OTTOMAN HISTORY PODCAST

a podcast about the Ottoman Empire, the modern Middle East, and the Islamic world

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SPEAKERS

Rabiat Akande, Ann McDougall, Chris Gratien, Wendell Marsh

Chris Gratien 00:16

Welcome to "The Making of the Islamic World." I'm Chris Gratien. If you're hearing this through the Ottoman History Podcast website, "The Making of the Islamic World" is a series of podcasts intended for the university classroom. With each episode, we provide a bibliography of readings associated with the topic, as well as readings and other activities great for group discussion, or for simply exploring on your own.

Chris Gratien 00:37

This installment of our series is about a place that we haven't really discussed much yet. Sub-Saharan Africa makes up over 15% of the world's Muslim population, and its share is continually rising. Roughly a quarter of the world's majority Muslim countries are in Africa, and most of those are in West Africa.

More than 95% of people in countries like Mauritania, Senegal, Niger, and Mali are Muslim. In Nigeria, Muslims are only a slight majority. But there are still more Muslims living there than in Egypt, Iran, or Turkey. Those facts alone merit West Africa's inclusion in our survey as a center of the Islamic world. But as we'll discuss in this episode, there are dimensions of West Africa's history that give a particular importance for understanding global history and Islam's place in it.

Wendell Marsh 01:26
When we put Africa at the center of Islamic history, we're challenged to take Islam seriously as a message to humanity. And if we do that, then we have to deal with prophetic statements like "I was sent to the Red and the Black." We have to deal with verses in the Quran like Verse 13 in Hujarat: "Oh mankind, indeed, we created you from a male and a female, and made you into peoples, into tribes so that you may know one another." Right? We have to deal with scriptures like Ar-Rum, Verse 22: "And among His signs are the creation of the heavens and the earth and the variations in your languages and colors. Truly in this are signs for those who know." These examples, they're not a justification of the kind of spiritual bypassing that's popular among some apologists of Islam, you know, that there's no race in Islam or that Islam is colorblind. But what these citations do is encourage us to go through human difference to arrive at responding to the question, "What does it mean to be human?," instead of pretending that difference doesn't matter.

Chris Gratien 02:55
Wendell Marsh is assistant professor of African American and African Studies at Rutgers University, Newark, where he teaches a class called "Islam and Blackness in Global History."

Wendell Marsh 03:05
In my course, "Islam and Blackness," I'm trying to encounter the problem of historical difference. In the words of Dahlia Gubara, I want us to be "taken and shaken by other times in places." What that means is moving from our certainties, certainties around, you know, race and religion, and moving backward, and peeling away, and thinking of how our certainties relate to other forms of human difference, the extent to which they existed in other times and places or not. And in the case of Blackness, I'm choosing that very intentionally as opposed to the traditional framing of race, because in this course, I'm trying to engage with but also depart from Black Studies, which has a very robust theorization of Blackness as a modern phenomenon.

Wendell Marsh 04:11
Black Studies has really dealt with in historic depth and theoretical complexity, how to think about Blackness as the organizing principle of the modern world. To think with someone like Saidiya Hartman as objection, as social death, and kinlessness, of the uneven distribution of death in a time that is otherwise characterized by an increasing control over the management of the processes of death and dying. All this is very useful to think with, even if it is incomplete and uneasy, or one is given a sense of unease in thinking through the pre-modern. I think that when we pivot to think about the historical specificity of Africans and the African diaspora in the long arc of Islamic history, there are obvious problems with applying too much directly from modern experiences. Of course, in particular, we have to attend to the differing nature of power in the modern versus the pre-modern, right?

Wendell Marsh 05:28
So, the first is segregationist, it is administrative, biological, and ultimately absolutist. Whereas the pre-modern is assimilationist. Take for example, the durable structure of pre-Islamic social organization. Tribal organization has been called an institution of incorporation. Kinless people could become kin across the color line. There are possibilities of social mobility. There was no parallel structure for this in Atlantic slave societies, even if some families were, in fact, crossing the the color line. And yet, you know, when we read the poetry of Antarah, or the polemics of Jahiz, in his "Boasts of the Blacks over the Whites," we sense a certain family resemblance to people today we want to call Black with these pre-moderns. And so, in the class, we're trying to attend to these ambiguities, these kind of incomplete parts that become less ambiguous and more certain with the gradual racialization of slavery we see over the course of the late medieval, early modern, and modern periods.

Chris Gratien 06:54
New research increasingly shows that questions of race have been part of the relationship between Africa and the Islamic world from the beginning. But studying that relationship requires bearing in mind that what we mean by "race" varies from context to context. Blackness may emerge in sources from different periods of history but that doesn't mean it signified the same things that it does today. The same could be said with regard to Islamic law, or Sharia, which also has a long history in Africa.

Rabiat Akande 07:20
The presence of the religion on the continent dates as far back as the earliest days of Islam, when a group of Muslims, you know, sought refuge in Abyssinia, which we now know, as, you know, present-day Ethiopia, you know, fleeing persecution, you know, in Mecca. And so, there was a period when, you know, the foundational legal texts were still in the process of coming into existence. So the Quran was still being revealed, the actions, you know, and sayings of the Prophet, God's blessings on him, were also, you know, still, you know, coming into existence, but in sort of, you know, sort of West Africa in particular, scholars, you know, updated, you know, the presence of Islam to the ninth century. Historians also argued that Islam must have existed in the areas of the Lake Chad Basin area, some of that is indeed Niger, but also Nigeria, Chad, you know, Cameroon's as we currently know it, at some point before the 11th century. And so, you know, as far back as that time, you know, Islamic law had come into existence. Its origins was really through Africa in the West, was through the Sahara, so through the trans-Sahara, you know, trade routes. And so, the messengers of Islam, as you know, scholars like Ousmane Kane would argue, were scholars, you know, traders, and Sufis, who, you know, were brought, and these identities were not always, sort of, mutually exclusive and so, you know, scholars were also traders, some were also Sufis who brought both the religion as well as the religious legal tradition with them across the Sahara.

Rabiat Akande 08:52
And what's really striking about this moment is that this was the moment when the foundational legal, you know, principles, you know, the, for instance, the four Sunni schools, you know, of Islamic jurisprudence, came into existence between the eighth and the ninth century. So it was really, as Islam was common to that region across the Sahara that this foundational legal text, you know, this, you

know, the foundations of Islamic jurisprudence, as we now know it today, was coming into existence. Right. Because obviously, there was no need for, sort of, a body of jurisprudence at the earliest of times. But, you know, after the first set of Muslims, jurists sort of wanted to, you know, to systematize the legal tradition. And so it's really interesting that it's just when it was coming in, right, into West Africa, that the legal tradition itself was being built, which then creates this, you know, system of, you know, of growth and it's dynamic because it was not cast in stone already before it came into the region.

