The suggestion to write this book came to me from Leon Nemoy, whose *Karaite Anthology* (New Haven, 1952) has been a major scholarly achievement and a source of inspiration ever since it was published. Judeo-Persian (JP) studies, although better explored at this point than Karaitism was when Dr. Nemoy published his book, are largely ignored by scholars of both Jewish and Iranian studies, and they are virtually unknown to the public. Significant publications touching on various aspects of Jewish life in Iran as reflected in JP texts have appeared sporadically in Hebrew and in a number of European languages since the nineteenth century, but knowledge of their contents remains the specialized domain of a small group of scholars. Yet there exists a large corpus of untapped JP manuscripts that, like the Judeo-Arabic texts of the Cairo Genizah, have the potential to shed considerable light on the ancient and vibrant Jewish communities of Iran—albeit mostly in their late medieval, early modern phase—since most of the surviving manuscripts date from the seventeenth to the twentieth centuries.

Judeo-Persian texts have the potential to enrich the fields of both Jewish and Iranian studies. They reward scholars of Jewish studies with variegated information about yet another Jewish diaspora community in a Mus-
Stimulated by Dr. Nemoy’s challenge, I undertook the task of compiling the present anthology of JP literature. It consists of annotated English translations of selections from some of the most important JP texts, preceded by brief introductions.

From the beginning I was aware of the numerous difficulties surrounding such a project. Two practical obstacles were the location of JP manuscripts and the lack of critically edited texts from which to make reliable translations.

There are several substantial collections of JP manuscripts worldwide, specifically, the collections of the Jewish Theological Seminary of America (JTS), New York; the Klau Library, Hebrew Union College (HUC), Cincinnati; the Ben Zvi Institute (BZI) and the Jewish National and University Library (JNUL), both in Jerusalem; the Library of the Oriental Institute (Institut Vostokvednya; IV) and the Saltykov-Shchedrin Library (SS), both in Saint Petersburg; the British Library (BL), London. The majority of these manuscripts are not catalogued. Three notable exceptions are Amnon Netzer’s catalogue of the JP manuscripts of the Ben-Zvi Institute, Ezra Spicehandler’s short descriptive list of the JP manuscripts of the Klau Li-
brary (see the bibliography), and Efraim Wust's catalogue in progress of the manuscripts housed at the Jewish National and University Library. I wish to thank all these libraries and their librarians, especially Robert Attal and Yosef Goel (BZI), Meir Rabinowitz (JTS), Efraim Wust (JNUL), and Nadezhda Ivanovna Nosova (IV), for their help and courtesy in providing me with access to the JP manuscripts in their collections. I owe a particular debt of gratitude to Oleg F. Akimushkin (IV), Saint Petersburg, for facilitating my trip to Russia and my visits to the libraries of Saint Petersburg. Special thanks are also due to Robert D. McChesney for drawing my attention to ms. 610 of Fond Vostochnykh Rukopise, Akademiia Nauk, Dushanbe, Tadzhikistan.

There are a significant number of privately owned JP manuscripts in Iran, Israel, the United States, and elsewhere that could not be considered for this book. I had access only to the collection of Efraim Dardashti (Merion, Pa.), which I gratefully acknowledge.

The bulk of JP manuscripts are literary in nature, reflecting the attraction for Iranian Jews of belles lettres, especially Persian poetry, rather than subjects of a halakic (legal), historical, mystical, or philosophical nature. (A separate study would be needed to establish to what extent these aspects of Iranian Jewry's legacy are represented by Hebrew texts produced in Iran.) Reflecting this inclination, the present anthology includes more poetry than prose. Naturally, the choice of texts and of the passages translated from longer works reflect my own taste. In general, I chose to translate texts that indicate the deep acculturation of Iranian Jews, as well as texts whose literary merit remained perceivable even after translation into English. I should point out, however, that these selections, while striving to be representative of JP literature as a whole, are not comprehensive.

Few JP texts have been translated into Western languages, and fewer still have been translated on the basis of critically edited texts. In compiling this anthology, the large number of manuscripts of many of the same texts precluded an exhaustive investigation of all available versions. In order to prepare sound translations for this volume, I edited, collated, or conflated several JP manuscripts for each selection, generally using at least two, and often more, texts. It is my hope that this anthology will spur the study of JP literature, especially the preparation of critical editions.

In *Queen Esther's Garden* has an important and inspiring precursor, Amon Netzer's Persian anthology of JP literature, *Muntakhab-i’ash'ār-i fāriūt*
az āsār-i yahudiyan-i Iran (An anthology of Persian poetry of the Jews of Iran; Tehran, 1973). The aim of Netzer’s volume was to introduce JP literature to Iranian audiences through the transcription of selected JP texts into the Persian alphabet. Although the present work attempts to do the same for an English-speaking audience, my selections, (partial) editions, and annotations differ from Netzer’s more general approach.

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