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Henrietta Diamond, © Courtesy of The National Maritime Museum, Haifa Museums collections, Photo Number 88-84(1).

Mothers of Seafaring: Henrietta Diamond and the Question of Female Representation in the Jewish Maritime Realm

by Franziska Weinmann

Abstract

The article aims to trace the contribution of Jewish women in the Yishuv's maritime history. Taking the example of Henrietta Diamond, a founding member and chairperson of the Zebulun Seafaring Society, the article seeks to explore the representation and role of women in a growing Jewish maritime domain from the 1930s to the 1950s. It examines Zionist narratives on the 'New Jew' and the Jewish body and studies their relevance for the emerging field of maritime activities in the Yishuv. By contextualizing the work and depiction of Henrietta Diamond, the article sheds new light on the gendered notions that underlay the emergence of the Jewish maritime domain and illustrates the patterns of inclusion and exclusion in it.

1 Introduction

This article examines patterns of female participation and representation in the formative years of the Zionist maritime sector in mandatory Palestine and Israel. Based on a biographical case study of Henrietta Diamond, a founding member and chairperson of the Zebulun Seafaring Society, the article aims to trace gendered representations in the Yishuv's maritime realm as well as their linkages to broader questions of gender roles in Zionism. In doing so, the article adds to the growing field of Jewish maritime history by drawing on perspectives from gender studies.

A range of recent research undertakings displays a growing interest in the diverse field of Jewish maritime history. Whereas Joachim Schlör¹ and Gilbert

¹ Joachim Schlör, "Towards Jewish maritime studies," *Jewish Culture and History* 13, no. 1 (2012): 1–6.

Herbert² discuss the relevance of applying a maritime perspective in Jewish studies in general, Kobi Cohen-Hattab's study *Zionism's Maritime Revolution* applies a maritime studies perspective to the Zionist nation building process in his examination of the Yishuv's political and institutional turn to the sea.³ In a similar vein, Maoz Azaryahu investigates the transformation of the Mediterranean into a "Hebrew Sea" and emphasizes the role of Tel Aviv within this process.⁴

Much like Jewish maritime history, a growing number of publications regarding gender roles and Zionism illustrate the pertinence of linking Jewish identity and history to the more general questions raised by gender studies. As Todd Presner demonstrates, the Zionist image of a 'New Jew' was strongly infused with gender labels and was created in opposition to anti-Semitic stereotypes, which aimed to link Jewishness to femininity, unmanliness, physical weakness, and other qualities considered inferior.⁵ This notion of the 'New Jew' was decisively shaped by the ideas of Max Nordau, who invented the concept of "muscular Judaism", the regeneration of the Jewish people through body and sport culture.⁶

In contrast to these stereotypes, Zionists saw the 'New Jew' as healthy and masculine, working the fields with his strong body in the historic homeland of Palestine/Eretz Israel. The transformation process was to be achieved in two ways: First, Zionists opposed anti-Semitic prejudices and distanced themselves from the image of a 'Diaspora Jew', which had emerged in inner-Jewish debates and was associated with backwardness, unmanliness, and physically weakness. Second, by mastering the environment and working on the soil of

² Gilbert Herbert, "A View of the Sea: Jews and the Maritime Tradition," in *Jewish Topographies: Visions of Space, Traditions of Place*, eds. Julia Brauch, Anna Lipphardt, and Alexandra Nocke (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2008), 181–199.

³ Kobi Cohen-Hattab, *Zionism's Maritime Revolution: The Yishuv's Hold on the Land of Israel's Sea and Shores, 1917–1948* (Berlin/Boston, MA: De Gruyter Oldenbourg, 2019).

⁴ Maoz Azaryahu, "The Formation of the 'Hebrew Sea' in Pre-state Israel," *Journal of Modern Jewish Studies* 7, no. 3 (2008), 251–267.

⁵ Todd Samuel Presner, *Muscular Judaism: The Jewish Body and the Politics of Regeneration* (London/New York, NY: Routledge 2007); Paula Hyman, *Gender and Assimilation in Modern Jewish History. The Role and Representations of Women* (Seattle, WA/London: University of Washington Press, 1995), 142.

⁶ Moshe Zimmermann, "Muscle Jews versus Nervous Jews," in *Emancipation through Muscles: Jews and Sports in Europe*, eds. Michael Brenner and Gideon Reuveni (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2006), 13–26; Hyman, *Gender and Assimilation*, 144–145.