Chris Gratien 09:48
Rabiat Akande is a scholar at the Harvard Academy for International and Area Studies. She has a doctorate in law and is licensed to practice in both Nigeria and New York State, but her scholarly work is very much situated in the past.

Wendell Marsh 10:02
I actually turned to history right? Because I was so you know, I was so bothered, right, by the deadlock in Nigeria's constitutional discourse, right? So, you know, there's been as far as I can remember, there's always been a debate about, you know, the Sharia and about, you know, the the Muslims, you know, Muslims in Nigeria seeking a return to pre-colonial Sharia of, you know, for the creation actually, more accurately, for the creation of Sharia institutions, you know, and Christians opposing that. And what's really striking is that both groups have invoked, you know, the past as, you know, in support of the opposition's way, even though, you know, the past that is invoked by both groups are so like, you know, radically, like, they can't possibly coexist. And so I was just really, I was just really sort of drawn to, like, understand, right, why both sides have such different memories of the colonial experience, you know, and what exactly was going on. And so that's, you know, really how I got into this, right, so like, the historian's regression, you know, as it's usually called, again, that's how I got, you know, into thinking about history as a way to figure out how legal ideas, how legal arguments, how legal debates travel over time, and how, you know, they're actually inherited. So, this is not to say, right, that we ought to be always fixated on the colonial past. But what history does for me, right, is to show there are always, you know, already alternative paths that are not taken, right, that our current, you know, the Nigeria's deadlock, it was not already predetermined, right? And it's, you know, it's the case in other parts of the world as well, that our notion of what it means to bring back the Sharia today, you know, we could have gone another word, for instance. So we can, there are alternatives. And just realizing that opens up possibilities, right, for what a future can look like.

Chris Gratien 11:59
Both Rabiat Akande and Wendell Marsh are scholars who work on the modern history of Islam in West Africa, interrogating how Islam is transformed, inevitably takes them back to its earlier history. Because many of the limitations in how people understand Islam in the modern context, are rooted in an incomplete understanding of its past. To delve deeper into that past, I spoke with Ann McDougall, who teaches at the University of Alberta. She has decades of experience working on the history of West Africa.

Ann McDougall 12:33

I was amazed to see what I said in 1983, which [laughing] scares me when I think about a long ago that was. But but I actually realized that what I said in 1983, is exactly pretty much what I still believe.

Chris Gratien 12:46
For many parts of Africa, pre-modern textual sources are limited, which means that scholars who work on earlier periods are engaged in some of the most innovative and interdisciplinary historical research out there. Scholars of West Africa are somewhat less limited in this regard. But their approach is similar.

Ann McDougall 13:03
We use this combination of material sources, that we're putting, it's like putting puzzles together only when you put a puzzle together, usually, all the pieces are, you know, of one nature. It's either three dimensional, or it's flat, or it's whatever. Here, it's like we're putting together puzzles made of all different, you know, so we have Arabic texts, you know, that come from outside, people who were looking at the Sahara and West Africa and interpreting it through their vision. We have people in the Sahara who are writing about the, you know, they're writing about their society as they understand it. And we have, of course, after the fact, we have archaeological work that, you know, that's a lot of what we know or think we know about places like Aoudaghost and Ghana come from archaeological work, in fact that's one of the most important challenges to some of these external sources. And then we also have oral tradition. That's another piece, I think, that is hugely important for understanding this early society. And, you know, it has to be worked with in a completely different way than we're working with these these written texts, obviously differently than archaeology. But nevertheless, I think they need to be, you know, we need to throw them in the mix and see, you know, see what they stir up.

Chris Gratien 14:25
For McDougall, the starting point for studying Islam in West Africa isn't really where the most people live there today, nor is it an adjacent region of the Islamic world like North Africa. Rather, we need to pay attention to the Sahara Desert itself, which in some places is more than 1000 miles across north to south. McDougall's work has focused on the southern edge of the Sahara, in a region known as the Sahel.

Ann McDougall 14:48
People tended to look at, well, they didn't look at the Sahara at all. What they were looking at was a sort of relationship between sort of North Africa and, quote, "sub-Saharan" West Africa. So I sort of decided to dive into the southern Sahara, attempting to look from that perspective. And in so doing, I was sort of reexamining the nature of the relationship, particularly around the desert edge, and I realized that's really where the focus was.

Chris Gratien 15:21
The Sahel is on the border of a number of West African countries today. But in the pre-modern period, it was at the center of a trans-regional economy.

Ann McDougall 15:30

You're absolutely right that we tend not to think of the desert as having resources that people actually want and that can be exploited, and that's part of the whole idea that we cross the desert or, you know, we bridge it, or it's a barrier. But we don't talk about what's in it.

Chris Gratien 15:53
The Sahara was and still is rich in something absolutely essential for human life: salt. Today, many of us suffer from too much salt in our diets. But in the pre-modern world, salt was scarce and extremely valuable. That's because without salt, humans and livestock can die. Salt deficiencies in the body create some of the same symptoms as dehydration, and salt was also useful for preserving perishable foods before the invention of refrigeration. So it's much more than a mineral that adds a little taste to food. And it turns out that some of the same environments that have all the natural resources to support a large population can be actually very poor in salt. The Sahara had what they lacked.

Ann McDougall 16:38
There were salts that were produced along the desert coast, and these were the areas in which the ocean floods the coastal regions for part of the year, ocean salt water pools, and these pools will then evaporate with this really hot sunshine. And there are some areas where the salt content of this sort of evaporated water is so high, that people can actually take it out in bars, in chunks. Now, there are other parts, other areas where it isn't quite that solid, but it forms a kind of loose salt almost the way we think of the salt in our salt shakers today, and it can be collected. It can be sort of scraped up, it can be put in sacks. We do know that around the, by the 11th and 12th century, for sure, there was one of these areas that was producing enough salt that, apparently, it was being transported into the desert and into places like ancient Mali.

Ann McDougall 17:45
The other main kind of salt that you find in much of the desert is salt that was formed from very ancient lake beds. So there is a time in history, when a lot of the Sahara was actually very wet and very green. And there are these sort of depressions and in those areas you had lakes. And, you know, over time as the Sahara dries up, etcetera, a lot of these lakes become sort of, they dry up, but they also become covered with sand, and I mean, sometimes several meters of sand. But they remain. They are, literally they've formed, they've dried up, and they become layers of salt. There are several of these areas, particularly, the most well-known one being a huge depression area north of Timbuktu in the central Sahara, and there are many areas there in which this underground salt can be dug out, and it's dug out in slabs.

