

# Pioneers – a Page in the History of Veterinary Medicine in Israel

## A. Shimshony

Former Chief Veterinary Officer and Director of the Israel Veterinary Services and Animal Health

On the 24<sup>th</sup> of July 1922, almost four years after the conquest of Palestine from the Turks by the "Egyptian Expeditionary Force" under the command of Sir Edmund Allenby, the Council of the League of Nations in Geneva proclaimed the British Mandate over Palestine. A population census at the time revealed about 700,000 individuals living in Palestine-Israel of which 70,000 were Jewish. At the time there were 17 veterinarians of which 7 were employed full-time in the government veterinary service: two British veterinarians (one of them, G. M. Smith, served as the Chief Veterinary Officer), four Arabs (in Jaffa, Nabulus, Jerusalem and Nazareth) and one Jew (in Haifa). Three other veterinarians served the government on a part-time basis of whom two were Jewish and one was Greek. Four other Jewish veterinarians worked privately giving service to farm animals in Jewish agricultural settlements. In addition there were a further two Egyptian veterinarians and one Greek.

On Friday, the 7<sup>th</sup> of July 1922, at dawn, Dr. Shlomo (Zigmund) Freund set out by horse from his home in Yavniel, in the Lower Galilee; however this morning it was not his intention to visit farms in Yavniel and its surroundings, rather he rode to the train station in order to reach Haifa. He was invited to attend a meeting to discuss the establishment of a Jewish Veterinary Association in the Land of Israel. Every morning a train set out from Tzemach to Haifa, a journey which lasted for about 5 hours. As he approached Degania, about 2 kilometers from Tzemach the 27 year-old horse rider realized he had missed the train and noticed the a long line of coaches carrying agricultural products of the Jordan Valley Settlements pass by on its way to Haifa.

The meeting thus started on the 8<sup>th</sup> of July 1922 at the home of Dr. Yitzhak Samsonoff at 10 Bat Galim Boulevard, in the absence of Dr. Freund. There were four participants, the host and three others: Dr. Yosef Shem-Tov (Sinto), Dr. Moshe Caspi (Serebriski), and Dr. Yakov Neriah (Kavkewitz) who initiated the meeting together with Samsonoff. They de-

cidated unanimously on Sunday the 9<sup>th</sup> of July on the resolution to establish "The Association of Jewish Veterinarians in the Land of Israel", and to join as a veterinary section "with autonomous rights regarding their profession" with the "Hebrew Medical Association in Palestine/Eretz Israel". The decision was published in the Medical Association Journal and in the agricultural journal "HaSadeh". In Haifa, in November of 1928, a general assembly of the association decided to break away from the Medical Association and form a separate autonomous group called "The Palestine Veterinary Surgeons Association", to be later renamed the "Israel Veterinary Medical Association".

A brief history of these five pioneer veterinarians is presented below:

**Dr. Yosef Shem-Tov** arrived in Palestine in 1904. He was born in 1879 in Ceres, near Saloniki, which was still under Ottoman rule. He completed his veterinary studies in 1900 in Istanbul. In 1903 an epidemic of Rinderpest broke out in Palestine. When in 1904 the disease began to affect the herds of the Sultan, Dr. Shem-Tov was sent from Istanbul to investigate the outbreak and assist in preventing its continued spread.

He found that the disease was imported into Palestine from cattle which arrived at Jaffa port from Turkey and not as presumed previously, from Egypt and Sudan, and then spread from the market in Lod. In order to protect the animals it was customary to inject cattle with antiserum. The advice of the central office in Istanbul was to inject 25 milliliters for each bovine; however Dr. Shem-Tov found through experience that this quantity did not give adequate protection to local cattle and instead he decided to inject a dose of 100 milliliters per animal. His decision was based on information that he had received from observations and experiments carried out in Sudan and Egypt by the German scientist Dr. Robert Koch who recommended the use of a higher dose of antiserum. And so for posterity, in 1904, a photographer

documented Dr. Shem-Tov, with the help of his assistant, injecting antiserum to a cow from Silwan (Kefar haShiloah).

Following the eradication of the epidemic he decided to stay on in Jerusalem and served as a veterinarian in the Turkish army during World War I – first as the director of a hospital in Palestine for camels and following that he spent one year in Galipoli. Following the British conquest of Palestine, he joined the veterinary services of the Mandatorial Government on a part-time basis. At the same time he worked in the Jerusalem SPCA. In July 1922 he attended the meeting in Haifa (Bat Galim). Dr. Shem-Tov retired in 1935 and passed away in 1967 at the age of 88 years.

