

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-88533-1 - The Kuzari and the Shaping of Jewish Identity, 1167-1900

Adam Shear

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

---

#### THE KUZARI AND THE SHAPING OF JEWISH IDENTITY, 1167–1900

Judah Halevi's *Book of the Kuzari* is a defense of Judaism that has enjoyed an almost continuous transmission since its composition in the twelfth century. By surveying the activities of readers, commentators, copyists, and printers for more than 700 years, Adam Shear examines the ways that the *Kuzari* became a classic of Jewish thought. Today, the *Kuzari* is usually understood as the major statement of an antirationalist and ethnocentric approach to Judaism and is often contrasted with the rationalism and universalism of Maimonides's *Guide of the Perplexed*. But this conception must be seen as a modern construction, and the reception history of the *Kuzari* demonstrates that many earlier readers of the work understood it as offering a way toward reconciling reason and faith and of negotiating between particularism and universalism.

Adam Shear teaches in the Department of Religious Studies at the University of Pittsburgh. He has been a Fellow at the Center for Advanced Judaic Studies at the University of Pennsylvania. He is editor of the English edition of *The Historical Writings of Joseph of Rosheim* (2006) and is currently co-editing a volume on the history of the early modern Jewish book.

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-88533-1 - The Kuzari and the Shaping of Jewish Identity, 1167-1900

Adam Shear

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

---

The *Kuzari* and the Shaping of  
Jewish Identity, 1167–1900

ADAM SHEAR  
University of Pittsburgh



CAMBRIDGE  
UNIVERSITY PRESS

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-88533-1 - The Kuzari and the Shaping of Jewish Identity, 1167-1900

Adam Shear

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

CAMBRIDGE UNIVERSITY PRESS

Cambridge, New York, Melbourne, Madrid, Cape Town, Singapore, São Paulo, Delhi

Cambridge University Press

32 Avenue of the Americas, New York, NY 10013-2473, USA

[www.cambridge.org](http://www.cambridge.org)Information on this title: [www.cambridge.org/9780521885331](http://www.cambridge.org/9780521885331)

© Adam Shear 2008

This publication is in copyright. Subject to statutory exception and to the provisions of relevant collective licensing agreements, no reproduction of any part may take place without the written permission of Cambridge University Press.

First published 2008

Printed in the United States of America

*A catalog record for this publication is available from the British Library.**Library of Congress Cataloging in Publication Data*

Shear, Adam.

The *Kuzari* and the Shaping of Jewish Identity, 1167–1900 / Adam Shear.

p. cm.

Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN 978-0-521-88533-1 (hardcover : alk. paper)

1. Judah, ha-Levi, 12th cent. Kitab al-hujjah. 2. Judaism – Apologetic works.
3. Philosophy, Jewish. 4. Philosophy, Medieval. 5. Jews – Identity. I. Title.

BM550.J84854 2008

296.3'5-dc22 2008027120

ISBN 978-0-521-88533-1 hardback

Cambridge University Press has no responsibility for the persistence or accuracy of URLs for external or third-party Internet Web sites referred to in this publication and does not guarantee that any content on such Web sites is, or will remain, accurate or appropriate.

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-88533-1 - The Kuzari and the Shaping of Jewish Identity, 1167-1900

Adam Shear

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

## Contents

<i>Preface</i>	<i>page</i> vii
<i>Acknowledgments</i>	xv
<b>Introduction</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>1 Texts and Contexts: Premodern Dissemination and Transmission</b>	<b>21</b>
<b>2 The Image and Function of the <i>Kuzari</i> in the Late Middle Ages</b>	<b>55</b>
<b>3 The <i>Kuzari</i> in Renaissance Italy</b>	<b>95</b>
<b>4 Judah Moscato's Project and the Making of an Authoritative Work</b>	<b>135</b>
<b>5 The Image and Function of the <i>Kuzari</i> in Early Modern Europe</b>	<b>170</b>
<b>6 The Creation of an Enlightenment <i>Kuzari</i></b>	<b>209</b>
<b>7 Continuity and Change in the Nineteenth Century</b>	<b>247</b>
<b>Conclusion: The Emergence of Late Modern Dichotomies</b>	<b>293</b>
<i>Conventions and Abbreviations</i>	315
<i>Bibliography</i>	317
<i>Index</i>	367

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-88533-1 - The Kuzari and the Shaping of Jewish Identity, 1167–1900

