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Establishment and Activity of the Jewish Marine School for Officers in Civitavecchia (1934–1938) in the Pages of the Revisionist Zionist Press

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In my work on the organisation of sailing and fisherman courses for Polish Jews associated in the “Zebulun” Society in the 1930s in both Gdynia and Palestine, I emphasised the need for a detailed inquiry into the participation of Polish Revisionist Zionists in maritime training courses conducted by the Marine School for Officers (also referred to as Naval Academy) in the Italian town of Civitavecchia.¹ This paper is based on press material published by organs of right-wing Zionist organisations (primarily the weekly “Trybuna Narodowa” issued in Cracow, Lviv and Warsaw) and foreign monographs examining the cooperation of the youth movement Beitar (also spelled Betar)² with Italian fascists. I wanted to discuss the history of this

1 Jarosław Drozd, “Kursy portowe i rybackie dla Żydów w Gdyni w okresie międzywojennym,” *Nautologia* 142 (2005): 37–41; Idem, *Lost in the Whirlwind of War: The Jewish Community in Gdynia, Poland* (Gdynia: Oficyna Verbi Causa, 2008); Idem, “Gdynia to Neve-Yam: The Jewish fisherman’s courses within the Bays of Gdańsk and Puck in the interwar period,” *Studia Maritima* 26 (2013): 55–68; Idem, “Idea «palestyńskiego morza». Działalność Związku «Zebulun» w l. 30. XX w.,” *Nautologia* 158 (2021): 24–32.

2 Beitar was established in 1923 in Riga on the initiative of the Revisionist Zionist Vladimir (Ze’ev) Jabotinsky. During the inaugural meeting of Jewish youth, Jabotinsky delivered a lecture on Arab attacks on Tel Hai and other Jewish settlements in Galilee. He believed that these incidents could only be dealt with by recreating the ancient Jewish state of Israel, stretching across the entirety of Palestine and Jordan. He proposed an organisation called Beitar should be created to raise a new generation of Jews by instilling in them nationalist ideals and training them for military action against the enemies of Judaism. In 1931, during the First World Conference held in Gdańsk (Danzig), Jabotinsky was officially elected head of Beitar. The organisation quickly gained support in Poland, Palestine, Latvia, Lithuania, Austria, Czechoslovakia, Germany and, to a lesser extent, in other countries. It was especially popular in Poland, which in 1934 was home to approximately 40,000 of the movement’s 70,000 members. Their role model was Josef Trumpeldor, the leader of

extraordinary institution, its character, the scope of maritime education it offered, and the participation of Polish Jews in it, as well as to present people who contributed the most to its development. This is a completely new topic in Polish historiography and one that is difficult to assess, as it can mainly be analysed based on ideologically-tinted, often extremely biased, press material (accounts, reports, propaganda articles). Despite these difficulties, this article makes an important step towards showing the actual role Beitar played in the process of “conquering the Palestinian sea.”

The establishment of the Jewish Marine School for Officers in Civitavecchia was first mentioned in public on 6 January 1935 in Warsaw, during the Second World Conference of Beitar. After an emotional speech by Vladimir (Ze'ev) Jabotinsky, dressed for the first time in the organisation's brown uniform, several speakers took the floor, including Dr. Alexander Lubotzky, Aharon Cwi Propes, Isaac Remba, Joseph Chrust, Otto Seidmann, Akiba Brunn (Akiva Brun) and Captain Yirmiyahu Halperin (Jeremiah Halpern).³ In a special paper, the last of these speakers not only discussed the matter of training the members of Beitar in sailing skills, but also showed, competently using statistical data, the benefits that seamanship could bring to the reconstruction of the Jewish state. At the same time, he presented facts regarding the actual work that had already been done toward educating marine crews, i.e. the organisation of the school in Civitavecchia. Apart from Capt. Halperin, this matter was also addressed by the Lithuanian commander of the naval squad, Yehezkel Dilion, who spoke to the delegates about the details of the support Beitar had received from the Italian authorities and the help it had been offered by the director of the Naval School for Officers, Capt. Nicola Fusco.⁴ Halperin and Dilion's campaign was successful, and one of the fruits the conference bore was the announcement of the slogan: “The road to Palestinian

the Jewish settlers, who had been killed at Tel Hai in 1920, the same one who during World War I, together with Jabotinsky, had participated in the creation of the Jewish Legion (modelled on the Polish Legions), fighting on the side of the British Army in the Battle of Gallipoli. The name Beitar was a slightly altered abbreviation of the organisation's Hebrew name “Brith Trumpeldor.”

- 3 Yirmiyahu Halperin (1901–1962), a Revisionist Zionist, member of Beitar and Haganah. Born in Smolensk, in 1913, he emigrated to Palestine, and after graduating from a gymnasium in Tel Aviv, he enrolled in a naval academy in Italy, and then a school for captains and engineers in Great Britain. He was a co-founder of the organisation Haganah in Jerusalem, where in 1920, as commander of the Old City and *aide de camp* to Jabotinsky, he fought against Arab rioters. In 1927 he joined Beitar, becoming the commander of the organisation's brigades in Tel Aviv. In 1932 he was appointed Director of the Maritime Department in Beitar.
- 4 Capt. N. Fusco was the administrative secretary of the local branch of the fascist party and a co-proponent of the idea of establishing an institution operating within the Consortium of Vocational Schools of Maritime Economy (*Consorzio della Scuole Professionali per la Maestranza Marittima*), which he then enthusiastically put into life (Norbert Ochs, “Nicola Fusco,” *Trybuna Narodowa* 11, 13/03/1936, 5. The history of the school goes back to April 1932, when Jabotinsky wrote a letter addressed to the Italian Zionist, prof. Yitzhak Schiach from *Liceo Classico Galileo* in Florence, in which he presented the project of establishing a central school for military instructors of Jewish youth. See: Eric Salerno, *Mossad base Italia. Le azioni intrighi, le verità nascoste* (Milano: Il Saggiatore S.P.A., 2010), 106.

land leads through the Jewish sea.”⁵ After extensive training courses for farmers and industrial workers who were supposed to work in Palestine had been launched, a decision was made to start courses for Jewish sailors. An article published in “Trybuna Narodowa” [National Tribune] on 14 June 1935, said:

We see from the heroic example of the Polish nation, which makes the most severe sacrifices to maintain its position in the Baltic Sea, how important it is for a nation to have its own maritime apparatus, its own ports, ships and its own seamen. And we too won't become a power without the sea. The idea of naval education might seem alien to the Jewish spirit, but the impressive development of the marine school in Civitavecchia puts an end to all such fears. We want to create more marine schools so that you understand that national chaluc [lit. “pioneer,” the name of the first Jewish settlers who came to Palestine – author's note JD] must man all workplaces in Palestine. Marine schools will be set up in each country to train future heads of the Jewish fleet. The first step toward implementing this idea of marine training will be sailing camps organised to train staff for the marine school in Civitavecchia.⁶