Ann McDougall 18:48
And then the last kind of salt, this is important, not in the region so much that I'm dealing, that I was talking about, but in the sort of more easterly regions, central to east, what is today, sort of, Niger or Chad. And there you have massive industries of deliberately creating a situation, rather than like on the coast, where you have a naturally-formed, you know, these pools that form and depressions along the coast, here they're created. So they literally create pools of, again, this is water, it's salt water, it's bringing up salt from deep in the Sahara, and pools are created. And then, again, the sun evaporates the water. There's a whole process by which you take a pool, you let a crust form, then you break it,

and it reforms, and then you break it again, and it reforms, and in the end you end up with salt that you can then pack in bags, or baskets, or whatever. And then you leave it to dry, and it gets hard, and it becomes like massive cones of salt, or baskets of salt, or whatever. And it can be, again, transported hundreds of kilometers for that matter. And so the whole sort of central, this is the region that Paul Lovejoy has worked on, and so, again, these are, you know, right across the Sahara, different kinds of salts. But all, you know, formed from the very, very long history of what the Sahara is.

Ann McDougall 20:21
If I could find a key element of this story, it was salt, in the sense that this was a commodity that was controlled by these desert pastoralists. And it was a commodity that was needed by populations to the south for health reasons. And in turn, these people also supplied to the pastoralists things like grain, and other foodstuffs. They also supplied, in exchange for salt, slaves, which could then, in turn, be used as labor to again produce things that the pastoralists wanted, and it was traded for gold. And that is the one commodity, for sure, that was geared to a trans-Saharan trade, that route to North Africa. But just about everything else I've talked about, really was initially a part of an inter-regional and a desert-edge set of commercial networks.

Chris Gratien 21:21
The salt trade also reveals that many of the binaries historians had taken for granted, such as the strict division between nomadic pastoralists and settled agricultural communities, were mistaken.

Ann McDougall 21:32
Too often people just assume, you know, "Well they're camel pastoralists, they just lived off their camels and their milk," and everything we know about pastoral society suggests that is very rarely the case. And so, you know, I was looking at, well, what did these people need? Did they, you know, did they consume grain? Did they, you know? And as I looked at it, it became quite clear to me that a lot of, if you could, sort of, characterize this society, very much of it had to do with sort of conflict over resources for their sort of pastoralism. But another huge part of their society, their economy, was geared towards relationships with non pastoralists, whether that be north of the Sahara, you know, or just on the southern edge, which is what I was looking at. And so the emphasis on the sort of conflict that supposedly dominated this southern desert edge had been, to my mind, was much exaggerated. And what was not being looked at, more to the point, were ways in which these desert peoples — what were the nature of their relationships with these people to the south? And not just ancient Ghana, but people throughout that whole region.

Ann McDougall 22:45
What I did argue was that much of the time what you actually see is economic exchange, a sort of interdependency along the desert edge for commodities that they supply to the south, and the south supplied to them. Many examples of political alliances to defend their interests or to expand their interests, and alliances that were not defined in terms of pastoralists versus cultivator, or Muslim versus non-Muslim, or White versus Black. But political alliances that were focused on joint allied political goals just like any other sort of political economy that you would talk about. That's the way I began to see the

southern Sahara as a kind of political economy, in which the dynamic around the sort of desert edge was a driving catalyst or a driving force.

Chris Gratien 23:42
Salt was the Sahara's most valuable commodity. And during the first century CE, the desert began to transform from a major barrier between North Africa and the rest of the continent to a major conduit for trade, thanks to the introduction of camels and camel caravans. The states of the Sahel, meaning the "edge" or "coast" of the Sahara, grew wealthy as the caravan trade expanded, and they converted mineral wealth into political power. Though the desert trade predated the arrival of Islam, it was in this region that the first major Islamic polities emerged in West Africa.

Ann McDougall 24:17
We want to draw those lines on the map, and we want to put a date around them, and and I think, in so doing, we've obscured that very dynamic that you're asking about. To me, there's a reason why these supposed empires that we talk so much about develop if you look where they develop. They develop right across the, you know, the Sahel, right across that desert edge, which I think should be drawing our attention because I think that's a key.

Ann McDougall 24:52
That desert edge and the opportunities it offered for economic development and economic development, in turn, offered possibilities for the creation — I'm going to use the word — for the creation of power. How do you take a particular form of wealth, whatever that might be, whether it's the control of salt, or the control of gold, or you know, or the control over a region through which trade must pass ... how do you take that potential and turn it into actual power? And I think the answer is not always the same. That's that's the whole point. That's where our problem is, with trying to attach power to the idea of this sedentary, you know, kingdom where we draw lines, and everybody knows where the frontiers are. I think that's why the southern Sahara and the desert edge is so interesting, because power isn't so much about that sedentary, power very much had to do in those regions with mobility, with seasonal movement, with the ability to, you know, control different resources that then, in turn, became part of that network. Then it's that it's a dynamic process, where you watch and you see — where do alliances occur? In this particular region, contrary to a lot of the initial interpretations and literature, you had pastoralists who were Muslim of Berber origin allied with, what we call, you know, Black Africans who were not Berbers, I'll put it that way, who were Soninke, or who were some other ethnicity of south of the Sahara. You had them working together, fighting together, they were allies.

Chris Gratien 26:49
The source base for the early history of Islam in West Africa is paltry. But it seems that rulers and communities were beginning to embrace Islam around the same time as it was happening in other regions of the Islamic world, like Central Asia, from which Turkic dynasties like the Seljuks, who we discussed in episode three, would emerge during the 11th century.

Wendell Marsh 27:17

So by and large, Islam spreads through West Africa in a very gradual process that takes a very long period of time, in fact, several centuries. The process is most characterized by exchange. By exchange, of course, I mean, trade in goods. But there's a broader kind of exchange that's happening in between, through different societies within West Africa and, of course, through the processes of trade to other regions of Africa, right? You know, the broader world. What is clear is that the services Muslims provided to states, in particular imperialist states, were very useful services. And of course, they included specialized knowledge around trade, navigation, etc. But of course, writing and divination of various sorts, right? So these were very powerful skills for one to have.

Wendell Marsh 28:38
And the earliest written record we have of embrace of Islam by one of these kind of rulers, is that of War Jabi in Takrur in the 11th century. And, you know, the story more or less goes that there had been an extended drought for a number of years, and all of the specialists of ancestral religion, who were in War Jabi's courts are unable to do anything about the drought. They couldn't bring rain. And there is a stranger, who is Muslim, who appears and basically says that, you know, "If you convert, if you embrace Islam, then rain will come." And he, War Jabi does, and it indeed rains. And so the first record that we have may be a kind of symbolic oral tradition that's been transcribed, or it might have been a historical personality. Either way, I think it speaks to this dynamic of services rendered that have kind of real effects in the world. And that kind of organized reality in a way for rulers of political formations of various kinds in this early period. As such, Islam is most associated with the courts of rulers. They, in return for exchanging these services, they were often given kind of spaces of autonomy in these.

