*Research Plan for the Next Five Years:*

*Toward a Shared Mediterranean Cultural Memory*

For the last century, the Mediterranean region has been facing a harsh cycle of hatred and violence, particularly in Israel/Palestine. It can be argued that there are two main reasons for the brutal violence prevalent in our region. The first, and the best known, is the ethnocentric model of the modern nation-state. The second, and the less recognized, is the ethno-religious memory dominant among groups in conflict. One possible way to escape the cycle of hostility and violence in which we live today in Palestine/Israel may be found in transforming the ethno- and religio-historical conflicting memories and eschatological contending beliefs into one integrative cultural memory, i.e. a shared memory of Mediterranean culture. The concept of *kulturelle Gedächtnis* – a concept coined by Aby Warburg, developed by Jan Assmann, was recently adopted by Guy Stroumsa. The dialectics of the Mediterranean religious and cultural interchange give rise to what Stroumsa calls “the Abrahamic eco-system.” Only within this eco-system, Stroumsa argues, can one fully understand the history of religions and of religious, cultural, and historical concepts. Too often, this history and these concepts have been at the core of bigotry, prejudice, and violence – indeed, they remain so today.

Such cultural memory may provide a way to escape the present cycle of bigotry and violence, while transforming the reciprocal impoverishment into reciprocal enrichment. The currently prevailing cycle is nourished by the alienation of and separation between the various conflicting groups and religions and their common ignorance regarding their respective cultures, religious as well as secular. To borrow a wise quotation from Galen, “ignorance is the vice of the unwell souls, whereas illumination is the merit of the excellent souls.”

The passage from *religious* to *cultural* memory may offer the counter-narrative to the one that breeds religious violence and bigotry, and can thus contribute to creating a multicultural and multi-ethnic society. While the former is founded upon the experience of one ethnic group, religion, or “nation” and centered on it, the latter strives to integrate the ethno-religious memories of other groups, religions, and “nations.” Judeo-Arabic literature – penned in the Arabic language but predominantly in Hebrew script – could offer a model corpus to attempt such a transformation. A first step towards this goal, however, must be to make this literature accessible beyond its first intended target-group, Hebrew-speaking Jews. In order to achieve this accessibility, one must transliterate a significant body of this rich Jewish literature, preparing annotated critical editions printed in the Arabic alphabet and intended it for Arabic-speaking audiences.

Generally, I would argue that modern Judaism as it has developed within and in the shadow of the Zionist’s framework, which is intensively inflected in nation-state vocabulary, is strictly Ashkenazi Judaism. This cultural slant excluded the largest portion of the rich body of Jewish literature – intellectual as well as exegetic – that developed over hundreds of years in the Mediterranean region, at least until the expulsion of Jews from Spain. The small portion of this literature which could not be ignored, including such prominent works as the writings of Maimonides, was expressed in, and translated into, ethnic and particularistic terms, and was subject to salient manipulation to strengthen the particularistic and the right wing Zionist political views. The minor marginal portion of the so called “oriental Judaism” became within the Zionist Ashkenazi project a ridiculous folkloristic popular faith. This Zionist approach seems as a duplication and a translation of the classical derisive attitude of Christian European toward the Jewish religion in general, and of Jews of Central and Western Europe (the so called “Westerners”) toward East European Jews (the so called “Easterners”). This is undoubtedly expressed in the translation of the mocking German term *Ostjuden* into Hebrew in the mandatory Palestine and later on in Israel, when this specific term was transferred into and assigned to the Jews of the Arab and Islamic countries while keeping its mocking tone side by side with the no less mockery term “Sephardic”.

My research in the next few years will strive to explore different manifestations of the symbiotic nature of medieval Mediterranean culture. By “symbiotic” I mean the movement of ideas and thought-systems between cultures and religions and their re-shaping to allow their absorption within a neighboring culture. The symbiotic nature is determined by two main factors: (1) the presence of different cultures in the same place – in this case the Mediterranean – and the interactions between them over time; and (2) the conversions of religions and the shifts from one language to another. In other words, people in the same place and cultural environment shifted naturally from one language and religion to another. The act of shifting ideas, concepts and systems does not certainly safeguard the preservation of the same ideas, concepts and the same systems that were held before, since each imported idea is in need of re-shaping it to ensure its absorption into the "host culture": Every time such a concept crossed a border it fused with other elements and meanings within the new culture and took on a new form. This is also true within the culture itself, when it moves diachronically from one historical stage to another, from a one corpus of meanings and needs to another.

