216.

<sup>785</sup> Glaser, “A Survey of Missions to the Jews,” 217; Ellison, “In Troubled Rumania,” *TT* 45/4 (April 1939): 56-57.

conversion (which was what Ellison also sought). He mentioned that Lutheran, Roman Catholic and Orthodox priests showed sympathy to Jews, but these were much fewer.<sup>786</sup> In his memoirs, Eric Gabe recounted the openness of Baptists to converts in comparison to the fear held by Bucharest's German-Lutheran and Anglican ministers to accept Jewish Christians.<sup>787</sup>

The Norwegian Israel Mission (NIM) branch in Galați, though Lutheran-affiliated, was perhaps the most inclusive institution in Romania at the time. It along with the Anglican mission in Bucharest ran a youth camp in Wolkendorf/Vulcan, Transylvania, near Brașov city, with Isaac Feintstein as camp leader. Previously good relations with Vulcan's German villagers worsened in the mid-1930s and NIM's Jewish campers started to receive harassment. On one occasion they avoided a potentially violent situation by singing a German marching song on their accordion, making good use of the Bukovina German-language background of some Jewish believers.<sup>788</sup> One of the most prominent Jewish Christians from the past century, known internationally for his writings and testimony before the United States of America Congress, Richard Wurmbrand, converted after interaction with camp staff while undergoing tuberculosis treatment in Vulcan.<sup>789</sup> Feinstein and then Wurmbrand were prominent Jewish Christian leaders in the eastern regions of Romania- both influenced by and influencing in turn Romanian evangelicals. Wurmbrand's Bucharest residence would spare him the horrors of deportation; Feinstein's war-time fate is discussed later in the chapter.

### *The German (Swabian/Saxon) Churches*

As observed in Vulcan, the considerably large German minority in Romania could be aggressive toward the Jewish minority.<sup>790</sup> However, the German Baptist churches attempted to

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<sup>786</sup> Ellison 1937, 8 in Glaser, 217.

<sup>787</sup> Gabe, *HC* 63/1 (April 1990- June 1990):18-23; *Ibid*, 63/2 (July 1990- September 1990):49-55.

<sup>788</sup> Gabe, *HC* 63/3 (September 1990- November 1990): 77-79.

<sup>789</sup> Gabe, *HC* 63/4 (December 1990- February 1991): 114-117. Includes a photo of part of the Bucharest Jewish Christian community in 1939. Wurmbrand was an apparently well-known atheist politician in the 1930s. He headed the Anglican mission in Bucharest after the foreign staff was forced to leave during the war. Anuta Moise was a staff member at the camp and in 1965 she helped coordinate the ransom paid by the Norwegian Israel Mission and International Hebrew Christian Alliance to get the Wurmbrands out of Romania. An account of Wurmbrand's early communist activity, trial, and conversion given in Ellison, "Richard," *TT* 46/13 (July 1940), 30-31. Gabe, *HC* 63/3 (September-November 1990): 80-81.

<sup>790</sup> Anthony Komjathy and Rebecca Stockwell, *German Minorities and the Third Reich: Ethnic Germans of East Central Europe between the Wars* (NY: Holmes & Meier, 1980), 118-119; Balázs Szelényi, "From Minority to Übermensch: The Social Roots of Ethnic Conflict in the German Diaspora of Hungary, Romania and Slovakia," *Past and Present* 196/1 (2007): 236-238; Mariana Hausleitner,

challenge escalating racism. Baptist minister Georg Teutsch from Hermannstadt/Sibiu reported: “Brother Richter published in the newspaper and through the invitations sent out that his subject was 'Salvation comes from the Jews' ... Every nation tries to present Christ according to its own nationalism and not as He is presented in the Bible.”<sup>791</sup> Teutsch argued for the acceptance of Jesus Christ as ethnically Jewish and for Christian churches to reflect the truth of his historical character accordingly.

Johannes Fleischer, the pastor of the Bucharest German Baptist church, gave similar reasons against anti-Semitism: “The more one makes Jews the scapegoat for our troubled world, the more they need to be evangelized ... Not hatred of the Jews but mission to the Jews is our task.”<sup>792</sup> However, Gabe’s memoirs present a more negative view of Fleischer. In one sermon article from 1937, Fleischer claimed that Jesus was at best only half Jewish. It created justifiable unease among the Jewish members of his congregation, such as Eric Gabe and Moses Richter. The latter responded that if Jesus was at best half Jewish what was he at worst.<sup>793</sup> His grandson Roland Fleischer, currently a Baptist minister, argues that J. Fleischer’s argument had purely theological implications regarding the Incarnation (God taking on a human body as Jesus), since only Jesus’s mother was Jewish but his father was God. Fleischer clearly proved his opposition to national socialism in other articles and sermons. He and fellow German Baptist Carl Ströbel, secretly ordained Jewish convert Richard Wurmbrand as a deacon at the Bucharest German Baptist church at 28 Popa Rusu street to enable Wurmbrand to conduct meetings and officiate baptisms.<sup>794</sup> Indeed, Jewish converts felt safer coming to him than to the Lutheran church in Bucharest where Hitler was praised.<sup>795</sup> However, in 1944 Fleischer’s church was also sealed by city authorities and his appeals to the German Legation were refused on the grounds that it would create conflict with the Romanian authorities.<sup>796</sup> Thus even the ethnic German “sectarians” had limited influence on the prevailing socio-political atmosphere.

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“Transformations in the Relationship between Jews and Germans in the Bukovina 1910-1940,” Tobias Grill (ed.), *Jews and Germans in Eastern Europe* (Berlin: DeGruyter, 2018 ), 199-214.

<sup>791</sup> *Tauferbote* 3/ 6-7 (1932): 9 (also in *Sendbote* 80/31 (1932): 10) in Fleischer, “Looking for Clues,” 141.

<sup>792</sup> *Tauferbote* 6/12 (1935): 5 in Fleischer, “Looking for Clues,” 140.

<sup>793</sup> Gabe, *HC* 38/1 (1991):17; Fleischer, “Begegnungen,” 225.

<sup>794</sup> Richard Wurmbrand, *From Suffering to Triumph* (Grand Rapids: Kregel Publications, 1993), 28.

<sup>795</sup> Gabe, *HC* 63/1 (April 1990- June 1990):18-23; *Ibid*, 63/2 (July 1990- September 1990):49-55.

<sup>796</sup> Viorel Achim, *Politica regimului Antonescu față de cultele neoprotestante: documente* (Iași: Polirom, 2013), Doc. 491. (Hereafter, Achim followed by document number.)



## *Romanian Evangelicals*

Among ethnic Romanian evangelical leaders, anti-Semitism was condemned but not too vociferously or publicly, as mentioned earlier by Ellison. In 1928 the Baptist publication *Farul Mântuirii* rejected anti-Semitic propaganda that claimed Jews refused to work, but the short article was hidden at the bottom of the external news section.<sup>797</sup> Richter's experience in 1930 in Pătrăuți, Bukovina revealed a great level of acceptance among Romanians in a Baptist congregation: when asked if they were anti-Semites they collectively replied "no," and added that "they love the Jews with all their heart."<sup>798</sup>

By 1938, Bucharest Baptist publications were unafraid to report that a church in Fălești-Târg, Bălți county, Bessarabia, pastors Peneovschi and Iacusăvici held Easter services at which the majority of visitors were Jewish, thus associating themselves with this ethnic minority. The church was even said to have a family of Jewish believers as members.<sup>799</sup> In Iași, also at Easter 1938 the festivities took place over three days with choirs and orchestras; one of the speakers was a Dr. Stein, said to have been a rabbi before he came to believe in Jesus as Messiah. This might actually be an incorrect reference to Isaac Feinstein who worked in Iași for NIM at the time.<sup>800</sup>

However, there were references made by evangelical leaders such as Ioan Cocuț against the "Alianța Israelită" (referring to the Alliance Israelite Universelle)<sup>801</sup> as the greatest enemy of Christ.<sup>802</sup> This was likely in response to the Zionist sympathies of the Alliance. Most evangelicals positioned themselves against Zionism for similar arguments to that of Averbuch. Zionism pointed to political autonomy and the creation of a Jewish nation-state rather than to cohabitation of Jews and Gentiles. News about Mussolini's and Hitler's campaigns against the Jews was printed in Baptist papers, revealing concern about the difficult situation of Jews all over Europe.<sup>803</sup>

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<sup>797</sup> I.R.S. "Externe," *Farul Mântuirii* 9/7 (April 1928):15.

<sup>798</sup> Moses Richter, "At Siret and Pătrăuți," *TT* 36/10 (October 1930): 118-119.

<sup>799</sup> "Din lumea religioasă," *Farul Creștin* 6/19 (May 1938): 7.

<sup>800</sup> "Din Lumea Religioasă," *Farul Creștin* 6/18 (May 1938): 7.

<sup>801</sup> "Alliance Israelite Universelle," <http://Bessarabia.aiu.org/fr/alliance-israelite-universelle> (accessed 7 January 2021).

<sup>802</sup> I. Cocuț, "Răspuns unor atacuri nedrepte," *Farul Creștin* 5/18 (September 1937): 2.

<sup>803</sup> "Exista un singur loc unde evreii ar fi bine primiți- la Hristos, dar acolo nu vreau ei să meargă," in *Farul Creștin* 6/32 (August 1938): 6.

Unfortunately, among those claiming to be followers of Christ were some of the individuals most hostile to Jews, especially in Romania. Churches across Europe were distancing themselves from Jews, often refusing them baptism out of fear of government reprisals or petitioning for legislation against changes of religion, especially in Bessarabia.<sup>804</sup> The Romanian evangelicals could do little against the rising anti-Semitism, even when they wanted to; they were continually under suspicion themselves and targeted by anti-sectarian legislation.

### **Failure to Negotiate Space before Summer 1940**

The interwar ministerial decisions of the Department of Religious Denominations fluctuated between granting and withdrawing legal status from evangelical groups. As part of increasingly restrictive nationalization policies, a controversial ministerial decision in 1938 closed a majority of evangelical churches and attracted international attention leading to its repeal. The law allowed only religious associations with congregations of at least one hundred male members, who owned a cemetery, and who were not located near the vicinity of an Orthodox church to gather.<sup>805</sup> This threatened almost all evangelical churches, which had small congregations spread across the country.

Jewish believers continued their activity through missions like NIM and Mildmay, which were allowed to operate, but these were also indirectly affected by the 1938 decision. Jews were afraid to attend because of the order, and police, unsure of the character of their meetings, mistook them for illegal Baptist meetings. In the town of Reni, Feinstein's Monday evening services were forbidden by police in the autumn of 1938.<sup>806</sup> While in Cernăuți, Ellison wrote of holding clandestine meetings in private homes and of being careful not to invite too many

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<sup>804</sup> Donald J. Dietrich, *Christian Responses to the Holocaust: Moral and Ethical Issues* (NY: Syracuse University Press, 2003); Ion Popa, *The Romanian Orthodox Church and the Holocaust* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2017).

<sup>805</sup> Members did not include regular visitors in attendance. The law referred to men baptised in and recorded on the membership roster of their local church. Iemima Ploscariu, "Transnational, National, and Ecumenical Convergences: The Baptist, Anglican, and Orthodox Reactions to the Romanian 1938 Religion Law," *Journal of Religion in Europe* 12/1 (November 2019): 49-77.

<sup>806</sup> Gabe, *HC* 63/3 (September-November 1990): 80.

people.<sup>807</sup> However, Ellison left Romania for England in July 1939.<sup>808</sup> He, along with Averbuch, Moses Richter, and Eric Gabe all managed to escape the horrors of the war, but Feinstein remained in Iași.

