

A Christian Martyr under Mamluk Justice: The Trials of Ṣalīb (d. 1512) according to Coptic and Muslim Sources

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Introduction

And when they brought him to stand before the king and all of the soldiers, armies, lords of nations, and rulers, he was not afraid of the majesty of the king nor was his heart distressed by the soldiers who surrounded him, nor from the torture that he was promised. He was brave in his answer to the king and his armies, when the king asked him, ‘Oh Christian one, heed me and leave the religion of your fathers and I will forgive what they have said about you in the testimony which those who accompanied you from the countryside brought with them and in which there are the inappropriate words which came out of your mouth.’ So the martyr took courage in the power of Christ, glory be upon him, and he said, ‘Oh king, everything that they said and wrote about me, and sent to you is true. Not a word of it is a lie, but all of it I have said with my heart and all of my senses. I am publicly a Christian!’¹

The above quotation is from the martyrology of Saint Ṣalīb (d. 1512 CE), a Coptic Christian who was condemned to death in the late Mamluk era and whose story was recorded soon after. The “king” in the narrative, whom we identify as Sultan Qānṣūh al-Ghawrī, is pleading with Ṣalīb to

renounce his religion so that he would be saved from execution for blasphemy. Immediately one is struck by the resolve in Ṣalīb's voice and by his choice of words, which are interspersed with the Egyptian dialect. He is portrayed as steadfast and proud as he stands before the Sultan's majesty, and his diction and confident demeanor give him a heroic air; it is clearly a scene intended to inspire a Christian audience. The saint is presented, in a sense, as a champion of the Coptic Christian community that had few opportunities to take pride in or to publicly declare its religious beliefs.

The attention to detail in this Copto-Arabic martyrology — the choice of words, the meticulous description of Ṣalīb's surroundings, and the subsequent narration of Ṣalīb's judgment, suffering, and execution — renders the text an important source for Coptic and Egyptian literary and social history.² This account (hereinafter referred to as *M.Ṣalīb*) is a rare Coptic martyrological text from the Mamluk and Ottoman periods. The text's original authorship date is unknown; some manuscript copies date variously from the sixteenth to the eighteenth centuries and other copies are undated. While the events described in *M. Ṣalīb* took place in the last years of Mamluk rule, they appear to have been recorded shortly thereafter and thus may have begun to achieve popularity in the years following the Ottoman conquest of Egypt (1517 CE) and the destruction of the Mamluk sultanate.

Because Ṣalīb was a martyr in the Islamic era, he can be considered a "neo-martyr." His story complements the scores of "neo-martyrologies" that appeared following the Islamic conquests of the seventh century. Though these types of stories were rare in Coptic hagiographic literature,³ they were profuse in the Orthodox Christian Balkan region during the Ottoman period. While Nomikos Vaporis defines neo-martyrs by their allegiance to the Byzantine Orthodox Christian creed and by their ethnic identities,⁴ Sidney Griffith offers a more general definition of the term. Griffith describes neo-martyrdom, in the context of the relationship between Christians and Muslims after the Islamic conquests of the seventh century, as follows:

[in] the Islamic world, unlike in the pre-Constantinian, late Roman empire, there was no general pursuit of Christians as such. Rather, in these new circumstances, it was on the one hand sometimes the Christian enthusiast himself who, if he did not instigate the confrontation with the Muslim authorities, used it as an opportunity to earn his death by defaming Islam and the prophet Muhammad. Sometimes, on the other hand, the martyr was a convert to Christianity from Islam, and thereby forfeited his life as an apostate Muslim. These were all 'neo-martyrs' in Byzantine Greek parlance.⁵

As Griffith notes, a common act that led to martyrdom was public defamation of Islam and/or its prophet, Muhammad. Due to the nature of this

crime, Ṣalīb's martyrdom shares features with other narratives in this genre, subtexts in which the accused confronts Muslim judges and officials and is encouraged to convert to Islam by Muslim authorities. However, beyond such particulars, the contents of Ṣalīb's narrative are relatively uncommon. The text gives a detailed Coptic Christian perspective on the social interaction between Muslims and Christians, brothers and sisters, husbands and wives, one that is, in general, unaddressed by other sources.

In this article, we focus exclusively on the interaction between the Christian martyr and the Mamluk authorities.⁶ In particular, we will examine the details and phases of Ṣalīb's involvement with Mamluk officials, the judicial-institutional framework in which Ṣalīb's adjudication took place, and how Christians and Muslims seem to have perceived and remembered this experience. We hope to provide insights about Islamic legal practice in Mamluk times, especially in relation to inter-faith relations and religious defiance. Furthermore, we will attempt to understand the ways in which Copts saw their place in Egyptian society, their relationship with Muslims and Mamluk authorities, and how they constructed and expressed their identity as a religious minority.

According to Griffith, the issue that the historian most often confronts when dealing with neo-martyrological texts is that of their authenticity:

Inevitably the question of historicity arises in connection with these narratives and it must be addressed on several levels. In the first place, of course, each narrative must be taken individually. But at the outset one can say that for none of them is there any independent confirmation to be had from non-Christian sources, and in particular no Islamic text confirms any one of them.⁷

A problem facing the researcher, then, is whether the martyrs actually lived and died as described in these texts or whether their stories were exaggerated and semi-fictitious. Generally, according to Griffith, modern scholarship has addressed this issue by accepting the "basic reports" of the narrative, and leaving aside the words and emotional states of the martyrs as well as the forms and phases of persecution.⁸ With this approach, certain details in a martyrology might be dismissed as factually incorrect. If we look beyond such "fictions," however, these stories are valuable because they allow us to recognize the motivations of the tellers, the expectations of the audience, and the social, political, and religious ideals shared by the community.⁹

Yet, what happens if there is corroboration of a martyr's story in a Muslim source? One unique aspect of Ṣalīb's experience is that his story was also told, if briefly, in a Muslim account, Ibn Iyās' chronicle *Badāʾiʿ al-Zubūr fī Waqāʾiʿ al-Duhūr*.¹⁰ *Badāʾiʿ*, as Michael Winter explains, is a singular account of late

Mamluk and early Ottoman history,¹¹ and the brief section that relates Ṣalīb's story allows us to consider issues, ask questions, and explore history in a way that is impossible with many other martyrologies. First, the existence of two alternative sources enables us to compare and authenticate what we learn about Ṣalīb's experience in each of these texts. Indeed, details gathered from both accounts constitute a distilled and cumulative source of information on different aspects of legal practice and on relationships between Muslims and non-Muslims in Mamluk Egypt. With the help of these two texts, we can construct a critical narrative that traces the legal process from beginning to end and, in the meantime, accounts for all the phases in between. Such a complete reconstruction is quite rare in Mamluk legal history.¹²

Furthermore, because Ṣalīb's hagiography and Ibn Iyās' chronicle provide alternative tellings of the same story, a comparative reading of the two can demonstrate how the incident was reported, interpreted, and remembered by both Muslims and Christians. Indeed, we learn from these parallel accounts how and why a man was judged a criminal by one community yet considered a hero by the other. Through close analysis, we see that different aspects of the incident concerned each community — what one group celebrated, the other condemned or forgot. In short, by providing us with a rare opportunity to see two sides of a story, these accounts not only give us an unusually nuanced understanding of the historical incident but also provide clues about points of dissention between Muslim and Christian communities during that time.

In the following pages, we will first present the two different accounts of Ṣalīb's story. Since Ibn Iyās' narrative is fairly short, we will provide a verbatim translation of this text. The martyrology, on the other hand, will be summarized in detail, as it is a significantly longer text. Our analysis of these two accounts will follow.

Two Accounts of Ṣalīb's Story

A. Ibn Iyās' Chronicle:

It seems that for Ibn Iyās, the martyrdom of Ṣalīb was a passing incident, yet one of enough significance to record. The narrative provided by this chronicler is concise, straightforward, and fairly linear. On Monday 20 Ramadan, 918 AH/November 29, 1512 CE, Ibn Iyās refers to a "strange incident" regarding a man named "ʿAbd al-Ṣalīb," a Christian from the village of Dalja in Upper Egypt, which is located southwest of the town of Mallawī and west of the meeting point of Baḥr Yūsuf and the Nile.¹³

[On this day] a strange incident occurred. There was a Christian person who was called ʿAbd al-Ṣalīb. He was from the area of Dalja in the southern regions. It was said about him that he insulted the Prophet,

peace be upon him, with vulgar words. A group of people witnessed this and wrote a record [*maḥḍar*] of it, which was authenticated by the judge [*qāḍī*] of the area. When they brought the Christian before the sultan and he confessed to what he said against the Prophet, peace be upon him, they offered him conversion to Islam, but he refused. The sultan sent him to the house of Amīr Ṭumānbāy al-Dāwadār, and he convened an assembly [*majlīs*]. [ʿAbd al-Ṣalīb] confessed what he had spoken before the judges [*quḍāt*] and insisted upon this. He pledged not to change his religion, so the judges condemned him to death. Representatives of the ruler bore witness to this [confession]. So they mounted him on a camel while he was nailed,¹⁴ and they displayed him in Cairo until they brought him to al-Madrasah al-Saliḥiyyah. They beheaded him under the windows of the school. The people then brought fire and wood and burned his body in the midst of the market [*sūq*]. When nighttime fell, the dogs came and ate his bones, and his matter ended.¹⁵

Michael Winter notes that *Badāʾiʿ* was written by someone who was highly invested in the Mamluk regime.¹⁶ Ibn Iyās includes the story as one of many “events” that took place during the reign of Sultan al-Ghawri in the year 918 AH/1512 CE. In the scheme of other events, the incident was probably insignificant both for Ibn Iyās and his relatively well-educated audience, although the fact that the accused was brought before the sultan and offered reprieve may have rendered the story worthy of retelling. By the same token, the chronicler likely referenced this story in order to make a point: to reflect on the justness of a Mamluk regime that he admired and to convey his and the community’s repugnance towards a Copt who overstepped his boundaries in society.

B. The Martyrology:

In contrast to the succinct version provided by Ibn Iyās, the Copto-Arabic martyrdom of Ṣalīb is filled with many elaborate details and rhetorical flourishes. The difference between the few lines in the Muslim chronicler’s account and the several pages devoted to Ṣalīb in the Coptic version is indicative of *M. Ṣalīb*’s meaning for the Coptic community. It was important for the hagiographer not only to evoke images of heroism and bravery but also to uplift his audiences spiritually. Although the summary below seems fairly linear and straightforward, the original narrative is, in actuality, textured with biblical references, personal comments, and words of spiritual encouragement that are woven into the main narrative.

