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Ben-Gurion University  
Professors act  
to preserve  
the heroic story  
of illegal immigration  
and arms acquisition  
in Mandatory  
Palestine.



Immigrants from the illegal ship *Shabtai Lozhinsky* scramble to the shores of

# Metamorphosis of Pomerantz



Palestine at Nitzanim.

Professor Zeev Hadari's eyes sparkle when he claims that he left the bloody business long ago. After years of adventure in the Jewish underground, he has found other battles for his spare time at the university he helped establish. He is currently struggling to preserve the history of the illegal immigration and arms purchases which paved the way for the creation of the State of Israel. During the last years of the British occupation in Palestine, restrictions were placed on Jewish immigration to the Holy Land, and importation of weapons to defend the Jewish settlement was strictly prohibited.

The professor himself is not a historian; he is a member of Ben-Gurion University of the Negev's Department of Nuclear Engineering, a field considerably distant from the humanities. However, as he notes, "I was involved in *making* history." From 1942 until after Israel's establishment, he was an emissary for the clandestine *Mossad la'Aliya Bet* (Institute for Illegal Immigration), and served in Europe as deputy to the organization's chief, Shaul Avigur.

## Cyprus: Gateway to Palestine

*Ships or a State*, which documents the story of the two largest illegal boats which attempted to run the British blockade, was recently published by Prof. Hadari and Dr. Zeev Tsahor of BGU's History Department. The Mossad's decision for the ships, called *Pan Crescent* and *Pan York*, to set sail for the forbidden shores of Palestine on December 27, 1947, aroused much debate within the Zionist movement. Fear of losing American support for the recently approved U.N. partition plan was weighed against the necessity to shatter the British stranglehold on Jewish immigration. The two vessels, renamed *Atzma'ut* (Independence) and *Kibbutz Galuyot* (Ingathering of the Exiles), reached Cyprus under escort of British warships on the first day of the fateful year of 1948. The passengers disembarked peacefully at the port of Famagusta, Cyprus, which became known as "the last

station on the way to Palestine." The ships were destined to bring thousands of Olim (immigrants) to Israel only after the proclamation of the Republic of Israel and the British evacuation.

