Constructing Religious Martyrdom

Martyrdom is a phenomenon common to many of the world's religious traditions. But why? In this study, John Soboslai offers insights into the practices of self-sacrifice within specific sociopolitical contexts. Providing a new understanding of martyrdom through the lens of political theology, he analyzes discourses and performances in four religious traditions during social and political crises, beginning with second-century Christianity in Asia Minor, where the term “martyr” first took its meaning. He also analyzes Shi’a Islam in the 1980s, when “suicide bombing” first appeared as a strategy in West Asia; global Sikhism during World War I, where martyrs stood for and against the British Raj; and twenty-first-century Tibetan Buddhism, where self-immolators used their bodies in opposition to the programs of the People’s Republic of China. Presenting a new theory of martyrdom linked to constructions of sovereign authority, Soboslai reveals common features of self-sacrifice and demonstrates how bodily performances buttress conceptions of authority.

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Constructing Religious Martyrdom
A Cross-Cultural Study

JOHN SOBOSLAI
Montclair State University
For Abby Normal
# Contents

Acknowledgments  
Abbreviations of Ancient Sources  

1 Introduction: Concerning Martyrdom  
The Practice and Discourse of Martyrdom  
Martyrdom as (Self-)Sacrifice  
On Suicide  
The Politics of Martyrdom  
Interpreting Martyrdom  
Comparative Approach and Introduction to Cases  

2 Executed Martyrs in Second-Century Christianity  
Introduction  
Cultural Precedence for Christian Martyrdom  
The World of Second Century Christianities  
Legal Recourse against Christians  
Constructing Christian Martyrs  
The Testimony of Christian Witnesses  
Conclusion  

3 The Human Bombs of Twentieth-Century Shi’i Islam  
Introduction  
The Shi’a Awakening  
Jihad against Oppression  
Developing Martyrology in Medieval Shi’i Islam  
Constructing Martyrdom Operations  
Witnessing (in) Islam  
Conclusion  

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## CONTENTS

4 Sikh Martyr Imaginaries during World War I 218

- Introduction 218
- The Situation inside and outside Imperial India 229
- The Great War 242
- Martyrs for Righteousness 250
- True to One's Salt 261
- Conclusion 269

5 Twenty-First-Century Tibetan Self-Immolators 272

- Introduction 272
- The Conflict with the People’s Republic of China 280
- Fears of Losing Tibet 291
- Self-Immolation as Sacrificial Offering 298
- Suffering, Coercion, and the Truth of Tibet 309
- Conclusion 320

6 Performances of Suffering: The Drama of Martyrdom 323

- Comparing Practices and Discourses of Martyrdom 323
- Settings 335
- Scripts and Roles 339
- Audience 347
- Martyrologists 353
- The Martyr's Performance 358

7 Witnesses to a Sovereign Imaginary 362

- Pain, Truth, and Witnessing 362
- Sovereign Imaginaries 375
- The Hermeneutics of Sovereignty 387
- Sovereign Performances 392
- Conclusion: The Witness of Martyrdom 396

Epilogue 402

Bibliography 409
Index 439
Acknowledgments

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## Abbreviations of Ancient Sources

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Abbreviation</th>
<th>Source Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ac. Justin</td>
<td>Acts of Justin and His Companions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clement, Strom.</td>
<td>Miscellaneies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eusebius, Hist. eccl.</td>
<td>Ecclesiastical History</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ign. Eph.</td>
<td>Ignatius, To the Ephesians</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ign. Magn.</td>
<td>Ignatius, To the Magnesians</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ign. Phil.</td>
<td>Ignatius, To the Philadelphians</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ign. Pol.</td>
<td>Ignatius, To Polycarp</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ign. Rom.</td>
<td>Ignatius, To the Romans</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ign. Smyr.</td>
<td>Ignatius, To the Smyrneans</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ign. Tral.</td>
<td>Ignatius, To the Trallians</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Iren. Ad. Haer</td>
<td>Ireneaus, Against Heresies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Josephus B.J.</td>
<td>Jewish War</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Justin Martyr, 1 Apol.</td>
<td>First Apology</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Justin Martyr, 2 Apol.</td>
<td>Second Apology</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mart. Carp.</td>
<td>Martyrdom of Carpus, Papylius, and Agathonike</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mart. Lyons</td>
<td>Martyrdom of Lyons or Lugdunum</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mart. Pionius</td>
<td>Martyrdom of Pionius</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mart. Pol.</td>
<td>Martyrdom of Polycarp</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mart. Ptol.</td>
<td>Martyrdom of Ptolemaeus and Lucius</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minucius Felix, Octav.</td>
<td>Octavius</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Philo, Legat.</td>
<td>On the Embassy to Gaius</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Plato, Phaed.</td>
<td>Phaedo</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pliny, Epist.</td>
<td>Letters (Epistulae)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tertullian, Apol.</td>
<td>Apology</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tertullian, De anim.</td>
<td>On the Soul</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tertullian, Fug.</td>
<td>On Flight in Persecution</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>