The fact that marine training was to be conducted in Italy was surprising to many. So far, the Jewish press (including Revisionist Zionist organs) had viewed any variety of fascism as a synonym of evil, brutality and anti-Semitism, but a characteristic turn was made in this perception. In the opinion of Beitar's leaders, philo-Semitic Italy negated racism. Revisionist Zionists did not see Italian fascism as a movement of hatred, but only as an egocentric, eminently a national front, rooted in the views of Giuseppe Garibaldi. Italy in the mid-1930s was perceived as a “happy island” in the sea of European anti-Semitism.⁷ The ties linking Jewish Revisionists with fascist Italy date back to 1922, when Jabotinsky sent a letter to Benito Mussolini (to which he probably did not receive a reply), in which he tried to get Italy's support for the Zionist idea. He started the letter by declaring that he was perfectly aware of Mussolini's prejudice against Zionism, which, in his opinion, led to the erroneous belief that Zionists were enemies of Italy. He then tried to persuade Mussolini to abandon pan-Arab politics, arguing that a strong Jewish presence in the Mediterranean was the only way to ensure the hegemony of the Italian language in the region. He argued that if Italy were to ally with the Jews, the new Jewish state would adopt the Italian language and culture and establish its dominance throughout the region. He argued that Arabs and Italians would soon confront one another eyeball to eyeball in a “cultural war” for the control of the Middle East, and that the Jewish state could create a buffer zone, in this war, between Europe, Asia and Africa. Jabotinsky concluded his letter by observing that the vitality of the

5 “Betarowcy obradują,” *Nowy Dziennik* 7, 07/01/1935, 9; “Przegląd obrad kinusu Bejtaru,” *Trybuna Narodowa* 6, 08/02/1935, 6.

6 *Trybuna Narodowa* 24, 14/06/1935, 2.

7 Jecheskiel (Yehezkel) Dilon, “Żydzi w Italii,” *Trybuna Narodowa* 15, 12/04/1935, 3.

Jewish people and the Italian fascists had many things in common, and by expressing an interest in Mussolini's personality and his movement. Nevertheless, for the next 10 years, Jabotinsky saw an alliance with Great Britain as the only international option for the Zionist movement. He changed his mind as late as the beginning of the 1930s. Other Revisionists also showed interest in Italy as a potential state model and partner. Ze'ev Shem-Tov, one of the leaders of Beitar in Warsaw, believed that for the good of the Jewish nation, his organisation, modelled on the Czech Society for Gymnastics "Sokół" [Falcon], but influenced by the Italian organisation "Balilla" (*Opera Nazionale Balilla*), should adopt the fascist model and follow its only leader, Jabotinsky, with full dedication. In 1928, Abba Haimeir, a leading Palestinian Revisionist, openly called on the leader of Beitar to declare himself the Duce of Palestine. In the second half of the 1920s, Revisionism became a growing force also among Italian Zionists. In 1930, the first issue of "L'Idea Sionistica," edited by the local Revisionist leader Leone Carpi, was published, which promoted cooperation between the Italian government and the Zionist movement.⁸

Less than three weeks after the end of the Second World Conference of Beitar, on 27 January 1935, the Jewish Marine School in Civitavecchia was officially inaugurated in the presence of eminent representatives of Jewish communities of Italy, including Prof. Angelo Sacerdoti (Chief Rabbi of Rome), Dr. Sergio-Izhak Minerbi (chairman of the Jewish Religious Community in Rome), attorney Bassano (president of the Jewish Sports Club in Rome), Gen. Prof. Guido Aronne Mendes (director of the tuberculosis clinic), his son Dr. Maurizio Maor Mendes (deputy commander of Beitar in Italy), chairmen of Italian Jewish communities and representatives of the local government.⁹ The ceremony held at the university was hosted by Capt. N. Fusco, who welcomed the guests together with the school's professors Scalabrina and Pavane. Then, the assembled company went to the newly-opened premises of Beitar, where they were greeted by cadets wearing sailor jackets, lined up in a row. The ceremony was led by Y. Dilion, appointed commander of the local troop by the Beitar World Headquarters (*Shilton*), and his deputy Zwi Kolitz.¹⁰ After an opening speech by Dr. M. M. Mendes, Prof. A. Sacerdoti first welcomed the cadets and then announced that the town of Civitavecchia was

8 On the impact of Italian fascism on Beitar: Eran Kaplan, *The Jewish Radical Right: Revisionist Zionism and Its Ideological Legacy* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2005), 151–152, 155; Cristina M. Bettin, *Italian Jews from Emancipation to the Racial Laws* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2010), 28; Joseph Heller, *The Stern Gang. Ideology, Politics and Terror, 1940–1949* (London-New York: Routledge Taylor & Francis Group, 2004), 4–5; Colin Shindler, *The Triumph of Military Zionism. Nationalism and the Origins of the Israeli Rights* (London: I.B.Tauris & Co Ltd., 2005), 13, 125–126.

9 "Italy Opens Its First Jewish Marine School," *Jewish Daily Bulletin* 3059, 28/01/1935, 1; "Uroczyste otwarcie Żydowskiej Szkoły Morskiej," *Nowy Dziennik* 30, 30/01/1935, 1; "Jüdische Marine-Schule in Italien," *Jüdische Wochenspost* 4, 01/02/1935, 2; "Feierliche Eröffnung der ersten jüdischen nautischen Schule," *Jüdisches Volksblatt* 5, 01/02/1935, 4; *Ceirim* 5 (Feb. 1935): 88; *The Sentinel* 6, 07/02/1935, 25.

10 Dan Tamir, *Hebrew Fascism in Palestine 1922–1942* (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018), 136–137.

admitted to the Union of Jewish Religious Communities. Next, Prof. G. A. Mendes thanked the Italian government for their help in establishing the school, and, at the end of the ceremony, the rabbi symbolically nailed a mezuzah to the door of Beitar's house. An article describing the opening of the school appeared on 31 January 1935 in "Il Giornale d'Italia," a semi-official journal of the Italian government. It featured a photo of the Beitarists with Capt. Fusco, with a note saying that the marine school was a turning point for Jews, who had set it as their goal to work for the "Palestinian sea" and that the institution brought "a breath of fresh air" to the small port town. The Italian government was apparently satisfied with the establishment of the school, as evidenced by the fact that, ten days after its opening, the Harbour Master's Office in Civitavecchia received a letter from the Minister of Communications, which read as follows:

Benito Mussolini and the Ministries of the Interior, Foreign Affairs, Navy, and Communications gladly welcome the new Revisionist Zionist students who have come to study at the Marine School in Civitavecchia.¹¹

It is worth mentioning that the classes of the first course began more than two months before the official inauguration, on 10 November 1934. Thirty cadets were to participate in the course (on the day of the inauguration, the school was attended by 12 cadets and was waiting for the arrival of another 18).¹² The Maritime Department of the Beitar World Headquarters issued an instruction in which it delegated the organisation of Beitar training courses to Y. Dilion, his deputy, and assistant instructors (*madrichs*), who were supposed to arrive from Poland in the near future.¹³ In mid-April 1935, the school was visited by Capt. Y. Halperin, who expressed thanks to Capt. N. Fusco for the effort put in to the organisation of the school so far. He also met the mayor of Civitavecchia, Ilario Cordelli, to thank the local community of 40,000 people for the assistance and hospitality they had offered to the Revisionist Zionists. Cordelli, for his part, assured that he was happy to host the students of the Jewish Marine School in his town and that he would do everything in his might to help develop this institution.¹⁴ In June 1935, the first graduates received their diplomas for completing the theoretical part of the course. The final exam, consisting of an oral and a written part, was held on 10–12 June 1935 before a commission composed of representatives of the Italian

11 "Beitar morski," *Trybuna Narodowa* 9, 01/03/1935, 5; "Rząd włoski o szkole morskiej Bejtaru," *Trybuna Narodowa* 8, 22.02.1935: 7.

