Meeting in the Middle Ages
Interview with Linda G. Jones, 12/24/25

Will: [00:05]
I'm Will Beattie.

Ben: [00:06]
I'm Ben Pykare.

Will: [00:08]
We're two graduate students at the University of Notre Dame's Medieval Institute.

Ben: [00:12]
We're here to chat with students and scholars of the medieval world about what they do and how they came to do it.

Will: [00:19]
So who have we got today, Ben?

Ben: [00:21]
Today we're sitting down with Dr. Linda G. Jones, Professor of Medieval History at Pompeu Fabra University in Barcelona, about her recent lecture on the status of Sufi female preachers.

Will: [00:34]
Let's go and meet her in the Middle Ages.

Ben: [00:37]
Thank you so much Dr. Jones for sitting down with this. We've had quite the fun the last couple days here at Notre Dame. A lot of lectures that ... We received your lecture yesterday, and then you participated in another round table today, which will all be posted online for our listeners to hear all these exciting conversations that we've been having.

[00:59] But to start we like to ask, when you're out and about in the world—let's say at a bus stop—and someone starts a conversation with you and asks you what it is that you do for a living, how do you typically answer that question—just to a random stranger?

Jones: [01:14]
Yeah. First of all, thank you to both of you for inviting me here and this opportunity to do this podcast with you. It's the first time I've ever done something like this, so I'm, like, really excited.

Ben: [01:26]
Great.

Jones: [01:28]

And to answer your question, it depends, because I wear many different academic hats. So, in other words, depending on who's asking, my answer changes. So sometimes I might say to them, *oh, I'm an historian of religions*, or, *I'm a religious studies scholar*, because I get a sense that people are interested in religion. And it's a vague enough way of introducing myself for them to then ask, *Oh, so what do you specialize in?* or whatever. And then I tell them.

[02:02] And then depending on what the reaction is, I stress one more than the other. So I do that sometimes. Other times I just ... I might stress the medieval historian angle, but always also emphasizing my principal interest is in Islamic history and the history of Muslim-Christian relations or doing sort of comparative studies on issues surrounding Islam and Christianity, always focused on the Middle Ages.

So those are the ways that I introduce myself.

Ben: [02:34]
Yeah. It sounds like a lot of ... kind of reading your audience and evaluating and reevaluating that conversation.

Will: [02:43]
Do you ever find that you have to change your answer if you are talking to, say, a Spanish audience versus an American audience?

Jones: [02:50]
Yeah, I guess I do sometimes. Obviously because, when I'm dealing with a Spanish audience, then I emphasize my identity as an historian that specializes in the history of the medieval Iberian Peninsula. And so I talk about that. I love to talk about that. And then again that piques people's interest too, because people will tell me ... people always have, like, their favorite episodes from Spanish history, or maybe they want to tell me about some really interesting place or interesting monument or something that would be fun for me to somehow incorporate into my classes or something, or ... Sometimes when I do just tourism ... Like last year, for example, on my summer holiday, I was staying with some friends that live in ... they have a house in the state of Aragon in Spain. And we visited this medieval church. And when you go to these places, people always ask you, *oh, so where are you from?*

Ben: [04:00]
What do you do?

Jones: [04:01]
And what do you do? And so when the guy ... when I told him, *Oh, I'm a historian. I'm a professor. I teach a class on medieval Spain*. It's, *Oh*, and then, *you have to show me this, and that, and this*, and *oh, make sure you take a picture of this, and that, and the other*. And so I was, like, clicking away, using the photos in my class and everything. So I thought this was really fun.

Ben: [04:21]

That's very cool.

A lot of people have come to medieval studies from different angles. We've heard some kids from childhood were just fascinated with all things medieval, other people late in undergrad or even after undergrad decided *this is what I want to devote my work to*. How did you come to the world of medieval studies?

