



Responses to crucifixion in the Islamic world (1st-7th/7th-13th centuries)

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The first longer treatment of crucifixion as a punishment in the Islamic world in a European language was a contribution by Otto Spies to the *Festschrift für Gustav Mensching* in 1967, bearing the title “Über die Kreuzigung im Islam” (“On crucifixion in Islam”). This article treats the background of the punishment in the Qurʾān, prophetic tradition (*ḥadīth*) and the books of Muslim jurists and then presents a long list of reports about crucifixions in the Arabic historical, biographical and narrative literature.¹ Nine years later, Hellmut Ritter’s short article “Kreuzigung eines Knaben” (“Crucifixion of a young boy”) was published posthumously by Rudolf Sellheim.² The article mainly consists of a translation of a report in Abū Shāma’s (d. 665/1268) *al-Dhayl ʿalā al-rawḍatayn* about a young Turkish slave who was nailed to the cross alive in Damascus in 646/1248. The slave allegedly had killed his master. From a remark of Abū Shāma and a line of poetry quoted by him one gets the impression that the slave had had to defend himself from sexual harassment on his master’s part. Abū Shāma describes the young man’s death, stretching over two days, in detail and with subtle sympathy for the offender. The impact of Abū Shāma’s prose is so strong that even a modern reader will find it difficult to read the Arabic original (or, for that matter, the German translation by Ritter) through to the end.

My contribution deals with some comparable texts containing information on how crucifixion as a punishment or method of deterrence was perceived by contemporaries. These texts are Arabic poems, composed

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between the early Islamic period and the 7th/13th century. They were collected by Manfred Ullmann in a monograph published in 1995; Ullmann successfully identified no fewer than eighty-three of these poems.³ Before presenting the poems and relevant verses, I will give some introductory information on (1) the juridical status of crucifixion, (2) the frequency of its application, and (3) the practice as far it becomes visible in the poems.

Juridical aspects⁴

Crucifixion is mentioned in Qurʾān 5:33 as one of the punishments for banditry (*muḥārabā*), the other ones being execution of the perpetrator, cutting off his hands and feet on alternate sides, and expelling him from the land. Most schools explain crucifixion as exposure of the bandit's body after his execution. The majority of the Mālikites, however, hold that the bandit must be crucified first, and then brought to death by stabbing him in the chest. For the Shīʿites, finally, the punishment consists of crucifying the bandit for a period of three days. If after this period the culprit is still alive, his life will be spared.⁵

As for the question which of the punishments mentioned in Qurʾān 5:33 has to be chosen, the Shīʿites hold that the judge or head of state can impose, at his discretion, any of these punishments if someone has committed an armed hold-up, regardless of potentially aggravating circumstances. Mālikite law prescribes the death penalty *or* crucifixion if someone has been killed. According to the other Sunnite schools, the punishment is death and crucifixion if the robber has both plundered and killed. The Ḥanafites, however, hold that in this last case the head of state may choose between amputation, capital punishment and capital punishment with crucifixion.⁶

In Qurʾān 5:33, the wrongdoers are designated in quite general terms as “those who wage war upon God and His messenger and strive after corruption in the land (*alladhīna yuḥāribūna llāha wa-rasūlahu wa-yasʿawna fī l-arḍi fasādan*)”. Therefore it comes as no surprise that the punishments mentioned in this verse, including crucifixion, were meted out for crimes other than banditry as “discretionary punishment” (*taʿzīr*) or acts of *siyāsa sharʿiyya*, that is, punishment based on the *raison d'état*.⁷

Frequency

Crucifixions were performed with some frequency. Spies remarks that in Arabic literature “countless” reports can be found, and he presents about two dozen of these.⁸ Mass crucifixions seem to have been a common practice. In the year 90/708–9, Qutayba Ibn Muslim had crucified so many

inhabitants of Ṭāliqān in Khurāsān that the masts formed two uninterrupted rows of a length of four *farsakhs*.⁹ Eighty members of the Umayyad family were crucified in Palestine by an uncle of the later caliphs al-Saffāḥ and al-Manṣūr in the course of the °Abbāsīd revolution; ninety Zuṭṭ met the same fate after the crushing of a revolt in southern Mesopotamia in the years 219–20/834–35.¹⁰ The banks of the Guadalquivir in al-Andalus witnessed several mass crucifixions ordered by al-Ḥakam I and °Abdaraḥmān III; the figures given for those executed in these events in the years 189/805, 202/817–8 and 327/938 are seventy-two in the first case and three hundred in the two other cases.¹¹ In the same place, thirty robbers were also displayed on crosses.¹²