12 Jecheskiel (Yehezkel) Dilion, "Zdobycie morza żydowskiego warte jest ofiar... (z dziennika)," *Trybuna Narodowa* 52, 27/12/1935, 8; Norbert Ochs, "Grób chaluca morza," *Trybuna Narodowa* 23, 12/06/1936, 7. The course was completed by 26 students, which suggests that three participants dropped out while it lasted. One of the students, Abraham Strausberg from Gdańsk, died tragically on 19 May 1935 and was buried in the Jewish cemetery in Civitavecchia.

13 "Morska Szkoła Oficerska w Civita Vecchia," *Trybuna Narodowa* 46, 28/12/1934, 7.

14 "Ku zdobyciu morza. J. Halperin w Civita-Vecchia," *Trybuna Narodowa* 19, 10/05/1935, 7.

Ministry of the Navy (Commanding Officer of the port of Bologna Capt. Pier Luigi Fiori, Capt. Federico Ferrari-Orsi and Capt. Giulio Bonamico), Captain of the port in Civitavecchia (Capt. Arezo) and professors of the Marine School (Captains Fusco, Faone and Scalabrino). The exam included seven compulsory subjects: Italian, navigation, shipbuilding, cartography, shipping regulations, captain's pragmatics and ship manoeuvring. In addition, each student was required to write an essay in Italian on one of the four topics: "What impression has fascist Italy had on you?", "How do you envision the future of the «Palestinian sea»?", "How do you envision your own future?", and "What impressions did you have on your first journey by ship." All 26 students completed the theoretical course (including five who completed it with honours), but this did not mean they were already qualified to work at sea. They still had six months of seagoing practice ahead of them to earn the rank of "master in medium-length voyages" i.e. inshore captain. Capt. Y. Halperin took the examination together with the students (passing it with a very good grade). He had spent two and a half months in Civitavecchia especially for this purpose, raising the students' morale with his presence.¹⁵

However, Halperin's stay in Civitavecchia was mainly related to the plan of buying a training ship, on board of which the graduates of the first course could sail on the waters of the Tyrrhenian, Adriatic, Aegean and Mediterranean seas, also calling at Palestinian ports.¹⁶ Having consulted the purchase with Capt. Fusco, Halperin chose the sailing ship "Quattro Venti" owned by Ferdinand Menconi (from Viareggio in Tuscany).¹⁷ The money for the purchase (approx. 105,000 lire) came from the self-defence fund *Keren Tel Chaj*¹⁸ and a donation from Ephraim and Sara Kirschner, Belgian Zionists who lived in Paris.¹⁹ The sailing ship was named "Sara I" (also spelled Sarah I) in honour of the donor's wife, and, since it was the first Jewish training ship in the world,

15 Zwi Kolitz, "Tam, gdzie się szkolą żydowscy marynarze," *Trybuna Narodowa* 29, 19/07/1935, 8, 10; *Haneszer* 2 (1935): 2.

16 "Mittelmeer-Segelfahrt eines jüdischen Schulschiffes," *Die Neue Welt* 439, 16/02/1935, 4.

17 "Einweihung der neuen Marinefahne," *Das Jüdische Volk* 14, 01/10/1937, 6. This motorised (two engines, 200hp) four-master was built in 1898 by the American company "Hall Brothers" in Port Blakeley (Washington). First launched as "Eric," she was then renamed "Crusader A" and "Four Winds." Under this last name and the British flag, she travelled twice around the world and circumnavigated the Cape of Good Hope eleven times. She was 62 m long, 11.52 m wide, 34 m tall, and had a capacity of 635 t.

18 The *Keren Tel Chaj* self-defence fund was established in 1929 after the riots in Palestine. Its purpose was to collect funds for the purchase of weapons, organisation of military training, support of professional training, defence sports and settlement, and other forms of aid and support to those fighting for an independent Jewish state.

19 "Okręć szkolny Bejtaru," *Trybuna Narodowa* 20, 17/05/1935, 4. See also: Kaplan, *The Jewish Radical Right*, 156.

it was also referred to as the “mother” of Jewish ships.²⁰ She set off on her first cruise under the new name and a new Italian flag (it was the ship’s third flag) from Livorno on 23 June 1935 and arrived in Civitavecchia the next evening after 20 hours at sea. There it underwent the necessary renovation, which included building a compartment in the front part of the ship serving as living quarters for the cadets and the ship’s crew. In the compartment, there was a place for prayer, with an altar cabinet (*Aron Kodesh*) and two Torah scrolls, donated by the Jewish communities of Rome and Livorno. Next to the sleeping compartment, there was a dining room and a kitchen and, in the rear part, cabins for the captain and officers, a spacious meeting room, bathrooms and a small ship hospital were built.²¹ The middle part of the ship was to be used as storage space for luggage. In addition to two regular lifeboats, the “Sara I” was equipped with a third, motor lifeboat. To compensate for the lack of a Palestinian flag and to clearly emphasise the crew’s nationality, the hull was painted white and blue.²² In August 1935, after a short stay in Paris, Y. Halperin returned to Civitavecchia to take charge of the preparations for the vessel’s first cruise to Seville.²³ She departed in a ceremonious atmosphere in the presence of government, city, port and school authorities.²⁴ The ship easily completed her trip, but the voyage showed that she was still unfit to be used for a six-month practical training course. Therefore, the graduates of the first course, owing to the efforts of the school authorities, were given the opportunity to complete their practical training on ships flying the Polish, Romanian and Italian flags.²⁵

The opening of the Jewish Marine School in Civitavecchia and the fact that the cadets had completed the first course kindled an interest in maritime affairs in the Revisionist Zionist circles. As part of a large-scale action to popularise the “idea of the Palestinian sea,” the Beitar World Headquarters prepared a plan for the establishment of the Jewish Maritime League, whose task was to create local maritime training facilities and raise the funds for this purpose. Prep and selection camps for applicants to the school in Civitavecchia were held among others in southern Poland. The first six-week camp, which started on 2 July 1935, was organised near Oświęcim, on the River Soła by the Beitar Headquarters in Poland and the District Headquarters for Małopolska Zachodnia (Western Little Poland) and Silesia in Cracow. During the camp, the participants took swimming, sailing, kayaking and rescue courses as well as an instructor’s

20 The Italian name of the vessel was “Sarah I-o,” I-o being an abbreviation of the Italian word “primo.” She was also known as “Sarah A” and “Sarah haRishonah,” which was a translation of the ship’s name into Hebrew.

21 Jecheskiel (Yehezkel) Dilion, “Betarim zur See,” *Das Jüdische Volk* 13, 24/09/1937, 3–4.

22 Lazer Kurzer, “Frontem ku morzu! Pierwsi żydowscy absolwenci szkoły morskiej udają się w wędrówkę po szerokich szlakach,” *Chwila* 5848, 03/07/1935, 5.

23 “W komendzie światowej,” *Trybuna Narodowa* 33, 16/08/1935, 6.

24 *Haneszer* 5 (1935): 82.

