

## Hidden Christians and Churches in the Middle East

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A monk named John from the monastery of St. Macarius converted to Islam before al-Malik al-Kamil (1177–1238) in exchange for becoming the governor of Minyat Ghamar. After three years, John remembered his faith in Christ and his monastic life. He repented and petitioned al-Malik al-Kamil to return to Christianity. The sultan granted his wish. Soon after, another ex-Christian decided to officially reconvert to Christianity, so he requested to be allowed to return to his faith. He was threatened with punishment and death if he returned to Christianity; he was also forced to convert to Islam for the second time. His request, to return to Christianity, became an alarming incident for the sultan. Therefore, he ordered John the Monk to be brought back and offered him two choices: to become a Muslim again or die. John chose the first option, and once again he converted to Islam; by doing so, as a reward, he was reinstated as the governor of Minyat Ghamar village. A few years later, John again repented and asked to return to Christianity. This time he wrote to the sultan, saying, “I am a polluted man. Purify me with your sword.”<sup>1</sup>

The stories of hidden Christians in the Middle East are remarkable. Unfortunately, many of those stories never have been recorded and shared. The majority of the stories that have been recorded are mainly from those crypto-Christians who managed to return to their Christian faith, mostly in nineteenth-century Ottoman rule, after the 1848 religious freedom law that allowed crypto-Christians to return to their faith. Like the story of John the Monk, the stories of crypto-Christians are stories of struggle and survival, stories of fear and courage, and stories of desolation and dilemma. In them might lie some answers to the question of how, in the face of impossible circumstances, the Christian faith and Christian communities survived in the Middle East. Their conceptual space, their struggle to maintain their faith in the face of various pressures, their cultural continuity and adaptation, and their public and private religious practices are all important and relevant issues even for us in the twenty-first

century in the Middle East, in which persecution, discrimination, and restrictions against Christians are still ongoing.

Despite the ongoing persecution, the region, especially in the twenty-first century, has also been witnessing conversion from Islam to Christianity in almost all countries in the Middle East. How can new members of the church survive in such situations? What kind of strategies did Christians adopt to increase their survival chances? What can we learn from the crypto-Christians of the past in order to strengthen the church today? Throughout the Islamic era, Christians utilized several different strategies, depending on the particular context and specific time. Rugh categorizes Christian strategies and survival in modern Egypt under three headings: "visibility versus invisibility, protection versus going it alone, and engagement versus withdrawal."<sup>2</sup> However, since this chapter is about hidden (crypto) Christians, our main concern is how secret Christians managed their invisibility and survival. This chapter will, briefly, discuss three survival methods that hidden Christians in the Middle East, during the Islamic period, used to survive persecution and difficult circumstances—namely, martyrdom, dissimulation, and secrecy.

## CRYPTO/HIDDEN CHRISTIANS

The term *crypto-Christian*, in this chapter, refers to two sets of groups: The first are Christians who had to keep their faith secret and dissimulated to the majority religious group (Islam), including conversion to Islam by force or under economic, social, and political pressures. Though they were Muslim in public, their religious commitment and practice was to their Christian faith. The second group are those from Muslim backgrounds who converted to Christianity and lived (or are living) in the predominantly Muslim-majority Middle East.

Hidden Christians have been part of Christian history and culture from the early days of Jesus's ministry. The stories of Nicodemus, "who came to Jesus at night" (John 3), and Joseph of Arimathea, who was a "secret follower of Jesus" (Mark 15:43), are known to us. Both were not only secret followers of Jesus but also publicly known as Jews: Joseph of Arimathea was a member of the Sanhedrin court, and Nicodemus was a member of the Jewish ruling council; yet in private, they were followers of Christ. Despite its long history, the concept of crypto-Christians has not been an easy one to reconcile. Christians are encouraged to live and preach their faith even in difficult times. Jesus, in Luke 14:27, says that "anyone who does not carry his cross and follow me cannot be my disciple." Thus, concealing one's faith in times of danger and persecution was not encouraged; for Christians, declaring their faith was also a declaration of self: "I am a Christian." Renouncing one's faith meant denying the very existence of "self."

