

Jack Natan



This is my father, Jack Natan. The picture was taken in Prilep in 1916, when he was awarded with his first medal for bravery. He was a brave man - he got two medals for bravery when he served as a military officer in World War I. There are some very interesting letters and memories from his superiors telling about his military service. I remember a letter to my mother describing how once he led off his company to a safe place under constant enemy fire. Later, when the persecutions against Jews began, he showed great courage and didn't allow any despondency to overwhelm us. The atmosphere at home was always calm and nice. My father was extremely communicative and active in terms of social life. He used to collaborate with Jewish magazines as a lawyer. After 9th September 1944, he put a lot of efforts into the cooperative movement, as he worked in a bank that financed it, and moreover he was convinced of its future. My father was an extraordinary person. He had a great impact on me when I grew up. He dressed in secular clothes. He was very open to people, extremely witty and the heart of each company. He was very cultured and had various interests. He took me to my first opera, my first exhibition and my first lecture. Even when I was already a grown-up, we still continued to accompany each other on such occasions. I inherited his taste for literature and writing. He strongly hoped that I would take a philology degree and was rather disappointed when I took up medicine. He was quite musical, had a nice voice and sang wonderfully. When he was young, he was even invited to join the Stephan Makedonski company. Yet my grandfather, Shabbat Natan, said that he didn't want his son to be a chalgadjia. [Editor's note: chalgadjia is a word of Turkish origin and means 'performer of popular songs'; it has an ironical connotation in Bulgaria.] Therefore my father chose another career. My father mostly used to read on his days off. He had left-wing convictions and preferred the socially-oriented works, which he also advised me to read. We regularly bought the newspapers Mir [Peace] and Zora [Dawn]. We didn't visit libraries; we preferred to buy books. My parents weren't religious, we only celebrated the greatest Jewish holidays - Rosh Hashanah, Pesach and Purim. Nonetheless, my parents have always felt and considered themselves an integral part of the Jewish community. My father made friends with many Bulgarians, but he considered himself a Jew and actively participated in a number of Jewish social organizations. He was a member of the boards of the Jewish Asylum in Sofia and the Bnei Brith. Being assimilated, he had a very strong feeling of belonging to Bulgaria.