Adam Shear

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

## Preface

This book is a history of the reception of the *Kuzari*, a defense of rabbinic Judaism by Judah Halevi, a twelfth-century Jewish polymath. Halevi (ca. 1075–1141), despite his outsider origins in northern Christian Spain, seemed the very model of the Andalusian Jewish intellectual. He was a physician and poet, broadly educated in both Jewish and non-Jewish sources, and eloquent in both Arabic and Hebrew.<sup>1</sup> Sometime toward the end of the 1130s, Halevi put the finishing touches on a major prose work in Judeo-Arabic that he had once called *Kitab al Khazari*. Shortly afterward, he set off for Palestine, presumably to satisfy the longings for the land of Israel expressed in much of his poetry of the previous decade. Halevi arrived in Egypt in the late summer or early fall of 1140, and it seems that he spent eight to ten months there before continuing his trip to Palestine, where he died in the summer of 1141.<sup>2</sup>

Whether Halevi published his work in Egypt or had already begun to circulate it in Spain is unclear, but by the end of the twelfth century, his work was circulating in the Muslim world under the title *Book of Refutation and Proof on the Despised Faith*.<sup>3</sup> Among Jews in Latin Christendom at the same time, the work had also begun to circulate in a Hebrew translation under the titles *Sefer ha-Kuzari* (The Book of the Khazar King) or *Sefer ha-Kuzar* (The Book of the Khazar). In the pages that follow, I present the first comprehensive survey of the influence and use of Halevi's work among European Jews (and Christians) from the late twelfth century to the end of the nineteenth century. My goal is twofold: first, to sketch the "biography" of this book beginning with its translation to Hebrew in the mid-1160s; and second, to examine the role of the book in the formation of certain expressions of Jewish cultural and religious identity before the twentieth century. The timeframe as well

1. On this image of Halevi as the quintessential Andalusian, see Brann, *The Compunctious Poet*, 85, and for a delineation of this cultural ideal, see Septimus, *Hispano-Jewish Culture in Transition*; idem, "Open Rebuke and Concealed Love"; and Cohen, introduction to Abraham ibn Daud, *Book of Tradition*, xix–xxi, and the sources cited there. On Halevi's self-consciousness about his northern origins, see Yahalom, "The Leningrad Treasures," 61–62; and idem, "Diwan and Odyssey," 31–32. For a brief biography of Halevi, see Brann, "Judah Halevi."
2. Much scholarly debate has taken place regarding the chronology of Halevi's last years. I rely on Fleischer and Gil, *Yehuda ha-Levi u-vene hugo*, esp. 252–257.
3. *Kitab al-radd wa-'l-dalil fi 'l-din al-dhalil*. For a detailed discussion of the various titles, see Allony, "The *Kuzari*: A Jewish Polemical Response," 120–122.

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-88533-1 - The Kuzari and the Shaping of Jewish Identity, 1167-1900

Adam Shear

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

as the choice of vehicle may seem curious to some readers. By the end of the book, however, I hope those readers will be satisfied with both choices. The simplest and most schematic version of my argument may be put as follows: Various readers interpreted the work in manifold ways and made strategic choices about whether and how to disseminate the work to serve particular cultural and intellectual agendas. Over time, the effect of the work of these human agents was to invest the *Kuzari* with the authority often associated with canonical texts; in other words, the *Kuzari* became a “classic.” All of this activity did not predetermine the uses made of the work or the interpretation given to the work by future generations and – as with many classics – disparate groups of Jews understood the work differently and used it for different purposes. This situation prevailed through the early modern period and well into the nineteenth century. However, as I argue in the conclusion, a series of new developments in the late nineteenth century led to one interpretation of the work becoming dominant.

Today, in both the academy and among religious Jews, the *Kuzari* is seen as presenting a strongly ethnocentric version of Judaism, and it is usually placed in the context of an apparent transformation in which Halevi came to reject some aspects of the cosmopolitan cultural model of al-Andalus. Often, this has been seen as a late-in-life conversion to a more conservative, particularist viewpoint, manifested by the *Kuzari*, by poetry yearning for the land of Israel, and finally by Halevi setting off on pilgrimage.<sup>4</sup> Halevi’s work has often been seen in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries as the clearest statement of an antirationalist and particularist stance in medieval Jewish thought and is often contrasted with Maimonides’ *Guide of the Perplexed*, which is seen as embracing rationalism and a more universalistic approach.<sup>5</sup>

