

## Nisim Uziel During WW I



This is my grandfather Nisim Uziel in full military gear. The photo was taken in 1914 -1916 somewhere at the front, but I don't know exactly when and where. I know only, that grandpapa Nisim fought in the Bulgarian Army in World War I and was awarded a military cross for bravery. The writing on the photo says: 'This is my father; a handsome man'.

My mother's father Nisim was born in the village of Kalishte, but I don't know when. He was a grocer and boza [oriental barley drink] maker. His wife was Mazal, my mother's mother. 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.