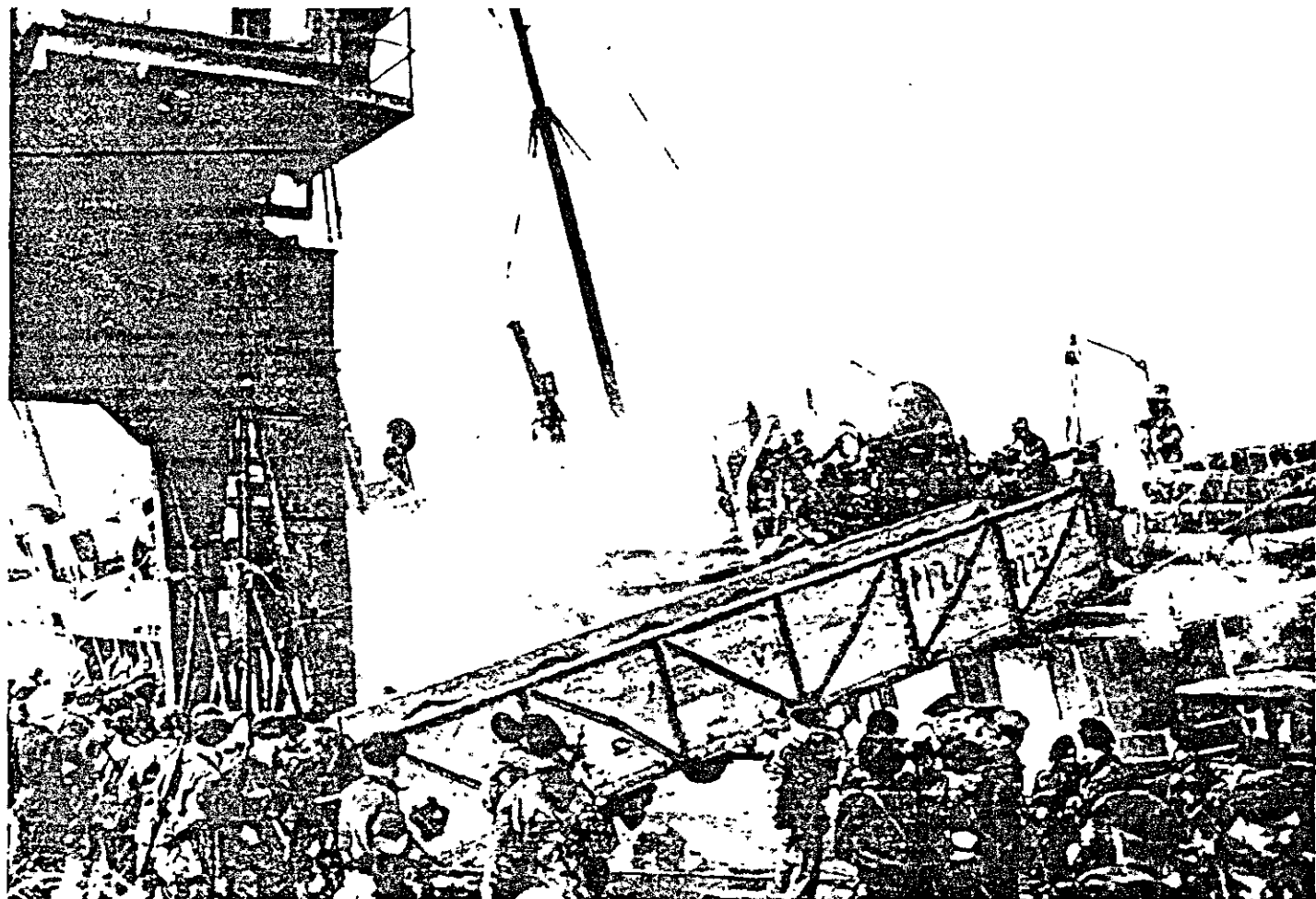
While the BGU researchers' book thoroughly describes the largest of such ventures, there is a serious gap in the written record of the attempts by 80 other ships, which carried over 70,000 Jews, to break through the British blockade. Prof. Hadari and Dr. Tsahor are currently working on a second book, which will discuss the history of the illegal immigration movement during the years 1945-48.

## Money, Men, and Munitions

In order to preserve this important chapter in Jewish history, Prof. Hadari hopes to establish at Ben-Gurion University a center for the investigation of *Ha'apala* (illegal immigration) and arms acquisition

during the struggle for a Jewish state. Professor Hadari explains, "The most many people know of this critical period is what they remember from the film *Exodus*. Processing the information related to these subjects must be done immediately, while much of the original documentation is attainable and many of those who participated in the historic events can contribute first-hand accounts."

Organization of immigration and defense for the still unborn Jewish state encompassed activities on several continents simultaneously. *Exodus 1947*, *Atzma'ut*, and *Kibbutz Galuyot*, for instance, were acquired in the United States. Much of the funding for the secret Zionist endeavors came from Diaspora communities in the West, while lifesaving ammunition and manpower often originated behind the Iron Curtain. The center will gather information from the pre-State era which is indispensable for understanding Israel's current



Tear gas fired by British troops forms a cloud over the gangplank of the illegal ship, *Moledet* (Homeland). March 2, 1947

relationship with world Jewry, as well as her present foreign policy.

Collecting documentation from this stormy era led Prof. Hadari to the British Public Record Office. "It is amazing how much trouble our small group of upstarts made for the English," says Prof. Hadari, who was known as Venia Pomerantz when he worked for the Mossad. "The files of the British Admiralty testify to the anxiety suffered by sailors who were given the task of confronting the refugee ships. They strongly desired to avoid the picture that appeared increasingly in the newspapers of the time — armed British naval officers boarding ships overflowing with helpless Jews at sea. Dozens of Cabinet meetings were held to deal solely with this subject."

