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AIMS

EURAS Journal of Social Sciences (EJOSS) is a peer-reviewed international scientific open access periodical published in accordance with independent, unbiased, and double-blind peer-review principles. It publishes two issues per year. The publication language of the journal is English. The journal is an official publication of the Eurasian Universities Union (EURAS). EJOSS aims to contribute to the literature by publishing manuscripts of highest scientific level in such fields as social sciences, Sociology, Social Anthropology, Economics (Political Economy and Public Economics), Political Science, International Relations, Contemporary History.

SCOPE

EJOSS welcomes experimental outputs as well as interpretative proposals in all the fields of (broadly intended) social sciences. The journal conforms to the Principles of Transparency and Best Practice in Scholarly Publishing (doaj.org/bestpractice).

From The Editor

The “Eurasian Heartland” is quickly getting back the strategic, cultural and economic importance it held for millennia. EURAS was born as a far-sighted project aimed at establishing a permanent, friendly and fruitful cooperation among universities and institutions of the European and Asian sides of the Eurasian continent. And now, in the difficult and delicate phase entire World is experiencing, EURAS Executive Board has decided to issue three scientific journals. EURAS Journal of Social Sciences (EJOSS) is one of them.

EJOSS’mission is observing and reporting the developments occurring in the emerging societies and economies of the World, especially (but not exclusively) Eurasia. Our purpose is to provide serious, updated and interesting information out of stereotypes. EJOSS will be an open space where scientifically grounded and as much as possible politically, nationally and culturally unbiased contributes are welcomed.

We enjoy the support of highly-qualified scholars from Italy to Philippines, who are either included in the scientific and editorial boards and in the honor committee or are ready to help us as referees. We are thankful to all of them. We are also thankful to the technical staff and to all the people who is cooperating to this task. Let me mention at least Dr. İrem Arman.

EJOSS includes a section on EURAS life. You will see that despite pandemic, EURAS has not stopped its activities.

We hope to give account of an increasing number of events and common achievements.

The first article of this first number is a special present by Prof. Dr. Mustafa Aydın, President of the Board of Trustees of the Istanbul Aydın University. He is the man who conceived EURAS. Thank you Mr. President!

Prof. Dr. Fabio L. Grassi

Preface

*This issue and the following issue of EJOSS host a comprehensive editorial project. It stemmed from a panel presented at the IUAES¹ Congress on "Identity, Separation, and Belonging", which took place in Istanbul in 2023. This project consists of two monographic issues of EJOSS dedicated to the Seven Sleepers legend and cult in both Christian and Islamic world. The tale of the Seven Sleepers, *Aṣḥāb al-Kahf* (Companions of the cave) in Islam, represents a trait d'union among the three Abrahamic faiths. It deals with the Christian legend dating back to the V century in Asia Minor, which has some antecedents in the Jewish tradition such as the Abimelech's and Maccabees' stories. Then it flowed in the Holy Koran with original innovations, precisely in the first part, verses 9-26, of the sura al-Kahf (The cave). The legend scattered in both Eastern and Latin Christendom, permeated the collective imaginary of the Mediterranean populations and of inland regions, spreading eastwards to China following the Nestorian Christian missionaries on the Silk Road. The fundamental message is the truth of the Resurrection and the belief in the life after death.*

The legend tells that seven Ephesian youths, escaping from the persecutions during the Roman emperor Decius' reign in the 3rd century, took shelter in a grotto in the mountain surrounding Ephesus. Here they miraculously fell asleep for about two centuries and woke up during Theodosius II's reign. After the miracle they died in front of the Ephesian citizens and authorities, hence a liturgical commemoration was established in their memory and a basilica was built over the cave. Over times the cave was visited by a multitude of pilgrims returning back from the Holy Land, as an Austrian archaeological mission revealed at the beginning of the last century. The related cult has partially faded away in the Catholic Christianity but is still widespread in Orthodox one and is very much alive throughout the Islamic world. The evidences of this devotion where it is no longer in force are still visible nowadays in material culture, i.e. in objects (talismans, icons, frescoes, reliefs, miniatures etc.) as well as in ancient texts (manuscripts, liturgical codes, hymns, synaxaries etc.).

In the past some renowned scholars such as Louis Massignon and Ignazio Guidi and more recently scholars such as François Jourdan, Ernst Honigmann, John Koch and Paul Peeters studied the origins and the diffusion of the Seven Sleepers tale. They examined it from different points of view, from the historical to philological and eschatological perspectives and so on. This editorial project aims to give new data and informations and a fresh ethnological perspective of analysis on the today cult sites. In this first monographic issue, which consists of four articles, the topic is addressed from textual to iconographic, artistic and anthropological scrutiny, through the methodologies of various disciplines.

¹ International Union of Anthropological and Ethnological Sciences.

Therefore, the first article, written by the EuTradOr² interdepartmental research unit of University of Florence, deals mainly with ancient textual Christian and Islamic traditions. The director of the unit, the academic Paolo La Spisa, and his team of researchers deal with the production and related investigation of ancient manuscripts, each one from a very specific area, from Portugal to Ethiopia, and in some cases they provided a critical edition of unedited material. The EuTradOr research unit studies the Seven Sleepers legend in all its aspects - religious, cultural, and anthropological - and traces the basis for its reconstruction, circulation and reception in both the Christian and Islamic literatures. Their research work constitutes a great and good theoretical frame for the anthropological surveys in the popular religiosity of both the believers.

The second article deals with the Islamic version of the myth, in particular with the innovative element of the divine dog Qıtmır, which God placed at the entrance of the cave to watch the asleep youths. Firstly the author, the cultural anthropologist Anna Tozzi Di Marco, analysed its role and symbolism in various religious texts and in the scientific literature as well as in the folk tale collection One thousand and one night, in pilgrims' travelogues and Eastern hagiographical texts. She also recorded and compared the presence of the supernatural dog in pre-Islamic civilizations like the Egyptian god Anubi and the Greek-Roman psychopomp monster Cerberus. During her fieldwork at the Tarsus cave she observed the pilgrimage to the Aşhāb al-Kahf, then she analysed the agency of Qıtmır, which is manifest in the healing and lithotherapeutic rituals related to the dog in a small cavity of the holy cave.

The third article deals with the tangible heritage referred to the Seven Sleepers in Old Rus' during the Grand Principality of Vladimir between the 12th and 14th century. This specific subject has been very little investigated by European scholars and in general by the Western studies. The Russian academic Alexander Lapshin made a survey of the related objects discovered in three cities, Suzdal', Yuriev-Polski, Vladimir, which are located about 200 km far from Moscow in the north-east. They are the hystera-amulet, a relief of the western facade of the Saint George Cathedral and a stone carved icon. The author describes and reconstructs the history of these materials and he pinpoints they are part of the tangible, intellectual and visual culture of North-Eastern Rus' during the Middle Ages.

The fourth and last article deals with the artistic re-awakenings of the Seven Sleepers' myth between the 19th and 21st century. Its author, the visual anthropologist Manoël Pénicaud, aims to continue the work of the main actor of the renewed interest in the Seven Sleepers in Europe during the last century, Louis Massignon, and to demonstrate the current vitality of the myth in the world artistic panorama. Following this scholar in collecting and examining a lot of primary artistic productions of the legend such as the

2 Cultures, Texts and Traditions of the Christian East in Dialogue with Europe and Islam.

Persian miniatures, the Ottoman calligraphy etc. Pénicaud provides a more amplified and updated overview. He recorded the creations which have been produced by painters, writers, poets, playwrights, film makers who interpreted the tale such as Jules Lemaître, Tawfiq al-Hakim, Laurence Sibille. He also extended his research to the artistic works which are indirectly influenced by the Seven Sleepers such as Andrea Camilleri's The terracotta dog and Loïk Le Floch-Prigent's The silence of the Dolmens.

This issue is supplemented by a valuable article and an accurate review of an interesting book. Both concern the old Soviet political space and perfectly harmonize with the Eurasian vocation of our journal.

The editor-in-chief Prof. Fabio L. Grassi, PhD

The coordinator of the two monographic issues freelance anthropologist - Anna Tozzi Di Marco

EURASIAN UNIVERSITIES UNION - POWERFUL COLLABORATION THROUGH A UNIQUELY

WIDE NETWORK

EURAS launched in 2008, is a non-profit international association, covering universities and other higher education institutions within the Eurasian region to promote cooperation among 120+ universities from all across the West and Central Europe, Balkans, Caucasus, Middle East as well as the whole of Asia and working for the global advancement of educational standards in the Eurasian region.

Being the cradle of all known civilizations and having 2/3 of all the world population, the Eurasian region thus represents a center of excellence in terms of educational developments and cultural flows. By building an international educational platform for regional universities, EURAS serves its members as a gateway to reach the best educational services worldwide. As per the aim of internationalization via a dynamic and communicative network, EURAS has been strongly working on a wide range of fields in order to reach the highest achievements globally.

EURAS, as one of the fastest-growing higher education associations connects universities and all the higher education institutions belonging to different geopolitical and cultural backgrounds and seeks ways to enhance their dialogue and exchange of best practices.

Eurasian Universities Union's mission summarized as follows:

- Building a platform for regional universities to reach international educational services.
- Encouraging student and academic staff mobility.
- Establishing cooperation and networking among members.
- Improving academic standards of education.
- Promoting policy development internationally.
- Representing the interests and concerns of member universities by supporting their prestige and visibility worldwide.
- Strengthening the leadership of Eurasian universities by sharing knowledge and exchanging best practices.
- Supporting innovation.

EURAS creates a wide and productive ground for mutual sharing in various academic, social and cultural areas. Each step taken for a certain end will also bring its own gateway to many other aspects and contribute to the enrichment of the activities of the members and the union. EURAS mainly target is at the following projects and services;

- Awards and scholarships.
- Certificate programs for EURAS Members.
- Database portal and Members guide.
- EURIE-Eurasia Higher Education Summit-Annual Conference of EURAS.
- Interactive platforms such as blog page and other common areas for intercommunication.
- Joint research and development activities.
- Joint projects under EU, UN and national agencies programs.
- Online events, webinars, workshops.
- Periodical and academic publications.
- Ranking systems.
- Short term programs, Summer schools, and internships.
- Student and academic exchange programs.
- Thematic conferences, seminars, and meetings.
- Volunteer programs.

EURAS has 3 academic journals;

- EURAS Journal of Social Sciences – EJOSS.
- Eurasian Journal of Health – EJOH.
- EURAS Journal of Engineering and Applied Sciences – EJEAS

Eurasian Universities Union's vision is to promote sustainable peace and advanced technology worldwide through cultural developments and new educational systems. EURAS' vision for the future is to contribute to the society consisted of self-aware and highly qualified individuals benefiting from global education and mobility services. EURAS aims to open the borders of education to the public and to favor the exchange of knowledge and best practices among higher education institutions from the entire Eurasian region.

In order to accomplish these goals, we believe that connecting the universities from diverse identities can carry out the distinction in guaranteeing real equality and accessibility to excellence in educational standards.

The Seven Sleepers Legend as a case of universal hagiography The EuTradOr interdisciplinary research project ¹

Paolo La Spisa, Antonella Brita, Lorenzo Ferroni, Roberta Franchi, Isabella Gagliardi,
Michela Graziani, Enrico Magnelli, Barbara Roggema, Salomé Vuelta Garcia

Introduction PLS

This paper has the aim to present a project currently underway at the Interdepartmental Research Unit of the University of Florence, entitled *Cultures, texts and traditions of the Christian East in dialogue with Europe and Islam* (EuTradOr). The aim of this project is the critical edition of the texts related to the Legend of the Seven Sleepers of Ephesus, the reconstruction of the history of their textual traditions, and the study of this Legend in all its aspects: religious, cultural, and anthropological. As a matter of fact, the authors think that the study of the textual traditions will give an important contribution to a better understanding of the history of the religious ideas that such texts have transmitted over the centuries. Of course, such an ambitious project needs a team of specialists in various fields. For this reason a Research Unit has been established with the aim of analysing this important legend in as many respects as possible². As is well known, the Legend of the Seven Sleepers has spread not only within the Christian world of both East and West, but it has also assumed considerable importance in the Muslim tradition, due to the fact that it was included in the Quran (*Suratu-l-Kahf* 18, vv. 8-26), which inspired a huge amount of secondary Islamic literature, in the form of commentaries, *Stories of Prophets*, and so on. As far as the Christian tradition is concerned, a homily by Jacob of Serugh, theologian, hymnographer, and Father of the Syriac church who lived in upper Mesopotamia between the fifth and sixth centuries on the one hand, and the hagiographic works by the Merovingian Bishop Gregory of Tours, who in the same period introduces the Legend to Europe on the other, testify that this Legend spread quickly within a very large geographical area early on. The reason of the success of the Legend

¹ Authorial responsibilities are indicated at the beginning of each paragraph with the initials of the names of the authors as follows: AB: Antonella Brita, LF: Lorenzo Ferroni, RB: Roberta Franchi, IG: Isabella Gagliardi, MG: Michela Graziani, PLS: Paolo La Spisa, EM: Enrico Magnelli, BR: Barbara Roggema, SVG: Salomé Vuelta Garcia.

² Recent anthropological studies have drawn the attention of scholars to this Legend, see for instance Manoël Pénicaud, *Le réveil des Sept Dormants. Un pèlerinage islamo-chrétien en Bretagne*, Paris, Cerf, 2014; Anna Tozzi Di Marco, *Agiografia e culto dei Sette Dormienti. Agiografia e processi di mitologizzazione dell'agiostoria efesina nel Mediterraneo*, Bologna, Edizioni del Gruppo di Ricerca Araba Cristiana, 2023.

might be the presence of several narrative archetypes of edifying and hagiographical literature, which affirm two cornerstones of the Christian and the Muslim creed: the faith in the bodily Resurrection and life after death.

Let us quickly recall the most salient features of the story according to the Christian versions. During the reign of Emperor Decius, around 250 AD, a persecution was launched against the Christians of the city of Ephesus, who were to be executed if they did not offer sacrifices to the pagan gods. Seven young Christians refuse to obey the edict. On account of their high lineage, the Emperor leaves them time to make a final decision. During this time, the young men hide in a cave on the outskirts of the city, but, tracked down by the soldiers, they are walled up alive by order of the emperor. At this point a miracle takes place: God puts them to sleep in a miraculous sleep that preserves them. They wake up two centuries later, under the reign of Theodosius II (402-450)³, without corruption or aging. One of them, Iamblichus (the names change between various recensions and versions), is sent to the city to buy food. Entering Ephesus he realises that Christianity has now spread throughout the city. Questioned by the bishop and the prefect about his origin, he decides to lead them to the cave together with the Emperor himself. The other companions are also questioned by the Emperor and confirm that they fell asleep at the time of Decius. After having revealed the miracle, they die immediately in front of the bystanders. Thus a liturgical date was established to celebrate their peculiar, bloodless ‘martyrdom’ and a basilica dedicated to their memory was erected on the cave.

The Origin of the Legend PLS

On the origin of the legend, up until at least the 1950s, the opinions of scholars were not unanimous⁴. That is, until Ernst Honigmann published

³ Some learned authors, like George Kedrenos (366.6, p. 581 Tartaglia), accordingly speak of 170 years or the like. Other Christian sources extend the sleep to as much as 372 years (309 according to the Quranic account). As scholars have long acknowledged, such a historical absurdity (which would imply that they woke up in 622, under the reign of the Byzantine emperor Heraclius; for the Muslims, the very year of Muhammad’s Hijrah) is not a mere mistake, but aims to connect the legend to another notorious persecutor: 440 (the thirty-eighth year of Theodosius’ reign) – 372 = 68, the year of Nero’s death. See John Koch, *Die Siebenschläferlegende, ihr Ursprung und ihre Verbreitung. Eine mythologisch-literaturgeschichtliche Studie*, Leipzig, Carl Reissner, 1883, pp. 70-71 (EM).

⁴ See Paul Peeters, *Le texte original de la passion des Sept Dormants*, in “*Analecta Bollandiana*”, vol. XLI, 1923, pp. 369-385, in which he definitively rejects Allgeier’s hypothesis according to which the legend saw the light within Syriac traditions; see for example Arthur Allgeier, *Untersuchungen zur syrischen Überlieferung der Siebenschläferlegende*, in “*Oriens Christianus*”, n. s., vol. IV, 1915, pp. 279-297; vol. V, 1915, pp. 10-59 and 263-270.

a study in which he reconstructed the times and places where the legend would have begun, based on the results of the archaeological excavations in Ephesus conducted in the 1930s by the Austrian mission directed by Miltner. Contrary to what was affirmed during the nineteenth century, and above all after the studies of Paul Peeters, Honigmann goes so far as to affirm that “the results of the archaeological investigations in the famous cave prove conclusively that the Ephesian legend must be based on some real historical events”⁵. Here Honigmann alludes to a Christian heresy that spread in fifth-century Asia. According to Pseudo-Zacharias Rhetor, an anonymous sixth-century author who wrote a part of the History of the Syriac church, around 446 AD a Christian heresy which denied the resurrection of the body spread rapidly thanks to the work of a bishop of Aegea⁶. One of the reasons for the success of the Legend is the presence of the miraculous *dormitio*, a theme found across literature and folklore⁷. Suffice it to say that even in Greek pre-Christian culture we find a story in which a prolonged and miraculous sleep in a cave – that of Epimenides of Crete⁸ – is described. Also noteworthy is the Old Testament apocryphal text known as *The Paralipomena of Jeremiah*, in which we find the same miracle⁹.

The Greek versions and traditions LF EM

The narration of the legend took many forms in the Greek-speaking world. Halkin's *BHG* records eleven versions, some of them severely mutilated¹⁰; the Benedictine Michael Huber, a scholar who taught at the Gymnasium of the small city of Metten in Bavaria¹¹, in his detailed monograph on the Seven

5 Ernst Honigmann, *Stephen of Ephesus (April 15, 448 - Oct. 29, 451) and the Legend of the Seven Sleepers*, in *Patristic Studies*, Città del Vaticano, Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, 1953 (Studi e Testi, 173), pp. 125-168, here p. 128.

6 Cf. PG 115, col. 437A; Honigmann, *Stephen of Ephesus...*, p. 142 n. 3.

7 François Jourdan, *La tradition des Sept Dormants. Une rencontre entre chrétiens et musulmans*, Paris, Maisonneuve-Larose, 2001, pp. 114-119; Alain Le Roux, *Les Septs Dormants d'Ephèse. Leur culte en Asie Mineure, en Afrique du Nord et au Vieux-Marché en Bretagne*, Gourin, Keltia Graphic éditions, 1999. An anthropological study on the cult of the seven sleepers in Brittany is in Pénicaud, *Le réveil des Sept Dormants*. 8 Fifty-seven years, according to Diog. Laert. 1.109 = Epimen. 3 A 1 Diels-Kranz (T 1 Fowler, Bernabé). Other sources provide different numbers, from six years to ninety: see Alberto Bernabé, *Poetae epici Graeci. Testimonia et fragmenta*, II 3, Berlin-New York, de Gruyter, 2007, p. 113 (EM).

9 Pierluigi Piovanelli, *Paralipomeni di Geremia (Quarto libro di Baruc)*. *Storia della cattività babilonese (Apocrifo copto di Geremia)*, in Paolo Sacchi (ed.), *Apocrifi dell'Antico Testamento*, III, Brescia, Paideia, 1999, pp. 237-381; Jens Herzer, *4 Baruch (Paraleipomena Jeremiou)*, Leiden-Boston, Brill, 2005; detailed commentary in Dale C. Allison, Jr., *4 Baruch: Paraleipomena Jeremiou*, Berlin-Boston, de Gruyter, 2019.

10 François Halkin, *Bibliotheca Hagiographica Graeca*, II, Bruxelles, Société des Bollandistes, 1957³, pp. 223-225 (nr. 1593-1599d).

11 He also produced the first critical edition of the Latin translation of John of Amalfi's Byzantine hagiographies: see John Duffy, *Byzantine Religious Tales in Latin Translation: The Work of John of Amalfi*, in Amelia Brown

Sleepers listed both the hagiographical texts and the mentions of the legend in Greek authors from Late Antiquity down to the end of the Byzantine age¹². The same Huber had published in 1905 the first critical edition of the three most important Greek versions of the story¹³. His pioneering work remains a firm basis for all further research. It goes without saying that Huber, in the narrow space of his 1905 booklet, could not provide his readers with all the information they might need. As he explicitly stated, he had to content himself with editing each text in the fullest version that a given manuscript preserved (the so-called *Grundtext*), omitting many variant readings of minor significance and printing (a) the additions of other manuscripts in round brackets, (b) portions of the *Grundtext* omitted in one or more manuscripts in square brackets, and (c) what appears only in the *Grundtext* and is probably a peculiar addition of the manuscript in bold¹⁴. No one could ask him more than that, in a brief and dense *Beitrag*. Of course, new critical editors are expected, on one hand, to unearth more manuscripts unknown to Huber¹⁵, and, on the other hand, to provide fuller information and a clearer picture of the different features of each version – by means of either a synoptic edition or a multi-level critical apparatus. It is not possible to deal here with all Seven Sleepers Greek sources¹⁶. We will therefore limit ourselves to the presentation of Huber's so-called *Pseudo-Metaphrastes-Gruppe*¹⁷, three different prose versions/redactions

/ Bronwen Neill (eds.), *Byzantine Culture in Translation*, Leiden-Boston, Brill, 2017, pp. 115-125, at p. 116.

12 Michael Huber, *Die Wanderlegende von den Siebenschläfern. Eine literarische Untersuchung*, Leipzig, Harrassowitz, 1910, pp. 37-59.

13 Michael Huber, *Beitrag zur Siebenschläferlegende des Mittelalters. Eine literaturgeschichtliche Untersuchung*, II: *Griechische Texte*, Beilage zum Jahresbericht des humanistischen Gymnasiums im Benediktinerstifte Metten für das Studentjahr 1904/5, Landshut, J. Thomann, 1905.

14 Huber, *Beitrag*..., p. v.

15 Huber himself (*Wanderlegende*..., pp. 45-46) provides the reader with a list of mss. he was not able to see (and that are still to be considered by modern scholars interested in the *Seven Sleepers*): seven Mount Athos mss., one preserved in Rome (Ang. Gr. 108, 12th century) and one in Vienna, according to Huber, Vind. Gr. 36 (*sic*), no date. As the Österreichische Nationalbibliothek does not possess any manuscript collection with such a label (whereas it has, as everybody knows, *Phil. Gr.*, *Theol. Gr.* etc. mss.), we think this is to be considered as a mistake by Huber. The ms. he is likely to be referring to is Vind. Hist. Gr. 126, which presents a version of the legend at ff. 23^v-38^r. It is also well worth mentioning that the online database Pinakes of the French IRHT (Institut de Recherche et d'Histoire des Textes, <https://pinakes.irht.cnrs.fr/notices/oeuvre/17658/>, last visited on January 24, 2024) lists 17 Greek mss. presenting a version of the legend: among them, five are preserved on Mount Athos, three in Moscow, one in Oxford (Bodleian Library). Before any editorial work on Greek versions of the Seven Sleepers is attempted, it is mandatory to shed light on the discrepancies existing between information provided by Huber's work and modern databases.

16 Huber (*Wanderlegende*..., pp. 37-43) offers a list of eleven Greek sources, among which at least John of Ephesus, George Kedrenos, Constantine Manasses (*Breviarium historiarum*), Nikephoros Kallistos Xanthopoulos, two *Synaxaria* (edited by H. Delehaye), Photios (*Bibliotheca*), the Pseudo-Dorotheos of Monemvasia are worth mentioning here.

17 See Huber, *Wanderlegende*..., pp. 43-45; Huber, *Beitrag*..., p. vi-viii. The name of the group is Huber's: as we shall see *infra*, however, Huber himself tends to consider the last of the three versions/redactions of the

of the legend edited in his aforementioned *Beitrag* (BHG 1593-1594, 1596-1597, 1599) that give a fairly clear idea, we believe, of the problems posed by the study of this kind of textual material.

BHG 1593 (Huber, *Beitrag*...pp. 1-24) BHG 1594 (PG 115, 428-448)

Attested by three mss.:

N = Par. Gr. 1454 (10th century), *Grundtext*.

S = Par. Gr. 1485 (10th century).

V = Vat. Gr. 1673 (11th century).

S is the basis of the text printed in PG 115 by Migne, who attributes it to Symeon Metaphrastes (10th century), the prolific Byzantine author who collected saints' lives and reworked them according to the more affected style and rhetorical taste of his age; Migne accompanies it with the Latin version of the *Seven Sleepers* by Surius¹⁸. V offers a sort of epitome of the version attested by N S. It is also to be noted that N S attest to two mostly but not entirely similar versions of the legend¹⁹. For instance, noteworthy discrepancies are:

- The names of the Seven appear in N V *always* in the same order: Maximilianòs, Iàmblichos²⁰, Martinos, Dionysios, Ioannes, Exakoustodianòs, Antoninos. This is not the case in S.
- In N V the name of the bishop of Ephesus is Mares, while in S it is Stephanos.
- The name of the mountain is Mochlos according to N S, Nochlos in V; the name of the "lord of the mountain"²¹ is Adolios in N S, Anatolios in V.
- The duration of the Seven's sleep is not the same: 372 years in S V, 254 in N.

legend in the group to be somehow related to Metaphrastes.

18 Lorenz Sauer, latinized Laurentius Surius (Lübeck, 1523 – Cologne, May 23, 1578), learned German Carthusian hagiographer and church historian, author, among other things, of a collection in six volumes (Cologne, 1570-1575) *De probatis Sanctorum historiis ab Al. Lipomano olim conscriptis nunc primum a Laur. Surio emendatis et auctis*.

19 See Huber, *Beitrag*..., p. vi: "N unterscheidet sich von S dadurch, dass N die Erweiterung des S oder umgekehrt darstellt". Huber prints in bold the *Erweiterungen* he finds in N.

20 He is the one of the Seven who goes to the city after waking up.

21 This is how we translate the Greek expression *tou kyriou tou orous* (Huber, *Beitrag*..., p. 13, l. 8). Huber's rendition choice is *Besitzer* (see Huber, *Wanderlegende*..., p. 50). The mountain referred to here is of course the one where the Cave of the Seven is located.

- In chapter XVII, when the names engraved on the plate (*Tafel*) found in the cave are read out, **N** mentions only six names (Ioannes is missing); **S** mentions Maximilianos and Martinos, plus the remaining seven (*sic*); **V** simply reads “the seven young men”.

BHG 1596-1597 (Huber, *Beitrag...*, pp. 25-54)

Attested by four mss.:

A: Par. Gr. 1512 (12th c.); *Grundtext*.

K: Par. Gr. 548 (11th c.)²²

W: Barb. Gr. III.37 (11th-12th c.)²³

R: Vat. Gr. 1170 (16th c.)

BHG 1599 (Huber, *Beitrag...*, pp. 55-70)

One ms.: Par. Gr. 1559 (14th c.). Anonymous panegyric on the *Seven Sleepers*.

A task for modern scholarship is to place these texts in the history of Greek and Byzantine hagiography. While *BHG* 1594 was printed by Migne among the works of Symeon Metaphrastes, Ehrhard and Huber were probably right in rejecting this assumption²⁴. *BHG* 1594 is just a slightly different version of *BHG* 1593, not a sophisticated re-writing of it: the style of both texts appears quite different from that of Symeon’s ‘updated’ hagiographies – this does not rule out the possibility that a careful lexical and stylistic analysis may reveal something interesting. On the contrary, the possibility that Symeon has to do with the much more refined diction of *BHG* 1599, considered by Huber²⁵, is well worth investigating. At a structural level, one would like to know whether the legend has been influenced by, or even modelled on, the *Fourth Book of the Maccabees* – a text that, albeit excluded from both the Jewish and the Catholic canon, enjoyed enormous popularity in the Greek-speaking world. There too seven young men (seven brothers: the Ephesian youths are not born from the same parents, but their spiritual brotherhood is repeatedly stressed), in that case Jews,

²² The ms. is hard to read because it has suffered various types of damage: ink often illegible due to humidity, loss of some sheets, botched restoration attempts.

²³ The ms. presents “charakteristische längere Zusätze” compared to the pair **A R** (two mss. with no major discrepancies). See Huber, *Beitrag...*, p. vii.

²⁴ Albert Ehrhard, *Die Legendensammlung des Symeon Metaphrastes und ihr ursprüngliche Bestand*, in Stefan Eshes (ed.), *Festschrift zum elfhundertjährigen Jubiläum des deutschen Campo Santo in Rom*, Freiburg i. Br., Herder, 1897, pp. 46-82 (esp. pp. 53 and 72); Huber, *Beitrag...*, p. vi.

²⁵ *Beitrag...*, p. viii; *Wanderlegende...*, p. 48.

are confronted by an impious monarch (Antiochus IV Epiphanes, enemy of faith as the Jewish tradition portrays him), who urges them to sacrifice to the pagan gods, and threatens their lives if they refuse. The sole relevant differences are that the Jewish martyrs are supported by their mother and eventually tortured and slaughtered, while the Ephesian ones are first repudiated by their own parents and then saved by their miraculous sleep. The story is briefly recounted in the *Second Book of the Maccabees* (ch. 7), and later becomes the subject of the *Fourth*, a Greek treatise in Asianic style composed between the first century BC and the first AD. The author of *BHG* 1599 (Symeon Metaphrastes?) explicitly says that the Ephesian youths were “equal to the Maccabees in both number and attitudes” (p. 56 Huber), but already in *BHG* 1593 we find Decius’ idolatry labelled as *Hellenismós* (ch. 1, p. 1 Huber) – a common word in Christian prose with the meaning ‘paganism’, but having one of its earliest occurrences in *2Macc.* 4.13 (cf. also *4Macc.* 8.8 *Hellenikòs bios*, in the same sense). A more careful comparison, on both linguistic and conceptual grounds, between the Greek Legend and the *Books of the Maccabees* might prove quite fruitful.

The Eastern Christian versions of the Legend PLS

In 1884 Ignazio Guidi published an impressive study about the Eastern Christian versions of the Legend of the Seven Sleepers²⁶. He presented the first edition of texts in five different oriental languages: Coptic, Syriac, Arabic, Ethiopic and Armenian. However, Guidi did not provide an edition of a complete Arabic text. He only gave a very short sample of a relatively recent version in *Karshuni* (Arabic written in Syriac script). Guidi supposed a Syriac source for both the Christian-Arabic and the Muslim-Arabic versions. However, from a recently published study²⁷, it clearly emerges that the oldest available Christian-Arabic version attested in an eleventh-century manuscript kept in the British Library (BL Or. 5019) clearly depends on a Greek source²⁸. Since the Legend circulated for centuries, a first examination of the manuscript tradition of the Christian Arabic versions is needed. Until today, more than 35 manuscript witnesses

²⁶ Ignazio Guidi, *Testi orientali inediti sopra i Sette Dormienti di Efeso*, in “Atti della R. Accademia dei Lincei, IIIa s., Memorie della classe di scienze morali, storiche e filologiche”, XII, 1884, pp. 343-445.

²⁷ Paolo La Spisa, *Una recensione araba cristiana della Leggenda dei Sette Dormienti di Efeso*, in “Analecta Bollandiana”, CXLI, 2023, pp. 241-292.

²⁸ The Greek *Vorlage* has been identified in the already mentioned *BHG* 1593, published by Huber, *Beitrag...*, pp. 1-24, See La Spisa, *Una recensione araba cristiana...*, p. 251.

have been identified, all of them are kept in monasteries and university libraries in the East and the West²⁹.

Indirect sources of the Christian Arabic Legend PLS

In Melkite Arabic literature we find numerous works that directly refer to this Legend. To get an idea of the extent to which this legend has influenced Christian religious literature, it is enough to mention a few examples. First of all the *Annals* by the Melkite Patriarch of Alessandria Eutychius (9th – 10th c.) have to be mentioned³⁰, where we can find a short allusion to the Legend as follow:

From the time when the boys fled from King Decius into the cave and slept there, until the time when they manifested themselves and died, according to what we read in the story of their martyrdom, three hundred and seventy-two years passed.³¹

Another quotation of the same content is found in the *Universal history* of Agapius bishop of Manbiğ (Hierapolis) (10th c.), whose Arabic name is Maḥbūb ibn Qusṭanṭīn. There is a reference to the story of the Seven Sleepers, which, although much shorter than the quotation from Eutychius, is nonetheless important. Over the centuries, the Arabic-speaking Antiochian Melkite Church continued to translate the Legend, which circulated in multiple versions and adaptations. Euthymius II Karne (1572-1635), Patriarch of the Melkite Church of Antioch who lived between sixteenth and seventeenth century, is known for his tireless activity of translating Byzantine liturgical works³². Worthy of mention among others is the *Eulogy* which he translated into Arabic in 1633-34 starting from a Greek edition,

29 See La Spisa, *Una recensione araba cristiana...*, p. 249-251.

30 On this author see Georg Graf, *Geschichte der christlichen arabischen Literatur*, vol. 2, Città del Vaticano, Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana 1947 (Studi e Testi, 133), pp. 32-38; Joseph Nasrallah, *Histoire du mouvement littéraire dans l'Église melchite du Ve au XXe siècle. Contribution à l'étude de la littérature arabe chrétienne*, vol. II/2: 750-Xe s., Louvain, Paris, Peeters, chez l'auteur, 1988, p. 23-34; Uriel Simonsohn, *Sa'īd ibn Baṭrīq. Eutychius of Alexandria*, in David Thomas / Alexander Mallett (eds), *Christian-Muslim Relations. A Bibliographical History*, vol. 2: (900-1050) Leiden, Boston, Brill 2010 (The History of Christian-Muslim Relations, 14), p. 224-233.

31 Louis Cheikho, *Eutychii patriarchae Alexandrini annales*, 2 vol. Corpus Scriptorum Christianorum Orientalium. Scriptores Arabici, IIIa s., 6-7, Beryti, Parisiis, Lypsiæ, 1906-1909, p. 151; for an Italian translation of the whole work, see Bartolomeo Pirone, *Eutichio Patriarca di Alessandria (877-940). Gli Annali*, Cairo, Franciscan Centre of Christian Oriental Studies, 1987.

32 Joseph Nasrallah, *Histoire du mouvement littéraire dans l'église melkite du Ve au XXe siècle*. IV: *Période ottomane 1516-1900*, Louvain, Paris, Peeters, chez l'auteur, 1979, p. 57-58; Bruce Masters, *Christians and Jews in the Ottoman Arab World. The Roots of Sectarianism*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2001, p. 81; Bernard Heyberger, *Les chrétiens du Proche-Orient au temps de la Réforme catholique (Syrie, Liban, Palestine, XVIIe-XVIIIe siècle)*, Rome, École française de Rome, 2014², pp. 467-469.

probably printed in Venice during the sixteenth century. In chapter 71 of the *Eulogy* we can find a page dedicated to the Seven Sleepers, invoked by the priest in order to cure the patient from insomnia³³. Another trace of the diffusion of the Legend in the Ottoman era is the translation into Arabic of important Byzantine hagiographic collections by Makāriyūs III ibn al-Za‘īm, the Patriarch of Antioch who was one of the main protagonists of the Christian Arab literary Renaissance in Syria in the seventeenth and eighteenth century³⁴. The Legend of the Seven Sleepers can be found in two main works translated into Arabic by Makarius: the *Kitāb qīṣaṣ wa-siyar wa-’aḥbār ba’ḍ al-rusul wa-l-ṣuḥadā’ wa-l-qiddisāt wa-l-’abrār*, or the “Book of stories and lives and news of some apostles, martyrs, saints and righteous”, which is none other than the Arabic translation of the work of the Cretan monk Agapios Landos known as Καλοκαιρινή. The other is the *Kitāb al-kunūz al-ḡadīd* or “The new book of treasures”, a new hagiographic collection that includes a total of 29 lives³⁵. These examples, although necessarily limited, clearly show how widespread the well-known Legend must have been not only within the hagiographic literature but also in Byzantine Arabic-speaking historiography and liturgy.

