

HERITAGE AND MEMORY STUDIES



Edited by Ihab Saloul and Jan Willem van Henten

Martyrdom

Canonisation, Contestation and Afterlives

Amsterdam
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Martyrdom

Heritage and Memory Studies

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Introduction*

Jan Willem van Henten and Ihab Saloul

The phenomenon of martyrdom is more than 2000 years old but, as contemporary events show, still very much alive. Think, for example, of the November 2015 Paris attacks at the 'Stade de France' and the 'Bataclan Theater', or the series of bombings which struck churches and hotels in Sri Lanka on Easter Sunday in May 2019. What these events, and many other ones around the world, show is that martyrdom keeps resurfacing as a highly controversial and contested concept. The concept of 'martyrdom' becomes more and more blurred especially because religious or secular martyrdoms play an important role in current social, political and ethnic conflicts, which calls for a book that goes beyond both the insider admiration of martyrs and the partisan rejection of martyrdoms.

This book examines the canonisation, contestation and afterlives of martyrdom and connects these with cross-cultural acts and practices of remembrance in the present. Martyrdom appeals to the imagination of many because it is a highly ambiguous spectacle with thrilling deadly consequences. Imagination is thus a vital catalyst for martyrdom, for martyrs become martyrs only because others remember and honour them as such. This memorialisation occurs through rituals, documents, artefacts, art works, and performances which contribute to a culture of remembrance that canonises martyrs, and in so doing, incorporate and re-interpret traditions deriving from canonical texts and pictorial programs. The canonisation of martyrdom, therefore, has two sides. On the one hand, there is the canonisation of martyrs as heroes of a group: clusters of martyr figures are formed and the texts about them are fixated step by step. Communities of inside readers, listeners, viewers and participants in rituals commemorate the heroes as martyrs: they create, recycle and re-interpret texts and traditions until martyrs ultimately receive a canonical status, at least within their

* We warmly thank Jörg Rüpke (Erfurt) for his helpful comments on an earlier version of this introduction.

own group. On the other hand, the ongoing process of canonisation often incorporates traditions inspired by older canonical texts. At the same time, we should acknowledge that martyr figures are contested as well, not only because they are commemorated by competing communities but also because those who are martyrs in the eyes of in-groups can be traitors or terrorists for others.

Moreover, in a society where the extension of life is one of the central values, martyrdom gains material and cultural forms which are open to change and contestation. The cases analysed in the various chapters of this book explicate the concept of martyrdom from diverse historical and geopolitical contexts in order to highlight the religious and cultural uses of the acts and afterlives of martyrdom in relation to the growing literature on social memory and the politics of commemoration as well as the theoretical nuances between bodily experiences, narratives and cultural discourses associated with the tangible and intangible heritage of martyrdom.¹ In many cases acts and practices of martyrdom, with their relations to material and ritual culture, create 'landscapes of memory' wherein the canon and its writings play a certain, but not the only nor always the decisive role. By adopting an interdisciplinary orientation and a cross-cultural approach, this book concisely synthesises key interpretive questions and themes that broach the canonised, unstable and contested representations of martyrdom as well as their analytical connections, divergences and afterlives in the present.

What is Martyrdom?

Most, if not all, definitions of martyrdom are either a scholarly construct or based on technical vocabulary that refer to martyrs (e.g. *martyrs* in Greek, *martyr* in Latin and *shahid* in Arabic). The second line of thinking focuses on Christianity and its earliest use of the 'witness vocabulary' that at a particular point in history developed into the meaning of 'martyr'. Whether the witness vocabulary already has martyrdom connotations in the Greek translations of the Hebrew Bible/Old Testament, the New Testament or

1 On social memory and the politics of commemoration, see Olick and Robbins, 'Social Memory Studies: From "Collective Memory" to the Historical Sociology of Mnemonic Practices', p. 105-40; Nora and Kritzman, *Realms of Memory: The Construction of the French Past*, Volume 1; Hallbwachs, *On Collective Memory*.

later Christian writings is highly debated.² Several scholars argue that such connotations are only found in post-biblical Christian writings such as *First Clement* (Brox, 1961, 211-237; differently: Dehandschutter, 'Some Notes on 1 Clement 5,4-7', p. 83-89) or the *Martyrdom of Polycarp*, dated in the second half of the second or even in the third century C.E. The author of 1 Clement 5 highlights the ways in which Peter gave testimony many times during severe sufferings as well as how Paul testified before rulers (5.4, 7). Moreover, the author mentions the vindication of the martyrs, but it is debated whether the witness vocabulary does refer to martyrdom in this context. In addition, several scholars hold the view that *martyr* and the related verb referring to martyrs and martyrdom were used for the first time in the second half of the second century C.E. (or later) in the *Martyrdom of Polycarp*. This document introduces bishop Polycarp's martyrdom as follows: 'We write you, brothers, an account of those who died a martyr's death (*tous marturêsantas*), and especially about the blessed Polycarp...' (1.1; cf. 2.1; 14.2).³ Roughly during the same period, the Latin equivalent *martyr* occurs as a self-designation and a reference to the martyrs' vindication in the North-African *Acts of the Scillitan Martyrs*. After the governor's proclamation of the verdict, Nartzalus, one of the condemned Christians, says: 'today we are martyrs (*martyres*) in heaven: thanks to God' (*Act.Scil.* 15).

