PREFACE

To the scholar of today, whose concept of knowledge is becoming ever more specialized, this book may appear presumptuous. It is, indeed, an indication of the changed scholarly outlook, when an author feels apologetic about presenting to the readers a book whose range of subjects may seem too wide for the competence of one man. He may defend himself, however, by recalling the cultural reality of the days of Yashar, when scholars strove for the totality of human knowledge and their goal was all-embracing and encyclopedic. It is not the author who may seem immodest, but his subject, who, following the tradition of the Renaissance, was a *uomo universale*, dabbling in a wide range of pursuits and speculations.

The preoccupation of this book with bibliographical studies is not of the author’s choice either, but dictated to him by his subject, in whose writings the problem of books, — whether they were actually written or not, their authorship and the authenticity of the views expressed in them, — is central.

Dealing as this book does with a number of scholarly areas in which I cannot claim expertise, I was fortunate to be living in a scholarly community as Columbia University, where I could turn to expert colleagues for both advice and reassurance. I am grateful and indebted to all of them.

Professor Zvi Ankori of the History Department, Columbia University, read sizeable parts of the work. His remarks and suggestions were especially helpful with regard to sections of the first part. Professor Samuel Devons of the Physics Department (History of Physics Laboratory), graciously accepted the reading of the chapter on Technology and Physics, and communicated to me in writing some of his notes and suggestions. Professor Alan Landman (Mathematics, Columbia College) read the chapter on mathematics, and Professor Lloyd Motz (Dept. of Astronomy, Col. Univ.) — the chapter on Astronomy. I am especially indebted to my former student, Dr. Warren Harvey, Professor of Philosophy, MacGill university, Montreal, Canada. He not only carefully read the section on philosophy, but contributed to an improved text. For a careful editing of the manuscript, my thanks go to Ms. Emily Soloff.

At all stages of the protracted writing of this book, I was fortunate
in having the cooperation and encouragement of my wife, Hayyah (Helly) [née Frost]. Her perceptive remarks and comments, and her inexhaustible patience helped improve the text and bring it to completion.

The publication of this volume was made possible by two generous grants: one from the Alexander Kohut Foundation of the American Academy for Jewish Research and the other from the Lucius N. Littauer Foundation, New York City, whose president, Mr. Harry Starr, showed a keen interest in the book. I offer my gratitude to him and to the members of the board of the Academy.

Columbia University,
May, 1974.