FOREWORD

This volume is being offered as a contribution by the University of Malta towards the study of the culture of the Mediterranean region.

The phrase '*culture* of the Mediterranean' and not '*cultures* of the Mediterranean' is here being used not because one is not aware of the differences that exist in this part of the world, but because of the fact that in spite of the variations that hide behind the language and national costumes of the countries that form the Mediterranean littoral, there exist fundamental similarities amongst them.

In this part of the world, renowned as it is throughout the history of the western world for its strategic importance, the ecological setting facilitated the *relative* isolation of different communities and of their civilization and culture: the mountainous peninsula, and the many islands, provided continuous and natural protection to their inhabitants, limiting cross-fertilization, and fostering among the local communities, by way of self-defence, a sense of communal cohesion not readily paralleled in larger communities. Formal unification mostly through military force, settlement, and rebellion following a period of relaxation by the conquering power, are a constant feature in the history of most Mediterranean communities. But although such a pattern of repeated rebellion against enforced unification fostered rather than hindered diversity, it did not entail total isolation or exclusiveness. Ecological factors did not prevent similar patterns from taking shape in the different communities. Perhaps it was the similarity of prevailing conditions, with which every community had to come to terms, that gave rise to such patterns. Concepts related to such items as 'honour', 'shame' and 'guilt', village traditions, mating patterns, organizations, networks, inheritance laws, and even indigenous economic structures, are easily comparable amongst the different Mediterranean societies. It is in this sense that one can talk of a regional Mediterranean culture that links the more particular folk-cultures, and

that reveals itself through the different political hegemonies that are themselves partly a reflection of the ecological conditions referred to above.

At the basis of both the distinctiveness and the similarity which paradoxically characterize Mediterranean civilizations, lies an important factor: religion – and the history of religion in this part of the world. The Mediterranean can be said to have given rise to three of the world's most important religions: Judaism, Christianity and Islam. The development of these religions from each other is too well-known to need comment here; but, despite their essentially monotheistic slant, the diversity in the details of the belief-content of these three religions, and the extent to which each has managed to crystallise itself around the ethnicity of different races, have resulted in a situation where each has come to symbolise a particular tradition, and a particular orientation to life, that appears to be in opposition to the others. The practical implications of such a situation, in political terms especially, is too evident to be disregarded even in this second half of the twentieth century: conflict tends to linger on, often enough outwardly basing itself on religious differences as a substitute for wider aspirations and interests. This explains the growing awareness in Malta, and especially at the University of Malta, of the special call Malta has in the development of a regional consciousness. This explains on the one hand, why the problems and the virtues of Maltese society cannot be understood without reference to the broader Mediterranean context; and, on the other, the role which the University of Malta aspires for itself in a future, re-organized Mediterranean.

In spite of its geographical limitations, Malta unites some of the more important features of Mediterranean communities. Most of the papers presented in this volume are directly concerned with ethnological details of either the Mediterranean as a whole, or of some section of it within a specific period of the history of the region. In this respect, the group of papers on Malta's social life and history, offer themselves as a very important link in the ethnological analysis of what has been earlier referred to 'the *culture* of the Mediterranean'. Although Malta is very small in size, it combines specifically the virtues of being both an 'isolated' community and a 'total society'. It is nearer to a community in the sense of a group of persons in social interaction within a geographical area and having one or more additional common ties – than perhaps any other nation state could claim to be. The pattern of repeated conquest typical of the Mediterranean has been Malta's recurring experience throughout its history, causing its people to

live necessarily close to one another both physically and emotionally, in a tightly-knit web of interrelations that offered the best prospect of common defence. Even now that the population is almost three times as large as that of the last century, the Maltese live lives in which inter-personal relationships colour every aspect of social involvement. In the villages, most especially in the smaller ones furthest away from Valletta, practically everyone knows everybody else, and friendship and kinship ties are of the greatest importance. And even though the same could not be said of relationships on the level of the 'total society', there is an important sense to the idea that one can know about everyone whom one needs to know about, that such information can be quickly acquired, and is indeed acquired inadvertently, and all the same. Obviously enough, in such a society, gossip, the exchange of information, and the recurrent attempt to 'locate' individuals in some sort of network which everyone apprehends in part, are important dimensions of social reality. At the basis of all this, of course, lies another important factor until recently literacy was very limited, and the slow tempo of rural or pre-industrial society allowed the Maltese to avoid the preoccupations with time and its use characteristic of an industrial and automatized society. Time was not the automatic measure of activity in everyday life which it has become in advanced nations. Work and play were less sharply differentiated, since time was less often a commodity which one sold as such. At times, over-recruitment with the Services establishments allowed an atmosphere of unhurried ease to prevail even at work, and this attitude reflected both the ryhthms of the pre-industrial world, and the importance attached to the cultivation and maintenance of interpersonal relationships.

On the other hand, Malta has gradually acquired a political structure, social institutions integrated throughout society, agencies of control, and incentive systems, which make it structurally very similar to much larger social entities, and unlike the ordinary community within a nation-state. In order to survive, Malta had, despite its size, to develop links with other bigger nations on various levels, and to consolidate these links by the appropriate institutions at home. Even though they exist only in miniature, Malta had to develop, for example, a communications system, a diplomatic corps, a currency, and financial institutions of its own. These and many other institutions which are a normal feature of a nation-state, but not of a town or a city, at times not even of a metropolis, Malta has had itself to create as a state society. In this sense Malta distinguishes itself, by its race, its language, by

its distinctive political and social institutions, from other Mediterranean communities. Sicily, less than sixty miles north, eighty-one times larger, and with a population fifteen times that of Malta, with a not dissimilar experience of foreign rule, has not (possibly because of a lack of distinctive racial and linguistic characteristic) ever succeeded in attaining full nationhood despite successive attempts to do so throughout its history. In more ways than one, therefore, Malta is simultaneously the microcosm and the macrocosm, uniting all the ethnological patterns of the Mediterranean region, but giving them a colouring that distinguishes them clearly from those of nearby communities.

