

The Seven Sleepers/Ashāb al-Kahf tale and cult: two case studies in Turkey (Ephesus) and Jordan (Al-Rajib)

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Summary

Two case studies, as multisited ethnography, have been conducted concerning the tangible and intangible patrimony of the Seven Sleepers/Ashāb al-Kahf tale in the territories of Selçuk (Turkey) and Al-Rajib near Amman (Jordan), but also through digital media. This paper intersects the historical data with the ethnographic research, in order to better understand their contemporary representations and their processes of heritagization from an anthropological perspective. The Seven Sleepers/Ashāb al-Kahf tale is religious and cultural heritage shared by Christians and Muslims which crosses borders of time and space.

Key Words: *Seven Sleepers/Ashāb al-Kahf heritage, Jordan heritage, Ephesian cave*

Introduction

This paper focuses on the tangible and intangible patrimony concerning the Seven Sleepers/Ashāb al-Kahf in two Middle Eastern countries. In particular, these two case studies, as multisited ethnography still in progress, have been conducted in the territories of Selçuk (Turkey) and Al-Rajib near Amman (Jordan), but also through digital media in order to better understand its contemporary representations and the processes of its heritagization from an anthropological perspective. This paper intersects the historical data with the ethnographic research, centred on religiosity as a local experience, lived at the level of individuals and communities. More widely the geographical frame of my research concerns the Mediterranean Christian cultic sites and the Islamic sites in the Middle East and North Africa. The Seven Sleepers tale and cult have its Islamic counterpart based on the Ashāb al-Kahf (Companions of the cave) story which is narrated in the Koranic sura XVIII titled al-Kahf (The Cave, Kor. XVIII: 9-26). During my period of fieldworks the people observed are not only believers and tourists which attend the Seven Sleepers places but also inhabitants

involved (or not) at various levels in them. Most of the believers I enquired are Sunni Muslims, in Turkey few are Alevi and Christians. I enquired many tourists and locals working near (Turkey) or inside the cave (Jordan). The coordinates of my field research which analyses the double binary of the living religiosity and the tangible heritage and their imbrication, consist of some fundamental issues: 1. how local Muslim communities, Christians, and groups of devotees from abroad, perceive the authoritative representation of the Seven Sleepers/Companions of the cave tale and place; 2. how its tangible heritage interacted and still interacts with the inhabitants' lives (i.e. place attachment, memories, practices of self heritagization, etc.); 3. which are the processes of valorisation and heritage making as well as the interrelated construction of the place identity, that is the locality, between State and local actors; 4. which is the reconfiguration of the caves and the renewal of the ritual to the holy figures; 5. finally which is the growing role of cultural heritage in the State policy of tourism and the entanglement between devotional place and heritage site. This paper tries to provide an analytical overview of these first crucial matters.

I hold that the Seven Sleepers/Ashāb al-Kahf tale is a religious and cultural heritage shared by both Christians and Muslims which crosses borders of time and space. It could be considered an interreligious myth interconnecting the three monotheistic faiths as the religious comparative studies have shown¹ since its multiconfessional nature is common in many shared sacred shrines and sanctuaries in the Mediterranean region.

The historical background and the transmission of the Christian legend to Islam milieu

The genesis of the tale moves back from a historical event happened in the mid III century AD in Ephesus, the flourishing capital of the Roman province, Asia Minor, (today Turkey). By imperial edict² Decius ordered to all the citizens of the Roman Empire to manifest their devotion offering

¹ The background to the Seven Sleepers tale is to be found in earlier legends, in particular the Greek tale of the prophet-philosopher, Epimenides of Crete, and the Jewish story of Abimelech the Ethiopian. Anna Tozzi Di Marco, *Agiografia e culto dei Sette Dormienti nel Mediterraneo*, [Agiography and cult of the Seven Sleepers in the Mediterranean], Edizioni del Gruppo di ricerca arabo-cristiana, 2023 (forthcoming).

² The ancient hystoriography certifies the edict in the works of Eusebius of Caesarea, Cipriano, and Lattanzio. Gregory of Tours gave a different list of names in his work *De septem Dormientibus apud Ephesum*: Maximianu

incense or wine to the protecting gods of Rome. In Ephesus seven Christian noble young men refused to celebrate the Roman deities, because of their Christian faith, and they escaped in a cave on the surrounding hills. The emperor informed of their refuge, ordered to wall the entrance of the cave. During its enclosing two notable men, secretly Christian, inserted among the stones a box with a lead tablet where they engraved the Seven Sleepers story and their names. According to the Coptic rendition and Theodosius' report the names were: Achillides (Archelides), Diomedes, Eugenius, Probatius, Sabatius, Stephanus e Cyriacus³. At this point the tale introduces its pivotal feature, the Seven Sleepers' resurrection which was connected to the religious conflicts of that period. It is recalled that their bodies were discovered unchanged up to the epoch of the kingdom of Theodosius II (408-450). God resuscitated the seven Ephesians through the entrance of the solar light in the cave after a shepherd had taken away some stones. The young men thought to have slept only one night and one of them, disguised by mendicant, went to the city to buy some food and to inquire on Decius's dispositions on their respects. When he arrived to the city he was astonished and confused to see the Cross on the City gate and on churches, hence he thought to have become mad. At the market in paying the bread he was accused to own an ancient treasure since his coins belonged to a very anterior age. The news came up to the bishop who with the proconsul questioned the boy. The latter was so frightened that he soon revealed their story and their refuge. The bishop, therefore, thought that it was a divine revelation, and he went to the mountain together with the proconsul and the citizens. At the sight of the other resurrected bodies they blessed God which had made them worthy of such a miracle. Meanwhile they informed the emperor Theodosius in Constantinople about the divine episode. At that time Theodosius was in a state of deep sadness for the hard controversies about the resurrection amongst the different Christian communities, i.e. the Origenist heresy⁴. Every group of believers gave its own interpretation of the message of Jesus, therefore the first Christianity had not a unitarian character. The entire province of Asia Minor was crossed by tensions which were internal to the various religious communities and external with the Roman authorities. Theodosius reached the cavern and

³ Gregory of Tours gave a different list of names in his work *De septem Dormientibus apud Ephesum*: Maximianus, Malchus, Martinianus, Johannes, Dionysius, Constantinus, and Serapion.

⁴ Giancarlo Rinaldi, *Le fonti per lo studio delle eresie cristiane antiche*, [The sources for the study of the ancient Christian heresies], Il Pozzo di Giacobbe, 2015.

he invited the seven young men to go down to the city but they refused and died immediately. The narrative ends with the imperial order to build an oratory facing the cave (of which we have archaeological evidence⁵) and the institution of an annual memorial in the day of their resurrection. Nowadays it is still officiated in the Eastern orthodox churches as their veneration is still widespread in many Mediterranean countries (both Christian and Islamic) and beyond till Chinese Turkestan and Southeastern Asia.