Along with the political upheaval occurring in September 1940 and the installation of Ion Antonescu as Prime Minister, the Ministry of Religious Denominations and Arts acknowledged Baptists' status as a religious denomination through Decision 5.657/1940. This long-coveted status should have provided the protection they needed. Adventists and Brethren fell under the designation of "religious associations," with fewer rights, and Pentecostals were still outlawed. However, Decision 42.352/1940 on 9 September excluded Baptists from the list of approved religious denominations and declared all religious associations or sects illegal.<sup>809</sup> This was coupled with another decision (42.353/1940) that forced all religious associations authorized in 1939 to stop activity and for their buildings and other property to be transferred to the state, in an attempt to control religious groups.<sup>810</sup> Just ten days later, on 19 September, all previous decisions were suspended through decision 43.931/1940. This back and forth created all sorts of confusion for both the authorities, expected to enforce the laws, and for the communities it affected.<sup>811</sup>

The suspension of previous restrictive legislation came as a result of protests from evangelicals across the country. They argued the country would lose an important force of moral regeneration and social action, as well as create domestic and international turmoil considering their confessions included an "important number of minority citizens."<sup>812</sup> Others argued for the tens of thousands of "pure and loyal Romanians" who belonged to these groups.<sup>813</sup> This consolidated effort by evangelicals and the mix of international and national argumentation seemed to temporarily influence the government.

However, at the local level authorities continued to enforce the rescinded legislation. Notaries often refused to carry out requests for changes of religion, often from BOR to an

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<sup>807</sup> Ellison, "In Troubled Rumania," *TT* 45/4 (April 1939): 56-57.

<sup>808</sup> *TT* 45/7 (July 1939), 93. Ellison became editor of *Trusting and Toiling* in "Notabilia," *TT* 46/15 (May 1941): 46; "Fellow Workers with God," *TT* 48/5 (March 1946): 172-173.

<sup>809</sup> Achim, Doc. 2, 4.

<sup>810</sup> Achim, Doc. 5.

<sup>811</sup> Achim, Doc. 12.

<sup>812</sup> Dumitru Florea and Victor Diaconescu, Union of Seventh-day Adventists in Romania to General Antonescu, 11 September 1940 in Achim, Doc. 8. A letter the following day laid claim to promises made during an audience with Antonescu on 11 July 1940 regarding the safety of Adventists (Ibid, Doc. 9).

<sup>813</sup> Achim, Doc.11, 15, 20.

evangelical denomination, in identification papers.<sup>814</sup> Reasons for this were to maintain the number of BOR members in the records or to avoid what were considered fake changes of religion, such as that of outlawed Pentecostals registering as Baptists in order to continue their activities.<sup>815</sup> Some civil registry offices recorded evangelicals as aconfessional (of no faith), thereby further limiting their rights and making them susceptible to future suppressive actions.<sup>816</sup>

Reports from the police and gendarme inspectorates in Bucharest condemned local law enforcement for not implementing laws as intended regarding these groups. Despite being recognized religious associations, Baptists, Brethren, and Seventh-day Adventists still faced the closing of their prayer houses for unlawful reasons, such as requiring their authorization papers to also state the owner of the church building (or other details not present in the order from Bucharest), or local gendarme chiefs setting their own day when members could meet.<sup>817</sup> In May 1941, after cries of protest from numerous closed churches across the country, the Ministry of Religious Denominations reminded local law enforcement that only the Ministry could issue orders for closure of prayer houses.<sup>818</sup>

Archives reveal continual arrest and mistreatment of individuals, such as Brethren members in Muscel county or Baptists in Hunedoara county.<sup>819</sup> Bukovina evangelicals received particularly harsh treatment at the hands of local police. In Rădăuți county, Bukovina, Baptists under arrest were forced to chop wood, scrub floors and were tortured for three days; one woman went into labor; the children of others were left home with no one to care for them.<sup>820</sup> In this case, however, the Inspectorate of police in Bucharest deemed the actions taken toward the apprehended were in line with military law. Some were in fact illegal Pentecostals, and the Baptists did not meet the requirements for gathering; the police claimed they also presented communist tendencies- all reasons they considered justified police action.<sup>821</sup> They continued to be carefully monitored by secret police agents, and Bucharest Baptist leader Constantin

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<sup>814</sup> Achim, Doc. 61.

<sup>815</sup> Achim, Doc. 36, 57. March 1941 in Arad.

<sup>816</sup> Achim, Doc. 26 (11 November 1940).

<sup>817</sup> Achim, Doc. 45, 52 (5 April 1941).

<sup>818</sup> Achim, Doc. 51.

<sup>819</sup> Achim, Doc. 33, 34, 53, 59.

<sup>820</sup> Achim, Doc. 38 (April 1941).

<sup>821</sup> Achim, Doc. 48 (May 1941).

Adorian's mention of anti-Semitic measures during a service fueled suspicion.<sup>822</sup> While Antonescu's government was trying to figure out how to handle these "sectarians"- what legislation to pass and how to enforce it at the local level- in Soviet occupied Bessarabia and Northern Bukovina, territories lost in 1940 due to the Molotov-Ribbentrop pact of 1939, these groups were struggling against harsh repression.

*"Counter-Revolutionaries" In Soviet Occupied Regions, 1940-1941*

Life for all religious groups- evangelical, Orthodox, Jewish, and others- was difficult during the year of Soviet rule in these two regions.<sup>823</sup> In northern Bukovina, politically suspect individuals were among the first to be deported to Siberia, and these included "religious propagandists."<sup>824</sup> Prayer houses were closed and used as schools, such as the Baptist church in the town of Reni, Ismail county, Bessarabia.<sup>825</sup>

The Bessarabian evangelical leaders, including those in Averbuch's congregation, were primary targets of the new Soviet administration as a means of dissipating these groups. Boris Bușilă, president of the Bessarabian Baptist Union was arrested and deported on 26 June 1941, in the fourth wave of expulsions, along with six others: Andrei Ivanov, Grigori Pșenicini, Marcu Tarlev, Daniel Tarlev, Isaac Trachtman, and Lidia Căldăraru.<sup>826</sup> Bușilă, Ivanov, and Pșenicini were charged with anti-revolutionary sectarian activity due to their membership in the Baptist community in Chișinău and for distributing anti-revolutionary literature. They were tried on 22 August 1942 in Irkutsk, Siberia. Bușilă was condemned to death by shooting, which seems was not carried out. Andrei Ivanov was sentenced to ten years in a labor camp; Grigori Pșenicini to four years in a labor camp. Marcu Tarlev was tried on 15 April 1942 and sentenced to eight years

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<sup>822</sup> Exactly what he said, whether in favour or against the measures, was not reported. Achim, Doc. 55 (May 1941).

<sup>823</sup> Dov Levin, *The Lesser of Two Evils: Eastern European Jewry under Soviet Rule, 1939-1941* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1995); Yitzhak Arad, *Holocaust in the Soviet Union* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2009), 42, 49-50.

<sup>824</sup> Hausleitner, "Transformations in the Relationship between Jews and Germans in the Bukovina," 214.

<sup>825</sup> USHMM, rg-31.004M, reel 21 in Achim, Doc.76. In December 1941, after Romanian re-occupation, the Baptist prayer house was still being used as a kindergarten.

<sup>826</sup> Teodor Cenușă, *Farul Creștin* 9/44 (November 1941): 6 at

<https://istoriebaptistablogul.blogspot.com/2018/06/lidia-caldararu-deportata.html?m=1>. Cenușă mentions Bușila, Ivanov, Pșenicinii, and Căldăraru. L. Kovalenko, *Cloud of Christ's Witnesses* (Kiev: Center for Christian Cooperation, 2006), 226.

in a labor camp.<sup>827</sup> With their leaders gone, the Baptists authorized a seven member committee to represent them in official documents and make decisions for the community until a new president was chosen to replace Bușilă.<sup>828</sup>

The Baptist publication *Farul Creștin* republished information from the periodical *Universul* nr. 230 on 26 August 1941, entitled “15,000 people deported from Chișinău.” The article contained a list of those imprisoned and deported by the Soviets; among them was the secretary of the Christian Community of Evangelical Baptists in Bessarabia, Lidia Căldăraru.<sup>829</sup> She had worked for over twenty years with the youth, Sunday school, and in women’s ministry and was well known across Bessarabia.<sup>830</sup> Lidia survived the Siberian labor camp and returned to Chișinău in 1956, where she continued work with the Baptist church.<sup>831</sup>

It is unclear what happened to Marcu Tarlev; Daniel Tarlev deported along with him, may have been his eldest son.<sup>832</sup> In January 1942, Nina Tarleva requested a certificate that her husband had been deported by the Soviets, perhaps to prove to the newly reinstated Romanian authorities that she had not collaborated with the previous regime, especially considering her Russian ethnicity.<sup>833</sup> Marcu Tarlev, Isaac Trachtman and Samuel Ordinsky were all deported to Siberia, thus eliminating the remaining leaders of Averbuch’s group.<sup>834</sup> It seems however, that Baptist communities in the Russian Far East flourished during the war, perhaps a result of those deported from other regions at the time.<sup>835</sup>

Little is known about the fate of Jewish Christians and other evangelicals in Northern Bukovina during the year of Soviet occupation 1940-1941. Previous accusations of Bolshevik

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<sup>827</sup> Serviciul de Informație și Securitate al Republicii Moldova, September 2007, courtesy of Vasile Filat. Olga Mocan writes that they were sentenced to 25 years, ten of which were without right to correspondence. Mocan, personal correspondence, 27 April 2020.

<sup>828</sup> USHMM, RG 54.001, Selected Records from the Moldova National Archives: Chișinău, Reel # 15, File 692.2, courtesy of Roland Clark. These seven were Profine Bineschi, Isidor Iandera, Mihai Gheorghiu, Grigore Rudenco, Profine Voinuic, Iosif Zablovschi, Maria Voisicovschi.

<sup>829</sup> *Farul Creștin* 9/41 (11 October 1941): 3. USHMM, RG 54.001, Selected Records from the Moldova National Archives: Chișinău, Reel # 15, File 692.2, courtesy of Roland Clark.

<sup>830</sup> Teodor Cenușă, *Farul Creștin* 9/44 (November 1941): 6.

<sup>831</sup> Olga Mocan, personal correspondence, 27 April 2020.

<sup>832</sup> Daniel survived and moved to Uzbekistan where he joined the Union of Musical Composers.

<sup>833</sup> Dinu Poștarencu and Ilie Demerji, *Istoria satului Bașcalia* (Chișinău: Gunivas, 2004), 138.

<sup>834</sup> Gabe, *HC* 63/1 (April-June 1990): 20-21. Photos of Ordinsky and Trachtman.

<sup>835</sup> Светлана Михайловна Дударёнок [Svetlana Mikhailovna Dudarenok], “Евангельские Христиане-баптисты Дальнего Востока СССР в годы Великой отечественной войны [Evangelical Christians-Baptists of the Far East of the USSR during the Great Patriotic War],” *Вестник Сахалинского Музея* 2/31 (2020): 164-189.

leanings were proven false as the Soviet atheistic regime regarded these groups as counter-revolutionaries. Just as under Romanian authority, they were seen as enemies of the people by the Soviet government, but this time due to its anti-religious stance.<sup>836</sup> Though many in Bessarabia and Northern Bukovina experienced horrors under Soviet rule, the danger increased for the Jewish population in particular with the retreat of Soviet troops and the reentrance of Romanian troops in June 1941.

### *Iași Pogrom*

The return of Bessarabia and Northern Bukovina first unleashed horrors in Romania proper. The largest pogrom to take place in regions which composed the pre-World War I Kingdom of Romania (Wallachia and Moldova) was in the north-eastern city of Iași. From 28 June to 2 July 1941, with Antonescu's approval, thousands of the city's Jewish residents were murdered as a way to deal with the "Judeo-communist threat" and with so-called Soviet accomplices.<sup>837</sup> The city was historically an important scene for inter-denominational activity, but cross-cultural dialogue was forgotten with the onset of the Iași pogrom.<sup>838</sup> Isaac Feinstein's experience during the pogrom reveals the precarious situation of converted Jews.