My research is composed of four major components:

1- One of my research projects seeks to prepare two revised editions of Saadia Gaon's*Commentary on Genesis*,based on its various Genizah manuscripts: one in Judeo-Arabic and Hebrew; the other in Arabic and English.

While the contributions of Saadia Gaon to Jewish thought are widely recognized, the content and the scope of his extraordinary intellectual-philosophical and his cultural abilities have yet to be fully understood. Saadia who was a master of the Jewish tradition and its sources was at the same time, open to the cultural and intellectual environments of his time; he was highly influential and revolutionary as a scholar, a witty man of letters well-mannered in intellectual culture (Arabic: *Adīb*), and as a commentator of Jewish sacred books. He was able to contribute intensively critical innovations into the "closed rabbinic system." A theologian, a philosopher, a community leader and a great authority in Jewish religious law (*Halakha*), Saadia's legacy includes a number of philosophical and theological treatises, Judeo-Arabic translations of the Bible, and extensive exegetical works, various *halakhic*, methodological, lexicographical, and grammatical writings, liturgical poems, and books.

In his exegetical works, Saadia naturally demonstrate his wide-ranging intellectual knowledge and depth. His commentary on Genesis remained virtually unreadable for many generations of the public as well as of the scholars. Therefore, many rich ideas and traditions found in Saadia’s writings – both Jewish and non-Jewish – are still waiting for further and deeper examination. After gathering manuscripts and collecting fragments from various Genizah collections, the late Moshe Zucker published an immense corpus of this commentary. Zucker’s publication contains the original Judeo-Arabic as well as a Hebrew translation (published by the Jewish Theological Seminary of America, New York, 1984).

Zucker's edition, however, is unfortunately quite problematic, due to the numerous mistakes in the transliteration of the original Judeo-Arabic texts, as well as because it’s very liberal and free approach to translation. Furthermore, since 1984 many new fragments and manuscripts have come to light, especially from the two Firkovitch collections in the Russian National Library in Saint Petersburg. In August 2015, the academic committee of the Ben-Zvi Institute in Jerusalem agreed to support my proposal to prepare a new and revised edition.

This research project attempts to re-introduce one of the richest Jewish exegetical works to the general Jewish and Arab world. Furthermore, the study will prove useful to the academic community in the pursuit of future research on related topics.

The final product will be published in two different editions. The first will include the original Judeo-Arabic text, accompanied by an annotated Hebrew translation, and is intended to be published hopefully by the Ben-Zvi Institute in the coming two years. The second, in Arabic and English, will be published as agreed in principle by the Brill publishing house in Leiden. To date, I have collected, transliterated, and edited the original Judeo-Arabic fragments (nearly 100 manuscripts). I have also identified many quotations from Saadia’s commentaries in other medieval Jewish commentaries, which can help to fill lacunae. In the coming two years, I plan to carry out the Judeo-Arabic-Hebrew translation and to add extensive explanatory footnotes. In the following three years, I plan to prepare the Arabic-English edition.

2- In another research project, titled *The Human Being as a Microcosm: the Judeo-Arabic Prism*, I will try to elucidate the different meanings of the classical Greek idea of the human being as a microcosm, as it was incorporated in Judeo-Arabic literature. This exploration will provide another angle to explore the nature and the status of the human being in the created world, as it is reflected in this corpus. For the pre-Socratic philosophers and, later on the Platonic tradition, this concept meant to point to the human being as a "frontier being," living on the boundary between matter and spirit, and to underline the tension caused by the competing pulls of these two dimensions. From the third century BCE onwards, however, the concept developed new and different meanings, mainly in Stoicism and later in the commentaries of the Church Fathers. It seems that the Stoics further developed and re-shaped this idea to mean that the human being is the goal of the created world. The same concept was consequently used in Greek and Syriac Christian literature in new ways. For instance: the human being is characterized as the master of the corporeal creation and as the cosmos in miniature – mirroring the unity of the cosmos itself – but not as the ultimate goal of the created world. This same concept is incorporated in Islamic literature, where it is mostly understood in a manner akin to the Stoic version, which appears in the realm of ethics and virtue while linking it with imitation of the surrounding natural world. It was also incorporated in the Judeo-Arabic literature, Rabbanite as well as Karaite, but with vastly different meanings. The proposed study aspires to expound these meanings as a case study emphasizing Christian-Jewish-Islamic links through the middle ages (9th-15th centuries) as well as to illustrate the various characterizations of this concept and their respective theological purposes.