The first written evidence of the Seven sleepers hagiographical episode is a lost Greek text, however faithfully handed down by the Byzantine hagiographer Simeone Metafraste in his *Menologe*⁶ While in the Western world Gregory of Tours (538-594) did the first version in Latin⁷, in the East the legend was transmitted from the Syriac renditions to the other Eastern literatures (Arab, Ethiopian). There is no agreement amongst the scholars about the first written rendering of the tale. According to the Belgian historian Ernest Honigmann it had been fictionalized by the bishop Stephen of the Ephesian church in the year 448 (E. Honigmann, 1953) while the Italian philologist Guidi and some others argued the primacy of Syriac version dating back probably to the beginning of VI century. Indeed the Greek and Syriac renditions are separated by a few decades. In 1885 Ignazio Guidi was amongst the earliest scholars who collected and examined the Oriental texts from a comparative perspective. Later, in 1955 the French orientalist Louis Massignon studied the Islamic renderings, tracing the spiritual geography of the Seven Sleepers⁸. Guidi and Massignon's works constitute the speculative basis for any further research to the historical and textual reconstruction of the tale and its sacred topography. In the field of Islamic studies we must also consider Father

⁵ In 1937 the publication of the mission of the Austrian archaeological Institute described three religious edifices with Greek inscriptions and frescos, numerous tombs and evidences of pilgrims and it asserted the authenticity of the cave.

⁶ It is the most ancient Byzantine menologe, written in 985 by the order of the emperor Basilius II, therefore called *Menologe of Basilius II*. It is composed of 12 volumes with precious miniatures where there are 140 saints' biographies.

⁷ Amongst the Medieval renderings based on Gregory's edition there are Paul the Deacon's "*Historia Langobardorum*" [*The History of Lombards*, 795] and the later Jacobus de Voragine's *Legenda Aurea* [*The Golden Legend*, 1260], a collection of hagiographies which most of the frescos and icons in Italy are based on.

⁸ He also founded a Christian-Islamic pilgrimage in Brittany. Cfr. Manoël Penicaud, *Le réveil des Sept Dormants*, Les éditions du Cerf, Paris, 2016.

Paolo Dall'Oglio who highlighted the eschatological meaning of the sura XVIII as well as the Italian scholar Massimo Campanini who pondered the philosophical viewpoint. In the current anthropological field the French anthropologist, Manoel Penicaud, following Massignon's investigations, analysed the Breton pilgrimage, while the Tunisian scholar, Thierry Zarcone, is carrying out his studies on the Silk Road caves in Central Asia.

The legend of the revived seven boys assumed different tones according to each Eastern Christian literature. The variants were also related to the concept of the death and of the destiny of the dead, and to the influences of the several religious groups such as Nestorians, Jacobites and Melkites. The Syriac culture of Asia Minor and further south served as a bridge between the Greek and Latin world and the Semitic one. About the Christian Arabic versions we have only very few existent manuscripts, among which the British manuscript dating to the century XVI which was analysed by Guidi. It presents the seven young men as "those of the cavern", emphasizing the persecution of the Christians and contemplating the destruction of many churches. Vice versa the Arab-Islamic literature has completely altered the prototype. The Arabic populations had been affected by the influences of the Greek-Hellenistic and Persian civilizations with whom they habitually traded. In the Arab peninsula the polytheistic Arabs believed in deities based in trees, objects and stones. While Judaism was professed by sedentarized Hebrews in the oases, the Christianity was spread out amongst the Bedouin clans through monks and hermits. The faith of the Christian Arabs had Semitic, Monophysite and Nestorian bases, with some peculiar concepts regarding the death as a sleep and the immortality of the soul⁹ Up to the time of Muhammad, the prophet of Islam, the errant storytellers (qussās) told some Christian and Jewish oral tales, the *isrā'īliyyāt*, to which the first generation of Muslims gave an Islamic version in order to integrate the interpretation of the Koran. The Islamic version of the Seven Sleepers anecdote ranges from literary interpretations to more esoteric meanings. One of the Prophet's companions, Ibn 'Abbas (d. 767 AD), mentioned the occasion of the divine Revelation of the sura XVIII in a hadīth. At that time Meccan citizens were incredulous of the new religion, thus they consulted the Jews about Mohammad, in order to discover the truth of his

⁹ Regarding the immortality of the soul, the Christian Arabs did not believe in its immortality. They thought it resurrects together with the body after the death and meantime waiting the resurrection it sleeps.

prophecy. They answered to question him on three matters, among which the Ephesian topic. According to Guidi, there are two kinds of Muslim Arab records: the Koranic altered transposition, and those derived from a Christian text¹⁰. The text attributed to the traditionist Ibn Ishāq who wrote the Prophet's biography, *Sīra nabawiyyah* [The life of the Prophet Muḥammad], was reported by Ta'labi and Damiri and it seems to derive directly from the Syriac Dionysius of Tell-Mahrē's chronicle (750 AD). This rendition differs from that of Monophysite bishop Jacob of Sarugh (probably 470 AD)¹¹. Whereas in Jacob of Sarugh's homily the number of Companions were eight, Ibn Ishaq gave the seven names of the sleepers as it follows: Maksalmina, Amlīha, Martukus, Navalī, Senius, Batnius, Kasfutāt¹². In the verses XVIII: 10-26 some distinctive aspects which are paradigmatic of the Islamic tale as alteration and transposition of the Christian tradition: the presence of a supernatural dog; the uncertain number of the companions of the cave; the uncertain number of the years of their slumber before their resurrection. The existence of the divine dog as custodian at the entrance of the cave is not attested in the Christian literature, except in the pilgrim Theodosius' account, *De situ terrae sanctae*. Only Theodosius cited the presence of the dog *Viricanus* (that means a man with canine aspects) describing his visit to the Ephesian seven tombs.

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¹⁰ Ignazio Guidi, *Testi orientali inediti sopra I Sette Dormienti di Efeso*, [Oriental unpublished texts on the Seven Sleepers of Ephesus], Tipografia della R. Accademia dei Lincei, Roma, 1885, p. 53

¹¹ Born in Sarug in the province of Edessa (today Urfa, Turkey), studied in the famous school of the city. In 519 he became bishop of the city of Bathnae. He wrote more than 700 omelies.

¹² Guidi, *Testi...*, p. 63.

