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*Aliyah*¹ of Estonian Jews.

Situation of Jews in Estonia in the second half of the XIX century

In 1710 – 1917 Estonia was a part of the Russian Empire. It was outside the Pale of Settlement (area where Jews were allowed to live). This partially explains why the number of Jews in Estonia was relatively small. However, in 1865 Emperor Alexander II issued a decree that allowed certain groups of Jews to settle anywhere in Russia. These groups included the so-called Nikolai soldiers with their families, first guild merchants, professionals with high education etc. Jewish population of Estonia started to grow, and by 1897 reached **3837** (0.4% of the total population).

In the 1870s a part of the Jewish intelligentsia still believed that it is possible to solve “the Jewish problem” by a partial or a total assimilation. The crisis and the disappointment came at the beginning of the 1880s when antisemitism in Russia grew significantly. The persecution of Jews, the notorious Pale of Settlement that restricted the free movement, a difficult economic situation and, finally, the pogroms of 1881-1882 brought the wave of massive emigration of Jews from Russia, mainly from the areas of the Pale of Settlement. Between 1881-1908 about 1,250,000 Russian Jews emigrated to America and about 20,000 to Palestine.

¹ *Aliyah* in Hebrew means "ascent" or "going up". Jewish tradition views traveling to the land of Israel as an ascent, both geographically and metaphysically. Anyone traveling to Eretz Israel from Egypt, Babylonia or the Mediterranean basin, where many Jews lived in early rabbinic times, climbed to a higher altitude. Visiting Jerusalem, situated 2,700 feet above sea level, also involved an "ascent".

Jews, who lived in Estonia, were in a somewhat better position. True, they were under constant surveillance, restrictions and pressure from the authorities, too. But there was no open antisemitism and certainly no pogroms. There are several reasons for that. The Baltic provinces, including the territory of today's Estonia, had a semi-autonomous status in Imperial Russia as they were governed by local laws. The number of Jews in Estonia was so small and their position so insignificant, that the local population looked at them more as an object of curiosity. However, at the end of 1870s a more close control was established over the Jewish population. Governors had to produce the detailed lists of Jews in areas under their control. Some governors used the situation in order to deport the Jews back to the Pale of Settlement. For example, on 11 June 1879 the Minister of Internal Affairs Lev S. Makov requested details about certain categories of Jews living outside the Pale of Settlement. In his order from 3 April 1880 he complained that some Governors had used his letter as a pretext for the immediate deportation of Jews without the valid residence permit. He ordered to stop all deportations until further notice.

The order of 21 July 1893 allowed all Jews who lived in the Baltic provinces before 3 April 1880 to stay (regardless of their social status and legal rights). As a result of these changes:

- Many Jews that had no valid residence permit and did not live in Estonia before 3 April 1880 were deported back to the Pale of Settlement or had to continue their stay in Estonia illegally (mainly in 1893).
- Some Jews, who had lived in Estonia before 3 April 1880, returned to Estonia.
- Some Jews, being afraid of possible pogroms and prosecutions, emigrated, the vast majority of them to the USA. According to Kopl Jokton², close to 100 Tartu families emigrated to the USA at this time³.
- According to K. Jokton, at the end of 1880s only five families out of hundred remained in Rakvere, and 200-300 out of 700-800 families remained in Tallinn.

² Kopl Jokton. Juutide ajaloost Eestis, Tartu, 1992.

³ See a very interesting story of the Kruskal family, who emigrated to USA in 1891, here <http://eja.pri.ee/stories/Kruskals.pdf>

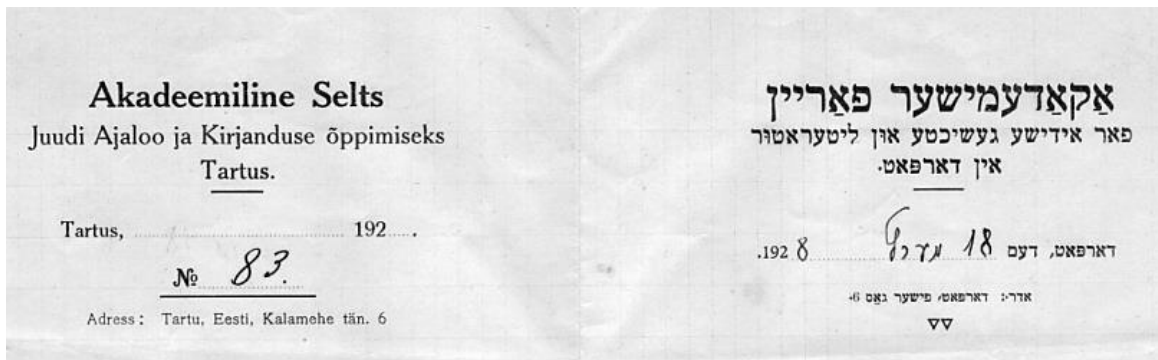
Religious settlement in Palestine

The religious Jews always had close ties with Palestine – the historic homeland and land of their forefathers. Each year at Passover the Jews all over the world are praying: “Next year in Jerusalem”. And indeed, the first settlers in Palestine in the XVIII and XIX centuries were religious Jews, who wanted to study Torah in the Holy Land. Even the First Aliyah (1882-1903) was mainly religious and not driven by the ideas of Zionism proper. As far as we know, no Estonian Jews settled in Palestine before 1913.

Jewish national revival

A wave of pogroms in Russia, that took place in the beginning of 1880s, had stirred up a part of the Jewish intelligentsia that was previously rather indifferent to the fate of their own people. Some of them started to be involved in the struggle for general human (socialist) ideals, believing that this is the only way to ensure a better future for all, including Jews. Others concentrated on the ideas of Jewish national revival. As always, the young people, especially the students of the Tartu (then Yuryev) university, were in front line of those ideas.

At the end of 1883, the Academic Society for the Study of Jewish History and Literature (Akademischer Verein für jüdische Geschichte und Literatur) was established in Tartu⁴. The goal of the society was education of its members in the Jewish history and culture and spreading this knowledge to the whole Jewish population of Tartu. A couple of years later a Zionist section of the society was established⁵.

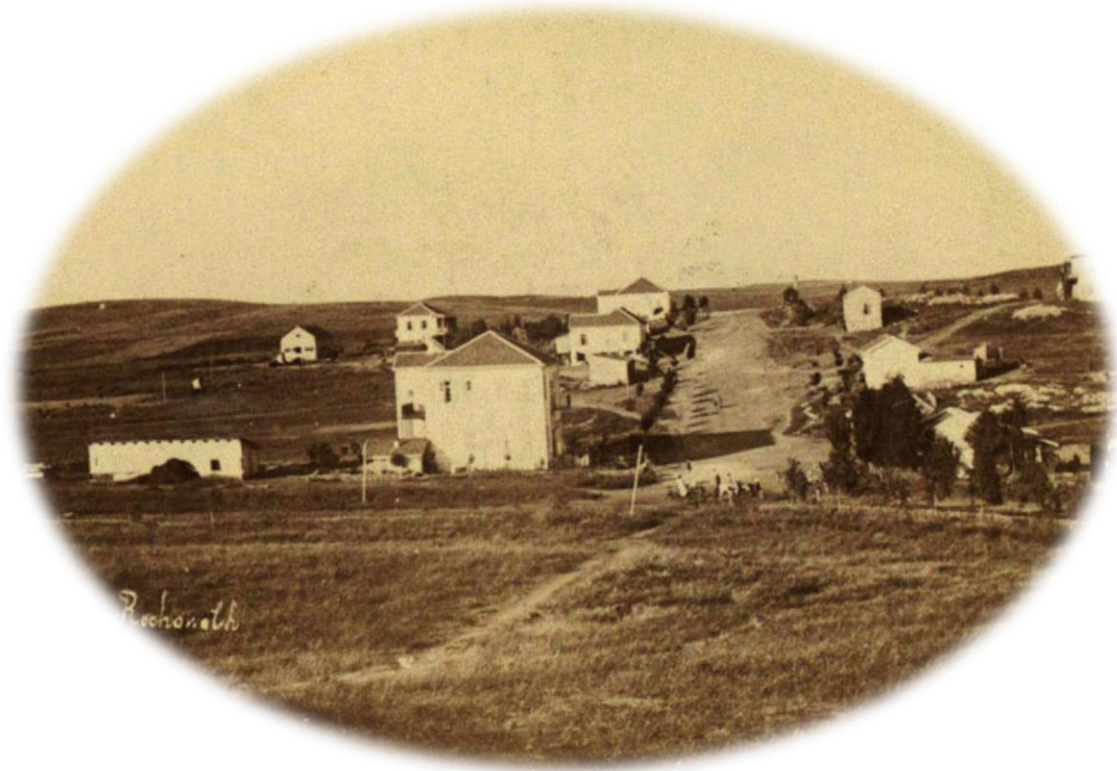


⁴ Officially registered in 1884.

⁵ Much more about the Verein and life of the students in Tartu in the excellent article of Leib Levitin (1879-1969) here http://eja.pri.ee/stories/Levitin%20Tartu_eng.pdf

In 1884 a workers' group was established in Tallinn by Rubin and Epstein. Its goal was to collect money for Jewish settlement in Erez Israel⁶. This group later transformed to the Lovers of Zion (Hovevei Zion) movement. The Society for Helping Jewish Settlers in Erez Israel was established in Tartu in 1890. Community members contributed quite actively and, for example, in 1899 the Tartu organization was able to send 120 rubles for the advancement of the Jewish settlement in Palestine⁷. The founders of the Tartu organization were Elja Mendel Usvansky (1862-1931) and Rabbi Meir Kropman (1843-1914).

All these groups and organizations promoted the idea of Jewish settlement in the ancient Land of Israel, the need for agricultural development of the land by the young Jewish settlers. At that time about 25,000 Jews lived in Palestine, 12,000 of them in Jerusalem (about the half of the population of the city). The rest of the Jews lived in Safed, Tiberias, Jaffa, Hebron and Haifa. On 30 July 1882 a single tent, erected on a dry and deserted land, became the foundation of the city of Rishon Lezion (the first to Zion). The active settlement of Erez Israel began.

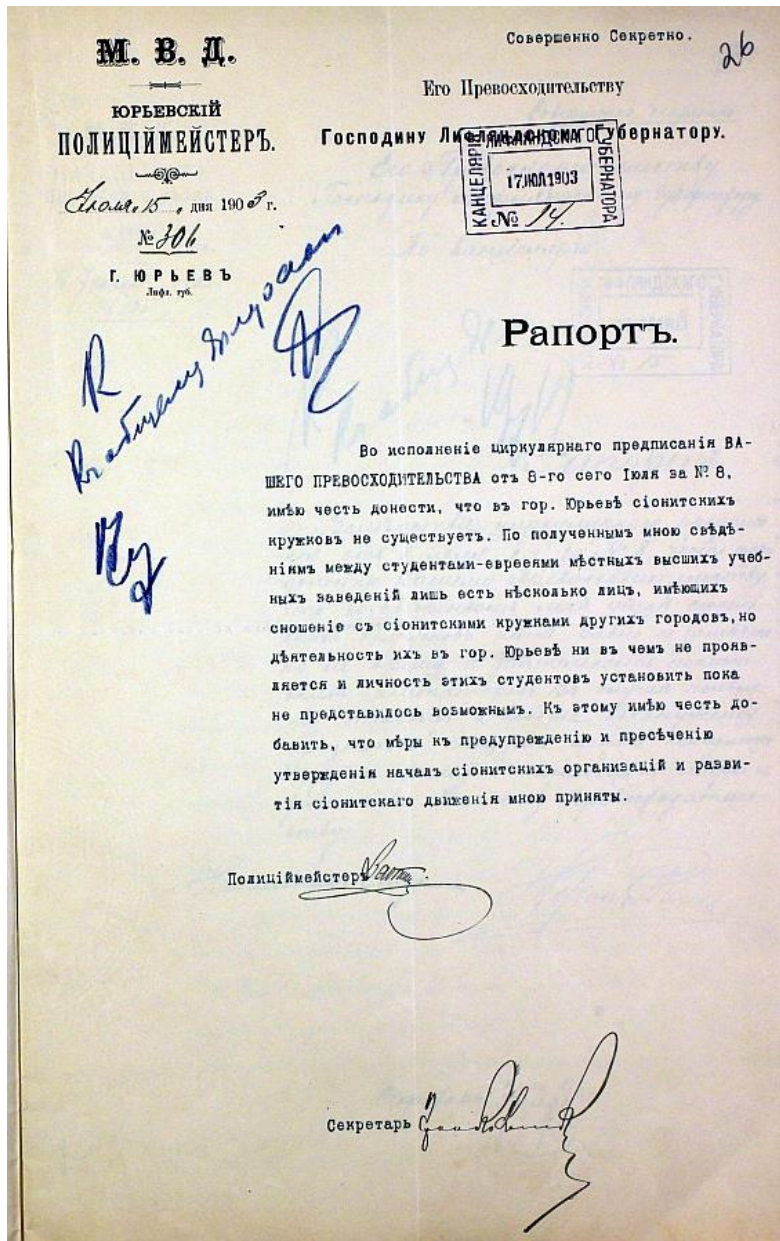


Postcard of Rechovot in the old picture album of Akademischer Verein.

⁶ Erez Israel (Eretz Yisrael) - the land of Israel – Hebrew.

⁷ The list of contributors can be seen here <http://www.eja.pri.ee/Organizations/keren%20kayemet.pdf> (in Russian).

The goal of the Zionism was officially agreed upon on the first Zionist congress that took place in 1897 in Basel, Switzerland. *“Zionism aims at establishing for the Jewish people a publicly and legally assured home in Palestine”*. The first step in achieving this goal was **“promotion of the settlement of Jewish agriculturists, artisans, and tradesmen in Palestine”**.



However, the attitude to Zionism in Russia – initially sympathetic (emigration of Jews from Russia is welcomed; it will also weaken the Ottoman rule by introducing more conflicts between the various ethnic and political groups), then - a total ban (1903), because, as stated in a secret circular of the Ministry of Internal Affairs: the Zionist society "postponed to the distant future" the main goal [...] and focused its activities on the development and strengthening of national Jewish ideas [...] this direction, being hostile to Jewish assimilation with other nations [...], contrary to principles of Russian national idea, and therefore cannot be tolerated".

Tartu Police Head reporting to the Governor of Livland on 15 July 1903:

“I have the honor to report that there are no Zionist circles in Yuryev. There are only several Jewish students that have some connections with Zionist circles of other cities, but they have no influence in Yuryev and their identity is still unknown”.

Zionist movement in the independent Republic of Estonia (1918 – 1940)

The above mentioned groups and societies (and some others, mainly various youth groups), were forerunners of the following main Zionist organizations in Estonia:

Keren Hayesod (the Foundation Fund)

Keren Hayesod was established at the World Zionist Conference held in London in 1920, to provide the Zionist movement with resources needed for the Jewish people



to return to the Land of Israel. The Estonian branch was officially registered in June 1926. The founding members were **Mordechay Schuklepper** (1875-1950), **Ilia Vulf** (1866-1933) and **Meier Rogovsky** (1867-1941). The first paragraph of the Estonian organizational charter said: “The organization’s goal is to explain and research all the questions related to the emigration and settling of Jews in

Palestine...”⁸.

The chairman of the Keren Hayesod in Estonia from 1929-1938 was Hirsch Aisenstadt (1885-1963), the permanent Chairman of the Jewish Cultural Council. The Estonian branch was one of the most successful in collecting money in Europe.

Tartu, 1923.
The visit of Yehuda-Leib
Vilensky, the representative of
Keren Hayesod.



⁸ Translated from Estonian. ERA.2199.1.19

Keren Kayemet (The Jewish National Fund)

Keren Kayemet was founded in 1901 to buy and develop land in Palestine for Jewish settlement. The blue box of *Keren Kayemet* (“pushke”) for collecting small change for that cause was almost in every family or at least in every Zionist minded family. *Keren Hayesod* also collected money, their box was yellow. Sima Gorin (Slosin) (1916-1997), a member of kibbutzim Afikim and Kfar Blum, who emigrated from Tallinn in 1936, remembers⁹:

“My family was quite assimilated, even though Mom and Dad clearly felt their Jewishness, and donated to all Jewish institutions, especially those that had Zionist orientation. I remember the blue box "KKL" (Keren Kaymet Lelzrael), which was always on my father's desk. Occasionally they came from KKL and emptied it. Later I was told that it is intended for the purchase of land in Palestine for the Jews. I was still small, and did not understand much.



After the blue box has been emptied, they left us colored postcards, which I have carefully studied. The pictures were figures of Jewish tillers, horses with plow. They hoed the soil, which was bought with the money from the blue boxes ... how many poems and stories were written about this box that galut-Jews filled with a small change in order for the Jews in Palestine to be able to buy the land ... and with hope that they themselves will one day make it to Eretz Yisrael!!”

On 9 September 1940, under the Soviet occupation, David Epstein was chosen by the commission for liquidation of the Estonian Zionist organizations (M. Sacks, L. Epstein, S. Vseviov, S. Saks and M. Epstein), to collect all the remaining boxes of *Keren Kayemet* and got from the Soviet authorities a written power of attorney for that¹⁰.

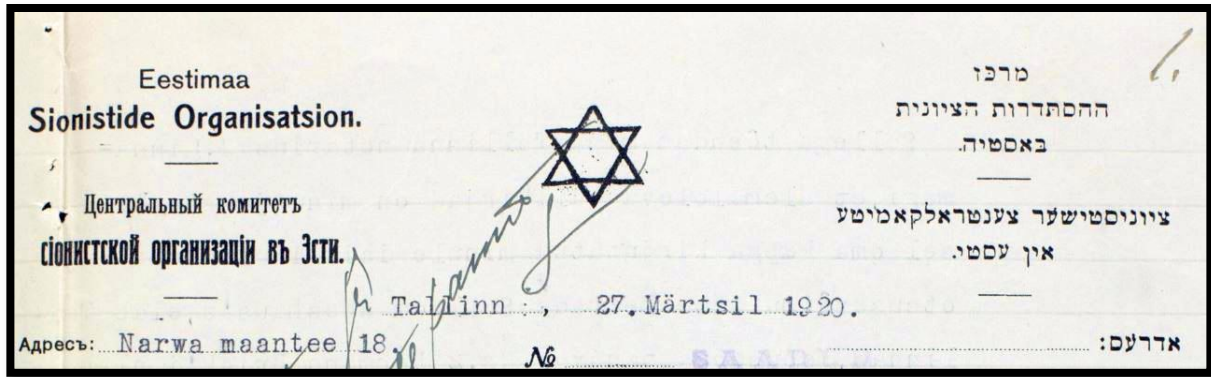
In the 1930s many wealthy Estonian Jews bought a piece of land in Palestine through *Keren Kayemet*. Dr. Markus Blumberg was one of the leaders of *Keren Kayemet* at that time.

⁹ See <http://eja.pri.ee/stories/Slosin.html> (in Russian)

¹⁰ ERA.2199.1.2

The Zionist Organization

Tallinn Zionist Organization was established by Shaul Pomeranz (1867-1932) soon after the first Zionist congress in Basel in 1897. Tartu organization was founded in 1900 by the members of the *Academic Society for the Study of Jewish History and Literature* (Akademischer Verein für jüdische Geschichte und *Literatur*). Active members were M. Usvansky, H. Selmanovitsch, A. Jakobson, D. Kan, M. Flaks, brothers J. and L. Kropman and others. Most active students were Gawendo, Wolfson and Kaidanovsky¹¹.