In 1938, the Norwegian Israel Mission (NIM) opened a new station in Iași, run by Feinstein, with the use of the London Jew's Society's building.<sup>839</sup> Police reports stated Feinstein was converted in a Brethren congregation in Bucharest and baptized at the age of eighteen in a Protestant church.<sup>840</sup> Born in Dorohoi, northern Romania, he worked in business in the

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<sup>836</sup> Kathryn David shows how the Soviet government by contrast encouraged conversion to Russian Orthodoxy in Ukraine to promote loyalty to Soviet Russia. "Soviet Governance in West Ukraine: Church and State," (Danyliw Seminar, University of Ottawa, 8-10 November 2018) <https://www.danyliwseminar.com/kathryn-david-2018>; David, "One Ukraine, Under God: Church, State, and the Making of the Postwar Soviet Union," PhD dissertation, New York University (May 2020), 100-102.

<sup>837</sup> Henry Eaton, "The Story Created Afterward: Iași 1941," Simon Geissbühler (ed.), *Romania and the Holocaust: Events, Contexts, and Aftermath* (Stuttgart: ibidem press, 2016): 42-58; Radu Ioanid, *Iași Pogrom, June-July 1941: A Photo Documentary from the Holocaust in Romania* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2017); Jean Ancel, *Prelude to Mass Murder: The Pogrom in Iași, Romania, June 29, 1941 and Thereafter* (Jerusalem: Yad Vashem, 2013).

<sup>838</sup> For more on Protestant mission among Jews in Iași see Mihai Ciucă, *Pe urmele lui Robert Murray M'Cheyne: Istoricul Misiunii Scoțiene pentru evreii din Iași* (Ratio et Revelatio, 2020).

<sup>839</sup> George Stevens, *Go Tell My Brethren: The Story of the London Jews Society from 1905-1959* (London: SPCK, 1960); Glaser, "A Survey of Missions to the Jews in Continental Europe 1900 – 1950," 219.

<sup>840</sup> ANR, DGP 2349, fol. 40/1931, f. 34.

southeastern port city of Galați and was a former sergeant in the Romanian army.<sup>841</sup> Feinstein was hired by NIM in 1929, and relocated with his Swiss wife Lydia to Iași in 1938.<sup>842</sup> On 22 June 1941 Feinstein gave his last talk at the Jewish mission in Iași, and in the days leading up to the pogrom the family spent most of their time in the cellar due to the bombings. They sheltered all acquaintances that could fit, including NIM missionary Olga Olaussen. Others present were Jewish Christians Duțu Moscovici, Milan Haimovici, Bianca Bringer, Monica Malici, and Filip Izi.<sup>843</sup>

On the morning of 29 June 1941, armed plainclothes men ransacked the Feinstein home and on finding a red Norwegian flag, accused Feinstein of being a communist. They ordered him to hold the flag above his head as they led him to police headquarters. The Feinstein house continued to shelter local Jews, and Olga Olaussen, when not assisting as a nurse at the hospital, inquired regularly of police regarding Isaac Feinstein. The police admitted that as a convert he should not have been arrested, showing again how some laws were disregarded by police and notably, that the law was not based on “race.” A local Jewish mathematics teacher later related how Feinstein used his knowledge of German (as at the camp in Vulcan) to temporarily stave off a massacre in the cellar of police headquarters. But in September 1941, news reached them that Isaac had been on one of the two “death trains” out of Iași and died of suffocation. The Feinstein children, despite having a Swiss Protestant mother and a Jewish father who was a convert, were required to wear a Star of David on their clothing. However, in October 1942 Lydia and the six children managed to move to Switzerland.<sup>844</sup>

Though Feinstein was an employee of the Lutheran organization NIM, he was first drawn to Christianity through the evangelical groups in Bucharest and was closely associated with Averbuch, before the latter moved to London in 1938. He collaborated with evangelical churches and even with Orthodox believers until his murder. He was thus an important figure in the multi-

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<sup>841</sup> He attended the London Jews Society Training School in Warsaw and the Institutum Judaicum in Leipzig. Gabe, *HC 63/3* (September-November 1990): 77. Glaser, “A Survey of Missions,” 219.

<sup>842</sup> ANR, DGP 2349, fol. 51/1930, f. 2, 23-25, 29; The mission had tried to open a branch in Bucharest through Adventists but the latter rejected the proposal according to a police note. A letter from Feinstein dated 4 February 1938, argued that NIM was not a religious sect and ministerial decision nr. 4781/937 was not applicable to them. Gabe, *HC 63/3* (September-November 1990): 77.

<sup>843</sup> Traian Dorz, *Hristos - mărturia mea* (Sibiu: Ed. Oastea Domnului, 2005), 155-156.

<sup>844</sup> Lydia Feinstein, “The Horror Days of 1941 in Jassy,” *The Chosen People* 53/2 (November 1947): 11-18.



cultural interaction spurred by the growing evangelical groups.<sup>845</sup> However, BOR priests who befriended Feinstein were a minority as BOR hierarchy continued an active missionary campaign of its own to counter what was seen as the spreading “bacterium” of sectarianism.

### **After 1941: BOR, Government Reprisal, and Evangelical Action**

BOR officials continued to petition the government to pass a law-decree against these groups rather than just ministerial decisions from the Minister of Religious Denominations.<sup>846</sup> They referred to evangelicals as “foreign pawns,” associating them with communism and calling for all ethnic Romanians to be brought back to Orthodox Christianity.<sup>847</sup> They had the full support of Antonescu, who believed evangelicals were “in cahoots with the Soviets,” especially in Transnistria.<sup>848</sup> BOR missionary activity developed already in the 1920s in reaction to these groups, but was amplified during the war in an attempt to “immunize against sectarians and anti-nationalist propaganda,” drawing again on biological language.<sup>849</sup> One Bacau priest commenting on clandestine Brethren meetings every Sunday in a private home argued they were “a revolutionary nest that aims at national disintegration.” He identified their loud singing as a particular annoyance, pointing again to the identifying role of music for these groups.<sup>850</sup>

BOR missionary attention was particularly focused on the reoccupied regions. Accusations falsely claimed the Soviets encouraged sectarian propaganda and even paid preachers 500 rubles.<sup>851</sup> In Cahul, priests claimed it was the Adventists and Baptists who

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<sup>845</sup> CNSAS I263053, Isac Feinstein, files 2-6 (Documents from the Ministry of Internal Affairs 1936); Gheorghe Samoilă, “*Eu știu că ei mă vor ucide: Isaac Feinstein (1904-1941) Un evreu roman, martir al lui Hristos* (Iași: Editura PIM, 2013), 29, 93-96. He often met with Tudorists as well. Dorz, *Hristos - mărturia mea*, 160-161.

<sup>846</sup> Achim, Doc. 19.

<sup>847</sup> Achim, Doc. 63.

<sup>848</sup> Vladimir Solonari, *A Satellite Empire in Romania: Romanian Rule in Southwestern Ukraine, 1941–1944* (Cornell University Press, 2019), 136.

<sup>849</sup> Achim, Doc. 64. Roland Clark, “The Stork’s Nest: Schism and Revival in Modern Romania, 1921–1924,” *Pleroma* 19/1 (June 2017): 81–114.

<sup>850</sup> Achim, Doc. 133, (24 February 1942)

<sup>851</sup> Achim, Doc. 76 (12 August 1941). Some Bessarabians fleeing into Romania during the Soviet occupation purported evangelical and communist collaboration. A teacher from Chirica village in Lăpușna county claimed Ilie Popan the head of the communist committee was also the leader of the Baptists in his village. It could have been an attempt by the teacher to prove loyalty to the Romanian government, as he would have been highly suspect coming from the Soviet occupied region. Courtesy of Roland Clark, CNSAS, D012118, f.532, dated 13 September 1940.

undermined the Russian Orthodox faith and brought Tsarist Russia to ruin.<sup>852</sup> A delegate of the Archbishopric of Chişinău in 1943 identified ten to fifteen Baptist families in Brânzenii Noi, Orhei county, where leader Nicolae Țapcov converted in 1926 through Averbuch's influence. They accused the latter of offering money in exchange for conversion.<sup>853</sup> By 1942 the anti-sectarian offensive in Bessarabia alone reported 419 returning apostates to BOR and several prayer houses turned into Orthodox churches or elementary schools.<sup>854</sup> In Transnistria, fifty-eight missionaries travelled across 600 villages to baptize locals, ordain new priests, and perform various rites.<sup>855</sup>

The Romanian government authorities strongly encouraged BOR missionary work. The Ministry of National Culture and Religious Denominations asked the Metropolitan Bishop of Bukovina, with the large number of evangelicals in the region, to do everything possible to increase conversion rates of sectarians back to BOR.<sup>856</sup> The Gendarme Inspectorate and the Governor of Bessarabia asked for an increase in missionary efforts and for more energetic priests to combat the “sects.”<sup>857</sup>

There were, however, BOR priests who came to the defense of evangelicals. The Orthodox revival group *Oastea Domnului* were more supportive, especially of Jewish Christians. *Oastea* leader Traian Dorz, for example, in his notary position in 1943 printed thirty blank identity cards for Jewish believers.<sup>858</sup> Archimandrite Iuliu Scriban spoke highly of Isaac Feinstein's *Prietenul* and *Calendar Biblic pe anul 1940* [Bible Calendar for the year 1940], proud that it was published in his home city of Galați.

Scriban is an interesting figure in this history. He also defended Bucharest Jewish Christian Richard Wurmbrand before Scriban's former students who worked in the Ministry of Religious Denominations.<sup>859</sup> He appeared with Norwegian Israel Mission (NIM) missionary

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<sup>852</sup> Achim, Doc. 114 (10 December 1941).

<sup>853</sup> ANRM 1135-2-1675, f. 1.

<sup>854</sup> Achim, Doc. 131 (21 February 1942).

<sup>855</sup> Ionuț Biliuța, “‘Christianizing’ Transnistria: Romanian Orthodox Clergy as Beneficiaries, Perpetrators, and Rescuers during the Holocaust,” *Holocaust and Genocide Studies* 34/1 (2020): 20, 24; Solonari, *A Satellite Empire*, 130-138.

<sup>856</sup> Achim, Doc. 298.

<sup>857</sup> Achim, Docs. 259, 262 (3 and 9 September 1942).

<sup>858</sup> Dorz, *Hristos - mărturia mea*, 163.

<sup>859</sup> Solheim, “Jewish Mission,” 40; Scriban was a friend of NIM missionary Gisle Johnson, and kept good relations with Solheim and Adeney, as well as with Averbuch. Emanuel Conțac, *Cornilescu: din culisele*

Magne Solheim and Wurmbrand before the Minister of Religious Denominations in 1943 requesting authorization for NIM to work in Galați and Iași. Though he helped them procure official authorizations from BOR, their request was denied by the minister since the law forbade conversion of Jews to any religion and NIM was a Lutheran missionary organization aimed at Jews.<sup>860</sup> Scriban was made Bishop of Transnistria and in charge of the missionary campaign in that region, but was replaced in November 1942 due to his close relationship with Jews in Bucharest.<sup>861</sup> Another sympathetic priest was Father Chiriacuța, who invited Wurmbrand to speak in his church and even voluntarily offered to testify in Wurmbrand's defense in court.<sup>862</sup> However, priests who pleaded for release of evangelicals were accused of being paid large sums by these churches to do so.<sup>863</sup>

Conferences were organized such as one by Professor Vasile Ispir on "Sects, a national and social danger," attended by Patriarch Nicodim, head of BOR, and other BOR leaders (including Scriban). Ispir and those participating called for new religious politics, implementing the ideology of "one faith, one people, one king" to ensure good national and moral development and accused the state of being too tolerant of sectarianism.<sup>864</sup> These accusations of being too tolerant toward sectarians were voiced by concentration camp officers in Onești Noi or by Antonescu himself, leading to more restrictions. Evangelical leaders attempted to continue their activity in the midst of such opposition. They provided counter arguments through petitions to Antonescu, as mentioned previously, which emphasized their loyalty and positive influence on national and moral development.

Education was another sphere of contention with BOR, where evangelical children were often targeted. The Orthodox Bishop of Alba Iulia called for "sectarian children" to be expelled from state schools.<sup>865</sup> Priests intervened to stop the marking of evangelical students' exams.<sup>866</sup>

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*publicării celei mai citite traduceri românești a Sfintei Scripturi* (Cluj-Napoca: Logos, 2014). Thanks to Mihai Ciucă for pointing me to this.

