

# **“Tabitha”: The First Baptist Women’s Association in Zagreb**

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**Summary** *The article investigates the beginning in 1937 of the Women’s Association “Tabitha” within the Baptist church of Zagreb and its later work. The key role in the founding of “Tabitha” was played by the Russian Lidija Kalmikova from Belgrade. The first president of “Tabitha” was Janja Baluban, and two other prominent Baptist women from Zagreb were local Russians Aleksandra Švast and Aleksandra Filipović. Other significant women of this period were Rozi Lovrec, Fani Lovrec, Katarina Gasteiger, Beti Bajš, Jozefina Vincetić, Marija Bistrović and Paula Dudović. The article addresses the structure and regulations of the Association, key events, activities, meetings, sermons, theological characteristics, visits to sister associations in the country in the period before and during the Second World War. The Association ceased with its activities and stopped functioning sometime after the end of the Second World War for no discernable reasons.*

*The study affords an insight into a significant aspect of existence and work of a minority religious community in Zagreb. It has made use of all available sources of information, such as written sources (meetings’ minutes, letters, reports, articles), oral sources (recollections from interviews) and photographs.*

## Introduction

The first Baptists appeared in Croatia in the second half of the twentieth century,<sup>1</sup> while a Baptist church existed in Zagreb from the last decade of that century.<sup>2</sup> After the stagnation during the First World War, the Baptist work was revived through the arrival in Zagreb of several Baptists from other parts of Croatia, and particularly through the arrival of Vinko Vacek in Zagreb in 1927. Vacek had served as the President of the Baptist Union in the Kingdom of the Serbs, Croats and Slovenians (later Yugoslavia) from 1922. With the opening of new Baptist churches and their growth, after some time the need arose for organising a ministry within local churches which would gather female Baptist believers around the questions and forms of activity which held special relevance and significance for them.

After a brief overview of the wider context of women's (or sisters') work in Croatia and Yugoslavia, this article focuses on the emergence and development of women's work in the Zagreb Baptist Church (ZBC), its main proponents, key events and activities, hardships during the Second World War and the inexplicable temporary discontinuation of this work after the end of the Second World War. The study has made use of all existing sources, both written (minutes, letters, reports, articles) and oral (recollections, interviews) and photographs.

## Lidija Kalmikova and women's Baptist work in Yugoslavia

Women's Baptist work in Yugoslavia existed in some form among ethnic German and Slovak Baptists already in early 1920s.<sup>3</sup> The incentive for the development of

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<sup>1</sup> J. D. Hopper, „A History of Baptists in Yugoslavia: 1862-1962“. Unpublished PhD dissertation. Forth Worth: Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, 1977.; Josip Horak, *Baptisti: povijest i načela vjerovanja*. [Baptists: History and Principles of Faith] Zagreb: Duhovna stvarnost, 1989.; Stanko Jambrek, *Crkve reformacijske baštine u Hrvatskoj*. [The Churches of the Reformation Tradition in Croatia] Zagreb: Bogoslovni Institut, 2003.; Juraj Kolarić: *Povijest kršćanstva u Hrvata*, [The History of Christianity among Croats] – Part two *Kršćani na drugi način (Heterodoksne kršćanske zajednice, sljedbe i vjerski pokreti)* [Christians in Another Way – Heterodox Christian Communities, Sects and Religious Movements] 2004. The most extensive source on the history of Baptists is Ruben Knežević, *Pregled povijesti baptizma na hrvatskom prostoru*. [A Survey of the History of Baptists in Croatian Lands]. Osijek: Baptistički Institut, 2001.

<sup>2</sup> More on the beginnings of Baptist work in Zagreb see in “Počeci baptističke crkve u Zagrebu 1870.-1921.“ [The Beginnings of the Baptist Church in Zagreb] *Časopis za suvremenu povijest* 2 (2006): 523-548, also in the article “Baptistička crkva u Zagrebu: Rane godine (1921. – 1927.)” [The Baptist Church in Zagreb: Early Years] which will be printed in the same journal.

<sup>3</sup> From its inception the mission journal published by German Baptists in Yugoslavia *Evangeliumsbote* contained the column “Sisters' Greeting”. In No 1 from 1924 it mentions the Association of women and girls. The wife of Jozef Turoczija, who was the pioneer of the Baptist work among Slovaks, writes: “We want to be the sweet scent unto the Lord (Jn 12:3) like the one in Bethany. We

women's work in all churches belonging to the Baptist Union was given by Emma Geraldine Gill,<sup>4</sup> the wife of Everett W. Gill (the older)<sup>5</sup> (1869-1958), the European representative for the Foreign Mission Board of the Southern Baptist Convention. Emma Gill had served as a missionary in Romania as early<sup>6</sup> as 1925.<sup>7</sup> However, the women's work in Yugoslavia really only picked up in the 1930s. The major engine of this development was a Russian<sup>8</sup> Lidija Platonova Kalmikova (? , Russia – 1944., Belgrade)<sup>9</sup> who fled the Soviet Union with her husband during the civil war 1918-1919. After having spent several years in Mostar in Herzegovina, the couple moved to Belgrade in 1929 where Kalmikova founded a Baptist church. According to the recollections of her daughter Nina (1921., Mostar - ) (later through marriage adopted the name Horak), Kalmikova was in her deathbed in

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invite all women and girls to donate 5 din. for women's work."

<sup>4</sup> The existing written sources do not mention her name. It can be found in Truett's biography in Spanish: Gabino Fernandez, "Everett W. Gill," [http://www.clie.es/?page=shop/author&author\\_id=154&ps\\_session=12ce703400046e0b6ab7ca74098b062a](http://www.clie.es/?page=shop/author&author_id=154&ps_session=12ce703400046e0b6ab7ca74098b062a), accessed 31 October 2007.

<sup>5</sup> There was also Everett Gill (1901-1954) the younger who also served as a Baptist minister and missionary in Europe although it is not clear if they were related. He married Rachel Truex in 1928. *Encyclopedia of Southern Baptists I*, Broadman Press, Nashville, Tennessee, 1958, 559-560. This information was sent to the author by Rut Lehotsky in an email of 11 October 2007. It is interesting that the sister of this Everett Gill was called Emma Agee. <http://archiver.rootsweb.com/th/read/MOHOWARD/2003-05/1054430430> accessed 31 October 2007. These coincidences create certain confusion over the identity of Everett and Emma Gill who were active in the Balkans in the 1920s and 1930s.

<sup>6</sup> Romanian Baptist historian Istvan Gergely records that the first Baptist groups of Hungarian background women and girls in Transylvania were organized at the initiative of Emma Gill as early as 1922. By the end of 1924 there were over sixty such groups and in 1925 they united in the Union of Hungarian Baptist women in Transylvania. An email from Ian Randall to the author of 16 October 2007.

<sup>7</sup> In a report from the meeting of the Yugoslavian Baptist Union in Daruvar from 6 to 8 September 1925 G. Lotz records that "Sister Gill spoke in the afternoon from 3 to 4 pm. about the ministry of a faithful woman. She drew special attention to the fact that the faithful woman can do much for her Lord and her neighbour, even though she is the weaker member and has limited resources... It is essential that our sisters in different congregations unite unto common work, to collect and offer for licitation their handiworks and other items, prepared for the Lord, in order to use the funds raised in this way to support the sick, the poor and mission." *Evangeliumsbote 10* (1925): 3-4. An email from Rut Lehotski to the author of 13 September 2007.

<sup>8</sup> An extensive study about all Russian men and women who gave their contribution to the development of the Baptist church in Yugoslavia from the beginning until today, including those mentioned in this article, are available in "Was There a Formative Russian Influence on Yugoslav Baptists?" *Religion, State and Society* 36/1 (2008): 65-104.

<sup>9</sup> An article is in preparation which will deal with the life of Lidija Kalmikova in light of existing sources and supplementary material obtained from Nina Horak, Lidija's daughter.

1931 when she pledged to God that she would work for him more fervently if she lived. At her initiative the association of Baptist women was founded in the Belgrade Baptist church (BCB) in 1933. It actively collected money for supporting the poor but also for meeting various needs within BCB. The Baptist women of Belgrade held prayer meetings, conducted Bible studies lead by Kalmikova, organised bazaars at which they sold items which they had made themselves and in this way collected much needed funds. The Minutes of the Association of Baptist women of BCB provides a plastic and detailed outline of their activities and contains many Kalmikova's inspirational spiritual messages.<sup>10</sup>

Kalmikova also encouraged the founding of women's associations in other Baptist churches often in the face of lack of understanding and resentment by the (male) local church leaders.<sup>11</sup> In 1936 she published a letter in *Glas evanđelja* [Voice of the Gospel], the official publication of the Baptist Union, in which she invited all female Baptists in Yugoslavia to establish such associations in their churches.<sup>12</sup> She kept on publishing similar exhortations in the following years. In September and October 1937 Kalmikova, accompanied with the President of the Union Vinko Vacek, visited a larger number of Baptist churches and established women's associations in them.<sup>13</sup> Vacek eagerly supported the establishment of these women's associations, and the Foreign Mission Board of the Southern Baptist Convention provided certain financial support for the Kalmikova's activity.<sup>14</sup>

The number of Baptist women's associations continued to grow steadily. As the women's ministry developed, the need presented itself for establishing an umbrella organisation for the purpose of mutual support and the overall coordination of work. For this reason the Women's Association within the Baptist Union of Yugoslavia was established on 29 May 1939 in the village of Cerna. One of the people present at the occasion was Irma Trutza (25 May 1902 – 4 August 1992),<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> The author has been able to consult the Minute book of the BC Belgrade Women's association and other documents and letters related to L Kalmikova and her ministry. These materials were supplied by Danijel Vidović from Belgrade. The copy of the whole collection is with the author.