On 9 December 1918 an all-Estonian Zionist conference took place in Tartu. Tartu Zionist organization was officially registered on 27 April 1920. The founding members were Jakob-Aron Jakobson, Hirsch Selmanovitsch and Wolf Hirschovitsch.

The Estonian Zionist organization was registered in March, 1920.



“One shekel” – the annual payment for the membership in the Zionist World Organization. This one belongs to Nosson Gens and was paid for the year 1938.

¹¹ K. Jokton

The Estonian Revisionist Zionist Organization

The Estonian revisionist Zionist organization was registered on 17 April 1931. The founding members were Dr. Rafael Jakobson, David Lerenmann and Mirjam Gabovitsch. Pinchas Katz (1907-1941) was the leader of the revisionist Zionist organization until his arrest by the NKVD^{12 13} in April 1941.

In the list of the Jewish organizations that were closed on 29 August 1940¹⁴ we can find the Zionist organizations of Pärnu, Tallinn, Rakvere, Valga, Võru, Tartu, Narva, and even Tõrva (!). Estonian Zionist Revisionist community and the Zionist Labor organization „Hitachdut“ also existed in Estonia.

WIZO – Women’s International Zionist Organization

WIZO dealt primarily with educational, cultural and charity activities. Since 1930, local WIZO branches existed in major Estonian cities. The Chairwomen in Tallinn were Haja Itskovitsch (Leibovitsch) (1884-1955) and Frieda Berkovitsch (Zipukov) (1889-1966). In January 1931 young Tartu University students organized a “Young WIZO” society. The active members were T. Judeikin, M. Gabovitsch, M. Schlifstein, P. Sverdlov, G. Sverdlov, M. Lipavski, G. Gutman, R. Jakobson.

Lia Kaplan (Berkovitsch) (1922-2014), the active member of after-war WIZO and the Estonian Jewish community, remembered:

“My mother was involved in charity work. She was the chairman of the ladies Zionist organization WIZO. My mother helped poor Jews a lot. Every day, students from poor families came to our home for lunch. One boy, whose parents were divorced, lived with us for a year as he was lonely. My mother led a group of women who visited the poor, gave them food and presents, and tried to support them the best they could. WIZO ladies collected clothing and footwear from rich families and then distributed them to poor people.

There was a buffet in our Jewish school where rolls, sandwiches, coffee, tea and stewed fruit were sold. Every day during recess, WIZO ladies served children from the buffet. My mother was also behind the counter. Apart from that, WIZO ladies baked rolls and cakes

¹² NKVD (abbr. Russian) – the People's Commissariat for Internal Affairs in USSR. Later KGB.

¹³ See <http://eja.pri.ee/stories/Kats.html> (in Russian).

¹⁴ ERA.14.11.123.

for children and handed them out for free. My mother knew all the students from the poor families in the school and always took care of them”.

Zionism and the language problem.

The “fight” between Hebraists and Yiddishists was one of the main problems of the pre-war Estonian Jewish life. The scandal over the incident in the Jewish gymnasium during the visit of the prominent Jewish poet Chaim Nahman Bialik was discussed in the local press (and not only in the Jewish press) for weeks¹⁵.

Emanuel Nodel (1919-1996), remembers¹⁶:

“...during the late twenties and early thirties, the language problem became the number one issue among the various political fractions of Estonian Jewry. The Zionists, looking toward the ultimate settlement of many, if not most, Estonian Jews in Palestine, insisted that Hebrew must become the cornerstone of Jewish education, with Yiddish, the language most Estonian Jews were using as their daily language, relegated to the second place. This view was opposed with growing ferocity by the Yiddishists, who insisted on the opposite: that most Estonian Jews would remain in Estonia and thus Yiddish, their mother tongue, should get preferential treatment.

This battle grew hotter with every year for two reasons: first, the leading Jewish community organizations became increasingly dominated by the Zionists, who by sheer democratic majority pushed Yiddish into the second place; second, after the emergence of the authoritarian regime of Konstantin Päts¹⁷, it openly supported the Zionist cause. Why did the Päts government support the Zionists in their struggle against the Yiddishists? On the surface it is hard to pinpoint the reason that put the Estonian government on the side of Estonian Zionism. The only explanation for this stand could be found in the political makeup of both Zionists and anti-Zionists. The former were primarily interested in preparing the Estonian Jewish youth for a future life in Palestine: the right-wing Revisionists for a capitalist Palestine, based upon military strength; the middle-of-the-road Zionists (General Zionists) for a capitalist Palestine with the help of economic concentration of Jewish capitalists there; and the left-wing Zionists for a socialist Palestine. The Yiddishists, on the other hand, were predominantly socialist in their ideological constellation, and many of them belonged to various Estonian liberal and socialist groups. It was the very distaste for the left-wing

¹⁵ See http://www.eja.pri.ee/stories/Barnoi_en.html

¹⁶ See <http://eja.pri.ee/stories/escape.pdf>

¹⁷ Konstantin Päts (1874-1956) – 5 times country’s Head of State.

leanings of the Yiddishists that tilted Päts' government toward supporting the cause of the Zionist majority”.

As Sara Bar-Noy (Epstein) (1920-2012) put it¹⁸: “I learned in Yiddish to be loyal to Hebrew. I expressed myself in Yiddish to declare my loyalty to Hebrew”.

Youth Zionist organizations before the Second World War

There were two major Zionist youth organizations in Estonia in the 1930s – the revisionist right-wing *Beitar*¹⁹ and the left-wing socialist *Hashomer Hatsair*,²⁰ which was named *Netzach*²¹ (or *Hashomer Hatsair – Netzach*) in the Baltic states. There was another Zionist school group called *Emuna* (Faith), which was completely non-political and positioned itself between *Netzach* and *Beitar*.

Members of *Beitar* and *Netzach* participated in lectures, disputes, sports, summer camps and all other activities of the scout organizations. The choice of either organization was rarely politically motivated (the kids were simply too young for that) – sometimes it was a choice of their parents, but normally they went after a friend or a sibling, or... after a beautiful boy or girl, or a nicer uniform. It seems that most *Emuna* members were from the wealthy families, whenever the *Beitar* and *Hashomer* members came from middle class or poor families, but, of course, this was not a rule. There were real fights between the members of the two “political” groups *Beitar* and *Hashomer*, even a tragic incident happened in a summer camp, when Zvi Ogus from *Hashomer* was killed in a fight with *beitarists*.

¹⁸ See http://www.eja.pri.ee/stories/Barnoi_en.html

¹⁹ *Beitar* (בית"ר) – abbreviation of Brit Yosef Trumpeldor (Yosef Trumpeldor' union) was established in 1923 by Zeev Jabotinsky.

²⁰ *Hashomer Hatsair* - The young guard in Hebrew – was established in 1913.

²¹ *Netzach* (נצ"ח) – abbreviation of Noar Zioni Halutzi (Pioneer Zionist youth). Established as a result of a division inside the *Hashomer Hatsair* movement that took place in 1930.

Beitar

Tuvia Ma-Yafit (Majofis) (1916-2011) entered *Beitar* because of the gold, shiny buttons on their uniform (*Hashomer* had a strict green uniform). He became the leader of a group of younger beitarists and in 1937 – the leader of the Estonian branch of *Beitar*. He remembers the visit of Zeev Jabotinsky, the founder of *Beitar*, in May 1939:



“Jabotinsky gave a speech in the concert hall “Estonia”. I remember every word of that speech. It produced an irresistible impression on those present. He said that we do not feel antisemitism in Estonia, and therefore cannot imagine the catastrophic situation of

Концертный Залъ „Эстонія“

Во вторникъ, 2 мая Единственный докладъ

Владимира Жаботинскаго **„Рѣшеніе еврейской проблемы“**

Начало въ 8 час. вечера.

Билеты отъ Кр. 1.— до Кр. 8.— можно получить у „Hilvu“ Põlmu m. 8, I Berkovitsch Viru 23, H. Zivjan S. Karja 23, въ евр. клубъ V. Karja 1/3, и въ кассѣ „Эстонія“.

Орг. Сионистовъ-Ревизионистовъ въ Эстоніи.

Jews in the Diaspora. He predicted that in the near future Poland will fall, and predicted that much of the Jewish blood will be shed. He convinced the listeners that the only salvation for the people of Israel is the construction of the State of Israel with its army, its government system, its prisons and its criminals”.

“Immediately, after the performance, it was announced to raise funds for the purchase of weapons for the Jewish Yishuv in Palestine and the Beitar youth organized a raid on the families, ready to donate money. The money, that we

collected then, was used to purchase weapons in London, packed in six barrels of butter and illegally delivered to Haifa ...”

Tuvia was arrested by the Soviets in 1941 and sentenced to 10 years imprisonment and 4 years exile for the Zionist activity. He emigrated to Israel in 1975.²²



Tartu Beitar group in 1937

Sara Bar-Noy (Epstein) (1920-2012) remembers²³:

“This was the beginning of the Zionist era in the Balticum. We left the Estonian scout organization and joined the Jewish youth organization: Beitar with all those beautiful slogans which we tried hard to materialize, and Hashomer Hatsair which tended to socialism.

These were the most beautiful years for me, and I am sure for every youngster who belonged to a youth organization – for this matter any youth organization. I personally belonged to Beitar. I cherished a series of moral values, which was called in a literal translation “the glory of Beitar”. The dream was to live up to those beautiful, noble values such as truth, loyalty, integrity, and respect towards your fellow-men, and self-respect that combined all these values. They weren’t just abstract terms”.

²² See <http://eja.pri.ee/stories/Majofes.html> (in Russian).

²³ See http://www.eja.pri.ee/stories/Barnoi_en.html

Hashomer Hatsair – Netzach.

It looks that the *Netzach* movement in Estonia owes its existence to one young man from Latvia – Lasik Goldberg (1912-1997). It was Lasik, who opened the new horizons to many young Estonian Jews. Many people mention him in their memoirs; here is just a couple out of many.

Nechemia Levanon (1915-2003)²⁴:

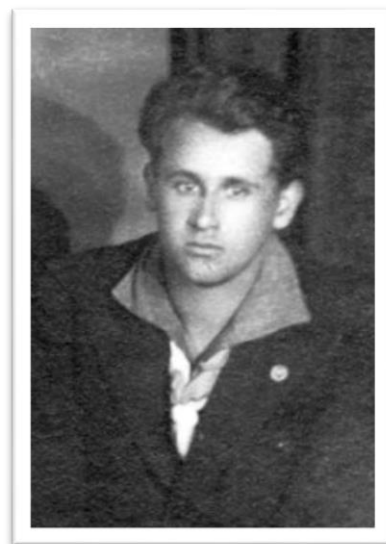
“One day²⁵, a striking young man arrived in Tallinn, dressed in a brown jacket, a gray shirt, riding breeches and high shoes with knee-high stockings. I was told that this was not a uniform, but the ordinary dress of the older level of "Shomrim" - that is, the Hashomer Hatzair Youth Movement, pioneer youth scouts in Latvia. The name of this interesting fellow was Lasik Goldberg. Lasik lived and was educated in the provincial town of Rezekna and in the youth movement "Netzach" (Noar Tzioni Chalutzi - Pioneer Zionist Youth)”.

...

“I was entranced by Lasik. I was attracted to all his stories. This was the first time that I heard about a movement of Zionist youth, a pioneering scout movement that raised the standard of "self-fulfillment" of the Socialist-Zionist goal. Lasik described to me the history of the movement, its character and its methods of youth education. He told me of the Russian members of the movement who succeeded in going to Palestine in the twenties and founded Kibbutz Afikim in the Jordan Valley”.

...

“I was in turmoil. I lost interest in my activities in other frameworks and saw them as unimportant, a waste of time. [...] I devoted myself completely to the task that Lasik had given me; I was to convince the students in our Jewish school to join our new movement which Lasik was organizing. I suggested to Lasik that we organize the class of 14-15-year-olds, as I did not see any appropriate candidates in my own class. The wealthy students in my class were nice, but too comfortable with their surroundings to be attracted to the movement.



²⁴ See http://www.nechemia.org/jordan2_e.html. More about Nechemia later in a separate chapter.

²⁵ In 1931.

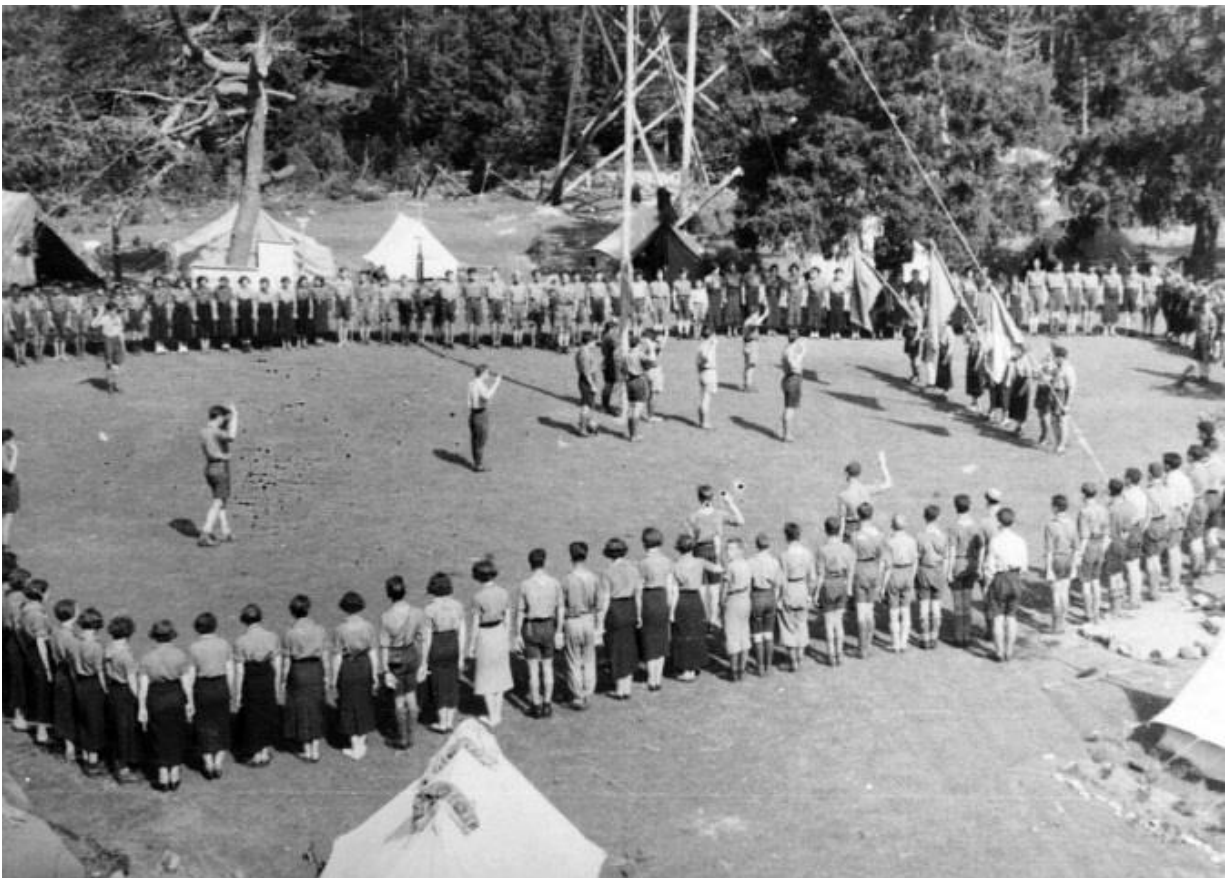
I must have found the right road to the hearts and minds of the younger children. Lasik himself worked to get the support of parents for the new movement, which he thought should be within the framework of the scout movement. We resurrected the Jewish contingent of the Boy Scouts with the accompanying uniform and flag, etc. We had a blue-and-white Jewish flag with the Boy Scout symbol in the middle. One of the boys learned to play the drum and became very good at it. Lasik took my advice and we started with one group of kids from 10-12 and another group from 12-16. We figured that the youngsters would mature into the older levels of the movement. We soon had quite a few groups of children organized into units. The unit that I myself lead was called "Trumpledor", but I also met and helped the leaders of the other younger groups."



Ben-Gurion with Tallinn *Hashomer Hatsair* members on a visit to Estonia in 1933.

Sima Goren (Slosin) (1916-1997)²⁶:

“Years passed, and I'm in the senior class. Somewhere at a break I notice in the school hallway a young guy named Lesik Goldberg. There is a crowd of young men and women around him who listen to him carefully, and he explains something to them. When I approached, I heard that the questions are about Palestine. Lesik enthusiastically talked about draining swamps, about transforming the desert into blooming gardens, about "Aliyah" of the Jews to Eretz Israel. And that we will certainly have our own state - the State of the Jews! I do not know how, but these words sank deep into my heart, soul, and, most importantly, the head! I returned home confused and agitated. I, who was born, grew up and brought up here in the northern Europe, was supposed to drop everything and go to the Land of Israel?! In fact, it all absolutely did not bother me, I did not think about separation after 18 years of normal life. All this would not matter. What matters is a goal, my great and holy mission - to create a national home for the Jews!!! Today it is a solid pathos, rant. But not then, not then!”



Hashomer summer camp in Kuressaare in 1934/5.

²⁶ <http://eja.pri.ee/stories/Slosin.html> (in Russian)

Emuna.



Tallinn *Emuna* members. 1930.

Leo Ginovker (born 1914)²⁷:

“When I was in the 8th grade, I attended a Zionist group called ‘Emuna’ [the word means ‘faith’]; the group was organized by Jewish students from Tartu. We were not right wing as the Beitar Zionist movement, or left wing as the Zionists of Hashomer Hatzair. We were in the middle. We read books on Palestine, prepared reports on Zionism, and dreamed of going to Palestine and building a Jewish state. Later, many of us actually went there. My friend David Gershanovich, whose family didn’t live far from us, was one such person; he had seven or eight siblings. David was a year older than me. He was 18 when he went to Palestine”.

²⁷ Lives in Tallinn

Nechemia Levanon (1915-2003):²⁸

“When I was 15 years old, I was drafted into the Zionist student club, "Emuna" (Faith). This club tried to resemble all the other clubs of the time. After graduation, many continued into other Jewish student clubs in the University of Tartu. One such club was called "Hasmonea" (Russian for Hashmonaim). The other club was called "Limuvia." These two clubs, like all the other Russian and German clubs, called themselves "societies," and each had a flag and a theme song, in addition to the student anthem, "Gaudeamus Igitur" which was sung in Latin. The Society had a strict code of behavior; the older boys held power over the "rookies" and the chief of the Society was all-powerful. The Tartu "societies" were run according to the German style, and they trained in dueling. I heard of actual duels that took place and the participants were wounded". [...]

