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Jewish and Islamic Philosophical Thought in al-Andalus
New Perspectives

Among the many crowns attached to al-Andalus (Islamic Spain), the flourishing of philosophy is one of the most splendid. In this context, the names of such luminaries as the Muslim Averroes (d. 1184) and the Jewish Maimonides (d. 1204) are often evoked together. But when the history of philosophy in al-Andalus is told in more detail, it is usually recounted as two separate stories: that of Islamic philosophy, and, as its offshoot or in its margin, that of Jewish philosophy. The resulting picture in both cases is punctured with holes and full of unexplained peculiarities. To patch over these holes, scholars have come up with ingenious theories, creating phantom-like philosophical schools whose introduction raises harder questions than the ones they were meant to answer. A simpler method to fill gaps in our historical information calls for tapping into all the available sources, both Jewish and Islamic, in order to piece together an integrative history of philosophy in al-Andalus. As this lecture will endeavor to show, it is the politico-religious map of al-Andalus that holds the key to understanding the development of its philosophical thought, as well as the respective roles played in it by Muslims, Christians and Jews.

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