<sup>860</sup> Solheim, "Jewish Missions in Romania," 41. Authorization was received in 1944 due to the intervention of the Swedish ambassador in Bucharest.

<sup>861</sup> Solonari, *Satellite Empire*, 132; Popa, *Romanian Orthodox Church and the Holocaust*, 56.

<sup>862</sup> Wurmbrand, *From Suffering to Triumph*, 85.

<sup>863</sup> Achim, Doc. 408.

<sup>864</sup> Achim, Doc. 141 (5 March 1942).

<sup>865</sup> Achim, Doc. 363. The example of Ioan Popovici described later in the paragraph shows that the state accepted these calls for "sectarian" expulsion from state schools.

<sup>866</sup> Achim, Doc. 411.

The Arad bishopric even requested during the 1943-1944 school year that students be barred from elementary school unless they could prove membership in a state recognized religion.<sup>867</sup> It is unclear how widespread this expulsion was, or how these groups provided alternate forms of education. Since education faced disruption across the continent, many may have just remained at home similar to colleagues of different faiths. On the other hand, others actively protested. Baptist student Ioan Popoviciu in Hunedoara county petitioned to complete his last year of gymnasium, but the government decided he would only be admitted once priority was given to “Christian” students, where Christian was equated with membership in BOR.<sup>868</sup>

With pressure from various sides, and with the need to install Romanian authority across the reconquered territories of Bessarabia, Northern Bukovina, and the annexed region of Transnistria, new laws made gathering and practicing their faith even more difficult for these evangelical communities. Yet, they continued to grow, such that on 31 July 1941, a circular from the Ministry of National Culture and Religious Denominations ordered civil registrars to refuse any switch from a recognized denomination to “aconfessionalism” (evangelicals were falsely categorized as such).<sup>869</sup> The following month, August 1941, a new order, considered necessary for the inner peace of Orthodox believers in liberated territories, forbade any sectarian activity in Bessarabia and Bukovina.<sup>870</sup> Evangelicals in these territories were forced to be more creative and cautious in practicing their faith, meeting in small groups in homes, using mattresses to cover windows, “singing” silently though together, and serving the Lord’s Supper under the pretense of a birthday dinner.<sup>871</sup>

The controversial secret order came on 26 November 1941, when the Ministry of Internal Affairs wrote to the Government of Bessarabia that, at Antonescu’s order, all sectarians were to be identified and prosecuted. His reason was the previously voiced accusation that most evangelicals were communists who used a religious mask to promote communist ideas.<sup>872</sup> A cable just a few days later clarified that the order was only meant for those religious associations unauthorized by the Ministry of Religious Denominations.<sup>873</sup> However, it was difficult for local

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<sup>867</sup> Achim, Doc. 456.

<sup>868</sup> Achim, Doc. 465, 475.

<sup>869</sup> Achim, Doc. 73; ANRM 1135-2-420, f. 82-83.

<sup>870</sup> Achim, Doc. 74.

<sup>871</sup> Popovici, 648-652.

<sup>872</sup> Achim, Doc. 105.

<sup>873</sup> Achim, Doc. 111 (2 December 1941).

authorities to differentiate between evangelical groups and to selectively enforce the order.<sup>874</sup> Police profiles on these groups containing erroneous material only added to the confusion.<sup>875</sup> Fear spread among these communities across the country, as unclear orders were often reinterpreted and sporadically enforced by gendarmes.

Evangelicals nevertheless continued proselytizing- actively sharing their faith convictions- through literature distribution, charitable outreaches in hospitals and public spaces or simply through conversations between individuals.<sup>876</sup> Such continued active presence led to another order on 16 December 1941, which called all sectarians caught “making propaganda” (preaching or distributing literature) to be interned in labor camps.<sup>877</sup> Evangelicals’ letters, books, magazines were stopped from circulation, confiscated and destroyed resulting in breakdown of communication among leaders in these communities and loss of valuable resources. Lists of subscribers and addresses were compiled from confiscated material, as well as what relations these held outside the country, to monitor and curtail their activity.<sup>878</sup> However, even in 1943, evangelicals were still at it, throwing literature from moving trains.<sup>879</sup>

In the winter of 1941, measures were taken to withdraw all authorizations of religious associations in Bessarabia and Bukovina so that any meeting would be illegal and members would be more susceptible to arrest and internment, strengthening the August 1941 order.<sup>880</sup> Baptists were also degraded from an official denomination to a religious association and all houses of worship of authorized religious associations that did not meet the provisions of Decision no. 31.999 from 1939 were to be shut down.<sup>881</sup> As a result of constant petitioning from these groups, the Minister of Religious Denominations clarified on 6 March 1942 that giving Baptists the status of religious denomination was only a recommendation in the 1940 ministerial

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<sup>874</sup> Baptist churches were still being closed by gendarmes. Achim, Doc. 165, 177 (2 April 1942).

<sup>875</sup> Police commissar C.I. Mazilu constructed a fabricated history of Romania’s religious sects in 1942, including calling Averbuch the current leader of the Stundists; he had moved to London before the war and passed away in 1941. ANR DGP 2350, 61/1942, f.1-26, 29-34; Achim, Doc. 121.

<sup>876</sup> Achim, Doc. 97, 104, 167, 171.

<sup>877</sup> Achim, Doc. 117, 118.

<sup>878</sup> Achim, Doc. 400.

<sup>879</sup> Achim, Doc. 375.

<sup>880</sup> General Inspectorate of Gendarmerie in Bessarabia and Bukovina. Achim, Doc. 127 (13 February 1942).

<sup>881</sup> Achim, Doc 129 (20 February 1942); Ministry of National Culture and Cults no. 2534/1942, Achim, Doc. 134 (25 February 1942).

decision and not a legal act. The communities lacked the legal representation required to effectively appeal, but they continued to send petitions.

The real blow came with Decree Law no. 927/1942, passed 28 December 1942, which amended the previous law on religious denominations. It abolished all existing religious associations, and the group's immovable goods, funds, and archives were to be transferred to the state, kept by the town halls until further notice.<sup>882</sup> By June 1943, 7,789 Lei had been confiscated from the dissolved religious associations and given to the Ministry of National Culture and Religious Denominations.<sup>883</sup> An explanatory report on the law argued these religious associations were “anachronistic remains of democratic ideology.”<sup>884</sup> In wartime and even previously, their linguistically, culturally, religiously diverse, seemingly more egalitarian communities, challenged what Antonescu believed was his “totalitarian” regime and the neat categories constructed by Romanian elites and government authorities.<sup>885</sup>

The restrictive legislation and suspicion among the population made them economically vulnerable and their employment was often in jeopardy. Baptist leader Constantin Adorian worked for the international transport company *Carmen*, where he was required to clarify his religious situation or be fired.<sup>886</sup> However, declaring it brought stigma, marginalization, and increased likelihood of their employment ending. Adventists, who observed Saturday rather than Sunday as a day of rest, were accused of sabotaging agricultural mobilization because they refused to work on Saturdays.<sup>887</sup> Likewise, two Adventist cheese shop owners in Bucharest were accused of economic sabotage in 1944 for remaining closed on Saturdays.<sup>888</sup>

Other reasons for strict legislation were that unauthorized religious associations like the Pentecostals found a way to continue their activity under the façade of recognized associations

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<sup>882</sup> Achim, Doc. 304, 339.

<sup>883</sup> Achim, Doc. 422.

<sup>884</sup> Ibid, Doc. 284.

<sup>885</sup> Totalitarian in the sense of state authoritarianism that impinged on personal freedoms. Antonescu referred to his government as totalitarian but it is considered a classic authoritarian government by scholars. Dennis Deletant, *Hitler's Forgotten Ally: Ion Antonescu and His Regime, Romania 1940-44* (Houndmills: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007); Roger Griffin and Constantin Iordachi, “Fascism,” *The SAGE Handbook of Political Sociology*, William Outhwaite and Stephen Turner (eds.) (London: SAGE Publications Ltd, 2018), 548-571.

<sup>886</sup> Achim, Doc. 370.

<sup>887</sup> Achim, Doc. 223.

<sup>888</sup> Achim, Doc. 490.

like the Baptists.<sup>889</sup> Outlawing them all was more efficient in the eyes of the authorities and reveals the government's unwillingness to deal with their complexity. Drafts of the 1942 law sought instead to force all sectarians to return to the "religion of origin" previously held by themselves or their ancestors, emphasizing the push from above for religious homogeneity.<sup>890</sup> Antonescu insisted on even stricter legislation against and abolishment of these groups.<sup>891</sup> As a result, Law no.431/1943 in June 1943 again dissolved all religious associations that existed in Romania prior to 29 December 1942 and any potentially authorized after that date as well.<sup>892</sup>

In response to rumors that Antonescu's November and December 1941 orders would be enforced, panic spread across evangelical communities that they also, like the Jews, would be deported to Transnistria. People sold their belongings and stopped working, expecting deportation orders at any moment.<sup>893</sup> Magdalena Semciuc and Velisca Dumitru from Storojineți county, Bukovina parceled their land to the poorest people in their villages, preferring to give it to those most in need rather than to the state.<sup>894</sup>

Often it was local authorities and BOR priests who perpetuated this confusion and fear, threatening deportation to evangelicals if they failed to return to BOR. Evangelicals were at the whim of those who resented their presence and growth in the town or village and who used the occasion to carry out personal vendettas.<sup>895</sup> The husbands of Baptists Ana Sabadas, Liuba Turcan, and Natalia Gherman from Opinca village, Bălți county were in fact sent to a labor camp because they refused to convert to Orthodoxy.<sup>896</sup> Rusin Voicu, a Pentecostal man from Lascăr Catargiu, Corvului county, was sentenced to 25 years forced labor and charged 500 Lei for the trial costs because he refused to join BOR.<sup>897</sup> Evangelical children were sometimes forcibly baptized and parents threatened with deportation to Transnistria if they did not change their

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<sup>889</sup> Achim, Doc. 288, 300.

<sup>890</sup> Achim, Doc. 340.

<sup>891</sup> Achim, Doc. 341.

<sup>892</sup> Achim, Doc. 434.

<sup>893</sup> General Inspectorate of the Gendarme, Note, Achim, Doc. 150 (16 March 1942); Doc. 249 (17 August 1942).

<sup>894</sup> Achim, Doc. 364.

<sup>895</sup> Achim, Doc. 180, 259.

<sup>896</sup> Achim, Doc. 107 (30 November 1941).

<sup>897</sup> Achim, Doc. 273.

religion to BOR. Baptists in some regions did not register their newborns to avoid their forced baptism.<sup>898</sup>

The Ministry of National Culture and Religious Denominations and the Military cabinet of the government of Bessarabia agreed in autumn 1941 that since sectarians continued their activities in the newly reconquered regions, their prayer houses were to remain closed until each member's action during the Soviet regime was carefully verified. Any pro-Soviet members were assigned to forced labor locally or sent to a camp.<sup>899</sup> Baptists from Buzduganii de Sus village, Bălți county were sent to the Târgu Jiu camp in southwestern Romania for supposed communist activity under the Soviet regime. Many of these were ethnic Ukrainians and assumed to be among the most loyal to the communists. As both Ukrainian and Baptist they proved a special threat in border regions and were brought further into the center of the country. This group from Buzduganii de Sus village claimed Baptist leaders from Iași told them they could continue observing the Baptist faith, perhaps not realizing regulations were stricter in Bessarabia.<sup>900</sup> Elena Grușovan and Vera Starciuc along with others were sent to the Oneștii Noi camp in Lăpușna county, Bessarabia in 1942 for “communist, Baptist, and anti-religious propaganda.”<sup>901</sup> They were considered dangerous to public order and state security. The contradicting accusations went unquestioned, although these same people faced accusations of anti-revolutionary activity and religious propaganda under Soviet occupation.