25 Edmund Schachter, “Walka o żydowskie morze,” *Trybuna Narodowa* 22, 05/06/1936, 4.

course.²⁶ Candidates were invited to submit their applications for the second course from 15 May to 1 August 1935. The course was scheduled to start on 1 September 1935.²⁷ Due to its great popularity among the Jewish youth, the Maritime Department of the World Beitar Headquarters decided to increase admissions to 100. The efforts were only partially successful, and the classes of the second course, which, for financial reasons, was inaugurated as late as March 1936, were attended by 48 cadets, of which 25 came from Poland, 8 from Czechoslovakia, 5 from Germany, 4 from Lithuania, 3 from Austria and 1 each from Hungary, the Free City of Danzig and Rhodesia.²⁸ The basic fee was 200 lire per month, but each student had to pay an additional 225 lire for uniforms (a sailor's uniform to be worn during lectures, and a training uniform for practical classes). After completing the theoretical course, the graduates were to receive uniforms of water officers of the Beitar unit. Y. Dilion, who had been delegated to take care of other tasks, was replaced in the position of the school's commander by Abraham Blass, a graduate of the first course, who came from Poland. At the same time, *Keren Tel Chaj* announced a 5-year work programme, which included the establishment of a maritime unit of Beitar in Haifa or Tel Aviv in the second year, the core of which (20%) was to consist of the best graduates from Civitavecchia.²⁹

The atmosphere in the school on the day of the inauguration of the second course shows the ideological change in the consciousness and behaviour of Beitar's young sailors. They cheered for Italy: "Long live Italy! Long live the king! Long live the Duce!", and then, after a blessing by Rabbi Aldo Lattes, they sang "Giovanezza," the official anthem of the Italian National Fascist Party.³⁰ Their uniforms were decorated with patches depicting an anchor joined with a menorah (the symbol of Beitar), above which there was a small Star of David, and *fascies* badges pinned to the lapels, which symbolised the fascist movement.³¹ The management of Beitar was aware of the potential negative propaganda connected with the opening of the school in Italy, and therefore insisted that the cadets should not get involved in local politics. In November 1934, Jabotinsky asked the participants of the first course to remember that they were guests both at the school and in Italy. He advised them to be polite, not to take part in political disputes

26 "Bejtat morski," *Trybuna Narodowa* 31, 02/08/1935, 6; Lazzaro Cohen, "S/s Sarah," *Israel. Hebdomadaire Juif Indépendant* 38, 18/09/1935, 3. *Trybuna Narodowa* 40, 09/10/1936, 2.

27 "Okręt szkolny Bejtaru," *Trybuna Narodowa* 20, 17/05/1935, 4; *Haneszer* 3–4 (1935): 50.

28 *Judisk Krönika* 4 (1936): 8; Shindler, *The Triumph*, 132. Some sources say that the second course was attended by 50 students, of whom 39 studied navigation (a "captaincy" programme) and 11 studied mechanics (a "mechanical" programme). During the first course, 24 students obtained a captaincy diploma and two a diploma in mechanics. See: Abraham Blass, "Civitavecchia-dwulecie," *Trybuna Narodowa* 44, 06/11/1936, 6–7.

29 Nachum ben Hajam, "Zdobycie Morza Żydowskiego," *Trybuna Narodowa* 29, 24/07/1936, 5–6.

30 Marco Pizutti, *Biografia non autorizzata della Seconda Guerra Mondiale* (Milano: Mondadori, 2018), 26.

31 Salerno, *Mossad base Italia*, 106.

over Italian affairs, not to express their opinion on political issues in public, and not to criticise the Italian regime, which had given them the opportunity to study at Civitavecchia. Y. Halperin recalled that, despite the objections of their superiors, the cadets had publicly supported Mussolini's regime. During the Italian campaign in Ethiopia, they marched alongside Italian soldiers in a demonstration of support for the war and collected scrap metal and shipped it to Italian armament factories. Eran Kaplan draws attention to an event that shows how the Italian authorities perceived Beitar's cadets. He refers to a press article published on 28 May 1935 in "Popolo di Roma," which described the mourning ceremony held on the occasion of the tragic death of A. Strausberg from Gdańsk, who participated in the first course. The ceremony confirmed the fraternal relations between the Revisionists and the authorities of fascist Italy. The Jewish cadets, Capt. Halperin and Capt. Fusco, the administrative secretary of the local branch of the fascist party, representatives of the mayor and port authorities, as well as Italian cadets from the Naval School for Officers, all stood on board the training ship "Domenico," whose flag was lowered to half-mast. At the scene of the accident, the comrades of the deceased said the Kaddish and held a military ceremony during which they threw a bouquet of flowers into the sea. At the end, everyone made the "Roman salute" with their hats off.³² As observed by Bowyer Bell, Beitar satisfied the needs of poor young Jews from Eastern Europe, by giving them the chance to "enter the world" of ceremonial processions, parades, banners, rituals, patriotic poetry, uniforms and training camps and to learn how to handle weapons, march, fly aircraft and sail.³³

Theoretical exams (for sailors and mechanics) of the second course were held in August 1936. This time, the state examination commission was composed of the commander of the local port, Col. P. L. Fiori (chairman of the commission), the port officers Capt. Arezo and Lieut. Petralese, and the lecturers Captains Fusco, Scalabrino, and Zenalini and Prof. Furi.³⁴ After completing the theoretical exams, the graduates of the second course, together with Commander A. Blass, set off on board "Sara I" on a cruise through Italian ports. They were seen off in Civitavecchia by the Commander of Italian Beitar, Dr. Gersh (Zwi) Roifer, General Prof. G. A. Mendes, Dr M. M. Mendes, Capt. Fusco and Prof. Yitzhak Schiach.³⁵ During the voyage, the ship called, among others, to Genoa, where the local Jewish community gave the crew a cordial welcome. After disembarking, the cadets marched in a tight line to the synagogue, where they were greeted by the local rabbi, Riccardo Reuven Pacifici. The ceremony was attended

32 Kaplan, *The Jewish Radical Right*, 156–157.

33 J. Bowyer Bell, *Terror out of Zion: Irgun Zvai Leumi, LEHI, and the Palestine Underground 1929–1949* (New York: Avon Books, 1977), 25.

34 Nachum ben Hajam, "Oficerowie marynarki żydowskiej," *Trybuna Narodowa* 33, 21/08/1936, 7; "Zakończenie kursu teoretycznego w Civitavecchia," *Trybuna Narodowa* 41, 16/10/1936, 8.