<sup>11</sup> J. A. Moore, "Yugoslavia," 33 typewritten pages size A4, no date but probably from 1956, 23.

<sup>12</sup> *GE* 5-6 (1936): 59.

<sup>13</sup> *GE* 8-9 (1937): 67-68. Also the letter from Betti Bajcs to Marija [Andriček] sent from Golubinjak, undated. A copy kept by the author.

<sup>14</sup> Minutes of the Baptist Women's Association ZBC of 3 August 1937. A copy kept by the author.

<sup>15</sup> This American, real name Earle Hester, spent some time as a Southern Baptist Union FMB missionary in Romania and then married the Romanian Baptist leader Peter Trutza (15 June 1910 – 3 March 1987) Emails from Daniel Mariş, the grandson of Peter Trutza, to the author of 16 October 2007 and 3 November 2007. The existing sources call her Irma Trutza or Earle Hester. Only J. A. Moore in his report mentions Earle Hester Trutza. George W. Sadler, J. D. Franks, W. Dewey Moore, J. D. Hughey, John Allen Moore, Europe – *Whither Bound? A Symposium. Telling of Southern*

the Director of the Mission school for girls in Bucharest in Romania. Certain later reports of the event, some authored even by people who took part in the founding of the Association, mention that Trutza had come to Cerna in order to found the Association,<sup>16</sup> but this is incorrect. She only came as an esteemed representative of the wider international network of Baptist women's work which the Yugoslavian Baptist women joined when they founded their national Association.

Kalmikova was elected first President and Janja Baluban<sup>17</sup> (b. Dobutović) (31 May 1894, Andrijaševci - 18 February 1975, Andrijaševci)<sup>18</sup> Vice President. Baluban had moved to Zagreb after the end of the Second World War and on 4 December 1923 got married<sup>19</sup> to Josip Baluban (21 August 1884, Donja Vlahinička - 1 September 1975, Andrijaševci).<sup>20</sup> That was the first wedding in Zagreb conducted according to the Baptist rite. Until the Vacek's permanent move to Zagreb at the end of 1927 Josip Baluban served as the President of the ZBC Assembly.<sup>21</sup> Rozi Lovrec (b. Vacek) (later married Forbes) (4. November 1911, St. Louis, USA<sup>22</sup> - 17. March 2005, London) was elected to take minutes and her sister Fani

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*Baptist Missionary Work in Italy, Spain, and the Balkan States – Hungary and Yugoslavia.* Nashville, Tennessee: Broadman, 1951., 134. It is not clear if Irma is a second name of Earle Hester's or if Earle Hester adopted the name Irma after the marriage to Trutza. Earle Hester had been in contact with Yugoslavian Baptist women. Lidija Kalmikova made a note in the Minutes of the Association of Baptist women in Belgrade of 8 March 1936 that "sister Ester from Bucharest" was willing to send monthly programmes for women's meetings in Belgrade.

<sup>16</sup> That is the working of the Minutes of the Association of Baptist women in Belgrade of 31 May 1939 signed by Vilma Zbořil. Zbořil incorrectly states that "sister Irma" comes from Bulgaria.

<sup>17</sup> According to the "Popis članova Zagrebačke crkv. Općine 1930. g." ("Popis 1930") [The List of the Members of CBZ from 1930 (List 1930)] No. 14 Janja Baluban was baptized in 1907. This list is not dated but is placed in the ZBC Minute book between entries for 12 January 1930 and 12 February 1930.

<sup>18</sup> The relevant information from the Registry in Andrijaševci was sent to the autor by David Dobutović on 11 October 2007.

<sup>19</sup> GE 7 (1924): 60.

<sup>20</sup> The relevant information from the Registry in Andrijaševci was sent to the autor by David Dobutović on 11 October 2007.

<sup>21</sup> See: D. Peterlin, "Baptistička crkva u Zagrebu: Rane godine (1921 – 1927)".

<sup>22</sup> "Članovi baptističke crkvene općine Zagreb (1942)," [Members of the ZBC (1042)] No. 10. Large size notebook, six pages, entries handwritten and numbered. The first part of the list, dated 1942, was compiled probably by Vaclav Zbořil, the pastor of ZBC at the time, and the second part, from 1946, which is inferred from the information, was added by Franjo Klem. The author has the original.

Lovrec<sup>23</sup> (b. Vacek) (later married Matetić) (8. September 1913, Detroit, USA<sup>24</sup> -)<sup>25</sup> as her stand-in. Both were Vinko Vacek's daughters.

The activity of the Yugoslavia-wide Association developed quickly and Kalmikova stayed in contact with local female leaders through correspondence. She also often visited local associations. Since she worked full-time in a Belgrade hospital, she often travelled from Belgrade by train on Friday evening and returned on Monday morning directly to work.<sup>26</sup> In addition, Kalmikova arranged visits of women's associations to each other, visitations of well-known speakers and the country-wide women's prayer week. She published regular reports about the work of women's associations in *Glas evanđelja* and in 1940 she reported that women's associations had been established in many places and that they "now existed in almost all [Baptist] churches".<sup>27</sup> The Second World War had a negative effect on the Baptist women's work, as it did on the work of many Baptist churches which were temporarily closed in some parts of Yugoslavia and their meetings suspended. In spite of that, Kalmikova faithfully continued to fulfill her ministry. She was killed in the Allied bombing of Belgrade in 1944.

### **Lidija Kalmikova and the founding of the Women's association in the Zagreb Baptist Church**

The existing sources about the early history of ZBC contain no mention of separate women's work.<sup>28</sup> There is, though, an almost accidental statement by Janja Baluban from 1937 in which she observes that the women of ZBC had longed for the establishment of women's work for a long time against the background of many obstacles. Baluban also refers to "many hardships and difficult temptations, which the enemy of our souls had brought on us".<sup>29</sup> In the absence of other information, and taking into account the picturesque language common to Baluban as witnessed in her numerous preserved letters, it does seem that this colourful

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<sup>23</sup> "Prva konferencija Udruženja sestara. Cerna, 29. V. 1939." [The First Conference of the Women's Association]. Minutes, three typewritten pages.

<sup>24</sup> "Članovi (1942)" No. 12.

<sup>25</sup> Fani Lovrec was baptized on 23 May 1926 in Daruvar. "Članovi 1930" No. 13; "Članovi (1942)" No. 12.

<sup>26</sup> Moore, "Yugoslavia," 24-25.

<sup>27</sup> *GE* 1-2 (1940): 12.

<sup>28</sup> *Evangeliumsbote* 5 (1924) provides statistical information for the whole Baptist Union in 1923. There is a list of female Baptists according to the ethnic background. German congregations, Novi Sad, 89 women and girls; Slovak congregations, Bački Petrovac, 34; Croatian congregations, Zagreb \_; Hungarian congregations, Svilojevo, 11.

<sup>29</sup> The letter from J. Baluban to L. Kalmikova of 26 October 1937.

statement has a primarily hortative-spiritual force, and that it cannot be interpreted literally.<sup>30</sup>

There exist several documents which testify to the founding of the women's work in ZBC.<sup>31</sup> They make clear that Kalmikova visited BCZ between 28 and 30 September 1937 in order to give an impetus to the establishment of women's work.<sup>32</sup> In a later report Baluban described how the Lord saw their wishes and prayers and answered to them positively. "In the same way as Paul came to Macedonia," so did the beloved sister Lidija Kalmikova from Belgrade come to them. The Lord had sent her in the right time from the faraway Russia.<sup>33</sup> A special meeting of the women of BCZ was convened on 3 August 1937 at which Kalmikova presented a paper on the work and ministry of women in the time of Jesus and in the time of the early church. She argued that it was Mary Magdalene who was the first missionary because she was commissioned by the resurrected Jesus himself to take the Good news of his resurrection to other followers of his. Jesus' paradigmatic commission to Mary is an example which is the root of the ministry of contemporary Christian women. This hortative and slightly apologetic address by Kalmikova was supported by examples. Here is one:

In one place in the Holy Scriptures it is said that "a woman must be silent." "Indeed," says sister Lidija, "a woman must be silent, but where?" What did the Apostle Paul want to say by that; must she be silent there where she might bring testimony for her Saviour, must she be silent there where a kind word of consolation might bring peace to the despondent heart?"<sup>34</sup>

In her speech Kalmikova advocated the ministry of women inside church which was practical in nature. One of her illustrations highlighted the sacrificial attitude of a Baptist woman from a village: "Every egg laid by the hen on Sunday, or milk milked of a cow on Sunday, she sacrifices for the work of the Lord." However, the actual forms of the women's ministry depend on the circumstances of respective local congregations:

A need appears which must be met with money. The church's treasury chest is

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<sup>30</sup> The minutes of the the Women's association in Belgrade of 16 August 1936 note that the bazaar planned in Zagreb was postponed.