The Christian tradition is one lens out of many through which we can approach martyrdom. The concept of martyrdom is also one of the most recurrent and complex themes in Islamic history, practice and belief. The Arabic word for martyr is *shahid* (plural *shuhada*). This word is derived from the Arabic verbal root *shahada*, which means to 'see', to 'witness', and to become 'a model or a paradigm'. From an etymological point of view, the word martyr in the Islamic tradition has a similar meaning as in Christian and Western traditions. In Greek, a 'witness' is *martyrs*, and 'to witness' or 'to be or become a martyr' is *martyrein*.⁴ In Arabic, the word *shahid* is usually

2 See, for example, the opposing views of Van Henten, 'The Concept of Martyrdom in Revelation', p. 587-618, and Bergmeier, 'Zeugnis und Martyrium', p. 632-647. See also Middleton, *Radical Martyrdom and Cosmic Conflict in Early Christianity*, p. 158-171.

3 See Baumeister, *Die Anfänge der Theologie des Martyriums*, p. 257-260; Dehandschutter, 'The Martyrium Polycarpi: a Century of Research', p. 508-514; Dehandschutter, 'Some Notes on 1 Clement 5,4-7', p. 83-89; Dehandschutter and Van Henten, 'Einleitung', p. 1-19; Buschmann, *Martyrium Polycarpi – Eine formkritische Studie: Ein Beitrag zur Frage nach der Entstehung der Gattung Märtyrerakte*, p. 136-137; Wischmeyer, 'Märtyrer II. Alte Kirche', p. 862-865. For relevant studies on martyrdom in Christianity, see also Boyarin, *Dying for God: Martyrdom and the Making of Christianity and Judaism*; Bowersock, *Martyrdom and Rome*; Boustan, *From Martyr to Mystic: Rabbinic Martyrology and the Making of Merkavah Mysticism*.

4 See Abedi and Legenhausen, *Struggle and Martyrdom in Islam 'Jihad and Shahadat'*, p. 3-5.

taken to mean that martyrs are those who testify to the sincerity of their faith through the ultimate proof which is sacrificing their own life.⁵ In the Quran, the word is attested in this sense as in the following verse: “So that God may know those who believe and may take *shuhada* (witnesses) from among you” (Quran 3.140). Moreover, the martyr’s sacrifice of his/her life is a physical act that entails an act of destroying the body (suicide). Although suicide is forbidden in Islamic tradition, the physical act of destroying the body does not have a strong meaning in the case of the martyr. This is so because the martyr’s sacrificial act is embedded in the Islamic belief of the after-life in which his/her death in this life is a necessary step towards the continuation of life in the after-life. Besides the religious dimension of the word *shahid* in the sense of witness, this application also adds a political dimension to the role of martyrs in society. In witnessing the ultimate truth of God, martyrs become the most effective agents in pursuit of God’s cause, and they testify to the legitimacy of this cause through their willingness to die. Moreover, for the martyrs, martyrdom becomes their religiously internalised goal, and only through their sacrificial act, they make this goal public. This public aspect of martyrdom adds a political meaning to the martyrs’ sacrificial act in which the act serves both to intimidate the ‘enemy’, and to inspire their followings by acting as a role model and a paradigm.⁶

Whatever the origin of the title ‘martyr’ may have been, semantic and semiotic studies imply that a social phenomenon can occur for a considerable time before it is circumscribed by particular vocabulary that gives it a specific name. One example is the recently invented word ‘millennials’ used for a specific target group for cultural events and marketing activities in order to refer to persons born between 1980 and 2000. By analogy it seems plausible that there may have been martyrs before the title ‘martyr’ was used. If so, how do we know what martyrdom is or was, and who was considered to be a martyr? Or who was made a martyr and by whom, since most of the evidence is not directly transmitted to us from the martyr’s mouth but often based on a document produced by others to commemorate someone’s special death?⁷

Perhaps we can only answer these questions by proposing a working definition of ‘what is a martyr’. One of the definitions often taken up by

5 See Ezzati, ‘The Concept of Martyrdom in Islam’, p. 9.

6 See Winters, ‘Martyrdom in Jihad’, p. 7.

7 See Middleton, ‘What is Martyrdom?’, p. 1-17; Middleton, “Suffer Little Children”: Child Sacrifice, Martyrdom, and Identity Formation in Judaism and Christianity’, p. 337-356.

scholars in this regard is the one given by Eugene and Anita Weiner, who rely on a sociological perspective and argue that 'The martyr will be seen as a member of a suppressed group who, when given the opportunity to renounce aspects of his or her group's code, willingly submits to suffering and death rather than forsake a conviction'. Moreover, according to Weiner and Weiner there were three ways of becoming a martyr: First, by choosing to suffer or die rather than giving up one's faith or principles. Second, by being tortured or killed because of one's convictions, and third, by suffering great pain or misery for a long time (Weiner and Weiner, 1990, p. 9). A different definition, proposed by Jan Willem van Henten and Friedrich Avemarie, implies that the notion and practice of martyrdom originated in the second century B.C.E. in a Jewish context. This definition presupposes that a martyr is killed by somebody else: 'a martyr is a person who in an extremely hostile situation prefers a violent death to compliance with a demand of the (usually pagan) authorities' (Van Henten and Avemarie, 2002, p. 3; cf. Avemarie 2013, p. 187). Van Henten and Avemarie's definition has been criticised because certain self-killings may be considered to be martyrdoms as well (Rajak, 2012, p. 167-172). In a different context, Paul Middleton puts forward an alternative approach of what he calls 'radical martyrdom' in which he defines martyrdom as 'a type of narrative which describes a death that reinforces a group's (whether religious, political or national) view of the world' (Middleton 2006, p. 13). However, in a later study Middleton argues that defining martyrdom is ultimately a futile exercise because from the very beginning martyrdom emerged as a contested practice (Middleton, 2014, p. 118-120; p. 130).