#### A BRIEF SUMMARY OF THE KUZARI

It may be the case that this reading of the *Kuzari* is closest to the author’s intentions, but such a determination is somewhat beside the point here, as I am concerned

4. On this subject, see Brann, *The Compunctious Poet*.

5. The full history of the influence of Halevi and the *Kuzari* on the Zionist movement and on twentieth-century Yishuv/Israeli Jewish culture is outside the scope of this book, although I analyze the image of Halevi and the *Kuzari* in the earliest phases of Zionism in the conclusion. Although Halevi and Maimonides are contrasted in many discourses (see Hartman, *Israelis and the Jewish Tradition*, and my discussion in the introduction), they are also yoked together in certain respects, perhaps most visibly in the sculptor Benno Elkan’s menorah for the Knesset building in Jerusalem, 1956, which includes a carved Halevi (with harp) and Maimonides (with a scholarly medallion) together in one of the tableaux on the arms of the menorah that represent heroes of the Jewish past. (See Mishory, *Shuru, Habitu u-Reu*, 194.) One should not overestimate the “name recognition” of Halevi, however. In a poll of readers (mainly American Jews and English-speaking Israeli Jews) published by the popular magazine, *Jerusalem Report* (January 3, 2000, 52–56), Halevi was named as the 84th “greatest Jew of the millennium,” finishing well below Moses Mendelssohn, Baruch Spinoza, Sandy Koufax, Karl Marx, and Steven Spielberg, while Maimonides was ranked fifth, behind only Albert Einstein, David Ben-Gurion, Theodor Herzl, and Sigmund Freud, and just ahead of Rashi and Yitzhak Rabin.

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-88533-1 - The Kuzari and the Shaping of Jewish Identity, 1167-1900

Adam Shear

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

with using the *Kuzari's* reception to tell us something about Jewish culture in various historical contexts other than the one in which Halevi lived. To offer any kind of summary in a reception history is problematic as the proper subject of this book is not what Halevi wrote but what other historical actors thought Halevi wrote. However, some understanding of the contents of the work is helpful in understanding the reception history that follows, and thus I offer a brief summary here, especially for the benefit of readers encountering Halevi's work for the first time.<sup>6</sup>

Halevi's work was not a systematic philosophical (or antiphilosophical) exposition of Judaism but a set of dialogues set within a narrative frame.<sup>7</sup> The book purports to tell of events in the Black Sea kingdom of Khazaria in the eighth century that led to the conversion of the Khazar king and then the remainder of his people to Judaism. While it seems that some kind of Judaism became the religion of Khazar elites and possibly some of the larger population of Khazaria in the eighth century, the debate over the extent of the conversions, their timing, and the full nature of Khazar Judaism remains unresolved.<sup>8</sup> Nonetheless, the Jewish kingdom in Khazaria was known to Jews elsewhere both during the period in which Khazaria existed as an independent kingdom (to the tenth century) and afterward. The existence of a Jewish kingdom had great appeal for medieval Jews in the Muslim world and Latin Christendom, and the conversion of a pagan king was certainly a compelling story for Jewish readers. While Halevi may have expected his sophisticated readers to appreciate the story of the Khazar conversions as a framing device for his constructed dialogue, many later readers of the work took it as a historical account.

Apparently, Halevi originally intended his work as a response to the polemic of Karaites against rabbinic tradition.<sup>9</sup> However, the work that has circulated from the second half of the twelfth century to the present day is much more than a defense of Talmudic authority against internal Jewish sectarian opponents. Rather, as the opening lines make clear, the text offers a broader apologetic agenda: "I was asked to state what arguments and replies I could bring to bear against the attacks of philosophers and followers of other religions, and also against Jewish sectarians who attacked the rest of Israel." Halevi then begins the story that frames the rest of the work. The king of the Khazars (the "Kuzari") has a disturbing dream. In it, he is visited by an angel who informs him that his intentions are acceptable to God, but his actions are not. The king sets out to systematically study religious thought and Halevi begins to offer a series of short dialogues between the king and representatives of different religious traditions. The king

6. Cf. Lobel, *Between Mysticism and Philosophy*, 10–20.

7. For consideration of the importance of the dialogue genre in the construction of Halevi's arguments, see Hughes, "The Art of Philosophy."