Though concealing one's faith was not encouraged, the *World Christian Encyclopedia* in the year 2000 claimed 120 million crypto-Christians in the world. That means, against the Christian doctrine of proclamation, dissimulation and invisibility have always been options for some believers who are living under persecution and severe discrimination.

However, dissimulation is not an "inherent quality of a particular religion's systems."<sup>3</sup> Historical cases show members of any religious groups in the face of danger may dissimulate, as practiced by crypto-Christians of the Ottoman period,<sup>4</sup> Japanese crypto-Christians,<sup>5</sup> crypto-Jews in Europe, crypto-Muslims in Spain,<sup>6</sup> crypto-Jews in Iran,<sup>7</sup> and hidden converts to Christianity in Iran and across the Middle East.

The idea of crypto-Christians has been overlooked by academics as well as church institutions. For the academics, the main obstacle has been a lack of or limited reliable data. Most of the stories of hidden believers were not recorded and handed down, and those stories that have been recorded are stories of crypto-Christians who were allowed to return to their Christian faith, so some of their stories were recorded. The majority of such stories are from the Ottoman period. The reformed period of the nineteenth century made it possible for some crypto-Christians to return to their Christian faith. Therefore, crypto-Christian communities in Albania, Kosovo, Crete, Pontos on the Black Sea coast, and Cyprus declared publicly that they were Christians by heart and had been practicing Christianity in secret and wished to officially return to Christianity. They were called *klostoi* and *kryfioi* (the hidden or secret ones). Cypriot crypto-Christians were called *Linovamvakio*, which had a negative connotation, meaning people with dual loyalties and identities who were like a cotton cloth covered by linen.<sup>8</sup>

The majority of the stories of crypto-Christians of the Ottoman Empire are linked to nationalism, which paralleled crypto-Christianity to crypto-Greekness. For that reason, the crypto-Christian stories became dominated in Greek historiography with regard to religious syncretism, identity, and Islamization in the Ottoman Empire. As Tzedopoulos explains, the interpretation of reconversion of crypto Christians was based on four factors: "Muslim conversion to Christianity, nationalism, ethnography and politics."<sup>9</sup> The best recorded examples are found in Bulgaria, Serbia, and Albania.

The archival data regarding crypto-Christians for the rest of the Middle East is very limited, except for a few anecdotal accounts of "pseudo-Muslims" in Egypt, but we do not know much about their survival stories. For example, Jenkins quotes a cynical Muslim preacher complaining about such *masalima*, "Muslim-ish":

Now look at those who embraced Islam, inquire. Do you find them—any one of them—in any mosque? If they say they became Muslims—where is the fruit of their Islam? They were never seen to pray, never fasted or went on pilgrimage: Or else—you say—they are not Muslims. Then why is poll tax not exacted from them, humiliation not imposed upon them?<sup>10</sup>

## THE CHURCH'S RESPONSE

How did the church respond? Opinion among churches regarding crypto-Christians ranged from fulmination and absolute rejection to compassion and acceptance. In general, the churches responded ambiguously. Some pointed to the Gospel and demanded an open proclamation of faith, at whatever cost. Yet as the situation became harder and discrimination became severe, the desperate situation demanded new tactics that would also include accommodation in order to increase the chance of survival. For example,

the patriarch of Constantinople in the 1330s unofficially allowed "double faith" practices, "promising that the Church would work for the salvation of Anatolian believers who dared not assert their faith openly for fear of punishment, provided that they tried to observe Christian laws."<sup>11</sup> In the seventeenth century, the patriarch of Jerusalem also permitted "fake" conversion to Islam. Although the Catholic Church took a harder line, Jesuit priests ministered to hidden Christian communities in the Balkans while themselves pretending to be Muslim in public so they could serve the hidden Christians.<sup>12</sup>