Wendell Marsh 30:37
A pattern that we discern very early on in the Empire of Ghana, for example, in which kind of there's a Muslim Quarter. Historians used to call this the kind of quarantine phase where, you know, it's thought that Islam is almost like a contagion and is being withheld from the common population. And, you know, thankfully, historians have moved away from that language and that idea, but what is important to recognize about this division or the circumscribed role of Muslims within a given state, it is really important to recognize the differences in the role of Islam later on, particularly after 17th, 18th century. Throughout West Africa, in oral tradition and various, you know, tales, there are kind of similar stories about strangers who appear and who bring Islam in various ways.

Chris Gratien 31:53
The first polities with Muslim rulers had formed along the desert edge around modern day Mauritania, Mali, and Senegal, and according to one telling of history, a group that emerged along that desert edge from the 10th century onward had the most significant influence on the spread of Islam in West Africa. In Episodes Four and Five of this series, we talked about the role of Berber confederations in the politics of North Africa, and we briefly discussed how the label of "Berber" itself is problematic for a number of reasons. One of those reasons is that the term does not refer to a monolithic community of any sort. Berber is a label applied by outsiders to a number of different groups speaking related languages and ranging across a vast territory on both edges of the Sahara Desert. In tenth-century West Africa, a movement known to history as the Almoravids emerged within the Sanhaja Berber communities. The term Almoravid comes from the Arabic word "murabit." It referred to people of the

Ribat, a ribat being a sort of outpost that could simultaneously be a lodge for traders and Sufis, as well as a fortification for soldiers. On the northern edge of the Sahara, the Almoravids, would build an empire that also controlled much of North Africa and al-Andalus. But this storied history often obscures their southern Saharan origins and connections.

Ann McDougall 33:10
When you look at the Sanhaja, the pastoralist people in the south, you know, part of the story and, again, it's a controversial part of the story, is that prior to quote, "launching jihad" against other Sanhaja groups and these pagan Black Africans, this is more or less what the literature tended to say. These these pastoralists were said to have sort of replicated the hijrah and sort of taken refuge in a ribat. Whether it was fortified or not remains, you know, argued. Probably not. Was it even a physical place? Nobody's quite sure. But the idea was that they removed themselves with a small group of followers who were taught the purer form of Maliki Islam. They agreed to follow this, they attract other followers, and then they leave their ribat, and they launch their jihad.

Ann McDougall 34:05
The whole concept of whether or not they had anything to do with a ribat, whether the ribat was anything physical — one theory about it is that it was, really we're just talking about a kind of religious network, a kind of religious coherence and that's all that was ever meant by the term. In Morocco itself, so in the north, you actually do have a history of these ribats, these centers, of religious learning. Again, the term, the same term is used, the Arabic term is used. In fact, one of these was the religious home to an early Almoravid leader, we'll say. And so, in a sense, there's a connection there as well. It's a combination of a very mobile, linguistic use of al-murabit, and it is an actual physical movement of these of these people because some of the Southern Saharan Sanhaja do, in fact, move into what, you know, becomes Morocco, do, in fact, establish Marrakesh do, in fact, create what we're used to thinking of as a political dynasty.

Ann McDougall 35:24
But they continued to have connections and roots, you know, in their southern, you know, to use Bennison's term, their "southern way," and so they are the same people. A lot of what fed into that northern empire, call it what you will, came from the south, you know, and it came from the Sanhaja, who were still based in the Sahara. They were still raising camels, those camels were the ones that were being used in caravans that brought gold, slaves, and various things to the Almoravids in the north. Those same camels, well not the same ones but, you know, camel caravans brought goods from the north into the Sahara, and from the Sahara to the regions south of it. So that southern part, those Sanhaja people, whether you call them al-Murabiteen, whether you call them a Almoravids, or whether you just call them Saharan Sanhaja, they were, they continued to be part of that dynasty.

Chris Gratien 36:29
The southern Almoravids are known for their conquest of the wealthy oasis city of Aoudaghost and their raids against the Ghana Empire. They also played a pivotal role in the establishment of the Maliki madhhab as the dominant school of Islamic jurisprudence in West Africa. Now, if we focus on a division of the Sahara, into a north and south, and juxtapose the Sanhaja with sub-Saharan African

communities, we may come away with the mistaken impression that Islam spread from the north primarily through conquest. But if we stay focused on the dynamics of the southern desert edge, we get a more nuanced picture.

Ann McDougall 37:02
At the very time that we're talking about, you know, the Almoravids somehow bringing Islam, you know, to Ghana. There were already Muslims in Ghana long before that. There were Muslims in another smaller, like before Ghana is so-called empire, you know, there were several states or polities, again, call them what you will, again, along this desert edge and down towards the Senegal River. One of them was a place called, or a region called Takrur. And Takrur was, as far as we can tell, was Muslim, or at least some of, you know, one of its leaders was Muslim, some of its people were Muslim. They were with the Almoravids. You know, at a time when the Almoravids were, you know, sort of internally conflicted in the southern Sahara, and there were battles going on for who was going to be the dominant clan within what we call the Almoravids. We can't overlook that. A lot of these early battles are not between so-called Muslims and non-Muslims. They're between different groups of Muslims. And their differences at that point were not necessarily, in fact, I would argue, were not about the nature of Islam at all. They were political differences.

Chris Gratien 38:24
The history of the Almoravids demonstrates that what was happening on the southern desert edge had a larger significance for Muslim societies in North Africa. Now let's move forward a few centuries to deal with a figure who's known to have made a big splash in the center of the Islamic world: Mansa Musa, Sultan of the Mali Empire.

Wendell Marsh 38:47
You know, Mansa Musa is probably, in many ways, one of the most consequential rulers of, you know, the medieval West African trade empires that kind of come to be known in world history and in the global history. He was a figure that was known by his contemporaries outside of, beyond West Africa. It's often said that he was the richest man to have ever lived. I think I saw some listicle online that showed that, you know, if you were to kind of value in today's, you know, currency that he would far outstrip Jeff Bezos, and Bill Gates, and all the other just ridiculously rich people that we can think of today.

Chris Gratien 39:38
Mansa Musa's wealth attained mythical proportions. But his presence as one of the most important rulers in the Islamic world during the fourteenth century is very real. In 1324, he visited Cairo during a Hajj pilgrimage to the holy cities of Mecca and Medina and left behind quite a reputation.

Wendell Marsh 39:55
The historical documentation is there. When, I believe, it was Umari who is writing years after Mansa Musa's visit to Cairo, he has no problem finding people to give accounts of the kind of splendor and the extravagance that he, his visit to Cairo and, ultimately, to Mecca during his pilgrimage, you know, all

that he brings to his trip. And, you know, it's often said, of course, that he brings so much gold that it loses its value or at least it is devalued for, I believe, it's twelve years.