The narrator begins with the saint’s early life. Ṣalīb was born to a devout Christian family from the town of Ibshāda in the Upper Egyptian province of al-Ushmūnayn.¹⁷ The devout parents raised their son with the virtue of purity,

the narrator relates. When he was born, they wished to give him the most prestigious of names, so they chose Ṣalīb (“cross”), the name that represented the sign of “worldly redemption.”¹⁸ Both parents are described as modest carpenters. They raised their son within the customs (*adāb*) of the church, but they also taught him their skilled trade. One day, his parents decided that their son should be betrothed to a relative, thinking that if he were to marry, it would bring grandchildren who would ultimately assist in the family business. They made plans, without their son’s consent, to marry him to a relative. Considering that the martyr had not chosen this marriage, he decided not to “lie with [his wife even for] one day” since his body was pure and without sin.¹⁹ The saint, in his defense, was defying his parents because he was heeding the words of the gospel, advising him to be virtuous and chaste, which he had so frequently heard in the church.

Ṣalīb spent most of his time wandering through the wilderness, visiting the numerous monasteries and churches that dotted Upper Egypt and listening to the “divine word.” These actions so enraged his parents that they imprisoned their son in the house in chains to prevent his escape. However, their attempts failed: the chains miraculously broke apart, and the saint was freed by the “power of Christ.”²⁰ During these hardships, Ṣalīb appealed to the Virgin Mary, asking her to bestow upon him the crown of martyrdom so that he could join Christ in heaven. During one of his usual wanderings, he came upon some “non-Christians,” and, without provocation, it seems, he insulted them by uttering something that was “not appropriate to be heard.” The offended group was angry and captured him, but they decided to release him as a “courtesy to his parents.” As they were about to release him, however, he hurled more insults their way, so they brought him to the governor of al-Saʿīd (*al-Mutawālī bil-ḥukm fī bilād al-Saʿīd*). As he stood before the official, Ṣalīb did not deny the charges against him and confessed in public before the crowd; as a result, he received much abuse for what he had said. He was tied up and stoned by the crowd, according to the text, but the Archangel Michael protected him.²¹

The governor then ordered Ṣalīb jailed. While in prison, the Muslim jailer witnessed Ṣalīb’s chains breaking miraculously. One night, as the saint was praying, a “very illuminated woman” (presumably the Virgin Mary) appeared and told him that he would receive the crown of martyrdom in the name of her son. Upon witnessing these events, the jailer and his wife offered to help Ṣalīb escape, but the martyr refused.²² The next morning, Ṣalīb stood before the local *qāḍī*, and the *qāḍī* ordered that he be sent to Cairo, accompanied by guards. Upon their arrival in Cairo, the commander of the guards approached a group of Christian “believers” and asked them to give the martyr some money, as he had nothing; the group complied and also offered to feed the saint.

In the next scene, we learn that the guard took the accused to meet the latter's sister, who lived in Cairo. This scene is filled with emotional and passionate pleas on the part of the sister and a vigorous defense on the part of Ṣalīb. Despite her intense appeal, the saint was unmoved from his commitment to die on behalf of his religion. The prisoner was then taken to "*al-ḥākim*," a Mamluk "*amīr*," and the written evidence against Ṣalīb, in the form of letters that recorded what he had said in his hometown, was also presented. Ṣalīb was confronted with these accusations and was asked by the *amīr* about the veracity of the accusations against him. Ṣalīb was threatened with torture if he did not respond truthfully. At that moment, the "Holy Spirit" gripped the saint, and "he confessed the noble confession,"²³ confirming the veracity of the accusations.

The *amīr* ordered that Ṣalīb be taken to the "King of Egypt" (*malik Miṣr*) the next morning. At this point, as in other parts of the text, the hagiographer interjects the martyr's thoughts, noting his state of mind, his disposition towards martyrdom, and his recollection of scriptural verses that strengthened his resolve to be martyred. According to the narrator, Ṣalīb was not in awe of the splendor and glory of the king's court, nor did he fear the king's soldiers or the torture with which he was threatened. The king asked him to recant what he had said, promising that once he converted to Islam, Ṣalīb would be forgiven for those "inappropriate" utterances. Yet Ṣalīb "confessed" again, confirming the veracity of the charges against him. At this, the sultan asked that the judges be brought in to hear Ṣalīb's statement and to judge him according to Islamic law. When judges and witnesses were called forth, the accused was again asked to confirm or deny the charges, and once more he confessed, claiming "Not only was everything that I spoke true, but I would even add more to what I have said."²⁴ Consequently, upon seeing with their eyes the face of the accused and hearing his words, the judges condemned Ṣalīb to death.

The punishment was ordered: a camel was brought and Ṣalīb was nailed to a wooden plank in the shape of a cross ("Ṣalīb") and then mounted on the camel. They paraded him in the streets of Cairo, repeating the words with which he had blasphemed Islam, but the actual words of blasphemy are not repeated in the text by the hagiographer.²⁵ The saint, according to the narrator, was pleased at this and happy that the hour of his death was near, the hour when the promise made to him by the Virgin Mary would be fulfilled. He was then brought before the executioner and a *qāḍī*. The *qāḍī* asked him if he would recant and adopt Islam. Ṣalīb turned down this offer once again and was subsequently executed. After his death, the Virgin Mary "took his soul," "wrapped it in sheets of light," and presented it to her beloved son. Ṣalīb's body was burned in the midst of the city, but miraculously, according to the

hagiographer, the saint's body withstood the fire for three days without damage or theft by "unbelievers." Finally, a group of "believers" claimed his body and brought it to the headquarters of Patriarch John XIII²⁶ (in Ḥārit Zuwaylah).²⁷ From there, some of the saint's relics were sent to various churches. His relics became a source of numerous miracles and healings, according to the narrator, and Ḥārit Zuwaylah would serve as the main shrine for the saint. The martyrdom date for Saint Ṣalīb, 3 Kiyahk 1229 AM/November 21, 1512 CE, is a few days earlier than the one recorded by Ibn Iyās (November 29, 1512).²⁸

Analysis

A. Religious-Historical Setting: Copts in Mamluk Egypt

To a large extent, modern-day historians portray the Mamluk era as harsh and brutal for many Egyptians, and this seems to be particularly the case for Copts.²⁹ A number of researchers have referred to the Mamluk sultanate, particularly to the Baḥrī Mamluk era (1260–1382 CE), as a "setback" to the Coptic population. Moshe Perlmann refers to the Mamluk period as an era that "contributed decisively to the crushing of the Copt[ic] element in Egypt."³⁰ And Donald Richards adds the following:

[From the end of the thirteenth century,] the non-Muslim population of Egypt was faced with increased violence and oppression in their relations with the Muslims. The pressure to convert was great, both on individuals and at times on communities at large, because of the periods of mob violence, the damage to property and loss of life, and the increased financial exactions and social disabilities. Most of this pressure fell on the Copts simply because they were numerically more significant [than other minority populations]. Large-scale conversions to Islam began about the middle of the fourteenth century.³¹

It is no surprise, then, that Theodore Hall Partrick, in his recent history of the Coptic Church, titles a chapter on this period "Surviving Mamluk Rule,"³² and in fact it was a matter of survival, considering that the conversion of numerous Copts by the mid-fourteenth century, as Little confirms, reduced this Christian group to a small minority.³³ In Terry Wilfong's evaluation, "the Mamluk period saw perhaps the most extensive conversions of Christians; increased tension between Christians and Muslims seems to have been a major factor in the marked increase in conversions during this period."³⁴

Among the Copts who worked under government service, whether as scribes or as financial agents, conversion was frequent and often occurred because of the threat of violence and restrictions on hiring non-Muslims. The

stories of these converts are rarely recorded in Coptic annals, as they were understandably viewed with suspicion. However, as Little points out, there is frequent mention of converts in the period's Muslim chronicles.³⁵ In many ways, then, the story of Ṣalīb can be seen as an implicit critique of these Copts who were unable to persist in their faith.

Furthermore, Ṣalīb's martyrology can potentially be viewed as a response to negative stereotypes of Copts that were common in contemporary Muslim accounts. Indeed, the antipathy towards Christians who were perceived as "manipulative opportunists" is a common theme in many Mamluk chronicles. The chronicler 'Abd al-Raḥīm b. al-Ḥasan al-Umawī al-Qurayshī al-Asnawī, for example, was among the fiercest of these writers. He wrote in the late fourteenth century that:

The Copts declare that this country still belongs to them, and that the Muslims evicted them from it unlawfully. Then they often steal as much as they can from the state treasury in the belief that they are not doing wrong. As to the possibility of confiscation and punishment, torture [sic], they hold that the chances of these happening to them are about equal to that of falling sick; that is to say, sickness does sometimes come upon a man, but is not likely to be frequent.³⁶

Historians such as al-Nuwayrī (d. 732 AH/1331–32 CE), al-Safadī (d. 764 AH/1363 CE), and Ibn Taghribirdī (d. 874 AH/1469–70 CE) were especially critical of Coptic converts — usually referred to as *masālīma*, which connotes the idea of "new Muslims" or "pseudo-Muslims" — and viewed them with skepticism, mistrust, and general disdain.³⁷

Given the accusations of opportunism and spiritual ambiguity leveled at both Copts and Coptic converts,³⁸ Ṣalīb's story must have provided the Coptic community with an ideal of courage and determination. In other words, Ṣalīb not only inspired Copts to be better Christians but also personified the best aspects of the Coptic character and demonstrated the resilience of the Coptic faith in the face of Muslim contempt. In this sense, and in addition to its self-critical intra-communal orientation, the martyrology can be read as an account of collective resistance and counter-propaganda; this aspect of the text is especially important given that during this period, it was becoming more and more difficult for any Copt to act "heroic" in defense of his or her religion in Egyptian public life.³⁹

In what follows, we will offer an analysis of the different stages of Ṣalīb's encounter with Mamluk authorities, fill in the missing details with the help of other sources, and, ultimately, examine how Ṣalīb's actions were construed and committed to memory by the Copts and Muslims. While the information available about each of these stages is highly uneven, the two accounts in our

possession do provide an important understanding of Mamluk judicial processes and of Muslim-Christian relations at the time.

