

MEDITERRANEAN HISTORY AND THE HISTORY OF THE MEDITERRANEAN: FURTHER REFLECTIONS

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This article attempts to explain the reasons why the Mediterranean topos and its repertoire have, since the seventies, become popular in the Israeli public discourse, along with a growing interest in the general history of the Mediterranean countries and of the Jews in the Mediterranean region.

The article asserts that the interest in the history of the Mediterranean stems from a desire to assign Israel to an historical region, which is neither 'Western' nor 'Oriental', in which symbiotic relationships have long existed between the Jews and their environment. The influence of the Romantic-idealistic concept of culture underlies this trend. However results mainly from the desire to characterise both actual and desired cultural traits in an ambiguous manner, since the notion of 'Mediterranean' provides definitions and characterisations that are not identified with any real civilisation and culture, and hence are convenient terms.

'The General observed that "the Mediterranean would be a noble subject for a poem"'

The Portable Johnson by Boswell, N.Y. 1947. Edited and with an introduction by L. Kronenberger, p. 238

In the December 1988 issue of *Mediterranean Historical Review*, volume 3, Number 2, I published an article entitled *The Mediterranean World and "Mediterraneanism": The Origins, Meaning, and Application of a Geo-cultural Notion in Israel*.¹ This article was written in response to the growing interest in the history of Mediterranean countries exhibited by the educated Israeli public in the eighties. However, it was actually more in reaction to the fact that a new term—'Mediterranean culture'—had become firmly established in Israeli public discourse. In that article I proposed a theoretical clarification of the nature of the term and traced some of its roots, and also tried to explain why this concept was accepted into the Israeli public discourse and become so popular and useful. The responses to my article provided further proof of the extent to which this concept has been internalised and how self-evident the topos of 'Mediterraneanism' has become.

It seems to me that a brief survey of the argument may shed light not only on the basic assumptions and concepts employed but also on the tension internalised in the debate—a tension between a view of 'culture' as a totality of sub-cultures living side by side and a view of 'culture' as a totality with a common integrative system of values. In my view, it may also cast light on the opposition between those who view 'culture' primarily as an aggregate of various constituents: dress, food, etc. (real culture), and those who view it first and foremost as a system of common values (value culture).

In my above-mentioned article, I briefly reviewed the history of the Mediterranean

topos as a product of the imagination of people who came to it from north of the Alps. I asserted that in the climatic morphology, from the Hellenistic era to the end of the nineteenth century, the Mediterranean was not perceived as one climatic and geo-cultural region. It first appeared as a uniform and cohesive framework in the writings of small groups of intellectuals and men of letters. The issue of when the Mediterranean 'became conscious of itself', and for what purpose, cannot be limited to a discussion of intellectual activity describing the Mediterranean as a coherent region and devoting attention to all of its parts and the interactions between them.² It must survey the way in which people and cultures define themselves and their traits. This calls for a comparative cultural study of the cultural-public discourse in all the Mediterranean countries.

Interest in the history of countries bordering on the Mediterranean is not only part of the public discourse, but has also attracted growing attention in academic circles. One manifestation of this interest in the history of the Mediterranean is the series of academic conferences and public lectures held in various settings and among diverse circles. At Tel Aviv University there is an institute and a chair in the study of the history and culture of the Jewry of Salonica and Greece, and several books have been published under its auspices, most recently, Minna Rozen's book, *In the Mediterranean Routes: the Jewish Spanish Diaspora from the Sixteenth to Eighteenth Centuries* (1993).³ In March 1990, the Ben Zvi Institute for Study of Jewish Communities in the Orient (in Jerusalem) organized a conference of scholars to mark the fifth year since the passing of Professor S. D. Goiten. The conference was devoted to the subject of Mediterranean society (from the seventh to the seventeenth century).⁴ Another conference was held at Tel Aviv University on 'Jews, Christians and Muslims in the Mediterranean World after 1492'.⁵ In recent years, several lecture series have been given under the general heading 'The Mediterranean Basin' or 'Palestine and the Mediterranean Basin'. These lectures actually dealt with various aspects of the history of the countries bordering on the Mediterranean. The summer 1990 issue of *Zmanim*, a historical quarterly for the educated public, was devoted to the history and cultures of the Mediterranean lands. It contained articles on subjects such as 'Braudel's Sea Revisited', 'Goitein and his Mediterranean Society', 'A City in Search of Identity', and others.⁶ In 1992, Tel Aviv University began teaching the history of Mediterranean countries as a part-time academic programme, and steps have been taken to establish an institute on Mediterranean history, centering on the *Mediterranean Historical Review* (which first appeared on June 1986). A series that was shown on Israeli television entitled 'The Encircled Sea: The Mediterranean Maritime Civilisation'⁷ aroused wide interest. Several years earlier, a collection of articles appeared, called *The Geography of the Mediterranean Basin* (edited by Yehuda Karmon, Avshalom Shmueli and Gabriel Horowitz, 1983), containing articles written from an historical, geographical historical and ecological viewpoint. At Haifa University for several years now there has been an institute for the study of maritime civilisations. In addition, a literary journal has appeared in Israel entitled *Apirion: Cultural and Social Review*, with the declared aim of publishing *belles-lettres* and articles that will give 'expression to the Mediterranean orientation in works created in Israel that are linked to the Jewish heritage', and to 'provide a platform for Middle Eastern and Mediterranean creators for the purpose of promoting an acquaintance and understanding with our neighbours'. Consequently, *Apirion* also publishes work written by authors from Arab countries, France, Spain, Italy, Greece, and others. Another literary journal, whose editorial board is in Israel but which is

published in France, is called *Levant*. Thus the Israeli academic researcher has joined in an ongoing international activity in various centres for the study of Mediterranean lands and their culture.⁸ In addition to all this local activity, Israeli representatives participate in various 'Mediterranean' conferences, particularly those focusing on 'Mediterranean literature' or 'Mediterranean cinema', which have been held in recent years.⁹

Despite this flourishing interest in the subject, one can hardly speak of any research activity of an extraordinary nature or one encompassing an integrative conception. Most of the articles published in Israel in recent years have dealt with the history of the Jews in Mediterranean lands or with the histories of various countries. As already suggested, one could actually include under the new broad general heading any discussion on each of the countries termed 'Mediterranean countries,' from Spain and France, through the Maghreb countries and Egypt, Italy, Turkey and Greece, Israel and others. Consequently, in lectures on the 'history of the Mediterranean' we will find discussions of subjects that would normally fall under the category of 'history of Palestine', 'history of the Middle East' or of the Ottoman Empire, 'southern Europe' and the like. A comparative discussion of social or political developments in the various Mediterranean countries also comes under the heading 'Mediterranean'.¹⁰ However, not a single comprehensive book with an integrative orientation, like those existing in European languages,¹¹ has been published in Hebrew.