<sup>31</sup> They are: handwritten letter from J. Baluban to L. Kalmikova of 25 October 1937.; same letter but slightly corrected and typed and dated 26 October 1937; the already mentioned report from J. Baluban published in GE; a postcard from J. Baluban to L. Kalmikova of 28 October 1937; handwritten letter from R. Lovrec to L. Kalmikova (with the photograph) and the sermon by J. Baluban which was subsequently published in GE of 18 August 1937; and the minutes of the founding meeting compiled by R. Lovrec.

<sup>32</sup> Minutes of the Women's association in Belgrade, 17 October 1937.

<sup>33</sup> GE 8-10 (1938): 57.

<sup>34</sup> Minutes the Women's Association in Zagreb of 3 August 1937.

empty of poor, so it can not be relied upon for assistance. This is where sisters will be able to do their duty. They will organise the presentation of handcraft or other events, such as tombola, bingo, etc., and will earn a hefty sum of money.<sup>35</sup>

After the address, and proposed by Kalmikova, the resolution was adopted to found the Women's association. The leadership was elected and their duties defined and agreed. Janja Baluban was elected first President of the Women's association at ZBC. "The President has the duty to the overall functioning of the Association, take care of each member; educate them in love, make sure that there is Bible exposition at every meeting of the Association." Rozi Lovrec was elected Secretary. She was particularly suitable for this duty as she was proficient in shorthand. "Her duty is to take minutes of all that is said in the meetings and to conduct correspondence with other associations in the country in an orderly fashion." Aleksandra Filipović (b. Mihajlovna Černozubova) (21. May 1899, Kalachinsk, Russia - 10. december 1961, Zagreb) was elected treasurer. She was a Russian from Omsk in Siberia who married a Croatian Nikola Filipović during his imprisonment.<sup>36</sup> She was baptised in Omsk in 1915,<sup>37</sup> joined ZBC around 1931 and became member in 1934 by recognition of her earlier baptism. "Her duty is to make sure that membership fee or voluntary contributions are collected on time, and keep a correct log of all outcomes and incomes." Betika Baiss (Beti (real name Bara) Bajš, Bais) (17 December 1902, Dubrovčan, Zabok<sup>38</sup> – 28 Sep-

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<sup>35</sup> Minutes the Women's Association in Zagreb of 3 August 1937.

<sup>36</sup> More on Filipović in addition to the mentioned article see also in D. Peterlin, "How I Researched my Grandmother and what I Found: Challenges and Avenues in Researching Baptist History in Eastern Europe." Sharyl Corrado and Toivo Pilli, eds., *Eastern European Baptist History: New Perspectives*. Prague: International Baptist Theological Seminary, 2007, 224-235; D. Peterlin, "Dva vjenčanja. Prilog povijesti ruskih emigranata u Hrvatskoj" [Two Weddings. A Contribution to the History of Russian Immigrants in Croatia] *Hrvatska revija* 2 (2007): 116-121.; D. Peterlin, "Was there a Formative Russian Influence on Yugoslav Baptists?" *Religion, State and Society* 1 (2008): 54-114.

<sup>37</sup> "Članovi (1942)".

<sup>38</sup> According to the list "Članovi (1942)" No. 13 she was born on 17 February 1902. in Zagreb. Agenda supplies the information that she was born near Maribor. All these information are incorrect. The next note.



tember 1978, Karlovac<sup>39)</sup><sup>40</sup> was elected Vice President.<sup>41</sup>

The same meeting determined criteria for membership in the Association: "Membership in the Association is open only to sisters who are also members of the local church. Membership is also open to friends who are regular attendees of church services, but they do not have the right to take part in business meetings nor in the closed prayer meetings".<sup>42</sup> The designation "friend" was the term used in Baptist churches in Croatia which had been used from earliest times to describe a sympathiser, i.e. a person who regularly attends church services but who has not yet converted nor has been baptised on the basis of her or his personal faith.

### **The establishment of the Women's association "Tabitha"**

The ZBC Women's work was formally established on 10 August 1937 at the meeting of the Zagreb Baptist women and without Lidija Kalimkova. In her letter to Kalmikova R. Lovrec specifies that there were 29 members, that is 24 sisters and five "friends".<sup>43</sup> The meeting commenced with the short exposition of Acts 2:17-18 as an introduction to the time of prayer. The name of the speaker is not recorded but it must have been Baluban. Prayer was followed by the registration in the book of members and the discussion about the title of the Association. Of the two proposals, "Lidija" and "Tabitha," the latter was chosen. It was also agreed that the meetings of the Association would take place every second Sunday a month<sup>44</sup> after the church service, and that no membership fee would be collected due to the significant number of poor members, but only voluntary contributions. In addition to the already elected four officials, the newly constituted executive board included<sup>45</sup> also Jozefina Vincetić (b. Knitl) (13 July 1893, Trojeglava

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<sup>39</sup> All these information are copied from her identity card and are taken as correct. They were supplied by Ladislav Ružička on 15 October 2007.

<sup>40</sup> Beti Bajs requested to be admitted into the membership of the ZBC on 10 June 1931 but it was decided to postpone her admittance and baptism for later until she is more fully acquainted with the Word of God. The Minutes of the ZBC of 10 June 1931. The Minutes of the ZBC of 26 August 1931 record that Bajs was admitted into membership at the previous Assembly. She was baptised on 3 August 1927 in Zagreb. 3 October 1930. According to the information from Ladislav Ružička, Bajs was a divorcee, but it is not known when she was married.

<sup>41</sup> Minutes the Women's Association in Zagreb of 3 August 1937.

<sup>42</sup> Minutes the Women's Association in Zagreb of 3 August 1937.

<sup>43</sup> The letter from R. Lovrec to L. Kalmikova of 18 October 1937.

<sup>44</sup> R. Lovrec writes in her letter to Kalmikova that the meetings will be held twice a month. The letter from R. Lovrec to L. Kalmikova of 18 October 1937.

<sup>45</sup> Minutes the Women's Association in Zagreb of 10 August 1937.

near Daruvar – ?, Zagreb),<sup>46</sup> Marija Bistrović (b. Moravec) (2 December 1886, Hlavečnik, Czech Republic<sup>47</sup> – ?, Zagreb)<sup>48</sup> and Katarina Gasteiger (Gaštajger). Although not recorded in the Minute book, in her letter to Kalmikova R. Vacek also mentions the decision about the possible future founding of a choir.<sup>49</sup>

This occasion was captured on the photograph which R. Vacek later sent to Kalmikova and which was subsequently published in *Glas evanđelja* alongside the report about the founding of “Tabitha”.<sup>50</sup> The photograph features twenty five women and two girls squatting in front of them, Olga Vacek (1928(?) - ?)<sup>51</sup> and Elizabeta (Lela) Bistrović (later married Gruić) (23 November 1928, Zagreb<sup>52</sup> - )<sup>53</sup>, and holding a plaque with the text: “‘Tabitha’ The First Association of Baptist Women in Zagreb 1937.” Women sitting in the first row, from left to right, are: Noemi Hoffman<sup>54</sup> (Naomi, Neomi; Croatised as Noemija Hofman) (31 July 1865, “Južna Leverton, Engleska”<sup>55</sup> [South Leverton, Nottinghamshire] - ?, England?), Jozefina (b. Peterlin) Matečić (later married Bistrović) (19 March 1896., Ojstro, Hrastnik, Slovenia - ?)<sup>56</sup>, Ana Vasiljevna Solovjeva (13 March 1869, Petrograd, Russia – 20 November 1941, Zagreb<sup>57</sup>),<sup>58</sup> Janja Baluban, Aleksandra Filipović, Katarina Gasteiger, Aleksandra Švast (b. Petrovna Sokol) (2 November 1899,

<sup>46</sup> Jozefina Vincetić was baptized on 26 January 1921. in Daruvaru “Članovi (1942)” No. 2.

<sup>47</sup> “Članovi (1942)” No. 4.

<sup>48</sup> According to “Članovi (1942)” No. 4 Marija Bistrović was baptized in 1926. in Zagreb.

<sup>49</sup> The letter from R. Lovrec to L. Kalmikova of 18 October 1937.

<sup>50</sup> The photograph is kept by the author.

<sup>51</sup> According to the Minutes the Women’s Association in Zagreb Olga Vacek was admitted into the membership of the ZBC on 10 February 1935.

<sup>52</sup> “Članovi (1942)” No. 59.

<sup>53</sup> According to “Članovi (1942)” No. 59 Elizabeta Bistrović was baptised on 13 August 1945 in Zagreb.

<sup>54</sup> Hoffman was a a teacher of English but she conversed with Filipović in Russian. She came from a Lutheran background and was admitted into the membership of the ZBC on 13 September 1938. (The Minutes of the ZBC of that date.). The report about the baptismal service published on 18 September 1938 states that the seventy-three years old English woman, baptised first, came to the bank of the river Sava “as if going to her wedding”. [V. V.] “Zagreb” *Glas evanđelja* 8-9 (1938): 54. “Članovi (1942)” No. 34 records incorrectly that Hoffman was baptised in 1937. The same source records that Hoffman moved to England during the Second World War.

<sup>55</sup> “Članovi (1942)” No. 34.

<sup>56</sup> “Članovi (1942)” No. 23.

<sup>57</sup> “Članovi (1942)” No. 36.