In al-Musabbiḥī's (d. 420/1030) *Akhbār Miṣr wa-faḍā'iluhā* (of which just the last of the forty original volumes has been preserved),¹³ there are four crucifixions mentioned for the year 415/1024–25 alone.¹⁴ The first report is about a money-changer who was injured by a robber from al-Ḥawf in the Delta region with a big knife when about to perform his evening prayer in the °Amr mosque (*al-jāmi' al-°atīq*) on a Friday. The attacker tried to flee but was caught by the people and brought to the headquarters of the police in Fuṣṭāṭ. The chief (*mutawallī*) of police received permission from the Imam to have the culprit beheaded at the Bāb al-Barādī° and crucified (*suliba*) at the Kūm Dīnār. The second report is about a man who had strangled a woman and robbed all he could find in her home. He was caught, beheaded and crucified on a dump at the cemetery. There is a short remark that the woman was either his mistress or lady (*dhukira annahā rabbatuhu*) or that she had raised or educated him (if we read *annahā rabbathu*), but it is not explained whether this relation contributed to the severity of his punishment. The third report tells us that a man was caught who had robbed a grave in the desolate area of the Muqatṭam hills. He was beheaded at the cemetery and crucified at that place. The fourth and last report of a crucifixion concerns a case of apostasy. A young Christian man was beheaded who had embraced Islam, made the pilgrimage to Mecca and had let grown two locks which he made hang down (*rabbā dhu'ābatayni wa-ja'alahā musbalatayni*), and claimed to be of noble descent (*wa-dda'ā l-sharafa*). He returned to his former belief; his execution prior to the crucifixion is not mentioned by al-Musabbiḥī but I think we can surmise it.

The practice of crucifixion as reported in the poems¹⁵

A poem that uses the well-known comparison of a chameleon sunbathing on a branch with a crucified man establishes a special relation between crucifixion and heresy or apostasy, a conceptual link already found in

al-Musabbiḥī's fourth report. This crucified man is said "to have left religion(s)" (*kharūjun mina l-adyāni*, no. 83 l. 32). The juridical foundation of the crucifixion punishment for apostates is probably a tradition going back to °Ā'isha, according to which apostates must be either killed or banned or crucified.¹⁶ Another verse establishes a connection between crucifixion and heresy (*zandaqa*, no. 25 l. 6, quoted *in extenso* below).

The practice of mutilating the corpse before crucifixion by cutting off a hand and a foot crosswise is mentioned in the Qur'ān as Pharaoh's habit.¹⁷ Allusions to mutilations are included in some poems, although none contains a hint at crosswise amputation. Rather, where there are details given, they indicate that either hands (no. 64 l. 2) or legs or feet (no. 107 l. 2, no. 93 l. 1) were cut off. The use of nails is attested to by three poems (no. 63 l. 4, no. 64 l. 2; cf. also no. 82); one of the delinquents – the young Turkish slave mentioned above – was crucified alive with nails (no. 28 l. 4–5). In other cases, ropes were used to fix the corpse to the tree trunk (no. 11 l. 55). If someone was crucified alive in this way, he thus had a chance of surviving, as did the poet °Alī Ibn al-Jahm (no. 30). Sometimes the head seems to have been fixed by a rope drawn through the mouth so that the molar teeth (the *adrās*) became visible (no. 49 l. 1); this habit is perhaps alluded to also in some other poems, where the grinning of the crucified is mentioned (no. 22 l. 6, no. 48 l. 5, no. 53 l. 1, no. 66 l. 2; cf. no. 21 l. 2).