“...all of us who were members of Emuna saw ourselves as potential members of Hasmonea, even if we were not Revisionists, because we preferred a Zionist affiliation to that of the assimilationists. I don't remember exactly how the Emuna Society chose its new members, but I do recall that not every candidate was accepted. During the first semester we learned the rules and regulations of the Society, we learned something about the Land of Israel and some of the fundamentals of what Zionism was. When we were accepted into the Society, we met at least once a week in the small club room decorated with the flag of the Society, with pictures of Herzl²⁹ and Max Nordau³⁰ and classes of alumni of the Society. At the meetings, having finished with the conduct of the internal affairs, there would be lectures and discussions. The lectures usually dealt with chapters in the History of the Jewish People (following the book on this subject by Simon Dubnow³¹), and on the development of the Zionist Movement. The latter also dealt with actual, current problems of Zionism. Most of the lectures were prepared by members of the Society”.

Tartu student organizations.

There were 3 Zionist-oriented student corporations in Tartu: the right wing revisionist *Hasmonea*, the apolitical *Limuvia* and the female students' organization *Hazfiro*.

²⁸ See http://www.nechemia.org/jordan2_e.html

²⁹ Theodor Herzl (1860-1904) – one of the fathers of the modern political Zionism.

³⁰ Max Nordau (1869-1923) – co-founder of the World Zionist Organization together with Herzl.

³¹ Simon Dubnov (1860-1941) - Jewish historian, writer and activist.

Hasmonea.

The name *Hasmonea* is a “local variation” of the Hebrew *Hashmonaím*. The Hashmonaim (Hasmonean) dynasty led the revolt against King Antiochus IV Epiphanes, defeated him after three years of struggle, and then ruled until 63 B.C.E. when Judea became a Roman province. *Hasmonea* students were usually with a background of the *Beitar* movement.

The fraternity *Hasmonea* was in the beginning part of the ***Academic Society for the Study of Jewish History and Literature*** (Akademischer Verein), but very soon stepped out and was officially registered on 5 October 1923.



Members of *Hasmonea* in 1934.

This was a Zionist oriented fraternity. Its members spoke Hebrew and saw the purpose of the organization, apart from the normal academic activities, in propagating the idea of national revival in Eretz Israel. In 1933 the corporation had 80 members and alumni.

Hasmonea was probably liquidated in 1940 by the Soviet occupation regime. We know that the rest of Jewish student organizations were already closed earlier due to small amount of their members.

Many members of *Hasmonea* emigrated to Palestine before the Second World War, where they continued the annual celebrations of the *Hasmonea* founding date, wearing the fraternity's caps and colors.

Limuvia

The official birthday of the corporation *Limuvia* is 21 October 1883. In 1907 it was merged from two separate Jewish student societies: the "Literary-Musical society" (established in 1883) and the "Scientific Association of History and Literature" (established in 1884). The new name was "Literature, Music and Science Society of Jewish Students *Limuvia*". The name *Limuvia* (Li-Mu-Wia) comes from the first letters of *L*iterarischer-*M*usikalischer und *W*issenschaftlicher Verein. On 27 October 1922 it was registered as corporation *Limuvia*.

It was an apolitical corporation - each member could have his own political views. A member of *Limuvia* Dr. S. Salzman (1906-2001) remembers³²: *"However, it was necessary for each member of the organization to recognize the Jews as a nation, support the Jews in being up to the mark, and defend the honor of the Jewish people. Assimilation was rejected categorically. To strengthen the national identity they became acquainted with Jewish literature and history, with the situation of Jews in the world and they put up a friendly relationship with Jewish organizations in Riga and Kaunas"*.

Happily enough the historical documents of the *Limuvia* corporation were not destroyed (as those of *Hasmonea*) and can be seen in the Estonian National archive.

In 1933 *Limuvia* celebrated its 50th anniversary. The historian Toomas Hiio summarizes this event as follows:

"In 1933 the 50th anniversary of Limuwia was festively celebrated. This event drew the attention of the press, at least in Estonia and Latvia. From Tartu University, Limuwia

³² <http://eja.pri.ee/Organizations/Limuvia/Corporation%20limuvia.pdf> (in Russian)

was greeted by the Rector, J. Kõpp, and Prorector J. Uluots. From the founders, Adolph Krüger, Solomon Salmanowitz and Adolph Wolosinsky in Riga, Hermann Schumacher in Lithuania, and Hermann Wunderbar in Bendery, Bessarabia, were alive in 1933. From the most prominent members of Limuwia, the press named dr. Isidor Feiertag (the doctor of Latvian President Jānis Čakste); dr. Rabinovitsch (the doctor of Fyodor Schalyapin); the head of the National Theatre in Kaunas, Berkowitsch; professor of Lausanne University E. Landau; and professor of the University of Concepcion in Chile, Alexander Lipschiitz. It was also mentioned that 17 members of the corporation had participated in the Estonian War of Liberation”.³³



Limuvia students' happening. 1930's.

³³ See <http://eja.pri.ee/Organizations/Hiio.pdf>

Hazfiro.

Tartu Jewish sorority *Hazfiro* (Sunrise) was registered 27 February 1925 by dr. B. Hirschfeldt (Tallinn), dr. B. Aronstamm (Tallinn), dr. M. Sack (Tallinn), dr. E. Bienemann (Pärnu), Mrs. O. Jachnin (Palestine) and Mrs. E. Joffe (Australia).

Hazfiro was an apolitical student organization, that was aimed at developing a sense of national patriotism and introduce its members the Jewish and Estonian history and culture.

In 1935, at time of its 10th Jubilee, *Hazfiro* had 60 active members (alumni and active fellows). The Chairwoman was M. Katsev, M. Getz - vice chairwoman, and O. Slutskin secretary.



Hazfiro girls in 1930s.

HeHalutz, Hachshara and certificates.

In the beginning of the 1920s, there was a great interest and demand for information about how to emigrate to Palestine. The Central Bureau of the Estonian Zionist Organization published some information about it in the Estonian Russian-language newspaper *Evreiskoje Slovo*³⁴. It wrote that...

1. Currently the emigration to Palestine from the Baltic countries is handled by the Palestinian Bureau in Riga, which is in a close contact with the British consulate.
2. The Palestinian Bureau gives permission to travel to Palestine only to such persons who possess a special knowledge or craft and may immediately upon arrival enter an existing company or business, or who, having appropriate capital, can arrange in Palestine their own business or enterprise.
3. The cost of travel is 20-25 English pounds.
4. The route from Riga: Riga – Liepaja – Klaipeda – Berlin – Vienna – Trieste – Jaffa.
5. The monthly living minimum for one person is 10-12 English pounds.
6. With regard to emigration from Estonia, the Bureau of the Estonian Zionist organization informs that in the next few days it will take steps for the early establishment of Palestinian Bureau in Revel (Tallinn), which will be in charge of emigration from Estonia.
7. The route from Tallinn will be: Tallinn – Stettin (Szczecin) – Berlin – Vienna – Trieste – Jaffa.

So, the problem of organized *aliyah* was solved for wealthy grownups, assuming that the British authorities issued enough residence permits (which obviously was not true). But what were the young people supposed to do, who were eager to work and build up the Jewish state in Palestine but did not have any profession yet and came from not so wealthy families? The answer came from Tartu, probably in 1919 – the *HeHalutz* movement.

³⁴ Еврейское Слово 9.10.1920

HeHalutz or *Hechalutz* (Hebrew: *חלוצ*, *lit.* The Pioneer) was an association of Jewish youth whose aim was to train its members to settle in the Land of Israel; it became an umbrella organization of the pioneering Zionist youth movements.

The Estonian branch of *Hechalutz* was established in Tartu by Leib Vilensky probably in 1919. It was called *Юрьевская Трудовая Палестинская организация Гехалуц* (*The Yuryev (Tartu) Labor Palestinian organization HeHalutz*).

L. Vilensky sent a letter to the Center of *HeHalutz* in Riga on 11 July 1920,³⁵ from which we learn that at that time the Yuryev *HeHalutz* organization had 15 members and candidates. The list of members and candidates with indication of their status and profession was as follows:

Babst, Ida	member	student	dressmaker
Bakscht, Ber	member	student	electrician
Vilensky, Ette	member	music teacher	dressmaker
Vilensky, Leib	member	student	carpenter
Vilensky, Ella	member	English teacher	dressmaker
Goldberg, Josif	member	student	electrician
Gurevitch, Nochum	member	manager	in the peat industry
Jegnus, Jacob	member	worker-mechanic	locksmith mechanic
Selmanovitch, M.	member	pupil	printing house
Selmanovitch, R.	member	student	printing - electrician
Rubin, Sima	candidate	student	-----
Usvansky, Josif	member	pupil	electrician
Judeikin, Elja	member	student	printing house
Jakobson, Ber	member	student	printing house
Jakobson, Kalman	candidate	craftsman	dressmaker

- From all the persons on the list, only one – Sima Rubin³⁶ did not work. She planned to become a dressmaker before emigration, and in Palestine she would work at a chemical plant.
- No one from the group dealt with agriculture because of lack of workplaces at that time.

³⁵ See the original letter (in Russian) here <http://eja.pri.ee/Organizations/Haluz/Haluz%20letters.pdf>

³⁶ Sima Rubin (1901-1976) married later to the Zionist leader Chaim Arlosorov.

Matsalu (1931, 1932), Põlva (1933), Sõmerpalu (1938), Kurna (1935) and in other places.

To enter Palestine legally, one needed a certificate. The demand was always much higher than the number of certificates obtained from the Jewish agency in Jerusalem. Part of the certificates were for a single person, part was given to the head of the family, and the young people entered into fictitious marriages in order to be able to send more people to Palestine. In some cases “the couples” even did not know each other before *aliyah*. In almost all cases they were officially divorced after arriving in Palestine.

The *HeHalutz* had permanent problems with the number of certificates sent to Estonia. This can be seen from the following letter to the Department of *Aliyah* of the Jewish Agency in Jerusalem³⁷:

[Received 21.10.1935]

*The office of Erez Israel in Estonia
Tallinn.*

*To the Jewish Agency
Department of Aliya
Jerusalem.*

We are writing today in a matter of getting Aliyah certificates for the second half of the year October-April.

Our Hachshara movement has increased and grown lately. In previous years our Hachshara groups were small and existed only for a short time during the summer months; after that halutzim³⁸ had to stop Hachshara. In 1932, the „Hehalutz“ movement decided to make Hachshara permanent and at the same time increased the value of the professional preparation in Hachshara towards the jobs needed in Erez Israel. Now we can say for sure that Hachshara in Estonia has prepared people that in spite of the prosperity and drive to cities, are in the main part, and almost all, ready for the front line - kibbutzim and agricultural villages. People are now staying in Hachshara for a year and a half. Most of the people who make Aliyah now have that background. As in other countries, in Estonia too we have groups who make

³⁷ Translated from Hebrew by me [MR].

³⁸ *Halutzim* - pioneers, people who made an aliyah to *Erez Israel* to establish or join a settlement for future development of the country or otherwise help to build a Jewish state. [Mark Rybak]

Hachshara in agriculture and in various jobs in the city. It should be noted that those halutzim, who are working in the city, made a full season Hachshara in the village.

This summer Estonia had three Hachshara locations with altogether more than 40 members (two in agriculture and one in the city). Members from the agricultural Hachshara locations move to the city during the winter and due to a large number of members we are working now on establishing an additional city kibbutz in Tartu.

Apart from that we have a "Haoved (Worker)" organization that is made up of people that have experience in professions mostly needed in Erez Israel. Many people with certificates for professionals are waiting for years for Aliyah, but in spite of our repeated requests, we did not receive certificates of this type from the Aliyah department. We really hope that this time you will answer our requests and send us at least 5 such certificates.

All the previous years we received 5 certificates for the heads of family, however last time we got only 2 Aliyah certificates for the heads of family and the rest for the singles. As a result, even if the Hachshara increased, the Aliyah of halutzim decreased. This obviously had bad consequences and did not allow us to further increase Hachshara as was required. We hope that this time, you will reserve the amount of certificates required for us [... 14].

With respect and Zionist greetings

In the name of the office: A. Kosotski

N.B. Attached is the list of Hachshara members.

**[Resolution: 1) Understand that due to the decrease in the number of permissions we are able to only send 2.
2) We promise to pay attention to your request and to increase the number in the future.]**

Sometimes the problem of certificates could be partially bypassed by indicating that the person is going to continue his/her studies in the Palestinian Jewish University. For example, the newspaper "Waba Maa" writes on 26.10.1934 about 8 Tartu Jews who went to Palestine – Mme Bakscht with daughter, Joschua Gor, Ganya Vilensky, student Miss Schajevitsch, advocate Verschvovsky, advocate Muschkat with sister, son of the Jewish school director Jakob Levitin. All of them indicated that they plan to study in the Hebrew University.

Nechemia Levanon (1915-2003):³⁹

“There were thousands of Halutzim (Pioneers) in central and eastern Europe, many of whom wanted to make Aliyah (immigrate) to Palestine, but could not get certificates because of the limits on immigration imposed by the British Government. Some of them went to villages to work in agriculture, in groups called Hachsharot⁴⁰ (Training Farms). Others, as they grew older, became sympathizers for the Zionist Movement”. [...]

“...A group formed in Estonia to go on Hachshara, and as I was one of the oldest, I wanted to join them, according to the principle of "self-realization" (or self-fulfillment; in Hebrew, Hagshama Atzmit). Of course this meant leaving my mother all alone, but she was very supportive and urged me to do what was best for me. Since our group had to be at the farmer's village for the hay harvest, we would have to leave the city before graduation ceremony. Mother said she would take my diploma and bring it to me on her first visit.

In the spring, we set out to a large farm far from Tallinn, in Western Estonia. Our group numbered 18 young fellows and girls, all of them several years older than me. Not only was I the youngest, I was also lacking in any work experience. Maybe the others hadn't worked in farming, but they did have some work experience. I knew it would not be easy for me, but I believed I would manage. At the farm, we were given a small storeroom to be used as dining hall and place to spend our spare time, and we would sleep in the attic on straw bedding. We could wash-up at two wells nearby, one for boys, the other for girls. This farm was actually a very large estate with a large, beautiful house in the midst of other farm buildings, storage rooms, a dairy barn, stables, and a smithy. There were also a few shacks where the regular workhands lived. Aside from these "regulars," there were also tens of seasonal workhands. The owner was a small, roly-poly German, a tough but decent man. I think he treated us rather well, and was patient with us because of our inexperience during the first few weeks.

The regular workers did the jobs requiring greater skill, plowing, sowing, harvesting and working with the horses. We did the simple seasonal work, harvesting with scythes, stacking and loading hay with pitchforks, removing manure from the barn and spreading it in the fields. We also cleared fields of stones. The work was very hard and the days were very long. We did our best not to fall behind the husky, experienced village women, but we didn't always succeed. I grew blisters on my hands and my back ached terribly. By the evening, I would get back to the attic exhausted and throw myself on my bed of straw. Only after several weeks of "black labor" we started doing more skilled work. Some of us were even allowed to drive the horses.

³⁹ See http://www.nechemia.org/jordan2_e.html

⁴⁰ Hachshara (pl. Hachsharot) – preparation, training, learning (in Hebrew).

Juudi noorfugu põllutööl!



Meie harjunud juute nägema ainult ärimeestena, mispärast tundub üllatusena, et Kiltsi mõisas on praegu grupp juudi noorfugu põllutööl.

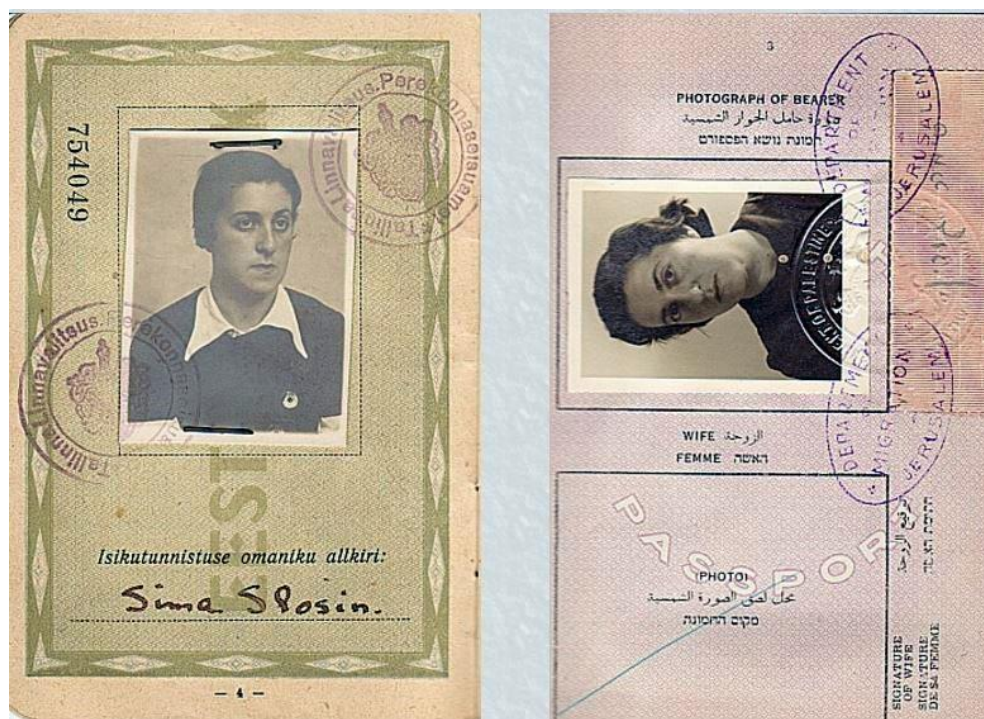
Päevaleht, 4 July 1929. "We are used to see Jews only as merchants; therefore it looks strange to see a group of Jewish youth in Kiltsi farmstead at agricultural work."

At first, we were too tired after the day's work to do anything in the evenings. It took us about one month to become accustomed to physical labor. When the blisters healed and the fatigue lessened, we would stay awake longer and talk or sometimes go for evening walks. As I look back at that period, I recall that the sure sign that we had stood the test of manual labor was when we would stay up till late at night singing. We sang songs of the Land of Israel and we sang Hassidic Nigunim (melodies). Far, far away from the Land of Israel, by the shores of the Baltic Sea, we sang, "Ve Ulai lo hayu hadvarim le olam Ve ulai..." (a very popular song by the poetess Rachel, about the Sea of Galilee). We were not troubled by the fact that nearby were the cold gray waters of the Baltic; we were dreaming, probably. [...]

Autumn had almost arrived and we received a letter from Lasik that he had rented a small house for our group to live in, in a workers' section on the outskirts of Tallinn. He also mentioned the possibility that some of the group might get certificates for immigration to Palestine".

Sima Gorin (Slosin) (1916-1997)⁴¹:

“Two years of “Hachshara” have passed⁴². It's time to resettle in Israel (“Aliyah”). A general meeting took place, at which it was decided that I was “ripe” for the “Aliyah” to Eretz Yisrael. I went to my parents and told the news to the family. There was a deathly silence. They were silent and apparently understood that they will never see me again (it was true). Mom immediately ordered a tailor to sew my dresses, suits, coats. Part of the clothes was bought in the shops. I had six suitcases packed with clothes, dishes, shoes. When I came to Afikim⁴³, all bags with clothes took their place in the closet, and I never wore anything of what was brought ...”