¹³ Anna Tozzi Di Marco, *La figura ambivalente del cane nell'Islam e la sua valenza simbolica nel racconto coranico dei Sette Dormienti/Ashāb al-Kahf*, [The ambivalent figure of the dog in Islam and its symbolic valence in the Koranic tale of the Seven Sleepers/Ashāb al-Kahf], paper presented to Congress in memory of Enrico Comba "Animali. Miti, Saperi, Simbologie" [Animals. Myths, Knowledge, Symbolologies], (Nemi, 7-10 luglio 2021), Museo delle religioni Raffaele Pettazzoni.

as follows: the contemporary people of Prophet asserted the number of three boys (al-mutanazfun fi zaman an-nab't); the Christian Arabs sustained they were five (nasari nijran); the general opinion was they were seven people and eight with the dog¹⁴. This vagueness of their number in the Koranic chapter is symmetrical to that of the number of years of their permanence inside the cave. In the Islamic tale the time of the supernatural slumber was 300 years plus 9. Dionigi Tell Mahrē's account cites 372 years as well as in the Latin translation of the legend. Also the Ethiopian Seneksar (Synaxary), compiled around 1250 by Michael, bishop of Atrib and Malig, cites the same number of the years. It seems this reticence, as the whole sura, has the intention of affirming once again that God is the only certain reference on which to rely totally (XVIII: 26). Therefore the Companions of the cave represent the perfect model for the Tawhīd, that is the faith in the oneness and uniqueness of Allah, the basic principles of Islam. The last feature of the Koranic story to be remarked is the lack of the indication of the exact location of the cave. The verse 17 of the XVIII sura gives just an indication about the solar light connected to the cave at the dawn and at the sunset. This lacking aspect of exact location has caused each Islamic country to claim the authenticity of its grotto. The Koranic commentators and traditionists gave different accounts on this point we are going to discuss in the next paragraph.

However, the archaeological findings and the many pilgrims' accounts attest the Ephesian cave as the original one. Here I conducted five ethnographic missions while regarding the Jordanian cave I carried out only two short fieldworks.

The Seven *Slepeers/Ashāb al-kahf* tangible and intangible heritage in the surroundings of Selçuk and of al-Rajib (Amman).

Nowadays Ephesian place Ephesian cave is situated in the rural surroundings of the modern town of Selçuk just behind the archaeological site of Greek-Roman ancient city of Ephesus. A small road on the left at the crossroad to Ephesus archaeological site leads to the cave. A large road sign "Yedi Uyuyanlar" (Seven Sleepers in Turkish language) indicates the path to the cave at the foot of the mountain Bülbül Dag. It lacks any Islamic reference unlike an old and rusty one wherein it was also written *Eshab ul-Kahf*. The linguistic and communicative perspective of the road signal informs us that the patrimonialisation of the site pertains to the horizon of

¹⁴ Massimo Campanini, La surah della caverna. Meditazione filosofica sull'unicità di Dio, [The chapter of the cave. Philosophical meditation on the oneness of God], La Nuova Italia, Firenze, 1986, p. 18.

meaning of the Christian tale. According to the French philosopher Paul Ricoeur, every statement can compass “the sign in which man ‘says his doing’.”¹⁵ This road sign interfaces with all the others in Turkey which indicate the locations exclusively as *Eshab i-kahf* sites (Tarsus, Afşin, Lice). We can hypothesise the intentionality of the modern State to assign and mark boundaries: on the one hand the Christian side relegated to the Antiquity as belonging to the ancient Past; on the other hand the Islamic side which is part of a process of building and reaffirming the Turkish Sunni identity (as *Eshab i-Kahf* writing underlines instead of the Arabic *Ashab al kahf*) against the past process of societal secularization. Following the anthropologist Michael Di Giovine, “some significant differences that set pilgrimage sites apart from heritage sites” shape not only the values and purposes of their preservation but they “will inevitably shape visitors’ ways of making meaning, and meaningfully interacting, with them”¹⁶. However, he concludes, “visitation to heritage sites can be seen as secular pilgrimage sites” and this can be the case of modern visits to the Ephesian cave.

In the immediate proximity of the excavations an explicatory panel was set in recent years and it gives some information to the visitors about the place and the archaeological finds. The Jewish lamps and pagan tombstones, dated I-II c. AD, suggest that the site was used even earlier. At beginning of the last century the Austrian archaeological mission found a huge cemetery, a mausoleum, some catacombs, a church and a crypt with a marble sarcophagus at the entrance¹⁷. The archaeologist Miltner claimed this to be the sepulchre of Mary Magdalene which was confirmed by the literary texts. In general, according to Zinnermann’s description “two long burial halls overlap somewhat offset from each other; they were placed in an east-west direction on two levels into the rocky couloir. The lower part is referred to as the crypt complex and the upper one as the church complex”¹⁸. The walls and the roof of the church still have traces of frescos and inscriptions as invocations left by the pilgrims. The inscriptions together with the paintings, mosaics and stuccos, confirm the 3rd-century

¹⁵ Paul Ricoeur, *La semantica dell’azione*, [La sémantique de l’action. I: Le discours de l’action], Jaca book, Milano, 1986, pp. 37-38.

¹⁶ Michael A. Di Giovine, *Sites of pilgrimage, sites of heritage*, *International Journal Tourism Anthropology*, Vol. 5, Nos. 1/2, 2016 p. 3.

¹⁷ Franz Miltner, Hans Gerstinger, *Das Coemeterium der Sieben Schlafer*, *Forschungen in Ephesos*, IV, 2, Wien,

¹⁸ Norbert Zinnermann, *The Seven Sleepers of Ephesos: From the first community cemetery to a place of pilgrimage*, Sabine Ladstätter – Paul Magdalino (Eds.) *Ephesos from Late Antiquity until the Late Middle Ages*, *Proceedings of the International Conference at the Research Center for Anatolian Civilizations*, Koç University, Istanbul 30th November – 2nd December 2012.

establishment of both church and crypt complex, and the Christian character of the cemetery belonged to the Ephesian Christian early community. The whole area had been sacred since the *Kriphi Panaya (Paulos mağarasi)*, a paleochristian cultic cave, probably dedicated to St Paul or to the Mother of God was also attested¹⁹. In Ephesus the tradition of dormitio of Virgin Mary and St John served as paradigm for the future dormitions. Not by chance it was a crucial city of important councils, keeping on its tradition of important religious center since the early antiquity.

The ethnographic investigation has revealed that in 2007 the Ephesian cave, despite its secularization (and first attempts of safeguard), could still represent one of the shared holy places disseminated in Turkey and more in general, in the Mediterranean countries²⁰. Although the reislamization of recent decades, Turkey has a thousand-year history of different ethnic, cultural and religious coexistences which are well evidenced by both a hemical anthropology and the countless researches of foreign scholars. Hence, the comparison between the results of my first period of fieldwork (2007) and those of the following years (2012, 2014, 2022, 2023) is emblematic to analyse the direction of the development of the place and of the visitors' and the other actors' experience. In other words it unveils not only the evolution of the physical and material landscape but also of the modalities of attendance and the type of the visitors. Over the past centuries the Seven Sleepers cave was visited by a multitude of pilgrims on the way or coming back from the Holy Land²¹ of which we have many accounts. They left some graffiti on the walls of the cave which attest the tradition of the Seven Sleepers' pilgrimage. Ephesus had a long tradition as pilgrimage centre since the pagan time and over time it kept its role because of the huge presence of holy tombs and relics, monasteries, heremits' and cultic places. Today the cave lost its sacredness as the context is completely secularized. However when the French orientalist scholar Louis Massignon visited it in the mid XX century, his local guide was scared to enter, due to the presence of mysterious entity, guarding the cave, according to the local

¹⁹ Renate Pillinger, «La cosiddetta grotta (chiesa rupestre) di S. Paolo a Efeso» in Luigi Padovese, Paolo di Tarso. Archeologia-Storia-Ricezione, Effatà editrice, Torino, 2009, pp. 21-29.