Jones: [04:40]
Yeah, no, that's a good one too, because I was ... I'm just not sure at what point I decided. I don't know. I was just much more interested in the medieval period than modern contemporary issues. Like I came to academics with a focus ... actually with a focus at first on like ... I got my BA in Near Eastern Studies—so Arabic, Near Eastern, or Middle Eastern studies on .... In fact, just to talk to your British colleague, I used to live in England. Yeah, I lived in London for about seven years. I was working at the International Secretariat of Amnesty International, and I was dealing with Iran and Kuwait, human rights violations and those two countries. I had this career where I was always focused on the Middle East or the Islamic world, but at the time I was working on contemporary issues.

[05:42] And then, I don't know, it just was so horrible, because you're dealing with all these horrible things. And then I decided I wanted to ... So I quit that. I came back to the States. I decided to get my ... to do my PhD. I decided that I wanted to do it in religious studies, and I decided that I wanted to do something comparative—Islam and Christianity. And I think at that point I just realized that I was just much more interested in when the two civilizations were interacting most intensely, which is, of course, in the Middle Ages—in the Christian world they call it the Middle Ages. So yes, that's how it all started.

And then I acquired, along the way, the typical attitude of so many medievalists that anything that happens after the 16th century, it's like, who cares? Anyway, yeah.

Ben: [06:29]
I don't have time for that. You have to stop somewhere. You have to draw some lines.

Jones: [06:36]
It's true. And I do sometimes, especially because of this class that I teach, which is very much focused on the history of the Iberian Peninsula in the middle ages. But I find myself having to come into the very early modern period. Because I always feel like I ... it's not an obligation. I want to ... typically in these classes in 1492 with the expulsion of the Jews, the conquest of Nasrid Granada, and the discovery of the New World ... but I found that it's important for people to realize that the Muslims were still there and that they were there for more than a century later, and that their expulsion didn't happen until the early 17th century. And so I end up justifying having to go into the early modern period just enough to be able to explain the circumstances around that, and then to do some interesting comparisons with the ... what do you call it? ... the context and the rationale for the expulsion of the Jews versus the expulsion of ...

Will: [07:40]
This is from Iberia, correct?

Jones: [07:41]
Yeah, from Iberia.

Ben: [07:42]
We're excited to have you all the way from Barcelona. How have you found teaching in that context? In terms of having been in London and receiving your PhD here, and kind of teaching through that, I assume. How has that experience been?

Jones: [07:57]
It's been fun. I have had some experience teaching in the States too, because, like so many people, I started off when I was doing my doctoral degree being a TA. So I had that kind of teaching experience while I was at Santa Barbara. And then I was given the opportunity to come back and teach a class. I was actually ... no, even before I finished my degree, I was able to teach a couple of classes on my own. And then I was invited to come back once again to fill in for another professor that was away.

[08:28] So I've had a little bit of experience teaching American students. Yeah, I still remember some of the classes that I taught at Santa Barbara with a lot of fondness for my students there. And the main difference that I see between teaching in Spain, like in Barcelona, and here is, I find it in general easier to get the American students engaged. So, you want to have a class where ... You know, obviously, as professors we have to, like, impart information and teach. But we're always looking for a bit of feedback, or trying to encourage the students to participate, to ask questions, to engage. And it tends to be more difficult to get that in Spain. Students tend to be a little bit shyer. There still tends to be a little bit more of, I think, a custom of this ... of the professor doing most of the teaching, just speaking all the time and the students taking notes, or just not really taking the initiative all the time to intervene.

[09:45] And so you have to ... I find that I have to encourage them a bit more or maybe be a little bit more systematic. Like I teach one class with ... and it's more like a religious studies class, so it's just like a very basic introduction. It's called the Great Religious Traditions. So, we do these five in chronological order: we do Hinduism, Buddhism, Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. And I did a dedicated part of the session to textual commentary, giving the students an opportunity to read portions of a sacred text. And so I just literally, just go down the line and just have them intervene. You know what I mean? If somebody isn't brave enough to raise their hand first, and I'm like, *okay, you, then you*. That's a little bit of ... it's a bit of a cheat to do that.

Ben: [10:35]
Yeah. But it gets some talking.

Jones: [10:36]
But it gets them talking, yeah. So that's kind of like the main difference that I've found.

Will: [10:42]
In Spain, then, is it more typical that lessons would be a lecture format, where you just … you have the professor that presents for an hour, rather than a seminar situation where you've got smaller groups that are chatting?