B. Ṣalīb in Upper Egypt

Our understanding of this phase of the incident is based solely on information presented in the martyrology, and for this reason, it is limited compared to what we know about Ṣalīb's experience in Cairo. According to the Christian account, after the offense was committed, Ṣalīb was taken to provincial authorities in his local district. There, he was confronted about his crime and immediately confessed. We learn from the martyrology that it was the local governor who supervised Ṣalīb's interrogation and not a *qāḍī* (the judge that Ibn Iyās mentions in his account is possibly the one in the martyrology who saw Ṣalīb after his initial encounter with the local governor). It is not clear why this was so, but it is not surprising: we know that Mamluk *amīrs* in general and provincial governors in particular were quite willing to get involved in judicial processes, especially when they carried some significance and/or involved the members of the political and religious elite.⁴⁰ The text, however, does not indicate why Ṣalīb's case might have been considered significant.

The martyrology provides no information regarding Ṣalīb's encounter with the governor other than that it took place in front of a "crowd." We cannot be sure if any judicial authorities were in that crowd, which is quite possible; if they were, their presence did not necessarily diminish the role that the governor played in the process.⁴¹ The Christian text mentions the involvement of a judge in Ṣalīb's case but only after the governor's ambiguous "judgment" and Ṣalīb's temporary imprisonment. Again, the part that this judge played in Ṣalīb's case is not clear, but had he been a deputy judge, he would have been responsible for preparing a legal account (*maḥḍar*) of the charges against Ṣalīb as well as the latter's response to the charges that accompanied the Christian to Cairo. According to Joseph Escovitz, deputy judges were placed all over the Mamluk territories to administer justice in remote locations. Yet, Escovitz also argues that they did not have the authority to decide on executions and that their function, in such cases, was limited to gathering evidence, investigating the reliability of witnesses, and preparing *maḥḍars* forwarded to the center.⁴²

The hagiography then relates that "the governor of Upper Egypt did not judge [Ṣalīb], but put him under arrest." At this point, no legal verdict was given — only the governor's decision to transfer Ṣalīb to Cairo. Although the motivation(s) behind this decision is not explained in the text, it might indicate once again the significance of Ṣalīb's offense or its repercussions in the eyes of the provincial authorities, which is a topic we will revisit in the following pages.

The martyrology indicates that Ṣalīb was stoned during his encounter with the governor. It is not clear who did the stoning or why it occurred. We know from contemporary accounts that beating and torture were not uncommon in cases of apostasy and blasphemy. For example, in 1353, a Christian in Cairo who was accused of committing blasphemy against the Prophet Muhammad was beaten continuously for a week before he was eventually executed.⁴³ In cases of apostasy, physical abuse was frequently used to “convince” the offenders to recant their words and readopt Islam.⁴⁴ Yet, not every *dhimmī* who was accused of committing blasphemy was given a chance to recant and convert to Islam, as we will see later. The beating and torture of these non-Muslims, therefore, are probably manifestations of intense hostility and anger felt by members of the Muslim community.

C. En Route to Cairo

Following the initial ordeal in Upper Egypt, Ṣalīb was sent to Cairo for further hearings. The martyrology indicates that he was brought to Cairo on a ship, undoubtedly along the Nile. We know nothing about how criminals were transported from the provinces to the center, and the text provides only limited information.⁴⁵ Hence, it is not clear if this was the usual way that lawbreakers were brought to Cairo. Also, we can only imagine who else was on the boat other than the captain, his crew, and Ṣalīb’s guards: were there other offenders along with Ṣalīb? How long did the journey last? None of these questions are answered in the text. Yet the captain’s request for money on Ṣalīb’s behalf might indicate that Ṣalīb was expected to pay for his expenses during and after the trip. Furthermore, the invitation extended to Ṣalīb by Christians in Cairo to join them for a meal could be interpreted as a sign of his destitute state.

D. In Cairo

The Christian text indicates that Ṣalīb first faced a *hākim* (ruler or judge) in Cairo. According to Ibn Iyās, this *hākim* was *al-amīr* Ṭūmānbāy al-Dawādār, who then ordered that the Christian be taken to the Sultan, who after interrogating the accused, sent Ṣalīb back to the *amīr*. At the residence of Ṭūmānbāy, a meeting of judges was convened to determine Ṣalīb’s fate. The judges concurred that he should be executed.

This phase of Ṣalīb’s encounter with Muslim authorities is described in both Ibn Iyās’ account and the hagiography, and, consequently, it is the part that lends itself best to alternative, if not contradictory, “readings” of Ṣalīb’s experience from both Muslim and Christian perspectives. In the following pages, we will attempt to identify different layers of meaning that surround Ṣalīb’s martyrdom by first focusing on the Islamic judicial context in which his fate was decided and his crime might have been perceived by the Mamluk

authorities. Later, we will also attempt to understand the way in which the Coptic community interpreted and remembered this incident.

1. Adjudicating a Christian in Mamluk Egypt: Ṣalīb's Story from a Muslim Perspective

As mentioned above, the title “*dawādār*” was a bureaucratic designation in the Mamluk administration given to “the bearer of and keeper of the royal inkwell.”⁴⁶ We learn from Jørgen Nielsen that the man who held this position performed a variety of functions in the Mamluk administration, including serving as a key player in the *mazālim* system, which institutionalized the ruler's discretionary jurisdiction to settle grievances and respond to petitions, independent of Islamic courts.⁴⁷ The prominent roles that the *dawādār* and the sultan himself played in Ṣalīb's case might lead the reader to assume that Ṣalīb's fate was decided in this framework.

According to Nielsen, *mazālim* should be understood as a system of channels that conveyed petitions to the state about a particular issue or problem.⁴⁸ The vast majority of these petitions were dealt with in the relevant bureaucratic office in the palace chancery, where their claims were checked against the records and were granted or denied accordingly. For a variety of reasons, however, some petitions reached the upper echelons of the system and decisions were made at a higher bureaucratic level; in these instances, the *dawādār* and the *kātib al-sirr* — the private secretary of the sultan and the head of the palace chancery — became personally involved in the decision making process.⁴⁹ A smaller number of cases, presumably the ones with particular significance, were handled at an even higher level in public sessions presided over by the sultan or one of his ranking *amīns*. For the most part, these sessions took place twice weekly in the palace of justice (*Dār al-ʿAdl*) and included, in addition to the ruler or his representative, a number of military officials, judicial authorities, and bureaucratic functionaries. Nielsen claims that most cases handled in *mazālim* sessions were decided, when applicable, in accordance with Islamic law and with the help of judicial authorities.⁵⁰ In this sense, the *mazālim* jurisdiction did not necessarily constitute an alternative to *sharīʿa* justice; rather, in the Mamluk context, it was an institutional framework that structured the judicial-administrative operations of the state.

Despite the parallels between the judicial process that Ṣalīb was subjected to and the *mazālim* jurisdiction as summarized above, Nielsen's description of the *mazālim* system does not explain the involvement of the sultan as well as his *dawādār* in Ṣalīb's case. According to Nielsen, the principal objective of *mazālim* jurisdiction in the Baḥrī period was to discipline the ruling elite in the state's attempts to prevent “the oppression, arrogance, mistakes or plain

inefficiency of officialdom.”⁵¹ We also know that the system tended in time to become an “instrument” used by various Mamluk factions and groups in the religious establishment against their rivals.⁵² Neither of these facts, however, justifies the reason(s) that Ṣalīb’s case was handled within this particular framework. To be sure, Nielsen mentions in his account several cases of blasphemy and apostasy that were adjudicated in public *mazālim* sessions, but he also makes it clear that it was the identity of the offenders and not necessarily the nature of the crime that determined the platform of adjudication.

Joseph Escovitz, on the other hand, offers an alternative perspective. In cases involving the death penalty, Escovitz claims that even after a *qāḍī* or a chief *qāḍī* had decided on the necessity of execution, “the matter had to come before the sultan in order to secure his agreement to the verdict.”⁵³ Remarkably, Escovitz does not mention the *mazālim* jurisdiction in his account, and, unlike Nielsen, he limits the involvement of the sultan or high-ranking Mamluk *amīrs* in judicial processes only to those cases that required death penalty. It is not clear if this is because Escovitz was unaware of the *mazālim* system or because he disagreed with Nielsen’s assessments regarding the scope and/or nature of *mazālim* jurisdiction in the Mamluk sultanate.⁵⁴ In any case, several recent studies demonstrate that, at least in the Circassian era, the military involvement in judicial affairs exceeded the bases that *both* Escovitz *and* Nielsen lay out in their studies: not only that — *pace* Nielsen — simple *shar‘ī* affairs among ordinary people could be adjudicated by Mamluk authorities during this period,⁵⁵ but also — *pace* Escovitz — the involvement of the sultan in judicial affairs was not limited to cases that required the death penalty.⁵⁶

Irwin, Little, and Petry’s observations on the late Mamluk Empire lead us to be cautious of categorical explanations, like those posited by Nielsen and Escovitz, regarding the sultan’s and his *dawādār’s* involvement in Ṣalīb’s case. In fact, we learn from Carl Petry that, during the reigns of Sultans Qāyṭbāy and al-Ghawrī, the actual services of many senior executives rarely corresponded to the original callings of their titles, that the personality of an individual who occupied a post and his relationship with the ruler frequently determined his actions, and that the extent of the rulers’ involvement in judicial affairs varied according to the inclinations of each individual sultan.⁵⁷ In such a fluid institutional context, the military’s involvement in a particular case might have had more to do with the significance or possible repercussions of that case, rather than how the judicial-administrative system was supposed to function. It is indeed possible that Ṭūmānbāy and al-Ghawrī’s active and interested participation in the case might be related to the political implications of the Christian’s actions;⁵⁸ Ṣalīb’s attack on Islam and its prophet, like any such

assault, might have been seen as a challenge to the legitimacy of the Mamluk state, which was expected to protect Islam and the Muslim community from internal and external threats. Being converts to Islam with no tradition of legitimacy posited on lineage or descent, feeling the constant threat of rival Mamluk factions as well as their own subordinates, and perhaps sensing intensifying ideological challenges from both Anatolia and Iran at the time,⁵⁹ Ṭūmānbāy and al-Ghawrī might have seen in Ṣalīb's case an opportunity to demonstrate their devotion to Islam and prove that they were indeed good Muslim rulers.⁶⁰

Given the importance of Ṣalīb's case, why, then, did al-Ghawrī return the case to Ṭūmānbāy and not decide it under his own personal supervision? This action could indicate the importance of the *dawādār's* position in the late Mamluk judicial-administration.⁶¹ We believe, however, that the personal relationship between Sultan al-Ghawrī and his nephew Ṭūmānbāy as well as the magnitude of the latter's involvement in state affairs during al-Ghawrī's reign are more relevant to the above question. Sources acknowledge al-Ghawrī's personal affection for and confidence to his nephew.⁶² We also know that, especially after 1507, Ṭūmānbāy became indispensable in his uncle's government: according to Petry, "over the years, Ṭūmānbāy grew in stature until he became al-Ghawrī's alter ego. The sultan bestowed office after office on him," and when al-Ghawrī declared Ṭūmānbāy as his regent outside Cairo, no one was surprised.⁶³

Much of al-Ghawrī's dependence on his nephew has to do with Ṭūmānbāy's excellent reputation. Referring to *Badā'ī*,⁶⁴ Petry argues that al-Ghawrī, who was known among his contemporaries as someone untrustworthy, attempted to turn his nephew's well-deserved popularity to his advantage: "Ṭūmānbāy became renowned for his integrity. A man whose word was sacred, he never broke a pledge. Al-Ghawrī, who went back on his whenever circumstances warranted, found a special satisfaction in cementing a bond with his nephew, whose honesty was impeccable."⁶⁴ Hence, Ṭūmānbāy was a person worthy of adopting as the public face of the regime. In a case like that of Ṣalīb's, which had important political and ideological implications, Ṭūmānbāy was a smart choice — perhaps much better than al-Ghawrī himself — to represent the state as the site of religious righteousness.