²⁰ Dionigi Albera, Sara Kuehn, Manoël Penicaud, Religious Sharing, Mixing and Crossing in the Wider Mediterranean, in "Religiographies", v.1 n. 1, Fondazione Giorgio Cini, 2022.

²¹ The literary sources cite amongst the others the North African pilgrim Teodosius (6th century), the AngloSaxon bishop Willibald, Emperor Constantine VI (both in the 8th century) and the Russian Abbot Daniel (12th century).

belief. In 2007 it was freely accessible and less dedicated to the tourism than nowadays. In that time I stayed in the unique touristic structure in the area, a hostel (Atilla getaway), about 6 or 7 km far from Selçuk town where there were no hotels. I used to hitchhike to the cave due to the lack of frequent local transports. In the hostel, frequented by above all young backpackers, I was the only guest interested in the Seven Sleepers site. The tourists used to visit Ephesus ruins in one day tour, go back to Kushadasi, a touristic centre faraway 20 km. Only very few tourists “do-it-yourself” went to the Seven sleepers cave. Initially my ethnographic activity consisted mainly in observing what happened on the site and recording the visitors’ performances in a notebook, in anthropological terms “the field diary”. I rarely stopped to dialogue with them according to my consolidated practice of letting the “terrain” (anthropological field) itself guides me on the times and methods of research. During this first survey I observed very few tourists and some pilgrims of both faiths arriving in couple or alone by foot or horse-drawn carriages. Both the categories of visitors used to enter into the above church which - according to the sources - was built after the miracle in the V century. Firstly they looked at the crypt and the many carved graves in the rocks and the other archaeological details of the church such as frescos, then they took pictures. Both Christians and Muslims, even not believers, concluded their visit by hanging a strip of cotton, or a handkerchief, or knotted rags attached to some wild bushes grown inside the ruins of the cave or to the trees outside. Some of them wrote their supplication of blessing or help on these strips. It is believed that as these rags disintegrate, the pilgrim’s troubles will decrease. This practice is very common in Islamic countries (even if I observed it also in Paphos grotto, Cyprus), whether in every holy mausoleum or at the Virgin Mary’s house, as she is also venerated by Muslims. The ritual of knotted rags, threads, and shreds of clothing belongs to the vernacular religiosity of Turkic world but nowadays it is also a secularized practice. On the other hand I recognized the devout pilgrims of each faith from their own manner of praying²². A Muslim woman was praying just outside the entrance of the site facing to Mecca. It is believed to recite the first ten verses of the sura XVIII works as protection from Dajjal, the false messianic figure who will appear before the end of time and he will be destroyed by Christ.

In the immediate vicinity of the site there was only one coffee shop (since the ‘90s) where visitors stopped for a while to buy a fresh drink.

²² Muslims pray with their hands leaned forward with palms up and their body in the direction of Mecca.

In conclusion, at that time the cave complex looked ruined, abandoned and little attended and Selçuk was a small village without any touristic structures and attractions. The archaeological museum was still closed, St John basilica wasn't restored and the old Ayasoluk fortress was a very ruined and degraded site. Below it there was an aggregate of dilapidated shacks inhabited by poor Kurdish immigrant families.

Some years later, my second period of fieldwork (2012) witnessed the first development of the whole area. The archaeological site was gated, surrounded by an enlarged net and the explicatory panel was set at the beginning of the path. There was also another coffee shop and a souvenir stand. Among the souvenirs those related to the Seven Sleepers consisted in a shaped small book (4 cm x 4 cm) with their names engraved and some medals and pictures which depicted the seven young men in long tunics with the dog. According to the Italian anthropologist Canestrini, the souvenirs are small territorial totem, which are manufactured in order to represent the culture which has produced them. Tourists buy them as symbols and reminder of their travel experience²³. So that although the origin of the Ephesian cave is Christian, in the book shaped souvenir the presence of the dog as well as *Ashāb al-Kahf* on the left page and the Turkish names on the right page represent either a clear Islamic reference either the Turkish tradition. Following Comaroffs' analysis of ethnicity, the commodification of Islamic Turkish ethnicity catalyzes the tradition of the Seven Sleepers/ Yedi Uyuyanlar as part of cultural collective identity²⁴. Also in the village some improvements such as a valorisation plan of its Islamic heritage began through restoration of some monuments together to the demolition of the Kurdish shelters. According to the Italian anthropologist Adriana Destro, the first settlement of Selçuk has turned more and more into a tourist centre in dependence on what Ephesus represents in terms of economic income. Today the small town and its citizens have another self awareness, the restoration of the Islamic and Ottoman heritage as well as the Christian one made the location attractive for a cultural tourism²⁵. Plenty of hotels and tourist accommodations, restaurants and coffee shops, souvenir shops, a big bus station, light plays on monuments restored, modernization of the streets, shed a new light on the contemporary city. The municipal administration invested a lot to promote the urban cultural heritage as also

²³ Duccio Canestrini, Trofei di viaggio. Per un'antropologia dei souvenir, [Travel trophies. An anthropology of the souvenirs], Bollati Boringhieri, 2022.

²⁴ John L. Comaroff, Jean Comaroff, Ethnicity, Inc., University of Chicago Press, 2009.

²⁵ Adriana Destro, I volti della Turchia. Come cambia un paese antico, [The faces of Turkey. How an ancient nation change], Carocci, Roma, 2012.

its website highlights in marketing the Past. In the municipal website the Seven sleepers cave is suggested among the cultural and faith itineraries, even if its representation has not been updated, given that there are still old photos which denote the first visitors' perception as holy place. The city is also part of an international circuit of cultural cities financed by European institutions.

Over the years the transformation in terms of heritagization of the ancient core of Selçuk went hand in hand with the systematization of the archaeological sites of the Seven Sleepers and *Meryem Ana Evi*²⁶. The two Christian places are connected in various ways. When in 1953 the Virgin Mary's house was restored and nationalized as part of Turkish heritage, the State issued six stamps, of which one was dedicated to the Seven Sleepers. The multiconfessionality of pilgrims of both places emphasizes the double track on which national cultural politics moved: the tolerance of religious plurality and at the same time the neo-Ottoman ideology²⁷ opposed to the secular Kemalist Past. In 2012 the gate protected only the ruins of the complex but most of times it was left open. The first part of the entrance of the cave which consists in a vestibule where there is the marble sarcophagus (believed to be Mary Magdalene's tomb) preceded by open air corridor, was open to the free fruition of the visit. Some of the visitors passed the open gate and walked on the edge of the uncovered tombs to take pictures, others ventured into other structures of the archaeological site circumnavigating the net on the hill. Most of them were Turkish. Also during this survey I noticed they left a strip of cotton or a handkerchief knotted to the gate at the end of the visit. I asked to some of them the reason of their gesture and they answered "to leave a sign of our visit and presence here". Also my second period of fieldwork was characterized by a sort of serendipity with awareness to come back again in other periods of the year, i.e. during the Islamic *bayrams*, the most important religious celebrations²⁸. Thus, the third fieldwork (2014) was conducted during the *Eid al-Fitr* celebration. Unlike the big gatherings with picnic shared with relatives and friends and the rural market which I observed in the

²⁶ At beginning the shrine, Panaghia Kapuli, was attended by Orthodox Greek inhabitants of Kirkindje (Serince), a nearby village, who used to celebrate there the Feast of the Assumption. After its restoration the site was promoted as Notre-Dame d'Éphèse in 7 languages on ecclesiastical journal edited by the Izmir diocese. Hence it attracted numerous pilgrims both Christian and Muslim.

