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EURAS
JOURNAL
OF SOCIAL SCIENCES

EURAS JOURNAL OF SOCIAL SCIENCES

Volume 4 Issue 1 April 2024

General DOI: [10.17932/EJOSS.2021.023](https://doi.org/10.17932/EJOSS.2021.023)

Volume 4 Issue 1 DOI: [10.17932/EJOSS.2021.023/2024.401](https://doi.org/10.17932/EJOSS.2021.023/2024.401)

EURAS JOURNAL OF SOCIAL SCIENCES

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Language

English

ISSN : 2757-7988

Publication Period

Published issues per year: April, October

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Printed by

Armoni Nuans Matbaa

Address: Yukarıdudullu, Bostancı Yolu Cad. Keyap Çarşısı
B- 1 Blk. N.24 Ümraniye/İST.

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10.17932/EJOSS.2021.023/ejoss_v04i1001

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10.17932/EJOSS.2021.023/ejoss_v04i1002

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10.17932/EJOSS.2021.023/ejoss_v04i1003

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10.17932/EJOSS.2021.023/ejoss_v04i1004

A New Era in Counter-Terrorism and Türkiye's Regional Influence Through the Lens of Constructivism

Tuğba Koç

10.17932/EJOSS.2021.023/ejoss_v04i1005

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

Dear readers,

this new issue of EJOSS completes the dossier on the gentle and ecumenic tale of the Seven Sleepers. We can be really proud to have hosted very valuable contributions on such an interesting and meaningful topic. Normally the book review is collocated after the articles, however in this case it is part of the dossier and we preferred not to detach it from the other papers. This second monographic number on the Seven Sleepers legend mainly focuses on its intangible and tangible heritage concerning mostly the Christian traditions.

The first contribute highlights the connections between the Ephesian story and the magic tradition by exploring either magic amulets which portray the seven youths (or their names engraved) or charms and prayers invoking them. The author of this article, Augusto Cosentino, traces the development of this legend from the religious field to its incorporation in magical folklore. Particularly, he analyses the magical practices in Islamic and Anglo-Saxon traditions and the significance of the number seven with its broader implications in religious and magical symbolism, through a cross-cultural comparative perspective. He investigates the use of the Seven Sleepers' names in protective charms and healing practices, focusing on their application in sleep-related issues and general healing. Moreover, he highlights how the divinely-induced sleep that preserves the youths for centuries, resonates with similar motifs in various cultural traditions, from Greek mythology to Norse legends and fairy tales. The elements of the preservation of the Sleepers' bodies and the miraculous nature of their outdated coins contribute to the legend's supernatural aura and provided a foundation for later magical interpretations and practices.

*The second article concerns the Georgian literature regarding the Seven Sleepers and it fills the gap left by the scholar Ignazio Guidi in his work *Testi orientali inediti sopra i Sette Dormienti di Efeso*. In Georgia this legend is known as the "Seven Infants of Ephesus" and despite its extensive analysis across various religious and cultural contexts, the Georgian perspective has largely been overlooked. The author of this contribute, Laura Mafizzoli, examines the place of the Seven Sleepers' legend in the Georgian cultural context, specifically how the legend is represented to the wide public and how it is studied by the contemporary Georgian scholars such as the philologist Nanobashvili. Even if Mafizzoli, in her field research in Tbilisi, did not find any rituals and acts of veneration related to the Seven Sleepers on their commemorative dates (August 4th and October 22nd), she came across two ecclesiastical magazines that reveal a vernacular veneration. Therefore, she reflects on the profound syncretism of the Georgian version of the Ephesian tale which synthesises elements from Medieval European, Syriac, and Coptic traditions, while blending theological, liturgical, and cultural aspects.*

The third contribute sheds light on the role of the Turkish Syriac Saint (Mor) Abhay related to the Seven Sleepers within the context of Mardin (a multi-cultured and multi-religious city in South-eastern Turkey) Syriac culture. Mor Abhay, originally from Rekman village in the Mesopotamian region of Mardin, was the special metropolitan of the Roman emperor Theodosius II in Constantinople. This Syriac saint who founded his monastery in the area of Tur Abdin, one of the foremost spiritual centers of Eastern Christianity since the 6th century, witnessed the miracle of the Seven Sleepers' awakening. The author of this article, Hatice Kübra Uygur, through the methodology of field research, analyses the local Syriac version of the Seven Sleepers tale known as "Yemliho and his Companions". Particularly, within the Christian community of Syriacs the telling of stories and the recitation of psalms lend significance to this narrative in the liturgical context. The Metropolitan of Diyarbakır-Mardin, Saliba Ozmen emphasises the importance of the psalm dedicated to Yemliho and his friends which is attributed to Mor Jacob of Sarug.

The issue is integrated by an intriguing paper which brings us to current times. So as to recall that our journal is opened to contributions where the past matches the present and where the present is scholarly discussed.

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 inter-
communi- cation.
- 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 qual- ified 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 di- verse identities can carry out the distinction in guaranteeing real equality and accessibility to excellence in educational standards.

The Seven Sleepers of Ephesus in the Christian and Islamic magical tradition

Augusto Cosentino¹

Abstract

The Seven Sleepers of Ephesus, a late antique Christian tale that flourished in both Christian and Islamic medieval traditions, incorporated various magical elements that enhanced its cultural resonance. This essay examines how magical components—including the miraculous preservation of the Sleepers' bodies and their connection to healing practices—shaped the narrative's evolution and adaptation across different societies. By analyzing the integration of the Seven Sleepers into Anglo-Saxon charms and Islamic magical traditions, this study demonstrates how religious narratives can absorb and reflect changing cultural values while addressing practical spiritual needs.

Keywords: *Religious Syncretism, Magic, Cultural Adaptation*

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Introduction

The legend of the Seven Sleepers of Ephesus is a late antique Christian tale that gained widespread popularity in both Christian and Islamic traditions during the medieval period. While primarily a religious narrative affirming the doctrine of bodily resurrection, the story contains several elements that could be interpreted as magical or supernatural.

The belief in magic amulets has been a prominent aspect of human culture throughout history, serving as objects of protection and symbols of faith. These enchanted charms have played a significant role in shaping the narratives and legends that have captivated people's imaginations for centuries. One such captivating tale is that of the seven sleepers of Ephesus, a story steeped in mysticism and divine intervention. This essay explores the contribution of the belief in magic amulets to the narrative of the seven sleepers, delving into their significance as symbols of faith and resilience amidst religious persecution. By examining this connection, we gain insight into how magical elements can shape stories and provide solace in times of adversity.

Specifically, this study aims to analyze the magical elements present in the original Seven Sleepers legend and their interpretations across different cultural contexts, examining their incorporation into magical practices and charms, particularly in Islamic and Anglo-Saxon traditions, and exploring the significance of the number seven in the legend and its broader implications in religious and magical symbolism. Moreover, it investigates the use of the Seven Sleepers' names in protective charms and healing practices, focusing on their application in sleep-related issues and general healing, and assessing the syncretic nature of the legend's magical interpretations, particularly in the context of early medieval Christianity. Starting from a review of primary and secondary sources, it is intended to make a critical examination of key texts, including religious narratives, magical charms, and inscriptions, to identify recurring themes, symbols, and magical elements associated with the Sleepers legend, with a cross-cultural comparative approach, examining how this legend has been interpreted and utilized in different cultural and religious contexts, and tracing its development from a religious narrative to its incorporation in magical practices.

Magical Elements in the Original Legend

Several aspects of the Seven Sleepers narrative involve supernatural or magical occurrences. The central miracle of the story is the young men falling into a divinely-induced sleep that preserves them for centuries. God caused them to fall into a deep sleep and kept them asleep for an unnaturally long time, ranging from about 150-400 years depending on the version. It demonstrates divine power over nature and time, showing God's ability to suspend natural laws. The theme of magical sleep, as a form of suspension of vital functions, induced by divine or human intervention, is quite widespread. We can quote the Greek myth of Endymion, a shepherd granted eternal youth through endless sleep by Zeus, the Norse legend of Brunhild, a Valkyrie put into a magical sleep by Odin, the folktale of Rip Van Winkle, who sleeps for 20 years and awakens to find the world changed, the fairy tale of Sleeping Beauty, where a princess and her kingdom are put into a magical sleep for 100 years, folklore about preserved bodies of saints or holy figures, or the Buddhist legend of Aśvaghōṣa, who is said to have entered a deep meditative trance for centuries. These stories share themes of magical preservation through sleep, divine intervention, and awakening to a changed world. However, it's important to note that the Seven Sleepers legend is primarily a religious tale, with its magical elements serving to illustrate divine power and religious doctrines, rather than being purely fantastical. Related to the miraculous sleep is the preservation of the Sleepers' physical bodies over the span of centuries without aging or decay. Their bodies remained unchanged during their long slumber. God protected the Sleepers while they slumbered. In some versions, this includes sealing the cave entrance to hide them from persecutors.

The outdated coins the Sleepers attempt to use upon awakening serve as miraculous proof of their story and the length of their sleep. While not explicitly described as magical objects, the coins function in a way that is central to the miraculous nature of the legend. They serve as physical evidence of a supernatural occurrence, bridging the natural and supernatural elements of the story in a tangible way. The coins function as tangible, miraculous proof of the Sleepers' story. When they try to use these ancient coins, it immediately demonstrates the vast amount of time that has passed during their sleep. This serves as a magical means of verifying their incredible tale. Moreover, the coins act as a form of divine authentication of the miracle. They provide physical evidence of God's power to preserve the Sleepers through time, making the supernatural

event verifiable through mundane objects. Magically, the coins serve as a bridge between the past world the Sleepers left and the present world they awakened to. They are physical artifacts that have traversed time along with the Sleepers. The outdated nature of the coins symbolizes the magical transformation of the world during the Sleepers' slumber. It dramatically illustrates how much has changed, including the shift from a pagan to a Christian empire. The fact that the coins survived intact along with the Sleepers adds to the miraculous nature of their preservation. It extends the magical effect beyond just their bodies to include their possessions. In storytelling terms, the coins serve as a magical plot device that allows for the immediate recognition of the Sleepers' miraculous nature by those they encounter upon awakening. The presence of the coins suggests a divine plan in the Sleepers' awakening. It provides them with a means to immediately prove their story, facilitating their role in affirming the truth of resurrection. This use of everyday objects as proof of miraculous events is a common motif in religious legends, where the mundane and the miraculous intersect to provide tangible evidence of divine intervention.

Some versions mention God leaving a "watcher" or guardian to protect the Sleepers' bodies while they slept. The Islamic version adds a dog that God set to watch over the cave and the Sleepers (Ceci, 2011). In some Christian traditions, guardian angels are believed to watch over and protect individuals. The idea of divine protection during sleep or vulnerable states is a common theme in many religious traditions.¹ For instance, in Judaism, there are prayers recited before sleep asking for God's protection. In some mythologies, there are stories of gods or supernatural beings appointed to guard specific places or people. While not exactly the same as the Seven Sleepers scenario, these stories share the theme of divine appointment of guardians. The idea of divine protection is certainly central to the legend, but the specific manifestation of this protection may vary in different versions of the story².

¹ Barbara E. Borg, *Slumber under divine protection. From vague pagan hopes to Christian belief*, in Nicola Hömke / Gian Franco Chiai / Antonia Jenik (eds.), *Bilder von dem Einen Gott: Die Rhetorik des Bildes in monotheistischen Gottesdarstellungen der Spätantike* [Images of the One God: The Rhetoric of the Image in Late Antique Representations of a Monotheistic God], Berlin-Boston, De Gruyter, 2016, p. 263-288. Thomas H. McAlpine, *Sleep, divine and human, in the Old Testament*, JSOT Supplement Series 38, Sheffield, JSOT, 1987.

² Holberg, J. L. (2010). "The Courage to See It": Toward an Understanding of Glory. *Christianity and Literature*, 59, 283-300.

Magical Practices and Charms

The belief in magic amulets played a significant role in shaping the narrative of the seven sleepers of Ephesus. According to legend, these sleepers sought refuge inside a cave to escape religious persecution during the reign of Decius. As they slept, their bodies remained miraculously preserved for several centuries until they eventually woke up. The story gained widespread popularity due to its supernatural elements. The Seven Sleepers legend was not only reinterpreted in literature but also became incorporated into magical practices and charms. Their names were used in protective charms, particularly those related to sleep and healing³. Used in charms to treat sleep disorders, their names were used also in charms to treat fevers⁴. Moreover, the legend inspired the creation of talismanic objects. In some Islamic traditions, the Seven Sleepers were associated with divination and prophecy.

These magical charms were believed to safeguard against evil forces and ensure divine protection for those who possessed them. They served as a powerful symbol of faith and resilience in times of adversity, reinforcing the notion that God's intervention could surpass human limitations. The inclusion of magic amulets not only added an element of mysticism but also emphasized the strength and importance of one's beliefs. This narrative resonated with audiences because it tapped into their desire for transcendence and hope amidst challenging circumstances. It provided solace by reminding individuals that even in times of oppression or persecution, there existed supernatural means through which divine aid could be obtained.

The Seven

The number seven carries significant mystical and symbolic weight⁵ that

³ Éva Pócs, *Dream Healing: The Nocturnal World of Healing*, in Éva Pócs (ed.), *The Magical And Sacred Medical World*, Newcastle, Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2019, p. 343-376.

⁴ Alessia Bellusci, *Oneiric Aggressive Magic: Sleep Disorders in Late Antique Jewish Tradition*, in Siam Bhayro / Catherine Rider (eds.), *Demons and Illness from Antiquity to the Early-Modern Period*. Magical and Religious Literature of Late Antiquity, Volume: 5, Leiden-Boston, Brill, 2017, p. 134-174; Zsuzsa Závoti, "... And Swore that He May Never Harm the Sick or Anyone that can Sing this Charm": Response to Mental Disorder in Anglo-Saxon England in the Context of Medical Charms, in Éva Pócs (ed.), *Charms and Charming: Studies on Magic in Everyday Life*, Studia Mythologica Slavica Supplementa, Supplementum 15, Ljubljana, Založba, 2019, p. 119-128; Louise S. Milne, *One, Two, Many: Dream-Culture, Charms and Nightmares*, in Éva Pócs (ed.), *Charms ...*, p. 129-167.

⁵ Nelson Cowan / Candice Morey / Zhijian Chen, *The legend of the magical number seven*, in Sergio Della Sala (ed.), *Tall Tales About the Mind and Brain: Separating Fact From Fiction*, Oxford-New York, Oxford University Press, 2007, p. 45-59.

contributes to the magical associations of the Seven Sleepers legend and its use in apotropaic amulet iconography. It has deep spiritual and symbolic meanings in many cultures and religions and is considered a sacred or mystical number in various traditions, associated with completeness or perfection. The Seven Sleepers legend itself revolves around seven holy figures, giving the number mystical weight in that context. Seven was seen as having magical protective properties when used in charms and amulets, and had significance in cosmological/universal understanding. In astrological lore, it related to the seven classical planets (Sun, Moon, Mercury, Venus, Mars, Jupiter, Saturn) which governed all aspects of life according to Hellenistic and medieval cosmology. So, the seven youths could be associated with the seven planetary forces, bringing the entire cosmos under their mystical purview; though this connection is not explicitly made in the sources. Representing this planetary influence on amulets allowed them to control or avert any negative astrological conditions.

The mystical associations with the number seven contributed to the magical potency attributed to the Seven Sleepers legend when used in protective amulets and charms. The sacred status of seven across multiple traditions enhanced its perceived apotropaic power.

The pervasive use of seven⁶ has led to various theological interpretations: Seven is often seen as representing the completeness of God's work and will, viewed as a number of perfection, combining the divine number three with the earthly number four. The number is associated with God's covenant relationships, as in the seven-day week established at Creation. In some interpretations, seven represents spiritual fullness or maturity. So the symbolism of seven has influenced various religious practices (Sabbath observance, seven-branched menorah, seven sacraments, seven virtues and seven deadly sins). The enumerative repetition of seven throughout the Bible and Judeo-Christian traditions serves as a powerful symbol of divine completeness, perfection, and covenant. Its pervasive use in biblical narratives, theological concepts, and religious practices has cemented its place as a number of profound spiritual significance. Understanding the symbolism of seven provides valuable insight into the structure and

⁶ The number seven appears with remarkable frequency throughout the Bible and Judeo-Christian traditions, serving as a powerful symbol of divine completeness, perfection, and covenant Genesis 1-2; Genesis 7:2; Genesis 41; Joshua 6; 2 Kings 5:10; Proverbs 9:1; Daniel 4:16, 23, 25; Revelation 1-3; Matthew 18:22; Mark 8:5-8.

meaning of many Judeo-Christian texts and traditions. Using the number seven to identify the Sleepers further underscored their perceived holiness and tie to biblical paradigms. Displaying this number brought its scriptural symbolic power to any protective talisman.

