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**GDYNIA TO NEVE-YAM:  
THE JEWISH FISHERMAN'S COURSES  
WITHIN THE BAYS OF GDAŃSK AND PUCK  
IN THE INTERWAR PERIOD**

The Neve-Yam kibbutz (Polish “The House of the Sea”) is situated in the northern Israel at the Mediterranean coast, about 20 km south of Haifa and near Atlit, the old village of crusaders. In Atlit there dwell no more than 200 inhabitants, some of whom convinced that their kibbutz was established in 1939 by young Jews of German origin. The actual – a dozen or so – originators of the Neve-Yam were, however, members of the “Gordonia,” a Polish unit of the Zionist Youth Movement (the so-called “Palestinian Pioneers”)<sup>1</sup> who went to Palestine after having completed fisherman’s courses in Gdynia. According to Samuel Echt, a historian of the Gdańsk Jews, the first students came to the “Gordonia” kibbutz in some Palestinian port as early as May 1938.<sup>2</sup> Today we know for sure that the Palestinian port in question was Nahariya (near Haifa) where these students managed to construct 3 fisherman’s boats for the money they had brought with them from Poland. In 1939 they established the Neve-Yam kibbutz.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Archiwum Państwowe w Gdańsku [The Gdańsk State Archives – further: APG], Komisariat Rządu w Gdyni [The Gdynia Government Committee – further: KRG], 124/1367, pp. 1515–1518. The “Hechaluc-Pionier – Gordonia” organization was registered in the records of The Warsaw Government Committee on December 23, 1929. It was named after an ideologist and Zionist activist Aharon Dawid Gordon (1856–1922), the originator of the “Hapoel Hacair” movement who died in Palestine in 1922.

<sup>2</sup> S. Echt: *Die Geschichte der Juden in Danzig*, Leer 1972, p. 176.

<sup>3</sup> R. Porat: *Kovshey Hayam*, Tel Aviv 1996, p. 54.

In fact, the fisherman's courses for young Jews were organized in Gdynia by a Zionist association called "Zebulun" (its full name was: "The Association for Training Emigrant Polish Jews to Perform Sea Work in Palestine-Zebulun") which cooperated with the "Gordonia."<sup>4</sup> The association owed its name to a historic peoples inhabiting the coast of Palestine which originated in the Biblical Zebulun, the son of Jacob. The first scholar who found the press notes on the mentioned courses was Andrzej Ropelewski, yet these notes come from The "Kurier Bałtycki" ("The Baltic Courier") of December 1, 1938.<sup>5</sup> In his monographies on the history of the Jewish community in Gdynia the author of this article demonstrated this initiative to be of far older origin.<sup>6</sup> In October 1937 in the "Przegląd Zachodni" [The Western Review]<sup>7</sup> a report from the "Gordonia" kibbutz in Gdynia was published. According to this report, the beginnings of the oldest in Poland maritime *hachsharah* (i.e. kibbutz training) went back to the year 1934.<sup>8</sup> The first European fisherman's courses for young Jews were organized in the Maritime Officer School in Civitavecchia (Italy) by the "Beitar" organization. In the first

<sup>4</sup> Archiwum Państwowe w Gdańsku Oddział w Gdyni [The Gdynia Branch of The Gdańsk State Archives – further: APG OG], Morski Urząd Rybacki w Gdyni [The Maritime Fisherman's Bureau – further: MUR], 217/201, the pagination is lacking. The Articles of the "Zebulun" was authorised by the Cracow Province Governor's Office on September 27, 1935. Cracow became the seat of the organization's headquarters, but the organization itself was active across the entire territory of the Republic of Poland except for the provinces of Poznań, Wołyń and Lwów. The most important aims of the "Zebulun" was supporting the emigration of the Jewish youth to Palestine and the colonization of the latter by people professionally associated with the sea.

<sup>5</sup> A. Ropelewski: *Nieznana karta z historii naszego rybołówstwa morskiego* [A Blank Page of the History of Our Maritime Fishery], "Gospodarka Rybna" [Fish Economy] 1964, No. 11, p. 23; idem: *Żydowskie kursy rybackie w Gdyni (1936–1939)* [The Jewish Fisherman's Courses in Gdynia 1936–1939], "Biuletyn Żydowskiego Instytutu Historycznego" [The Bulletin of the Jewish History Institute – further: BŻIH] 1981, No. 1 (117), pp. 59 ff; idem: *Żydowskie kursy rybackie w Gdyni (1936–1939)* [The Jewish Fisherman's Courses in Gdynia 1936–1939], "Rocznik Gdyński" [The Gdynia Annals – further: RG] 11, 1992/1993, pp. 164–167; "Kurier Bałtycki" [The Baltic Courier] 278, 1.12.1938.

<sup>6</sup> J. Drozd: *Spoleczność żydowska Gdyni w okresie międzywojennym* [The Jewish Community of Gdynia in the Interwar Period], Gdynia 2007; idem: *Lost in the Whirlwind of War. Jewish Community in Gdynia*, Gdynia 2008; see also idem: *Kursy portowe i rybackie dla Żydów w Gdyni w okresie międzywojennym* [The Jewish Port and Fisherman's Courses in Gdynia in the Interwar Period], "Nautologia" [The Nautology] 40, 2005, No. 142, pp. 37–41.

