

Conversion in Late Antiquity: Christianity, Islam, and Beyond
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"Neo-martyrs and the attitude of the Church to martyrdom in early Islamic Syria"

Abstract

Islamic rule inaugurated a new generation of Christian martyrs. These 'neo-martyrs' were Arabs who refused to convert to the new Arab faith, converts to Islam who subsequently repented, apostatized and reverted to Christianity, but also Christians who deliberately came into conflict with Islam to defend and glorify their own faith. Highly concerned by the question of conversion to Islam, the Church could evidently not ignore the phenomenon and wavered between firm condemnation and promotion of such figures. By discussing a selection of canonical, hagiographical and liturgical sources, I plan to examine these changing attitudes of the Church towards martyrdom in Syria between the 7th and the 9th centuries.