Palestine/Eretz Israel, Zionists aimed to liberate the body, spirit, and Land – thereby fulfilling the Zionist dream of creating a ‘New Jew’.⁷

Not only did Jewish men feel “a need to distinguish themselves from women and to eliminate any hint of the feminine in their self-presentation”,⁸ but in Zionism the male Jew was also portrayed as the key figure, representing the physical engagement of the ‘New Jew’ in his historic homeland. Thus, “in seeking to create the New Jew, they also rejected the modern West’s equation of Jewishness with femininity, for the New Jew was clearly and unabashedly a masculine creature.”⁹

As a result, the negative representation of femininity as well as a strong emphasis on the land and its function within the male dominated Zionist project of creating a ‘New Jew’ contributed to a demotion of women in Zionism. Despite this backdrop, a growing female self-awareness and commitment to the national cause as well as the lived experience in the myriad roles women came to occupy in the Yishuv spurred the development of a “new Hebrew civil woman”.¹⁰ Shilo, who traces this development from the First Aliyah (1881–1903) to the founding of the State of Israel, stresses “the double or multiple image of the new Hebrew woman”. Whereas women in the First Aliyah fulfilled the tasks of wives and mothers, many women of the subsequent immigration waves arrived without a family and identified with national aims. During this time, the national sphere became more important than the domestic one. However, equal distribution of labor continued to be an “impossible mission”.¹¹

Nevertheless, as the ‘new Hebrew woman’ turned from the private to the public sphere, a new image of Jewish women in the Yishuv’s evolving society began to emerge. Especially the involvement in war efforts – some women became members of Palmach and Haganah – changed the picture. Consecutively, the “double image of the new Hebrew woman”, traditional and modern,

⁷ Yael Zerubavel, *Desert in the Promised Land* (Redwood City: Stanford University Press, 2018), 27–30.

⁸ Hyman, *Gender and Assimilation*, 153.

⁹ Hyman, *Gender and Assimilation*, 142.

¹⁰ Margalit Shilo, “The Double or Multiple Image of the New Hebrew Woman,” *Nashim: A Journal of Jewish Women’s Studies & Gender Issues* 1 (1998): 73–94, here 74.

¹¹ Shilo, “The Double or Multiple Image,” 80.

developed and became “part of a Zionist myth around the female counterpart of the new Hebrew man”.¹²

Based on Shilo’s portrayal of the “double or multiple image of the new Hebrew woman”, the article seeks to integrate women, participating in the Yishuv’s maritime realm, into discussions about evolving female Jewish identities in the Yishuv’s society and to trace their role in the national endeavor. In doing so, the article is structured in four parts. After analyzing the integration of maritime labor into the Zionist ideal of the ‘New Jew’ the article traces the contribution of Jewish women to the maritime sector. Following a biographical case study of Henrietta Diamond, chairperson of the Zebulun Seafaring Society, the article sheds light on her depiction and asks what her story might tell us about the participation and representation of women in the maritime realm in the Yishuv’s evolving society.

2 Integrating maritime work into the framework of the ‘New Jew’

A process which led to a more general sea-awareness and acknowledgment of maritime labor – including the fields of fishing, port work, and shipping – took place during the 1930s in the Yishuv. The influx of Jewish port workers after the opening of Haifa’s deep-water port and the establishment of Jewish fishing kibbutzim and maritime sports organizations were just a few examples of an expanding maritime sector. The *Yom haYam* (day of the sea) celebrations, maritime literature, and naval training in the context of different youth movements were additional signs for a beginning process of institutionalizing and nationalizing the maritime realm.¹³

With the opening of Tel Aviv’s port in 1936 and the increasing political conflicts following the Arab revolt of 1936–1939, shipping and port work gained even broader attention. The establishment of the first Jewish port and the participation in trafficking Jewish immigrants (*Ha’apalah*) and weapons to the Yishuv by sea changed the Zionist perspective towards the maritime

¹² Ines Sonder, “Das wollten wir. Ein neues Land ...’ Deutsche Zionistinnen als Pionierinnen in Palästina, 1897–1933,” *Medaon. Magazin für Jüdisches Leben in Forschung und Bildung* 8, no. 14 (2014), 1–14, here 5 (my own translation).