These diverse definitions imply that martyrdom is contested even within the relatively confined area of the Protestant or Catholic Christian tradition. As such the best option would be to take the contested discourses of martyrdom as a point of departure for research which enables us to analyse a corpus of relevant sources of the phenomenon of martyrdom. Several of the contributors to this volume link up with one of the above definitions while others opt for alternative approaches through which the contested discourses about martyrdom become broader and more ambiguous. Most of these definitions also show that documents and artefacts about martyrs are part of a discursive process of canonisation. A few examples of martyrs, sometimes ancient but still relevant and sometimes recent, discussed in this book concern the Maccabean Martyrs, the Ten Rabbinic Martyrs, spiritual martyrs, gender and homosexual martyrs, South African post-Apartheid's martyrs, Palestinian female martyrs, and the martyrs of the Arab Spring.

Canonising Martyrs

The cross-cultural history of martyrdoms is full of canons of martyrs, i.e. lists of heroes with a special or holy status of martyrs that were or still are fixated. We use the term 'canon' in a discursive and broader sense than the official use of the term in the Roman Catholic Church. The Vatican has revised the procedures for the beatification and sanctification of Roman Catholic persons several times, which also concerns a 'canonisation' of martyrs, that is declaring a martyr a *beatus* ('blessed') or *sanctus* ('holy') person of the Church often after much lobby-work by local communities.⁸ As it is well-known, Pope John Paul II surpassed his predecessors of the last 400 years in beatifications and sanctifications. By March 11, 2001, he had beatified 1,227 and sanctified 477 saints as martyrs (his predecessors 1,310 and 300 respectively).⁹ Interestingly, these recent canonisations of martyrs show that for Pope John Paul II the concept of martyrdom has become broader than earlier conceived. During a service in the Jubilee Year 2000, on May 8, 2000, the Pope paid tribute to contemporary martyrs and said that the hatred and murder of Christians experienced in the modern period resulted in more than 12,000 new Christian martyrs of the 20th century. He also stated that 'countless numbers refused to yield to the cult of the false gods of the 20th century and were sacrificed by communism, Nazism, by the idolatry of state or race...'.¹⁰

The canonisation of martyrs discussed in this volume is cross-religious and cross-cultural, going even beyond religion, which implies a double

8 The reports about the ancient 'Catholic' martyrs were summarised and collected together with more recent ones in the so-called *Martyrologium Romanum*, a volume that was published for the first time in 1584 for the appropriate religious commemoration of these martyrs, *Martyrologium romanum ad novam kalendarii rationem, et Ecclesiasticae historiae veritatem restitutum: Gregorii XIII Pont. Max. iussu editum: accesserunt notationes atque tractatio de Martyrologio Romano* (Antwerp: Plantijn, 1584). For an internet copy of the version sanctioned by Pope Benedict XIV in 1749, see *Martyrologium romanum ad novam kalendarii rationem, et Ecclesiasticae historiae veritatem restitutum: Gregorii XIII Pont. Max. iussu editum ac deinde anno MDCCXLIX Benedicti XIV labore et studio auctum et castigatum* (Eichstätt: Tipografia vaticana, 2013), http://introibo.net/download/brevier/martyrologium_latein.pdf (Accessed on May 4, 2018).

9 <http://www.dailycatholic.org/issue/2001Mar/mar12nr1.htm> (Accessed on May 7, 2018). At the end of 1995 Pope John Paul II had finalised 208 beatifications and 38 sanctifications, which involved 875 individuals. See Woodward, *Making Saints: How the Catholic Church Determines Who Becomes a Saint, Who Doesn't, and Why*, p. 5.

10 http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/english/world/europe/newsid_740000/740218.stm (Accessed on May 7, 2018). See also Royal, *The Catholic Martyrs of the Twentieth Century: A Comprehensive World History*.

process of fixation: the number of martyrs is fixed for a longer period, and the documents about them were gradually selected and authorised. This type of canonisation can be explained with the theoretical framework developed by the German Egyptologist and historian of religion Jan Assmann in his work *Das kulturelle Gedächtnis* (The Cultural Memory).¹¹ Assmann analyses how communities organise their memories and how various mnemotechnic devices affect their social imagination. By transcending daily experiences, collective memories fixate and objectify experiences and transform them into myths which give symbolic meanings to life experiences.¹² Thus cultural memory is closely connected with the fixation of myths and sacred texts that cannot be changed and require interpretation and explanation. Within literary studies two theoretical approaches are dominant, which either focus on aesthetics or on social-cultural aspects; sometimes both are combined. A dynamic variant of the first approach understands canons as 'autopoietic systems' and implies that the codes determining the inclusion or exclusion of texts into a canon are intrinsic to the system. An important point in Assmann's concept of the 'canon' concerns the transition from ritual coherence to textual coherence. When a ritual is put to text, the stability of its meaning often becomes problematic. This is due to textual variations which accordingly require a second process of fixation ('Schliessung') that leads to a canonical text ('der geheiligte Bestand') and, as a consequence, to exegetes who need to explain the text according to the normative tradition.¹³

One of the examples that reflect the process of canonisation of martyrs, following Assmann's model, concerns the famous Mennonite martyr book, *Martyrs Mirror*, which describes Mennonite martyrs from the 16th century.

