

Bulgaria

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2.1 Introduction

The modern Bulgarian state was born with the Treaty of Berlin in 1878 and its key defining features were its Bulgarian ethnicity, nationality, and Orthodox Christianity as its official religion. That was the general context that Bulgarian Roma found themselves at the time, which contrasted to the previous era of the Ottoman Empire which was far larger and comprised of many ethnicities, peoples and religions. Bulgarian Roma thus were citizens of a nation-state which now sought ways to establish, define and institutionalise itself.

As is the case today, official census data is not entirely reliable when it comes to establishing the true numbers of Roma in Bulgaria. Nevertheless, according to the census data, in 1910, three percent of the Bulgarian population comprised of Gypsies and this figure dipped to two percent in 1920, 1926, 1934 and 1946, respectively (see Table 2.1). In the years between 1910 and 1934, the vast majority of Roma (defined by the census according to mother tongue/spoken language) identified as Muslims i.e., an average of 83 percent; on average, 17 percent identified as Eastern Orthodox in this period and just 0.1 percent in 1926 and 1934 said they were Protestant (Царство България – Главна дирекция на статистиката 1923, 1927, 1931a, 1931b).

Table 2.1 Population by ethnicity according to Bulgaria census data

	1910	1920	1926	1934	1946
Bulgarian	3518756	4036056	4557706	5204217	5903580
Turkish	465641	520339	577552	591193	675500
Gypsies	122296	98451	134844	149385	170011
Other (including those who did not answer)	230820	192125	208639	133144	280258
TOTAL	4337513	4846971	5478741	6077939	7029349

Source: (Национален статистически институт 2011).

Against the previously discussed backdrop of the creation of the new Bulgarian state, the Roma found themselves within the boundaries of a nascent country which witnessed domestic unrest, several coups, wars, and power struggles. The Roma's visions for their future and civic development were to a great extent influenced not only by their unequal place within the society but by the overall development, trends and aspirations observed within the nascent Bulgarian state. The Tarnovo Constitution of 1879 and its legislation would encompass various religious and ethnic groups, including Gypsies, and give them rights and freedoms (Crowe 2007). When the Bulgarian government decided, on May 31, 1901, to suspend the voting rights of Muslim Gypsies (which were in the majority) and nomads, this gave rise to the convocation of a conference in the town of Vidin, which was organised by a group of Gypsies who insisted that they deserve to have the same rights as the rest of the Bulgarian citizens. This initiative is also believed to be one of the earliest signs of the civic emancipation struggles of Roma in Bulgaria, where the campaign was headed by the *tsaribashi* (headman, leader) of the Gypsies in Bulgaria, Ramadan Ali, and was supported by the Bulgarian lawyer, Marko Markov in 1905 (Marushiakova and Popov 2021a:33–69).

Thus, when the Bulgarian Roma felt like their rights have been infringed upon or that they have been left unprotected by the state, they sought ways to pursue them and secure an equal social position through the establishment of their own organisations. One of earliest Roma civic organisations was thus founded in 1910 in the town of Vidin, as we learn from the officially recognised “Statute of the Egyptian Nationality in the Town of Vidin” (Marushiakova and Popov 2015; Устав 1910). Several years later, in the capital Sofia, the Sofia General Muslim Educational-Cultural and Mutual Aid Organisation “Istikbal-Future” was established (CSA, f.1B, op.8, a.e.596, l.69) which, in 1930, absorbed other Roma organisations from around the country and renamed itself to the General Mohamedan-Gypsy National Cultural-Educational and Mutual Aid Union in Bulgaria (CSA, f. 264, op. 2, a.e. 8413, l. 15–20; for the full text of these statutes in original and in English see, Marushiakova and Popov 2021a:69–111). That organisation in fact began publishing their newspaper, *Terbie*, (which will be discussed in more detail later in this chapter) and which was ultimately used as a tool that advocated for the interests, visions and rights of Bulgarian Roma.

Bulgarian Roma took active part in all wars that the country fought, they gave their lives to these wars, that whole experience has been remembered by the Roma and, furthermore, they have professed their readiness to defend and fight in the interest of their Bulgarian homeland. Their contribution in the wars has been recognised and some Roma even took positions of respectable ranks in the military, the police, and the gendarmerie. As a whole, this has contributed to the emergence of Roma leaders who would be active among their Roma communities (Кръстев and Иванова 2015, 2016, 2018).

The old Gypsy forms of leadership observed during the Ottoman Empire were transferred in the new socio-political realities in Bulgaria after its liberation (Устав 1910; DA Sofia, f. 1 K, op. 4, a.e. 531, l. 5; DA Montana f. 3 K, op. 1, a.e. 56; for the full text in original and in English, Marushiakova and Popov 2021a). Such was the case of the *cheribashiya*/

tsaribashiya/muhtar (headman/leader), whose role was to act as a proxy for a given Gypsy community to the state and local authority and third parties. Such has also been the role of Shakir Pashov, who had been representing a Roma neighbourhood in Sofia, *Konyovista* (Кръстев and Иванова 2018), from the late 1920s until mid 1940s and who became one of the first and most influential Roma leaders in Bulgaria (Ковачева 2003; Marushiakova and Popov 2021a:69–140). Pashov's contribution and role will be discussed in more detail later in this chapter.

It should be highlighted that, in fact, the majority of Bulgarian Roma led a sedentary way of life and had various distinctive professions, such as porters, shoeblacks, basket-makers, florists, blacksmith, musicians, etc. which was a pre-requisite for the emergence of their civic emancipation movement and press and literature.

The level of literacy is a key issue related to the concept of Roma civic emancipation. Roma were included in the Bulgarian educational reforms and legislature, which made attendance of the first four years of school compulsory for all Bulgarian citizens. Official statistics show, however, that most of the Roma in the period until the wake of the Second World War were illiterate. According to the respective census data, Roma literacy was 3.4 percent in 1910 which increased to 6.0 percent in 1920, and to 8.2 percent in 1926 (Държавна дирекция на статистиката 1931).

Against this general framework of the formation of the modern Bulgarian state, Roma's position within it and the lack of genuine interest in dealing with the Roma, hence the lack of national policies toward them, this chapter will try to present the early development of Romani literature and publications. The birth of Roma writing was thus Roma's search for their recognition, organisation, and emancipation. Specifically, the chapter will explore two sections – one which was influenced and inspired mainly by the Protestant missionary work among Roma in northwest Bulgaria and, secondly, the publications that came from Bulgaria's capital, and the works of a couple of Roma civic organisations which were based on the Islamic faith and their newspaper *Terbie*.

2.2 Publications through the Work of Early Protestant Missionaries

The overall presence of Protestants within Bulgaria, which has been predominantly Orthodox, has been quite limited. For example, in 1910, out of a total population of 4,337,513, there were 3,374 Protestants; in 1920, out of a total population of 4,846,971, Protestants were 2,842; in 1926, out of 5,478,741, Protestants were 2,895; in 1934, out of a total of population of 6,077,939, Protestants were 4,983 (Царство България – Главна дирекция на статистиката 1923, 1927, 1931a, 1931b).

As indicated in the introduction to this chapter, the number of Roma Protestants was quite nominal while one of the key features of being Bulgarian was to be Eastern Orthodox. As such, Protestantism would have been regarded as a religious sect on the fringe of Bulgarian society. The Protestant missionary work and involvement with this

small number of Bulgarian Roma played an important role in the emergence of some of the earliest Roma publications. Protestant missionaries have recognised the importance of learning about Bulgarian Roma, their culture and mastering their language. Thus, one was able to witness the issuing of translations into Romani as well as original publications which sought to resonate better among the Roma and attract them to religion.