<sup>58</sup> For more information about Solovjeva see D. Peterlin, “Mirogoj između Rusije i Amerike” [A Cemetery Between Russia and America]. Irena Lukšić, ed., *Ruski emigranti u Hrvatskoj*. Zagreb: Hrvatsko filološko društvo, 2006, 289-297.

Rostov, Russia – 1986, Chicago, USA),<sup>59</sup> Terezija Zrinščak (1964, Šandrovci, Međimurje – 1 February 1944, Zagreb)<sup>60</sup>. Women standing in the second row, from left to right, are: X, Elizabeta (married) Perhoč<sup>61</sup> (17 October 1895, Po[d]turen, Čakovec<sup>62</sup> - ?), Paula Dudović (2 January 1901, Sisak<sup>63</sup> - ?), Terezija Gregl (28 September 1895, Griže, Celje<sup>64</sup> - ?)<sup>65</sup>, Sofija (b. Pobjoljšaj) Peterlin (20 May 1904, Svibno, Slovenia – 1998, Čakovec<sup>66</sup>)<sup>67</sup>, X, Marija Bistrović, Sida Artner (later married Klem) (17 June 1917, Žiškovac, Čakovec<sup>68</sup> - 28 August 1988, Andernach, Germany)<sup>69</sup>. Women standing in the third row, from left to right, are: Zlata (Lala) Lovrec (later married Kramar) (2 November 1893, Zagreb<sup>70</sup> - ?)<sup>71</sup>, Magda

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<sup>59</sup> According to "Članovi (1942)" No. 37 Švast was baptised in the Crimea in 1920, and according to the Minutes of the ZBC of 1 August 1937 she was admitted into the membership of the ZBC on the same date. For more information on the activity of Švast see "Was There a Formative Russian Influence on Yugoslav Baptists?" *Religion, State and Society 1* (2008): 65-104 and in the forthcoming article on the history of the ZBC 1939 – 1945.

<sup>60</sup> "Članovi (1942)" No. 24. Zrinščak was baptized in 1904. "Članovi (1942)" No. 23; "Članovi 1930" No. 9.

<sup>61</sup> "Jelisava Prhoč" was admitted into the membership of the ZBC on 1 August 1937. The Minutes of the ZBC of 1 August 1937. The list "Članovi (1942)" No. 17 records incorrectly that she was baptised in 1936.

<sup>62</sup> "Članovi (1942)" No. 17.

<sup>63</sup> "Članovi (1942)" No. 54. It is possible that P. Dudović was born in Sisak but there is also a possibility that she was born elsewhere. The part of the list "Članovi (1942)" with her entry was written by V. Zbořil who as a Czech may not have known Croatian geography well or who misunderstood given information or incorrectly remembered the name of the town in which P. Dudović was born. Taking into account the ties between the Dudović family and Rijeka it is conceivable that P. Dudović was not born in Sisak but in Sušak. See the note about Katarina Dudović.

<sup>64</sup> "Članovi (1942)" No. 47.

<sup>65</sup> According to "Članovi (1942)" No. 47 Terezija Gregl was baptised on 8 September 1934 in Zagreb.

<sup>66</sup> The information received from the son Vinko Peterlin on 2 October 2007 in Zagreb.

<sup>67</sup> Sofija Peterlin was baptised originally in the Adventist church, and according to the Minutes of the ZBC of 26 August 1931 she was admitted into the membership of the ZBC on the same date on the basis of her testimony. The information from "Članovi (1942)" No. 62 about her baptism in August 1932 is incorrect.

<sup>68</sup> "Članovi (1942)" No. 18.

<sup>69</sup> According to the Minutes of the ZBC of 17 September 1936 Sida Artner was admitted into the membership of the ZBC on that date and was baptized on 13 September 1936 in Zagreb. The information from "Članovi (1942)" No. 18 that she was baptised in 1937 is incorrect.

<sup>70</sup> "Članovi (1942)" No. 43.

<sup>71</sup> According to the Minutes of the ZBC of 13 September 1938 Zlata Lovrec was admitted into the membership of the ZBC on that date. According to "Članovi (1942)" No. 43 she was baptised in 1939.

(b. Japec) Vukonić (19 January 1898, Marija Bistrica<sup>72</sup> - ?)<sup>73</sup>, Ana (Ankica) Lovrec (20 August 1908, Bačuga<sup>74</sup> - ?)<sup>75</sup>, Micika Gasteiger (1917/1918<sup>76</sup> - ?)<sup>77</sup>, Beti Bajcs, Regina Klem (later married Balog) (16 February 1919, Karavukovo<sup>78</sup> - ?)<sup>79</sup>, Elsie (Elizabeta) Vacek<sup>80</sup> (later married Horak) (24 March 1917, Detroit, USA<sup>81</sup> - 24 August 1997, Zagreb), Rozi Lovrec, Vikica Gregl (1923(?) - ) (Terezija's daughter). The seating arrangement is significant. The President and Treasurer as leaders sit in the centre of the first row. Other women who sit in the same row are either women with relatively long standing as Baptists (Matečić, Gasteiger, Švast) or are women of advanced age (Hoffman, Solovjeva, Zrinščak). It is also worth noting that all three local Russians (Solovjeva, Filipović, Švast) sit in the first row.

### The first five months of "Tabitha's" activity

Relatively much is known about the first four months of "Tabitha's" activity because the records of the meetings from that period have been preserved. However, this source would be more useful for the reconstruction of the beginnings of the women's work in Zagreb if in addition to spiritual messages and sermons it also contained other practical details or discussions.

The first business meeting of the newly established executive board was held on 15 August 1937 in the Baluban flat in Masarykova 3. The main topic was the structure of the future meetings. It was decided that in additional meeting there would be a special prayer meeting and a special evangelistic meeting. Mediation

<sup>72</sup> "Članovi (1942)" No. 20.

<sup>73</sup> According to "Članovi (1942)" No. 20, Magda Vukonić was baptised in 1923. in Daruvar. Ledger records that Magda Japec from Marija Bistrica was born in 1901, and that she admitted into the Baptist congregation in Ivanovopolje on 31 May 1923.

<sup>74</sup> "Članovi (1942)" No. 44.

<sup>75</sup> According to "Članovi (1942)" No. 44 Ana was baptised in Bačuga on 27 July 1924.

<sup>76</sup> The Minutes of the ZBC of 17 September 1936.

<sup>77</sup> According to the Minutes of the ZBC of 7 September 1936. she was admitted into the membership of the ZBC on that date.

<sup>78</sup> "Članovi (1942)" No. 30.

<sup>79</sup> According to the Minutes of the ZBC of 1 August 1937 Regina Klem was admitted into the membership of the ZBC on that date. According to "Članovi (1942)" No. 30 she was baptised in 1937 in Zagreb, and in 194? She got married and moved to Novi Sad.

<sup>80</sup> Elizabeta Vacek was baptized on 3 August 1931 in Zagreb. "Članovi (1942)" No. 8; also Agenda. She was admitted into the membership of the ZBC on 26 August 1931. The Minutes of the ZBC of 26 August 1931.

<sup>81</sup> "Članovi (1942)" No. 8.

in the quarrel between two pairs of women was also agreed upon.<sup>82</sup>

The first regular meeting occurred on 17 August 1937. It was a prayer meeting at which two hymns were sung, Nos. 194 and 188, from the Baptist hymnal *Pjesnik vjere: Pjesme za uporabu u skupštini i domu*<sup>83</sup> [The Singer of Faith: Hymns for the Use in the Congregation and at Home]. Baluban then preached on the basis of Mt. 20:1-16 and 1 Cor. 13:4-8. The stress was on pure personal life supported by the illustration of "the garden of the heart" which requires conscientious care. The Minutes do not mention other details of the meeting but in her letter to Kalmikova Baluban described the meeting and added: "All of us prayed to the Lord (except one), and our friends prayed for the first time, there were sisters present who had not prayed for years in the congregation, and now they prayed".<sup>84</sup>

Later meetings followed the same pattern. The meeting of 22 November 1937 commenced with the hymn 139 after which Baluban preached on the basis of Song of Solomon 1:1-9 about the fear of God.<sup>85</sup> The next two entries only contain the number of the hymn, Scriptural text and the summary of Baluban's sermon: hymn 216 and Rim.12:1-2, 6,13-14 for the meeting on 19 December 1937,<sup>86</sup> and hymn 115 and Psalm 115 for the meeting of 9 January 1938.<sup>87</sup>

A meeting entitled "A closed prayer meeting in the presence of brethren" also took place in this period on 28 November 1937. It is not known which brethren were present, but it was probably a meeting open to all members of ZBC. It was again Baluban who preached on this occasion on the basis of Eph 5:16 and Mt. 9:2. The sermon puts emphasis on the care of and prayer for the male and female members of the congregation who are spiritually sick and weak. The Minutes also note the concluding prayers of Terezija Bistrovic and Baluban in this same vain.<sup>88</sup>

Another meeting of the executive board was held at the end of January 1938. It took place on 31 January 1938 in the flat of the family Filipovic. After the reading of 2 Tim 3:16-17 the board considered eight predominantly practical questions: 1. How should female believers approach the Lord's supper? 2. Should individuals taking part in congregational prayer within the church service publicly declare their "trespasses"? 3. What is true Christianity, that is, what is the relationship between freedom and responsibility? 4. Should female believers reproach each

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<sup>82</sup> The Minutes of the ZBC Baptist Women's Association of 15 August 1937.