8. For discussion of these debates, see Golden, "Khazaria and Judaism."

9. See Goitein, "Autographs of Judah Halevi," 409–410 (and cf. Baneth "Some Remarks," 299–300); Goitein, "The Biography," 46; Silman, *Philosopher and Prophet*, 114; and Lasker, "Judah Halevi and Karaism." For the broader context, see Lasker, "Karaism in Twelfth-Century Spain."

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-88533-1 - The Kuzari and the Shaping of Jewish Identity, 1167-1900

Adam Shear

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

begins with an Aristotelian philosopher who argues that contemplation of God matters more than the performance of specific religious rituals. Finding this to contradict God's explicit message in the dream, the king turns to representatives of revealed religion, first to a Christian and then to a Muslim but finds both of their answers to be illogical. Noting that both the Christian and the Muslim express their belief in the truth of the Hebrew Bible, however, the king turns reluctantly to a rabbi, known in the Hebrew translation by the title "Ḥaver," a representative of the "despised religion." At first the Kuzari finds the Ḥaver's particularism distasteful but is gradually convinced that Judaism is the true, revealed religion. He and his people convert to Judaism, and the rest of the work consists of dialogue between the king and his new teacher, the Ḥaver. This dialogue is wide-ranging – covering Jewish belief, history, and law, as well as a number of scientific and philosophic issues. In other words, the *Kuzari* may be viewed as a comprehensive (although unsystematic) introduction to rabbinic Judaism and a defense of it from all of its critics – philosophers, Christians, Muslims, and Karaites. The work is at once polemic, catechism, and religious philosophy.

Book 1 of the work is largely concerned with establishing the frame story and with the dialogues that convince the king of the truth and reliability of the Mosaic tradition. When the Ḥaver and the king first meet, the king is taken aback by the rabbi's credo:

I believe in the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Israel, who led the children of Israel out of Egypt with signs and miracles; who fed them in the desert and gave them the land, after having made them traverse the sea and the Jordan in a miraculous way; who sent Moses with His law, and subsequently thousands of prophets, who confirmed his law by promises to the observant, and threats to the disobedient. Our belief is comprised in the Torah – a very large domain. (1:11)<sup>10</sup>

The king is surprised that the rabbi did not begin with a declaration of faith in God "as Creator of the world, its Governor and Guide" (1:12). The Ḥaver's answer sets up Halevi's basic distinction between philosophy and revelation: "That which thou dost express is religion based on speculation and system, the research of thought, but open to many doubts" (1:13). As in Pascal's famous aphorism, the Ḥaver prefers the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob to the God of the philosophers. Elsewhere in book 1, he presents sophisticated fideistic arguments against philosophical religion. The Ḥaver will go on in book 1 to emphasize the public nature of the Sinai revelation and the "uninterrupted" traditions of the Jewish people. It is also in this initial exchange that the Ḥaver introduces a hierarchical understanding of all of nature in which prophets stand above other humans and the people of Israel stand above the other nations of the world (1:25–27).

10. All translations from the *Kuzari* are by Hirschfeld unless otherwise noted.



Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-88533-1 - The Kuzari and the Shaping of Jewish Identity, 1167-1900

Adam Shear

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

As the dialogue continues, the king and the rabbi discuss the nature of Judaism as a revealed religion in contrast to systems of human speculation that attempt to become close to God via astrology or magic or through philosophical speculation (1:63–81). Halevi offers an interpretation of the Golden Calf episode as a prime example of the dangers of seeking the “divine influence” without proper instruction (1:97). Immediately thereafter, the Ḥaver offers his first defense of the “traditions of the Rabbis” (i.e., the Oral Law) as also part of the divine instructions (1:99). The end of book 1 contains a reflection on the nature of Jewish existence in the diaspora, the hope for the Messiah, and the possibilities of converts joining the people of Israel.

Book 2 opens with a return to the frame story. The king decides to convert and does so with his vizier in secret, in a cave. He and the vizier then return to the capital and begin to gradually promulgate Judaism among the people. Eventually, they “induced the rest of the Khazars to embrace the Jewish faith” (2:1), and the king hires scholars, establishes Torah study in his kingdom, and even builds a “tabernacle in the shape of that built by Moses.” Finally, the reader is told that the king hires the Ḥaver to be his personal teacher, and the dialogue resumes with an issue that had been touched upon in book 1, the “names and attributes ascribed to God.” As Maimonides does in the *Guide of the Perplexed*, Halevi here takes on a vexing question for Jewish readers of Aristotle: How could the Bible and rabbinic sources describe God in anthropomorphic and corporeal terms? After the Ḥaver offers a justification of such terms as “predicates and attributive descriptions” (2:2), the king is pleased but points out that Judaism nonetheless attributes “Will” to God (in contrast to the philosophers), a charge the Ḥaver does not consider much of a problem.