The place where Protestant missionaries have been particularly successful in reaching and influencing Roma has been in the north-west of the country, more specifically, in today's towns of Lom and Montana and, in particular, the small village of Golinsti, which presently is a neighbourhood called "Mladenovo" and is part of the town of Lom. Its Roma residents could be considered some of the first in Bulgaria to have successfully received and benefitted from the outreach of the Evangelical Baptist work of Austrian missionaries. Its history is linked to the general history of the work of American, Austrian, British, and German missionaries from the times of late Ottoman empire. From the outset of their work, missionaries aimed to also attract Bulgarians by doing chiefly charitable work, providing education, and offering medical assistance while the spreading of religious teachings was left for a later stage. As a result, between 1903 and 1910 a Baptist Church in the larger town of Lom was established while a Roma group of Baptist churchgoers was formed in the nearby village of Golinsti. The two churches were not exclusive and often members of one group would frequent the services of the other. The Protestant missionary work among Bulgarian Gypsies first began in the 1920s but there is no information about its founders, or about its leaders. In 1934, it was re-launched (Marushiakova and Popov 2021a). We are aware thus of the Evangelical Baptist Mission Among the Gypsies in Bulgaria, which was based in Lom and the Committee Gypsy Evangelical Mission based in Sofia.

Consequently, in the village of Golinsti, in 1920s, the first Gypsy Baptist Church in Bulgaria was eventually formed. By 1921, the Gypsy Church in Golinsti could boast of a steady following of around 30 persons and that was when it was recognised as a part of the Baptist Church in the town of Lom. Ultimately, on September 28, 1930, because of its success, the Roma Church managed to erect its own building on its purchased land which was a true source of pride of many of its followers (Marinov 2019; Славкова 2007). One of the main figures there, and in the history of the Evangelical religion of Bulgaria, was the Rom Petar Punchev. He could be considered as a Roma leader and one of the pioneers of the Roma Protestant movement, whose journey with the religion is believed to have begun when he was involved as a travelling missionary for the Baptist Church in Lom. He is also believed to have been the first Roma to preach in his mother-tongue, Romani. He was also, for several years, the only representative of the only Gypsy church in Bulgaria. Due to his work and dedication to spreading the Baptist message among the local Roma, Punchev was officially recognised as a pastor, which granted him power and authority, on November 11, 1923, just a year before he passed away (Marinov 2019; Славкова 2007).

In 1919, another Baptist community was established in Lom's neighbouring town, Ferdinand (today, it is called Montana), whose local preacher was Baro Boev. Boev was

even recognised in the protestant journal, *Християнски Приятел* (Christian Friend) in 1939 as a pivotal figure in the spreading of the Evangelical Baptist faith in the town of Ferdinand and for his successful work among the Gypsies in the same town (Славкова 2007). In 1925, the Roma Baptist community of Ferdinand was headed by a Bulgarian pastor, Petar Minkov, whose following is reported to have been 20–30 Gypsies who also benefited from evening educational courses that Minkov had been running (Славкова 2007). Minkov had been working not only in Ferdinand but in other parts of Bulgaria. He was another prominent figure among the Bulgarian Roma Evangelists. He managed to learn Romani language which helped him to successfully reach and invite Roma followers. Minkov also sought to elevate his followers by offering beneficial skills and knowledge through his Sunday school attached to the Church in Golinsti. He also founded *Дружесто “Ромни”* (Association “Roma Woman”), and offered courses such as German language. Notably, as we will see later, Petar Minkov is an especially important figure for the topic of Romani literature as he translated and published religious books and periodicals in the Romani language (Славкова 2007).

Against this background of the setting up and the existence of the first Roma Church in Golinsti, the first piece written by Roma churchgoers was published (for the full text in original and in English, Marushiakova and Popov 2021a:140–156). Its genre is that of opinion journalism and was written to represent the subjective viewpoint of the churchgoers in Golinsti. The whole conception of the idea of writing and publishing it could be described as a direct consequence of the power struggle, interests and the pursuit of civic and social rights, and the position of the Roma churchgoers. The printed booklet bears the title *Циганска Евангелска Баптийска църква. с. Голинци* (Gypsy Evangelical Baptist Church, village Golinsti) (Циганска Евангелска 1926). It contains ten pages, written in Bulgarian, and begins with a title *Делото на циганската Евангелска Баптийска църква в село Голинци* (The Case of the Gypsy Evangelical Baptist Church in the Village Golinsti). It was published in Lom in 1926 by Printing House “Alpha” (for the full text in original and in English, see Marushiakova and Popov 2021a). It was signed by a total of 20 persons, both male and female, among them members of the managing body of the Gypsy Church as well as some of its lay members.

The writing of the booklet is a great demonstration which addresses a major issue for several Roma Baptist churchgoers. It clearly seeks to raise awareness of what the authors have perceived as a great injustice related to who would become the next leader of the Baptist Church in Golintsi following the passing of its previous leader, Petar Punchev. Punchev died in 1924, a year after he was recognised as a pastor. At the time, the Gypsy Baptist Church in the village could boast of acquiring an almost complete shape, having a steady following, its own structure, deacons, and a choir. This conscious civic act of writing and publishing the booklet was a clear attempt by the Evangelists from Golintsi to secure their own place, representation, independence and access of power and privileges. From the booklet we learn that the Roma churchgoers were against their merging with the Baptist Church in Lom and wanted to remain an independent branch while preserving the Roma character of their church.

The booklet describes the Gypsy Church in Golitsi as a great privilege. The Roma believers considered themselves also as receivers of a great blessing and a favour of God, to whom they were extremely grateful, especially as they consciously recognised their lower standing in the Bulgarian society: “[God] revived us too, the Gypsies, as the very last people to accept [in His religion] from our [Gypsy] tribe” (Циганска Евангелска 1926:11) and granting them the favour to form their own church. In other words, the mere emergence of the Church was considered a sign of the raising of the social standing of the Gypsies in Golinsti, a fact that was a source of their true joy and pride. They considered the church to be unique not only because of its ‘Gypsy’ character but also because it was one of its kind in the world.

This church is located on a northern end of Bulgaria, two kilometres from the town of Lom on the historic side of the village of Golinsti. Our church was renowned and gave joy to the whole West: Germany, England and America. (Циганска Евангелска 1926:1)

The booklet then quickly moves forward to the core of the matter and presents to the reader that the Gypsy Church’s existence and future had been challenged by the interference of external figures such as Trifon Dimitrov, the Bulgarian priest of the Baptist Church in Lom. Dimitrov is presented to have influenced some members of the Gypsy Church and meddled in the whole decision process, which determined its future. The actual reasons, we learn, were personal as Dimitrov’s aim was to head the church in Golinsti. This total disregard of the will of the Roma churchgoers thus urged them to write and publish the booklet, hoping to raise awareness of the situation, the injustice and disregard of their interests and will to have their own and independent Roma church. This publication of the booklet in 1926 is a clear indication of Roma protestant churchgoers’ search to publicly express their own interests, vision and place within the protestant community and, by extension, in the Bulgarian society.

