

Eli Perahya With His Brother Albert And Aunt Cecile



I'm standing on the left. I can be seen on this photo together with my brother Albert and my aunt, my mother's sister, Cecile. The picture was taken in Istanbul in the late 1910s. According to the Muslim Calendar my year of birth is 1328, meaning 1913 in the Gregorian calendar. I was born on 14th February in a distinguished little district of Istanbul on the Anatolian side, called Haydarpasha. Why am I named Eli, when according to the Sephardic tradition, where the first child is named after his paternal grandfather, I should have been named Ishak? The simple reason was that my paternal grandfather didn't want to give his name when he was alive, thus he opened the Torah at random and decided on the first biblical name he read: it was Eliyau? Ilyao is my name spelt erroneously in

the civil registers. My younger brother, Albert, whom we lost as a very young child, was a beautiful baby. On a summer day on Buyukada while my mother was pushing him along in his baby carriage, a woman passing by came to her and said, 'ke ermozo ijiko' [what a beautiful boy] and went away. That same night, after a very sudden high fever, my brother developed quick-spreading meningitis, and in a short time he passed away. My mother, Klara Rottenberg, was born in Istanbul in 1886 as one of eight children of an Ashkenazi family. My mother's sisters Rachel and Hanna died very young, of tuberculosis, in Istanbul. Her brothers Manuel and Josef immigrated to France whereas Leon and Cecile went to Belgium.