The dialogue then shifts to a description of the superior qualities of the land of Israel (2:9–24), in the midst of which is a highly technical description of the calculation of days according to the rotation of the sun around the earth, including discussion of the international dateline and the existence of a common calendar for the entire globe (2:20). At the end of this discussion comes a discussion of pilgrimage to the land of Israel and the necessity of living in the land to fulfill the Law. The king then asks for an explanation of sacrifices, which leads to a further discussion of the post-exilic status of the Jewish people (2:28–44). The apparent irrationality of sacrificial laws leads then to a discourse by the Ḥaver on the nature of the *mizvot* in which asceticism is rejected (2:50). In response to the Ḥaver’s frequent discussions of physiology and other natural sciences, the king notes that “your law comprises all sorts of profound and strange sciences, not to be found in other codes” (2:63). The Ḥaver agrees and praises the scientific knowledge of the rabbis. Book 2 concludes with a long discussion of the nature of the Hebrew language.

Book 3 simply continues the dialogue with the Ḥaver responding to the king’s request for a “description of a servant of God” (2:81). Included in this discussion of the ideal “pious man” is an extended reflection on ethics and on the fulfillment of human potential through the observance of rituals, including the Sabbath and

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-88533-1 - The Kuzari and the Shaping of Jewish Identity, 1167-1900

Adam Shear

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

communal prayer. Ultimately, the king concludes the discussion by noting that the best exemplars of this “mode of life” reach a level of prophecy (2:22). The second half of book 3 – perhaps thematically connected by the issue of observance of halakha – is devoted to a refutation of standard Karaite arguments against rabbinic Judaism and to a kind of Rabbanite history of Jewish sectarianism.

Book 4 is framed as an answer to the king’s desire for a discourse on the names of God and on rabbinic science. This leads to a more developed discussion of the nature of God, picking up on some of the philosophical issues touched on in book 1. In the course of this discussion, the Ḥaver offers additional criticism of the philosophers and a further reflection on the nature of Jewish existence under the domination of Islam and Christianity, which are described as paving the way for the Messiah. When the king and Ḥaver take up “the relics of the natural science [of the Rabbis],” the dialogue shifts to a commentary on the *Sefer Yezirah* [The Book of Creation] (4:25–29), a cosmological work which was influential in early Kabbalah.

Book 5 is an extended critique of Aristotelian philosophy (but also one of the first serious engagements with Aristotle in the history of Jewish thought). The king and the Ḥaver take up key concepts in philosophy, including “notions of matter and form, elements, nature, soul, intellect and metaphysics in general” (5:2). Toward the end of the book, the Ḥaver offers a basic introduction to the doctrines of Kalam, Muslim theological discourse that had been influential on Jewish thought before the introduction of Aristotelianism in the twelfth century (5:15–18). This is followed by the Ḥaver’s own “opinion and principles of faith” in response to the king’s request (5:19–21). Here, the Ḥaver outlines what we may take to be Halevi’s views of the fundamentals of Judaism: God is the perfect creator; “the existence of intermediary causes”; that “God gives every substance the best and most appropriate form”; that all of creation is ordered in terms of distance from the “divine degree”; that “true reproof” can lead to a return to God; that humans have free will in regard to their actions but that God’s will is evident in the history of the Jewish people (5:20). The Ḥaver then informs the king that discussions of these principles “afford proper points for research, comprising as they do the character of the divine decrees, concerning man” (5:21), and thus delineating the proper scope for religious philosophy. The work ends with the Ḥaver’s explanation for his desire to depart from Khazaria for the land of Israel (5:22–28), words often taken as Halevi’s own justification for his departure from al-Andalus as he was finishing the work.