With regard to the legal bases of Ṣalīb's sentence, there exist a variety of opinions in Islamic legal traditions on how to punish a *dhimmī* blasphemer. Perhaps the most liberal approach originates from the founder of the Ḥanafī *maddhab*, Abu Ḥanīfah (d. 767), and some of his early followers, who maintained that the protection extended by the Muslim community to the life and the property of the *dhimmī* should not be terminated as a result of blasphemy against the Prophet. According to this view, the offender would

be only liable to a deterrent and discretionary punishment (*ta'zīr*) in the same way as when he commits other illegal acts. In early Ḥanafī sources this judgment is justified with reference to the *ḥadīth* narratives that show the Prophet did not kill or inflict any sort of punishment on the Jews who addressed him with the phrase “death upon you” (*al-samu ‘alaykum*).⁶⁵ According to Hanaa Omar, this position was overruled by Abu Ḥanīfah’s later followers who favored the death penalty if the offender refused to recant his/her words and did not adopt Islam.⁶⁶

According to Imams Mālik (d. 795) and al-Shafī‘ī (d. 820), the founders of the two most popular legal schools in Mamluk Egypt, cursing prophets would require the repeal of the covenant between the Muslims and *dhimmīs* and thus establishes reasons for the execution of the blasphemer. Adopting Islam is the only way for *dhimmīs* convicted of committing blasphemy against the Prophet to avoid execution.⁶⁷ Omar claims that there is little variation in the Shafī‘ī opinion during the medieval period, whereas several Māliki jurists of this era left it entirely to the discretion of the judge to give the *dhimmī* offender a chance to convert to Islam in order to avoid execution.⁶⁸ Aḥmad bin Ḥanbal (d. 855), the founder of the Ḥanbalī school, also maintained that the *dhimmī* may not be asked to repent, but if he/she decides to convert to Islam at his/her own initiative, he/she would not be liable to any punishment.⁶⁹ By the seventh/thirteenth century, however, a consensus emerged among most Sunni jurists to reject the repentance of *dhimmī* blasphemers and to put them to death. And if the offenders chose conversion to Islam, professing *shahāda* was not sufficient: they were also obliged to acknowledge and observe the pillars of Islam and avoid *ḥudūd* offenses.⁷⁰

Hence, it is not surprising that Ṣalīb was given the chance to convert to Islam,⁷¹ which was the only way for him to avoid execution, according to most Sunni jurists at the time. According to Omar, cases involving accusations of apostasy and blasphemy were decided in the Mamluk period primarily with the involvement of the Māliki judges.⁷² Nevertheless, we cannot overrule the possibility that judges from other schools were present in Ṣalīb’s trial since both accounts make it clear that there were more than one judge in Ṣalīb’s trial and since Escovitz maintains that it was common for chief judges of the four schools of law to participate in those matters that required the death penalty.⁷³

2. Ṣalīb’s Martyrdom from the Coptic Perspective

Interestingly and in direct contrast to neo-martyrologies from the Balkans, the presumption in the Ṣalīb’s martyrology is that the accused *actually* committed the crime without any sabotage by his accusers. In the Balkan narratives, most martyrs are falsely accused of insulting Islam or of blaspheming the Prophet Muhammad, or are tricked into publicly professing

their Christian faith. Few Balkan neo-martyrs, in contrast to Ṣalīb and other Arab Christian martyrs, actively sought their deaths.⁷⁴ We might call them “coincidental martyrs”: martyrs who were in the wrong place at the wrong time, but whose bravery is nevertheless applauded.⁷⁵

Despite this discrepancy, the neo-martyrdom genre as a whole not only embellishes the bravery of its heroes but also insists on noting the judicial processes used to condemn these individuals to death. Neo-martyrs, including Ṣalīb, gain more credibility and respect when they must defend themselves multiple times in front of numerous Muslim judges and rulers. In a manner reminiscent of early Roman and Byzantine martyrologies, these narratives illustrate the tenacity with which true Christians hold to their faith in the face of persecution. On the one hand, the exchange between the accusers and the accused in the Ṣalīb hagiography is reminiscent of the biblical trials of Jesus. In fact, in a highly stylized manner, the martyr Ṣalīb relives Christ's life: he is named “Cross”; he is nailed to a cross; he is judged in front of multiple arbitrators just as Christ was. On the other hand, the perception of the Muslim judicial system is relevant in the way that it lends authority to the story. For instance, the narrator of Ṣalīb's story keeps sight of the fact that his audience is aware of an Egyptian judicial system that includes a “sultan” or a “king” and *sharī'a* judges. Ultimately, biblical and contemporaneous images are both featured in the story of this martyr.

It is important to note that many Christian hagiographic texts reflect a desire to present the martyr as one who strives to mimic the life of Christ (*Imitatio Christi*). The gospels in the New Testament, upon which many hagiographies are modeled, are rich in imagery of the judicial trials of Jesus prior to his crucifixion. The Gospel according to Matthew, for example, furnishes a poignant account of the first altercation between Jesus and the Jewish high priest Caiaphas, an exchange retold in the “question-answer” format that later became familiar in the hagiographic genre. The Coptic perception of a similar verbal exchange uncovers resemblance to and divergence from the trials of Jesus. In both narratives, witnesses are brought forth to face evidence against them, and the accused is asked to respond to the charges. However, while the biblical narrative emphasizes Jesus' innocence in the face of his false accusers, the narrator of Ṣalīb's hagiography, as mentioned above, never casts doubt on Ṣalīb's guilt:

And they brought [Ṣalīb] to one of the rulers in the land of Egypt and they stood him in front of the ruler and brought to him [the ruler] the books and letters which they had written regarding what the pure one had spoken in the lands of al-Sa'aīd and he asked him saying, 'Oh Christian one, did you truly speak those words that they have alleged against you? Tell me the truth or else I will bring upon you the harshest

of tortures.’ Upon hearing these words, the martyr derived strength from the Holy Spirit and made the noble confession, saying courageously and with little fear of the torture with which they had threatened him, ‘Everything they have spoken about me regarding the religion of Christ is true, for there is no God in heaven or on earth, except Jesus Christ.’⁷⁶

The martyr Ṣalīb again exhibited bravery when he faces the sultan in the account that opens this article. It is uncertain whether this dialogue could actually have taken place or whether a modest carpenter would have been so insolent in the presence of a Mamluk sultan. Ibn Iyās’ chronicle certainly does not give any indication of such an exchange. In any case, it is not the accuracy of the encounter but its dramatic retelling that was important to the audience of this hagiography. The tale is conveyed in a manner consistent with similarly dramatic encounters related in the Bible and in other hagiographic narratives.

Following this exchange, as described above, the sultan ordered Ṣalīb to appear before the judges so that they could hear his testimony and make a judgment regarding his case. He was taken to Ṭumānbāy’s residence once again; there, the judges, as well as other witnesses, were convened to hear his case.⁷⁷ In this scene, by “forcing” Ṣalīb to such a confession, the biographer foretells the martyrdom of the saint in the most conclusive way, thereby fulfilling the expectations of his audiences. In many regards, these “contests” between the saint in one corner and the Islamic judicial system in another, retold in colloquial language, are more spectacular than the subsequently described acts of torture and death.

In the Coptic text, however, the mystery of the nature of Ṣalīb’s offense lingers. According to Ibn Iyās, Ṣalīb’s crime was speaking “criminal words” against the Prophet Muhammad; Ṣalīb’s “confession” in the hagiography (“Everything they have spoken about me regarding the religion of Christ is true, for there is no God in heaven or on earth, except Jesus Christ;” and “Oh king, everything that they said and wrote about me, and sent to you is true. Not a word of it is a lie, but all of it I have said with my heart and all of my senses. I am publicly a Christian!”) does not necessarily vilify the Prophet (*sabb al-rasūl*) but entails what Muslim jurists call “associationism” (*shirk*), tantamount to “vilification of God” (*sabb Allāh*).⁷⁸ Could this discrepancy be accidental? Ṣalīb’s statements in the hagiography would have been considered an act of apostasy if made by a Muslim and could lead to his/her execution, yet it is not clear in the sources if Christian *dhimmīs* were supposed to be punished at all for uttering such words. First of all, the Qur’ān is very clear in its separation of the “People of the Book” from the “associators” or the “polytheists” (*al-mushrikūn*): as prescribed in the “Verse of the Sword” (IX, 5) the punishment to be applied in this world to the “associator” is death, whereas the “People of the Book” are allowed to maintain their religion as

long as they pay the *jizya* (IX, 29).⁷⁹ In a similar manner, Abu Ḥanīfah explicitly argued against subjecting *dhimmīs* to duress or pressuring them because of their *shirk* as long as they continue to pay the *jizya* and comply with the pact of coexistence, which obliges the Muslim ruler to accept the “associationism” of the *dhimmī* and to protect his life and property.⁸⁰ Several judicial manuals — Imam al-Shafi‘ī’s *Kitāb al-Umm* (9th c.), for example, and al-Mawardī’s *Al-Mustaḥaqq wal-Mustaḥabb* (11th c.) — contain prescriptions against *dhimmīs* who let Muslims hear their “idolatrous” claims “regarding ‘Uzayr (Ezra) and Jesus,”⁸¹ yet it seems that such offenses were less serious than the vilification of the Prophet or his companions. In fact, whereas al-Mawardī sees attacks on the Qur’ān, the Prophet, and the religion of Islam as reasons for the breach of the covenant between Muslim rulers and non-Muslims, claims regarding ‘Uzayr and Jesus warrant only a discretionary punishment with no life-threatening consequences.⁸² Ultimately, there are reasons to believe that the accusations of “associationism” were inapplicable or perhaps irrelevant against *dhimmīs*:⁸³ classical and medieval manuals of jurisprudence virtually ignore these topics when they discuss the rights and obligations of *dhimmī* communities and, instead, focus on the punitive consequences of blasphemous claims against Muhammad and his companions.⁸⁴ Furthermore, there is no indication in the accounts of contemporary chroniclers that a *dhimmī* was ever accused of committing *shirk* or *sabb Allah*, whereas accusations of blasphemy against the Prophet are quite common.

