

NAAIMS – 3rd Biannual (Virtual) Lecture: By Dr. Manuela Ceballos
Hosted by Michigan State University, East Lansing, MI
Webinar – Monday, November 17, 2025; 1:00 – 2:00 p.m. EST

Conversion and Purity in the Hagiographies of Sīdī Riḍwān al-Januwī

The convergence of diverse religious communities in the early modern Western Mediterranean often caused anxieties about pollution, both material and symbolic. Ideas about purity and pollution also influenced discourses about conversion, lineage, and religious authority both north and south of the Strait of Gibraltar during the same period (albeit in different ways). This talk will focus on the role that various forms of purity play in the memorialization of Moroccan Sufi Sīdī Riḍwān al-Januwī. The son of a Castilian Jewish refugee who converted to Islam and a Genoese Christian merchant who was also a Muslim convert, Sīdī Riḍwān al-Januwī (d. 1583) purportedly described himself as emerging “from between dung and blood” in reference to his origins. This major sixteenth-century Sufi saint and hadith scholar is also portrayed by his hagiographers as concerned with quotidian aspects of material purity, spiritual purity, and lineage in ways that echo and respond to broader Mediterranean discourses on the same subjects. This talk will explore how, against a background of interreligious and political conflict (especially between Portugal and Morocco), al-Januwī’s story, as told by his hagiographers, offers a model in which purification (genealogical, material, and material) is possible through proper ritual observance, scrupulousness, and humility.

Manuela Ceballos, Assistant Professor of Religion, The University of Tennessee-Knoxville. Her book *Between Dung and Blood: Sainthood, Purity, and Power* will be published by The University of California Press in December (2025).