²⁷ Manoël Pénicaud, La Maison de la Vierge à Éphèse. De la fondation à la patrimonialisation d'un sanctuaire «international», "European Journal of Turkish studies", n. 19, 2014.

²⁸ *Eid al-Fitr* at the end of the Ramadan (Ramazan in Turkish) month and *Eid al-Adhā*, the celebration of the Abraham's Sacrifice, are the main Muslim feasts.

surroundings of Tarsus cave complex, at Ephesian spot there was not much difference from the other periods of the year. The place had been cleaned and all the strips of cotton which were all around, had been removed. The road and the path were in a better conditions. The parking was enlarged in its proximity. The site was attended by many more visitors arriving even in small groups by taxi or own cars. This time I didn't see any pilgrims praying and I never saw them anymore. The travellers were mainly foreigners from all over the world, also from other Islamic countries. After visiting briefly the cave from outside, since the gate was closed, people went up to the mountain to see the entire site from above. At the end they stopped in the coffee shops enlarged and transformed in restaurants to spend the Bayram. Starting from this fieldwork the ethnographic encounters began to increase. While in the first phase I limited myself to direct my gaze, above all, only to observation of the subjects involved, from time to time I increased the interaction with them. The general feeling was the turistification of the whole area.

The fourth period of fieldwork was undertaken recently in September 2022. Most of the visitors which arrived by big tour buses, were tourists not interested in the past sacrality of the cave. While their knowledge of the Seven Sleepers story gained the guide books or internet was superficial, the Muslim visitors knew it from the Koran. Although religious tourism has been promoted in recent years by emphasizing Turkey's belonging to the three Abrahamic religions, it still remains a niche market. In 2014, only 0.5% of tourists from abroad traveled for religious reasons and 4.5% visited Turkish sacred places for their historical and cultural value. In the list of 316 sacred structures which includes monuments, churches, mosques, synagogues, tombs, etc., drawn up by the Ministry of Culture and Tourism, the only Seven sleepers location mentioned is Tarsus cave²⁹ which is not related to any Christian remains. During this investigation I noticed an increasing number of the Turkish visitors which is an evidence of the better economic conditions of the population despite the economic crisis, and a greater awareness of national historical and cultural Past. The surrounding bigger net and some gates had been added and expanded, I suppose partly in order probably to better protect the archaeological excavations. The only possibility of visiting was and still is the open air corridor at the entrance. The place is a secularized and more touristic than religious destination, even if it looked still a wild and unkempt space. Amongst the private investments at micro economic level such as restaurants and

²⁹ Istvan Egresi, *Alternative tourism in Turkey. Role, potential development and sustainability*, Springer, 2016, pp. 154-

souvenir shops, it should be mentioned the opening of a large antique shop. This economic expansion denotes: the increasing of the flow of tourists and the intentionality to fulfil the tourists' travel performance such as the purchase not only of simple souvenirs but also antique objects (or their reproduction) considered locally "traditional"³⁰. During this trip to Turkey I generally observed the new attitude of Turkish bourgeoisie which consists in collecting and displaying old objects at home or in the courtyard open to the passers-by. They recall the rural and traditional milieu, and have the capacity to evoke collective memories³¹ and nostalgia for an idealized national Past. The space of their house dedicated to the display of the old objects resembles a small ethnographic museum which could deserve a research a part³².

The results of the qualitative and open interviews to the different actors, such as visitors, pilgrims, owners of restaurants and souvenirs stands, have revealed the types of the perceptions and the fruition of the place which concern the recent attempts of self construction of the locality³³. The experience of the place by foreign travellers differs from Turkish visitors' one. We can consider the visitation pattern and the perception of the place by the first group as mere and short practice of a consumer good. Within the second category of visitors very few pious Muslims usually coming from inland areas of the country with their family, can represent better the active agents of the locality. They ascribe a deeper and different meaning to the place. Their attitude manifests the lack of the separation in the sacred/secular binary even if I didn't observe the ritual performance, the bodily dimension and the ecstasy experience as for instance those at Tarsus cave. They combine tourism and religiousness and their hybrid visit

³⁰ The term traditional is a problematic category investigated by the anthropologists. Cfr. Eric J. Hobsbawm, Terence Ranger, *The Invention of Tradition*, University of Cambridge Press, 1983; Eugenia Shanklin, *Two Meanings and Uses of Tradition*, *Journal of Anthropological Research* 37, no. 1, 1981, pp. 71–89; Alessandro Testa, Cyril Isnart, *Reconfiguring Tradition(s) in Europe: An Introduction to the Special Issue*, *Ethnologia Europaea*, 2020, 50 (1); Alessandro Testa, *Ripensare la tradizione: Riflessioni critiche su una nozione controversa*, [Rethinking the tradition: critical considerations on a contested notion], *Annuaire Roumain d'Anthropologie/Romanian Yearbook of Anthropology*, 2016, 53, pp. 63–91; Regina Bendix, *In Search of Authenticity*, University of Wisconsin Press, 1997.

³¹ Maurice Halbwachs, *La memoria collettiva*, [The collective memory], Unicopli, Milano, 1987.

³² There is a vast anthropological literature on the objects as system of symbols and values, as means of communication and as representation of self and of community. Just to mention some texts: Arjun Appadurai, *The social life of the things*; Jean Baudrillard, *Le système des objets*; Thomas N., *Entagled objects*; George W. Stocking, *Objects and others*.