As prayer houses were requisitioned by the state, many were used to house prisoners, turned into schools, cultural centers, paramilitary training centers, or Orthodox churches.<sup>902</sup> In Bălți, Baptists claimed some were even turned into public toilets.<sup>903</sup> Some prayer houses/churches were registered under individuals' names or companies and evaded expropriation by the state until later.<sup>904</sup> However, people continued to meet in their homes, even with just their immediate family members.<sup>905</sup> Others found opportunities to sneak in times of gathering

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<sup>898</sup> Achim, Doc. 357.

<sup>899</sup> Achim, Doc. 160, 161.

<sup>900</sup> Achim, Doc. 136 (2 March 1942).

<sup>901</sup> Achim, Doc. 214.

<sup>902</sup> Achim, Doc. 175, 278, 347, 351, 418, 420.

<sup>903</sup> Prefect of Police in the Capital, Informative note on letter intercepted from Eugen Jurenco to Johannes Fleischer. March 1942, Achim, Doc. 154. More details in Achim, Doc. 175, April 1942 in a letter from Jurenco to the Governor of Bessarabia.

<sup>904</sup> Achim, Doc. 397.

<sup>905</sup> Achim, Doc. 289.



together such as workers in labor detachments who prayed together in the woods.<sup>906</sup> Believers in Bucharest sent letters to encourage co-religionists in other regions to not abandon their faith convictions, but such correspondence was intercepted by the police.<sup>907</sup>

Though the meetings continued, they could lead to arrests, fines, physical violence, including threats of rape, imprisonment, and deportation.<sup>908</sup> A group of five Brethren, including a Jewish man named Samson Augustin, who was part of the Predeal Jewish Military Detachment, was caught meeting without permits in Predeal, Transylvania, and sent to court.<sup>909</sup> Twenty Baptists in Cetatea Alba, Bessarabia, were sent to court for gathering weekly on Sunday without a permit and for proselytism.<sup>910</sup> The archives mention arrests in various parts of the Banat region, in the city of Galați, and in Bucharest for unauthorized gatherings or illegal religious services.<sup>911</sup>

In Ismail county, Bessarabia in 1942, Daria Pugaciev, Feodosia and Feodora Lujanschi, Marfa Umanet, and Eufimia Covalenco were brought to court for reading the Bible together in the home of the latter. Although that was the extent of their activity, by declaring themselves Baptists (three of the women having only been so for a few months) and meeting privately, they were accused of illegal religious gatherings and fined 6000 Lei. Most of them had never attended an official Baptist service.<sup>912</sup> Their police statements reveal people were attracted to and joined these groups even during this time of suppression largely due to the dissatisfaction of locals with their BOR priests. Arrest, fines, and physical torture were insufficient and authorities argued that those caught in clandestine meetings should be temporarily deported to Transnistria.<sup>913</sup>

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<sup>906</sup> Achim, Doc. 416. Police report mentioned they were sectarians of Hungarian origin.

<sup>907</sup> Achim, Doc. 91 (14 October 1941).

<sup>908</sup> Achim, Doc. 154, 175.

<sup>909</sup> Achim, Doc. 292.

<sup>910</sup> Achim, Doc. 299.

<sup>911</sup> Achim, Doc. 383, 384, 391, 489.

<sup>912</sup> Odessa Oblast Archives, Izmail Branch RG-31.014M, Acc. 1996.A.0115, Roll # 3, 7525/1c/147, courtesy of Roland Clark. The women ranged in age from 24 to 56.

<sup>913</sup> Achim, Doc. 392.



**Brethren congregation from Cetatea Alba<sup>914</sup>**

In Botoșani city, the police discovered a clandestine Brethren meeting on 19 April 1942 with thirteen people present in the house of Dumitru Bardan and sent them to Iași for trial. The Military Cabinet of Antonescu passed an order that they were to be sent immediately to work camps on the (Southern) Bug river and that the same measures should be applied to all sectarians.<sup>915</sup> Though it is unclear what happened to these thirteen, a note from the General Police Directive to the Ministry of Internal Affairs dated 11 September 1942 claimed they were indeed deported but that no other evangelicals were sent to Transnistria.<sup>916</sup> It seems however, that others were sent to camps across the Dniester River.

Among them was Baptist leader Eugen Jurenco. His persistent petitions on behalf of his community brought the Bălți Gendarmerie Legion to request his imprisonment in a camp, also claiming false accusations in his petitions.<sup>917</sup> He was interned in Oneștii Noi, Lăpușna county on 5 July 1942.<sup>918</sup> At the Oneștii Noi camp, efforts to reconvert evangelicals and Inochentists through BOR initiated choirs and religious talks every Sunday were mostly unsuccessful. Camp officers reported: “Baptists and Inochentists remain recalcitrant, having their hearts hardened and their conscience sold to Averbuch.” It is remarkable that they continued to be associated with

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<sup>914</sup> Photo confiscated from member Mihai Argint. Odessa Oblast Archives, Izmail Branch RG-31.014M, Acc. 1996.A.0115, Roll # 4, 7687/1c/679, Roll # 4, 7687/1c/811, courtesy of Roland Clark.

<sup>915</sup> Achim, Doc. 183,184, 191, 197.

<sup>916</sup> Achim, Doc. 263.

<sup>917</sup> Achim, Doc. 182.

<sup>918</sup> Achim, Doc. 500.

Averbuch (he had left for London in 1937 and died in 1941), and that even seemingly random camp gendarmes knew of him. Biological language was again used to describe sectarians' sickly spiritual and national state of being ("stare bolnăvicioasă"), against which decisive state action was recommended. Camp officers singled out Jurenco, Nicolae Dulgheru, and Efimie Savaziuc (all from Bălți), and Silvestru Turcanu (from Slobozia, Cetatea Alba county), all Baptists, for isolation and severe treatment ("regim sever").<sup>919</sup> The camp commander recommended refusing them visitor rights and deporting them to special camps outside Bessarabia.<sup>920</sup>

Jurenco was suspected of conducting clandestine business while in the camp with a cousin in Bucharest and of providing black market goods to sectarians, as well as for personal gain. This was done supposedly in collaboration with Nicolae Afhim, previously released from Onești Noi camp.<sup>921</sup> Police claimed Jurenco used the Baptist faith as a façade to engage in smuggling oil, honey, and other goods. He was accused of continuing his propaganda among sectarians, of attempts to contact foreigners, and of holding secret meetings in the camp. As a result his New Testament was confiscated and camp officers recommended he and other Baptists be refused visits and be given indefinite incarceration in the camp.<sup>922</sup>

In 1943 Jurenco was still considered among the most dangerous of internees at Onestii Noi and the Police Inspectorate of Chișinău recommended his deportation to Transnistria, with that of 59 other sectarians who refused to give up their religious convictions.<sup>923</sup> This may have included Baptist Petre Tăbăcaru from Ismail.<sup>924</sup> It seems Jurenco was later sent to the Golta camp in Transnistria and not released until February or March 1944.<sup>925</sup>

Antonescu's previous order for the deportation of sectarians to Transnistria was again circulated by order of the Ministry of Internal Affairs in June 1942. The communique stated that activities of all sects were forbidden across the country and only those who neglected these regulations were liable for deportation to labor camps in Transnistria. However, in certain

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<sup>919</sup> ANR, Fond IGJ 1474-155/1942, f. 31 (18 August 1942).

<sup>920</sup> Achim, Doc. 252 (24 August 1942), reply Doc. 265.

<sup>921</sup> ANR, Fond IGJ 1474-155/1942, f. 28 (31 July 1942).

<sup>922</sup> ANR, Fond IGJ 1474-155/1942, f. 24-26, 29 (22 July 1942 and 12 August 1942).

<sup>923</sup> Achim, Doc. 376.

<sup>924</sup> Odessa Oblast Archives, Izmail Branch RG-31.014M, Acc. 1996.A.0115, Roll # 3, 7525/1c/72, courtesy of Roland Clark.

<sup>925</sup> Achim, Doc. 500.

counties like Muscel, the prefecture sent out a notice that Antonescu ordered *all* members of religious sects to be immediately sent to labor detachments on the Bug river.<sup>926</sup>

As a result, civil registry offices in Muscel county complained they received daily requests from sectarians to switch their religion to BOR. Notaries asked whether this was legal since switching to “aconfessionalism” was outlawed in 1941, but authorities clarified that “returning” to BOR was permitted.<sup>927</sup> Police reports from Bessarabia especially note the conversion to BOR of leaders such as Baptist pastor Mitrofan Timoșevschi from Reni and Vasile Asiev from Bolgrad. According to these reports it would seem all “sectarians” were on the verge of returning to BOR, though this was not the case.<sup>928</sup> It is unclear how many switched their religious affiliation but fear and uncertainty ensued among these communities who seemed at the whim of local authorities.

The order was again changed in August 1942 when Antonescu ordered that only the Inochentists would be deported to Transnistria and so suspended the deportation of other sectarians. It was believed this was brought about by pressure from the German Legation and the German Baptist community in Bucharest, though the latter proved to have little influence.<sup>929</sup>

In Romanian-governed Transnistria, evangelicals also had to find other ways to privately maintain their religious identity. Ordinance nr. 89 published on 23 September 1942 by Gheorghe Alexianu, Governor of Transnistria, stated that all religious sects were forbidden in the region. Any breaking of this law would result in five years imprisonment.<sup>930</sup> Individuals belonging to these groups were identified in reports but it seems they were not active for fear of reprisals. A Jewish man named Butman, belonging to the Brethren, was married to a Ukrainian woman and they lived in the Golubecea district in January 1942, but no further information was given about them.<sup>931</sup> In Alexandrovca, Odessa county, four Brethren members and in Freudenthal, Ovidiopol county nineteen Baptists were identified and kept under strict surveillance to ensure they did not

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<sup>926</sup> Achim, Doc. 211, 213.

<sup>927</sup> Achim, Doc. 218, 219.

<sup>928</sup> Odessa Oblast Archives, Izmail Branch RG-31.014M, Acc. 1996.A.0115, Roll # 3, 7525/1c/72, courtesy of Roland Clark; ANRM 1135-2-420, files 3-14, 16, 17, 26, 36-37 (59 former Baptists from Caușani), 76-79, 85, 86, 92-94.

<sup>929</sup> Achim, Doc. 247, 248.

<sup>930</sup> Achim, Doc. 268. For more on Romanian rule of Transnistria see Vladimir Solonari, *A Satellite Empire in Romania: Romanian Rule in Southwestern Ukraine, 1941–1944* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2019).

<sup>931</sup> Achim, Docs. 124 (24 January 1942).

meet or conduct propaganda.<sup>932</sup> Here also they were accused of communist links and threats to state security, despite the harsh treatment they received under Soviet rule. In Tulcin city, Brethren were associated with Bolsheviks and one hundred evangelicals in Copaignorod, Moghilau county were said to have grown under the influence of Olga Capinos, accused of Soviet leanings.<sup>933</sup> There seems to have been no communication between Romanian evangelical leaders and believers in Transnistria, who were connected more to Russian evangelicals.

Authorities in Bukovina seemed particularly keen to arrest “sectarians.” At one point, three quarters of the prisoners at Cernăuți prison were Adventists.<sup>934</sup> There is no evidence to suggest evangelicals were more active here than in other regions. Viorel Achim argues this was illustrative of their treatment across the country, and just better documented in Bukovina.<sup>935</sup> Of the 506 Evangelicals imprisoned there in 1943, some had sentences ranging from two to twenty-five years and 142 were sentenced to death for refusing to fight on the front lines. Pardons were given to those willing to go to the front or those willing to convert.<sup>936</sup> Some accepted conversion to BOR, including two who had been sentenced to death.<sup>937</sup>

In Cluj-Turda county all members of religious associations were ordered to convert to one of the recognized Christian denominations by 1 June 1943 (though the government order did not require this) or risk deportation to Transnistria and that their dead would not be buried in cemeteries.<sup>938</sup> In other parts of the country, the issue of burial was also contentious and a means of punishment by authorities. Brethren leader Mihai Schmidt from Bacău city was brought to court for illegally officiating the burial of his ten month-old son according to Brethren custom.<sup>939</sup>

Disagreement arose between evangelical leaders as some felt others were not doing enough to help their communities. Baptist pastor Ioan Socaciu from Arad accused Constantin Adorian that the Bucharest leadership was not addressing the disoriented flock and had left them without spiritual and material support.<sup>940</sup> Throughout the war, evangelicals attempted to

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<sup>932</sup> Achim, Doc. 237 (23 July 1942); Doc. 254.