<sup>7</sup> "The Western Review" (subtitled „An Independent Weekly for Pomeranian and Great Poland Jews”) – a periodical established in Gdynia in the spring of 1936 by the Jewish trade unions (craftsmen and merchants) and the weekly's first editor-in-chief, Izydor Zylberman (nickname "Leliwa"). The greatest development of the weekly came at the times of Samuel Joachim Drück as its editor-in-chief (i.e. after 10.12.1936).

<sup>8</sup> *W kibucu Gordonii w Gdyni (reportaż)* [In the Gordonia Kibbutz in Gdynia – a Report], "Przegląd Zachodni" (The Western Review – further: PZ] 40 (48), 22.10.1937, p. 6.

three stages (i.e. till the year 1937) several dozen of young Zionists from Hungary, Czechoslovakia, Austria, Poland and Palestine took part in these courses.<sup>9</sup>

Young “Palestinian Pioneers” began their organized ventures into Gdynia in September 1934, and independently of the wave of Jewish emigrants taking place in Gdynia at the time in question.<sup>10</sup> They were staying in the local kibbutz called The “Hechaluc-Pionier – Gordonia” Jewish Work Centre and found jobs in the port companies set on Jewish capital. After the completion of job training they were directed to Palestine by Zionist organizations. The “Gordonia” was supposed to prepare them, professionally and culturally, for this emigration thus teaching the “Pioneers” both sailing and fishing skills as well as the Hebrew language and the culture of Palestine on general knowledge courses.<sup>11</sup>

From the very beginning the young Zionists were supported in Gdynia by the board of the Committee for Fulfilling the Tasks Ascribed by the Jewish Commune and vigorously acting Zionist organizations while their social supervisor was dr Janusz Rauch.<sup>12</sup> By the end of 1935 the board of the “Hechaluc-Pionier” via the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Ministry of Industry and Trade submitted an application to the Pomerania Province Governor’s Office in Toruń (Thorn). The application concerned the work permits for another contingent of Jewish people to be trained as port workers so that they would eventually become a qualified group of workers in the Palestinian port of Haifa. The Pomerania Province Governor’s Office consulted the Government Commissioner in Gdynia about the said permits, and the Commissioner strongly opposed the idea of allowing yet another group of Jews to work in port claiming that “there are hundreds

<sup>9</sup> R. Porat: op. cit., p. 52.

<sup>10</sup> APG, KRG, 124/2299, p. 283.

<sup>11</sup> The preparations for the Palestine trip also encompassed: lectures on tasks and aims of the organization and the country soon to become the pioneers’ motherland; and meetings, conferences, conventions and exhibitions. The “Gordonia’s” educational basis comprised special libraries with appropriate books on the subject. The organization offered its members the possibility of participating in additional courses (theatrical, musical, painting, sports and tourist) funded from membership fees, donations, income from organized performances, lectures, concerts and own economic activity (ibid., pp. 1515 f).

<sup>12</sup> Janusz Rauch (born 1894), got his PhD in law at the Vienna University after he had graduated from the Vienna Trade and Export Academy. He participated in WWI as an Austrian aviation lieutenant. He came to Gdynia from Lwów on October 12, 1932. His many functions encompass the title of the Head of the Polish-Hungarian Chamber of Industry and Commerce in Gdynia, he was an activist and the first leader of the Committee for Fulfilling the Tasks Ascribed by the Jewish Faith Commune in Kartuzy District. From 1937 he was the Head of a branch of the Union of Small and Retail Jewish Merchants. In 1939 as PA reserve lieutenant he volunteered to defend Gdynia. Wounded at Kępa Oksywska, Rauch survived through the war in unknown circumstances. In 1946 he came to live in Bytom.

of job applications from permanent Gdynia residents awaiting the decision in the office of the Qualification Committee.”<sup>13</sup> Besides, in the Commissioner’s opinion, instead of emigrating, “Pioneers” oftentimes resolved to stay in Gdynia thus “squeezing Polish people out of enterprises.”<sup>14</sup>

As early as 1935 the Committee for Fulfilling the Tasks Ascribed by the Jewish Commune resolved to purchase a few fishing boats so as to begin professional trainings. In the course of the first reporting meeting of the Gdańsk group of “Zebulun” held in the association’s premises at Kilińskiego 10 on January 17, 1937 the board members and active Zionists such as dr Otto Menasché,<sup>15</sup> dr Benjamin Schläger,<sup>16</sup> dr Jakub Neumark,<sup>17</sup> and Bernard Fisch<sup>18</sup> were introduced. The first of these men, a Committee member dr Menasché read out loud report stating that

<sup>13</sup> Archiwum Państwowe w Bydgoszczy [The Bydgoszcz State Archives – further: APB], Urząd Wojewódzki Pomorski w Toruniu [The Toruń Province Governor’s Office – further: UWP], 3140, pp. 5, 7–10.

<sup>14</sup> APG, KRG, 124/2300, p. 54.