³³ About the anthropological notion of locality cfr. Arjun Appadurai., *The production of locality*, Routledge, 1995

of Seven sleepers cave is sometimes part of religious pilgrimage which includes the visit of Virgin Mary house. They tried to follow partially the tradition of the shrines' *ziyāra* [visit], a ritual practice in whole Islamic world consisting in prayers, circumambulation, request of intercession to God. At the end of their visit which I have felt more spiritual than a consumption behaviour, in a more and more restricted space, they search to enact the spatial practice of leaving a tangible sign of their presence in a corner where to knot their request of help or just a sign of their attendance. Given that a set of gestures (bodily postures), acts (prayers etc.) and objects (sacred tree, written requests of blessing, etc.), even at micro level, produce and transmit the sacredness of a space, a continuous interplay of agency between Muslim devotees and official institutional governance which make the site frozen in the Past, is enacted. This interaction makes the production of this locality very fluid during the course of the time. As many other field researches have stressed heritage sites can turn into pilgrimage sites and viceversa by the visiting groups' or local community agency. These shifts reveal the complexity of the locality and can transform a heritage site in a "living" heritage or in what the anthropologist Sharon Macdonald calls "past presencing" that is the modalities "by which the past may inhabit the present"³⁴. Nonetheless during last year the Ephesian cave still looked like the "Cinderella" of Selçuk/Ephesus heritage in the cultural policy of the municipality. Therefore, there were still some *status quaestionis* to be explored deeply during the next fieldwork, i.e. the relations between the cave complex and the town itself, between the Seven Sleepers site and the local population not involved economically on the place (place attachment, memories). In conclusion, about these previous four stages of the research we can assume that there has been not any big development in the process of valorisation of the place and its landscape comparing with the other Turkish *Ashāb al-Kahf* sites. Its ancient religious legendary appeal had and has still not become one of the brands of the town and of its new production of the locality by the institutions despite the large flow of tourists nowadays. However the memory of the Seven Sleepers keeps being in the minds of Turkish people, according to the many messages shared on the social networks on the occasion of the tragedy for the recent earthquake. They, addressing the dead, wrote as follows: "May you rest in peace as the seven sleepers". My last period of fieldwork has been undertaken very

³⁴ Sharon Macdonald, *Memorylands. Heritage and Identity in Europe Today*, Routledge, London, 2013, p. 16.

recently at the beginning of June 2023. I decided to change strategy and method of research, so that I prepared a written survey in English language for foreign visitors and in Turkish language for local citizens and Turkish visitors in order to answer to the *status quaestionis* left unsolved during my previous fieldworks. Regarding the site I have noticed some improvements in its organization and management. Ministry of culture built a wooden small shed and allocated an employer as guardian who spontaneously gives some informations about the place to the visitors. He stressed in an open interview that he also collects rubbish and he cancels the visitors' graffiti. During the visit of a group of Turkish tourists I saw him pointing to the faint remains of a fresco above a niche grave and asserting to be the shape of Virgin Mary. I asked him if and how he got this information and he answered "*ben gördüm*", that is he himself had recognized the figure of Mary on this wall. In four days period of fieldwork I collected seventy surveys whose results I have analysed at my back home. Firstly I have divided them in two groups: 1. foreign and Turkish visitors; 2. local citizens and local workers.

Most of the people who have completed my questionnaire were Turkish, among them: eleven local citizens who are involved in the place (the owner of the nearby restaurant, the waiter of this restaurant, the owner of the nearby souvenir stand, four archaeologists of Selçuk museum, the director and an employer of the excavation house, the guardian of the archaeological complex, a carpet seller) and a local intellectual living in Selçuk.

At first I have started to examine the first group of visitor's questionnaires. Most of few foreign visitors were not interested to answer to my questionnaire, except two tourists from Tagikistan, a Malesian, a Pakistani, an Algerian, an American and an Italian. Most of the visitors I interviewed had a cultural interest in the site and they were disappointed as they expected to enter the archaeological complex. Only three Muslims have declared to have a religious reason, however they didn't pray on site. The Muslim tourists knew the Seven Sleepers tale from the Koran but also from friends and relatives and they thought it is really occurred while the younger ones read information from the websites and from the guidebooks. However on the contrary, very few Muslims, some Christians, some Alevi, atheists, believers in shamanism and in deism think it is just a legend and they were very sceptical about the authenticity and the historicity of the

Seven Sleepers' presence in the cave. The majority of the interviewees have visited the Ephesian site for the first time and they never went to the other Turkish caves. Among those who have visited the *Aşhāb al-Kahf* caves in Tarsus, Lice and Afşin, the Tarsus site is the most common. The last questions regarded the orthopraxi, that is the religious rituals (but also the secularized practices) performed at the site, and the visitors' perception of the place and the feelings during the visit. The majority consider the site both archaeological and religious likewise. Some tourists have asserted to be astonished and excited and to perceive a sense of mysticism and peace, just two persons have expressed fear. One of the three visitors who have felt a sense of sacredness, has written "Allah blesses those who believe in their [of the Seven Sleepers] religion". At the end one third of the respondents to the questionnaire didn't answered.

Regarding the tourists' performances, I never saw anyone pray again. During this last period of fieldwork I have observed only few visitors to attach a strip of handkerchief to a fig tree outside the archaeological complex, even though the tree was completely full of them. At the end of the visit few tourists have bought souvenirs, some of which related to the *Yedi Uyuyanlar* The Seven Sleepers souvenirs are increased in models and shapes. Nowadays there are also some souvenirs which contain just the writing *Yedi Uyuyanlar* " surrounded by shells or accompanied by the *nazar*, that is the evil eye. The second group of the interviewees consists of local people working (or not) at the site. Among these interviewees the archaeologists employed in the Selçuk museum have declared there are no evidences that the Ephesian cave is connected to the Seven Sleepers whose tale is just a legend, while the director of the excavation house believes that it is a true story. Also all the other workers at the site I have interviewed believe the tale as true while the writer of short stories, who is also an archaeologist, is completely sceptical. Nobody of them has memories of the place to be told.

Jordanian Seven Sleepers cave

At the opposite the Jordanian Seven Sleepers cave represents a case of State oriented overall valorisation. It is also known as the *Kahf of Raqīm* or *Kahf al Rajib* since it is located close to the village al-Rajib in the area of the capital city, Amman. This research is at its first explorative stage even if I have already conducted two short fieldworks (2005, end 2009)

as part of a greater research on the national places of memory³⁵. Some preliminary remarks are, however, possible.

The cave, partly natural and partly man-made burial cave, is situated on a limestone hill close to a Byzantine cemetery. Although it is marked by a sign in Arab and English languages as “Cave of the Seven sleepers. Byzantine tombs one mentioned in the Koran”, it is related entirely to the *Ashāb al-Kahf*, that is to the Islamic side, in a cultural appropriation of the space since the Islamic conquest. In fact it is reported in the Gazette of the Islamic heritage sites in Jordan as *maqām of Ashāb al-Kahf* under the voice *Raqīm*, *ar-*³⁶ despite a Greek cross on its rock-cut facade. It has two Byzantine pillars with Corinthian capitals, a niche at each side and five medallions above the doorway. According to this architectural style it was built in the first half of the VI century. At the terracing level of the underlying cave there is an ancient squared mosque (with a *mihrab*) of unknown date which was formerly a church dating back to the VI century. These archaeological finds demonstrate that the site was clearly of Christian origin. Another ancient mosque was built and rebuilt (IX c.) in front of the cave. Of course, like the other Islamic nations where there are Seven sleepers locations, also the Jordanian State claims its cave to be the authentic one. According to the national view, the Jordanian location corresponds to the Koranic indication in the chapter XVIII: 17, “And you would have seen the sun, as it rose, inclining away from their cave to the right, and as it set, declining away from them to the left”. Moreover, in order to substantiate this thesis al Rajib is thought to be the right term instead of al Raqīm (the inscription) in the XVIII: 9 “have you thought that the *Ashāb al-Kahf* and *al-Raqīm* were, among Our signs, a wonder?”. Al-Raqīm was interpreted by some among the first traditionists as a mistake. However Ibn Abbas reported it referred to the valley near Aylah where this cave was located; while Ka’b said that it referred to the seven sleepers city. Al-Damīrī said it is a valley between Amman and Aelia beyond Palestine. As we know, a third tradition reported by al-Tustari and al-Nafasī interpreted al-Raqīm as the name of the dog. During the ancient times travelers reported their earliest visits to the site: Yāqūt and al-Muqaddasī for ‘Ubādah ibn as Shāmit in 632 AD, Mujāhid ibn Yazīd

³⁵ Lucilla Rami Ceci (a cura di), *Luoghi e oggetti della memoria*, [Places and objects of memory], Armando editore, Roma, 2011.

