

Avraam Shukhman



This is a picture of my maternal grandfather Avraam Shukhman. The photo was taken in Odessa in 1915. My mother, Rachil Belotserkovskaya [nee Shukhman], came from an artistic family. My maternal grandfather, born in Odessa around 1870, sang in the Odessa Opera Theater. He had a very rare timbre of voice: dramatic tenor. My mother told me that once a well-known Christian activist called Ioahn Kronshtadski from Saint-Petersburg visited Odessa. He went to the opera where he heard my grandfather sing. He liked him so much that he met him and invited him to sing in a church choir. However, in order to do this my grandfather would have needed to convert to Christianity. My grandfather said, 'I shall die with the same faith I was born with'. My grandfather was a self-educated person. He was religious, went to the synagogue and observed Jewish traditions. My mother's family celebrated Sabbath and all Jewish holidays and followed the kashrut. However, it was more like a tribute to old traditions and the education that my grandparents got from their families. It was probably due to my grandfather's surrounding and his work in the opera.

At least all my mother told me was associated with the theater and artistic surrounding that she was raised in. I know that my mother's family lived in a three-bedroom apartment in the center of Odessa. They had a grand piano, which was the focus of their life. My grandmother Sophia Shukhman - I don't remember her maiden name - was a housewife. She died around 1910. My grandfather lived eight years longer. After his wife died he became very sickly and it was hard for him to sing. He became the director of the music library of the theater. During the Revolution of 1917 and the Civil War, the time of attacks of gangs and pogroms, the family found shelter in their Russian neighbors' houses. It was a hard time. My grandfather actually died of hunger and diseases in 1918. My maternal grandparents had three children: my mother was the oldest. She had two brothers: Yakov, born in 1900, and Grigori, born in 1902.