Correspondingly, because of the influence of some of the members of the Baptist church in Lom, along with the priest Trifon Dimitrov, the Gypsy Church in Golinsti became a branch of the one in Lom, i.e. it lost its independence. Eventually, this period of contention came to an end with the appointment, in 1926, of the Bulgarian priest Petar Minkov. Minkov is a figure who has made a notable contribution for the spreading of the Evangelical faith among Roma. He was the editor of the Roma newspaper, *Светилник* (Candlestick, in Bulgarian) which came out in 1927 and contained a section in Romani language which translates as Roma Word (the whole newspaper will be discussed later on here). Before we engage with this, however, we will introduce the Journal *Evangelist* which, even though not exclusively dedicated to Roma audience, recognised the importance of reaching out and including the Bulgarian Gypsies and provided a platform for the publishing of Roma writing and literature.

The journal *Евангелист* (*Evangelist*) was a publication of the Bulgarian Evangelical Baptist Union. The first issue of *Evangelist* came out in January 1920 and in 1939 it was

renamed to *Християнски приятел* (*Christian Friend*). It is reported to have published mainly articles that discussed the history of Baptism, poems and stories, biographical essays on prominent foreign and Bulgarian Baptists, apologetic articles, lessons for Sunday schools and other useful materials related to the Bulgarian Protestant youth. Until 1938, *Evangelist* distributed between 900 and 1,200 copies. Initially, it was a quarterly publication, but from 1925 it was published monthly, with the exception of the months of July and August (Ангелова 2015). Over the course of its run, *Evangelist* was published in several Bulgarian towns including Chirpan, Ferdinand, Lom, Ruse, Sofia, and Kazanlak. In 1929 and 1930, with pastor Petar Minkov as its editor, it was also distributed abroad (Ангелова 2015). Its editorial position was held by pastor Trifon Dimitrov in 1927, while the administrative position of the journal was assumed by Petar Minkov (Ангелова 2015; Иванчев 1969).

It must be emphasised that journal *Evangelist* acted as a platform where the general progress of the mission to include Roma was showcased and it simultaneously published Roma's personal voices, experiences, opinions, and reflections. *Evangelist's* issues 5 of 1927 published an article with the title "Christ or Mohamed" and it was authored by a Gypsy who has signed his name simply as F. Adzhov (Аджов 1927). The piece gives a description of the author's life in his native Gypsy mahala in the town of Ferdinand and how, from being illiterate, he became able to read and write. Eventually, Adzhov describes how he left behind his traditional Islamic faith and how he was edified through his acceptance of the new Baptist faith. The pivotal figures described in the text which helped him in this are the pastor, Petar Minchev, and the Gypsy, Baro Boev (ibid.). The article should also be read as one which presents the author's life as a 'before and after' where his 'new' life is marked with his discovery of the Evangelical faith which directed him not only to leave behind his old ways and religion but also enlightened him both in educational and spiritual sense.

Between the Ogosta River and the town of F[erdinand] the little huts are located, in which I, how many years ago - I do not know, saw the world of God. My life did not differ in any way from the life of my fellow tribesmen, the Gypsies. It [my life] was quiet around the big smith's skin and anvil of my father's smithery ...

A winter's day in 1924, in our mahala the news was spread that a teacher has come to gather the illiterate and teach them to read and write. I did not know how to read nor to write and I also decided to go to this teacher ... Together with this teacher, whose name was [P]etar M[inkov], there was also one Gypsy whose name was B[aro] B[ojev]. Very often, almost every time before they taught us how to read and write, the teacher or the Gypsy B[ojev] used to read from a book and talked to us about God and about Jesus Christ.

So that I could learn, I ought to buy the needed books, while I did not have money for this. My father did not give me money for such silly things, while I could not take it from anywhere ... (Аджов 1927:16)

The article seeks to highlight the power and the positive changes that the Baptist religion could bring to other Gypsies. Their old ways of life and faith are presented almost as

outdated, useless, and ignorant. This is opposed to the positive change that the protestant missionaries brought while teaching the Roma to read, write and learn about God. As Adzhov writes, the twist of his life comes with his acceptance of the new religion, leaving behind his old ways and religion to become a better person. Thus, the raising of the social standing of the Roma and consequently the emancipatory character of the Baptist mission were emphasised.

In the summer of 1925, as usual, we went to work and cheat the villagers from the villages. We settled in the village of K. One day, by us came B[aro] B[oev]. My Christian brother welcomed him with great joy. They read again from the book; [...] I felt very heavy and sad. For the first time in my life I felt the power of sin and its weight. And I fell on my knees praying already not to Mohammad but to Jesus Christ to forgive my sins ...

One day during fall, I was baptised by my first teacher, P[etar] M[inkov] and I joined the followers of Jesus Christ. (ibid.)

The importance to learn, recognise and include Gypsies into the general Protestant mission was presented several times in the journal *Evangelist*. For example, in 1931 it stated: "One of our holy songs tells us to walk forward and up. That is exactly how our work among the Gypsies in Bulgaria could be characterised. The history of the mission of this people is a history of progress." (cited in Славкова 2007:76)

Early Evangelical Baptists were aware of the outcast status of the Gypsies and their desperate situation not only in Bulgaria but across the world (Георгиев 1939). The article whose title translates as "Something Principle for the Gypsy Mission" begins with a direct challenge to its readers, and at the same time seeks to inspire them, stating that even though it is a difficult task, it is the will of God to spread His orders and messages to everybody regardless of who they are. For example, because of the described inclination of Gypsies to steal, cheat and lie, the article explains that "[Gypsies] are persecuted by the wild beasts, despised, threatened and chased by all countries of the world." (ibid.)

The protestant missionary work sought to make Gypsies better Christians and, as a consequence, this gave them the chance to assume another, better position in the general society. The central question, that early missionaries have been pondering about, has been to what extent different cultures and local customs should be recognised so that they accept the professed faith and, importantly, be good believers. This was important because the Evangelical missionaries did not advocate for the obliteration of the identities of the Roma believers. Instead, they pondered on the question what would be the best way for Roma to retain their identities and at the same time be good Christians.

Among the pages of the journal, readers could also learn about some of the progress and fruits of that intention. For example, under the rubric *News of the Union*, we can read the article "The First Baptist Deacon House in Bulgaria" (Редакцията 1939). It shares the news that the first Baptist deacon house in Bulgaria has been bought and is located not far from the Evangelical Baptist Church in Lom. Its reported purpose was "to give shelter to the homeless, to host guests, where our deaconesses would live, female Bulgarians, and also for many other stuff of similar character." (Редакцията 1939:12) Even though

the news article does not necessarily centre around Roma and their incorporation into the general purpose of the first Deacon House in Bulgaria, it presents two photographs of how the current manager of the home, deaconess Ema Herman, provides first-hand training to young Gypsies. The page shows how young Gypsy girls receive practical training on sewing and knitting. In the journal we could also find photos of the Gypsy Women Christian Association *Romni* (*Roma Woman*, in Romani language) (Муди 1927:5) as well as the Sunday school of the Gypsy Evangelical Baptist Church in the village of Golinsti. The image shows more than 20 persons, presumably Roma, as beneficiaries of the service that the Gypsy church offers (Марчев 1927:7). Journal *Evangelist* allowed Gypsies to share their positive experiences with the religion but it also showcased the fruits of their labour. What is also noteworthy here is that the ethnic identity of the Roma was presented and preserved, as compared to adopting the more general one i.e. Evangelical/Baptist. Also, the purpose of publicising these activities was to show the positive, emancipatory, effect on the Roma.

Roma were clearly recognised as in need of help, but at the same time, this quest to help them resulted in also recognising their culture and language. The Baptist and Evangelical missionary work thus uplifted the status of the Evangelical Roma, albeit few in their numbers, by teaching them literacy and other valuable skills which ultimately not only introduced them to the Protestant faith but empowered them as better citizens. This recognition of the Roma was also clearly manifested in the journal *Evangelist* when in its issue 7 in 1927, it included an additional supplement which was in the Romani language (Ангелова 2015:9). Unfortunately, the actual supplement could not be recovered at the time that this archival research was conducted. It has been the belief of Bulgarian archivists, however, that it does exist, but it has been misplaced and not adequately filed.

