

Ester Levi Bivas(later Anjel)



My mother, the beautiful girl from Balat, Ester Levi Bivas , was born in 1885 in Balat. She was of Italian descent. Avramo Bivas, who was the father of my mother's maternal grandfather had come to Istanbul from Italy in the 1860's. This event has a historical short story, let me elaborate. The Sultan Abdülaziz [1830-1876. The first Ottoman sultan to visit Europe] was invited to Italy by the Italian king Viktor Emanuel II in the 1860's. One night, he wakes up with a horrible toothpain in the palace he is being hosted. The king, having been appraised of the situation, immediately calls for his personal dentist Avramo Bivas who resides close to the palace. The dentist Bivas relieves the Sultan of his pain with his intervention. After visiting different cities in Italy, when the Sultan returns to Rome, he again seeks care with the dentist Bivas a couple of times to feel better. The day of return, when the King Viktor Emanuel, sending off the Sultan, says: "I was very happy with your visit. If there is anything you saw or liked, I am ready to offer it to you from the heart", the Sultan has only one answer: "Your dentist". One month later, Avramo Bivas and his whole family is already in Istanbul, they are already settled in a magnificent villa that has been assigned to them close to the palace. The Bivas family who was part of the Sephardic Jews who had left Spain in 1492 when the Spanish rulers Ferdinand and Isabella decreed the imperial edict, was on Ottoman soil that was chosen by the ones who came before them, three and a half centuries after emigrating to Italy. The name Bivas stayed as a symbol in the family. When the girls got married, they kept the last name Bivas to carry on their father's fame, and inscribed it in the public registration ledgers along with their husband's last name and used it. My mother Ester is only 17 years old in this photograph taken on November 2nd., 1902.