The number seven held a place of unparalleled symbolic power in European folkloric magic from the medieval period through early modern times⁷. Its associations with cosmic completion, divine creation, and natural cycles made it an ideal number for structuring magical rituals, charms, and esoteric systems like alchemy. Whether in the complex symbolism of learned magical texts or in simple folk charms, seven represented a point of confluence between spiritual and material realms. Understanding the role of seven provides key insights into how European magicians and folk practitioners conceptualized the universe and humanity's place within it. Further comparative research could illuminate whether similar uses of seven appear in magical traditions worldwide.

The combination between the value given to the number seven by the biblical tradition with the magical power inherent in it in folklore legends meant that the legend of the Seven Sleepers increasingly took on a magical power and was reused in the creation of objects that drew their inspiration from that legend. their strength. So while seemingly arbitrary, the conscious use of the number seven created a talismanic and iconographic archetype overflowing with established symbolic resonances deeply meaningful within the worldview that birthed the Seven Sleepers myth itself. This lent amulet depictions great esoteric power and prestige.

The Seven Sleepers in Arabic Inscriptions on Healing Objects

The legend of the Seven Sleepers of Ephesus has held an important place in Islamic traditions for centuries. In Islamic contexts, the story of the *Ashab al-Kahf* [Companions of the Cave], as they are known, has been incorporated into various magical and medicinal practices. The miraculous

⁷ The importance of the number seven in European magical and alchemical traditions, demonstrates its pervasive use in symbolism, rituals, and magical practices (Nicholas Goodrick-Clarke, *The Western Esoteric Traditions: A Historical Introduction*, Oxford-New York, Oxford University Press, 2008, p. 45). Cords with seven knots were used for healing, protection, and other magical purposes (Owen Davies, *Grimoires: A History of Magic Books*, Oxford-New York, Oxford University Press, 2009, p. 78). Combinations of seven herbs were common in folk remedies and magical preparations, and many folk magic rituals required seven days of repetition to take full effect. Protective charms often incorporated seven objects (stones, seeds, etc) (Richard Kieckhefer, *Magic in the Middle Ages*, Cambridge UK, Cambridge University Press, 2000, p. 133).

sleep is seen as a sign of Allah's power and ability to resurrect the dead on Judgment Day. The Qur'an presents the Sleepers as evidence for doubters of resurrection⁸.

Archaeological and textual evidence indicates that the names of the Seven Sleepers were frequently used in protective charms and healing practices.⁹ The legend inspired the creation of talismanic objects, such as a 13th-century bronze mirror inscribed with the names of the Seven Sleepers¹⁰. The names were used in charms for sleep-related issues and general healing. Some charms invoking the Seven Sleepers were used to treat fevers.

A study examining magical practices in Muslim Ingush healing traditions found two objects with Arabic inscriptions used for treatment that contained the names of the Seven Sleepers¹¹.

While the core narrative remains similar across versions, the Islamic retellings include a notable addition - the dog Qitmir who accompanies and guards the sleeping youths, as a companion and guardian of the Sleepers. According to these versions, Allah set Qitmir at the entrance of the cave to watch over the Companions of the Cave (*Ashab al-Kahf*) during their long slumber. The inclusion of Qitmir imbues the dog with several layers of magical and symbolic significance: As a divinely appointed guardian, Qitmir represents Allah's protection over the faithful Sleepers. This reinforces the theme of divine providence central to the narrative. Positioned at the threshold of the cave, Qitmir occupies a liminal space between the mundane world outside and the miraculous realm within where time stands still. This liminal status enhances Qitmir's magical aura. Dogs are often symbols of loyalty in folklore. Qitmir's steadfast vigil over centuries emphasizes the virtues of faith and constancy. Like the Sleepers themselves, Qitmir's preservation over centuries demonstrates Allah's power over life, death, and time. In some folk beliefs, Qitmir came to be

⁸ Patricia Crone, "Nothing but Time Destroys Us": *The Deniers of Resurrection in the Qur'an*, in "Journal of the International Qur'anic Studies Association", 1, 1, 2016, p. 144.

⁹ Venetia Porter (ed.), *Arabic and Persian seals and amulets in the British Museum*, London, The British Museum, 2011, pp. 147-149, nn. A48-A54; Venetia Porter, *Amulets Inscribed with the Names of the 'Seven Sleepers' of Ephesus in the British Museum*, in Fahmida Suleman (ed.), *Word of God, Art of Man: The Qur'an and Its Creative Expressions*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2007, p. 123-134.

¹⁰ Tewfik Canaan, *The Decipherment of Arabic Talismans*, in Emilie Savage-Smith (ed.), *Magic and Divination in Early Islam*, London, Routledge, 2004, p. 125-178.

¹¹ Makka Albogachieva / Maryam Rezvan, *Some Magical Practices in Muslim Ingush Healing Traditions*, in "Manuscripta Orientalia. International Journal for Oriental Manuscript Research", 29, 2, 2023, p. 70-76.

seen as a potential intercessor between humans and the divine, capable of carrying prayers and bestowing blessings.

The magical associations of Qitmir in the Companions of the Cave legend led to the dog's name being incorporated into various folk magical and healing practices in Islamic cultures. The name of Qitmir was inscribed on talismanic objects for protection. For example, a 13th-century bronze mirror was found inscribed with the names of the Seven Sleepers and their dog Qitmir¹². Objects with Arabic inscriptions containing the names of the Seven Sleepers and Qitmir were used in healing practices¹³. A study of Muslim Ingush healing traditions found two such objects used for treatment. Reciting the names of the Seven Sleepers and Qitmir was believed to offer protection, particularly against sleep-related issues or during travel. Some folk practices involved symbolic interactions with Qitmir, such as offering wishes or prayers to the divine dog¹⁴. Beyond its magical associations, the inclusion of Qitmir in the Islamic Seven Sleepers narrative holds deeper symbolic and theological significance. The elevation of a dog to a divinely appointed guardian challenges notions of ritual purity and emphasizes Allah's universal compassion. Qitmir represents how elements of the natural world can serve as instruments of divine will and protection. The dog's inclusion emphasizes themes of loyalty and companionship in faith, even across species boundaries. As the only conscious entity present during the Sleepers' long slumber, Qitmir serves as a witness to the miracle, enhancing the story's credibility.

The addition of the dog Qitmir to the Islamic versions of the Companions of the Cave legend demonstrates how religious narratives can evolve to incorporate new elements that resonate with cultural values and spiritual needs. Qitmir's role as a magical protector and symbol of divine providence enriched the tale's significance for Muslim audiences¹⁵. Furthermore,

¹² Gwendolyn Collaco, *With Sleep Comes a Fusion of Worlds: The Seven Sleepers of Ephesus Through Formation and Transformation*, A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Degree of Bachelor of Arts in Medieval and Renaissance Studies and Classics, Latin Vassar College, Poughkeepsie, New York, May 2011, Senior Capstone Projects. Paper 3, p. 113.

¹³ Collaco, *With Sleep ...*, p. 125-126.

¹⁴ Albogachieva / Rezvan, *Some Magical Practices ...*, p. 70-76.

¹⁵ The attitude of the Islamic world towards dogs is quite negative. In fact, they are considered impure animals. This makes the presence of the dog Qitmir in the Islamic version of the Seven Sleepers legend all the more significant. Cf. Richard M. Foltz, *Animals in Islamic Tradition and Muslim Cultures*, Oxford, One World, 2006, p. 129-143; Jalal ai-din Rumi, *Mathnawi al-ma'anawi*, trans. R. A. Nicholson, *The Mathnawi of Jalalu'ddin Rumi*, Vol. 5; London, Luzac, 1925-1940), vv. 2008-11, p. 131:

the dog's incorporation into subsequent magical and healing practices shows how elements of sacred narratives can take on lives of their own in folk belief and ritual. The enduring popularity of Qitmīr in Islamic folk tradition highlights the power of animal figures in religious symbolism and the complex interplay between formal theology and popular spirituality¹⁶.

The divinatory and prophetic aspects of the Seven Sleepers legend appear to have varied across different Islamic cultures and regions. In Turkey, there are multiple cave sites associated with the Seven Sleepers legend, each with its own set of devotional practices. These sites, such as those in Tarsus, Afşin, and Lice, encompass a variety of rituals that may include divinatory elements¹⁷. The study of Muslim Ingush healing traditions reveals specific uses of the Seven Sleepers' names in protective and healing objects, suggesting localized adaptations of the legend for divinatory purposes¹⁸.

The use of the Seven Sleepers' names in healing objects can be understood in several ways: By invoking figures associated with divine preservation, the objects seek to channel similar protective power. Since the Sleepers' story involves a miraculous sleep, their names were seen as particularly efficacious for sleep-related issues. The Sleepers' awakening after centuries serves as a metaphor for healing and revival from illness. In Islamic magical traditions, the names themselves were believed to carry inherent power that could be activated through inscription.

The incorporation of the Seven Sleepers' names into Arabic inscriptions on healing objects demonstrates the complex interplay between religious narrative, folk belief, and medical practice in Islamic cultures. This

Wolf and bear and lion know what love is:
He that is blind to love is inferior to a dog!
If the dog had not a vein of love,
How should the dog of the
Cave have sought to win the heart of the Seven Sleepers?
You have not smelt the heart in your own kind:
How should you smell the heart in wolf and sheep?
Rumi's reference is to Qur'an, 18 :17-21.

¹⁶ Anna Tozzi di Marco, *Preliminary analysis of the symbolism and the agentivity of the dog Qitmīr during the devotion to the Seven Sleepers of Ephesus (Ashāb al-Kahf)*, in "EURAS Journal of Social Sciences", 3, 2021, p. 191-209.

¹⁷ Anna Tozzi di Marco, *The Seven Sleepers Tradition (Ashab-ı Kehf) in Afşin, Tarsus and Lice: Comparative Analysis of their Intangible Heritage*, in "Edeb Erkan", 5, 2024, p. 55-66.

¹⁸ Bartłomiej Grysa, *The Legend of the Seven Sleepers of Ephesus in Syriac and Arab sources – a comparative study*, in "Orientalia Christiana Cracoviensia" 2, 2010, p. 45-59.

usage shows how a story emphasizing God's power over sleep, time, and resurrection was creatively adapted to address everyday health concerns. Further research into the specific formulae used in these inscriptions and their distribution across different Islamic cultures could yield additional insights into how sacred narratives were operationalized in magical healing practices.

Anglo-Saxon Metrical Charm 3

In Anglo-Saxon England, the names of the Seven Sleepers were frequently used in protective charms, particularly those related to sleep and healing¹⁹. Their inclusion in Metrical Charm 3 is part of this broader tradition of using the Sleepers as spiritual protectors.

Anglo-Saxon Metrical Charm 3, commonly known as "Against a Dwarf," is a fascinating example of the syncretic nature of early medieval English Christianity. This charm, which invokes the Seven Sleepers of Ephesus to protect against a supernatural threat, demonstrates how pre-Christian magical practices were adapted and incorporated into Anglo-Saxon Christian culture.²⁰

Metrical Charm 3 is found in the 11th century manuscript London, British Library, Cotton Caligula A. xv. The charm reads:

Man sceal niman VII lytle oflætan swycle man mid ofrað and written þas naman on ælcra oflætan: Maximianus, Malchus, Johannes, Martimianus, Dionisius, Constantinus, Serafion.

One shall take seven little wafers such as one offers with, and write these names on each wafer. The charm then goes on to provide instructions for its use, including reciting it in the left ear, right ear, and over the head of the afflicted person²¹. The "dwarf" (*dweorh*) mentioned in the charm's title likely refers to some kind of malevolent supernatural entity rather than a person of small stature. Dwarfs appear in other Anglo-Saxon charms and medical texts as causes of illness or misfortune.

¹⁹ British Library, Harley MSS 273, fol. 213r, and 585, fol. 167r–v, Royal MS 12 E xx, fol. 162v, Sloane MS 431, fol. 45r; Vatican, Biblioteca Apostolica, Reg. Lat. 338, fol. 91r; and York Minster Library, MS XVI.E.32, fols. 172r and 173r. (cf. Katherine Storm Hindley, *Textual Magic: Charms and Written Amulets in Medieval England*, Chicago-London, University of Chicago Press, 2023, p. 67; Hugh Magennis (ed.), *The Anonymous Old English Legend of the Seven Sleepers*, Durham, Durham Medieval Texts 7, 1994).

²⁰ David E. Gay, *Anglo-Saxon Metrical Charm 3 against a Dwarf: A Charm against Witch-Riding?*, in "Folklore", 99, no. 2, 1988, p. 174-177.

²¹ Wilfrid Bonser, *Anglo-Saxon Laws and Charms Relating to Theft*, in "Folklore", 57, 1946, p. 7-11.

The most striking feature of this charm is its invocation of the Seven Sleepers of Ephesus. The use of the Seven Sleepers in a charm against a "dwarf" is a clear example of religious syncretism in Anglo-Saxon England. The charm combines Christian figures (the Sleepers) with a pre-Christian magical practice (the use of written charms against supernatural threats).²² This syncretic approach was common in Anglo-Saxon Christianity.²³

The continued use of charms and other magical practices alongside Christian devotion suggests that the Anglo-Saxons did not see these as incompatible. The use of communion wafers as the medium for the charm further demonstrates this blending of Christian and pre-Christian elements. By writing the names of the Sleepers on consecrated bread, the charm maker is literally inscribing Christian holy figures onto a physical representation of Christ's body.

Anglo-Saxon Metrical Charm 3 provides valuable insight into the religious and cultural landscape of early medieval England. Its combination of Christian figures and pre-Christian magical practices demonstrates the complex ways in which Anglo-Saxon Christians negotiated between old and new belief systems. The charm's use of the Seven Sleepers legend also highlights the importance of these figures in Anglo-Saxon spirituality. Their invocation in a protective charm suggests that they were seen as powerful intercessors, capable of defending against supernatural threats.

Other anglo-saxon charms

While Anglo-Saxon Metrical Charm 3 is perhaps the best-known charm invoking the Seven Sleepers of Ephesus, it is not the only example of these figures being used in Anglo-Saxon magical practices. There are multiple examples of charms against fever that invoke the Seven Sleepers. W. Bonser's seminal 1945 study *The Seven Sleepers of Ephesus in Anglo-Saxon and Later Recipes* provides valuable insight into the use of the Seven Sleepers in Anglo-Saxon magical traditions.²⁴ Bonser identifies several charms beyond Metrical Charm 3 that invoke these figures.

²² John E. Richardson, *Hlude Woeran Hy: Syncretic Christianity in the Old English Charm Wio Foerstice*, in "Mankind Quarterly", 42, 2001, p. 21-45.

²³ Clare A. Lees, *Didacticism and the Christian Community: The Teachers and the Taught*, in R. M. Liuzza (ed.), *Old English Literature*, New Haven, Yale University Press, 2002, p. 246 notes that "Charms, medicinal recipes, poetry, and other material artifacts (...) offer evidence for a more culturally diverse world of belief than the Christian homilies".

²⁴ Wilfrid Bonser, *The Seven Sleepers of Ephesus in Anglo-Saxon and Later Recipes*, in "Folklore", 56, 1945, p. 254-256.

The names of the Seven Sleepers occur in various charms of the Middle Ages, not only to secure sleep but also to treat fever. This suggests that the Sleepers' association with miraculous preservation extended to ideas of healing and protection from illness.

