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978-0-521-61551-8 - Martyrdom in Islam
David Cook
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Martyrdom in Islam

In recent times Islamic martyrdom has become associated with suicide missions conducted by extremists. However, as David Cook demonstrates, this type of martyrdom is very different from the classical definition, which condemned suicide and stipulated that anyone who died as a believer could be considered a martyr. Ideas about martyrdom have evolved to suit prevailing circumstances, and it is the evolution of these different interpretations that Cook charts in this fascinating history of the role of suffering and people's willingness to die as a testimony to their faith. The book covers the earliest sources, including those from the Jewish and Christian traditions, discussions about what constituted martyrdom, differences in attitudes between Sunnis and Shi'ites, the role of martyrdom in conversion and the literary manifestations of romantic martyrdom. A concluding section discusses martyrdom in today's radical environment. There is no other book which considers the topic so systematically, and which draws so extensively on the Arabic and Persian sources, as well as on Muslim literature from across the world. This will be essential reading for students of Islamic history, and for those looking for an informed account of this controversial topic.

DAVID COOK is Assistant Professor in Religious Studies at Rice University. He has written *Studies in Muslim Apocalyptic* (2002), *Understanding Jihad* (2005) and *Contemporary Muslim Apocalyptic Literature* (2005).

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CAMBRIDGE UNIVERSITY PRESS
 Cambridge, New York, Melbourne, Madrid, Cape Town, Singapore, São Paulo
 Cambridge University Press
 The Edinburgh Building, Cambridge CB2 2RU, UK
 Published in the United States of America by Cambridge University Press, New York
 www.cambridge.org
 Information on this title: www.cambridge.org/9780521615518
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First published 2007

Printed in the United States of America

A catalogue record for this publication is available from the British Library

Library of Congress Cataloguing-in-Publication Data

Cook, David, 1966–
 Martyrdom in Islam / David Cook. – 1st edn.
 p. cm. – (Themes in Islamic history)
 Includes bibliographical references and index.
 ISBN-13: 978-0-521-85040-7 (hardback)
 ISBN-13: 978-0-521-61551-8 (paperback)
 1. Martyrdom–Islam. 2. Muslim martyrs. 3. Islamic fundamentalism. 4. Islamic law. I. Title. II. Series.
 BP190.5.M3C66 2007
 297.2'3–dc22 2006026058

ISBN-13 978-0-521-85040-7 hardback

ISBN-10 0-521-85040-1 hardback

ISBN-13 978-0-521-61551-8 paperback

ISBN-10 0-521-61551-8 paperback

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Dedicated to Professor Fred M. Donner

Appreciated by all who have studied with him,
an example to all in our field.

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Acknowledgments

I would like to thank a number of people who have helped me out with this book by reading and critiquing it: my closest friend, Deborah Tor, read the text with her usual thoroughness and incisiveness. My parents, W. Robert and Elaine Cook, both read over the manuscript, in addition to having provided me with the encouragement to study Islam over the years. My colleague, Paula Sanders, with whom it is a pleasure to work, also read the manuscript. My research assistant, Olivia Allison, read over the first draft. She also helped me immensely in my research throughout the Muslim world (in Africa, the Middle East and Central Asia), and exhibited unique patience with me during numerous difficulties. Several of my best students, including Noorain Khan and Saira Karim, read over the manuscript. I received help and advice from Bakhtiyar Babajanov, Betul Cavdar (for translations from Turkish), Peter Dorman, April DeConick, Rich Haeder, Mas'ud Khalili (with whom I spent several pleasant evenings and learned first-hand about the martyrdom of Ahmad Shah Mas'ud), Joshua Lingel, Badrus Sholeh and Elizabeth Urban. I would like to thank Muhammad Iyssa Bello of the State University of Lagos, Nigeria, for discussing martyrdom with me and for providing intellectually stimulating conversations. My colleagues at the Department of Religious Studies, Rice University have been very helpful and supportive, especially Elias Bongmba. Thanks are also due to Etan Kohlberg of the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, from whom I first learned about the subject of Islamic martyrdom. During the process of research and writing, my work was supported by a grant from the Smith Richardson Foundation and the Baker Institute for Public Policy. Many books to which I would not have otherwise had access were purchased by funds supplied through the Jon R and Paula Mosle Research Funds. Appendix II (b) is reprinted with the permission of CNN. An especially big thanks goes to Marigold Acland, the editor at Cambridge University Press, who has helped me quite a lot during the past years and to my copy-editor on this book, Adrian Stenton. It goes without saying that all remaining mistakes are solely my responsibility.

Glossary

Arabic diacritics follow the style used in the *Encyclopedia of Islam* with standard modifications as used in the *International Journal of Middle East Studies*.

In Arabic names, Abdallah b. al-Mubarak may also be given as Ibn al-Mubarak.

- ʿAjami* any non-Arabic language, in the classical period usually Persian
Allahu akbar! “God is greater!” (popular Muslim exclamation)
ana al-haqq “I am the Truth” or “I am [one with] the Truth” (saying associated with al-Hallaj)
al-aʿraf “The Barrier” mentioned in the Qur’an
Ashab al-ukhdud the Companions of the Pit, from Qur’an 85:4–9
ashrat al-saʿa the Portents of the Hour of Judgment
ayyam al-ʿArab the heroic stories and poetry of pre-Islamic battle-days
baraka blessing that is bestowed by Sufi holy men and women (often after death)
darwish (in English, *dervish*) virtually synonymous with Sufi
duʿa al-mazlum the prayer of the wronged person
fatwa a legal opinion given by a qualified expert
hadith the record of the sayings and actions of the Prophet Muhammad
hajj the pilgrimage to Mecca
hijra emigration (usually the emigration to Medina, but also one of the stages of *jihad*)
hijri the lunar calendar based upon the date of the *hijra* from 622
houris (in Arabic *al-hur al-ʿin*) the women of paradise given to the martyrs for their pleasure
al-Israʾ wa-l-miʿraj the Night Journey and Ascension into Heaven by the Prophet Muhammad
Ithna ʿashariyya (also vocalized *Isna ʿAshariyya*) the Twelver (majority) branch of Shiʿism
jihad divinely sanctioned warfare with the objective of either expanding Islam or defending it