Upon their return, the church struggled to accept and include crypto-Christians in their congregations. The challenges in front of the church were, first, reliable evidence that would prove that the returnees remained true Christians "in their hearts" (Eliav-Feldon 2012). Second, as Eliav-Feldon argues, if the church accepted the claim of the returnees that they were Muslim only in public and were Christians in their heart, that meant the church was accepting "the Nicodemistic argument, and such an attitude might open the floodgates of acceptance of other forms of dissimulation." Third, by accepting crypto-Christians, the church also could be seen as openly ignoring lying and endorsing dissimulation. Fourth, if the returned Christians were to be judged mainly based on their belief, why, then, were crypto-Jews of Europe and crypto-Muslims of Spain condemned by the church? As Eliav-Feldon argues, "if forced conversion of Christians to Islam was so easily condoned, should the Church not allow forced converts to Christianity to return to Judaism or Islam without penalising them as heretics?"<sup>13</sup>

Although at the arrival of Islam, Christians were not forced to convert to Islam, Christianity had to learn to live under a different religious framework. In this new framework, the top church leaders were to act as representatives of their community, both internally and externally within the state. This legitimized state interference in church affairs, including appointing the top leaders. This practice has been continued in most of the countries in the Middle East to this day. The legal framework was that of *dhimmitude*, which meant that Christians were protected minority groups and expected to pay tax (*jizya*); as second-class citizens, they were not allowed to serve in the military or carry weapons.

This framework brought moral challenges as well as heavy restrictions, discrimination, and persecution against Christians and churches. Depending on the particular situation and context, the church altered its tactics to combat their situations. Among the methods used were contextualization<sup>14</sup> (adaptations and engagement or withdrawal), tradition (liturgy and sainthood), martyrdom, and monasticism. The individual Christians also responded to the challenges of Islam differently, with some choosing invisibility (secrecy) and dissimulation as their survival tactics. The length of this chapter does not permit us to discuss all the methods of survival, but we will briefly look at the concepts of martyrdom, dissimulation, and secrecy.

## MARTYRDOM

The rhetoric of martyrdom has always been at the heart of the persecuted Christian Church, not only as a strategy for survival but also to define and defend the identity and existence of the Christian community. The primary principle of Christian martyrdom is

to witness the Good News of Jesus Christ. The Greek term μαρτυς, and related words derived from it such as μαρτούρι, μαρτούριον, and μαρτούρο, means "witness" or to testify (testimony). It is the same in Arabic and Farsi languages: *shahed* ("witness") and *shahid* ("martyr"). In the book of Revelation (1:5 and 3:14), Jesus Christ is described as "the faithful witness" (μαρτυς ο πιστος). It was this rhetoric that once again was rediscovered and employed by the Middle East churches in their struggle against persecution and the increase in the conversion of Christians to Islam.

Heavy and multiple taxes,<sup>15</sup> severe discrimination, and humiliation drove many Christians to choose conversion to Islam. Later on, during the Ottoman period many Christians were forced to convert to Islam.<sup>16</sup> To combat this, some churches (for instance, the Coptic Church) purposely sought martyrdom. "Dozens of Copts who hoped that their sacrifice would set a moral example for their fellow believers" sought martyrdom (Armanios 2011, 6). Martyrdom was a familiar concept for the church: from the early years, martyrs became the foundation of the church on which it was built. The Coptic Church began its religious calendar from the Roman emperor Diocletian (283–305) when thousands of Christian Copts were killed for their faith. Hagiographies of martyrs exist to this day as a living reality and part of the Christian collective memory.<sup>17</sup> Among the most recent ones are the twenty-one martyrs of the Coptic Church in Egypt who were beheaded by ISIS on February 5, 2015, on the beach near the port town of Sirte, Libya.<sup>18</sup> As with these twenty-one Coptic martyrs of our time, the choice to embrace martyrdom has never been only an individual conscience; it is also a deliberate action to be faithful, to serve God, and to strengthen the Christian community. At the same time, the Christian community also shared the experience of martyrdom through their struggle and suffering as the result of persecution.