11 Jan Assmann, *Das kulturelle Gedächtnis. Schrift, Erinnerung und politische Identität in frühen Hochkulturen*, p. 87-129; p. 163-66; p. 171-185; p. 280-289.

12 Jan Assmann, *Das kulturelle Gedächtnis. Schrift, Erinnerung und politische Identität in frühen Hochkulturen*, p. 52-59.

13 Jan Assmann, *Das kulturelle Gedächtnis. Schrift, Erinnerung und politische Identität in frühen Hochkulturen*, defines the canon as '... die Übertragung eines in der Rechtssphäre verwurzelten Ideals der Verbindlichkeit und Erfolgungstreue auf den gesamten Zentralbereich schriftlicher Überlieferung', p. 106; p. 18; p. 87-116. See also Aleida Assmann, 'Theorien des kulturellen Gedächtnisses', p. 76-84. On literary theoretical approaches of cultural memory, see Kümmerling-Meibauer and Müller, 'Introduction: Canon Studies and Children's Literature', p. 1-14; Papadima, Damrosch and D'Haen, *The Canonical Debate Today: Crossing Disciplinary and Cultural Boundaries*; Winko and Rippl, *Handbuch Kanon und Wertung: Theorien, Instanzen, Geschichte*. Benedict Anderson and Charles Taylor elaborated the concept of 'social imaginaries': the knowledge conveyed and preserved in a canon is not merely a literary knowledge but forms part of a more encompassing notion of cultural memory and cultural values which also includes aesthetic concerns. See Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*; Taylor, *Modern Social Imaginaries*.

Thieleman van Braght compiled the *Martyrs Mirror* in 1660 after which the book became a source of inspiration for the spiritual life of many Mennonites up to the 21st century. The Mennonites, named after their founding father Menno Simonsz, were a branch of Anabaptists, but different from the radical apocalyptic movement that created the Kingdom of Muenster that was crushed in 1535. Nevertheless, as Protestants living in the Low Countries the Mennonites faced a violent oppression from the representatives of their Catholic overlord, the Holy Roman Emperor King Charles V (1500-1558), especially in Ghent and Bruges, but also Middelburg, Muiden, The Hague and Antwerp during the fifties and sixties of the 16th century. One of the king's edicts against the Protestants was particularly brutal. This so-called Bloody Placard of 1550 decreed the death penalty for all who were convicted of heresy: the males had to be executed by the sword and the females buried alive; those who were obstinate were burnt alive. The first Mennonite book that collected the stories of the martyrs who were executed during this persecution was *The Sacrifice of the Lord* (*Het Offer des Heeren*), published by Jan Hendricksz in 1562 in the Frisian town Franeker.¹⁴ The title *The Sacrifice of the Lord* can be explained on the basis of the content of the book which presents the martyrs' entries in a chronological order as sacrificed children of God, and aligns them with a list of biblical heroes and previous Christian martyrs. The book also includes a section with Mennonite songs and the preface points to the martyrs as models 'for the comfort and strengthening of all lovers of the truth'.¹⁵ The further canonisation of the Mennonite martyrs took ca. 100 years and resulted in a definitive collection compiled by Thieleman van Braght that was repeatedly reprinted.¹⁶ After *The Sacrifice of the Lord* several other Mennonite martyrologies were published, including those by Hans de Ries whose history of martyrs was entitled *Martyrs Mirror* from 1624 onward.¹⁷ Van Braght's work was originally entitled *The Bloody Theatre*, but it borrowed the title *Martyrs Mirror* from De Ries. Van Braght's aim for the *Martyrs Mirror* was to highlight the martyrs as models of virtues such as patience, humility, piety and steadfastness, as well as modesty and chastity. As his preface indicates, Van Braght's criterion for including reports

14 The scholarly edition of this work is based on the fourth edition of 1570. See Cramer and Piper, *Bibliotheca Reformatoria Neerlandica: Deel 2. Het Offer Des Heeren* (*De Oudste Verzameling Doopsgezinde Martelaarsbrieven En Offerliederen*) *Bewerkt Door Dr. S. Cramer* (Dutch Edition). Charleston: Nabu Press, https://books.google.es/books/about/Bibliotheca_reformatoria_neerlandica_dee.html?id=BD8UAAAAYAAJandredir_esc=y (Accessed on June 12, 2018).