The Islamic tradition PLS

Chapter 18 of the Quran, known as the “Sura of the Cave”, devotes eighteen verses to this legend in an elliptical and allusive style. Louis Massignon, who was one of the greatest orientalist, mystics and theologians of the last century, thoroughly studied the diffusion of this legend which even reached the Comoros Islands and Indonesia from the Mediterranean basin. In one of his seminal articles published in 1950 entitled “Les ‘Sept Dormants’ Apocalypse de l’Islam” he demonstrated the diffusion of the cult of the Seven Sleepers throughout the Islamic world and recalled the importance assumed by the Quranic sura which transmits the legend for every Muslim. At the Prayer of noon on every Friday this sura (or the main parts of it) is recited. Massignon examined all the symbolic and mystical meanings

33 Jean-Baptiste Darblade, *L’Euchologe arabe melkite de Kyr Méléce Karmī*, in “Proche Orient chrétien”, VI, 1956, pp. 28-37; Nasrallah, *Histoire...* vol. IV/1, pp. 82-85. This work is witnessed by the Vat. Ar. 618 and the Beirut, Bibliothèque Orientale, 879 (a. 1659), p. 351-353.

34 The modern bibliography on this author is boundless, here suffice it to mention the introductory study by Hilary Kilpatrick, *Makāriyūs Ibn al-Za‘īm (ca 1600-1672) and Būlus Ibn al-Za‘īm (Paul of Aleppo) (1627-1669)*, in Joseph E. Lowry / Devin J. Steward (eds), *Essays in Arabic Literary Biography 1350-1850*, Wiesbaden, Harrassowitz Verlag, 2009, pp. 262a-273b.

35 Nasrallah, *Histoire...* vol. IV/1, pp. 99-114. Regarding the mention of the story of the Seven Sleepers in the Melkite Synassari, see Joseph-Marie Sauget, *Premières recherches sur l’origine et les caractéristiques des Synaxaires melkites (XIe-XVIIe siècles)*, Bruxelles, Société des Bollandistes, 1969, p. 365.

that the various passages of this chapter of the Quran have assumed for Muslims, in despite of their confessional differences and local traditions, focusing mainly on the protective and superstitious meaning that the names of the seven young men have assumed in the devotional piety to this day³⁶.

The Stories of the Prophets by Abū Ishāq al-Ta‘labī (d. 1035 CE) BR

It is obvious that the Quranic story of the Seven Sleepers and its many elaborations in the Islamic traditions take us in another direction. In the Quran (Q 18:9-31), the young men are not identified as Christians but rather take on a generic pious and monotheistic identity. Their refuge into a cave is not in response to persecution by a pagan ruler, but derives from their desire to withdraw from the polytheistic world. The basic storyline agrees with the Eastern Christian versions and many elements overlap, not in the least the assertion that the veracity of the resurrection is demonstrated in this story (Q 18:21). Yet the discovery of a new world that is transformed after having found the correct faith – a core element in the original Christian versions – is lacking. The emphasis is rather on patience and trust in God’s guidance and rewards for humankind.³⁷ The Quranic narration formed the fertile ground for endless retellings in Quranic commentaries, folktales, magic and, most importantly, in the genre of *qīṣaṣ al-anbiyā’*, the so-called “Stories of the Prophets”. Together with the stories of the later Muḥammad ibn ‘Abd Allāh al-Kisā’ī (ca. 1100?), Abū Ishāq al-Ta‘labī’s *‘Arā’is al-majālis fī qīṣaṣ al-anbiyā’* belongs to the best known and most voluminous examples of the genre. The author, also famous for his Quranic exegesis, was active in Khurasan and died around 1035. As with most other examples of this genre, the main aim of the narration about the Seven Sleepers in the *‘Arā’is al-majālis* was to supply answers to the most basic questions the Quranic text provokes in the reader: who were these youngsters, where

36 Louis Massignon, *Les ‘Sept Dormants’ apocalypse de l’Islam*, in “Analecta Bollandiana”, LXVIII, 1950, pp. 245-260, by the same author see also *Les Sept Dormants d’Éphèse (Ahl-al-Kahf) en Islam et en Chrétienté. Recueil documentaire et iconographique réuni avec le concours d’Émile Dermenghem, Lounis Mahfoud, Dr. Suheyl Ünver, Nicolas de Witt*, in “Revue des études islamiques”, XXII, 1954, pp. 59-112; Youakim Moubarac, *Le culte liturgique et populaire des VII Dormants martyrs d’Éphèse (Ahl al-Kahf): trait d’union Orient-Occident entre l’Islam et la Chrétienté [...] d’après la documentation recueillie par Louis Massignon*, in “Studia missionalia”, XI, 1961, pp. 136-192; Jourdan, *La tradition des Sept Dormants...*, pp. 146-151. For an eschatological interpretation of the same sura see Paolo Dall’Oglio, *Speranza nell’Islam. Interpretazione della prospettiva escatologica di Corano XVIII*, Genova, Marietti, 1991.

37 For these themes in al-Ta‘labī’s *‘Arā’is al-majālis fī qīṣaṣ al-anbiyā’* in general, see: Marianna Klar, *Interpreting al-Ta‘labī’s Tales of the prophets: temptation, responsibility and loss*, Milton Park/ Abingdon, Routledge, 2009. The Legend of the Seven Sleepers is also preserved in a Middle Turkic (Khwarezmian Turkic) version in the *Qīṣaṣ al-Anbiyā’* of al-Rabghuzi: ed. Beschotten and O’Kane, *Al-Rabghuzi: The Stories of the Prophets*, Leiden-Boston, Brill, 2015, part 1, pp. 405-408 (text); part 2, pp. 467-471 (version).

was their cave, how long did they stay there, etc. In this respect, the genre of *qīṣaṣ al-anbiyā'* can be characterized as narrativized exegesis. At the same time, one notices the typical openness to multiple interpretations and edifying anecdotal elaborations. In his detailed discussion of two translations of the work, Claude Gilliot has drawn attention to some of the challenges the text poses.³⁸ First of all, there is no critical edition of the text. The translations into English and German are made from an often faulty Arabic edition.³⁹ Secondly, the sources of al-Ta'labī's work are still to be properly mapped out, especially since Gilliot demonstrated that the author is hardly dependent on al-Ṭabarī, as has often been claimed. A critical edition of the chapter on the Seven Sleepers can serve as a starting point to evaluate the possibility of making a full critical edition. There are two additional reasons why I consider it worthwhile to pursue an edition of the relevant part of the book. Many new manuscripts have come to light during recent digitization campaigns, for example from Yemen, Saudi Arabia, Iran and Lebanon. The variations between them makes the project all the more intriguing. Secondly, as Reyhan Durmaz has pointed out in her discussion of the Islamic traditions about the 'Companions of the Cave' (*aṣḥāb al-kaḥf*), as they are called in Arabic, the more elaborate narrations engage with Christian hagiography in interesting ways.⁴⁰ This deserves to be explored in greater detail in the hope that the required philological work will eventually also lead to a better understanding of the communication channels between Muslims and Christians during the first centuries of Islam.⁴¹

The Ethiopic versions and traditions AB

Known in the Christian Ethiopian tradition as *sab'atu daqiq* (the "seven children"), their Legend is preserved in Gə'əz in a few liturgical texts. A first examination of the Ethiopic textual tradition on the Seven Sleepers was done by Ignazio Guidi and published in the above-mentioned study

38 Claude Gilliot, *Les Histories des Prophètes d'al-Ta'libī: Sources et Traductions*, in "Oriente Moderno", LXXXIX, 2009, 2, pp. 333-347. For the works he reviewed, see the following note.

39 William M. Brinner, *'Arā'is al-majālis fī qīṣaṣ al-anbiyā' or « Lives of the Prophets » as recounted by Abū Ishāq Aḥmad ibn Muḥammad ibn Ibrāhīm al-Tha'labī*, Leiden, Brill, 2002; Heribert Busse, *Aḥmad ibn Muḥammad Tha'labī: Islamische Erzählungen von Propheten und Gottesmännern : Qīṣaṣ al-anbiyā' oder 'Arā'is al-majālis*, Wiesbaden, Harrassowitz, 2006.

40 Reyhan Durmaz, *Stories between Christianity and Islam: saints, Memory, and Cultural Exchange in Late Antiquity and Beyond*, Oakland, University of California Press, 2022; the discussion of the Seven Sleepers can be found on pp. 70-76 and passim.

41 Exchanges between Muslims and Christians about the Legend also took place in the Iberian Peninsula, for which, see below.

about the Eastern Christian traditions of the Legend.⁴² Guidi identified three different versions circulating in Ethiopia. The longest version is entitled *zenāhomu la-sab'atu daqiq za-konu samā't bawəsta ba'at* ("story of the seven children who were witnesses in the cave") (= *BHO 1018*;⁴³ *CAe 4854*⁴⁴) and it is part of the *Gadla samā'tāt* ("Acts of the martyrs") collection.⁴⁵ The text is designed as a reading to be performed on the 13th of the month *ṭərr*. Of this version Guidi provided an edition based on the sole three manuscripts known to him at that time – London, BL, or. 687-688 (18th c.)⁴⁶, or. 689 (15th c.)⁴⁷ and Berlin, Berlin State Library, SBP, Ms. orient. fol. 117 (14th-15th c.)⁴⁸ – together with an Italian translation.⁴⁹ The editing criteria he adopted, as he admitted (in a quite confusing explanation), tended to prefer the reading of the two oldest manuscripts, mostly the Berlin manuscript, and to record in the footnotes the 'most important' variants of BL, or. 687-688. 'Only rarely' did he prefer the reading of BL,

42 Guidi, *Testi orientali...* pp. 404-429 (§. IV. Testi etiopici), reprinted together with *La lettera di Simeone vescovo di Bêt-Aršām sopra i martiri omeriti* in *Raccolta di scritti*, vol. I. *Oriente Cristiano I.*, Roma, Istituto per l'Oriente, 1945 on the occasion of the 10th anniversary of his death; cfr. Pier Giovanni Donini et al., *Pubblicazioni dell'Istituto per l'Oriente*, "Oriente Moderno", vol. V (66), N. 1/6, 1986, pp. 93-118, 104. Guidi's work as well as the textual tradition of the Legend in Ethiopic is ignored by René Basset in the short note published in 1886: "[...] M. Kr. Nyrop mentionne une variante de la légende des Sept-Dormants, don't le Héros est Avemeleh (Abimélech), variante qui a échappé aux recherches de M. Koch sur ce sujet. Le long sommeil d'Abimélech est mentionné dans le livre apocryphe intitulé 'livre de Baruch' don't il nous reste une version éthiopienne publiée par M. Dillmann [...]", cfr. René Basset, *La légende des sept-dormants*. I. 1. *Une variante éthiopienne*. 2. *Version arabe*, in "Mélusine", 3, 1886 [1887], pp. 176-177, 176.

43 Paul Peeters and Société de Bollandistes, *Bibliotheca hagiographica orientalis* (Subsidia Hagiographica, 10), Bruxellis-Beyrouth, Apoud Editores-Imprimerie Catholique, 1910, p. 223.

44 Massimo Villa, Alessandro Bausi, *Zenāhomu la-7daqiq za-kona samā't ba-wəsta ba'at*, in Alessandro Bausi (ed.), *Die Schriftkultur des christlichen Äthiopiens und Eritreas: Eine multimediale Forschungsumgebung / Beta maṣāḥəfti* (Last Modified: 1.12.2017) <https://betamasaheft.eu/works/LIT4854Sleepers> [Accessed: 2024-01-31+01:00].

45 *CAe 1493*, Alessandro Bausi, Pietro Maria Liuzzo, Eugenia Sokolinski, Dorothea Reule, Marcin Krawczuk, *Gadla samā'tāt*, in Alessandro Bausi (ed.), *Die Schriftkultur des christlichen Äthiopiens und Eritreas: Eine multimediale Forschungsumgebung / Beta maṣāḥəfti* (Last Modified: 5.7.2020) <https://betamasaheft.eu/works/LIT1493Gadlas> [Accessed: 2024-01-27+01:00]. On the *Gadla samā'tāt* see at least: Alessandro Bausi, *La versione etiopica degli Acta Phileae nel Gadla Samā'tāt*, in "Annali dell'Istituto Universitario Orientale di Napoli", Suppl., 92, Napoli, Istituto Universitario Orientale, 2002; Antonella Brita, *Performing (with) Multiple-Text Manuscripts in the Making of the Ethiopian Sainthood: Matter and Devotion in Ethiopia between the Fourteenth Century and the Present Time*, in Antonella Brita, Janina Karolewski, Matthieu Husson, Laure Miolo and Hanna Wimmer (eds), *Manuscripts and Performances in Religions, Arts, and Sciences, Studies in Manuscript Cultures*, 36, Berlin, Boston, De Gruyter, 2024, pp. 371-424.

46 William Wright, *Catalogue of the Ethiopic Manuscripts in the British Museum Acquired Since the Year 1847*, London: printed by the order of the Trustees and by Longmans & Co. and Asher & Co., 1877, p. 169b (ms. CCLVIII).

47 Wright, *Catalogue of the Ethiopic...*, p. 161a (ms. CCLIII)

48 August Dillmann, *Verzeichniss der abessinischen Handschriften, mit drei Tafeln*, Die Handschriften-Verzeichnisse der Königlichen Bibliothek zu Berlin, 3, Berlin: Buchdruckerei der Königl. Akademie der Wissenschaften, 1878, p. 57 (ms. 66).

49 Guidi, *Testi orientali...*, pp. 406-419 (edition) and 419-426 (translation).

or. 689, in particular when the latter presented shared readings with BL, or. 687-688, and provided the variants of SBP, Ms. orient. Fol. 117 in the footnotes; ‘more often’ he chose to adopt the shared readings of SBP, Ms. orient. Fol. 117 and BL, or. 687-688 and to disregard the variants of BL, or. 689, which he rarely included in the footnotes ‘because, in most of the cases, they appear to be mistakes or slips made by the copyist’.⁵⁰ In Guidi’s opinion, this version derives from an Arabic text.⁵¹ One-hundred and forty years after Guidi’s edition, a new survey, conducted within the scope of EuTraOr project, allowed us to identify at least ten additional manuscripts, thus providing enough new material for a revision of Guidi’s work. These manuscripts will be collated with the three manuscripts used by Guidi and his *editio princeps* in order to find out whether new and fresh evidence may emerge to justify not only a new edition of the text but also to shed light on its relationship with the Arabic versions.

Besides *CAe 4854* (= *BHO 1018*), an additional shorter version of the Legend, entitled *ta’ammər za-qəddusān 7 daqiq* (“miracle of the seven children”),⁵² to be read on the eighth of the month *maggābit*, is also transmitted in the *Gadla samā tāt* collection. The text is known at least since 1859, when the catalogue of Ethiopic manuscripts of the d’Abbadie collection was published.⁵³ The catalogue includes the description of one of the text witnesses, the manuscript Bibliothèque nationale de France,

50 In Guidi’s own words: “[...] Le varietà che passano tra i tre codici sopra ricordati non sono grandi, ma in generale i due codici più antichi, quel di Berlino e l’Or. 689, concordano fra di loro più spesso, che non coll’Or. 687-688, il cui testo sembra ritoccato recentemente, come è difetto assai comune nei mss. etiopici specialmente più recenti. E parecchie delle diversità che pure si osservano fra i detti due codici antichi, sono certamente dovuti all’ignoranza dell’amanuense dell’Or. 689, il cui testo è altrettanto scorretto, quanto è buono ed emendato quello del codice di Berlino. Io pertanto seguì la lezione di questi due codici antichi, registrando in nota le varianti di qualche importanza dell’Or. 688-689 [to be read Or. 687-688, *a.n.*]. Rarissimamente ho abbandonata la lezione del codice Berolinense ed ho seguita quella dell’Or. 687 [to be read Or. 689, *a.n.*], quando cioè questo concordava coll’Or. 688-689 [to be read Or. 687-688, *a.n.*] e mi sembrava preferibile al codice di Berlino, del quale tuttavia do sempre in nota le varianti. Molto più spesso ho seguito la lezione di quest’ultimo, quando concordava coll’Or. 688-689 [to be read Or. 687-688, *a.n.*]; abbandonando la lezione dell’Or. 687 [to be read Or. 689, *a.n.*] e notandone raramente le varianti, perchè [*sic!*, *a.n.*] in massima parte si appalesano essere non altro che errori o inavvertenze del copista. [...]”, Guidi, *Testi orientali...*, pp. 405-406.

51 Again, quoting Guidi’s words: “[...] io son persuaso che questo testo etiopico derivi da alcun testo arabo. Una tale origine, ancorchè [*sic!*, *a.n.*] mancasse d’ogni argomento positivo, dovrebbe reputarsi siccome assai probabile, poichè [*sic!*, *a.n.*] sappiamo che fra le moltissime opere etiopiche del periodo più recente e tradotte dall’arabo, s’annoverano pressochè [*sic!*, *a.n.*] tutte le vite dei Santi, specialmente di quelli non originari di Abissinia; [...] Ma nel nostro caso la provenienza araba è direttamente accertata tanto dalla somiglianza colla versione arabo-cristiana, quanto e più dai nomi proprî nei quali le differenze si spiegano facilissimamente supponendo un originale arabo”, Guidi, *Testi orientali...*, pp. 404-405.

52 This version is not recorded in the *BHO*, neither in the *CAe* yet.

53 Antoine d’Abbadie, *Catalogue raisonné de manuscrits éthiopiens appartenant à Antoine d’Abbadie*, Paris, Imprimerie Impériale, 1859

d'Abbadie 179 (1509).⁵⁴ In addition, the description of a second witness of the text, the manuscript London, BL, or. 690 (15th c.),⁵⁵ was published in 1877 by William Wright in his catalogue of Ethiopic manuscripts in the British Library (at the time British Museum). Yet, curiously, neither of the two witnesses were noticed by Ignazio Guidi. They do not feature in his study and apparently William Wright, the author of the catalogue, did not inform Guidi about the manuscript, even though he made the two other witnesses of *CAe 4854* (= *BHO 1018*) from the British Library available to Guidi.⁵⁶ In 1922 Sylvain Grébaut published the text of the *ta'ammār za-qəddusān 7 daqīq* from Ms Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, d'Abbadie 179 (1509) together with a short introduction.⁵⁷ In my recent investigation, additional witnesses of the text have been found. Apart from its brevity, this version presents interesting details not found in *CAe 4854* (= *BHO 1018*), that deserve a more profound and careful investigation. A critical edition with translation is currently in preparation. A further version of the Legend is included in the work *Tārika Walda 'Amid* ("History of Walda 'Amid"),⁵⁸ Gə'əz translation of the Arabic work *al-Mağma 'al-mubārak* ("The blessed collection"), known also as or the *Universal Chronicle* or *History*, composed by the Christian Arab historian Ġirğīs al-Makīn b. al-'Amīd (1206-1273).⁵⁹ Of this version at least one witness is known, the manuscript Frankfurt, Universitätsbibliothek Johann Christian Senckenberg, Frankfurt Ms. or. 134, pp. 227a-228a.⁶⁰ Additional manuscripts containing the *Tārika Walda 'Amid* will be surveyed in

54 Sylvain Grébaut, *Les sept dormants d'Éphèse*, in "Aethiops" I, 1922, pp. 52-54.

55 Wright, *Catalogue of Ethiopic...*, p. 161a (ms. CCLIV).

56 Guidi, *Testi orientali...*, p. 404.

57 Antoine d'Abbadie, *Catalogue raisonné...*, pp. 183-184; on this manuscript see also Marius Chaîne, *Catalogue des manuscrits éthiopiens de la collection Antoine d'Abbadie*, Paris: Imprimerie nationale 1912, pp. 107-110; Carlo Conti Rossini, *Notice sur les manuscrits éthiopiens de la collection d'Abbadie*, Paris: Imprimerie nationale, 1914, pp. 173-175 (ms. 163).

58 *CAe 4723*, Alessandro Bausi, Dorothea Reule, Solomon Gebreyes, *Tārika Walda 'Amid*, in Alessandro Bausi (ed.), *Die Schriftkultur des christlichen Äthiopiens und Eritreas: Eine multimediale Forschungsumgebung / Beta maṣāḥaft* (Last Modified: 25.2.2019) <https://betamasaheft.eu/works/LIT4723TarikaWaldaAmid> [Accessed: 2024-01-27+01:00].

59 Ute Pietruschka, *Giyorgis Wāldā 'Amid*, in Siegbert Uhlig (ed.), *Encyclopaedia Aethiopica*. Vol. II: D-Ha, Wiesbaden, Harrassowitz Verlag, 2005, pp. 812b-814a; Manfred Kropp, *Zekra Nagār. Die universalhistorische Einleitung nach Giyorgis Walda-Amid in der Chronikensammlung des Haylu*, Speyer, Kartoffeldruck-Verlag Kai Brodersen, 2016, pp. 1-12.

60 Lazarus Goldschmidt, *Die Abessinischen Handschriften der Stadtbibliothek zu Frankfurt am Main (Rüppell'sche Sammlung) nebst Anhängen und Auszügen*, Berlin: S. Calvary & Co., 1897, pp. 71-83; Dorothea Reule / Alessandro Bausi, *Frankfurt, Universitätsbibliothek Johann Christian Senckenberg, Frankfurt Ms. or. 134*, in Alessandro Bausi (ed.), *Die Schriftkultur des christlichen Äthiopiens und Eritreas: Eine multimediale Forschungsumgebung / Beta maṣāḥaft* (Last Modified: 22.11.2017) <https://betamasaheft.eu/manuscripts/FSUor134> [Accessed: 2024-01-27+01:00].

search of additional witnesses. The Ethiopic traditions of the Legend also include two commemorative texts from the *Sənkəssār*.⁶¹ The first, to be read on the 13th of the month of *tərr*, was published in 1884 with an Italian translation by Guidi⁶² and critically edited and published with a French translation much later by Gérard Colin in 1990;⁶³ the second, to be read on the 21 of the month of *naḥase*, was edited by Guidi and published in 1912 with a French translation made by Sylvain Grébaut.⁶⁴ To conclude this short exposition on the Ethiopic versions of the Legend, we need to mention the hymnographic tradition that, with the exception of a hymn transmitted in the collection *ʾĒgzi ʾabəher naḡsa* (“The Lord reigns”)⁶⁵ published by Guidi,⁶⁶ remains largely unexplored, as well as uncharted are the therapeutic (healing and protective) practices that are connected with their veneration in medieval and contemporary Ethiopia, for which we have numerous examples involving other saints.⁶⁷

The Syriac versions and Gregory of Tours’ work RF

As mentioned in the introduction of this article, the story of the seven sleepers was destined to spread throughout the Christian world, becoming a fascinating legend and prompting the problem of the resurrection. At the beginning and end of the sixth century, the Syriac and Latin traditions testify to this story through the works of two authors: the Syrian Bishop Jacob of Serugh (ca. 450–521), and Gregory of Tours (ca. 538–594). Understandably, the transmission of the legend in the Syriac tradition, which includes a prose version in addition to the poetic version by Jacob

61 CAe 4032 and CAe 4033, Dorothea Reule, Alessandro Bausi, *Sənkəssār (Group A)*, in Alessandro Bausi (ed.), *Die Schriftkultur des christlichen Äthiopiens und Eritreas: Eine multimediale Forschungsumgebung / Beta maṣāḥəft* (Last Modified: 29.12.2021) <https://betamasaheft.eu/works/LIT4032SenkessarS> [Accessed: 2024-01-27+01:00]; Dorothea Reule, Alessandro Bausi, *Sənkəssār (Group B)*, in Alessandro Bausi (ed.), *Die Schriftkultur des christlichen Äthiopiens und Eritreas: Eine multimediale Forschungsumgebung / Beta maṣāḥəft* (Last Modified: 25.8.2021) <https://betamasaheft.eu/works/LIT4033Senkessar> [Accessed: 2024-01-27+01:00].

62 Guidi, *Testi orientali*..., pp. 426–428 (text) and 428–429 (translation).

63 Gérard Colin, *Le Synaxaire éthiopien: mois de tērr. Édition critique du texte éthiopien et traduction*, *Patrologia Orientalis*, 45, 1/201, Turnhout: Brepols, 1990, pp. 93–95.

64 Ignazio Guidi and Sylvain Grébaut, *Le Synaxaire éthiopien. Les mois de sanē, hamlē et pāguemēn* publiés et traduits par Ignazio Guidi avec le concours de L. Desnoyer, A. Singlas et S. Grébaut. III. *Mois de nahasē et de paguemēn* (traduction de S. Grébaut), *Patrologia Orientalis*, IX, 4, Turnhout, Brepols 1912; repr. In *Patrologia Orientalis*, 44, Turnhout, Brepols, 1981, pp. 563–568.

65 CAe 1325, Alessandro Bausi, Pietro Maria Liuzzo, Eugenia Sokolinski, Dorothea Reule, *ʾĒgzi ʾabəher naḡsa (General record)*, in Alessandro Bausi (ed.), *Die Schriftkultur des christlichen Äthiopiens und Eritreas: Eine multimediale Forschungsumgebung / Beta maṣāḥəft* (Last Modified: 21.3.2022) <https://betamasaheft.eu/works/LIT1325egziab> [Accessed: 2024-01-27+01:00].

66 Guidi, *Tradizioni orientali*..., p. 429.

67 Brita, *Performing*..., pp. 375–378 and 412–414.

of Serugh⁶⁸, has led to a very long debate among scholars about the primary source: was the Greek or the Syriac version the original source? On this question it seems possible to conclude that an almost unanimity of scholars considered more likely that the Syriac narrative and that of Gregory are based on an original Greek source, written in the fifth century, which is now lost⁶⁹. In the Syriac tradition, the names and numbers of the Seven Sleepers⁷⁰, as well as the name of the mountain where they found refuge, the name of the city, and the number of years they slept, vary greatly, but the story is mostly the same. During the persecution of Emperor Decius, the boys refused to burn incense to the idols with their hands. As a result, they were forced to flee into a cave, where God “took their spirits and raised them to heaven”⁷¹. The awakening of the Sleepers took place during a politically and religiously significant period in the reign of Theodosius II⁷². The Emperor was determined to combat paganism, destroy pagan temples, eradicate idolatry and make Christianity triumphant: Jacob of Serugh emphasised that crosses now appeared everywhere⁷³. But during his reign, important controversies arose within Christianity concerning the nature of Christ and the resurrection of the body. First of all, the patriarch of Alexandria, Nestorius, spoke about two substances in Christ, two hypostases (in Greek ὑπόστασις) and one person (in Greek πρόσωπον). Moved by the intention of safeguarding the human nature of Christ, Nestorius also denied Mary the title ‘Mother of God’ and spoke in favour of ‘Mother of Christ’ (Χριστοτόκος) or ‘Mother of Man’ (ἄνθρωποτόκος)⁷⁴. Cyril of Alexandria fiercely attacked this concept, maintaining that Mary

68 For the edition of the Syriac text see Paul Bedjan, with additional material by Sebastian P. Brock, *Homilies of Mar Jacob of Sarug/Homiliae selectae Mar-Jacobi Sarugensis*, Piscataway, Gorgias Press, 2006, vol. 6, pp. 324-330. For an English translation, see Sebastian P. Brock, *Jacob of Serugh's Poem on the Sleepers of Ephesus*, in Pauline Allen, Majella Franzmann, and Rick Strelan (eds.), “I Sowed Fruits into Hearts” (*Odes Sol. 17:13*): *Festschrift for Professor Michael Lattke*, Strathfield, NSW, St. Paul's Publications, 2007, pp. 13-30. For Jacob's version I quote from Brock's English translation.

69 Honigsmann, *Stephen of Ephesus* ..., p. 131; Peeters, *Le texte original de la Passion* ..., pp. 369-385; Marco Tondello, *The Story of the Sleepers of Ephesus according to the Oldest Extant Text: Manuscript N.S.S.4*, in “Journal of Eastern Christian Studies”, vol. LXX.1-2, 2018, pp. 29-92, see especially p. 44 where he supports the hypothesis of a Greek Vorlage behind the older Syriac recensions. Among the supporters of the Syriac origins of the Legend see above all Arthur Allgeier, *Die älteste Gestalt der Siebenschläferlegende*, in “Oriens Christianus” n.s., vol. VI, 1916, pp. 1-43.

70 For instance, in Jacob's version we have eight boys.

71 Brock, *Jacob of Serugh's Poem* ..., p. 25.

72 Bartłomiej Grysa, *The Legend of the Seven Sleepers of Ephesus in Syriac and Arab Sources – A Comparative Study*, in “Orientalia Christiana Cracoviensia”, II, 2010, pp. 45-59.

73 Brock, *Jacob of Serugh's Poem* ..., pp. 26-27.

74 Friedrich Loofs, *Nestorius and His Place in the History of Christian Doctrine*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1914.

should be defined as the ‘Mother of God’ (Θεοτόκος), not because she had bestowed divinity upon Christ, but because she had generated the Logos according to the flesh⁷⁵. The question of Mary’s divine motherhood was closely linked to Cyril’s Alexandrian Christology and is the key to interpreting the mystery of the Incarnation, which made the union of the two natures possible according to the hypostasis. Following the position of Nestorius, Eutyches, presbyter and archimandrite at Constantinople, affirmed that before the Incarnation there were two natures, but after the Incarnation there was only one nature, the divine nature, derived from the union of the two natures. Human nature was absorbed into the divine one. The Council of Chalcedon (451), convened by the Eastern Roman Emperor Marcian (392-457), condemned Monophysitism⁷⁶. Although it is not easy to classify the Christology of Jacob of Serugh because of his irenic position, it is evident that he was an anti-Chalcedonian, who stressed the unicity of the hypostasis in Christ⁷⁷. His formula in one of his letters claims: “the one nature that becomes a body” or “the one embodied nature”⁷⁸. Jacob of Serugh opens his poetic version of the legend, evoking the “Son of God, whose door is open to whoever calls on him”⁷⁹. The divine Sonship is again mentioned in the following narrative along with a proclamation of Trinitarianism. In contrast to Zeus, worshipped by pagans, the Seven Sleepers proclaimed their faith in the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit: “Your king is Zeus and Apollo, along with Artemis. Our king is the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit”⁸⁰. The Trinitarian formula becomes a confession of faith in the one true God⁸¹. But there is something more. Jacob’s version reads the legend in close connection with the problem of

75 John A. McGuckin, *St. Cyril of Alexandria: The Christological Controversy. Its History, Theology and Texts*, Leiden-New York-Köln, Brill, 1994.

76 See Grysa, *The Legend of the Seven Sleepers* ..., pp. 47-48.

77 Philip M. Forness, *Preaching Christology in the Roman Near East. A study of Jacob of Serugh*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2018.

78 See Tanios Bou Mansour, *The Christology of Jacob of Sarug*, in Alois Grillmeier / Theresia Hainthaler (eds.), *Christ in Christian Tradition*, vol. 2/3, *From the Council of Chalcedon (451) to Gregory the Great (590-604): The Churches of Jerusalem and Antioch from 451 to 600*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2013, pp. 430-477, esp. pp. 439-442, 461; Theresia Hainthaler, *The Remaining Legacy of Syriac Orthodox Christology*, in Martina Aras, Charbel Rizk, and Klaus von Stosch (eds.), *Syriac Theology: Past and Present*, Paderborn, Leiden, Boston, Brill, 2023, pp. 99-124, esp. pp. 109-111.

79 Brock, *Jacob of Serugh's Poem* ..., p. 23.

80 Brock, *Jacob of Serugh's Poem* ..., p. 24.

81 Marcel Poorthuis, *The Martyrdom of the Seven Sleepers in Transformation. From Syriac Christianity to the Qur'ān and to the Dutch-Iranian Writer Kader Abdolah*, in Ihab Saloul / Jan Willem van Henten (eds.), *Martyrdom: Canonisation, Contestation and Afterlives*, Amsterdam, Amsterdam University Press, 2020, pp. 241-254, esp. p. 244.

the resurrection of the body. In fact, not only God, after the pagan era, wanted to awaken them, but the Emperor Theodosius, impressed by this miraculous story, offered to build a temple on the spot. The boys declined, affirming that this event has happened to prove the truth of the resurrection: “For your sake has Christ our Lord awoken us, so that you might see and hold firm that the resurrection truly exists”⁸². In this way, the boys, with their living bodies, became witnesses to the belief in the resurrection⁸³. It is no coincidence that the centuries in which the legend comes to life were marked by a debate on the resurrection of dead bodies. If Origen, master of Alexandria and promoter of the allegorical exegesis of the Holy Scriptures, and the Origenists had put forward the idea that the physical body would be replaced by a spiritual one, the legend of the Seven Sleepers testifies that the same physical body that died will be resurrected by God⁸⁴. The fact that the legend of the Seven Sleepers ended up being closely linked to eschatological questions in the Christian context is shown by the story given by Gregory of Tours in the late sixth century. He offers two different versions of the text: a small redaction, inserted in his *Liber in gloria martyrum* (ch. 94), and a longer redaction, a *passio* conceived of as a *libellus*⁸⁵. At the end of the chapter 94, Gregory affirms that he gave access to the text thanks to a source, written in Syriac (*quam Syro quodam interpretante in Latinum transtulimus*)⁸⁶. Is this a reference to the Syriac version of Jacob? Did Gregorius ask a Syrian interpreter to translate for him the text into Latin?⁸⁷ While maintaining the framework of the legend, Gregory does not fail to include original insights into his version. In particular, his retelling aims to demonstrate the physical resurrection. In fact, in his version, he expressly affirms that the bodies and the clothing of the Seven Sleepers remained intact (*integra atque inlaesa*), and that the Lord resurrected the youths to show the whole world that there will be a resurrection of the bodies. Soon after the Emperor entered the cave, the

82 Brock, *Jacob of Serugh's Poem* ..., p. 24.

83 Brock, *Jacob of Serugh's Poem* ..., p. 24.

84 Poorthuis, *The Martyrdom of the Seven Sleepers* ..., p. 243.

85 For a critical edition of the texts see Bruno Krusch (ed.), *Gregorii episcopi Turonensis Miracula et opera minora: Liber in Gloria martyrum* (Monumenta Germaniae Historica: Scriptorum Rerum Merovingicarum 1,2), Hannover, Hahn, 1885, pp. 100-102; *Passio sanctorum septem dormientium apud Ephesum* (Monumenta Germaniae Historica: Scriptorum Rerum Merovingicarum 1,2), Hannover, Hahn, 1885, pp. 398-403.

86 Krusch (ed.), *Gregorii episcopi Turonensis liber in Gloria martyrum* ..., p. 102.

87 Pieter W. van der Horst, *Pious Long-Sleepers in Greek, Jewish, and Christian Antiquity*, in Menahem Kister, Hillel Newman, Michael Segal, and Ruth Clements Tradition (eds.), *Transmission, and Transformation from Second Temple Literature through Judaism and Christianity in Late Antiquity*, Leiden, Brill, 2015, pp. 93-111, in part. p. 106.

boys talked with him at length about the resurrection⁸⁸. According to Gregory, he told the legend of the Seven Sleepers to counter the “impure heresy of the Sadducees”, who were ready to deny the resurrection of the body (*volens evertere spem resurrectionis*)⁸⁹. Although it is difficult to identify these enemies (they are only mentioned in Gregory’s version), it is clear that he evokes an active debate on the issue in his time. Interestingly, the same question also occupies the last book, the tenth, of his *Histories*, which centres on eschatological issues. Here, we have a dialogue with a priest, who doubts the resurrection of the flesh. The priest is presented as a promoter of the false doctrine of the Sadducees, and according to him, the resurrection of bodies that have long since decomposed seems unlikely⁹⁰. The aim of the dialogue is to show that the body we use on earth is the same one that will be resurrected. By evoking such stories and dialogues, Gregory is suggesting a response to those who question a fundamental aspect of Christian doctrine: the resurrection of dead bodies⁹¹. In contrast to the Greco-Roman world, where the body and its needs were subordinated to the Stoic ideal of ἀπάθεια (impassibility), the Christian way of dealing with physical suffering was linked to the new concept of corporeality that Christianity was maturing: the belief in the resurrection of the flesh⁹². Willy Rordorf has noted that the *quid* of the martyrs’ testimony was not in words but in deeds, to demonstrate the resurrection of the body in order to get eternal life⁹³. In this regard, we must not forget that the core of the Christian mystery is the eschatological event that began with the Incarnation of Christ and culminated in his crucifixion, resurrection and glorification. Rich in theological implications, the fascinating legend of the Seven Sleepers becomes an important text in Christian theological debates, because it clearly shows that the boys resurrected with their own earthly bodies and with their bodies they were able to contemplate God.

88 Krusch (ed.), *Gregorii episcopi Turonensis Passio sanctorum septem dormientium* ..., pp. 400; 402.

89 Gregory of Tours, *Historiae* 10.13, ed. Bruno Krusch and Wilhelm Levison, in *Gregorii Turonensis Opera*. Teil 1: *Libri historiarum* X (Monumenta Germaniae Historica - Scriptores Rerum Merovingicarum, 1), Hannover, Hahn, 1951, p. 496.