The Middle East Church hoped that martyrdom would allay fear and fulfill the community's needs for heroes. The martyrdom ideology was employed as an integral part of the battle, to protect the Christian community, to ensure communal boundaries, and maintain Christian identity.<sup>19</sup> Moreover, martyrdom functioned as part of the church's apologetic to signal that *only* Christianity is the true faith and to distinguish themselves from Islam. In addition, martyrdom functioned as a solution for the pollution of assimilation and dissimulation, as we see in the story of John the Monk: "I am a polluted man. Purify me with your sword." Though martyrdom was an ideal, not many had the courage to choose martyrdom. As Calvin describes, martyrdom is a gift and ability granted by God. The act of martyrdom was not and is not prescribed for every believer, "but all could attempt or incorporate the qualities described by the martyrologic accounts."<sup>20</sup> Since martyrdom was a difficult choice, many chose instead invisibility to dissimulate and keep their faith secret.

## DISSIMULATION

In the movie *Ask Your Heart*, directed by Yusuf Kurcenli, set in nineteenth-century Trabzon, North Turkey, Mustafa and his entire family are crypto-Christians. They and their ancestors have kept their Christian faith secret for nearly two hundred years.<sup>21</sup> Though they were Muslims in public, they had a small chapel beneath their house with a secret

passageway to it. The priest would visit them secretly, mainly at night, to give them Holy Communion, baptize their children, and bless their marriages. The Ottoman rulers had just issued a religious freedom law that would allow crypto-Christians to reconvert to Christianity. However, there was a dilemma: if they reconverted to Christianity and made their Christian faith known, they might lose their status and friends, and they might even have to leave their villages and migrate elsewhere. This was also a dilemma in Mustafa's family when the grandfather, Haji Suleyman, died. While Haji Suleyman's wife, Sefiye, was praying in the secret chapel, the elders and village imam gathered and started performing the Islamic funeral rituals. At this moment, Sefiye rushed out and shouted, "Stop, wait!" While crying she said, "Suleyman, my husband, was a Christian. He is a Christian, his Christian name is Yuhannes. My husband is not a Muslim. He wanted to be buried as a Christian." Everyone was shocked: "Who are these people? How could they keep their faith so secret all these years?"

Theologically, dissimulation practice has been criticized as falsifying and deception. However, some religions such as Islam, especially Shia Islam, and the Baha'i faith may have theological backing for dissimulation (*taqiyya*). *Taqiyya* is derived from the Arabic word *waga* "to shield and to protect oneself." In Islam, the concept is supported by the Qur'an (in 3:28 and 16:106) and Hadith. In Baha'ism, though, they use Shia practice of dissimulation (*taqiyya*); the concept of dissimulation is deliberately left obscure. The main emphasis has been on "the mystical dimension of religious faith rather than mere obedience to its outer laws."<sup>22</sup> Dissimulation is not a theological choice for Christians. Notwithstanding, it has been an option for many thousands (and perhaps millions) of Christians: first, those who, for different reasons (such as persecution, heavy restrictions, and discrimination), were forced to convert; second, those who couldn't face martyrdom or did not have the means to migrate, yet could not fully digest the Islamic creed. Dissimulation and secrecy have also been practiced by converts from Islam to Christianity throughout the Middle East and North Africa in the twenty-first century. One of the examples of converts from Muslim background to Christianity is the story of Maryam, a convert from Iran.