A charm from MS. Harley 464, f. 177 invokes the Seven Sleepers for protection against chills and fevers:

In nomine domini nostri Jesu Christi, et in nomine Sanctae et Individuae Trinitatis et in nomine sanctorum Septem dormientium, quorum nomina haec sunt: Maximianus, Malchus, Martinianus, Johannes, Seraphion, Constantinus, Dionysius.²⁵

MS. Regius 2 A XX, f. 52 contains a protective charm invoking the Seven Sleepers:

In Epheso civitate in monte Celion requiescunt sancti Septem dormentes, quorum ista sunt nomina: Maximianus, Malchus, Martinianus, Dionisius, Iohannes, Serapion, Constantinus. Per eorum merita et piam intercessionem dignetur dominus liberare famulum suum N. de omni malo. Amen.²⁶

One charm is described as "the best charm for nightmare,"²⁷ indicating that the Sleepers were seen as particularly efficacious against sleep-related supernatural threats.

Charms in Latin that invoke the Seven Sleepers, suggesting that their use crossed linguistic boundaries within Anglo-Saxon magical practices.²⁸

Additional Latin charms against fever invoking the Seven Sleepers are found in MS Royal 12. E. xx. fol. 162v, MS Colton Faustina A. x. fol. 136, and MS III. Q. I. fol. 95 v.²⁹

The use of the Seven Sleepers in Anglo-Saxon charms exemplifies the complex interplay between Christian and pagan elements in early medieval English magic. As Godfrid Storms notes, "In spite of its Christian wording the atmosphere of this charm is pagan. The magic numbers three and nine

²⁵ Godfrid Storms, *Anglo-Saxon Magic*, s-Gravenhage, Martinus Nijhoff, 1948, p. 277.

²⁶ Storms, *Anglo-Saxon ...*, p. 278.

²⁷ Wilfrid Bonser, *Magical Practices against Elves*, in "Folklore", 37, no. 4, 1926, p. 351.

²⁸ Cf. Lisa M.C. Weston, *The Language of Magic in two Old English Metrical Charms*, in "Neuphilologische Mitteilungen", 86, no. 2, 1985, pp. 176-186; Anne Lawrence-Mathers, *The problem of magic in early Anglo-Saxon England*, in "Reading Medieval Studies", XXXIII, 2007, p. 87-104.

²⁹ Bonser, *The Seven Sleepers ...*, p. 255.

play a conspicuous part and retain their full significance".³⁰ The Seven Sleepers, as Christian figures, provided a way to Christianize older magical practices. Their story of divine preservation made them ideal figures for protective magic, while their association with sleep allowed them to be incorporated into charms dealing with sleep-related issues. However, the use of these Christian figures in magical practices that likely had pre-Christian roots demonstrates the persistence of older beliefs and practices within the framework of Anglo-Saxon Christianity. This syncretic approach is characteristic of Anglo-Saxon religious culture more broadly.

The use of the Seven Sleepers in Anglo-Saxon charms beyond Metrical Charm 3 demonstrates the widespread adoption of these Christian figures into folk magical practices. Their invocation in charms for sleep, fever, and protection reveals how Christian narratives were adapted to address everyday concerns in Anglo-Saxon England. These charms provide valuable insight into the syncretic nature of Anglo-Saxon Christianity, showing how Christian figures could be incorporated into magical practices that likely had pre-Christian roots. This syncretism reflects the complex processes of religious and cultural change in early medieval England.

Conclusions

The legend of the Seven Sleepers of Ephesus, while originally a Christian religious tale, contains elements that have lent themselves to magical reinterpretation and reuse in later literature and folklore. By extracting the supernatural aspects from their religious context, storytellers, folklorists, and magical practitioners transformed the Seven Sleepers into a fertile source for fantastical narratives, magical beliefs, and protective practices. This demonstrates how even explicitly religious legends can evolve and be repurposed to serve new storytelling needs and cultural functions over time. The Seven Sleepers legend's journey from religious narrative to magical folklore exemplifies the dynamic nature of oral tradition and the enduring appeal of supernatural themes in human culture.

This study set out to explore the intricate relationship between the Seven Sleepers legend and magical practices across various cultural contexts, with a particular focus on how magical elements shaped this religious narrative and its subsequent use in protective and healing traditions. Our findings

³⁰ Storms, *Anglo-Saxon ...*, p. 276.

reveal a complex interplay between religious doctrine, folk beliefs, and magical practices that transcended cultural and religious boundaries.

The analysis of magical elements in the original Seven Sleepers legend reveals several aspects that lent themselves to supernatural interpretation. The central miracle of divinely-induced sleep that preserves the youths for centuries demonstrates divine power over nature and time. This theme of magical sleep resonates with similar motifs in various cultural traditions, from Greek mythology to Norse legends and fairy tales. The preservation of the Sleepers' bodies and the miraculous nature of their outdated coins upon awakening further contribute to the legend's supernatural aura. These elements, while primarily serving religious purposes in the original narrative, provided a foundation for later magical interpretations and practices.

Examining the incorporation of the Seven Sleepers narrative into magical practices and charms, reveals widespread adoption across different cultural contexts. In Islamic traditions, the names of the Companions of the Cave were frequently used in protective charms and healing practices. Archaeological evidence, such as the 13th-century bronze mirror inscribed with their names, demonstrates the creation of talismanic objects inspired by the legend. Similarly, in Anglo-Saxon England, the Seven Sleepers' names were incorporated into various charms, particularly those related to sleep and healing. The use of their names in charms against fever and other ailments suggests that their association with miraculous preservation extended to ideas of healing and protection from illness.

The significance of the number seven in the legend proves to be a crucial factor in its magical interpretations. Seven's deep spiritual and symbolic meanings across various cultures and religions enhanced the perceived magical potency of the Seven Sleepers legend when used in protective amulets and charms. Its associations with completeness, perfection, and divine creation in biblical and Judeo-Christian traditions, as well as its importance in European folkloric magic, contributed to the legend's power in magical contexts.

Investigating the use of the Seven Sleepers' names in protective charms and healing practices, our fourth objective, reveals a wide range of applications. From Arabic inscriptions on healing objects to Anglo-Saxon charms against supernatural threats and illnesses, the Sleepers' names were

believed to offer powerful protection. This widespread use demonstrates how elements of sacred narratives can take on lives of their own in folk belief and ritual.

Finally, assessing the syncretic nature of the Seven Sleepers legend's magical interpretations reveals a fascinating blend of religious and magical elements. The incorporation of the dog Qitmir in Islamic versions and the use of communion wafers in Anglo-Saxon charms demonstrate how the legend was adapted to resonate with different cultural values and spiritual needs. This syncretism reflects the complex processes of religious and cultural change in medieval societies.

This study primarily relied on textual evidence and archaeological findings, which may not fully represent the oral traditions and practices that were not recorded. Future research could benefit from a more comprehensive archaeological investigation of talismanic objects related to the Seven Sleepers across different cultures. Additionally, a comparative study of similar legends in other cultural contexts could provide further insights into the universal themes that lend themselves to magical interpretation.

While the sources used in this study provide valuable information on the magical uses of the Seven Sleepers legend, it's important to note that many of these interpretations are based on later folk practices rather than contemporaneous accounts. The evolution of the legend's magical associations over time deserves further scrutiny, as does the potential influence of scholarly interpretations on popular understanding of these practices.

The magical interpretations of the Seven Sleepers legend significantly reinforced themes of faith and resilience present in the original narrative. By invoking the Sleepers in protective charms and healing practices, believers sought to channel the divine protection and preservation demonstrated in the legend. This use of the legend in everyday magical practices shows how the themes of faith triumphing over adversity and divine protection in times of need resonated deeply with people across various cultures and time periods.

While the core elements of the Seven Sleepers legend remain consistent across cultures, its magical interpretations show interesting variations. Islamic traditions, for instance, place greater emphasis on the dog Qitmir,

incorporating it into protective practices. Anglo-Saxon charms, on the other hand, focus more on the Sleepers themselves, often invoking their names for protection against specific ailments or supernatural threats. These differences reflect the unique cultural and religious contexts in which the legend was received and adapted.

In conclusion, this study demonstrates how the Seven Sleepers legend transcended its origins as a religious narrative to become a significant element in magical practices across various cultures. The legend's journey from religious tale to magical folklore exemplifies the dynamic nature of oral tradition and the enduring appeal of supernatural themes in human culture. It provides valuable insight into how religious narratives can evolve and be repurposed to address everyday concerns and spiritual needs in diverse cultural contexts.

Georgian Perspectives on the Legend of the Seven Sleepers of Ephesus

Dr. Laura Mafizzoli ¹

Abstract

This article explores the legend of the Seven Sleepers, known in Georgia as the “Seven Infants of Ephesus“, within the context of Georgian scholarly literature and its cultural resonance. Despite the extensive analysis of this legend across various religious and cultural contexts, the Georgian perspective has largely been overlooked. This study aims to address this gap by examining Georgian scholarship, particularly the work of philologist Mariam Nanobashvili, whose dissertation and subsequent book represent the primary contemporary source. The article investigates the representation of the legend in Georgian literature, its perceived significance among scholars, and how it is known to the wider public. Through this analysis, the article contributes new insights to the understanding of the Seven Sleepers’ legend and its place in the Georgian cultural context.

Keywords: *Georgia, Seven Sleepers, Christian manuscripts, early Middle Ages, Georgian veneration*

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Introduction

This article represents the first effort in English to examine how the legend of the Seven Sleepers is depicted and studied in Georgia. The legend has garnered considerable attention and has been analyzed in diverse contexts and religious traditions¹. Two nearly contemporary versions of the Ephesian resurrection miracle from the 6th century exist: one is a Latin translation by Bishop Gregory of Tours, and the other is a Syriac version by Bishop Jacob of Sarugh. Consequently, the legend spread widely across the eastern provinces and the West, particularly within Latin Christianity. It traveled with missionaries from the Syriac Churches, notably the Assyrian Church of the East, along trade routes of the Silk Roads, both northern and southern branches. These routes were frequented by merchants transporting goods and artifacts, as well as missionaries, pilgrims, and soldiers. The legend extended northeast to Turpan in China and southeast to Yemen and Ethiopia². In the 7th century, the story of the Seven Sleepers was incorporated into the Qur'an in Sura XVIII, with significant additions, becoming part of Islamic tradition. Following the Islamic conquest of former Byzantine territories, the Muslim version of the legend, known as Ashab al-Kahf (Companions of the Cave), also spread widely³. Across various regions, multiple caves were identified as the true locations of the legend. Evidence of the story is found in material culture, such as church frescoes, ancient manuscripts, talismans, miniatures, and icons⁴. Prominent caves along the northern Silk Road routes include those in Nakhchivan, Azerbaijan; Maymanah, Afghanistan; and the sanctuary at Tuyuq in Turpan's oasis. Along the southern routes, notable sites include Ashab al-Kahf in Tarsus, Afsin in Turkey, as well as caves in Damascus, Syria, and near Amman, Jordan⁵.

¹ For a critical overview of the legend and its different versions, see: Paolo La Spisa et al., *The Seven Sleepers Legend as a case of universal hagiography. The EuTradOr interdisciplinary research project* in *EURAS Journal of Social Sciences*, vol 3, N.2, October 2023, p.121-144.

² Anna Tozzi di Marco, *Agiografia e culto dei Sette Dormienti: Storicità e processi di mitologizzazione dell'agiostoria efesina nel Mediterraneo*. Edizioni del Gruppo di Ricerca Arabo-Cristiana, 2023, Bologna, p.121.

³ Tozzi di Marco, *Agiografia...*, p. 141.

⁴ Alexander Lapshin, *The "Seven Sleepers": Materials from North-East Rus'* in *EURAS Journal of Social Sciences*, 2023, Vol 3, N. 2, 145-161

Tozzi di Marco, *Agiografia...*

Anna Tozzi di Marco, *Preliminary Analysis of the Symbolism and the Agentivity of the dog Qitmīr during the Devotion to the Seven Sleepers of Ephesus (Ashāb al-Kahf)* in *EURAS Journal of Social Sciences*, 2023, Vol 3, N. 2, 191-209.

Manoël Pénicaud, *Artistic Reawakenings of the Seven Sleepers' Myth (19th - 21st centuries)*, in *EURAS Journal of Social Sciences*, 2023, Vol 3, N. 2, 63-190

⁵ Tozzi di Marco, *Agiografia...*

The different versions of the Seven Sleepers' legend and the continuing reverence for them in various Mediterranean regions and Central Asia illustrate how this myth crosses cultural boundaries, thus representing a shared cultural legacy between the Christian and Muslim worlds. Many scholars have examined this peculiarity as it constitutes an interreligious myth linking the three major monotheistic religions. Early scholars like the Italian philologist Ignazio Guidi and the French orientalist Louis Massignon extensively analyzed this legend⁶. Guidi focused on collecting and reviewing Eastern texts from a comparative perspective, while Massignon explored Islamic interpretations and mapped the spiritual significance of the Seven Sleepers⁷. Additionally, also in the work of Paul Peeters, one of the most prominent researchers of Syriac hagiography, the Georgian case is absent⁸.

Although this article is part of a second volume that examines the myth of the Seven Sleepers from a distinctive anthropological and ethnographic perspective, I must acknowledge that during my research for this article, I did not find rituals and acts of veneration related to the Seven Sleepers in Tbilisi. However, I came across two ecclesiastical magazines that reveal a more vernacular aspect of this veneration. In the first part, I will draw upon the work of philologist Nanobashvili, whose dissertation (later published as a book) is the only contemporary source in the Georgian language I identified that deals with the Seven Sleepers in the Georgian context. The second part will explore a vernacular aspect of veneration and how it is presented to the wider public. It is important to note that in the Georgian context, the Seven Sleepers are referred to as the "Seven Infants of Ephesus" (Georgian: *q'rma*). Therefore, I will use the term "Seven Infants" in this article when referring to the Georgian version and "Seven Sleepers" when discussing established scientific research.

⁶ Ignazio Guidi, *Testi orientali inediti sopra I Sette Dormienti di Efeso*. Roma: Tipografia della R. Accademia dei Lincei, 1855.

Louis Massignon, *Les sept dormants d'Ephèse (Ahl al Kahf) en Islam et en Chrétienté*. Parigi: Librairie Orientaliste Paul Geuthner. 1955.

Louis Massignon, *Les sept dormants. Apocalypse de l'Islam in Opera Minora*. Beirut: Dar al Maaref. 1963

⁷ Tozzi di Marco, *Agiografia...*, p. 15

⁸ Paul Peeters, *Le texte original de la passion des Sept Dormants*, in *Analecta Bollandiana*, vol. XLI, 1923, p. 369-385.

Mariam Nanobashvili, *Motifs of the Seven Sleepers of Ephesus in Georgian and Arabic Traditions*, Tbilisi, 2007 p.35.

"The torture of the Seven Infants" in Georgian literature

Georgian philologist Mariam Nanobashvili has researched the Seven Sleepers within the Georgian context to address a gap in this area. She published her dissertation, "The Martyrdom of the Seven Infants from Ephesus. Georgian Versions," in 1999⁹. This dissertation was later transformed into a book, "Motifs of the Seven Sleepers of Ephesus in Georgian and Arabic Traditions," in 2007.

In her work, Nanobashvili demonstrates that the hagiographic narrative entitled "The Torture of the Seven Infants," which stems from the martyrdom of the Ephesians, holds a significant place in Georgian literature dating back to the early Middle Ages. She analyzes the discrepancies and consistencies among the early manuscripts, their sources, and the broader implications of these variations.

Within the realm of hagiographic literature in Georgia, she identified several editions of these works in the Georgian language:

1. Kymenian (Georgian: *k'imenuri*)¹⁰
2. Metaphrastic
3. A later translation (19th century) derived from the Armenian language is preserved in the following collections: H3140 (19th-20th centuries), S 7666 (19th century), and Q 409 (1845). The latter edition mentions the translator Ioane Manulovi¹¹. Other editions include Q 499 (1858) and Q 750 (19th-20th centuries). The Mekhitarists in Venice published this work, which is available in the book "Life of Saints" (1859)¹².
4. Finally, an edition was printed as a separate pamphlet in 1893, titled "Life of the Seven Infants." This pamphlet was published by the Printing House of Maksim Sharadze. The text adheres to the norms of the new Georgian

⁹ Mariam Nanobashvili, *The Martyrdom of the Seven Infants from Ephesus, Georgian versions*. Thesis. Tbilisi. 1999.