35 Nachum ben Hajam, "Sarą I-o po brzegach Italii. Wyjazd z Civitavecchia," *Trybuna Narodowa* 43, 30/10/1936, 5.

by Rabbi Gustavo Castelbolognesi and the chairman of the local Jewish community Frederico Jarach, who came for the ceremony especially from Milan.³⁶

Before the start of the third course, the rules for recruiting candidates for the Jewish Marine School in Civitavecchia were reviewed. It was decided to accept applications not only from Beitarists, but also from Jabotinsky's Brit he-Chai (also known as the "Union of Reservists" or the "Union of Soldiers") and other Revisionist youth organisations. Candidates were required to have been members of the above-mentioned organisations for at least a year (although priority was given to those who had completed Palestinian or Beitar military training), have a good command of spoken and written Hebrew (a language exam certificate), have a valid ID card, a general certificate of good health (particularly, good sight), and a graduation certificate from a six-grade gymnasium or another secondary school. The eligible age was 17 years to 23 years (a special form for younger people aged 14–16 was planned to be organised). Candidates had to submit two application forms, one in Hebrew and one in Italian, signed by the commander of the branch of the organisation they were members of, providing comprehensive answers to all questions. The applications had to include two ID-format photos of the candidate wearing the Beitar uniform or the uniform of another organisation, and the applicants had to pay an official fee of 7 English shillings (or an equivalent in Polish zlotys), which was not reimbursed in the event the candidate was rejected. Applications for which the fee had not been paid were not processed. Each candidate also had to send in a medical certificate, although they had to appear before the medical board again after arriving at Civitavecchia. Those who were not considered fit to attend the school at this stage had to return home. Each candidate was obliged to send in a letter of commitment from their parents or legal guardians to pay the tuition fee regularly every month by the deadline set by the school. The Maritime Department of the World Beitar Headquarters, however, reserved the right to change the terms of payment and to increase the tuition fee during the school year, in accordance with the school's current needs. The school's admission regulations also required that the candidate apply through the World Headquarters for a confirmation of admission, which was necessary for them to obtain a passport or an Italian visa. Upon receipt of these documents, the candidate had to immediately pay for the first month of study and for the fare from Civitavecchia to their place of residence in order to be able to return home. They could depart for Italy only after receiving a special order from the World Headquarters. Candidates who would appear before the school authorities without such an order would be immediately returned to their place of residence and deprived of the right to study at the school. Upon receipt of the confirmation of admission, the students had to pay their first monthly tuition fee, cover the travel costs and pay an amount of 50 lire for the sailor's uniform. After completing the theoretical course, graduates had to buy

36 "Żydowski statek szkolny odwiedza Genuę," *Chwila* 6353, 26/11/1936, 8.

officer uniforms. The deadline for submitting applications was set for 1 December 1936. The processing time was short, as the students heard back about their acceptance or rejection within 10 days of applying. Those accepted received their acceptance letters by mail and were obliged to appear in Civitavecchia between 25 and 31 December 1936. Latecomers could be sent back home. During the entire instruction period (theoretical and practical courses), each cadet had to pay a tuition fee of 250 lire no later than on the 3rd day of each month. The fee covered instruction, housing, maintenance and health care. However, the World Headquarters reserved the right to increase this fee if need be. There was no discount and they all had the same obligations. The only exception was instructors, who could get a rebate.³⁷

Theoretical classes of the third course began on 1 January 1937. The large number of applications sent to the Maritime Department of the World Beitar Headquarters demonstrated that the members of this organisation attached increasing importance to marine education and training. In order to meet their expectations, a decision was made to accept a larger number of students than before (no fewer than 50 and no more than 100), but quantity did not always go hand in hand with quality, and not all of those who came to Civitavecchia managed to complete their marine training and become seamen. Y. Halperin assessed this situation in harsh words:

a great part, perhaps the greater part [of the students], remain dilettanti content with having received a certificate of completion of the theoretical course, and return home to go back to their old life. These young men regret their effort, they regret the lost several months, advising their friends not to preoccupy themselves with maritime matters. But this is a perfectly natural thing, just as it was natural for hundreds or even thousands of Jewish youths to go bankrupt at a time when the type of Jewish farmer in Palestine was only in its formation stage. Only some of them continued their conquering work until they managed to create cadres of Jewish farmers. Education for life at sea must go the same way. Some will discontinue their efforts, some will leave the marine school, etc., but each course will also produce those who will stubbornly continue their work and overcome all major and minor difficulties that inevitably await every man who wants to devote himself to the maritime profession.³⁸

This is probably why the Revisionist Zionist press postulated that the selection and training criteria should be raised for new courses. Dr. G. Roifer wrote:

we need a lot of seamen and excellent seamen at that. Therefore, our immediate task will be to mobilise as many Beitarists as possible for the task of conquering the sea, while constantly keeping in mind the matter of selecting candidates for training. Let me explain this with an example: we mobilise 200 Beitarists to Civitavecchia. They will be admitted

37 "Warunki przyjęcia do szkoły morskiej w Civitavecchia," *Trybuna Narodowa* 45, 13/11/1936, 8.

38 Jirmejahu (Yirmeyahu) Halperin, "U progu trzeciego roku," *Trybuna Narodowa* 47, 27/11/1936, 5.

in compliance with the conditions we set. (...) It will be only after several months spent at the school that a proper selection can be made. (...) Our motto in the school year 1937 will be: as many Beitarists as possible trained in the maritime profession.³⁹

In this way, the plan to “conquer the Palestinian sea” was consistently implemented. The model was the Second Polish Republic and its maritime policy. The intention was to use the state (subsidies) to build navy, merchant and fishing fleets, establish marine schools, construct and expand Palestinian ports, establish trade relations, organise immigration, tourism and defence of the Palestinian coasts, and at the same time promote a wide social movement among the diasporas, modelled on the Maritime and Colonial League, which was at the peak of popularity in Poland and earned public support for the Polish government regardless of the public’s political sympathies.

Before the start of the third course, Capt. Y. Halperin came to Civitavecchia. During a week’s stay in Italy, he visited the port of Genoa, where the training ship “Sara I” had been moored since the second half of October 1936, after arriving from Livorno.⁴⁰ Probably with Halperin on board, the ship made a voyage to Elba and Corsica at the end of December 1936 and in the first days of January 1937, from which she returned to Livorno, greeted enthusiastically by Italian Zionists, including Dr.G. Roifer. The next day, on the day of departure to Genoa, Rabbi Elio Toaff and the chairman of the Jewish Community of Livorno, Shlomo Belforte appeared on board the ship.⁴¹ It was still impossible to run a fully-fledged seagoing training course on the “Sara I,” which is why ten graduates were urgently employed on a different vessel, flying the Hungarian flag. After completing the second course, six other graduates decided to stay in Civitavecchia for the next six months to take part in a training course for fishermen. They were given the ambitious task of setting up the first Beitarist fishing unit in Palestine.⁴² The Maritime Department of the World Beitar Headquarters officially announced the opening of the special fishing course at the end of May 1937. Graduates of the school, who showed appropriate progress in their education, were to be engaged on fishing vessels of the “Society of the Friends of the Jewish Navy” and work as fishermen at the shores of Palestine for a monthly salary.⁴³ The course, the full programme for which had been developed by Cpt. Fusco, was launched at the beginning of June 1937 in Civitavecchia, a town that was prospering mainly due to fishing.⁴⁴ The place was perfect for this for another reason – the natural marine conditions of Palestine and Italy were

39 Gersh Roifer, “Dokąd?,” *Trybuna Narodowa* 47, 27/11/1936, 4.

40 “Brith Hechajal,” *Trybuna Narodowa* 47, 27/11/1936, 8.

41 Nachum Ben Hajam, “Sarą I-o brzegami Italii. Livorno,” *Trybuna Narodowa* 51, 25/12/1936, 7; Idem, “Sarą I-o brzegami Italii. Genua,” *Trybuna Narodowa* 2, 08/01/1937, 4–5.

42 Dawid Gross, “Zdobycie morza,” *Trybuna Narodowa* 48, 04/12/1936, 7.

43 “Komunikat w sprawie kursu dla rybołówstwa w Civitavecchia,” *Trybuna Narodowa* 21, 28/05/1937, 7.