15 See Weaver-Zercher, *Martyrs Mirror: A Social History*, p. 21-44.

16 See Weaver-Zercher, *Martyrs Mirror: A Social History*, p. 45-65.

17 See Van der Aa, *Biografisch woordenboek der Nederlanden* 16, p. 330-332.

about the martyrs is clear as well: First, the martyrs included had suffered and were slain for 'the testimony of Jesus their Saviour', which means that they were put to death as a direct result of their confession of faith and being 'baptism-minded' (Dutch: 'doopsgezind', i.e. they lived in accordance with the apostolic Christ-centred way of life, which included adult baptism). A second criterion was 'defencelessness' ('weerloos'), which implied a pacifist attitude.¹⁸ Finally, the core of the book consisted of the martyrdoms already included in *The Sacrifice of the Lord*. The first edition of the *Martyrs Mirror* of 1660 was updated by an anonymous editor in 1685 and illustrated with prints from 104 copperplates by the Dutch artist Jan Luyken. This edition has been reprinted up to the present day.

Contesting Martyrs

As we discussed above, Assmann's approach to canonisation focuses strongly on diachronic continuities which concern the formation and preservation of canons. In this regard Assmann acknowledges that every period has its own canon which can be relativized or even abolished because of contradictions or doubts concerning the truth claim expressed by the canonical texts, for which he coined the word 'hypolepse' (controlled variation).¹⁹ However, Assmann does not pay much attention to the flip side of canonisation: the process of non-inclusion or even rejection of events or persons while a canon is formed or functioning. This process may be as important as the canonisation itself, as had already become apparent from the example discussed above of the Mennonite Martyrs.²⁰ Several documents that were supposedly written between 1577 and 1609 by Mennonite martyrs were included in the first edition of the *Martyrs Mirror*, but they were not included in subsequent editions. This implies that the process of the canonisation of Mennonite martyrs also included the exclusion of certain martyrdom writings.²¹

A more recent and highly controversial case of the canonisation of a martyr is Edith Stein. Stein's case shows that sometimes there are competing

18 See Weaver-Zercher, *Martyrs Mirror: A Social History*, p. 54-61.

19 Assmann, *Das kulturelle Gedächtnis: Schrift, Erinnerung und politische Identität in frühen Hochkulturen*, p. 121; p. 280-89; p. 101-03.

20 See Aleida Assmann, 'Theorien des kulturellen Gedächtnisses', p. 76-84.

21 Gregory, *The Forgotten Writings of the Mennonite Martyrs*, offers an edition of mostly writings from prison of seven Mennonite martyrs: Henrick Alewijnsz, Jacob de Roore, Thijs Joriaensz, Hendrick Verstralen, Joos Verkindert, Reytse Ayssesz and Christiaan Rijcken.

groups: one which claims that a deceased person is one of its martyrs and the other group radically contests the martyrdom of this person. Stein or Sister Teresa Benedicta (1891-1942) died at Auschwitz. She was Jewish by birth and one of the first German women who earned a PhD in philosophy. Christian fellow-philosophers introduced her to Christianity and she was baptised when she was thirty years old. Eleven years later she took the vows of a Carmelite nun and lived in the Carmelite monasteries of Cologne (Germany) and Echt (the Netherlands) until her arrest in 1942, which was probably an act of revenge by the Nazis for the protest of the Dutch bishops against the anti-Semitic outrages of the occupation forces.²² Stein anticipated her own death in 1939 as beneficial and prayed that it would lead to 'the preservation, sanctification and perfection of our Holy Order, particularly the Carmel in Cologne and in Echt [...] (and) for the atonement of the unbelief of the Jewish people'.²³ Stein's life story and her writings, which keep being re-published, inspire many Christians, and Pope John Paul II made her a saint of the Roman Catholic Church, also because of the miracles she allegedly performed after her death. As is well known, Stein's canonisation was heavily criticised by Jews and non-Jews alike, who argue that she died because she was Jewish and that her Christian canonisation is a misplaced appropriation of a Holocaust victim.²⁴

This book deals with several martyrs or groups of martyrs who are contested as in Stein's case. These cases, as the contributors will argue, imply that Assmann's concept of canonisation should be revised, amended or, perhaps, even replaced by a more dynamic and flexible model that takes into account both the constant reshaping of martyrs as well as the trends towards canonisation and contestation of martyrdom in the present. Such an approach may be derived from Pierre Bourdieu's theory about *Les Règles de l'art* (The Rules of Art). Although Bourdieu does not use the words 'canon' and 'canonisation' excessively, his discussion of the radical changes in the art scene in the nineteenth century, when the old hierarchical structures had disappeared, results in the leading idea that a new 'literary field' ('champ littéraire') was formed. In this field continuous battles for the 'symbolic power' take place between artists and the groups connected with them in

22 See Herbstrith, *Edith Stein – ihr wahres Gesicht?: Jüdisches Selbstverständnis, christliches Engagement, Opfer der Shoa*; Knaup and Seubert, *Edith Stein-Lexikon*.

23 <https://www.catholicculture.org/culture/library/view.cfm?recnum=802> (Accessed on May 8, 2018).