<sup>15</sup> Naftali Otto Menasché (1896–1990), got his PhD in law at the Jagiellonian University in Cracow. Before he came to Gdynia he was an ardent Zionist activist. He co-originated and headed the “Merkaz Haceirim” association and a Cracow branch of the “Hechaluc.” He was on the board of the Central Committee of “Hechaluc” in West Little Poland and Silesia as well as of the “Ceire Syjon” in West Galicia. He came to Gdynia in 1928, yet became a resident of this city as late as March 29, 1933. A leader of Gdańsk Zionists concentrated first around the “Jewish Social Club,” and then around the Zionist Union whose head he was, too. In the years 1935–1938 he was Head of the “Zebulun,” Honorary Head of a branch of Jewish Craftsmen Union, and Leader of the Zionist organization of “C.S. Hitachuth.” In the years 1935–1937 he was Head of the Committee for Fulfilling the Tasks Ascribed by the Jewish Faith Commune in Gdynia and, after the elections to the Jewish Faith Commune in Kartuzy District in 1937 he became the head who managed to move the seat of this organization from Wejherowo to Gdynia. His war fate remains unknown. We only know that he lived through the war and in 1945 r dwelled in Holona (Palestine, later on Israel).

<sup>16</sup> Benjamin (Bronisław) Schläger (1899–1939/45), MD – a pediatrician specializing in children’s internal diseases graduated from a medical academy in Vienna and worked there in a clinic as a student. Then he was employed in hospitals in Warsaw and Rzeszów. He came to Gdynia from Leżajsk on December 29, 1934.

<sup>17</sup> Jakub Neumark (1882–1942), a PhD in law and a syndic. He came to Gdynia from Katowice on July 31, 1936.

<sup>18</sup> Bernard (Berel) Fisch (1885–1941/45?) was an energetic Zionist activist when still dwelling in Rzeszów. There he functioned as Head of the rightist “Poalej-Syjon” (a member of this party’s central committee) and board member of the “Keren-Hejesod.” He came to Gdynia from Rzeszów on October 10, 1933. Immediately after his arrival in Gdynia he became a vital part of the social and political life of this city as a coorganizer of the “Jewish Social Club,” the Zionist Union and a branch of the Palestine Work League. From 1934 he was a member of the Committee for Fulfilling the Tasks Ascribed by the Jewish Faith Commune in Gdynia and from 1937 – of the board of the Committee for Fulfilling the Tasks Ascribed by the Jewish Faith Commune in the Kartuzy District in Gdynia (Head of a social security department). From 1938 he became Head of the Zionist Union. Soon before WWII began he moved to Warsaw where he was seen with his son for the last time in 1941. In this year he worked for an organization called the “Joint.” His further lot remains unknown.

the training of the Jews to work in Gdynia port companies went as expected. Despite the reluctance of local authorities, a growing number of Jewish youth could find jobs in the fishing industry thus “becoming specialists in this profession.”<sup>19</sup> The group resolved that its main aim would be the establishment of the Jewish Maritime School, the germs of which were: a fishing boat offered to the group by dr Max Lesser from Gdańsk and announcing the soon-to-happen purchase of a cutter. The funds for financing the latter purchase began to be collected from April 1937.<sup>20</sup> Propagating the idea of the “Zebulun” among the Jewish youth all over the Republic of Poland turned out to be another vital question to be animatedly discussed at the meeting. The new association soon gained the sympathy and support of the city’s Jewish community, and the propaganda resulted in the form of a growing number of applicants for the said courses in Gdynia.

During the training young people were lodged in three places: at Słupecka 11, Paderewskiego 17 and Św. Piotra 5. A report on the kibbutz published in the “Przegląd Zachodni” [The Western Review] reads that after years of wondering and living and working in very harsh conditions all over Gdynia, in 1937 the three-floor villa “Zgoda” with a sea view situated at Paderewskiego 17 became both the main place for the trainings and a boarding school.<sup>21</sup> The first floor – or a cellar really – comprised three rooms and a kitchen, on the second floor there were four rooms and a bathroom as well as the additional separate bathroom and toilet, whereas on the third (the attic) – five rooms and a bathroom.<sup>22</sup> The villa had also a library, a bedroom, a living room and an infirmary. The rooms were humbly furnished with the equipment the kibbutz members crafted but clean. The inhabitants of the premises had the drama club and choir practice at their disposal as well as they organized speeches, lectures and courses in Hebrew. The author of the above mentioned report noticed the living conditions in the boarding school were far from comfortable. In twelve rooms there dwelled 50 persons of whom twelve were constantly working, thirteen constituted a fishing group, five took care of cleaning and housing chores (in the kitchen or laundry), and as many as twenty people remained jobless. This latter number is surprising for it suggests

<sup>19</sup> APB, UWP, 4601, p. 41; *ibid.*, KRG, 124/2301, p. 11.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.* On the day of the meeting the fundings for the aim amounted to a mere 50 pounds sterling. Since the purchase of a motor cutter was an expensive undertaking (in 1936 it cost 25 000 zł), a one-mast *Gdy-40* was leased (APB, KRG, 4601, p. 181).

<sup>21</sup> *W kibucu Gordonii ...* [In the Gordonia Kibbutz ...], p. 6.

<sup>22</sup> APG, Bank Gospodarstwa Krajowego Oddział w Gdyni [The Gdynia Branch of the Domestic Economy Bank], 1289/423.

that, despite the existence in the Gdańsk port of the many companies set on the Jewish capital, they could not ascertain jobs for twenty physical workers. In 1937 the kibbutz's budget amounted to a mere 1200 zloty per month, whereas its actual income did not exceed 700 zloty. Consequently (the rent, electricity, water and fuel costs amounting to 375 zloty included), each course participant's living costs amounted to no more than 90 gr per day.