44 “Rybołówstwo żydowskie,” *Trybuna Narodowa* 22, 04/06/1937, 7.

quite similar, so the Italian fishing methods and the experiences gained from applying those methods could be used directly in Palestine. Twelve students took part in the fishing course, for whom two fishing boats were purchased with funds donated by E. Kirschner and Dr. G. Roifer. The larger of the boats, the "Nekha," with a displacement of 35 tons, equipped with a motor and sails, was suitable for long fishing voyages, while the smaller "Lea" was used for inshore activities. Practical training was supervised by local fishermen who taught the cadets how to steer a boat, fish, prepare and repair nets, salt and preserve fish, etc. Interestingly, the Jewish fishermen were self-sufficient, as they sold their catch every time. After a few months of training and hard work, only the four toughest and most indomitable of the 12 students continued their education. The fact that they were stout-hearted was evidenced by the events of 13 December 1937, when the Beitarists were fishing 30 miles from Civitavecchia on board the "Nekha." At 2 p.m., seeing the barometer dropping rapidly, they decided to immediately take shelter from the storm in the port. Then they saw in the distance the Italian fishing boat "Madonna di Loreto," which was calling for help due to a failure. The Jewish fishermen instantly rushed to the rescue, fighting the wind and the high waves while towing the cutter. After 9 hours, they overcame the element, reaching the port, where Capt. Fusco and the fishermen's families were awaiting them. The cadets impressed everyone not only with their heroic attitude, but also with selflessness, as they refused to receive any money for their rescue operation. As a token of appreciation, the commanding officer of the port invited them for a glass of wine.⁴⁵

In the second half of the 1930s, Palestine was an object of everyday interest to almost every Jew (including those who were not Zionists), and tens of thousands of Jewish youth were looking for an opportunity to emigrate to it. The idea of conquering the sea was then one of the most important foci of political Zionism. The leaders of Beitar, Jabotinsky and Halperin, saw it as a priority to organise a propaganda cruise for cadets to Palestine on board the training ship, which they believed could be the first step towards creating the Jewish Maritime League. As more courses began to be offered, more and more of those who completed them sailed under foreign flags, as Palestine was still unable to provide them with a job. Only a few were employed on the SS "HarZion" and the SS "HarCarmel" owned by the Jewish shipping company "Lloyd Eretz Yisrael" in Haifa ("Palestine Maritime Lloyd Ltd.").⁴⁶ Jabotinsky reassured the graduates who were disappointed with this state of affairs, repeating that: "a man who wants to devote himself to the cause of conquering the sea must forget about Zionism and Palestine for

45 Nachum Ben Hajam, "Żydowsy rybacy morscy," *Trybuna Narodowa* 7, 18/02/1938, 3–4.

46 Drozd, "Idea «palestyńskiego morza»," 25. These ships cruised visiting the ports in Haifa, Istanbul and Constance, and were mainly used for the carriage of goods, with the transport of passengers treated as a secondary task.

a while.⁴⁷ Kaplan wrote that the first trip the “Sara I” made to Palestine was more than just a training cruise. For Revisionists, it symbolised a return to the ancient origins of the Hebrew people, a Mediterranean society that had been developing for centuries as a maritime civilisation. The voyage was also proof of the Revisionists’ commitment to the heroic struggle for the nation’s past as a regional power, as well as an expression of Beitarrists’ desire to bring Italians and Jews closer together to create a Mediterranean alliance and thereby to push the Atlantic powers away from Palestine and restore Latin domination there.⁴⁸ The cruise was preceded by thorough preparations. The organisers had to overcome major financial and technical difficulties, but the largest obstacle was the position of the Palestinian authorities, who did not want to allow the ship to enter their ports. This is why the flag was changed from Italian to French, but this also proved to be insufficient. The Palestinian authorities (the Assembly of Representatives) demanded a deposit of 60 pounds from each Jewish sailor, which was an unprecedented measure, not used in any port in the world. After long disputes, E. Kirschner, the co-donor of “Sara I,” lost his patience and paid the deposit the British demanded, for the entire crew. The largest sailing ship navigating in the Mediterranean Sea, with 51 people on board (including 37 or 44 officers and cadets), left the port of Genoa for Palestine on 18 August 1937. Most of the crew members came from Poland, but there were also Jews from Latvia, Lithuania, Romania, Germany, Austria, Czechoslovakia, Belgium and such exotic countries as South Africa, Egypt, Somalia and Libya. The crew members were speakers of as many as 17 mother tongues, but during the voyage they were only allowed to speak Hebrew.⁴⁹ The school under sails was commanded by Capt. Halperin and his deputy J. Dilion, who reappeared among the cadets after two years of absence. Since the flag was changed to the French one, the position of Captain was given to the Corsican Anton Bianki, who had 37 years of experience working at sea. The following crew members also had special positions on the ship: A. Blass (group leader since the time he had completed the first course), Aron Steinberger (first

47 Jecheskiel (Yehezkel) Dilion, “Myśl o zdobyciu morza realizuje się,” *Trybuna Narodowa* 19, 14/05/1937, 6. One of them was Yehuda Leon Stark, who completed the first or the second course in the school in Civitavecchia, and then returned to his hometown in the spring of 1937. Next, he moved to Gdynia (on 22 August 1938) and sailed the trawlers of the Pomeranian Fishing Society. During World War II, after release from the Polish Army in exile, he graduated from The King Edward VII Nautical School (1944), was transferred to the army reserves in London or Liverpool, and then in the period from 1 April 1944 to 31 May 1945, he sailed as second mate on the MS “Oksywie”. After World War II, he lived in Haifa, where he was promoted to the rank of Master Mariner of Israeli seafaring vessels (State Archives in Gdańsk, Gdynia Branch, *Kartoteka mieszkańców Gdyni 1926–1939*, APG OG 124/kartoteka). See also: Wadim Konstanty Taniewski-Elliott, *Spis personelu zatrudnionego na statkach Polskiej Marynarki Handlowej w latach 1939–1945* (Gdańsk: Towarzystwo Przyjaciół Centralnego Muzeum Morskiego), 308–309.

48 Kaplan, *The Jewish Radical Right*, 158.

49 O. Barzeli, “Wizyta na Sarze. List z Italii,” *Trybuna Narodowa* 34, 27/08/1937, 3–4. “Sara I w drodze do Palestyny,” *Trybuna Narodowa* 35, 03/09/ 1937, 8.

mechanic), Alexander Bloch (ship writer) and Dr. A. Hebbenstreit from Lviv, who performed the duties of the ship's doctor.⁵⁰