24 See Batzdorff, 'A Martyr of Auschwitz', p. 5; Van Biema, Penner, and Mitchell, 'A Martyr But Whose?'

order to survive and maintain a particular and active position.²⁵ This highly competitive view of the literary field implies that the rules of the game are no longer determined by external religious and political powers. The autonomous artists themselves define the rules and position themselves within the 'space of possibilities' ('l'espace des possibles').²⁶

Applied to martyrdom, Bourdieu's approach focuses on the agents who commemorate martyrs and eventually 'create' new martyrs, or even criticise such commemorative practices and act against them. These agents may be in continuous competition with each other, signifying that the canonisation of martyrs goes hand in hand with their contestation. A case in point is the French priest Jacques Hamel, who was brutally killed by two supporters of ISIS on July 26, 2016. Hamel is commemorated both as a martyr of France, who died for Western values and ideals, and a martyr of the Roman Catholic Church.²⁷ During the commemoration, one year after the priest's death in Saint-Etienne-du-Rouvray, President Macron stated that Hamel's martyrdom was not in vain ('Et sans en diminuer l'horreur, le martyre du père Hamel n'aura pas eu lieu pour rien' (*Le Figaro* July 26, 2017). Pope Francis gave a morning meditation in Rome on 14th September 2016, during which he stated that Hamel was part of a chain of Christian martyrs and should be beatified as soon as possible.²⁸ Here one clearly can see the mechanism that by calling someone a martyr the opponents are often denied any legitimacy and bedevilled. Building on Bourdieu's views, we can imagine the processes of mediatization and commemoration of martyrs as an arena in which various agents, individuals as well as groups, religious or secular, compete for the commemoration or contestation of martyrs. As will be apparent in this volume, the protagonists will have strong disagreements about who is a martyr and who is not as well as which kind of martyrdom is legitimate and which is not. As such, communities will commemorate, appropriate or contest martyrs, depending also on their own context and group identities and the power mechanisms and discourses involved.²⁹

25 See Bourdieu, *Les Règles de l'art. Genèse et structure du champ littéraire*, p. 180-81; p.191; p. 223; p. 282-283; p. 357.

26 Bourdieu, *Les Règles de l'art. Genèse et structure du champ littéraire*, p. 413. For further discussion of Bourdieu's agonistic approach focusing upon discontinuities in comparison with the work of Jan Assmann and Walter Benjamin, see Zschachlitz, "Blocage canonique", "espace des possibles", "dialectique à l'arrêt". *Éléments d'une théorie du canon chez Assmann, Bourdieu et Benjamin*, p. 543-557.

27 See Volder, *Martelaar: leven en dood van de vermoorde priester Jacques Hamel*.

28 *L'Osservatore Romano*, weekly edition in English, no. 38, September 23, 2016.

29 For approaches to the nexus of canon and power, see Ter Borg, 'Canon and Social Control', p. 411-423; Winko, 'Kanon/Kanonizität, VII Literaturwissenschaftliches', p. 316-317.

Afterlives of Martyrdoms

Our brief discussion of canonisation and contestation of martyrs reflects several ways in which the dividing line of finding a working definition for the concept of martyrdom is not only between what is martyrdom or not, nor is it between what is right and legitimate or illegitimate martyrdom. Instead the point which this book attempts to put forward is that definitions and legitimacy of martyrdom are mutually dependent. Moreover, the commemoration of martyrs entails a process of canonisation because many groups who remember their martyrs have established a more or less fixed group of martyrs and sometimes also canonised the documents about those martyrs. Yet, this canonisation of martyrs goes hand in hand with two other processes: First, the canonisation implies the inclusion *and* exclusion of martyrs and the writings connected with them; martyrs who are heroes for one group are flatly contested by another group; that is to say, canonisation usually emerges in a plural of diverse and conflicting canons. No matter how martyrs are configured during their commemoration, they function as heroes and models for the in-group, which designates them as idealised figures. And, second, the ways martyrs are remembered in documents, visual material and narrations, performances, and rituals build on and re-interpret older textual and pictorial traditions that are either connected with older martyrs or are interpreted in new settings through the lens of commemoration. The canons, lists, and cultural texts of martyrdom are open to later and various traditions; these are present and future-oriented practices which are not permanently closed.

Moreover, inasmuch as martyrdom involves actively opting for death rather than abandoning a belief, martyrs also publicly embrace political, ideological and religious positions that oppose powerful institutions and dominant discourses. The various chapters in this book address the issues discussed above through opening up an interdisciplinary space for the analysis of the remnants and narratives of martyrdom, as well as of the re-making and re-conceptualisation of these pasts in the present in order to facilitate a dynamic and transnational approach across several fields and cultural-political contexts. The contributions to this volume deal with various forms and contexts, from Late Antiquity up to the present era, in which they examine how spaces of martyrdom are equally relevant for heritage and memory studies since most of these spaces have been recycled, remediated and musealized in art and cultural practices (reliefs, frescoes, paintings, illustrated manuscripts, etcetera). Many martyr shrines and reliquaries are still being venerated, and street names and graffiti keep the

memory of recent martyrs alive. The cross-cultural approach and analyses make this book valuable for students and scholars of heritage and memory studies, religion and ancient history, literature and poetry, and media and public culture.

In his chapter, Tobias Nicklas focuses on the dynamic interconnections between what became the early Christian canon of the Holy Writings of the Bible and the identities resulting from the history of various Christian groups. The development of the canon was decisive for the beliefs of the Christians and their identity, but changes in the group identities led to changes of perspectives on the canon in various contexts. Thus, the 'canonical process' did not come to its end with the discontinuity of the closure especially of the canon. As a matter of fact, other writings that do not claim to be part of the canon, fulfil a function analogous to canonical writings, as the reception history of several so-called apocryphal writings and martyrdom passages implies. Building on Maurice Halbwachs' concepts of 'social memories' (*Les cadres sociaux de la mémoire*), and 'collective memory' (*La mémoire collective*), Nicklas critically analyses the relationship between memory and martyrdom and argues that while most of the canonical texts have been largely forgotten the landscapes of memory which were created by these texts still exist. This argument highlights the contestation but also the non-fixation and exclusivity of canons.