90 Kamil Choda, *The Religious Other in the Histories of Gregory of Tours*, in “Classica Cracoviensia”, vol. 17, 2014, pp. 5-19, esp. pp. 15-16.

91 Pia Lucas, *Scattered Bones and Miracles – The Cult of Saints, the Resurrection of the Body and Eschatological Thought in the Works of Gregory of Tours*, in Veronika Wieser, Vincent Eltschinger and Johann Heiss (eds.), *Cultures of Eschatology: Volume 2: Time, Death and Afterlife in Medieval Christian, Islamic and Buddhist Communities*, Berlin, Boston, De Gruyter Oldenbourg, 2020, pp. 479-508, esp. pp. 488-498.

92 Judith Perkins, *The Suffering Self: Pain and Narrative Representation in the Early Christian Era*, London, Routledge, 1995, pp. 119, 173-174.

93 Willy Rordorf, *Martyre et ‘témoignage’. Essai de réponse à une question difficile*, in Id., *Liturgie, foi et vie des premiers chrétiens. Études patristiques*, Paris, Beauchesne, 1986, pp. 381-403.

European receptions in the Middle Ages

The reception of the Seven Sleepers' legend in Spain SVG

The legend of the Seven Sleepers spread in medieval Spain through two different channels: in the Christian kingdoms of the north and centre of the Peninsula, it circulated thanks to the *Legenda aurea* of Jacobus de Voragine⁹⁴, where, as in the rest of Europe, it was expanded by including numerous lives of 'local' saints⁹⁵; and in al-Andalus, where it penetrated through Arabic versions that were part of the commentaries on Sura 18 of the Koran. This double channel of reception, as a result of the particular political-cultural situation of the Iberian Peninsula at that time, is reflected in the versions that have been preserved to the present day. In the territories under Arab rule, the vitality of this legend is confirmed by the survival of three recensions in Arabic: two unpublished, contained in the ms. 5379 of the National Library of Spain and in ms. LXI of the Royal Academy of History of Madrid⁹⁶, and a third one, recorded on folios 116r-138r of a manuscript preserved in the Library of Arab Studies of Granada, which was edited and translated by the Arabist José Vázquez Ruiz, who dates it to the end of the fifteenth century.⁹⁷ Furthermore, as the legend spread in the Islamic Arab world, local legends also emerged in al-Andalus which alluded to the existence of the cave of the Seven Sleepers near the city of Córdoba (in whose famous mosque the seven young people were apparently painted)⁹⁸ and, especially in Loja, a small town near Granada.⁹⁹

In the Christian area of the peninsula, the extraordinary reception of Jacobus de Voragine's compilation not only stimulated interest in the lives of saints, collected in numerous *Flos Sanctorum*, but also gave rise to translations and adaptations in Castilian romance that were made well into the seventeenth century. An interesting example is the *Flos sanctorum* or *Libro de las vidas de los santos* of the Jesuit father Pedro de Ribadeneira, who briefly incorporated in his work the "well-known" story of the "seven

94 See Iacopo da Varazze, *Legenda aurea*, Italian translation and edition by Alessandro and Lucetta Vitale Brovarone, Torino, Einaudi, 2007, pp. 549-553.

95 da Varazze, *Legenda aurea*..., pp. XIX-XXI.

96 Emilio García Gómez, *Un texto árabe occidental de la Leyenda de Alejandro según el manuscrito árabe XXVII de la Biblioteca de la Junta para ampliación de estudios*, Madrid, Instituto de Valencia de Don Juan, 1929, p. XXXIII, n. 2, apud José Vázquez Ruiz, *Una versión árabe occidental de la Leyenda de los siete durmientes de Efeso*, in "Revista del Instituto de Estudios Islámicos de Madrid", vols. VII-VIII, 1959-1960, p. 52.

97 Vázquez Ruiz, *Una versión árabe occidental*..., p. 52.

98 Vázquez Ruiz, *Una versión árabe occidental*..., p. 49.

99 Vázquez Ruiz, *Una versión árabe occidental*..., pp. 49-51. See Antonio Olmo, *Loja islámica. Historia y leyenda: la Cueva de los Durmientes*, in "MEAH, Sección Árabe-Islam", vol. 51, 2002, pp. 161-189.

sleeping brother martyrs“ He focused on the various opinions of Latin, Greek and Christian authors in order to discern how much truth there was in it.¹⁰⁰ In the second half of the seventeenth century the story was taken up theatrically by the playwright Agustín Moreto, who, in *Los siete durmientes o los más dichosos hermanos*, transformed it into a peculiar “comedy of saints” with a love plot and the presence of the Devil¹⁰¹; a very different version of the tragicomedy in the Latin language was *Septem dormientes*, composed by Alexander Luzón de Millares, “*Canonici Regularis Ecclesiae B. Mariae in Viridi Valle*”, and published in 1666, in Brussels, together with a treatise on the resurrection of the dead, a central theme in the legend from its origins.¹⁰²

Whether the well-known *exemplum* of the monk and the little bird derives from the Legend is probable, albeit not certain. Since the 12th century, it is found in three Cistercian monasteries (Armenteira and Leire, in the north of Spain, and Vilar de Frades, in Portugal) to whose primitive monks¹⁰³ it appears to have been attributed as a hagiographic adaptation.¹⁰⁴ It was also incorporated, in the 13th century, into the collections of Marian miracles from the Galician-Portuguese poetic version contained in the *Cantigas de Santa Maria* by Alfonso X the Wise (cantiga 103)¹⁰⁵, and it spread widely in the fifteenth century thanks to *El libro de los exemplos o Suma de exemplos por A. B. C.* by Clemente Sánchez de Vercial, a collection of around five hundred short stories to be used by preachers¹⁰⁶, which survives orally until today in the northwest of the peninsula¹⁰⁷. According

100 Pedro de Ribadeneira, *Flos sanctorum o Libro de las vidas de los santos en la cual se contienen las vidas de muchos santos de todos estados que comunmente llaman extravagantes... segunda y tercera parte*, Madrid, Francisco García de Arroyo, 1609, pp. 327-328.

101 Agustín Moreto, *Los siete durmientes o los más dichosos hermanos*, in *Parte diez y nueve de comedias nuevas escogidas de los mejores ingenios de España*, Madrid, Domingo Palacio y Villegas, 1663, ff. 98r-115v; modern edition by Miriam Martínez Gutiérrez in Agustín Moreto, *Tercera parte de comedias*, IX, Kassel, Reichenberger, 2023.

102 Alexander Luzón de Millares, *Septem dormientes sive vera et tractabiles mortuorum resurrectio metro et prosa declarata*, Bruxellae, Philippi Uleugarti, 1666, pp. 1-39.

103 In Spain: San Ero and San Virila, respectively.

104 José Filgueira Valverde, *Tiempo y gozo eterno en la narrativa medieval (La cantiga CIII)*, Vigo, edicións Xerais de Galicia, 1982, pp. 111-121. Regarding San Virila and the monastery of Leire, see also Tomás Moral Contreras, O.S.B., *Mil años en tu presencia... Evocación de San Virila*, Estella, Monasterio de Leyre, 2006.

105 Alfonso el Sabio, *Cantigas de Santa Maria*, facsimile edition of the one published in 1889 by the Royal Spanish Academy, Madrid, Real Academia Española, 1990, 3 vols., vol. I, cantiga CIII, pp. 158-159.

106 Clemente Sánchez de Vercial, *Libro de los Exemplos* (National Library of Spain, ms. 1182 and National Library of Paris, ms. Espagnol 432); edited by Pascual de Gayangos in *Escritores en prosa anteriores al siglo XVII*, Madrid, Rivadeneyra, 1860, pp. 447-542.

107 See the contemporary oral narratives among the peasants of Asturias, transcribed by Jesús Suárez López, *Cuentos medievales en la tradición oral de Asturias*, with a prologue from María Jesús Lacarra, Gijón, Red de

to José Filgueira Valverde, who has studied this exemplum by closely examining the ancient legends of the sleepers, the narrative of the monk and the little bird, of which the first textual link has been lost, did not come directly from the legend of the Seven Sleepers, as it was often believed. He believes, instead, that it was the creation of some ecclesiastical writer from the West, familiar with the Hebrew legends of Choni Hameaghel and Abimelech the Ethiopian (which were also widely spread in the Islamic world in the commentaries on Sura 2:126 of the Quran), with which, without any doubt, it is related¹⁰⁸.

The Legend in Portugal MG

In Portugal the canticle 103 of Afonso X the Wise, king of Leon and Castile, is not the first trace of the legend, but this lyric poem that makes part of his *Cantigas de Santa Maria* (Canticles of Holy Mary) composed at his court in the 13th century, which forms the largest collection of medieval poems written in Galician-Portuguese language, contributed to the circulation of the legend in the following centuries. Nevertheless, canticle 103¹⁰⁹ gives us a cause to doubt right away, because we do not find a clear reference to the Seven Sleepers in it but rather to another story: a monk who slept for three hundred years to the song of a little bird by the will of Holy Mary. So we have one of the most ancient reinterpretations of the legend that will continue to circulate in Portugal in other texts of modern age as the legend of the monk and the little bird. The first serious studies in this regard date from the last century, respectively in 1903-1905 by Leite de Vasconcelos¹¹⁰ and in 1919 by José Joaquim Nunes whose works attest to the reworking of the Portuguese legend from the Legend of the Seven Sleepers. In other words, for many centuries the most popular theory was the Christian origin of the Portuguese legend because the Seven Sleepers legend entered in Portugal in the Medieval age through Jacobus de Voragine's *Golden Legend*, of which the National Library of Lisbon preserves a manuscript copy of the 13th century (1276)¹¹¹, which belonged to Alcobaça Monastery

Museos Etnográficos de Asturias, 2008, pp. 91-92.

108 Filgueira Valverde, *Tiempo y gozo eterno...*, pp. 78-85.

109 See Alfonso X il Saggio, *Cantigas de Santa Maria*, Ms. B.R.20, Biblioteca Nazionale Centrale di Firenze, secolo XIII, BNCf ms. Banco Rari 20; Alfonso X o Sabio, *Cantigas de Santa Maria*, edición crítica de Walter Mettmann, tomo I, Vigo, Edicións Xerais de Galicia, 1981, pp. 392-393.

110 Leite de Vasconcelos, *Poesia e Ethnographia*, in "Revista Lusitana", VIII, 1903-1905, pp. 29-35; José Joaquim Nunes, *Uma lenda medieval: o monge e o passarinho*, in "Academia das Ciências de Lisboa – Boletim de Segunda Classe", XII, 1919, pp. 3-25.

111 Jacobus de Voragine, *Legenda Aurea*, 1276, Ms., Biblioteca Nacional de Portugal digital, ALC-40.

(one of the first foundations of the Cistercian Order in Portugal). In addition, the Seven Sleepers legend is included in *Martyrologium Romanum* (that was translated in Portuguese from Latin in 1591)¹¹², in the *Menologion of Basil II*¹¹³ and in *Passio Sanctorum Martyrum Septem Dormientium apud Ephesum*¹¹⁴ by Gregory of Tours; texts that were transmitted to Portugal. In 1922 Pires de Lima¹¹⁵ was the first to support the hypothesis of the Muslim origin of the Portuguese legend, on the basis of the coexistence between Christians and Moors since the 8th century and the circulation of Eastern and Western texts in the Iberian Peninsula. So the Portuguese circulation of the Seven Sleepers legend might have occurred through two ways: a northern way thanks to the texts of Gregory of Tours and Jacobus of Voragine, and a southern one through Arab poets who arrived in the Iberian Peninsula from North Africa.

Jacobus de Voragine's Golden Legend and the Liturgy in the Western Middle Ages IG

It is notoriously complicated to measure the success of a hagiographic tale in the public eye during the medieval period, because suitable indicators are lacking or are so slim and indirect as to require an interpretative effort that may risk generating a sort of over-interpretation. Yet, at least for those stories and hagiographic references that became part of the liturgy, it is possible to try to recover their diastatic circulation. Their presence in liturgical texts, in fact, not only confirms that the narrative was referred to during sacred services and could be heard by all the faithful who attended mass, but above all, it confirms that it could inspire sermons. These did not usually take place in Latin but in the vernacular, which ensured the widest understanding and circulation. The data found in this way, if brought closer to the data resulting from the number of manuscripts and their dislocation in the various conservation institutions, can help us grasp the dimensions

112 *Martyrologio romano accommodado a todos os dias do ano conforme a noua ordem do Calendario que se reformou por mandado do Papa Gregorio XIII, tresladado de latim em portugues por algu[n]s padres da Companhia de Iesu. No fim deste Martyrologio vay o Calendario dos Santos naturaes deste Reyno e dos que nelle particularmente se celebrão*, Em Coimbra: em casa de Antonio de Maris, 1591, Biblioteca Nacional de Portugal digital, 323837.

113 *Menologio di Basilio*, sec. X, Ms., Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, Vat. gr. 1613.

114 Gregorius Turonensis episcopus, *Passio septem dormientium apud Ephesum* [translatio ex graeco], sec. IX-X, Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, Vat. Lat. 5771; Gregorius Turonensis episcopus, *Passio septem dormientium apud Ephesum* [translatio ex graeco], sec. XV, Biblioteca Medicea Laurenziana, Strozzi 4. See also Gregorii Turonensis, *Passio septem dormientium*, in B. Krusch, *Monumenta Germaniae Historica, Scriptores 2. Scriptores rerum Merovingicarum*, vol. VII, Hannover: Hahniani, 1884, pp. 757-769.

115 J.A. Pires de Lima, *Tradições portuguesas de origem possivelmente muçulmana*, in "Revista de Guimarães", 32/1, Jan.-Mar., 1922, pp. 27-33.

of the “success of the hagiographic narrative” more accurately. For this reason, I consider it worthwhile to investigate the dissemination of the account of the Seven Sleepers in the *Legenda Aurea*, a text that reproduces the sequence of the liturgical year and experienced an extraordinary dissemination.¹¹⁶ In addition to the *Legenda*, I would like to analyse some liturgical texts in particular, in the *Liber Sacramentorum*, the *Genorimian Martyrology* and other later liturgical sources, as well as some *Passionaries* (14th -15th c.) from a Minorite environment, copies of which are kept in the Library of the International Society of Franciscan Studies in Assisi and come from various Italian and European Franciscan monasteries.¹¹⁷

Some (not) conclusive remarks (PLS)

Since the state of the research is still, so to say, in its infancy, it is not currently possible to draw conclusions on what we have presented above. It seems however mandatory to insist on the several innovative aspects that characterize EuTradOr as well as the present project. Our interdisciplinary approach will allow us to deal with the different versions of the Legend by highlighting both their common elements as well as the innovations existing within each literary and religious tradition. Since the work of philological reconstruction of the texts and the history of each literary tradition is necessarily time-consuming, we have decided to focus at first on the rituals connected to the texts. For this reason, priority will be given to the anthropological field experience conducted in recent years by Anna Tozzi Di Marco and Manoël Pénicaud in Turkey and France respectively; their expertise and collaboration will be thus crucial to EuTradOr’s research, inasmuch it will help us to understand the connections between texts and rituals, something which philology and textual criticism alone would not be able to shed light on. Another no less important issue is related to the ties between Christian and Muslim traditions. In this respect, it seems that an important contribution can be offered, for instance, by pre-modern Andalusian Arabic literature, a research field that has yet to be investigated in its entirety, while already appearing very promising. For the whole of these reasons, a workshop will be organized at University of Florence to focus on the main issues raised by EuTradOr’s work on the Legend.

116 A peculiar kind of circulation in L. Vezzosi, *I sette dormienti: evoluzione della Historiola contra insomniam in vox magica*, in “Filologia Germanica”, II, 2021, pp. 141-171.

117 G. Scarcia, *Nelle terre dei sette dormienti*, Perugia, Graphe, 2018

THE “SEVEN SLEEPERS”: MATERIALS FROM NORTH-EAST RUS’

Alexander Lapshin ¹

Summary

The history of the Grand Principality of Vladimir fits into a period between the 12th and 14th centuries. Materials related to the plot of the Seven Sleepers date back to this time. The Seven Sleepers are presented in iconographic compositions on the Suzdal hystera-amulet, in the reliefs of the western facade of the Saint George Cathedral at Yuriev-Polski and on the stone carved icon from Vladimir. The authors of these works are unknown. The Suzdal hystera-amulet and the stone icon arrived ready-made in Vladimir region. Among the builders and stone cutters of Saint George’s Cathedral, there were also local artisans. All these artifacts are united not only with the plot composition, but also by the fact that they are part of the material, intellectual and visual culture of North-Eastern Rus’ during the Middle Ages.

Key Words: *Seven Sleepers, North-Eastern Rus’, Grand Principality of Vladimir, Suzdal hystera-amulet, Saint George’s Cathedral of Yuriev-Polski, stone carved panagia icon, visual culture, religious culture*

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Introduction

The plot of the Seven Sleepers occupies a particular place in the culture of medieval Rus'. The story of seven young people, who hid in a cave to protect their faith and slept there for over 300 years, was well known and revered in Rus' during the Middle Ages. This plot is presented in the heritage of medieval Rus': church literature, book miniatures, icon painting, temple fresco and monumental relief composition, works of applied art (carved stone and metal icons).

The earliest description of a cave in Mount Ohlon (Celion, Peony) in Russian pilgrimage literature is the text of the southern Russian cleric Abbot Daniel (Daniel the Pilgrim), who traveled to the Holy Land in 1104-1106. He was not the first traveler to leave Russia, but his travels were the first, which there are written records of. In the chapter dedicated to the city of Ephesus, Daniel wrote:

*"There is a cave nearby where lie the bodies of seven youths who slept for three hundred and sixty years: under King Decius they fell asleep, and under King Theodosius they appeared. In the same cave, three hundred holy fathers lie; here Saint Alexander lies, and the coffin of Magdalene Mary, and her head; and the holy Apostle Timothy, a disciple of the holy Apostle Paul, lies in an old tomb. And in the old church there is an icon of the Holy Mother of God, with the help of which the saints defeated Nestorius the heretic."*¹

It is noteworthy that Daniel talks about the cave as something well known. He does not retell the plot, but gives a description of the shrine. In other words, Daniel assumes that any reader (or listener) knows the story of the Seven Sleepers and understands the importance of this plot in a religious and ecclesiastical sense. The materials of this publication confirm this thesis.

The list of medieval Rus' monuments associated with the plot of the Seven Sleepers is quite large². In this publication, I present materials from the

¹ Zhitiye i khozhdeniye igumena Daniila iz russkoy zemli [The Life and Walking of Hegumen Daniel from the Russian Land], in "Pamyatniki literatury Drevney Rusi: XII vek", M.: Khudozhestvennaya literatura, 1980, S.24-115.

² The most representative materials of this group: a miniature (12th-13th centuries) of the Khludov Psalter (9th century), a fresco in the Church of the Annunciation on Myachino near Novgorod (1189), a relief composition on the western facade of St. George's Cathedral in the city of Yuryev-Polski (13th century), stone double-sided icon "Our Lady of Tenderness and the Seven Youths of

Vladimirian Rus' or Grand Principality of Vladimir - a North-East Slavic medieval state, centered in Vladimir.

North-Eastern Rus' is a historical region uniting a group of Russian principalities between the Volga and Klyazma rivers in the 9th-15th centuries. Finno-Ugric tribes lived here at the end of the 1st millennium AD. In the 9th-10th centuries, the Slavs came here and the active development of these territories began: numerous rural settlements and cities appeared. The main urban centers of these lands were: Rostov (first mention in the chronicle - 862), Suzdal (first mention in the chronicle - 1024), Vladimir (first mention in the chronicle - 1108), Moscow (first mentioned in the chronicle in 1147), Yuriev-Polski (first mention in the chronicle - 1152), Pereslavl-Zalesski (first mention in the chronicle - 1152), Dmitrov (first mention in the chronicle - 1154). The rulers of this territory were members of the Rurik dynasty - the sons of the Prince of Kyiv. In 987-1010 at Rostov the first prince was Yaroslav the Wise. His son Yuri Dolgorukiy (Yuri the Long Arm) in 1125 transferred the capital of his possessions from Rostov to Suzdal. In 1149-1151 and 1155-1157. Yuri was the Great Prince of Kyiv. In 1155, his eldest son Andrei became Prince of Vladimir. After the death of his father in 1157, Andrei inherited the title of the Great Prince, but remained at Vladimir. After the death of Andrei, the throne of the Grand Prince of Rus' passed successively to his younger brothers - Mikhail and Vsevolod. The last of them (Vsevolod III, Vsevolod the Big Nest) was the Prince of Kyiv and Pereyasavl before the reign at Vladimir. During the reign of the sons of Yuri Dolgorukiy (Andrey and Vsevolod), the princes of Vladimir controlled Kyiv and Novgorod. This is how the Great Principality of Vladimir arose. In the XII-XIV centuries, the Grand Principality of Vladimir became the core of the Russian state. In 1214,

Ephesus"/"Nicholas the Wonderworker with the Life" (14th century), a cast encolpium icon from the collections of the State Historical Museum (XVI century), an icon sample from the collections of the State Historical Museum (late 17th century). See: Vagner G.K., *Legenda o semi spyashchih efesskih otrokah i ee otrazhenie vo vladimiro-suzdal'skom iskusstve* [The Legend of the Seven Sleeping Ephesian Youths and Its Reflection in the Vladimir-Suzdal Art], in "Vizantijskij vremennik", Tom 23, M.: Izd-vo AN SSSR, 1963, S. 85–104; Tsarevskaya T. Yu. *Freski tserkvi Blagoveshcheniya na Myachine («v Arkazhakh»)* [The frescoes of the Church of the Annunciation on Lake Myachino ("in Arkazhi")]. Novgorod; St. Petersburg: Dmitry Bulanin, 1999, S. 57-61; Milutenko N.I., *Suzdal'skij i peremyshl'skij zmeeviki – molitva i zaklinanie* [Gorgoneia from Suzdal and Przemyśl: The Prayer and the Spell], in "Slovesnost' i istoriya", No. 1, 2021, SPb: Izd-vo "Pushkinskij" Dom", 2021, S. 30–61; Macarius (Veretennikov), archimandrite. [The Holy Seven Youths of Ephesus], in "Theological Bulletin", No. 3 (42), 2021, M.: Moskovskaya dukhovnaya akademiya 2021, S. 189-201.

under the Great Prince Yuri (son of Vsevolod), the diocese of Vladimir was established. Since 1299, the residence of the Metropolitan of All Rus' was at Vladimir. The most famous of the princes of Vladimir is Alexander Nevsky - a commander and saint of the Russian Orthodox Church. From the end of the 14th century, the center of political life of Rus' moved to Moscow.

The iconographic composition "Seven Sleepers" is presented with materials from Suzdal, Yuriyev-Polski and Vladimir. The artifacts date back to the period of the 12th-14th centuries and are described in chronological order.

Suzdal hystera-amulet ("Suzdal'skii zmeevik")

"Suzdal'skii zmeevik" is a double-convex medallion with a diameter of 5.9 cm and a thickness of 0.7 cm, carved of heliotrope (blood jasper). The medallion was kept for a long time in the Sacristy of the Cathedral of the Nativity of the Theotokos in Suzdal. G.D. Filimonov published the medallion in 1876³. The medallion was transferred to the collection of the State Historical Museum (SHM, Moscow, Russia) in 1890. Currently, the amulet is exposed in the window of hall №10 at the main building of the museum. In the Electronic Catalog of Museum Objects SHM, the amulet is presented in the "Precious Metals" collection and has the inventory number OK 15560/19726/10811416⁴.

On both sides of the medallion, there are images and inscriptions in Old Russian, made using the intaglio technique (carved in depth). On one side, there are images of Seven Youths of Ephesus with their names. The youths are depicted sitting or reclining: Maximian is in the center, others are in a circle. There is a basket or a bag with a pilgrim's staff threaded through its handles near each figure. Along the rim of this side, there is a two-line Russian prayer inscription: an appeal to Christ, with a mention of the Seven Sleepers about the granting of life-giving sleep to certain George and Christina and the extinguishing of the "fiery power", which could include various diseases. On the other side there is a gorgoneion - an image of an anthropomorphic head with six serpentine bodies emanating

3 Filimonov Yu.D., Zmeevik suzdal'skogo Rozhdestvenskogo sobora [Zmeevik from the Suzdal Nativity Cathedral], in "Vestnik obshchestva drevnerusskogo iskusstva pri Moskovskom Publichnom muzej", № 1-12 (1874-1876), Otd. IVth Smes', M.: Universitetskaya tipografiya, 1876, S. 73-75.

4 Zmeevik. Nachalo XIII veka [Zmeevik. Beginning of the XIII century.] in "Gosudarstvennyj istoricheskij muzej. Elektronnyj katalog". Retrieved from <https://catalog.shm.ru/entity/OBJECT/1703850?query=змеєвик&index=9>

from it with the heads of dragons, turned to the left. Six eight-pointed stars are located between the serpentine bodies. Along the rim of this side, there is a two-line Russian prayer inscription: an appeal to Christ for mercy on certain Mary and Christina.

The medallion became the subject of attention of many researchers. The most significant works were carried out by M.N. Speransky⁵, A.S. Orlov⁶, A.N. Ryndina⁷, M.V. Shchepkina⁸, V.N. Zalesskaya⁹, T.V. Nikolaeva and A.V. Chernetsov¹⁰, A. A. Gippius i A. A. Zaliznyak¹¹, Yu.Yu. Shevchenko¹², N.I. Milyutenko¹³. "Suzdal'skii zmeevik" is known outside of Russia and is considered within the framework of the hystera-amulet typology of Byzantine and medieval Russian traditions¹⁴.

In 2019-2023, I completed a complex study program of the amulet on the topic "Suzdal'skii hystera-amulet in the context of the history of medicine." The project plan included the characterization of the medallion as an instrument of magic-medical practices in three stages: 1 – iconological analysis of the images on both sides of the medallion; 2 - identifying the relationship between images and prayer inscriptions; 3 – definition

5 Speranskij M.N., O zmeevike s sem'yu otrokami [About the Zmeevik with Seven Youths], in "Arheologicheskie izvestiya i zametki, izdavaemye imp. Moskovskim arheologicheskim obshchestvom", Tom I, № 2, M.: tip. A.I. Mamontova, 1893, S.49-60.

6 Orlov A.S., Amulety-«zmeeviki» Istoricheskogo muzeya ["Zmeevik"-amulets of the Historical Museum Collection], in "Otchet gosudarstvennogo istoricheskogo muzeya za 1916-1926 gg. Prilozhenie V", M.: GIM, 1926, 55 s.

7 Ryndina A.V., Suzdal'skij zmeevik [The Suzdal Zmeevik], in "Drevnerusskoe iskusstvo: hudozhestvennaya kul'tura domongol'skoj Rusi", M., 1972, S. 217-234.

8 Shchepkina M.V., O proiskhozhdenii Uspenskogo sbornika [On the Origin of the Assumption Codex], in "Drevnerusskoe iskusstvo: Rukopisnaya kniga", M.: Nauka, 1972, S. 74–80.

9 Zalesskaya V.N., K voprosu ob atribucii suzdal'skogo zmeevika: V svyazi so stat'ej A. V. Ryndinoj «Suzdal'skij zmeevik» [On the Issue of Attribution of the Suzdal zmeevik: In Connection with the Article by A.V. Ryndina "Suzdal'skij zmeevik"], in "Vizantijskij vremennik", Tom XXXVI, M.: Nauka, 1974, S. 184–188.

10 Nikolaeva T.V., Chernetsov A.V., Drevnerusskie amulety-zmeeviki [The Old Russian Zmeevik-Amulets], M.: Nauka, 1991, S. 82–83.

11 Gippius A.A., Zaliznyak A.A., O nadpisyah na Suzdal'skom zmeevike [About the Inscriptions on the Suzdal Zmeevik], in "Balto-slavyanskije issledovaniya –1997", M.: INDRIK, 1998, S. 540–562.

12 Shevchenko Yu.Yu., Bogoroditsa Spileotissa na drevnih hristianskih filakteriyah c izobrazheniyami serpentarid [Our Lady Spileotissa on Old Russian Christian Phylacteries with Images of Serpentarides], in "RusArh – elektronnyaya nauchnaya biblioteka po istorii drevnerusskoj arhitektury". Retrieved from <http://rusarch.ru/shevchenko4.htm>

13 Milutenko N.I., Suzdal'skij i peremysl'skij zmeeviki – molitva i zaklinanie [Gorgoneia from Suzdal and Przemyśl: The Prayer and the Spell], in "Slovesnost' i istoriya", № 1, 2021, SPb: Izd-vo «Pushkinskij Dom», 2021, S. 30–61.

14 Spier J., Medieval Byzantine Magical Amulets and Their Tradition, in "Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes", Vol. 56, London: The Warburg Institute University of London, 1993, Pp. 25–62; Björklund H., Protecting Against Child-Killing Demons: Uterus Amulets in the Late Antique and Byzantine Magical World, Helsinki: Faculty of Arts at the University of Helsinki, 2017, 82 p.

the relationship between images, inscriptions, material and shape of the amulet. The results of the work are presented in some publications¹⁵.

The question of dating and attribution of this artifact is debatable. Some researchers believe that the medallion belonged to Maria Shvarnovna (1158 - 1205/1206) - the wife of the Grand Prince of Vladimir Vsevolod the Big Nest (1154–1212)¹⁶. Others correlate the gem with Princess Christina Ingesdotter of Sweden (?-1122), who was the first wife of Mstislav I (1076-1132) – the Prince of Novgorod and Kyiv¹⁷. The third option is to identify the owner of the medallion, Maria, as the wife or widow of Moislav, a member of the princely family of the mid-12th century¹⁸. Keeping in mind the variability of attribution of the medallion, the following theses seem quite consistent: 1) the inscriptions were made between the mid-12th and early 13th centuries; 2) the inscriptions correlated with the images.

The "Suzdal'skii zmeevik" belongs to a group of artifacts defined as Byzantine Hystera amulets and Old Russian zmeevik-amulets¹⁹. These medallions appeared in Byzantium, came to Rus' at the end of the Early

15 Biserova A.V., Lapshin A.G., «Suzdal'skij zmeevik» v kontekste istorii mediciny [Suzdal Hystera-amulet in the Context of History of Medicine], in "Suzdal'skij sbornik – 2018: Materialy XI Vserossijskoj nauchno-prakticheskoy konferencii (26.10.2018)", Vladimir: OOO "Tranzit-IKS", 2019, S.14–20; Biserova A.V., Lapshin A.G., Molel'nye nadpisi «Suzdal'skogo zmeevika» i medicinskie praktiki Srednevekov'ya [Prayer Inscriptions of the Hystera-amulet and Medical Practices of the Middle Ages], in "Kul'turnyj sloj. Sbornik nauchnyh statej", Vyp. 6, Nizhnij Novgorod: NGU, 2020, S.38–45; Lapshin A.G., «Suzdal'skij zmeevik» v kontekste istorii mediciny-2: syuzhet o semi otrokah efesskih [Suzdal Hystera-amulet "in the Context of History of Medicine -2: The Story of Seven Sleepers of Ephesus], in "Suzdal'skij sbornik - 2019: Sbornik nauchnyh statej", Vladimir: OOO "Tranzit-IKS", 2020, S. 139–146; Lapshin A.G., Verbal'naya formula «Suzdal'skogo yazyka» [Verbal Formula of the Suzdal Hystera-amulet], in "Vestnik VIGU. Seriya: social'nye i humanitarnye nauki", №25, Vladimir: VIGU, 2020, S. 16-24; Lapshin A.G., "Suzdal'skij zmeevik" i magicheskie praktiki mediciny Srednevekov'ya [Suzdal Hystera-amulet and Magical Practices of Medieval Medicine], in "Materialy XXIV Mezhhregional'noj kraevedcheskoj konferencii (19.04.2019)", Vladimir: VONB, 2020, S. 30–37; Lapshin A.G., K voprosu o naznachanii «Suzdal'skogo zmeevika» [About Destination of the Suzdal Hystera-amulet], in "Arheologiya Vladimiro-Suzdal'skoj zemli. Materialy nauchnogo seminar", Vyp. 10, M.: IA RAN, 2020, S. 146–152; Lapshin A.G., «Suzdal'skij zmeevik» i gemma iz Peremyshlya [Suzdal Hystera-amulet and the Gem from Przemyśl], in "Materialy XXVI Mezhdunarodnoj kraevedcheskoj konferencii (16.04. 2021)", Vladimir–Saratov: Amirit, 2022, S. 29–33; Lapshin A.G., «Suzdal'skij zmeevik» i ego poddelka [Suzdal Hystera-amulet and its imitation], in "Suzdal'skij sbornik - 2021: Sbornik nauchnyh statej", Vladimir: OOO "Tranzit-IKS", 2022, S. 98–106; Lapshin A.G., O poddelke «Suzdal'skogo zmeevika» [About Imitation of Suzdal Hystera-amulet], in "Arheologiya Vladimiro-Suzdal'skoj zemli. Materialy nauchnogo seminar", Vyp. 12, M.: IA RAN, 2022, S. 131-139; Lapshin A.G., «Suzdal'skij zmeevik» –3: medal'on iz geliotropa [Suzdal Hystera-amulet in the Context of History of Medicine –3: the Gem Made of Heliotrope], in "Suzdal'skij sbornik - 2022: Sbornik nauchnyh statej", Vladimir: OOO "Tranzit-IKS", 2022. – S. 17–25.

16 Nikolaeva T.V., Chernetsov A.V., Drevnerusskie amulety-zmeeviki...; Filimonov Yu.D., Zmeevik...; Shchepkina M.V., O proiskhozhdenii...

17 Zaleskaya V.N. K voprosu ob atribucii...; Ryndina A.V. Suzdal'skij zmeevik.

18 Gippius A. A., Zaliznyak A. A. O nadpisyah...; Milyutenko N.I. Suzdal'skij i peremyshl'skij zmeeviki...

19 Nikolaeva T. V., Chernetsov A. V. Drevnerusskie amulety-zmeeviki...; Spier J. Medieval Byzantine Magical Amulets...; Björklund H. Protecting Against Child-Killing Demons...

Middle Ages together with Christian Greek-speaking scholarship, were adapted into the old Russian culture and had been used for a long time - until the XIX century. All Russian medallions are made of metal or stone, with images on both sides: on one side - a Christian image, on the other - an image of a creature with the head/body of a woman from which 6 to 14 serpentine or dragon-like creatures emanate. Some of these zmeevik-amulets carried on prayer or spell inscriptions in Greek and/or Russian. Sometimes the prayer inscriptions mentioned the names of the owners - men and women. The shape of the medallions varied: round, oval; less often – octagonal, icon case; very rarely – quadrangular. During the Middle Ages, objects from this group were used as apotropaic artifacts.

The “Suzdal'skii zmeevik” occupies a special place among these materials. This is a high quality gemstone intaglio. This combination of images, inscriptions, material and shape is unique. The image of the Seven Sleepers correlates with their mention in the prayer inscription. Appeals to the Seven Youths of Ephesus in the treatment of diseases are recorded in healing prayers of the Middle Ages in the Greek, Slavic, Latin and Old English traditions²⁰. These text-prayers had to be personal, that is, include the name of the patient. The mention of the Seven Sleepers in these text-prayers correlates with the Christian theological meaning of the plot: the Lord, through the awakening of the youths after a long sleep, revealed to the Church the secret of the resurrection of the dead. The youths are depicted as sitting or reclining - in positions that are uncomfortable for sleeping. Perhaps such poses are iconographic attempts to convey the moment of awakening from sleep - a continuation of “way”. Near each youth are depicted a staff and a bag - markers of a pilgrim. This corresponds to one of the self-designations of a Christian - “Follower of the Way.”

Medieval medicine was “sympathetic,” meaning it treated like with like. There are two parts of this medicine - “material” and “immaterial”. The first (“material”) involved treatment with substances and objects similar (in color, shape or composition) to parts of the body, physiological fluids or the cause of the patient’s suffering. The second (“immaterial”) turned to prayer, rituals and spells. They followed a “comprehensive approach” often, using both material objects and verbal incantations. In the logic of medieval sympathetic medicine, an appeal to the plot of the Seven

20 Lapshin A.G. «Suzdal'skij zmeevik» v kontekste istorii mediciny-2...; Lapshin A.G. Verbal'naya formula...; Lapshin A.G. K voprosu o naznachanii...; Milyutenko N.I. Suzdal'skij i peremyshl'skij zmeeviki...