Jones: [10:54]
Yeah. No, we do both. And even with the lecture format, we've been moving away from that. Like … What do you call it? Pretty much every class at the undergraduate level is organized so that you have a certain number of real lectures, and then they have what they call over their "*practicas*." So, in other words, there are … it's like seminars within the class, opportunities for students to … where the whole session is devoted to discussion. It could be commentary on text; it could be doing other kinds of exercises; it could be presentations, either individual or in groups—so, all kinds of ways for students to be participating in a more active way. And then they're graded on these other … on these exercises as well.

[11:47] But the thing is, we have a quarter system. And so it's 10 weeks per quarter. And so if you want to impart information and make sure that you've covered all the material, you have to dedicate some of the classes to just lecture.

Ben: [12:04]
Getting through content.

Jones: [12:05]
Yeah, just getting through content, because otherwise, there's just no way. Because if it's *all* just free-flowing discussion, maybe you'll get through everything, but then maybe you won't. And then you have a certain amount of information that you have to have on the final exam, and then if you haven't covered it in class, you know, that's a problem.

Ben: [12:25]
Fascinating. Another question I had: When I was coming to these things I learned classical Arabic first and then got a little bit of modern standard on top. With your studies—and in your undergrad, coming to the modern Middle East and then later moving back—what was that experience like with the language? And I'm sure with your undergrad, you had some basic history, but then really digging into it later … I'm just curious about that experience of working from the present back.

Jones: [12:53]
I started to learn Arabic at Berkeley, and it was Classical Arabic. So, you learn classical Arabic, and there I did … There were some classes in dialects. I did that too. But my training is basically classical. For that reason, for me, it was easy to transition to dealing with text.

[13:16] It's true that when we were first learning—taking these classes in Arabic—it's true that we were reading texts that were modern. Like, we'd be reading the newspaper. Or, we'd be reading modern novels, and things like that. And then, the teacher would point out to us, *Oh, here's a*

colloquialism that, you know, *that the Egyptian authors put in*, or something like this. But then we also had to read classical. We were reading passages from the Koran, and that way you're able to see how ... you appreciate the complexities of Arabic grammar, and how things do tend to get simplified with modern ... like modern newspaper stuff, or whatever. So no, I didn't find it difficult at all, that transition to just working with medieval text.

[14:01] The hard thing was the first time I encountered a manuscript, because, before then, I had only read printed, edited works. And so, the first time that I actually sat down and had a *manuscript* in my hand ... and even, it was like a, it wasn't a ... at first it was like a microfilm of the manuscript. But even still, it was the manuscript; it wasn't like a typed-out version. And so that was a real challenge. That was like, *Oh my God, I'm never going to be able to read this. Oh my God. Never*. And then eventually you get used to the person's calligraphy and everything.

Ben: [14:36]
You start finding your alphabet. *How do they do these?* Yeah, with Arabic there's a lot of forms, and so, calligraphy is tricky.

Will: [14:46]
For those who don't know ... Sorry, for those who don't know, what are the differences between using an edited text and a manuscript, and what are the new challenges that a manuscript presents?

Jones: [14:57]
Yeah, a manuscript is just ... it's often more difficult to read because you've got ... It's literally like the difference between .... You pick up any book, you pick up a newspaper, and the letters are written in a certain font and with straight lines and everything, and it's all very clear and easy to read ... as opposed to picking up somebody's handwritten letter, and maybe that person has like a kind of a messy handwriting, or maybe they have a certain style in the way ... and, *Is that an "I" or is that a "J"*? Do you know what I mean? Things like that. So that's the difference.

[15:30] And then sometimes ... although it's not so much in the case with Arabic texts ... but sometimes there'll be abbreviations that are unexpected, or I discovered that sometimes the person will be writing the words along, and then we'll get to the end of the line, and they'll realize they don't have enough room to complete the whole word. And so they'll write the first letters over here at the end, and then the other letters over here, or something like this. So it's, *Oh, so that's what's going on*.

Ben: [15:57]
So you're stuck for like minutes being like, *What word is this?* And then you're like, *Oh, it continues*.

