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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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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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Contents

<i>Acknowledgments</i>	<i>page</i> ix
<i>Glossary</i>	x
<i>Chronology</i>	xiii
1 Martyrs in religions	1
2 Martyrdom in the genesis of Islam	12
3 Legal definitions, boundaries and rewards of the martyr	31
4 Sectarian Islam: Sunni, Shi'ite and Sufi martyrdom	45
5 Martyrs: warriors and missionaries in medieval Islam	74
6 Martyrs of love and epic heroes	98
7 Patterns of prognostication, narrative and expiation	116
8 Martyrdom in contemporary radical Islam	135
9 Martyrdom in Islam: past and present	165
<i>Appendix: The classical story of the Ashab al-ukhdud and translated contemporary martyrdom narratives</i>	172
<i>Bibliography</i>	184
<i>Index</i>	202

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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 Qurʿan

Ashab al-ukhdud the Companions of the Pit, from Qurʿan 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

Ithnaʿashariyya (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*
- mustada‘fun* 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 *jiḥād*
 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 *jiḥād* 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 *jiḥād*
 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-Qaʿida