

THE DEPARTMENT OF
NEAR EASTERN LANGUAGES AND CIVILIZATIONS AND
THE DEPARTMENT OF HISTORY PRESENT

CONTESTING THE CALIPHATE: GENEALOGIES OF POWER IN THE ISLAMIC WEST

A LECTURE WITH
DR. ABIGAIL BALBALE
ASSISTANT PROFESSOR OF ISLAMIC HISTORY
DEPARTMENT OF MIDDLE EASTERN AND ISLAMIC STUDIES
NEW YORK UNIVERSITY



*Dr. Abigail Krasner Balbale is Assistant Professor of Islamic History in the Department of Middle Eastern and Islamic Studies at New York University. Her book, *The Wolf King: Ibn Mardaniṣh the Construction of Power in al-Andalus*, is forthcoming from Cornell University Press.*

In the twelfth century, as Iberian Christian kingdoms fought to expand into the peninsula's Muslim territories and the Almohad caliphate conquered much of the Islamic west, one king fought the Almohads and served as vassal to the Castilians. At its peak, his kingdom constituted nearly half of al-Andalus and served as an important buffer between the Almohads, Castile, and Aragon. Muḥammad ibn Sa'd ibn Mardaniṣh was celebrated in Castilian and Latin sources as "the Wolf King," and denigrated by Almohad and later Arabic sources as irreligious and disloyal to fellow Muslims. A close examination of contemporary sources across the region shows that his short-lived dynasty actually constituted an attempt to integrate al-Andalus more closely with the Islamic East—particularly the Abbasid caliphate—than ever before. This talk uses the lens of genealogy to trace two contradictory trajectories: how Ibn Mardaniṣh sought to connect himself to the Islamic east, and how modern scholars have used this figure to emphasize the difference of al-Andalus from the east, as a particularly advanced, cosmopolitan and "European" part of the Islamic world.

FRIDAY, MARCH 4, 1:30PM

OPEN TO THE HARVARD COMMUNITY. ZOOM ONLY: [REGISTER HERE](#) WITH A HARVARD EMAIL ADDRESS.

IF YOU OR A PARTICIPANT REQUIRE DISABILITY-RELATED ACCOMMODATIONS, PLEASE CONTACT

NELC@FAS.HARVARD.EDU -