A particular skandalon was the habit of crucifying the delinquents or their corpses naked, as this is mentioned nine times: *mujarradan* (no. 17 l. 8), *maslūb al-qamīš* (no. 18 l. 4), *urriya min burdayhi* (no. 19 l. 7), *istanābū °ani l-akfāni thawba l-sāfiyāt* ("they gave him a garment of wind instead of shrouds", no. 23 l. 6), *°ariyan min thiyābihi* (no. 27 l. 3), *°uryān* (no. 28 l. 8), *buzza thawbayhi* (no. 76). In one case, at least a loin-cloth was left to the dead man (*mujarradīna siwā mā kāna min uzurin*, no. 46 l. 2). Only °Alī Ibn al-Jahm, who mastered his one-day crucifixion in a poem displaying an extreme degree of self-confidence, seems to see no problem in his nakedness on the cross (no. 30 l. 6–7):

The fact that he [i.e. the crucified poet himself] was stripped of his clothes has not brought dishonour upon him; does not the sword have the most terrifying appearance when it is drawn? And if he was exposed to the people's gaze – is the moon degraded when it is, in the night of his completion, exposed to the glances/openly displayed? (*mā °ābahu an buzza °anhu libāsuhu fa-l-sayfu ahwalu mā yurā maslūlā * in yubtadhal fa-l-badru lā yuzrī bihi an kāna laylata timmihi mabdhūlā*).

The period of time for which the crucified were exposed were remarkably long. Ibn Baqiyya is said to have hung five years (cf. no. 24 and the

report from Ibn Khallikān that Ullmann provides), and in a poem by Ibn Kunāsa a tree trunk is addressed as having stood since a crucifixion thirty years before (no. 31 l. 1).

In many cases, the names of the crucified are not mentioned in the poems or the accompanying *akhbār*, but sometimes their identities or roles are known.¹⁸ One group consists of rebels/conspirators/political enemies: the Zuṭṭ (no. 3), Ṭarkhān Ibn Yūsuf (no. 13), °Umāra al-Yamanī¹⁹ (no. 14), Ibn Baqiyya (nos 23 and 24), the Barmakids (no. 26 l. 2) and the Umayyads (no. 16). An additional religious element is involved in the cases of Zayd Ibn °Alī (nos 1 and 17, mentioned also in no. 23 l. 9), the “Azraqī” Ḥuṣayn (no. 2), Bābak al-Khurramī (nos 4–9 and 79) and al-Afshīn (no. 10).²⁰ Khubayb al-Anṣārī, killed in the year 3/625 by the Meccans, can be classed with this group (no. 29). Apostasy is given as the reason in no. 83 l. 3. The majority of reasons for crucifixion thus appear to lie in the sphere of political and sectarian conflict. There is only a small number of other crimes or offences that led to crucifixion: robbery (no. 69), theft (no. 67) and merely drunkenness in the case of a certain Ibn al-Kāzarūnī (no. 15).

Assessments of crucifixions in Arabic poetry

In many of the poems collected by Ullmann, the punishment either is mentioned neutrally or is even presented as well deserved; several poems in the first chapter of Ullmann’s collection (“Historical Cases”) outspokenly deride the crucified. Somewhat undecided is an otherwise unknown poet called al-°Uqaylī, who first addresses a crucified man called Abū °Amr by saying:

*fa-mā tashtaḥī °aynāya min dā°imi l-bukā °alayka wa-law annī bakaytu ilā
l-ḥashrī* My eyes don’t get relief by my continuous crying about you, even if I
weep until Resurrection (no. 25 l. 4).

However, two lines later al-°Uqaylī concludes his poem by stating:

*fa-in kunta zindīqan fa-qad dhuqta ghibba mā janayta fa-lā yab°ad siwāka
Abā °Amrī* If you [really] were a heretic, you tasted the consequences of your
crime [rightly]! In that case, Abū °Amr may not rest in peace!

In three other poems, the poets explain that the punishment has to do with the rejection of benefits and pardon from the side of the rulers: “he always rejected the favours harshly” (*mā zāla ya°nufu bi-l-nu°mā*, no. 2 l. 62, no. 4 l. 1; cf. also no. 10 l. 33–34).

Whether the poets feel sympathy for the crucified or not, they underline that the exposure on the tree trunk means shame, and they sometimes

point to the contrast between this shame and the elevated position of the corpse:

sāmin ka-anna l-‘izza yajdhibu dab‘ahu wa-sumuwuwuhu min dhillatin wa-safāli He is elevated as if glory had pulled his arm, but his elevation is due to lowness and degradation (Abū Tammām, no. 5 l. 80; cf. nos. 40–42).