¹⁰ The Georgian word *k'imeni* stands for a biblical-canonical text presented without explanatory comments, typically found at the center of manuscript pages containing biblical content. Byzantine jurist-commentators distinguished *k'imeni* as a separate text from their own commentaries. The term has a dual meaning. The Georgian scientist and translator, developer of the Athos literary school, Ephraim the Lesser notes that when Symeon Logothete initiated reforms of the saints' lives, a historic text known as *k'imeni*, which translates to "it is located," was placed before him. At the end of this text, the "book of the martyrs" is referred to as *k'imeni*. This concept represents a certain stage in hagiographical writing that preceded later metaphrastic redactions. It is believed that the translation of the hagiographic material from *k'imeni*'s redaction was completed in the 10th century by Ekvtime of Athos and his contemporaries (see K'orneli Kekelidze, *Kartuli lit'erat'uris istoria* [History of Georgian Literature], Vol. 1, Tbilisi, 1960).

¹¹ All these collections are preserved in the National Parliamentary Library of Georgia

¹² "Life of Saints", Tsmindiani ckhovreba (<https://dspace.nplg.gov.ge/handle/1234/317333>)

literary language and presents a straightforward and simple narration based on the Russian original version. According to Nanobashvili, following the words of historian and publisher Zakaria Chichinadze, Maksim Sharadze's printing house focused on producing affordable books for "simple people," providing accessible versions. The content of these publications reflected the lifestyle of Sharadze's Cabinet brotherhood (Georgian: *dzmoba*), who, according to the historian and book publisher Zurab Chichinadze, was very pious and preferred simple prose, translated directly from Russian¹³. In contrast to the Russian version, the Georgian edition is shortened and simplified. The pamphlet's title page printed by Sharadze features an image of the Ephesian martyrs, which is an imitation of an illustration printed in Moscow. Her research examines various Georgian editions of this text, with a particular focus on the Kymenian and Metaphrastic redactions. In this article, I have translated Nanobashvili's work on the Kymenian edition as it proved to be an interesting analysis that places the legend of the Seven Sleepers in Georgia within the broader cross-pollination context of the Middle Ages that see the legend of the Seven Sleepers move across the Christian and the Muslim worlds. The Kymenian edition contains hagiographies of various saints and is preserved in three early manuscripts: one from the Saint Catherine Monastery in Sinai (dated 983) and two others from the 11th century. She refers to these manuscripts as Syn. 62, Bodl. 1, and H 341, respectively¹⁴.

Nanobashvili's comparison of three early manuscripts (Kymenian versions)

Nanobashvili highlights that the hagiographic work of the Seven Ephesian Infants is the only text in the databases of all three manuscripts¹⁵. Nanobashvili observes that these manuscripts comprise collections of different martyrdom accounts. For the three early manuscripts examined, no single manuscript served as the exclusive source; instead, multiple collections were utilized. She explains that copying literary works from various collections and compiling them into a single manuscript was common practice in the Middle Ages. This is often justified in the manuscripts. Namely, the composition of these collections was often influenced by several factors, including the patron's preferences, the copyist's ideas, the unavailability of certain materials, or the later

¹³ Nanobashvili, *Motifs of...*, p. 43.

¹⁴ These manuscripts are preserved in the National Parliamentary Library of Georgia.

¹⁵ Nanobashvili, *Motifs of...*, p. 44.

acquisition of those materials¹⁶.

Her comparative analysis of the text "Torture of the Seven Infants," preserved in the three manuscripts, reveals that the discrepancies arise not only in phrasing and vocabulary but also in using non-standard grammatical forms. Manuscripts Syn.62 and Bodl.1 often present similar readings, while manuscript H341 shows more significant discrepancies¹⁷. Yet, she points out that there are instances where Syn.62 and H341 share the same reading, distinguishing them from Bodl.1. This indicates that the texts of the three manuscripts did not derive from one another. Rather, as collections, they likely originated from similar (though not identical) sources, as evidenced by their textual closeness. Specifically, the first two collections share seven tales of seven martyrdoms, and the order of these works remains consistent in both collections¹⁸.

Regarding the origin of the Georgian translation of the Kymenian edition of "The Torture of the Infants of Ephesus," Nanobashvili notes that the translation maintains a complete archaism in vocabulary, morphology, and syntax, suggesting its antiquity as well as its creation before the Greek version on which "The Torture of the Infants of Ephesus" is based. After comparing the Georgian text with the corresponding Greek, Armenian, Arabic, and Syriac sources, she concludes that the translation was made from Greek (Ibid. 46). She references the Greek text published based on the manuscript from the National Library of Paris (Graec. 1454, 10th century) and the Vatican manuscript (Vat. Graec. 1673, 11th century).

The Georgian Kymenian redaction closely follows the Greek text, nearly word for word, while the Eastern versions differ in phrases, narration, and occasionally specific details¹⁹. For instance, the Syriac tradition states that there were eight infants instead of seven²⁰. She refers to the Armenian

¹⁶ Nanobashvili, *Motifs of...*, p. 45.

¹⁷ Nanobashvili, *Motifs of...*, p. 45.

¹⁸ These are the works present in both the manuscripts: 1. "The Martyrdom of Saint Christopher"2. "Leotis, the Holy Martyr"3. "The Martyrs Paul, Bilon, Theon, Iron, and their companions"4. "Forty-five martyred saints from the city of Nicopolis in Armenia"5. "Athanasius, the martyr of the Holy and Great Martyr from the city of Kolisma, located by the sea"6. "Martyrdom of Saint Panteleimon"7. "Martyrdom of the Maccabees and their mothers, who suffered under King Antiochus in the city of Antioch".

¹⁹ Nanobashvili, *Motifs of...*, p. 46-47.

²⁰ This, however, it is only in one rendition of Jacob of Sarugh (451-521). Of the same tale, Jacob of Sarugh presented two recensions of different lengths, likely composed around 470. Among the elements that have been passed down are many legendary aspects that remain historically unverified, such as the involvement of Decius

version of the story, noting that it clearly shows that the young boys served King Decius as idolaters and were only later converted to Christianity. Additionally, the Armenian version includes details about a basilica being built over the burial site of these young boys (following the version of Gregory of Tours), which is not found in the Georgian version. Furthermore, the Armenian tradition claims that the miraculous sleep of the saints lasted for 144 years, while the Georgian version (following the Syriac version) states it lasted for 372 years²¹. We see then that this Georgian translation features elements that belong both to the Latin version by Bishop Gregory of Tours and the Syriac version by Bishop Jacob of Sarugh.

Similarities to the Greek version and Georgian archaisms

In examining the similarities with the Greek text, the author highlights several aspects related to content and syntax. The first similarity is found in the names of the Seven Infants. The names of the Ephesian martyrs differ across the various versions. Three main groups can be identified: 1) Achilles-Diomedes; 2) Maximiliane-Konstantines; and 3) Maximilian-Exakusdadianes. The first group appears in Syriac, Coptic, and Ethiopic texts, with slight variations including Achillides, Diomedes, Eugene, Stephen, Probatius, Sabatius, and Quiriacus. The second and third groups are found in Greek, Armenian, and Arabic texts, as well as in the Georgian version that Nanobashvili analyzes. The names in Georgian are a direct translation of the Greek ones: Maksimiliane, Iamblike, Martine, Ioane, Dionise, Eksakustodiane, and Antonine. The Georgian version aligns closely with the Greek text, as well as the names mentioned in the writings of kings and bishops. However, the name of the mountain where the cave is located varies among different editions. In the Georgian text, the toponym used is derived from the Greek version, as noted in the Vatican version. Nanobashvili also observes many Greek calques in the Georgian version, along with similar syntax.

While there are notable similarities with the Greek text, her analysis indicates that the Georgian translation of "The Torture of the Ephesian Infants" is not merely derived from a Greek version similar to those found in the Parisian and Vatican manuscripts. Instead, it also retains significant archaic features, suggesting that the Georgian version predates the 10th-

in Ephesus, who interrogated the young Ephesians about their refusal to offer sacrifices to the gods. Notably, in one of his versions, the number of Sleepers was counted as eight (Tozzi di Marco, *Agiografia...* p.77).

²¹ Nanobashvili, *Motifs of...*, p. 48.

11th century Greek manuscripts from which it originates. She mentions that the Georgian text has been translated into Coptic from the same Greek edition to support this claim.

She references the work of linguist and philologist Ivane Imnaishvili, titled "Historical Chrestomathy of the Georgian Language" (1963) which examines morphological, orthographical, and phonetic changes in the Georgian language over the centuries²². This work supports her thesis regarding the antiquity of the Georgian version compared to the Greek edition from which it is translated. For example, she notes that some lexical units and archaic words have been replaced by New Persian and Arabic terms after the 8th century. One such example is the word for treasure, "sapase," which was replaced by the word "gandzi" in later collections after the 9th century. The historian Abuladze identifies "gandzi" as a word of New Persian origin, asserting that it did not exist before the 9th century²³.

Nanobashvili identifies numerous Persian influences in the Georgian text, noting terms like "Hambavi" and "Zorva."²⁴ It is well-documented that many words from the Persian lexicon were adopted by Georgian speakers, integrating them into the literary language. Overall, she argues that the lexical, orthographic, and grammatical features present in the Georgian manuscript highlight a wealth of archaic elements. The antiquity of the Georgian translation of "The Torture of the Ephesians" is underscored by its textual variations, which reflect the cultural contacts that have taken place in Georgia over the centuries, particularly following the Arab arrival in the VIII century. The presence of such elements further supports the notion that the Georgian translation preserves archaic linguistic characteristics and was likely translated before the 9th century, as indicated by the variant features in the text²⁵.

Additionally, Nanobashvili points out that the circular script used in "The Torture of the Seven Infants" manuscripts suggests these texts were

²² Ivane Imnaishvili, *Kartuli Enis Ist'oriuli Krest'omatia* [Historical Chrestomathy of the Georgian Language] Tbilisi. 1963.

²³ Ilia Abuladze, *Asurel Moghvatseta kkhovrebis ts'ignta dzvel redakciebi* [Old editions of books of life of Assyrian Figures], Tbilisi, 1955 in Nanobashvili, *Motifs of...*, p.51.

²⁴ "Hambavi" is the old Georgian version of the current "ambavi", which means "story". "Zorva" instead means "sacrifice" as well as "victim", depending on the context. Source: Ilia Abuladze, *Dictionary of old Georgian language*, Tbilisi, 1976, p.85.

²⁵ Nanobashvili, *Motifs of...* p.50-51.

produced in one of the prominent literary centers of the East, most likely in Palestine. The assumption that "The Torture of the Infants of Ephesus" was likely translated in one of the three literary centers in Palestine is bolstered by several points. During the early period of Georgian writing, there was significant interaction between Georgians and Christian territories in the East, particularly in regions like Syria and Palestine. This connection facilitated the exchange of literary and religious texts, making it likely that Georgian scholars were involved in translating works from these areas. Additionally, the fact that the oldest manuscripts containing the "Torture of the Seven Infants" originate from Palestine further supports this idea²⁶. The links between these manuscripts and Palestine indicate that there was already an established literary activity in that region, especially in monasteries and lavras, permitting the translation and adaptation of texts. Consequently, the combination of the historical context of Georgian literary activity in Christian centers and the origins of significant manuscripts bolsters the assumption that works, including "The Torture of the Infants of Ephesus," could have been translated into these Palestinian centers²⁷.

In his review of the Legend of the Seven Sleepers of Ephesus in the Arab Christian context, La Spisa discusses what is believed to be the oldest Christian Arabic version of this text the standard edition believed to be the oldest Christian Arabic version. This version is preserved in two manuscripts: London, BL, Or. 5019 (X-XI century), fols 40v - 47r, and Paris, BnF, Ar. 6256 (AD 1694-1707), fols 14v - 30r²⁸. He argues that both versions of the text are derived from an ancient Arabic translation of a Greek metaphrastic text. He compares different passages from these manuscripts based on content and codicological analysis conducted by van Esbroeck, who concluded that the origin of the manuscript BL, Or. 5019 (which comes after BL, Add. 26117) is linked to the area of the monasteries of Palestine. Furthermore, La Spisa outlines a genealogy that traces the text back to a Greek *Vorlage* from the X century, from which an initial Arabic version was translated. This initial Arabic version served as the archetype for all subsequent Arabic translations²⁹.

²⁶ See Paolo La Spisa, *Una recensione Araba Cristiana della leggenda dei Sette Dormienti di Efeso* in *Analecta Bollandiana*, Tom 141, II, December 2023, p. 241-292.

²⁷ Nanobashvili, *Motifs of...*, p.51-52.

²⁸ La Spisa, *Una recensione...* p. 259.

²⁹ La Spisa, *Una recensione...* p. 253-254.

For the first time, La Spisa introduces what he calls *recensione antica* of the Arabic versions of the legend in a critical edition. The antiquity of this recension is primarily supported by its close relation to the Greek-Byzantine version, which is documented as early as the X-XI centuries, coinciding with the oldest Greek codices³⁰. There are numerous textual parallels, and he highlights particularly intriguing aspects of their convergence, illustrating a genealogical link between the Arabic and Greek texts through the names of the Sleepers. La Spisa argues that the almost complete overlap between the Arabic and Greek texts supports the hypothesis that the Arabic version is derived from the Greek. He additionally explores other Christian Arabic texts and demonstrates how the Palestinian-Melkite tradition continued to translate the Legend of the Seven Sleepers, which circulated in various versions and adaptations also in the following centuries³¹.

La Spisa's findings and analysis align closely with those of Nanobashvili. It could be interesting to understand whether both the Georgian and Arabic versions examined by the authors derive from the same Greek text from the 10th century. Furthermore, La Spisa's work confirms Nanobashvili's assumption that the Georgian version was translated in one of the monasteries or lavras in Palestine, which served as vibrant hubs for the cross-pollination and interconnectedness of Eastern Christian communities as early as the Middle Ages.

Vernacular forms of veneration

In the previous sections, through Nanobashvili's work, I explored how the veneration of the Seven Sleepers of Ephesus in the Georgian Kymenian translation reflects a profound syncretism, synthesizing elements from Medieval European, Syriac, and Coptic traditions, while blending theological, liturgical, and cultural aspects. According to the official liturgical calendar in Georgia, the Seven Sleepers are commemorated on August 4th and October 22nd. During my visits to various churches in Tbilisi on both dates, I sought specific observances dedicated to the Seven Sleepers. However, I found no distinct ceremonies or liturgical events associated with these feast days. This absence of dedicated observances raises important questions about the contemporary significance of the Seven Sleepers within the Georgian Orthodox Church, which merits

³⁰La Spisa, *Una recensione...* p. 254.

³¹La Spisa, *Una recensione...* p. 257.

further investigation across different regions and minority groups in Georgia in future research. Additionally, my inquiries with church priests in Tbilisi yielded limited information regarding prayers or specific liturgies associated with the feast of the Seven Sleepers, suggesting either a lack of attention to these dates or a more nuanced practice that remains less visible in public worship.

Despite the absence of distinct ceremonial observances, I came across two ecclesiastical magazines in the library that offered substantial sections on the Seven Sleepers of Ephesus, recounting their legend as presented in the "Life of Saints" (2001), based on the Armenian translation by the Mekitarists. The first magazine presents a liturgy invoking the Seven Sleepers, asking for their intercession in prayer for children suffering from sickness, insomnia, and anxiety. This liturgy also seeks divine protection against the persecution of the Antichrist and shielding from the evil eye³². In this context, the invocation of the Seven Sleepers highlights their role as martyrs and protectors of the vulnerable, particularly children, linking them to both pastoral care and apotropaic functions. The prayer reads:

Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, who judges the living and the dead, with the prayers of the saints, the seven children of Ephesus, have mercy on us sinners. Save us from an immoral life, and by their providence, protect us from the unrighteous Antichrist in the shelter of your salvation. Amen. May the Seven Sleepers of Ephesus pray for the healing of children suffering from sickness, insomnia, anxiety, and deliverance from the persecution of the Antichrist.

This prayer emphasizes the multifaceted role of the Seven Sleepers in the liturgy, highlighting their function in healing, protection, and intercession against eschatological evil. By referencing the Antichrist, it indicates an influence stemming from Christian texts, such as the letters of Saint Paul and the Apocalypse of John. Yet, Tozzi di Marco notes that the Antichrist is an apocalyptic figure in Islamic tradition—considered the false Messiah who deceives the Muslim community at the End of Times and will ultimately be defeated by the true Messiah, Jesus³³. Furthermore, she points out a significant difference between Christian and Islamic accounts of the legend. In early Christianity, the Ephesian legend served an apologetic purpose, conveying the miracle of the Resurrection while honoring the

³² AA.VV. *Khsovna shvidta q'rmata Efeselta* [Commemoration of the Seven Infants of Ephesus] in "Mrevli" 151, 2011, p. 4-5.