Yair Furstenberg discusses the changing nature of canonisation of a cluster of martyrdom traditions about the ten rabbinic sages, who were executed by the Romans in the First or Second century CE. The canonical texts were transmitted as isolated stories in several rabbinic writings, which were only combined to a grand narrative in Late Antiquity or the early Medieval period. One indication of the major re-interpretation of martyrdom in this period is the fact that instead of idolatry or the transgression of a Roman decree or another reason that was obvious from a Roman perspective, the ten Rabbis were executed because the emperor found out that the Jews were never punished for the ancestral sin of selling Joseph to the Ishmaelite merchants (Gen. 37:23-37). This implies that their death was intended by God, which was confirmed by the heavenly journey of one of these Rabbis, Rabbi Ishmael, to inquire about their case. Furstenberg argues that the evolution of the *Story of the Ten Martyrs* from its Talmudic foundations in interaction with Christianity betrays a fundamental shift in Jewish martyrological discourse that reveals the strategy for confronting the religious claims of the political power through the act of martyrdom.

Jennifer Knust surveys the gradual canonisation of the Maccabean martyrs within a collection of Christian sacred texts. The eventual adoption of

these martyrs as proto-Christian models of faith was clearly the result of a complex but now lost process of reconfiguration and appropriation. This march forward of a Christian Maccabean cult also coincides with a post-Julian consolidation of Christian ascendancy that began during Julian's reign and was then further advanced during the ramping up of Christianisation following his death. The introduction of the Christian cult of the Maccabean martyrs can be interpreted *both* as an anti-Jewish Christian response to changing circumstances under Julian *and* as evidence that the traditions associated with the Maccabees endured as a continuing site of Christian-Jewish interaction *even as* these same martyrs were spiritualised. The fourth-century re-signification of these martyrs as Christian participated in what Andrew Jacobs describes as the 'historicisation' of the Jew, a process that renders living Jews merely 'historical' by transferring the Jew or the Jew's remains into an embodied, living Christian past. Once the martyrs were detached from earlier commemorative contexts, they served to buttress particular, disputed formulations of Christian rather than Jewish identity. According to Knust, the reverberations of this process reach beyond their initial settings and Christian anti-Judaism, rhetorical or real, and have persisted within ongoing and contested histories of difference.

Mieke Bal examines the first autobiographical text written by a woman which concerns the life of the Carthaginian martyr Perpetua. The analysis combines narratology, psychoanalysis, and deconstruction, in a voluntarily anachronistic appropriation of this unique document. Scenes of martyrdom are etched on our retina, because there are so many artworks that represent them. The case Bal analyses, however, is literary, although some of its metaphors and descriptions are vividly visual. Bal speculates that a contest shapes the one that informs Perpetua's choice for this particular martyrdom: the contest between male and female, or rather, the contest for masculinity. Perpetua's move away from femininity would lead her, not so much to give up sex as to enjoy it in the only way she could have access to it, turns this story of victimhood into a story of victory: over gender-limitations and over narration.

Asghar Seyed-Gohrab analyses the concept of 'love' in the context of Islamic mystical martyrdom. As a concept, love was used increasingly in a religious and mystical context from the 10th century onward in the Islamic world in such a way that it was often hard to make a distinction between profane and spiritual love. A true lover was often a pious person who would offer everything including his life for the beloved or for love itself. Love was frequently connected with death or to be killed by the beloved either in a metaphorical or literal sense. There are several examples referring to

love-death and how such a death is interpreted as martyrdom. After an analysis of the origin and the evolution of the concept of love-death to martyrdom in medieval texts, Seyed-Gohrab examines how love martyrdom was reactivated in Twentieth century Iranian political philosophy for a wide range of purposes. He focuses in particular on the cult of martyrdom, scrutinising how the concept was deployed during the Iran-Iraq war (1980-1988) to propagate a militant ideology, to justify violence, and to convince soldiers that their fight was a spiritual quest to attain the immaterial beloved.

Jan Willem van Henten takes a speech by the English Bishop Arthur Winnington Ingram from 1914 for the bereaved families of fallen soldiers as point of departure for a survey of the commemoration of soldiers who died in World War 1 as martyrs. Winnington Ingram characterises the soldiers whom he commemorates as martyrs and links them to Stephen, the proto-martyr of the Church (Acts 7). Van Henten explores whether Winnington Ingram's speech is an isolated case or if others also commemorated soldiers who were killed during the Great War as martyrs, indirectly or explicitly. Van Henten concentrates on several case studies about German and British soldiers: a mosaic referring to the soldiers, a chapel at two German military cemeteries in Belgium (Hoogdele and Menen), and a stained glass window and a table with names of the fallen at All Saints Church at Huntingdon (Cambridgeshire). This chapter discusses the particularities of these commemorations as well as how the soldiers are associated with martyrdom and the reward of martyrs with the help of Christian pictorial traditions and specific biblical passages.

