

Martyrdom on the Margins

February 20, 2020, MBI Al Jaber Building, Corpus Christi College, Oxford

A conference sponsored by:

The Centre for the Study of the Bible in the Humanities, Oriel College
The Oxford Centre for Byzantine Research
The Faculty of Oriental Studies

Organised by:

Hindy Najman, Oriel and Laing Professor of the Interpretation of Holy Scripture
Christian Sahner, Associate Professor of Islamic History

The idea of martyrdom features prominently in Judaism, Christianity and Islam. Despite this, pre-modern Jews, Christians, and Muslims often understood martyrdom in radically different ways. This conference aims to explore both the similarities and differences between ideas of 'dying for God' in the three religions, stretching from the Hellenistic to the Medieval periods. In particular, it explores the concept of 'martyrdom on the margins,' that is, cases which diverge from the classic model of martyrdom most closely associated with the saints of the pre-Constantinian period. This may include, but is not limited to Jewish martyrs in the Seleucid and Roman periods, martyrs who emerged through intra-Christian violence, martyrs in Shi'i or Khariji Islam, or Jewish martyrdom at the time of the Crusades. It may also include reflections on the theological significance of martyrdom in the three religious traditions, the semantic range of the word 'martyr' in various pre-modern languages, the rhetoric of martyrdom and its connection to biblical tradition, early Christian, Rabbinic, Islamic and the Qur'an. We are also interested in possible influence between and among the three religions.

The goal is to understand martyrdom more broadly by exploring non-traditional manifestations of the practice, both as an event in time and its literary, liturgical, and theological afterlives. By studying martyrdom 'on the margins,' we stand to better understand what is central to tradition more broadly, the ways in which innovation is introduced, how old practices are revived, and how minority traditions become majority ones. Contemplating practices on the margins also prompts us to rethink what constitutes a 'canon'; indeed, what texts constitute the most significant examples of martyrological literature and how can these be reconceptualized through study of sources often regarded as 'peripheral'?

Programme

8.30–9.00 **Coffee**

9.00–9.15 **Introduction**

Hindy Najman (University of Oxford)

9.15–11.15 **Session 1: Judaism**

Jan Willem van Henten (University of Amsterdam) – *The Marginality of Ancient Jewish Martyrdom*

Israel Yuval (Hebrew University of Jerusalem) – *Jewish Martyrdom as Halachic Transgression*

Anna Abulafia (University of Oxford) – *The Polemics of Martyrdom in the Hebrew Chronicles of the First Crusade*

11.15–11.40 Coffee

11:40–13.00 Session 2: Christianity

Elizabeth Castelli (Barnard College) – *Hostile Witnesses: Making Martyrs out of Persecutors in Lactantius's De mortibus persecutorum*

Mark Edwards (University of Oxford) – *Were the Early Christians Persecuted?*

13.00–14.00 Lunch

14.00–16.00 Session 3: Islam

Christian Sahner (University of Oxford) – *Community and Identity in the Christian Martyrs of the Early Islamic Period*

Sean Anthony (Ohio State University) – *The Crucified Martyrs of the Early Shāh: Understanding their Late Antique, and Early Islamic, Context*

Adam Gaiser (Florida State University) – *Early Shur t (Kh rijite) Poetry on Martyrs*

16.00–16.30 Coffee

16.30–17.00 Summing up

Hindy Najman (University of Oxford) and Christian Sahner (University of Oxford)

Please register online through [this link](#).