- jizya* the poll tax to be paid by non-Muslims (Jews and Christians) in a Muslim state
- kafir/kuffar/kafirun* infidels, non-Muslims
- Khuda* (Persian) God
- Mahdi* the Muslim messianic figure
- Malfuzat* literally, dictations
- Maqatil* literature literature recording prominent violent deaths or martyrdoms
- al-maqtul* the one who was killed
- mihna* the tribulation, historically the period between 833–47 in which the Mu'tazila interrogated prominent Sunnis as to their belief in the doctrine of the creation of the Qur'an
- al-Mu'allaqat* the seven pre-Islamic Odes supposedly suspended on the Ka'ba
- muhtasib* the town censor, who regulated the public domain to make sure Islamic norms were upheld
- mujahid(in)* fighter(s) in the *jihād*
- murabit* one who guards the boundaries of Islam in a *ribat*
- mustadafun* oppressed
- mustakbirun* proud, arrogant, haughty
- nikaya* terror
- qadi* a judge
- raka'a* prostration (in the Muslim prayer)
- ribat* a location on the borders of Islam used for the purposes of guarding
- sa'alik* vagabonds, used pejoratively of Sufis
- sabr* patience, submission to the will of God
- Salam* peace, the greeting Muslims exchange between each other
- sati* the Hindu practice of widow immolation
- sayyid al-shuhada'* the lord of martyrs (traditionally Hamza)
- siddiqin* truthful people
- shahada* the Muslim confession of faith "There is no God but Allah and Muhammad is the Messenger of Allah"
- shahid*, (plural *shuhada'*) a martyr, one who testifies to something
- shari'a* the Divine Law of Sunni Islam
- shirk* associating other beings or creatures with the one God, the primal sin in Islam
- shuhada' al-mahabba* the martyrs of love
- sunna* the Way of the Prophet Muhammad, the basis for Sunni Islam
- sura* a section of the Qur'an
- talib al-'ilm* a student, a seeker of knowledge
- al-Tawwabun* The Penitents, historically a group that appeared in 683
- ta'ziya* a passion play in Shi'ite Islam to commemorate the martyrdom of al-Husayn

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xii Glossary

topoi literary tropes that are understood for their symbolic value and are not to be taken literally

ʿulama the religious leadership of Islam

umma the community of all Muslims

wali a friend (of God), mainly in the Sufi tradition

zalimun tyrants

zuhd asceticism

Chronology

- ca.* 305–70 BCE, the Selucid Empire
- ca.* 167 BCE, the martyrdom of Eleazar and the beginnings of the Maccabean revolt
- ca.* 70 BCE–475 CE, the Roman Empire
- ca.* 30 CE, the crucifixion of Jesus Christ
- 115, the martyrdom of Polycarp
- ca.* 300–1453, the Byzantine Empire
- ca.* 610–22, the beginnings of the ministry of Muhammad in Mecca
- 622, the *hijra* to Medina
- 624, the Battle of Badr
- 625, the Battle of Uhud (martyrdom of Hamza)
- 627, the Battle of the Khandaq
- 630, the conquest of Mecca
- 632, the death of Muhammad
- 634–732, the great Muslim conquests
- 661, the assassination of ‘Ali
- 661–747, the Umayyad Dynasty (ruling from Damascus)
- 680, the martyrdom of al-Husayn
- 682, the martyrdom of ‘Uqba b. Nafi’ by the Berbers
- 747–1258, the ‘Abbasid Dynasty (ruling from Baghdad)
- 754, the murder of Abu Muslim
- 833–47, the *mihna*, during which Ibn Hanbal was beaten
- 922, the martyrdom of al-Hallaj
- 1031, the raids on India by Mahmud of Ghazna
- 1131, the martyrdom of ‘Ayn al-Qudat al-Hamadani
- 1191, the martyrdom of Shihab al-Din al-Suhrawardi
- 1273, the death of Jalal al-Din al-Rumi
- thirteenth through fifteenth centuries, the foundation of the great Sufi brotherhoods
- 1490s (?) Kabir active in India
- 1490–1500 (?) Siti Jenar active in Indonesia
- 1492, the formal expulsion of Jews and Muslims from Spain

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xiv Chronology

- ca. 1517–1924, the Ottoman Dynasty (ruling from Constantinople, Istanbul)
- 1529–43, the Ethiopian *jihād*
- 1592–93, the murder of the scholars of Timbuktu
- 1609–14, the final expulsion of the Moriscos from Spain
- 1658–1707, Aurengzeb rules India
- 1804–12, the Fulani *jihād* in northern Nigeria under Shehu Usman Dan Fodio
- 1881–85, the Mahdi in the Sudan
- 1948, the foundation of the state of Israel
- 1967, the Six-Day War
- 1979–92, the Afghan *jihād*
- 1980–88, the Iran–Iraq War
- 1987–93, the First Intifada of the Palestinians
- 1992–95, the Bosnian–Herzegovinian War
- 1999–, the Chechen War
- 2000–04, the Second Intifada of the Palestinians
- September 11, 2001, attack on New York and Washington, DC, by al-Qa’ida