¹³ Cohen-Hattab, *Zionism’s Maritime Revolution*; Björn Siegel, “‘Going Down to the Sea’: David Ben-Gurion’s Maritime Turn and Jewish Migrations to Mandatory Palestine, 1933–1948,” *Revista Crítica de Ciências Sociais* 125 (2021): 129–146.

realm as well. Nevertheless, despite a growing awareness regarding the sea in general and the recognition of the importance of 'Hebrew labor' in the maritime field in particular, the sea-workers still had to fight for integration into the framework of Zionism, in which forming the body through working the soil was a major narrative.¹⁴

The idealization of a physically fit, male Jewish body and the Zionist attempt to shape the Jewish body through agricultural labor in Eretz Israel was only gradually expanded to the maritime realm. The value of sea work in relation to the efforts of the Jewish pioneers who worked on the fields was debated. When Ben-Gurion declared "Our land's sea awaits its redemption, just as the land awaited and awaits it",¹⁵ he linked the sea to Zionist discourses on the appropriation of Eretz Israel. However, it remained questionable whether the "redemption of the sea" would change the Jewish body in the same way as the "redemption of the land" was supposed to do. In 1936, the newspaper *Jüdisches Volksblatt* recapitulated: "Der Seemann ist ein völkisch genauso gesunder Typ wie der Bauer,"¹⁶ to emphasize the (physical) adequacy of seamen in the Jewish state-building project.

Since sport and body culture were central elements of the Zionist concept of the 'New Jew', physical training became a crucial factor, but unlike Max Nordau's original approach in the Yishuv, "it was not perceived as body development by means of gymnastics and sports, but as an ideal to be realized through Hebrew labor, pioneer work and the building of a military force."¹⁷ Early activities of sea sport organizations reveal the appropriation of Zionist discourses. The education of the youth and preparation for national and military duties went hand in hand with body development according to the role model of the 'New Jew'.¹⁸ Many of the participants in the illegal immigration operations were former members of maritime sport associations.¹⁹

¹⁴ Boaz Neumann, *Land and Desire in Early Zionism* (Waltham: Brandeis University Press, 2011), 49; Yael Zerubavel, *Desert in the Promised Land* (Redwood City: Stanford University Press, 2018), 27–33.

¹⁵ Ben-Gurion, "Towards the Sea," 7.

¹⁶ Dr. Emanuel Stein, "Das Jüdische Meer," *Jüdisches Volksblatt*, April 17, 1936, 3–4.

¹⁷ Haim Kaufman and Yair Galily, "Sport, Zionist Ideology and the State of Israel," *Sport in Society* 12 (2009): 1013–1027, here 1018.

¹⁸ Haim Kaufman, "Jewish Sports in the Diaspora, Yishuv, and Israel: Between Nationalism and Politics," *Israel Studies* 10, no. 2 (2005): 147–167; Cohen-Hattab, *Zionism's Maritime Revolution*, 240–248.

¹⁹ Shimshon Bober, ed., *A Navy: Stories from the Sea Companies* (Israel: Unknown Publisher, 2004; Hebrew).

Newspaper reports honored the pioneering effort and physically hard work in the fishing settlements and attempted to locate the fishermen in the Zionist model of a ‘New Jew’.²⁰ Placing the Jewish fishermen in the Zionist framework, the writers lobbied for a broader recognition of the fishermen’s arduous work and the unique character of their project. Eventually, Ben-Gurion was convinced that “[i]n water culture, [...] we will create a new type of Jew who complements and diversifies the type of Jews created in field work.”²¹

3 The Contribution of Jewish Women to the Maritime Sector

While the depiction of Jewish fishing pioneers or port workers was gradually embraced by Zionism and its leaders, the contribution and participation of Jewish women in the maritime sector was less acknowledged. Since most of the archetypical occupations – like those of fishermen, seafarers, ship owners, and port workers – were considered male professions, a gendered dominance in the field of maritime activities in the Yishuv’s Jewish community was broadly accepted by Zionist leaders. Such a male focused view on maritime work and labor was reinforced by the adoption of Zionist images of the ‘muscle Jew’.

While Zionist narratives heavily stressed the importance of the male Jewish body and linked this image to the cultivation of the land, they only gradually expanded the pioneer’s field of activity to sea work and rarely mentioned the occurrence of women in the new maritime sector. Nevertheless, women took part in the founding period of a Jewish maritime domain and were crucial in shaping the developing sector.