The author Shai Agnon – Nobel Prize laureate for literature – dedicated one of his stories to Dr. Shem-Tov which was printed in 1972 on the back cover of the Jubilee edition of the Israel Veterinary Medicine Association”.

The second Jewish veterinarian in Palestine (1914) was **Dr. Itzhak Samsonoff**. He emigrated with his parents from Gomel in White Russia (Belorussia) in 1890, when he was just nine years old. He was the youngest of six children. The family settled in Hadera on land that was purchased while still in Russia from the organization Hovevei Zion, (Lovers of Zion). After completing agricultural school at Mikveh Yisrael, he was sent by the representatives of the philanthropist and supporter of Jewish settlement in Palestine, Baron Edmund Rothschild, to study veterinary medicine in École Vétérinaire de Maisons-Alfort, Paris, France. In 1909 he returned and started working on the settlements of the Baron. Besides Hebrew he was fluent in Yiddish, Arabic, Turkish, French and English which helped him in communicating with the Jewish farmers, Arab Felahin, Bedouins, the Turkish authorities, the administrators of the Baron (who wrote in French) and later on with the British.

During his first years of activity, an important area of his work was the handling and control of Rinderpest among cattle. In 1910 the disease caused extensive losses to the settlement of Petach Tikwa, and it was impossible to acquire antiserum, the only treatment that was used as a prophylactic for the disease at the time. Dr. Samsonoff initiated the purchase of cattle in order to produce the antiserum himself in Petach Tikwa. Knowing that there was no antiserum to be purchased, he approached the representative of the Baron, Yoel (Jules) Rosenhak, sending him a telegram written in French to his office in Nazareth asking him to urgently assist in the finance of cattle to produce Rinderpest antiserum.

His work was a great help to the farmers. At the outbreak of World War I he enlisted to the army and served as a captain in the Turkish army and lived in Damascus with his family. He served as the director and veterinarian of the horse and mule unit of the Turkish army in Damascus. Towards the end of the Turkish rule he was accused of espionage in favor of France and England and was imprisoned in Damascus. This was the period during which the underground movement "Nili" and members of the Aharonson family were active. A fellow prisoner was Dr. Ticho, the famous ophthalmologist. Towards the end of the war he was released due to lack of evidence and returned to this post. After the war he returned to live with his family in Hadera and renewed his work at the Baron's settlements (PIKA) as a private veterinarian in the north of the country. In 1921 he joined the British mandate government services in a full time capacity as a "regional veterinary officer" of Haifa and its suburbs, while still serving the settlements in the Galilee and the Shomron, until his retirement in 1939. He was the most senior among the Jewish veterinarians serving in the government. Dr. Samsonoff was among the founders of Bat Galim neighborhood in Haifa in the years 1921-1922. It was at his home that the meeting was held in July 1922 that resulted in the establishment of the Jewish Veterinary Association for which he served as chairman from 1922 to 1930. He passed away in 1944 at the age of 62.

**Dr. Moshe Caspi (Serebriski)** was the third participant at the Bat Galim meeting. He started working in Palestine in 1914. He was born in the Ukraine in 1895. After completing elementary school where he received a traditional education, he was sent to Warsaw (Poland) where he completed his studies at the gymnasium. Towards the end of his studies he volunteered to the Russian Czar Army to participate in the Japanese-Russian War. He served in Vladivostok and after the war returned to Warsaw, and completed his studies in Veterinary Medicine in 1912. He was sent to Tomsk to attend to the outbreak of Rinderpest and contagious bovine pleuropneumonia. During the Beiliss Blood libel trial he fell under the influence of Ze'ev Jabotinsky and his Zionist teaching. In 1914 he sailed with his wife on the "Odessa 2" for Palestine. On the way to Palestine during a stop at Istanbul, Moshe Shertok (Sharett) boarded the ship. Under the influence of Moshe Sharett he changed his name from Serebriski to the Hebrew name Caspi. In the beginning of his professional life in Palestine he served as a veterinarian for the settlements of

Hulda, Ben Shemen, Gadera, Ekron and others. From 1914 at the request of Eliyahu Krauze, principal of the Mikveh Israel agricultural school, he served as a veterinarian and teacher in zootechnology and so he continued until 1926. We can learn about the nature of his life during the first years in Palestine from his letters to Arthur Ruppin "The Father of Zionist Settlement" who was head of the "Land of Israel Office" of the Zionist organization in Jaffa, directing the settlement activities of the Zionist movement.