After a wave of persecution that Maryam and her church community in the southeast of Iran went through, including the closing down of the church and forced return of many converts to Islam, she moved to a new town in the north of Iran. In this new town, she managed to find a job as a teacher. Although she knew that attending a church was a dangerous risk, she became a member of a church in another city. However, she carefully and deliberately constructed a method of a dual naming and identity for herself. She established herself as a teacher by the name of Roya, whose religious ideology was similar to Sufism rather than folk Islam. In her new church, she was Maryam, and she did not talk much about her job as a teacher to her new Christian community. She kept her dual identities and lives separate from each other. The only people who knew about both of her identities were her church leaders and a few fellow Christian converts from her old church.

However, secrecy has never been an easy task. Since she was a single young woman in her early twenties, it was difficult for her to find rental accommodation. Eventually, a middle-aged lady agreed to rent her a room, but with two conditions: she had to be a committed and practicing Muslim, and she had to be clean and tidy. The first one

was a problem. Since she was desperate, she agreed to both conditions. For the first two months, she dissimulated: she would wake up at 4:30 a.m. every morning, go to the bathroom, and leave the light on, pretending she was praying. As days past, she felt more and more uncomfortable with her pretense. After two months, she decided to stop. A few weeks after that, her landlady confronted her, saying, "I don't see your light on for morning prayers!" With a nervous voice, Maryam told her landlady that she didn't believe in Islam and Islamic rituals. She told her all about her faith, except she did not use two words: *Christianity* or *conversion*. Her landlady was perplexed and shocked. After a long silence, eventually she said, "During the past two months, I learned that you are a decent and modest young girl, and I have become fond of you. For that reason, not only do I want you to stay, but I will also protect you, even if that means to lie. If anyone asks me whether you pray at home, I will tell them, 'Yes, she does.'"<sup>23</sup>

In both stories—Mustafa's and Maryam's—dissimulation and secrecy were used as strategies to survive and as methods of participation in a sense of contribution to an overall process of continued existence in the face of decline and persecution. At the same time, both stories represent crypto-Christians' struggles of fall, shame, perseverance, resistance, and resurgence. Though the tale of Mustafa's family is a nineteenth-century crypto-Christian story in Turkey and Maryam's is a twenty-first-century story of a convert from Islam to Christianity, both stories have many similarities: both struggled to proclaim their faith; instead, they dissimulated. For both, dissimulation had internal and external challenges. They both used dual naming and dual identity methods. They both saw their dissimulation as a fall. Yet they both persevered to practice their faith and stay in a relationship with the Christian community. At the end of each story, we also witness a resurgence of Mustafa's family proclaiming their faith to their villagers and Maryam speaking about her faith to her landlady.

In both stories, one can explore the concepts of fall (sin and guilt) as well as redemption—redemption of identity and continuity as Paul says in Romans 5:21. Therefore, the questions that need to be reflected upon are these: Just as "grace might reign through righteousness," can the struggles and sufferings that crypto-Christians go through because of their faith link them to the experience of martyrs? Or is dissimulation the antithesis of martyrdom? Moreover, if martyrdom is largely overt resistance, can dissimulation be seen as covert resistance, a way for not only the individual's faith to survive but also the faith of the community? Like martyrdom, can dissimulation also be seen as a long-term investment for the faith community?<sup>24</sup> Because of the complexity of the nature of dissimulation as well as individual motivations, it is difficult to respond to these questions. However, crypto-Christians' effort and struggles for survival should not be taken for granted. They purposefully fuse dissimilar concepts (resistance and quietism/resilience) for the purpose of continuity and adaptation with the idea of temperance. It is a last resort for extremely marginalized and persecuted minorities, who can't utilize other tactics such as dissimulation (emphasizing their separate identity) or assimilation (blending with the society at large), or who lack courage and means to migrate.