The University of Malta in turn has to reflect these characteristics. At home, the University is at times thought of as an institution with very limited interests in the development of the society that nurtures it. In fact, the University has, since its very foundation as a theological college nearly four hundred years ago, been contributing substantially to the needs of the loacl population. The schools of theology, medicine and Law which we have, in fact provided, and still provide, the local people with a route for social and intellectual mobility that greatly facilitated their interrelations with the ruling foreigners. It was through the routes provided by this University that local leaders emerged. The changes in social and political conditions on the island are a reflection of the skills and techniques imparted throughout the University courses. It was within the precincts of the University too that freedom of dialogue and expression, of unbiased analysis and criticism, were fostered. In the last analysis, the very set of symbols used by local leaders in their campaign to politicize the local population are essentially a complex fusion of old and new ideas that under conditions when Malta had no proper identity, could be brought about only within the search for truth which has been the hallmark of our University.

But although this University's main obligation is towards Maltese society, it has to fend off the parochialism that would characterise it if it related its function exclusively to local needs. Increasingly, the disparities already referred to as characteristic of the Mediterranean, are losing ground to the similarities of the region. The rate of change and of relative affluence of the Mediterranean countries is quickly showing itself, and, perhaps for the first time in its history, the Mediterranean is becoming a region with a world-interest, and with a potential power-position which it will have to learn properly to exploit. As a pre-eminently educational institution, the University of Malta seeks to insert itself into this movement, and indeed, to provide the intellectual stimulus for the

search of a macro-Mediterranean consciousness. At first sight, the task at hand might appear to be beyond the resources that are at our disposal. Not only is Maltese society too small to be able to support a University with such vast aspirations, but the tools that are needed as prerequisites for development along such lines seem to be missing. This might explain the relative inertia that followed a specific recommendation to this effect by the 1957 Heatherington University Commission which insisted in its report that the University of Malta should develop into 'an important intellectual centre of the Mediterranean'. A closer analysis of the problems and the possibilities however need not be so pessimistic. Linguistic tools are the most urgent prerequisite for developments in this field. The Mediterranean is bedevilled by a multitude of languages that reflect the patterns already discussed, and any attempt to develop a Mediterranean studies programme, will have to tackle the language barriers that thus far have hindered full communication and co-operation. In this regard, the natural bent for languages of the Maltese should in the long run be an important asset.

There are three obvious fields where the University might contribute at a Mediterranean level. Because of its history Malta has archaeological remains of the utmost interest, beginning with paloelithic times. Increased emphasis in this field at our University could contribute to the better understanding of the sources of western civilization. The resources of the sea, on the seabed, and below it, are increasingly being recognised as possibly the main source for man's future requirements. In some areas the economic wealth of the sea and of the seabed are already being exploited to meet some of man's needs; this has now to be done with more emphasis on regional collaboration. Developments in the sciences in Malta should be orientated more to research on the sea, not just to enable man better to exploit the most common sources around him in this part of the world, but to lead him to learn how not to spoil the ecological setting on which the well-being of future generations depends. Earlier it has been indicated that a basic characteristic of Mediterranean countries is development. Acculturation and the transfer of technology is changing the way of life of most people in the region; expanded education is consolidating these changes and is giving rise to demands for further change from within. Man in the Mediterranean should be able to understand this process, he should be allowed to modify himself the symbolism of folk-culture rather than be dragged to suffer from the ills resulting from the fragmentation of social relations, a common experience in the more developed, more industrialised, societies. The University

of Malta is only now envisaging a demand for expansion in the direction of the social sciences. Given a wider, Mediterranean basis, social policy courses could assist potential leaders and social workers who will be increasingly in demand in the whole region.

As such, the papers presented in this volume have to be considered primarily as one step in an on-going search for relevance and meaning in a context which is increasingly becoming more complex. Mediterranean Symposium II, which was held under the auspices of the Extension Studies Board of the University of Malta, jointly with Dowling College, New York, covered a range of topics, and a variety of interests. By itself, it was never intended to cover all the vicissitudes of the region, but to serve as a rallying point for scholars from all over the world to come together and share the results of their research. There is very limited reference to specific aspects of Arab culture in the following papers, for example. This does not mean however that in Malta the Arab world is being neglected: only a few months after Mediterranean Symposium II, another conference was held in Malta specifically to discuss Euro-Arab relations, this time organised by the Euro-Arab Social Research Group. It is through this and other on-going initiatives that the University seeks to build up the literature on the Mediterranean, and to develop multiplex relations among the communities that harbour along the Mediterranean littoral. A global picture of the Mediterranean is indeed in the making, but it certainly needs much more work to be completed.

The presentation of the papers has followed more or less the proceedings of the symposium itself, with the whole material divided into three main blocks, each focusing on a relatively related series of interests. The first section deals broadly with the Mediterranean History, the second treats aspects of Iberian History, and the third discusses aspects of Maltese life and history.

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