Already during the early years of activity, most of the water sport organizations had a women’s section. Zehava Gov, member of the first girls’ group of Hapoel’s sea sport division in Tel Aviv, described the initial skepticism against the new female group. She proudly recalled the weekly training at the Yarkon river, which became part of her weekend routine, the sailing courses and swimming lessons, the naval training courses, and the preparations for supporting *Ha’apalah* activities.²²

²⁰ “The Second Week of Plugat HaYam’s Aliyah to the Bay of Acre,” *Davar*, June 16, 1939, 4; “A night at the settlement site of Plugat HaYam,” *Davar*, October 11, 1939, 8.

²¹ Ben-Gurion, “Towards the Sea,” 7.

²² Bober, *A Navy*, 84–85.

In Haifa, the Sea Scouts of the Hebrew Reali School had several girls' groups and in 1932 more girls than boys were interested in becoming Sea Scouts.²³ Female members of Maccabi Haifa, which formed a successful swimming division already by the 1920s, took part in many water sport competitions and were trained by female instructors. Only their uniform distinguished them from the boys' groups.

In the fishing kibbutzim, female members were responsible for ordinary work. According to personal stories of women from Sdot Yam, they used to work in the kitchen or in the children's home, growing vegetables in the garden or washing clothes.²⁴ Aliza Levy describes the division of labor with a concise slogan: "By the slogan 'boys to the ships and girls to the pots' we were sent to Sdot Yam. And who then dared to rebel against the leadership of the movement?"²⁵

However, a few members decided to become fisherwomen. One of them, Tovah Netzer, worked for three years in repairing nets before she decided to pursue a different occupation:

The nets of the *Mikhmoret* ships were fixed in the port of Haifa, on the platform. I worked there too, even though it was hard to let me inside the port, which was a military zone during World War II and usually only men were allowed to enter. But Dr. Wydra, from the Fishery Department of the Agency, managed to get me an entrance permit – and I went inside. Since I was already next to the boat, I also wanted very much to work in fishing, on the "Aliza". The fishermen accepted my request – and so I became the first Hebrew fisherwoman (after 2000 years) at the Mediterranean Sea.²⁶

Describing the hardships of becoming a fisherwoman at Lake Hula, Gerda Cohen illustrates her experiences as a young woman in the fishing kibbutz Hulata during the 1930s. Beyond the hard work, Cohen encountered initiation rituals and arduous tasks in order to get accepted, being the only woman on the boat. Besides the hardships, her stories also entail depictions of the beauty

²³ Protocol about scout activities, Hebrew Reali School Archive, Haifa, 1931–1932, box no. 446-1.

²⁴ Several members complained how hard it was to clean the port workers' clothes, cf. Yisrael Meir, ed., *Between Fields and Sea: Stories of Sdot Yam's Veterans 1936–1956* (Sdot Yam: Unknown Publisher, 1985; Hebrew), 24.

²⁵ Meir, *Between Fields and Sea*, 27.

²⁶ Meir, *Between Fields and Sea*, 64.

of nature, revealing a romantic approach towards fishing. However, gendered aspects of the work entailed problems as well: “The boys did not want to work with girls, not because they were not good at work, they tried hard so usually they were really good. But they disturbed them. After all, they spent a great amount of time together on the boat, and it is quite an intimate closeness.”²⁷

4 Henrietta Diamond’s Seafaring Mission

In a sector in which the ubiquitous contributions of women were routinely made invisible, Henrietta Diamond presented a curious anomaly. In 1949, the newspaper *HaBoker* featured an article conspicuously titled “Mother of Hebrew Seafaring” that outlined Diamond’s importance:

At a time, when our youth did not even dream of maritime life; when the voice of seafaring pioneers merely aroused a weak echo in the Yishuv; when only poor Arab boats sailed our coasts – already Henrietta Diamond realised the great value of seafaring for our country, and by the beginning of the 1930s she was extending her helping hand to a small group of Jewish seafaring pioneers and laid the foundation of the Zebulun Seafaring Society.²⁸

Born Nye Beckerman in Frankfurt in 1876, Diamond took the name of her husband Salomon Sigismund after the couple got married in their early twenties. Shortly after the wedding, they moved to Leeds where Diamond built up a successful corset factory while her husband worked as the cantor of the Great Synagogue in Belgrave Street. She changed her name to Henrietta Diamond and became actively involved in Zionist activities in Leeds. She admired Herzl and expressed her devotion to Zionism in her work for the “Leeds Ladies Zionist Association”, which she had already founded in 1899 with Rebecca Umanskii, wife of Dr. Moses Umanskii, an attendee at the first Zionist Congress in Basel 1897. Diamond became involved in the establishment of Leeds’s first Jewish hospital, the Herzl Moser Hospital in 1905. Together with her close friend Umanskii she organized the Palestine Bazaar, an annual enterprise to collect funds for Zionist activities. Additionally, she served as an activist for

²⁷ Gerda Cohen, *To Live with a Lake* (Tel Aviv: Sifriyat Poalim, 2001; Hebrew), 64.