Another poet states that “as he is exposed to the glances of those who look at him, he is like the meat on the meat-block” (*ka-annahu fī tajallīhi li-mubširihi laḥmun ‘alā waḍamin*, no. 63 l. 3); *laḥm ‘alā waḍam* is a figurative expression for “being exposed to shame”. One poet named al-Yakkī states:

*sā’anī an yarā l-‘aduwwu l-ḥabībā fawqa jidh‘in mina l-judhū‘i ṣalībā *
ash‘athan bāsītan dhirā‘ayhi kurhan mithla man shaqqa li-l-surūri juyūbā *
‘ariyan min thiyābihi yatalaqqā shiddata l-ḥarri wa-l-ṣabā wa-l-janūbā*
It hurts me that the enemy can see the beloved crucified on a tree trunk,
with matted hair and unwillingly stretching his arms like someone who tears
the bosom of his shirt in joy;
deprived of his clothes and exposed to intense heat and to east and south
winds (no. 27 l. 1–3).

And even in a case where the poet denies that crucifixion means shame (*wa-laysa bi-‘ārin mā ‘arāka*, no. 19 l. 12), this cannot obscure the fact that humiliation, even be it after death, was one of the most unsettling elements of this punishment.

In three cases, the punishment is criticized: a poem by al-Sayyid al-Ḥimyarī (d. between 173/787 and 179/795) is devoted to cursing those who killed and crucified Zayd Ibn ‘Alī. He declares that “they fought against God and hurt Muḥammad” (*innahum ḥārabū l-ilāha wa-ādhaw Muḥammadan*, no. 17 l. 6). This is clearly an allusion to Qur’ān 5:33, where, among other punishments, crucifixion is prescribed for “those who fight God and His messenger” (*alladhīna yuḥāribūna llāha wa-rasūlahu*). In saying so, the poet implies that the murderers of Zayd themselves deserve crucifixion. In the poem addressed to the young Turkish slave mentioned above, the sentence is openly blamed as being too hard: “O you who have been crucified with unjust severity” (*wa-yā laka maṣlūban bi-zulmin wa-qaswatin*, no. 28 l. 13, cf. l. 15). Ibn Ḥamdīs al-Ṣiqillī (d. 527/1132–33) mentions a crucified man who, “after his rank had diminished, was treated in an evil way by a transgressor although he himself had acted righteously” (*asā’a ilayhi zālimun wa-hwa muḥsinū*, no. 72 l. 1). In those cases where the poets felt sympathy with the crucified, the latter’s ill luck is always explained by reference to “fate”.²¹

One of the favourite strategies of those poets who show affection for the crucified person is the invention of a positive interpretation of this fate.

Being crucified at least saves from the narrowness of the grave, we read in a poem by al-°Uqaylī (*wa-°ūfīta °inda l-mawti min ḡaḡḡati l-qabrī*, no. 25 l. 2), and this thought is used in other words by three more poets (no. 19 l. 11, no. 23 l. 5, no. 53 l. 3). Crucifixion combines the two advantages of being removed from the anguish and grief of the earth and of being present in the world at the same time, as one poet puts it, then going on to ask: “Don’t you think that you ought to be grateful?” (*fa-hal laka min shukrin*, no. 25 l. 3). Another attempt to alleviate the ignominy of crucifixion are the references to prominent figures who were crucified, such as the Barmakids (no. 26 l. 2) or Zayd Ibn °Alī:

rakībta maṭīyyatan min qablu Zaydun °alāhā fi l-sinīna l-māḡīyātī *
wa-tilka faḡīlatun fīhā ta°assin tubā°idu °anka ta°yīra l-°udātī
 You ride a beast that in former days has been mounted by Zayd,
 and this is a comforting advantage that keeps the enemies’ reproach from you
 (no. 23 l. 9–10).

A widespread literary realization of a positive reinterpretation is an allegorization of the posture and situation of the crucified. In one case, this means is employed in a hostile sense when a poet remarks on °Umāra al-Yamanī:

wa-amsā sharīka l-shirki fi buḡḡi Aḡmadin fa-aṣḡaba fi ḡubbi l-ṡalībi
ṡalīban First, he was an ally of polytheism in his hatred of Muḡammad, but
 this morning, he found himself crucified due to his love for the crucified one
 [i.e. Jesus Christ] (no. 14 l. 3).