This general aim to evangelise the Roma indirectly resulted in the recognition of their language, culture, gave them credulity and ultimately resulted in uplifting their social status. Here we should also mention the first translations into Romani language of books of the Bible. Not long after the start of protestant missionary work in Bulgaria, in 1912, the British scholar, Bernard Gilliat-Smith, translated the Gospel of Luke into Romani language. Gilliat-Smith has been commissioned by the British and Foreign Bible Society (Gilliat-Smith 1912). According to the author himself, this translation has “[marked] the beginning of Gypsy literature in modern Bulgaria, a fact known only to a few.” (Gilliat-Smith 1934:161) A rather curious question here lies as to why Gilliat-Smith has done this first translation using the Latin letters, rather than Cyrillic, and there is no information to suggest that that translation was used. It is hard to imagine that Latin characters were intelligible and meaningful to the target audience – the Roma readers themselves. Consequently, there came two additional translations in Romani language of Books of the Bible, this time using the Cyrillic alphabet. In 1932 Angel Atanasakiev translated the Gospel of St Mathew (Сомнал евангелие 1932) and in 1937 the Gospel of John (Сомнал евангелие 1937). His works have been commissioned by the American Bible Society and the British and Foreign Bible Society.

In addition, the Scripture Gift Mission in London has issued several publications in Romani language. Translations of the titles include: *Барре придобивке* (Large gains) (n.d.); *Дуваре бианине* (Rebirth) (1933); *О Дел вакярда* (The Lord said) (1933); *О дром ухтавдо* (The high road) (1938); *Саво пересарла Библия* (What the Bible tells) (n.d.); *Спасител ацал безаханен* (The Saviour remains unharmed) (n.d.); *Спаситело светоско* (The Saviour of the world) (n.d.); *Щар безспорне факте* (Four undisputable facts) (n.d.) (Славкова 2007). Unfortunately, at the time of this research, none of these works could be discovered and they seem to no longer be available from the publisher; thus, there is little information regarding their authors, print run, distribution, etc. Judging by their Romani language titles, it is very likely that they have been authored by Roma and, more importantly, the target audience has been the Roma community itself. Thus, these religious publications, being a mere translation or a creative adaptation of religious themes, gave way for the Romani language to be used as medium of expression in print and be used by the Roma religious community.

This discussion of religious publications in Romani language is further continued with three other publications of religious songs. *Романе свято гили* (Roma Holy Song) (1929), was published by the Evangelical Baptist Mission among the Gypsies in Lom (Славкова 2007). While I have not been able to access the original collection, it is described as a collection of Evangelical songs which have been translated into Romani language by the pastor Petar Minkov and are well linked to the formation of the Gypsy Church in Golitsi and the formation of its own choir, which was directed by Todor Erinkin (ibid).

Four years later, a second publication in Romani language was published in Sofia by the Union of the Bulgarian Evangelical Baptist Churches – *Романе свети гили* (Roma Holy Songs) (1933). It appears to be the second issue of a series entitled *Roma Books*. The collection *Roma Holy Songs* could be deemed as different from the collection from 1929 (Романе свято гили 1929); rather than being a Romani language translation of existing Evangelical songs, many of its songs appear to be pieces of original Roma creative writing. The book contains a total of 79 pages with 78 songs in total, all in Romani language and written in Cyrillic. Its author(s) is unknown but it could be assumed that a) if authored by one individual he/she has been well-versed in two dialects of Romani language and at the same time they must have had a substantial knowledge of the religion or b) two or more authors have collaborated in composing the religious collection – one group must have had a substantial knowledge of the Bible and its teachings while the other (group of) author(s) has been involved in interpreting it and producing it in Romani language. Overall, the collection is unique and valuable especially because of the substantial number of songs with poetical value. As such, it is very likely they were composed by (a) Roma author(s) who demonstrates abilities to play with the Romani language, its rhythm, and rhymes while at the same time conveying the religious message. Thus, the whole collection could be regarded as a great example

of Romani creative writing and that is what exactly what distinguishes it and makes it special.

Андо Исус Гараде

Са мъре гивеса
Девла сила дема
Та Туке буки те керав
Джикай ме ка мерав.

Лачо овчари сан
Традес кире бакрен
Пиравес ка шукар чаря
Тай ка шудре пая.

Кана темно ачел
Тай о лъво ровел
Ва ме джанав кай мъро Дел
Лестар ман ка църдел.

Само годолеске
Дикав анде лесте
Ме джанав кай чаче Вов бут
Ман обичал тай тут.

(Романе святи гилия 1933:27, song No.26)

Jesus is my Refuge

In our days
God, give me strength
So that I can serve You
Or I will die.

You are a good shepherd
You lead your sheep
And take them to the best pastures
And to cool shades.

When it becomes dark
And the lion roars
Yes, I know that my God
He will protect me.

That is why
I turn to him
I know that He truly
Loves me and you.

As a whole, *Roma holy songs* (Романе святи гиля 1933) covers many themes such as praise and finding peace and protection that have been based on various books of the Bible.

A third collection of religious songs was published in Romani language, in 1936, bearing the title *Романе гиля е Девлеске* (Roma Songs about God) (Романе сомнал гиля 1936). From the booklet we learn its sub-title's is *Романе сомналъ гиля* (Roma Gospel Songs) and the person accredited with ordering its collection is Ioto At. Tatarev. The collection was published in Sofia by the Gypsy Evangelical Mission; it is comprised of around 30 pages and it offers translations in Romani language of standard Evangelical songs. Notably, some of these songs still figure in the repertoire of Protestant churches today such as the Seventh Day Adventists (Духовни песни n.d.) and are sung today in their Bulgarian versions. Such are, for example, songs Song No. 13 *О Слънце на душата ми* (Oh, Sun of my soul) (Романе сомнал гиля 1936:14–15), Song No. 16 *Любете един друго* (Love one another) (Романе сомнал гиля 1936:17–18), and Song No. 28 *Аз съм чул че ме люби Христос* (I have heard that Christ loves me) (Романе сомнал гиля 1936:29–30) (all titles are in Bulgarian).

The translations in Romani language of books of the Bible, of standard evangelical songs as well as the publication of original creative work in Romani as seen in *Roma Holy Songs* (Романе святи гиля 1933) could all be appreciated as ways of adoption of the Protestant religious tenets while internalising and expressing them through their own, Romani, prism. At the most basic level, all these sought to be relatable to the Roma readers while seeking to teach, inspire and enable them to receive and understand the evangelical faith. Ultimately, the publishing of materials in Romani language is a vital form of civic emancipation as it elevates the status of the language and offers a unique representation for the Roma.

There are three known Roma religious newspapers published in the interwar period. One is *Известия на циганската евангелска мисия* (News of the Gypsy Evangelical Mission, in Bulgarian) which is reported to have been published in 1933 by the Protestant Gypsy Evangelical Mission in Sofia, and its publishing house is “Gladstone” (Иванчев 1969:387, 436, 415, 477). It was issued between 1,000 and 2,000 copies (Ангелова 2015). Also, Marushiakova and Popov (1999) and Slavkova (Славкова 2007) have indicated its existence. Reportedly, only issue 3 has been preserved while there is no information about issues 1 and 2. The second was the newspaper *Bulletin of the Gipsies Mission in Bulgaria* and was published in September 1932 and carried the sub-note, “The people which is in need of enlightenment through the Gospel” (Иванчев 1969:6). Its publishing house “Gavazov” (ibid.) issued about 2,000 copies in Sofia. The newspaper was a Bulletin of the American Mission for the Help of Gypsies (ibid.) and it was published in English (Ангелова 2015:89). Therefore, the intended readership has not been Bulgarian Roma, it did not intend to influence or inform them in any way and therefore it did not have any impact on the Roma.