²⁸ Yitzhak Zeitlin, “Henrietta Diamond: Mother of Hebrew Seafaring,” *HaBoker*, November 25, 1949, 6.

the Jewish National Fund in London and was one of the founding members of the Women's International Zionist Organization (WIZO).²⁹

Her interest in Jewish seafaring started during her first trip to Palestine in 1930, when she saw a boat launch ceremony at the Yarkon river, organized by Emanuel Tuvim and Meir Gurvitz. The latter was the initiator of the Water Commission and an early supporter of the maritime sector.³⁰ In a speech to the Leeds Zionist Society she described the beginning of her commitment with the following words:

When I arrived in Tel Aviv in 1930, I looked at the sea-shore and blue sea, so perfectly undisturbed by any boat or activity of any kind and I was surprised, and, knowing England's busy shores I began to agitate for the sea and I said "whilst the Dead Sea is alive now, you have the dead sea outside your door".³¹

From then on, the wealthy businesswoman and Zionist activist dedicated herself to Jewish seafaring in general and to the support of the Zebulun Seafaring Society in particular. Full of confidence and commitment, she collected funds and soon became the chairperson of the young association, which emphasized three main goals in its self-description: a) connecting the new movement to ancient Jewish sea-history, b) preparing the Jewish community in Palestine for a future national maritime industry and trade, and c) becoming part of modern seafaring nations.³²

In the first years of her engagement Diamond achieved notable accomplishments.³³ Due to her large contributions, the association could finance the building of a docking station in Herzliya, open branches in Hadera and Netanya, and continuously expand its training centers in Tel Aviv and Haifa. Furthermore, Diamond was able to attract influential personalities to Zebulun and to collect huge amounts of donations. After more than 20 years of activism in England, she had established a network of well-known Zionists to

²⁹ Derek Fraser, *Leeds and Its Jewish Community: A History* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2019), 115–121; Zvi Herman, *Conquering a Route at Sea: Chronicles of Hebrew Shipping* (Tel Aviv: Hakibbutz Hameuchad, 1978; Hebrew), 80–87.

³⁰ Cohen-Hattab, *Zionism's Maritime Revolution*, 36–55.

³¹ Henrietta Diamond, Paper read at the Living Newspaper of the Leeds Zionist Society, July 31, 1941, Central Zionist Archives (hereafter CZA), folder Z4/31.483.

³² Zebulun Palestine Seafaring Society, Third Annual Report, December 1935, CZA, folder A114/93.

³³ Newspaper article regarding 10 years of Zebulun, cf. Yitzhak Zeitlin, "The first decade of Seafaring – the group Zebulun," *HaBoker*, October 25, 1940, 6.

whom she kept sending letters and information material. She was in contact with Chaim Weizmann, Simon Marks, Israel Rokach, Edmond de Rothschild, and the Marchioness Lady Reading, who became the international president of Zebulun. Diamond also corresponded with several fishing and seafaring experts like Emanuel Tuvim and Zeev Hayam in Mandatory Palestine or the German Captain Gustav Pietsch in Gdynia. The latter worked as instructor for the “Nautical and Fishery School Gordonia Maapilim” in Gdynia, which was affiliated with different *Hachshara* groups in Poland and Zebulun. She even initiated the establishment of several branches around the world and Zebulun training centers were to be found in England, South Africa, Poland, Canada, and the United States.³⁴

Based on Gustav Pietsch’s survey of the Palestinian coast, Diamond mobilized all her resources to reserve a plot of land near the crusader fortress of Atlit for a future fishing settlement. For that purpose, she traveled to Palestine in 1936. During her stay, Diamond met Robert Gottlieb of PICA³⁵ in Haifa and visited the site near Atlit. Following that visit, she reported to James de Rothschild, President of PICA, informing him about the important future role of this plot for the development of Jewish seafaring:

