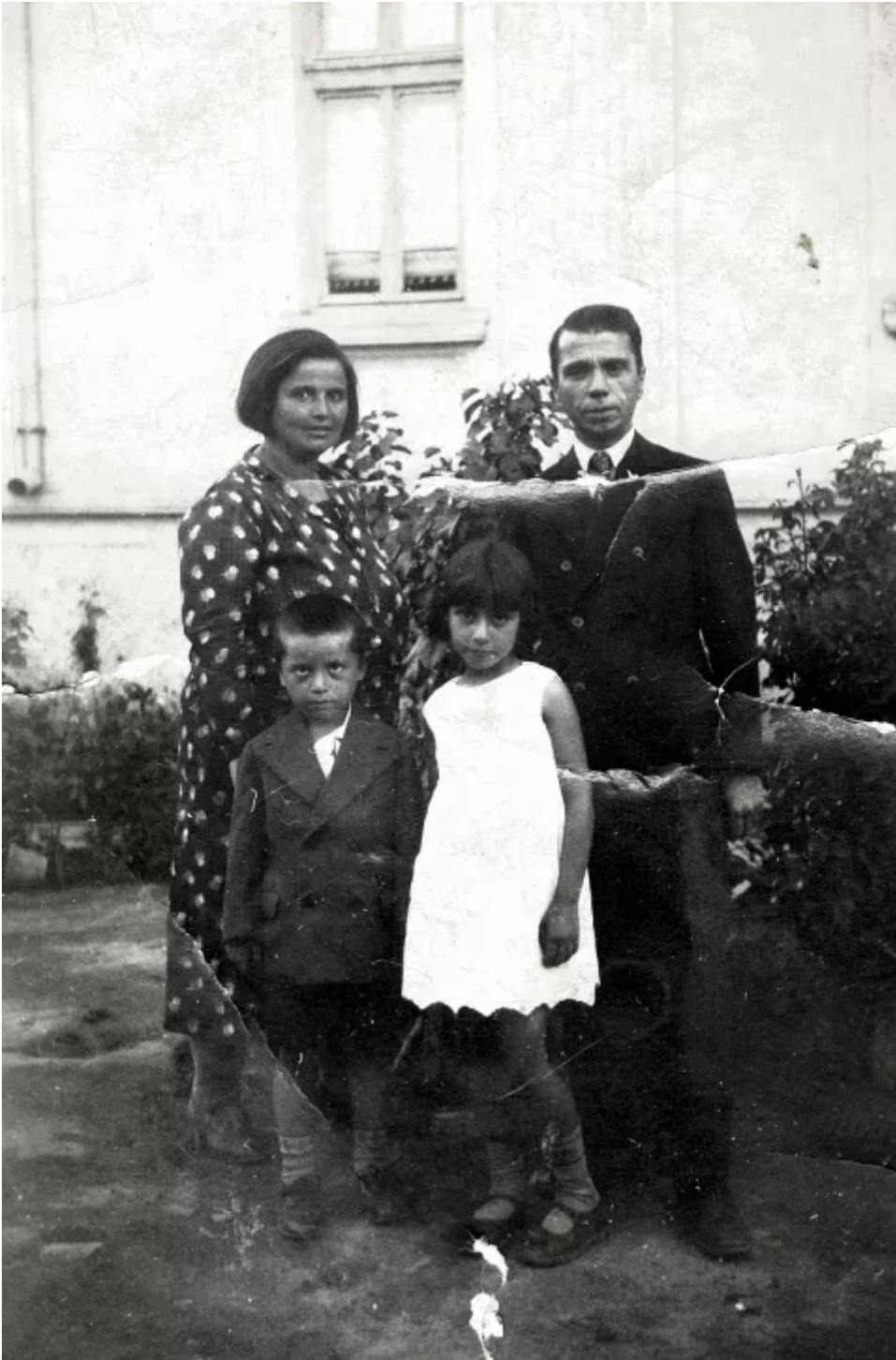


Shimon Danon With His Father And Mother, Eshua And Ester Danon, And Sister, Simha Moshe Danon