Why do Israeli scholars show so much interest in Mediterranean countries? First, the development of historical research in the West has clearly exerted its influence here. About fifty years ago there was hardly a single historical or geographical writing describing the 'Mediterranean region' as one distinct, independent unit, while after World War I, such literature became a widespread historiographical branch. Unquestionably, leaving aside political and cultural orientations, this is a distinct manifestation of the influence of the 'Annales' school on the history of the Mediterranean as a subject that has enriched research on the history of the Mediterranean from its advent, from the standpoint of its long duration. However, in the Israeli case, two other trends were added to the Annales influence. The first, a marginal one, was influenced by the literature dealing with the history of the (Semite) Phoenicians in the Mediterranean, and attempted to prove that close commercial and cultural ties existed in the Eastern Mediterranean basin between the Phoenicians and the Jews.¹² The second, major, trend was one of expanding and deepening research on Jewish society in the Mediterranean countries from the Muslim conquest to the modern era (including the history of the Jews of Byzantium and Italy and the dispersal of Spanish Jewry after the exile from Spain). Unquestionably, the major influence on this trend was Goiten's monumental work *A Mediterranean Society*; however, no less influential were socio-cultural currents in Israel that called for the deepening of knowledge about the history of 'non-Ashkenazi' Jewry. Zvi Ankori, for example, was writing in this spirit when he stated 'I am deliberately using, also with regard to Jews, the term "Mediterranean" rather than "Palestinian". The whole Mediterranean world served as the setting for Jewry's ancient and medieval history [...]. It is the vicissitudes of the Mediterranean world as a whole, and not merely of its eastern corner, that affected and conditioned from remote antiquity to our own day the rise, decline, and rise again of Jewry's political, economic, and intellectual creativity.' Ankori adds that the Jews are a 'Mediterranean people' and if there is no Jewish consciousness of Mediterranean existence, this is because Jewish history is taught and studied with a distinctly European

orientation, which never took account of the Mediterranean Jewish community and its extensions which were not only closely interconnected but also belonged to the same world.¹³ Recent studies, however, emphasise the diversity of Mediterranean Jewry and the tensions between its various components. Rather than a homogeneous Jewry, the Jews living around the Mediterranean were 'Mediterranean trade communities'.¹⁴ The special character of the Jewish communities around the Mediterranean (with the exception of Spain and France) resulted from the character of the host cultures of the countries in which they lived (countries in which no national consciousness or national state had developed) in Italy, under Ottoman rule and in Islamic countries, as well as from the nature of the commercial ties between the various parts of the Mediterranean region.

Solely on the basis of all of this academic and public attention, one cannot conclude that the interest in the history and culture of the Mediterranean lands in Israel has become a cultural phenomenon. What has turned the interest in the Mediterranean into a cultural phenomenon (or a phenomenon in culture) is the widespread use of the term. In the last decade I have seen it appear with ever-growing intensity as an everyday phenomenon and in diverse contexts as signifying both an idea of culture (as well as an 'ideal culture') and a model of culture. This model is based primarily on a topos of antithesis comprising a set repertoire of attributes, both positive and negative. Its popularity and widespread use is a new phenomenon that has become entrenched in the last decade and hardly existed prior to it.

The penetration of the new topos into the Israeli public discourse¹⁵ is worthy of note. The use of this topic and its repertoire have nearly become an everyday phenomenon. I will cite only a few examples from the daily press. 'We are Mediterranean people, desirous of generosity from whoever can provide us with strength, vitality and excitement' (*Tel Aviv*, 1.11.91). The Mediterranean youth orchestra performs in a manner characterised by strict discipline and very 'European' musical practices, 'that are contradictory to everything one might think of in connection with discipline and work habits when speaking of the "Mediterranean" character' (*Ha-Aretz*, 29.7.91). 'In our Mediterranean ambience, the boundaries between the public, functional self that comes into contact with the environment, and the personal self are blurred, and that's why we show so little tolerance, even outwardly' (*Davar*, 15.1.93). 'The aubergine—the vegetable considered the most "Mediterranean"—loses some of its qualities when it gets a "Mediterranean" treatment' (*Yedioth Aharonoth*, 19.10.90). 'Perhaps under Lawrence Durrell's influence [...] people all over the world have conjured up the idea of the perfect Mediterranean restaurant. This ideal place is always whitewashed [...]' (*Ha-Aretz*, 18.6.91). 'It is surprising to find a Mediterranean blend in the work of a Scandinavian director [...] a blend of comic and tragic, humorous and sentimental, sad and amusing' (*Yedioth Aharonoth*, 2.9.91).

I could cite many other examples, just from the past few years, of the nearly daily use of the term in every imaginable context. This widespread use of the term and the definition of various cultural traits as 'Mediterranean' led the Israeli Minister of Culture (in 1993) to state that 'today the consumption of Mediterranean culture has made it the general culture, confuting the perception of European culture as a "high" culture'.¹⁶ In fact, music is the only type of artistic creation to which distinctively 'Mediterranean' characteristics were attributed. The term first appeared in Max Brod's book *Israeli Music* (1951). Influenced by Nietzsche, Brod regarded Mediterranean music as a reflection of the glowing light of the Mediterranean air; music aspiring to

clarity, rhythmic simplicity, a minimum of dynamics and timbres and a tendency towards a clear texture.¹⁷ Since the seventies, the term 'Mediterranean music' has referred to popular or quasi-popular music from the various Mediterranean countries. The 'Mediterranean music' played on radio programmes (one of which is called 'Mediterranean mix') is songs from Turkey and Greece, Neapolitan songs and 'Oriental music' from Egypt.

