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Suicide in Ottoman Syria: An Annotated Bibliography

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This is an annotated bibliography about suicide in early modern Ottoman Syria (circa 1500-1800) that I prepared for an article I am writing. The bibliography is very short, for the simple reason that there is hardly any scholarship on suicide anywhere in the Arab world, or in the Middle East more broadly, for that matter, before the twentieth century. On the other hand, perhaps unsurprisingly, there is an enormous body of literature -- of wildly varying quality -- on martyrdom and Muslim suicide bombers in the contemporary Middle East. Since this scholarship is not relevant to my project, I have not included it here.

The bibliography is arranged in descending chronological order. I have searched for books and articles in all major European languages as well as in Arabic, but not in other Middle Eastern languages, such as Turkish or Persian. I could not find a single secondary source pertaining specifically to the early modern period, but the articles listed below contain very valuable information about suicide from the rise of Islam to the end of Mamluk rule that might be applicable to the early modern period.¹

Rosenthal, Franz. “On Suicide in Islam.” *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 66, no. 3 (1946): 239-259. This is the first and to this day the most comprehensive overview of this topic. It is divided into two sections. The first, “Theoretical Discussions of Suicide,” analyzes suicide in the Qur’an, the Hadith, and in philosophical and literary texts. The second section, “Reported Cases of Suicide,” briefly examines forty-seven cases of suicide from 644 C.E. to 1488 C.E.

Rosenthal, Franz. “Intihār.” In *The Encyclopaedia of Islam*, 2nd ed., 3: 1246–1248. Leiden: Brill, 1960-2007. An encyclopedia article that both summarizes and adds some new information to the author’s seminal 1946 article.

Denaro, Roberta. “Il suicidio nell’Islam medievale: un’ipotesi di lettura della Sunna.” *Rivista degli studi orientali* 70, nos. 1-2 (1996): 23-45. A close reading of sayings pertaining to suicide contained in the Hadith, which the author divides into four distinct typologies. Concludes that although suicide was condemned, no serious penalties were attached to it because, unlike crimes such as apostasy and fornication, for example, it did not constitute a threat to public order.

¹ In contrast, there is an impressive body of literature, both in terms of quality and quantity, on suicide in early modern Europe. Jeffrey R. Watt, one of the leading scholars in the field, compiled an online bibliography of this scholarship (up to 2001) at <http://home.olemiss.edu/~hswatt/biblsuic.html>.

Martel-Thoumian, Bernadette. "La mort volontaire: le traitement du suicide et du suicidé dans les chroniques mameloukes tardives." *Annales Islamologiques* 38, no. 2 (2004): 405-435. A recent important contribution that examines 28 cases of suicide reported in late Mamluk Egypt and Syria between 1468 and 1516. It is based on chronicles and to a lesser extent biographical dictionaries.

In addition to these four articles, the following brief encyclopedia entries offer some useful information:

Canetto, Silvia Sara. "Suicide." In *The Oxford Encyclopedia of Islam and Women*. Oxford Islamic Studies Online, <http://www.oxfordislamicstudies.com/article/opr/t355/e0366> (accessed Jun 24, 2016).

Clarke, Lynda. "Suicide." In *The Oxford Encyclopedia of the Islamic World*. Oxford Islamic Studies Online, <http://www.oxfordislamicstudies.com/article/opr/t236/e0761> (accessed Jun 24, 2016).

Halevi, Leor. "Death and Dying." In *Medieval Islamic Civilization: An Encyclopedia*, edited by Josef W. Meri, 2: 196-199. New York: Routledge: 2006.

Karamustafa, Ahmet T. "Suicide." In *Encyclopaedia of the Qur'an*, edited by Jane Dammen McAuliffe, 5: 159-162. Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2006.

Last but not least, the Ethics of Suicide Digital Archive (The University of Utah and Oxford University Press) reproduces all the Qur'anic verses and the sayings of the Prophet Muhammad about suicide.

<http://ethicsofsuicide.lib.utah.edu/selections/quran/>

<http://ethicsofsuicide.lib.utah.edu/selections/al-bukhari-muslim-al-hajjaj/>