<sup>83</sup> Daruvar: Savez baptista, 1925. Printed by Gustav Lotz.

<sup>84</sup> The letter from J. Baluban to L. Kalmikova of 26 October 1937.

<sup>85</sup> The Minutes of the ZBC Baptist Women's Association of 22 November 1937.

<sup>86</sup> The Minutes of the ZBC Baptist Women's Association of 19 November 1937.

<sup>87</sup> The Minutes of the ZBC Baptist Women's Association of 9 January 1938.

<sup>88</sup> The Minutes of the ZBC Baptist Women's Association of 28 November 1937.

other? 5. Should believers lie in order to avoid hardships? 6. The relationship between the subjective understanding of truth and God's revealed truth. 7. What is greater, holiness or blessing? 8. How to know that God has forgiven one's transgression?

The Minutes for each issue contain the corresponding Biblical text and a brief response, usually in one sentence, even though the discussion was probably more extensive. The majority of views found therein would be easily recognizable and acceptable in Baptist churches today, even though the concrete background of some of the issues discussed is not clear. For instance, the question about lying (6) has the accompanying comment: "Every man thinks that what he does is only true, but let us beware, because what is important is what the Lord will say to that." Still uncertain is the background to the question about holiness and blessing (7): "Holiness is greater because God is holy, and God is the one who gives holiness. It is not correct to pray that God would bless his holy Word in our hearts, but to pray that God would bless our hearts, so that his Word finds room in them. When something is holy, it is already blessed."<sup>89</sup>

As some issues were not exhausted in that meeting and as they were relevant to the wider circle, they were discussed in the next full meeting on 13 February 1938. The discussion resumed after the hymn 153 and the reading of 1 Tim 3:16-17. With regard to the public confession of sin (2) it was concluded that personal sin should not be confessed publicly in the congregational prayer within the church service, but that the person concerned should immediately make appropriate amends and only then publicly in prayer express their gratitude to God for the mercy expressed to them. Similar procedure is recommended with regard to the question about how to recognize that God has forgiven guilt (8). As for the need for mutual warning (4), below is the entry from the Minute book reproduced in full:

It is a difficult task, to warn someone for his transgression! But beware, if we do it in such a way that we bring the whole issue before God in prayer and then approach that soul with the heart full of love, he will not be offended, but will accept your warning. We are as each other's guardians. If we have love towards the neighbour, and see that his soul is in danger of falling into sin, it is our duty to warn her, because we will also be responsible for that to God. We are all in weak bodies, Satan approaches us with various issues, if we keep watch in prayer, he will not succeed, but if the guardian falls asleep, then the enemy enters the heart easily and wins. I will give you an example. The devil wanders around the earth and meets a young girl. He starts to whisper to her how beautiful she is, that she has to dress up nicely and then she will get

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<sup>89</sup> The Minutes of the ZBC Baptist Women's Association of 31 January 1938.

married. But she recognized the enemy in him and started singing the hymn Jesus, you are my faithful shepherd... - When the devil heard the song he fled from her. He walked on and entered a village with people resting after a hard day's work. They were all asleep except for a boy who minded the horses. The devil started whispering to him too to rob his master and run away. The young man considered it and imagined how he has been caught, imprisoned, spent time with bad people, learned even greater evil, and in the finally ended on the gallows. This scared him and he started singing I am my Saviour's lamb.... And the devil ran fled again. Then he remembered the preacher on his death bed, went to him and started pouring doubt in his heart suggesting that all his work was in vain. But the preacher also chased him away because he also sang in his thoughts. When the devil tempts us also in our thoughts, let us chase him away with prayer or song, because the devil has no access there where there is singing and where the Lord is being praised.<sup>90</sup>

There is but little information about later meetings. One was held on 29 March 1938. The number of the hymn sung (15) and the text read (Acts 12:5,12) are inscribed by hand at the top of the page which contains the whole sermon on various issues related to prayer.<sup>91</sup>

Just over a year later Baluban reports to Kalmikova about the progress of the women's work in Zagreb and God's blessing on it. She also writes that the association meets regularly and that there had recently been a conference, probably gathering women from the region around Zagreb or possibly only from the city of Zagreb.<sup>92</sup>

Two photographs have been preserved from the period 1938/1939.<sup>93</sup> Both feature a group of women, all from ZBC. In front of them stands a girl Olga Filipović and hold a plaque. The inscription on the plaque is completely unreadable. However, it is either the title "Tabitha" or a description of the occasion at which the photograph was taken, such as a conference. The group of women in the first photograph<sup>94</sup> is slightly larger than the group present at the founding meeting of „Tabitha,” i.e. 29 women and two girls, but it is clearly the same group. Women sitting in the first row, from left to right, are: Terezija Zrinščak, Noemi Hoffman, Janja Baluban, Aleksandra Filipović, Ana Solovjeva, Marija Bistrović, Rozi Lovrec. Women standing in

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<sup>90</sup> The Minutes of the ZBC Baptist Women's Association of 13 February 1938.

<sup>91</sup> The Minutes of the ZBC Baptist Women's Association of 27 March 1938.

<sup>92</sup> The letter from J. Baluban to L. Kalmikova of 27 June 1939.

<sup>93</sup> Although the photographs are not dated, the year can be inferred from the age of the girl featuring on the picture. Olga Filipović (the daughter of Aleksandra Filipović) was born in 1934 and is about four or five in the photograph. The dating is confirmed by Nada Opačić, the older daughter of Aleksandra born in 1923.

<sup>94</sup> The photograph is kept by the author.

the second row, from left to right, are: Aleksandra Švast, X, X, X, Jozefina Vincetić, Terezija Gregl, Regina Klem, Elsie Vacek, Fani Lovrec, Katarina Rošker (7 August 1901, Velika Gorica<sup>95</sup> - ?)<sup>96</sup>, Jozefina Matečić, Sofija Peterlin, Marija Belković (1884(?) – 1954(?))<sup>97</sup>, Beti Bajš, Elizabeta Bistrović. Women standing in the second row, from left to right, are: Magda Vukonić, Ana Lovrec, Nada Filipović (later married Opačić) (11 June 1923, Magić Mala, Posavina<sup>98</sup> - ) (Aleksandra's daughter), Vera Dudović (later married Dobutović) (9 September 1922, Zagreb<sup>99</sup> - ?) (Paulina's daughter),<sup>100</sup> Vikica Gregl, Paula Dudović, Sida Artner. Leading women sit in the first row as in the photograph from 1937. The order of seating is similar as well.

The other photograph has been preserved only as a photocopy,<sup>101</sup> and the comparison with the first photograph demonstrates it to be a mirror reflection. In addition, this second photograph was taken immediately before or immediately after the first photograph because some women have assumed slightly different postures. Further, two persons are absent from the second photograph: Elizabeta Bistrović and Marija Belković.

### **The activity of J. Baluban in the region and country-wide**

After election Vice-president of the Union of Baptist Women's Associations, Baluban became involved in its work right away. According to the existing though

<sup>95</sup> "Članovi (1942)" No. 52.

<sup>96</sup> According to the Minutes of the ZBC of 13 September 1938. Katarina Rošker was admitted into the membership of the ZBC on that date. According to "Članovi (1942)" No. 52 she was baptised in that year.

<sup>97</sup> The years of birth and death are tentative. Olga Peterlin, 1 July 2007, Zagreb. According to the Minutes of the ZBC of 29 November 1930. she was admitted into the membership of the ZBC on the basis of her testimony and previous baptism in the Adventist church. She is mentioned in "Članovi (1942)" No. 60. See also in the forthcoming article "Baptistička crkva u Zagrebu: Rane godine (1921.-1927.)."

<sup>98</sup> Information gathered from Nada Opačić on 10 September 2007, Zagreb.

<sup>99</sup> "Članovi (1942)" No. 55. The Minutes of the ZBC of 13 September 1938 only record the age of sixteen at the time.

<sup>100</sup> Paula Dudović probably also had a son. Ivan Dudović was admitted into the membership of the ZBC on 1 August 1937. On that occasion eight people were admitted. Paula Dudović shared her testimony and was admitted into the membership immediately after Ivan. The Minutes of the ZBC of 1 August 1937. The baptismal service was held on 15 August 1937. Ivan Dudović died of heart problems on 13 April 1938 in Zagreb. According to the obituary he was fervent in evangelism and the study of the Bible. In 1938 he compiled two crossword puzzles with Biblical contents which were published in *Mladi kršćanin*, the youth supplement to *Glas evanđelja*. J. H. [Josip Horak], "† Ivan Dudović," *Mladi kršćanin* 5 (1938): 14-15.

<sup>101</sup> The original comes from Vikica Gregl who borrowed it to Vinko Peterlin in September 2005.



incomplete information she spoke at the all-country meeting of the Union in Belgrade on 4 July 1939.<sup>102</sup> She also took part in the preparations for the publication of Baptist women's journal *Žena kršćanka* [Christian Woman] which was conceived as a supplement to *Glas evanđelja* but which for unknown reasons never got published.<sup>103</sup>

At the founding meeting of the Union of Baptist Women's Associations Baluban was also named the co-ordinator of Baptist women's work in one of seven territorial regions into which the Union was divided. This region included Zagreb and its surroundings, Slovenia, Lika, Mačkovec, Severin na Kupi, Duga Resa, Grabovac and Mošćenica.<sup>104</sup> The primary task of all co-ordinators was to provide support to women's work in Baptist churches and to establish new associations whenever they did not exist.