This 'Mediterranean' repertoire is based on two major principles:

1. A repertoire relating to features of the natural environment (the sun, the sea, the 'colour of the landscape') or to details of material culture (fauna and flora, foodstuffs, and the like).
2. Characteristics of human behaviour and of a singular human code. The people of the 'Mediterranean world', according to this characterisation, are creative, sensual, superficial, impatient, or, alternatively, amicable, tolerant, and the like.

The topos and its repertoire of connotations and stereotypes has penetrated the Israeli public discourse and its presence is very palpable.¹⁸

What I would like to ask is: is this a case in which academic research has influenced and inspired public discourse by creating a new historical perspective and a reconstruction of cultural history that was unknown heretofore? There is unquestionably a certain link between the scholarly interest and the use and abuse of the term as a buzzword that has come into common use in the Israeli public discourse. But mainly we are confronting a 'case in culture' that enables one to follow closely the appearance of a new term in the realm of culture and the process of its reception and use. Why has 'Mediterraneanism' been perceived as a broad cultural reality that one ought to aspire to express or to realise, and to become 'part of' as an element of affinity and of identity, and as a category according to which diverse phenomena of the cultural system are scrutinized in Israel?

In the thirties, the main motivation for describing Jewish history in the Mediterranean context was in order to encourage maritime activity. From the seventies, the motivations had changed. The major one was the desire to determine the geo-cultural affiliation of Israeli society. The basic assumption underlying this desire was that every society 'naturally' belongs to some geo-cultural region and ought to develop as part of it. This is not the desire of a small and peripheral society to belong to a large cultural region, since the Israeli society and culture maintain deep ties with other cultures ('Jewry', 'Western culture', 'Islamic culture'). It should be borne in mind that in contrast to other Mediterranean societies, Israel's is a society of immigrants, a large portion of whom did not come from Mediterranean countries. Hence, the need, or the desire, to establish an affiliation with the Mediterranean does not stem from the peripheral status of a small cultural-national group, or from the search for an identity that will 'overcome' the fact that many cultures passed through the area, leaving their imprint on it and creating the need to unify them into one cultural entity. It stems from the desire to belong to a 'natural environment' (usually defined as the 'Mediterranean' and not as the 'Mediterranean world'). And the definition of such an identity makes it necessary to define the content of the Mediterranean culture, not only in order to identify it but also to characterise it, making it possible to develop cultural values appropriate to it. The preference shown for the 'natural environment of the Mediterranean' is the choice of an option which I call the 'third option', an invented option

which is neither a 'European cultural region' nor an 'Islamic region', but a new one, an entirely new entity. Not the 'Orient' nor the 'Levant' both of which carry negative connotations, but a 'Mediterranean culture', which has positive connotations. It offered a solution to the question of the co-existence or the symbiosis between 'East' and 'West' in the Israeli cultural context. Thus we hear expressions like 'Mediterranean urban architecture', 'Mediterranean pleasures', 'Mediterranean ideals' used as a positive model of cultural patterns.

My article, as well as several other publications on the subject, evoked varied reactions. These indicated not only how deeply rooted the concept and the topos had become, but also showed what value was assigned to it. These reactions related mainly to the scepticism I voiced about the validity of the model (or of the notion) as a signal of geohistorical and cultural realia. The critics asserted that I had failed to understand to what extent 'Mediterranean' is a concrete reality and a real cultural phenomenon, endowed with specific attributes.¹⁹ It has been written that notwithstanding my criticism, the Israeli public is extremely conscious of the Mediterranean context of Israeli society, a consciousness expressed until now by 'esoteric sects of scholars and thinkers. But it is beginning to be felt in the air all around, and will certainly begin to filter through'. One critic wrote that it is the role of Israeli society to fulfill the most ancient human dream — the 'Mediterranean dream', the 'Mediterranean idea', i.e., the model of Mediterranean history that is characterised by both unity and uniformity and thus perceived not only as an historical reality from the distant past, but as an ideal and as a concrete, consecutive and contemporary cultural historical reality. It is envisaged as a geohistorical and cultural structure, which is perpetual and unchanging. They speak not only of a civilisation which is the 'source' of Western culture, but also a preferred and aspired-for model of a 'culture' that is viable in the present as well as in the future.

From these responses one might get the impression that the attempt to cast doubt on the realness of the concept 'Mediterranean culture' and its repertoire is tantamount to casting doubt on the existence of a desired cultural (and political) option. From this viewpoint, the idea of the Mediterranean culture is a manifestation of a cultural reality, not an idea invented by authors, travellers and scholars. My claims were directed not against the idea, but against the argument that it manifests a historical-cultural reality.

I shall not reiterate all of the arguments I put forward in that article. My intention is to react to some of the critical comments made, in an attempt to reexamine the view I expressed in that article and to cast light on several principal points.

Since the public discourse was influenced by arguments and structures proposed by historical research, it seemed important to examine the basic premises underlying the Mediterranean concept. As a point of departure, I shall begin by summarising my arguments.

