

History Lecture Series

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STUDIES, HISTORY AND CLASSICS
UNIVERSITY OF ALBERTA

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THE UNION - SINCLAIR SUITE (3.128)

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LEAVING IBERIA: A MUFTI, HIS FATWĀS, AND THE ISLAMIC OBLIGATION TO EMIGRATE

During the fall of al-Andalus (known to Christians as the reconquista) some of the first substantial Muslim populations came under permanent non-Muslim rule. For centuries, Muslims had lived alongside Jews and Christians who accepted a subordinate, dhimmī status. Christian conquest inverted this hierarchy and thus presented novel and difficult questions for Muslim jurists. Could Muslims accept minority status under Christian rule, or must they emigrate to Muslim-ruled territory? Scholars interested in Islamic legal responses to Christian conquest have devoted generous attention to the legal opinions (fatwās) of one jurist in particular, Fez's chief muftī Ahmad al-Wansharīsī (died 1508). In this talk, I explore multiple ways of reading al-Wansharīsī's infamous fatwās obligating Iberian Muslims to leave their conquered homelands. Did these texts speed the "downfall of Spanish Islam"? Do they represent Islamic law at its medieval worst, strict and inhumane? Or were they a thinly veiled commentary on the lesser-known Reconquest, the expansion of Portugal into Morocco? Are the questions posed to al-Wansharīsī "true" stories? This talk critiques the perceived exceptionalism of the Iberian Muslim predicament, takes a fresh look at Muslim-Christian relations in North Africa, and considers fatwās as narratives of indigenous resistance and political critique.

Jocelyn Hendrickson is an Assistant Professor of Religious Studies and History and Classics at the University of Alberta. Her research focuses on Islamic legal history in medieval and early modern North Africa and Iberia. She has published articles in *Islamic Law and Society*, *Journal of Spanish Cultural Studies*, and *MELA Notes: Journal of Middle Eastern Librarianship*.

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