Baluban started working on these tasks immediately even though it must be noted that she had been active outside the Zagreb circle even earlier. Towards the end of 1938 she was involved in the activity of Baptist women in the Slavonian village of Andrijaševci and the founding of the local Baptist women's association there.<sup>105</sup> In the Summer of 1939 Baluban visited Trbovlje,<sup>106</sup> Bačuga<sup>107</sup> and Grabovac<sup>108</sup> with existing Baptist women's work and established local Baptist women's associations. Such an attempt in the hamlet of Zebić in Lika on 16 July 1939 failed,<sup>109</sup> same as in Tavankut in the region of Bačka where it met the opposition of the local Baptist leader Santay who argued that such a form of association of women was "not according to the Holy Scriptures". In her report Baluban

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<sup>102</sup> The Minutes of the Belgrade BC Baptist Women's Association of 4 July 1939.

<sup>103</sup> The letter of J. Baluban to L. Kalmikova of 27 June 1939.

<sup>104</sup> "Prva konferencija Udruženja sestara. Cerna, 29. V. 1939." [The First Conference of the Women's Association. Cerna 29 May 1939].

<sup>105</sup> The letter of J. Baluban to L. Kalmikova of 21 September 1938.

<sup>106</sup> "Osnutak Udruženja sestara. U Trbovlju, dne 9. jula 1939." [The Founding of the Women's Association. In Trbovlje, 9 July 1939]

<sup>107</sup> The Association was founded on 2 July 1939. The letter of J. Baluban to L. Kalmikova of 12 July 1939.

<sup>108</sup> She wrote to Kalmikova of her intention to visit Grabovac immediately before the trip. The letter of J. Baluban to L. Kalmikova of 27 June 1939. See also "Izvještaj "Savezu sestara." Zagreb, 20. IX. 1939." [A Report to the Women's Association. Zagreb, 20 November 1939]

<sup>109</sup> In an earlier document J. Baluban specifies the precise place in Lika. The letter of J. Baluban to L. Kalmikova of 12 June 1939. That is evident from a later report in which Baluban describes the cause of her failure: "...although there are over thirty sisters there, brother Vezmar stated at the meeting that older sisters are illiterate and the younger ones are to young to lead the Association. "Izvještaj "Savezu sestara." Zagreb, 20. IX. 1939." [A Report to the Women's Association. Zagreb, 20 November 1939].

added a note: "Therefore I sent the brother a book 'ŽENA U KRALJEVSKOJ SLUŽBI',<sup>110</sup> in which he will find all Scriptural proof and the personal statement by Jesus Christ about the dignity and value of the woman for all future times".<sup>111</sup> Since the existing sources are neither exhaustive nor complete, it can be surmised that Baluban established Baptist women's associations in a few more churches in the region in which she was active.

### **The activity of "Tabitha" before and after the Second World War**

Unfortunately there is hardly any relevant written information for the period after March 1938. What is known is that the Baptist women from Zagreb organized visits to other Baptist churches. In the Autumn of 1938 they made preparations to go to Daruvar to attend their Thanksgiving celebration, and later that year they traveled to a course which was to be lead by sister Gill in Belgrade.<sup>112</sup> Fourteen representatives from Zagreb attended the founding of the Union of Baptist women's associations in Cerna on 29 May 1939,<sup>113</sup> and several Baptist women from Zagreb also traveled to the founding of the Women's association in Trbovlje.<sup>114</sup>

The members of "Tabitha" were active in their church as well. They took part in the preparations for holidays and the New Year eve vigil. In the wake of the Old Year's eve they would organise a bazaar at which they sold various pieces of clothes which they made themselves.<sup>115</sup> Furthermore, there is a brief yet significant note which throws light on their meetings in this period:

In 1939/1940 sisters' meetings were lead by sister Baluban. It was a small group of sisters comprising only 15-20 sisters. Sisters' meetings were held once a week, and the main purpose of those meetings was prayer. Also, there was the exposition of the Bible, then the organization of the visitation to the sick and the new members who were in need of spiritual nourishment through the word of God.<sup>116</sup>

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<sup>110</sup> It the book by Earle Hester [i.e. Irma Trutza], *Žena u kraljevskoj službi*. Translation from English. Prepared by Vinko Vacek. Zagreb: Tiskara "Merkantile" (Jutriša i Sedmak), 1938.

<sup>111</sup> "Izveštaj Savezu sestara." Zagreb, 20. IX. 1939." [A Report to the Women's Association. Zagreb, 20 November 1939]

<sup>112</sup> The letter of J. Baluban to L. Kalmikova of 21 September 1938.

<sup>113</sup> "Prva konferencija Udruženja sestara. Cerna, 29. V. 1939.," [The First Conference of the Women's Association. Cerna 29 May 1939], p. 1.

<sup>114</sup> "Osnutak Udruženja sestara. U Trbovlju, dne 9. jula 1939." [The Founding of the Women's Association. In Trbovlje, 9 July 1939]

<sup>115</sup> Olga Peterlin, Nada Opačić 5 May 2006, Zagreb.

<sup>116</sup> Zlata Kandučar, "Kratok osvrt sestrinskog rada u Zagrebu, unazad 37 godina, godina prije i poslije rata." [A Short Survey of the Women's Work in Zagreb, from 37 Years Ago, Before and After the War] One page A4, typewritten, from the collection kept in BC Belgrade.

It can be surmised though that Baluban as the leading sister for the wider Zagreb region and Slovenia made frequent trips to other Baptist women's associations, and that as a result other Zagreb women took part in leading their meetings. When Baluban moved from Zagreb to Andrijaševci on 31 March 1940, the new Association president became Aleksandra Švast<sup>117</sup>. It appears though that Švast did not remain in that position for very long because already on 28 January 1942 another person is mentioned as the president of "Tabitha," that is Paula Dudović. The reasons for this change are unknown, and the change is interesting even more so since Švast remained in Zagreb until 1946 (when she moved to Daruvar, and then shortly afterwards to Rijeka), and was active in the work of ZBC throughout this time. Throughout the Second World War Dudović as the president submitted reports about the activities of the ZBC women at the annual business meetings of ZBC.<sup>118</sup>

During the Second World War women's meetings took place regularly on Sunday afternoons. The women would often stay in church after the Sunday morning service to attend their meeting and remain there until the evening service at five in the afternoon.<sup>119</sup> The few laconic comments in the Minute book of ZBC from the period disclose only that in 1943 the women's work progressed well,<sup>120</sup> and two years later that women continued to pray and work.<sup>121</sup> When the German army temporarily requisitioned the church premises in the second half of 1944 and the beginning of 1945 and used them for storage, the women met in private homes.

In this period a significant contribution to the women's work was made by the three ethnic Russians, particularly Filipović who often fasted before women's meetings. Z. Kandučar made a note about their steadfast involvement: "At our meetings it was usually the two Russian sisters, sister Filipović and sister Švast, who translated from their Russian language the interpretation of the Bible."<sup>122</sup> The devotional literature that was used consisted of publications which the Russian women had brought with them from Russia or which they obtained later from evangelical Russian publishers and mission organizations throughout the world. They would translate into Croatian hymns from Russian hymnbooks (such as *Gusli*) and some were later incorporated in subsequent Baptist hymnals.<sup>123</sup>

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<sup>117</sup> GE 3-4 (1940): 31.

<sup>118</sup> 1 January 1943, 2 April 1944, 4 April 1945.

<sup>119</sup> Nada Opačić, Olga Peterlin 5 May 2006, Zagreb.

<sup>120</sup> 1 January 1943.

<sup>121</sup> 4 April 1945.

<sup>122</sup> Kandučar, "Survey."

<sup>123</sup> Nada Opačić, Olga Peterlin 5 May 2006, Zagreb.

## The women of ZBC

There is a certain number of women who were members of ZBC or regular attendees of church services in the period 1937 to 1948 or at some time in that period and who could have been involved in the work of "Tabitha", but who are not mentioned in the material surveyed so far because they were not present at the two picture-taking occasions nor are they mentioned in the reports and minutes. The following list is probably not exhaustive but it includes all those about whom there exists any written or photographic evidence.

This group includes the wife of Vinko Vacek Marija (b. Šagovac) Vacek (15 February 1894, Požega – ca. 1980, Opatija)<sup>124</sup> and their daughters which have not been mentioned so far: Marija (Mary) Vacek (later married Magerle) (7 May 1915, Detroit, USA - )<sup>125</sup>, Nada Vacek (later married Jonke) (16 February 1928, Zagreb - )<sup>126</sup> and Branka Vacek.<sup>127</sup> Here also belong the daughters of Aleksandra Švast Nada and Nina, the mother of brothers and sisters Lovrec<sup>128</sup>, her daughter-in-law Micika (Marija?) Lovrec (? - ?)<sup>129</sup>. Others are: Terezija (b. Bedić) Bistrovčić (10 October 1906, Mačkovec<sup>130</sup> - 1988)<sup>131</sup>, Jelka (b. Hlišč) Blatt (Bladt) (15 May 1914, Deržimurec, Međimurje - ?)<sup>132</sup> and her sister<sup>133</sup>, Dragica Božičković (29 August 1926 - )<sup>134</sup>, Katica (married) Bujan (23 October 1919., Miletinac - ?)<sup>135</sup>,

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<sup>124</sup> According to the lists Članovi 1930. No. 12 and "Članovi (1942)" No. 15 she was baptised on 16 December 1913 in Detroit, USA.