My basic assumption was that a distinction should be made between the 'history of the Mediterranean' and 'Mediterranean history'. The first definition refers to a geographical setting that includes all the countries on the shores of the Mediterranean, and which acted as a factor that linked and unified them. These countries have a common history, or, at least, a history that created many points of contact and interrelationships between them, particularly due to the fact that the Mediterranean is an 'inner sea' that made possible intensive reciprocal relations even in times when they were not united under one political rule. Fernand Braudel's statement that '[...] To live in the Mediterranean is to exchange one's ideas, ways of life, beliefs, or habits of courtship',²⁰ concisely articulates the very ramified system of interactions and

reciprocal relations that were conducted between the lands of the Mediterranean, many through the intermediary of the Mediterranean Sea itself, throughout human history.²¹ 'Men passed to and fro; indifferent to frontiers, states and creeds'. This outlook is in opposition to the historical view that places 'Europe' in the centre of the evolution of world history and advocates a diffusionist cultural approach: the Mediterranean is an excellent example of the dynamics and mechanism of diffusionism in culture.²² These interactions and reciprocal relations, I claimed, must be examined according to the degree of their intensity; in other words, every 'Mediterranean country' 'imported' and 'exported' cultural goods to and from other countries bordering on the Mediterranean. However, in each period one has to examine the relationship between the ties maintained by each country with the other Mediterranean countries and its ties with countries that do not belong to the 'Mediterranean world.' Such an examination will show that in different periods countries bordering on the shores of the Mediterranean maintained closer and deeper reciprocal relations with countries (and cultures) located in other geographical regions (with 'Asia', 'Africa', or 'Europe') than with those on the shores of the Mediterranean. These reciprocal relations and interactions could have created an identical or similar cultural repertoire, and given rise to a different level of 'borrowing' or symbiosis, but they did not create around the shores of the Mediterranean an identical or similar culture, i.e. one single culture.²³ Only in the Roman era was there a united Mediterranean. Only then, writes Mark Bloch, could a native of Aquitaine become a member of the Roman senate, hold office on the banks of the Bosphorus and own lands in Macedonia. All parts of Rome were not only united under the same imperium but also were closely linked to one another. As is well known, this is also Henri Pirenne's position.

The intent of the second definition is to contend that there was homogeneity in the patterns of human existence and human behaviour in countries around the Mediterranean. In other words, it is a claim of great uniformity in social patterns and cultural models. This homogeneity and uniformity may be the result of two basic factors: A. the intensive reciprocal relations that caused various cultures to transfer and adopt different items of culture and created processes of great cultural integrativity; B. the specific features of nature in the Mediterranean region that created a similar 'natural' infrastructure along the Mediterranean shores. It is this infrastructure (and not necessarily the processes of contact and reciprocity) which engendered similar patterns of society and similar models of culture.

The first definition focuses on a reconstruction of the activities of various 'cultural agents' that played a role in the transfer and dissemination of elements of culture. Consequently, a discussion of the 'history of the Mediterranean' cannot be a discussion about each Mediterranean country separately, without alluding to the Mediterranean 'region of belonging' and its attributes. It must be a discussion about the history of the processes of contact and interaction that took place in the setting of the Mediterranean region. A study of this kind would emphasise the various levels of the reciprocal relations, and their outcomes in each of the countries separately. On the other hand, a discussion of 'Mediterranean history' would attempt to expose and identify the lines of similarity in the development of the various countries, which are a direct result of the basic attributes of the infrastructure of the Mediterranean region. The basic assumption here is that all the Mediterranean societies responded and reacted to the 'natural Mediterranean environment' in the same patterns, and that this similar response to the challenges of the 'natural environment' was the force that engendered

the homogeneity and the uniformity, even when the 'Mediterranean' was not a geo-historical unit, but was divided among various empires, different peoples, cultures and religions. This conception, of course, makes several a priori assumptions, that are climatic or anthropogeographical in nature, i.e., they posit that various factors of the 'natural environment' have a formative influence on the development of human culture, and that this influence must inevitably produce similar results. In any event, this anthropogeographical assumption makes it necessary to describe and characterise the basic features of the 'natural environment' and the ways in which they exert their influence.

The history of the Mediterranean as an integrative geohistorical unit begins with the processes initiated by the Phoenicians and the Greeks to 'tame' and 'civilise' the Mediterranean and to turn it into the centre of the *oikoumene*, continues with the description of its transformation into *mare nostrum*, and thereafter with the ongoing dynamic of the reciprocal relations (and their mechanisms) between the Mediterranean world and 'Europe'. The main point of the debate centres on the question of when the Mediterranean world 'separated' from 'Europe,' and focuses on H. Pirenne's famous theory.²⁴ Another branch of this debate revolves around the question of the nature of the contacts between 'Greece' and the 'ancient orient', i.e., the contacts maintained by the 'Aegean region' with Pharaonic Egypt, Phoenicia and Mesopotamia.²⁵ The major focus of this reciprocal movement can also be depicted as the history of the contact between 'East' and 'West', a contact that the Mediterranean employs as its axis and its bridge. Up until the Roman era, this movement is from 'East' to 'West', whereas the *pax Romana* changes the direction, particularly in the political context, as the movement of cultural goods from 'East' to 'West' continues throughout the entire period and reaches its peak with the spread of Christianity in the direction of the 'West'. Hence, the Mediterranean here constitutes the arena of reciprocal relations between the Occident and the Orient.

Pirenne's dominant idea was, as is well known, that in the Roman world the Mediterranean served as the heart and the juncture around which the Mediterranean civilisation was built. The Arab-Muslim conquest split it between two mutually hostile civilisations. I believe Pirenne was correct in contending that although various cultural agents, including the Muslims, continued to transfer items of culture from the 'East' (and from Byzantine) to the 'West', this did not result in the 'West' understanding the 'East', and vice versa.²⁶ What had in the Roman era a symbiotic character, in the Middle Ages took on a character of cultural differences in well-defined and limited spheres. Bernard Lewis strengthened Pirenne's theory by emphasising that the Muslim world never displayed any curiosity about 'Europe'. The Muslim traveller travelled within the bounds of 'dar el-Islam', only rarely crossing those boundaries. For a medieval Muslim, 'Africa' and 'India' were closer to his geographical cultural world than 'Greece' or 'Italy'.²⁷

Lewis speaks about exchanges in the intellectual spheres and in images, whereas S. D. Goitein, in his monumental work on Mediterranean society in the middle of the Middle Ages, described the texture of life of the Jewish society around the *pont exenoi*s as being well integrated into the ethnic religious mosaic of the Muslim East. It was based on a mercantilistic economy and free trade, a high level of urbanisation and personal ethnic law.²⁸ However, Goitein also attempted to expose, beneath this mosaic, a permanent infrastructure of 'Mediterraneanism', a common and unchanging foundation that is a product of 'natural environment' and of an ancient historical heritage

and tradition. What Fernand Braudel did was to greatly expand the geographical frame of the 'Mediterranean society' and to include within it both the centre of the Mediterranean and the concentric circles around it. Another contribution he made was his totalising approach, in organising all the components of culture within the bounds of this frame. However, Braudel also presents a positivistic approach along with his organistic approach: the Mediterranean world is depicted at one and the same time as a framework in which things 'happen' in an integrative fashion, and as a 'stage' which imposes, by virtue of its attributes, cultural and social integrativity and uniformity. This 'totalising' conception of history and geography enables Braudel to join together the 'totality' of the static and the dynamic, the uniformity and the multiplicity, and all of that within the perspective of history's long duration.

