

## Rebeka Avram Natan (nee Geron), Merkado Mois Natan With Their Son Mois Merkado Natan



These are my parents Rebeka Avram Natan (nee Geron) and Merkado Mois Natan with me in Varna in 1926.

I was born in Varna in 1925. We moved to Ruse when I was two. I don't remember Varna from this period, I remember it from the period when I started visiting my grandmother in Varna. Ruse had a very strong Jewish community - around 3,500 people. [Ruse had the third largest Jewish community in Bulgaria after Sofia and Plovdiv, numbering 3,134 people in 1926.] The town had its own Jewish school, which was true only for Sofia, Plovdiv and Pazardzhik these days. There was no Jewish middle school in any other Bulgarian towns. Ruse had then between 50,000 and 60,000 inhabitants. The Jewish community was very united - there was a Jewish municipality, led both by the synagogue and the school boards of trustees. There were several Zionist organizations - General Zionists, Poalei Zion and Jabotinsky's revisionists, as well as the youth's organizations Hashomer Hatzair and Maccabi. Maccabi was the sports organization - we had a very good gym hall where we gathered every day and two times a week we made exercises under the supervision of a gymnast. My father was in the administration of the General Zionists, who were centrists. The other organization, Poalei Zion, was a bit more leftist, social democratic, while the revisionist fraction

that was created by Jabotinsky were rightists and a bit more radical as far as the liberation of Palestine was concerned. Each organization had a youth's subdivision. The Revisionists one was Betar - they used to have manifestations in the Jewish street dressed in brown shirts and black pants. The other ones were Hashomer Hatzair - they studied Ivrit rigorously and in their organization 'Ken' [Hebrew for Nest] they used to speak only in Ivrit so they prepared themselves for the Alyah to Israel - to work there in the kibbutzim. Maccabi was also a Zionist organization - followers of the General Zionists, mainly devoted to sports.

In Ruse there were two synagogues: the Ashkenazi one and the Sephardi one. There was a chazzan, too. Haribi [rabbi] Naftali was the chazzan at the first one and haribi Tuvi was servicing the second one. There was a shochet, too - there was a chazzan and a mezamer. The chazzan was the chief one and mezamer was the one, who accompanied him, his assistant to the service. Bar mitzvah was made in both the synagogue and home. Mine was at home. A chazzan came with plenty of relatives and friends. He read and gave me the maturity certificate. Marriages were performed in the synagogue only according to the traditional ritual - the prayer was read and the respective certificate was issued [Ketubbah]. This was the routine in Ruse, [which was possible because Bulgarian Jews were not extremely religious and certain rituals had been adapted to the situation in Bulgaria] and I can't say anything more.

There was one Jewish school - a secondary school where we studied all the subjects taught in Bulgarian schools in Bulgarian language; in the primary school - up to the fourth grade Ivrit was taught. In the middle school we also studied Ivrit, Toldot [Hebrew for history], and Tannakh. There were Jewish children who were not sent to study in the Jewish school, because it was more difficult there - we studied in the mornings and in the afternoon. But when we reached the high school level we were completely prepared for it. I have a brother, Avram Merkado Natan. My brother is four years younger than me. He studied in the same schools as I did, but couldn't graduate from high school, because the Law for Protection of the Nation was introduced and he was not allowed to go to school. He couldn't graduate until 1947, after which he studied at the Technical University in Sofia.