On arrival there, I found Mr. Gottlieb most kind and ready to help us and he advised me to go to Athlit and see it for myself. [...] Now is the moment to begin Marine Redemption, otherwise we fear we will be too late, as Jewry so often is. The only place where fishing boats could shelter is at Athlit and the Yarkon River at Tel Aviv. [...] With a concrete plan and place, we are sure Jewry will help financially and quickly to realise this important object, without which Palestine will remain small and unsafe. It is the sea that will triple the size of our nation at home.³⁶

Her approach of connecting nationhood and seafaring was certainly influenced by her British background. She admired the Royal Navy and imagined a future Jewish navy to be educated and trained in the same way. She voiced her admiration in a report of a meeting between Zebulun members who were trained in England and members of the British Navy: “At that moment, when

³⁴ “The Zebulun Seafaring Society. Activities in four countries,” *The Jewish Chronicle*, March 21, 1947.

³⁵ The Palestine Jewish Colonization Association (PICA) was founded in 1924 to purchase land for establishing Jewish settlements in Mandatory Palestine.

³⁶ Henrietta Diamond to James de Rothschild, Haifa, March 17, 1936, CZA, folder J15/13235.

our finest Jews mixed with the best among the British, a remarkable and unforgettable gathering, I could visualize what it would mean to have a closer union with the British Merchant Service.³⁷

The training and recruitment of Jews to the Royal Navy, among them several graduates of Zebulun, enabled the young boys to receive naval military training and to learn from high rank British officers. Emphasizing the courage of four Zebulun graduates who succeeded to save the freighter *El Fath* from fire during an air attack near Famagusta in August 1942, Admiral Cunningham, Commander-in-Chief of the Mediterranean Fleet, sent a letter of praise to the Zebulun branch in Tel Aviv.³⁸ The ties to the Royal Navy and the acknowledgment by Cunningham were very important to Diamond, who repeatedly referred to his letter.

Although Diamond was involved in the first attempts to connect the maritime realm to official Yishuv structures³⁹, it became difficult for Zebulun to survive as soon as new institutions were founded. On deck of the steamer *Tel Aviv*, on the way to the 19th Zionist congress in August 1935, influential members of the Yishuv set up institutional structures for maritime activities. Furthermore, the World Zionist Congress addressed different areas of sea work and declared its support of Jewish transport and shipping companies as well as the establishment of a Maritime and Fisheries Department within the Jewish Agency.⁴⁰ Zebulun's annual report at the end of the same year informs readers about the creation of the new department and a future co-operation and assistance.⁴¹

With the establishment of the Palestine Maritime League (PML) two years later, Zebulun had to fight for recognition and financial support.⁴² Connected

³⁷ Diamond, Paper, July 31, 1941, 1.

³⁸ Reprint from the Jewish Chronicle, "Praise from the Admiral. Jewish Sea Officers' courage noted.", January 16, 1942, CZA folder Z4/31.483.

³⁹ Correspondences between Diamond and Yitzhak Ben-Zvi reveal the interest of the Jewish Congress regarding seafaring and the establishment of a commission for the sea by the Jewish Agency, cf. Yitzhak Ben-Zvi to Henrietta Diamond, Letter, February 23, 1933, addressing interest by the Jewish National Council (JNC) about "National character" of marine training, CZA, folder J1/4456.6.

⁴⁰ Cohen-Hattab, *Zionism's Maritime Revolution*, 145 and 155–157.

⁴¹ Zebulun Palestine Seafaring Society, Report, December 1935, 1.

⁴² Minutes of a conversation between Mrs. Henrietta Diamond, Mr. Issy Bonn, Mr. Norman M. Jacobs and Mr. D. Meerovitch of the Maritime Department of the Jewish Agency (JA), August 6, 1945, CZA, folder J1/6765.

to the Jewish Agency, the PML's aim was to bring all seafaring organizations together and form an umbrella organization. The founding of the new institution was directed towards Zebulun, since it was the largest Jewish sea-organization at that time.⁴³

The growing influence of the PML became a disappointing experience for Diamond. She fought for recognition of Zebulun as a forerunner in the maritime field. She repeatedly emphasized that Zebulun was never connected to any political direction. "Zebulun's only fault is, that we do not go off the deep end about political colours."⁴⁴ Diamond kept sending letters to inform about Zebulun's activities, to get financial funding, and to complain about the vanishing support. "We are pennyless in Tel Aviv, our Haifa boys are in the street, having no club rooms and I must help from my small means and that is becoming very difficult."⁴⁵ Growing increasingly desperate about Zebulun's future, she repeatedly sent letters to Chaim Weizmann. Forwarding the letters to the Jewish Agency's treasurer, Eliezer Kaplan, Weizmann became annoyed by Diamond's persistence. By 1943, Weizmann's exasperation was palpable: "But if anything could be done to meet her wishes in some way, it would be a relief to me. I get letters – with voluminous annexes – from her rather frequently, and frankly, would like to be spared."⁴⁶