The discussion about the directions of movement into, within and from the Mediterranean, as well as their influences, has generally remained one that is conducted within the professional milieu. Only echos of it reach the educated public, usually those echos that ostensibly have some bearing on questions such as 'what was the first culture in the Mediterranean basin?' 'Which culture influenced another culture?' and the like. This debate strikes a more popular chord because it has an impact on two key issues in the popular historical consciousness, as well as an ideological significance. First, it revokes the absolute dichotomy between 'West' and 'East', since historical research has revealed the existence of unceasing reciprocal relations and cross-fertilisation. Second, it presumably shows that in different periods, from the third millennium B.C., the 'East' left its imprint on the cultural history of the 'West'. From this one can conclude that the national culture need not choose to belong to one geo-cultural region of the world and separate itself from the other. In the Jewish-Israeli context, historical research has cast light on the way in which Jews became an integral part of the Mediterranean region, culturally as well, showing that they did not live within it in isolation, but in reciprocal relations and even in symbiosis with the neighbouring peoples and cultures. The annals of the Jews in Mediterranean countries were described as disparate in character from those of the Jews in Christian Europe. The search for a positive historical model of the Jews' relations with their environment was transferred to the Mediterranean basis. This made it logical to conclude, in the topical context, that the Mediterranean region, due to its immemorial traits and patterns, was the appropriate host for the Jewish society and culture, and that Israeli culture ought to maintain mutual relations with its various parts. However, it was not this dynamic and pluralistic historical concept that shaped the popular discourse, which is rooted in an idealistic and organistic concept of culture.²⁹

However, in the main, the academic debate reverberates through the public in relation to the second aspect of the discussion, i.e., to that concerned with the uniform character of the 'Mediterranean world' and its culture. The popular discourse was mainly concerned with the second definition, which focuses on an identical development of society and culture arising from environmental conditions with similar features.

The description of the Mediterranean region as a defined and delineated world, characterised by similar or identical features of nature, was formulated in the geographical, anthropogeographical and geostrategic literature of the nineteenth century. But it was no less a product of the geocultural consciousness shaped and disseminated in literature, as well as of a very broad and diverse corpus of travel literature.³⁰ One can trace this trend in the intellectual and literary world of 'Europe' in the manner in which diverse geocultural 'regions' were lumped together into the consolidating

'Mediterranean' framework. Thus 'southern Europe' (Roman Catholic Europe and Greece), the Islamic lands (from the Maghreb to Anatolia), i.e. the 'Levant' and the 'Orient', became a unit endowed with similar cultural features. This similarity blurred the deep-rooted cultural differences between Italy and Greece, between Italy and Spain and between them and the Maghreb countries, between Islam and Christianity. To no less a degree, it blurred the cultural differences within the various countries: between the coastal areas and the interior of the country, and between 'North' and 'South' in the Mediterranean lands themselves. Nevertheless, even though these disparities were obscured, there still remained a deep gap between the description of the Muslim 'Orient' and that of 'southern Europe', and the cultural differences revealed between Greece and Italy, for example, in the 'cultural' context, remained undiminished. Thus, for example, Emil Ludwig, the Romanticist of the Mediterranean, who depicts it as the antithesis of 'Teutonic Europe', writes: 'To the life of the Mediterranean, the acropolis is more important than the whole history of Morocco.'³¹

It is important to bear in mind that the literature employed by proponents of the 'Mediterranean ideal' or the 'Mediterranean spirit' to substantiate its existence is mainly belles lettres and travel literature about the grand tour in Italy (and in France south of the Loire) and not literature about other areas of the Mediterranean. In European literature and art, from the close of the eighteenth century, an intricate dialogue was conducted between 'Germany', 'England' etc. (the 'countries of the North') and 'Italy' (the 'South'). In this dialogue, 'Italy' was perceived both as an opposite, a different and disharmonious 'other', as well as a complementary and harmonious opposite of the 'northern essence'. Italy is also the bridge connecting 'Europe' with the 'warm south' and with the 'classical world' and the 'Renaissance'. These are the two faces of one 'Europe'. Therefore, in the eyes of a traveller coming from north of the Alps, and all the more so of one coming from beyond the Rhine, 'southern Europe', as a generalisation and a topos, has represented, since Madame de Staël's *Corinne*, an antithesis and complement to northern Europe, particularly Protestant Europe. Needless to say, this 'Italy' was differently perceived and judged depending on the cultural origin and intellectual artistic leanings of the traveller-author. I should also point out that just as the 'Orient' was perceived as the 'immovable east', so Italy was regarded as an 'unchanging' area. Here lies the secret of its uniqueness: an unvarying blend of 'history', 'scenery', and 'human society', unlike the 'North', which underwent numerous revolutionary changes in the course of the nineteenth century.