The Estonian and the Palestinian passports of Sima Goren (Slosin)

Sonya Margalit (Muschkat) (1915-2008) emigrated from Tartu in 1934⁴⁴:

“Six months have passed between the end of Hachshara and aliyah. I returned home to my parents. I was in constant tension due to the approaching departure. I tried not to think that I, may be, will never see my parents and brother again. I spent time with friends and my

⁴¹ See <http://eja.pri.ee/stories/Slosin.html> (in Russian)

⁴² In 1936

⁴³ Name of the one of the first kibbutzim.

⁴⁴ See <http://www.eja.pri.ee/stories/Mushkat.html> (in Russian).

niece, who came to visit us from Lithuania. Mom prepared us for the trip; I sewed clothes and bought everything that was needed.

A long-awaited day arrived. There was no Farewell party, but almost half of Tartu Jews accompanied us to the station. The grandmother also saw us off halfway. We kissed and told her that one day we will also take her to Palestine. She laughed and did not take it seriously. Parents accompanied us to the train station. My brother and I did not cry, but the parting was very exciting. We were thrilled and were in anticipation of upcoming. For parents, parting from us was very difficult. Later, my mother told me that father burst into tears when we left. My brother Eli hugged him and said, "Dad, I'll never leave." But he left the family when he went into the army".

From 1936 the British authorities severely limited the entrance permits due to Arab unrests, but even before that the illegal immigration significantly increased (so called *Aliyah Bet* (the second *Aliyah*) that started in 1934). Unrests and the increased number of immigrants due to situation in Germany were the main reasons for that. In 1935 the second Maccabiah games were held in Tel-Aviv. Estonian Maccabi sent a delegation of 14 sportsmen and tourists. The weight-lifter Ruven Teitelbaum (1907-1941) won a gold medal. Several people from the Estonian delegation, for example Dr. Blanda Racov (Hirschfeldt), remained in Palestine illegally.

Jewish Cultural Autonomy, Zionism and *Aliyah*

British oldest and most widely-read *Jewish* newspaper "The Jewish Chronicles" wrote on 25 September 1936:

"Estonia is the only country in Eastern Europe where neither the Government nor the people practice any discrimination against Jews and where Jews are left in peace. In sharp contrast to the other Baltic States, the cultural autonomy granted to Estonian Jews ten years ago still holds good, and Jews are allowed to lead a free and unmolested life and fashion it in accord with their national and cultural principles".⁴⁵

⁴⁵ See the full text of the article here http://eja.pri.ee/history/Chronicles_en.html

This is true. Jewish schools, clubs, theaters, banks, numerous organizations existed in Estonia after the cultural autonomy was established for Jews in 1926 and before it was forcefully closed by the Soviet occupation regime in 1940. Why then the *aliyah* continued and the number of people going to Palestine even increased significantly? I think that the main reasons are as follows:

- The Zionist ideas and ideals were already very deep in the hearts of many young people, who grew up in the 1930s. They saw their mission in building up the Jewish state.
 - Some people joined their families that had already earlier settled in Palestine.
 - Even after the cultural autonomy was established, Jews could not get any work in the governmental offices. It was a non-written policy, and the main explanation was that Estonia was a small country, there were too few new working places and they had to be “reserved” for the new graduates of the “national majority”. One can’t call this behavior totally antisemitic as the same unwritten rules applied probably to Russians and other nationalities. As a result, young Jews had to open their own businesses or work as a freelance doctor or lawyer, or had to join relatives at the factories and shops that they owned. When the country economic situation worsened, they started to look for a work in Palestine.
 - In 1934 the Elder of the State Konstantin Päts, being afraid of the possible coup d’etat by the Vaps⁴⁶ movement, outlawed all organized political activity in the country. The so-called Silent Era continued till the Second World War. This, and especially the situation in Germany in the second half of the 1930s, have caused many Jews, who could read the situation and see one step ahead, to escape to Palestine.

Estonia – Palestine relationship before the Second World War

On 29 May 1926 a big ceremonial meeting was held in Tallinn on the occasion of establishing the Jewish Cultural autonomy in Estonia. Leib Jaffe, a famous Jewish poet, was representing the Central Bureau of *Keren Hayesod* in Palestine. The meeting was attended by then Minister of Foreign Affairs Jaan Lattik and the speech was given by General Johan Laidoner. General Laidoner talked about his impressions of visiting Palestine in 1925. At the end of his speech he turned to those Estonian

⁴⁶ Vaps - *Eesti Vabadussõjalaste Liit* (Estonian) - Union of Participants in the Estonian War of Independence.

Jews, who intended to proceed to Palestine. He urged them not to expect an easy life, but to fight for the existence of Jewish people, for their national progress. The General also said: "I stress once again that I am sure - after some time Palestine will become a Cultural and National Center of the Jewish people."

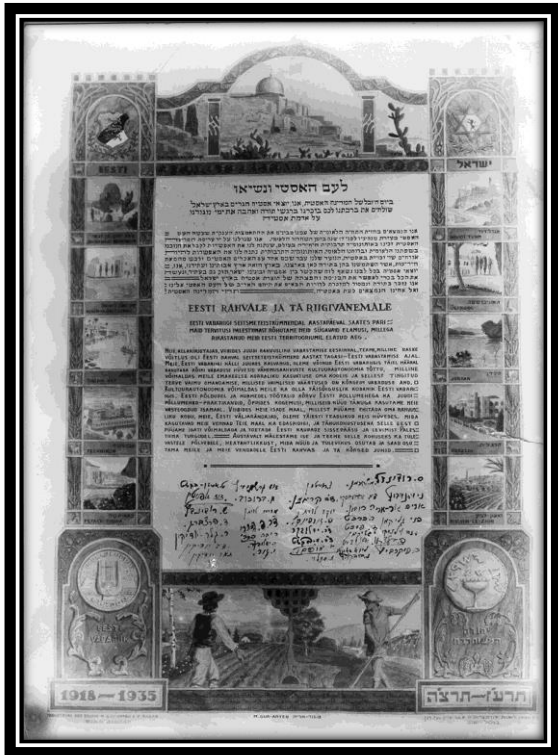
General Laidoner and Jaan Lattik, as well as some other leading Estonian politicians of that time, did express their sympathy for Zionism. Jaan Lattik published in 1925 a pro-Zionist book "To the Holy Land". The reasoning for their sympathies for the Zionist movement can be seen in the fact that both took part in the national liberation struggle for the existence of the Republic of Estonia.

In 1931 Leib Jaffe visited Estonia again, and, apart from the Jewish community, met with the Elder of the State Konstantin Päts. In his letter Jaffe reported home about that meeting⁴⁷: "We had a long cordial conversation. / - / He asked me questions and expressed their deepest sympathy for our movement". Jaffe also visited the Foreign Minister Jaan Tõnisson. He wrote: "He is the oldest, with the Head of the State, Estonian freedom fighters. / - / He said that he monitors the development of the Zionism for decades, and promised that the Estonian government will retain the sympathy for our movement".

Michael Heltzer (1928-2010) wrote in his article⁴⁸:

"It is interesting to note that the then Estonian leadership realized that Palestine is a future state. It must be noted however, that the Jewish community was not united: there was a struggle between Zionists and anti-Zionists. The sympathies of the Estonian leadership belonged to Zionists, without interfering into the struggle. There were several reasons for doing so: besides the idea of national liberation, one must take into account the internal political considerations. The then Estonian community tried to assume prevailing positions both in economy and culture. Thus, the Zionist ideology, that was directed towards emigration, especially of the adult Jewish youth, was acceptable to the Estonian nationalist ideology".

⁴⁸ <http://eja.pri.ee/history/Helzer.pdf> (in Estonian) or http://eja.pri.ee/history/Heltzer_ru.pdf (in Russian). More about Prof. Heltzer later.



On 24 February 1935, on the occasion of the 17th Independence Day of Estonia, the Estonian Jews living in Palestine sent a Proclamation to the people of Estonia and Elder of State. Young people, who emigrated from Estonia, were grateful to the laws of the Republic of Estonia and the local attitude, that allowed them their mother-tongue education, but also to learn the field work - it was an appropriate preparation for a work in Israel. They also talked about the need to advance the trade between the both countries.

In the end of the 1920s the economic ties between Estonia and Palestine were not particularly strong. This was probably one of the reasons why the Estonian

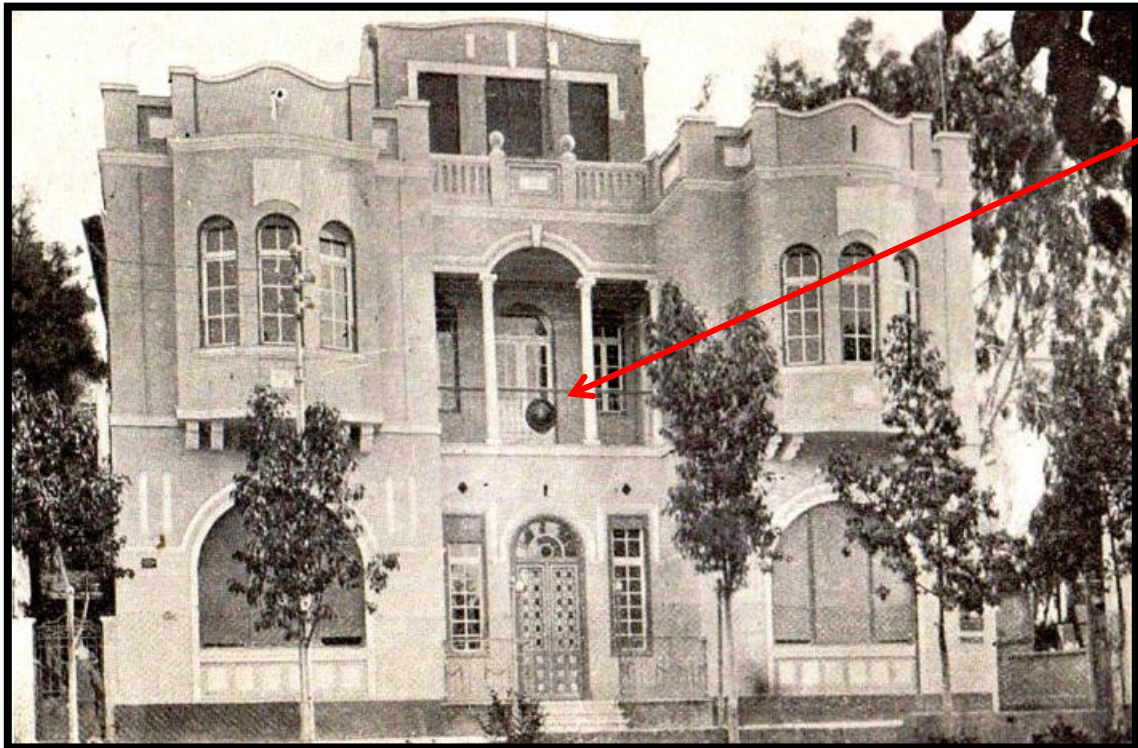
government decided to appoint an honorary Consul in Palestine. Another reason was obviously the increasing amount of Estonian Jews who settled in Palestine.

In 1930 Mr. Maurice Litvinsky was appointed to be the first and the only pre-war Estonian Consul in Palestine. Maurice Litvinsky (1888-1952) was the eldest son of Jakob Elchanan Litvinsky, one of the founders of Tel-Aviv.



Jakob Litvinsky built a soap-works in Jaffa, but then started to be interested in the agricultural settlements. He bought a piece of land and became one of the founders of Rishon Lezion. He returned to Jaffa and entered into the timbering business. The need for timber increased and he became the leading supplier of timber in the country. His activity only increased with time. He organized some more businesses, amongst them he built the whole neighborhood of the city, or, actually, the city within the city, which is now Tel-Hashomer area called Tel Litvinsky.

Jakob built a house, one of the fifteen first houses of Tel-Aviv, at 22, Ahad Ha'am Street. Jakob died in 1916, but his family continued to live there for some time.



On the facade of the house, on the second floor even at the beginning of the 2000s one could see traces of the emblem of Estonian consulate, Honorary Consul of which was Maurice Litvinsky. We still need to investigate (if possible) the contribution of Maurice Litvinsky to the economic relations between the two countries.



Official Gazette
OF THE
Government of Palestine.
PUBLISHED FORTNIGHTLY BY AUTHORITY.

APPOINTMENTS OF CONSULS.

NOTICES.

I.

The High Commissioner directs it to be notified for general information that Mr. Maurice Litvinsky has been appointed by the Estonian Government to be Honorary Estonian Consul in Palestine resident at Jaffa, and that he has been recognised by His Excellency in that capacity.

By His Excellency's Command,

E. MILLS

Acting Chief Secretary.

15th January, 1930.

(6850/29)

**Esti võid ja juust Pales-
tiinasse.**

Meie ekspordöörid on juba kauemat aega teinud katseid laugemaid maid võita meie karjasaaduste turule. Eets on proovisadaetised läkitatud Hispaaniasse, Marokkosse, Egiptusse ja Palestiinasse. Seni pole neil katsetel lahjuks kuigi junri tagajärgi olnud. Kuid nüüd lõpuks näib asi niiski liikumvat ja p/t. Estonia ning Seemnetvija ühisus saatsid välja Palestiinasse 200 tünni võid ja 200 kg. juustu. Ekspordöörid loodavad, et lähel forda ka edaspidi saata Palestiinasse võid, kuid juba suuremal arvul.

Postimees, 11.2.1933. "... we sent to Palestine 200 cascs of butter and 200 kg of cheese. We hope to be able to continue, but in bigger amounts".

Aliyah of the 1920s and 1930s

This was *aliyah* from the independent Republic of Estonia, where Jews had cultural autonomy, did not feel antisemitism (at least not at official level), had a religious and a relative political freedom. All young Jews spoke freely Estonian, as well as many of the grownups. This was their country and they loved it.



Members of Estonian Jewish student fraternity *Hasmonea* in Palestine in 1947.

An Estonian writer and politician Karl Ast (1886-1971) visited Palestine in 1938. He wrote in the newspaper “Uus Eesti” on 24 January 1938⁴⁹:

“Other compatriots are joining, including a lawyer from Narva. I am surprised that they still remember Estonian language. They laugh and brag: “This is our heritage and pride. Nobody here understands this language. How can we forget such a beautiful language? It is our mother tongue, after all⁵⁰”.

[...]

⁴⁹ See http://eja.pri.ee/stories/Karl%20Ast_en.pdf

⁵⁰ See also http://www.eja.pri.ee/stories/Kask_en.html

“Estonian Jews are linked to their old homeland because of their relatives who are still living there, and because of the particular Estonian way of life that they, too, have absorbed. I was sad when one young woman said, “Here nobody celebrates Christmas, no Christmas trees. I used to love this. It was so nice...”

“So where is your homeland – Palestine or Estonia?”

“Estonia.” She pronounced it as if this was the sweetest word in the world. The kiosk worker, whom I mentioned before, stated categorically: “I would be a fool to believe in God, but I believe in the laws of nature. And according to the law of nature, Palestine should belong to Jews.”

This deep conviction is shared by everyone. Whatever is ahead of them – be it water or fire – Eretz Israel is going to be built. This is the faith that sustains them”.



Estonian “girls” in 1973: Agi Berman (Kellert), Anna (Baby) Feinstein, Fanny Duhamel (Kellert), Riva Gradnauer (Pikarevitsch), Sima Arlosoroff (Rubin)

Life was not easy, but most of them managed. They were kibbutzniks (close to 30 families) and doctors, lawyers and factory workers, teachers and writers, vets and

drivers, politicians and office workers, business owners and policemen, etc., etc. They fought for the Jewish state in Palestine, they fought for the State of Israel, and some of them lost their lives for this country.

Many of them kept together - after all, Estonia is a small country and some of them knew each other before *aliyah*. And their children kept coming together. The Estonian community in Palestine (later Israel) was growing.

1940s - 1960s

Everything changed in 1940. Estonia was occupied by the Soviet Union. All Jewish organizations and clubs, apart from the leftist "Licht", were closed. It was forbidden to teach and to learn Hebrew. About 10% of the Jewish population was deported to Siberia and Urals in 1941. Zionist leaders were arrested and some of them killed⁵¹. A special permission was needed to leave the country. The Jewish life stopped to exist in Estonia for almost 50 years.

On 22 June 1941 Nazi Germany started the war against the Soviet Union, and on 22 August 1941 Estonia was occupied by German army. Practically all Jews, who remained in country and did not evacuate to the Soviet Union, were killed (979⁵², about 22% of Estonia's total pre-war Jewish population). About 11% of Estonian Jews fought Nazis in the Soviet army, 196 of them did not return home.⁵³

It is estimated that only around 1000 Estonian Jews returned after the war (about the same amount that remained in Estonia and was killed). Much more Jews from Russia and other Soviet republics moved to Soviet-occupied Estonia. In 1959 there was 5436 Jews in Estonia.

As said, the borders of Estonia were closed and nobody could leave it freely. However, some Jews did manage to escape the Soviet Union and settle in Israel. The family of Jakob Kaplan (born in 1927) from Tartu wanted to emigrate to Israel for a long time. His two uncles Misha (Elimelech) and Dodya (David) Bakscht came to Palestine already in the 1930s. When Estonia was occupied by the Soviet Union, the

⁵¹ See <http://eja.pri.ee/stories/Kats.html> and <http://eja.pri.ee/stories/Majofes.html> (in Russian)

⁵² True on 02.05.2016. The current list is here <http://eja.pri.ee/history/Holocaust/Holo.pdf>

⁵³ True on 02.05.2016. The current list is here <http://eja.pri.ee/history/fallen%20soldiers.xls>

family business was nationalized and they all were deported – in short, they had enough reasons not to love the Soviet regime too much. Jakob's father died in 1965. The next year his mother Henrietta Kaplan (1903-2009)⁵⁴ got permission to visit her brothers in Israel. When the time came to return home, brothers started to persuade her to stay in Israel. Jakob supported the idea. They knew that the Soviet Embassy would threaten her, saying that she would never again see her sons etc. But they decided that she would stay. Jakob joined her in Israel in 1968. The story is worth a couple of words.

Visas for going abroad were given in the organization called the Visas and Registration Office (OVIR).⁵⁵ When Jakob went there to ask permission to join his mother in Israel, he was greeted by a stout Estonian female captain with a Russian surname V. She said "Of course I understand that your mother is there, but then, from the other side, you were born here..." Jakob answered her bluntly: "No, both of us were not born in this country. Our country ceased to exist on 17 June 1940"⁵⁶. The unexpected answer was: "Don't talk like that. They will never allow you out".

1967 was the turning point in life of many Soviet Jews, including the Estonian Jews. It was the year of the "Six-Day War" in Israel. It was the year when the world saw that Jews can fight, and fight perfectly. For many young Soviet Jews it was almost the first time they heard about Israel, the first time they actually realized their Jewishness. Most of them felt solidarity with Jews of Israel despite the official Soviet policy that condemned the "Israeli aggressors". The Soviet Union broke diplomatic relations with Israel. Many young people secretly started to look for information about Jewish history, traditions and culture. They started to think about *aliyah*. However, the Soviet authorities refused in too many cases to give exit visas. The word "refusenik" was introduced to the world. The mass movement for the free emigration to Israel began.