Perhaps the pinnacle of the Sofia-based Evangelical Baptist Mission Among the Gypsies in Bulgaria, was the publishing of the newspaper *Светилник* (Candlestick, in

Bulgarian). The newspaper was published in 1927 in the town of Lom and its editor was pastor Petar Minkov (Иванчев 1969). Its first, and sole, issue came out on January 15, 1927. Originally, it was intended to be issued monthly, however, the reasons for its discontinuation remains unknown. This periodical is unique because it has not only been commissioned by the Evangelical Baptist Mission among the Gypsies in Bulgaria but also because it exclusively sought to include and address the Bulgarian Roma. By its design and vision, it would be right to call it a Roma newspaper and that is why below we will outline the context and give details on the content published in this sole issue. The newspaper consists of four pages. The first three are in Bulgarian, while the last section, *Романо алав* (Roma Word), is in Romani language. We can assume that the target audience were both Bulgarians and Roma, including those Roma who did not necessarily speak the language.

The opening statement by the editor of *Candlestick* is a clear indication of its intention to help Bulgarian Gypsies alike by exposing them to the doctrines of the Evangelical religion, on the one hand, and by stressing the importance of all believers to spread the word of God especially to those who need it the most, the Gypsies, on the other hand. The small opening article is entitled “The Gospel for Everybody” (Редакцията 1927а). It asks its readers and fellow Evangelical Baptists for their moral support and prayers so that they all would be able to enlighten and help their Gypsy sisters and brothers. The inclusive title of this article, and the newspaper altogether, have been clearly an instruction of Christ to His disciples to spread His words to everybody.

Thus, fulfilling this mission, the newspaper is dedicated exclusively to work with and help Bulgaria’s Gypsies, and at the same time alleviate their hardships and misfortunes.

Go to all corners of the world and preach the Gospel to every creature (Mark 16. 15). [...]

In this grand march of the children of God around the world a humble place has been dedicated for the evangelical work among the Gypsies in Bulgaria. We are glad that with the help of God, we could do something about this forgotten by the people, but dear to God, creatures.

We begin the publishing of the small newspaper “Svetilnik” with a prayer to God so that it would be really a real candlestick for the spreading of light amongst the impenetrable darkness which surrounds the Gypsy tribe in Bulgaria. With that we fulfil also a debt to our human brothers – Gypsies, which makes us doubly happier and strong in welcoming the hardships and misfortunes of a similar task.

We believe that in this difficult task we will be supported by the prayers of all who love God Jesus Christ. (Редакцията 1927а:1)

From the very outset of the newspaper, its editors seem to be well-aware of the low social status of the Roma and the need to work with them and help them. Thus, they could be allies in their social emancipation, even though this is through the work and prism of the Protestant movement.

Immediately after the editor’s note, on pages 1 and 2 we find the article “The stolen Gospel.” The importance of this article in fact is integral for the birth and consolidation of the history of Roma evangelical faith in Bulgaria and particularly in the geographical north-west of the country – precisely where the first evangelical missions in Bulgaria

were first concentrated. The author of the piece is Trifon Dimitrov and he argues here about the unparalleled power of the Gospel. Besides arguing that there is no better way to receive enlightenment and becoming a better person than through reading and receiving the Gospel, Trifon Dimitrov tries to promote and propagate a legend which would in fact become pivotal in the birth, spreading and the success of the protestant religion among Bulgarian Roma.

No other book has not had such an immense influence upon the moral transformation of humankind and the personality as the gospel. All great poets, philosophers and writers, no matter how great they may be in the world, they were not able to write a book which would possess such beneficial power to bring up and to renew the people, in the way that the Gospel has.

It has influenced people in various experiences in their lives. (Димитров 1927:1)

Keeping that opening excerpt in mind, about the unparalleled power of the word of God and its ability to influence and uplift those who come across it, the author Dimitrov swiftly introduces his key point and how a Gypsy brother embraced the evangelical faith. It must be noted that the Gypsy is not named, nor does the article commit in supporting its arguments by giving more specific details. "Recently, a Gypsy brother has, by the way, told that the reason for his conversion was a gospel which he has stolen from one Evangelist." (Димитров 1927:1) According to this story, "the Gypsy-brother," then such "a silly man," goes to the home of the Evangelist, steals one nice, wrapped book and puts it in his back among other things. (ibid.) Then, he took the book to his Gypsy friend and they began reading the stolen Gospel. After reading it for two-three weeks, God managed to gradually influence their hearts – one of the Gypsies felt that his soul has been saved and, after a while, the Gypsy thief also felt that God had forgiven his sins.

But that was not enough. They, under the influence of the Gospel, began to preach to others. They built a small pulpit, carried it from house to house, as the Jews carried the tabernacle, and preached about the deliverance through the blood of Jesus also to their other tribesmen.

Thus, they continued for a long time. Today, because of this stolen holy book, there are more than 60 souls in this village who have abandoned their old inclinations and sins and enjoy the great redeeming Deed of the Saviour. Among these 60 persons, 20 are Bulgarians while the other 40 are of the Gypsy tribe. (Димитров 1927:1–2)

The article tells that, at the time of writing, in that village, "almost everybody" (Димитров 1927:2) knew about the incredible things that the Gospel has done and its power. It is most reasonable to assume that this refers to the discussed above village of Golinsti which has enjoyed a considerable success with its Roma followers. It is curious to note that the author Trifon Dimitrov does not cite any names, dates or provide other specific data in this story of the Stolen Gospel. This is a clear attempt at myth making that played an important role in propagating the (in)credible nascent history of the Baptist Evangelical religion among the Roma. In this regard, Slavkova (Славкова 2007) has showed that

this legend has been already retold and promoted by the same author a couple of more times – first in 1924, in issue 6 of journal *Evangelist* and again in its issue 13–15 (Славкова 2007:77–78). In that earlier version, the Gypsy, Bogdan Markov from the village of Golinsi, steals the Gospel from the house of his Bulgarian employer and because he is illiterate, he gives it to Petar Punchev. The story then follows similarly to the one presented above where both Gypsies become transformed by its power, become believers and take it to themselves to spread the word of God to the other Gypsies in the village. Even today, among the Roma from the neighbourhood Mladenovo (the previous village of Golintsi) in the town of Lom, a version of this legend still exists (Славкова 2007).

Myths may have many social and political implications; they may be simplified or dramatised while important historical details overlooked and usually there is no evidence to support their veracity. In any case, myths and legends are integral in the process of nation-building and group identity while in this case, when they are related to spirituality and religious belief, the creation and existence of myths and legends can lead to the emergence of beliefs among Roma churchgoers of being ‘chosen’ or favoured by God (Marinov 2019). It should also be noted that the writing of the story of the stolen Gospel and its perpetuation today counters the widely held belief that the Roma have predominantly an oral tradition.