Could it be that Ṣalīb was executed merely for professing his faith? This is unlikely. A careful reading of Ṣalīb’s martyrology and Ibn Iyās’ narrative shows that the facts in the accounts do not actually conflict; rather, each text concentrates on different aspects of the event. In Ibn Iyās’ account, the focal points are Ṣalīb’s crime and his punishment. The martyrology, on the other hand, diverts the audience’s attention to Ṣalīb’s bravery, his resolute character, and those utterances that are not offensive to Islam, while at the same time explicitly acknowledging that Ṣalīb spoke words “not appropriate to hear.” The text does not specify these words and, instead, identifies Ṣalīb’s “confession” with those statements that demonstrate his strength and devotion to his religion. This choice indicates that the narrator had a significant degree of awareness about the type of “crime” that Ṣalīb committed and the possible consequences; it also suggests the narrator anticipated the fact that the martyrology would be vocalized in church and sanitized the language accordingly.⁸⁵ Incidentally, at this point we notice an unusual tension between the martyr and the narrator: while elaborate accounts of the dialogues between the accused and his Islamic judges regarding the nature of his crime are provided in the text, the goal of the narrator seems to be neither to praise Ṣalīb’s crime nor to encourage his audience to commit illegal acts. The

narrator, rather, provides *one*, albeit Christian, depiction of the incident in order to recapture select images of Şalib's heroism.

Indeed, the care taken in *Şalib's* martyrology to avoid insulting Muhammad's persona and his mission is what makes this narrative unique. Compare Şalib's words as narrated in the text, for example, to the case of a Bulgarian monk who in the face of Muslim accusations of blaspheming Islam, says:

Your false prophet Muhammad is a teacher of perdition, a friend of the devil, and an apostate of God. His teaching is satanic and you unprofitable servants have believed in him and are destined for hell unless you believe in Christ the true God.⁸⁶

Şalib's martyrology, however, does not bristle with anti-Islamic invective. Again, this text stands in stark contrast to Balkan neo-martyrologies, for instance, in which Muslim characters cast as the "other" dominate the narratives as they persecute Christians and attempt "forced conversions."⁸⁷ In Şalib's story, however, a diabolical Muslim character is not a main focus of the story. In fact, several Muslim characters introduced in *M. Şalib* act with a great deal of kindness and goodness, which the narrator highlights in the text.

Take the example of the jailer and his wife, who are charged with guarding Şalib in prison. We assume that this couple is Muslim, although no mention of their religion is made. The main literary function of this couple is to observe the miraculous powers working through this seemingly ordinary man. Both the jailer and his wife observe different facets of Şalib's supernatural force. The jailer chains Şalib, only to discover, repeatedly, that his chains are broken. The idea that this martyr could not be tied down by earthly shackles is revisited in prison after having been established earlier when the martyr was chained by his parents. As for the jailer's wife, she sneaked a peek at the prisoner out of curiosity during the night and observed him praying to an "illuminated woman" (the Virgin Mary). Although it is stated that the jailer's wife had no comprehension of the dialogue between the martyr and the woman, she was deeply moved by this vision.

From these details, one can speculate that the narrator sought to underscore Şalib's powers and faith by depicting two separate miraculous events. Each of the witnesses was privy to different aspects of the martyr's supernatural abilities, and thus the ensuing dialogue between wife and husband is unusually dramatic. As the couple excitedly shares the encounters, the husband concludes in awe and amazement that their prisoner is a "magician." Consequently and possibly out of fear of the "magician," the jailer and his wife not only decide to offer their prisoner his freedom, but they also express their own intentions to escape, thereby reinforcing the themes of

freedom and imprisonment that permeate the text. Ṣalīb rejects this offer, for he is seeking spiritual freedom. The jailer and his wife, however, are seeking an earthly freedom. Possibly facing a powerful sorcerer and perhaps feeling confined by their own religious values, the couple may, as the story subtly implies, have been tempted to escape to Christianity. While the words “Muslim” and “Christian” are never used in this subplot, the depiction of these witnesses’ reaction reveals the narrator’s conviction that, particularly in face of the (Christian) paranormal, Muslims can act with kindness and compassion and are ultimately “redeemable.”

A supernatural situation recurs when the officer in charge of Ṣalīb on the boat trip from Upper Egypt to Cairo witnesses apparitions and conversations among the martyr, the Virgin Mary, and the Archangel Michael. The narrator implies that perhaps it is this experience that moves the Muslim officer to ask a group of “believers” to aid Ṣalīb upon their arrival in Cairo.⁸⁸ The officer not only approaches these Christians but also “presents a case” to them on behalf of Ṣalīb, reporting the prisoner’s lack of financial means and support. Indirectly, the kindness of this guard is juxtaposed with the kindness of the Christians, who agree to help Ṣalīb. The narrator describes these “believers” as joyous in receiving Ṣalīb and kind in their generosity towards him; they are lengthily praised for their charity. Subsequently, in another act of compassion, the guard takes Ṣalīb to see his sister and to bid her farewell. It is only after these episodes are concluded that the guard finally brings Ṣalīb to face his judges.

Indirectly, the actions of “believers” and “non-believers” in these passages are presented with relative impartiality. No hostile words are used to describe most of the characters in the story. Their behavior, whether motivated by personal kindness or by the supernatural revelations streaming through the martyr Ṣalīb, can be considered highly significant in a narrative in which the protagonist is ultimately condemned to death by Muslim state officials. The narrator seems to distinguish intentionally between those who incite violence and make the judgment of death against the martyr and those ordinary individuals who, as jailers or officers, carry out their duties in the most compassionate way possible.

E. Punishment

The martyrology and Ibn Iyās’ account both indicate that after the judges found him guilty, Ṣalīb was nailed on a cross, placed on a camel, and led through the streets of Cairo until he arrived at al-Madrasah al-Ṣalīhiyyah.⁸⁹ According to the martyrology, “no Christians happened to be shamed and crucified on a camel” before, although we know from the contemporary sources that the public display of criminals on camel was common in Mamluk

Egypt.⁹⁰ Crucifixion was also not unknown: according to the sources, it was occasionally inflicted upon both Muslim criminals and Christian offenders of Islam, although in Ṣalīb's case the choice of crucifixion must have certainly had something to do with the identity of the offender and the nature of the crime.⁹¹ What makes Ṣalīb's experience unique, then, is not the fact that authorities placed him in public view but that they combined two different display techniques — the camel and the cross — to create a distinctive spectacle. Yet, once again, this image seems to be viewed differently by Muslims and Christians. For the Mamluk officials and Muslim Cairenes, Ṣalīb's crucified body on the camel represented a public degradation of a Christian by using the very symbol of his religious beliefs as an instrument of torture and humiliation. For the Christians, on the other hand, Ṣalīb's very crucifixion symbolized his ultimate victory and redemption:

They placed him on the camelback. They raised the martyr upon the camel's back pulling his back to the cross, they extended his hands on the cross and wandered in all the districts of Cairo while the announcer publicized in front of him what he had confessed before the kings, the governors, and the leaders. He was rejoicing and glad with what he had suffered in the name of our lord Jesus Christ. His face was full of God's grace and of the joy that God has given to him in regards to martyrdom. 'Rejoice and be glad you, O great martyr because the hour and the time that you have hoped became near, and the Lady, the Virgin Mary completed for you what she had promised you with, that you should take martyrdom in the name of her beloved son.'⁹²

Ṣalīb's beheading is also described in the martyrology in a similarly triumphant manner:

How great is the departure of the soul from the body you experienced during that great and feared hour. What a great hour when the swordsman is standing with the sword ready in his hand, while all creation are standing to watch his holy head being cut off. He was rejoicing and glad before the entire world. Then the judge with the swordsman said to him: 'Ṣalīb, change your mind and I will not shed your blood and will set you free in your way.' He raised his voice to the extreme: 'I am only going to die as a Christian in the name of Christ.' When the judge had heard from the martyr that noble confession, he immediately ordered to cut off his head by the sword. The swordsman beheaded him by the sword cutting off his holy head at the sixth hour of Monday the third of the month Kiyahk the [Coptic] year 1229 [AM] of the pure martyrs.⁹³

The judge's presence at the execution is consistent with what we observe in other sources.⁹⁴ What is surprising is his one last attempt to convince Ṣalīb

to convert to Islam. We cannot be sure if such interventions were common before executions at the time or if it was placed in the text merely to demonstrate Ṣalīb's devotion to Christianity one final time. Unfortunately, Ibn Iyās' chronicle provides no comparable information.

On the other hand, both the martyrology and Ibn Iyās's chronicle indicate that Ṣalīb's body was burned in a bonfire after his head was severed.⁹⁵ Incidentally, the only point on which the two accounts explicitly contradict each other is about the fate of Ṣalīb's burned body. As we have seen above, the martyrology insists that no harm came to the corpse during the burning. This was a true miracle in the eyes of the Christians that validated the suffering and sacrifice of Ṣalīb. Ibn Iyās' chronicle, however, indicates not only that the corpse was burned by the fire, but also that the remains were subsequently "eaten by dogs," another degradation that he claims that Ṣalīb (or rather, his body) had to endure.⁹⁶ What is interesting in this context is that, although the two accounts make different claims about what happened to Ṣalīb's corpse, both narrators regard the fate of the corpse itself as a validation of their own perceptions of Ṣalīb and of his story. Despite obvious differences in religious orientation, the two accounts' expectations of a true saint were not that different from each other after all.