The trainings were conducted by Captain Gustav Pietsch<sup>23</sup> and Engineer Leon Komorowski,<sup>24</sup> whereas the fishing practice within the Bays of Gdańsk and Puck was additionally supervised by a doyen of the Gdynia fishery, Józef Koss.<sup>25</sup> Komorowski and Pietsch did not live in the villa "Zgoda." The former rented a room in the villa "Zosieńka" at Sędzickiego 22 while the latter commuted to Gdynia from Gdańsk-Oliwa where he lived with his wife Gertrude and sons Heinz and Karl from the spring of 1937.<sup>26</sup> The reason to hire Pietsch for the job was not only his high professional, particularly pedagogical, qualifications (earlier he worked as a navigation and diving instructor in the "Bar-Kochba" in Gdańsk); procuring a captain with the Polish citizenship for the purpose of the courses simply turned out an impossible task.<sup>27</sup> Pietsch's contribution into the organization of the training (mainly of navigation) was huge; hence, the fact of addressing him as the

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<sup>23</sup> Gustav Pietsch (1893–1975) was captain of transport and fish vessels and a navigator. During WWI he served in the German navy sailing aboard the U-boat's minesweeper and escorting ship. From 1918 he lived in Gdańsk (first in Jelitkowo, then in Oliwa). An activist of the German Union of the Merchant Navy Officers and Veterans' Union, closely associated with the German National People's Party (DNVP). After 1933, as an antifascist, he was expelled from the Union, arrested and persecuted. In 1935 he started the "Feldgrauer Alarm" weekly and ran for the Volkstag elections as an independent candidate. Many Times attacked by the Nazi militia, fearing for his and his family's life, he moped to Gdynia in the summer of 1936 (D. Riffel: *Flucht über das Meer. Illegal von Danzig nach Palästina, Überleben im Dritten Reich: Juden im Untergrund und ihre Helfer*, hg. v. W. Benz, München 2003, pp. 154–165).

<sup>24</sup> Leon Komorowski (b. 1905) was a course organizer and fishing instructor as well as a member of the "Makkabi" in Warsaw and of the Zionist Union. He arrived to Gdynia from Warsaw in 1935.

<sup>25</sup> Józef Koss's (1871–1954) sons: Feliks Teodor, Karol Andrzej and Stefan Augustyn as well as his son-in-law, a legend of the post-war Gdańsk fishery, Paweł Gic must have aided him in conducting the courses. In the milieu of Gdańsk fishermen, Józef Koss was a legend himself. Within the 56 years of his sea work (up till 1936) he caught about 2 million tons of fish. Koss began his fishing adventure when he was only 9 only to emigrate to the States 7 years later. In 1898 he volunteered to enroll in the US army and took part in the war against Spain, a fact which contributed to his spending 6 months in Cuba. He returned to Gdynia in 1901 (*Polski żeglarz Sindbad* [The Polish Sinbad], "Torpeda" [Torpedo] 3, 9.05.1936: 3).

<sup>26</sup> APG, Komitet Wojewódzki PZPR [The Provincial Committee of the Polish United Workers' Party – further: KW PZPR], 2384/2261, p. 55.

<sup>27</sup> APG OG, MUR, 217/201, pagination lacking.

school's "head" in the association correspondence with the Gdańsk Maritime Office does not surprise us.<sup>28</sup> Pietsch was hired by Komorowski, the main organizer of the training within the "Zebulun" in Gdynia<sup>29</sup> who came there from Warsaw in order to organize a Jewish maritime centre, an aim which Zionist organizations assigned to him. Owing to Komorowski the local Zionist leaders looked more than kindly on the school in question.<sup>30</sup> It needs to be added that Komorowski gained his own fishing and navigation experience together with the participants of this first course. While living in Gdynia, Komorowski also turned out to be a gifted editor-columnist writing about economic matters in the periodicals dedicated to the economic questions of the Gdynia port.<sup>31</sup> The practical classes took place on board of two fishing boats of which one (*Gdy-40*) belonged to Koss, whereas the other (*Gdy-52*) – to Józef Detlaff.<sup>32</sup> It seems interesting that in June 1936 the board of "Zebulun" addressed the Maritime Fishing Institute in Gdynia with the proposal to purchase one of the fish cutters constructed in the fish yard at the time in question. The correspondence as regards this matter suggested that the purchase in question would be a sample transaction finishing in the purchase of more boats of such a type provided the type would meet the criteria which the "Zebulun" had set. After the completion of the training its participants were supposed to sail to Palestine aboard the mentioned cutters.<sup>33</sup> Yet, the transaction was never completed.

The training went according to the rules customary for such courses in West European countries. The admittance of a candidate was conditioned by the results both of his/her medical and entrance examinations. The course was supposed to last for at least twelve months (but never exceed 14 months). The lectured

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<sup>28</sup> APG, Gdański Urząd Morski w Gdyni [The Gdańsk Maritime Office in Gdynia], 217/201, pagination lacking.

<sup>29</sup> APB, UWP, 4601, p. 181.