The end of the 1960s brought also some Jewish cultural life to Estonia – the amateur Yiddish theater was allowed to exist, as well as occasional concerts of the local Jewish performers or guest Yiddish singers from Lithuania and other Soviet republics. In 1968 the Soviet authorities allowed a small number of Jews to emigrate to Israel for the purpose of family reunification.

⁵⁴ Not a mistake... She lived 106 years. The oldest known person from Estonia.

⁵⁵ Отдел Виз И Регистрации - Visas and registration office

⁵⁶ The day, when the Soviet troops entered Estonia.

1970s – 1980s

The 1970s were the years of the struggle for free emigration to Israel. The “aircraft hijacking affair” also known as “The First Leningrad Trial” was an unsuccessful attempt to steal a civilian aircraft on 15 June 1970 by a group of sixteen Soviet *refuseniks* in order to escape to the West. International condemnation that followed caused the Soviet authorities to increase emigration quotas. “Let my people go” was a popular slogan of that time.



In order to emigrate one had to have a written “invitation” from a close relative in Israel (the formal reason was still to allow a family reunion). Not everyone had real relatives, so the dummy “invitations” were sent by friends or even by the Jewish organizations. Everyone had to pay for “rejection of the Soviet citizenship”.

In August 1972 another “bomb” was thrown upon the Jews wishing to emigrate – a law that requested to pay back “for the Soviet high education”. There was a gradation of the higher education institutions, and, for example, the graduate of the Moscow State University had to pay 10,000 rubles (monthly salary of the young graduate was 100-120 rubles).

ГЕНЕРАЛЬНОМУ СЕКРЕТАРЮ ООН, НЬЮ-ЙОРК, США.

ПОСТОЯННОМУ ПРЕДСТАВИТЕЛЮ ИЗРАИЛЯ ПРИ ООН, НЬЮ-ЙОРК, США.

КОМИССИИ ООН ПО ЛИКВИДАЦИИ ВСЕХ ФОРМ РАССОВОЙ ДИСКРИМИНАЦИИ, ООН, НЬЮ-ЙОРК

Обстоятельства заставляют меня обратиться к Вам за помощью. Вот уже много лет, как я добиваюсь разрешения на въезд в государство Израиль. Стремление выехать на Родину своих предков созрело в нашей большой еврейской семье уже давно. Еще в 30-е годы уехала в Палестину сестра матери. Потом стали готовиться к переезду мой отец и мать и все наши оставшиеся родственники. Но война помешала осуществлению нашей мечты.

Мне с родителями удалось эвакуироваться, а 12 человек моих близких родственников погибло от рук фашистов в Рижском гетто. В 1942г. умер мой отец и, таким образом, из всех моих родственников у нас с матерью осталось только сестра матери, проживающая в Израйле.

В течении многих лет войны и периода культа личности мы не переставали мечтать о своей исторической Родине. Однако в те времена по вполне понятным причинам даже малейший намёк о репатриации грозил жестокими репрессиями. Смерть Сталина и ликвидация последствий культа личности вселили в наши сердца надежду на возможность скорого въезда в Израиль. В течении 8 лет моя мать неустанно ходатайствовала о въезде к своей сестре. Наконец в 1966 году её просьба была удовлетворена. Ей было тогда 66 лет.


Таким образом в СССР я остался совершенно один. И вот уже в течении 5 лет я неоднократно и бесполезно обращаюсь к властям с просьбой – разрешить мне выехать к моей матери и к моим родственникам, проживающим в Израйле, на земле наших предков. Я неизменно получаю отказы на все мои заявления о въезде, сопровождаемые следующими абсурдными объяснениями:

1. Я не имею никакого права на въезд, т.к. родился в Эстонии;
2. Меня не выпускают до заключения мира между Израйлем и арабскими странами;
3. Моя мать, уехав в 1966 г. в Израйль, бросила меня;
4. Я составляю отдельную семью / я одинок и семьи не имею /, материально независим и живу обеспеченно.

Абсурдность подобных мотивировок, полное отсутствие малейшей надежды на разрешение и безсходность моего положения заставили меня принять участие в голодовке протеста 10-11 марта с.г. в Москве.

Я не знаю, как сложится моя судьба в дальнейшем, но я твёрдо уверен; что я готов к любым испытаниям и никогда не отступлю от намеченной цели.

Я с надеждой обращаюсь к Вам: возьмите свой голос в мою защиту, помогите мне уехать домой в Израйль.

 / Эльханан Якобсон /

СССР, г.Таллин, улица Крейцвальди 15 кв. 4

март 1971 года.

Letter of Estonian "refusenik" E. Jakobson to the Secretary General of the United Nations
in 1971.

This caused another big wave of protests in the free world. Senator Henry Jackson submitted amendment to the US Trade Act that denied the status of “most favored nation” to countries that restrict emigration. This was one of the major reasons why the “education tax” was quietly removed already in March 1973. If I am not mistaken, I am the only “unlucky” person in Estonia, who actually paid for education. It is a long and even “funny” story that I would tell if I would write my memoirs...



An exit visa. 1977.

After that the restrictions to emigration became even harder and the “unification of families” was not enough. The new usual “reason” for saying “No” was “access to state secrets”, whether it was justified or not.

In Estonia, as usual⁵⁷, the situation was much easier than in the rest of the Soviet Union. In the rest of the country people, who submitted their application for emigration, usually lost their jobs and had to find a work for living. It was not unusual for professor to sweep the streets. It was especially hard for “refuseniks”, as this situation could continue for years. In Estonia, however, people who did not work at really “secret” or “Russian only” workplaces continued their work till the last minute. A big party with abundant drinking and many presents was given to me by colleagues some days before I left for Israel.

The “refuseniks” were in Estonia as well, but not so many. Some families moved from other republics to Estonia just in order to submit their application in Estonia⁵⁸.

⁵⁷ I will not explain here why the atmosphere in Estonia was more open and not so “politically strict” as in the rest of the USSR. Let’s just say that most of Estonians did not like the Soviet regime too much, and understood very well the desire of Jews to go to their own homeland. Many people from other republics visited Estonia to have “a breath of the fresh air of Europe”.

⁵⁸ You can read more about all this here <http://eja.pri.ee/stories/gurfel.html> or here <http://eja.pri.ee/stories/Gurfel%20ishod.pdf> (both in Russian).

Practically all Estonian Jews, who emigrated in 1972-1973, went to Israel. Later some went to other countries as well. Still, all of them left the country with an exit visa for “permanent residence in Israel”.

I went to say “goodbye” to my Estonian neighbor. She burst into tears: “You are so lucky: You do have a place to go...” What could be sadder than that?

End of the 1980s brought big changes – from the “perestroika” and “glasnost” of Gorbachev (1985), Estonian Sovereignty Declaration (1988) and up to re-establishment of the independent Republic of Estonia in 1991. A huge change in lives of Estonian Jews happened in 1988. The Estonian Jewish Cultural Society was officially registered on 5 May 1988 – the first in the Soviet Union. First after-war Jewish newspaper, first Jewish Sunday school, classes of Hebrew, etc., etc. A new era has begun.

The great aliyah of the 1990s and “integration” to Israeli life.

In 1989 president of the Soviet Union Mikhail Gorbachev decided to lift restrictions on emigration. It was the start of “the great *aliyah* of the 1990s”. In 1989-1992 411,000 Jews made *aliyah* from the former Soviet Union⁵⁹, 728 of them – from Estonia⁶⁰.

Many of these people, their children and grandchildren consider themselves as part of the Estonian community in Israel and keep up active links with the country they came from and with each other. At the same time, they have become a natural and enriching part of the Israeli society. The story of their Aliyah still waits to be told and written – individually or collectively – and would form an invaluable chapter in our common Estonian-Israeli history.

⁵⁹ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/1990s_Post-Soviet_aliyah

⁶⁰ From data obtained by the author from the Israeli Ministry of Absorption in 2007.

Contribution of Estonian Jews to the creation and development of Israel

Without doubt, the Estonian *aliyah*, be it the pre-war *aliyah* of the 1920s-1930s, or the *aliyah* of the 1990s, as a whole, contributed a lot to the Israeli life. We will mention here only some especially outstanding examples.

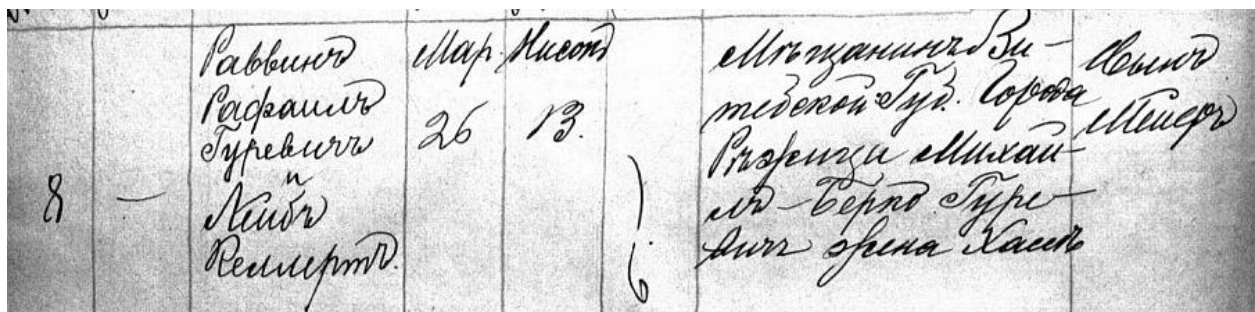


Meir Gurevitsch – probably the first Estonian Jew who settled in Palestine.

Dr. Meir Gurevitsch - an engineer, educator and public figure in Erez Israel, initiator of aviation and seafaring was probably the first Estonian in Palestine.

Dr. Meir Gurevitsch (26.03.1887⁶¹ - 03.02.1950) was born in Tallinn to Berke Gurevitsch and Hasse Mirski. His grandfather was a rabbi of Estonia – Raphael Gurevitsch⁶². In 1909-1911 he

studied mathematics and physics in Geneva, and was accredited as an engineer in Academy of Aeronautics in Paris in 1912. He came to Palestine in 1913 and was registered as an aviation engineer, unemployed.⁶³



Meir Gurevitsch' birth date as reflected in the 1887 Tallinn synagogue births book.

⁶¹ Wikipedia gives his birth year as 1890, other Israeli sources give 1888.

⁶² See <http://eja.pri.ee/Religion/Rabbies.pdf> (in Russian).

⁶³ The information and some photos are taken from Wikipedia and from "ציפור האדם באופקנו. הטיסות הראשונות" לארץ-ישראל. דב גביש).

He started to work as a teacher in the Herzliya Hebrew Gymnasium in Tel-Aviv.

“Engineer Gurevitsch arrived to school with a fame aureole around his head. He came from Paris, where, it turns out, he graduated from the Academy of Aeronautics. I do not know, and none of us knew, if ever his plane took off, but we all called him a "pilot". He was a remarkable man, dressed at all times, in a black suit with coat buttoned up to the neck, whereas during the break he was walking alone back and forth across the yard muttering some eternal mystery monologue” writes one of his pupils.

Gurevitsch realized that there was no awareness of the importance of seafaring and aviation in Palestine, and there was no single sailor or pilot. In 1913 he built a model of an aircraft, but failed to fly it. The knowledge in aviation area was very limited at that time, and the materials needed for that were not available in Palestine. At the end of that year he spoke to big audience in Tel Aviv on "airplane", when the real model that he built was behind him. He persuaded his audience to purchase two airplanes - one for the Jewish youth “to get wings”, and the second – for the Ottoman rulers, to maintain good relations and to avoid feeling as if the Jewish community is gaining strength and would endanger the government. He finally managed to raise all the money, but the intention was not realized. Weeks after the outbreak of the First World War, when he wanted to make an aviation show in order to purchase a study airplane, the Ottoman plane crashed on the sands of the Tel Aviv, and this caused the Jewish settlement to give up the dream.

He conceived the establishment of a primary school in Haifa called “Zevulun” for “boating, fishing and flying”. After the war he abandoned his affinity for flying and devoted his life to revive the Jewish seamanship and shipping. In August 1919 he issued a memorandum on establishment of a "Water Committee in Erez-Israel”. This committee had to address the question of cultural sea life in Israel, such as respectable floating of passengers arriving to the port of Jaffa, fishing, purchase and building of ships, cruises and all other aspects connected to water, sea and rivers. Meir Gurevitsch was the chairman of the “Water committee” in 1920-1925.

Same year he married Tirza Katinko - a sister of the famous engineer Baruch Katinko.

In 1920 he went to deepen his marine education at the University of Washington in Seattle, and in 1924 graduated the Faculty of Fisheries. In 1926 Gurevitsch added seamanship to his mathematics lessons in Herzlia gymnasium.

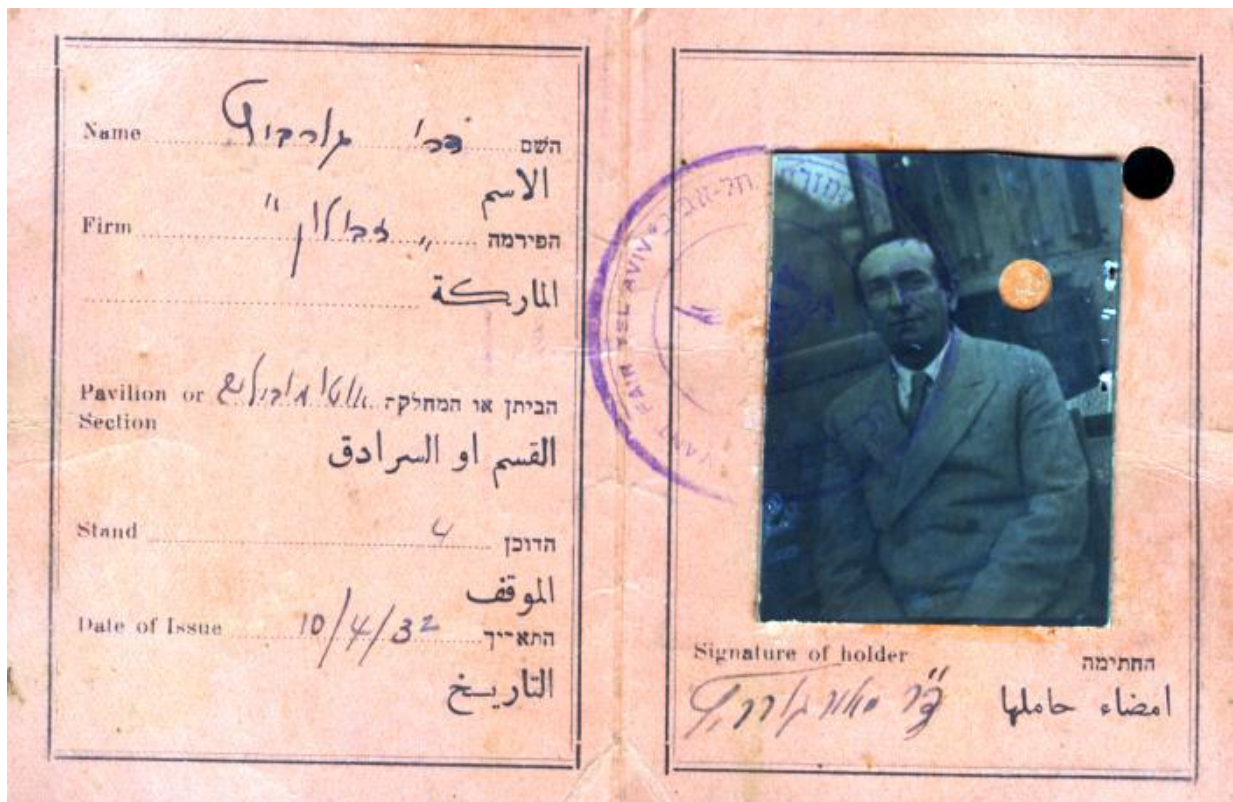


Meir Gurevitch with his students at Hayarkon in 1928.

He was one of the founders of the Zevulun Sailors association (Agudat Yorde-Yam Zevulun), which was the first Hebrew body in the modern era that targeted maritime education as its goal. It was founded in 1928 in Tel -Aviv (officially registered in 1930) and operated "Zevulun maritime school". It was in charge of training sailors (officially for the merchant marine but also for crewmen for the illegal immigration ships).

There were too many activities of Meir in the following years to be mentioned here. He switched his attention to many different subjects, the last one being the body energy and alternative medicine.

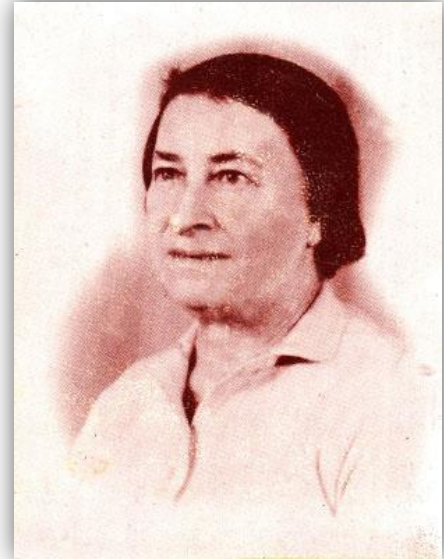
Meir Gurevitch died from heart attack on 3.2.1950. He had a son Nimrod, one of the founders of kibbutz Ginosar and a daughter Hagar. As far as we know, he was the first Estonian who settled in Palestine.



Ida Priver (Babst) – the first halutza from Estonia⁶⁴.

Ida Babst was born on 2 June 1900⁶⁵ in Tartu.

Her father Shmuel (Shraga) Androvsky was the second son of a very wealthy, first guild Jewish merchant from St. Petersburg Haim Androvsky. In spite of the fact that Haim and his wife Gitel tried to hide their Jewish origins, Shmuel was different from them. He visited the synagogue, studied Torah and was fond of his Jewish roots. When the time came to go to the army, he was eager to do so despite of his father's attempts to convince him not to go and to free him from the service.

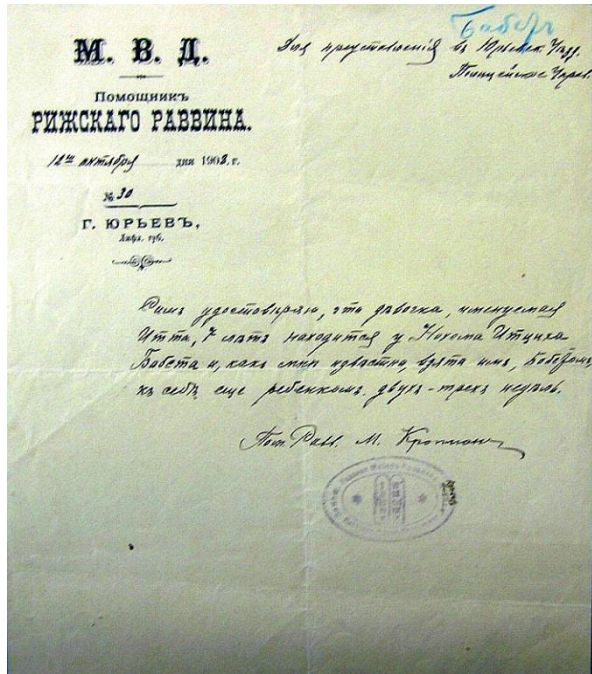


Shmuel was sent to serve in Tartu, where he met Ida's mother Bella Babst (1875-1930). It was love from the first sight, and the young people decided to marry. However, Shmuel's parents did not want to hear about such marriage, they promised Shmuel career in family business. Shmuel's decision did not take long time. Soon the quiet wedding was held in their house and the young couple started a happy life. About a year later the baby girl was born – it was Ida.