3- A third study, *On the Biblical* El-Shaddai *in Judeo-Arabic Literature: Three Different Traditions*, will explore different exegetical traditions relating to this divine appellation, mainly those of Syriac and Greek Byzantine traditions, as incorporated into Judeo-Arabic literature. I will argue that this exegetical tradition was re-shaped in order to fit, in different ways, a single, opaque exegetical sentence mentioned in *Genesis Rabbah.*

4- I also intend to produce annotated Arabic editions of major medieval Judeo-Arabic works of Jewish thought, with an emphasis in footnotes on traditional Jewish texts related to Syriac traditions and relevant Islamic materials. This ambitious project aims to render these masterpieces of Jewish thought accessible to the contemporary Arabic-speaking world, which knows little if anything about Judaism. The project further aims to serve scholars of Arabic and Islamic literature who do not read Hebrew and/or are not sufficiently versed in Judeo-Arabic literature.

The proposed research-plan aims to contribute to filling a critical gap in making the most prominent Jewish books accessible to the Arabic speakers. In terms of acculturation and socio-political education, I am very conscious of the socio-cultural and "ideological" implications of my academic vocation, projects and approaches. A quick scan of the books of Jewish philosophy available in Arabic until recently yields very few titles. Those available in Arabic edition include: Maimonides' *Guide for the Perplexed* (Hüseyin Atay's edition, 1973); Saadia Gaon's *Doctrines and Beliefs* (S. Landauer's edition, 1880); and Bahya ibn Paqudah's *Guide to the Duties of the Heart* (A.S. Yahuda's edition, 1912). These editions, however, are not annotated and are almost unreadable, and their target audience is limited to a few scholars of Judeo-Arabic culture. While there has been much written **about** Judaism and Jews in Arab world, there is little access to original Jewish sources written by Jews without an apologetic nature in Arabic. One of my own primary purposes in publishing transliterated and annotated editions of Judeo-Arabic books and monographs is to help address this critical gap: to give a voice – Arabic authentic voice - to the seemingly speechless Judaism. It should be noted that most researchers of Arab and Islamic cultures, including Western scholars, do not read Hebrew script. Therefore, my editions will serve their research purposes as well. Recently we are witnessing some minor revive in the field, such as the series publications of the Middle Eastern Texts Initiative in Brigham Young University Press, which published till today some medical writings of Maimonides and Sarah Stroumsa’s Arabic edition of Twenty Chapters of al-Muqammas (2016), my Arabic edition of the *Kuzari* (Beirut, 2012) and Mustafa ‘Abd al-Ma’bud’s Arabic translation of the *Mishnah*.

Most of Saadia Gaon's books and exegetical works have survived only in fragments and lack critical editions. My first two projects in this component of my research are to produce a critical Arabic edition of Saadia's *Doctrines and Beliefs* and a critical edition and analytical study of his *Introductions*. The "introduction" is a medieval literary genre in which the author elucidates his aims, methods, and the importance of his book, and in many cases such introductions can be considered independent works in their own right. This genre flourished in Judeo-Arabic literature, especially in the writings of Saadia Gaon and Maimonides. Each of Saadia’s introductions provides a concise explication of his basic principles and methods of analysis and interpretation in the following commentary. In addition, they address the challenges that he faced in his translation and exegetical work. One cannot fully grasp Saadia's intellectual worldview without understanding the outlines and his elucidations mentioned in his introductions.

In sum, the various components of my research project for the next five years aim, together, to broaden access to the major works of the Judeo-Arabic tradition. This will be achieved both through an expanded the literary traditions that shaped medieval Jewish thought to include the Christian and Islamic exegetical and intellectual traditions, and by preparing annotated critical Arabic editions of some of these works and making them available in Arabic, as a tool for suggesting an integrative shared cultural memory in the Mediterranean.