³³ Tozzi di Marco, *Agiografia...*, p. 145.

first Christian martyrs. In contrast, when the legend is incorporated into the Qur'an in the Sura "The Cave", it shifts to a purely ethical and theological perspective, emphasizing the importance of surrendering to God, where true salvation is found³⁴. This element is present in the Troparion of the Georgian liturgy:

Your martyrs, O Lord, by their deeds, won the crown of sanctity. They drew their strength from You and overcame mighty forces, destroying idols. Through their actions, dear Jesus, they bring peace to our souls.

This text emphasizes the sanctity of the Seven Sleepers, positioning them as figures who transcended physical suffering to achieve divine glory. The notion of peace brought through their actions is tied to the eschatological victory over evil and the tangible protection they offer in the present. Yet, the Book of Liturgy instead expresses the miracle of resurrection, thus returning to the Christian tradition:

The inhabitants of the village, those who rejected corruption and received the gifts of uncorruption, are the ones who established the holy Seven Children. For these children, who will be resurrected later, were laid to rest amidst the unbelief of many years. Let all believers, filled with praise, sing to Christ today.

Here, the Seven Sleepers are positioned as symbols of uncorruption and resurrection, their veneration entwined with themes of spiritual renewal and hope for eternal life. This text underscores their continuing relevance not only in the context of personal protection but also as a reminder of the Christian eschatological promise.

An especially revealing anecdote from the second ecclesiastical magazine, authored by Bishop Isaiah of Nikoz and Tskhinvali, further highlights the syncretism of different traditions of the Seven Sleepers in contemporary Georgian Christianity³⁵. The article, titled *The Cure for Insomnia*, recounts a personal experience on the commemoration day of the Seven Sleepers. This anecdote vividly illustrates the practical, immediate impact of invoking the Seven Sleepers for the protection and healing of children, particularly for issues such as insomnia. Bishop Isaiah recalls:

Returning from the Martq'opi Monastery on the commemoration day of the Seven Sleepers of Ephesus, I attended the morning prayer service at the

³⁴ Tozzi di Marco, *Agiografia...*, p. 145.

³⁵ AA.VV. *Udzilobis k'urneba* [The cure for insomnia] in *K'aribch'è* 23, 2005.

Patriarchate. After the service, His Holiness read the life stories of the Seven Sleepers of Ephesus and the saints commemorated that day. He said, 'Those who suffer from insomnia should pray to the Seven Sleepers of Ephesus. In the Great Blessing Book, special prayers are meant to be read by a priest, and anyone in need can ask a priest to read these prayers for the sick.' One of the nuns complained to His Holiness, 'My grandchild has insomnia; what should I do?' He replied, 'Take a priest to pray for him.' 'Which one?' she asked. His Holiness pointed to me and said, 'This one.' We quickly gathered the necessary items: the Great Blessing Book, a stole, bracelets, a censer, and candles. When we arrived at her grandchild's home and asked about him, we were told, 'He's sleeping.' We did not know what to do. After some brief discussion, we decided it would be best to pray anyway, so we tiptoed into the room where the child was peacefully sleeping. Quietly, so as not to wake him, I began to pray... but the young boy still woke up, got up, and left the room grumbling. We found ourselves in an odd situation—we had come to help him sleep but ended up waking him instead. That night, however, the boy reportedly slept more peacefully than usual. In a way, it worked out—by waking him during the day, he could sleep better at night³⁶.

The veneration of the Seven Sleepers of Ephesus in these two examples thus reflects a deep syncretism, integrating Medieval European, Syriac, and Coptic traditions. In Medieval Europe, the Seven Sleepers were invoked to calm restless or sleepless children, likely due to their youthful age, emphasizing their pastoral role as protectors in everyday life. This influence is evident in Georgian practices, where the Seven Sleepers are called upon for children's illnesses, anxiety, and insomnia, blending medieval eschatological concerns with local pastoral needs. In Syriac Christianity, prayers to the Seven Sleepers were employed against insomnia, fever, and the evil eye, as documented by Louis Massignon in liturgical manuscripts of the Patriarchate of Antioch³⁷. These apotropaic practices resonate in Georgian liturgical texts, where the Seven Sleepers are invoked as protectors against the Antichrist and other evils, linking these practices to ancient Eastern Christian traditions.

Similarly, in Coptic Christianity, archaeological and literary evidence attests to the veneration of the Seven Sleepers, such as in the Nubian city of Faras, where a hermit's cave bore a written dedication to them³⁸. A magical papyrus containing apotropaic formulas against ailments further demonstrates their role as healers and protectors in Coptic rituals. Georgian

³⁶ Translated by the author of the article.

³⁷ Tozzi di Marco, *Agiografia...*, p. 68.

³⁸ Tozzi di Marco, *Agiografia...*, p. 53.

veneration of the Seven Sleepers thus incorporates both formal liturgical practices and folk-Christian traditions, blending theological elements with protective rituals. The use of ritual items such as the Great Blessing Book, a stole, bracelets, a censer, and candles enriches the practice with symbolic meanings: the Blessing Book provides theological legitimacy, the stole signifies priestly authority, the bracelets serve as protective objects linked to apotropaic traditions, and the censer and candles sanctify the space, aligning with Eastern Orthodox and Coptic practices. Together, these elements create a sacred atmosphere while reflecting a syncretic tradition that integrates Syriac apotropaic formulas, Coptic protective rituals, and European medieval customs. The invocation of the Seven Sleepers to combat insomnia and anxiety thus demonstrates the continuity of these traditions, rooted in Syriac Palestine, transmitted through Medieval Europe, and adapted into Georgian liturgy.

Conclusion

In her extensive examination of the hagiography surrounding the Seven Sleepers in both Christian and Muslim contexts, Tozzi di Marco notes that Guidi provides no reference to the Ephesian narrative within Georgian literature due to a lack of relevant information³⁹. However, she argues that because Georgia, along with Armenia, was among the first nations to embrace Christianity as a state religion in the mid-4th century—establishing its own national church several decades before the Roman Empire—the Georgian Church likely absorbed both Western and Eastern Syriac traditions through Armenian Christian influence⁴⁰. Indeed, this is supported by the work of Nanobashvili, who demonstrated that all the different redactions of the "Seven Infants of Ephesus" in the Kymenian edition originate from a common archetype presumably translated from Greek in Palestine before the 9th century. Nanobashvili reached this conclusion through a comparative analysis of the text "Torture of the Seven Infants," preserved in three manuscripts. This analysis revealed differences in phrasing, vocabulary, and non-standard grammatical forms, suggesting that the texts of the three manuscripts were not derived from one another. Nanobashvili explains these instances of cross-pollination and archaisms in Georgian translations by highlighting that, during the early stages of Georgian literature, the Georgians were well-connected in

³⁹ Tozzi di Marco, *Agiografia...*, p. 126.

⁴⁰ Tozzi di Marco, *Agiografia...*, p. 126.

the East, particularly with Christian countries such as Syria and Palestine. They engaged in extensive literary activities in three major centers within monasteries and lavras. Therefore, she posits that it is plausible to think that "The Torture of the Infants of Ephesus" was translated in one of those literary centers, most likely in Palestine, before the 9th century.

The brief analysis of the liturgy and the tale about the cure of insomnia in the second part of the article highlights how the prayers related to the Seven Sleepers demonstrate a synthesis of various written sources: Medieval Europe, the Syriac version from Palestine, and the translation into Coptic from Georgian. Further research is needed to investigate how the Seven Sleepers are venerated in contemporary Georgia. It would be interesting to explore their veneration in Adjara region, where about 30% of the Georgian ethnic population is Muslim, as well as among the Armenian and Azerbaijani minorities in Georgia⁴¹. Additionally, it would be worthwhile to examine whether caves (Ashab al-Kahf) are venerated in Georgia, similar to those found in Azerbaijan, Turkey, Afghanistan, Syria. Hopefully, this article illustrates the importance of the Legend of the Seven Sleepers in the Georgian tradition during the Middle Ages and will encourage new scholars to explore this legend within the Georgian context, analyzing how it is embedded in the contemporary social and cultural landscape.

⁴¹ For an overview of faith-based activism as 'lived citizenship' among Georgian Muslims, especially in the Adjara region of Georgia, refer to Tsypylma Darieva *Claiming the city: Muslim faith-based activism as 'lived citizenship' in Georgia in Religion, State Society*, 2023, Vol 1, N. 1, 65-82.

Syriac Mor Abhay's Witness To The Miracle Of The Seven Sleepers¹

Doç. Dr. Hatice Kübra Uygur²

Abstract

This study delves into the miraculous narrative of the Seven Sleepers, which is widespread in various religions and cultures, albeit with nuanced variations, and that generally tells of the Seven Sleepers' escape from the tyranny of a king, their prolonged slumber over centuries, and their eventual awakening. While acknowledging the many variations within this popular narrative, this study aims to draw attention to the encounter between the seven faithful youths and the Syriac figure of Mor Abhay after their awakening. Specifically, it evaluates a variant within Syriac hagiography that testifies to Mor Abhay's witnessing the miracle of the Seven Sleepers. Using the methods of literature review and field research, this study undertakes a comprehensive examination.

This study is structured under the following main headings. It first provides information on the identity of the Seven Sleepers and their location. Subsequently, it briefly touches upon the history of Mardin and the Syriac tradition in relation to the subject. The next section examines who Syriac Mor Abhay is and why he holds significance. The relationship between Mor Abhay and the Seven Sleepers is then analyzed through one particular Syriac narrative. This section specifically focuses on the Syriac narrative, under the heading *Yemliho and His Companions*. Ultimately, the narrative of the Seven Sleepers, which appears across almost all religions, is evaluated within the context of Syriac literature and its connection to Mor Abhay. This evaluation specifically aims to highlight Mor Abhay, a witness to the miracle of the awakening of the Seven Sleepers. Thus, it becomes possible to not only assess the narrative itself but also to interpret Mor Abhay, one of the witnesses to the miracle, from a distinct perspective.

Keywords: *The Seven Sleepers/Ashāb al-Kahf, Syriac Hagiography, Mor Abhay, Mardin.*

¹This article was presented at the IUAES (International UNION of ANTHROPOLOGICAL and ETHNOLOGICAL sciences) Commission of Anthropology of the Middle East at Institut Français d'Études Anatoliennes (IFEA), İstanbul, Turkey 2023, 6-8 September 2023, Symposium on *Identity, Separation and Belonging*, in the session *The Myth of the Seven Sleepers in the Mediterranean and Silk Road Regions*.

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Introduction

In this study the aim is to shed light on the relatively underexplored relationship between the narrative of the Seven Sleepers, which exhibits diverse details across various accounts, and the context of Mardin culture and that of Mor Abhay. Prior to delving into the specific narrative of the Seven Sleepers in Mardin with a focus on Mor Abhay, it is essential to highlight the significance of this story within the multicultural and multilingual city of Mardin, located in the southeastern region of Turkey. This city's rich tapestry of cultures, religions, and languages underscores the importance of exploring this narrative within its unique socio-cultural context. One of the most interesting aspects of this city is the Syriac community. This research is divided into three separate sections: the first section examines the life and teachings of Mor Abhay, while the next section explores the narrative of the Seven Sleepers, also known as Yemliho and his companions. The final section explores the relationship between the Seven Sleepers and the Syriac figure of Mor Abhay from the perspective of Christian narratives.

The common feature of both stories, the legend of the Seven Sleepers of Ephesus in Christianity and the legend of Ashāb al-Kahf (Ashab-ı Kef¹) in Islam, is the resurrection of people after death. The emergence of this tale in Christianity coincides with a period when people started to disbelieve in life after death and the story is used to strengthen their beliefs.² Islam, on the other hand, uses the same story for a different purpose. In Anatolia, in a geography where Islam was trying to settle, it identifies some caves associated with this legend as areas to claim for itself. In the Islamic tale, which is almost the same as in Christianity, Islam does not attach much importance to the details. For the Qur'an, the main striking part of the story is represented by the claim of Life after death and that God is capable of realising it. In this study, special attention will be paid to the figure of Mor Abhay, who witnessed the miracle of the Seven Sleepers.

The names of the Seven Sleepers/Ashāb al-Kahf

Regional variations aside, there are different opinions about the names of the Seven Sleepers/Ashāb al-Kahf and their place in public narrative variants. Though the names are different in other sources, in Christianity they are known as Saints Malta, Malchus, Martinianus, Dionysius, Joannes,

¹ Although it is referred to as Ashab-al Kahf (Companions of the cave) in the literature, "Ashab-ı Kef" is used in this article to avoid confusion of meaning.

² İsmet Ersöz, *Ashāb-ı Kef*, İstanbul, Türkiye Diyanet Encyclopedia of Islam, 1991, C: 3, p. 465-467.

Serapion and Constantinus.³ According to the narrative of the Seven Sleepers, six of them were appointed within a palace, seated beside the emperor of the time. Those on the right were termed "Ashab al-Yamin," while those on the left were designated "Ashab al-Yasar."

For instance, according to the Catholic Church, the names of Seven Sleepers are: Maximian, Malchus, Martinian, Dionysius, John, Serapion, and Constantine. But according to Grégoire of Tours (538-594 AD) they are: Achillides, Diomedes, Diogenes, Probatas, Stephanus, Sambatus and Quiriacus. According to the Eastern Church, they are: Maximilian, Jamblichus, Martin, John, Dionisos, Constantine and Antonin,⁴ but their dog is not mentioned. While in Western resources they are: Malcus, Marquianos, Maximilian, Ioannes, Dennis, Serapion and Constantinos, they are: Yamliha, Makthalina, Mashlina, Marnush, Darbanush, Zazanush and shepherd Kaferstatyush in Eastern resources (Koçer 2012: 154).

In Islamic mythology, as mentioned in the work *Zubdat al-Tawarikh*, their names are: Makseline, Yemliha, Mertus, Sazinus, Peynus, Zubunus, and Kefestetayyus. The name of their dog is Kıtmir. In other versions, there are eight individuals in the cave, and their names are: Meksemlina, Mahsemlina, Yemliha, Martuş, Kusutans, Biruns, Resmuns, Betuns, and Falus. According to Ottoman sources, their names are: Yemliha, Mekseline, Mislina, Mernuş, Debernuş, Sazenuş, Kefeştatayyuş, and Kıtmir. Names such as Yemliha, Debernuş/Tebernuş, and Sazenuş are commonly found in places such as Tarsus and Afşin, believed to be the locations of the cave according to Islamic tradition.⁵

People who live in the places where the ones who were told about in Ashāb al-Kahf narrative and known as the Seven Sleepers, give those names to their children and some places, continue to keep the myth alive by giving it a place in their culture and traditions as the symbols of 'the resurrection'.

Where are located the Seven Sleepers/Ashāb al-Kahf?

Four of the thirtythree cities where the cave of Ashāb Al-Kahf is said to be located are in Turkey: Afsin, Selçuk (Ephesus), Lice and Tarsus. Although there are several stories, according to Christian belief, it is believed that

³ URL:1 <http://www.yediuyurlar.com/eshabikehf.asp>.

⁴ Encyclopaedia Britannica, (2008). "Seven Sleepers of Ephesus", Encyclopædia Britannica Online: <http://search.eb.com/eb/article-9066942>, Date of Access: 12.05.2012.

⁵ Metin And, *Ottoman -Islamic Mythology with Miniatures*, İstanbul, Yapı Kredi Publications, 2008, p. 233-237.

they lived in Ephesus. The cave accepted by the Christians is located at the foot of Panayır Mountain, which is near the ancient city of Ephesus in Selçuk. A church was built over the cave. It was discovered during an excavation between 1927 and 1928 by the Austrian archaeological mission. As a result of this excavation, some tombs were found which belonged to the 5th and 6th centuries. Writings dedicated to the Seven Sleepers were found both on the graves and on the walls of the church.⁶

The German-Jewish Orientalist Schaht adopted the Seven Sleepers myth and spread it. In the magazine "Al Mustemi-ul-Arabi", which was published for 20 years, he said that the Seven Sleepers were in Ephesus. He also stated that they might be near Amman, Jordan. On the other hand, in "Al Abhas" magazine, Dr. Enis Feriha stated that according to the Greek and Syriac sources, the cave was located in Ephesus (Özdoğan 2012: 97).