Sleepers implies healthy sleep, restoring physical strength and mental balance. Waking up from such a dream is, in a sense, "resurrection." This completely coincides with the theological significance of the plot about Seven Youths of Ephesus, which was interpreted in folk Christianity in the context of everyday life²¹.

Calming and restorative sleep counters agitation, fussiness, restlessness, delirium and frenzy. The medical indication of the last are aggressiveness and incoherent speech of a patient in an unconscious state. The causes of mental disorders can be mental illness, extreme conditions (for example, hypoxia in the mountains or under water), as well as pathological conditions of the body (for example, intoxication). Often illnesses are accompanied with increase in body temperature.

A person's subjective sensations at elevated temperatures include increased chills and trembling in the muscles. These markers of the disease in the Middle Ages were called "fever". Many healing prayers and magic-medical recipes of Medieval Europe, mentioning the Seven Youths of Ephesus, are aimed at counteracting fever. They named the fever as "fiery force" in the prayer on "Suzdal'skii zmeevik". Taking into account the level of development of medical knowledge in the Middle Ages, symptoms, including malaise, weakness, sleep disorders and high temperature, could relate to a wide range of diseases - from various infections and poisonings to nervous disorders.

The images and inscriptions on the other side of the medallion from Suzdal, its shape, the material of which it is made, and the carving technique (intaglio) also find explanations in the traditions of the healing practices of Europe and the Middle East of the late Classical and Middle Ages. But this has an indirect connection with the plot of Seven Sleepers and it is out of topic-limits of this publication.

21 Kirillin V. M. Simvolika chisel v literature Drevney Rusi (XI-XVI veka) [Symbolism of Numbers in the Literature of Medieval Rus' (XI-XVI centuries)]. St. Petersburg: Aletya, 2000; Bonser W. The Seven Sleepers of Ephesus in Anglo-Saxon and Later Recipes., in "Folklore", Vol. 56, №2 (1945), Abingdon: Taylor & Francis, Pp. 254-256; Lapshin A.G., «Suzdal'skij zmeevik» v kontekste istorii mediciny-2: syuzhet o semi otrokah efesskih [Suzdal Hystera-amulet " in the Context of History of Medicine -2: The Story of Seven Sleepers of Ephesus], in "Suzdal'skij sbornik - 2019: Sbornik nauchnykh statej", Vladimir: OOO "Tranzit-IKS", 2020, S. 139–146; Lapshin A.G., Verbal'naya formula «Suzdal'skogo yazyka» [Verbal Formula of the Suzdal Hystera-amulet], in "Vestnik VIGU. Seriya: social'nye i gumanitarnye nauki", №25, Vladimir: VIGU, 2020, S. 16-24; Milutenko N.I., Suzdal'skij i peremyshl'skij zmeeviki – molitva i zaklinanie [Gorgoneia from Suzdal and Przemysl: The Prayer and the Spell], in "Slovesnost' i istoriya", No. 1, 2021, SPb: Izd-vo "Pushkinskij" Dom", 2021, S. 30–61.

Thus, "Suzdal'skii zmeevik" represents healing practices not at the level of primitive magic and superstition, but as synthesis of the text tradition and complex technologies. This is not an object of personal piety, but a individual medical multitool used in the case of illness of one of three named persons. The amulet from Suzdal, Church Slavonic text-prayers and European (latin, old english) recipes with the mention of Seven Sleepers belong to a single magic-medical tradition. The Eastern Christian and Western Christian versions of the story of the Seven Youths of Ephesus are different in details. However, this is not of fundamental importance in the context of the topic under consideration. The reproduction of the plot of the Seven Youths of Ephesus in different cultures brought some variability of the names of the youths. For all traditions, the importance of the plot about the Ephesian events remained unchanged in the context of understanding sleep as the state of a person on the border (or abroad) of reality and as evidence of the possibility of rebirth or continuation of life after death. This explains the popularity of this plot for the treatment of sleep disorders. "Suzdal'skii zmeevik" perfectly illustrates this.

Reliefs of Saint George's Cathedral in Yuriev-Polski

In 1152, Prince Yuri Dolgorukiy founded a city on the left bank of the Koloksha River. They named city after the founder - Yuriev-Polski (Yuri's city in the fields). The ramparts and public buildings were erected in accordance with the order of the prince. Among these buildings was a Christian church, consecrated in honor of Saint George (George of Lydda), the patron saint of Prince Yuri. In 1212, Yuriev became the center of a small estate belonging to the son of Vsevolod III – Svyatoslav. In 1234, Svyatoslav, the grandson of Yuri Dolgorukiy, built a new Saint George's Cathedral here on the site of a "dilapidated" church built by his grandfather. The new cathedral was a four-pillar, three-aisle, three-apse temple, constructed of white stone of average quality. The vaults were made of porous tuff-like limestone, the walls were covered with cobblestones and lime mortar. The exterior of the cathedral was richly decorated with carvings and was famous for its beauty even centuries later. Unfortunately, the cathedral collapsed in the middle of the 15th century. It was "assembled again" by the Moscow architect V.D. Ermolin in 1471, probably with great changes. Later, it underwent repeated alterations, and only in Soviet times the extensions (bell tower, sacristy, warm side-chapel) disfiguring this beautiful building were demolished.

Initially the building was very slender and picturesque. The facades were divided with pilasters into three parts along the vertical and by arcature (columnar belt) horizontally, as was characteristic of the white-stone architecture of the late 12th-early 13th century. Judging by the design of the northern wall, surviving from the 13th century, the whole surface of the facades of the temple and all the architectural details were entirely covered with carving, which distinguished the Saint George's Cathedral. The combination of a carpet pattern with high relief figures of saints, human faces, animals and monsters was very difficult technically. First, at the construction site, on individual stones relief images were hewn out. Then they were introduced into the wall masonry. And only on the already finished wall carving of the carpet pattern was made, which braided all high reliefs and architectural details. This work required perfect precision from the carvers and was possible only on the basis of a preliminary detailed project for the placement of carved stones. The calculation shows that two artels (a cooperative association of artisans living and working together) worked on the carved decoration of the temple: one (at least 12 masters) cut high relief figures, another (up to 20 people) performed floral ornament. At the same time, the individual manner of the Vladimir-Suzdal masters is visible behind the unity of decoration.

A distinctive feature of the exterior of Saint George's Cathedral in Yuriev-Polski is the presence of complex plot compositions: Deesis, Our Lady of the Orante, "Crucifixion", "Ascension", "Trinity", "Jonah in the belly of the whale", "Transfiguration", "Seven Sleepers" "Three Youths in Fiery Furnace", "Daniel in the Moat with Lions", "The Ascension of Alexander the Great". Probably all the compositions were located in the upper parts of the facades. It was these parts that were heavily damaged during the collapse of the building. In 1471 V.D. Ermolin was unable to restore the temple to its original form. That is why some compositions were fragmented. This also applies to the composition on the subject that interests us.

Only five stones of the composition "Seven Sleepers" have survived. These are elaborate stones of rectangular shape. Their sizes range from 40 to 56 cm. During the restoration work of 1471, they used these stones not as parts of the plot composition, but as building material: they were mounted separately in the walls of the southern, western and northern facades of the temple. Thus, the plot composition fell apart. Each of five stones represents a figure of young man sitting or reclining. There is a halo around the head

of each youth. Near of every figure there is a basket with a staff threaded through its handle. The youths are dressed in tunics with long sleeves (kabbadion) and in cloaks fastened at the chest with a fibula. The youths are turned to the right on two stones, to the left - on three. Particularly noteworthy is the high quality of the stone carving: details of the clothing and hairstyles of the youths are visible on the reliefs. Fragments of floral patterns are visible on four blocks.

The historiography of the reliefs and architecture of Saint George's Cathedral is varied and numerous. G.K. Vagner studied the reliefs of the Ephesian youths and published the results during 1960-1963²². He interpreted the stones as parts of a multi-figure composition, identified the plot of the composition and presented a graphic reconstruction of the composition based on an analysis of the features of the reliefs and the sizes of the stones.

The conclusions of G.K. Vagner boil down to the following.

- 1) The composition included seven stones with similar reliefs of youths, five of which have survived. Two stones were lost, probably in the collapse of the cathedral in the mid-15th century. Stones and images differ in size, but not much. Perhaps this is due to the peculiarities of the masonry or is an attempt by the stonecutter to visualize the different ages of the youths.
- 2) The composition of the reliefs was centric (G.K. Wagner called it “circular”). There was a stone with the largest image at the center of the composition. Around it there were six stones with smaller images. The total area of the composition was calculated hypothetically (taking into account the dimensions of the surviving stones and the estimated sizes of the stones that were not preserved): $\approx 180 \times \approx 240 = \approx 43200$ square centimeters.
- 3) The centric character and poses of the youths bring the reliefs from Yuryev-Polski closer to the “Suzdal'skii zmeevik”.

22 Vagner G.K., O pervonachal'noj forme kompozicii «Sem' spyashchih otrokov» na fasade Georgievskogo sobora g. Yur'eva-Pol'skogo [About the Original Form of the Composition “Seven Sleeping Youths” on the Facade of St. George's Cathedral at Yuriev-Polski], in “Sovetskaya arheologiya” № 2 (1960), M.: Izd-vo AN SSSR, 1960, S. 263–270; Vagner G.K., Dva syuzheta fasadnoj plastiki Georgievskogo sobora 1230–1234 godov [Two Scenes of the Facade Plastics of St. George's Cathedral of 1230–1234], in “Kratkie soobshcheniya o dokladah i polevyh issledovaniyah Instituta arheologii”, Vyp. 87: Slavyano-russkie drevnosti, M.: Izd-vo AN SSSR, 1962, S. 92–99; Vagner G.K., Legenda o semi spyashchih efesskih otrokah i ee otrazhenie vo vladimiro-suzdal'skom iskusstve [The Legend of the Seven Sleeping Ephesian Youths and Its Reflection in the Vladimir-Suzdal Art], in “Vizantijskij vremennik”, Tom 23, M.: Izd-vo AN SSSR, 1963, S. 85–104.

- 4) The composition was located above the south window in the upper tier of the western facade.
- 5) Complex relief compositions were located above the windows in the upper parts of the northern, western and southern facades according to the scheme: at the center, there is a composition on a Gospel story, on the right and left - compositions on Old Testament and/or post-Gospel scenes. The compositions of the western facade were arranged in the following order: above the northern window - "Jonah in the belly of the whale", above the central window - "Transfiguration of the Lord", above the southern window - "Seven Sleepers". All three plots are evidence of transformation, overcoming death, and the infinity of existence of the righteous. The iconographic program of the western facade also included a Deesis composition located above the main portal of the temple.

The western facade is the main facade of any Christian church. The orientation of the cathedral to the cardinal points is a mandatory characteristic of Christian church architecture. Taking this into account, the peculiarity of the layout of the fortress within which the cathedral was located is noteworthy: the city was round in plan; there were two tower-gates and a main street connected the gates. Saint George's Cathedral was located in the southern part of the city, on the main street. This street was straight from the northern gate and approached the northern portal of the cathedral. Then the street turned southwest and went in a straight line through the southern gate of the city to the piers on the Koloksha River. Thus, the cathedral was an important factor for organizing of the city internal space. It was impossible not to see the cathedral. The reliefs of the cathedral served a didactic function: they represented a visualization of ideas, which were important to the residents of Yuriev-Polski and of the surrounding areas. Approaching the main facade of the cathedral, the believer saw what will happen (overcoming death, exit from darkness - reliefs "Jonah in the belly of the whale", "Transfiguration of the Lord", "Seven Sleepers") and how to achieve it (be firm in faith, follow the way of good people under the Deesis composition, including eleven figures above the portal). The reliefs were open to everyone. They were visible and were perceivable by representatives of social elite (nobility and priests) and commoners (peasants, artisans, merchants). This allows us to conclude: the plot of Seven Sleepers occupied an important place in the ideology of North-Eastern Rus' of the XIII century and was comprehensible at all levels of the social hierarchy.

Carved stone icon from Vladimir

In the second half of the 12th century, the city of Vladimir expanded significantly: they build new churches and new fortifications, the area and density of urban development increased. The city now included three hills, separated with deep depressions, and represented three independent fortified areas, connected with bridges. Vladimir's plan at that time was a triangle stretched along the east-west line: Vetchany Gorod (eastern part), Pecherny Gorod (central part), Novy Gorod (western part). Vetchany Gorod was built in a short time and had a regular infrastructure. This happened during the reign of Andrei Bogolyubsky - when Vladimir became the residence of the Grand Prince. The main unit of this part city structure was the "city estate" (usad'ba) - a complex of residential and utility buildings. Archaeological materials from this part of medieval Vladimir allow us to identify the social status of the estates owners: representatives of the nobility and church hierarchy, highly skilled artisans.

In 2007, during archaeological excavations in the northwestern sector of the Vetchany Gorod, a double-sided stone-carved icon made of grayish-brown slate was discovered. The icon has a rectangular shape (5.2 x 4.1-4.3 x 0.9-1.2 cm). The icon has losses on both sides. On both sides of the icon, there are relief images: on one side - depictions of Saint Nicholas and the Seven Sleepers, on the other - an image of a saint, presumably John Chrysostom²³. There are lot of attrition (traces of wear) on the second side. That means that second side was the reverse one. Calculating the specifics of elaboration of both sides, we may conclude: the icon was originally one-sided. A large stylistically different image on the reverse side was cut out later. Therefore, it differs sharply from the image on the front side. Thus, we may exclude a simultaneous formation of images on both sides.

The centerpiece of the icon contains a waist-length depiction of Saint Nicholas the Miracle Worker wearing a bishop's omophorion, holding a closed book of Gospels in his left hand and blessing with his right. Seven Sleepers surrounded the central image. They are located in three tiers, separated by two crossbars up to 0.3 cm thick: three figures at the bottom, two figures on the sides of Nikola, and two at the top of the composition.

23 Kabaev D.A., Kamennaya ikonka iz raskopa 2007 goda v 22-m kvartale goroda Vladimira [The Stone Icon from Excavations in 2007 at the 22nd quarter of Vladimir city], in "Arheologiya Vladimiro-Suzdal'skoj zemli: materialy nauchnogo seminara", Vyp. 3, M.: IA RAN, 2011, S. 122–125; Putsko V.G., Srednevekovye kamennye ikonki vo Vladimire [Medieval Stone Icons from Vladimir], in "Arheologiya Vladimiro-Suzdal'skoj zemli: materialy nauchnogo seminara", Vyp. 5, M.: IA RAN, 2015, S. 199–208.

Two figures in the upper part of the icon are depicted reclining, the rest are seated (they prop their heads up with their hands and lean on low columns). The columns are decorated with a mesh that imitates twisting. The youths are dressed in himation. The folds of clothing are conveyed with straight, hard lines. All the youths turn to Nicholas. The features of their faces are shown schematically. There is a halo around the head of each Sleeper.

The archaeological context of the discovery of the icon contains materials from the 15th-16th centuries. But from the point of view of iconographic typology, the icon dates back to the beginning of the 14th century²⁴. There is no contradiction here: a stone icon was made at the beginning of the 14th century and have been used more than 200 years. This corresponds to the conclusion that the image of John Chrysostom on the reverse side appeared a considerable time after the creation of the icon. Traceology analysis data allows us to conclude that the ornament on the side surfaces of the icon was applied much later after the icon began to be used. Perhaps the icon had a precious metal frame, which has not survived. Thus, the history of the icon can be divided into two periods: the first one – when it was an icon with the image of Saint Nicholas and the Seven Sleepers, in a metal frame; during the second period it was an icon with images on both sides, with primitive ornament on the side surfaces and in a new frame.

Carved stone icon from Vladimir takes place in the typological series of stone Russian medieval icons. The tradition of these icons came to Rus' from Byzantium and was adopted by Russian masters. A separate group of Russian medieval stone-carved icons include icons with images of Seven Sleepers. There are fourteen icons of such kind in museum collections at Moscow, Sankt Petersburg, Novgorod, Svyatogorsk, and Vladimir²⁵. Seven icons are with images on both sides: on one side - a composition with Seven Sleepers, on the other side - the Resurrection of Christ, the

24 Putsko V.G. Srednevekovye kamennye ikonki...

25 Ryndina..., S. 225-228; Nikolaeva T.V., Drevnerusskaya melkaya plastika iz kamnya XI-XVI w. [Medieval Russian Small Stone Plastics of the XI-XVI Centuries], M.: Nauka, 1983; Shamray A.V. Kamennaya ikonka s Tsarina gorodishcha [Stone icon from the Tsarina settlement], in "Materialy issledovaniy, restavratsii i ispol'zovaniya pamyatnikov istorii i kul'tury Slavyanogorskogo gosudarstvennogo istoriko-arkhitekturnogo zapovednika", Slavyanogorsk: SME, 1995, S. 67-70; Pyatnitsky Y., The Cult of "The Seven Sleepers of Ephesos" in "100 Jahre österreichische Forschungen in Ephesos. Akten des Symposions Wien 1995", Wien: Verlag der Österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, 1999. S.361-366; Putsko V.G., Novgorodskiy kamennyye ikonki s vklyucheniym izobrazheniy semi spyashchikh otrokov efesskikh [Novgorod stone icons including images of the seven sleeping youths of Ephesus] in "Sofiya", № 2 (2008), Novgorod: Izdatel'stvo Novgorodskoy yeparkhii, 2008. S. 8-12.

Holy Sepulcher, the Mother of God Hodegetria, Saint Nicholas of Myra, Saint Demetrius of Thessalonica), John Chrysostom. The other seven icons have images on only one side.

On all icons, the side with the Seven Sleepers is always a centric composition: the Seven Sleepers are located around the central figure - Christ (two icons), Our Lady of Tenderness (two icons), Saint Nicholas (nine icons), two unidentified saints (one icon). Thirteen icons date from the XIV century, one from the beginning of the XV century. The sizes of the icons are small, ranging from 4,1-10,2 x 3,3-6,3 x 0,3-1,2 cm. The icons are covered different types of soft stone (limestone, slate and other) and made of using the technique of relief carving. Six icons have a silver frame with a ring pendant. Presumably, the other eight icons also had a metal frame with a ring suspension, which has not survived. All the icons are identified as products of Russian masters.

There is no generalizing study on this group of artifacts. However, we can make several conclusions in the context of the topic under consideration. The plot of the Seven Sleepers continued to occupy an important place in the religious consciousness and visual culture of Rus' in the 14th century. All of these icons are objects of personal piety: people worn them ostentatiously, over clothes. These icons can be classified as "panagia" - a small, richly decorated religious image worn by high-ranking clerics on a chain over clothes and near their chest. A combinatorial scheme of the image is important in the context of the iconography. The composition with Seven Sleepers is organized around one of the main Christian images - Christ, Virgin Mary, Saint Nicholas. There is no need to talk about the importance of the image of Christ. The veneration of the Mother of Jesus was of great importance in the Middle Ages in general and particularly in Rus': for example, all the churches built in North-Eastern Rus' by Andrei Bogolyubsky were consecrated in honor of the feasts of the Mother of Jesus. Let us add to this the above-mentioned detail from the description of Abbot Daniel: in the Ohlon cave (or near the cave) in the old church there was an icon of the Holy Mother of Jesus, with the help of which the saints defeated Nestorius the Heretic. The presence of Saint Nicholas in third place in this row is not casual. Nicholas of Myra is the most revered saint in Rus'. The Orthodox calendar contains three feasts of Saint Nicholas, each of which has its own hymnography: December 6 (19) - the day of death; May 9 (22) - the day of the arrival of the relics in the city of Bari;

July 29 (August 11) - Nativity of Nicholas. In the weekly cycle, Saint Nicholas is venerated on Thursday, together with the apostles. Thus, the composition of the considered icons is a direct evidence of the importance of Seven Sleepers in theological and mnemonic aspects for the culture of late Medieval Rus'.

Conclusion

The history of the Grand Principality of Vladimir fits into the chronological framework between the XII and XIV centuries. Materials related to the plot of Seven Sleepers date back to this time. Seven Sleepers are presented in iconographic compositions on the Suzdal hystera-amulet, in the reliefs of the western facade of the Saint George Cathedral at Yuriev-Polski and on the stone-carved icon from Vladimir. The authors of these works are unknown. The Suzdal hystera-amulet and the stone icon arrived at Vladimir region ready-made. Among the builders and stonecutters of Saint George's Cathedral, there were also local artisans. All these artifacts are united not only with their plot iconographical composition, but also with the fact that they are part of the material, intellectual and visual culture of North-Eastern Rus' of Medieval epoch.

"Suzdal'skii zmeevik" is an individualized instrument of magic-medical practices, the tradition of which dates back to the era of Antiquity. The imported amulet was adapted for the daily life of members of a noble family (possibly the family of the Great Prince). This was impossible without knowledge of the plot of Seven Sleepers and the perception of its Christian theological meaning (salvation through the faith). The mention of Seven Sleepers in the healing prayer on the gem confirms this thesis. Consequently, we can say with full confidence that the plot about Seven Sleepers was an important part of the elite culture of North-Eastern Rus' of the 12th-13th centuries, which was based on the traditions of the late classical Middle East and Byzantium. These traditions, codified in Greek and Latin texts, were adopted in different national cultures of the High Middle Ages Europe. An example of this are healing prayers and medical prescriptions mentioning Seven Sleepers in Church Slavonic language and Old English one. One of these prayer recipes is presented on the Suzdal hystera-amulet.

Materials of the 13th-14th centuries (the reliefs of Saint George's Cathedral and the stone-carved icon from Vladimir) at first glance also belong to elite culture. The construction of Saint George's Cathedral and its design were

agreed upon with the princely administration. The icon-panagia was chosen by cleric himself. The cleric was definitely educated in theology and knew the story of the Seven Sleepers. However, it is the social status of these people (who made decisions about this choice) that indicates the fame and popularity of the plot of the Seven Sleepers among the majority of Rus' population. There could be no random elements on the main facade of the temple in the princely city and in the vestments of the high-ranking cleric. A large number of people (nobles and commoners, laymen and clergy - people of different levels of theological knowledge and biblical education) had the opportunity to examine the main facade of the cathedral or see the bishop. Consequently, the plot presented in the reliefs of the facade and on the icon-panagia had to be understandable and perceived by a wide range of people who represented all levels of the social hierarchy. All this gives reason to conclude that the story of Seven Sleepers was widely known and occupied an important place in the religious life, ideology and visual culture of North-Eastern Rus' during the Middle Ages.

Artistic Reawakenings of the Seven Sleepers' Myth (19th - 21st centuries)

Manoël Pénicaud¹

Abstract:

This study offers an extended overview of the many creations and reinterpretations by artists inspired by the shared myth of the Seven Sleepers (Christianity) and/or the People of the Cave (Islam). This survey is a continuation of the systematic collection undertaken in the 20th century by the Catholic Islamologist Louis Massignon (1883-1962), who is regarded as the main actor of the revival of the Seven Sleepers in the last century. Fifty years after his death, I have resumed this data collection, focusing here on the –potentially areligious– artistic reinterpretations of this myth that have inspired so many poets, writers, composers, playwrights, filmmakers, contemporary artists and so on. So much so that the story of the Seven Sleepers has become a myth “free of right” that anyone can appropriate and reinterpret freely, regardless of its religious or interreligious significance.

Keywords: *Seven Sleepers' Myth; Artistic creation; reinterpretation; heterochrony*

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Fig 1. *Les Sept Dormants*, by Laurence Sibille (2021) in the chapel of the Sept-Saints, Brittany, France © Pénicaud 2022

This chapter is a continuation of an extensive comparative study carried out over several years on the Seven Sleepers, and more specifically on the way in which the French Catholic Islamologist Louis Massignon (1883-1962) actively “awakened” them in the 20th century¹. Well known for his work on the Muslim mystic Mansûr el-Hallâj (858-922)², this scholar extended his research to other holy figures, such as Abraham, Elijah, Mary, Fatima or the Seven Sleepers. In the specific case of the latter, going beyond the strictly academic framework, this precursor of interreligious dialogue went so far as to initiate, from 1954-1955, a Christian-Muslim pilgrimage

1 Manoël Pénicaud, *Le réveil des Sept Dormants. Un pèlerinage islamo-chrétien en Bretagne* [The reawakening of the Seven Sleepers. A Christian-Muslim pilgrimage in Brittany], Paris, Le Cerf, 2016 (2014). For a biographical approach to L. Massignon, see Manoël Pénicaud, *Louis Massignon. Le “catholique musulman”* [Louis Massignon. The ‘Muslim Catholic’], Paris, Bayard, 2020.

2 Louis Massignon, *The Passion of Hallaj*, trans. by Herbert Mason, 4 Vol. Bollingen Series, Princeton University Press, 1982.

in Brittany (France), by inviting Muslim immigrant workers to take part in a modest Catholic pilgrimage (“pardon” in French) dedicated to the Seven Sleepers of Ephesus.

After discovering this local patron saint’s festival through his ethnologist daughter (Geneviève Massignon), Louis Massignon saw in it –in a rather avant-garde way at the start of the Algerian War – an opportunity to encourage a “serene peace” in North Africa and to prepare for the reconciliation of the “children of Abraham”. In so doing, he was aiming for both a political (intramundane) and eschatological (at the end of time) reconciliation. Despite inevitable ups and downs, this interfaith pilgrimage is still going strong seventy years on, and is one of the first initiatives for dialogue between Christians and Muslims in France³. Its rich history is a subject in itself, but we will see that several of the artistic works presented in this study are directly connected to this shared pilgrimage, which was intentionally “invented” for this purpose.

An Islamologist and professor at the prestigious Collège de France from 1926 to 1954, Louis Massignon –in the second half of his life– listed and collected “the many ‘awakenings’ of Christian and Muslim artists to the ‘apocryphal’ theme⁴” of the Seven Sleepers throughout the world, he wrote, in order to “supplement textual criticism with the study of artistic monuments⁵”. He therefore attached particular importance to works of art inspired by this “myth”, in the anthropological sense of the term. What is particularly significant is that it is a myth shared by Christians and Muslims alike.

From the 1930s onwards, and especially after 1950, Massignon systematically sought out all the cultural, textual and artistic references to the Seven Sleepers. The aim of his long-term investigation was to “locate, geographically and iconographically, a legend that had until then been ‘uprooted’ and projected into unreality⁶”. This article is not the place to list the many sites (caves, cemeteries, places of worship, pilgrimages,

3 *Les dormants d'Éphèse, au Vieux-Marché et dans le Coran* [The Sleepers of Ephesus, at Vieux-Marché and in the Qur'an], Rennes, Editions Goater, 2024 ; Manoël Pénicaud, *Muslim Pilgrims in Brittany. Pilgrimage, dialogue and paradoxes*, in Richard J. Natvig / Ingvild Flakerud (eds.), *Muslim Pilgrimages in Europe*, London, Routledge, 2017, pp. 184-198.

4 Massignon L., *Les Sept Dormants d'Éphèse (ahl Al-Kahf) en Islam et en Chrétienté. Recueil documentaire et iconographique* [The Seven Sleepers of Ephesus (ahl Al-Kahf) in Islam and Christianity. Documentary and iconographic collection], in “Revue des Études Islamiques”, Paris, Geuthner, 1959, p. 9.

5 Massignon, *Les Sept Dormants...*, 1961, p. 61.

6 *Ibid.*, p. 3.

etc.) or the various religious practices (prayers, therapeutic invocations, prophylactic formulae, etc.).

Nevertheless, let's mention a few examples of religious works that he catalogued during his lifetime: Persian miniatures in the greatest collections (private or public), Ottoman calligraphies in Istanbul, Greek and Russian icons, incunabula in the National Library in Paris, a Rococo altar in a chapel in Bavaria, Muslim mural inscriptions in the Comoros, engravings in Florence, an ex-voto in Germany, an antique reliquary in Marseille, etc.⁷

On the strength of this heritage, I thought it would be useful to continue this investigation into the 21st century and to research the artistic creations and variations inspired by the Seven Sleepers in Christian and Muslim worlds, as well as in non-religious contexts. Although the veneration of the Sleepers has now almost disappeared in the Western Catholic world, with a few exceptions⁸, it has to be said that, paradoxically, a number of artists continue to make use of this “governing myth”⁹ –as the Franco-Lebanese poet Salah Stétié (1928-2020) put it– and to appropriate it in forms that are sometimes as unexpected as they are renewed.

This article is therefore the result of a careful review of the artistic occurrences collected during my ongoing work on the Seven Sleepers and the Companions on the Cave. From a methodological point of view, this collection has been enriched over the years by the reading of academic works, the systematic watch of the Internet and my work as an exhibition curator¹⁰. For the sake of coherence, it has been decided to classify them by category of work, covering theatre, literature, poetry, folk tales, plastic arts, music and audiovisual productions¹¹. This inventory does not pretend

7 Massignon, *Les Sept Dormants...*, 1954-1963. His eight articles are richly illustrated (photographs, engravings, icons, calligraphy, plans, miniatures, statues, etc.). Massignon has also listed numerous textual and/or vernacular versions of the Dormants, in Islam and Christianity, from the Atlantic Ocean (Brittany, Morocco) to Central Asia (Afghanistan, China) and the Indian Ocean (Comoros).

8 Very few devotional sites remain, as in Brittany (Pénicaud 2016). The Italian anthropologist Anna Tozzi has studied a Catholic cult in Angri in Italy. See Anna Tozzi Di Marco, *Agiografia e culto dei Sette Dormienti. Storicità e processi di mitologizzazione dell'agiostoria efesina nel Mediterraneo* [Hagiography and the Cult of the Seven Sleepers. Historicity and processes of mythologising Ephesian legend in the Mediterranean], Bologna, GRA Publishers, 2023, pp. 173-175.

9 Salah Stétié, *Passage des Dormants* [Passage of the Sleepers], *L'ouvrage*, Paris, 1995, pp. 25-73

10 I have curated several exhibitions featuring the Seven Sleepers: *La Méditerranée des Sept Dormants* (2011), *L'Oriente dei Sette Dormienti* (2011) and *Lieux saints partagés* at the Mucem in 2015 and subsequently in other museums.

11 This classification took precedence over a chronological approach. It should be noted that the many purely religious creations (texts, martyrologies, icons, painting charts, etc.) are not taken into account here.

to be exhaustive, as these creations are legion¹². It does, however, aim to demonstrate the great heterogeneity and connections of the themes raised by this shared myth. It should be noted that we will be discussing both works featuring the Sleeping Ones and works inspired by them, either directly or indirectly. The focus will be on works created in the 20th and 21st centuries, although some earlier examples will be mentioned where relevant to the issue of artistic reinterpretation. The aim of this study is not to provide an exegesis, or even to deal with the great Christian founding narratives (the Syriac homilies of Jacob of Sarug¹³, *De Gloria Martyrium* by Gregory of Tours, *History of the Lombards* by Paul the Deacon, *The Golden Legend* by Jacobus de Voragine) or Islamic narratives (the Qur'an, Sura 18 known as the Cave). Similarly, this article does not aim to list ancient works of religious art (bas-reliefs, frescoes, paintings, icons, miniatures, etc.) but focuses primarily on contemporary creations.

Heterochrony of the Seven Sleepers and earlier heterochronic sources

Before presenting such an artistic panorama, it is crucial to mention the concept of “heterochrony” that is particularly well-suited to the Seven Sleepers. Brenda Dunn-Lardeau, a specialist in medieval literature, defines this notion as “the co-presence, deliberately instituted and clearly marked by a writer, between distinct historical periods that are qualitatively distant and maintain a significant relationship¹⁴”. The simultaneity of different eras is central, and this is indeed the case with the “legend” of the Sleepers, so much so that Dunn-Lardeau considers it to be the first properly heterochronic narrative:

“Taking all narrative genres together, the oldest heterochronic story we have found is the legend of the Seven Sleepers [...]. As far as literary history is concerned, even if the precursor motifs of the long sleep have been around since Antiquity [...], it is the legend of the Seven Sleepers that is the source

12 The inventory is more extensive in the French-speaking world, due to the nationality of the author. For a closer look at Italian productions, see Anna Tozzi Di Marco, *Il mito dei Sette Dormienti nella produzione letteraria e artistica italiana attraverso i secoli*, in Nicola Maria Camerlengo (ed.), *Atti del convegno Storia e Miti*, Agrate Brianza, Edistorie, 2024.

13 See François Jourdan, *La tradition des Sept Dormants. Une rencontre entre chrétiens et musulmans* [The tradition of the Seven Sleepers. A gathering between Christians and Muslims], Paris, Maisonneuve et Larose, 2001 (1983).

14 Brenda Dunn-Lardeau, *Le Voyage imaginaire dans le temps. Du récit médiéval au roman postmoderne* [Imaginary time travel. From the medieval tale to the postmodern novel], Grenoble, Ellug, 2009, p. 12 ; see also Brenda Dunn-Lardeau, *La légende des Sept Dormants ou la traversée du temps* [The legend of the Seven Sleepers or a journey through time], in Barbara Fleith / Franco Morenzoni (eds.), *De la sainteté à l'hagiographie. Genèse et usage de la Légende Dorée* [From sanctity to hagiography. Genesis and use of the Golden Legend], Geneva, Droz, 2001, pp. 227-252.

of heterochronic stories [...] thanks, on the one hand, to its dissemination and numerous rewritings and, on the other, to the fact that the motif of the crossing of historical time, detached from its original context, has spread to a number of works [...]¹⁵.”

In narrative terms, the story is peppered with elements that demonstrate the anachronism experienced by the seven characters, at least by the one who returns to Ephesus in hiding to supply his companions: the city has changed and he doesn't recognise it, the gold coin is no longer legal tender, no one believes or recognises him, his house is inhabited by other people, Christianity has become the main religion (the cross on the city gate), and so on. Whether written or told orally, these heterochronous events must have left a strong impression on people's minds over the centuries, with everyone imagining themselves in the place of the Sleepers. What would we do if we woke up two or three centuries from now? The Sleepers's story is therefore a kind of science-fiction story before its time, in the sense that it already contains the dramatic elements that many 20th and 21st century authors would come to appreciate, namely time travel.

As a preamble, we should mention other long legendary slumbers, in which the protagonists, after having slept for an inhuman length of time, wake up in a transformed society. A number of earlier stories pre-existed the Seven Sleepers of Ephesus and may have inspired its development. Let's start with the story of Epimenides (6th or 7th century BC). Originally from Knossos in Crete, this young shepherd is said to have slept for fifty-seven years, as recounted by the philosopher Diogenes Laertius (3rd century BC):

It is reported of him, that when he was young, his Father sent him a field to fetch home a Wether; but that he in the heat of the day, turning aside out of the way entered into a Cave, and there falling asleep, slept on for fifty seven years together. When he awoke, he went to seek the Wether, as one that believed he had slept not above an hour or two; but not finding it, he returned to the Village. Where when he saw an unexpected change of unknown Faces, and found the Land in the possession of a stranger, he hastened to the City. At what time when he entered his own House, he was asked who he was, and what he would have? He began to be in a deep amaze, till being with much ado known by his younger Brother, who was now grown into years, from him he understood the whole Truth. Upon which his fame flying over all Greece, he was look't upon as one beloved of the Gods¹⁶. [...]"

¹⁵ Ibid., pp. 17-18 et p. 66. Translated into English by the author, as the following quotes.

¹⁶ Diogenes Laertius, *The lives, opinions, and remarkable sayings of the most famous ancient philosophers*, London, Brewster, I, 1688, pp. 85-86.

In his sleep, he is said to have acquired a certain amount of knowledge, so much so that when he returned to mankind, he was immediately recognised for his wisdom. Hence the proverbial expression “Epimenidean Sleep” is used when someone sleeps for extremely long time. This episode inspired Goethe to write his poem *The Awakening of Epimenides* (*Des Epimenides Erwachen*, 1815), and we will see later that he also dedicated a poem to the Seven Sleepers.

The myth of Endymion, also from Greek mythology, tells of another long sleep. Depending on the version, Endymion is either King of Elis or a simple shepherd. He was the lover of Selene –or Artemis (who was worshipped in Ephesus)– who put him to sleep in a cave so that he would keep his beauty for ever. In his study on the Seven Sleepers, François Jourdan adds a few details: “A shepherd of rare beauty, he lived on Mount Latmos near Milet (province of Caria), fifty kilometres from Ephesus. He fell asleep with his dog in a cave, sleeping eternally and never growing old, thus preserving his youth and beauty for ever¹⁷.” The presence of the dog, the cave and the proximity of Ephesus immediately bring to mind the myth of our Sleepers.