Jones: [16:02]
Yeah, *it continues*. And things like that. I just had to figure out that those sorts of things were going on.

Or what they would do, which is, I thought, rather ingenious, is … So, manuscripts will not be paginated. And so what they tend to do is, at the end of a page, in the margins, often the author or the scribe will write, in the margin, the last word on that page. And then, on the following page, they'll write that word again—or something—so that you can tell. So that you can connect. So, things like that.

[16:51] Again, dealing with a manuscript, the other thing that you have to … unlike a printed text … is you also have to pay attention to see whether there are any kind of marginal writings, that a scribe or maybe a later reader has written in—like in the margins, or on the side, and it might be making a comment on something, or maybe correcting something that … or whatever.
And so that's always interesting too, to see.

Will: [17:17]
So then you have to deal with additional hands and additional kinds of messy or very crisp and clean handwriting.

You said there as well that there isn't as much abbreviation generally in Arabic manuscripts as you might find in Latin manuscripts, where—given things like maybe the quality or the value of the parchment they're using and also just conventions—there is more abbreviation. There's an accepted kind of *system* of abbreviation that's used. Is there a reason that in Arabic manuscripts you find it less, or does it just come down to conventions?

Jones: [17:51]
I honestly don't know. My instinct tells me conventions, but I honestly … like, don't quote me on that. I don't really know. But I'm just going from what I personally have encountered in the numerous manuscripts that I personally have looked at. In various libraries, whether they're manuscripts that are housed in libraries in Spain, or libraries in Morocco, or libraries in Tunisia, or a few manuscripts that I've been able to see online, or some of them are housed in Paris, et cetera, and in the Vatican … I just see that. I haven't seen any kind of … never any kind of an indication of any, like, systematic abbreviations, as you have in the Latin tradition. But I have no explanation for why they didn't develop that system, or whether they … or why they didn't feel the need to.

Ben: [18:55]
Can you … I just want to hear more about your archival work. As a graduate student, archival work is still very scary, intimidating. And I'm just curious, as you gain more experience and go to more places with letters of introduction, et cetera, how has your archival life developed as a scholar?

Jones: [19:15]
Yeah, it's all … it really depends on the place. Sometimes you can have very good experiences because the culture there at the library is to facilitate scholarship and be open to receiving scholars and to expect that scholars are going to want to come and take a look at the manuscripts or whatever. And so you can find librarians that are really into that. And then you find others where they treat it as if it's these state secrets, or something. *It's mine, mine, go*, or something like this. And they don't want anybody to take a look at them.

[19:51] And I had a really bad experience at a library. I won't say where. And it was like being interrogated at first by the Gestapo. "Why do you want to look at this document?" And the guy didn't even ... he didn't even think that I could read it. And so he gave me a paper or something to read in Arabic. "What does this say?" And I was like, "look, I need my dictionary. There's a word I don't know." And it's, "Aha. You can't really read it." And so in the end I ...

Ben: [20:21]
That's like my worst nightmare, is that you'd show up and get a quiz from the library.

Jones: [20:2]
And so then I looked at the manuscript, and I ordered it. And I said, "Okay I, this is the manuscript that I want." I paid for it, and they never sent it to me. So that's, like, what you can ... worst case scenario. We're not talking about a lot of money or anything, but it's the principle of the thing.

Ben: [20:43]
Yeah. Certainly, certainly. When libraries don't live up to ... the reason they presumably exist is for people to come and see what they're holding.

Jones: [20:52]
Exactly.

Ben: [20:54]
Oh, wow.

Jones: [20:55]
Yeah.

Will: [20:55]
Were you a graduate at that time when you were ...

Jones: [20:57]
No, this was like a few years ago. No, I had funding, I went to that country, I stayed there for I think a couple of weeks, and I was going to the library all the time and all of this. And I came back practically empty-handed because they never sent me the ...

Ben: [21:13]
They never pulled what you asked for.

Jones: [21:15]
Yeah.

Ben: [21:17]
Wow. *Wow*. That's hard.

With kind of that process of your needing to go to places to look at things, is there … Do you feel like, with your research, there's already enough, there's so much in collected, printed editions for you to mine? Or do you feel like you're a scholar that's … *no, I know there's more out there that I need to find in these archives and bring to the light to help with my arguments*.