Chris Gratien 40:37
If you read Umari's account, it's pretty clear that Mansa Musa was trying to show off in Cairo. But that's because charity was considered a virtue for a Muslim ruler, and the many gifts he dispersed in the city affirmed his generosity for posterity. Another noteworthy moment in the account was when Mansa Musa met the Mamluk Sultan of the time, al-Nasir Muhammad. Musa refused to kiss the ground before the Sultan's feet, according to al-Umari, making a prostration to God instead. Now this was a significant moment in Islamic history for a number of reasons. As we've learned throughout the series, both sub-Saharan Africa and Central Asia had been reservoirs of enslavable people employed in the armies of many rulers. But here we see the ruler of the largest empire south of the Sahara in an encounter with a Mamluk Sultan, whose father, Qalawun, was literally an enslaved Kipchak Turk, who served the Ayyubid Sultan. During the early fourteenth century, they were arguably the two most powerful figures in the Islamic world.

Wendell Marsh 41:35
This, of course, is interesting, in and of itself. At the same time, I'm really taken with an observation that historian Michael Gomez makes in his recent, relatively recent book, "African Dominion," that there is a curious absence of Mansa Musa in the region's oral tradition. So, often, when we talk about African history, oral tradition is one of the primary means of making African history in terms of, you know, kind of reconstructing it. And yet this very consequential figure for global history isn't present in the regional tradition. And I think that curious absence really captures some major problems, limitations when we think of global history, right? The very reason why someone might be important, beyond one's, kind of home space, home region, might be the very reason why they're inconsequential within it, or vice versa.

Chris Gratien 42:46
Mansa Musa may have earned a reputation as the most wealthy ruler ever known to people in Egypt, or Iberia, where a famous 14th-century Catalan Atlas, commissioned by the king of Aragon, depicted him holding a large piece of gold. But in West Africa, he might have simply been the rich heir of a long line of powerful Sultans.

Wendell Marsh 43:06
In some ways, yes, Mansa Musa enters into the historical record with this extravagant trip. Yes, he puts West Africa on the map as is evidenced in the Catalan Atlas, right? But what does that mean locally? That's where I think we see this really ambiguous legacy, this ambiguous inheritance. So within the oral tradition of West Africa, it's all about Sundiata Keita, who is the founder of the empire of Mali, who's a predecessor of Mansa Musa. Within the oral tradition, Sundiata Keita represents a figure who really establishes social order, and is making sense of the space that he is in. In contrast, if we think about what might have been the effects of taking so much gold, so much wealth, taking so many people in his entourage out of West Africa, is a possible impoverishing of that space.

Wendell Marsh 44:19

So something that we see over the kind of long duree of the history of Islam in West Africa is that the Hajj pilgrimage is an incredible undertaking, right? Let's think about the distance here, right? It's an incredible distance, and to organize an entourage it takes an incredible amount of resources. And, you know, there are different times and places, I'm thinking, in particular, in the Sokoto Caliphate much later in the 18th, early 19th century, you know, the position is taken that actually Hajj isn't necessary, because it's too much of an expense. It requires too many resources, you know, struggling on behalf of Islam locally is far more important. But yet, Mansa Musa makes this move. And it could be that it was a strategy for power, you know, not exclusively that, like, you know, there were likely very sincere reasons why he went as well. But it could be one of these situations where he was kind of an outlier, and he did the thing that no one else would do. Does that make him great? Or does that make him something else? You know, that's up for debate.

Chris Gratien 45:37
Looking back from the 20th century, it's hard not to admire what Mansa Musa represented. West Africa has passed through a centuries-long experience of colonialism and resultant impoverishment visa vie other regions of the world. Millions of West Africans were also carried off to the Americas by European slave traders during the early modern period. Their descendants continue to live with the legacy of enslavement long after the practice itself was abolished. In this context, the image of a powerful Black sovereign on the world stage is certainly compelling. Yet Mansa Musa controlled an empire, one that he inherited from his predecessors, who built their position by extracting wealth from their populace, which included profiting from the traffic and exploitation of enslaved people. And in this regard, Islam was a double-edged sword, tied to the identity of an elite class, while also binding them to the responsibilities towards the growing number of Muslims they ruled over.

Wendell Marsh 46:32
The history of Islam in West Africa, in many ways, is paradoxical if not contradictory. The key way to navigate those contradictions, not surprisingly for a historian, is to periodize. And, I think, that what happens before the fall of Songhai Empire is quite distinct from the dynamics that happen after. And the historical division that matters most, for me, it's really that. What happens before, you know 1591, Tondibi, and what happens after in the place of Islam, they're two very different dynamics. The place of Islam and the identity of imperial states, that only happens Songhai and before. And while there are Islamic political formations that happen after and the wave of Islamic revolutions, in particular, late 18th-, 19th-century, it's of a very different order.

Chris Gratien 47:42
To get to the heart of this paradox, we need to talk about Islamic law and what it came to mean in West Africa. By the time the Songhai Empire eclipsed the Mali Empire, during the 15th century, the region was developing a tradition of Islamic jurisprudence in the Maliki school of thought, which also predominated in Iberia and North Africa.

Rabiat Akande 48:01
It is certainly the case that Maliki thought became, you know, the predominant school of jurisprudence in West Africa. And, you know, particularly, you know, to the activities of, you know, the Almoravids,

right, in Morocco, right, were, you know, sort of sponsored Maliki jurists, and so what would happen is that, you know, certainly by the 11th century, there would be a very rich tradition of Maliki jurisprudence. And it would, you know, spread throughout the region to traders, and scholars, as well as, you know, Sufi saints. But this is also not to say that there was no sort of recognition or even engagement, indeed, with other schools of jurisprudence. You know, there was recognition of diversity of schools of thought, but Maliki thought was certainly the most influential. And, you know, probably the most influential, foundational textbook, I mean, apart from, of course, the, you know, Imam Malik's, "Al-Muwatta," which, you know, obviously, is the foundational text. But you know, there was also a very famous text, "Al-Mukhtasar," which I've, you know, been reading. It was a really foundational text that scholars would engage with.

Rabiat Akande 49:04
A very striking thing that existed then, which we don't see today, which, you know, is also really important in conceptualizing how Islamic law took a form and how it developed at that time was that there was a really sort of rich engagement between, on the one hand, the qadis, the judges, and then muftis and where the jurists were. So there was always sort of this exchange back and forth. The institutions of learning, you know, were very, you know, very dynamic, the most famous, as we now know today, is when to Timbuktu, right, you know, Sankoré, for instance, was a very famous center of learning that was there. And these centers of learning were usually sort of of mosques, schools, right? So they were both mosques at the same time that they were schools. You know, and scholars, you know, could sort of engage across the sciences. It was also, you know, the case that many of these scholars would engage in different branches of the sciences, which, again, runs contrary to what we think of as, you know, the Islamic legal specialists. It's not how we would sort of conceive of, conceptualize of courts today, because even the judges themselves were sort of engaging, for instance, with muftis who were not the sitting judges, but they could have tremendous influence on the outcome of actual cases.