#### THE KUZARI IN JEWISH INTELLECTUAL HISTORY

The *Kuzari*’s reception history offers insight into some important questions in Jewish intellectual and cultural history. The first of these is the process by which works not taken to be divinely written or inspired and not taken to have normative legal authority become “classics.” How do readers and transmitters (printers, scribes, commentators, translators) of a text understand the authority of such

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-88533-1 - The Kuzari and the Shaping of Jewish Identity, 1167-1900

Adam Shear

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

## PREFACE

xiii

a work? How do their actions (of interpretation, of commenting, of material presentation) construct the authority of the work for future readers? How then do readers and other “consumers” of such works use the text to construct a notion of Jewish cultural identity? The *Kuzari* offers an excellent case study in this identity-making process not only because it became a classic of Jewish thought but also because of its content. The *Kuzari* offers its readers a statement about the superiority of a Jewish identity over other possible religious, ethnic, or cultural identities. At the same time that it presented its apologetic for rabbinic Judaism, it also offered a textbook of basic Jewish beliefs.

My argument is that the *Kuzari* became a classic statement of Jewish identity in a dialectic process, which involved both inherited “images” of the work from previous generations and conscious reframing of the work to make it speak to new generations of Jewish readers. One consequence of the construction of the *Kuzari* as a classic was the mobilization of the text and its author to provide models and legitimacy for new cultural activity. In other words, Jewish intellectuals in different cultural circumstances found the *Kuzari* to be a useful vehicle for constructing, articulating, and disseminating their own conceptions of Jewish identity.

Contrary to what we might expect about readers of a work that proclaims the racial superiority of born Jews, the spiritual superiority of their religious revelation, the linguistic superiority of their sacred language, and even the climatic superiority of their promised land, the *Kuzari* was not only put forward in the service of radically ethnocentric conceptions of Judaism. Although premodern and many modern conceptions of Judaism were ethnocentric *avant la lettre*, Halevi’s work was often interpreted by late medieval and early modern readers as a way of negotiating between particularism and universalism. Likewise, although an antirationalist critique of philosophy is a central element in the work, the *Kuzari* was also an important source for many rationalistically inclined thinkers. The conceptions of the *Kuzari* as a work that defended a parochial Jewishness (according to its detractors) or as one that defended a national identity (according to its proponents) emerge in the nineteenth century along with new ideological positions on modern Jewish identity. By drawing attention to premodern, more synthetic interpretations of the *Kuzari*, I argue that we need to rethink paradigms in the academic study of Jewish thought that stress dichotomies between reason and faith and between universalism and particularism.

The methodological implication of this study for historians of Jewish culture and religion is caution in assuming stable meanings to canonical texts.<sup>11</sup> We tend

11. Jacob Soll aptly compares the practice of intellectual history which works from “seemingly stable classic editions” to the practice of “tourists who stay on a tour bus and ignore the gritty reality of the monuments they visit” (*Publishing the Prince*, 5). Also important is Debra Shuger’s argument against a false dichotomy between “cultural studies” and “intellectual history” (*The Renaissance Bible*, 12).

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-88533-1 - The Kuzari and the Shaping of Jewish Identity, 1167-1900

Adam Shear

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

to assume that the interest of a particular group in the writings of a past individual or group suggests “influence” of the latter on the former. In the introduction, I will discuss current discussions among literary theorists regarding the construction of meaning in texts. Here, I merely point out that the *Kuzari* of authorial intent (to the extent that it can be reconstructed) is not necessarily the *Kuzari* as understood in Renaissance Italy or in the Jewish Enlightenment. This simple insight might be applied more generally in the history of texts and their transmission and reception over time. The reception history of the *Kuzari* among Jews (and some Christians) is a case study in the power of readers to shape meaning. Texts may be more or less stable over time. The circumstances of their production (authorship) may be of great interest. But their transformation into material books and into “works” that take their place in the cultural imaginary are the work of later actors.

In a programmatic essay, Aviezer Ravitzky notes that historians have challenged students of Jewish philosophy by posing questions about the role of Jewish philosophy in Jewish culture.<sup>12</sup> I hope to continue to play this role here by looking at manifestations of the *Kuzari* and interpretations of the text as cultural products as important as any abstract “work” that emerges in the mind of the author. In this kind of project, the historian can go beyond the job of contextualizing a particular intellectual such as Halevi for the sake of improved understanding of his agenda or ideas. Rather, we can look toward an interpretation of the Jewish culture(s) that produced and disseminated texts attributed to that intellectual.