During the course of the First World War, like all foreign residents, Dr. Caspi faced expulsion, however he was spared as he had residence in Mikveh Yisrael and served the Turkish army. After the British occupation he was employed on a part-time basis by the military government to attend to the problem of Rinderpest. Dr. Caspi was the first veterinarian to open a private clinic in Jaffa and Tel Aviv for the treatment of working horses, dairy cattle and also some dogs. For those times, he ran a modern clinic and hospital situated in the Florintine suburb of Tel Aviv of today.

In 1918 Dr. Caspi was requested by the settlement authorities to start a "School for Veterinary Assistants". The school was functional for two terms with 15 students who were supported by the "Board of Deputies" (a body of 11 Zionist members that was established following the Balfour Declaration and was active between 1918 to 1921. This body was the predecessor of the "National Council"). A great proportion of the students of Caspi applied to study veterinary medicine overseas, including Sturman (who was later the chief veterinarian of the "Hachaklait"), Ashkenazi, Portugali, Ben-Yosef and others.

Between 1919 to 1926 Caspi served as the veterinarian at the abattoir in Jaffa. After the establishment of Tel Aviv as a city an abattoir was built on Yarkon Street; Dr. Caspi was appointed the City Veterinarian and Director of the abattoir where he worked from 1926 to 1928. During the years 1939 to 1960 he was the City Veterinarian for Natanya after which he retired. He son Baruch followed in his footsteps, studied veterinary medicine in Edinburgh, Scotland and continued running his father's clinic.

Dr. Caspi was active in the Israel Veterinary Association all of his professional life and passed away in 1969 at the age of 85.

The fourth Jewish veterinarian to arrive in Palestine was **Dr. Shlomo (Zigmund) Freund**. Dr. Freund was born in 1895 in the region of Silesia in Germany. In his youth he wanted

to learn medicine, but like anyone who planned to immigrate to the Land of Israel preferred to study a profession which would contribute to the settlements and he therefore decided on Veterinary Medicine. He completed his studies in 1921 in Munich. In the same year it was decided by the "Hachaklait" (which was established in 1919) to employ qualified veterinarians and not to rely on "veterinary assistants". At Dr. Ruppin's recommendation Dr. Freund was accepted to the "Hachaklait". He arrived in Palestine in December 1921 and settled with his family in Yavniel. There he received a two bedroom house and a stable for a horse which would serve him as his means of transport for his work in the Lower Galilee. There he learnt about the problems facing veterinarians: management, clinical problems and epidemiology. After four years of work in the Lower Galilee he moved to Tel Aviv there he continued working for settlements in the area and also with the "Hachaklait". He taught zootechnology at the agricultural schools of Ben Shemen and Mikveh Yisrael. He often wrote on subjects in veterinary medicine; until 1923 he published a series of articles in the journal "Sadeh" on the subject of "Ticks and the fight against them". In 1936 he published a book "Farm Economics" which dealt with the anatomy of domestic animals, their hygiene and a few diseases. In 1939 the second part of his book was published. The book dealt with problems of reproduction, obstetrics and the care of the newborn. Dr. Freund considered public information and post-graduate education to be of utmost importance to the veterinary profession and wrote many articles even after his retirement in 1960, some under the pseudo name of "Amir's Grandfather" ("Saba shel Amir").

In 1922 he co-founded the veterinary section within the Medical Association and in 1928 was one of the main speakers at the meeting to decide on the establishment of an independent veterinary organization. He served as Chairman of the organization from 1930 to 1939 and was the first editor of the organization's Journal of Veterinary Medicine which made its first appearance in 1939 and which became the Israel Journal of Veterinary Medicine (Refuah Veterinarith) of today.

In 1941 Dr. Freund was appointed to head the "Hachaklait" and carried out this task with great success controlling both the diseases brucellosis and tuberculosis in cattle, two diseases which the British mandate authorities were, apparently, responsible for eliminating. In 1943, during the Second World War, his son Eli, who volunteered to serve in the British army fighting the Nazis, was killed in

Sicily. Dr. Freund attached his son's name to the family name – Avieli (“Eli’s father”). In 1946 he travelled to Holland to enlist the help of Dr. Herman Frankel to prepare a vaccine against Foot-and-Mouth disease, a vaccine which was not available previously in the country. He promoted the opening of a central veterinary institute and even in these early years strongly supported the idea of opening a school of veterinary medicine in Israel.