The same François Jourdan also relates the story of Abimelech, a character present in the third book of Baruch, a Greek Christian apocryphon from the 2nd century. He is said to have undergone “a long sleep of seventy years, which preserved him from the Exile (to Babylon) that took place at the same time¹⁸.” He also mentions the case of another Abimelech who is said to have slept for seventy years during Nebuchadnezzar’s siege of Jerusalem.

Let’s briefly mention the Jewish legend of Honi haMe’aguel, a Jewish scholar of Israel from the 1st century BC, recorded in the Talmud (*Mishna Ta’anit* 3; 8). This man, seeing someone planting a carob tree, pointed out to him that he would never have the usufruct of it since this tree, it is said, does not bear fruit for seventy years. Honi then went on his way. But God put him to sleep for seventy years. Once awake, he came out of his cave and measured the time by seeing the tree laden with fruit. But no one recognises him anymore, so he returns to his cave to die.

¹⁷ Jourdan, *La tradition des Sept Dormants*..., p. 114.

¹⁸ Ibid., p. 116.

Theatrical works

Theatrical productions about the Dormants are not abundant. To date, the oldest date back to the 18th century. Anna Tozzi Di Marco places them in the context of a dramatic genre that had been in vogue in Italy since the late Middle Ages, a kind of popular religious theatre, in the vernacular with an apologetic aim. She mentions two works from the 18th century: *I santi sette Dormienti* (1718) by the Cortonese canon Sebastiano Zaccagnini and *Li sette dormienti* (1789) by Luigi Billi¹⁹.

In France, in the second half of the 19th century, there were several children's stories and a few plays published for schoolchildren, making it a particularly popular theme without becoming a theatrical success²⁰. Massignon mentions the satirical drama *The Seven who slept* (1919) by Arthur Kingsley Porter (1883-1933), published in Boston²¹. A specialist in Romanesque architecture and sculpture, this medievalist was influenced and inspired by the four magnificent stained-glass windows of the Rouen Cathedral, which are now part of the collections of major American museums²².

The most important theatrical work is the Arabic play *Ahl al-Kahf* (*The People of the Cave*, 1933)²³. Its author, Tawfiq Al-Hakim (1898-1987), is considered the most important Arab playwright, if not the creator of modern Egyptian theatre. Based on the legend of the Sleepers, he wove a drama in four acts, in which he allowed himself several innovations. Although his characters are presented as Christians, there are several elements of the Qur'anic version, starting with the number of Sleepers (three), the importance of the cave, the name of the dog (Kitmir) and the length of their sleep (309 years). Another variation is that the story is not set in Ephesus but in the city of Tarsus, in Cilicia, not far from which there is a Muslim site dedicated to the People of the Cave. Al-Hakim therefore composed between the Christian and Muslim versions. In his story, there

19 Tozzi Di Marco, *Il mito dei Sette Dormienti...*, 2024.

20 For example: J. M. Bouteloup, *Dormants ou les martyrs d'Éphèse,, mystère en trois actes et un prologue d'après la légende de Jacques de Voragine*, Nemours, Paris, A. Lesot ; A. Pages, *Les sept frères Dormants, drame historique (actes pour jeunes gens)*, Le Mans, Le répertoire des cercles ; *Les sept Dormants, mystère en un acte et deux tableaux, paroles et musique de La Bonne de Beuretour*, Nice, L'Éclaireur, 1910.

21 Arthur Kingsley Porter, *The Seven who slept*, Boston, Marshall Jones Company, 1919.

22 Massignon, *Les Sept Dormants d'Éphèse...*, 1960, pp. 110-111. As I write these lines in 2024, a controversy has broken out in France over the disappearance of these stained glass windows in Rouen at the beginning of the 20th century.

23 Tawfiq Al-Hakim, *The People of the Cave*, Cairo, Elias Modern Publishing House & Co., 1989. See Bruce Fudge, *The Men of the Cave: Tafsīr, Tragedy and Tawfiq al-Ḥakīm*, "Arabica", 54, 1, 2007, pp. 67-93

are only three Sleepers: two nobles from the court of Diocletian (and no longer Decius), plus a shepherd and his dog. Once awake, one of them leaves for the city. But after warning his companions, all three set off for Tarsus. Then, realising that their world has disappeared, two of them return to their cave, while the last one chooses to stay with Priska, the king's daughter, who turns out to be a lookalike of his beloved of old. Al-Hakim has therefore included this love story to lengthen the narrative and spice up its dramatic dimension. Finally, the Companions of the Cave die again. It should be noted that one of them dies by losing his faith, which is the opposite of the legend's original purpose. Brenda Dunn-Lardeau comments: "The legend now reflects the eschatological doubts of its new audiences²⁴." The other Sleepers choose to abandon themselves to God, because even if the population has become religious (i.e. Muslim), they can no longer find their time or their place. This play has been a great success in several Arabic-speaking countries²⁵. Massignon was already familiar with it in 1938, when he quoted it in his first lecture on the Seven Sleepers at the Congress of Orientalists in Brussels²⁶. It is a famous example of a contemporary adaptation of the myth, in its Christian and Muslim versions²⁷.

Literary works

Many more literary adaptations feature the Seven Sleepers, each in its own way. Some are directly inspired by the great founding stories already mentioned (and which are therefore not considered here).

In 1869, the famous American writer, essayist and humourist Mark Twain (1835-1910) published *The Innocents Abroad*²⁸. In this novel, the young hero Samuel Clemens is asked by a newspaper to accompany the first tourist trip organised from America through old Europe, particularly the Mediterranean. The itinerary takes in Ephesus, and the author takes the liberty of telling the story of the Seven Sleepers in his own way, with the humour and offbeat outlook of a man from the New World.

24 Dunn-Lardeau, *Le Voyage imaginaire dans le temps...*, p. 53.

25 The play has been studied by several generations of students in many Arab countries. For example, it probably influenced the name of the theatre company *Ahl al-Kahf* directed by Toufik Kheznadar in Constantine (Algeria) in the 1950s.

26 Louis Massignon, *Recherches sur la valeur eschatologique de la légende des Sept Dormants chez les Musulmans* [Research into the eschatological value of the Seven Sleepers' Legend among Muslims], "Bulletin des Amis de Louis Massignon", 16, 2004, pp. 12-16.

27 In 2023, an Egyptian movie based on this play has been shot in Egypt and Morocco (see below).

28 Mark Twain, *The Innocents Abroad or The New Pilgrim's Progress*, American Publishing Company, 1869.

In 1905, the now forgotten French writer Jules Lemaître (1853-1914) published *La seconde vie des Sept Dormants*²⁹. Based on Jacobus de Voragine's version of *The Golden Legend*, he recounts their story with a clearly hagiographic intention, imagining the events that took place after their awakening in a world that had become Christian. Massignon does not seem to have known this version, even though he was a contemporary of it. However, a radio adaptation was broadcast on the national airwaves in 1959, at a time when the theme of the Seven Sleepers was well known thanks to the pilgrimage in Brittany. Nor did Massignon know the story by another contemporary, the Italian writer Nino Savarese (1882-1945), who published *I sette dormienti* (1922) in the literary journal *Rassegna Italiana*³⁰. Notoriously, there is also a dog in the story, named Kitmir, the name retained from the Qur'anic tradition.

In 1974, the French-speaking Swiss writer Jacques Mercanton (1910-1996) published the novel *L'été des Sept Dormants*³¹. It was through Louis Massignon that he learned of this legend. This former secretary of James Joyce met the French islamologist through the Protestant pastor Maurice Zundel. This was in 1955, at the height of Massignon's Ephesian period, and the two men were to maintain a rich correspondence³². The plot of this novel takes place in Germany, not far from the Chapel of the Seven Sleepers in Rothhof (Bavaria), which Massignon must have told him about. The story revolves around young teenagers in a house lost in the middle of deep forests, on a spiritual quest and a quest for sexual identity. Mercanton sprinkles a few Qur'anic (the divine rocking of the Sleepers) and Christian (the Dormition of the Virgin) references into the story, which he also takes from his readings of Massignon.

The short story *The Legend of the Sleepers* (1983)³³ by the Serbo-Croatian writer Danilo Kiš (1935-1989) offers the subjective point of view of one of the Sleepers as he wakes up. According to Brenda Dunn-Lardeau, the author "demonstrates his sensitivity to the Western and Qur'anic traditions

29 Jules Lemaître, *La seconde vie des Sept Dormants* [The second life of the Seven Sleepers], *En marge des vieux livres*, Paris, Société française d'imprimerie et de librairie, 1905.

30 Nino Savarese, *I sette dormienti* [The Seven Sleepers], in "Rassegna Italiana", Rome, September-October 1922, pp. 586-591. I thank Anna Tozzi for bringing this reference to my attention.

31 Jacques Mercanton, *L'été des Sept Dormants* [Summer of the Seven Sleepers], L'Âge d'Homme, 1980 (1974).

32 Dunn-Lardeau notes that Massignon "was one of the writers Jacques Mercanton admired most", *Le Voyage imaginaire dans le temps...*, p. 57.

33 Danilo Kiš, *The Legend of the Sleepers*, London, Penguin Modern, 2018 (1983).

of the Seven Sleepers, which he explores in a lyrical prose that is as spellbinding as it is expressive³⁴.” The son of a Montenegrin mother and a Hungarian-speaking Jewish father, he uses several Qur’anic elements: the three Sleepers, the 309-year sleep, the divine rocking, the name of the dog (“Qitmīr”). But the characters are indeed Christians. The setting is the same as that of Tawfiq Al-Hakim, from whom Danilo Kiš also borrowed the character of Priska. Moreover, his main character is also plagued by metaphysical doubts (like one of the Sleepers directed by Al-Hakim), and Brenda Dunn-Lardeau concludes: “Kiš shatters the certainties of the original story, replacing them with the doubts and fleeting flashes of hope of modern man³⁵.”

In 1996, Italian writer and director Andrea Camilleri (1925-2019) penned the crime novel *Il Cane di Terracotta*, translated into English under the title *The Terracotta Dog*³⁶. Here, the story is not about the Sleepers, but a detective mystery set in Sicily. The investigators discover a cave containing the bodies of two lovers in each other’s arms, with a terracotta dog at their feet, a bowl full of 1940s coins and a clay jug. One thing leads to another and Superintendent Montalbano, Camilleri’s hero, delves into the Christian and Muslim versions of the legend of the Seven Sleepers, and ends up arresting someone who had once written a research paper on them. Note that the writer introduces his character to the play by Tawfiq Al-Hakim, taking the liberty of “cleverly rewriting [the] sura” in the course of a dialogue, as Brenda Dunn-Lardeau puts it³⁷. Moreover, it was through the myth revisited by the Egyptian playwright that Camilleri’s idea for a novel was born, as he himself writes: “The idea of writing this story came to me while, as a courtesy to two Egyptian student directors, we were studying Tawfiq Al-Hakim’s *People of the Cave* in class.”

In 1999, the French author Alain Santacreu published the esoteric novel *Les Sept Fils du Derviche*³⁸, a title taken from a lost orientalist project by Gustave Flaubert. In a very personal and openly occultist reinterpretation, this literature teacher and theatre director weaves a mysterious initiatory story between Toulouse, Istanbul and Minor Asia. He sets the scene for two

34 Dunn-Lardeau, *Le Voyage imaginaire dans le temps...*, p. 53.

35 Ibid., p. 56.

36 Andrea Camilleri, *Il cane di terracotta* [The Terracotta Dog], Palermo, Sellerio, 1996 ; translated in English in 2002 by Stephen Sartarelli.

37 Dunn-Lardeau B., *Le Voyage imaginaire...*, pp. 60-61.

38 Alain Santacreu, *Les Sept Fils du Derviche* [The Seven Sons of the Dervish], Helette, Editions Curutchet, 1999.

caverns of the Seven Sleepers, one in Turkey and the other in “a certain place in France”, without revealing the location. The story concludes with an eschatological horizon that leads to the double ritual suicide/sacrifice of the two main characters.

In a completely different style, the novel *Je t'attends à Damas. Récit en écho à la légende des Sept Dormants* (2001) tells a very different story:

“A young film-maker wants to prove himself with a screenplay combining poetry, imagination and spirituality. He remembers a pilgrimage he went on as a child near Perros-Guirec [in Brittany]: the chapel built on an old dolmen, the big fire (‘tandad’), after Saturday evening mass. He decides to rediscover this pilgrimage and dreams of producing, scouting, extras, special places... Will he succeed?³⁹”

This story is interesting because it is rooted in Brittany, in the Christian-Muslim pilgrimage of the Sept-Saints founded by Massignon. A graduate of the École du Louvre, the author discovered the legend of the Sleepers through Muslim miniatures of the Ashab Al-Kahf.

In the Muslim world, the Sleepers are sometimes summoned freely, in one form or another. In 1988, a Moroccan author and ethnographer, Abdelkader Mana, established a metaphorical link between the People of the Cave of the Qur'an and a confraternity Sufi group from southern Morocco, the Regragas, known for having had seven founding Christian saints. This was an analogy made by the author and not by the members of this maraboutic confederation⁴⁰. A few years later, in 1994, another Moroccan author, Mustapha Akhmis, identified the Sleepers with another group of seven saints, those of Marrakech⁴¹. This author, who presents himself as an ethnologist, travels the city in search of its seven saints. However, the title is “misleading”, as it refers neither to the Seven Sleepers nor to the Ahl al-Kahf. This case is interesting because it shows how identification can be made at any time. The author gives no explanation for the choice of such a title.

In 2019, French writer Xavier Accart publishes *Le Dormant d'Éphèse*⁴², the story of a Breton man forced into a 40-year exile in 1903, leading him

39 Françoise Legré-Zaidline F., *Je t'attends à Damas. Récit en écho à la légende des Sept Dormants* [Waiting for you in Damascus. A story echoing the legend of the Seven Sleepers], Paris, Maisonneuve et Larose, 2001.

40 Abdelkader Mana, *Les Regragas. La Fiancée de l'eau et les gens de la caverne* [The Regraga. The Water Bride and the People of the Cave], Casablanca, Eddif Maroc, 1988.

41 Mustapha Akhmis, *Les Sept Dormants de Marrakech ou itinéraire fétiche* [The Seven Sleepers of Marrakech or a fetish itinerary], Casablanca, Dar Khotba, 1994.

42 Xavier Accart, *Le Dormant d'Éphèse*, Paris, Tallandier, 2019.

to Turkey, Egypt, Libya, Morocco... It is this long exile that recalls the long sleep of the Ephesians⁴³. Also in 2019, Loïk Le Floch-Prigent has written a thriller, *Le silence des Dolmens*, which begins in July 1962, in the hamlet of Les Sept-Saints, on the site of the Muslim-Christian pilgrimage. In this fictional account, the author recounts the creation of this event by Louis Massignon, before a detective story develops⁴⁴... Recently, Anna Tozzi Di Marco reported on the historical thriller *Il segreto del mercante di libri* (2020) by Italian author Marcello Simoni⁴⁵. In 1234, the hero sets off from Sicily to Spain in search of the mysterious Cave of the Seven Sleepers, hoping to find the key to immortality.

In addition, there are many literary works based on long slumbers, but without any reference to the Seven Sleepers⁴⁶. In other cases, it is the name or the toponym of the Seven Sleepers that is used, without any direct connection with the myth we are dealing with here⁴⁷.

With this in mind, let's mention a number of re-uses in children's literature, particularly Anglo-Saxon, and in comics. Susan Cooper's series *The Dark Is Rising* delves into Celtic and Arthurian mythology, as the Sleeping Ones are former knights of King Arthur who are awakened by a divine harp to fight a final battle, a barely concealed allusion to the Last Judgement. Another author, Gilbert Morris, has written the *Seven Sleepers Series*, featuring the adventures of seven characters in a post-apocalyptic world who must also wake up to fight evil.

On the comics front, a book by Sebastiano Ruiz Mignone entitled *Les sept dormants d'or* (2008) tells the story of pirates on a quest for seven

43 The author is well acquainted with Massignon's work and with the Seven Sleepers pilgrimage in Brittany, to which he devoted a chapter in his last book: Xavier Accart, *Tro Breiz, ma Bretagne intérieure* [Tro Breiz, my inner Brittany], Paris, Salvatore, 2023

44 Loïk Le Floch-Prigent. *Le silence des Dolmens* [The silence of the dolmens], Clermont-Ferrand, Ed. De Borée, 2019.

45 Marcello Simoni, *Il segreto del mercante di libri* [The book seller's secret], Rome, Newton Compton Editori, 2020. See Anna Tozzi Di Marco, *Il mito dei Sette Dormienti...*, 2024.

46 For example, *Rip Van Winkle* (1819) by the American writer Washington Irving (1782-1859), in which the hero falls asleep before the American War of Independence, under the reign of George III, and wakes up twenty years later under the presidency of George Washington; or *The sleeper awakes* (1910) by Herbert George Wells (1866-1946), which tells the story of a man waking up after a sleep of 203 years in the totally transformed city of London. The novel *Amours et aventures de Sindbad le Marin* (2010) by Algerian author Salim Bachi features a mysterious character, the Sleeper, who arrives in the port of Algiers. Armed with an old French passport, he knows nothing of the conflicts that followed independence in 1962, as if waking from amnesia or a long sleep.

47 In Francis Beeding's spy novel *The Seven Sleepers* (1925), the "sleepers" refer to a special German intelligence unit. There's also the crime novel *La Plage des Sept Dormants* (2022) by Cyril Dussuchaud, who created this toponym as the setting for the plot, and Gaël Aymon's dystopian story *La Planète des 7 Dormants* (2018), which recounts the adventures of a crew stranded in an unknown world.

solid gold statues. Another example: the comic strip by Daniel Bardet and Brice Goepfert: *Les 7 dormants* (2008), the penultimate in the series *Les chemins de Malefosse*, set in the heart of the 16th century. Jonathan Munoz also penned the comic *Les dormants* (2013), which tells the story of an insomniac with amnesia.

Folk tales

The myth of the Sleepers has undoubtedly influenced a number of folk and popular tales. Without explicitly referring to the Ephesian legend, the recurrence of long sleeps induced by a spell, and whose awakening serves as a happy ending, is particularly frequent, so much so that Brenda Dunn-Lardeau does not hesitate to speak of its “prodigious influence throughout Celtic and Irish stories, as well as in Arabic literature, in countless fairy tales and in the tales of the North American Indians⁴⁸.” Among the Grimm brothers’ fairy tales are *Die drei (trei) Telle*, which seems to go back to the legend of the Seven Sleepers, or *Die Sieben Schlafenden Männer in der Höhle*, taken from Paul the Deacon, who wrote a version of the Seven Sleepers in the 8th century ; or the famous story of Snow White, in which Jacob Grimm (1785-1863) and Wilhelm Grimm (1786-1859) increased the number of dwarves (beings from Germanic mythology living underground) to seven, no doubt under the influence of the Christian legend.

The famous *Sleeping Beauty*, by Charles Perrault (1628-1703), who wakes up after sleeping for a hundred years, is even more significant. Indeed, as François Jourdan points out, “the parallel with the Seven Sleepers is so striking that the publisher of 1883 published with this tale the French text of the Seven Sleepers from the Latin *Golden Legend*⁴⁹.” He also mentions several versions of the same tale, notably in operas and ballets (Tchaikovsky), to which we could add the famous animated film by Walt Disney. All in all, we can see how a founding and legendary tale is propagated and distorted as it is adapted and transformed by the arts.

Poetic works

The poetic field is also significant in this study, which focuses on artistic reinterpretations of the Seven Sleepers myth. Going back to sources older than the contemporary period proves instructive. In a recent chapter by Anna Tozzi Di Marco⁵⁰, I learned of two works that had already escaped

48 Dunn-Lardeau, *Le Voyage imaginaire...*, p. 63. She refers to Stith Thompson, *Tales of the North American Indians*, Bloomington, Indiana University Press, 1966 (1922).

49 Jourdan, *La tradition des Sept Dormants...*, p. 115.

50 Tozzi Di Marco, *Il mito dei Sette Dormienti...*, 2024.

Louis Massignon's attention.

One is the first French version of the myth, a long poem of 1800 verses composed around 1200 by the Anglo-Norman poet Chardri (late 12th - early 13th century): *La vie des set dormanz*⁵¹. Brian Merrilees' remarkable edition suggests that this is above all "a free and intelligent adaptation. Chardri, an original mind, took full advantage of the dramatic possibilities of the legend and, by means of skilful interpolations, produced a colourful and lively narrative⁵²".

The other poem is *The Holy Seven Youth* (1925), by the Greek Konstantinos Petrou Kavafis (1863-1933), also known in English as Constantine P. Cavafy. Little recognised in his day, he is now considered one of the greatest Greek poets of the 20th century. When he died, the drafts of thirty unfinished poems were found, including the poem about the Seven Sleepers. Here are the last two stanzas:

*And the Holy Seven Youths rejoiced
for this beautiful world, and Christian,
sanctified with churches, and crosses.
But with everything that was so different,
and all that they had to learn and say,
(and such strong joy perhaps exhausts also)
the Holy Seven Youths quickly grew tired,
for they came from another world, nearly two centuries prior;
and they became sleepy amid conversation
and their holy eyes shut.*

In the course of my work, I identified other poetic references. In one of his first poems, *The good-morrow*, the English poet John Donne (1572-1631) mentions the Seven Sleepers, but in a romantic sense:

*I wonder, by my troth, what you and I
Did, till we loved? Were we not weaned till then,
But sucked on country pleasures, childishly?
Or snorted we in the Seven Sleepers' den?
'Twas so; but this, all pleasures fancies be.
If ever any beauty I did see,*

51 Brian S. Merrilees (éd.), "*La Vie des set dormanz*" by Chardri, London, Anglo-Norman text society, 1977.

52 Jean-Pierre Perrot, Brian S. Merrilees, éd. "*La vie des set dormanz*" by Chardri, in "*Cahiers de civilisation médiévale*", 102, 1983, p. 194.

*Which I desired, and got, 'twas but a dream of thee. [...]*⁵³

It is a love poem, in which the author evokes the time of youth when the two lovers only “sniffed” each other in the lair of the Seven Sleepers before experiencing true passion. So it’s just an allusion, with no mention of religion or resurrection, but rather of more frivolous matters.

Two centuries later, in his *West-Eastern Divan* (1819), Johann Wolfgang Goethe (1749-1832) wrote the following poem, entitled *The Seven Sleepers*:

*[...] The tender youths light-sandalled gaily-vested,
Found reception of a shepherd,
Who concealed them in a cavern,
With himself, their entertainer.
Nor his dog would quit the shepherd,
Chased away his fore-foot broken,
Yet he pressed towards his master,
Joined them hidden in the cavern,
Joined the men beloved of Slumber. [...]*⁵⁴

It is indeed the Ephesian legend that Goethe takes up in this collection, which draws heavily on Persian poetry, of which he was a great admirer.⁵⁵ According to the recent interpretation of two Italian authors, Goethe was an Islamophile, knew the Qur'an and had studied Arabic. Even if he does not mention it, he was obviously aware of the dual version – Christian and Muslim – of this story, as is shown by the reference to the dog, which is an Islamic marker. Without calling this into question, it is certain that he was not unaware of the dual –Christian and Muslim– version of this story, which is doubly attested to by the explicit reference to the divine cradling of the bodies of the sleepers (as in verse 18 of Sura 18) and the presence of the dog, which is an Islamic marker. In his poem, the six Ephesians are joined by a shepherd and his dog. Anna Tozzi Di Marco sees this poem as a “synthesis” of the Christian and Muslim versions, but that would mean that Goethe knew them all, which is unlikely. On the other hand, in my opinion it shows a syncretic process that corresponds to the free interpretation of artists.

53 John Donne, *Songs and Sonnets*, Cambridge, London, Harvard University Press, 2009, p. 227.

54 Johann Wolfgang Goethe, *West-Eastern Divan*, London and Toronto, Dent & Sons, 1914, pp. 190-192.

55 Francesca Bocca-Alda, Pietrangelo Buttafuoco, *Sous ses pas naissent les fleurs, Goethe sur le chemin de l'islam* [Flowers bloom in his footsteps, Goethe on the road to Islam], Paris, Editions Fenêtres, 2023. The original Italian work is *Sotto il suo passo nascono i Fiori. Goethe e l'Islam*, Milan, La Nave di Teseo, 2019.

Another poem written in the second half of the 20th century is directly linked to Massignon's works: *The Seven Sleepers*, by the American Herbert Mason (1932-2017). Mason was a student of Massignon's and became close to him, taking part in the Christian-Muslim pilgrimage in 1959. Then he composed the following poem:

*When the world was made
The sky, the sea, the land, the fire,
So also when this cave created
Where the Companions sleep.*

*Seven candles are set in a boat called Abandonment in God
In witness that this seven hearts
Refuse idolatry to Decius*

*They sleep in a circle of darkness
Until it is time to walk,
And then their faces glow like roses
Drawn to an opening for light.*

*When the world was made
The sky, the sea, the land, the fire,
So also was this cave created
Where the Companions sleep⁵⁶.*

In its confidential publication, a note specifies the author's three influences: "Based on Jacobus di Voragine's *Legenda Aurea*, a Breton Gwerz [hymn], and Sura 18 of the Qur'an." These verses are therefore "Massignonian" and directly echo the pilgrimage, since the first and last stanzas are directly inspired by the traditional Breton hymn of the Sept-Saints: "You may ask me / when and how it (the chapel) was built; / and I answer: that I believe that when the world was created, / the sky, the sea, the earth, it was also built⁵⁷..." Herbert Mason's interest in the Seven Sleepers and this pilgrimage can only be understood through his loyalty to Massignon. He later became a professor in the United States and translated the Massignon masterpiece *La Passion de Hallâj* into English⁵⁸.

56 Herbert Mason, *The Seven Sleepers*, in "Bulletin de l'association des Amis de Louis Massignon", 8, 1999, p. 50.

57 Louis Massignon, *La crypte-dolmen des VII Saints Dormants d'Éphèse au Stiffel (en Plouaret, puis Vieux-Marché)* [The crypt-dolmen of the VII Sleeping Saints of Ephesus at Le Stiffel (in Plouaret, then Vieux-Marché)], "Extrait des Mémoires de la Société d'Émulation des Côtes-du-Nord", Les Presses Bretonnes, Saint-Brieuc, 1992 (1958), p. 17.

58 Massignon, *The Passion of Hallâj*..., 1982.

The French-Lebanese poet and diplomat Salah Stétié (1928-2020) has devoted several essays to the Seven Sleepers. This interest stems from the fact that he was also a former student of Massignon. In 1993, he published *Rimbaud, le huitième dormant*, an essay that is anything but a new biography. In preamble, he writes:

“At first I had wanted to title this essay: *Rimbaud, perhaps...* ‘The Eighth Sleeper’, in reference to the Seven Sleepers of Ephesus, stubborn young men guided by the Christ Star of the East, then powerful metaphysical sleepers and, equally, people of the Qur’anic cave who inhabited the nocturnal underside of the world only to better inhabit, when the day came, the eternal land of air - this title mysteriously imposed itself on me⁵⁹.”

In fact, Salah Stétié had already compared Rimbaud and the Sleepers in a first essay published in 1991⁶⁰. He modified it and added a documentary dossier, resulting in *Passage des Dormants* in 1995⁶¹. The Lebanese essayist then took a closer look at the Ephesians and their story, which he described as a “governing myth”, in the sense that it would pretend to universality. For him, the Sleepers “are hard-headed men of refusal. They do not agree to obey authority simply because it is authority and speaks loud and clear. They reject the principle of authority, at the risk, if need be, of their lives. They reject ready-made ideas, which are also idols [...]”. Here are a few more of the poet’s powerful lines:

“By their precipitous flight in the face of what Baudelaire would one day call ‘the stupidity in the bull’s forehead’, the seven marvellous adolescents, the *fitya* as the Qur’an says [...] and who will naturally take their place without the Golden Legend, bear witness and prove, in their own way, that the divine deposit, whatever type of divine one refers to, it is in the initial purity of the still intact being that it must be sought.”

The Christian-Muslim dimension is fundamental to him, so he does not hesitate to quote verses from Sura 18 or to think of the Qur’anic dog as “perhaps an angel, an archangel⁶²”. The depth of his approach is very much in the Massignonian tradition, where mysticism rhymes with poetry. As Brenda Dunn-Lardeau observes again:

“Salah Stétié’s essay thus offers, in the wake of Louis Massignon, a poetic and mystical meditation on the meaning of the myth and symbolism of the Seven Sleepers, each time linking the elements to ancient, Christian, Islamic and

59 Salah Stétié, *Rimbaud, le huitième dormant* [Rimbaud, the eighth Sleeper], Fata Morgana, 1993, p. 11.

60 Salah Stétié, *Les Sept Dormants au péril de la poésie* [The Seven Sleepers at the peril of poetry], Leuvense Schrijversakademie, 1991.

61 Stétié, *Passage des Dormants...*, pp. 25-73.

62 Ibid., p. 27.

Eastern philosophical, literary or mythological translations [...]”⁶³.

Let’s add three occurrences found recently: *The Seven Sleepers and Other Poems* (1944) by the American poet Mark Van Doren (1894-1972), a contemporary of Massignon’s but they did not know each other: “Then, orient, the islands, and at last, The cave, the seven sleepers. Who will rise and sing to you in numbers till you know White magic. Which remember. Do you hear⁶⁴?”

The second is *The Vision of the Seven Sleepers* (1979) by the Canadian Susan McCaslin, composed of seven long poems based on the hypothetical dreams of the Sleepers during their long sleep of here a hundred years. The third is *De zeven slapers* (1991) by Anton van Wilderode, a Dutch-speaking Belgian poet⁶⁵.

In January 2011, I came across the poem *La chasse au requin (The Shark Hunt)* by Tunisian poet Mohsen Lihidheb, which offers a political re-reading of the myth of the Seven Sleepers by depicting fishermen returning from the high seas to find their town transformed after the departure of the tyrant of the legend, none other than former Tunisian President Zine El-Abidine Ben Ali. Here, myth is freely invoked at the start of what would become known as the Jasmine Revolution.

More recently, the Tunisian poet Tahar Bekri (1951-) wrote this poem in the wake of the deaths of seven aid workers working for the World Central Kitchen NGO, on 1 April 2024 in Gaza. Here too he evokes explicitly the Seven Sleepers:

*Gaza Ils étaient sept
 Dans trois voitures
 Ils apportaient de la nourriture [...]
 Ils étaient sept
 Saints tués par des drones
 Sept dormants d’Ephèse
 Sans grotte la caméra témoin de la zone
 Morts sous l’œil du cyclone
 Ils étaient sept
 A la solidarité humaine
 Qui voulaient sauver des frères
 ils furent abattus par la haine*

63 Dunn-Lardeau, *Le Voyage imaginaire dans le temps...*, p. 59.

64 Mark Van Doren, *The Seven Sleepers and Other Poems*, New York, Henry Holt and Company, 1944.

65 Anton van Wilderode, *Les Sept dormants / De Zeven slapers*, Louvain, Leuvense Schrijversaktie / Cahiers de Louvain, 1991.

*Brûlés par les maîtres de la poussière*⁶⁶

Plastic arts and contemporary art installations

The plastic arts are also concerned. Without going back to the many ancient pictorial productions (illuminations, miniatures, paintings, icons) that punctuate the history of art, I am focusing on “awakenings” dating from the end of the 20th century.

The first is particularly relevant because it was born of a clear Christian-Muslim intention. It concerns the series of frescoes painted in 1993 by the Italian painter Duccio Guidotti (1920-2008) at the monastery of Mar Mûsa al-Habashi in Syria. This work was commissioned by the Italian Jesuit Paolo Dall'Oglio (1954-?), who was a spiritual disciple of Massignon⁶⁷. The theme of the Seven Sleepers was already very present in this monastery, which was refounded in 1983 and dedicated to Abrahamic hospitality and Christian-Muslim dialogue. In an ancient rock cistern in the monastery, the artist pictorially retraced the story of the Seven Sleepers, punctuated by a text in Arabic “that a Christian can read and a Muslim can read”, according to Paolo Dall'Oglio. What's more, he explained to me on site in 2010 that Muslims came to pay their respects in this singular space. Here, contemporary art has served to encourage the umpteenth relocation of the myth of the Seven Sleepers. (see Fig.02).



Fig. 02 Duccio Guidotti, Seven Sleepers Frescoes, Mar Mûsa Monastery, Syria, 1993 © Manoël Pénicaud

66 Bkz. <https://www.leaders.com.tn/article/35772-un-poeme-tahar-bekri-gaza-ils-etaient-sept>

67 Manoël Pénicaud, *Autres réveils des Sept Dormants* [Other reawakenings of the Seven Sleepers: case study in the Mediterranean], in “Revue science and Video. Des écritures multimédia en sciences humaines”, 4, 2013, <http://scienceandvideo.mms.h.univ-aix.fr/numeros/4/Pages/5.aspx>.

We should add that it was also in response to the Christia-Muslim vocation of this Islamophile priest that the Syrian iconographer Ossama Mossleh wrote a Christian icon of the Sleepers, incorporating a dog in front of their cave, an innovation that takes up an emblematic marker from the Qur’anic narrative (see Fig. 03).



Fig. 03 Ossama Mossleh, Icon of the Seven Sleepers, 2010. Private collection.

The Sleepers have also resurfaced in the identification established with the seven monks of Tibhirine (Algeria), tragically murdered in May 1996 and beatified in 2018 in Oran. In 2004, the Franco-Algerian visual artist Rachid Koraïchi published a beautiful book entitled *Les Sept Dormants*. *Sept livres en hommage aux sept moines de Tibhirine*, comprising calligraphy and texts by seven different authors⁶⁸. The book is presented as a humanist testimony against religious intolerance, but the connection with the Sleepers is not developed. One can read: “The title ‘Les 7 Dormants’ refers to a popular Arab tale. It evokes withdrawal from daily life, sleep and resurrection”⁶⁹.

68 Rachid Koraïchi, *Les Sept Dormants, sept livres en hommage aux sept moines de Tibhirine* [The Seven Sleepers, seven books in tribute to the seven monks of Tibhirine], Arles, Actes Sud, 2004. On the identification with the monks of Tibhirine, see Pénicaud, *Le réveil des Sept Dormants...*, pp. 216 et 414.

69 Ibid., p. 9.

In the same year, the Tunisian artist Abdallah Akar produced another landmark work. Born in southern Tunisia in 1952, this artist has been familiar with the story of the Sleepers since childhood, thanks to his proximity to the Ahl al-Kahf Chenini site⁷⁰. In this work, he calligraphies on seven laminated glass steles an extract from sura Al-Kahf about the long sleep of persecuted young believers. It is worth noting that it was during the Seven Sleepers pilgrimage in Brittany that he was inspired to create this work. In 2013, he has created a new adaptation, calligraphing the same text on seven large tarlatan veils (see Fig. 04)⁷¹.



Fig. 04 *Les 7 Dormants* (2013), installation of seven banners by Abdallah Akar in Paris, 2017 © M. Pénicaud

In 2005, Egyptian artist Wael Shawky filmed himself reciting the same sura in an Istanbul supermarket. Built around a long tracking shot, *The Cave* (12 min) is an opportunity for him to talk about the economic exile of poor Muslim migrants in the age of consumer society⁷². Here, the interpretation is highly political.

70 Virginie Prevost, *Les Sept Dormants dans le Sud tunisien : de la légende au culte vivant* [The Seven Sleeper in southern Tunisia: from legend to living cult], in “Revue de l’histoire des religions”, 1, 2020, pp. 5-36.

71 These two works have been exhibited at the Mucem in Marseille, the Bardo Museum in Tunis and the Musée National de l’Histoire de l’Immigration in Paris, as part of the *Lieux saints partagés / Shared Sacred Sites* exhibition (2015-2017).

72 Jacques Sapiega, *Scènes de croisades. Cabaret Crusades. The path to Cairo de Wael Shawky* [Scenes from the Crusades. Cabaret Crusades. The path to Cairo by Wael Shawky], Aix-en-Provence, PUP, 2013, pp. 32-33

At the end of the 2000s in Tunisia, a collective of young Tunisian artists and activists took the name Ahl al-Kahf. This name evoked the resistance and clandestinity under which they produced their protest Street Art in the public space, under the regime of President Ben Ali, like the Sleepers hiding in their cave, without denying their values. From then on, this initiative was a political initiative, not a religious or inter-religious one. This political awakening of the Sleepers can now be seen as one of the harbingers of the Jasmine Revolution in January 2011⁷³.