On page 2 of *Candlestick*, there is a small rubric, titled *News*. It tells about the existence of the Gypsy Women’s Missionary Association in the village of Golinsti. The Association is described as quite valuable for the Gypsy women in the mahala in Golinsti and thus it informs about the success of their recently organised a charitable night. For the event “the sisters gave away various objects that were sold away with success. The income [was] 708 leva. This association does a very useful work among the Gypsy women in the mahala. Pray about the work of these diligent workers.” Analysing the association between the previously mentioned, Gypsy Women Christian Association “Ромни” (Roma Woman, in Romani language) and the Gypsy Women’s Missionary Association, mentioned in *Candlestick*, it could be reasoned that the latter organisation has evolved and been renamed to the Gypsy Women Christian Association “Ромни” considering the geographical location of the work dedicated to Roma and also the dates which report about the women’s association – in January 15, 1917 in newspaper *Candlestick* we read about the Gypsy Women’s Missionary Association while in the month of December of the same year, in journal *Evangelist*, we read about the Gypsy Women’s Christian Association “Roma Woman” (Муди 1927:5).

On the same page 2 of the newspaper, there is the article which asks the rhetorical question – What is the Dearest Name? (Редакцията 1927b). It gives the explanation that name should be not gold, not the name of your homeland, nor the one of your mothers that should be dearest to anybody. Instead, that name should be Jesus Christ because only He could give salvation and true happiness and therefore Jesus “would stay the dearest name for all times” (Редакцията 1927b:2).

Page 3 of *Candlestick* is dedicated to the experience of a renowned Italian actor and how he embraced the Evangelical faith. The turning point of the story, which has been envisaged to be continued in the following issue of the newspaper is when, as part of his next role to play and ridicule an Evangelical pastor, he decides to pay a visit to an Evangelical pastor who used to live nearby. The intention of the actor's visit has been to study the pastor so that he could get an inspiration for his performance. Instead, upon the actor's arrival in the house of the pastor, he encounters his disabled daughter who is doing so poorly, she has reconciled that soon she will leave the worldly life. Instead of being sad, she says that her dream and happiness "are towards the heavenly home. [...] Her deep gaze, crossed arms and trembling lips – this was not a theatrical gesture." (Редакцията 1927a:3) As a result, the actor becomes so moved that instead of learning the actions of the pastor, he receives a priceless Christian advice. Ultimately, in a couple of years, the actor shares how he left his profession to become a pastor and how he gladly exchanged a well-paid job for a more impoverished life. Since then, his sole purpose has been to preach about Christ.

This article fits well the general narrative of newspaper *Candlestick*. It seeks to convince its readers that true happiness could be only found in the Holy scripture and in Jesus Christ and that the evangelical work is at the same time equally important as it gives a purpose to the believers and also happiness and joy for enabling others to have salvation, peace and prosperity.

The Roma newspaper *Candlestick* thus started with an editorial column which stressed on the importance and the need to evangelise the Bulgarian Roma. In its body, we can read three feature articles, and a news piece which were in Bulgarian while the last section was in Romani language – *Романо алав* (Roma word).

It offers three articles. The first one is a Romani language translation of the article presented on page 2, "Think about the One who Loves You" (Редакцията 1927b). Here, the article entitled "The dearest thing" reiterates that it is not gold, not the house, nor the mother but Jesus who should be the dearest (Редакцията 1927d:4). The editors are seemingly trying to challenge the 'earthly' value system of their target audience, and to encourage them to seek God and salvation through Jesus Christ.

The second article, "Who is my neighbour" gives the Romani language translation of Luke verses 25–37 with a re-telling of the story of the Good Samaritan (Редакцията 1927c). While not an original piece, the selection of this parable (rather than any one of the many other parables available in the Bible) is special for the editor, Petar Minkov, as it seeks to convey something about the link between a person's perceived social status and their position within the religion. It is notable that Samaritans and their culture were despised by the Jewish people and the story teaches that a person's social standing is not an indicator of their actions and those of low social status should not be overlooked. As such the inclusion of the parable of the good Samaritan in this specific section can be analysed as an attempt to make the religion more accessible and identifiable to the Roma.

The third article is a presentation in Romani language of the story of “the Prodigal Son” which is from Luke 15:11–22 (Редакцията 1927e). It is not a direct translation from the original but a somewhat shortened adaptation to the story. Nonetheless, it conveys the same message and, much like the parable of the Good Samaritan, it could be appreciated by the Roma readers.

Newspaper *Candlestick*'s section *Romano alav*, translated as *Roma word*, which is all written in Romani language, contained parables which seem to be consciously selected by the editors. They can be linked to the existing stereotypes of the Roma who live day by day, wastefully and not saving, and thus can be seen as another attempt at making the religion accessible and identifiable to its Roma audience. Newspaper *Светилник* (1927) should undoubtedly be regarded as a unique endeavour of the Evangelical Baptist Mission among the Gypsies in Bulgaria. Even though it came only with one published issue, it was one of the first in Bulgaria to clearly dedicate itself to the Roma and to address them directly.

2.3 Newspaper *Terbie* and Its Role in the Pursuit of Roma Civic Interests

This section will present and discuss the newspaper *Terbie* (Upbringing, from Arabic, through Turkish) which was the publication of the Sofia-based General Mohamedan-Gypsy National Cultural-Educational and Mutual Aid Union in Bulgaria (CSA, f. 264, op. 2, a.e. 8413) in 1930. Official records have reported that newspaper *Terbie* was a publication of the Sofia-based General Mohamedan National Cultural-Educational Union in Bulgaria; its editor was Shakir Mahmudov Pashev; it was published in Sofia by the publishing house “Bulgaria”; its price was 2 leva, 1,500 copies were issued and it was published in seven issues between 1933 and 1934 (Иванчев 1969:45, 465).

The history of this Gypsy organisation, however, goes back to 1919 and its predecessor organisation, called the Sofia General Muslim Educational-Cultural and Mutual Aid Organisation “Istikbal-Future” (CSA, f. 1 Б, op. 8, a.e. 596, l. 69) (moving forward, we will refer to it as Organisation ‘Istikbal-Future’). Both organisations are linked with the active involvement of the Rom, Shakir Pashov, who in fact, as we will see later, has left a couple of sources which give reference to the newspaper *Terbie*. The Muslim charitable organisation known as Organisation ‘Istikbal-Future’ was founded in 1919 in Sofia. Its Statute does not make any references to ‘Egyptians’ or ‘Tsigani,’ the terms by which they would most commonly be referred to elsewhere, but instead it references Muslims. Nevertheless, it was a Roma organisation which pursued the furthering of its prominence in the Bulgarian society. From its statute, we learn that it sought to organise the Muslims in a general organisation which would help the poor in times of illnesses, accidents, death and others and would fight for their moral, material and educational-cultural upbringing (ibid.). There are a couple of noteworthy points here. One is that Organisation ‘Istikbal-Future’ had a vision for the inclusion of the wider, i.e. Roma, community. The

second relevant point is that the organisation envisaged to have nation-wide reach and one way to achieve this has been by issuing and distributing its own publication (*ibid.*). It therefore becomes clear the organisation knew that one powerful way to realise their goal, to help and include Muslims from across Bulgaria, was by issuing their own print and narrative.

A publication, which was not explicitly mentioned at this stage, was envisaged to be sold and bring income to the organisation. Apart from selling its publication, the organisation sought to get income, among other things, from selling badges. These badges, its newspaper, along with its proclaimed yearly celebration of St George's Day, point to the creation of unifying symbols around which Gypsies in Bulgaria would derive meaning and a sense of pride. Unfortunately, none of these badges have been recovered. Perhaps, the stamp of the Union might provide some idea; it had circular form bearing the inscription around its edge: "General Mohamedan National Cultural Educational Union in Bulgaria" bearing a star in its middle (CSA, f. 264, op. 2, a.e. 8413, l. 15–20). The whole translation of the text and a commentary have been presented elsewhere (Marushiakova and Popov 2021a).