However, the happy family life did not last long - Shmuel was transferred to Manchurian border as the Russo-Japanese war started on 8 February 1904 and sometime later he was wounded and died soon. Ida was just a couple of weeks old. Bella became absolutely deranged, and soon simply disappeared. All attempts of her father Nochem Babst (1847-1910) to find her were unsuccessful. Nochem adopted Ida and gave her his family name – Babst.

⁶⁴ Based on the I. Priver autobiographical book "Maagalei Haim" (Life circles), Estonian archive material and internet.

⁶⁵ By some accounts in 1902.



On the left is a letter of Tartu assistant Rabbi M. Kropman from 12 October 1908, certifying that the girl Ida (Itta), 7 years old lives with Nochem Babst since she was 2-3 weeks old baby.

Sometime later mother suddenly returned and even started to work as a midwife. The life slowly normalized.

Ida graduated from the Tartu girls' school and on 26 August 1920 submitted the request for entering the medical faculty of the Tartu University. The permission was granted despite of the fact that she had a residence permit only

for half a year and only for Tartu (she was not yet an Estonian citizen).



By that time she was already an active member in the Tartu Zionist circles and in the *HeHalutz* movement. Lectures of Zionist leaders, who visited Tartu, discussions about Zionism and the future of Jewish settlement in Palestine – all this strengthened her will to actively participate in the Zionist work and, may be, even make aliyah to Palestine. She felt inadequate as she had no experience in “real work”, a physical work. In order to check her ability to work really hard she went to Tallinn and started to work in a garment factory. Dust and dirt weighed on her body and mind alike, especially because she had no money for the hotel and had to sleep in the same dusty room of the factory. But she did it and now she was sure that

she will be able to make it in Palestine!

On 11 August 1921 the leader of the Tartu *Hehalutz* Leib Vilensky sent a letter to Hehalutz Center in Riga asking how and where *halutz* Ida Babst could join the next

group in Riga going to Palestine. She already had the entrance visa from the British consulate in Tallinn. He asked to telegraph the answer as the matter was urgent.

The people in the *Hehalutz* center in Riga were happy to admit Ida to the group – after all - the first *halutza* from Estonia! The young people from the Estonian Zionist group admired her for courage and determination, and hoped to join her soon.

Ida Babst arrived to Palestine in September 1921. She worked at a construction site, in citrus plantation, in the kitchen of the “Bezalel” art school in Jerusalem.



In 1922 she married Baruch Priver – one of the founders of the Kfar-Sava city. In 1925 the family moved to Tiberias.

In 1929 she returned to Tartu to see her ill mother, but had to return soon because of events in Palestine. A week after she left, her mother died.

Ida was very active in social and cultural work – on behalf of the *Histadrut*,⁶⁶ women’s organizations, working with *olim*,⁶⁷ on a mission of the Jewish agency in the displaced persons camps in Germany, and much, much more.

Already in Estonia Ida started to write short stories in local Russian publications. Her love for literature grew, and since 1953 she published eight books in Hebrew. The autobiographical book “Maagalei haim” (the circles of life), that we are using in this article, was published in 1982.

Ida Priver (Babst) died in Kfar-Sava in 1989.

⁶⁶ Trade Unions organization.

⁶⁷ Newcomers to Israel

Those, who fought and gave their lives for this country.⁶⁸

Israel Ben-Yehuda (Itzoch) יצחק (20.1.1911-6.6.1936)

Born in Tallinn on 20.1.1911 to Yehuda Itzoch and Ester Itzoch (Hait).



After graduating high school he went to Belgium to study welding in preparation for *aliyah*. In Tallinn he worked in this profession at various factories in the neighborhood. As he had a sturdy body, he was very active in sports and even won a few awards in boxing.

Israel served in the Estonian army as a trooper and was the only Jew in the company. The army service was also seen as preparation for *aliyah*. During his military service he continued his activities in *Hahalutz* and *Maccabi*, of which he was a member during his youth. In 1933, upon his release from the army, he emigrated to Eretz Israel. In Israel he immediately changed his name to Ben-Yehuda (son of Yehuda) and began to practice in the factory; at the same time integrated into public activities, joined the Eretz Israel Workers Party and the Haganah. He read the writings of many writers and thinkers of that time while learning and developing professionally. He also studied Arabic in recognition of the importance of knowing the language. As a dedicated son caring for his parents, he planned to bring them to Israel and started to look for a home for them in their new country. They came to Palestine in May 1936. Israel hid from his parents his activities in the Haganah and only informed them on developments in the country in those days, days of constant bloody riots. At the same time he and his girlfriend made plans for common future life in kibbutz.

On 5 June 1936 Israel was on duty in the position of the Haganah next to the Shapira neighborhood in southern Tel Aviv. At midnight, the neighborhood was attacked and fire was opened at him and his friend who was with him at the service. Two police officers, British and Arab, who were on their way, shot and wounded Israel and his friend. The next day, 6 June 1936 Israel died of his wounds and was buried in the cemetery on Trumpeldor

⁶⁸ All personal data is translated from the memory site of the Israeli Ministry of defense <http://www.izkor.gov.il>

Street in Tel Aviv. He was survived by his parents, two sisters and a girlfriend, whom he was to marry.

Gabriel (Gabi) Bakscht ג"ב (14.3.1932-21.9.1956)

Born in Tartu on 14 March 1932 to Tatiana Bakscht (Amitan) and Michael Bakscht.



Gabi was two years old when his parents emigrated to Israel. The family settled in Tel Mond; there he went to kindergarten and attended the school. He loved very much nature and environment. When he was a kid, he used to accompany his father, a veterinarian, to his job, and knew the life of cattle-house. He also helped his mother and sister in setting up garden-vegetable-and landscaping at the home. He acquired a love and understanding of agriculture and his dream was to specialize in one of its specialties. He belonged to the “working youth” movement.

During the War of Independence Gabi played active role in the defense of the place. He graduated from the Herzliya Hebrew Gymnasium. He was working as a laborer in his free time and later he became a foreman in a citrus plantation. He also worked as a tractor driver, building worker and a driver. After completing his studies he was recruited to the Israeli Defence Forces (July 1950) and served as a guide. After completion of an officers course, he served in a combat unit. At that time, he married his childhood girlfriend.

In 1952 he was accepted as a student at the Faculty of Agriculture of the Hebrew University. He lived with his wife and a small girl in Rehovot. He became involved in his work-finals, but before the dream was fulfilled in full, he was wounded in the battle in an Arabic village Dwima, and he died in eleven days on 21 September. Gabi was laid-rest at the military cemetery in Netanya.

Haim Mazliach ז"ל (5.11.1935-31.10.1956)



Born in Ramat-Gan on 5.11.1935 to Shloma Mazliach and Rachel Mazliach (Epstein) from Estonia.

From childhood, he has demonstrated leadership ability. As a youth, he participated in various courses in the Scouts, Maccabi and Gadna: sniper course, scouts course, and a squad commander's course.

In gymnastics and Gadna classes, Haim was especially prominent and was also the commander of the Ohel Shem school where he studied until the eleventh grade. He participated in the school championship in light athletics and won first place in the various competitions and brought gold medals and pride to the

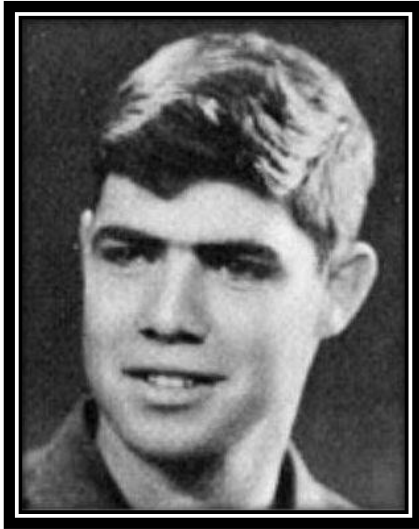
school. He was the youth champion in short runs for ages 14-16 and was the country champion in a 400m run in 1953. In the fourth Maccabiah he won a gold medal in a 300m run for boys and a third place in the men's 400m run. In addition to his love for sports, he loved painting and dancing folk dances .

When he enlisted in the IDF in May 1954, it was clear to him that he wanted to be part of the paratroopers. Haim took part in all the retaliation operations against the police in the days before the Sinai Campaign. During Operation Husan, he was wounded and was unable to participate in the Qalqiliya operation, from which the explosions reached Ramat Gan. Then he decided to return to base. His last words when he left the house were: "I cannot pamper myself at home when my comrades fight." Although he was still limping badly and barely able to bend his wounded leg, he managed to convince his commanders that he was fit for action and went to the combat parachute and the last battle - the Battle of Mitla, from which he did not return. .

Lieutenant Haim Mazliach fell in battle at the Mitla Pass in the Sinai system on the 26th of Mishvan 5710 (October 31, 1956), five days before his 21st birthday. He was buried in the Military Cemetery of the Shalhal Emergency Cemetery and was taken to eternal rest at the military cemetery on Mount Herzl in Jerusalem on October 23, 1957.

Aleksander (Alik) Kligberg א"ל (27.6.1943-5.6.1967)

Born in Haifa on 27.6.1943 to Riva Kligberg (Kaplan) and Ben-Ariye (Lev) Kligberg, both from Estonia.



After graduating from the A. D. Gordon School, learned in "Ironi A" on scholarship. Brought up in a city, he lived a life without worries and without shade, grew and evolved and began to understand the meaning of life. His mother went to work in the morning and would return late in the afternoon. Loneliness had left wrinkles on his forehead and shadows in his eyes; however the difficult questions of life were brushed aside by the joy of life and his vaccinated and strong character. He faced many difficulties, both internal and external. One day he started to wear a military uniform; this was in November 1961, the year of completion of a high school with honors.

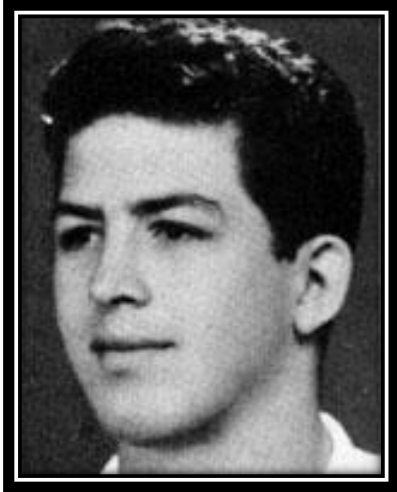
He was loved by his friends and acquaintances. He went to army with an immunized body and a strong spirit, and advanced from step to step. Full of responsibility and seriousness, lively and spirited, lovable and intelligent – he was liked by his subordinates and superiors. He volunteered for the paratroopers Force and was sent to an officers-course which he completed with honors. Upon completion of this course he was sent to guide the platoon commander-class in Golani Brigade. He completed his military service as a lieutenant. After completion of the service, he entered the mechanical engineering faculty in Technion in Haifa. For three years he studied with honors and showed seriousness and responsibility of perfectionism.

In May 1967, on the eve of the Six Day War, he was called to duty, and in the first day of fighting, he fell in battle near Khan- Yunis, when he broke to the enemy position in head of his force. During the battle he was injured but despite his wounds continued to fight and destroyed the position with grenade. Afterwards he was hit again and fell.

He was laid-rest at the military cemetery in Kiryat Shaul.

Ehud (Udi) Lifschits ל"ד (24.12.1944-5.5.1967)

Born in Kfar-Saba on 24.12.1944 to Aharon Lifschits and Genya Lifschits (Neuschloss) from Estonia.



After graduating from elementary school in Kfar Saba, he studied at the Katzenelson High School. He was a sports fan and belonged to *Hapoel*. He belonged to a youth movement and joined the Airborne Nahal service.

When his service ended, he began studying Statistics and Economics at the Hebrew University in Jerusalem. After the first year in Jerusalem he studied in the Tel Aviv University, but did not neglect the sports.

He had the joy of life which found expression in his love for dancing. He was also a sensitive soul and loved music and singing. Directness of youth, modesty and simplicity defined his personality. He was full of strength and energy - active in social life of Kfar Saba and together with his colleagues worked to establish a student club for Kfar Saba and the neighborhood. He initiated various cultural activities and wanted to participate together with friends in the memorial evening of the Israel Defense Forces that was held in Kfar Saba that year, but when he missed that evening he said: "Never mind, I'll be there next year!" Didn't know what he predicted...

A few days later he was called to duty and in the first letter that he sent home from Jerusalem (on 5 June) he wrote: "War is terrible. Much blood will be shed. But there is no choice."

The next day (6 June 1967), during a fighting in a Jerusalem's fortified Sheikh Jarrah neighborhood he was hit by a burst of gunfire while he was checking the house from which the shots were fired.

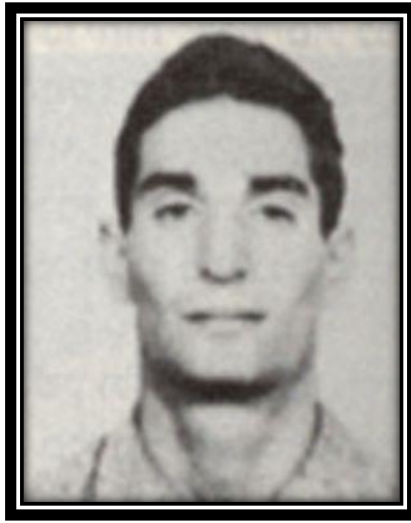
Udi was laid-rest in the military cemetery on Mount Herzl in Jerusalem.

Ehud (Udi) (14.4.1950-10.9.1973) and Haggai Gordon (14.4.1950-22.10.1973) ז"ל

The twins were born in Afula on 14 April 1950 to Benjamin Gordon and Mery Gordon (Josselson), both from Estonia.



Udi Gordon



Haggai Gordon

In 1955 the family moved to Kfar Mordechay.

The twins were completely different. After graduation of the primary school, they went different ways.

Udi was a "man of book", read avidly, and knew a lot, almost in every area, however was

slow and deliberate in his manner, completely without ambitions and lacking any desire to show off his knowledge. His body was delicate and somewhat fragile, and his character was withdrawn and introspective.

Haggai was a man of action, and from an early age developed a love for bee keeping. He completely devoted himself to the apiary industry. His father bought a farm in the village, near the parents' farm, where he spent his time from morning to night. Haggai showed proficiency in the profession, from the simplest things to more complicated things, like growing kingdom of bees. Work and economy were at the top of his mind. He had plans to increase the apiary and to reach great industry dimensions.

Haggai was drafted into the Israeli Defence Forces in mid-May 1968, and was placed in the Armored Corps. Ehud was drafted in mid-November and due to his high intelligence was sent to serve in an elite armored unit. Only when they saw his back stooped, they understood that he is not "a fighter" type, and he was transferred to serve in a tank battalion, where Haggai was serving.

In 1971 they both were released from service. Haggai returned to the economy and his bees. He was working day and night with very distinguished achievements. Ehud returned to civil life and tried various jobs. He never stopped thinking and looked for innovations to

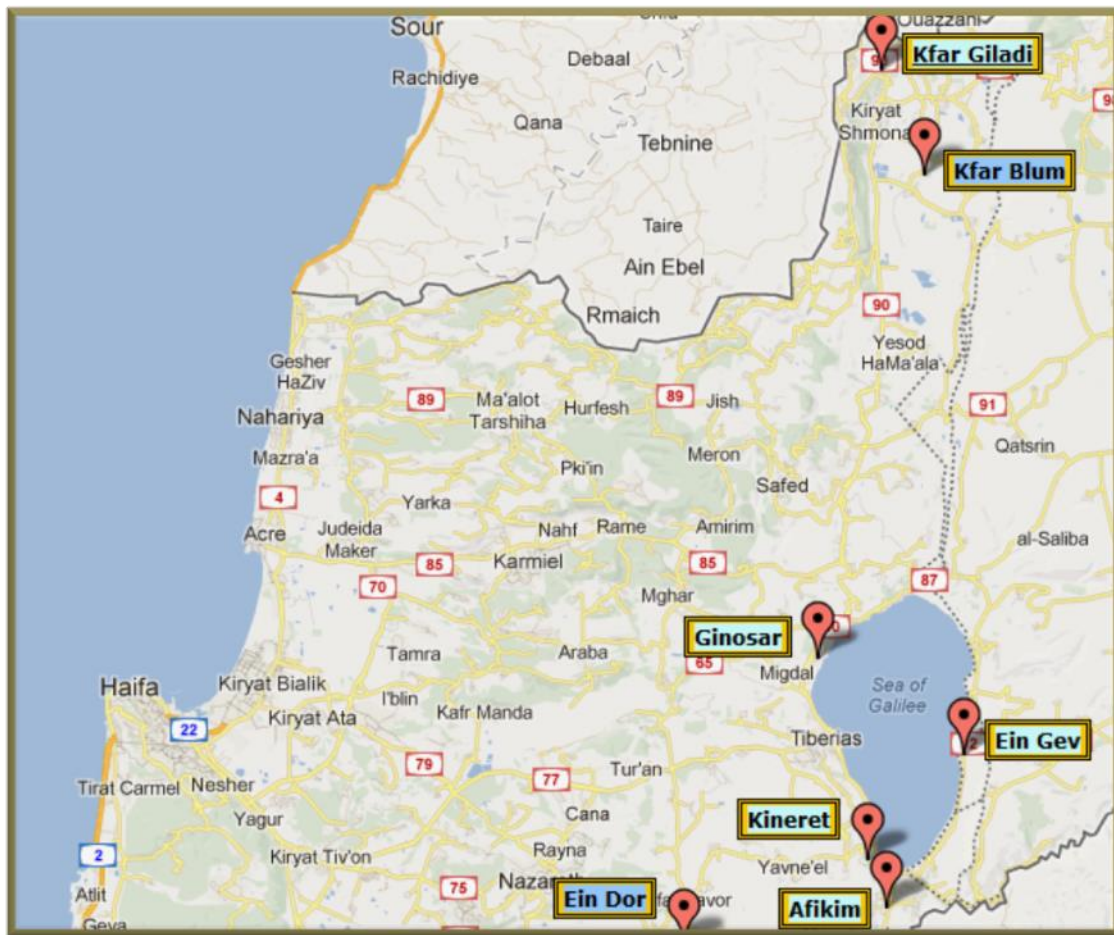
streamline the work in their hive, repairing cars and assembling complicated instruments in the factory.

When the Yom Kippur War broke out, Amos, the elder brother, was called to his armored unit in the Golan Heights. Ada, their sister, was then a soldier in compulsory service in the Air Force. And the twins, Haggai and Ehud fought both on the southern front, both died in the Battle of the "Chinese Farm".