³⁶ Thomas M. Weber-Karyotakis, *Ammar Hammash, Islamic heritage sites in Jordan*, 2020, p. 359.

in 720 AD and the astrologer of Caliph al-Wāthiq Bi'llāh, Muhammad ibn Mūsā al-Munāyyim in about 842-847 AD.

Further Harawī citation goes as follows:

Al-Balqā' is a town that contains the Cave (al-Kahf) and al-Raqīm. Near it is a city called 'Ammān that contains ancient ruins. Tradition maintains that it is the city of Diqyānūs (Decius). It is said that it also the city of the Giants. God knows best.

In the XII century Ibn 'Atīyyah wrote:

In the Levant, there is a cave and inside the cave, there are dead bodies and remains of the bones of a dog. The people there claim that it is the cave of Seven Sleepers. There also is a mosque above the cave.

In the same century Usāma ibn Munqīdh:

My route took me by the cave of the Seven Sleepers. So I stopped there and went to pray in the mosque, but I did not go through the narrow passage that one finds there....

The cave was firstly discovered by a Jordanian journalist in 1953, later it was excavated by the Jordanian archaeologist Rafiq al-Dajani in 1963. Inside the cross-shaped arcosolium type cave a graffiti of a dog was discovered. The three vaulted chambers are described to contain eight graves (even if I have seen only six stone sarcophagi). Some of them are decorated with high reliefs with Byzantine motifs. One sarcophagus has carved the old Christian octagonal star on its smaller side, another one has two holes from which it is possible to see some bones inside it. People believe these bones include a dog skull as another sign of the authenticity of the cave. At the opposite side of the entrance a glass showcase displays some clay pots and other finds discovered in the cave. The archaeological complex is presently protected by an enclosure fenced and it is under the custody of the Jordanian Ministry of Wafq (Religious Affairs). Within the field of the anthropology of Islam as the Saudi cultural anthropologist Talal Asad suggested, we need to analyse Islam as a discursive tradition contextualizing it. Hence, in order to understand the processes of the State valorisation of this cave we need to contextualize it within the Jordanian recent history. Its heritagization is oriented practice and directly connected to the Hashemite dynasty of the Jordanian monarchs. Thus it is the result

of certain and precise choices as the historian Le Goff argued about the monuments,

what survives is not the complex of what existed in the past, but a choice implemented both by the forces operating in the temporal evolution of the world and of humanity, and by those who are delegated to the study of the past and past times, the historians³⁷ The Hashemite royal family claims to be the direct descendant of Fatima, the Prophet's daughter³⁸, so that the king has the authority on religious matters as well as on State politics. He promoted the restoration and heritagization of all sacred places in Jordanian territory which belong in particular to the Companions of Muhammad, to the pre-Islamic Prophets, to *ahl al-bayt* [lit. People of the house, that is the Prophet's family] and to the other Muslim martyrs. However, even if the renovation plans involved also the Christian sites such as the Christ's baptism place, and even if before the Islamic conquest the local Arab tribes such as the Ghassanids were Christianized, the realization of the Islamic sacred topology has been jointly undertaken together the nationalist discourse centred on the monarchy. The project of the sacralization of Jordanian territory as Islamic Holy Land is related directly to the person of Muhammad, the Prophet. For instance it is underlined as Jordan is on the way from Hejaz to Jerusalem (considered the third Islamic sacred city) and on the route of Hajj as well as the place of the encounter between the young Mohammad and monk Bahira. The aim of the Jordanian kingdom is to offer places of memory, in particular referred to Omayyads for their proximity to *Ahl al bayt*. A plan of "Memoryland" in Macdonald's words, which reminds to the glorious past in a historical continuity between the earlier golden Islamic ages and the contemporary Jordan. Within this frame of reconstruction and valorisation of the Past as a selection of part of it, there is the heritagization and the new sacralisation of the Seven sleepers site and its placing on the map of transregional and transnational pilgrimage routes. It is a total reconfiguration of the place to the aim of the construction and reproduction of the national identity as perceived and conveyed by the dominant social classes.

³⁷ Le Goff J., *Documento/monumento*, [Document/monument], Einaudi, 1978, p. 46.

³⁸ Since the Prophet's times the Banu Hashim belonged to the Koreish tribe, the biggest and powerful tribe in Mecca and in all Hijaz. Untill 1924 the Hashemite monarchy had the role of sharif (noble) of Medina and Mecca, the haram cities of Islam, and it was in charge to protect the sacred sites of these cities

During my first period of fieldwork (2005) the showcase in the cave was absent and I noticed very few visitors. Among them a Muslim old woman dressed completely in black was praying facing Mecca near to the eastern arcosolia of the cave. The whole archaeological site, including the cave, was unguarded and at its entrance a big olive tree did have neither fence nor cotton strips which usually mark the visitors' attendance. My second period of fieldwork (November 2009 together the anthropologist Rami Ceci, University of Rome La Sapienza) attested the complete transformation in terms of the landscape, "ethnoscape" and of its fruition. In the immediate vicinity a huge and modern style mosque which was under construction during the earlier survey, was completed and inaugurated by King Abdullah II in 2006. This kind of royal agency in building new mosques which began in the years '70 when his father, king Hussein, decided to give an Islamic character to the capital, culminated with earning Amman the title of the capital of Islamic culture, as announced by the Islamic Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (ISESCO) in 2017³⁹.