Moreover, it is interesting to note that dissimulation under Islam was easier than under Christianity in Europe. This is because Islam wasn't concerned about new converts' inner thoughts or beliefs as long as they behaved properly regarding the Islamic

codes of practice. However, maintaining one's secret faith and religious identity without a strong community in places such as the Middle East, in which Christian cultures and worldviews are similar to their Muslim neighbors, has not been an easy task for many hidden Christians. Many crypto-Christians who converted to Islam for protection and survival eventually converted for good and lost their Christian faith, and some Muslims who converted to Christianity, because of lack of community, never completed their conversion process or entered into a hybrid situation where they practiced both religions. One of the examples of such hybrid practices would be the story of Ibrahim, from a village in Kurdistan Iran, who converted to Christianity while continuing to practice Islam, thinking it was all right to become a "follower of Jesus" and have Islam as a religion.<sup>25</sup> Therefore one might conclude that the survival rate among crypto-Christians might be low, and even if they survive, their version of Christianity may not be the same as the church's doctrinal practice.

## SECRECY

When there's a trap set up for you  
In every corner of this town  
And so you learn the only way to go is underground  
When there's a trap set up for you  
In every corner of your room  
And so you learn the only way to go is through the roof.<sup>26</sup>

Secrecy (سريه) is another survival strategy that hidden Christians use, making sure that the devotion to their faith stays private and their collective worship remains invisible or "at least beyond the reach of the law."<sup>27</sup> When I was collecting my interviews for my PhD study (2014–2015), the pre-interview process with converts from Muslim backgrounds made for awkward moments, especially among those who were still living in Iran. Trying to gain their trust, I first told them my own conversion story and challenges that I went through as a result; after that, I explained the purpose of my study and what I was going to do with their interviews. Using their language (the language of secrecy and conversion), including symbolism and codes, helped me gain their trust and become an insider who not only knew the secret codes of hidden converts but also shared their experience. The paradox of their watchfulness (don't tell) and their enthusiasm to talk about their faith to strangers was very much noticeable in their interviews: "I don't want anyone to know about my faith" versus "I handed out Bible verses to strangers on the bus or street"; almost all informants mentioned that they engaged in evangelizing others, yet they wanted their faith to be concealed. However, secrecy ("do not tell") did not mean absolute secrecy: it was just another way of disseminating information.<sup>28</sup> It also gave them a degree of control in revealing information about their new faith and identity. That is, they hid their Christian identity but not the content of their new faith. This can also be seen to be symptomatic of their dissimulations, a line in which secrecy and dissimulation cross. In the earlier story, Maryam didn't want her identity as a convert to Christianity be known to her landlady; yet, without revealing her identity, she



told all about her new faith. For many hidden Christians, secrecy and dissimulation go hand in hand; therefore, one can argue that beyond collective secrecy, there is the individual practice of dissimulation.

The survival of the faith of hidden Christians also depends, to some extent, on the behavior of others—for example, the landlady in Maryam's story and the village community in the story of Mustafa's family. It is because secrecy and secrets are social acts, and in social interactions, the meaning and values of secrecy change and are negotiated and renegotiated. This process also opens doors for social and cultural realities to be renegotiated. For example, in the movie *Ask Your Heart*, when the villagers deserted Mustafa's family, the head of the village urged them not to judge them based on their secret faith but based on their lived life and their contributions to their village community. After this negotiation, some of the Muslims even helped them take Suleyman's body to the Christian cemetery. It was the same for Maryam: her devoted Muslim landlady was willing not only to overlook her faith requirement but also to accept and protect her. Therefore, we should not underestimate the importance of toleration in ordinary people among whom crypto-Christians live and survive. Sometimes genuine toleration is seen "as an intellectual or cognitive attribute of properly enlightened individual minds, but it is equally importantly a social and political practice."<sup>29</sup>

Moreover, since the majority of the countries in the Middle East are ruled by dictatorial regimes, secretive behaviors were (and still to some extent are) normal in dealing with the rulers. Communities and individuals—Muslims or non-Muslims alike—try to avoid attracting the attention of authorities as much as possible. Therefore, discovering the secret of crypto-Christians would not be seen as a rare practice.

