

Feiga Bashmet



Here you can see my grandmother, my father's mother Feiga Bashmet (nee Rohkes). This photo was taken in Odessa in 1922.

My grandfather Avrum Bashmet was born in Odessa in 1872. At 17 or 18 he was recruited to the army. He served as a private in an infantry regiment located in the vicinity of Grodno. At that time soldiers who had Judaic faith were given leave on religious Jewish holidays. They joined Jewish families for celebrations. So one seder my grandfather came to the family of a wholesale fish trader named Michel Rohkes in the town of Indura. Everything was different for him on this day: the festive celebration according to all rules, the children posing four traditional questions, the family reclining on cushions, the thick red wine the remainder of which they poured into a big jug calling this the 'Egyptian tortures.' He was a soldier, and the food seemed extraordinarily delicious to him.

There were many people at the table, but Avrum laid his eye on the daughter of the master of the house, Feiga, born in 1876. I guess Avrum happened to visit the Rohkes house more often than holidays occurred. He got to know Feiga more closely in no time, and they got married before Avrum was to demobilize. Of course, this was a real Jewish wedding in a special building, there was a chuppah and a special chair for the bride.

My grandfather returned to Odessa with his young wife in 1894 or 1895. Avrum went to work upholstering furniture, and Feiga, as they say nowadays, joined in the family business. She owned a stand selling oriental 'Colonial sweets' such as rakhat-lukum, khalva, sugar almonds, candied fruits, etc. She had little education that she got at home: she could read and write in Russian and Yiddish so-so, but she could calculate nicely and was successful in her trade.

My grandmother was a beautiful woman and a good housewife. She knew customs and rules, spoke Yiddish and worked hard, but she didn't have a happy life. She became a widow at the age of 44. My grandfather died of typhus at the age of 48 in August 1920 and was buried in the Jewish cemetery in Odessa according to traditions.