In 2014, the cultural association “La Chapelle des Sept Dormants” was founded in Autun, Burgundy (France). Shortly afterwards, those in charge took over a “deculturalised chapel-laboratory” to organise a Biennial of Sacred Art, bringing together poets, writers and visual artists⁷⁴. Their approach is one of inter-spiritual openness and universality, rather than a strictly religious one. The organiser is fascinated by the Seven Sleepers and has great admiration for Massignon. In 2018, he organised the conference “Les Sept Dormants de la Caverne d’Orient & d’Occident”, whose poster was created by a new work by Rachid Koraïchi (already mentioned). The following year, he will be striking to find the Seven Sleepers in the work *Quarterly Myth* (2019) by Thai Buddhist artist Pannaphan Yodmanee at the Lyon Biennial of Contemporary Art. In 2023, I personally had the opportunity to present my own ethno-photographic work on *La Méditerranée des Sept Dormants* at the Autun Biennial, where I discovered Bernard Husson’s stone sculpture *Nef des Sept Dormants* (2023). Such artwork is remarkable because it features their dog at the prow of their boat. This work was commissioned for the Biennial, with a Christian-Muslim and Massignonian intention.

We could also mention the reinterpretation of the Seven Sleepers by visual artist Adel Abdessemed in his work *Moutarde* (2018), exhibited in France. This installation shows a noisy clockwork mechanism that does not disturb seven cats and the dog (taxidermised) lying or sleeping on the floor.

Last but not least, as a resident of the village of Vieux-Marché (Brittany), where the theme of the seven saints is very present, the French painter Laurence Sibille created the painting *Les Sept Dormants* in 2021⁷⁵. This painting (acrylic on canvas) depicts the seven bodies haloed and sleeping

73 The 2017 edition featured the aforementioned poet Salah Stétié.

74 The 2017 edition featured the aforementioned poet Salah Stétié.

75 This painting has been used as the cover for the collective book *Les dormants d’Éphèse...*, 2024.

one on top of the other, while their dog watches, eyes open, over their divine sleep. The painting was solemnly blessed during the Christian-Muslim pilgrimage on 24 July 2021. Since then, it has hung in the little chapel of the Sept-Saints (see Fig. 01).

Lastly, we should also mention a sculpture commissioned by the “Sources des Sept Dormants” association in Brittany, still in the context of the Christian-Muslim pilgrimage where, to commemorate the 70th anniversary of the event, the artist-sculptor and stonemason David Puech designed a monument dedicated to Louis Massignon and the Seven Sleepers. This sculpture is a reproduction of both sides of a commemorative bronze medal produced by the Monnaie de Paris in 1975 and designed by the Franco-Hungarian artist William Schiffer (1920-2007). On one side is the effigy of Massignon, slightly in relief, and on the other are the bodies of the seven sleeping saints. This new bronze work has been set on a granite rock in the Place Louis Massignon in Vieux-Marché.

Musical works

The miraculous sleep of the young Ephesians has inspired a few rare musicians. The work of Italian musicologist Fabrizio Florian has revealed the existence of a little-known work by the German composer Carl Loewe (1796-1869). An organist, singer, theology graduate and choirmaster of the Jakobikirche Church in Szczecin, he wrote the oratorio *Die sieben Schläfer* (1835) for solo choir and orchestra, divided into three parts and based on a libretto by the poet and historian Ludwig Giesebrecht (1792-1873). The work recounts the reopening of the walled cave to bury the seven lost ancestors. But the shepherds who knock down the wall are surprised to hear voices coming from the cave, those of the sleepers awakened by the light of day. What follows is a series of events that Florian rightly describes as “transformations” to evoke situations and feelings characteristic of the Romantic movement⁷⁶.

In the 1950s, the composer Paul Le Flem (1881-1984), who lived near the Christian-Islamic pilgrimage of the Seven Saints, planned to write a cantata on the Seven Sleepers. He even kept up a correspondence with Massignon, but was never able to create such a work.

More recently, Dominique Joubert composed an *Oratorio des Sept Dormants* (2009), to a libretto by Yves Letort based on the text *Sept Stèles*

⁷⁶ Fabrizio Florian, *Carl Loewe e l'oratorio Die sieben Schläfer*, in Tozzi Di Marco, *Agiografia e culto dei Sette Dormienti...*, pp. 189-200.

pour les Sept Dormants by Sylvie Germain⁷⁷. But once again, despite its name, this work is in fact a tribute to the monks of Tibhirine. So we see a text already dedicated to the seven Trappists serving as the basis for this musical composition, and not the original story of the Sleepers. However, the first concerts (2009) followed meetings on the dialogue of cultures and religions.

In a completely different vein, there are other references, such as the song *Seven Sleepers Den* (1970) by the American singer-songwriter Garland Jeffreys; the album *Seven sleepers* (2006) by the indie rock band Feeder (Wales); or an American hard-rock outfit called *Awake the seven sleepers*. Without having investigated in depth, it seems that it is above all the name of the Seven Sleepers that is popular in these cases.

Created in 2011, the music and puppet show *Les sept dormants* is the fruit of a Franco-Indonesian collaboration between two groups of musicians, Léda Atomica Music (Marseille) and Gayam 16 (Yogyakarta), and is presented as a “hybrid creation [...] at the crossroads of styles and instrumental mixes (invented instruments, traditional instruments, gamelan, experimental lutheries) with contributions from voice, dance, video, theatre and puppets.” The plan is for each artist to take a sleeper’s dream and propose it to his or her companions.

In 2022, the live show *Sept Dormants*, created at the Abbaye Royaumont (France), brought this myth back to life, through the creation of composer and guitarist Camel Zekri, with dancer Jean-Paul Mehansio of Ivorian origin. The interreligious dimension is clearly underlined in the presentation: “Christians and Muslims have long shared this myth, which evokes life, death and eternity.”

Finally, for the 70th anniversary of the Breton Christian-Muslim pilgrimage in 2024, the “Sources des Sept Dormants” association has produced recordings of the Seven Saints hymn (Gwerz) in Breton and Sura 18 in Arabic, and *vice versa*, which is highly original. This recording is accompanied by a book presenting the Sleepers and this unusual pilgrimage to the general public⁷⁸.

⁷⁷ Sylvie Germain, *Sept Stèles pour les Sept Dormants* [Seven Steles for the Seven Sleepers], in Rachid Koraïchi, *Les Sept Dormants...*, pp. 233-295

⁷⁸ *Les dormants d'Éphèse, au Vieux-Marché...*, 2024.

Audiovisual works

In the cinema, the theme of the long sleeps is more a vehicle for time travel, which is popular in futuristic and science fiction films. Although not part of this genre, some films are directly or indirectly inspired by the story of the Sleeping Ones.

The film *Youcef ou la légende du septième dormant* (1993) by Algerian director Mohamed Chouikh is freely inspired by the myth of the Sleepers. It tells the story of a young combatant of the Front National de Libération (FLN), seriously wounded in 1960, who escapes thirty years later from a psychiatric hospital, convinced that he is still a prisoner of the French army. Through this journey through time, this work tackles the difficult issues of contemporary Algeria.

Several adaptations, including cartoons, of the Qur'anic version of the miracle of the People of the Cave can be found on the Internet. These include historical reconstructions such as the Iranian series *Ahl al-Kahf* (1999), directed by Farjallah Sallahshour, in which the story is told in 18 episodes. However, it is worth noting that the heroes are presented as persecuted Christians waking up after 309 years, which is a mix of Christian and Muslim elements.

Following on from Tawfiq Al-Hakim's play *People of the Cave* (1933), a major film adaptation *Ahl al-Kahf* is currently in production in Egypt. Adapted by Ayman Bahgat Qamar, it features several Egyptian stars. For some observers, the film is considered one of the greatest productions in the history of Egyptian cinema. It was shot in Egypt and Morocco.

On another level, Fakhri El Ghezal's short film *Companions of the cave* (2019) offers a distant evocation of the myth. Shot in black and white and super-8, it follows the clandestine emigration of two young rappers from Redayef (Tunisia) to Nantes (France). Here again, the theme of exile dominates.

*

In conclusion, this chapter has demonstrated the importance and contemporary vitality of the Seven Sleepers's myth in the plural and teeming world of the arts. This original approach differs from existing works on texts, cults and places dedicated to the Seven Sleepers in Christianity and Islam. The variety of works and artistic reinterpretations that this shared story has given rise to testifies to a great heterogeneity, in

terms of both content and form, as well as a certain dynamism. This is all the more remarkable given that the cult of the Ephesian Sleepers has all but disappeared from Western Roman Catholicism, whereas it is a very prominent theme in Muslim liturgical life. It is also worth noting that it has often been used by artists who are neither Christian nor Muslim.

Admittedly, a significant number of cases are French or Francophone, which is due to the prism of the author that I am, but we can also observe that many creations were initiated or inspired following the emblematic work of Louis Massignon, who is in my opinion the greatest actor of the revival of the Seven Sleepers in the 20th century. As a result, many later works are more or less directly linked to his work (both academic and spiritual) and/or to the Christian-Islamic pilgrimage in Brittany.

As stated in the introduction, this article has been limited to contemporary artistic production and does not include works that are exclusively religious or date from earlier periods. It should also be remembered that this study is not exhaustive, as there are still many cases that have yet to be identified and studied. Nor have we listed the political reawakenings that are frequent, particularly in the writings of journalists in the Arab press. There have also been also military occurrences in the Middle East, such as the pro-Iranian para-military group “Ashab al-Kahf” responsible for attacks in Iraq for example in 2021.

This overview leads us to a broader anthropological reflection on a myth that has gone to sleep, but which sometimes reawakens, here and there, thanks to an individual, a group or a political context. But these revivals are no longer strictly eschatological (like the original versions), or even religious. I have focused on artistic creations of a more areligious nature. What emerges is that the Seven Sleepers narrative is recomposed and updated to suit the present. Each era generates new interpretations. Tawfiq Al-Hakim’s play is an emblematic case, with Christian and Muslim elements intertwined, the addition of a love story by one of the sleepers and even the loss of faith by another, which at first glance seems to run counter to the eschatological *raison d’être* of the founding narratives. What is more, all these revivals and artistic reinventions are also encouraged by the heterochronic dimension of the Seven Sleepers miracle, which allows for the deployment of narrative devices (e.g. time travel) that are highly effective on the public imagination. Born in Ephesus, this story has unquestionably become a “rights-free” myth, a reserve of meaning and

symbols that anyone can appropriate and interpret, even if it means changing its eschatological original meaning. Both versatile and polysemous, it is no longer the exclusive property of Christianity or Islam, and can now cross religious boundaries and even be reused for non-religious and artistic purposes.

As a result, the story of the Seven Sleepers is part of a wider collective heritage (both tangible and intangible) and imagination, which is certainly of religious origin, but which in some cases is undergoing a process of secularisation of its initial meaning, as is the case in certain societies, particularly in the West. Every myth is a vehicle that each person is free to invest with the meaning of their choice. Artists have no hesitation in making it their own, subjectively and without fear of overstepping the political or religious boundaries. These re-uses and rearrangements can lead to a process of creative bricolage from which the eventual work of art is born, whether or not it is free of its religious roots.

Preliminary Analysis of the Symbolism and the Agentivity of the dog *Qıtmır* during the Devotion to the Seven Sleepers of Ephesus (*Aşhāb al-Kahf*)

Anna Tozzi Di Marco ¹

Summary

This article focuses on the folk religiosity concerning to the figure of the dog *Qıtmır* which God set at the entrance of the cave to guard the *Aşhāb al-Kahf*, the Companions of the Cave, during their long sleep. It emphasizes the symbolic role and the agentivity of the divine dog during the *ziyaret* at the *Eshab ı-kehf* cave near Tarsus in Turkey. This study is a first pilot exploration of the topic from an ethnographic viewpoint. Preliminary analyses of the believers' imaginary and the rituals enacted towards *Qıtmır* to whom direct their wishes and to heal own body.

Keywords: *Aşhāb al-Kahf*, *Qıtmır*, *Seven Sleepers*, *Tarsus Eshab ı-kehf cave*, *healing rituals*.

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Premise

The focus of this article is the folk religiosity concerning the “People of the cave”, that is *Ahl al-Kahf* (or *Aşhāb al-Kahf*, the Companions of the cave), related in particular to the holy¹ figure of the dog *Qıtmır*. To study its symbolic role through the written sources and to analyse its agentivity in the *Aşhāb al-Kahf* cave, in particular the cave located nearby Tarsus, constituted the main goal of this paper. It is part of my wider ethnographic research on Seven Sleepers of Ephesus/*Ahl al-Kahf* in the Mediterranean Christian and Islamic countries, even in the cases of interterritoriality and fluidity of both traditions. As starting point of my research I studied different kinds of sources, such as religious sources, scientific texts as well as literary heritage and iconographic works, historical books in order to contextualize the topic. I considered also the orientalist scholars’ studies. Among Islamic religious sources: the Holy Koran and the Tafsīr, the Sunna as well as the mystical literature; about Christian sources I examined pilgrims’ travelogues and Eastern hagiographical texts of the narrative. Among scientific works I looked at the Islamic zoological treatises. At the end the iconographic sources consisted of illustrated manuscripts and amulets. From the anthropological side I carried out periods of fieldwork in Northern Africa and Middle Eastern countries (as well as in the Mediterranean Christian countries concerning the Christian legend). Periods of fieldwork in Turkey started in 2016 and the research is still in progress in Tarsus and Lice caves. This ethnography of which I am undertaking a preliminary analysis, is centred above of all on native voices, their narratives and their performative actions. In particular I analysed how the believers perceive and deal with the symbolic role and the agentivity of the dog *Qıtmır* during their *ziyāra* to *Aşhāb al-Kahf* at the holy cave of Tarsus². This last ethnographic part related to the specific topic of *Qıtmır* symbolism is not complete and it embodies only a preliminary analysis, so that it is a minority section of the whole article.

1. Some modern scholars’ studies on the symbolism of *Qıtmır* in the *sūrah al-Kahf*

1 In the entire article the designation “holy” referred to *Qıtmır*, the Seven Sleepers and the cave is intended to be interpreted with anthropological connotation. In Islām the category of sacredness is plural. It has different levels of intensity and there are numerous terms such as *Şarīf*, *qiddīs*, etc. to designate it. For instance, at the highest level Allah is *al-Quddūs*, the holiest.

2 The results of the fieldworks carried out at Afşin, Tarsus and Lice caves came out in my paper presentation *The Turkish cult of Seven Sleepers/Aşhāb al-Kahf in Afşin, Tarsus and Lice* presented at the 1st International Congress of History of Religions (Türkiye Dinler Tarihi Kongresi) at Ankara University in September 2023. <https://kongre.tahr.com.tr/program>

Even if the the *sūrah al-Kahf* has been widely studied and analysed by scholars, only a few of them took in consideration the figure of the dog *Qitmīr*.

The French orientalist Louis Massignon who dedicated his life to the Companions of the cave, considered *Qitmīr* as the embodiment of the spiritual director *al-Khadir* who teaches to the Sleepers the prayer of community intercession³.

The French anthropologist Pénicaud in his book on the Breton Seven Sleepers pilgrimage reported Jean Dumont's records on their apotropaic names engraved on the cups and plates against the evil eye in Egypt⁴.

The academic Norman O. Brown reflected on literal and metaphorical interpretation of the Koran, that is between surface and substance, respectively the *zāhir* and the *bāṭin*, between the symbolic and hermeneutic (*Tafsīr*) interpretation of its meaning. He underlined that the *sūrah* 18 includes an esoteric wisdom⁵. He stated that *al-Kidr* (The Green One) is a source of mystical illumination which can be extended to *Qitmīr* as also the Italian scholar Campanini observed.

The USA scholar of Religious Studies, George Archer, highlighted the symbolic role of *Qitmīr* as a sign of Allah as well as a protective device for the faithfuls against the worship of false gods and saints. In supporting his thesis he took in consideration another element of the Islamic version, that is when Allah struck the Sleepers' ears. So that during their sleep they couldn't hear the prayers of the faithfuls⁶.

The Italian scholar, Father Paolo Dall'Oglio, in his analyses of the *sūrah al-Kahf* from an eschatological viewpoint, argued that the dog has the task to reinforce the Islamic faith in the absolute monotheism (*al-tawḥīd*) and in the total abandonment in Allah, the One and only God, with the final perspective of the resurrection and the eternal life⁷.

3 L. Massignon, REI, 1954, p. 72 in M. Pénicaud, *Le réveil des Sept Dormants*, [The awakening of the Seven Sleepers], Paris, Editions de Cerf, 2016, p. 71.

4 Pénicaud, *Le réveil...*, p. 75.

5 Norman O. Brown, *The Apocalypse of Islam*, "Social text", Duke University Press, n. 8, 1983, pp. 155-171.

6 G. Archer, *The Hellhound of the Qur'an: the dog at the gate of the underworld*, "Journal of Qur'anic Studies", v. 18, n. 3, 2016.

7 P. Dall'Oglio, *Speranza nell'Islam. Interpretazione della prospettiva escatologica di Corano XVIII*, [Hope in Islam. Interpretation of the eschatological perspective of Koran 18], Marietti, 1991.

According to the scholar Massimo Campanini, although in the following verses of the sūrah 18 the dog is not anymore mentioned, in its second story it can be connected with the mysterious figure of *al-Khadir* (or *al-Kidr*) who guides Moses in his journey through the divine secrets. Indeed both are the guardians of the divine message⁸.

The scholar Andrés-Toledo, in his article on the dog guarding the sleeping body of Adam, asserts that “heir of this tradition [The Seven Sleepers’] is the story of the Golden-Eared dog...which is transmitted in the Zoroastrian New Persian Revāyat of Šāpur Bharuci”, written in 1569 CE. This Zoroastrian narrative merges earlier motifs from other traditions including the epic of Gilgameš who fell asleep for seven days. However, Andrés-Toledo argued Adam did not explicitly fall asleep, but he was in a lethargic state. The Golden-Eared dog is also a keeper of the path to the otherworld. It originates from Adam’s navel. Its physical description matches that one of Qitmir⁹.

Sarra Tlili pointed out the presence of the dog in the sūrah al-Kahf “as a reflection and recognition of this longstanding human-canine bond”. She supposes that “one of the ways in which the Qur’ān redefines the human-canine relationship is by foregrounding the spiritual affinity between dogs and human beings”. The Aṣḥāb al-Kahf piety allows them to be chosen by the dog and to accept his offer of companionship. She emphasizes how through this part of the Seven Sleepers narrative both the Holy Koran and the Tafsīr inspire the human-canine companionship with spiritual meaning¹⁰.

2. The analysis of written sources

2.1 Islamic scientific works

Muslims always had an ambivalent position about dog over time, as it is considered in both negative and positive ways. Although dog commonly protects humans, unlike other domesticated animals it may also hurt them deliberately. Hence Muslims perceived it as a dangerous animal and useful at the same time¹¹. The scientific literature of the Golden Age includes

8 M. Campanini, *La Sūrah della caverna. Meditazione filosofica sull'unicità di Dio*, [The chapter of the cave. Philosophical meditation on the oneness of God], Firenze, La Nuova Italia, 1986, p. 56.

9 M. A. Andrés-Toledo, *Reshaping Religious Traditions: The Seven Sleepers of Ephesus and the Zoroastrian Golden-Eared Dog*, "Iran Namag", v. 6, n. 3-4, 2021, p. 1.

10 S. Tlili, *The canine companion of the cave: The Place of the Dog in Qur’ānic Taxonomy*, "Journal of Islamic and Muslim Studies", v. 3.2, 2018, p. 56.

11 During the Ottoman time in Cairo dogs were fed, also in mosques, by the city authorities in order to keep

the zoology and a lot of treatises include dogs. The greatest scientist in this field was the Basran theologian and polymath Amr bin Bahr al-Jaḥiẓ (9th c. CE) who lived during the Abbasid caliphate in current Iraq. His work which consists of seven volumes, The book of animals (*Kitāb al-ḥayawān*) written “in service to God”¹² is one of the oldest and pioneering Arabic manuscript on animals. Al-Jaḥiẓ described and classified 350 species of animals, their habitat and behaviour¹³. Among them he argued on the nature of dog¹⁴, its characteristics, its behavior, its medical cures, its pharmacopoeia and its relationship with men. In this respect al-Jaḥiẓ indicated the things a dog can do and a man cannot as for instance a dog can, upon seeing a deer, identify the sick and the healthy ones¹⁵. He also wrote that in every Bedouin tent there was a dog in the pre-Islamic era, even later¹⁶.

Another important scholar in this field was al-Damīrī who lived in the 14th century Egypt. He wrote The Lives of the Animals (*Ḥayāt al-ḥayawān*), a zoological lexicon where animals are ranked in an alphabetic order. The Egyptian scholar used the scientific information from al-Jaḥiẓ’s book, although he eliminated anecdotes and poetry. The description of the most important animals is followed by the paragraph The interpretation of the dreams (*ta’bīr*)¹⁷. The methods he used in these interpretations were: the symbolical approach and the decoding based on the qualities of the animal. For instance about camel, he reported that dreaming one camel can be a sign of great fortune but many of them can be the omen of war and epidemics. Thus, he added also the interpretations of dog symbolism. Dreaming a dog can have a lot of meanings: slaves; impudent people; illness; lamentation; liars; guards. For instance bitten or scratched by dogs means obtaining

streets clean of garbage. Killing a dog (or a cat) was illegal and strongly punished. Dogs had an useful military, social and economic role. At Ottoman, Safavid and Mughal courts nobles had hunting dogs as status symbol of prestige. See A. Mikhail, *The animal in Ottoman Egypt*, Oxford University Press, 2013.

12 He said that his goal is to show how wondrous divine creation is, including human innate reaction of repulsions and attraction towards animals.

13 His work is a collection of traditions about animals selected from the pre-Islamic poetry, the Koran, the Traditions, and anecdotes and Aristotle’s *Generation of Animals*.

14 In this respect he also reported the hybrid nature of a mysterious animal, that is a kind of monstrous dog like a creature living in Yemen highlands, whose the semi imaginary description seems to be based on the wild dog. M.V.M. McDonald, *Two Mysterious Animals in the "Kitāb al-Ḥayawān" of al-Jāḥiẓ: The Sim' and the 'Isbār*, "Journal of Arabic Literature", v. 22, n. 2, 1991, pp. 100-107 (<https://www.jstor.org/stable/4183243>).

15 F. Alajmi, *Dogs in the Ancient Arabic Stories*, Independent print, 2023, p. 13.

16 Ibid. p. 26. Two of the most famous Arab tribes were named by the word dog, they were: Kalb (dog in Arabic language) bin Wabra; Kolab bin Rabia.

17 J. de Somogyi, *Ad-Damirī's Ḥayāt al-ḥayawān: An Arabic Zoological Lexicon*, "Osiris", v. 9, 1950, pp. 33-43.

what the dreamer endeavours to get. Moreover: chasing dogs means glory and elevation; a dog tearing one's clothes means slander by a fool; to dream a puppy means beloved child; shepherd's dog: profit from a king. Chasing with dogs represents desires fulfilled. Watch dog: chastity of wife. Al-Damīrī cited also *Qiṭmīr*. To dream the Seven Sleepers' dog represents the danger of imprisonment, escape or concealment, that is the remaining in a hiding place¹⁸.

Avicenna (Ibn Sīnā)'s Iraqi disciple, Marzubān (10th c. CE), in his treatise dedicated entirely to dogs, The superiority of the dogs over many of those who wear clothes, depicts it as a creature characterized by in-betweenness, that is between the human and animal realms. It is on the boundary between wilderness and domesticity. The writer also exalted its virtues in comparing to the negative aspects of some human beings, as for instance dog loyalty against human infidelity, or its courage against men cowardice. Also in the field of geography we have some texts concerning the term *kalb* (dog) such as Yaquout al-Hamwī 's The Dictionary of Countries (*Mogem al-Boldan*). In his book he mentioned some sites named after dog, such as Al-kalb a place between Qoms and Al-Rai in present Iran and the mountain Al-kalb one-day far from Yamama' in current Saudi Arabia¹⁹.

2.2. Islamic folk literature

There are many proverbs regarding dog in the Islamic literature. Some of them are: "Dog owners do not stay alone", "Dogs cannot be forced to work", "Active dog is better than a lazy lion", "Easier than barking at clouds"²⁰. In the collection of folkstories One thousand and One nights (Alf layla wa layla) the dog is portrayed in contrast with the aridity of human soul. The tale of Sidi Nouman starts with the Abbasid Caliph, Hārūn al-Rashīd (766-809 CE) who asked the name to a young man who had ill-treated his horse. He was Sidi Nouman. Then the caliph said him: "I have never seen any horse broken in such a barbarous manner as by you yesterday. Every one who looked on was indignant, and blamed you loudly". So that Sidi Nouman prostrated himself before the throne of the Caliph and encouraged by the Caliph's kindness he began his tale. Amina, his wife, had a strange behaviour at dinner every evening, hence he started to follow her one night. Each night she went to the cemetery to meet a

18 J. de Somogyi, *The Interpretation of Dreams in Ad-Damīrī's Ḥayāt Al-Ḥayawān*, "The Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society of Great Britain and Ireland", n. 1, 1940, p. 11. (<https://www.jstor.org/stable/25221590>).

19 Alajmi, *Dogs...*, p. 39.

20 Ibidem, p. 43.

female ghoul “one of those demons which... springing out upon unwary travellers whose flesh they eat... if no live being goes their way, they then feed upon the dead bodies”. During the next day Sidi Nouman talked to her about what he witnessed at the graveyard. So Amina who was a magician, after putting her hand in a vessel of water and murmured some words, sprinkled it on his face. As consequence he was transformed in a dog by her spell. After beating up him/it she chased it away in the street. The fiction continues with his tale on how he/it saw the human world through animal eyes. At the end his encounter with another magician, a young lady who gave him a bottle of water in order to dash it on Amina’s face. So that his wife was transformed in a horse the caliph saw him beating²¹. These are only some examples which demonstrate the positive perception regarding dog in the Islamic culture. The Arabic heritage about dogs as protagonists of the tales which are collected by Faisal Alajmi, is wider and it deserves a more specific research.

2.3. Pre-Islamic era: Mediterranean ancient civilizations and Christian sources

If we go back to the pre-Islamic times in the Mediterranean region it is useful to stress the role of mythical dogs in ancient civilizations. This animal had a liminal status between earth and underworld, the human and the monstrous, human and supernatural sphere, the civilised world and the uncivilised one. Above of all it had chthonic aspects. For instance in the Egyptian civilization the jackal god Anubi was the guardian of the soul after death who presided to the rite of mummification. It is represented in the same position of the Sleepers’ dog, *Qitmīr* as some scholars such as George Archer, Gobillot and others underscored²². Likewise in the later Greek-Roman world the canine psychopomp, the multi headed monster Cerberus, was the guardian of Hades (the underworld). It was the intermediary between life and death or guide to the afterlife. In the Greek-Roman city of Ephesus pilgrims visited the temple of the goddess Artemis, who was always accompanied by a greyhound dog. However no dog of the mythology of the classical world was endowed with the ability to speak.

If we consider the Jewish and Christian sources, in the Old and New Testaments there are many references to dog either to affirm virtues or to condemn vices. Nevertheless it is mostly considered an impure animal, a

21 <https://sacred-texts.com/neu/lang1k1/tale31.htm> (consulted 22/11/2023)

22 Archer, *The Hellhound...*

terrifying beast, and in allegorical sense symbol of enemies of the Hebrews and of the Church²³.

On the contrary if we look at the apocriphal literature, the *Acts of Peter*, dating to the late 2nd century CE (probably in Asia Minor) we have a talking dog with divine powers. The text describes the rivalry between the apostle Peter and Simon Magus which occurred in Rome. The dog plays a prominent role in this conflict. In this apocriphal account it is told Peter unchained a watch dog at the entrance of the house where Simon Magus was hosted. Thereupon the dog started to talk to him: "What do you wish for me to do, servant of the ineffable living God?". Peter asked to the talking dog to act as the apostle's helpmate and envoy to the sorcerer Simon Magus. After its mission the dog fell at Peter's feet and died. The role of this supernatural dog intended to effect the redemption of Simon Magus' disciples who were fascinated by his magic and false teachings. Moreover in his work *Cronographia*, John Malale, reporting Peter's anecdote, highlighted the intervention of the talking dog in helping him in order to assert the superiority of the faith in God. The metaphorical representation of Peter as shepherd and the dog as sheep dog could have influenced the Eastern versions of the Seven Sleepers myth and lately the Islamic tale²⁴. Also in some Fathers of the Church such as St Augustine and Ambrose (bishop of Milan), dog represents a good metaphorical example²⁵.

On the opposite side of benevolent dog, in some patristic books such as Justin Martyr's *Apologies*, Simon Magus was represented as rapacious wolf²⁶ likewise the emperor Decius' image as voracious beast.

During early Eastern Christianity Jacob of Sarugh's homely on the Seven Sleepers is the Syriac text (6th c. CE) from which the Arab Christian and Islamic renditions descend. In this account there is a watcher whom God sets over the Sleepers but it is not specified if it is doglike. In this Syriac text most of the specific elements of the Koranic story are present: the guardian, the number 8 of the Sleepers, the duration of 309 years of their

23 For a deeper understanding of the issue, see G. J. Botterweck, H. J. Fabry, H. Ringgren (eds), *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament*. Volume VII, William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1974.

24 I. Thurn (ed.), *Ioannis Malalae Chronographia*, De Gruyter, 200; E. Jeffreys, M. Jeffreys, R. Scott (tr.), *The Chronicle of John Malalas*, in E. Jeffreys, B. Croke. R. Scott (eds) *Studies in John Malalas*, Australian Association for Byzantine Studies, Byzantina Australiensia, Sidney, 1990.

25 A. Ferreiro (ed.), *The Devil, Heresy & Witchcraft in the Middle Ages*, Leiden, Brill, 1998, pp. 53-56.

26 A. Ferreiro, *Simon Magus in Patristic, Medieval and Early Modern Traditions*, Brill, 2005.

sleep²⁷. Later according to the Muslim traditionists Ta'labi and Damīrī the Arab historian Ibn Ishāq adapted this narrative to the Arab world.

There is only a Christian chronicle wherein the dog of the Seven Sleepers is clearly mentioned: the pilgrim Theodosius' guide to the Holy Land written in the year 530 CE. In his travelogue he wrote he stopped in Ephesus coming back from Holy Land. He visited the Seven Sleepers cave and inside he saw a puppy dog (*catulus* in Latin language) named *Viricanus*. However, *Viricanus* refers to a dogman. The dog headed men were considered barbarian foreigners par excellence, living on the edge of the world and civilization²⁸. Some scholars such as Bellamy think that the detail on *Viricanus* is a post Koranic interpolation even if archaeologists have underlined it is not rare to find in the ancient tombs of children also the skeleton of a dog²⁹. It is also functional to remember that when the French orientalist Louis Massignon visited the Ephesian cave, his Turkish guide was frightened to enter because of *Qıtmır*. The Italian iranianist scholar Gianroberto Scarcia's study traces a connection between *Viricanus* and the giant saint Christopher (Christ carrier) who originally had the aspect of *cynocephalus* (dog headed man)³⁰. Reprobus renamed Christopher after his baptism, was a Roman soldier martyred during Decius's kingdom in the same period of the Seven Sleepers' martyrdom and in the close region of Lycia. According to the scholar the word *Viricanus* seems to echo a word in Middle-Persian language, *barracanus* (in Latin). The *barnakan* was a royal rotated garment which was adorned with coins. At the same time Scarcia argues that the Turkish word *raqım* is referred to a colorful fabric with spots like *Qıtmır*'s coat and it also corresponds to Christopher's cloth. Further, he highlights that *Qıtmır* is also a multiple of the coin called *dhiram*, as well as the coin with the function of offering for the dead in order to lead his soul to the afterlife. Thus, Scarcia supposes a relationship on the symbolic level between *Viricanus* and Christopher through some adjuvants (helpers to the cause), that is the royal rotated garment/spotted

27 A. Tozzi Di Marco, *Agiografia e culto dei Sette Dormienti. Storicità e processi di mitologizzazione della agiostoria nel Mediterraneo*, [Hagiography and cult of the Seven Sleepers. Historicity and processes of mythologization of the hagiostory in the Mediterranean], Edizioni del Gruppo di ricerca arabo-cristiana, 2023.

28 D. G. White, *Myths of the Dog-man*, University of Chicago press, 1991.

29 L. Migliorati et al, *Sepolti nel teatro: il valore dei cani in sepolture comuni infantili*, [Buried in the theatre: the significance of the dogs in common childish graves], comunicazione presentata in occasione del Seminario di Storia e Archeologia Greca, Sapienza Università di Roma, Facoltà di Lettere e Filosofia, 27-29 maggio 2015.

30 During the ancient times it was believed that the homeland of the cynocephalus giants was Lybia or Armenia. In the Coptic museum in Cairo there is an icon which portrayed two Coptic cynocephalic saints, named Ahrakas and Oghan.

coat and the coins regarding the Arab term³¹. The commemoration of the cynocephalic saint who is the patron saint of boatmen and pilgrims, occurs on July 25th while the Seven Sleepers' day is July 27th.

In the Christian iconography the cynocephalic saints are not limited only to the icon of saint Christopher. They are also depicted in the Pentecostal icons and miniatures, mostly in Armenian manuscripts³². Indeed since the 13th century CE a specific characteristic of the Armenian iconography of Pentecost is the portrayal of the cynocephalic figures among the populations of the world. The oldest one is in the Armenian Gospel of Mamistra (in Cilicia as Tarsus), dated to the year 1223 CE, wherein a demoniac cynocephalic figure is struck by the Pentecostal revelation likewise Saul of Tarsus (St Paul)³³.

Another Christian source also certifies the presence of the dog in the cave. It is an Ethiopic manuscript of which I don't have further information³⁴.

2.4. Islamic religious sources

At the level of Islamic sacred scriptures (Koran and Sunna) and in folk religiosity dog plays a symbolic and liminal role. It is regarded as one of the signs of Allah. In the Holy Koran it is mentioned in some sūrah (K. 7:176; 5:4; 18:18) which show how it was not considered an impure animal, except in the chapter (sūrah) 7 according to some commentators such as Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī. In the chapter 7 verse 176 it is written: "If it had been our will, we could have used these signs to raise him high, but instead he clung to the earth and followed his own desires - he was like a dog tongue whether you drive it away or leave it alone. Such is the image of those who reject Our signs". However, as the scholar Sara Tlili argued

31 G. Scarcia, *Reveries canicolari intorno a Cristoforo e ai Sette Dormienti* [Canicular Reveries on Christopher and Seven Sleepers], in D. Bredi, L. Capezzone, W. Dahmash, L. Rostagno (eds.), *Scritti in onore di Biancamaria Scarcia Amoretti*, vol. 3, Roma, Edizioni Q, 2008, pp. 1109-1129; G. Scarcia, *Una grotta Circium versus da terra d'Islam a terra cristiana* [A cave towards Circium from Islamic world to the Christian world], "Quaderni di Studi e Materiali di Storia delle Religioni", Supplemento al n. 82 (1/2016), Brescia, Morcelliana, 2017.

32 In some manuscripts such as the 15th c. Kievian Psalter they are portrayed as the Barbarian warriors who are Christ's enemies and in another manuscript, which tells St. Mercurius' story (Abu Sayfain), still alive and documented in Ethiopia. <https://orthodoxartsjournal.org/the-icon-of-st-christopher/> (consulted 05/01/2024)

33 Today the Gospel is in the Armenian church of Balat/Galata in Istanbul. Rudy Favaro, "Iconografie in itinere", in P.G. Borbone, A. Mengozzi, M. Tosco (eds), *Linguistic and Oriental studies in honor of Fabrizio A. Pennacchietti*, Wiesbaden, Harrassowitz Verlag, 2006, p. 253.

34 Cfr. A. Brita, *Performing (with) Multiple-Text Manuscripts in the Making of the Ethiopian Sainthood: Matter and Devotion in Ethiopia between the Fourteenth Century and the Present Time*, in A. Brita, J. Karolewski, M. Husson, L. Miolo and H. Wimmer (eds), *Manuscripts and Performances in Religions, Arts, and Sciences, Studies in Manuscript Cultures*, 36, Berlin-Boston, De Gruyter, 2024, pp. 371-424.

in opposition to Archer's view³⁵, the analogy in question deals merely with the behaviour of the dog when it is attacked, it pants without any ethical dimension; "but if one does not molest him he also pants, rather, it is part of its intrinsic nature. In the same way, the behavior of the morally misguided person is not influenced by what one tells him; rather, it is determined by his own character"³⁶.