However, there is a problem in such secrecy since identities are constructed by interaction and negotiation and are constantly being interpreted and renegotiated: separating public from private has practical and theological consequences. The multiple identities of crypto-Christians are applied to different social environments: the same people, for different reasons, define themselves as Muslim in one social setting and as Christian in another. It would be difficult to say which identity is real and which one is false, because in reality both identities are real, depending on the context; therefore, the religious practices of hidden Christian become a hybrid (not fully Muslim and not fully Christian).

## CONCLUSION

Every religious group in times of difficulty and severe discrimination may dissimulate to the religion of the majority: Christians pretending to be Muslims, Jews pretending to be Christians, Calvinist Christians pretending to be Catholic or Jesuit Catholics pretending to be Anglicans.

Investigating and analyzing the stories of crypto-Christians who dissimulate during the rule of Islam in the Middle East tells us more than the themes of their specific religion or practice. It reveals a unique manifestation of power, intolerance, and a hostile majority over minority religious groups.<sup>30</sup> It is also saddening to notice how little improvement has been made in the Middle Eastern societies with regard to religious tolerance and freedom. Therefore, one can easily see countless similarities between the

crypto-Christian experience of, for example, the nineteenth-century Ottoman Empire and contemporary converts to Christianity in Iran. In such rigid situations, one might be perplexed as to how Christianity really survived in the Middle East. It is an amazing fact that, despite prolonged persecution, hardship, and challenges of dissimulation and secrecy, Christians have survived in this region and will continue to survive.

Nevertheless, the issue of dissimulation is convoluted. Even if the church informally endorses dissimulation, from the church's doctrinal point of view, the issue of legitimacy of religious dissimulation will always be a challenge for the church to deal with: To what extent, how, and when is the dissimulation of some groups or individuals legitimate, especially in relation to the contemporary converts from Muslim background into Christian faith? Some dissimulate irrespective of whether it is theologically legitimate, doing so as a method of survival in a hostile environment, and some do it for convenience. Whatever the motivation might be, dissimulation is a manifestation of the collective agency of minority group members, based on their conditions, deciding to what degree and how long to dissimulate.

Finally, researching the stories of hidden Christians is not an easy task. This chapter is only a brief contribution to the issue of dissimulation and the challenges of the church in the Middle East. The topic deserves much more in-depth study. Its significance is evident for the contemporary church, especially converts to Christianity under persecution and repressive regimes whose survival may be at stake. Thus, there is much to learn from crypto-Christians with regard to their tactics in facing persecution and discrimination as well as their adaptability in the face of the dominant culture.

