Constructing Lineages: Jews, Muslims and nasab in the Middle Ages

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Jews living in Islamic lands in the Middle Ages celebrated members of their community who could trace their lineage back to biblical ancestors. Modern scholars have generally treated this phenomenon as either inconsequential or the natural extension of longstanding genealogical preoccupations evident already in antiquity. A fresh look at the medieval sources, however, suggests that it was neither trivial nor a straightforward continuation of older cultural patterns. Rather, the Jews’ concern with genealogy emerges as a new and notable response to the importance of nasab in Islamic society.

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