At the entrance of the cave, open to visitors till 5 pm daily (still without admission fee), two guardians indicated the right behaviour (*adab*) in requesting to me to wear a brown long tunic which covered all my body. The term "*adab*" is an emic construction from within Islamic culture influences notions of the right behaviour. The behaviour of Muslims - and not Muslim in Islamic world - has to follow a codex of prescribed norms which are dominated by the official discourse on Islam, despite the *adab* is a value such as an ideal to aspire to and a lived practice, often multiple and fluid, unlike the fixed religious law (*sharī'a*) Dissimilar to the Turkish saintly tombs or Sufi lodges wherein at times the *adab* (in Turkish *edep*) is particularly emphasized through a statement posted on the wall such as "*Edepla Gelen, Lütufla Gider*" [Come with *adab* leave with grace], in this Jordanian case the task is entrusted to the two caretakers. Further, unlike the shared pilgrimage where the *adab* - as the researcher Logan Sparks noticed about the Turkish shared Muslim-Christian rituals - "is determined through a process of encounter with the other and linked to a notion of hosting the other, generally and even in religious space", in this occasion of normative reconfiguration of the Seven Sleepers tradition I felt a discomfort⁴⁰. The "correct behaviour" for an ethnographer is always

³⁹ <https://www.theArabweekly.com/amman-celebrate-status-capital-islamic-culture>

⁴⁰ It was the first time I had this kind of feeling, even if I lived in Cairo Muslim cemetery for ten years. Cfr. Anna Tozzi Di Marco, *Egitto inedito. Taccuini di viaggio nella necropoli musulmana del Cairo*, Ananke, Torino, 2010.

problematic since it consists of a mediation between two contrasting forms of relationship with the field: involvement and detachment. The Jordanian Seven Sleepers cave is paradigmatic of the way in which Jordanians interact with not Muslims in what they consider “own” sacred place as memory-heritage-identity complex. Their narrative has totally erased the Christian origins. In particular, the way in which they articulate the practice of *adab* in a hybrid musealized and “museumized” place such as the Jordanian Seven Sleepers cave, in origin clearly a Christian shrine. In this case the *adab* can represent a hermeneutic lens through which to observe the Jordanian declination in some religious places which overlaps with the religious law. My fieldwork underlined the key concept, as Logan Sparks asserted, of “the *adab* in sacred space [that] is intimately connected to the recognition of authority and agency invested in the generally clear roles of host and guest”⁴¹ .

During my last period of fieldwork I noticed there were a lot of pilgrims in groups from all over the Islamic world and very few secular tourists. At the end of *ziyāra* the guardians tried to sell cd containing the historical data of the cave and the Seven sleepers tale. Pilgrims’ behaviour in visiting the cave was to listen the explanation of their guides or of the guardians and to shoot a video with their mobile which they successively upload to their youtube channel. Even if it is considered and perceived as sacred shrine none was praying and it was not forbidden to shoot photos and videos inside the cave as for instance it sometimes happens in the mosques. It looks like a new and secularized way of marking one own presence at the sacred place instead of knotting a cotton strip as in the old tradition. The netnographic research (on websites, youtube and facebook etc.) has shown that as in particular some Jordanian websites emphasize the cave as “a must visit that fosters an intimate relationships with its guests”. According to Appadurai the virtual communities are among the three elements which mostly affect the production of locality⁴² . Some of the many tourists/pilgrims’ videos on youtube channel I could analyse (because some others are in hindi and urdu languages), stress the sacredness of the place linked to the sura XVIII, while nobody mentions the Christian origin of the cave. Further they enlighten its Islamic aura of authenticity given the

⁴¹ Logan Sparks, *Ambiguous Spaces: a Contextualization of Shared Pilgrimage in Ephesus*, PhD dissertation, Tilburg University, Tilburg, 2011.

⁴² The other two are the diasporic flows of people and the State. Cfr. Appadurai A., *The production...*, 1995.

orientation of the cave concerning the sun light⁴³. Nowadays after visiting it, Muslim visitors go and pray in the new mosque which has a separate hall for women. Therefore, it looks like the restoration of the sacred places (and in some cases a new reconstruction after the demolition of ancient structures) is a means to control the local spaces of sociability and of popular faith in order to redefine a new use according to Islamic tourism. The French historian Norig Neveu in her study on the Jordan heritage stated the reconstruction of the sacred mausoleums represents a case of State misappropriation of cultic places of popular piety to touristic ends. Also the case of the patrimonialization and the musealization of the cave complex aims to control popular religiosity and the increase of tourism. According to Neveu's study, my next period of fieldwork (14 years later the last one) should deepen the relationships between the restoration of the cave and its neighbourhood, its re-sacralisation and the eventual eclipse of local cult, as well as consider the impact of the new religious tourism on the neighbourhood⁴⁴. In conclusion we can claim that the Jordanian Seven sleepers cave embodies both the representation of a symbolically reconfigured and revitalized space drawing on tradition in an oriented re-elaboration of the Past and a space of representation as symbolic capital of the nation and its ruler. Both are relevant to an understanding of the Jordanian cultural and heritage policy and the official image of the society.

Ending remarks

According to the Italian anthropologist Alessandro Testa

the ways in which traditions [the Seven Sleepers traditions]– or what is labelled as such – are used for a variety of purposes... constructing and expressing local or national identities [Turkish interreligiosity, Jordanian national identity], solidifying or contesting the political order [Jordanian monarchy], legitimizing narratives and discourses [Islamic rendering of the tale], acquiring or maintaining symbolic positions in the arena of social and political interactions, accessing or protecting or exploiting economic resources [secular tourism - religious tourism income]⁴⁵.

⁴³ Kor. XVIII: 17 “and you might have seen the sun, when it rose, declining to the right from the cave, and when it set, turning away from them to the left, while they lay in the midst of the cave. That is one of the signs of Allah”.

⁴⁴ Noring Neveu, *La sacralisation du territoire jordanien. Reconstruction des lieux saints nationaux, 1980-2006*, “Archives des sciences sociales des religions”, 2010, n.151.

⁴⁵ Testa, *Ripensare...*

In the Turkish case the faint process of preservation of the cave complex reveals the dichotomized use of the Past transformed in heritage by the institutions to the ends of secularized tourism. This process, intentionally or not, is detached from the context of social and religious life of some visitor groups. Being an archaeological site, neither reconfigured as religious place, nor islamized over the times, there is less control by the religious authorities. Hence its fruition and perception reveal free expressions of feeling and belonging to the locality, as for instance the pieces of handkerchief with the written request of bless attached to the three. During the visit the common feelings consist of astonishment, calm and disappointment for the impossibility to enter the site. It seems also that inhabitants of Selçuk do not have particular place attachment to the Yedi Uyuyanlar cave even though they recognize it as a part of Selçuk heritage to be better protected. Their major interests are the economic activities connected to the tourism as restaurants, souvenir shops, transportations, tour guides. Many of them, despite - especially Muslims - believe that the Seven Sleepers tale is an authentic story, have strong doubts about its relation with the Ephesian cave. Some sceptical Muslim visitors (especially foreigners) asked me where is the mosque as evidence of this connection.

Unlike the Jordanian governance of the cave deals with the Islamic reformulation and re-enactments of the Seven Sleepers shrine centred on poetics of authenticity. Its heritagization aimed to Muslim international tourism and to the placing Jordan within the wider Islamic holy land circuit linked to the Hashemite monarchy with Muhammad's sacred family, *ahl al bayt*. Visits to Jordan cave encompass a series of codified norms and it seems there is not space for the vernacular religiosity since they are also connected to the new mosque built nearby. Amongst the Middle Eastern and North African *Ashāb al kahf* caves the Jordanian one is the unique visited internationally for religious purposes.

In conclusion we can say that the Ephesian cave represents a historical place of cultural interest for visitors and especially of economic interest for citizens to be restored and better safeguarded, while the Jordanian one is perceived mostly as a religious site for both local people and visitors despite its musealisation.