Considering the Sunna the position of the dog is ambivalent. Al-Buhāri reported that at the Prophet's time dogs entered and left the place of prayer without the believers being concerned. However, Moḥammad stated that when a dog drinks from a container the owner has to wash it seven times. Moreover, although he ordered to kill all the dogs in Medina except those concerning the sphere of domestic utility and work as the sheepdogs and hunting dogs, Maymounah, one of his last wives, had a white dog named Mismar. Wherever she went Mismar accompanied her, thus nobody could steal her baggage. When her dog died she was very sad and cried a lot. However the transmitter of the ḥadīth Abu Dāwud reported that he ordered to kill only the black dogs with a white spot in their eyes because they were considered devils. Another ḥadīth reported that both pilgrim and prostitute could redeem their sins by giving water to a thirsty dog.

In the mystical milieu the first story of the *sūrah al-Kahf* indicates symbolically the *sūfi*'s personal spiritual journey towards Allah³⁷. In his mystical manual, *Risālah fī 'l-Taṣawwuf* (1045 CE) the theologian and *sūfi* al-Qushayrī (11th c. CE), discusses *sūfi* theory and praxis. The mystical path consists in the advancement towards the detachment and isolation from the world necessary to approach God through a number of spiritual stations (*maqāmāt*) and spiritual states (*aḥwāl*). They are compared to the Ahl al-Kahf condition when God deafened their ears (K. 18:11). During the same period in another treatise on sufism such as al-Hujwīrī's *Kash al-Mahjūb* (Unveiling of the Hidden) the Companions of the cave were represented as *awliyā* (s. *walī*, the sacred person), who perform miracles (*karāmat*). According to al-Hujwīrī the stray dog represents the metaphor of the *sūfi*'s marginality of living. However, in the mystical literature the figure of the dog appears in all its ambivalence. On the one hand it is exalted for its quality of rectitude as term of comparison and measure of the

35 Archer, *The hellhound...*, p. 2.

36 Tlili, *The canine companion...*

37 Sufism (*al-taṣawwuf*), the Islamic mysticism, is the esoteric dimension of Islam.

sūfī's itinerary, and on the other as symbol of human egoism. In particular, Farid al-dīn 'Attar lauded the obedience of the lowly guard dog who stays up all the night as opposite of a prideful human being. Mevlana Jalāl-al-Dīn Rūmī, the renowned *Sūfī shaikh* and poet, had a reverence for *Qıtmır* and he equated it to the mystic in own inner love of God. When a group of students asked to him about the color of the dog of Seven Sleepers, he answered "yellow/sallow; a lover is always yellow/sallow as I am; and that dog was a lover"³⁸. The reciprocal closer relationship between the dog and the mystic brings them until their identification. Therefore it was not rare to encounter a *sūfī* accompanied by his dog who lived in the streets and cemeteries, eating in the garbage dumps in a radical poverty: for instance the well-known Persian Mansūr al-Ḥallāj with his two black dogs³⁹. Also the mystic Nasih al-Dīn had a pet dog he named *Qıtmır*, attributing to it spiritual virtues. His hagiography reported someone asked to the *Sūfī* why he was so attached to his dog. He answered because of its friendship to God, because it can distinguish a lover from a repudiator of God⁴⁰. The researcher Alexander Papas who examined the *Sūfī* literature regarding the involvement between the dog and the dervishes, gave extensive accounts of this bond. Among the examples, the existence of a shrine of a mystic surnamed Abu al-Kalb in Edirnekapi cemetery in Istanbul. He had five stray dogs and he used to roam in the streets with them⁴¹. In some of these cases the dog was perceived as a saint with own disciples as their sanctuaries reveal in Central Asia. Papas argued that this phenomenon expressed the introduction of the marginal and antinomian practices within the *Sūfī* orders⁴².

2.5. The *sūrah al-Kahf* - the cave - (K. 18: 9-26) and its *Tafsīr*

In the *sūrah al-Kahf*, in particular in its first story concerning the Companions of the cave, (*Yedi uyuyanlar* in Turkish language for the Seven Sleepers) the dog has a divine role. It represents the pivotal innovation compared to the Christian tradition of the Seven Sleepers anecdote. It appears four times in this chapter. This dog whose name is not mentioned, is only referred briefly and it does not contribute to the core plot of the account even if it is among the main characters. In the Koranic worldview

38 Shams al-Dīn Ahmad-e Aflākī, (tr. John O' Kane), *The Feats of the Knowers of God*, Brill, 2001

39 F. Zanella (a cura di), *Il cane di Maometto*, [The dog of Mohammad], Stampa alternativa, 2005, p. 178.

40 A. Papas, *Dog of God: animality and wildness among dervishes*, in S. Raei (ed.), *Islamic alternatives. Non-mainstream religion in Persianate societies*, Wiesbaden, Harrassowitz Verlag, 2017, p. 125

41 Papas, *Dog of God...*, p. 126

42 Papas, *Dog of God...*, p. 127

this dog is equated to the Companions of the cave. Without any note or explanation, we read that the dog is lying with its paws stretched out on the threshold of the cave, placed by Allah to guard the *Ahl al-Kahf*. It seems that the Koran expects this familiarity by its primary audience. The Koran takes for granted that its earliest listeners were already aware of this tale, mostly belonged to Jewish and Christian lore, to whom it makes reference. In this case the Koran offers elaboration, a rereading of pre-Islamic material. This process of adaptation and transformation of the Christian Seven Sleepers parable to the Muslims' mindset is evident in the different accounts given by the commentators of the *sūrah*⁴³. Moreover, the absence of the dog before the sleep and after the Sleepers' miracle of resurrection suggests that it is relevant to the story only during their sleep. The second reference of the dog in the chapter is: "if you looked at the Sleepers, you surely would have turned from them fleeing. And you surely would have been horrorstruck by them" (K. 18:18). Thus, in the Islamic rendition the cave is not walled⁴⁴ like in the Christian legend but it is marked by a liminal being, which inspires terror to whom approaches them. On Sarra Tlili's opinion the positive presentation of the dog in the sura 18 is the attempt to give it a respectable place in Koranic taxonomy of the Creation and to counter the biases on canines. Therefore it seems the Holy Koran approves the proximity between humans and dogs, hence the close human-canine relationships⁴⁵. Although in the Koran there are not other references about the dog which acts as God's mouthpiece, on the contrary it is extensively mentioned in the writings of the exegetes (*Tafsīr*). The dog of the *Aṣḥāb al-Kahf* is a talking animal, named for some commentators of the Koran *Raqīm* interpreting the verse 9 (K. 18:9) and for others *Qīṭmīr*. According to the Persian al-Tha'labī (d. 427/1036) *Raqīm* was referred to the inscription with the names of the Companions of the cave, while for others it was their hometown⁴⁶. Al-Tha'labī offered also other variants of its name, such as *Rayyān* and *Hamrā*. He and ibn Kathīr recorded someone who said this dog was a royal hunting dog from the court of the Sleepers' evil king. According to another commentator, Muqatil b. Sulayman, the dog was the Sleeper Maximian's pet (*Makslimīnā*). *Qīṭmīr*'s agency is

43 N. N. Roberts, *A parable of blessing: the significance and message of the Qur'anic account of 'The Companions of the cave'*, "Muslim world", vol. 83, n. 3-4, 1993, pp. 295-317.

44 The cave is not walled to allow the solar light to enter in the cave in order to awake the sleepers.

45 Tlili, *The canine companion*...

46 The scholar James A. Bellamy asserted that al-Raqīm is a corrupted word instead of al-ruqud, which means sleepers, thus he thought it was a copist's error. J. A. Bellamy, *Al-Raqim or Al-Ruqud? Note on Sura 18:9*, "Journal of the American Oriental Society", 1991, v. 111, n.1, pp. 115-117.

evident in the Koranic exegesis, since it is the one who approaches the youths and insists on accompanying them. Indeed al-Tha'labi gives us two narratives of this encounter. In both versions while the Sleepers were going up to the cave they encountered a sheepdog. They threw stones at it to chase it away, thinking its barking would have revealed their location. At this point the dog stood up on its hind legs like a person and started to speak. In the first version of the story, attributed to 'Ali (d. 40/661), the dog said: "Do not drive me away, for I bear witness that there is no other god but God alone. Let me protect you from your enemy." In the second version, attributed to Ibn Abbās (d. 68/687), the dog said: "Do not be afraid of my presence for I love those beloved of God. So sleep, and I shall guard you". So that, the dog is considered either fearful (perceived by the Sleepers as a threat) or protective as a guardian (its offer to protect them). It is on the threshold in-between this world and the netherworld, the living and the dead asleep like a barrier at the entrance of the cave.

3. The anthropological fieldwork

3.1 Islamic iconography

During my periods of fieldwork I often noticed in the houses and shops of Islamic countries of Middle East and North Africa the iconography related to the Seven Sleepers and *Qıtmır*. Since the tale of the Companions of the cave has been always in the hearth of Muslims, Islamic iconography developed this topic on many different kinds of materials such as manuscripts, drawings, amulets, veneration artifacts. In order to find and to study this material I visited also the museums of Islamic Arts. Specifically Muslim artists were inspired by the pericope of the long miraculous sleep in the cave with the watch dog at the entrance since the 13th century and markedly after the 14th century. During this time in particular, Turkish-Persian art developed the sleeping youths' portrait in a circular frame. Muslim miniaturists always depicted them in number of seven despite the traditionally eight and the ambivalence of the Koran in this respect. Thus, the academic of Islamic art Ibrahim Ellassal emphasizes the Western influence on these Muslim representations. In his view the painters, although of different schools of art like Persian, Turkish and Indian schools, were influenced by the Western iconography of the Seven Sleepers of Ephesus, because they were always represented in number of seven and as young people⁴⁷. Furthermore, according to the anthropologist Thierry Zarcone

47 Ibrahim Ellassal is an Egyptian historian of Islamic art. I. Ellassal, *Stories of Sūrah Al -Kahf in Islamic*

Qitmīr plays a key position in these drawings⁴⁸. Although the color of its coat was debated among the exegetes of the Holy Koran, it is above of all portrayed as white and curled up, sleeping right alongside his apparent masters like in the Persian manuscript *Qisas al-Anbiyā* (Stories of the Prophets) written by Abū Ishāq Ibrāhīm ibn Manṣūr Nīsābūrī. However, the most common variant says it was a sheepdog. Concerning the general theme of dogs some illustrated manuscripts such as *Tarjuma-i Thawāqib-i manāqib* (A Translation of Stars of the Legend) written by Shams Al-dīn Ahmad Aflākī, (probably in Bagdad 1590 CE), represent them as part of the social life of the community: in the streets and bazaars close to its owner or during the hunting trips. Despite this during the first time of Islām herds of stray dogs roamed the city streets, they were hungry and aggressive and they posed serious health problems due to rabies and other diseases. Thus, these social and health problems caused the general prejudice of the impurity of the dog. On the contrary, the name of *Qitmīr* together with the names of the *Aṣḥāb al-Kahf* has a prophylactic function and they were and are engraved on the talismanic pendants in various shapes and on drawings in form of a ship (in Turkish *Eshāb ül-Kahf gemisi*) to hang on the wall of the house⁴⁹. The position of *Qitmīr* in the paintings or engravings is central to mark its high sacred status and the significance of its mission. We can find also their names carved on the stern of Turkish Ottoman ships to ensure a safe journey, because of the wavy movement of the Sleepers (K. 18:17), as well as on the Ottoman swords to protect their owners. Some times they are inscribed also in a tree of life shape. In one Ottoman glass painting (19th century) *Qitmīr* name shapes two leaves at the bottom of the tree, in order to mark its prominence to protect the access to the tree, likewise at the entrance of the cave⁵⁰. In Maghreb they were written on pebbles in order to ward off the wild dogs⁵¹. The thaumaturgical power of their names derives from a *ḥadīth* reported by the transmitters of Tradition (*al-ḥadīth*) such as Muslim, Abu Dāwud, and al-Tirmidhī, which refer to the recitation of the *sūrah al-Kahf*. Its recitation preserves from the Dajjal, the equivalent of Antichrist, therefore from any evil.

The theoretical framework described so far nourishes the Muslims'

Miniatures, "International Journal of Heritage, Tourism and Hospitality", 12(1), 2018, pp. 1-21.

48 T. Zarcone, *The Seven Sleepers between Christianity and Islam: from portraits to talismans*, "Religiographies", n. 1, Fondazione Cini, Venezia, 2022.

49 Zarcone, *The Seven Sleepers*...

50 Zarcone, *The Seven Sleepers*...

51 Papas, *Dog of God*...

collective social imaginary for centuries and it is revealed to be embedded into the believer's religious actions. According to the anthropologist Talal Asad, "Islam is not a social structure or a complex of beliefs, artifacts, customs and morals. It is a tradition, a discursive tradition. It should be considered a discursive practice (rather than a normative one), which is connected to the social action and to the bodily discipline"⁵². Indeed the lived Islam by the Muslim Turks at the *Aşhāb al-Kahf* caves is engaged onto this framework. In this regard the traditional knowledge of the symbolic role of *Qıtmır* as divine messenger (friend of God) is transferred and incorporated in the physicality of the holy place. The dog acts as baraka carrier, which is transferred to the cave and experienced through the body rituals. During my periods of fieldwork in Turkey, according to the visitors' religious practice, only two of the four existent caves - Tarsus and Lice caves – (the other two are: Selçuk, Afşin caves) denote the metaphorical presence of *Qıtmır*. Here the relationship with the faithfuls is remarkable. The methodology of my fieldwork consists of the participant observation and semistructured interviews. Even if the ethnographic research is not yet complete (in Lice I just started last year) we can assume some preliminary results regarding Tarsus cave.

3.2 Tarsus cave⁵³

Tarsus cave is generally considered the authentic cave of the *Aşhāb al-Kahf*, even if Jordanian Muslims claim their cave near Amman⁵⁴. The grotto is situated close to Dedeler village, about 15 km far to the north of Tarsus. During past times it was attended also by the Orthodox Christians, mostly Greek residents before the exchange of the population in 1923. The French archaeologist and orientalist Victor Langlois who explored Cilicia in 1852-53, said that after Jerusalem and Mecca it was one of most important pilgrimage among Muslims. He recorded a tradition which told of seven young people who tasked with carrying a message to the king of Tarsus, left the Armenian castle of Lempron (in Turkish Namrun Kalesi) fell asleep miraculously in the cave and awakened two hundred years later⁵⁵. Up to the hill of the Taurus mountains, called Encülüs Mountain (or locally

⁵² T. Asad, *The idea of an anthropology of Islam*, Washington D.C., Georgetown University, 1986.

⁵³ A. Tozzi Di Marco, *The Seven Sleepers Tradition (Ashab-ı Kehf) in Afşin, Tarsus and Lice: Comparative Analysis of Intangible Heritage*, "Edeb Erkan", n. 5 (forthcoming).

⁵⁴ A. Tozzi Di Marco, *The Seven Sleepers/Ashāb al-Kahf tale and cult: two case studies in Turkey (Ephesus and Jordan (Al-Rajib))*, "Euras Journal of Social Sciences", 2023, v. 3, issue 1.

⁵⁵ V. Langlois, *Voyage dans la Cilicie et dans les Montagnes du Taurus: exécuté pendant les années 1851-1853*, Paris, 1861, pp. 336-338.

Ziyarettepe, that is Ziyaret Mountain), it is accessible through a long stair. Nowadays Tarsus *Eshab ı-kehf* is mostly attended during the Islamic feasts such as Kurban or Ramazan but also during Hıdırellez⁵⁶ (between May 5th and 6th). Recently the Diyanet (Directorate of Religious Affairs) put a sign inside the cave which lists the correct rules of the *ziyāra*. The Diyanet aims to direct the devotees in a correct manner (*edep*) according to the orthodox practice. The main end is to prevent the heterodox folk rituals. Despite these indications the pilgrims still enact local beliefs and narratives. Let's examine the Islamic discursive tradition of the Turkish Muslims during their *ziyāra* at this holy cave, following Asad's analysis.

Devotional practices such as stopping in front of the holy funerary recint to recite the *al-Fatiha* (the Opening sura) and reciting the sura al-Kahf are part of the orthopraxi. They are intermingled with traditional folk rituals performed in the cave in order to invoke God's grace, the *baraka*⁵⁷. This complex of rituals represents the lived Islam, enacted by the locals, that is their perceptions of the sacred. After reciting the *al-Fatiha* believers give candies to the *Eshab ı-kehf* in the funerary enclosure. This custom to give them some food is a ritual also witnessed among Indian Muslims. In particular, according to the scholar Sharif Ja'far, before beginning a travel or in order to get rid of own troubles "they take out seven plates of food, recite the Fatiha over them, eat some and distribute the remainder. A special plate is reserved for the dog, wich is not placed with the rest, but given to a dog to eat"⁵⁸.

Inside the Tarsus grotto in a small cavity the pilgrims identify a rock as the head of *Qıtmır* due to its shape. Since this mythical canine embodies God's will, it manifests its agentivity through the protective power. Pilgrims use to kiss and to touch *Qıtmır* rock in order to invoke it in their lives. These apotropaic actions which prevent the evil, include also the ritual of putting small stones as symbols of a vow in some holes of the wall. Furthermore the litholatric tradition at the *Eshab ı-kehf* consists of rubbing the rock with the sick part of the body. This practice is enacted to receive the *Qıtmır*

56 It is a celebration of the day of the first encounter on earth between the Prophets Hızır (Al-Khidr) and Ilyas (Elijah). Cfr. M. Boivin, M. Penicaud (eds), *Inter-religious Practices and Saint Veneration in the Muslim world. Khidr/Khizr from the Middle East to South Asia*, London, Taylor&Francis, 2023.

57 According to the new Encyclopaedia of Islam the *baraka* is a beneficent force of divine origin which causes superabundance in the physical sphere and prosperity and happiness in the psychic order.

58 Sharif Ja'far (tr. G. A. Herklots), *Islam in India: or the Qānūn-i-Islām The Customs of the Musalmāns of India*, Taylor&Francis, 2017, p. 137.

baraka, hence to cure own illness. The faithfuls think *Qıtmır* can help them because of his *wilāya* (sainthood) that is the metaphysical proximity to or intimacy with God. They don't venerate the divine dog since it is not allowed in Islam but they believe in the miraculous power of its *baraka*. Therefore in this context *Qıtmır* expresses his agentivity through his symbolic capital as intercessor to God likewise the pious Seven Sleepers on the basis of Koran and Sunna.

4. Conclusions

Comparing to the copious studies on the *sūrah al-Kahf* there are not many scholars who dealt deeply with the role of *Qıtmır*. During my periods of fieldwork in Tarsus and Lice caves I experienced the importance that believers give to *Qıtmır*, that is to its power of intercession. Very few anthropological studies have analysed its pivotal role in the Seven Sleepers/ *Eshab ı-kehf* devotion. The present study is the first pilot exploration from an ethnographic viewpoint.

In the past times anthropologists of Muslim societies such as Clifford Geertz and Ernest Gellner used the dichotomy between orthodox and unorthodox Islam or between the categories of Great and Little Traditions to explain the distinction between the scripturalist authoritative religion and the ritualistic folk faith. On the contrary, Talal Asad's conceptual framework of Islamic discursive tradition assumes that

tradition consists essentially of discourses that seek to instruct practitioners regarding the correct form and purpose of a given practice that, precisely because it is established, has a history. These discourses relate conceptually to a past (when the practice was instituted, and from which the knowledge of its point and proper performance has been transmitted) and a future (how the point of that practice can best be secured in the short or long term, or why it should be modified or abandoned), through a present (how it is linked to other practices, institutions, and social conditions). An Islamic discursive tradition is simply a tradition of Muslim discourse that addresses itself to conceptions of the Islamic past and future, with reference to a particular Islamic practice in the present... An anthropology of Islam will therefore seek to understand the historical conditions that enable the production and maintenance of specific discursive traditions, or their transformation and the efforts of practitioners to achieve coherence⁵⁹.

59 Asad, *The idea of...*

Therefore if we consider this conceptual frame, the healing rituals which involve the divine dog, performed at the Tarsus cave, represent a discursive tradition. This discursive praxis entails a fluid interaction between the scripturalist tradition of the first part of the *sūrah Al-kahf* (which forwarns the Truth of the Resurrection, hence of the eternal life on condition of total abandon to God) related to *Qīṭmīr* (among the five animals accepted in Paradise) and the localized narratives and beliefs. Believers consider *Qīṭmīr* an intermediary between humans and God on the threshold between the world of the living and the divine. They think of it as *baraka* giver and asking for its intercession to heal own sick body or to help in solving own sufferings they perform some lithotherapeutic rituals. It is evident that the symbolic efficacy⁶⁰ embedded in these healing practices plays a crucial role which is based on the local religious, social and cultural context. The materialized encounter with *Qīṭmīr* at Tarsus cave leads the devotee to a ritual transformation of self through bodily healing.

60 The notion of the symbolic efficacy has been analysed by many anthropologists over times: Levy-Strauss (1949), Geertz (1966), Turner (1967), Csordas (1983), Langdon (2007), etc.

The “Ogarkov Doctrine” and the End of World Bipolarity. A historical perspective

Roberto Motta ¹

Abstract

During the 1980s, an underground conflict between two power groups was taking place within the Soviet Union. On the one hand, the exponents of the political élite, on the other that of the military leaders, divided on the choice regarding the allocation of domestic financial resources. Passing almost unnoticed by the general public, this debate had important echoes in Western think-tanks and decision-making centers, especially in the United States, up to the condition of the internal political evolution of the Soviet Union and its relations with the Western bloc in the last phase of the Cold War.

Keywords: *Cold War, Mikhail Gorbachev, NATO, Nikolai Vasilevich Ogarkov, nuclear warfare, Soviet military doctrine, Warsaw Pact.*

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1. 1988: The Ideological Surrender of Gorbachev

At a meeting held on October 31st, 1988, the general secretary of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU)¹ and chairman of the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet, Mikhail Sergeyevich Gorbachev, expressed to some of his closest advisers his intention to arrive at a decisive break with past Soviet positions about the European chessboard². Gorbachev expressed to them his intention to offer his Western interlocutors substantial reductions in Soviet forces in Europe as a unilateral act of détente³. It was also on the basis of this decision that, on the following December 7th, the Soviet reformist leader explicitly conceived of his own address to the United Nations as diametrically opposed to that of Fulton in 1946, when former British prime minister Sir Winston Spencer Churchill used the expression “Iron Curtain” to refer to that line from Stettin to Trieste that marked the geopolitical boundary between a Soviet-ruled East-Central Europe and the remaining European-Western countries. Gorbachev, explaining the meaning of his speech to his staff, stated: “In general, this speech should be an anti-Fulton [...] Fulton in reverse”⁴. In this way Gorbachev hinted that in 1988 the long parenthesis represented by the East/West opposition should now be considered over⁵. By offering significant reductions in Soviet Army units⁶, Gorbachev also intended to reassure his international interlocutors about the goodwill of Soviet policy at a juncture when the threat of war in the European theater seemed to be strongly felt within the Western bloc, especially in view of the considerable superiority of Soviet (that is Warsaw Pact⁷) conventional forces deployed in East-Central Europe⁸. It must be remembered that in 1981 the Warsaw Pact had conducted the Zapad-81 military drill, while in 1983 NATO enacted the Able Archer exercise⁹. Both simulated a large-scale war scenario on the

1 Ru. transliterated in Latin characters: Kommunističeskaja partija Sovetskogo Sojuza.

2 <https://nsarchive2.gwu.edu/NSAEBB/NSAEBB261/index.htm> [Accessed April 5th, 2023].

3 <https://nsarchive2.gwu.edu/NSAEBB/NSAEBB261/sov03.pdf> [Accessed April 5th, 2023].

4 Archive of the Gorbachev Foundation, *Conference with advisers*, October 31st, 1988, Fond 2. Notes of A.S. Chernyaev. On file at the National Security Archive. Translated by Svetlana Savranskaya (URL in footnote [3]).

5 Ibidem.

6 Ru. transliterated in Latin characters: Sovetskaja armija.

7 Formally Treaty of Friendship, Cooperation and Mutual Assistance, signed in Warsaw (Poland) on May 14th, 1955.

8 On the situation of Soviet forces in Europe in the 1980s, see the series of documents collected under the title *Soviet Military Power* by the U.S. Defense Intelligence Agency (URL https://fas.org/irp/dia/product/smp_index.htm [Accessed April 6th, 2023]), and also data from NATO (URL <https://archives.nato.int/force-comparison-1987-nato-and-warsaw-pact;isad> [Accessed April 6th, 2023]).

9 See e.g. Blackwill, Robert D., & Legro, Jeffrey W. Constraining Ground Force Exercises of NATO and the Warsaw Pact. *International Security* Vol. 14, No. 3 (Winter, 1989-1990), pp. 68-98.

European continent. Moreover, in 1981, on the eve of the 26th Congress of the CPSU, that was to open on February 23rd, the Soviet minister of Defense marshal Dmitry Fyodorovich Ustinov gave (on February 21st) a speech in which he accused the United States and its allies: << of seeking to revive the Cold War and subvert the “socialist” community, and, indeed, making active preparations for war, including a preemptive attack on the Warsaw Pact >>¹⁰. On the other hand, in 2005 Polish Defense minister Radoslaw Sikorski made public some Warsaw Pact documents showing that as early as 1979 Moscow had conceived war-game plans, code-named “Seven Days to the Rhine River”¹¹, that envisioned a nuclear clash in Europe between Soviet forces, supported by their allies, and NATO. In 1988, reiterating the centrality of the Helsinki Accords for the stability of the international security architecture, Gorbachev had affirmed the importance of the principle of self-determination of the states, as a political value in regard to which no exceptions would be tolerated¹². However, the aspect that aroused the greatest surprise, especially within NATO¹³ and the CIA¹⁴, was the announcement of the decision to proceed with the reduction of 500,000 in the Soviet armed forces and the unilateral withdrawal of six armored divisions along with 50,000 Soviet military personnel deployed in Eastern Europe¹⁵, including the assault units with all the equipment assigned to them¹⁶. In an editorial that appeared on December 8th in the American newspaper *The New York Times*, the Soviet leader’s speech – because of its contents – was compared to Woodrow Wilson’s declaration of the Fourteen Points in 1918, and the promulgation of the Atlantic Charter by Franklin Delano Roosevelt and Churchill in 1941¹⁷. The most significant comment, however, came from the US¹⁸ congressional senator Daniel Patrick Moynihan, who called Gorbachev’s statement the most stunning surrender speech in the history of ideological struggle¹⁹. Gorbachev also added that all Soviet divisions still remaining on the territory of European

10 FRUS, 1981-1988, Vol. III, Soviet Union, January 1981-January 1983, Document 21.

11 See URL <https://css.ethz.ch/content/specialinterest/gess/cis/center-for-securities-studies/en/services/digital-library/articles/article.html/107840> [Accessed April 11th, 2023].

12 <http://www.literaster.com/writing/gorbachevs-speech-un-7-december-1988> [Accessed April 5th, 2023].

13 North Atlantic Treaty Organization.

14 Central Intelligence Agency.

15 <https://nsarchive2.gwu.edu/NSAEBB/NSAEBB261/index.htm> [Accessed April 5th, 2023].

16 *Mikhail Gorbachev’s address ...*, cit., ibidem

17 See footnote [12].

18 United States [of America].

19 Ibidem.

countries allied with the USSR²⁰ would be reorganized, specifying that they would be given a different structure, than the one existing at that time, that is, such that they would assume an unambiguously defensive posture²¹. Why did Gorbachev feel the need to include within his speech this last emphasis? In an attempt to offer an answer to this question, it is necessary to go back to the debate that arose in the 1980s about the role of a pivotal figure in the Soviet armed forces: the Deputy Defense minister, Chief of the [Military] General Staff, and Hero of the Soviet Union marshal Nikolai Vasilevich Ogarkov (1917-1994).

2. The Struggle for Consensus in the Soviet Civilian and Military Élite in the 1980s

As he himself revealed in 1983, in an interview with *The New York Times*, Ogarkov was concerned about his country's lag behind the United States in the development of information technology applied to the civilian sector and to the military compartment²². According to the senior Soviet official, such a gap would constitute a crucial vulnus to the USSR's military doctrine, so much so that it led him to state prophetically, that because of this reason, the Soviet Union would eventually lose the confrontation with the western bloc²³. How to interpret these words: astute boutade or concrete concern of the highest representative, at that juncture, of Soviet military thought? In fact, the debate opened by Ogarkov – already during 1970s – within the Soviet political-military intelligentsia reached its peak in the eighties, revealing all its vehemence, so much so that in some circles of Western block intelligence (i.e. in the United States) the need arose to put it under the magnifying glass. For example, specific studies were commissioned from the RAND Corporation, such as the 1987 report entitled *Ogarkov's Complaint and Gorbachev's Dilemma: The Soviet Defense Budget and Party-Military Conflict*. Already in the title was contained all the substance of the matter. This is the dilemma which Mikhail Gorbachev seemed to be holding hostage, namely the decision on which and how much monetary

20 Union of Soviet Socialist Republics [Ru. transliterated in Latin characters: Sojúz Sovétskikh Socialističeskikh Respúblik].

21 *Mikhail Gorbachev's address ...*, cit., ibidem. Additionally, on the existence of a dichotomy between doctrine and Soviet (military) strategy see Scott, William F. Another Look at the USSR's “Defensive” Doctrine. *Air&Space Force Magazine*, March 1st, 1988, URL <https://www.airandspaceforces.com/article/0388ussr/> [Accessed December 15th, 2023].

22 Cfr. Lubar, Steven. *InfoCulture. The Smithsonian Book of Information Age Inventions*. Houghton Mifflin Company, 1993, p. 311.

23 Ibidem.

means should be allocated to Soviet defence funds within the wider framework for allocating financial resources. Two sides were described: on the one hand the military, led by personalities such as Ogarkov and grouped in what was called the military-party, on the other the Soviet Communist Party. The argument was summed up with the conventional expression “the military-Party conflict”. The report stressed not only the conflict in question, but also the possibility that failure to keep the promises made by Gorbachev could, in future, aggravate the conflict with the military élite. It was, in some ways, a far-sighted anticipation of some of the causes behind the 1991 coup d’état, in which fringes (dissatisfied) took part of the Soviet armed forces together with elements of the State Security Committee (KGB)²⁴.

Another interesting aspect concerned the dialectical tools – including internal propaganda – used by both sides to obtain the greatest useful consensus for the affirmation of their own theses. Citing previous CIA and DIA²⁵ analyses, the study pointed out that one of the effects of Ogarkov’s request for more financial resources for high technology in the military environment could include greater control by the armed forces over the Soviet Academy of Sciences²⁶. It was also noted that Gorbachev came to power with the intention of speeding up reforms aimed at modernizing the Soviet economy, but to achieve this he needed to avoid objections from the military led by Ogarkov. Such was Gorbachev’s military-economic dilemma. In this scenario, Ogarkov pushed for more appropriations to be allocated to the Defense budget mainly for the advance of newly developed conventional weapons. Otherwise, Gorbachev seemed more inclined to fuel the development of the domestic economy. The RAND study pointed out that the dilemma had emerged in all its gravity especially in the late 1980s, although – as US intelligence pointed out – it had its roots in the Brezhnev

24 Ru. transliterated in Latin characters: Komitet Gosudarstvennoj Bezopasnosti.

25 Defense Intelligence Agency.

26 Becker, Abraham S. *Ogarkov’s Complaint and Gorbachev Dilemma. The Soviet Defense Budget and Party-Military Conflict*. RAND Corporation, December 1987, p. vi. On Ogarkov see in particular: Erickson, John, & Erickson, Ljubica. *The Soviet Armed Forces, 1918-1992: A Research Guide to Soviet Sources*. Bloomsbury Academic, 1996; Fitzgerald, Mary C. Marshal Ogarkov on the Modern Theater Operation. *Naval War College Review*, Vol. 39, No. 4 (Autumn 1986), pp. 6-25; Kokoshin, Andrei A. *Soviet Strategic Thought, 1917-91*. Paperback, January 15th, 1998, MIT Press; Larrabee, Stephen F. Gorbachev and the Soviet Military. *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 66, No. 5 (Summer, 1988), pp. 1002-1026; Odom, William E. Soviet Military Doctrine. *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 67, No. 2 (Winter, 1988), pp. 114-134. Rice, Condoleezza. The Party, the Military, and Decision Authority in the Soviet Union. *World Politics*, Vol. 40, No. 1 (Oct., 1987), pp. 55-81; Westwood, James T. Conventional War and Marshal Ogarkov’s Continuing Role. *Naval War College Review*, Vol. 40, No. 1 (Winter 1987), pp. 98-100;

era, a decade earlier, when Ogarkov had reached the top of the Soviet military hierarchy²⁷. Was it for these reasons that already in the first half of the eighties Gorbachev and the leaders of the Politburo, decided to resolve the dilemma gorily by removing the charismatic marshal? Ogarkov, in fact, fell into disgrace at that particular time, being removed from his post, and in September 1984 destined to an unspecified unified command in Europe. The speculations that followed the fall of Ogarkov were, both at home and abroad, many and of different nature, especially because there was already a Soviet supreme command with authority over the forces deployed in the Warsaw Pact countries. So why create a duplicate? We will see later how the answer to this question is not insignificant due to the strategic-military implications that it revealed in that particular phase of the history of the Soviet Union, and more generally of the bipolarity era. The circumstances surrounding the removal of Ogarkov in 1984 and the dismissal in 1987 of his successor as Chief of the General Staff marshal Sergey Leonidovich Sokolov (which was also minister of Defence), revealed a detail that in the eyes of public opinion (both Soviet and Western) was not known: the existence of a dichotomy, quite marked, if not even profound, between the Soviet Communist Party and military circles in Moscow²⁸. The peak of the crisis was reached in May 1987 with the accident of the Red Square, when a small plane driven by a citizen of West Germany, Mathias Rust, landed undisturbed in the heart of the Soviet capital. The episode offered Gorbachev the reason to carry out a purge in the higher ranks of the Soviet Army, as not seen since the days of the so-called Tikhachevsky affair²⁹.

27 Ibidem. In a memorandum from the Special Assistant to the Under Secretary of State for Political Affairs William Courtney dated October 2nd, 1985 it was indicated that: "As Ogarkov's May 1984 article hinted, the Soviet military may now want nuclear reductions in order to free more resources for high-technology conventional forces, and to reduce the risk of NATO escalation to nuclear conflict in Europe" (See FRUS 1981-1988, Vol. V, Soviet Union, March 1985-October 1986, Document 112).

28 A dichotomy that as far as Soviet intelligence was concerned was also revealed in the coexistence of two distinct agencies: on the one hand, the KGB, which as political intelligence was emanation of the Party (i.e. its interests and ideology) and, on the other, the GRU (Ru. transliterated in Latin characters: Glavnoje Razvedyvatel'noje Upravlenije), that is, the information and intelligence structure of the Soviet armed forces. A significant comment was recorded on April 14th, 1986 at a high-level meeting chaired by the President of the United States when the director of the Department of Defense's Office of Net Assessment Andrew Marshall stated that Soviet generals "can get into trouble if they are too vocal, e.g., Ogarkov received a demotion when he spoke out about cuts in military spending" (See FRUS 1981-1988, Volume V, Soviet Union, March 1985-October 1986, Document 214).