<sup>30</sup> In 1937 during the interrogation to have taken place in relation to the investigation by the State Police regarding communist activists in Gdynia, Komorowski pointed to Dr. Rauch, Dr. Menasché i Dr. Schächter as well as "other higher Jewish citizens" being the most significant patrons of the fishing courses (APG, KW PZPR, 2384/2261, pp. 54 f).

<sup>31</sup> "Danzig-Polnische Wirtschaft Nachrichten," "Gdynia Hafen-Schiffahrt und Wirtschaft-Nachrichten" and "Gdynsko-Gdański Biuletyn Gospodarczy" [The Gdynia/Gdańsk Bulletin of Economy].

<sup>32</sup> The majority of courses were held aboard *Gdy-40*. The cutter was constructed in the Gdańsk company "Korsch" in 1924. It was 9,4 m long, 3,7 m wide and draught of 1,3 m. It was driven by the 15 hp "Bergedorf" engine. In August 1938 the cutter was sold to scouts receiving the name of *Gdy-94* upon its second registration.

<sup>33</sup> APG OG, MUR, 217/71: a weekly report of the Head of the Bureau of June 13, 1936.

subjects were: fishing and navigation practice, practical knowledge of the sea, navigation rules (including those on the international navigation traffic), rules of lifeboat service, biology, zoology and sea fauna, meteorology, engine and steamship knowledge, log book writing, transport and fishing product conservation, rudimentaries of the boat- and merchant vessel-building, economic news on trade and fishing industry, knowledge on insurance, knowledge on fishing (both off-shore and deep-sea) and English.<sup>34</sup>

Within three years only two fishing courses were completed in Gdynia. The first of these courses lasted as planned, i.e., from May 1, 1936 till May 15, 1937. The other course began in the spring of 1938 yet was extended so that it ended only after 17 (!) months due to Pietsch's decision to leave for Palestine as soon as possible on one hand and the jeopardy of Jews being resettled from Gdynia on the other.<sup>35</sup> The organization of the third course was postponed because of the outbreak of WWII. On the whole in the years 1936–1939 the Gdynia kibbutz witnessed the coming and going of at least 77 persons (60 boys and 17 girls).<sup>36</sup> They came from various parts of Poland (even situated as far away as Wołkowysk, Tarnopol, Stanisławów, Lwów, Wilno, or Nowy Sącz), yet, the majority of these people came from Łódź and Będzin where "Gordonia" organized a preliminary recruitment.

"Kurier Bałtycki" [The Baltic Courier] informed that 12 fishermen completed the first course yet there may have been more than 12 boys who, due to the hardness of the course, interrupted the training (a report of 1937 mentions 13 fishermen).<sup>37</sup> Little is known about the details of the port training parallelly taking place at the time in question. The majority of Jews undergoing training there were also trained as regards fish processing. Women constituted the group's core. The Warsaw head office of the "Gordonia" carried out the preliminary activities

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<sup>34</sup> The knowledge of English and other foreign languages could be helpful in Gdynia. This is because the participants of the sea *hachsharah* contacted Jewish sea pioneers from other European countries. Ropelewski mentioned e.g. the coming of a Latvian schooner *Theodor Herzl* with a group of young (17–20 years old) Jewish sailing students to Gdynia on October 28, 1937. In the Gdynia seat of the "Zebulun" foreign lecturers had their speeches, too – e.g. in October 1936 an Englishwoman Henrietta Diamond spoke there on Palestine (APB, UWP, 4598, p. 373).

<sup>35</sup> R. Porat: op. cit., p. 57.

<sup>36</sup> J. Drozd: *Kursy portowe i rybackie ...* [The Jewish Port and Fisherman's Courses ...], p. 41.

<sup>37</sup> The events of 1938 which the "Kurier Bałtycki" [The Baltic Courier] depicted might have influenced this. According to the report, a boat with Jewish course participants disappeared within the Bay of Gdańsk. The young students of fishery were rescued by a special – and expensive (800 zloty) – operation (A. Ropelewski: *Żydowskie kursy rybackie ...* [The Jewish Fisherman's Courses ...], BŻIH, p. 60).

related to the organization of the Palestine venture for the graduates from the first course as early as 1937. These people could not leave Poland all at the same time, a reason why a list had been made of the order of emigration certificates which the course participants subsequently received.<sup>38</sup> According to Bencjon Kagan, a course participant, problems with fulfilling all the necessary emigration formalities and the time it took pushed some of the course participants to organize an illegal trip to Palestine.<sup>39</sup>

The first group of the “Pioneers” left the Gdynia depot on March 21, 1938. At first there were 13 persons in the group, 6 fishermen included. The remaining 7 people were trained as port workers for four years. At the last moment the Headquarters of “Gordonia” augmented the number of certificates to 19 thus enabling all of the trained fishermen (12) leaving for Palestine.<sup>40</sup> The course participants crossed the border of Poland in Śniatyń on March 24, 1938. Then, via Constanța (Romania), they voyaged to the Haifa port where they landed on March 30, 1938.<sup>41</sup> Another group of course participants together with Gustav Pietsch left Gdynia at night on December 24, 1938. They voyaged to “Eretz Israel” along the coasts of Belgium and France only to eventually arrive in Haifa on January 10, 1939.<sup>42</sup>

The least information we have on the lot of the participants of the third course. According to the budget of the Jewish Faith Commune in the Kartuzy (Karthus) District in Gdynia for the year 1939, 25 fishermen participated in the last course.<sup>43</sup> Some of them underwent training aboard the cutters of the Deep-Sea Fishing Association “Pomorze” [Pomerania] directed to fish at the North Sea.<sup>44</sup>