The first Palestinian port visited by the "Sara I," in September 1937, was Haifa. Later, the ship called at Tel Aviv, but due to the Arab revolt (the Great Arab Revolution) which had lasted since April 1936, and the ban on entry which the British had introduced trying to pursue a balanced policy in this explosive region, the crew was not allowed to come ashore.⁵¹ They had to return to Haifa and take the train from there to Tel Aviv. They were greeted during a welcoming ceremony in the local town hall by Mayor Israel Rokach, Chief Rabbi Moshe Avigdor Amiel, the historian and Zionist Prof. Josef Klausner and many other leading figures. The mayor voiced his deep regret that the ship had not received the permission to moor in the local small port and expressed his hope that it would be allowed to do so during Beitarists' next visit. It was on that occasion that Capt. Halperin received the Palestinian flag for the ship (this was only a symbolic gesture since the "Sara I" still had to fly French colours). In the following days, the sailors travelled to Tel Hai to pay tribute to the patron of their organisation, Josef Trumpeldor.⁵² Then, they returned to Haifa, from where, after the eventful journey, the vessel left for Thessaloniki. The American film company "Fox Movietone News," the producer of the popular newsreel, sent a cameraman there to film the ship's entry into the port and the Beitarists' visit. The filmmakers and the press were mostly interested in Y. Halperin, who was eager to give interviews, in which he declared, among others, that Greek Jews could play an important role in organising the Jewish merchant navy and fishery in the near future. In his opinion, it was a mistake to send to Palestine Jewish fishermen who had so far been learning their trade and sailing in the waters of northern Europe and knew nothing about the conditions in the Mediterranean Sea. He believed that it was only experiences from Italy and Greece that could have a decisive influence on the development of fishery in the future Jewish state. Halperin was touched by the warm welcome that he and the cadets received in Thessaloniki, and perhaps that is why he stayed in the city for as long as seven days. Plans for the ship's further voyage included a visit to Marseille, where registration formalities were to be completed, and to London, from which the "Sara I" was to set sail towards

50 Dilion, "Betarim zur See," 3.

51 When the "Sara I" had left for Palestine, the Revisionists proudly emphasised that it was the first Jewish ship in modern times and that its arrival in Tel-Aviv would be, on the one hand, a clear symbol of the revival of Jewish sailing traditions, and on the other, an impulse to open up immigration routes to Palestine, to which, parenthetically, the British reacted in a negative way.

52 "Das Schulschiff «Sara» in Palästina," *Die Neue Welt* 688, 14/09/1937, 7; "Das Schulschiff «Sara I» in Palästina," *Das Jüdische Volk* 12, 17/09/1937, 7. See also: "Das Schulschiff «Sara I» in Palästina," *Jüdisches Gemeindeblatt für den Verband der Kultusgemeinden in Bayern* 19, 01/10/1937, 340; *Chadness* 1 (1937): 11.

the ports of South America.⁵³ In January 1938, the ship reached Tunisia, where a series of armed clashes broke out between the cadets and local Arab groups.⁵⁴ After several days of riots, the sailing ship continued its journey. Unfortunately, a tragic accident happened on the coast of Corsican Bastia, as a result of which the ship sank during a sudden and strong storm and some of her crew drowned. Allegedly, the last man on board was Y. Halperin, who left the ship only when he decided that the chances of saving her were zero.⁵⁵

The catastrophe hampered the development of the Jewish Marine School in Civitavecchia. In February 1938, Jabotinsky stopped in Rome, on his way to South Africa, to hold a conference with Capt. Fusco, Dr. Roifer and Dr. Mendes on the resumption of instruction at the school.⁵⁶ It turned out that with the loss of the "Sara I," the school's three-year achievements had gone to waste, because although the ship was lifted from the sea bottom and towed to the port in Livorno, there were no funds for her renovation. Soon, resumption of the school's activities turned out to be impossible for political reasons (as King Victor Emmanuel III signed Mussolini's racial laws which discriminated against Jews).⁵⁷ In October 1939, Louis Brodsky became chairman of the Jewish Maritime League, one of the goals of which was to organise maritime education in Palestine. On this occasion, the weekly "The Sentinel" announced that the Jewish Marine School had been moved from Civitavecchia to Netanya in Palestine, which was probably partly related to the outbreak of World War II.⁵⁸ Halperin, who had arrived in the USA as the 3rd officer on a transatlantic ship shortly before Jabotinsky's death, was no longer in charge of the school. Moshe Arens, a later Israeli politician and diplomat who had attended Halperin's Beitar course for instructors, recalled that he was a colourful figure, albeit a strict judge, who put emphasis on firm drill, discipline, punctuality and accuracy. He taught infantry tactics, Morse code and semaphore signalling, and lectured on the history of Jews and Zionists. At Jabotinsky's funeral (he died on 3 August 1940), he appeared in the uniform of a Palestinian navy captain,

53 "Sarah I w Salonikach," *Nowy Dziennik* 318, 19/11/1937, 6. *Nasz Przegląd* 331, 21/11/1937, 10; Jacques Pilo, "Le navire-école Sarah I à Thessalonique," *L'Aurore* 303, 25/11/1937, 4.

54 Kaplan, *The Jewish Radical Right*, 157.

55 "Nowaczyński o opanowywaniu morza przez Żydów," *5ta Rano* 72, 13/03/1938, 6. The details of this disaster or its scale (the degree of damage to the sailing ship and the number of victims) are unknown. Information about this event was most likely deliberately omitted by the Jewish press, even that unrelated to the Revisionist Zionist movement, which was pointed out by Adolf Nowaczyński.

56 "Ze szkoły morskiej w Civitavecchia," *Chad-ness* 7 (1938): 1.

57 Norbert Ochs, "Walka Bejtaru o Morze Żydowskie," *Trybuna Narodowa* 36, 09/09/1938, 7; Colin Shindler, *The Hebrew Republic. Israel's Return to History* (Lanham-Boulder-New Yor-London: Rowman & Littlefield, 2017), 49.

58 *The Sentinel* 4, 26/10/1939, 12.

made according to his own design.⁵⁹ In 1948 he returned to Israel, and in 1951 he developed a plan to reorganise the local merchant and military navy.

The Jewish Marine School in Civitavecchia was not the only institution of this type set up by Beitar before the outbreak of World War II. In Riga, Jabotinsky's hometown, a more modest marine school was established in 1935 on the initiative of local Zionists.⁶⁰ It is unknown whether it had been inspired by the Italian Beitar school, but it had its own ship, which was used for naval training. The schooner "Theodor Herzl" had previously sailed under the Estonian flag as a merchant ship. She had been purchased for 15,000 Latvian lats, half of which was donated by the *Keren Tel Hai* fund, and the other half by Rudolf Kaplan and Jakob Hoff, wealthy Jewish merchants from Riga.⁶¹ The ship's crew consisted of apprentices and professional sailors – a total of 12–14 people coming from Latvia, Estonia and Lithuania. Initially, a Latvian became the captain of the schooner, but in 1936 this function was taken over by Capt. Abraham Yitzhak Ross (a 1911 graduate of one of Western European marine schools), who was Jewish and had previously commanded ships that operated liner services from Liepaja to New York.⁶² In September 1937, the "Theodor Herzl" docked at Wismar, and on 28 October 1937, she visited Gdynia. Representatives of the entire local Jewish community participated in a special banquet in honour of the crew at the premises of the Jewish Club. The atmosphere was solemn and festive at the same time. Especially poignant was the moment when the crew members sang the so-called "Anthem of the Jewish seaman." During a stay in Gdynia, Capt. A. I. Ross and the helmsman Shul Rutror inspected the schooner "Elemka" owned by the Maritime and Colonial League.⁶³ Almost the entire crew (except for one of the steersmen, who was a Latvian), consisted of Jews who communicated with each other in Hebrew. The average age of the 12 seamen who came to Gdynia was 18 years. They were sons of both wealthy industrialists and small merchants and craftsmen.⁶⁴ In total, within a few years (until October 1937), 40 seamen were trained on board the "Theodor Herzl."⁶⁵

The Jewish Marine School in Civitavecchia operated in the years 1934–1938. It was established with the consent of Benito Mussolini on the initiative of Beitar, the Revisionist Zionist organisation led by Vladimir Jabotinsky. During three courses run

59 Moshe Arens, *In Defense of Israel. A Memoir of a Political Life* (Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution Press, 2018), 17.