### A Variety of Visas

Today, Zeev Hadari visits the United Kingdom freely, but the plethora of passports he has col-

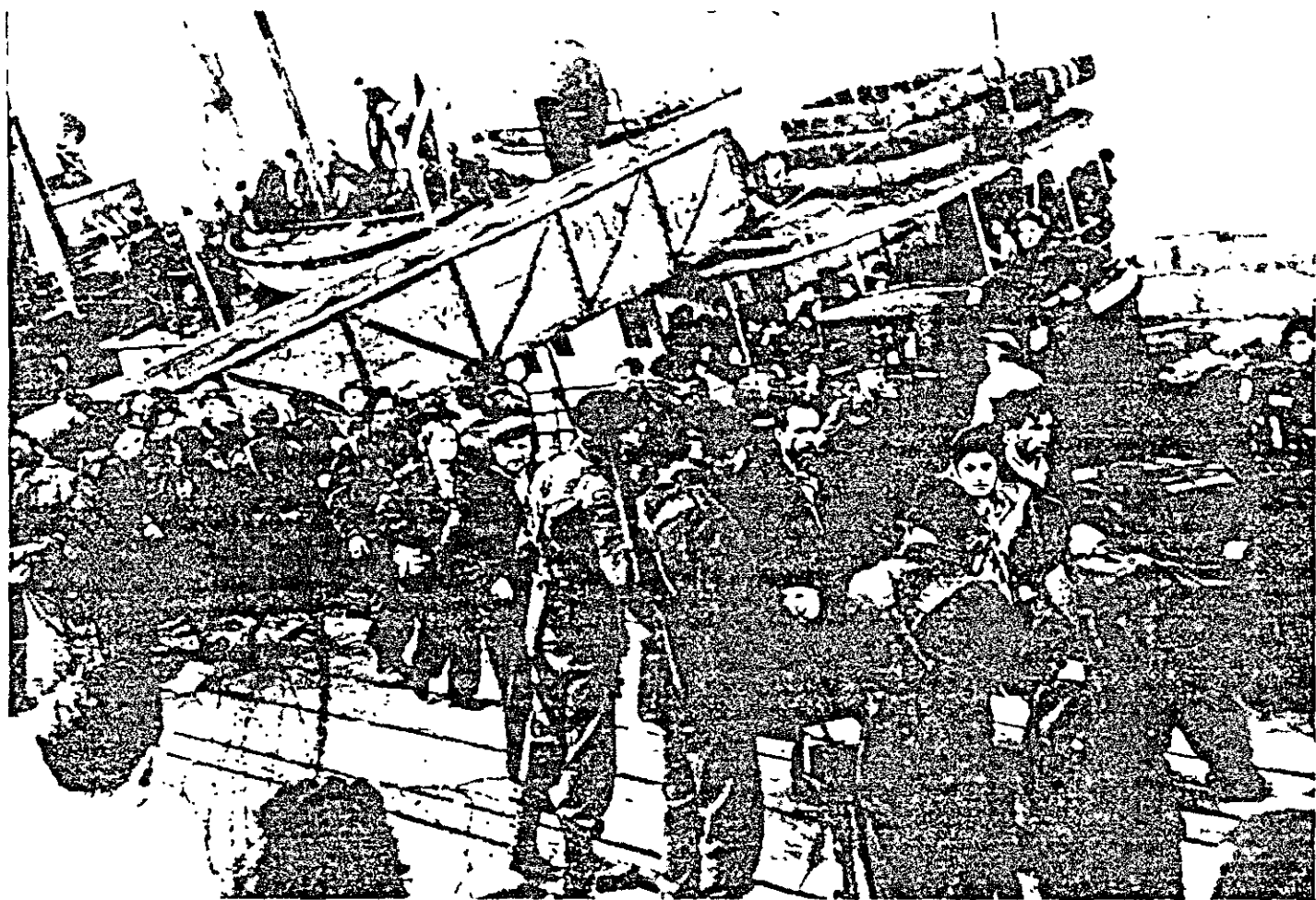
lected ("I had seven different names, but I always used the same picture," he recalls with a smile) indicate that travelling to Britain once entailed unique "arrangements" for him. He remembers a rather unpleasant landing he experienced in London during his days in the underground. "I arrived by airplane, but I was caught right away. Instead of sending me to prison, though, the police simply returned me immediately on the next plane out. I came back to London again by train, carrying a French passport... and had no trouble at all."