<sup>933</sup> Achim, Docs. 253, 277.

<sup>934</sup> Achim, Doc. 242; Achim, “Situția sectelor religioase în Provincia Bukovina. Un studiu al Inspectoratului Regional de Poliție Cernăuți din septembrie 1943,” *Archiva Moldaviae* 6 (2014): 351.

<sup>935</sup> Achim, “Situția sectelor religioase în Provincia Bukovina,” *Archiva Moldaviae* 6 (2014): 354.

<sup>936</sup> Achim, Doc. 442.

<sup>937</sup> Achim, Doc. 471.

<sup>938</sup> Achim, Doc. 396.

<sup>939</sup> Achim, Doc. 406.

<sup>940</sup> Achim, Doc. 480 (4 December 1943).

influence the government through various patriotic statements and charitable actions. They provided winter clothing for soldiers and offered needed personnel at the military hospital housed in the Adventist Bible Institute in Braşov.<sup>941</sup> In petitions of protest to Antonescu they often defended themselves as Christians and loyal Romanians.<sup>942</sup> They also prepared delegations to Antonescu in 1943 of Baptist, Brethren, and Adventist decorated or invalid war veterans to argue against accusations of not serving their country in wartime.<sup>943</sup> These largely went unheeded and there was little they could do without placing themselves in further danger. However, even after Law 431/1943 dissolved all sectarian religious associations, most still practiced their faith privately in their homes.<sup>944</sup>

### **The Fate of Jewish and Roma Evangelicals**

Unfortunately, we know very little about the fate of the Jewish evangelical community in Chişinău and the Roma evangelicals in Arad. In April 1940, the congregation led by Marcu Tarlev, Isaac Trachtman, and Samuel Ordinsky was composed of around 50 members with a mix of Bulgarian, Jewish, German, Romanian, Russian, and Ukrainian ethnicities.<sup>945</sup> In March 1941, Tarlev wrote to Swedish Israel Mission director Borger Pernow to get word to Averbuch about the group's seemingly stable situation, but things changed rapidly with the deportation of its leaders in June 1941 to Siberia.<sup>946</sup> The Chişinău ghetto was set up in July 1941, soon after Romanian reoccupation of the territory, and a ghetto committee was appointed in August 1941.<sup>947</sup> After the signing of the Tighina Agreement on 30 August 1941, the territory of Transnistria between the Dniester and the Bug Rivers was ceded to the Romanian state.

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<sup>941</sup> Achim, Doc. 233 (25 August 1941); Doc. 79, 103 (November 1941).

<sup>942</sup> Achim, Doc. 403.

<sup>943</sup> Achim, Doc. 349.

<sup>944</sup> Achim, Doc. 451.

<sup>945</sup> ANRM 679-1-5555, f. 415. Lev and Maria are listed as living in London and Eric and Stefania Gabe in Silistria. The Ţahan family, Meileh Cram, Ida Galperin, and Averchi Urzanovschi were listed as excluded from the community, but no reason given. Ibid, f. 416. They may have joined the Baptist or another evangelical church.

<sup>946</sup> SIM E48, 1/12/1940- 31/12/1941, courtesy of Kai Kjaer-Hansen.

<sup>947</sup> Paul Shapiro, "The Jews of Chişinău: Romanian Reoccupation, Ghettoization, Deportation," in Randolph Braham (ed.), *The Destruction of Romanian and Ukranian Jews during the Antonescu Era* (NY: Colombia University Press, 1997), 135-194; *The Kishinev Ghetto, 1941-1942: A Documentary History of the Holocaust in Romania's Contested Borderlands* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama, 2015).

Deportations then began of Jewish residents from Bessarabia and Bukovina to Transnistria in October 1941. After a brief cessation due to the inability of Romanian authorities to handle so many deportees, the deportations resumed at the end of May 1942.<sup>948</sup>

In Chişinău, city police claimed the Jews in the ghetto were trying by all means to convert to Christianity to escape deportation. They referred to about 183 Jews that remained in the ghetto after the second round of deportations.<sup>949</sup> Police identified in June 1942 a group of Jewish youths studying what they claimed was Roman Catholic dogma in a former Polish-language school at the corner of Unirii and Schmidt streets, although the Catholic priest denied such meetings were taking place.<sup>950</sup> This could have been the former location of, or close to, Bethel Hall where Averbuch's group met and the group may have been converts or people who previously attended Averbuch's meetings. It seems there was an increased effort among the city's remaining Jewish residents to prove conversion to Christianity, even to the marginalized sectarian groups. The authorizations granted to converts included former members of Averbuch's group.

Nathan Feighin, baptized by Averbuch, was a member of the Baptist Church in Chişinău until his death in 1931; his oldest son, Pinchas Feighin, was baptized in 1928 as part of the Baptist community. A former medical worker (*agent sanitar*), Pinchas published articles in the Bessarabian Baptist newsletter in the 1930s, interestingly always in Romanian rather than Russian.<sup>951</sup> His preference for using the Romanian language may be a result of his education completed under Romanian rule after the union of Bessarabia to Romania in 1918 or because the language offered social or political leverage/protection. Despite being a Baptist, he was interned at 20 Cojocarilor street in the Chişinău ghetto. The Governor General approved his release from the ghetto in 1941, likely prior to the October deportations to Transnistria that same year. Formal approval to remain outside the ghetto was again requested in April 1942 while Feighin was living at 2 Anton Pan street. It is unclear why he needed this, except perhaps in an attempt to

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<sup>948</sup> Solonari, *Purifying the Nation*, 207-208, 211

<sup>949</sup> Solonari, *Purifying the Nation*, 211.

<sup>950</sup> USHMM, RG 54.001, Selected Records from the Moldova National Archives: Chişinău, Reel # 16, File 692.2, courtesy of Roland Clark.

<sup>951</sup> Pinchas Feighin, "Microscopul Credinciosului," *Svetilnic* 3/4 (April 1931): 3; "Vindecătorul Sufletelor," *Svetilnic* 4/1-2 (January-February 1932): 2; "Lumina Vieţii," 4/3 (March 1932): 2;

protect against future deportations or in response to harassment and threats received for living outside the ghetto.<sup>952</sup>



**The Feighin Family, 1930<sup>953</sup>**

Wulf Țahan's wife Sura made a petition also in April 1942 while living at 9 Bugeac street to be allowed to live freely outside the ghetto in Chișinău with her daughters Miriam and Sima. News of resumed deportation orders had evidently reached them as well. The Evangelical Christian Community (the Baptists) issued certificates of membership to them in March 1942, signed by committee members Parfine Binevschi, Grigore Rudenco, Mihai Gheorghiu, and Isidor Iandera. The authorities corroborated the authenticity of the certificates for the Țahan women, but it is unclear if they were allowed to leave the ghetto.<sup>954</sup> One of Sura's daughters survived the war and moved to Israel. Wulf was not mentioned in the request by Sura in April 1942; he may have been killed while doing colportage work in Transylvania, but this is yet to be corroborated.<sup>955</sup> Both Feighin and the Țahan women may have been among the 178 Jews who had authorizations to remain in Chișinău in August 1942 after the two large deportations.<sup>956</sup>

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<sup>952</sup> USHMM, RG 54.001, Selected Records from the Moldova National Archives: Chișinău, Reel # 15, File 692.2, courtesy of Roland Clark.

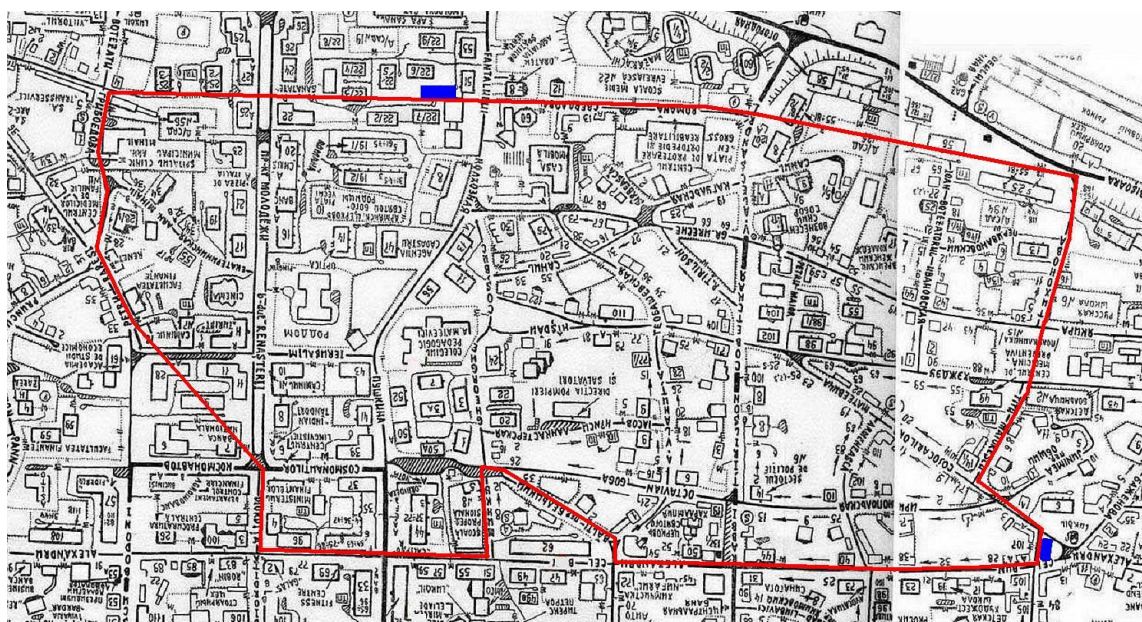
<sup>953</sup> "Обращение к Богу израильтянина Янкель-Нусим-Натана-Фейгина [Appeal to the God of the Israelite Yankel Nusim Nathan Feigin]," *Svetilnic* 2/5 (May 1930): 3-5.

<sup>954</sup> USHMM, RG 54.001, Selected Records from the Moldova National Archives: Chișinău, Reel # 15, File 692.2, courtesy of Roland Clark. ANRM 679-1-5555, file 396. The address of Țahan family in 1938 was 1 Bugeac street.

<sup>955</sup> Gabe, *HC* 64/2 (June 1991-August 1991): 50.

<sup>956</sup> Solonari, *Purifying the Nation*, 211.





Map of Chişinău Ghetto<sup>957</sup>



Borders of Chişinău ghetto on contemporary map of city<sup>958</sup>

Tragically, Eric Gabe’s aunt Jeanette Katz and her children, all baptized by Averbuch, were killed in the Holocaust. According to Milan Haimovici, originally from Iaşi but required to work at the Chişinău hospital during the war, all of Averbuch’s congregation perished in the

<sup>957</sup> “Life in Chisinau Ghetto,” <http://jewishmemory.md/en/life-in-chisinau-ghetto/> (accessed 7 January 2021).

<sup>958</sup> “Chisinau Ghetto,” [http://sharemap.org/public/Chisinau\\_Ghetto#!webgl](http://sharemap.org/public/Chisinau_Ghetto#!webgl) (accessed 7 January 2021).

Holocaust except for Moses and Olga Dreitschman who successfully hid.<sup>959</sup> We know this is inaccurate as some of the Tarlevs and the Gabe family survived. But the Tarlevs were ethnic Bulgarian and Russian and the Gabes lived in Bucharest or in Silistria, only visiting Chişinău for religious services. The remaining Jewish members may have indeed all been killed, apart from Moses Dreitschman (his wife Olga was German Protestant). The fate of Pinchas Feighin and of the Țahan women is also unclear, showing they were still identified as Jews and only through difficulty as “Christians.” Their position became even more precarious when evangelical groups also were forbidden, but due to the confusion over legislation and by avoiding religious gatherings some may have been protected.