Paul Middleton deals with the contested homosexual martyr Matthew Shepard. Matthew Shepard, a gay twenty-one year old political science student at the University of Wyoming, was robbed and brutally beaten by two other men on the night of Tuesday, 6 October 1998. The men tied him to a fence after the attack, while he was bleeding profusely in freezing temperatures. He died a few days later, on 12 October 1998, and was called a martyr in *Time Magazine*, just a week after his death. Middleton examines the popular martyr-making process in respect of Matthew Shepard, arguing that both the making of the martyr and the reaction it provoked reflect American 'culture wars', because martyrology is conflict literature, foremost about the conflict between the story-tellers and their opponents. Ironically, both LGBT activists and right-wing religious groups have in some ways sought to undermine Shepard's martyr status by focusing on his life rather than his death. Such efforts, as Middleton argues, had a limited effect because in martyrologies any interest in the lives of their heroes is incidental, merely setting up the scene for a significant death.

Friederike Pannewick examines the public memorialisations of the martyrs of the Arab Spring in Egypt as expressed in graffiti and murals in Cairo. The state tried to censor and destroy them, but the memorial spaces were re-appropriated by the public and functioned as visual narratives of the history of the revolution. This artwork not only aimed at counteracting forgetfulness through public remembrance, but also enshrined the remembrance of more than once unpunished crimes and tragic events. The commemoration of these martyrs oscillates thus between personal efforts to cope with inescapable suffering and political strategy. From the perspective of previous commemorations of martyrs in Arab contexts the remembrance of the Arab Spring martyrs displays a major shift: this time the Arab citizens themselves engaged in self-empowerment and establishing and defending their own national history, instead of the political or religious institutions. In addition, a semantic transformation took place through a reconfiguration of religious ideas in the context of secularised modernity that transcends the particularities of specific groups and simultaneously builds on Muslim and Christian imageries.

Jeremy Punt argues that the canonisation of South Africa's anti-Apartheid heroes is an important component in the construction of a narrative of a country emerging from a violent, divisive past informed by racist engineering and deliberate processes of exclusion and othering. The icon of the struggle against Apartheid and the one who most often springs to mind is, of course, Nelson Mandela, around whom quite a hero if not a martyr cult was erected. Heroes' discourse plays an important role in structuring memories about South Africa's past and negotiating identities in the present. Notwithstanding the ambiguities, the role of anti-Apartheid heroes and their veneration are important in underscoring new group values, restoring human dignity and self-esteem while at the same time articulating identity and acknowledging leadership and achievement. But the commemoration of heroes is also time and place bound and therefore susceptible to constant critique and adjustments as is evident from recent events in South Africa.

Marcel Poorthuis discusses the radical re-interpretation of the story about seven boys who fall asleep for several centuries in a cave during the persecution by Emperor Decius. They refused to burn incense before 'idols made by hands' and fled into a cave, where God took their spirits and brought them to heaven. The story has been associated with martyrdom and has pre-Christian forerunners but it was transmitted in a Syriac-Christian version by Jacob of Serugh (451-521 CE). The Qur'an recycles this story, but its thrust is wholly different. Ironically, the story in Sura 18 has been transformed into an anti-Christian polemic. This story in turn has been re-created in

the novel *My Father's Notebook* (*Spijkerschrift*) by the Iranian-Dutch writer Kader Abdollah (translated in English as *My Father's Notebook*, 2006). The story symbolises the future return of happiness and beauty for the people, persecuted both under the Shah and under Khomeini.

Ihab Saloul investigates the phenomenon of 'female martyrdom operations' in relation to the issue of women's agency in society, particularly women's political participation and gender roles in contemporary Palestinian society. In the context of the conservative social climate promoted by the Islamists through their emphasis on the religious rather than the nationalist dimensions of martyrdom operations, female martyrs had nationalist motivations and aimed at restoring their position as politically active participants in Palestinian society. Three operations in 2002 (Wafa Idris, Dareen Abu Aysheh and Ayat Al Akhras) managed to open up new spaces for women's participation on the nationalist front and women were indeed accepted as active participants in the military struggle. On a religious level, these three female martyrdom operations represented a significant challenge to the interpreted religious notions of women's political participation in relation to contemporary Islamic discourse of martyrdom and warfare. A fourth operation (Hanadi Jaradat, 2003) was carried out on behalf of the Islamic Jihad Movement, which justified her operation also from a religious point of view.

Finally, Laura Copier builds on Elizabeth Castelli, who characterises the discourse on martyrdom as highly ambivalent, yet persistent and powerful to this day and age, evaluating martyrdom as 'an idea without a precise origin' (Castelli, 2004, p. 35). Because it is both impossible and unproductive to pinpoint the exact historical moment in which martyrdom came into existence, Copier focuses, with Castelli, on the ongoing manifestations of martyrdom, in particular on the sustained investigation of contemporary, popular, and secular representations of martyrdom. The discourse of martyrdom is so powerful precisely because of its adaptability and, critically, the transformation of the object that it allows. It is not just the concept of martyrdom that is not fixed; it also causes related discourses to change. One of those discourses is Hollywood cinema, and its representations of gender and the body in female action heroes. Castelli's 'culture making' dimensions of martyrdom that 'depend upon repetition and dynamics of recognition' are played out, as Copier shows, in the female character of Imperator Furiosa (Charlize Theron) in the 2015 film *Mad Max: Fury Road*. Through a close reading of the film's genre, narrative, and iconography, Copier argues that the female action hero Furiosa is able to transcend and destabilise the equation of martyrdom with death.

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