<sup>38</sup> A letter of the “Gordonia” Top Management in Warsaw to the Office in Tel Aviv of January 17, 1937 (The Hulda Kibbutz Archive, a copy from the collection of J. Drozd). Emigration formalities lasted long due to the requirement of an emigrant being in possession of valid: passport, entrance visa to Palestine, travel means (money or tickets). The list included the following 10 fishermen and port porters: Abram Gerszowski, Cael Bidak, Aron Szerman, Zymel Lejzerowicz, Jankiel Rojzman, Josiel Szapiro, Izrael Hersz Szmulewicz, Srul Garc, Noech Michael Zamberg and Josif Ber Rabiner. Also, awaiting the Palestine trip were the following women, all workers of the Gdynia can factories and smoking houses: Lea Gross, Chana Kuperberg, Blima Majnemer, Jochemet Kaplan, Cywia Zbar and Zlata Malinowicz.

<sup>39</sup> R. Porat: op. cit., p. 56.

<sup>40</sup> PZ 3 (60), 12.01.1938, p. 3; *Kronika* [The Chronicle], *ibid.*, 10 (67), 1.03.1938, p. 4.

<sup>41</sup> Archiwum Żydowskiego Instytutu Historycznego w Warszawie [Archives of the Jewish Historical Institute in Warsaw], Paszporty [Passports], 1898: Zymel Lejzerowicz; *ibid.*, 2496: Josif Ber Rabiner.

<sup>42</sup> Е. Беркович: *Из Данцига в Эйлат: морем к свободе. Жизнь капитана – гуманиста и борца*, “Еврейская газета. Russischsprachige jüdische Zeitung” 2004, No. 6.

<sup>43</sup> APB, UWP, 4485, p. 405.

<sup>44</sup> The list of the crews of the following ships: *Adam, Barbara, Cezary, Dorota, Eugeniusz* and *Franciszka* of July and August 1939 in Possession of the “Pomorze” and directed to Fish at the

The trainees sailed charge-free, for food only. They could have also participated in the fishings at the Barents Sea, the Arctic Ocean, La Manche Channel and near Boulogne-sur-Mer. As he reminisced in the presence of Andrzej Ropelewski in May 1964, Jehuda Leon Stark,<sup>45</sup> later Deep-Sea Captain of Israel together with six young Jews left Gdynia on the “Pomerania” trawlers in the summer of 1939 only to learn about the outbreak of WWII in the course of a voyage on the North Sea.<sup>46</sup> One of these young Jews, a Fajwel Barszef remembered having eventually arrived in Palestine, together with four other course participants, aboard *Colorado*. His colleagues were sent to a maritime branch of the Kiriat-Yam kibbutz near Haifa where they continued sailing aboard a fishing boat named *Snapir*. Barszef himself landed in the Saar kibbutz established by the “Hashomer Hatzair” organization.

According to the estimates by Reuben Porat (a fisherman in the S’dot Yam kibbutz), 29 fishermen – of which the majority landed in the Neve-Yam – were supposed to get from Gdynia to Palestine.<sup>47</sup> Kagan, the already mentioned Pietsch’s most talented student established a fish can factory there.<sup>48</sup> Also Zeew Gomuliński, a worker in the fishery branch for 50 years, and Aron Szerman, one of the first cutter skippers contributed immensely to the development of the Israeli fishery.<sup>49</sup>

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North Sea includes: Mendel Sapersztejn, Mordechaj Bursztyn, Jakub Płatek, Henoch Ander i Szloma Trzewik – as the trainees, Jehuda Leon Stark – able seaman, Dawid Myszałow – seaman, Zyskind Zilberberg and Chaim Cypersztejn as sea boys.

<sup>45</sup> Jehuda Leon Stark (b. 1913), later Deep-Sea Captain of Israel arrived to Gdynia from Gorlice on August 22, 1938 as a seaman in the Deep-Sea Fishing Association “Pomorze”. After he had been released from the Polish army and when on emigration he graduated from the King Edward VII Nautica School on March 21, 1944. In the period from April 1, 1944 to May 31, 1945 he was the second mate aboard m/s *Oksywie* (W.K. Taniewski-Elliott: *Spis personelu zatrudnionego na statkach Polskiej Marynarki Handlowej w latach 1939–1945* [The List of the Crew of the Ships of the Polish Merchant Navy in the Years 1939–1945], Gdańsk 1981, pp. 308 f).

<sup>46</sup> A. Ropelewski: *Żydowskie kursy rybackie ...* [The Jewish Fisherman’s Courses ...], BŻIH, pp. 60 f; idem: *Żydowskie kursy rybackie ...* [The Jewish Fisherman’s Courses ...], RG, pp. 166 f. Stark reminisces: “We entered Ijmuiden [in Holland – J.D.] so as to see what the situation is and receive advice of our consul in Amsterdam. Then we left for Fleetwood [in England – J.D.] and took the trawlers back to Mr. Stockhamer [the owner of the “Pomorze” – J.D.] who managed to get to England via Sweden in the meantime. Some of my colleagues stayed aboard the ships they worked for, whereas I left for France where I volunteered to join the army commended by General Sikorski. A group of six young Jews from Gdynia fishing school established by the Zionist Organization joined us on our last voyage.”