Conclusion

Before we conclude, let us review some of the important points of this article. First, thanks to both Ibn Iyās' chronicle and Ṣalīb's martyrology, we understand, in remarkable detail, how Ṣalīb's case was handled by the Mamluk judicial and administrative authorities. It should be clear from our analysis above that the Mamluk government attributed some significance to this incident. The fact that this case was transferred from Upper Egypt to Cairo where it involved high ranking Mamluk officials attests to this situation. It might be true, as Escovitz insists, that all crimes that required the death penalty were brought to the attention of the Mamluk sultan and that military and administrative leaders' participation in judicial affairs became relatively common during the Circassian period. At the same time, the personal attention given to Ṣalīb's case by the *dawādār* and the Sultan might also be related to the ideological concerns of the regime. The adjudication and punishment of a Christian blasphemer according to well-recognized Islamic prescriptions must have helped strengthen the image of the Mamluk regime as a pious Muslim government.

Secondly, the main difference between the two accounts lies not in the factual details of the incident, but in how Ṣalīb's story was interpreted by the two narrators. In the Muslim account, the main issue is Ṣalīb's crime — his blasphemy against the Prophet — and his subsequent punishment by the

Mamluk regime. The martyrology, on the other hand, almost disowns the crime, without necessarily denying it, and, instead, privileges examples of Ṣalīb's Christian devotion and courage when threatened with torture and execution. The narrative seeks to highlight Ṣalīb's bravery and steadfast character for those Copts who might be contemplating conversion to Islam, yet in the process, the narrator tries not to offend Muslims or to commit the same crime that led to Ṣalīb's execution. The result is a complex, if not internally contradictory, text that praises Christian resistance against Muslim persecution and at the same manages to portray many Muslim characters as positive, redeemable, figures.

What is missing here is Ṣalīb's own version of the incident, which, as obvious from the above discussion, cannot be reduced to the martyrology. Be that as it may, the Muslim and Christian accounts provide us collectively with an elaborate understanding of Ṣalīb's story and as such, they help us grasp the multifaceted nature of Muslim-Christian relations in early sixteenth-century Mamluk Egypt.

Endnotes

1. *M. Ṣalīb*, 18r. From here on, we will refer to the "martyrology of Ṣalīb" as *M. Ṣalīb*, which will denote Coptic Museum manuscript, MS Tāriḫ, 475.

2. A special gratitude goes to Father Wadi Abullif, of the Franciscan Center for Christian Oriental Studies in al-Muskī district in Cairo, for guiding us in researching the topic of Saint Ṣalīb. He generously shared his brief but immensely significant work "Ṣalīb (pictauroc) ?-1512. Martire Ch. Copta," in *Santi della Chiesa Copta di Egitto* (Cairo, Al-Muskī: Centro Francescano di Studi Orientali Cristiani, 1991–1996), 255–256, which contains an excellent bibliographical guide to many of the available sources about this Coptic martyr.

The seven manuscripts which exist of this martyrology (or which make mention of Ṣalīb's martyrdom) are as follows: 1) Cairo, Coptic Museum, MS Tāriḫ 475(2), fols. 10^r–24^v (listed by Murqus Simayka in his *Fabāris al-makḥṭūṭāt al-Qibṭiyyah wal-ʿArabiyyah al-mawjūdah bil-maṭḥaf al-Qibṭi wal-dār al-baṭriyarkīyyah wa-abamm kanāʾis al-Qābirah wal-Iskandariyyah wa-adyirat al-quṭr al-Miṣrī*, vol. I (Cairo: Government Press, 1939), serial number 102, 54). The manuscript in which Ṣalīb's martyrdom is embedded is dated 24 Baʿūnah, 1266 AM (1550 CE); 2) Bibliothèque Nationale, MS Arabe 152, fols. 90^v–108^r, listed by Gérard Troupeau, *Catalogue des manuscrits arabes*, Tome I (Paris, Bibliothèque nationale, 1972[1995]), 122. This manuscript is undated but according to the notes by Troupeau, it is a sixteenth-century document; 3) Cairo, the Patriarchal Library, MS Tāriḫ 31(5), fol. 78^r–92^r, listed by Simayka in his *Catalogues*, vol. II, serial number 651, p. 297; 4) Cairo, Patriarchal Library MS Taqs 106(3), listed by Simayka in *Catalogues*, vol. II, serial number 723, 331. The dating of this manuscript is unclear. The first section of the manuscript contains a document which dates from 1377 CE. But there is a dedication in the manuscript from circa 1496–1497 CE made by Patriarch John XIII (1484–1525 CE) to the Muʿallaqah Church in Old Cairo. It is possible that after the martyrdom of Ṣalīb, his story was compiled with this manuscript; 5) The John Rylands Library, Manchester, MS 433[69], fol. 101^a, listed by W. E. Crum, *Catalogue of the Coptic Manuscripts in the Collection of the John Rylands Library, Manchester* (London: Bernard Quaritch, and Sherratt and Hughes, 1909), 208. This

is an eighteenth-century manuscript and the entry regarding Ṣalīb is in the form of an *Iḥṣālīyyah* or hymn dedicated to him; 6) Crum also cites another work, the John Rylands Library Manchester, MS 435 [22 and 21] (pp. 210–212). This citation is in a *difnār* (Antiphonary), a work of hymns that correspond to saints and their festivals. One hymn is dedicated to Ṣalīb, the martyr “who came at the eleventh hour, yet received the whole day’s wage.” This manuscript is from the year 1799 CE. In the year 2000 the Coptic Church published a booklet about the martyr Ṣalīb. The author, Father Dawūd ‘Abd al-Masīḥ, indicates that he used an original manuscript of *M. Ṣalīb* which is housed at the Convent of the Virgin Mary at Ḥārīt Zuwaylah in Cairo. While this manuscript is not cited in any other source, there is no question that this author relied on an authentic copy of the martyrology. This would indicate that there are in fact seven copies of the martyrology in existence today.

3. Yūḥanna al-Qalyūbī, a monk in the Monastery of Saint Bishāy, was another Coptic martyr killed during the sixteenth century. His story is retold by Iris Ḥabīb al-Maṣrī in *Qīṣṣat al-kanīṣab al-Qibṭīyyah, 1517–1870*, vol. 4 (Cairo: Maktabat Kanīṣat Mārī Jirjis Sporting, 1992 [1975]), 25. Reportedly, Yūḥanna was captured by a ruler (*ḥākim*, probably the provincial governor of Jirja or possibly even a judge) who demanded that the monk deny his Christianity. Because he refused to do so, he was tortured and then killed. He died on 30 Ḥatūr, 1298 AM/6 December, 1582. His story is recorded in Patriarchal Library MS Taqs 106(2) (listed by Simayka in his *Catalogues*, vol. II, serial number 723, 331). Interestingly, this text is embedded in the same manuscript as the fourth copy of Ṣalīb’s story, cited in fn. 2. There are also stories of other Coptic neo-martyrs from the Mamluk and Ottoman periods. One of these martyrs is of St. John of Sanhut, a thirteenth-century martyr about whom little is known. See René Georges Coquin and Maurice Martin, “Dayr Yūḥanna,” in *Coptic Encyclopedia* 5:1556 and a brief discussion of this martyr in Leslie MacCoull, “The Rite of the Jar: Apostasy and Reconciliation in the Medieval Coptic Orthodox Church,” in *Peace and Negotiation: Strategies for Coexistence in the Middle Ages and the Renaissance*, ed. Diane Wolfthal (Turnhout, Belgium: Brepols, 2000), 154–155. Sidhum Bishāy is the most known neo-martyr from the Ottoman period. He was “a Christian native of Damietta, [and] he was working in a rice factory when a Muslim accused him of blasphemy against Islam and had him taken to court. The judge ordered him flogged and the angry populace tortured him and led him in a procession through the city riding a buffalo. He died five days later.” See Aziz Atiya, “Martyrs, Coptic,” in *Coptic Encyclopedia* 5:1550–1559.

4. According to Vaporis, neo-martyrs were mostly of Albanian, Bulgarian, Georgian, Greek, Romanian, Russian, Serbian, Syrian, or Ukrainian heritages. See Michael Vaporis, *Witnesses for Christ: Orthodox Christian Neo-Martyrs of the Ottoman Period, 1437–1860* (Crestwood, N.Y.: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 2000).

5. Sidney H. Griffith, “Christians, Muslims, and Neo-Martyrs,” in *Sharing the Sacred: Religious Contacts and Conflicts in the Holy Land: First-Fifteenth Centuries CE*, eds. Arieḥ Kofsky and Guy G. Stroumsa (Jerusalem: Yad Izhak Ben Zvi, 1998), 169.

6. See Febe Armanios, “Coptic Christians in Ottoman Egypt: Religious Worldview and Communal Beliefs,” Ph.D. Dissertation. Ohio State University (Columbus, 2003), chapter 2, for a detailed discussion of other subtexts in the martyrology, including generational tensions, familial responsibilities, and forms and expressions of religious piety in Coptic community. Also addressed in this study are issues regarding authorship and audience.

7. Griffith, 204.

8. *Ibid.*

9. For more on this approach to studying history, see Alessandro Portelli’s work *The Death of Luigi Trastulli and Other Stories: Form and Meaning in Oral History* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1991).

10. See Muḥammad ibn Aḥmād ibn Iyās al-Ḥanafī, *Badāʾīʿ al-Zubūr fi Waqāʾiʿ al-Dubūr*, vol. 4 (906–921/1501–1515), arranged and introduced by Muḥammad Muṣṭafa (Cairo: al-Hayʾah al-Miṣriyyah al-ʿĀmmaḥ lil-Kitāb, 1982), p. 286.

11. Michael Winter, “Attitudes toward the Ottomans,” in Kennedy, ed., *The Historiography of Islamic Egypt*, 198. There are no other chronicles dating from this period with which *Badāʾīʿ* might be compared. See Winter’s article for a critical evaluation of this account and for the relationship of Ibn Iyās with late Mamluk administration. Also see Carl Petry’s *Twilight of Majesty: The Reigns of the Mamlūk Sultans al-Asbrāf Qāyṭbāy and Qānṣūḥ al-Ghawrī in Egypt* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1993) and *Protectors or Praetorians? The Last Mamlūk Sultans and Egypt’s Waning as a Great Power* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1994), for some discussion of Ibn Iyās and his work *Badāʾīʿ*.

12. See Donald Little, “Communal Strife in late Mamluk Jerusalem,” *Islamic Law and Society*, 6, 1 (1999), 69–96, for a rare example.

13. Heinz Halm, *Ägypten nach den mamlukischen Lebensregistern*, vol. I (Wiesbaden: Reichert, 1979), 113.

14. The text does not specify how he was nailed.

15. Ibn Iyās, *op. cit.*

16. Michael Winter, “Attitudes toward the Ottomans,” 198. The biases of someone who was part of the “*awlād al-nās*,” (“the sons of the [important] people,” i.e. the Mamluks), according to Winter, must be considered when studying Ibn Iyās’ chronicle. When it was fitting to his views, Ibn Iyās criticized the Mamluk regime; however he would later compare it favorably to the Ottoman rule which came to replace it.