The existence of newspaper *Terbie* is known and noted, however, its issues have been lost from libraries and archives. In spite of that, there is valuable information about the newspaper and here we will present information about its content. One such source we find in the Roma newspaper *Romano Esi* (Roma Voice) which was the publication of the third Roma organisation, the successor of the General Mohamedan-Gypsy Union – the United General Cultural Educational Organisation of the Gypsy Minorities in Bulgaria 'Ekiye' (Unity) (CSA, f. 1 Б, op. 8, a.e. 596, l. 50–52). Its editor was still Shakir Pashov (who was later replaced by Mustafa Aliev, also known as Manush Romanov) and its first issue appeared on February 25, 1946 while its last issue came out in 1948 (Marushiakova and Popov 2015; Стоянова 2017).

The title of the article that appeared in *Romano esi* is "From the Life of the Sofia Muslim Confessional Municipality – Sofia" (Билялов 1946), however, its sub-title reads "Articles by Hyusein Bilyalov, printing house of [newspaper] *Terbie* on 8 November 1933." The clear aim of re-printing the article published by Hyusein Bilyalov was to raise awareness about a perceived injustice against the Roma, particularly those from Sofia, and therefore, it was a call for a change. The reprinting of *Terbie's* article of 1933 more than a decade later, this time in *Romano esi*, sought to raise awareness among the readership of the newspaper, both Roma and especially Bulgarian officials, about the long-standing struggles of the Muslims from Sofia, i.e. Roma/Gypsies, to run for a place and gain access to the Sofia Muslim Confessional Municipality.

Bilyalov tries to emphasise several times in his text that for a number of years, Bulgarian officials rejected the plea of the Muslims of Sofia to hold elections for trustees of mosques in the capital, even though they had their own mosque, a following of reported 4,000 people and waqf properties (Билялов 1946:2).

It is not 40, but more than 200 [people who are settled] and properties in the capital Sofia, Muslim families have for a number of years been fighting, subject to the law, for the ordering of the election for the appointment of electing trustees and of confessional municipality. (ibid.)

Despite their best efforts, including legal action, the Muslims of Sofia were not successful:

We filed a lawsuit No. 337 from 1927 for the denial of the Minister to fulfil the rule of the law [...]. It was not until 1929 when an order of some kind was made for the election of mosque trustees, however, persons in office frustrated its creation by not advertising the list with the Muslims from Sofia [...]. We filed a complaint to the Public Prosecutor of the Court of Sofia Municipality, incoming No. 14983 from 1930, for violating the official obligations of the respective bodies, however, they were not charged. (ibid.)

It is important to note that the offered reprinted article seems to convey the history, relevance, and the frustration of the Muslims from Sofia. Not once in the article the terms ‘Tsigani’, i.e. Gypsies, Roma, Egyptians, have been used, but instead it references “Muslims of Sofia” and Bulgarian Muslims, and their interests (ibid.). This is certainly a relevant and conscious decision, keeping in mind that their main goal has been to gain access or become in charge of the Muslim properties and their mosque – which are all indicative of the clear civic, religious and therefore political purpose of the organisation. Thus, the newspaper *Terbie* was the vehicle used to convey their struggles and ideas and advance their cause. In that regard, the article makes an emphasis on the importance of education. Becoming in charge of their religious institutions and their properties is recognised by Bilyalov as a way of emancipation that would furthermore facilitate education for the youth in their community:

This [the appointment of trustees] would guarantee also the educational work of our confessional municipality so that our children come out from the university of the street and get involved in general and professional education.

We address our sincere appeal for the revival also of our Muslim school which has been existing for a number of years in Sofia and where our children would receive light, science, upbringing, education and public virtues, [all] desperately needed and good for our homeland. (ibid.)

Reading the excerpts above thus supports the idea that newspaper *Terbie* had been actively and purposefully utilised as a tool which sought to pursue the civic and political interests of the Roma at the time making it a source of great pride, “To our great joy, after heroic efforts, today we enjoy our child and Supreme patron, our enlightening source “Terbie.”” (ibid.)

Their struggles and hope continued even with the coming of a new, democratic government. And despite that their efforts remained fruitless, the author Hyusein Bilyalov

finished his article with a positive note conveying that, “The belief in us, after waiting for more than 10 years, is not yet crashed. We are waiting patiently and we are faithful!” (ibid.)

To support the idea of their conscious Muslim identification, Organisation ‘Istikbal-Future’ published in 1930 a document entitled “Moods and Truths” (DA Sofia, f. 1 K, op. 2, a.e. 831, l. 1). In that official statement, it does not reference the term *Tsigani*, i.e. Gypsies. Quite on the contrary, it clarifies the term “Gypsies” are in fact associated with “pariah” and throughout the text it refers to them instead as “old Muslims,” “poor Muslims,” “minority from Sofia” and “Muslims” (ibid.). As such, this choice of a preferred, non-Gypsy but religious or pious Muslim identity, can be seen as a clear dissociation and distancing of the damaging associations and images that Gypsies may bring but also this can be interpreted as a way to defend the Roma/Gypsy community and clear their disruptive images (Marinov 2020). The choice of the Roma from Sofia to express and employ their Muslim religion is a meaningful, civic, and political act which was aimed at access to positive outcomes in their lives. This is certainly not to be understood that they decided to adapt a new, non-Roma/Gypsy identity but rather a conscious and strategic choice which was hoped to result in the uplifting of their social status which was ultimately an effort for their civic emancipation.

About the Roma newspaper *Terbie* we learn from another source, authored by the Bulgarian scholar and writer, Nayden Sheytanov, who published an article in the Bulgarian newspaper *Mir* (one of the most read Bulgarian newspapers for its time) on May 5, 1934 (Шейтанов 1934). Sheytanov was in fact one of the earliest Bulgarian scholars reported to have endeavoured to conduct a serious and comprehensive study of the Roma in Bulgaria. His studies also encompass the period between the two world wars and, as the majority of his contemporaries, his interests were focused on studying their language, history and folklore. Sheytanov collaborated with scientists from abroad and tried to attract Bulgaria’s public’s interest and attention to the issues and problems facing the Roma.

Among other things, Sheytanov’s article is particularly useful in our topic of Romani literature because it has fleshed out some direct quotes from *Terbie’s* issue 6, published on March 4, 1934. Before we present the quotes from *Terbie*, it is integral to keep in mind that they have been brought up in a specific context and especially in support of the author’s own views and objective, which appeared to be aimed at stirring the indifference and inactivity of the Bulgarian nation at large toward the Roma. In his article “Gypsies and the Gypsy question”, Sheytanov (Шейтанов 1934) tries to urge readers to understand that the Gypsies form the largest non-Bulgarian nation and informs them that they issue their own newspaper, called *Terbie*. Yet, to Sheytanov’s disappointment, few people in Bulgaria express any genuine or serious interests in Bulgaria’s Gypsies with the exception of the “police, to whom Gypsies present a lot of work with their criminalities and to a few politicians, who used to grant and take back suffrage rights to the settled Gypsies.” (Шейтанов 1934:3)

From the selective collection of quotes that Sheytanov offers, there is a certain image about *Terbie's* visions. Its editors seem to stress on history, pride, a much-needed change of the (low) status of the Gypsies, especially in Bulgaria. Therefore, the narrative can be viewed as a call for a total Gypsy (inter)national civic organisation and uprising.