The positive allegorization takes various form. The otherwise unknown Muḡammad Ibn °Umar al-Anbārī (*fl.* 4th/10th century), in his poem on Ibn Baḡīyya, underlines that the latter, after his death, is surrounded by the people, as he was in his lifetime’s when people were listened to his sermons or waited for gifts from his outstretched hands (no. 23 l. 2–4), and that now fires are burning around him at night as they did in former days (l. 8). A high death is the outcome of a high position in life, al-Yakkī remarks (no. 26 l. 1). Because the pretty young Turkish slave had a better claim to beauty even than the sun, sun has declared war on him (*nādat bi-ḡarbihi*, no. 28 l. 11) and now destroys his face. In the outspread arms of the man who was crucified unjustly, in the eyes of Ibn Ḥamdīs al-Ṣīqillī, the poet recognizes the gesture of someone who is about to embrace the virgins of paradise (no. 72 l. 3). Another poet, finally, interprets the crucified’s outspread hands as the gesture of cursing the person who ordered his execution (no. 73 l. 2).

Compassion for the crucified is expressed several times. Al-Yakkī says:



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yā laytahum ṣalabūka bayna jawāniḥī fa-aḍumma ishfāqan °alayka ḍulū°ā
I wish they had crucified you in my breast so that I could close my ribs
around you in pity for you (no. 26 l. 3).

The author of the poem on the Turkish slave states:

fa-yā laka mamnū°an mina l-mā°i ḍillatan tafattatati l-akbādu min °uẓmi
karbihī *
*wa-yā laka maṣlūban bi-ẓulmin wa-qaswatin taqaṭṭa°ati l-aḥshā°u min
sū°i ṣalbihī*

Oh you, to whom water has been denied out of blindness – our hearts are torn
to pieces for our grief for you.

Oh you, who have been crucified with unjust severity – our entrails are cut to
pieces because of your wretched death on the cross (no. 28 l. 12–13).

A third instance that expresses pity is no. 27 l. 1, which has been quoted
above (“it hurts me that the enemy can see the beloved one crucified on
a trunk”).

Concluding remarks

In the Islamic world, the normal case was crucifixion after death. For this
reason, “crucifixion” in the majority of the cases is perhaps a less suitable
translation of *ṣalb* than “display”; this latter term does not arouse the same
associations and emotions in Western minds as does the former. Moreover,
sometimes the corpses were not really crucified on a (T-shaped)²² cross,
with outspread arms, but simply tied to a pole – “crucifixion” is an even
more misleading translation in these cases.

The phenomenon of mass crucifixions is something unheard of in
medieval Europe. There were massacres, especially when revolts were
considered illegitimate, but the public display of corpses on the cross was
unusual. If the corpse of a single delinquent was displayed after his execu-
tion, this could happen by leaving hanged persons on the rope until they
fell off or by displaying them on the wheel. The gallows were in many
cases placed outside the city walls but also near a castle or the court of
justice. As reflected in the crucifixion poems, the normal case seems to
have been crucifixion *extra muros*, as is shown by verses that speak of the
wild animals leaving empty handed while the birds get their share (no. 2 l.
63–64, no. 8 l. 21–22, no. 9 l. 2, no. 11 l. 58). In but a single instance in the
poems can we assume that the punishment was executed *intra muros*: “he
[i.e. Bābak’s brother] was raised [on the cross] at the bridge, in full view of
everyone” (*fa-dhāka bi-l-jisri naṣbun li-l-°uyūni*, no. 8 l. 12). Prose reports
show that crucifixion could also happen *intra muros*.²³



In the West, iron cages were sometimes used for the display of the dead, as for example in the case of the leaders of the Anabaptist Münster Rebellion of the years 1534–36. Jan Bockelson and some of his followers, after being tortured, were executed in the marketplace; their dead bodies were exhibited in cages which hung from the steeple of St Lambert’s church. Joseph Süß Oppenheimer, a Jewish banker, was hanged in Stuttgart on 4 February, 1738. His body was displayed in a bird cage that hung in a public square of the town for six years.