**Women from the Chişinău Jewish-Christian congregation<sup>960</sup>**

In Cernăuți, the ghetto was not set up until 11 October 1941 due to the resistance of mayor Traian Popovici and the city’s Jewish leaders.<sup>961</sup> But already in mid-September 1941 city police accused Brethren leaders of issuing baptism certificates to Jews to save them from

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<sup>959</sup> Kjaer-Hansen, *Joseph Rabinowitz*, 230.

<sup>960</sup> Jeanette, Lola, and Bronya Katz, Nina Tarleva, and others in 1940. Gabe, *HC* 63/2 (July-September 1990): 51.

<sup>961</sup> Marianne Hirsch and Leo Spitzer, “The Cernăuți Ghetto, the Deportations, and the Decent Mayor,” in Valentina Glajar, Jeanine Teodorescu (eds), *Local History, Transnational Memory in the Romanian Holocaust. Studies in European Culture and History* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), 57-75.

imprisonment in a ghetto.<sup>962</sup> Israel Schnapp, identified as from the Brethren church, and Mildmay's Jewish Christian representative who replaced Moses Richter in Cernăuți in September 1932, was accused of issuing such a certificate to Iacob Rittberg. By July 1942 Schnapp was imprisoned for an unidentified reason and Rittberg was seeking baptism in the Roman Catholic Church.<sup>963</sup> Some Jews, understandably, on failing to gain security from conversion to an evangelical denomination, attempted baptism in the Catholic Church, since Jewish conversion to BOR was illegal.

As the Jewish Christian community of Cernăuți was much smaller or at least less documented than the one in Chișinău; there are almost no names to trace at present. Moses Richter, originally from Chișinău but living in Cernăuți, escaped the horrors of the war by moving to England in 1938. The role of the Cernăuți German Baptist Church where he pastored in aiding Jewish residents is still unclear but was perhaps similar to that of the German Baptist Church in Bucharest, pastored by Johannes Fleischer. Despite Fleischer's petitions to the German Legation it refused to intervene due to the precarious relationship of the Romanian state with evangelical churches.

In Bucharest, Wurmbrand, ordained by Fleischer, spoke at various Baptist churches. This resulted in Wurmbrand's arrest for suspicious activity, as in one incident in 1941 after a sermon given at the Baptist church in the Giulești district. Though he was denounced by one of those attending, a female gentile member demanded to be arrested with him and the other five Jewish Christians. Another Bucharest pastor, Gheorghe Pop accepted Wurmbrand and other Jewish Christians as members in his congregation after the London Jewish Society mission they attended was shut down by city authorities. Pop welcomed them despite receiving warnings from the Baptist Union that such an action would jeopardize all Baptists in the country. Different versions of this history exist, but it reveals the precarious position of all involved and different

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<sup>962</sup> Achim, Doc. 84 (16 September 1941).

<sup>963</sup> Courtesy of Philippe H. Blasen, Arhivele Episcopiei Romano-Catolice de Iași, AERCIS, 5/1937, 240; "Personal and Miscellaneous," *Trusting and Toiling* 38/10 (October 1932): 123; *Ibid*, *TT* 38/11 (November 1932): 139. Schnapp joined the leadership of the Pentecostal church (*Asociația Biserica lui Dumnezeu Apostolică*) in Rădăuți by 1949. CNSAS, D6886, f.463. A reference appears to what seem to be a Jewish Pentecostal couple, Isache and Rafila Neamțu in Iași in 1944. Their names give that impression although the police report lists them as Romanian. CNSAS D12386, f.136.

attitudes Jewish Christians faced among co-religionists.<sup>964</sup> However, much more research is needed on the experiences of Jewish evangelicals during the war.



**Richter, Averbuch, and Feinstein in Cernăuți, 1934<sup>965</sup>**

The situation differed for the Roma. Deportation to Transnistria of Romanian nomadic Roma started on 1 June 1942, followed by the deportations of some sedentary Roma (those labeled a burden and danger to public order) on 2 September 1942. Small groups continued to be deported until January 1944.<sup>966</sup> However, the Roma of Arad city were spared deportation to Transnistria.<sup>967</sup> We can assume the members of Credința Baptist Church were not taken from their homes, but nothing is known of how they experienced the war. The Baptist community in Arad submitted a petition to the Ministry of Interior in April 1942 in which they stressed the Romanian ethnicity and citizenship of its members (specifically in regards to a case in Secucigiu, Timiș county). This seems a clear neglect of their minority members though it may also have served as a tactic to protect their Roma members.<sup>968</sup> However, none of the denominational

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<sup>964</sup> Wurmbrand, *From Suffering to Triumph*, 26-27, 91-93. Mihai Ciucă, Personal correspondence based on his interview with Iosif Pop, 1 October 2020.

<sup>965</sup> Gabe, *HC* 63/2 (July-September 1990): 54.

<sup>966</sup> Solonari, *Purifying the Nation*, 275, 277, 283.

<sup>967</sup> Lucian Nastasă, Andrea Varga, *Minorități etnoculturale. Mărturii documentare. Țigani din România (1919-1944)* (Cluj: Editura Centrul de Resurse pentru Diversitate Etnoculturală, 2001), 417. Achim, Doc. 214, 228.

<sup>968</sup> Achim, Doc. 176.

accounts mention the endangerment or deportation of Roma members of their congregations. It is unclear if evangelicals considered Roma a different ethnic group at this time.

International support for these double minorities during the war was almost non-existent. James Rushbrooke, president of the Baptist World Alliance based in London, helped Jewish refugees but the archives do not mention aid for Jewish or Roma Baptists. For Romanian evangelicals in general, support from coreligionists abroad continued, as evidenced in a letter from American-Romanian diaspora Baptists to Ioan Socaciu, president of the Romanian Baptist Union. The letter, stopped by the censors, revealed the Romanian diaspora in America were encouraging Romanian Baptists to remain in their faith arguing that Allied victory was near and Axis countries would be forced to allow full freedom for all religious associations with ties to America.<sup>969</sup> Such communication of course, did not help these groups already accused of treasonous activity.

As Allied victory became more certain, Evangelicals were nevertheless worried what liberation by the Soviet army would look like for them. The deportations of religious leaders that occurred in 1941 made them wary of Soviet influence. They again sought the protection of the Swiss Legation; Baptist leader Constantin Adorian had petitioned the Swiss Legation to intervene for Romanian Baptists earlier in the war with some success.<sup>970</sup>

In October 1944 an order finally granted Baptists, Brethren, and Seventh-day Adventists freedom to exercise their faith, but they were still under surveillance by authorities.<sup>971</sup> Previous decrees were annulled and property previously confiscated from these groups was to be returned.<sup>972</sup> Baptists were recognized as a religious denomination rather than just a religious association, but all other religious associations apart from Baptists, Brethren, and Adventists were still banned.<sup>973</sup> These three had the largest domestic and foreign support allowing for this special status among the other “sects.”

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<sup>969</sup> Achim, Doc.446.

<sup>970</sup> Achim, Doc. 493, 462; ANR, DGP 2350-62/1942, f. 59 (11 March 1942) Swiss Legation asked for the number of members and the budget of the Romanian Baptist Union.

<sup>971</sup> Achim, Doc. 508.

<sup>972</sup> Achim, Doc. 509.

<sup>973</sup> Achim, Doc. 510, 512.

## After the War

As expected by most religious leaders in Romania, the advent of the new political regime, brought evangelical groups legality but under a limited scope of activity. Milan Haimovici, who survived the Iași pogrom by hiding in the Feinstein house, became a Lutheran minister as did Richard Wurmbrand from Bucharest. Haimovici spent over seven years in prison and Wurmbrand fourteen years during the first communist governments.<sup>974</sup> Wurmbrand's unconventional testimony before the United States Senate in 1966, stripping to show the scars from his time as a political prisoner, revealed the horrors experienced by these Jewish believers under the communist regime in Romania.<sup>975</sup> Eugen Jurencu moved from Bălți, Bessarabia, to Hăghig in Brașov county in 1944 and afterwards lived in Bucharest at the Baptist seminary where he was involved in Bible smuggling after the war because of the dearth of religious literature allowed in the country.<sup>976</sup> Interestingly, Vasile Asiev from Bolgrad, who along with his whole congregation returned to BOR during the war, became pastor of the Brăila Baptist church (1946-1957); his new congregations were unaware of his wartime renunciation.<sup>977</sup>

Though much of this history has been forgotten, there are recent attempts to commemorate and engage with these difficult aspects of history. Filocalia, a Brethren church in Iași, held a commemorative event in 2011 for the 70<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the pogrom, condemning the actions of the city's Christians in the past, and asking forgiveness. Before the commemoration, young people from various churches in the city helped care for the Jewish cemetery.<sup>978</sup>

This analysis of the war shows how interwar racist rhetoric and policy was radicalized even for evangelicals who were majority ethnic Romanians. They were grouped with other enemies of the people and labeled a bacteria, in line with eugenicist language of the time. For the double minorities in their midst, the Jewish and Roma members, the situation was worse, and the

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<sup>974</sup> "Tortured for Christ: Milan Haimovici," *The Rotarian* (December 1971): 12.

<sup>975</sup> "The Reverend Wurmbrand Recounts Communist Torture," *United States of America Congressional Record: Proceedings and Debates of the 89th Congress, second session* (4 August 1966): 18260- 18269.

<sup>976</sup> Achim, Doc. 500; Buni Cocar, "Amintiri,"

<https://romaniaevangelica.wordpress.com/2015/07/01/buni-cocar-amintiri-9/> (accessed 7 July 2021).

<sup>977</sup> Mihai Ciucă, *Baptiștii din Brăila*, 100-103, 137. Ciucă's mother remembered rumors circulating in the church that Asiev had icons in his home. Ciucă, Personal correspondence, 6 October 2020.

<sup>978</sup> Samoilă, 8-9. The church's website: <http://bisericafilocalia.ro/>.

congregations seemed unable to do much for them. Both the Romanian state and the Orthodox Church hierarchy pushed for ways to curtail their activity.

The wide-ranging wartime experiences of these groups show how diverse Romania itself was at the time. The changing occupational powers and the instability in border regions accounted for harsher policies and actions against evangelicals in those areas and against Jews and Roma regardless of their Christian conviction. The constant factor in evangelical war-time experiences was some degree of marginalization across the country.

These complex individuals reveal the current units of historical analysis, be they social, political, economic, cultural, have failed to adequately analyze the porous nature of national, ethnic, religious identities, and thus obscure how entangled these identities were in Romanian history during that period. The changing legislation and threats of mass deportation even for evangelicals reveal the refusal of state or BOR authorities to deal with this complexity. The view of distinctly separate ethnic groups and national categories unfortunately largely continues into the present understanding of the period, but looking at various actors simultaneously and at a micro-level allows for a better understanding of how mixed were national, ethnic, and religious identities.

## **A Pied and Dappled Conclusion**

Evangelicals are today often associated with American Christian fundamentalism or with right wing politics. This is, however, a very different picture from the forgotten socialist accusations of the interwar and World War II period. In chapter one, the 1930 census figures revealed rather small but growing communities, which were spread across Romania. The census presented a mix of urban and rural communities, while archival documents gave flesh to the figures showing mixed gender and diverse class, ethnicity, and linguistic characteristics of evangelical individuals.

These groups seemed to flourish in border areas with already very complex cultural and ethnic compositions. This made them even more suspicious in the eyes of Romanian authorities, who were concerned about the successful integration of these regions after World War I and any foreign influence that might hinder this. The specific stories of Lev Averbuch's the Israelites of the New Testament and the Roma Credința church detail the unique appeal and interaction of evangelicals with minorities, Jews and Roma in particular, and how they were able to grow such multicultural communities based on their faith convictions.

The lived religion of Romanian interwar evangelicals, not solely their theology, is reconstructed through the analysis of their church activity and social institutions (increasing in number and quality especially in the 1930s), the sermons and literature in many languages, their relationships with those outside their group, and through their music. They used music as a way to create space for themselves in Romanian culture and society while also as a means of teaching and encouraging their church members. Both the story of Averbuch's group and the story of the Arad Roma evangelicals point to how welcoming and open these communities were while simultaneously providing a close-knit and supportive network for their members. They not only provided spiritual guidance and support, but also employment, education, and care for children, the sick, and the elderly. Theirs was a world with a myriad of social connections and engagements. World War II revealed how counter-cultural indeed these Jewish, Roma, and Romanian evangelicals were in Romania as they too were targeted by Antonescu's cleansing policies.