Diamond finally moved to Israel in 1949 and lived in the "Villa Zebulun" in Nahalat Yitzhak until her death in 1958. She continued to lobby for support and campaign for Zebulun. However, the ongoing marginalization of Zebulun took a personal toll on her and she became bitterly disappointed. In the end, Diamond was relegated to a nuisance by the men that took over the process of Zionist maritime institutionalization and her contribution is largely forgotten in contemporary Israeli historiography.

5 Public Representations of Henrietta Diamond

During thirty years of activism, Diamond became a public figure in the maritime realm. Yet, the representation of her in the public discourse remained occupied with her as a woman rather than as an activist for Jewish seafaring.

⁴³ Cohen-Hattab, *Zionism's Maritime Revolution*, 188.

⁴⁴ Henrietta Diamond to Chaim Weizmann, Letter, April 27, 1952, Israel State Archives (hereafter ISA), folder 2633.

⁴⁵ Diamond to Weizmann, April 27, 1952.

⁴⁶ Chaim Weizmann to Eliezer Kaplan (JA), Letter, August 24, 1943, CZA, folder Z4/31.483.

Diamond was repeatedly portrayed in the Yishuv press.⁴⁷ Besides several portrayals in Zebulun publications honoring her commitment, *HaBoker* published the article “Mother of Hebrew Seafaring” in 1949, and one year later, Yitzhak Zeitlin published an article concerning the 20th anniversary of Diamond’s activities. Descriptions of her person connect to her small and burly body, her formal dresses, her Britishness, and her gender. Through her public engagement, she gained the nickname “Mother of Hebrew Seafaring”.⁴⁸ Henrietta Diamond was not the only woman wearing this title. Lucy Borchardt, owner of the Jewish shipping company Fairplay, was called “Mother Borchardt” or “Mother of Jewish Seafaring”, while herself referring to the sailors who worked for the company as “her children”.⁴⁹ In a similar vein, Diamond’s activities became associated with motherhood and care while members of Zebulun were described as “her children” or “her boys”, as evidenced in report by the *Sunday Chronicle*:

A private navy, formed by a 60-years-old grey-haired British woman, is now serving with Admiral Sir Andrew Cunningham’s Naval Forces in the Mediterranean. Mrs. Henrietta Diamond founded the navy to train boys in Seamanship. All the time Mrs. Diamond supervised the maintenance of the navy from wherever in the world she was, and she is a great traveler. Mrs. Diamond waits at her home in Leeds for letters from “her boys” telling how they are helping to fight the Axis.⁵⁰

Evidently, the “Zebulun family” constituted a cohesive group identity and a bond that extended well beyond the initial years of training:

There is no Hebrew ship in which the disciples of Zebulun do not sail as sailors. They have reached adulthood, they have families of their own, but they have not

⁴⁷ Cf., for example, Yitzhak Zeitlin, “The first decade of Seafaring – the group Zebulun,” *HaBoker*, October 25, 1940, 6; Yitzhak Zeitlin, “Henrietta Diamond. Mother of Hebrew Seafaring,” *HaBoker*, November 25, 1949, 6; Yitzhak Zeitlin, “Henrietta Diamond. 20 years of maritime activities,” *HaBoker*, June 9, 1950, 5.

⁴⁸ Zeitlin, “Henrietta Diamond. Mother of Hebrew Seafaring”.

⁴⁹ Ina Lorenz, “Seefahrts-Hachschara in Hamburg (1935–1938). Lucy Borchardt: ‘Die einzige jüdische Reederin der Welt’,” in *Bewahren und Berichten. Festschrift für Hans Dieter Loose zum 60. Geburtstag*, ed. Hans Wilhelm Eckardt (Hamburg, Zeitschrift des Vereins für Hamburgische Geschichte 83, 1997), 445–472; Rebekka Großmann, “‘Mutter Borchardt’ – eine jüdische Reederin,” in *Hamburger Schlüsseldokumente zur deutsch-jüdischen Geschichte*, January 1, 2018, <https://dx.doi.org/10.23691/jgo:article-168.de.v1>.