The poems so masterly collected and made accessible by Manfred Ullmann give us valuable insight into various attitudes to crucifixion or display. Compassion is not a conspicuous feature of them. Ullmann writes: “Even when the poet’s sympathies lie with the crucified, his laments and his compassion do not show the same emotional depth as Christian Passion songs.”²⁴ But that this should be the case cannot be expected; at best, the crucified is the poet’s friend, as in nos 26 and 27. In Christian civilization, the Crucified is the central figure of religion. A more fruitful object of comparison could be Arabic prose. If we compare Abū Shāma’s prose report translated by Ritter with the anonymous poem on the same incident (no. 28), the modern reader will probably decide that the prose report tells more about its author’s emotions than does the poem. But on this question the reader would do better to form his own opinion. In the following appendix, both texts are given in translation.

Appendix: Poetry and prose on the death of a young Turkish slave at Damascus in 646/1248²⁵

AN ANONYMOUS POET²⁶

1. I will describe someone who was left on his own on the beams of his death and who exhaled a soul that he had preserved [pure] in fear of his Lord.
2. I cry for a [young man] of obvious beauty who spreads his hands like someone wishing to embrace his beloved
3. and who has put his feet side by side like someone who stands to perform his prayer humbly and in obedience to his Lord.
4. His members were fixed with nails so that he was unable to prostrate [for prayer], and therefore he indicated prostration with his heart.
5. His pains have overwhelmed him, pierced by nails and deeply distressed, and death appears to him to be the smaller evil.
6. He can be seen lonely, although [many] people surround his beam, and thirsty, although the waters [of the Baradā river] flow below him.

7. What a pity for him that he had to drink a drop [of rain]! That drink filled him with raging excitement.
8. And [one could see him] naked except for the tender garment of his beauty, bare-headed, [his hair] falling free and easy.
9. The winds revolve around him, and the whirlwinds wrap him up in all the dust that is near him.
10. The summer sun shines straight into his face. Now its beauty has gone since the sun has risen over him,
11. as it (the sun) has disfigured the beautiful features of his face because he had a more legitimate claim for beauty than the sun, and so it declared war on him.
12. Oh you, to whom water has been denied out of blindness – our hearts are torn to pieces for our grief for you.
13. Oh you, who have been crucified with unjust severity – our entrails are cut to pieces because of your wretched death on the cross.
14. In dark night, he is cold. Then he complains about a [bright] day; but this does not console him who has confessed his crime.
15. I am amazed by him who ordered the crucifixion! Oh yes, be amazed and bear witness to his hard-heartedness.
16. [The crucified is but] a small child, extremely beautiful, pious, and courageous, and in battle he had rushed forward.
17. Full of patience, he has borne all these pains, till death came to him and set an end to his life.

ABŪ SHĀMA AL-MAQDISĪ AL-DIMASHQĪ (D. 665/1268)²⁷

On Friday, 16 Rabī^c II 646 [= 8 August 1248], a Turkish slave of one of the Ṣāliḥi Najmī amīrs called al-Saqsaqīnī, a sexually mature boy (*ṣabiyyun bālighun*), was crucified. He was said to have killed his master because of some reason, and so he was crucified on the banks of the Baradā river under the castle, at the end of the cattle (*dawābb*, lit. ‘mount’) market. His face was turned towards the east, and his hands, upper arms, and feet were fixed with nails, and he stayed alive from the noon of Friday till the noon of Sunday, then he died. He was said to have been courageous, brave, and pious and had taken part in a campaign at Ascalon and killed a number of Franks and also killed a lion notwithstanding his youth. There were some memorable things in connection with his crucifixion. He abandoned himself to crucifixion without resistance and fear but rather stretched his hands so that they could be nailed [to the beams]. Then his feet were nailed, and he looked on this without groaning or grimacing with pain or moving any of his limbs. This I was told by several people who

were witness to this. He remained patient and quiet without groaning but just looked at his feet and his sides, to the right and to the left again, and sometimes he looked at the people. It was said that he asked for water but was not given any. People's hearts flowed over with pity and compassion for [this] creature of God, so young a boy who had to suffer such a trial. The waters flowed by his sides, he looked at them and regretted much that even a single drop of it was out of reach to him, but he remained patient. Praise to Him who has the command and judgment.

I was told that he had visions (*manāmāt ṣāliḥa*) and that a light covered him before his death, and that he complained about thirst only during the first day; then he kept silent. God gave him strength, steadiness, and patience. A person who had heard him told me that he said on the second day: "I was given a drink that made my thirst cease." And afterwards he did not ask for water until his death. He spat like a man who is not thirsty, and spat his spit far away.