The notion of 'Mediterraneanism' in fact extended the topos of Italy as a generalisation that ignores the multifariousness of Italy itself to include other parts of the Mediterranean basin. The fact that the morphology of the Mediterranean basin enabled diverse societies and cultures to exist in relative isolation from each other was also ignored by many tourist and artists who wrote of the 'Mediterranean spirit', etc. In other words, no notice was taken by them of the fact that along with the possibilities of movement and relatively easy passage of cultural goods, thanks to the sea serving as a bridge linking three continents, within the various countries themselves communication was not always easy or convenient, mainly due to the mountainous areas dividing them, and this created a pronounced trend of localism and of isolation between the coastal areas and the interior of the country. All those defending the validity of the Mediterranean notion also overlooked the pronounced difference between the regional features of the landscape of each individual Mediterranean country. Moreover, the

multiplicity and diversity—ethnic, cultural and societal—was entirely diluted in the illusory figure of a human type—the imaginary *homo mediterraneus*.

In any event, the great heterogeneity of the Mediterranean world did not escape the notice of the proponents of the notion of Mediterranean unity. On the contrary, this very heterogeneity became a key element of Mediterranean uniqueness, and paradoxically enough, also a symbol of its uniqueness. However, all those promoting the notion and the concept of 'Mediterraneanism' attempted to reveal the common and uniting components that lay behind this multifariousness. My argument is that before one speaks of cultural homogeneity, drawn from one influential and radiating centre or about one 'human type', one ought to define the attributes of the homogeneity. This is particularly important since the assumption that cultural homogeneity exists around the Mediterranean has become, as we have seen, a convention in part of the popular public discourse.

There are two facets to every claim of 'homogeneity'. The first asserts that despite the multiplicity, the various components share basic attributes, which are stronger than the disparities and which create a broad common denominator. The second claims that these shared basic attributes create a defined human-cultural type that can easily be identified in every case, and which is in opposition to other cultural social human types. Thus, for example, according to this claim, farmers in Anatolia, in the Nile Delta, in Attica, in Provence and in Catalonia have a broad common denominator, which clearly distinguishes them from farmers in Upper Egypt, in Mesopotamia, in the Rhine Valley and in Aragon. In order to make such a far-reaching claim, it is essential to formulate the attributes of the society and the culture that are considered fundamental attributes: patterns of social organisation, the code of human behaviour, religion, cultural customs and the like. Such a detailed examination must determine a hierarchy of components of culture, for it is incontrovertibly evident that one cannot attribute the same value and the same significance to different types of components; the fact that people in Yemen, Turkey and Vienna drink coffee, or that the inhabitants of Turkey, Greece and France cook with olive oil, does not carry the same weight as differences in religion and basic cultural customs. 'Writers endorsing the idea of a 'Mediterranean culture' invariably shift attention to those components of the cultural repertoire which do not, in my view, belong at the top of the hierarchy that determines the nature and style of a 'culture'.

One of the criticisms levelled at my position stated, *inter alia*: 'There is one common element, and it is a cardinal one, shared by Turks of Mongolian origin, Catholic Spaniards and Frenchmen, Muslim Arabs in North Africa, Orthodox Greeks, and Slavic Serbs, and that is that all of these are lands of sun and sea, vine and home. There are no vineyards in Siberia, no olive groves in Scandinavia. And all those [Mediterranean people], despite the diversity of their religions and social and literary cultures, eat sea-fish and lamb, which is also not a commonplace dish in northern Europe.'³²

Thus, in this particular approach, the diet of the Mediterranean person, his food and the manner in which it is prepared,³³ or the style of architecture or of Mediterranean painting become the fundamental components that determine cultural and cultural style. Even these are open to question, for although it is true that the Mediterranean diet is characterised by several basic ingredients, surely the difference between pork-eating cultures and those that prohibit the eating of this meat is a fundamental one, which carries no less weight than the common use of olive oil or the consumption of lamb. Are various

other prohibitions relating to diet that distinguish between the different 'Mediterranean' cultures (the drinking of wine, for example) any less important than the similarity in the fruits eaten by people living in the Mediterranean world? Moreover, culinary items, by their very nature, are products of culture that pass easily from place to place, undergoing a process of 'acculturation' within the receiving culture. Many items in the 'Mediterranean' diet are imports that came from outside the region.³⁴ In any event, clothing as well as customs of joy and mourning, for example, which are shaped by cultural religious tradition, are unquestionably much more important than the types of decorative plants in the typical 'Mediterranean' orchard or garden. 'Culture' is not distinguished on the basis of types of cheeses, olive oil and the typical colour of walls. Many typical items of Mediterranean cultures became widely accepted not through 'natural' growth due to the conditions of the common natural environment, but rather, as already noted, were a result of cultural agents. These cultural agents brought items of culture to the Mediterranean and took from it other cultural items. The key cultural items of the Mediterranean had greater success in the Western Mediterranean than in its Eastern part; Homer and the Bible made a much greater impact in the Western Mediterranean and beyond it than in the Eastern Mediterranean basin and its Asian flank.

No less important, the claim that literary works written in the Mediterranean world have a common character ignores not only the variety and diversity of this world as a 'natural region', but also the absence of any real link between the works and the natural environment. Obviously, the raw materials used in a literary work are those taken from the natural surroundings, but it is utter nonsense, in my view, to detect the imprint of the 'Mediterranean sun' on the writings of Homer, Dante, Cervantes and others. Even the material culture of the Mediterranean displays a wide variety of patterns of response and reaction to the challenges posed by the natural environment. The Bedouin living in the desert behind the coastal strip, the villager living on the mountain tops (covered with snow in winter) or the inhabitant of a port city, all respond in totally different ways to the conditions of the natural environment which are themselves entirely different. What is more 'typical' of the Mediterranean cultural landscape: the Mosque of Omar, the church of Gethsemane, or the Notre Dame church, all of them in Jerusalem? Which is more characteristic—a Greek temple or an Egyptian pyramid? Aqueducts or terraces?