<sup>47</sup> R. Porat: op. cit., p. 58.

<sup>48</sup> Later on he actively worked at a Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations in Chorkor (Ghana) as a specialist in that branch. He invented there e.g. a special stove for fish smoking called a “Kagan’s oven,” soon to be popularized all over West Africa as a “Chorkor kiln” or “Chorkor oven.”

<sup>49</sup> A letter of Menakhem Ben-Yami to Jarosław Drozd dated for October 2, 2003.

Gustav Pietsch together with his wards arrived in Palestine, too, an evidence that he did not participate in the last course organized in Gdynia. On October 2, 1938 dr Heinz Wydra from the Maritime Department of the Jewish Agency issued a permit for a yearly stay in Palestine for Pietsch himself, his wife and two sons. This was not Pietsch's first stay in the Near East. In 1937 following an invitation of the "Sochnut," the "Gordonia" sent him to Palestine for the purpose of conducting the research on the country's coastline so as to found fishing settlements there. After having travelled from Rosh-Pinna up north to Ashdod in the south Pietsch wrote a report in which he pointed to 3 places he considered best for the said purpose. They were Atlit, Ceasarea and Abu-Zwora (now Mikhmoret near Netanya).

According to Porat, it was Pietsch who ordered the "Gordonia" to accelerate the completion of the Gdynia courses so as to allow the graduates's leaving for Palestine as soon as possible. On his initiative money began to be collected in Jewish communes for the purpose of purchasing both fishing equipment and material for the boat construction in Palestine. During his stay in Palestine, Pietsch also supervised the construction of two fishing boats as well as he organized sailcloth and materials for fishing nets. He was the first specialist who, on the initiative of the Palestinian maritime office researched the coastlines of the Mediterranean, the Lake Kinneret and the Red Sea.<sup>50</sup> Because of the outbreak of WWII, the English interned Pietsch and placed him in the Akkon camp where he stayed until February 1940. In the years 1940–1948 Pietsch and his family dwelled in Tel Aviv in very difficult social conditions. In 1943, out of his private means, he purchased the boat *Birkor* aboard which he and his two sons sailed towards Al-Arish and Port Said finding shoals of fish to be caught there. After the institution of the state of Israel the Gdynia "Pioneers" found him, Soon he became Head of the "Hamashbir" company producing fish meal in Eilat.<sup>51</sup> In the following years he become an advisor to the "A tid" Company and since 1953 the Head of the Eilat fishing port.

Since Gustav Pietsch emigrated to Palestine together with the participants of the second course in December 1938, the question arises of who conducted the

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<sup>50</sup> R. Porat,; op. cit., p. 54.

<sup>51</sup> Е. Беркович: op. cit. For a short period Pietsch was Head of the Eilat port. Due to his deteriorating health and old age Pietsch subsequently functioned as a captain-expert on port matters. In 1958 he and his wife returned to Germany (Berlin). They stayed there only till 1961 after which date the two people resolved to emigrate to Australia to the "Glettkau" (Jelitkowo) farm where their daughter lived. The Pietschs died there in 1975.

third training in fishery in Gdynia? Evidence exists that this task could have been tackled by the Gdynia branch of the Association for Supporting Aviation and Sea Work in Palestine actively functioning from November 19, 1938 at least.<sup>52</sup> On this very day the association's secretary, dr Henryk Schächter<sup>53</sup> registered in the MFB (for the purpose of receiving the fishing badge) two sail-pull boats *Gdy-79*, both constituting the Association's possession.<sup>54</sup> The main aims of the Association for Supporting Aviation and Sea Work in Palestine were propagation and popularization amongst the Jewish community the knowledge of the sea and aviation in Palestine, organizing, supporting and preparation of all potential emigrants who wished to undertake sea and aviation jobs in Palestine.

In order to realize these aims, the Association committed itself to establishing a hydrobiological institute and maritime and aviation schools. The Articles of the Association preserved as a resource of the Gdynia Branch of the Gdańsk State Archives includes an entry on conducting fishing courses, organizing groups for performing port work (loading and unloading ships, ware- and storehouse work), propagating water sports, organizing competitions and sea excursions for propagandist aims. The association was also supposed to collect funds for purchasing boats and ships for Palestine. The doubts researchers have as regards this latter and other questions can easily be dispelled by the results of a search query performed in the archives of one of the oldest (est. 1930) kibbutzim of the "Gordonia" – that of Hulda in Israel (situated in the central part of the country). There, documentation (also photographic) is kept concerning the prewar organization by the Zionist Youth Movement "Gordonia" in Poland both of vocational courses and the subsequent emigration. Also in Hulda there are archival materials confirming the

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<sup>52</sup> The Association for Supporting Aviation and Sea Work in Palestine was registered in its Warsaw headquarters on May 24, 1938. The minor units were branches established by the resolution of the governing body when the need to do so was expressed by at least 15 persons. The Gdynia branch was established no later than on November 19, 1938. Its first head was Dr. Jakub Neumark. On June 28–29, 1939, almost the eve of WWII, the first general meeting of the Association was held in Gdynia. There were 30 participants of which as many as 13 came from Warsaw. The topics to be discussed covered organizational matters (APB, UWP, 4610, p. 80).