29 See, in particular: Balticus. The Russian Mystery: Behind the Tikhachevsky Plot. *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 16, No. 1 (Oct., 1937), pp. 44-63; Blackstock, Paul W. The Tikhachevsky Affair, *The Russian Review*. Vol. 28, No. 2 (Apr., 1969), pp. 171-190; Campbell, Kenneth. Walter Schellenberg: SD Chief. *American Intelligence Journal*, Vol. 25, No. 2 (Winter 2007/2008), pp. 88-94; Furr, Grover C. III. New Light on Old Stories About Marshal Tikhachevskii: Some Documents Reconsidered. *Russian History*, Vol. 13, No. 2/3, Labor and Society in the 1920s and 1930s (Summer-Fall 1986 / Ete-Automne 1986) pp. 293-308; Whitewood, Peter. The Purge

Interestingly, according to the interpretation provided by an authoritative Italian scholar of Soviet history as Andrea Graziosi, this purge was also conceived to cut the wings to any future temptation for a coup d'état³⁰. In fact, Gorbachev demanded the resignation of marshal Sokolov and other high ranks, and sent on trial about one hundred and fifty officers and generals. Sokolov was replaced by general Dmitry Timofeyevich Jazov. For an irony of History, in 1991 Jazov was among those who became protagonists of the coup against Gorbachev. In the second half of the eighties, the purge of the military, which ceased to be a power group to deal with, allowed Gorbachev to declare that NATO was no longer a threat to the USSR, making a new, drastic break with the positions of the past³¹. In October 1987, a second report, prepared for the USAF³², and entitled *Conflict and Consensus in the Soviet Armed Forces*, analyzed the evolution of the confrontation on modernization within the Soviet armed forces, and the dialectical tools used to create the necessary consensus to resolve the dispute between the mid-1970s and 1988. The document, also fruit of the RAND Corporation, highlighted the earthquake caused by the Soviet armed forces as a result of Gorbachev's reforms. In the summary it was stated that, already at the beginning of the seventies, in some circles of the Soviet Army had understood the importance of replicating the successes achieved by the Western bloc, thanks to the latest technological innovations³³. It was illustrated how the Soviet General Staff traditionally held enormous power within the Soviet Union. The report described a flattering portrait of marshal Ogarkov defined: "a forceful and intelligent theoretician, headed the General Staff during six of the years covered". In the following lines it was explained that:

Ogarkov recognized that nuclear parity with the United States, which his country had achieved with great effort, would not solve all of the USSR's strategic problems and that the Soviet defense establishment would have to catch up with the high-technology revolution in the West despite increasing budgetary constraints. His solution involved the rapid implementation of changes that would transform the Soviet Armed Forces with high-technology weapons and equipment and new strategy and tactics for their use³⁴.

of the Red Army and the Soviet Mass Operations, 1937–38. *The Slavonic and East European Review*, Vol. 93, No. 2 (April 2015), pp. 286-314.

30 Graziosi, Andrea. *L'Urss dal trionfo al degrado. Storia dell'Unione Sovietica 1945-1991*. Il Mulino, 2008, p. 547.

31 Ibidem.

32 United States Air Force.

33 Gottemoeller, Rose E. *Conflict and Consensus in the Soviet Armed Forces*. RAND, October 1989, p. v.

34 Ibidem.

In a subsequent passage we touched on the core of the question raised by Ogarkov, who proposed to his fellow officers the immediate adaptation to new technologies and a substantial change in the strategy and tactics in use in the Soviet Army. There was also a reference to a (sort of) opposition between officers of the Strategic Missile Forces and followers of what was (already) called “Ogarkov Doctrine” which seemed to favour the rapid-projection of conventional forces over the traditional nuclear component. According to the report, however, Gorbachev’s arrival could have upset the process of changing the Soviet military doctrine as laid down by Ogarkov, so much so that it concluded – very prophetically – that the new Gorbachev approach could probably lead to a new phase of internal political confrontation. Like the previous report, this also considered the time period during which Ogarkov’s strategic thinking began to take shape, namely the Brezhnev era. It was also argued that Ogarkov’s entourage was aware that if the effective development of new technologies applied to armaments were to be achieved, it would have to go hand in hand with a change in strategic and tactical thinking. It also highlighted how the debate, already in the seventies, from within had moved on the pages of the Soviet specialized press. The emergence of the discussion and therefore the search for an extension of the internal consensus, revealed the conflict between the (communist) party and the military of which it was said. Suddenly, for Western analysts, the growing publicity of the debate seemed to reveal clues in support of the existence of a deep internal rift. It was in 1972 that a decisive factor for shifting the debate in favor of the development of conventional armaments was presented: the signing of the SALT³⁵ I Agreement, which guaranteed (at least formally) the strategic nuclear parity between the United States and the Soviet Union, by freezing, limiting the number of ICBM³⁶ and ABM³⁷ systems that can be deployed by both superpowers. The RAND study thus illustrated Ogarkov’s reasoning about the close connection between conventional weapons, new technologies and changing needs of military doctrine:

In addition to reconsidering their reliance on nuclear weapons, the Soviets recognized the approach of “a new revolution in military affairs”. According to Soviet theory, such a revolution occurs under the influence of scientific-technical progress, which brings changes in weapon systems, in the organization

35 Strategic Armaments Limitations Talks.

36 Intercontinental Ballistic Missile.

37 Anti-Ballistic Missile.

and training of the Armed Forces, and in combat methods. The first modern revolution in military affairs, according to Soviet theorists, grew out of advances during the 1950s in nuclear weapons, radioelectronic technology, and automation. The new revolution, they state, is likewise based on advances in electronics, but also on weapons “based on new physical principles” and on longer-range conventional as well as nuclear weapons. Conventional weapons and weapons based on new physical principles became an explicit element of this new revolution only in the late 1970s, with marshal of the Soviet Union N. V. Ogarkov as its main exponent³⁸.

In the continuation of the report the thought of the marshal was directly quoted, reporting how he wrote in 1971 that the evolution in armaments (both nuclear and conventional) would radically change the forms of conduct of military operations, by posing profound questions for the Soviet scientific-military thought, as well as for the ideological-theoretical and professional training of the army and navy cadres³⁹. In the concluding lines of the report drawn up by RAND it was illustrated how Ogarkov had created among his officers a kind of think-tank with the task of conceptually elaborating the application of new high technologies to the military doctrine of the Soviet Army⁴⁰. In essence, Ogarkov was consolidating a school of thought within the Soviet General Staff whose results could have had a decisive impact on USSR’s military strategic doctrine, eventually influencing the confrontation with the United States and the blockade of Western European countries. In October 1986, this was confirmed by another Soviet marshal, namely Sergey Fyodorovich Akhromeyev (1923-1992), during a conversation he had with the US Chief Negotiator and Special Advisor on Arms Control (with the rank of ambassador) lieutenant-general Edward Leon Rowny, on the sidelines of the Reykjavik summit between US president Ronald Reagan and Gorbachev. Akhromeyev reported to Rowny that Ogarkov was providing the Soviet army with solid strategic thinking and continuing to do so, calling him a creative and imaginative strategist⁴¹. Nevertheless, at the height of his career, Ogarkov – as mentioned earlier – seemed to fall victim to a purge. It is reasonable to suppose that this disastrous fall may have been attributable to the success of Gorbachev’s political line in the aforementioned political confrontation, and to the war of succession

38 Gottemoeller, p. 3.

39 Ogarkov, Nikolai. *Krasnaya Zvezda*. September 3rd, 1971; English version in *Foreign Broadcast Information Service Soviet Union Daily Report* (FBIS), September 10th, 1971.

40 Gottemoeller, p. 7.

41 FRUS 1981-1989, Vol. XI, START I, Document 166.

which began on the eve of his death (1985) by Konstantin Ustinovich Chernenko⁴². A data seems to emerge: both the circumstances of his ouster from the top position in the Soviet military apparatus and those relating to his sudden return to vogue can at last reveal what kind of atmosphere was hovering in Moscow, and, consequently, in Western power circles about the situation that seemed to be maturing in Europe in the mid-1980s. This situation – for a series of indications that we will shortly examine – seemed very close to a conflict between the Warsaw Pact and NATO.

3. The Scenario for a Victory in the West According to Ogarkov’s Strategic Thinking

As mentioned before, immediately after his defenestration (September 6th, 1984) rumors began to arise – especially in the West – about the assignment to Ogarkov of an operational command in a combat area. The new post was the result of a precise strategic decision taken by the Supreme Council of Soviet Defense, that entrusted to the marshal the command of what was called “theater of western front”⁴³, in fact making Ogarkov: “the supreme representative of the Soviet military command in what could become the most important operational and strategic sector in case of conflict”⁴⁴. In his new role, Ogarkov sought to strengthen ties with the USSR’s most important ally in that area: the German Democratic Republic (GDR). In October, the Soviet marshal had a meeting with the leaders of East Germany, being received with the highest honors. On that occasion, the GDR’s official news agency⁴⁵ reported that the discussions had touched on the issue of strengthening the military alliance in view of improving the efficiency and combat readiness of the Warsaw Pact⁴⁶. Commenting on the incident, the Italian press pointed out that the USSR had taken: “another opportunity to remember its special rights of control over the future of its most important ally and in general on the German question”⁴⁷. Rumours about Ogarkov’s unspecified new assignment began to fade in the second half of October, when it became clear that the marshal had actually been given command of the main Soviet forces in the West

42 General secretary of the CPSU and president of the Supreme Soviet of the Soviet Union.

43 See URL <https://ricerca.repubblica.it/repubblica/archivio/repubblica/1984/09/19/il-maresciallo-ogarkov-sara-forse-assegnato-al.html> [Accessed April 5th, 2023].

44 Ibidem.

45 Allgemeiner Deutscher Nachrichtendienst.

46 <https://ricerca.repubblica.it/repubblica/archivio/repubblica/1984/10/14/ogarkov-accolto-con-massimi-onori-nella-germania.html?ref=search> [Accessed April 5th, 2023].

47 Ibidem.

with a special assignment. In Europe the news was unofficially attributed by Finnish television to a member of the Politburo, Grigory Vasilyevich Romanov, although no official confirmation came from Moscow⁴⁸. The aura of mystery about the special nature of the new assignment still pushed the Italian press to comment as follows:

It is not [...] clear what exactly “major forces of the USSR in the West” means, as no subdivision of Soviet military zones responds to this indication. This formula may include the forces located in central Europe or the entire belt that extends from the Baltic Sea to the Black Sea affecting most of the 18 military districts of the Soviet Union. Western experts point out in any case that this “unified command” has reason to be only in case of war. According to a reductive interpretation, Ogarkov may be responsible for the Soviet forces [...] of the Warsaw Pact, but in that case it would still not be clear what his relationship would be with marshal Kulikov, supreme commander of the Pact forces. The Ogarkov mystery therefore does not seem definitively clarified [...]⁴⁹.

The mystery was finally solved a few days later when, in the British specialized magazine *Jane's Defense Weekly*, the expert in strategic issues and advisor to the Washington Government, Yossef Bodansky⁵⁰ wrote – confirming earlier rumors however coming as we have seen from Soviet sources – that Ogarkov had actually assumed: “the supreme command of the forces stationed in the Western operating theatre”⁵¹ and the exact date of his investiture on September 7th. Over the course of a year, marshal Ogarkov had thus gone from appearing as an outcast to being once again a decisive figure in the USSR's strategy. Suddenly, in Italy, some journalistic speculation even suggested that he might have been appointed commander of the Warsaw Pact forces in place of marshal Viktor Georgiyevich Kulikov. Despite these speculations, the chronicle of the time, however, had the merit of deepening the analysis of the situation by evoking questions that, in hindsight, appear worthy of being considered, such as the clash of power that arose after the departure of Chernenko mentioned earlier. In this regard, the Italian newspaper *La Repubblica* wrote:

48 <https://ricerca.repubblica.it/repubblica/archivio/repubblica/1984/10/16/ogarkov-comandera-il-fronte-occidentale-sovietico.html?ref=search> [Accessed April 5th, 2023].

49 Ibidem.

50 At that time he was Analyst for Mid-Atlantic Research Associates. For a complete profile view URL <https://www.harpercollins.com/blogs/authors/yossef-bodansky> [Accessed April 5th, 2023].

51 <https://ricerca.repubblica.it/repubblica/archivio/repubblica/1984/10/24/ogarkov-nominato-comandante-del-fronte-occidentale.html?ref=search> [Accessed April 5th, 2023].

The exact reasons for Ogarkov's removal have never been very clear. Soviet sources then suggested that the marshal had manifested tendencies [...] Bonapartist accumulating excessive power within the armed forces. Others said that they had damaged some “non-party” positions and in contrast to Defense minister Ustinov. More credible, however, is a version of his military thinking, the kind of strategy he would try to impose in the “Stavka”⁵², the USSR military General Headquarters. According to an interview he gave to the newspaper of the Soviet armed forces *Krasnaja Zvezda* on May 9th, 1984, Ogarkov hinted that the deployment of new NATO missiles did not increase the risk of an American “first blow” against the [Soviet] Union because the US-USSR strategic balance remained anchored to the principle of “mutual assured destruction” [...] The periodic appearances of Ogarkov in some military delegations, the publication of his articles in Soviet newspapers, His presence at the sessions of the Supreme Soviet was, on the other hand, confirmation that the star of the marshal had not been definitively clouded and that his departure probably coincided with the tensions existing in the Kremlin against the various factions Soviet forces engaged in the succession to power. However, his eventual return must be interpreted not only in the context of internal adjustments [...] but above all as a re-evaluation of political-strategic thinking [...] ⁵³.

It should be noted that the accusation of Bonapartism made by some Soviet circles to Ogarkov was identical to that attributed to marshal Mikhail Nikolayevich Tukhachevsky in 1936. The analysis made by American intelligence after the purge of Ogarkov in September 1984 is also very interesting. In a memorandum – at that time secret – entitled *Some Further Thoughts on Ogarkov*, drafted by the National Intelligence Officer for the president of the National Intelligence Council with responsibility for Europe, George Kolt, were described three possible new destinations for the marshal⁵⁴. In the first case, Ogarkov – it was written – could have been assigned to the Inspectorate General of the armed forces⁵⁵. This scenario – it was argued – would almost certainly have meant a relegation and consequently the end of his career⁵⁶. A second hypothesis concerned the possibility that he was entrusted with the Ministry of Defence, a decision that would have created a completely new situation⁵⁷. The third

⁵² It was created on June 23rd 1941, see <https://www.prlib.ru/en/history/619333> [Accessed December 12th 2023].

⁵³ See footnote [51].

⁵⁴ <https://www.cia.gov/readingroom/docs/CIA-RDP87R00529R000200160010-5.pdf> [Accessed April 5th, 2023].

⁵⁵ Ibidem.

⁵⁶ Ibidem.

⁵⁷ Ibidem.

possibility – described as intriguing in the memorandum – contemplated the hypothesis that Ogarkov could be given command of the Soviet forces in Afghanistan, a circumstance that would have guaranteed the Soviets an intelligent commander, energetic and probably more assertive in that delicate theatre of operations: it was also added that, for these reasons, the chances of further, eventual, Soviet action against Pakistan would increase⁵⁸. Given these aspects, the surprise – and therefore the alarm – that aroused in Western countries the decision to assign instead to Ogarkov the command of what was called the theater of western war can be understood. It was again Bodansky who clarified the mystery. He did so on July 23rd, 1985, in an article in *The Washington Times* newspaper devoted entirely to the strategic thinking of the Soviet marshal. The importance of this article is indicated by the fact that a copy is kept in the CIA digital archives⁵⁹. Bodansky, calling him the most important Soviet in uniform, wrote that Ogarkov was the creator of a new military grand strategy that provided – in the hypothetical case of a confrontation with the West – not (only) the use of nuclear weapons, but (also) the use of modern conventional forces for a first surprise attack against Western Europe. Thus the Soviet forces could have achieved a strategic victory over NATO without necessarily having to resort to nuclear arsenals. Relying on the supposed American reservations about the unilateral use of nuclear weapons in the event of a conventional Soviet invasion of Western Europe, Ogarkov believed he could rapidly implement and complete the conquest already during the initial phase of a large-scale conflict, without recourse to nuclear weapons, that is before Washington could take a decisive decision in support of the European allies. For Bodansky, Ogarkov's military thought did not stop at this only hazard. The Soviet marshal believed that the first reaction of the United States would be to consider the use of nuclear weapons [we can suppose non-strategic nuclear weapons] to stop the Soviet advance in Western Europe. In order to avoid this, it would have been essential to show in Europe a considerable superiority in nuclear weapons, so as to discourage the nuclear escalation of the conflict, placing the United States at risk of being subjected to atomic retaliation on its territory or fulfilling commitments arising from its extended nuclear deterrence policy. The debate on this option would have lengthened Washington's reaction

⁵⁸ Ibidem.

⁵⁹ <https://www.cia.gov/readingroom/docs/CIA-RDP90-00965R000100580003-8.pdf> [Accessed April 5th, 2023].

time, by providing an additional advantage to the USSR to complete its conventional advance in Western Europe.

4. Significance and Legacy of the so-called “Ogarkov Doctrine”

In a secret CIA report of April 1981 (released in 2012), entitled *The Development of Soviet Military Power: Trends Since 1965 and Prospects for the 1980s*, were reported an article signed by Ogarkov in which the Soviet marshal had expressed some considerations about a future hypothetical global conflict that would involve the Soviet Union. The report noted that, according to the contents of that article, a new world conflict “could be conducted at a conventional level for an indeterminate time”⁶⁰, but added that “the article also states that it could lead to general nuclear war”⁶¹. An interesting aspect was the hypothesis that local conflicts could reach the threshold of a global conflict, without however excluding that, on the contrary, they could also assume the nature of a frozen war (or protracted conflict). In fact, there was reference to: “long wars [...] limited in area and scope”⁶². Five years after that CIA report, Bodansky, in his previously mentioned article (published by *The Washington Times*)⁶³, noted that Ogarkov had been the main planner of the Zapad-81 exercise “in which the Soviet military forces confirmed their ability to conduct a non-nuclear, strategic deep offensive”⁶⁴. Bodansky also recalled that in April 1986 one of Ogarkov’s main tasks was to reactivate the Chief Directorate of Strategic Maskirovka (GUSM⁶⁵). Both the 1981 CIA report and Bodansky’s analysis agreed that the concept of victory in a regional or global conflict was predominant in Soviet military leadership. In 1991, the dissolution of the Soviet Union and the subsequent liquidation of the Warsaw Pact have consigned to History the strategic thought of Ogarkov. Today the condition relating to the European chessboard appears reversed, if we consider the new strategic balances deriving mainly from the enlargement of NATO. For example, with regard to the military doctrine, or the scenarios in which it could be applied today, Virgilio Ilari⁶⁶ noted that this reversal emerges mainly from the assumption that in the case of a

60 https://www.cia.gov/readingroom/docs/DOC_0000964634.pdf [Accessed April 5th, 2023].

61 Ibidem.

62 Ibidem.

63 See footnote [54].

64 <https://www.cia.gov/readingroom/docs/CIA-RDP90-00965R000100580003-8.pdf> [Accessed April 5th, 2023].

65 Ru. transliterated in Latin characters: Glavnoye upravleniye Strategicheskoy Maskirovki.

66 Professor Emeritus, President of the Italian Society for Military History (SISM).

crisis between the Russian Federation and NATO “the Russians would not react with a strategic nuclear attack, but would try to de-escalate the conflict with tactical nuclear weapons”⁶⁷, adding “[...] just as NATO would have done during the Cold War [...]”⁶⁸. Ilari also added: “At that point the United States should choose whether to scale further risking retaliation against the national territory, or withdraw, accepting defeat”⁶⁹. Above all, from this last consideration emerges a correlation with the strategic concept at the time expressed by Ogarkov and summarized in the West, among others, by Bodanksy. In fact, the legacy of the “Ogarkov Doctrine” also consists in the mechanism illustrated by Ilari, that we can partially recognize in the current Russian Military Doctrine, also conceived to win a regional conventional conflict, which could harm the vital interests of the Russian State, through the graduated use of nuclear weapons. Contemporary Western strategic thinking has defined this approach with the expression “escalate to de-escalate”⁷⁰, although in the Military Doctrine of the Russian Federation (approved by the Russian president Vladimir Vladimirovich Putin on December 25th, 2014) there is no trace of an equivalent expression. However, this circumstance has not prevented Western conception from taking for granted the use of non-strategic nuclear weapons. According to Russian’s Military Doctrine the use of its atomic arsenals is made explicit in Article 27, which is reproduced below in the English language version published on the Internet, on June 29th, 2015, by the Russian Embassy in the United Kingdom:

The Russian Federation shall reserve the right to use nuclear weapons in response to the use of nuclear and other types of weapons of mass destruction against it and/or its allies, as well as in the event of aggression against the Russian Federation with the use of conventional weapons when the very existence of the state is in jeopardy.

The decision to use nuclear weapons shall be taken by the President of the Russian Federation⁷¹.

67 https://www.researchgate.net/publication/269332492_Dancing_with_the_Grizzly [Accessed April 5th, 2023].

68 Ibidem.

69 Ibidem.

70 See URL <https://media.defense.gov/2018/Feb/02/2001872886/-1/-1/1/2018-NUCLEAR-POSTURE-REVIEW-FINAL-REPORT.PDF> [Accessed April 5th, 2023].

71 https://london.mid.ru/en/press-centre/gb_en_fnapr_1947/ [Accessed April 5th, 2023]. The same principle is contained in Article 17 of the document entitled *Basic Principles of State Policy of the Russian Federation on Nuclear Deterrence*, approved by Executive Order of the President of the Russian Federation of June 2nd, 2020 No.35. For the text see URL https://archive.mid.ru/en/web/guest/foreign_policy/international_safety/

We can notice a detail. Although the common principle of proportionality probably suggests the validity of the scenario evoked by the (Western) thought contained in the formula “escalate to de-escalate”, this passage of the Russian Military Doctrine does not specify which type of nuclear weapons would be used, if whether low-yield (or even very low-yield) non-strategic or strategic fusion bombs. Another aspect of marshal Ogarkov’s thinking that seems to have survived the end of the bipolarity era is that related to the importance of strategic deception. In fact, it has been seen that Ogarkov in 1986 had taken care to reactivate the characteristic functions of the GUSM. In 2014 this same aspect was part of the Russian hybrid warfare in Crimea⁷². From a strictly historiographical point of view, it is also possible to discern parallels between the international condition of the USSR in the 1930s and that existing in the 1980s. Given this aspect, both the purge of which marshal Tukhachevsky was a victim and that suffered by Ogarkov seem to have some elements of similarity. Both military leaders felt the need to adapt Soviet military doctrine to the challenges posed by an external enemy: in Tukhachevsky’s case the National Socialist Germany, while for Ogarkov the North Atlantic Alliance. Tukhachevsky had illustrated very clearly the insidiousness posed by the rearmament of National Socialist Germany in a speech on January 15th 1936, during the 2nd Session of the Central Executive Committee of the USSR, advocating the idea of increased funding for the Red Army⁷³. As for the Soviet military élite of the 1980s, it was seen that they did not entirely rule out the possibility of a Western bloc first strike against the Warsaw Pact. Both courses of action – that of Tukhachevsky and that embodied by Ogarkov in the 1980s – were, however, effectively countered by the Soviet political leadership of the time with two purges: that of Stalin and that of Gorbachev. Regarding the motives that led to Tukhachevsky’s downfall, it is plausible to assume that, in order to protect the international status quo (especially in East-Central Europe) against any possible German revisionist attempts, Stalin did not desire a clean break in relations with Berlin at all, especially at a juncture when the Soviet Union was engaged in boundary clashes with Japan in Asia (i.e. Manchuria and Mongolia). In the 1980s, for his part,

disarmament/-/asset_publisher/rp0fiUBmANaH/content/id/4152094 [Accessed December 15th, 2023].

72 Cfr. DeBenedictis, Kent. *Russian “Hybrid Warfare” and the Annexation of Crimea. The Modern Application of Soviet Political Warfare*. Bloomsbury Publishing, 2021. See also Galeotti, Mark. *HEAVY METAL DIPLOMACY: RUSSIA’S POLITICAL USE OF ITS MILITARY IN EUROPE SINCE 2014*. European Council on Foreign Relations, 2016, JSTOR, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/resrep21613>. [Accessed April 16th, 2024]; Murawiec, Laurent. Putin’s Precursors. *The National Interest*, No. 60 (Summer 2000), pp. 50-54.

73 <https://www.jstor.org/stable/4203165> [Accessed April 11th, 2023].

Gorbachev believed that he could avoid a rise in the level of confrontation with the Western bloc with a policy of détente, which would simultaneously allow resources to be allocated to the civilian sector as an economic prerequisite to the development of domestic political reforms. Indeed, the Soviet Union was engaged in as many as three different theaters of crisis. Firstly, in Europe, where the tug-of-war with Washington and NATO over Euromissiles was ongoing. Secondly, in Central Asia, where since 1979 the Soviet Army had penetrated Afghanistan. Finally in Central America, where the Soviets were providing support to Nicaraguan Sandinista groups⁷⁴ (and where in 1983 the United States had intervened militarily by overthrowing Hudson Austin's Marxist-Leninist regime in Grenada). Moscow therefore could not have afforded to take the risk of a conflict in Europe that could have proved fatal for its own survival. The victory of the political line embodied by Gorbachev over the military faction led by Ogarkov can also be read as the conclusion of a decades-long dual strategy that, first adopted by the USSR leadership for international policy purposes, would later become de facto institutionalized by eventually influencing Soviet domestic political debate. In this regard a significant clue is provided by the *Pipes memorandum*⁷⁵, drafted in February 1981 for the President's Assistant for National Security Affairs Richard V. Allen. This document, a product of the National Security Council Staff, stated: << the Soviet leadership seems to have decided to travel simultaneously on two roads: the aggressive "low road" given to Ustinov and the conciliatory "high road" assigned to Brezhnev. Such a dual strategy gives the Soviet Union greater flexibility in meeting the challenges of the new American Administration >>⁷⁶. Another element of continuity that we can consider is the assumed vulnerability of the extended US nuclear deterrent, which Ogarkov seemed to be so clear about, so much so that he wanted to exploit it with the goal of avoiding escalation to the atomic threshold in a possible large-scale conflict scenario in Europe. In this regard, it is interesting to note that today within the Atlantic Alliance and in the Western press such a debate appears to be alive, as evidenced, for example, by the 2020 study *Recalibrating NATO Nuclear Policy*⁷⁷ (published by NATO Defense College), and two interventions authored by Olivier Zajec⁷⁸ that appeared

74 <https://www.jstor.org/stable/20751350> [Accessed April 11th, 2023].

75 See footnote [10] for the text.

76 Ibidem.

77 <https://www.jstor.org/stable/resrep25147.1> [Accessed April 9th, 2023].

78 Jean Moulin University – Lyon III.

on April 2022 in the pages of the French magazine *Le Monde Diplomatique*, with the titles “La menace d’une guerre nucléaire en Europe”⁷⁹ and “A third nuclear age may be dawning in Ukraine”⁸⁰. In conclusion, it is intended here to argue that in the Soviet Union, during the 1980s, the outcome of the clash, discussed in this study, between a faction more assertive toward the Western bloc (the soviet military party led by personalities such as Ogarkov, Sokolov, Ustinov) and another one more inclined toward dialogue and favoring the allocation of resources toward the domestic economy⁸¹ (the nomenklatura referring to Gorbachev) would sensitively connote the nature of the last phase of the age of bipolarity. This aspect is considered important in suggesting how such internal contrast deserves the attention of both scholars, so that through historical research the events that ended the so-called Short Century may be better understood, and international relations analysts, so that elements of continuity⁸² between Soviet military thinking and that currently dominant in the Russian leadership may be traced.

79 <https://www.monde-diplomatique.fr/2022/04/ZAJEC/64552> [Accessed April 9th, 2023].

80 <https://mondediplo.com/2022/04/03nuclear> [Accessed April 9th, 2023].

81 See in particular Bova, Russell. The Soviet Military and Economic Reform. *Soviet Studies*, Vol. 40, No. 3 (Jul., 1988), pp. 385-405; Herspring, Dale R. Gorbachev and the Soviet Military. *Proceedings of the Academy of Political Science*, Vol. 36, No. 4, Soviet Foreign Policy (1987), pp. 42-53.

82 See in particular: Palmer, Diego A. Ruiz. *Back to the Future? Russia’s Hybrid Warfare, Revolutions in Military Affairs, and Cold War Comparisons*. Research Paper – Research Division, NATO Defense College, Rome – No. 120 - October 2015, JSTOR, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/resrep10267> [Accessed April 16th, 2024].

Ainash Mustoyapova, *Decolonization of Kazakhstan*, Palgrave Macmillan,

2023, pp. 304

*Jessica Venturini*¹

Ainash Mustoyapova, Candidate of Philological Sciences, and Associate Professor, is a prolific author in the field of Central Asian studies. In this book, she presents a comprehensive analysis of various factors influencing the processes of decolonization and nation-building in Kazakhstan. The author underlines the relevance of these issues in contemporary times, especially after the Russian invasion of Ukraine. Additionally, because a deep understanding of the past can help to prevent the recurrence of totalitarian practices. These issues are in fact persisting in the country nowadays; the author cites as examples the events of Zhanaozen in 2011 and Kanatar in 2022².

The book is divided into four interconnected main sections; and an extremely useful glossary is provided at the end of each chapter. In the second chapter Mustoyapova traces the origins of foreign domination in Central Asia, from the expansion of the Russian Empire to the Soviet annexation of Kazakhstan. Through extensive research and analysis, she reveals the various forms of oppression and exploitation endured by the Kazakh people, emphasizing how colonial powers sought to subjugate and assimilate indigenous cultures.

Mustoyapova explains how the decolonization process in Kazakhstan did not commence with its independence in 1991, also stressing the lack of a political effort towards decolonization. An emphasized theme extensively discussed in this chapter, and recurring throughout the book, is the challenge of overcoming the prevailing Soviet narrative, which still persists today. However, it is important to note that the Soviet interpretation of history often differs from collective memory. She also explains how orientalism has been used to justify imperial conquest, and to generate a false narrative about the nomadic civilization. There is also a section dedicated to Edward Said and the importance of his ideas, that can be applied also when talking

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² These are two examples of protests bloodily repressed by the authorities.

about colonization in the Steppe. Taking also into account the difference between history and collective memory, the author introduces important historical facts such as Asharshylyk, the two Kazakh famines. These events, among others, have been traumatic for the Kazakhs and are still important for the construction of their identity, and will be explored in depth in the subsequent chapters.

In the third chapter, extensive space is dedicated to the nomadic culture. Mustoyapova focuses also on the contrast with the sedentary world, with the purpose to show the two different points of view. By using a comparative approach, she tries to explain the rich nomadic world and its social structure. She accuses the current authorities to follow the old (Soviet) ideological paradigm, rather than trying to deconstruct it. Russification and colonization took place in name of the civilization, but what does civilization means? A wide and positive imagine of the nomadic Kazakh world finds huge space in this section. The author explores this theme in depth, from their social structure to their representation.

The same theme continues in the following chapter, where the author tries to analyze and deconstruct several false myths that are widespread among people. These stereotypes have origins in the colonial and Soviet periods but are persisting in the mind of people, including many Kazakhs. Among these, for example, there is the false common idea that because nomads were mainly busy with cattle breeding, they were not able to cultivate the land, and Soviet taught them how to do it. Moreover, she explains how the process of sedentarization contributed to change drastically the Kazakh's national identity. Nomadism was a pivotal element of their identity and has been eradicated. But the colonial legacy embraces many aspects such as the negative consequence on the environment. For example, the Semipalatinsk nuclear test side was active from 1949 until 1989 and it had terrible outcomes for both the territory and the population.

The fifth chapter addresses the theme of collective traumas, as well as collective identity and collective memory. Essential to Mustoyapova's narrative is the topic of the resistance against the colonial rule. She emphasizes the efforts of Kazakh intellectuals, activists, and ordinary citizens who advocated for autonomy and self-determination. A central theme that runs throughout her narrative is the process of nation-building in post-colonial Kazakhstan. She explores the complexities of identity formation, language policy, and cultural revival, shedding light on the

challenges and opportunities that arose in the wake of independence. Mustoyapova examines the role of state institutions, educational reforms, and media narratives in shaping the contours of Kazakh national identity, offering valuable insights into the dynamics of nation-building in a multi-ethnic society. In this section the author also presents a list of groups of people which are conditioned in different ways by the events of the past:

- descendants of people who suffered during the famines
- descendants of Bolsheviks and Soviet nomenklatura
- part of the Russian population
- nostalgic of the Soviet Union
- government officials

The presented categories (p.239) are interesting and can be a useful starting point for further research about national identity and collective memory in Kazakhstan. This if we consider the theory of Halbwachs according to which the number of collective memories is related to the number of groups.

The first and the last chapters are dedicated to the preface and the conclusions, where once again the author of the book underlines the legacy of the colonial past. Mustoyapova shows how the legacy of colonialism is present in the new independent Kazakhstan, highlighting the socio-economic and cultural consequences of decades of foreign rule. She repeats how the influence of the colonization and collective trauma are still present in the current society, and she appeals to her people. It is time to weaken this condition and to interrupt the colonial dependency. It is time to overcome the victim complex and to foster self-esteem. Furthermore, she openly condemns the Kazakh authorities which never started a political process of decolonization within the country. Her thought is consistently clear and explicit in her work, like when she openly criticizes the Eurasian Economic Union, advantageous maybe for Moscow but not for Astana. After all, this is what Mustoyapova also asks her fellow citizens: to hear their voice and their opinions.

Probably due to the connections of the arguments addressed within the book, sometimes the text can be repetitive. On the other hand, this can help readers which are not familiar with these themes. Besides, when dealing with certain topics it would be better to add a little context. A clear example

is the definition of Asharshylyk, the famines that took place in the Steppe in the early 1920s and in the early 1930, and that had terrible consequences on the population. Even if this page of history has not been completely studied and new searches are still taking place, the author provides an extensive overview of the past events. However, she describes Asharshylyk as an “artificially created famine” and indicated it as a genocide (p. 25; p. 257). First of all, inside the scientific community this is not a certain date; many scholars, in fact, disagree with this opinion. It is absolutely an author’s right to spread her point of view, but, nevertheless, it would be useful to know at least her definition of the term genocide. If for example she is using the definition adopted by the United Nations or not. This does not change the tragedy lived by the Kazakhs but can help a reader which is not familiar with their history to create his /her own opinion and agree or disagree with the content of the book.

If the differences with other realities can help to understand certain topics, a comparative approach can sometimes favor the use of a narration despite another one. It is clear that Mustoyapova wishes to overcome a Eurocentric and settled-centric vision of the world, especially when referring to the alleged backwardness of the nomads, but often she obtains the opposite effect. The positive narration of the almost perfect nomadic world is not always credible, and it finds plenty of space within the book. An example is constituted by the theme of prostitution and the comparison with nineteenth-century England. The author reports that, unlike the European country, prostitution did not exist in the Kazakh nomadic world. Furthermore, rape was equated with murder, and protection was ensured to women. This seems certainly positive, but then she continues saying that for a rapist was sufficient to pay a compensation or even worse marry the raped girl³ to avoid consequences. (p. 179). Yes, prostitution did not exist, but maybe women could face other problems.

Referring to chapter two, in the conclusions Mustoyapova repeats that decolonization is an urgent problem for the country. Then, the author herself declares that this matter needs to be explored in strength also in other fields of sciences such as economics, political science, or history. This is certainly true. This book offers an overview of the theme, but to delve into it, an interdisciplinary approach is needed. Kazakhstan history

³ Shotgun wedding still exists in some countries, and it was common also in Europe. For example, it did exist in Italy until 1981.

is dense, and its demography drastically changes over time, at some point they were a minority in their own lands⁴. Moreover, the strong bilateral relations with the Russian Federation are also due to economics and security factors. These are just few elements that help to understand the complexity of the situation and the reason because different disciplines must work together on this research topic.

Overall, the author's intentions are commendable, and her contribution to the field of decolonization studies in Kazakhstan is admirable. One of the purposes of Mustoyapova is surely to spread the topics she addresses in this book among the Kazakh population, and her hope is that Kazakhstan may soon overcome the dependence on the Russian Federation, and in order to achieve these results she proposes some concrete solutions. An example is constituted by the creation of a national school of translation; she also stresses the importance of cinema and literature. But unfortunately, it will be very complicated (but not impossible) for the Kazakhs to overcome the consequences of the colonization without a political process devoted to do it. However, it is important to approach this book with careful consideration, ensuring that no single narrative dominates over others.

⁴ After the collapse of the Soviet Union the Kazakhs had a constant growth, and today they are the major ethnic group of Kazakhstan.

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Giuseppe Motta, *Giustizia, Affari Interni e Immigrazione in Bulgaria nel Processo di Integrazione*, [Justice, internal affairs and immigration in Bulgaria during the integration process], in Fabio L. Grassi / Roberto Sciarrone (eds.), *I Bulgari e la Bulgaria in Europa* [The Bulgars and Bulgaria in Europe], Roma, Aracne, 2014, p. 140.

Fabio L. Grassi, *La Turchia nella Politica Francese e Italiana tra le due Guerre* [Turkey in the French and Italian policy between the two World Wars], in "Transylvanian Review", vol. XV, N. 1, Spring 2006, p. 134.

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