The aspect of the existence of a 'proud' history of the Gypsy identity could be inferred from references to its past. This preoccupation with 'glorious past' makes sense in the context of nation-building struggles in the Balkans. Gypsies here are referred as the "[...] offspring of the greatest King Pharaoh" (ibid.). They are therefore urged by the editors of newspaper *Terbie* that "[they] ought to proudly call [themselves] a Gypsy!" Their own traditions, too, should be not ignored but preserved as can be inferred from the quote which urges Gypsies "[not to] ignore your people, faith, traditions!" (ibid.) The idea of Gypsy pride could be also inferred from *Terbie's* quote of a great number of Gypsies according to which they number "over a quarter of a million in Bulgaria" (ibid.).

Apart from offering a certain narrative or an image of an 'ancient' Gypsy people with proud historical past and traditions and a large population, it is also one which is marred with low social status: "... since the liberation of the Bulgarian country till today, not a single Government of ours take any special care for our nation." (ibid.) "Why are the Gypsies in Turkey not at such a low social status compared to us in Bulgaria?" (ibid.)

Precisely from that recognised premise of inactivity and indifference of the Bulgarian nation and officials, the editors of *Terbie* urge for the social organisation, and uplifting of the Gypsies in Bulgaria. The original premise lies on the portrayal that Bulgaria is not doing enough for their Gypsies compared to other European nations – "In Europe, especially Austria, Hungary, Romania, Poland ... and Soviet Russia, there are law-makers who passed a number of laws for their support, both financially and cultural-educational." (ibid.) Hence, it should not be surprising to learn about *Terbie's* appeal "[...] to the Sofia Muslim Gypsies to organise themselves sooner, to give an impetus to whole of Bulgaria so that ... we have representatives who would protect our interests." (ibid.) Receiving education is certainly also recognised as integral as we are informed that "... soon, in Sofia [Gypsies] will enjoy a Turkish school." (ibid.) As such, phrases are found which indicate for the need of "[...] our [Gypsy] national revival," "[Gypsy] national movement," "Mohamedan nationalists" and "uprising of the Muslims in Sofia" (ibid.) – all indicating for the need for change, pride and organisation.

That organisation, furthermore, was not limited only to Gypsies from Sofia but throughout the country. We learn that they had associates and members across Bulgaria – "Our editorial board will send lists of stock to all our associates in Bulgaria." (ibid.). Additionally, there are indications that suggest there had been information about the Gypsies, as we saw from the quotes above, internationally such as Turkey, Austria, Poland the Soviet Union and curiously the General Mohamedan-Gypsy Union has been collaborating with "Hungarian and Romanian Gypsies" (ibid.). This highlights the wish of the organisation for greater international cooperation and for a transnational identity.

Another valuable source about *Terbie* is the editor himself, Shakir Mahmudov Pashov. He wrote a monograph entitled *History of the Gypsies in Bulgaria and in Europe. "Roma"* (in Bulgarian), which was never published (Пашов 1957) and a memoir, biography (ASR f. Шакир Пашов) which is not dated but it is assumed to have been written in 1967 (Marushiakova and Popov 2015).

In his short autobiography, Pashov presents his political and civic involvement from 1919. This work is associated with some discrepancies (ibid.) but in it Pashov writes that as a Chairman of "the Gypsy Cultural-Educational Organisation in Bulgaria" he has "founded the first Gypsy newspaper in Bulgaria, 'Terbie' (Upbringing), which advocated for the cultural and educational uplifting and for the political consciousness of our tobacco workers in Bulgaria." (ASR f. Шакир Пашов). One of the discrepancies is the vague reference of the organisation which in reality must have been called the Sofia General Muslim Educational-Cultural and Mutual Aid Organisation "Istikbal-Future" (1919) or the General Mohamedan-Gypsy National Cultural-Educational and Mutual Aid Union in Bulgaria (CSA, f. 264, op. 2, a.e. 8413, l. 15–20).

Pashov gives another reference to newspaper *Terbie* in his monograph (Пашов 1957), also unpublished. Here, Pashov paid more attention to the importance of the newspaper and we learn that its role has been regarded as significant in the organisation and uniting of Bulgaria's Roma and especially in promoting political ideas among the youth. He even describes it as the first and only Gypsy newspaper in Bulgaria and in Europe which is "issued in the name of the Gypsy minority." (Пашов 1957:108). One of the major takes from the Shakir Pashov's monograph is that *Terbie* was a source of great pride for both its visionaries, himself, his associates, such as Hyusein A. Bilyalov, and all Roma across Bulgaria.

Considering the three secondary sources presented above, the importance of *Terbie* ought to be appreciated in the context of its position as the first Bulgarian newspaper which was wholly initiated by Roma, managed by Roma and advocated for the interests of the Roma not only in Bulgaria's capital but throughout the country, regardless of their perceived differences. It sought to pursue and promote its interests and agenda, disseminate ideas, and inspire civic and political consciousness. On the whole, the newspaper was a Gypsy/Roma in its core and character and it stressed its vision for the right, equal and peaceful co-existence with the rest of the Bulgarian nation, and its interest in participating in the political and civic life of the country.

2.4 Conclusion

From the presented Roma publications in this chapter, we could discern the emergence and existence of translations in Romani language of books of the Bible, religious hymns, publishing a booklet by the Roma churchgoers from Golinsti in 1926, as well the Roma newspapers *Candlestick* in 1927 and *Terbie* in 1933–1934. Overall, these publications acted

as a platform for expression of the experiences of the Roma but also for their recognition, social positions, and needs. Translations of Gospels in Romani language, as well as religious songs, gave way for the recognition of the Romani language and were examples of some of its earliest (re)presentation in print form. It is also unique to see the publishing of the Evangelical song collection *Roma Holy Songs* in 1933 which represented an original creative work of Romani language poetry writing.

The publishing of the Romani literature in Bulgaria was a public expression of the interests and visions of the Roma in the country from the interwar period. For example, we saw how the struggle of the Gypsy Baptist churchgoers in the village of Golinsti to form an independent church and the experienced injustice led them to write and publish a small booklet. In the example of the Muslims from Sofia, Roma have been excluded from the general context of the Muslim community in Sofia. The two cases may have been different in their actual visions and interests; however, they are similar in the way Roma have decided to express publicly their fervent passions, frustration, interests, and what they have perceived as social injustice. In both cases, the actual publishing, printing, and reprinting of these events are a clear demonstration of active civic consciousness.

All these publications offered a unique chance for the Gypsies to express themselves, their visions, interests, and the way they would like to be considered in the Bulgarian society. Thus, reading and interpreting these documents, we could understand that, regardless of their sometimes differing identities, they retained their Roma identities while their visions for emancipation were not in opposition to the general Bulgarian society. In fact, Roma have professed their desire to be a part of Bulgarian society. This points to their functioning as part of both the community and the wider society to which they belong (Marushiakova 2008). In the case of the Protestant Roma, the religion did not try to obliterate their ethnicity but on the contrary, it conveyed that they are 'better Gypsies' because of their knowledge of the religion and by knowing how to live in accordance with the tenets of the Protestantism. *Terbie* and its parent organisations in fact sought to advocate for the interests of all Roma, regardless of their differences, and to unite them under one organisation. As a whole, both the instances presented in the Protestant Roma publications and in *Terbie* (which was originally framed within the Muslim faith) should be interpreted as seized opportunities in which Roma voices were made manifest. These were utilised not in opposition to being 'Bulgarian' but rather as channels through which they could assert their position, elevate their social status, get recognition and ultimately pursue their civic interests.