After his death, he hung the whole Sunday and was taken down only on Monday morning. By chance, I saw him as he was just taken down when I was on my way to the Ḥusāmiyya *madrassa*. I saw that his members had become black and his beauty had been altered. Many beseeched God for mercy for him and prayed for him, and perhaps he was a martyr – may God have mercy for him. I was told that he had defended himself from something he did not like to happen to him – may God forgive us altogether.

Among the memorable things was also that death reached him quickly as a relief from God's side; he [just] stayed alive for two days and nights. I heard that many men went through this crucifixion with nailing and that it took many more days until their fate reached them, as an additional punishment.

On the second day, he became confused, and he did not feel the pains and the thirst any more. He was unable to speak properly but uttered words showing his mental confusion; by this, God made things easier for him. Sometimes he fell asleep and then woke up, horrified by the violent pain, and then the hearts of the people watching him were rent. Sometimes he mentioned God's name. I was told that in the morning of Sunday or Saturday one of the persons to whom he had been entrusted [for the execution of the punishment] asked him how he was, and his answer was: "Fine with God". And I heard that when he was nailed, not a single word was heard from him except when the person who knocked the nail in his upper arm hit the bone. He then said: "Oh man, avoid the bone!" And I heard that the man who nailed him died on the same day or one day later, and this also belongs to the memorable things of what happened. The [crucified] boy was told this in order to let him know that God had punished him for

what he had done. And the boy, in his terrible situation, said: “He did not do wrong and should not be blamed; the blame is on him who ordered him to do that.”

And he – may God have mercy upon him – was one of the most beautiful boys with a lovely face and long hair. His price had been thousands of *dirhams*. When he was executed, he was baer-headed. His locks hung down behind him, and the winds played with them and turned them towards his chest, and he took them with his mouth, occupying himself with them and spending his time playing with them.

I was told that he said: “It is two days now that I haven’t prayed”, as if he were sorry about the missed prayers. And somebody said that he was just fasting when he was hung to the cross. And someone whom I trust said that he asked the spectators to move away from him in order to relieve himself, and they did so, and he urinated. He had a proud soul and immense strength. Some people told me that he moved his feet, fixed with nails as they were, and did not cease to keep himself busy with moving them until the holes of the two nails on them widened, and he turned them [his feet?] with the nails, and if the nails were not stuck so firmly in the wood he surely would have pulled them out.

Notes

1. Otto Spies, “Über die Kreuzigung im Islam,” in *Religion und Religionen: Festschrift für Gustav Mensching zu seinem 65. Geburtstag*, ed. Rudolf Thomas (Bonn: Ludwig Röhrscheid Verlag, 1967), 143–56.
2. Hellmut Ritter, “Kreuzigung eines Knaben,” *Oriens* 25 (1976), 38–40.
3. Manfred Ullmann, *Das Motiv der Kreuzigung in der arabischen Poesie des Mittelalters* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 1995). Another twenty-five poems mention the phenomenon of speared skulls. Maribel Fierro draws my attention to three poems about crucified men transmitted in Ibn Ḥayyān’s *Muqtabis*. The first one is about Sulaymān Ibn ‘Umar Ibn Ḥafṣūn. See Maribel Fierro, “Violencia, política y religión en al-Andalus durante el s. IV/X: el reinado de ‘Abd al-Rahman III,” in *Estudios onomástico-biográficos de al-Andalus. XIV. De muerte violenta. Política, religión y violencia en al-Andalus*, ed. Maribel Fierro (Madrid: CSIC, 2004), 37–102, 47. The other two are about the latter’s father, ‘Umar Ibn Ḥafṣūn, and his other son Ḥakam, whose corpses were crucified ten years after their deaths, together with that of Sulaymān. See *ibid.*, 58–9.
4. The following abstract is drawn from the chapter “The classical doctrine” in Rudolph Peters, *Crime and Punishment in Islamic Law* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 6–68, esp. 37–8, 57–9.
5. *Ibid.*, 37–8.