Ehud's unit went into battle on the first day of the war. On 10 September 1973 his unit was facing the large Egyptian force in Hamadya compound. Egypt had many more tanks and all the unit attempts to curb the enemy attacks were unsuccessful. Several enemy tanks managed to reach the hill where Israeli forces holed up. Since Israelis could not find the enemy, the head of department sent some tanks directly in the direction of the enemy tanks. Ehud and his team, remained last in the field, fought enemy tanks, and managed to hit several before their own tank was hit and the whole crew lost their lives. For his courage in battle, Ehud was awarded "Medal of Distinguished Service" post-mortem.

Haggai served as a tank driver, also on the southern front. On 21 October 1973 he still fought in an armor unit near the "Chinese Farm". At the end of the day, when he transferred the wounded commander to the collection point, he learned that his twin brother Ehud was injured. When the army learned that one of the twins fell, Haggai was transferred to a Headquarters union in the rare. On 22 October 1973, five minutes before the first cease-fire had to enter into force, the Egyptians started hard shelling of the bridges. Ten of the company members fell, including Haggai.

Kibbutzniks.



We can name at least 27 Estonian Jewish families⁶⁹, who have participated in the creation, or lived in 9 kibbutzim around the country (Kfar Giladi, Kfar Blum, Ginosar, Ein Gev, Kineret, Ein Dor, Afikim at north, and Kfar Mordechai and Glil Yam – at the center of the country):

Asnovitsch, Bakscht, Baran, Baskin, Bell, Bub, Gurevitsch, Gurfinkel, Josselson, Kruskal, Kulman, Levin, Levitan, Maisel, Muschkat, Ogus, Piel, Schagal, Schajevitsch, Schapiro, Schats, Slosin, Spungin, Stein, Vigderhaus, Vsevirov, Zilevitsch.

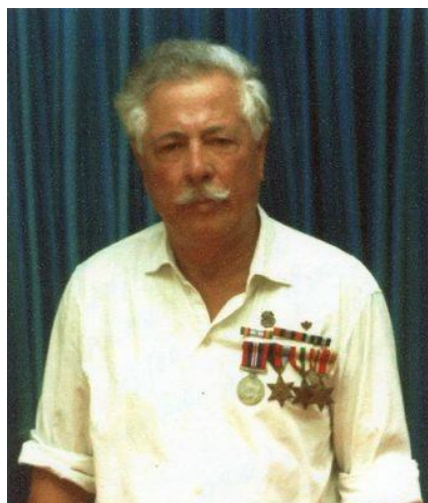
⁶⁹ Original names as they were in Estonia.

Some of them left memoirs (Gurevitsch, Levitan, Muschkat, Slosin), which can be read in full or partially on the site of the Estonian Jewish museum <http://eja.pri.ee>, but the comprehensive work about the Estonian kibbutzniks is yet to be written.

In Israeli cargo and battle fleet.

Asher Ben-Shmuel (Itzoch) (1913-1995)

Asher (Osja) Itzoch was born in St. Petersburg to Schmuel Itzoch and Sarra Itzoch (Rivkin).



He and his wife Dora Haitov prepared themselves for *aliyah*. Asher studied ship mechanics and Dora - to become a nurse. After the school, Asher had a practice on the sea for one year, after which it was easier for him to enlist the service of the Estonian navy duty, which he served a year and a half and reached the rank of the first-class sailor.

After emigration in 1935, Asher sailed on merchant ships, participated alongside the British in World War II and helped to smuggle weapons to Israeli Palmach.

With the establishment of the State of Israel, he enlisted to the young navy of the country, and served him faithfully for 13 years. Further professional life has been with the ship company Zim, where he worked for 18 years.



Seaman at Estonian ship "Kompass" in 1933

Tuvja (Teffi) Smolensk (Smolensky) (1916-1993)

Teffi Smolensk was born in Tartu to Ovsei Smolenski and Feige Heiman.

He was a member of *Beitar* youth organization. When Zeev Jabotinsky asked Beitarists to go to Palestine and to become agriculturists and seamen, he chose the second. He became an Estonian sailor.

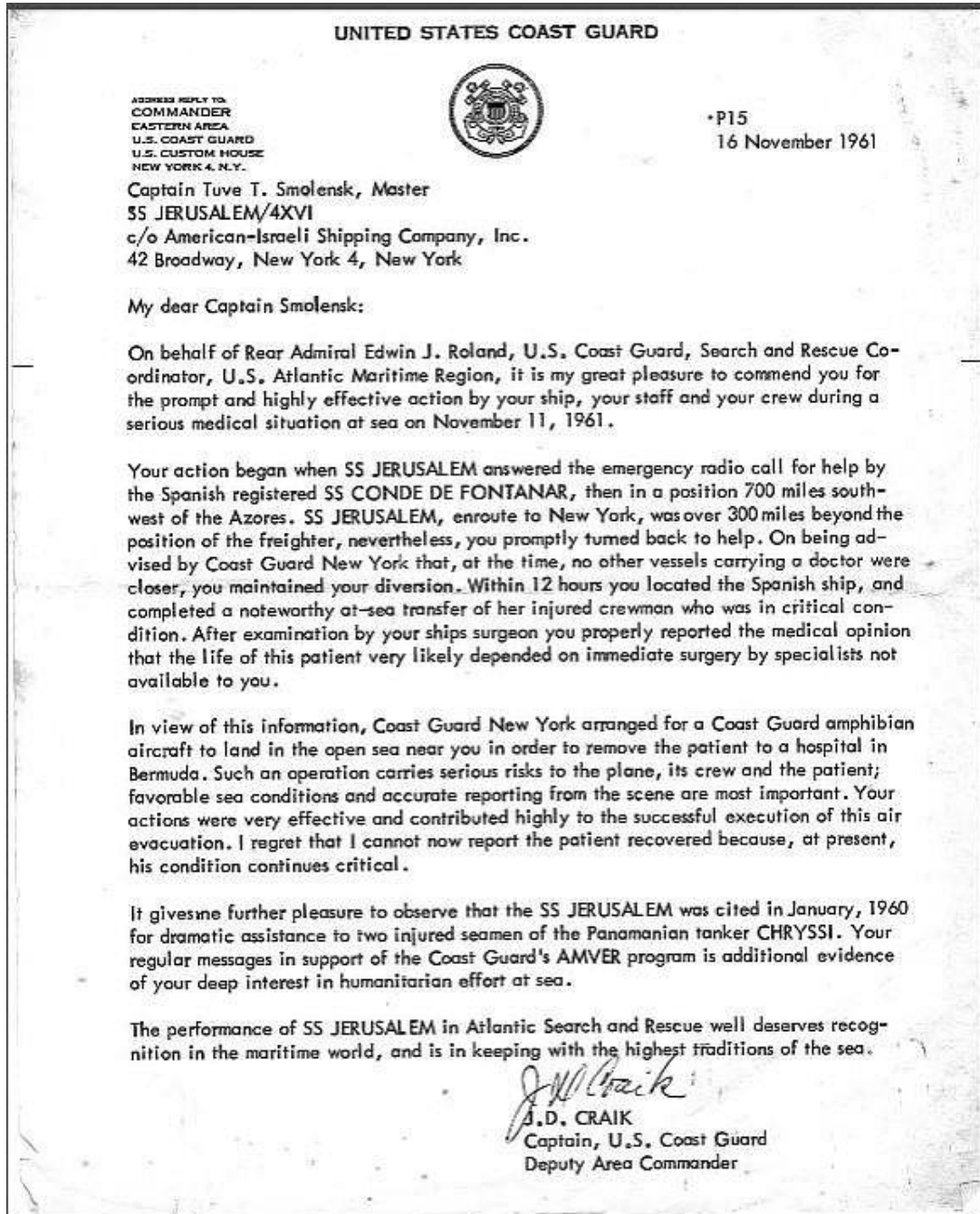


In 1935 *Beitar* organization acquired a training ship to train young seamen from Latvia and Estonia to sail on the Palestinian ships and help in the illegal *aliyah* to Palestine. Amongst those young men was also Teffi Smolensk.

He was able to make *aliyah* only in 1940. Till 1944 he worked at the “Ha’Atid” ship company and from 1948 joined the “Zim” shipping company. In 1949 he was already a first mate at the ship “Glila”, which brought illegal immigrants from the detention camp in Cyprus to Haifa.



In 1961 he was the captain of the ship "Jerusalem" that helped to save the life of an injured crewman of the Spanish ship.



At the service of the country and the Soviet Jewry: Nechemia Levanon (Levitan) (1915-2003)⁷⁰

Nechemiah Levanon (23.3.1915 – 2.9.2003) - an Israeli intelligence agent, diplomat, head of the *Aliyah* program Nativ, and a founder of kibbutz Kfar Blum.



After Israel's independence in 1948, Levanon served in a variety of roles to encourage the well-being and emigration of Soviet Jewry. Due to the covert nature of his work, Levanon's decades of service were largely unknown until after his retirement, during the last days of the Soviet Union.

Niuma Levitan was born in 1915 in Rūjiena, Latvia, to Yosef and Bertha Levitan (Ilion). His father died, and in 1922 the family relocated to their relatives in Tallinn.

He became inspired by a member of *Hashomer Hatsair* to join the Labor Zionist movement. In

1931, Levitan established a chapter of the socialist Zionist youth movement *Netzach*. He was active for several years with Netzach, assuming leadership of the Estonian branch in 1933 and the Latvian branch—the movement's largest—by 1937. For part of this time, he received agricultural training and lived on a communal farm near Tallinn.

Levitan arrived in Palestine in February 1938



⁷⁰ The text from Wikipedia, two pictures – from <http://www.nechemia.org>

and joined the kibbutz Afikim, near the Sea of Galilee. He and other immigrants (together known as the "Anglo-Baltic kibbutz" due to their lands of birth) moved to the town of Binyamina later that year. In October 1943, Levitan married Beba Levin, a fellow community member whom he met a few years earlier at a summer camp in Latvia. Two weeks later, he laid the cornerstone for kibbutz Kfar Blum. From 1946 to 1948, he acted as an emissary for the *Habonim Dror* and *HeHalutz* chapters in London. He returned to Israel in June 1948 to help the Yishuv⁷¹ during the War of Independence.

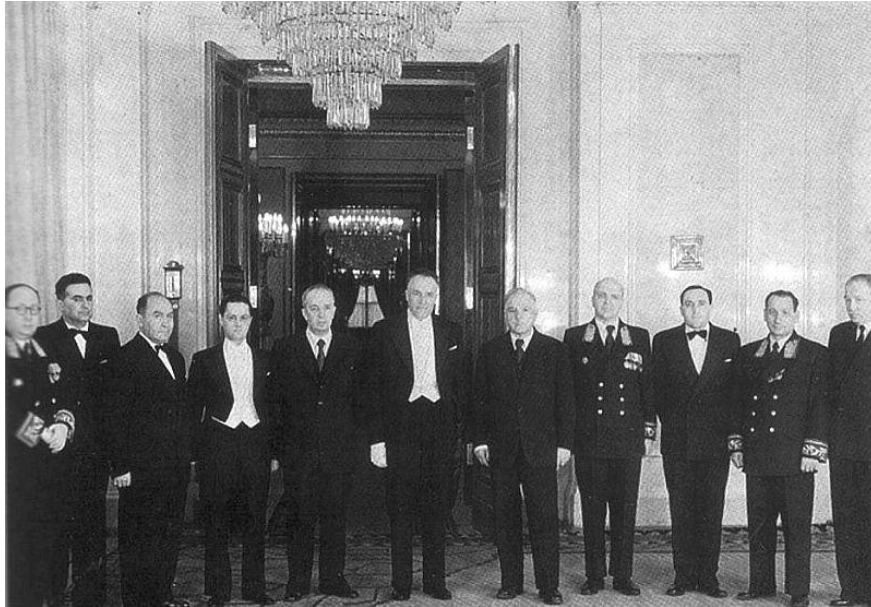


In 1953, Levitan accepted an invitation from Mossad⁷² director Isser Harel to establish contacts in the Soviet Jewish Community. This was a part of an effort by a small, new clandestine agency that reported to the Prime Minister's Office. Originally known as "Bilu", it was known by the code name "Nativ" and was officially called Lishkat HaKeshet, or the "Liaison Bureau". Levitan changed his name to the more Hebraic-sounding Nehemiah Levanon, as many Israelis did at the time. At the time of his posting, the Soviet Union had broken off diplomatic relations (in response to the bombing of the Soviet Embassy in Tel Aviv). Levanon therefore worked in Sweden until ties were re-established later that year.

⁷¹ Yishuv - The Jewish community in Palestine prior to the declaration of the state of Israel.

⁷² Mossad - national intelligence agency of Israel.

Levanon and his family then moved to Moscow, where he disguised his covert activities by working as an agricultural attaché in the Israeli embassy. For two years, he met with Soviet Jews to pass along information, prayer books, and pictures of Israel. In 1956, however, he and two other Israeli diplomats were declared *persona non grata* for their ties to the Soviet Jewish community.



Presenting the letter of accreditation (1954). 6th from left – the Ambassador J. Avidar, 7th – Chairman of the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet K. Voroshilov, 9th – N. Levanon.

Levanon continued his work from Israel by joining Nativ's Tel Aviv headquarters. He set up a unit called Bar, composed of Israeli diplomats in the delegations to the United States, United Kingdom, and France. Bar was tasked specifically with encouraging the immigration of Soviet Jews to Israel.

In January 1970, Prime Minister Golda Meir appointed Levanon to serve as the head of Nativ. Levanon's appointment came at a pivotal time in the cause of Soviet Jewry: public campaigns were being organized across the Jewish world in protest of the Soviet government's treatment of several dozen Zionist activists who were accused of planning a hijacking.

Further attention to the issue of Soviet Jewry was spurred by the "refuseniks," people denied exit visas from the USSR. The Soviet government in 1972 imposed the "diploma tax," a fee meant to discourage educated Jews and other Soviet citizens from emigrating. Apparently aware that the tax would be controversial, the Soviets

intended to keep the law secret. However, word reached Western governments when a Ukrainian Jew forwarded a copy of the decree to Levanon, who then passed it to American and Israeli officials. Levanon allied with Senator Henry Jackson to pass a law denying most-favored nation trade status to countries that restricted the free emigration of its citizens.

Levanon retired in 1982, returning to Kfar Blum. He wrote two memoirs: "*Code Name: Nativ*", about the history of the organization, and "*The Road to the Banks of the Jordan*", about his migration to Israel. He also traveled to Russia several times after the collapse of the Soviet Union, including a 1995 meeting with the former Soviet president Mikhail Gorbachev. Levanon died in Kfar Blum on September 2, 2003.

In culture.

Ella Amitan-Vilensky (1893-1995) – the first Israeli children’s poet.

Ella Vilensky, the author of the first children’s books in Hebrew, was born on 14 April 1893 in Tartu. In 1911 she graduated the Pushkin gymnasium for girls. Then studied in the Levinovich dentists’ school, which she graduated in 1914. In 1918-1919 she was a medical student in the Tartu University. From 1920 - an English language teacher in the Russian gymnasium.

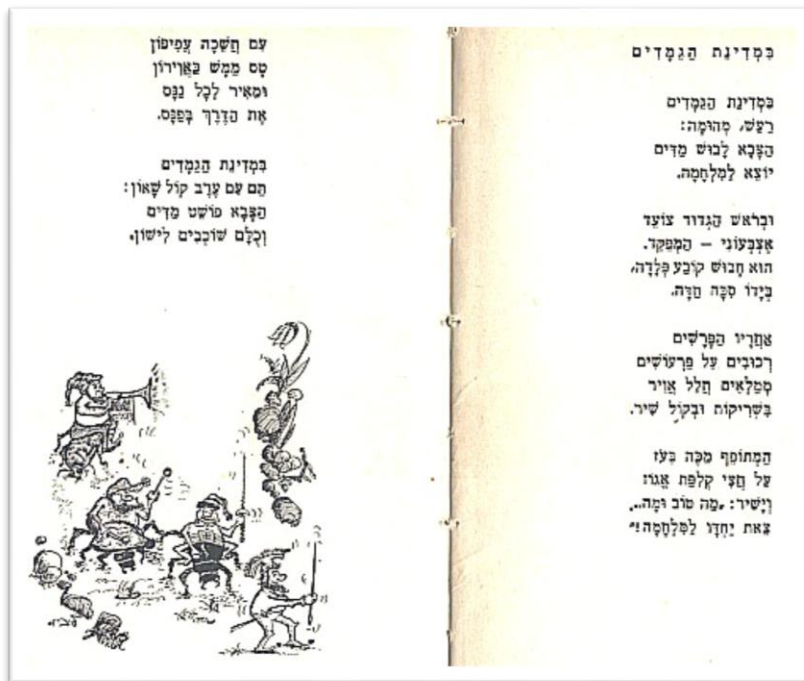
She was a member of *HeHalutz*, and already since 1921 she intended to emigrate to Palestine.



Ella completed her studies in Switzerland and Germany and in 1925 came to Palestine. She fluently spoke no less than seven languages: Yiddish, Russian, Estonian, German, French, English and Hebrew.

Around forty years Ella worked as an officer in *Keren Ha-Yessod*. From her late 20s Ella had published short poems, mainly for children and school pupils in the Hebrew press and had signed them "Ella Vilensky". Later she added her mother's name Amitan, because in this name the Hebrew root can be clearly heard: *amit* – close friend.

In the late 1930s and in the 1940s Ella Amitan, and later a few of her colleagues, actually created a new branch of literature. In the ancient period, to say nothing of the long Diaspora period, there wasn't such the genre, and the Hebrew children's literature was virtually non-existent.



In the 1950-60s some verses of Ella became popular songs, and one of them, "Be-Medinat Ha-Gamadim" ("In the Land of the Lilliputians"), won several prizes and for decades was very popular not only among children.

During all these years, Ella translated classic works of European literature into Hebrew. Among them works by Balzac, Hugo, Heine, Goethe, etc. In the same

time Ella perfectly translated texts from Hebrew for European journals - short stories and articles by Israeli writers.

Her works in translation were awarded several national prizes. In the late 1960s her translation of "Myths of the Ellada" was awarded a special premium by the

President of Greece and she was invited to visit the country and stay in the presidential Palace.

Her last book of verse was called "My Family Album", which Ella had published at the age of 93. The title itself hinted to the tragic fate of her relatives and her generation in the Holocaust, wars and others cruel events of the century. To the last days of her life (she passed away at the age of 103) Ella maintained her clear mind and even a grain of humor. When her relatives and friends (she never got married) prepared to celebrate her 95th anniversary, she turned down the idea. "There is nothing special about my birthday," she said "but 50 years ago saw the birth of the first Hebrew children's books". Her birthday became a kind of symposium of Israeli literature.

Ella passed away in 1995 in Tel-Aviv.

Avi Benjamin (Nedzvedski) – a composer and performer.⁷³



Avi Nedzvedski was born on 3 March 1959 in Tallinn. His father Benjamin Nedzvedski was a professor of psychology at the University of Tartu and his mother Edith was a physician. After graduation from the college he was accepted to the Estonian Academy of Music and Theater, where he was studying piano under Professor Bruno Lukk and Toivo Nahkur.

