Application Letter

My name is Oded Cohen. I would be honored to apply for the tenure track position in Mediterranean history. I am a postdoctoral student in the Department of Israeli History at the University of Haifa and a research fellow at the Haifa Center for Mediterranean History (HCMH). My doctoral dissertation, supervised by Prof. Elhanan Reiner, was approved by the senate of Tel Aviv University in 2017. Entitled “New and Old: Cultural Spaces in the World of the Hida,” my thesis addresses the cultural and intellectual horizons of Rabbi Haim Yosef David Azulai (known as the Hida), who lived in the eighteenth century. He spent many years of his life traveling, as a physician and as a fundraiser on behalf of the community in Hebron. In this study, I examined the impact that travel had on him, his extensive work, and his changing attitudes toward various cultural phenomena, spaces, and people, including non-Jews. A book I wrote based on this doctoral dissertation is under contract to be published in 2022 by Magnes Press.

In October 2017, the year I joined the HCMH at the University of Haifa as a postdoctoral student, I began to study the migration of Jews through Mediterranean countries in the early modern period, creating a database of Jews who left Israel and traveled throughout the Mediterranean region during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. I presented the first fruits of this research in various forums at the University of Haifa, as well as at other forums in Israel and abroad. Also in 2017, I joined the LabexMed research group at the Mediterranean House of Human Sciences at Aix-Marseille University in France (Maison méditerranéenne des sciences de l'homme, Université d'Aix-Marseille). During my time there, I presented my research to local scholars. I also worked in the archives of the Vaucluse department in the city of Avignon and other local archives within and outside of Avignon, as part of my research on Mordechai Tema, a Jew who left Hebron for Western Europe in the mid-eighteenth century. The first article I wrote on Tema was published in 2020 in the journal *Studia Rosenthaliana*. A second, more comprehensive article on this topic is in the final stages of preparation.

I was a postdoctoral student at the Center for the Study of Conversion and Inter-Religious Encounters at Ben Gurion University of the Negev (2018-2019) and subsequently received a Lady Davis Fellowship at Hebrew University (2019-2020). During this time I continued my research on the cultural practices of nomadic Jews in the Mediterranean region in the early modern period. I began to delve into questions dealing with the self-image of nomadic Jews following their encounters with various societies and cultural spaces, via a discussion of individual Jews. I also began to study the various editions of the text “Genealogy of the Patriarchs” and how holy sites in the Land of Israel were described by Jews from various places throughout the Mediterranean region from the late Middle Ages through the seventeenth century. I also am interested in the seventeenth-century Christian Hebraist Johann Heinrich Huttinger and am researching this subject in collaboration with Dr. Tzur Shalev. I intend to continue to study these and similar texts.

As a postdoctoral student on a Weller Scholarship in the Department of Israeli History at the University of Haifa and as a research fellow with the HCMH at the University of Haifa, I am addressing questions related to migration in the Mediterranean region and beyond during the early modern period. In particular, I look at issues of transfer and acceptance of rabbinic literature and its interpretation in Israel and the Sephardic communities scattered throughout the Western world, with an emphasis on knowledge transfers between Israel and Italy and southern France.

I have been teaching high school intermittently since 2008, and despite the differences between teaching in the high school education system and teaching at the university level, I have gained significant teaching experience. The recommendations of my superiors testify to my strong abilities in this area.

I believe that my research and teaching experience, taken together, can contribute to my successful integration as a member of the Faculty of Humanities at the University of Haifa, in the field of Mediterranean Jews in the Middle Ages and the Early Modern period. Upon integration into this faculty, I would be able to offer collaborations in the fields of research and academic teaching with my colleagues from the HCMH, who deal with geographical spaces and periods that overlap those of my current research in terms of theme and time period, such as Dr. Tzur Shalev, Prof. Yossi Hayut, Dr. Cedric Cohen-Skelly, and others. I will also forge collaborations with researchers from abroad, including fellow members of the Mediterranean Studies Association.

Further, I intend to submit a proposal for a research grant from the National Science Foundation to conduct a comprehensive study on the impact of physical movement and intercultural encounters on the cultural world of rabbinic emissaries and other nomadic Jews in the early modern era, and the individuals and societies with whom they came in contact during their travels. This will be done through the selection and examination of letters, manuscripts, and printed books written by these individuals, or works in which they were involved in producing sections of the texts and paratexts.

Through my research, which I plan to expand upon in the coming years, I will be able to make use of the diverse skills I have acquired by reading manuscripts, especially those written in literary Spanish, through my knowledge of Mediterranean Jewish communities, my ability to read and analyze rabbinic texts and manuscripts in Ladino and Italian, and my familiarity with the methodological principles in the area of knowledge transmission.

In terms of teaching, I would be pleased to offer the following types of courses from these fields of specialization:

1. General courses – for example, a course on the history of the Jews in the Mediterranean region in the early modern period (15th – 18th centuries) - from the expulsion of the Jews from Spain through the Hasidic migrations to Israel. This course will progress along two axes: a geographical axis of demographic changes following the expulsion during the late Middle Ages and the rise of new population and cultural centers. This will enable a discussion of the implications of the rise and fall of communities and population centers and peripheries. The second axis in this course will be thematic and will include a discussion of major issues, phenomena, and processes that took place in the early modern period, including Messianism, secularism, martyrs, and the “new Jews”, the Hebrew press, Hebraism, history of the book, organization of Jewish knowledge, and attitudes toward science, Kabbalah, Halacha, Hasidism, and education.
2. Thematic courses for example:
3. The Wandering Jew: Travels and intercultural encounters in the Mediterranean region in early modern times
4. Self-discovery: Autobiographies and egodocuments of Jews from the Mediterranean region, and their significance
5. Jerusalem in the eighteenth century: Social and cultural aspects
6. Jewish identities in Europe and the Mediterranean region in the early modern period
7. Holy cities and Diaspora communities: Rabbinical emissaries and the Diaspora, between solidarity and friction
8. Conceptions of holy sites in the Land of Israel during the Mamluk and Ottoman periods
9. The writing and the letter: Hebrew books, from handwriting to printing

In these courses, I will use a combination of teaching methods that include methodological and theoretical training as well as familiarity with historical sources, both in manuscript and printed, that allows for in-depth study of the topic under investigation.

Sincerely,

Oded Cohen