<sup>53</sup> Henryk Schächter (1898–1941) was an MD as regards obstetrics and gynecology as well as a Zionist activist. He came to Gdynia from Drohiczyn on July 6, 1934. He was the pillar both of the Zionist Union and the cultural-educational association "Tarbut." On the other hand, he was also an extremist Zionist (maximalist) and a right-wing revisionist. He functioned as a board member of the Jewish Faith Commune in the Kartuzy District in Gdynia.

<sup>54</sup> The older of the two was constructed in Jelitkowo in 1928 (it was 3,8 m long, 1,5 m wide and of 0,55 m draught). The other boat was built in Sopot or Gdańsk in 1930 (length: 6,5 m, width: 2,3 m, and immersion: 0,8 m). They might have been a gift from Gustav Pietsch who emigrated to Palestine.

establishment of the Neve-Yam kibbutz by the Jews who came to Palestine from Gdynia.

The fishing courses for young Zionists from the Association organized in Gdynia, the years 1936–1939, by the Zebulun and the Association for Supporting Aviation and Sea Work in Palestine for the purpose of preparing Jewish emigrants from Poland to perform sea jobs in Palestine were one of the best organized European courses. These courses were assumed to be a foundation for the Jewish Maritime School and the hydrobiological institute. Owing to the aid of local Zionist organizations (mainly the Zionist Union and CS Hitachduth) and the commitment of the course instructors among whom a defector from Gdańsk, Captain Gustav Pietsch played the main role, in no time at all about 30 young Jews were trained as regards fishery and navigation; the Jews who created the basis of Israeli fishing fleet as soon as they reached Palestine. The Neve-Yam kibbutz which they founded became a training base for subsequent groups of young “Pioneers.” The participants of prewar fishing courses remembered Gdynia, the city in which they learnt their job, well. It was precisely in Gdynia that in the course of numerous additional courses carried out by the Zionist Youth Movement “Gordonia” these people learnt about Palestine and studied English. They left their memoirs published in Polish, German, Russian, and Hebrew which attest to their huge nostalgia for the City of the Sea and Dreams.

*Translated by Beata Zawadka*

**Z GDYNI DO NEVE-YAM.  
ŻYDOWSKIE KURSY RYBACKIE  
NA WODACH ZATOKI GDAŃSKIEJ I PUCKIEJ  
W OKRESIE DWUDZIESTOLECIA MIĘDZYWOJENNEGO**

**Streszczenie**

„Pionierzy Palestyny” zaczęli w zorganizowanych grupach przyjeżdżać do Gdyni w 1934 roku. Mieszkali w kibucu zwanym Żydowskim Ośrodkiem Pracy „Hechaluc-Pionier – Gordonia” i znajdowali zatrudnienie w działających w porcie firmach o kapitale żydowskim. Po zakończeniu przeszkolenia zawodowego organizacje syjonistyczne oraz zarząd Komisji do Spełniania Zadań Gminy Żydowskiej w Gdyni kierowały ich do Palestyny. „Gordonia” przygotowywała ich do emigracji pod względem zarów-

no zawodowym, jak i kulturalnym. Kształciła równie starannie w zakresie żeglarstwa i rybołówstwa, jak i znajomości języków hebrajskiego, angielskiego oraz na kursach ogólnokształcących. Zajęcia instruktażowe prowadzili kpt. Gustav Pietsch i inż. Leon Komorowski, a praktykę rybacką na wodach Zatoki Gdańskiej i Puckiej nadzorował gdyński rybak Józef Koss. Przeszkolenie odbywało się według zasad przyjętych dla tego typu kursów w Europie Zachodniej. Ogółem w latach 1936–1939 przez kibuc przewinęło się przynajmniej 77 osób z różnych zakątków II RP. Założony przez nich w Palestynie w 1939 roku kibuc Neve-Yam stał się bazą szkoleniową dla kolejnych grup młodych „Pionierów” z Europy Środkowo-Wschodniej.

**GDYNIA TO NEVE-YAM:  
THE JEWISH FISHERMAN’S COURSES  
WITHIN THE BAYS OF GDAŃSK AND PUCK  
IN THE INTERWAR PERIOD**

**Summary**

The “Palestinian Pioneers” began their organized Gdynia ventures in 1934. They stayed in the kibutz called the Jewish Work Centre “Hechaluc-Pionier-Gordonia” and found work in the port companies founded on Jewish capital. After the completion of work training, Zionist organizations and the board of The Committee for Fulfilling Tasks of the Jewish Commune in Gdynia directed these people to Palestine. The “Gordonia” prepared them – professionally and culturally for the incoming experience of emigration. It carefully educated the Jews in question as regards both navigation and fishing as well as languages: Hebrew, English at the general knowledge courses. The training was conducted by Captain Gustav Pietsch and Engineer Leon Komorowski, whereas the fisherman’s practice within the basins of the Bays of: Gdańsk and Puck – a Gdańsk fisherman Józef Koss. The training was conducted according to the rules as applied for such courses in Western Europe. On the whole, in the years 1936–1939 the kibbutz welcomed and farewelled at least 77 persons from various parts of the Republic of Poland II. The Neve-Yam kibbutz which these people established in Palestine in 1939 became a training base for subsequent groups of young “Pioneers” from Central and Eastern Europe.