Syriac history of Mardin

Mardin and Tur Abdin have historically been significant centers. Due to its location at the heart of Mesopotamia and its proximity to Anatolia, Mardin has been subject to numerous invasions throughout history, bearing traces from every era, from the Paleolithic age to the present. It is almost like a summary of human history.

Mesopotamia extends beyond the area between the Tigris and Euphrates rivers, covering a much larger geographical region. The Tur Abdin Mountains, part of the Southeastern Taurus range, mark its northern boundary, with Mardin and Midyat situated in this mountainous region. The southern border of Mesopotamia reaches the deserts of the Arabian Peninsula and the Persian Gulf, while its eastern border is defined by the Zagros Mountains and its western boundary by the Mediterranean coast. After this point, the area around Midyat, previously known as Kashyari by the Assyrians and Mons Masius by the Romans, came to be called Tur Abdin. The adoption of a Syriac name reflects the influence of the Syriacs, who shaped the region's identity. Having distanced themselves from mainstream Christianity, the Syriacs viewed this mountainous region as an perfect place for seclusion, away from major centers and dangers. Over the centuries, they established many monasteries, turning the area into one of the foremost spiritual centers of Eastern Christianity. Indeed, Midyat and its surrounding areas became the heartland of the monastic tradition

⁶ Hatice Kübra Uygur, *Narratives of Mardin Syriacs in the Context of Sacred Space*, (Unpublished doctoral dissertation), Ankara, Hacettepe University, Institute of Social Sciences, 2015.

within the Eastern Church. The earliest records that refer to the region as Tur Abdin date back to the 6th century.⁷

In the diverse population of south-eastern Türkiye,

the Syriac Christians stand out both as a religious and ethnic minority. The population of the Syriac Christians has been concentrated in the city of Mardin and in the villages of a limestone plateau to the east of Mardin which is called the Tur 'Abdin. This community is historically called Syrian Orthodox but terms like West Syrians, Suryoye, Syriacs are also used to define the community. Syriac Christians still speak a dialect of Aramaic and are proud to be speaking the language of Jesus. It is not surprising that the community, its language and its written heritage attract international attention. However, the architectural heritage of this community is not less important.⁸

Currently, the Syriac population in Turkey is estimated to range between 15,000 and 20,000, with the majority residing in Istanbul. To facilitate administrative efficiency, the Syriac Church in Turkey is structured into four regional archdioceses and patriarchal vicariates. These are: the Archbishopric of Istanbul and Ankara; the Patriarchate Vicariate of Mardin; the Patriarchate Vicariate of Tur Abdin; and lastly the Archbishopric of Adıyaman. Syriacs speak a dialect of Aramaic known as Turoyo.⁹

Mardin's diverse cultural heritage is reflected in its architecture, including houses, churches, monasteries, synagogues, markets, mosques, and madrassas. The city has preserved its bilingualism and continues to embody a multicultural and multi-religious identity. Ancient traditions, rituals, arts, and crafts are vividly present in the city's enduring languages, flavors, and aromas. This focus extends to the churches and monasteries of the Tur Abdin region, bordered by the Tigris River and the South-eastern Anatolian mountain range to the north and east, the Syrian plain to the south, and the city of Mardin to the west. Although there are different views about the etymology of the word Tur 'Abdin, the translation 'Mountain of God's Servants' approved by Sebastian Brock, is quite appropriate to describe this region which is dotted with churches and monasteries.¹⁰ Tur 'Abdin

⁷ W. A. Wigram, *History of the Assyrian Church or The Church of the Sassanid Persian Empire 100-64 AD*, NY, Gorgias Press, 2004, p. 8.

⁸ Elif Keser-Kayaalp, *Preservation of the Architectural Heritage of the Syriac Christians in the Tur 'Abdin: Processes and Varying Approaches*, in "TÜBA-KED", 14/2016, p. 59.

⁹ Mesut Alp, *Mardin from tales to legend*, MST Project, 2015.

¹⁰ Sebastian Brock, *From Ephrem to Romanos: Interactions between Syriac and Greek in Late Antiquity*, Aldershot: Variorum CSS 664, 1999, p. 22.

holds significance not only due to its sacredness but also because it is seen by the Syriacs as their homeland, where their cultural traditions and heritage are deeply rooted. Herman Teule emphasizes this importance by stating that the end of the Syriac presence in Tur'Abdin will be the end of the Syriac identity (2012, s. 56). However, many of these buildings have either vanished or are at risk of being demolished. The Syriacs built not only religious structures, but also villages, roads, and castles in this region. However, most of the buildings that have survived today are religious structures, and therefore mostly religious buildings are included.¹¹

Even though Syriac literature may not have produced many renowned historians, numerous historical writings in Syriac have survived. These often take the form of annual chronicles, which serve as valuable resources for understanding the political, social, and economic history of the Middle East, particularly between the 4th and 14th centuries AD. Among the most significant of these are *The Chronicles* of Michael and Abu'l Faraj. According to modern historians, many of these have not always received as much attention as they should have.¹²

Saint/ Mor Abhay¹³

In the Syriac liturgical tradition, saints hold a significant place. Among the saints whose names are mentioned both during their lifetime and thereafter, Saint Mor Abhay¹⁴ occupies a prominent position. The information concerning Mor Abhay utilized in this study is derived from field research notes conducted in 2012 with the clergyman Priest/Hori Gabriel Akyüz of the Forty Martyrs Church in Mardin, as well as from my doctoral dissertation titled *Narratives of Mardin Syriacs in the Context of Sacred Space* and literature review.¹⁵

Mor Abhay and his brothers were born in Rekman village. This village is in the Mesopotamian region of Mardin, known as Beth Nahrin. Mor Abhay and his brother Mor Zuko settled in Beth Hamoro Monastery after

¹¹ Keser-Kayaalp, *Preservation...*, p. 58.

¹² Sebastian Brock, *Studies in Syriac Christianity, History, Literature and Theology*, Variorum, US, 1992, p. 7.

¹³ Mor in Syriac means Saint. The use of Mor Abhay in the text is considered appropriate.

¹⁴ A Summary of Information on the Seven Children Sleeping in Ephesus in the *Life Story of Mor Abhay* from the Beth-Hamoro Monastery in the North West of Mardin was obtained from interviews with Priest Gabriel Akyüz in 2012. The information in question can be accessed from the following sources in the literature. Uygur, *Narratives...* and Gabriel Akyüz, *The Great awakening Ashâb-ı Kehf in Lice*, Editors: Hatip Yıldız, Abdusselam Ertekin, Davut Adlıg, Abdullah Cengiz, İstanbul, Sonçağ Akademi, 2021, p. 77-101.

¹⁵ *Life Stories of Saints*, Syriac Manuscript, No: 275. Story consists of 70 pages.

their parents died. They became priests and then deacons. While Mor Abhay became a saint, Mor Zuko was an anchorite in the cave. This cave is named Mor Zuko Cave. After Mor Abhay worked as an episcopus of Nikaia (Nicaea), he lived an anchoritic life in Kayseriye of Cappadocia.¹⁶ It is assumed that Mor Abhay, who lived 120 years, passed away on July 15th. If we were to chronologically sequence the periods during which the miracles associated with Mor Abhay and the Seven Sleepers transpired, we would approach this topic through an examination of the era pertaining to Seven Sleepers/Yemliho and his companions, as well as the reign of the emperor reigning during that time:

- Decius' sovereignty years: AD 249-251
- Teodosiyos II' sovereignty years: AD 408-450
- Death occurred during Decius' reign.

Priest of Forty Martyr Church, Gabriel Akyüz, interpreted considering these dates: if Yemliho and his friends indeed entered their period of slumber in the year AD 250, their resurrection would have occurred during the 38th year of the reign of Emperor Theodosius II. Adding 38 years to 408 AD, the resurrection event would then be situated in the year 446 AD. Consequently, it can be deduced that the duration of Yemliho and his companions' slumber spanned from the year 250 AD to 446 AD, amounting to a total of 196 years.

The Seven Sleepers/Yemliho and his friends according to Syriac narrative

Anna Tozzi Di Marco in her study *The Seven Sleepers/Ashāb al-Kahf tale and cult: two case studies in Turkey (Ephesus) and Jordan (Al-Rajib)* evaluates the narrative from the perspective of Christian and Muslim narrative traditions as follows:

The story of the Seven Sleepers/Ashāb al-Kahf is a religious and cultural heritage shared by Christians and Muslims that transcends the boundaries of time and space. I argue that the story of the Seven Sleepers/Ashāb al-Kahf is a religious and cultural heritage shared by Christians and Muslims that transcends the boundaries of time and space. It could be considered an interreligious myth linking the three monotheistic faiths, as comparative religious studies have shown, since its multi-confessional nature is common to many shared holy shrines and sanctuaries in the Mediterranean region.¹⁷

¹⁶ Uygur, *The narratives...*; Akyüz, *The Great awakening...*

¹⁷ Anna Tozzi Di Marco, *The Seven Sleepers/Ashāb al-Kahf tale and cult: two case studies in Turkey (Ephesus) and*

According to Brock and Taylor, one of the oldest variants of the narrative of Yemliho and his friends can be seen in 6th-century Syriac texts. It is thought that, at the end of the 6th century, Gregoire de Tours learned about the myth from a Syriac called Johannon and translated it into Latin with his help. The narrative has been translated into many languages.¹⁸ Notably, their story found inclusion in the western *Golden Legend*, which stood as one of the most widely read works of the later Middle Ages.¹⁹ For the various versions of this legend see Act. Sanct.²⁰

The evolution of this legend reached its culmination, at the latest, with the establishment of the present version of the Qu'ran. It is conceivable that variations between the Greek and Syriac renditions of the tale were overshadowed by the narrative presented in the Qu'ran.²¹ Furthermore, Islamic sources, including the Qu'ran and Muslim tradition, mention individuals known as informers to Muhammad, with Kusa Ibn Sa'id being among them. On the other hand, if the Syriac text was translated from Greek, it is not known.²² It is strongly possible that the *mushriks*²³ of Mecca might have learned the Ashab al-Kahf myth from the Syrians, with whom they were in close touch.²⁴

The story, which has several variants in Christianity, Islam, and public narratives, changes according to the narrative.²⁵ Some of the divergent elements: if they were seven or eight people, whether they had a dog, for how many years they stayed in the cave, for how many years they lived after they woke up, and other details.

Jordan (*Al-Rajib*), in "EURAS Journal of Social Sciences", Volume 3 Issue 1, April 2023, p. 245-260.

¹⁸ Sebastian Brock, D. Taylor, *The Hidden Pearl, The Ancient Aramaic Heritage I*, Italy, Trans World Film, 2006, p.157.

¹⁹ Tony Devaney Morinelli (tr.), *The Seven Sleepers of Ephesus*, Erişim Tarihi, 20.05.2023.

²⁰ Jul. vol. vi. p. 375 ff., and Ignazio Guidi, *Testi Orientali Inediti sopra i Sette Dormienti di Efeso*, Atti de Accademia de' Lincei, ser. 3, torn. xii. The Greek Acts are in Migne, Patr. Grec. vol. cxv. p. 428. A Syriac version similar to our author's is in Add. MS. 14,641. *The Syriac Chronicle Known as that of Zachariah of Mitylene*, translated Into English By F. J. Hamilton, D.D.\And E. W. Brooks, M.A, Methuen & Co. 36 Essex Street, W.C London, 1899.

²¹ Bartłomiej Grysa, *The Legend of the Seven Sleepers of Ephesus in Syriac and Arab sources- a comparative study*.

²² More deatails: Gwendolyn Collaco, *With Sleep Comes a Fusion of Worlds: The Seven Sleepers of Ephesus Through Formation and Transformation*, Senior Capstone Projects. Paper 3, 2011.

²³ *Mushrik*: polytheist.

²⁴ Necati Demir, *The Historical Process That Arpasus and Arabisos Transforming Into Afşin With Background Of Eshab-ı Khef*, 2012, pp. 101-111. (Editors: Seydihan Küçükdağlı, Serdar Yakar), International Symposium On Religious Tourism and Eshab-ı Khef' 20-22 September 2012 Kahramanmaraş.

²⁵ For detailed information see Grysa, *The Legend...*

In my Ph. D. dissertation titled *Narratives of Mardin Syriacs in the Context of Sacred Space* I conducted fieldwork on the miracles attributed to saints. Among the saints investigated in my research there is Mor Abhay. During this period, I focused on exploring the relationship between Mor Abhay and the Seven Sleepers. The data utilized in my study were drawn from a compilation of miracles attributed to Mor Abhay, who purportedly witnessed the miracle of the Seven Sleepers. Also, as we know, the hagiographical narratives are important for Syriac literature and tradition. It is accepted that saints and martyrs are commemorated on the date of their death rather than their birthdays. The believers built monasteries and churches for saints and martyrs. The Church writes their names on the calendar. Thus, believers remember and memorize their good manners.²⁶

Various versions of the story of the Seven Sleepers exist in Greek, Syriac, Coptic, and Georgian.²⁷

Which resources did Priest Gabriel Akyüz utilize regarding the Seven Sleepers?

1. Great Poet Episkopos Jacob of Serugh (*Suruçlu büyük Şair Episkopos Mor Yakup*) (b. 450 – d. 521).
2. Ahisnoyo Mor Philoxynos from Menbec (b. second half of the 5th century - d. 523). (*Menbecli Mor Filüksinos/Ahisnoyo-Mor Filüksinos*).
3. Logician Zekariye/ Zğaryo Mlilo (b. 465 – d. 536) (*Zğaryo Mlilo/Mantikçi-Zekariye*)
4. The Assyrian Mor Yuhanon (d. 507 -d. 587), Ephesus Bishop from Egil origin. (*Eğil kökenli Efes Episkoposu Süryani Mor Yuhanon*).
5. *The Chronicle* (8th Century) written by an unknown priest from Zuqnîn between 313-485 AD. (*Zuqnînli adı meçhul bir rahibin 313-485 yılları arasında yazdığı Vakayiname*).
6. Patriarch and Historian Mihoyel Rabo (b.1126 - d.1199). (*Patrik ve Tarihçi Mihoyel Rabo*).
7. Church and world history book (12th century) written by an unknown Syriac priest from Urfa. (*Urfalı adı meçhul Süryani bir rahibin yazdığı*

²⁶ Akyüz, *The Great awakening...*

²⁷ Encyclopaedia Britannica, (2008). "Seven Sleepers of Ephesus", Encyclopædia Britannica Online: <http://search.eb.com/eb/article-9066942>, Date of Access: 12.05.2012.

kilise ve dünya tarih kitabı).

8. Mor Ğrigoriyos from Malatya Yuhanon Bar Ebroyo/Abul Farac, *Church History* written by Mafiryani (b.1226 - d. 1286). (*Malatyalı Mor Ğriğoriyos Yuhanon Bar Ebroyo/Abul Farac, Doğu- Mafiryani'nın (d.1226 - ö. 1286) yazdığı Kilise Tarihi*)

9. *Life Story of Mor Abhay*.

Priest Gabriel Akyüz primarily relied on two key resources to elucidate the narrative of the Seven Sleepers. The first resource is *Seven Children Sleeping in Ephesus in the Life Story of Mor Abhay* from the Beth-Hamoro Monastery in the Northwest of Mardin, found within the Syriac manuscript titled *Life Stories of the Saints*.²⁸

The sources attributed to the legend of the Seven Sleepers include the *Legenda Aurea* by Jacobus di Voragine (1230-1298) and the Qu'ran, specifically in its chapter *The Cave*. This narrative is widely manifested in Christian and Muslim Pardons and Pilgrimages across Europe and the Muslim world. It recounts the story of seven young Christian men who, during the reign of Emperor Decius (about 249-251 AD), refused to worship him as a self-proclaimed deity and sought refuge inside a cave in Ephesus to escape persecution for their Christian beliefs. According to the narrative, they fell into a deep sleep and remained so for 309 years, awakening as witnesses to the concept of Resurrection. The legend, as ritualized in both Christianity and Islam, encapsulates a common thematic thread shared by both faiths.²⁹

Yemliho³⁰ and his friends

The narrative expounded by Hori Gabriel Akyüz concerning the Seven Sleepers can be succinctly encapsulated as follows: the incident involving Yemliho and his friends, narratives referred to as Ashab al-Kahf in Arabic, can be articulated as follows (as is commonly understood).