⁵⁰ John Fishman, “Woman’s ‘private’ navy fights the Germans. Four of ‘her boys’ win praise from Admiral Cunningham.”, *Sunday Chronicle*, June 14, 1942.

forgotten Ms. Diamond. She is considered among them the “Mother of the Hebrew Sea”.⁵¹

Beyond the gendered characteristics of motherly care and – in the case of her interactions with Weizmann – vexing overreach attributed to her, Diamond was a conscious participant in Zionist women’s activism. Diamond made use of her ties to WIZO and her close relations with Henrietta Szold and Rebecca Umanskii, who were not part of the maritime realm but supported Diamond in her activism as a female Zionist.⁵²

After her death in 1958, Yitzhak Zeitlin commenced her obituary with the following episode, which reveals both her relevance and embeddedness in the Zionist project:

On the occasion of the founding of the Tel Aviv port, a glorious celebration was held in which a large crowd and also the heads of the settlement of those days participated. On the stage sat the late Menachem Ussishkin. He saw in the front row a woman, aged, a typical British. He got off the stage and invited her to sit at the presidential table. It was Henrietta Diamond, the pioneer of the Hebrew navy. Ussishkin knew her well from England. Her useful and extensive work in the maritime field was also well known to him.⁵³

6 Conclusion

Henrietta Diamond was one of the most prominent proponents of Jewish seafaring activities during the 1930s and 1940s through her engagement as chairperson of the Zebulun Seafaring Society. She corresponded with well-known Zionist figures and seafaring experts all over the world. Passionate about the topic and reluctant to accept the male-dominated world of Jewish seafaring, she became an activist in the maritime field and linked it to her preceding work in Zionist women organizations.

Diamond was influenced by a European-style imperial model, which implied for the Zionist movement to become sea-minded. Shaped by her British background, she understood the importance of seafaring from a practical and nationalist point of view. Despite her initial involvement in the institutional-

⁵¹ Zeitlin, “Henrietta Diamond. 20 Years of Maritime Activities”.

⁵² Letters between Henrietta Diamond and Henrietta Szold, cf. CZA folder J1/4456/6.

⁵³ Yitzhak Zeitlin, “Henrietta Diamond. Of blessed memory,” *Haaretz*, August 7, 1958, 4.

ization and politicization of the maritime realm, she fell victim to that very process in the end.

However, her activism generally remained out of touch with the situation of most female actors in the Yishuv's maritime domain, who fought for recognition in the new maritime sector. Even though she wore the title "Mother of Jewish Seafaring" with pride and referred to the Zebulun members as her "boys", the focus on motherhood in fact subverted her achievements. The story of Henrietta Diamond illustrates the situation of women in the maritime sector and reveals a gap between the perspective of a western European, upper-class feminist woman and that of female members of maritime sports and training organizations or fishing kibbutzim, who were part of a society in which agricultural work and the ideal type of a physically strong male body were crucial elements. Despite widespread female participation in sport organizations and fishing cooperatives, most of the leading positions were filled with men. As a result, women's actual contributions were largely forgotten and marginalized in Zionist maritime historiography.

Women in the maritime realm had to assert themselves in two respects: They had to fight for support of their work in relation to their male coworkers and were confronted with a more general lack of recognition for their maritime labor. As Diamond's case highlights, this dual marginalization was also at play at the level of political activism and Zionist institution-building. Only a few female participants in Zionism's maritime activities are commemorated today and usually not for their work in building up the new sector.⁵⁴ Thus, uncovering Henrietta Diamond's struggle to establish Zebulun as the primary institution of Jewish seafaring offers valuable insights into an often neglected aspect of the Zionist project and the gendered dynamics at play. Additionally, the case underscores the benefit and urgency of further research integrating the often disjunct agendas of Jewish maritime history and gender studies.⁵⁵

⁵⁴ Commemorated for her engagement as a paratrooper during World War II, Hannah Szenes became a symbol of the new society. Unbeknownst to most, she was also involved in the establishment of the Fishing Kibbutz Sdot Yam, cf. Shilo, "The Double or Multiple Image," 91.

⁵⁵ For their help, input, and engagement with this article, I want to thank David Bayer and Björn Siegel as well as Erez Gitai for pointing my interest to the female members of the Reali School's Sea Scouts in Haifa.