<sup>125</sup> According to the Minutes of the ZBC she was admitted into the membership on 30 October 1930. According to "Članovi (1942)" No. 71 she was baptised in Mačkovec and Agenda records that it happened on 8 March 1931.

<sup>126</sup> According to "Članovi (1942)" No. 40 Nada Vacek was baptised as a pupil on 13 August 1945 in Zagreb.

<sup>127</sup> She appears on several photographs from before and during the Second World War.

<sup>128</sup> The list from 1930. No. 18. does not mention the name of sister Lovrec nor the date of her baptism but under the place of baptism there is a note "Bačuga?" All her children are: Marko, Rudolf, Emil, Ana, Zlata, Magareta (who may have been the half-sister of others).

<sup>129</sup> According to "Članovi 1930" No. 16. Micika Lovrec was baptised on 14 May 1925 in Zagreb. She married Rudolf Lovrec.

<sup>130</sup> Ledger, Mačkovec No. 27.

<sup>131</sup> According to the Minutes of the ZBC Terezija Bedić was admitted into the membership on 30 October 1930.

<sup>132</sup> According to "Članovi (1942)" No. 32 an Agenda of that date Jelka Hlišč was baptised on 7 September 1930 in Daruvar.

<sup>133</sup> She appears on several photographs from during the Second World War.

<sup>134</sup> According to "Članovi (1942)" No. 49 Dragica Božičković was baptised on 10 October 1943 in Daruvar. She appears on several photographs from during the Second World War.

<sup>135</sup> "Članovi (1942)" No. 48. According to the same source Katica Bujan was baptised in 1937 in

Suzika Čater (1922, Trbovlje - )<sup>136</sup>, Olga Černelc (Černelić) (1905/1906, Sveti Petar, Slovenija - ?)<sup>137</sup>, Fanika Čukac (? – 1944)<sup>138</sup>, Olga Derharić (31 March 1906, Sv. Petar, Slovenia - ?)<sup>139</sup>, Katarina Dudović (8 April 1877, Zagreb? – 9 April 1960, Rijeka<sup>140</sup>)<sup>141</sup>, Ričika Dudović (1911 – 7 October 1960, Zagreb<sup>142</sup>)<sup>143</sup>, Ana Fay (26 May 1895, Osijek<sup>144</sup> – ca. 1955, Zagreb<sup>145</sup>)<sup>146</sup>, Micika Grešak (Gresak)<sup>147</sup>, Helena

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Daruvar. She appears on several photographs from during the Second World War.

<sup>136</sup> According to the Minutes of the ZBC of 13 September 1938 Čater was admitted into the membership of the ZBC on that date.

<sup>137</sup> According to the list from 1930. No. 11 Černelc was baptized in Trbovlje on 3 July 1927. See also *Glas evanđelja* 8 (1927): 93, and Agenda of that date.

<sup>138</sup> According to the Minutes of the ZBC of 1 August 1937 Fanika Čukac was admitted into the membership of the ZBC on that date, and according to "Članovi (1942)" No. 53 she was baptised in 1937 in Zagreb.

<sup>139</sup> Even though "Članovi (1942)" No. 57 records that Olga Derharić was baptised in 1927 in Trbovlje, Agenda records a baptismal service in Hrastnik in 1927, ali Derharić is not on the list of baptisands.

<sup>140</sup> The information from the necrologue was sent to the author by Ruben Knežević on 29 August 2007.

<sup>141</sup> According to the Minutes of the ZBC of 13 September 1938 Katarina Dudović from Zagreb was admitted in the membership of the ZBC on that date. It is not known when she moved to Rijeka, but she lived there in the 1950s. She had a daughter Tereza Kaucman (9 December 1899 – 25 November 1998) who sporadically attended BC Rijeka. The information was sent to the author by Ruben Knežević on 26 August 2007. It is possible that Katarina was Paula's aunt or mother in law and that Paula and her daughter Vera moved to Rijeka at the end of 1940s. The Dudovići had ties with Rijeka even earlier. A photograph from Sušak from 1937. shows Helena, Franjo and Josip Klem, Josip Horak as well as Paula and Vera Dudović.

<sup>142</sup> *Glasnik, Rijeka* 1(1961): 11.

<sup>143</sup> According to the obituary from *Glasnik Ričika* Dudović became a Baptist only in 1950s. during a long and serious illness she translated brochures and articles of devotional nature. She was probably Paula's sister in law, i.e. the sister of Paula's husband. Information obtained from Olga Peterlin on 12 October 2007.

<sup>144</sup> "Članovi (1942)" No. 64.

<sup>145</sup> Olga Peterlin 1 July 2007, Zagreb.

<sup>146</sup> According to the Minutes of the BCZ Ana Fay was admitted into the membership of ZBC on 1 August 1939 accompanied with a "favourable testimony" of her neighbour Paula Dudović. According to "Članovi (1942)" No. 64 she was baptised on 13 August 1939 in Trbovlje. More about her in the forthcoming article about the history of ZBC 1939 – 1945.

<sup>147</sup> According to the Minutes of the ZBC of 4 November 1932. Micika Grešak from Slovenia was admitted into the membership of the ZBC on that date.

Jokan<sup>148</sup>, Ana Kamerman (9 July 1908., Ruševo, Sl. Požega - ?)<sup>149</sup>, Ajkica Kamerman and Jelka Kamerman,<sup>150</sup> Helena Klem (4 February 1891, Bogojevo - ?)<sup>151</sup>, Marica (married) Lauš (7 November 1903 - ?)<sup>152</sup>, Mira Lovrec<sup>153</sup>, Wilhelmina (Vilma) Lotz (16 May 1901, Daruvar<sup>154</sup> - ca. 1980, Canada<sup>155</sup>)<sup>156</sup>, Jozefina (Zofka) Matečić (married Peterlin) (later married Bistrović) (19 March 1896, Ojstro, Hrastnik – 17 May 1974, Zagreb)<sup>157</sup>, Julija Mraz (1897, Koprivnica - ?)<sup>158</sup>, Nelica (married) Peškir,<sup>159</sup> Franciska Plahuta (1895 - ?)<sup>160</sup>, Franciska Pucelj (1901/1902, Maribor - ?)<sup>161</sup>, Franciska Razboršek (3 March 1907, Zbelovo, Konjice, Doljnja

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<sup>148</sup> According to the Minutes of the ZBC of 8 March 1931 Helena Jokan was admitted into the membership of the ZBC on that date.

<sup>149</sup> According to “Članovi (1942)” No. 29 Ana Kamerman was baptised in 1937 in Zagreb and moved away from Zagreb before 1942.

<sup>150</sup> She appears in several photographs from during the Second World War. The GE subscriber list includes J. Kamerman GE 5-6 (1940): 42 and F. Kamerman GE 5-6 (1940): 42.

<sup>151</sup> According to the Minutes of the ZBC of 13 September 1938 Helena Klem was admitted into the membership of the ZBC on that date. According to “Članovi (1942)” No. 31 she was baptised in 1938 in Zagreb and was taken to Germany in 1942.

<sup>152</sup> According to “Članovi (1942)” No. 58. Marica Lauš was baptised on 13 August 1945 in Zagreb.

<sup>153</sup> She appears in several photographs from during the Second World War.

<sup>154</sup> “Članovi (1942)” No. 65.

<sup>155</sup> Nada Popović, a niece of Vilma Lotz, by telephone on 5 October 2007.

<sup>156</sup> According to “Članovi (1942)” No. 65. Vilma Lotz was baptised on 15 June 1924 in Daruvar. She was a member of ZBC from 1925 to 1928, and from March 1944 when she and her husband fled Daruvar in a mass exodus of ethnic Germans before the partisan takeover of Daruvar. Nada Popović, by telephone on 5 October 2007.

<sup>157</sup> „Članovi (1942)” No. 23. incorrectly spells the name as “Matešić” but records that she was baptised in the Adventist church in Zagreb in 1925. According to Agenda of 4 December 1927 she was admitted into the membership of the ZBC on the basis of her testimony in December 1927.

<sup>158</sup> According to “Članovi (1942)” No. 27 Julija Mraz was baptised in 1942.

<sup>159</sup> She was a member of ZBC probably from 7 May 1933, when her husband Gjuoro was first mentioned in the Minutes of the ZBC, until 1939, when they moved away from Zagreb.

<sup>160</sup> According to the Minutes of the ZBC of 4 November 1932. Franciska Plahuta was from Laško in Slovenia. She was admitted into the membership of the ZBC on that date.

<sup>161</sup> According to Agenda Franciska Pucelj was admitted into the membership of ZBC on 5 April 1931. There is a similar note in the Minutes of the ZBC of 10 June 1931, even though the name recorded is Branka Pucelj. According to “Članovi 1942” No. 21 F. Pucelj withdrew from the membership of the ZBC sometime between 1942 and 1946. The list of GE subscribers of 5-6 (1940): 42 lists B. Pucelj.