In the the Syriac resources, it took place in Ephesus. During the Roman Empire Christian people were facing great suppression, tyranny, and massacres. The spread of the Christianity was a great threat for Rome.

²⁸ The Life Stories of 11 Saints, Syriac Manuscript, No: 275, comprising 70 pages. The second resource is an inscription authored by an unidentified Assyrian priest from Urfa (B. - D. 1234), (Syriac, Print, 2004, Mor Efremon Monastery, Netherlands, p: 110. akt Akyüz, 2021, p. 105.

²⁹ Herbert W. Mason, *The Seven Sleepers of Ephesus*, in "Existenz" 8/1, 2013, p. 31-66.

³⁰ It is used in the text as Yemliho based on the Syriac pronunciation.

Seven friends who converted to Christianity had to escape from Ephesus because of their great fear. They sheltered in a cave, which was on a mountain at high altitude. As darkness fell, they started praying: "Oh God, give us a solution and end this case". Eventually, God took their souls so that they could set an example for people in the future and prove resurrection after death. And they drifted into a sleep that lasted for years. The owner of the cave dreamt: In your cave, you have seven people who escaped from Decius' tyranny and died. Go into the cave, write these dates on a metal plate, and leave it with them. Close the cave and do not touch them. The owner went to the cave to verify his dream; upon inspection, he found that his dream had indeed come to fruition. There were seven youths in the cave, lying dead on the floor. He wrote the dates and explanation that stated their escape from Decius' tyranny on the metal plate, left the plate with them, closed the cave, and went back to his village. After that in Theodosius' time they were resurrected. The epithet ascribed to Theodosius encompasses his reputation as an emperor characterized by his devout and fervent adherence to the tenets of Christianity. During his reign, there was unrest in the world of Christianity. Christians divided into two groups because of the resurrection issue. Some people claimed that there was no such thing as resurrection; people vanish like grass after they die. As the emperor did not know how to solve this problem, and what to do about it, he was very upset. So, he did not leave his palace for days.

Regarding the relationship between Theodosius and Mor Abhay, it is noteworthy that Mor Abhay held a significant position as Theodosius' special metropolitan, hailing from Mardin and of Syriac descent. Curious about their emperor's concerns, the people sought counsel from Mor Abhay, prompting discussions on potential solutions to the predicament. Meanwhile, as they deliberated, news of the resurrection of the seven youths reached the emperor. According to the narrative, amidst hunger and trepidation, the youths found themselves trapped as the cave began to close around them, prompting their contemplation on the identity of the one who sealed the cave. Returning to the narrative of the Seven Sleepers; They decided to send Yemliho to the city to buy some bread. In this way, they could hear what rumors there were about them within the city's environs. Yemliho saw a big cross at the entrance of the city and was surprised. When he saw the crosses all over the city that he had to leave because of his beliefs, he thought he was dreaming. He entered the city and saw that even the clothing of the people had been changed. Everyone talked in

Jesus Christ's name, and he understood them because the language was not altered. He entered a bakery to buy bread. When the baker saw the old money, he was really surprised and asked Yemliho if he had found a treasure. Yemliho replied,

I'm a poor man; I did not find any treasure either. Let me explain the case. I took the money from here yesterday. My other six friends are waiting for me in the cave. We escaped from the city because we were afraid of Decius. And today, there are crosses everywhere. I do not know what happened in this city; I am as surprised as you.

Nobody could make sense of what he said. The baker thought that if anything this man said was real, then a great miracle was happening in the city. The baker and his friends told this miraculous event to the metropolitan of Ephesus. They brought Yemliho to the church and talked to him with the metropolitan and his metropolitan friend. They could not believe in what he said, so they went to the cave to see the miracles of God and to confirm the event's trueness. A great council with Mor Abhay and the Emperor went to the cave. When they entered, they saw that what Yemliho told them was true; they saw the metal plate and read it. So they could verify the situation. The emperor was really happy about what happened. The miracle spread all over the empire. Thus, the issue of resurrection among Christians was solved. When the time between Decius and Theodosius' lifetimes is calculated, they slept for about 200 years and died after everyone saw them. In all sources discussing the Seven Sleepers, there is no definitive information regarding the duration of their slumber. They are reported to have entered a miraculous sleep while attempting to protect themselves from being compelled to practice pagan religious activities³¹ and to evade the persecution of Decius.³² It is stated that this sleep lasted for 187 years.³³ Accounts vary, however, with durations of 307, 158, 197, and 353 years also being mentioned.³⁴ During the reign of the Eastern Roman (Byzantine) Emperor Theodosius II (AD 408-450), the

³¹ Encyclopaedia Britannica (2008). "Seven Sleepers of Ephesus", Encyclopædia Britannica Online: <http://search.eb.com/eb/article-9066942>, Date of Access: 12.05.2012.

³² Drabble, M. (ed.), (2000). "Seven Sleepers of Ephesus", *The Oxford Companion to English Literature*, Oxford University Press. Online: <http://www.oxfordreference.com/views/ENTRY.html?subview=Main&entry=t113.e685>, Date of Access: 14.04.2012.

³³ Ibidem.

³⁴ Ersöz, *Ashâb-ı Kehf...* pp. 465-467.

entrance to the cave was reopened, awakening the sleepers.³⁵ Additionally, there is a version where the entrance was destroyed by laborers hired by a shepherd intending to convert the cave into a barn.³⁶ In the subsequent part of the narrative, Yemliho and his friends died in a short time. The emperor wanted to make golden coffins for them in memory of this miracle. But he dreamed about Yemliho and his friends. They told him, "Do not bury us in golden coffins! It will be unfair. We are made of earth, and we want to become the earth. Just close the cave over us. Leave us alone in there." And so, the seven sleepers got their wish. The Emperor's private metropolitan, Mor Abhay, who saw Yemliho and his friends, protected the saints' bones, and he was originally from Mardin. He dreamt about this situation on the day that the emperor was going to die. Thus, he left Istanbul with his two friends and went to Adıyaman in Southern Turkey. He passed Euphrates and built himself a monastery known as Mor Abhay Monastery. On the night of the king's death, Mor Abhay, together with his disciple Andreos, left Constantinople and travelled to Jerusalem. They did not take any wealth/money or clothes from the riches of the royal treasures. They took only five thousand five hundred (5500) bones of the saints. The king had collected 38,000 bones of saints and martyrs and tested them with fire to know whether they were saints or not. Eight thousand (8,000) bones that were not damaged by the fire, came out intact. From Jerusalem they travelled to Beroa/Aleppo and from there to Manbaj. From there they came to the area of the city of Shamishat, which was built on the banks of the Euphrates River. They entered a tunnel in an ancient rock. There Mor Abhay built a monastery and made a special place for the bones of the saints he took with him. Although this monastery was known as the Monastery of Mor Abhay, it was also known as the 'Monastery of the Stairs' because they went up and down the stairs to the monastery. Moreover, Theodosius built a church in Adıyaman for the bones of 5000 saints and appointed Mor Abhay to protect these bones. Mor Abhay lived in this monastery until the end of his life and thus his name is always remembered in Syriac ceremonies.

Seven Sleepers in Syriac Liturgy

The Seven Sleepers are recognised as saints by Christians and commemorative ruins and religious services are held for them in the

³⁵ Encyclopaedia Britannica (2008) "Seven Sleepers of Ephesus", Encyclopædia Britannica Online: <http://search.eb.com/eb/article-9066942>, Date of Access: 12.05.2012.

³⁶ And, *Ottoman -Islamic...*

Orthodox Church as well as in the Latin Catholic Church.³⁷ The importance of the Seven Sleepers narrative is evident in the realm of knowledge, particularly in the domain of Syriac Christians. The telling of stories and the recitation of psalms in the context of religious observances lend significance to this narrative. The assertions of the Metropolitan of Diyarbakır-Mardin, Saliba Ozmen, who emphasises that the psalm dedicated to the narrative of Yemliho and his friends occupies an important place among the liturgical psalms of the Church, lead to a significant distinction. This important psalm is attributed to Mor Jacob and it follows a poetic structure which is characterised by a septet syllabic meter.

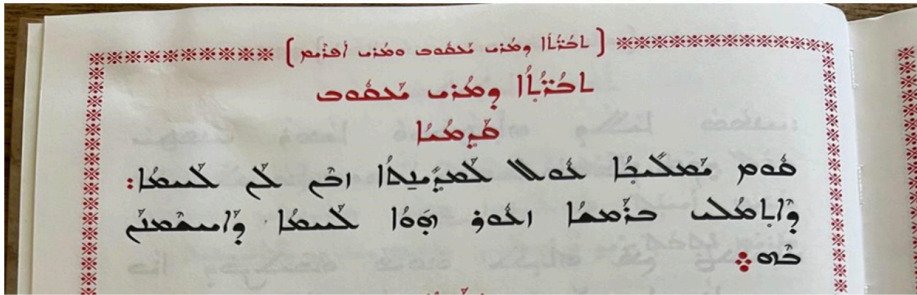


Photo 1: Sükrü Aktaş from the Mor Gabriel monastery sings this Syriac psalm, which is about the Seven Sleepers. This psalm was translated by Yuhannun Vergili.

“Yemliho, wake up! Get into the city/ Buy us bread.
As last day’s supper was less” (Vergili, 2015)

³⁷ Ahmet Aras, *The Legend of The Seven Sleepers in The Anatolian Culture*, International Symposium On Religious Tourism and Eshab-ı Khef, 20 - 22 September 2012, Kahramanmaraş, p. 145-155.

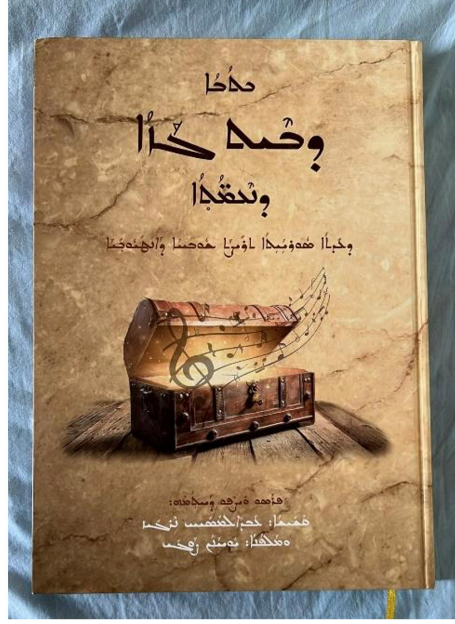


Photo 2: Furthermore, in the Bethgazo³⁸ music makam book, Yemliho and his companions are mentioned in the first eight verses of the hymn of Mor Jacob.

In his hymn to the Seven Sleepers, St. Jacob of Serugh initially records that the two wise men who witnessed the event, wrote down what happened on lead plates, and later writes that the emperor Theodosius, who had come to Ephesus upon invitation, took the plate and began to read it.³⁹

Sebastian Brock prefers to use the terms ‘poem, sermon, poetic sermon, a kind of hymn or liturgical sermon (*mêmrâ*)’ to emphasise the different qualities of the text of Mor Jacob of Serugh. In this case, the use of the terms ‘poem’ or ‘monumental memra’ makes sense.

Conclusion

In the multicultural and multireligious context of Mardin, there are no direct traces of the Seven Sleepers narrative. However, during my thesis consultations with Gabriel Akyüz, a Syriac narrative emerged, both in oral

³⁸ Published by Priest Abdülmesih Nergiz and Malfono Yuhanun Savcı (2022), p.197.

³⁹ Sebastian Brock, *The Place of Syriac Literature among the Middle Eastern Literatures*, in “Religious, Cultural and News Magazine”, Mardin, Kurkmo Mardin Syriac Orthodox Metropolis of Mardin, 2007, 6, 3448.

accounts and written sources, featuring Mor Abhay, a saint of significant importance in Syriac tradition. Through this study I have explored the relationship between the Seven Sleepers and the Syriac Mor Abhay of Mardin. This story is important in Syriac tradition and belief, as it is in almost all religions. According to Hanna Dolabani's book, *History of Mardin*, in addition to his duty of protecting the bones of saints and 40 martyrs, Mor Abhay was a saint who witnessed the miracle of the Seven Sleepers, and it is also significant that Mor Abhay built a monastery on the relics of saints, which is important in the Christian tradition. For this reason, the narrative of the Seven Sleepers is important in Christian and Islamic sources alongside public narratives.

As a result, this narrative, which occupies a significant place in the history of religions, intersects with Mor Abhay, one of the saints who holds an important position in the Syriac saint tradition. Unlike other accounts focusing solely on the narrative of the Seven Sleepers, this study has aimed to highlight Syriac Mor Abhay as one of the witnesses to the miracle of the seven individuals who slept in a cave for centuries and then awoke. Miracles and testimonies, which are pivotal in Christian tradition, play a crucial role in the dissemination of religious beliefs. After witnessing this miracle, Mor Abhay's act of gathering the holy and miraculous relics of saints, proving their authenticity, and subsequently traveling to Adiyaman to build a monastery, further underscores his significance.

In short, Mor Abhay not only bore witness to a miracle but also performed miracles himself, solidifying his prominent place as a saint in Syriac liturgy. This study emphasizes the intertwining of a universally significant religious narrative with the unique contributions of Mor Abhay, shedding light on his enduring role in Syriac tradition and belief systems.

Agiografia e culto dei Sette Dormienti. Storicità e processi di mitologizzazione dell'agiostoria efesina nel Mediterraneo [Agiography and cult of the Seven Sleepers. Historicity and mythologization processes of the Ephesian agiographic tale in the Mediterranean], preface by Bartolomeo Pirone, afterword by Giancarlo Rinaldi, Bologna, Edizioni del Gruppo di Ricerca Arabo-Cristiana (Edizioni Patrimonio Culturale Arabo Cristiano vol. 30 / studi), 2023, 246 pp. ISBN: 9791280091154.

Jessica Venturini

This monograph, authored by the Italian cultural and social anthropologist Anna Tozzi di Marco, deals with the historicity and the mythologising processes of the legend of the Seven Sleepers of Ephesus. The historical and cultural context is the medieval space of the ancient Levant, the Near East, and the Mediterranean Region. The monograph represents a contribution to interdisciplinarity ranging from the religious studies to the history, hagiology, archaeology and art history. It is the first volume of a 2 books project where the second one, in the author's words, will be centred on the cultic places of the Seven Sleepers and rituals of devotion in current Christianity and Islam from an ethnographic perspective.

The nine chapters with three appendices of the text are preceded by a foreword by the current GRAC president, Prof. Bartolomeo Pirone, and followed by the afterword of Prof. Giancarlo Rinaldi, historian of the Christianity at the University of Naples, L'Orientale. In the first chapter, the reader is introduced to the historical and cultural context of the city of Ephesus, where the legend originated, as well as the surrounding region.

The second chapter deals with the Ephesian religious milieu going back to the pagan context. In the third chapter the author gives an account of the historical facts and the context related to the birth of the Ephesian legend, analysing not only the written sources but also the archaeological evidences, the epigraphic and the iconographic documents. In the fourth chapter she reconstructs the creation of the Seven Sleepers' myth and its hagiographic construction. The fifth chapter deals with various similar past stories from ancient Greece, Sardinia, and Hellenistic Judaism which may have influenced the legend of the Seven Sleepers. In the subsequent chapters Anna Tozzi di Marco focuses on the Christian hagiography, including the Christian Arabic texts. She gives an account of the spread of the legend in

the Latin West and in the Eastern provinces of Roman Empire. In particular, the sixth chapter begins with the translation attributed to Gregory of Tours (6th c.), then it examines the versions of Paulus Diaconus (8th c.), Photius (9th c.), and James de Voragine (13th c.).