In the mid-1970s he became familiar with the contemporary Western music, mostly prohibited in the USSR at that time. During his studies at the academy, Benjamin was performing with the Estonian Philharmonic Orchestra, and following his graduation he became a musical director of the Estonian State

Russian Drama Theater in Tallinn.

⁷³ Most of the text – from Wikipedia.

In the mid-1980s Avi moved to Moscow to work as a theater composer. His musical “Goodbye America!” was named the “Best Show in Moscow” in the 1988-1989 season. He also composed music to the “Journey of Benjamin the Third to the Holy Land” (after the classic Yiddish epic by Mendele Mocher Sforim). During his time in Moscow Benjamin also became interested in Jewish music and formed a Klezmer band.

In February 1991, Avi moved to Israel and eventually settled in Jerusalem. At this time he adopted “Benjamin” as his last name as a tribute to his father. He became the musical director of the Gesher theater. In his twenty years as a composer and a conductor with Gesher, Benjamin wrote music to more than 30 plays.

The musical “Devil in Moscow” after the famous classical novel “The Master and Margarita” by Mikhail Bulgakov became another highlight in Benjamin’s theatrical career. In 2001, he won Israeli Theater Award as the best composer for this work. In 2004 it was shown in Tallinn.

In 2012, Avi Benjamin started a new conceptual music and multimedia project "Soundtracks to the movies that don't yet exist". The project combines on-stage performance by Avi using the musical instruments of new generation with on-screen performers.



Shlomit (Frieda) Dekel (Kosotsky) – the first Israeli TV woman anchorperson⁷⁴.



Frieda Kosotsky was born on 27 June 1928 in Tallinn to school teacher Abram Kosotsky and Sara Kosotsky (Tscherny). Abram was an active Zionist and Hebrew teacher, thus wanted to hear only Hebrew at home. However, Frieda spoke several additional languages: German with nanny, Estonian with housemaid, Russian with her aunt and Yiddish with grandma.

When Frieda was 8 years old, the family moved to Palestine. Many were against that decision: “How can you go to the country of desert and foxes? Are you crazy?” But Abram insisted on that, and in June 1936 they left Estonia.



Farewell at the train station in Tallinn. June 1936. In front: grandpa Salman Kosotsky (in Israel - Israel Kasif), mother Sara K., Frieda and father Abram K.

⁷⁴ Part of the text and pictures are taken from "Makor rishon. Dyokan", 14.8.2015.

The family settled in Rehovot. Abram continued to work as a Hebrew teacher. Shlomit (this became the new name of Frieda) had no problems with the language, however, the children in the school laughed at her "old fashioned Hebrew". Eight years later, when Shlomit was 16, the famous gymnasium under the patronage of the Hebrew University in Jerusalem offered free education to all students, who, after graduation, would continue to study in the teachers seminar nearby. So Shlomit moved to Jerusalem and continued her studies there.

The last year of the studies in the teachers' seminar was stuck because of the War of Independence. Itzhak Dekel, a close friend and a future husband, was a reservist in Palmach. He was called for an active duty, and Shlomit went with him. They were part of the Harel brigade, and their duty was to accompany armored convoys to besieged Jerusalem and back.

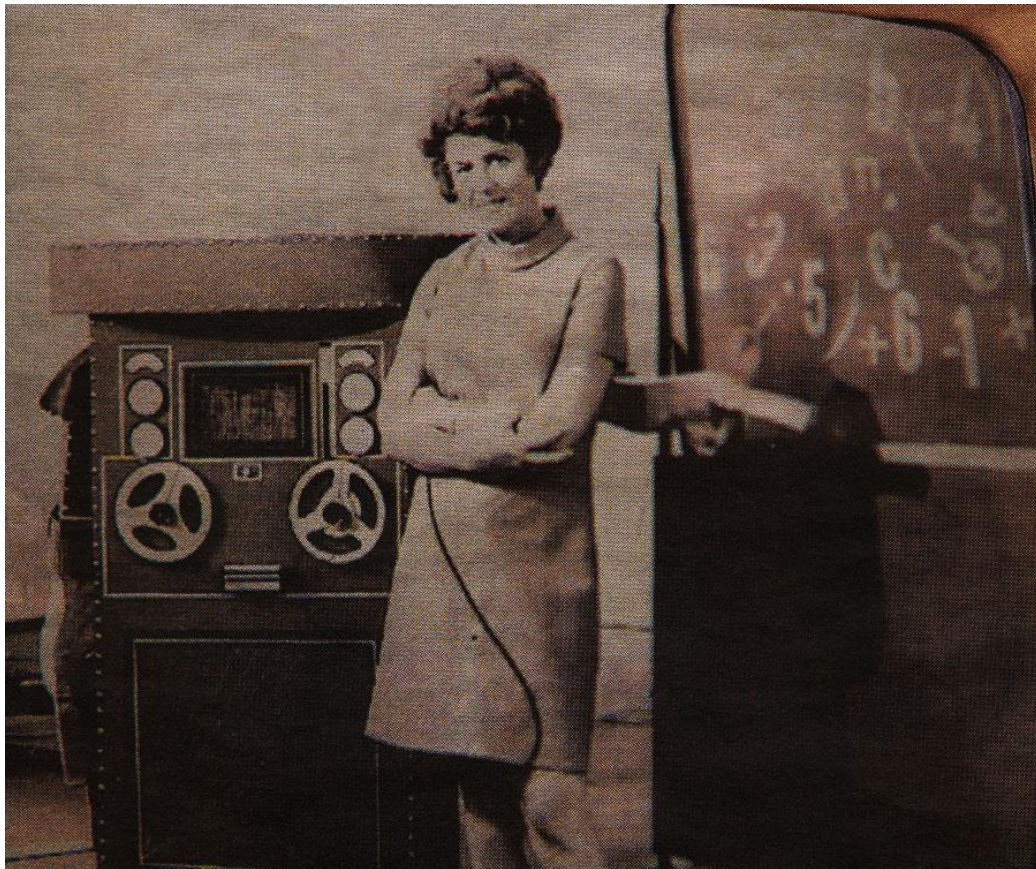
After several months of the intensive war with many heavy casualties, Itzhak approached Shlomit with a sudden suggestion: "Let's go married!" "Why now, what's the hurry?" asked Shlomit. "You know, it looks that we will not stay alive after the war... At least we will die as a married couple."

When the fighting across the country began to fade, Shlomit asked to be released from the Palmach in favor of fulfilling her civic duty: working as a mathematics teacher in an elementary school near Netanya. After ten years in the education system Shlomit received a tempting offer: to audition for the TV presenter as part of educational programs, which was to start at that time.

Plans for Israeli television were thrown into the air years before the first broadcast in 1966, but Prime Minister David Ben-Gurion strongly opposed to the idea. After some time, the then minister of Education Abba Evan and Teddy Kolek, who was the head of Prime Minister's office, approached "the old man" again. They said that the Prime Minister's opposition to TV is well-known - and therefore they are not proposing TV now on a large scale, but are talking about something smaller, that will not cost much money and will help greatly the course of education in the country. They elaborated: Take the proposal of the Rotshild Fund to pay for a small network installation and experimental transmission of educational broadcasts. This network will not be for entertainment, and of course there will be no advertising. Only Education. So the pioneers of Israeli TV went to establish the educational television. Inspectors from the Ministry of Education sent to locate the best teachers in Israel, in order to choose three teachers who would lead the first broadcasting channel: mathematics, English and nature.

To the screen tests Shlomit came without ever watching a television broadcast. “Although I did not know what is a TV, but I figured out that we should prepare lesson with visual aid, because on TV people can see us. I decided to teach the volume of the pyramid, so that I can show pyramids, and talk a little about ancient Egypt. I spoke on a camera test as I speak with children in the classroom”.

And they chose Shlomit to teach mathematics on TV. She became the first lady who appeared on the screen of Israeli TV.



In science.

Michael Heltzer (1928-2010) – orientalist, assyrologist.

Michael Heltzer was born in 1928 in Tallinn to Leo Heltzer and Ida Heltzer (Levin).

He started his education in Tallinn, but with the beginning of the war in 1941 evacuated to Tatarstan with his aunt⁷⁵. There he studied at a school in 1941-45. In



1945 he entered the Faculty of Oriental Studies of the Leningrad University. The subjects were the ancient oriental history and Semitic studies. For political reasons, he could not continue to work in the University after the graduation. In the first half of the 1950s he worked as a teacher in the schools of Tihemetsa and Pärnu. In 1955 he defended his Candidate degree at the Hermitage in Leningrad.

After writing his Doctor of Sciences thesis at the Institute of Oriental Studies in Moscow in 1969, he became professor in 1971. In 1972, Michael Heltzer emigrated with his family to Israel. For the longest time, he worked at Haifa University Ancient Oriental history department as an ordinary professor.

Michael Heltzer wrote over 300 scientific works, in particular, about the Persian period of the Israeli history, the Phoenician and the Biblical era and others. He was a visiting professor in the Tartu University and delivered lectures at the Faculty of Theology since its reopening in 1993 until 2009, including the ancient history of Israel, biblical exegesis and about ancient Hebrew epigraphy.

⁷⁵ Both parents were arrested by Soviets, imprisoned and later sent to the camps in Kazakhstan and Gorki oblast.

In 1998 he became a Honorary Doctor of the University of Tartu, and in 2001 the Estonian Order of White Star IV Class was bestowed on him.

Michel Heltzer passed away in Haifa on 6.6.2010.

In sports



Yuval Spungin

2015, he returned to play after 8 months in the championship match against Ironi Kiryat Shmona F.C. which Maccabi won 2–1.



Yair Spungin

Spungin family of football players.

Yuval and Yair Spungin were born in Ramat-Gan to Sally and Izhak Spungin from Estonia.

Yuval Spungin (b. 3 April 1987) plays currently for Maccabi Tel-Aviv in the Israeli Premier League. Right back.

Club career:

In January 2010, Spungin signed a three-year contract with AC Omonia, starting from June 2010.

In July 2013, Spungin signed a two-year contract with R.A.E.C. Mons.

In the summer of 2014 he returned to Israel and signed with Maccabi Tel Aviv. At the beginning of 2014–15 season he played few games before suffering from injuries. On May 17,

Yair Spungin (b. 22 January 1996) plays currently for Hapoel Tel-Aviv in the Israeli Junior Premier League.

A forward.

Soon he is expected to enter the National Premier League.

Some statistics

The official figures about the *aliyah* from pre-war Estonia are not available. The list of known Estonian Jews, who moved to Palestine before the WWII⁷⁶ has currently⁷⁷ 264 names. But those are only the people known to the author.

Another problem is that out of these 264 names, we do not know the exact year of *aliyah* for 74 persons.

We can compare the available numbers to those, given by the newspapers of those years.

- “Postimees” writes on 22.5.1935: “About **150** Jews have emigrated to Palestine, most of them are working in agriculture and also as craftsmen. Most have secondary or higher education. In the first half year 5 family entry visas were already received.” The current list has **128** known names in this period.
- “Postimees” 23.2.1933: “Last year **21** Jews emigrated from Estonia to Palestine. Among them: 4 doctors (1 psychologist, 1 therapist, 1 gynecologist and 1 laryngologist), 1 dentist, 1 advocate, 1 agronomist, 1 nurse, 1 teacher. The rest were farmers and craftsmen”. The list has **18** for 1932.
- “Eesti arvudes”, 1937, Tallinn: In 1929-1935 **127** Jews left Estonia. In the list we have **105** names.

Thus it looks that the list has about 85% of the total number of emigrés; consequently we have added 15% to the number of people from the list that made *aliyah* in 1921-1940.

We have estimated the number of Estonian Jews, who made *aliyah* in 1941-1971 at 15 persons.

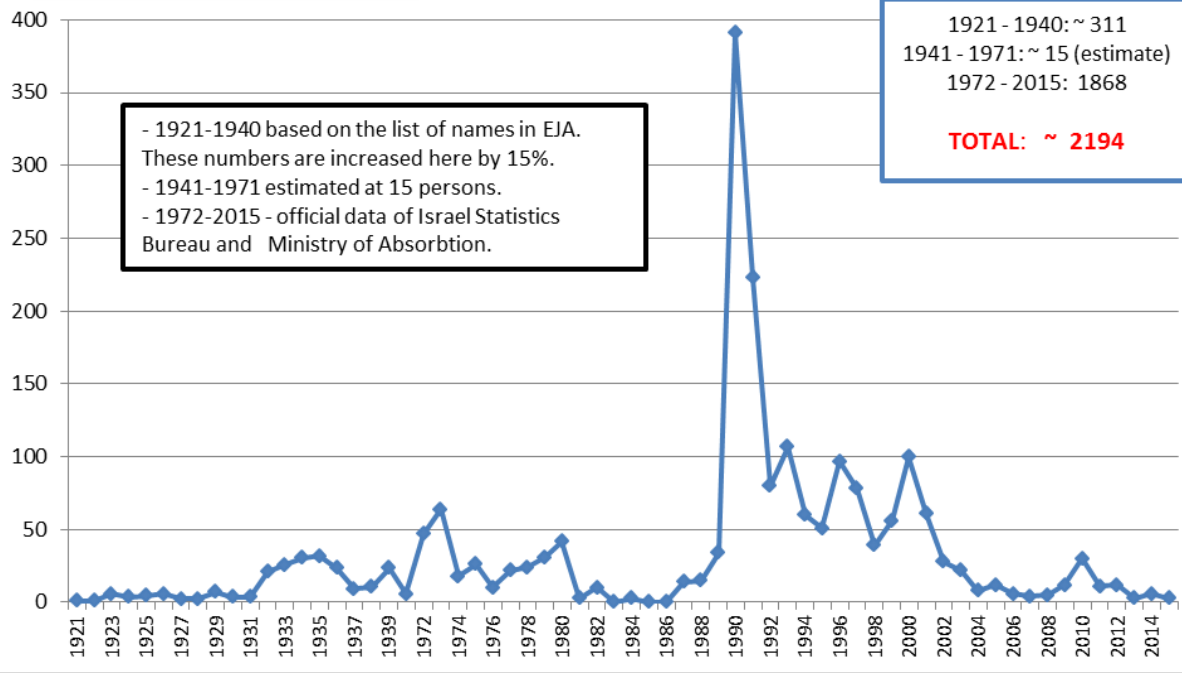
The rest of the numbers are from the official data of the Ministry of Absorption and the Statistical Bureau of Israel.

⁷⁶ <http://eja.pri.ee/Genealogy/Juudid%20Palestiina%20site.pdf>

⁷⁷ 02.5.2016

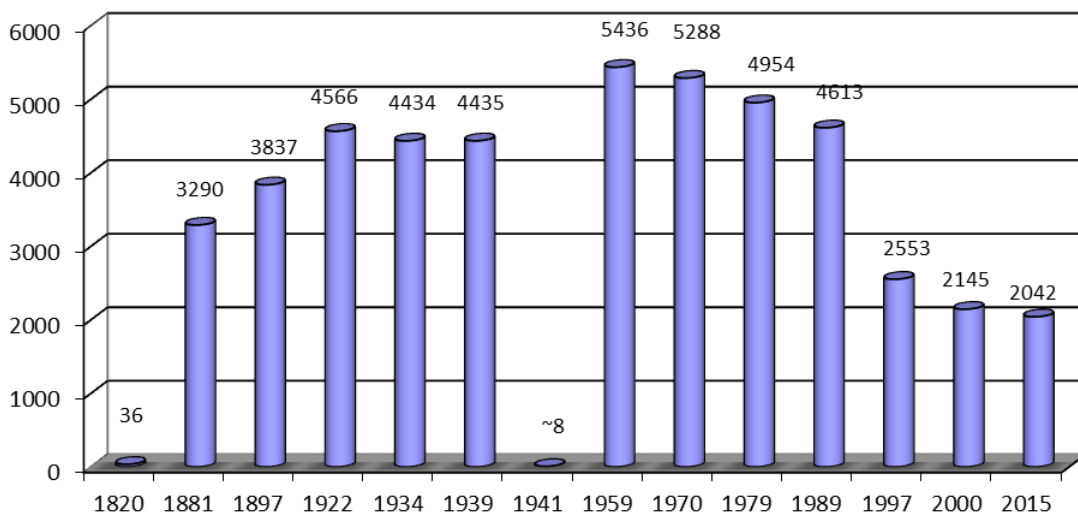
Aliyah from Estonia

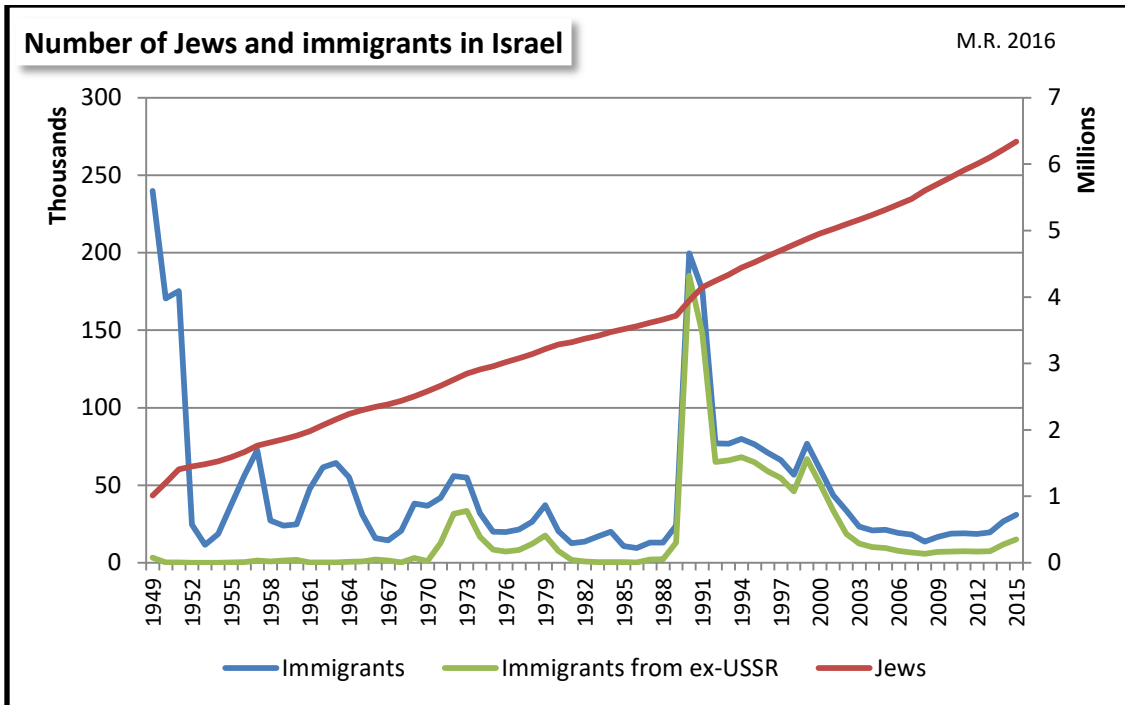
M. R. 2016



Jewish population of Estonia

M.R. 2016





A very short Afterword

It is not easy to live in Israel. It is certainly not easy to start a new life in a new country. It is even more difficult for someone who was brought up in so different country like Estonia. But we love Israel - she is beautiful, and she is ours.

Still, we will always remember and tell our children, who will tell their children about another beautiful small country on the Baltic Sea called Estonia.

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