

# Harvard Theological Review

<http://journals.cambridge.org/HTR>

Additional services for *Harvard Theological Review*:

Email alerts: [Click here](#)

Subscriptions: [Click here](#)

Commercial reprints: [Click here](#)

Terms of use : [Click here](#)



***The Problem of Space in Jewish Medieval Philosophy.*** Israel Isaac Efros, Ph.D. Columbia University Press, 1917. Pp. viii, 125. \ \$1.50. ***Saadia's Polemic against Hiwi Al-Balkhi.*** Israel Davidson. Published by the Jewish Theological Seminary of America. A Fragment edited from a Genizah MS., with a Facsimile. New York. 1915. Pp. 104. \ \$1.00. ***Scrolls. Essays on Jewish History and Literature and Kindred Subjects.*** Gotthard Deutsch. 2 vols. Bloch Publishing Co. New York. 1917.

Joshua Bloch

Harvard Theological Review / Volume 12 / Issue 04 / October 1919, pp 479 - 482  
DOI: 10.1017/S0017816000011007, Published online: 03 November 2011

**Link to this article:** [http://journals.cambridge.org/abstract\\_S0017816000011007](http://journals.cambridge.org/abstract_S0017816000011007)

## How to cite this article:

Joshua Bloch (1919). Harvard Theological Review, 12, pp 479-482  
doi:10.1017/S0017816000011007

**Request Permissions :** [Click here](#)



As one closes these volumes, whether he agrees with Dr. Inge or not, Plotinus compels admiration as a solitary figure prepared for the worst, but refusing to bow to the idols of the market place or to surrender his intellectual freedom "*arbitrio popularis aurae*."

F. J. FOAKES-JACKSON.

UNION THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY.

THE PROBLEM OF SPACE IN JEWISH MEDIAEVAL PHILOSOPHY. ISRAEL ISAAC EFROS, Ph.D. Columbia University Press, 1917. Pp. viii, 125. \$1.50.

SAADIA'S POLEMIC AGAINST HIWI AL-BALKHI. ISRAEL DAVIDSON. Published by the Jewish Theological Seminary of America. A Fragment edited from a Genizah MS., with a Facsimile. New York. 1915. Pp. 104. \$1.00.

SCROLLS. ESSAYS ON JEWISH HISTORY AND LITERATURE AND KINDRED SUBJECTS. GOTTHARD DEUTSCH. 2 vols. Bloch Publishing Co. New York. 1917.

This scholarly work by Dr. Israel Isaac Efros forms volume XI of the Columbia University Oriental Studies, edited by Professor Richard Gottheil, a fact which, taken by itself, gives it a standing in the world of letters. But even without such a background it would attract the attention of the learned, for its merits are quite apparent in many ways. The study of Jewish philosophy has in recent years received more attention on the part of English-speaking Jewish scholars than ever before. But most of them, following the pathway of German Jewish scholars, regard Jewish philosophy as a mere effort from a philosophical point of view to defend Judaism or at best as efforts to adjust it to conditions of the world. Dr. Efros finds Jewish mediæval philosophy rich in original thought on problems that have no direct bearing on the Jewish religion, and endeavors to derive from it a possible solution of "a problem that has baffled human thought ever since the days of Zeno of Elea" — that of space. He shows that the Jewish mediæval philosophers not only affirmed the independent existence of space, but some even took a geometric view of things and conceived the corporeal essence in terms of space. To them space and matter were often synonymous terms. Because Jewish philosophy is so much influenced by the theories of Plato and Aristotle, Dr. Efros gives by way of introduction an excellent though brief discussion of both the Platonic and Aristotelian conceptions of space. The views of the Jewish philosophers of the Middle Ages on Empirical, Absolute, and Infinite space are then carefully presented. Dr. Efros brings

forth many suggestions advanced by the Jewish thinkers in the Middle Ages, which might lead to a new and perhaps better understanding of the problem.

Students of Hebrew philosophical texts will find Dr. Efros' *Glossary of Some Hebrew Philosophical Terms in Connexion with the Subject of Space* extremely valuable, for it embodies a good deal of philosophical matter.

It is regrettable that neither the author of the work nor the editor of the series makes mention of the fact that the work, with the exception of the glossary and index, appeared previously in the pages of vols. VI and VII of the *Jewish Quarterly Review (New Series)*, 1916.

As a whole the work of Dr. Efros will have accomplished much if it will help to stimulate a larger interest in Jewish philosophical problems among students of philosophy in general.

During the summer of 1914, while on a visit to the library of Cambridge University, Professor Israel Davidson of the Jewish Theological Seminary of America examined the Genizah collection, and was "fortunate enough to light upon so important a document as the long-lost Polemic of Saadia against Hiwi Al-Balkhi," who flourished about 850-875. Despite the fact that the latter is mentioned in Saadia's *Emunoth W'Deoth*, Ibn Ezra's *Commentary on Exodus* and Ibn Daud's *Sefer Hakabalah*, his name was almost lost to Jewish history and literature. It was not until the early part of the nineteenth century that his name was again brought to light. It was first Rapoport, and after him Luzzatto, who drew the attention of Jewish scholars to the importance of Hiwi as a rationalistic critic of the Bible. Ever since then, Hiwi and his teachings became the subject of hypothesis and vague conjectures advanced by many Jewish scholars. Hiwi was a skeptic, who, because he propounded two hundred questions relating to the Bible, Jewish philosophy and theology, was attacked by the Rabbanites and Karaites alike.