Jones: [21:45]
Yeah, yeah, because people are discovering text all the time. Yeah, all the time. Even if it's a new copy of a work that's already known, and maybe you have certain additions based on … Usually what scholars do, if it's a text that has multiple manuscripts, copies, what the scholar will do is we'll try to gather together all of the copies, compare each of them, and do the addition based on what's the best—our most complete edition—and then, in the footnotes, indicate wherever there might be differences among the different … And so, even in situations like that, where you have a text that's been edited and maybe there are multiple manuscripts that are already extended and are known, it's always exciting. Even then when you find yet another manuscript that people didn't know about and and then you wanna see, *Oh*, you know, what little differences you might find there or something. So that's fun.

Ben: [22:42]
As you're looking for different things, if there is a dream manuscript that you could will into existence, what kind of information from the past would you like to stumble across?

Jones: [22:56]
Yeah. Oh, I know exactly one. And it's not even anything that I particularly work on, but I mentioned it in passing yesterday in my talk. There was this book that was written by this Muslim woman from Al-Andalus, who was a professional singer and an instructor of music, and she wrote a book. She wrote a book called *The Book of the Female Singers of Al-Andalus*. And she obviously wrote it in the style of a very famous book of singers that was written in Baghdad in, I think, the 10th century.

[23:38] And so here you have this woman in Al-Andalus who lived in the 11th century, who was a musical master, right? So, not merely an entertainer, but also well-versed in the theory of music and who probably had within her own repertoire … probably memorized thousands of songs and was obviously training other women in the profession. And it was big enough of a profession for her to have written a book about just all of the women involved in music in her country. And so I thought, *My gosh.* If that … if somebody were to …. If that manuscript … If a copy of that were able to appear one day, we'd all be … All of us medievalists working on like medieval Liberia … we'd all be, like, killing each other probably to get ahold of this. So that would probably be it.

Ben: [24:38]
That's very cool.

Will: [24:40]
So how do we know about this mysterious author who wrote this book that sadly has not yet been found?

Jones: [24:49]
Yeah. It's because the Arabs have this wonderful tradition of writing, like, dictionaries of works that have been produced by authors. And we know about this book precisely because there were various Andalusi authors who compiled these lists of works that were produced by their fellow Andalusis over the centuries, and in one of these, he mentions this work. And so that's how we know.

[25:22] Or sometimes it'll be the case ... Another type of a source is in, like, a biographical dictionary. So that's another really interesting genre that the Arabs developed of ... So a typical biographical dictionary will be like "The book of the ... and all the Andalusis who lived in the 12th century," or something like this. Or it might be people associated with a particular dynasty, or people associated with a particular profession—like a dictionary of all of the Muslim scholars, or a dictionary of all the musicians, or something like this.

[25:59] And so, in these kinds of ... when they're ... Usually, they can be very short one-liner entries, which is the person's name and what their profession is—the bare bones. But some of them are quite extensive and would be pages and pages of lots of information. And so usually the typical things that they always put are like, (1) where the person studied, (2) who or rather whom the person studied with, (3) often which works they studied and under whose supervision, and then (4) if they obtained a license to teach those works, a list of their disciples. And in the course of providing that information, often you see them—the author or the compiler—also providing the names of the authors and the titles of the works. And then, of course, if the person who's the object of the biography, if that person has written works, then of course they will list the titles of those works as well. And so through biographical dictionaries, we often find out the titles of works that existed, even if we often ... people try to see whether these works are still extant somewhere. And then we know that some were lost and then others sometimes do appear.

Ben: [27:15]
Very exciting. I'm always curious, when you hear an invitation like this to come to a different institution and to give a lecture or a talk, how do you begin the process of answering that call? Does it start with an idea that you've wanted to be working on? Does it start with, *I have this in progress, and this kind of fits the theme*? Or is it something completely new that you cook up for an event like this? How is that process?

