

Merkado Mois Natan As A Soldier In The Medical Contingent



This is my father, Merkado Mois Natan as a soldier in the medical contingent . The picture was taken in 1919-1920, the place is unknown.

My father Merkado Mois Natan was born in 1893 in Varna and had four brothers and a sister. Merkado means 'bought' [in Ladino] - this is an old Jewish custom of selling the eldest son to relatives when he remains alone; they take care of him until he himself asks for clothes from his mother and father. [According to the Sephardi tradition if all brothers and sisters of a child die he is 'sold' to some relative, so they take care of him and this way he may survive. According to the custom, the child continues living with his parents but they do not buy anything for him.] So they called him Merkado, because he was bought by relatives in Varna. His elder brothers and sisters had died and he remained alone. Our relatives took care of him, they loved him. According to the tradition, he lived with his parents but they didn't buy him anything until he asked for something from them. I don't know exactly the name of this Jewish tradition - but it was most probably developed for the survival of the oldest son, the continuer of the family. I don't know how many elder siblings he had, but after him came Aron, Albert, Marko and David. My grandfather could afford to take care of him and pay for his expenses, but that was the custom. My father used to speak Bulgarian very well because he studied in a Bulgarian middle school.

My father's youngest brother David was 12 years older than me. His brothers (Aron, Albert and David) all died in Israel between 1983 and 1988. I don't know where the other brother Marko died. Aron had a daughter who also died of natural death. Albert had a daughter who is alive and we keep in touch on the phone from time to time. Marko had two daughters. David was not married and didn't have children. Belina was not married, too and she didn't have children. Albert and Marko studied in a college in Romania. David had a high school education - he was a theater critic - this was his passion, while the others were tradesmen.

During the World War I my father hired a cab and illegally moved to Bulgaria where he served in the army. That was in the period when Dobrich was in Romanian hands. He was wounded in his hand - not seriously - but he served as a nurse. [The matter in focus is about the military service of the father as a young man - yet before he married.] After that, already during the World War II, he was too old to be taken to the forced labor camps. So he didn't serve in the army. Together with my mother they had an arranged meeting where they liked each other. They had a marriage (religious and civic one) in 1923 in Varna. They dressed very fashionably - my father was a dandy. He had 12 suits in the wardrobe.

My father worked as a procurator in a Turkish tobacco company - he was in charge of the finances. The owners respected him and his salary was 12,000 Bulgarian leva - very good for that time. However, the Turkish company went bankrupt and he returned in Ruse where he became the accountant of my uncle's company.

I don't remember where we lived in Varna, but the house in Ruse was a decent small one and we lived on the ground floor. After that we moved from there to a bigger house with two rooms and a kitchen; this house shared the same yard with the old one. Then we moved to live in the center of the Jewish neighborhood where we had two rooms, a living room and a kitchen. We had a toilet inside the house and a bathroom, too - it was heated on firewood from outside as a Turkish bath. We had electricity, but we used firewood and coal for heating. We were four of us - my mother, my father, my brother and I. After that we lived in other similar houses. The reason for moving so much was that we were seeking for better living conditions for the growing family. Besides, one of the houses was in the Bulgarian neighborhood, while later we managed to find a better one in the Jewish quarter, where we moved to. We used to change houses every five years or so.