Moreover, the claim that the 'Mediterranean man' feels 'at home' anywhere in the Mediterranean is also not substantiated in the travellers literature. Jewish travellers from Italy who came to the eastern (Muslim) Mediterranean basin felt they were in an entirely foreign place, whose life style was not at all familiar to them. Meshullam of Volterra, the 15th-century Jewish traveller, writes, for example: 'I observed Alexandria and their actions and saw that they were strange in all they did', and describes at length everything strange and unusual that he found in Alexandria and its inhabitants in nearly every walk of life.³⁵

Paradoxically, all those who characterise the Mediterranean world as a united human totality attempt to impose on it a unidimensional topos, romantic and exotic in its external elements or in its codes of behaviour (the code of 'honour and shame'). It would be much more correct to argue that as a human historical phenomenon, the Mediterranean is a singular instance of multiplicity and diversity existing in one framework and maintaining, over thousands of years, reciprocal relations, integration and acculturation, without either the multiplicity or the diversity being impaired. It is a vast human cultural mosaic revealing a wide variety of social and cultural patterns.

The similarity or the affinity between the various pieces of this mosaic are not the result of geographical determinism but rather of interactions within that same framework and of the manner in which components of 'foreign' culture were received and adopted: for example, the influence of the West on the 'modernization' of the different Mediterranean countries. One ought to note that here we will find similar patterns in the processes of 'Western' influence, not because of the similar nature of the 'natural environment', but because in all the Mediterranean lands, 'modern' 'Europeanizing' elements were adopted into traditional conservative societies. Certainly one cannot claim that the natural Mediterranean environment was the cause of some 'retardation' in the cultural development of the Mediterranean. Such a claim would be absurd, for it is diametrically opposed to an assertion of the same type, i.e., that the Mediterranean world was the cradle of civilisation owing to the conditions and features of its natural environment. If so, one certainly can find in the 'Mediterranean region' a symbiosis of various components of culture, but alongside it one also finds the continuous existence of particularistic layers of culture and patterns of culture. The question is then to which 'culture' is the Italian closer, to that of 'France' or that of the 'Maghreb'? To whom is the Greek closer, to the peoples of the Balkans or to the Turks in Anatolia? In what ways does the culture of a Catalan resemble that of an Egyptian of the Nile delta? Where will an inhabitant of the Adriatic coast feel more 'at home', in Amsterdam and Antwerp or in Alexandria and Istanbul? Who feels closer to the 'classical culture' created in the Mediterranean, a son of Mesopotamia or Anatolia, or a Scandinavian or Irishman?

The solution found for the contradiction between diversity and an unceasing dynamic and the search for the permanent and the typical was, as in other cases, an attempt to pinpoint the special spirit of the Mediterranean, the Mediterranean *Geist*, or the 'Mediterranean psyche', i.e., the stable and unchanging core of its 'collective personality'. According to this view, one can find a stable and unifying 'cultural code' beneath all of the layers of culture that have been placed on the ancient ('autochthonic') underpinning of the Mediterranean human social 'essence'. It seems to me these searches must inevitably lead to cultural conceptions that disregard the multifariousness and the diversity as well as the dynamic. 'Geography' is given a met a historical status reconstructed with individualistic positivism!

There are those who attempt to organise all the pieces of the mosaic that make up the 'Mediterranean reality' and existence into one cohesive homogeneous framework, which is meant to realise the 'notion of Mediterraneanism'. This notion and its repertoire have been disseminated through the literature and have nearly become a 'cultural regalia'. In this fashion, a cultural fiction, by force of repetition becomes an accepted cultural ideal. The unity of the culture and the unity of the consciousness of the 'Mediterranean region' exist mainly in the imagination of the 'outside' observer, and it is this observer who has attached this image to the Mediterranean cultures so that they will adopt it as a definition of self identity. However, it is a mistake to assume we are dealing with an ideal of a humanist renaissance culture. Needless to say, such a definition applies an ideal, which is distinctly 'European' in nature, to the Mediterranean, while overlooking its other layers. It would be more correct to say that the very fact that the Mediterranean world is so multifaceted enables everyone to invent a Mediterranean of his own.

Why is it that the second concept of the Mediterranean—as a cultural space with unique qualities, different from those of other spaces—has become rooted in the public discourse? Why is it that the public discourse has recourse to neither the pluralistic,

heterogeneous and dynamic character of the Mediterranean region, as an historical framework, nor to the historical model? The truth is that one sometimes finds in the public discourse words of praise for the Mediterranean as an historical model which offers a heterogeneous religious and, cultural reality, in contrast to Christian Europe. In this fashion a region was invented in which no religion tried to impose itself on the diversity, and in contrast to the 'Moslem East', a geocultural region was created that was not characterized by immanent cultural inferiority and backwardness.

But in the main discourse any attempt to deny the existence of a 'Mediterranean entity' meets with harsh criticism. And the question that arises is: Why is there such a strong desire within some circles to foster and utilize this concept and its repertoire? The answer is that the 'Mediterranean' offers a convenient cultural utopia, one not identified with a national civilisation or culture, but rather a combination of historical traditions. It offers in fact a (regional) localism of a universal nature, or a universalism of a local-regional nature. It is an expression of the need for a utopia of culture and for complete defined values: Mediterranean values in place of 'Jewish values', 'Western values' or 'Muslim values'. The description of the region as one in which a cultural symbiosis occurred through processes of cross-fertilisation, without the imposition of forces striving for integrativeness, served to 'purify' the term 'Levant' (and 'Levantine'), which carried a negative connotation. The Levant as a 'Mediterranean culture' was presented as an antithesis to the cultural approach of the Ashkenazi elite in Israel that attempted to foist on Israeli society a 'European-Jewish' culture, in the spirit of integrative nationalism, which it had brought with it from Eastern Europe. Once again, the natural state of the Mediterranean region was conceived of as pluralism within a common framework and the attempt to impose on it a culture of a uniform and integrative nature was viewed as an attempt to impose an unnatural culture, which creates not only an inner tension in the culture but also 'unnaturalness' and alienation from the historical character of the environment.³⁶ And, primarily, it is an expression of a poetic and rhetorical need to characterise every trait in a way that will assign it to a defined cultural region and depth. All branches of historical research and belles lettres have in this manner become an available repertoire in the Israeli public discourse.