## FOR FURTHER READING

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## NOTES

1. Jason R. Zaborowski, *The Coptic Martyrdom of John of Phanijoit: Assimilation and Conversion to Islam in Thirteenth-Century Egypt* (Leiden: Brill, 2005), 6.
2. Andrea B. Rugh, *Christians in Egypt: Strategies and Survival* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), 198.
3. Hande Sozer, *Managing Invisibility: Dissimulation and Identity Maintenance among Alevi Bulgarian Turks* (Leiden: Brill, 2014).
4. Miriam Eliav-Feldon, *Renaissance Imposters and Proofs of Identity* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012).
5. Peter Nosco, "Secrecy and the Transmission of Tradition Issues in the Study of the 'Underground' Christians," *Japanese Journal of Religious Studies* 20, no. 1 (1993): 3–29.
6. Eliav-Feldon, *Renaissance Imposters*.
7. Hilda Nissimi, "'Us' and 'Them': The Formation of the Crypto-Jewish Community of Mashhad, Iran," *Revue de l'histoire des religions* 3 (2005): 321–60.
8. Sozer, *Managing Invisibility*.
9. Yogros Tzedopoulos, "Public Secrets: Crypto-Christianity in the Pontos," *Bulletin of the Centre for Asia Minor Studies* 16 (March 2009), 167.
10. Philip Jenkins, *The Lost History of Christianity* (London: HarperCollins, 2008), 177.
11. Jenkins, *The Lost History of Christianity*, 178.
12. Eliav-Feldon, *Renaissance Imposters*, 59.
13. Eliav-Feldon, *Renaissance Imposters*, 60.
14. Contextualization and adaptation was also one of the church's responses to the situation, which meant that as Arabic became the dominant language, Christians adapted it, and even many churches used Arabic as the language of prayers; as a result, Christian languages such as Coptic and Syriac faced a decline.
15. For instance, under the Umayyads Christians had to pay five different taxes: the land tax (*karaj*), a poll tax (*jizya*), a tax to cover the expenses and maintenance of tax collectors, a general tax dedicated to requisitions, and provisions in kind (proportional to their harvests). During the caliphate of Al-Mutawakkil (847–861), *jizya* was tripled on Christians and Jews (for more information, see Gerhard Böwering, ed., *The Princeton Encyclopedia of Islamic Political Thought* [Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2013]).
16. The situation in North Africa was much worse. For example, Ibn-alAthir, ibn Khaldoun histier, was quoted as saying that in Tunis in 1159 "the Jews and Christians who lived in this town had the choice of Islamism or death; one part became Muslim and the remainder were executed." Islamization of the Ottoman rulers forced masses of Christians to convert to Islam around the Mediterranean and to the East and the Middle East. Children were forcibly taken from their parents and brought up as Muslims.
17. Febe Armanios, *Coptic Christians in Ottoman Egypt* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011).
18. Their names are Tawadros Youssef Tawadros, Magued Seliman Shahata, Hany Abd el Messiah, Ezzat Boushra Youssef, Malak (the elder) Farag Ibrahim, Samuel (the elder) Alham Wilson, Malak Ibrahim Seniut, Luka Nagati Anis, Sameh Salah Farouk, Milad Makin Zaky, Issam Baddar Samir, Youssef Shoukry Younan, Bishoy Stefanos Kamel, Abanub Ayat Shahata, Girgis (the elder) Samir Megally, Mina Fayez Aziz, Kiryollos Boushra Fawzy, Gaber Mounir Adly, Samuel Stefanos Kamel, Girgis Milad Sniut, and Matthew Ayariga from Ghana (Mosebach 2019).
19. Armanios, *Coptic Christians*, 42.
20. Nikki Shephardson, "The Rhetoric of Martyrdom and the Anti-Nicodemite Discourses in France, 1550–1570," *Renaissance and Reformation / Renaissance et Réforme* 27, no. 3 (2003): 37–61.
21. The movie *Ask Your Heart* is based on the story of crypto-Christians of the nineteenth century; it can be seen at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HicceDMrBC8>.
22. Peter Smith, *An Introduction to the Baha'i Faith* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 5.

23. This testimony has been taken from the data that I collected for my PhD thesis in 2015 ("Reception of Christian Television in Contemporary Iran: An Analysis of Audience Interactions and Negotiations"; see <https://era.ed.ac.uk/handle/1842/25987>).
24. For example, in the nineteenth century a Jewish community in Mashad, Iran, faced two choices: convert to Islam or die. Dissimulation helped the community to survive, until they all gradually left for Israel in the mid-twentieth century. (For more information, see Vera B. Moreen, "The Problems of Conversion among Iranian Jews in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries," *Iranian Studies* 19, no. 3-4 (1986): 215-28.)
25. I interviewed Ibrahim on August 23, 2015, for my PhD study.
26. Gogol Bordello, "Through the Roof 'n' Underground," <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=grKaSsyvxZE>.
27. Erik Sengers and Thijl Sunier, eds., *Religious Newcomers and the Nation-State: Political Culture and Organized Religion in France and the Netherlands* (Delft, the Netherlands: Eburon Academic, 2010).
28. Sozer, *Managing Invisibility*.
29. Heather J. Sharkey, *A History of Muslims, Christians, and Jews in the Middle East* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017).
30. Sozer, *Managing Invisibility*.