Chris Gratien 50:16
The Maliki school was one of many schools of thought, but its role in West Africa developing its own local tradition of Islamic learning and thought may have been more than incidental.

Wendell Marsh 50:26
Someone like Amadou Hampâté Bâ, who was a writer, kind of an ethnographer from colonial Mali, and thereafter. And, you know, he kind of made the argument that Islam was already in West Africa, in so many different ways, right? In terms of the kinds of practices and traditions, and so when, you know, merchants, and traders, and scholars arrive, they're very, it's a very easy transition. And it becomes very attractive to West Africans who are otherwise followers of ancestral religions.

Rabiat Akande 51:12
And one of the really sort of striking things about this Maliki thought is that it gives a lot of room to local custom, right? Which then, you know, empowered these jurists to engage with the foundational Maliki texts, but also the primary texts, you know, in Madeira al-Subh, you know, the Quran and the Sunnah, while also taking into careful consideration, you know, the local circumstances, which, you know, really,

really enriched the jurisprudence of the scholars. And so, as these scholars expanded upon the law, institutions suddenly came into existence, especially in those areas with well developed state forms, like, you know, in the Songhai Empire. We would also say that Machida and the Sokoto Caliphate, you know, and the Kanem-Bornu Empire as well, which was, you know, in the Lake Chad Basin area, so northern Nigeria, you know, and Niger, Chad, Cameroon.

Rabiat Akande 51:59
Maliki thought does make for more room for, you know, for custom, and, which might also sort of account for why, you know, some persons might imagine that sort of African Islamic law, is not sort of Islamic law, per se, right? And, of course, Maliki law itself places, you know, immense significance on the custom of the people of Medina. You know, if something is not clear, you know, in the law, then we ought to look, you know, at the practice of the people. It's usually the case, like obviously, you know, you might have, you know, a principle, but then how it comes to life, in an actual case, you know, what, you know, would largely depend on, you know, the background of the judge or the jurist. And this is not obviously, you know, to discount with the other principles that jurists take into consideration, like maslaha, which is also a really, really big sort of concern of Maliki jurisprudence. But Maliki law does give a lot of room to custom. You know, one of the reasons why, you know, scholars have argued why Maliki law, you know, found such fertile ground in Africa, right, was that scholars were able to sort of really expand on the law by taking into, you know, into consideration, you know, the unique local circumstances.

Rabiat Akande 52:03
And, you know, it's well-known, you know, Africa, you know, it's just, it has, it's really diverse in the customary practices that exist, you know, in its different parts, right? So when in one modern sort of post colonial state in Africa, you might have what as many as, in Nigeria, for instance, about 300 ethnicities, just as many customary laws and there was some variations within. And so Maliki law, you know, has historically taken that into consideration, which is reflected in the jurisprudence and the rich tradition of jurisprudence. But also in the form Maliki thought and Maliki scholarship came to take, you know, over time, especially in pre-colonial times. So again, the colonial sort of manifestation, and in its post colonial form is, you know, pretty different sort of question. But in pre-colonial times, Maliki scholarship was, it really engaged with, you know, the diversity of the customary, you know, circumstances.

Chris Gratien 53:59
While the early Muslim rulers of West Africa were known to the rest of the Islamic world, even in their day, scholars of recent decades have shown just how early local populations began to convert to Islam so that by the early modern period, Islam could absolutely be said to have been a religious tradition rooted in the context of local societies. West Africa became a center of Islamic learning in its own right.

Wendell Marsh 54:21
You know, actually, this might take us back to the Mansa Musa. When he comes back from his pilgrimage, he brings a lot of people with him, right? He brings a kind of architects, you know, people to build mosques, and teachers, scholars of various sorts. So I think that is a really important moment.

You know, I suspect that even Ibn Batuta's journey to West Africa, you know, if we recall Ibn Batuta's big world tour happens before the trip, his trip to West Africa. His trip to West Africa is a kind of specific mission that the ruler of Morocco dispatches him on. It's because of the kind of ways that Mansa Musa has become, and it's really developed an interest among kind of other Muslim sovereigns to see Mali as an important Muslim state in some respects. So under the Empire of Mali is usually when we think of the very important, though it's imperial, there's a substantial kind of Muslim culture that is developing within that empire. But then the next really important moment is the kind of second phase of the Songhai Empire after Askia Muhammad, which is often thought of as something of a, you know, going back to Gomez, as he calls it, "a renaissance." Askia Muhammad creates a kind of a moment of very important, flourishing culturally, intellectually, economically, etc. This is also a moment where you have kind of distinct smaller political formations in which sovereigns are Muslim. I'm thinking specifically of Borno and others.

Rabiat Akande 56:45
There's always sort of this assumption, right, that Africa is always a place, you know, that is sort of shut off from the rest of the world and sort of this exchange of ideas. And, at best, it is this place where knowledge might be received, but never actually sort of exported. But, you know, scholarship has shown that Africa was not just, you know, did not only sort of, you know, receive. It was not shut off. Certainly, it also exported knowledge. It did, you know, through the scholarship of, you know, some of the, you know, the famous sort of scholars in Timbuktu, Sankoré, you know, especially in Sankoré College produced scholars who were not only famous across the region and whose works were not only tremendously influential across the region, but who also expanded both their work across the Sahara and students came from the Maghreb, right? So from Morocco, Algeria, Tunisia, and Libya, right, to study in great centers of learning in Africa. You know, surely in the Songhai Empire. But also some of the scholars actually, you know, went, right, so some of them would be, you know, invited by Sultans, right, to come and sort of teach students across, you know, across the empire.

Ann McDougall 57:59
What did it mean to be a Muslim at any given moment in these regions that we're talking about? I just felt that this was a critical issue. During this period, one can get an idea of how people were questioning the meaning of being Muslim in this sort of the desert edge region across much of West Africa by looking at the question of slavery.

Chris Gratien 58:32
At the end of the 15th century, the Songhai Empire controlled the large territory stretching all the way from modern day Niger and Nigeria to the Atlantic coast. Its major centers of learning where Gao, Djenné, and the world famous city of Timbuktu. Askia Muhammad, who ruled Songhai at the beginning of the 16th century, is the ruler associated with its apex. In addition to gold and salt, knowledge was becoming one of the major products of the southern edge of the Sahara. Sources from the period reveal that the relationship between sultans and scholars in the region was not completely harmonious. And this is because Saharan scholars, like Muhammad al-Maghili, were becoming some of the first of their kind in the Islamic world to grapple with the changing nature of power, specifically, the practice of slavery.