Jones: [27:42]
Yeah, it could be both or either, depending on the situation. But if it's something that's just so far out of my ... where I just ... sometimes I have to just politely decline, because I just literally can't think of anything that I'm working on that would remotely tie in, fit into what they want to do. So, it just depends. But I try to always link it to something that I'm working on already.

[28:10] Or maybe it's like an opportunity to work on something. Like this happened, actually ... This happened to me last year, because I was invited to participate in ... I was invited by Professor Thomas Burman to participate in this religious pluralism seminar, and that gave me a wonderful

opportunity to work on a text that I've been wanting to go back and work on for a long time. And I just never really figured out a moment to do it. And so, I was able to work on it, present the first draft, and get some meaningful feedback on it from the participants in the seminar. So, that was really useful.

Ben: [28:50]
Well, wonderful. For this Conway lecture series, was this an easier task, or was it a harder task?

Jones: [28:57]
No, this one was pretty easy because what happened was, again, Professor Burman, he reached out and he said, "Do you know anybody who has written anything about Muslim women and preaching?" And I said, "Actually, I know one other person that had touched upon it in a recent book that she was working on just a few years ago." And I said that I did a little bit of work on that. And he said, "Oh, that's what I want to know. Would you like to be able to come, write about this?"

Ben: [29:24]
Fantastic. That's very cool.

Jones: [29:27]
And I was like, "Yeah." That gave me a chance to do a kind of deeper dive into some of the information about these women, about these female preachers that I had come across. And I had just written a brief notice about them in a previous publication, but I didn't get a chance to find out a lot more about them. Like the woman that I focused on in the second part of my talk yesterday, for example, that was, a material that I was able to look at just for this talk. So, I hadn't had a chance to really analyze her text, that hagiography, in depth. So that was good.

Will: [30:02]
We are obviously going to provide links for the Conway lecture and all that information when we post this episode, but would you mind just summarizing very quickly the main topic of your talk and that second half, and the hagiography that you're referring to?

Jones: [30:19]
Oh, sure, okay. Basically what I was doing was I was talking about this tradition of homiletic exhortation, these sort of … they're not … maybe it's wrong to call it "informal preaching," but it's the preaching that's not done in the formal context of the Friday communal prayer. So, it's another type of preaching, which is mainly homiletic exhortation and stories and sort of moral exhortations. And people can do these at any time and on any topic, although it tends to be associated with asceticism and ascetic themes—things like, "retirement from the mundane world" and "devoting yourself exclusively to God," or encouraging people to maybe perform some extra prayers or extra rituals in order to get extra merits, or something like this. And because of the informality of it, because it's not attached to the liturgy and because these are not obligatory rituals, it means that this kind of preaching was open to women in a way that the formal liturgical preaching was not.

[31:32] And so I just explained the circumstances around that and what we know about these female preachers. And so I gave them a sense of the sources that we have, the two main types of sources that we have of information about these preachers. I explained how some of them were in biographical dictionaries and others were in a hagiographic compendium, because the women were mystics or some of them were considered saints, et cetera. And so I gave people a sense of how different the information was presented in these two literary genres. We went through five examples of these very brief one- or two-liners and the biographical dictionaries, which just gave the name and then it said, *Oh* .... My favorite one is Rashida [???]. So, "Rashida the hortatory preacher who used to wander around Al-Andalus preaching to the women, and she was a pious person." And that's it; that's what they say—there's no other details.

[32:26] And then I explained how in the other, in the hagiographic sources, there tends to be more information. They tend to record the words of the women sometimes because ... and I explained why the function of recorded speech is hagiographic texts dedicated to Sufi mystics. And then I featured a couple of examples of these women preachers, who were also Sufi mystics. And so I gave them a sense of what the information was there. And with this one Tunisian woman, I reproduced in a handout the fragments of her sermons, of her exhortations, that were recorded in these sources, to give people a sense of what her words were like.

[33:26] And I also explained, I was engaging with this scholarship that the main thesis of which is that ... showing how in Islamic mysticism and Sufism, that's where you have ... where women have a lot more opportunities to hold these kinds of leadership roles. And preaching is of course a kind of a leadership role, because in the practice of exhorting someone and preaching to them, well, you're speaking to that person from a position of authority, and the person who's receiving it is heeding what you're doing. And so, that was a way of showing a kind of gender inversion, because it's usually the men who are in positions of authority, and it's usually women who are subservient or obedient with respect to the male authority. And so, Sufism is one of the areas in Islamic culture where you can have the roles reversed, and it's not really or necessarily deemed controversial. But that's what I explained.

