

# Canonization and Cross-Cultural Martyrdoms

*International Expert Meeting  
December 8-9, 2016. University of Amsterdam*

This expert meeting examines several aspects of canonization and connects those with cross-cultural martyrdom. The phenomenon of martyrdom is more than 2000 years old, but, as contemporary events show, still very much alive. Martyrdom is part of the foundation myth of Christianity. It appeals to the imagination of many, because it is a highly ambiguous spectacle, with thrilling deadly consequences. The concept of martyrdom itself becomes more and more blurred and contested, also because religious or secular martyrdoms play an important role in current social, political and ethnic conflicts. Martyrs only become martyrs because others remember and honor them as such. Documents about martyrs as well as the ritual remembrance of martyrs incorporate and re-interpret traditions deriving from canonical texts. Finally, as martyr cults show time and again, the martyr figures themselves are contested not only because they can be commemorated by competing communities, but also because those who are martyrs in the eyes of in-groups are traitors or terrorists for others.

The canonization of martyrdom has two sides. On the one hand 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 ritual meetings commemorate the martyrs. They create and recycle texts, re-interpret them until they ultimately receive a canonical status. A few examples out of many concern the Ten Rabbinic Martyrs, the Martyrologium of the Roman-Catholic Church, Protestant martyrs whose stories are collected in Fox Book of Martyrs, the Mennonite Martyrs' Mirror, or recently the Martyrs of the Arab Spring. On the other hand, martyr texts themselves incorporate segments of other texts or traditions that are part of a process of canonization, such as passages from the Jewish or Christian Bibles or fixed religious symbols. The case of martyrdom is relevant for heritage and memory studies as well. Scenes of martyrdom have been recycled in art (reliefs, frescoes, paintings, illustrated manuscripts), martyr shrines and reliquaries are still being venerated. Street names and graffiti keep the memory of recent martyrs alive.

The expert meeting aims at discussing aspects of canonization and cross-cultural practices of martyrdom as well as several examples of the interconnections of heritage and memory acts related to martyrdom from the past up the present era.

*This expert meeting is organized by the Amsterdam Centre for Cultural Heritage and Identity (ACHI), The Amsterdam School for Heritage, Memory and Material Culture (AHM), and the Netherlands School for Advanced Studies in Theology and Religion (NOSTER/Theme group Canon-Commentary-Heritage).  
Organizers: Prof. Jan Willem van Henten & Dr. Ihab Saloul.*



## Program

### 8 December 2016

#### **Session 1: Methodological Reflections on Canonization**

9:00—9:10	<i>Welcome</i> , Jan Willem van Henten & Ihab Saloul
9:10—9:40	<i>Canonization and Literature</i> , Thomas Vaessens (UvA)
9:40—10:10	<i>Canonization of Modern Art</i> , Gregor Langfeld (UvA)
10:10—11:00	Discussion
11:00—11:15	Coffee
11:15—11:45	<i>Biblical Canon and Qumran Manuscripts</i> , Mladen Popovic (Groningen)
11:45—12:15	<i>Interaction of Canon and History</i> , Tobias Nicklas (Regensburg)
12:15—12:45	<i>Canonization of Anti-Apartheid Heroes</i> , Jeremy Punt (Stellenbosch)
12:45—13:30	Discussion
13:30—14:30	Lunch

#### **Session 2: Canonizations of Martyrdom**

14:30—15:00	<i>The Ten Rabbinic Martyrs</i> , Yair Furstenberg (Ben Gurion University, Beersheva)
15:00—15:30	<i>Early Modern Protestant Martyrs</i> , Jo Spaans (Utrecht University)
15:30—16:00	Discussion
16:00—16:15	Coffee
16:15—16:45	<i>Classical Martyrs in Hollywood Film</i> , Laura Copier (Utrecht University)
16:45—17:15	<i>Shia Martyrs</i> , Asghar Seyed-Gohrab (Leiden University)
17:15—18:00	Discussion
18:30	Dinner

**9 December 2016**

**Session 3: Heritage and Memory of Martyrdom in Artistic and Cultural Practices**

10:00—10:30	<i>Museums, Curation &amp; Martyrdom</i> , Mia Lerm-Hayes (UvA)
10:30—11:00	<i>Remembering World War 1 Victims as Martyrs</i> , Jan Willem van Henten (UvA)
11:00—11:30	<i>The Contested Martyrdom of Matthew Shepard</i> , Paul Middleton (Chester)
11:30—12:15	Discussion
12:15—14:00	Lunch
14:00—14:30	<i>The Martyrs of the Arab Spring</i> , Frederike Pannewieck (Marburg University)
14:30—15:00	<i>Kurdish Martyrs and National Identity</i> , Mariwan Kanie (UvA)
15:00—15:30	Discussion
15:30—15:45	Coffee
15:45—16:15	<i>Nationalism, Gender and Martyrdom</i> , Ihab Saloul (UvA)
16:15—16:45	<i>Title</i> , Bart Wallet (VU Amsterdam)
16:45—17:15	Discussion
17:15—18:00	Closing
18:30	Dinner