### The French Connection

The French government was generally sympathetic to the Jewish cause, and the Mossad's European headquarters were in Paris, although the activists were forced to change residence frequently. In 1944, the Mossad sent Prof. Hadari to Bulgaria to organize Aliya. He

broadcast nightly radio reports in Hebrew to Palestine under the guise of being a journalist. This aroused the suspicions of the Communist authorities, and he was deported as a British spy. Upon arrival in Eretz Yisrael at the northern border post of Rosh Hanigra, the British arrested him under suspicion of being a Communist agent. He joined Kibbutz Ramat Rachel but, until he escaped to France, he had to report daily to the police.

Professor Hadari returned to Paris to study after the establishment of Israel. He settled in Kibbutz Givat Haim following completion of his education. His area of interest shifted to the Negev Desert afterwards, and he was instrumental in founding the University of the Negev, later to become Ben-Gurion University of the Negev. Prof. Hadari was a member of the founding "Ottoman Association," and served on the Supreme Academic Committee of BGU's forerunner,



After the struggle, haggard refugees disembark from *Moledet* under the watchful eyes of British soldiers.



Professor Zeev Hadari at Ben-Gurion University today.



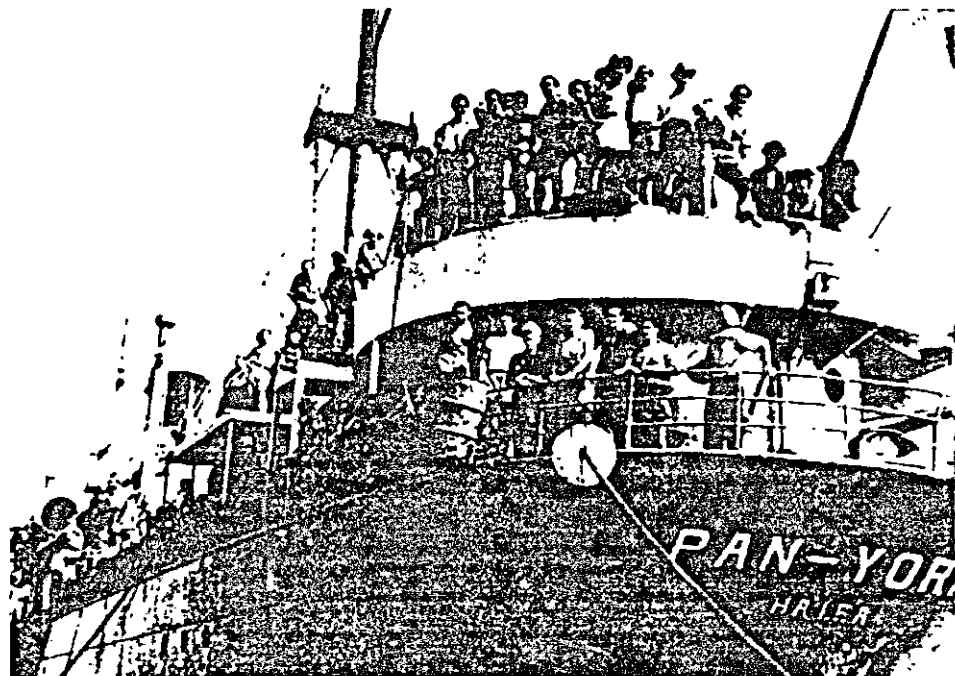
Venia Pomerantz (standing, center) with Mossad and rescue activists in Istanbul, 1943. Also pictured, from right, Zeev Shind, Shaul Avigur, Ehud Avriel, a representative of the Joint Distribution Committee, representatives of the Istanbul Jewish community, Yosef Klarman, and Mr. Brohd, representing the Turkish Kehilla.

the Institute for Higher Education in the Negev. His academic interests merged with his activities on behalf of the young university when he established a department in his field — nuclear engineering. Now that the university and department he helped create are flourishing and contributing to the Negev's growth, Prof. Hadari is concerned again with the preservation of the past.

"Most of the extant literature on the efforts to undermine British arms and immigration restrictions consists of 'I' books — personal accounts of individuals who were involved in aspects of the underground's work," points out the Professor. "It is important that this center succeed in systematically cataloguing, recording, and perpetuating the details of these operations."

*Ships or a State* will soon be published in English translation. The center Prof. Hadari and Dr. Tsahor are forming will be an indispensable tool for completing the portrait of an era in Jewish history which is fascinating in any language. ■

Avraham Halevy



The Pan York, after the establishment of Israel, brings immigrants to a new life.