Ann McDougall 59:18
In one instance, in the case of al-Maghili, a new ruler of one of those empires we were just talking about, Songhai, came to power having overthrown another ruler who was Muslim. And this is tricky because, technically, there's no justification for this. The justification came to be the same one that many Muslims used as they attacked other Muslims: "You're not a good enough Muslim." So now, you know, this guy, Askia Muhammad, is turning to a cleric, a learned Muslim scholar, and saying "Okay, now that I've, you know, I've overthrown this guy. Now I'm supposed to be the, you know, I'm the epitome of the the good Muslim ruler, how do I be a good Muslim ruler? You know, here's what's going on, tell me how I'm supposed to be a good Muslim ruler." Well, one of the key topics that keeps coming up in his questions have to do with slavery. So we got a lot of discussion in al-Maghili's comments about about slavery.

Ann McDougall 1:00:25
Most of the time we pay attention to what al-Maghili says. What I'm suggesting is that we should pay attention to the questions. Because it seems to me that in the questions that this new king, Askia, is asking, this is where we get to see inside his view of his own state. He is definitely a Muslim. But he is also a political ruler. He's somebody who has just carried out a coup d'etat and overthrown a ruler. He's now trying to get people united. He's trying to make sure that he has a solid economy going, that, you know, that commerce is in place, that he's not going to get rebellions, and that where he thinks he might have rebellions and problems, he's basically trying to find a way to get rid of them. And he wants to be able to use a lot of the slave labor that his, you know, the other, the former King had in place. He wants to be able to usurp a lot of the property that people have. When you look at his questions, and then you start thinking about them from different points of view. "Yes, I want to be a good Muslim ruler. But hey, wait, I also want to be a good ruler. Oh, wait, I actually just really want to be a ruler. I want to exercise power. How do I get power out of this situation?" And and as I say, a lot of the questions revolve around slavery. So it's not that we're going and saying "I want to know about slavery." But as we look, if we pay attention to his questions, we realize how central slavery is to this larger picture and that's where we can start to learn a lot.

Chris Gratien 1:02:03
At the turn of the 16th century, legal questions surrounding slavery in West Africa were becoming more complicated. A large segment of the population had become Muslim. Muslims and people living under the protection of a Muslim ruler were, in theory, off limits when it came to the question of enslavement. But that was at odds with some of the incentives of a new ruler. By the end of the 16th century, these questions surrounding slavery would tie more explicitly into the question of race.

Chris Gratien 1:02:31
The Songhai Empire was faltering, and a new dynasty was on the rise on the other side of the Sahara in modern-day Morocco, the Saadi Dynasty. During the 16th century, the Saadis were among the many aspirant empire builders on the world stage, and the first in North Africa to effectively deploy firearms. The Saadi Sultan, Ahmad al-Mansur, who came from an Arab lineage, claimed dissent from the family of the Prophet and the title of Caliph. Across the Sahara, Songhai had a lot that such a ruler would

need to build a new imperial caliphate — gold salt, people to conscript or enslave, and important centers of learning. His rise would spell the end for Songhai.

Wendell Marsh 1:03:11
By the end of the Songhai Empire, right, and this is a very critical moment in global history, in 1591, battle of Tondibi. Ahmed Mansur has sent the arma to capture the salt mines and the gold mines of West Africa. You know, there's the scholar Ahmed Baba, who is from Timbuktu, and he's imprisoned and taken to Marrakech.

Ann McDougall 1:03:46
So he's sitting under house arrest in Morocco, you know, giving all this advice and interpretation and a lot of it, okay, so a lot of the questions that we're interested in are asked by merchants. And these are merchants who want to do business, you know, in Timbuktu and so on. It's really interesting how many of their questions have to do with slavery. It tells us something about their own view, in this instance, of the society, you know, to the south of the Sahara. And, in this particular instance, one of the most important questions that gets asked, there's lots of interesting stuff but one of the most important questions that gets asked, it's the one that most people raised, is somebody asked him, "So who is it we can legally enslave? And who is it we can legally buy and sell as slaves? Is anybody who is Black, you know, is this a legitimate reason to capture, buy, sell, use?"

Wendell Marsh 1:04:49
So here, at the beginning of the 17th century, there's this fantastic document that is a fatwa, which is the Miraj al-Su'ud, you know the ladder of ascent. And in it, he's asked, "Is it not true that Blacks who are taken, aren't they all slaves because they were conquered?" And Ahmed Baba says,

Ann McDougall 1:05:14
You know, in a nutshell, "No, no, no."

Wendell Marsh 1:05:18
"We've never heard of any such thing, and so those rules don't apply."

Ann McDougall 1:05:24
"It's whether or not they are a believer."

Wendell Marsh 1:05:26
"You know, in fact, if someone says that they're Muslim, the burden of proof is, you know, really on you as the slave trader, and it's best to free them."

Ann McDougall 1:05:41
The very fact that somebody is asking the question suggests that, at this moment, so now we're in late 16th century, the idea of race has become a piece of the story. They wouldn't ask the question otherwise. And that wasn't an issue that was brought up with al-Maghili. Maybe something's changing. But his answer in this instance, really is interesting, too. Because he goes through this long story about

how we decide who is really Muslim and who isn't. And that's, to me, fascinating not because it tells you who can or can't be enslaved. But because in that whole process, we're getting some insight into how people are understanding what being Muslim is.

Wendell Marsh 1:06:28
He gives a very extensive list of the community's political formations, groups considered to be Muslim at this time.

Ann McDougall 1:06:40
Most of this region, people are voluntarily, you know, they're becoming Muslims. And so, you know, that means they're really committed. So you can't really touch those people.

Wendell Marsh 1:06:51
The list is so long and so extensive that it suggests that it wasn't simply like the big imperial formations that were associated with Muslim scholars and might have had some, you know, nominal Islamic affiliation, which is, in older scholarship, is sometimes thought. What this list suggests is that, actually, is quite widespread, and it includes groups that aren't thought of as being particularly hierarchical, right. So that, you know, there very well may have been a much more kind of widespread and vibrant Islamic practice.

Ann McDougall 1:07:40
So again, what I'm hearing is the changes that are occurring in how people see themselves in a time when more and more people are wanting to see themselves as Muslims. And that question of slavery, opens it up.

Wendell Marsh 1:07:54
Now, all that being said, the other thing to consider is that, for Ahmed Baba, what matters is the status of the ruler. You know, who do you pray behind and what is his status? Right. That's what matters. And so, the entire question of "Well, how Muslim were they really?" is a question that implies a certain understanding of religion, that is, dare I say, modern, right, of individual belief and practice. You know, reading Ahmed Baba, his understanding, dare we say, he was quite ecumenical.

Ann McDougall 1:08:37
I don't think we just need to go in there and look at slavery. I realize a lot of people do that. But I think what people who do that are doing is they're missing the fact that it's not slavery. It's that slavery is such an integral part of society that it starts to open up all these other questions.