17. Al-Ushmūnayn is a town (and also a province) in Upper Egypt, located on the west bank of the Nile. Under Fatimid rule, according to Ayman Fuʾād Sayyid, it served as an important region between the two provinces of al-Bahnasā and Manfalūt. In the medieval period, it was known as a center of the woolen and carpet industry. Gradually, however, it lost its significance. In 1720, under Ottoman rule, the nearby town of Mallawī became the administrative center of the area and eventually in 1826, the province of al-Ushmūnayn ceased to exist and became a village in the province of Mallawī. See *Encyclopedia of Islam*, 2nd ed. (hereinafter *EF*), s.v. “al-Ushmūnayn” by Ayman F. Sayyid.

18. *M. Ṣalīb* 12^r.

19. *Ibid.*, 13^r.

20. *Ibid.*, 13^r.

21. *Ibid.*, 14^r.

22. This incident in prison recalls and is likely based on the imprisonment of Paul and Silas in Philippi, as recorded in Acts 16:25–34. For more on the trope of the Virgin Mary dissolving the chains of imprisoned Christians, see Marvin Meyer, “Mary Dissolving More Chains in Coptic Museum Papyrus 4958 and Elsewhere,” in *Coptic Studies on the Threshold of a New Millennium: Proceedings of the Seventh International Congress of Coptic Studies, Leiden, August 27–September 2, 2000* (Leuven: Uitgeverij Peeters en Dep. Oosterse Studies, 2004). We are grateful to Maged Mikhail for this reference.

23. In *1 Timothy*, 6^{13–14}, the phrase “made the noble confession” is used to refer to Jesus’ testimony of faith before Pontius Pilate. It is also in the Nicean-Constantinople Creed, which is recited at every liturgical gathering.

24. *M. Ṣalīb* 19^v.

25. This was precisely the case in the martyrdom of ʿAbd al-Masīḥ, as discussed by Mark Swanson, “The Martyrdom of ʿAbd al-Masīḥ, Superior of Mount Sinai (Qays al-Ghassānī),” in *Syrian Christians under Islam: The First Thousand Years*, ed. David Thomas (Leiden: Brill, 2001), 123.

26. Very little is known about the reign of this patriarch. The most eventful happening of his reign seems to have been the fall of the Mamluk sultanate and, according to Iris Ḥabīb al-Maṣrī, the transfer of many skilled Copts and Egyptians to Istanbul to serve the Ottoman sultan. See al-Maṣrī, *Qiṣṣat al-kanīṣab al-Qibṭiyyah*, 1517–1870, vol. 4 (Cairo: Maktabat Kanīṣat Mārī Jirjis Sporting, 1992 [1975]), p. 259.

27. Myriam Wissa writes that “In the year 1303, the [Ḥārīt Zuwaylah] church became the patriarchal seat that had previously been transferred from Alexandria to the Church of al-Mu‘allaqah and then to the Church of Abū Sayfayn in Old Cairo. It remained in Ḥārīt Zuwaylah for almost three centuries amid the greater security of a Coptic community. The first pope to reside in Ḥārīt Zuwaylah was John VIII (1300–1320), the eightieth patriarch; the last was the 102nd patriarch, Matthew IV (1660–1675). Subsequent popes moved to the neighboring Ḥārīt al-Rūm.” See *Coptic Encyclopedia*, s.v. “Ḥārīt Zuwaylah” by Myriam Wissa.

28. The martyrdom of Saint Ṣalīb is briefly noted in the Coptic Synaxarium and in the Coptic *diḡnār*.

29. For an excellent review of the life of Copts in Egyptian society during Mamluk rule, see Qasim ‘Abdu Qasim, “Al-Wad‘ al-iṭimā‘ī lil-Aqbaṭ fī ‘aṣr salāṭīn al-Mamālīk,” *Al-Tārīkh wal-Mustaḡbal* 3 (1989), 151–170.

30. Moshe Perlmann, “Notes on Anti-Christian Propaganda in the Mamlūk Empire,” *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 10, no. 4 (1942): 843.

31. Donald S. Richards, “Dhimmi Problems in Fifteenth-Century Cairo: Reconsideration of a Court Document,” in *Studies in Muslim-Jewish Relations*, vol. 1, ed. Ronald L. Nettler (Chur, Switzerland: Harwood Academic Publishers, 1993), 127.

32. Theodore Hall Partrick, *Traditional Egyptian Christianity: A History of the Coptic Orthodox Church* (Greensboro, NC: Fisher Park Press, 1996), 92.

33. Donald P. Little, “Coptic Converts of Islam during the Baḥrī Mamluk Period,” in *Conversion and Continuity*, eds. Michael Gervers and Ramzi Jibran Bikhazi (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 1990), 263. Little does not provide exact statistics on the number of Copts in Egypt during this period. The closest statistical study we have of the Coptic population during the Ottoman period is in the article by Maurice Martin, “Note sur la communauté Copte entre 1650 et 1850,” *Annales Islamologiques* 18 (1982): 193–215.

34. Terry G. Wilfong, “The Non-Muslim Communities: Christian Communities,” *The Cambridge History of Egypt I: Islamic Egypt: From the Arab Invasion to the Ottoman Conquest (641–1517)*, ed. Carl F. Petry (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 184.

35. Little, “Coptic Converts of Islam,” 266. Also see Little’s earlier “Coptic Conversion to Islam under the Baḥrī Mamluks, 692–755/1293–1354,” *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies*, vol. 39 (1976), 552–569.

36. Cited in Perlmann, “Notes on Anti-Christian Propaganda in the Mamlūk Empire,” 847.

37. A more detailed discussion is offered in Little, “Coptic Converts of Islam,” 266.

38. Perlmann, “Notes on Anti-Christian Propaganda,” 847. Also see Al-Maqrīzī, *Kitāb al-sulūk*, vol. 2, 173; Little, “Coptic Converts to Islam,” 272–277.

39. In 1320, following the mob burning of Coptic churches all over Cairo, Lower Egypt and Upper Egypt, a group of Coptic monks decided to avenge these acts by plotting the burning of Cairo. A number of Cairene districts were burned in the catastrophe which followed, and the long-term consequences for Copts were grave. By the mid-fifteenth century, Muslim chronicles reported that most churches in Egypt had been defiled or destroyed; see *Coptic Encyclopedia*, s.v. “Mamluks and the Copts” by Aziz Atiya.

40. Jørgen S. Nielsen, *Secular Justice in an Islamic State: Mazālīm under the Baḥrī Mamluks, 662/1264–789/1387* (Istanbul: Nederlands Historisch-Archaeologisch Instituut,

1985), 77. Also see Robert Irwin, "The Privatization of 'Justice' under the Circassian Mamluks," *Mamluk Studies Review*, 6 (2002), 63–70.

41. Nielsen argues that *qādīs* could be present in judicial meetings presided over or convened by the Mamluk sultan or provincial governors especially when the matters discussed and decided in these meetings were distinctly *sharʿī* in nature and normally within the *qādī*'s jurisdiction; see Nielsen, *Secular Justice*, 43.

42. Joseph Escovitz, *The Office of Qādī al-Qudāt in Cairo under the Bahṛī Mamluks* (Berlin: Klaus Schwarz Verlag, 1984), 134–138.

43. *Ibid.*, 210. Edward Colbert also reports the instances of beating and torture of Christian blasphemers in the hands before their eventual execution; see his *Martyrs of Cordoba (850–859): A Study of the Sources* (Washington D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 1962), 242 and *passim*.

44. *Ibid.*, 84, 112, 289, and *passim*.

45. Carl Petry indicates that Bedouin bandits were frequently brought to Cairo for trial and punishment after they were captured in the provinces. He does not indicate, however, how they were transported; see his "Disruptive 'Others' as Depicted in the Chronicles of the Late Mamluk Period," in Hugh Kennedy (ed.) *The Historiography of Islamic Egypt (c. 950–1800)* (Leiden: Brill, 2001), 178.

46. *ET*², s.v. "Dawādār," by David Ayalon.

47. On the *maẓālim* system see *ET*², s.v. "Maẓālim" by Jørgen S. Nielsen and idem, *Secular Justice*.

48. *ET*², s.v. "Maẓālim," 935.

49. Nielsen, *Secular Justice*, 133–134.

50. *Ibid.*, 140–158.

51. *Ibid.*, 133.

52. *Ibid.*, 132.

53. Escovitz, *The Office of Qādī al-Qudāt*, 137. According to Escovitz, at the *majlis* of the sultan in which such cases were discussed and at subsequent meetings that followed the sultan's *majlis*, all four chief judges of Egypt were required to be present as it was required for them to unanimously support the verdict; *ibid.*, 137–138. This is not inconsistent with what we know about Ṣalīb's case: Ibn Iyās' chronicle and the martyrology both indicate the presence of "judges" (in plural) in the hearing held in Ṭūmānbāy's residence. Unfortunately the identities of these judges are not clear.

54. It is not difficult to see why Escovitz (or others) might have been skeptical: if, indeed, Mamluk rulers acknowledged and enforced, whenever applicable, Islamic legal prescriptions in their own attempts to settle disputes, as Nielsen admits, it would be difficult to consider the "*maẓālim* system," or, at least certain stages of it, separate from the traditional domains of Islamic jurisdiction, even in institutional terms. It should not have mattered if a case were adjudicated by a ruler or a judge as long as appropriate *sharʿī* prescriptions were followed or the judiciary's consent was taken. After all, the *qādīs*, even when they heard and decided cases independently, that is, without the direct involvement and/or supervision of other authorities, were supposed to be representing the authority of the Mamluk sultan, who was, according to Carl Petry, the "supreme [legal] arbiter" in his realm. See Carl Petry, *Protectors or Praetorians*, 152 and 155.

55. Robert Irwin, "The Privatization of 'Justice' under the Circassian Mamluks," *Mamluk Studies Review*, vol. 6 (2002), 63–70.

56. Little, "Communal Strife," *passim*; Carl Petry, *Protectors or Praetorians*, 152–158; idem, "Disruptive Others," 187.

57. Petry, *Protectors or Praetorians*, 132 and 152.

58. According to Petry, in comparison to his predecessor Sultan Qāyṭbāy, who was represented in the chronicles as a champion of *sharīʿa* and religious orthodoxy, al-Ghawrī was known by his contemporaries as someone who was indifferent to judicial affairs; see Petry, *Protectors or Praetorians*, 150 and idem *Twilight of Majesty*, 170.