Will: [34:29]
Brilliant. Thank you.

Ben: [34:30]
As you're working still with comparative religions, that seems to be true also ... in some senses, right? ... in the Christian mystical tradition, that you see much more frequently women ... It was fun hearing the similar parallels using language, right? Where, "I have this message from God. This is not from me. Don't blame me. I don't want to take the heat, but this is God's word that I have been tasked to deliver." And that kind of throat clearing, cultural throat clearing, perhaps, to say, "Now here's the contact that I have." What is it, do you think, about these mystical traditions in Christian and Islam that give opportunities, seemingly ... where the typical hierarchies within the religions might not be as welcoming to some of these voices?

Jones: [35:16]

Yeah, I think Islam and Christianity kind of share a tradition sometimes of resistance … resistance to those voices. There are several examples in the history of Christianity where certain mystics were female mystics were … some of them were exalted, and some of them had the ear of the Pope and everything. And others didn't end up in such a happy way.

[35:40] And in the Muslim hagiographic sources, there are all kinds of hints, and subtle hints, and sometimes not so subtle hints, about the resistance that these women encountered. I could tell an anecdote that comes from the hagiography of this Tunisian saint. She had a novice. It seems like all of her novices were male. And so she had this novice, and there were these 10 Muslim *ulamā*—scholars—who basically beat the guy up, because he was cavorting with this woman. And she was going around frequenting places where men who were not relatives, et cetera, were. And so these 10 scholars beat up the disciple and told him to stop this. And so of course he goes to the saints and he says, "Look, this is what happened." And then she says, "Okay." And then within—I don't remember whether it was within an hour or within a day after she told him this—all ten men died, because they all shared it … they all were in the same building—I guess they all worked in the same building—and the roof just miraculously collapsed on them, and they all just died instantly.
And so her enemies, the people who challenge her, tend to meet these untimely deaths.

Ben: [37:08]
Yeah, divine affirmation.

Jones: [37:09]
Yeah. But it's like, a lot of these miracles occur within the context of powerful men challenging her right … the right that she's claiming to occupy this space, and be in the public sphere, and be in a position of authority, and engaging with other men, and talking about Sufism or whatever.

Ben: [37:34]
Very exciting. Very exciting.

Will: [37:36]
I know that this has been a very busy few days for you, and we're right at the end of a pretty hectic Conway lecture series, so we don't want to keep you too much longer. But I did have one final question I'd like to ask: What advice would you give anyone that's interested in pursuing a humanities degree or graduate school, particularly given that you also took a few years out of the academy before coming back in?

Jones: [38:03]
Alright. I guess I don't have any really concrete advice, except to just say that I'm a fan of the humanities, and we just have to … we just can't allow them to take us out. We just have to keep on clinging on and showing that we are, I think, immensely relevant. I think it would just be an absolute horror for the state of humanity for the humanities to disappear. Do we really want to live in a society where it's just run by robots and technocrats, and with people who have an idea that only the next new thing is the thing that's important, and if it's older than yesterday, it doesn't matter? What is that? To me that's …

[39:00] I guess my piece of advice is just to not give up on the humanities, and to just … not just cling in a kind of a defensive way, but go on the offensive and say, "Yeah, we definitely matter. And what we're doing definitely has purpose." And I just feel like without the humanities, society really is going to fall apart. So, that's where I see it.

Ben: [39:20]
Well said. Thank you so much.

Unfortunately, that's all the time we have today, Dr. Jones. Thanks again for taking time to sit down with us and talk. Is there anywhere online that you would want to direct our listeners to learn more about you or your work?

Jones: [39:26]
The webpage of my university, Pompeu Fabra University. All of the professors have a webpage there, so I think people can just find me there.

Will: [39:47]
Thank you again, Dr. Jones, for joining us. And thank you all for listening, and we'll see you next time in the Middle Ages.