Chris Gratien 1:08:59
Ahmed Baba lived at a crossroads in the history of West Africa. The fall of Songhai meant the end of Islamic empires in the area for some time. But Islam continued to spread. And, at the same time, the practice of slavery was also transforming. As we discussed in a previous episode, the Iberian kingdoms of Spain and Portugal colonized a number of islands off the Atlantic coast and built sugar plantations there during the 15th century. With the discovery of the Americas, that plantation model spread to the

Caribbean and, eventually, to North and South America. The creation of plantations in the Americas caused the scale of the slave trade to grow, especially from the early 17th century onward. European Maritime empires established trading colonies along the coast of West Africa that were engaged, to varying extents, in the transatlantic slave trade — the Portuguese the Dutch, and later the British and French. With the rise of the Atlantic slave trade and the fall of Songhai, Islam's emancipatory discourses surrounding slavery became more salient.

Wendell Marsh 1:09:58
By the time you get to the 17th century, the racialization of slavery has really made a definite turn. You know, earlier, slavery is pretty equal opportunity. Any number of people can kind of be enslaved and the close association of Blackness and enslavability isn't quite there in earlier periods. But by the 17th century, Blackness and enslavability are coupled. Of course, I think this is a result of the disappearance of a Black sovereign on the global stage. Right. So with the fall of Songhai, with the fall of Black sovereignty, what we might call today, you know, Black sovereignty, it enables, it is the enabling condition of the racialization, or the completion of the racialization of slavery. So that's one thing that's happening.

Wendell Marsh 1:11:01
The second thing is that the scale of the Atlantic slave trade — it heightens the stakes, significantly. And it creates a situation in which people are really struggling to identify a means to protect themselves in a very volatile context. And again, even you know, even in the 18th century, the population isn't yet majority Muslim, right? It's really a product of these revolutionary movements, that we start to see something approaching the numbers we're familiar with today. And, I think, that rulers who were not Muslim, who were really engaged in the slave trade and the, kind of, practices of warfare that were part and parcel of the slave trade made ancestral religions appear to be very much a part of that predation. Islam was poised to be seen as a revolutionary force in the 18th and 19th century.

Chris Gratien 1:12:19
Muslim sovereignty waned in West Africa after the fall of Songhai. Even before the expansion of European colonial rule in the region, the economic center of gravity had moved towards the largely non-Muslim kingdoms of the coast, where the Atlantic slave trade had an enormous impact. This experience of colonialism would utterly transform the political formations of West African societies.

Rabiat Akande 1:12:40
You know, it's not, sort of, for no reason, right, that many scholars have been really invested in understanding the ways in which the post-colonial West African state, or African state, or, you know, the post-colonial manifestations of Islam, you know, are in many ways, consternations, parts of the unfinished colonial past itself. The post-colonial state itself, it is, you know, a colonial, it's a, you know, was midwifed by colonial modernity, right, across the continent. The impact that European colonialism had on Islamic law, as many have argued, including myself, was such as, you know, to radically alter Islamic law, as well as customary law on the continent.

Chris Gratien 1:13:20

As Rabiat Akande explained, colonialism did not erase Islam in West Africa by any means. However, the changes to local legal systems under colonial states had a profound impact on the formation of modern Islamic law. In Nigeria, the codification of Islamic law totally changed the role of judges and jurists, introducing rigid criminal codes that stipulated certain forms of punishment, which had, in practice, seldom been applied due to the traditions of jurisprudence in West Africa. Akande considers this situation of what she calls "judges without jurists" to be a colonial legacy with a lasting impact on how people in the region imagine Islamic law today. That's one reason why, for scholars of Islamic law and politics in West Africa, the lives of figures like Ahmed Baba and the legacies of independent jurists and scholarship in the region are so relevant.

Wendell Marsh 1:14:15
I guess in some ways, you know, West Africa is dealing with modernity in a much more direct way sooner than other parts of the Muslim world. Yeah, I mean, I think that's it. Right? I think being subject to Atlantic slave trade means you have to figure out much sooner than, you know, kind of colonial rule of what to do about modernity and rapacious capital.

Chris Gratien 1:14:57
The example of West Africa underscores the value of maintaining a global perspective when talking about the history of Islam. If you look to the major, early modern centers of the Islamic world, like Istanbul, Cairo, Isfahan, and so forth, you won't necessarily find Muslim jurists theorizing the issues of race and slavery that emerged as a central question during the 19th century. But in West Africa, you'll find scholars thinking about these questions very early on in the development of the Atlantic economy, even when their ideas challenged the interests of Muslim rulers. And what they said did not remain confined to the West African context.

Rabiat Akande 1:15:34
The works of the scholars were not only exported. Some of them actually went across the Sahara to teach in Morocco. Much later in, you know, in the Lake Chad Basin area Uthman Dan Fodio's, you know, his handbook on Maliki fiqh. You know, it's been tremendously influential even until today, right. So scholars are still studying Uthman Dan Fodio's Maliki fiqh. But even beyond North Africa itself, right, so scholars are, you know, beginning to examine how the ideas and the work of slaves in the United States, who had been brought from West Africa, right, how this ideas, actually, you know, survived even after they got into captivity, right. So, maybe the most famous of them are Omar Saeed, right, who was born in, in the late 18th century in Senegal, was captured in his thirties. He was a scholar, he was, you know, a teacher and a scholar when he was brought across the Atlantic and, you know, and lived in South Carolina, and then in North Carolina. And his manuscripts have been discovered, you know, on exhibition at the Library of Congress. So those ideas actually did not only travel within it, right? Some of them traveled, you know, less willingly across the Atlantic, you know, to the Americas. And, you know, and you can imagine that scholars would be, you know, would continue to discover more and more of those kinds of books.

Chris Gratien 1:17:03

If you'd like to learn more about Islam in West Africa, we've got two interviews on the Ottoman History Podcast website that I absolutely recommend. One with Ousmane Kane deals with the Muslim scholarly traditions of West Africa, including authors writing in other languages than Arabic. And the other, with Oludamini Ogunnaike, discusses the Sufi traditions of West Africa through the lens of a form of sung poetry praising the Prophet Muhammad, known as "madih."

Chris Gratien 1:17:29
In the next installment of this series, we're going to wrap up a millennium of history by exploring the changing map of the early modern Islamic world. The fall of the Songhai Empire at the turn of the 17th century, was not the first but rather the last of a series of momentous shifts in our region of study. We'll talk about the long end of al-Andalus and the consequences of the slow erasure of a Muslim presence in Iberia. We'll also talk about the fall of the Byzantine Empire, as well as the Mamluk Sultanate, which were both absorbed into the ascendant Ottoman Empire. As we'll discuss, the Ottoman Empire was one of three major Islamic empires that rose to the fore, in part, by mastering the use and production of firearms. We'll talk about connection and competition with those empires, the Safavids of Iran and the Mughals of South Asia, and tie up some other threads that have run throughout this series.

Chris Gratien 1:18:23
I'm Chris Gratien. That's all for now. Thanks for listening.