59. Petry argues that riots by the members of the Mamluk military establishment intensified after 1508; see his, *Protectors or Praetorians*, 92. See Ibn Iyās' *Badāʾī* 218–222 on al-Ghawrī's attempts to represent himself as the protector of the Sunni orthodoxy especially after 1511, in response to the Safavi threat in Iran. Also critical is that fact that, Sultan Selim I, one of the fiercest and most accomplished warrior-sultans in Ottoman history, came to power in the summer of 1512 (about 3 months before Ṣalīb's execution) with the support of those factions in the Ottoman state who intended to organize military campaigns towards East and South. Sultan Selim would defeat the Mamluk forces, conquer Egypt, and, at least according to some sources, claim the title of Sunni Caliph in 1517; see Andrew C. Hess, "The Ottoman Conquest of Egypt (1517) and the Beginning of the Sixteenth-Century World War," *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, 4:1 (1973), 55–76. Also, see Shai Har-El, *Struggle for Domination in the Middle East; the Ottoman-Mamluk War, 1485–91* (Leiden: Brill, 1995), 7–11 for the nature of the religious claims that justified the Mamluk and Ottoman aggression against one another.

60. Little, "Coptic Conversion to Islam under the Bahri Mamluks," 557 and Carl F. Petry, "'Quis Custodiet Custodes?' Revisited: The Prosecution of Crime in the Late Mamluk Sultanate," *Mamluk Studies Review*, vol. 3 (1999), 13–14.

61. This would be consistent with David Ayalon's claim that during the Circassian period the *dawādār* became one of the highest and most influential *amīrs* in the sultanate; see *EI*², s.v. "Dawādār."

62. Petry, *Twilight of the Majesty*, 159.

63. *Ibid.*, 143.

64. *Ibid.* We also know that Ṭūmānbāy was widely respected for his staunch defense of *sharīʿa*; see Petry, *Protectors or Praetorians*, 78.

65. Muḥammad ibn ʿAbidīn, *Majmūʿat Rasāʾil ibn ʿAbidīn*, 2 vols. (Cairo, 1978), 1:318 and 352' cf. Kamali, 236 and Hanna H. Kilany Omar, "Apostasy in the Mamluk Period: The Politics of Accusations of Unbelief," Ph.D. Dissertation, University of Pennsylvania (2001), 143.

66. Omar, 143.

67. Ibn Abidīn, 1:320; ʿAbd Allah bin Aḥmad bin Qudāma (Ibn Qudāma), *Al-Mughnī*, 16 vols. (Cairo: Dār al-Ḥadīth, 1996), 12:144; Yūsuf bin ʿAbd Allah bin ʿAbd al-Barr (Ibn ʿAbd al-Barr), *Kitāb al-Kāfi fī Fiqh abl al-Madīna al-Māliki*, 2 vols. (Riyad: Maktabat al-Riyād al-Ḥadītha, 1980), 2: 1092; cf. Kamali, 236. Also see Lutz Wiederhold, "Blasphemy against the Prophet Muhammad and his Companions (*sabb al-rasūl*, *sabb al-saḥābah*): The Introduction of the Topic into Shafīʿī Legal Literature and Its Relevance for Legal Practice under Mamluk Rule," *Journal of Semitic Studies*, 42, 1, 39–70.

68. Omar, 143; cf. Aḥmad bin Muḥammad al-Dardīr, *Al-Sharḥ al-Saghīr ʿala Aqrāb al-Masālik ila Maddhab al-Imām Mālik*, 4 vols. (Cairo: Dār al-Maʿārif, 1972), 4:440.

69. Kamali, 236.

70. Omar, 143.

71. Isabel Fierro argues that most Christian offenders in ninth-century Spain were offered by the Māliki *qādis* the possibility of repentance, and not conversion to Islam, as a way out from the death penalty, although this was not agreed upon in the Māliki doctrine. See Isabel Fierro, "Andalusian 'Fatawa' on Blasphemy," *Annales Islamologique*, 25 (1991): 114.

72. Omar, 167, n. 239.

73. Escovitz, *The Office of Qāḍī al-Quḍāt*, 92.
74. See Swanson, "The Martyrdom of 'Abd al-Masīḥ," and Colbert, *The Martyrs of Cordoba*, passim.
75. These martyrs, as cited by Vaporis, *Witness for Christ*, include Malachios of Rhodes (1500 CE), p. 45, Kyrillos the Tanner of Pelagonia (1566), p. 79, and Damianos the Monk of Myrichovo (1568 CE), p. 81.
76. *M. Ṣalīb*, 17^r, 1.2–12.
77. *Ibid.*, 19^v, 1.7–14.
78. According to Omar, *sabb Allah* involves "denying His Divinity and Oneness, Attributes, Prophets and Messages, or by imputing partnership, such as a wife and children to Him. It is also the product of challenging and rejecting His Commands, Prohibitions, and Promises;" *Ibidem*, 116.
79. *ET*², 2nd ed., s.v. "Shirk."
80. Ibn Qudāma, *Al-Mughnī*, 12:144; cf. Omar, 142.
81. According to Daniel Earl Miller, "the prohibition against the use of the name 'Uzayr grows out of Quranic passage that accuses Jews of claiming that Ezra is the son of God, just as Christians claim Jesus is the son of God"; see his "From Catalogue to Codes of Canon: The Rise of the Petition to 'Umar among Legal Traditions Governing non-Muslims in Medieval Islamic Societies," Ph.D. Dissertation, University of Missouri-Kansas City (2000), 157.
82. *Ibid.*
83. Muhammad Hashim Kamali argues that a non-Muslim's profession of "an article of his own faith which happens to contradict the Islamic creed," would be "a simple variety of disbelief rather than actual blasphemy." See his *Freedom of Expression in Islam* (Cambridge: Islamic Texts Society, 1997), 235. Also, we learn from Sidney Griffith that in the martyrology of Peter of Capitolas (early eighth century) and after Peter blasphemes against Muhammad, 'Umar, the son of caliph Walīd, says to him, "You are free to recognize as God, Jesus, who is a man and a slave of the Creator. But why blaspheme our religion and call our peaceful prophet the master of error and the father of lies?" see Griffith, 186.
84. Wiederhold, 40 and Kamali, 231.
85. This seems to also have been the case with earlier Coptic and Copto-Arabic texts. The research of Jason Zaborowski on the Coptic neo-martyr John of Phanijōit confirms the point that certain texts served as "hidden texts," available only to the Coptic community and not to the Muslim community at large. See Jason R. Zaborowski, "The Coptic Neo-Martyr *John of Phanijōit*: The Re-Conversion of an Apostate Christian 'Deceived by Lust of a Saracen Woman' (c. 1210)," paper presented at the American Academy of Religion Annual Meeting, Toronto, November 24, 2002. This paper is a condensed version of a chapter in Zaborowski's dissertation, titled "The Neo-Martyr John of Phanijōit: A Late Coptic Text Describing a Public Conversion from Islam to Christianity," Ph.D. Dissertation, (Catholic University of America, 2004).
86. Cited in Vaporis, *Witnesses for Christ*, 20. The same provocative tone is also present in the statements of Christian neo-martyrs in ninth-century Muslim Spain; see Kenneth Wolf, *Christian Martyrs in Muslim Spain* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988); Jessica A. Coope, *The Martyrs of Cordoba; Community and Family Conflict in an Age of Mass Conversion* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1995); and Edward P. Colbert, *Martyrs of Cordoba (850–859): A Study of the Sources* (Washington D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 1962).
87. One such story, of the monk Theophanes from Constantinople, tells that the hero "because he was a child-like person, was easily tricked by a group of Muslims to accept the Muslim faith." The martyrdom of John the Tailor from Ioannina was brought forth partly

“because he was quite handsome and a man with great dignity and fearlessness,” and therefore “some Muslims were envious of him.” Theophanes was martyred in 1559 (Vaporis, *Witnesses for Christ*, 76) and John the Tailor in 1526 (Vaporis, 64).

88. *M.Ṣalīb*, 16^v.

89. This *madrasab* was built by the Ayyūbids during their final years of rule in Egypt. The construction began under al-Malik al-Ṣāliḥ Najm al-Dīn Ayyūb (639 AH/1241–42 CE) and was completed in 647–648/1249–1251. According to Carl Petry, this *madrasab* was “the supreme judicial tribunal of the state.” See Petry, *The Civilian Elite of Cairo in the Later Middle Ages* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1981), pp. 330–331.

90. Petry, “Disruptive ‘Others,’” 188.

91. *Ibid.*, 178. Crucifixion is often mentioned in the early Islamic sources, usually in the context of putting blasphemers and apostates to death. See, for example, David H. Vila, “The Struggle of Arabisation in Medieval Arabic Christian Hagiography,” *al-Masāq*, vol. 15 (2003), 38, and for similar incidents in Muslim Spain, see Colbert, *The Martyrs of Cordoba*, 120.

92. *M.Ṣalīb* 20^v–20^f.

93. *Ibid.*, 20^f–21^v.

94. See, for example, Colbert, *Martyrs of Cordoba*, 98, 157, 213 and *passim*.

95. Although burning of the offender's body was not permitted in legal manuals, we know that the bodies of many apostates and blasphemers were burned before and during Mamluk period after their execution. See Omar, 207, and Colbert, 203, 206, 227, and *passim*. Also see Frank Griffel, “Toleration and Exclusion: al-Shāfiʿī and al-Ghazālī on the Treatment of Apostates,” *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and Asian Studies*, vol. 64 (2001), 339–54 and Maged Mikhail, “Egypt from Late Antiquity to Early Islam: Copts, Melkites, and Muslims Shaping a New Society,” Ph.D. Dissertation (University of California, 2004), esp. ch. 2. This burning, aside from being another act of public degradation and a show that demonstrated the vulnerability of the martyr's body, aimed to prevent the Christians from obtaining relics. Ibn Iyās mentions an incident in his chronicle indicating that religious relics could be quite valuable. According to Ibn Iyās, a Mamluk by the name of Damurdash was accused in 1512 CE for decapitating cadavers and selling their body parts to Europeans. Also, boxes of skulls, bones, and other body parts were found in Damurdash's house. See *Badāʾiʿ*, vol. 4, 275. Cf. Petry, “Disruptive Others,” 188.

96. As we see in Colbert's account, such claims of miraculous preservation of the martyrs' bodies even after their burning is not uncommon in Christian accounts.