Interwar eastern European evangelicals capitalized on the diversity in their communities, not initially imposing ethnic, national, or linguistic limits. This was contrary to what major religious institutions and governments were doing at the time. States were intent on creating



national communities, due to the vulnerability of their borders and in an attempt to protect their sovereignty as nation-states, but these non-conformist religious groups showed there was an alternative to ethnic and cultural homogenization. They provided a space for “cross-cultural conversation...on...fears of cultural hybridity, religious reforms, and unorthodox religion.”<sup>979</sup> Besides bridging linguistic and ethnic divides, evangelicals were also crossing class and gender barriers as we see in chapters one and two of this study or in chapter three with Earl Hester speaking at the Roma church. Women, though still in marginalized roles, were more involved in evangelical publication, music, and missionary endeavors. Performing a mix of local and inter/transnational, multi-lingual, cross-denominational music gave agency to these groups to pursue cultural legitimacy for their faith and cross-ethnic communities.

There were limits to integration due to theological disagreements, cultural frictions, and linguistic strains, as the continued existence of separate ethnic churches reveals. However, as both the Chişinău Jews and the Arad Roma showed, it was minority groups within their churches who chose to start separate congregations for outreach purposes, but who still collaborated intimately with other Baptists and Brethren. No other religious groups seemed to be quite so diverse and so radically inclusive- a clear contrast to established religion, represented here by BOR.

They also found themselves occasionally drawn into the rhetoric of the time- trying to prove or defend their loyalty as Romanian citizens to the Romanian state. This was one reaction to the repressive actions of police and state authorities. At their base these colorful communities through their interactions with one another and with those outside were much more diverse and inclusive than other institutions, derived also from the global diversity of Christian doctrine and practice. Even during the years of communist government in Romania, remnants of this diversity continued, such as in the Banat village of Valcani on the Serbian border where members sang in Romanian and Hungarian at the local Baptist church.<sup>980</sup>

Their stories shed light on European religious and ethnic minorities through the largely neglected study of the evangelical minority in historical studies and the hitherto under-studied role of Jewish, Roma, and Romanian evangelical churches in nationalism studies. The legacy of

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<sup>979</sup> Schinker, *Confessions of the Shtetl*, 11.

<sup>980</sup> Olimpia Ciuraş, personal communication, 10 July 2015.

relatively marginal Russian Jewish conversion is shown to be much larger than realized, especially with the increased presence of Messianic groups across Eastern Europe today.

Their stories, therefore, bring a vital contribution to the current discourse on religion and national identity, its “everyday” aspects, in twentieth century Europe. For evangelicals, national categories were not their main form of identification at the local level, but rather religion. They also serve as an important contribution to Holocaust studies and Roma studies in the still under-examined eastern borderlands of Europe, such as Romania. These groups’ multiple layers of boundary breaking or crossing and complex understandings of identity beyond that of the nation or of ethnicity reveal how important it is to not be limited by what we perceive as national units, the nation-state and national identity as primary units of analysis, in historical research.

Though not much more than names or vague descriptions are available at times, a focus on evangelical individuals when possible rather than on state actors presents a more intricate picture of Romanian society. Their stories reveal the current units of historical analysis- social history, political, economic, cultural, national- are inadequate on their own and must be reconceptualized to account for these complex individuals and groups. In the present study, they are analysed within an entangled framework of social history, demographics, anthropology, music, and legislation. A complex methodological approach such as this is necessary in order to understand the rich and intricate history.

The multi-ethnic characteristic and complex religious, ethnic, and national identities of everyday Romanian evangelicals is an important contribution to current literature on post World War I European regionalism. They were particularly numerous in contested borderlands making them more of a challenge to interwar Romanian government attempts to integrate these regions linguistically and religiously. The ethnic tensions and gender categorizations previously researched by Bucur, Davis, Turda, Schinker and others are analysed here from a religious perspective through the lens of another less examined minority group. The study contributes to works on religious revival (Zhuk, Clark) showing the ethnic mixing within one such sub-category (evangelical) of the time. It inserts Roma evangelicals, whose history prior to World War II is mostly unknown, into the literature on Roma interwar emancipation efforts (Achim, Matei, Marushiakova and Popov).

Identities of these individuals cross neatly constructed boundaries and labels. Their non-conformism challenges preconceived notions of completely divisive society and politics in

interwar and war-time Romania and provides a better understanding regarding fluid identities of current ethnic and religious minorities in Europe. It is the history of multi-ethnic religious groups in one of World War I's biggest "winning" states in terms of territorial gains, who find themselves faced with pressure to conform to clear ethnic and religious categories. The double and triple minority status of Roma and Jewish members make the study a valuable contribution to the study of how marginalized groups navigated and legitimized their identities.

Along with the Siguranța agent reporting on Averbuch's congregation in 1925 Chișinău, we too remain perplexed, amazed, and intrigued by these "dappled" groups- these multi-ethnic, multi-lingual, gender mixed communities at a time of ethnic homogenization and strong nationalization policies. In Averbuch's words, they sought to show that their "*Friend* [Jesus] is the true friend both of Jews and all others."<sup>981</sup> Their stories, emerging here from archival depths, seem to paint just such a picture.

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<sup>981</sup> *TT* 27/2 (February 1921): 19; Averbuch, "Work for God in Roumania," *TT* 28/3 (March 1922): 28.

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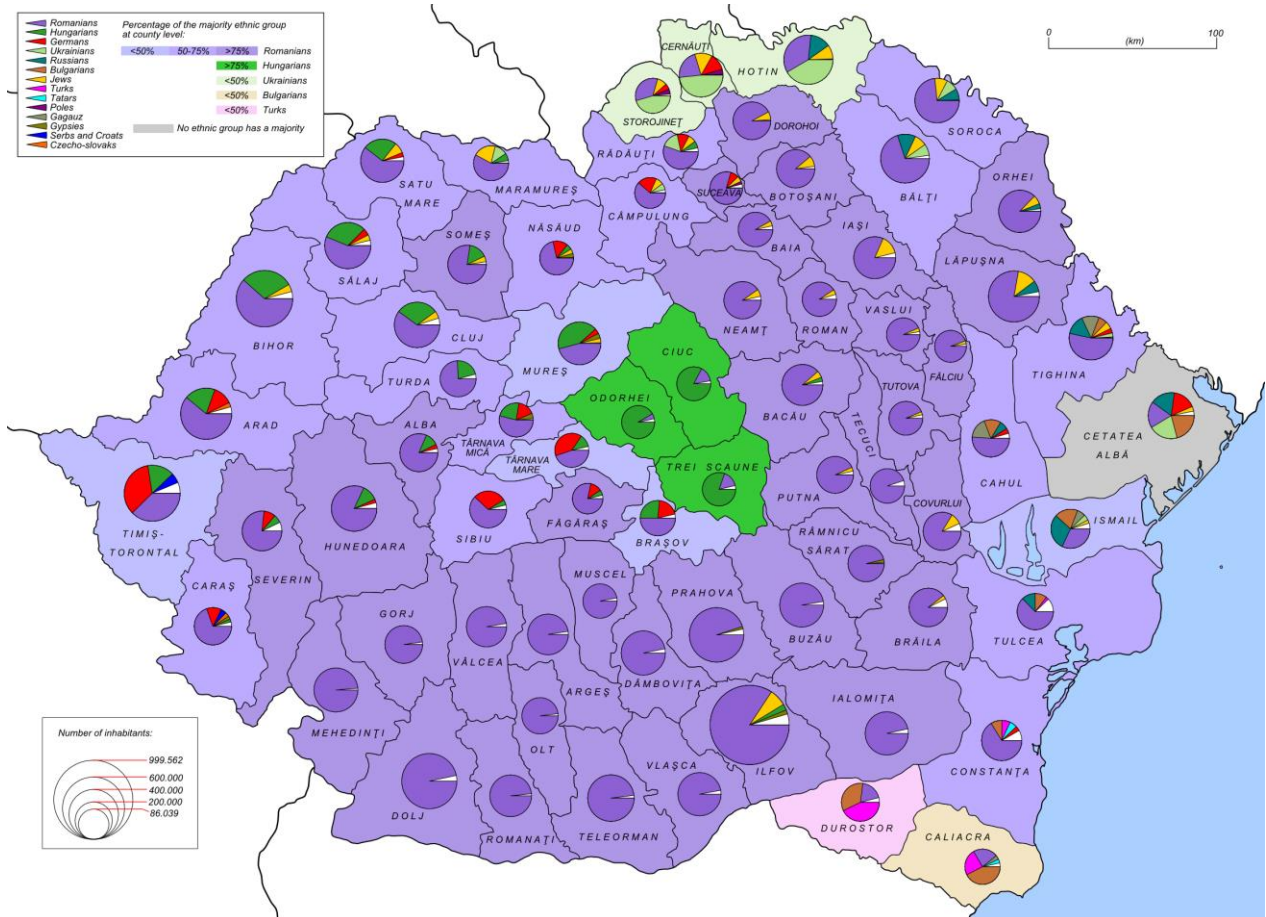
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Appendix

Map I:  
Ethnic Map based on 1930 Census<sup>982</sup>



<sup>982</sup> Andrein, “Romania 1930 ethnic map,” [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Romania\\_1930\\_ethnic\\_map\\_EN.png#/media/File:Romania\\_1930\\_ethnic\\_map\\_EN.png](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Romania_1930_ethnic_map_EN.png#/media/File:Romania_1930_ethnic_map_EN.png) (Accessed 20 April 2021).

**Table I:**  
Sums acquired for Romanian Baptist Union Roma mission, October-December 1934<sup>983</sup>

<b>Sponsors</b>	<b>1934</b>
“Psalmistul” Youth Society, Bucharest	100 lei
Sisters in Bucharest	500 lei
Bucharest	400 lei
Hungarian Sunday School, Bucharest	271 lei
Bobda Church	140 lei
Cârjiț	50 lei
Seleuș	245 lei
Zărand	54 lei
Pătrăuții de jos	200 lei
Baia de Criș	140 lei
Târnava	103 lei
Căscioarele	250 lei
Ilălchiu	150 lei
Rosia	61 lei
Frumușica nouă	50 lei
Corjeuți, Hotin	140 lei
<b>Total</b>	<b>2704 lei</b>

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<sup>983</sup> “Stiri si informatiuni,” *Farul Creștin* 2/24 (December 1934): 11.

**Table II:**Sums acquired for Romanian Baptist Union Roma mission, 21 August to 6 November 1935<sup>984</sup>

<b>Sponsors</b>	<b>1935</b>
Sunday School, Grăniceri	30 lei
Storojineț Circle, Bucovina	366 lei
Fr. Ungureanu S., Bucovina	50 lei
Anovca, Tighina	50 lei
Holudița, Tighina	50 lei
Moscovei, Basarabia	63 lei
Vulcănești, Cahul	121 lei
Chislița, Cahul	87 lei
Sadaclia, Basarabia	40 lei
Iosași, Arad	70 lei
Pescari, Arad	60 lei
Petroșani Church	150 lei
Fr. Isimula, Turtucaia	40 lei
Fr. Nica, Corabia, Romanati	100 lei
Sister Marinca E., Avram-Iancu	50 lei
Sunday School, Tulcea	800 lei
Fr. Gurgulescu, Tulcea	100 lei
Women's Society, Moreni	100 lei
Women's Society, Cetate, Dolj	100 lei
Fr. Ilie Barbulcsu, Cetate Dolj	20 lei
Gramatic, lawyer	40 lei
Sister Lucreția Botosan, Cosniciul de jos	164 lei
<b>Total</b>	<b>2651 lei</b>

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<sup>984</sup> "Misiunea țigani," *Farul Creștin* 4/1 (January 1936): 6.