6. Ibid., 58.
7. Ibid., 65–9.
8. Spies, “Über die Kreuzigung,” 150. A similar number of historical cases of crucifixions is listed in °Abbūd Shālījī, *Mawsū‘at al-‘adhāb*, 7 vols (Beirut: al-Dār al-‘Arabiyya li-l-Mawsū‘āt, 1985), 7:165–72; cf. also 3:278–92 (chapter on *al-tasmīr*). (My thanks to Christian Lange for drawing my attention to this work and to Patrick Franke for his help in making it available to me.) Five cases from Islamic Spain are enumerated in Maribel Fierro, “Religious Dissension in al-Andalus: Ways of Exclusion and Inclusion,” *Al-Qanṭara* 22 (2001), 463–87. Seven more cases from al-Andalus during the reign of °Abd al-Raḥmān III (300–50/912–61) are dealt with in detail in Maribel Fierro, “Violencia,” 47, 55–62. In three cases, the convicted seem to have been crucified alive.
9. Spies, “Über die Kreuzigung,” 150.
10. Ullmann, *Kreuzigung*, nos. 16 and 3.
11. Spies, “Über die Kreuzigung,” 151.
12. Ullmann, *Kreuzigung*, no. 69.
13. For the author and his work, cf. *EI2*, s.v. al-Musabbiḥī, 7:650–2 (Th. Bianquis); Stephan Conermann and Tilman Seidensticker, “Some Remarks on Ibn Ṭawq’s (d. 915/1509) Journal *Al-Ta‘līq*, vol. 1,” *Mamluk Studies Review* 11.2 (2007), 121–4; Yaacov Lev, “The Suppression of Crime, the Supervision of Markets, and Urban Society in the Egyptian Capital during the Tenth and Eleventh Centuries,” *Mediterranean Historical Review* 3 (1988), 71–95.
14. Musabbiḥī, *Akhbār Miṣr*, ed. Ayman Fu‘ād Sayyid and Thierry Bianquis as *Tome quarantième de la chronique d’Égypte de Musabbihi* (Cairo: Institut Français d’Archéologie Orientale du Caire, 1978), 52–3, 97–9.
15. In the following, poems are cited by the numbers attributed to them in Ullmann, *Kreuzigung*.
16. Spies, “Über die Kreuzigung,” 145.
17. See Ullmann, *Kreuzigung*, 20.
18. Detailed historical information is always provided by Ullmann.
19. Religious matters beyond the Fāṭimī-Sunnī antagonism might also have played a role, as the allusions to his Christian inclinations in no. 14 l. 1 and 3 show.
20. Al-Afshīn is called a fire-worshipper in no. 10 l. 24.
21. See, for example, *al-khuṭūb* (no. 18 l. 3), *rayb al-zamān* (no. 18 l. 6), *iḥdā l-ghawā‘il* (no. 19 l. 1), *al-manāyā* (no. 19 l. 2), *al-qadar al-maḥtūm* (no. 19 l. 10), *al-ayyām* (no. 22 l. 1), *al-nawā‘ib/al-nā‘ibāt* (no. 23 l. 12), *ṣarf al-layālī* (no. 23 l. 13) and *al-ḥimām* (no. 26 l. 1).
22. Cf. Ullmann, *Kreuzigung*, 21.
23. The young Turkish slave was crucified on the banks of the river Baradā in Damascus, under the castle at the end of the cattle market. See Ritter, “Kreuzigung eines Knaben,” 38; Ullmann, *Kreuzigung*, no. 28 l. 6. The

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reports collected by Spies, “Über die Kreuzigung,” 150–3, are not unambiguous about this question.

24. Ullmann, *Kreuzigung*, 22–3.
25. The following translations are based on the original Arabic wording, but Ullmann’s and Ritter’s German translations have been gratefully consulted.
26. Quoted in Shihāb al-Dīn Abū Muḥammad ʿAbd al-Raḥmān ibn Ismāʿīl, *al-maʿrūf bi-Abī Shāma al-Maqdisī al-Dimashqī, Tarājim rijāl al-qarnayn al-sādis wa-l-sābiʿ al-maʿrūf bi-l-Dhayl ʿalā al-rawḍatayn*, ed. Muḥammad Zāhid ibn al-Ḥasan al-Kawtharī and ʿIzzat al-ʿAṭṭār al-Ḥusaynī (Cairo: Dār al-Kutub al-Mālikiyya, 1947 [repr. Beirut: Dār al-Jīl, 1974]), 181:25–182:9. For further references, see Ullmann, *Kreuzigung*, no. 28.
27. Abū Shāma, *Dhayl*, 180:21–181:24.