With the establishment of the State of Israel, Dr. Freund was appointed to become the Director of Livestock Department at the Ministry of Agriculture, including the Veterinary Services, as well as Chief Veterinary Officer. After his retirement in 1960 the “Veterinary Services and Animal Health” department became a separate unit at the Ministry of Agriculture.

Dr. Freund put Israel on the world veterinary map. He was honorary president of the Israel Veterinary Medical Association and after his retirement served as an advisor for developing countries (Liberia).

The early support by Dr. Freund for the establishment of a Veterinary School grew stronger and in honor of the Jubilee of the Israel Veterinary Medical Association in 1972, Dr. Freund contributed an article entitled “Fifty years of the Veterinary Medical Association in Israel.”

Dr. Freund's enthusiasm for the profession never faded and this is illustrated in an episode described by Dr. Ami Neriah in his book “Veterinary Medicine in Israel”. This anecdote demonstrates his passion as well as his sense of humor:

“One day the pensioner Freund visits the pensioner Gvati (former Minister of Agriculture): Gvati asks whether Freund is still involved in the profession? Yes, answers Freund, once a month I visit the library at the Veterinary Institute. Are there any innovations? Gvati asked. I will tell you, replied Freund: If I read something that I don't understand – that is something new!”

Dr. Freund died in 1988 at the age of 93 and was buried in Yavniel.

The fifth in this group was **Dr. Yakov Neriah (Kavkevitz)** who immigrated to Palestine and started working in 1922. He was born in 1892 in the city of Lomzha in Poland. He began his veterinary studies in Warsaw in 1912. In 1915 because of the war, the veterinary school moved to the University of Novocherkassk in Russia. After three years of interruption in his studies during which he worked at the abattoir in Lomzha and participated in wide ranging cultural and social Zionist activities, he completed his veterinary studies in Novocherkassk and received his diploma in

1919. At first he worked as a government veterinarian in Lomzha and afterwards in Novogrudok (Vilnius district). In 1921 he joined the Polish army where he became a second lieutenant (Podporucznik). In February 1922 he fulfilled his old dream and moved to Palestine. After a few months he was employed by the “Hachaklait” working in the Judean and Jerusalem areas. In 1925 he went to Italy and Germany to study zootechnology. On his return he served as an instructor in veterinary-zootechnology on farms on behalf of the experimental stations of the Zionist executive. In 1930 he moved to Magdiel and three years later to Kfar Malall. He was a veterinarian of the “Hachaklait” in the area of the Sharon. At first he used a donkey for transport but when his practice area was extended his transport vehicle was upgraded to a car.

Since his arrival in Israel Neriah was involved in teaching, lecturing and writing professional articles to journals, covering a wide range of subjects including farm animal diseases, nutrition and zootechnology. He contributed new Hebrew terms to the professional terminology. Dr. Neriah was active in promoting the establishment of the Israel Veterinary Association and was active, with Dr. Samsonoff, at the foundation meeting. He served as the secretary of the Veterinary association from its initiation up until 1939 when he was elected as the Chairman, a position he held until his death in 1945 when he was hit by a British army car on its way to a farm. He was 53 years of age.

Since 1942, Dr. Neriah edited the second series of the journal “Refuah Veterinarith”. The significance of his activities, his broad perspective and his professional and organizational efforts – and this in an organization of less than 90 members – can be seen when one looks at the contents of the editions of the Journal.

This review would not have been possible without relying on the information from the two following sources:

## REFERENCES:

1. Neriah, A.: Veterinary Medicine in Eretz-Israel – Fifty years of veterinary Medicine (1917-1967). Published by the Cattle Breeders Association, 2001
2. Meltzer, D.: The History of Veterinary Medicine in Israel during the Last Phase of Ottoman Period (1870-1917). Dissertation for the degree of Doctor of Veterinary Medicine. Koret School of Veterinary Medicine. The Hebrew University of Jerusalem, 1995.

Both publications were supported by the late Shlomo Dori, the founder and director of the Israel Dairy Museum on Kibbutz Yifat.