The past decade has seen the appearance of several histories of medieval Jewish philosophy and more are on the way.¹ For students and teachers in the field, the appearance of these new works raises the question whether they complement or supplant the well-known histories of Jewish philosophy of the previous century. Are the older works still of value or are they now outdated?

By a series of coincidences I have had the opportunity to consider this question several times in past years, most recently with regard to Renan’s account of Jewish Averroism and with regard to Husik’s History of Mediaeval Jewish Philosophy. I will mention very briefly my conclusions concerning these two works as background and as points of comparison for the present inquiry. In Ernest Renan’s classic work, Averroès et l’averroïsme, published in 1852 and in a revised expanded version in 1861, the author briefly described the life, teachings, and works of Averroes, and then discussed his impact on later Islamic, Jewish, and Christian philosophers. In a study written for an issue of the Jewish Studies Quarterly, whose theme was the reevaluation of the great scholarly works of previous generations in the area of medieval Jewish thought, I reconsidered the accuracy of Renan’s account of the impact of Averroes on medieval Jewish thought, and suggested how it

might be modified and updated in light of recent research. Although Renan’s account was based primarily on bibliographical notices and manuscript catalogues, rather than on a careful reading of the texts themselves, he was able to give his reader what we now know to be a fairly accurate account of this impact. In considering the extent to which Renan’s account needs to be updated, I took the example of Gersonides. The burgeoning research into his thought illustrates how far we have progressed, not only in the past century and one-half since Averroës et l’averroïsme, but even in the past decade or so, in understanding the influence of Averroes on the philosophy and science of major post-Maimonidean Jewish philosophers. The same can be said with regard to the recent research, impressive in scope and depth, on the impact of Averroes upon many less original and less known Jewish thinkers. I concluded that Renan’s pioneering account of Jewish Averroism needed to be updated and greatly expanded on the basis of a century and one-half of research, but it did not need to be totally overhauled.

Indeed Renan grasped the impact of Averroes on post-Maimonidean thought even better than some contemporary scholars.

Husik’s A History of Mediaeval Jewish Philosophy, published in 1916, was intended to be the first one-volume history of medieval Jewish philosophy. His method was to give a ‘detailed exposition of the individual philosophers’, arranged in chronological order. He explicitly did not seek originality in his History or to impose his own or any other modern ideas on those of the medievals. Rather, he ‘endeavored to interpret their ideas from their own point of view’ in light of the religious and philosophical texts that could have influenced them.

I had the opportunity a few years ago to consider the value today of Husik’s History for a preface to a new printing of the work. When Husik’s book first appeared, it was at once praised as a ‘very valuable summary of mediaeval Jewish philosophy’, and recog-

3. Ibid., 119.
5. Ibid., ix.
6. S. Harvey, preface to Husik, History, i-vi.
7. H. Malter, ‘Husik’s “History of Mediaeval Jewish Philosophy”’, Jewish Quarterly Review ns 9 (1918–1919) 233–244, esp. 233. For Malter’s objections and corrections, see ibid., 238–244.