

Isak And Mazel Simon, Nisim Navon's Maternal Grandmother's Relatives



Isak and Mazel Simon were relatives of my grandmother's, who lived in Pristina. All the old men in the community wore the fez, and they were always black. Both of our grandfathers, Rabbi Zaharija Levi, everybody. They would even wear them in synagogue. The younger men all wore hats or caps in the shul (synagogue) and on the streets. No one had a kipa (skullcap) like men wear today. My father wore his hat in his store, too. The women wore kerchiefs on their heads, some of which were held on by gold chains called kilindjare, which had gold coins hanging down from them.

The Pristina community was entirely Sephardic. I never even met an Ashkenazic Jew before refugees from the north reached Pristina during the war. There was little interaction between the Jews of Pristina and more distant Jewish communities, but there were occasional meetings between the Jews of Kosovska Mitrovica and those of Pristina. All Jews in Pristina before the war were observant and there was very little intermarriage. I remember one instance when that occurred, and the drama that accompanied it. A young Jewish woman, of 16 or 17 years of age, ran away from her home and married a Serbian man. This was almost unheard-of at the time. The family was distraught over her actions and responded by ripping their clothing as a sign of mourning for their now "deceased" daughter. This young woman converted in a Serbian church and her family had no more contact with her.