12. See Ravitzky, “Some Remarks on the Study of Jewish Philosophy.”

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-88533-1 - The Kuzari and the Shaping of Jewish Identity, 1167-1900

Adam Shear

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

## Acknowledgments

Since I began research on this topic more than a decade ago, I have been the recipient of much helpful advice and constructive criticism. The first fruit of the research was a dissertation at the University of Pennsylvania written under the supervision of David Ruderman to whom I am grateful for ongoing advice and encouragement. Talya Fishman's comments have been helpful in rethinking the work. Over the past few years, as I did additional research and revisited the material, the following people have offered comments or suggestions that have been particularly helpful to me in thinking through complex issues or in pointing me toward specific resources: Richard Cohen, Joe Davis, Shmuel Feiner, Gad Freudenthal, Bernie Goldstein, Zev Harvey, Martin Kavka, Menachem Kellner, Rebecca Kobrin, Daniel Lasker, Alex Orbach, Elchanan Reiner, Abe Socher, David Stern, and Adam Sutcliffe. I am particularly grateful to the two (no longer anonymous) readers for Cambridge University Press, Allan Arkush and Matt Goldish, whose comments were very helpful at the last stages of work. My colleagues in Pittsburgh have provided me with a supportive intellectual environment and have been wonderful conversation partners. I was also privileged to be a member of a research group on the history of the Jewish book at the Center for Advanced Judaic Studies in Philadelphia in 2005, and I am grateful to my colleagues in that group for their intellectual companionship as well.

I am grateful to the staff at the university libraries of Harvard, Pennsylvania, and Pittsburgh; the Jewish National and University Library in Jerusalem; and the Ets Haim Library and the Biblioteca Rosenthaliana, both in Amsterdam. My work has been generously supported by the School of Arts and Sciences at the University of Pittsburgh, which granted me research leaves in the spring 2005 and fall 2005 semesters and a Faculty Research Expense Grant that allowed me to do further research in Philadelphia, Boston, and Amsterdam in the summer of 2003. I want to thank Dean John Cooper and Associate Dean Jim Knapp for this support. I also want to thank the administrator of the Religious Studies Department, Judy Macey, and my two chairs during my time in Pittsburgh, Tony Edwards and Linda Penkower, and the director of the Jewish Studies program, Alex Orbach, for their support of my work.

This project has also been supported by the Cahnman Publication Subvention Grant, awarded by the Association for Jewish Studies in 2007, which paid the

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-88533-1 - The Kuzari and the Shaping of Jewish Identity, 1167-1900

Adam Shear

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

cost of the camera-ready illustrations and the preparation of the index. Some material in Chapters 3 and 4 appeared in my essay, “Judah Moscato’s Scholarly Self-Image and the Question of Jewish Humanism,” in David B. Ruderman and Giuseppe Veltri, eds. *Cultural Intermediaries: Jewish Intellectuals in Early Modern Italy* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, copyright 2004); and some material in Chapters 6 and 7 appeared in my essay, “Judah Halevi’s *Kuzari* in the Haskalah: The Reinterpretation and Reimagining of a Medieval Work,” in Ross Brann and Adam Sutcliffe, eds. *Renewing the Past, Reconfiguring Jewish Culture: From al-Andalus to the Haskalah* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, copyright 2004). In both cases, material is reprinted by permission of the University of Pennsylvania Press. In addition, some material in Chapters 5 and 6 appeared in an earlier form in my essay, “Judah Halevi’s *Sefer ha-Kuzari* in Early Modern Ashkenaz and the Early Haskalah,” in Resianne Fontaine et al., eds. *Sepharad in Ashkenaz: Medieval Knowledge and Eighteenth-Century Enlightened Jewish Discourse* (Amsterdam: Royal Netherlands Academy of Arts and Sciences, 2007). Andy Beck, Ken Karpinski, and the staffs of Cambridge University Press and Aptara have been helpful and patient.

I am grateful to all who have offered scholarly and practical advice and financial support to this project, but none of them should be held responsible for my errors of fact or judgment or for the inevitable omissions in a reception history, for all of which I offer an advance apology to the reader.

I also want to thank my children, Daniella, Samuel, and Aliza, for being sources of joy, amusement, and (mostly) welcome breaks from work. Maybe they will read this work someday and understand better their father’s preoccupations during their early childhoods. Parents and siblings have been very supportive, and I am not sure that this book could have been written without their visits to help with child care when I was away doing research and when I was present but preoccupied with writing and revisions. Finally, I thank my wife, Shoshanna, for many things, but notably for her support, encouragement, advice, and tolerance.