It was the refutation of these two hundred questions that caused Saadia to write in Hebrew an extensive polemical work, a fragment of which Dr. Davidson has edited from a Genizah MS., accompanied by an English translation and critical notes, and published as volume V of the *Texts and Studies of the Jewish Theological Seminary of America*. It is not difficult to infer from this fragment, containing answers to at least forty-seven questions, that Saadia regarded Hiwi's work as destructive criticism of the Old Testament doctrines. That the Gaon Saadia had written a polemical work against Hiwi was known before, but only a single quotation in Barzilai's *Commentary*

on the *Sefer Yezirah* was accessible. Dr. Davidson's find restores to us a large part of that work, enabling us to clear up many doubtful points as to the nature and contents of Hiwi's questions. We may well agree with Dr. Davidson's inference from two passages in the fragment (sect. 37 and 61), "that Hiwi composed his Book of Questions in a tongue that was not Hebrew," and that he "wrote it in rhymed prose." That Saadia wrote his "polemic" in Hebrew was already suggested by S. D. Luzzatto in 1847, in connection with his publication of an extract from Barzilai's *Commentary on the Sefer Yezirah*. Dr. Davidson's discovery not only confirms this suggestion, but also shows that Saadia followed Hiwi in writing his refutations in the form of a rhymed prose poem with acrostics of the Hebrew alphabet as well as of his own name.

In his excellent introduction Dr. Davidson comes to the probable conclusion that, being inclined towards both Christianity and Zoroastrianism, Hiwi denied the authenticity of the Torah, and accordingly "endeavored to spread his views throughout the schools by means of a new principle of Biblical exegesis;" but he neither defines nor does he show the workings of this principle. Far fetched is Davidson's "additional testimony," that Hiwi was influenced by the teachings of Magi. This consists of a peculiar, indeed ingenious, explanation of the Hebrew term *מכשף* applied by Ibn Danan to Hiwi. Dr. Davidson thinks that this term "is to be taken as the rendering in Biblical Hebrew of the word *magician* in its etymological significance of a follower of the Magi, not in its derived sense of enchanter." Equally untenable is his contention that *בכפרים ובלוחות* in Ibn Daud's description of Hiwi stand for two cities or districts in the Orient, though he admits that he is "unable to identify them."

In editing the text Dr. Davidson displays vast erudition and critical acumen, though in a number of cases he misread the text and accordingly mistranslated a few, quite important, passages. But this in no way diminishes the value of the publication as a whole. We may heartily join the editor in the hope "that the publication of this text together with the facsimile will enable others who work in the same field to discover the rest of this remarkable document."

Jewish learning in America is placed under an obligation to Professor Deutsch by the collection of his *Scrolls*. For first, the *Scrolls* though representing a reprint of articles which have appeared in various periodicals, come in a period of dearth in Jewish scholarship, at least so far as publications are concerned; and secondly, they appear at a time when historical sanity is tremendously needed, an invigoration

of the historical sense; while in the third place, the *Scrolls* are uncommonly interesting. They comprise, besides the Introduction containing reminiscences of the author's youth, surveys of the years 5663 (A.D. 1903), 5665, 5666, 5668-5676 in Jewish history; Philosophy of Jewish History; Minima Curat Historicus; De Minimis Curat Historicus; Everybody Says So; 1815 to 1915; History Repeats Itself; Isaac M. Wise; Moses Mielziner; Jacob H. Schiff; One Generation Goeth and Another Cometh; Reminiscences of the Breslau Seminary; Leyser Lazarus; Friedenthal and the Breslau Seminary; Isaac Hirsch Weiss; Isaac Loeb Perez; Shalom Alechem; Heinrich Heine and Francis Joseph.

In these *Scrolls* Dr. Deutsch exhibits a unique quality. He has a historical imagination that never flags. He sees the scene vividly before his own mind, and presents it as vividly to his readers. He has an intense human interest, not without the salt of humor. It is the personal human side of Jewish history that seems primarily to attract his interest. In a manner of his own he describes the transition from mediævalism to modernism in Jewish history, from the Ghetto community to the Reform congregation. Because Dr. Deutsch always scrupulously insists on unimpeachable truth in history, his *Scrolls* will be found indispensable to the future historian of present-day Jewry. For he has brought together a wealth of material valuable for one who desires a knowledge of the ideas that permeated Jewish life in the period that marked the transition from strict Jewish orthodoxy with its uncompromising opposition to secular culture, to the period when the acquisition of secular ideas was no longer considered deleterious to the religious life of the Jew. Indeed, what Dr. Deutsch says of his own reminiscences is equally true of his *Scrolls*. They "serve future generations as a mirror of conditions, in many instances representing a remote past, and important because they coincide with an era of transition."

Though the *Scrolls* are frequently prolix in statement, they are written with refreshing vigor and are rich in unworn phrases. Dr. Deutsch drives his facts and theories abreast rather than tandem. For this reason the reading of the *Scrolls* calls for close application, of which the rewards are ample. It is only regrettable that present conditions did not enable the learned author to give us more of his *Scrolls*; but the excuse is perhaps to be found in the Rabbinic phrase, "The Torah was given in single scrolls" (Gittin 60a), which Dr. Deutsch so aptly placed on the front pages of his *Scrolls*.

JOSHUA BLOCH.

LAKE CHARLES, LOUISIANA.