Notes

1. Pp. 96-117.
2. Joshua Prawer, (1990: 9-10).
3. See A. Toaff and S. Schwarzfuchs (1989),
4. Some of the lectures were printed in the quarterly *P'eamim: Studies in Oriental Jewry*, in an issue devoted to the subject of Mediterranean society 700-1700 (number 45, Autumn 1990).
5. The conference papers were edited by Alisa Meyuhas Ginio (London, 1992) and also in a special issue of *MHR*, volume 6, No. 2 (December 1991).
6. See also: 'Latin and Greeks in the Eastern Mediterranean after 1204', *MHR*, volume 4, no. 1 (June 1989).
7. Published in book form as S. Arenson (1990).
8. The periodical *Mediterranean Archaeology* (Univ. of Sydney) has been coming out since 1988. *The Journal of Mediterranean Studies*, published in Malta by the Mediterranean Institute, Univ. of Malta, was first published in 1991, and the Mediterranean Institute was established at the University of Malta in 1988. E. J. Brill in Leiden has announced a new series: *The Medieval Mediterranean: Peoples, Economics, and Cultures*, 400-1453.

The first discussion of the Mediterranean as a separate geographical-historical region was held in December 1961 at the Fourteenth Convention of the Historical Society of Israel, and was published in Jerusalem in 1970 under the title *The Mediterranean—Its Place in the History and Culture of the Jews and other Nations*. To the best of my knowledge, the Israeli anthropological literature did not participate in the debate centering on Mediterranean anthropology. See P. Sant Cassia (1991: 1–17).

9. The author Orly Castel Blum recently attended a conference on 'The Mediterranean and I', and unlike participants in previous conferences who generally spoke in a predictable pattern about cooperation between 'Homer and the Bible', she actually referred to the fact that no such in-depth pattern existed (*Yedioth Aharonoth*, 11.6.93). Recently, five Israeli authors participated in a competition entitled 'The Mediterranean Story'.
10. J. Alpher The discussion focuses on the emergence of the modern national states in the region of the Mediterranean and their political and social problems.
11. For example: M. Grant, (1969); E. Bradford, (1971); E. C. Semple, (1932); R. Carrington, (1971); E. Ludwig, (1943); A. Philipson, (1931); J. L. Myres, (1944); D. S. Walker, (1961); J. More, (1956); F. Braudel, (1985); F. Braudel & G. Duby, (1986) (pocket edition of the (1977) album edition). See also the new edition of L. Casson, (1991).
12. See: Y. Shavit, (1984: 157–180). M. Bernal, (1987: 337–399).
13. Z. Ankori, (1976, [539] 23). See also: Z. Ankori, (1984).
14. M. Rosen, (1993 [note 2], 68).
15. On the Maltese cultural scene see P. Sant Cassia, (1993: 291–315).
16. *Ha-Aretz* (10.2.1993).
17. L. Bressler, (1985: 136–160).
18. Typical expressions of this are the programmes and festivals devoted to 'Mediterranean music'.
19. See the articles by Y. Bronowsky, (1990, 1988). 'Only a "complete professor", he says there with irony, 'is incapable of sensing the existence of Mediterraneanism.' In another article, on the exhibit of Gaudi's sculptures, he wrote that the Spanish sculptor, unlike me, does not search for definitions of 'Mediterraneanism' (although he once defined it as characterised by a wide variety of plant life and by the contrast between the white of its arid land and the blue of its sea, as well as by the cultural diversity on its shores). Gaudi's works are 'a slice of the very spirit of Mediterraneanism', wrote E. Zandberg, 1991.
20. II, p. 761.
21. See: J. Herrin, 1987. '[...] the Mediterranean Sea was itself a factor making for homogeneity in Hellenistic culture, since it facilitated movement and intercommunication.' F. W. Wallbank, (1981: 67).
22. B. G. Trigger, (1990: 148–206).
23. The plan for establishing an institute of Mediterranean history at Tel Aviv University included the following statement: 'The history of the Mediterranean basin has unique characteristics. The similar climatic conditions and their influence on patterns of human existence and everyday customs have throughout time left their imprint on the societies living along the inner shores. Historical processes that linked the Mediterranean lands, such as the Phoenician settlement, the Greek colonisation, or the Roman *mare nostrum*, have throughout the generations enhanced the uniqueness of the region. Immigration and pilgrimage, diasporas of ethnic and religious minorities, mutual economic dependency and shared historical memories have all ensured the continuity of these links even in those periods in which the Mediterranean basin was ostensibly divided between rival civilisations, as, for example, between the Muslim empire and Latin Europe in the Middle Ages, or between the Ottoman empire and Christian Europe in modern times'.

'Though the sea itself may seem a common unifying influence, a brief acquaintance with such individual ports and cities reveals a diversity of character due to a large variety of influences, both old and new.' J. More, (1956: 27).

24. See the revision suggested by Z. Rubin, (June 1981: 13–62).

25. See: W. Burket, (1992); E. Vermeule, (1972: 271–274).

As is well known, in the last ten years a debate has been taking place centering on Martin Bernal's theory, which I cannot go into here. I will only remark that there were many scholars who preceded Bernal, and that this concept — of a total shaping Egyptian influence on Greek culture from the third millennium B.C. — underlies the extensive African-American literature (on which I have written a book to be published next year).

26. See B. Z. Kedar, (1984).

27. See R. E. Dunn, (1986: 1–12), and B. Lewis, (1982).

28. See S. D. Goiten, (1960: 29–42). As Goiten puts it: 'Despite the many frontiers and frequent wars, people and goods, books and ideas travelled freely from one end of the Mediterranean to the other'.

29. E. H. Gombrich, (1969).

30. J. Pembele, (1988); P. Sant Cassia, (1991: 1–17).

31. (1943: 7).

32. A. Kenan, *Ha-Ir*, 19.7.91.

33. C. Roden, (1987). G. Smith and R. Goldman, (1993).

34. The fig, the banana and the persimmon came from Southeast Asia, the peach from China, the apple from Europe and West Asia, and cactus fruit from Mexico, the tomato and potato from South America, etc.

35. *Masa Meshullam m'Voltera: Masa'ot Eretz Yisrael shel Olim Yehudim*, (1976: 118–119).

36. J. Kajanoff, (1978).

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