Štajerska - ?)<sup>162</sup>, Zlata Rošker (later married Kandučar) (1923 - ),<sup>163</sup> a certain sister Skopples (?)<sup>164</sup>, sister M. Solar and sister Tompa<sup>165</sup>, Katarina Špeletić (Špelečić, Šperletić) (? , Slovenia - ?)<sup>166</sup>, Marta Vacek (b. Horak) (17 May 1919, Derventa - )<sup>167</sup>, Jelka Vrabec<sup>168</sup>, Ljubica Vučković and her mother<sup>169</sup> Vilma (b. Bajer) Zbořil,<sup>170</sup> Antonija (Tonka) Žgela (1894, Slovenia - ?)<sup>171</sup>.

## Conclusions

The Baptist women's association "Tabitha" in Zagreb came into being at the initiative of the Russian Lidija Kalmikova who founded the women's work in the whole of SHS/Yugoslavia and who was the main engine of that movement. Until the beginning of the Second World War Janja Baluban occupied the leading role in Zagreb and the rest of Croatia. Two other prominent Baptists were Aleksandra Švast and particularly Aleksandra Filipović who together with Ana Solovjeva comprised a small group of Russians within ZBC. Other prominent Baptist women of this period were Rozi Lovrec, Fani Lovrec, Katarina Gasteiger, Beti Bajš, Jozefina Vincetić, Marija Bistrović and Paula Dudović who (after a brief period

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<sup>162</sup> "Članovi (1942)" No. 28 does not contain the date of baptism but Franjo Klem added a note that Franciska Razboršek moved away from Zagreb, which means at latest in 1946. According to the Minutes of the Baptist Women's Association of BV Belgrade a certain Fani Razboršek was admitted into the membership of the Association on 1 December 1934.

<sup>163</sup> According to the Minutes of the ZBC of 13 September 1938 Zlata Rošker from Kustošija was admitted into the membership of ZBC on that date and according to "Članovi (1942)" No. 51 she was baptised in the same year.

<sup>164</sup> According to the Minutes of the ZBC of 25 March 1933 financial aid was collected for a sister Skopples.

<sup>165</sup> According to the Minutes of the ZBC of 25 March 1933 these two people were admitted into the membership of the BCZ. GE 7-8 (1940): 50 records the name J. Solar.

<sup>166</sup> "Članovi (1942)" No. 22 and 64 records the name "Katarina" and family name "Špelečić." According to the list from 1930. No. 17 Špeletić was baptised in the Adventist church in 1923. According to Agenda of 4 December 1927 Špeletić was admitted into the membership of the BCZ on the basis of her testimony in December 1927. Vacek incorrectly spells her name Špeletić as "Šperletić".

<sup>167</sup> According to "Članovi (1942)" No. 72 Marta Vacek was baptised on 16 August 1942 in Belgrade. She moved to Zagreb in 1946.

<sup>168</sup> According to the Minutes of the BCZ of 1 August 1937 Jelka Vrabec was admitted into the membership of the ZBC on that date.

<sup>169</sup> They appear on several photographs from during the Second World War.

<sup>170</sup> She appears as a subscriber to GE 1-2 (1941): 11.

<sup>171</sup> According to the list from 1930. No. 17 Žgela was baptised in Zagreb on 1 April 1926, perhaps in the Adventist church. According to Agenda of 4 December 1927 Špeletić was admitted into the membership of the ZBC on the basis of her testimony in December 1927.

when A. Švast served as the president) succeeded J. Baluban as the president of “Tabitha”.

The existing information show that the members of “Tabitha” focused on the development of personal spirituality and prayer, as well as on practical Christian charity and ministry to the church and its poor and sick members. The theology gleaned through the summaries of sermons and spiritual addresses is simple and practical, and apparently also conservative, as is the theology of the whole Baptist movement of that period.

## **Afterward**

After the end of the Second World War the work of the whole Baptist Union was revived which included the work of the Union of the Baptist women’s associations whose president L. Kalmikova had been killed. The position previously occupied by J. Baluban, now defined as the president of the Serbo-Croatian region, was filled with Beti Bajs from Zagreb. This ministry presumably replaced the service of Baluban in the region of Zagreb and its wider surroundings. Judging from the manner in which J. Baluban describes Bajs in a letter written from Andrijaševci towards the end of 1945<sup>172</sup> to the sisters in Belgrade it may be inferred that Bajs may have started functioning as the president of the Serbo-Croatian women’s work already in 1945.

However, the first time Bajs is officially referred to in her role of the “leader of the women’s section” at the meeting of the Serbo-Croatian conference held on 31 November 1946. Several representatives first raised the question whether Bajs should be allowed to attend the whole proceedings or only the section dealing with women’s work. After deliberation it was agreed that she may attend the whole meeting. Bajs then presented the report about the women’s work which was followed by the discussion. There were three proposals about the future work: “1) To increase the spirit of prayer among the women. 2) Educate women to live in mutual peace. 3) Train our girls for future mothers and Christian women at home.” The minutes record still another resolution: “The Conference has further resolved that the leaders of the Women’s section can be only those sisters who meet the above qualifications.”<sup>173</sup> This clearly means that the leaders must be women of prayer who live in peace with other Baptist women and who are exemplary mothers and Christians in their home. In the absence of any context it is not evident whether these criteria were set in order to exclude certain existing leaders or as criteria for the election of future ones.

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<sup>172</sup> A letter from J. Baluban to the sisters in BC Beograd of 31 December 1945.

<sup>173</sup> The Minutes of the Serbo-Croatian conference of 31 November 1946.



After the end of the Second World War the Zagreb association of Baptist women "Tabitha" continued to be lead by P. Dudović. She submitted reports about women's work at annual business meetings of the ZBC on 2 February 1947 and 18 January 1948 (there is no record of her report for 1946), but the terse entries reveal only that the Zagreb Baptist women continue to work hard.

Precisely what happened with the women's work in Croatia and Zagreb after the end of the Second World War is not manifest. Beti Bajs, who around 1947 moved from Zagreb to Daruvar<sup>174</sup>, is not mentioned in the Minute book of the Serbo-Croatian regional conference after 1946, neither is there in the next ten years any record in the Minute book which would testify to the existence of the women's work. This is surprising in light of the fact that the minutes are rather extensive and contain reports about a large number of issues discussed at the meetings.

The same applies to "Tabitha" and the women's work in ZBC. Dudović submitted her last report in 1948. After that there is no mention in the ZBC Minute book of Dudović (in any context) nor of women's work even though these records are quite extensive and deal with a great number of different issues important for the ZBC. One final thing is worth noting. From the beginning of ZBC until 1948 (when Dudović submitted her report which was, as it transpired later, also her last), no women had served as a member of the Board of ZBC. At the following ZBC business meeting in 1949 Filipović is elected as a member of the Board ZBC to fill the vacated seat<sup>175</sup> (which had until then been occupied by a male member). For the period of the next four years she remained the only woman on the Board, until the business meeting in 1953.<sup>176</sup> It is possible that in this way Filipović unofficially represented women's work which had died away or had been formally discontinued.

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<sup>174</sup> Her departure may have been connected with the move of the family Klem from Zagreb when F. Klem became the pastor of BC Daruvar. For a shorter period Bajs lived in Daruvar as the warden of the Baptist seminary when it was located before the move to Novi Sad. Later, probably from the opening of BC Pakrac, Bajs lived in Pakrac in the church flat and took care of church property. She then moved to Golubinjak, and later lived in Karlovac from 1975 to 1978. Stefica Orčić in the email to Rut Lehotsky forwarded to the author on 13 September 2007; Timothy Ivan Špičak in the email to the author of 18 October 2007; Štefice Orčić in the email to the author of 1. November 2007.; Nikola Vukov in the email to the author of 22 November 2007.

<sup>175</sup> The Minutes of BCZ of 27 February 1949.

<sup>176</sup> The Board was re-structured at this meeting. There was a smaller executive board and a wider consultative board of eleven members five of which were women: M. Bistrotić, A. Filipović, V. Lotz, M. Grubješić i D. Mraković. The Minutes of BCZ of 8 March 1953.

Članak istražuje nastanak i djelovanje Sestrinskog udruženja "Tabita" pri Baptističkoj crkvi Zagreb 1937. Ključnu ulogu u osnivanju "Tabite" imala je Ruskinja Lidija Kalmikova iz Beograda. Prva predsjednica "Tabite" bila je Janja Baluban, a uz nju su važne zagrebačke Ruskinje Aleksandra Švast i Aleksandra Filipović. Druge istaknute baptistkinje ovoga razdoblja bile su Rozi Lovrec, Fani Lovrec, Katarina Gasteiger, Beti Bajs, Jozefna Vincetić, Marija Bistrović i Paula Dudović. Članak se osvrće na ustroj i pravila Udruženja, ključne događaje, djelatnosti, sastanke, propovijedi, teološka obilježja, posjete sestrinskim udruženjima u Hrvatskoj i prije i tijekom Drugoga svjetskog rata te kasnije nerazjašnjeno zamiranje Udruženja.

**Sažetak**

Prikaz pruža uvid u značajan aspekt djelovanja manjinske vjerske zajednice u Zagrebu. U istraživanju su korišteni svi postojeći izvori, kako pisani (zapisnici, pisma, izvješća, članci) tako i usmeni (sjećanja, razgovori) te fotografije.

**BOOK REVIEWS**  
**BOOK BELIEFS**