60 Shindler, *The Triumph*, 131.

61 "Ein jüdisches Schulschiff," *Israelitisches Familienblatt* 37, 14/09/1937, 11.

62 K. Landau, "Okręt szkolny Bejtaru łotewskiego," *Trybuna Narodowa* 24, 18/06/1937, 8.

63 Drozd, *Lost in the Whirlwind of War*, 197.

64 Teodor Hatalgi, "Teodor Herzl w Gdyni," *Trybuna Narodowa* 44, 12/11/1937, 7; "Łotewski Teodor Herzl i jakaś Sara," *Chad-ness* 1 (1937): 14–15.

65 Pilo, "Le navire-école Sarah I à Thessalonique," 4; "Marynarze słodkich wód," *Trybuna Narodowa* 8, 25/02/1938, 4.

under the supervision of Capt. Nicoli Fusco and the head of the Maritime Department of the World Beitar Headquarters, Capt. Yirmeyahu Halperin, Jewish youth from Europe, Palestine and Africa received maritime training. Despite suggestions from Beitar leaders that the students should not interfere with local politics, the Jewish cadets expressed public support for Mussolini's regime. They used fascist symbols in their behaviour and clothing. They viewed fascism, similarly to Zionism, as a return to the roots of the national culture and the historical past. Jewish Beitarist sailors did not conceal their admiration for fascists and for Mussolini. They were impressed by the Italian nationalist pride built in an atmosphere of heroism, militarism, and the will to regain dominance of the Mediterranean Basin. In January 1938, the "Sara I," Beitar's training ship, called at the port of Haifa and its crew then visited Tel Aviv, officially greeted by Mayor Israel Rokach. On the way back, off the coast of Corsica, the vessel sank, and this catastrophe largely contributed to the closure of the school just before the start of the fourth course. In the years 1934–1938, a total of nearly 150 students (trained as sailors, mechanics, and fishermen) graduated from the Italian school; at least half of them were Polish citizens. In addition to the school in Civitavecchia, Beitar also set up a smaller marine education centre in Riga, which trained local Revisionist Zionists on the training ship "Theodor Herzl." This vessel made cruises on the Baltic Sea, calling in port, among others, at Wismar and Gdynia. During these visits, the crew popularised the slogan of the Beitar naval unit: "The road to Palestinian land leads through the Jewish sea."

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English version: Radosław Dolecki, Mark Atkinson

SUMMARY

The Jewish Marine School was established in 1934, with the consent of Benito Mussolini, on the basis of the Italian Naval School for Officers in Civitavecchia. It was set up on the initiative of Beitar, a Revisionist Zionist movement led by Vladimir Jabotinsky. The three courses organised by the main lecturer, Capt. Nicola Fusco and the head of the Maritime Department of the World Beitar Headquarters, Capt. Yirmeyahu Halperin, were attended by 17 to 23-year-old cadets from Europe (mainly Poland, Czechoslovakia, Latvia and Germany) as well as Palestine and Africa (Egypt, Somalia and Rhodesia). Despite suggestions from Beitar leaders not to interfere with local fascist politics, the cadets expressed public support for Benito Mussolini's regime by marching alongside Italian soldiers and supporting the Italo-Abyssinian war as well as collecting scrap metal for the Italian arms industry. They saw Italian nationalism as a perfect contemporary example of a formerly great culture gradually regaining its role in the world through the affirmation of national power and pride. In January 1938, the training ship "Sara I," a four-master purchased with the funds obtained from "Keren Tel Hai" and a private donation of the Kirschners from Paris, entered the Haifa port, and its crew then visited Tel Aviv, officially greeted by Mayor Israel Rokach. On the way back, off the coast of Corsica, the vessel sank, and this catastrophe largely contributed to the closure of the school just before the start of the fourth course. In the years 1934–1938, the institution educated nearly 150 graduates (seamen, mechanics and fishermen). In addition to the school in Civitavecchia, Beitar also established a smaller educational facility in Riga, which offered courses to local Revisionist Zionists on the training vessel "Theodor Herzl." The ship made cruises on the Baltic Sea, touching in, among others, at the ports in Wismar and Gdynia.

Powstanie i działalność Żydowskiej Szkoły Morskiej w Civitavecchia (1934–1938) na łamach prasy syjonistów-rewizjonistów

Słowa kluczowe: Żydzi, Bejtar, syjonizm, rewizjonizm, faszyzm, szkolnictwo morskie

STRESZCZENIE

Żydowska Szkoła Morska powstała w 1934 r., za zgodą Benito Mussoliniego, na bazie włoskiej Oficerskiej Szkoły Marynarki Wojennej w Civitavecchia. Była inicjatywą Bejtaru, syjonistyczno-rewizjonistycznej organizacji, kierowanej przez Włodzimierza Żabotyńskiego. W III kursach, zorganizowanych przez głównego wykładowcę kpt. Nicolę Fusco i szefa Wydziału Morskiego Komendy Światowej Bejtaru, kpt. Jeremjahu Halperina, wzięli udział kadeci (w wieku 17–23 lat) pochodzący z Europy (głównie Polski, Czechosłowacji, Łotwy i Niemiec) oraz Palestyny oraz Afryki (Egiptu, Somalii i Rodezji). Mimo sugestii ze strony liderów Bejtaru, by nie mieszać się do lokalnej polityki faszystowskiej, kadeci wyrażali publiczne poparcie dla reżimu Benito Mussoliniego, maszerując u boku włoskich żołnierzy i wspierając wojnę włosko-abisyńską oraz zbierając złom metalowy dla włoskiego przemysłu zbrojeniowego. Włoski nacjonalizm był przez nich postrzegany jako doskonały, współczesny przykład wspaniałej dawniej kultury, która stopniowo odzyskiwała swoją rolę w świecie poprzez afirmację władzy i dumy narodowej. W styczniu 1938 r. statek szkolny „Sarah I-o,” czteromasztowy żagłowiec, zakupiony ze środków funduszy „Keren Tel Chaj” i prywatnej donacji małżeństwa Kirschnerów z Paryża, zawinął do portu w Hajfie a jego załoga odwiedziła następnie Tel Awiw, witana uroczystie przez burmistrza Ji’sraela Rokacha. W drodze powrotnej, u wybrzeży Korsyki, statek zatonął, przyczyniając się w sporej mierze do zamknięcia szkoły tuż przed rozpoczęciem IV kursu. W sumie w latach 1934–1938 placówkę ukończyło niespełna 150 absolwentów (marynarzy, mechaników i rybaków). Oprócz szkoły w Civitavecchia, Bejtar zorganizował również mniejszą placówkę w Rydze, gdzie szkolili się miejscowi syjoniści-rewizjoniści, mając do dyspozycji statek szkolny „Theodor Herzl,” który pływał po Morzu Bałtyckim, odwiedzając m.in. porty w Wismarze i Gdyni.

Citation

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