This is a photo of my whole family without my brother, who was born later: my father, my mother, my sister and me in front of our house in Pazardzhik. The photo was taken in 1931. My mother and my father didn't marry for love - because of those times and an age-difference of thirteen years that separated them. My father got married quite late - in 1921 - because of the wars between 1913 and 1920 [the Balkan wars and WWI]. They certainly had a religious marriage in the

synagogue, as secular marriage wasn't a common practice then. My father was a handsome man, a dandy - he was interested in clothes and fashion. He was keen on decorating our house with sculptures and paintings. My father was a classical music fan. We had a gramophone with records and we used to listen to arias sung by world famous singers. His greatest pleasure was to 'wind up' the gramophone and enjoy Rigoletto and Traviata. Such things were not very common for 99% of the people in a town like Pazardzhik. My father was a very interesting person. He was a gabbai - this is something like an elder - the first man after the rabbi. People addressed him as a public figure. The gabbai was responsible for solving any problem that proved interesting to visitors of the synagogue. 99 % of the rabbis who read the prayers were not quite aware of what they were actually reading. They used to say the words only by heart, without knowing their meaning. Unlike them, my father knew what he was reading. He used to translate the prayers into Latino [Ladino], as it was the spoken language among Jews. Especially during the family holidays, prayers were usually first said in Hebrew and then in Ladino, which made them clear and understandable for the people present. My father wasn't a religious fanatic like my maternal grandfather. He made religion somehow close and comprehensible. He 'updated' it. He was a progressive man. At one time he even had left-wing convictions. He even participated in the September events [Events of 1923], after which he was wanted by the authorities. My father's courtyard in Pazardzhik wasn't big, but we had fruit trees and a hencoop, in which some 15-20 hens were looked after. My father had various interests, which definitely enhanced the modern development of the village. Pazardzhik was an agricultural region, and there was hardly any industry. In order to improve village life, there had to be some way to make a living. My father took care of this. He organized the breeding of silkworms. Mulberry trees had to be planted, special rooms and pottery also had to be provided. It is true that nothing effective came out of it, but my father was, so to say, the founder of the whole initiative. After that, some 200-300 villagers started to breed silkworm. My father also cultivated rice, he rented land, hired people, because rice growing was not traditional for Pazardzhik (wheat was usually grown there), and it required a unique approach. Special irrigation 'cells' were prepared. The technology that he used was different to the one used in traditional agriculture. My father, who was one of the innovators of the Pazardzhik district, actually introduced rice growing - even though he didn't make much profit from it. Later on he started hemp cultivation. All these initiatives didn't come from the village people, but came from a few enterprising people, one of whom was my father. Hemp growing was very difficult; it had to be reaped, forged out, stapled. Although it sounds rather unlikely, my father also had a herd of sheep. He had some ideas about changing the old mode of non-profitable sheep breeding. I remember that one of the shepherds he had hired simply robbed him. Every time he came, he responded with the simple 'They died' to the question about what had happened with the sheep. At home we had medicines against all sorts of sheep-diseases. My father wanted to make full use of the sheep: for example, to process their fleece into fine, not rough, wool for cloaks. My father, who saw that innovations could bring greater profit than tradition, enthusiastically experimented with lots of things, even though he didn't benefit much himself. He was an avant-garde thinker. My father had a good knowledge of French - he could write and speak well, without having studied it anywhere, just due to his own interest. My father never went to bed without turning on the radio to hear the International. And he always cried at it. He imagined that the International would bring the liberation of people all over the world, with equality and respect to their national interests. He also wanted to be seen as an equal among others; therefore, whenever he heard the International, the inspiration usually brought tears to his eyes. At the time of the Holocaust, around 1941, the radio was first stamped and later on we were obliged to give it away. It was as if something had been torn from us.