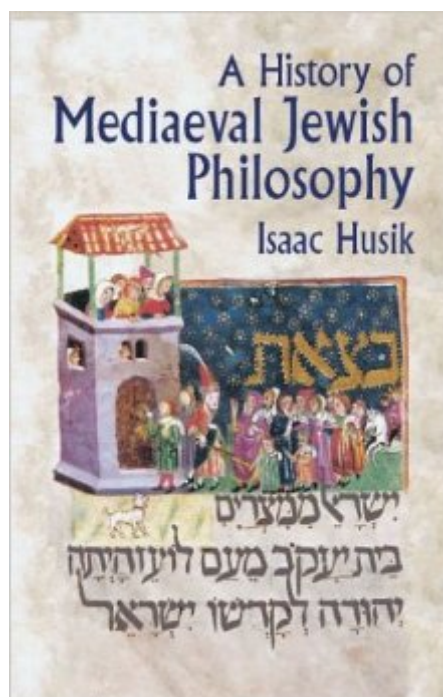


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A History Of Mediaeval Jewish Philosophy



Synopsis

A noted scholar elucidates the distinguishing characteristics of the works of several Jewish thinkers of the Middle Ages. In addition to summaries of the main arguments and teachings of Moses Maimonides, Isaac Israeli, Judah Halevi, Abraham Ibn Daud, Hillel ben Samuel, Levi ben Gerson, and others, the author offers insightful analyses.

Book Information

Paperback: 528 pages

Publisher: Dover Publications (March 20, 2002)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 0486422372

ISBN-13: 978-0486422374

Product Dimensions: 8.5 x 5.5 x 1.1 inches

Shipping Weight: 1.2 pounds

Average Customer Review: 3.8 out of 5 stars See all reviews (6 customer reviews)

Best Sellers Rank: #1,802,793 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #543 in Books > Politics & Social Sciences > Philosophy > Medieval Thought #1568 in Books > Religion & Spirituality > Judaism > History #2246 in Books > History > World > Religious > Judaism

Customer Reviews

This book was written in 1916 by -then- Assistant Professor of Philosophy Isaac Husik (1876-1939). The printed edition has 603 pages. This book is not easy to read, you will really have to take your time to read it and absorb what Prof. Husik is telling you. The author has written this book with a public of both scholar and the 'intelligent non-technical reader' in mind. He treats only the rationalistic school in this book, so there is no information on mysticism or Kaballa. This book is a 'must' for anyone who is interested in Mediaeval Jewish Philosophy, and will also be interesting for anyone who is interested in Mediaeval Philosophy, History of the Jewish People, the Middle Ages, or Philosophy in general. As an example of this book I will copy the first few lines of the first chapter: ISAAC ISRAELI We know next to nothing about the condition of the Jews in Mohammedan Egypt in the ninth and tenth centuries. But the fact that the two first Jewish writers who busied themselves with philosophical problems came from Egypt would indicate that the general level of intellectual culture among the Jews at that time was not so low as the absence of literary monuments would lead us to believe. Every one knows of Saadia, the first Hebrew grammarian, the first Hebrew lexicographer, the first Bible translator and exegete, the first Jewish

philosopher of mediæval Jewry. He was born in Egypt and from there was called to the Gaonate of Sura in Babylonia. But not so well known is his earlier contemporary, Isaac ben Solomon Israeli, who also was born in Egypt and from there went later to Kairuan, where he was court physician to several of the Fatimide Califs.

I've been re-reading parts of Isaac Husik's "History of Mediaeval Jewish Philosophy" in the Kindle edition (originally, it appears, produced as an e-book from Project Gutenberg). The Kindle edition is well-executed, with the rather detailed index hyperlinked to the text, so that there is no problem converting the old page references to location numbers just to find where something is mentioned. I first read Husik's book in a library copy, and longer ago than I care to remember. It was even then antiquated in detail (it is now approaching the centennial of its publication, in 1916), and more recent scholarship concerning the figures it covers can be found, or is at least referenced, in the two editions of "Encyclopedia Judaica" (not to be confused with the old "Jewish Encyclopedia," of the same vintage as Husik's book.) There has been a great deal of impressive scholarship in the general area of medieval Jewish thought since Husik wrote; most spectacularly, but not only, in the case of the mystical movements (Kabbalah and its predecessors). However, I don't know of a more modern treatment of medieval Jewish rationalistic thought (in English) that is equally comprehensive in coverage (twenty philosophers in eighteen chapters), and goes into much detail on each thinker -- sometimes tediously so, as Husik rehearses X's stand on Problem Y, so the reader can see how it differs from those of A, B, and C. However, this is exactly the sort of detail a student needs to form a correct impression of the various thinkers, and their intellectual world(s). The book is, however, weakest when it comes to the issue of the Muslim thinkers of the early Middle Ages, and their impact, individual and cumulative, on Jewish thought.

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