

Mazal Uziel



This is a photo of my maternal grandmother, Mazal Uziel. The photo was taken in Sofia in 1943. My maternal grandmother, granny Mazal, almost always covered her head with a kerchief. She used to put something on my head, too, but I don't know what it was. She spoke Ladino. The whole Jewish neighborhood in Sofia, or Koniovitsa, Pernik Street, where my grandmother lived, spoke Ladino or the so-called Spaniol in Bulgarian. It was a very poor quarter. The way of living itself - with those huts, with those cortijos ['small gardens' in Ladino], and the fountains in the yards - all that was 'borrowed' from Spain. The Jews of the neighborhood used to speak Turkish too and some of them spoke Arabic as well. Their Bulgarian was very funny. [i.e. they spoke grammatically incorrect Bulgarian]. More refined Jews would definitely speak French. [Ottoman Jews traditionally enrolled in French language high schools instead of Turkish or Bulgarian ones in the late 19th century.] I don't know if they spoke Hebrew, but I have seen some books in the houses of both my grandmothers. I've never seen a Jewish woman wearing a wig in Bulgaria. I haven't seen a Jewish man wearing a kippah either, nor do I remember a Jew walking down the streets with a black hat. Kippot were worn only in the synagogue. My poor granny Mazal had a strange nickname: the Courtier. The

history of her nickname was the following: She was close to a cook of King Boris III, who liked meals with goose very much. Once her friend the cook told my grandmother: 'Mazalika [diminutive from Mazal], if you can bring me four geese a month you will earn a lot of money'. She didn't earn much money, but she kept on taking four geese a month to the palace, stuffing them with maize the same way my mother showed me. The geese swell this way only for a month or two.