The seventh chapter concerns the legend preserved in Coptic, Syriac and Armenian literatures, underlining their differences. In the eighth chapter the author faces the versions of the legend in Arab Christianity and those of Ethiopian milieu. The ninth chapter copes with the transmission of the legend from the Christian Syriac and Arabic renderings to the Arabic Muslim story of the Companions of the cave (*Ashab al-kahf*), which is told in the holy book of Koran. The following three appendices are important contributions to the state of the art in the studies about the Seven Sleepers legend: the first appendix concerns with the pictorial and sculptural evidences of the subject in Italy; the second one traces the itinerary of the legend in literature (fiction, poetry), theatre and music; in the third appendix the author, the Italian musicologist Fabrizio Florian, deals with Carl Loewe's work, analysing his oratorio *Die sieben Schläfer*.

Finally the monograph is enriched with a number of photographs and is supplemented by a bibliography and a name index.

A NEW ERA IN COUNTER-TERRORISM AND TÜRKİYE'S REGIONAL INFLUENCE THROUGH THE LENS OF CONSTRUCTIVISM

Tuğba Koç¹

Abstract

This paper aims at analyzing the importance of the new ways of counter-terrorism efforts of Türkiye in sustaining regional and international security in light of constructivism. In recent years, Türkiye has embarked on a new era, marked by an assertive counter-terrorism approach and expanding regional influence. Once primarily a NATO ally focused on domestic security, Türkiye now employs a proactive strategy that stretches across borders, extending its impact in the Middle East, North Africa and the Eastern Mediterranean. The Turkish government has reshaped its foreign policy and military strategies, transitioning from a reactive to a forward-leaning stance aimed at preemptively addressing threats and asserting its role as a key regional power.

Key Words: *Türkiye, counter-terrorism, UAVs, constructivism*

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Introduction

Türkiye has been pursuing an aggressive cross-border military campaign in Syria and Iraq since 2010, for example, while making considerable progress in the battle against terrorism with its operations within its borders. Terrorist groups looking for ways into the Mediterranean Sea from the south of the country are not only targeted by the use of military action, but their ability to move is also severely restricted through effective intelligence cooperation.

Türkiye's counter-terrorism efforts significantly contribute to international security by targeting transnational terrorist organizations and stabilizing conflict-prone regions. Situated at a strategic intersection between Europe and the Middle East, Türkiye serves as a frontline defense against groups like ISIS and the PKK, both of which operate across borders and pose global threats. Through intelligence sharing, cross-border operations and cooperation with NATO and other international allies, Türkiye helps to curb terrorist movements, weapons smuggling and extremist recruitment networks that could otherwise expand across continents. Moreover, Türkiye's advanced surveillance and precision strike capabilities, particularly its use of drones, allow it to neutralize threats with minimal collateral damage, enhancing security not only within its borders but also in neighboring countries like Syria and Iraq. By stabilizing these regions, Türkiye plays a crucial role in reducing the flow of refugees and foreign fighters, thus supporting broader efforts to maintain peace and security on an international scale.

The efforts of Türkiye in counter-terrorism can be analyzed through a constructivist perspective. Constructivism, which focuses on the importance of identity, norms and social constructs helps to explain how Türkiye's unique positioning-as a secular, predominantly Muslim country situated between Europe and the Middle East- affects its approach to terrorism. Constructivists would argue that Türkiye's anti-terrorism stance is not only about national security but also shaping its identity on the global stage as a moderate, responsible actor within the Muslim world. Türkiye's actions against Islamist extremists and Kurdish insurgent groups reflect its effort to establish a distinct identity that rejects terrorism and promotes regional stability. This identity-building can affect its relations with both Western allies and Muslim-majority nations, positioning Türkiye as a bridge and a balancing power in regional and global anti-terrorism dialogues.

Counterterrorism strategies around the world have evolved significantly over the years, with countries constantly adapting to new threats and challenges. Türkiye, in particular, has a rich history of dealing with terrorism and has recently shifted towards incorporating technological solutions into its counterterrorism efforts. One key development in this shift has been the implementation of Unmanned Aerial Vehicles (UAVs) as a crucial component in Türkiye's counterterrorism strategies. Türkiye has significantly invested in developing latest drone technology, exemplified by the Baykar and important national defense industry corporations in the country. This push towards domestic production allows Türkiye greater self-reliance and control over its military technology, reducing dependency on foreign suppliers. Turkish drones have been operationally successful in various countries such as Syria, Libya and during Nagorno-Karabakh conflict between Azerbaijan and Armenia. Their effectiveness in surveillance, reconnaissance and targeted strikes has been widely recognized and has reshaped battlefield tactics.

In the contemporary global security landscape, Türkiye occupies a unique and increasingly critical position due to its strategic location, historical legacy, and multifaceted foreign policy. Bridging Europe, Asia, and the Middle East, Türkiye serves as a geopolitical pivot state, influencing regional security dynamics, energy routes, and global trade corridors. Its active involvement in NATO, complex relationships with major powers like the United States and Russia, and evolving role in regional conflicts highlight its significance in international security. Türkiye's security challenges are multifaceted, ranging from domestic terrorism and ethnic separatism to regional conflicts and geopolitical rivalries. Internally, Türkiye faces threats from groups like the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) and the Gülenist Terror Group (FETO), both classified as terrorist organizations by the Turkish government. Externally, Türkiye grapples with the implications of the Syrian conflict, tensions with Greece and Cyprus over maritime disputes, and the destabilizing impact of refugee flows.

Unlike traditional realist or liberal approaches that focus solely on material power or institutional cooperation, constructivism considers how Türkiye's historical legacy, cultural identity and evolving domestic narratives influence its international actions and alliances. Türkiye has adopted a more assertive foreign policy in recent years, as evidenced by its

warming ties to Russia, involvement with less developed nations in Asia and Africa, and rapprochement with Iran. In the struggle for control of the region's future, it is caught between the United States and Russia and is fighting other regional powers in the Middle East at the same time.¹ This new approach gave too much importance on the intelligence development besides the new strategy of the country's fight against terrorism. Also, Türkiye's cross-border military actions underscore its proactive stance on national security and reflect its willingness to use military force to protect its interests and influence regional dynamics. These operations play a crucial role in shaping Türkiye's foreign relations.

The country's cross-border military operations in Iraq and Syria are pivotal elements of its national security strategy and foreign policy. These operations, primarily targeting the PKK and ISIS aim to mitigate threats from these groups and prevent the establishment of hostile territories along Türkiye's borders. As a result of these operations, Türkiye have enhanced a control over key strategic areas along its borders, significantly reducing terrorist attacks and infiltration and the country have complicated relationships with global powers, including tensions with the United States and European nations, particularly over the issue of Kurdish groups allied with Western forces in the fight against ISIS. Türkiye's military actions in Iraq and Syria are critical to its broader security and regional influence strategy. While effective in curtailing immediate threats, these operations also contribute to the intricate dynamics of regional stability and pose ongoing diplomatic challenges. These miscellaneous operations highlight Türkiye's commitment to securing its borders and influencing the geopolitical landscape of the Middle East.

Throughout the twentieth century, there was very little disagreement among Turkey's academics, decision-makers, and media regarding the importance of the country's geographic location. Turkey's national identity has always been strongly influenced by its physical topography, as has its educational system, which places a strong focus on a sense of patriotism toward the Turkish motherland.² As a country with such a strategic geopolitical position, Türkiye has been actively engaged in counterterrorism efforts

¹ Meltem M. Baç, *Turkey's Grand Strategy in the Context of Global and Regional Challenges*, in "Perceptions", vol. XXV, N. 2, p. 178.

² Çağdaş Üngör, *A 'bridge' pushed to the periphery? Turkey's geopolitical significance in the Asia-Pacific century*, in "Turkish Studies", vol. XXVI, N. 1, p. 28.

to address the persistent threat posed by various terrorist organizations operating within its borders. The country has implemented a range of strategies to combat terrorism, including military operations, intelligence gathering, law enforcement measures, and international cooperation. These efforts are crucial in safeguarding national security, maintaining stability, and protecting citizens from the impact of terrorist activities. One significant aspect of Türkiye's counterterrorism approach is its focus on countering violent extremism (CVE). As a country who suffered more than many countries, a strong strategy is very important for stability. Moreover, Türkiye has taken steps to enhance its legal framework for prosecuting terrorist activities and disrupting terrorist networks. The country has implemented counterterrorism legislation to strengthen its ability to investigate, prosecute, and prevent acts of terrorism. These legal measures are essential in holding terrorists accountable for their actions and deterring future attacks.

Türkiye's alliances and cooperative measures, such as its role in NATO and intelligence-sharing with regional and Western partners, reflect the constructivist idea that international cooperation is guided by shared norms and values. Türkiye's counter-terrorism strategy aligns with a collective goal of combating terrorism, reinforcing the norm of mutual security in its alliances. These partnerships are not only about practical cooperation but also about shared values in fighting global terrorism and upholding regional peace. Actually, Türkiye's commitment to counter-terrorism also reflects its intention to distance itself from extremist ideologies and establish a clear, moderate identity in the Muslim world. By fighting groups that threaten not only national security but also regional stability, Türkiye cultivates an image of moderation and resilience. This stance is intended to counteract narratives of extremism and demonstrate a constructive role within the Muslim world and broader international community.

Counter-Terrorism Strategy

Due to the risks posed by several terrorist organizations operating both inside and outside of its borders, Türkiye has been heavily involved in counterterrorism activities. The Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK), which Türkiye, the US, and the EU have all labeled as a terrorist group, has been one of the main targets. Since the 1980s, the PKK has waged an armed insurgency against the Turkish government in an effort to secure more

autonomy for the Kurdish community in southeast Türkiye.³ Since May 2019, the Turkish army launched a series of military operations against the PKK in Northern Iraq, called Pençe Hareketi (Operation Claw). Beyond airstrikes, these missions also utilize helicopters, drones, artillery pieces and special forces on the ground.⁴ Beyond immediate security concerns, these operations reflect Türkiye's broader strategic objectives to influence the political outcomes in Syria and Iraq, ensuring that any power structures that emerge are favorable to Turkish interests and do not threaten its security.

In fact, Türkiye's counter-terrorism efforts have a complex history that spans several decades, marked by various challenges and shifts in strategy. In the 1970s and 1980s, Türkiye faced significant internal security challenges, primarily due to political instability and violence. The most notable threats came from far-left and far-right political groups, which often engaged in street battles, bombings and assassinations. PKK terrorist organization, founded in 1984, began an armed insurgency against the Turkish state in 1984, seeking an independent Kurdish state or greater autonomy within Türkiye. The conflict led to a prolonged and violent struggle, which has been the primary focus of Türkiye's counter-terrorism policy. Initially, Türkiye's response to terrorism, especially in the southeast, was heavily militarized. The 1980s and 1990s saw numerous states of emergency, military operations and policies aimed at disrupting terrorist activities, often at significant human rights costs. The 2000s, however, brought new dimensions to Türkiye's counter-terrorism challenges, including the rise of radical Islamist terrorism. Al-Qaeda's presence manifested in major attacks, such as 2003 Istanbul bombings. Later, the rise of ISIS added to the complex security landscape, especially following the Syrian Civil War. Actually, Türkiye's counter-terrorism landscape is shaped by its geographic location, diverse internal dynamics and external threats. Türkiye's geographical location has had a profound impact on its counter-terrorism efforts. Situated at the crossroads of Europe and Asia and bordering eight countries, Türkiye occupies a strategically significant position that has influenced its security policies and challenges. Türkiye's location makes it a pivotal route for migration and trade which has necessitated a robust and

³ Michael M. Gunter, *The Kurds: A Modern History*, Princeton University Press, 2016.

⁴ Jean Marcou, *Türkiye's military engagement in Northern Iraq, a never-ending story*, in "French Research Centre on Iraq (CFRI)", February 2022.

proactive approach to counter-terrorism, as Türkiye must guard against threats from multiple fronts. In addition, Türkiye shares borders with Iraq and Syria, two countries that have experienced significant conflict and instability due to the presence of terrorist groups such as ISIS and other militant organizations. As a result, the strategic geographical location is not just a backdrop but a central factor in shaping its counter-terrorism strategy. It has necessitated a multidimensional approach that includes military, diplomatic and legal strategies to address both external threats and internal vulnerabilities. “Therefore, Turkey has always been concerned about its territorial integrity and national security because of its perception of external threats.”⁵

Counterterrorism is one of Turkey's main foreign policy objectives. Turkey has been fighting terrorism for many years. Terrorist organizations that operate under the cover of religion include the ISIS, the leftist-extremist terrorist group DHKP-C, the ethnic separatist PKK, and Armenian terrorist organizations like ASALA and "Revolutionary Organization 17 November or 17N."⁶ In the process of time, Türkiye has strengthened its anti-terrorism laws, although there has been international criticism. By enhancing intelligence capabilities and conducting domestic and cross-border military operations against terrorist groups, Türkiye efforts to prevent radicalization near its borders and neighbor countries. In other words, Türkiye’s approach to counter-terrorism has evolved significantly over the years, transitioning from a predominantly military response to a more holistic strategy that includes legislative, social and international dimensions. In this respect, the success of the foreign policy and the intelligence operations made Türkiye an important ally and actor for the neighbor countries and the international community.

Turkey’s proactive stance against groups like ISIS and the PKK reflects its commitment not only to national security but also to regional stability, reinforcing its image as a responsible actor. By actively engaging in counter-terrorism, Turkey seeks to project a narrative of moderation, rejecting extremist ideologies and demonstrating leadership in maintaining peace in the region. Its partnerships with NATO and collaboration with

⁵ Cenap Çakmak, *Turkish-Syrian relations in the wake of the Syrian conflict: back to securitization?*, in “Cambridge Review of International Affairs”, vol. XXIX, N. 2, 2016, p. 695.

⁶ Bilgay Duman, *Turkey’s Fight Against Terrorism and The Role of The Kurds*, in “ORSAM Review of Regional Affairs”, N. 53, October 2016, p. 1.

international allies further reflect a commitment to shared security norms. Thus, constructivism shows that Turkey's counter-terrorism strategy is shaped by both its security needs and a desire to influence its role and identity within the international community.

RE-DESIGNED SECURITY POLICIES

“For a long time in its Republican history, Turkey did not identify itself as a Middle Eastern actor; rather, it aimed to be a part of the Western state system. Even when Turkey has accepted its Middle Eastern identity, such acceptance has always occurred in the context of defining Turkey as having multiple identities”⁷ Through constructivism, one can understand that Türkiye's counter-terrorism efforts are not only about neutralizing threats but also about influencing regional perceptions. Türkiye's actions communicate its rejection of terrorism and a commitment to regional security, which reinforces its desired role as a leading Middle Eastern actor committed to both development and peace. Since it first initiated efforts to combat terrorism in the 1970s, Türkiye has experienced a number of terrorist attacks both domestically and abroad. This process has had a significant impact on determining Türkiye's regional and international relationships as well as her national security strategies. In Türkiye's history of counterterrorism, the battle against the PKK has played a crucial role. The group launched an armed uprising in 1984, inciting fierce fighting in Türkiye's southeast regions and rural areas. The PKK's terrorist actions have given harm to both Türkiye and neighboring countries such as Iraq, Syria, and Iran. Since the early 2010s, DAESH, which “emerged” in the Middle East, has posed a new threat. DAESH's terrorist attacks in Türkiye prompted a reconsideration of border security as well as interior security policy. Türkiye attacked DAESH with international support, staging cross-border military operations in Syria and Iraq. The Turkish military industry and its excellent intelligence infrastructure probably made the most significant contributions to this process.

As stated above, the most enduring and significant terrorism-related challenge for Türkiye has been its conflict with the PKK terrorist organization. This terrorist group which is designated as a terrorist group by Türkiye, the United States, EU and some other countries initiated an armed struggle against the Turkish state in 1984, primarily advocating

⁷ Ayşegül Sever & Gonca O. Gök, *The UN factor in the “regional power role” and the Turkish case in the 2000s*, in “Cambridge Review of International Affairs”, vol. XXIX, N. 3, p. 1150.

for Kurdish autonomy and rights. The conflict has resulted in tens of thousands of deaths and has seen various phases of intensified violence and attempts at peace negotiations, particularly the failed peace process in the early 2010s. In addition to PKK, Türkiye has faced threats from jihadist groups, particularly following the onset of the Syrian Civil War. Türkiye's proximity to Syria and Iraq made it a significant route for foreign terrorists joining ISIS and in return Türkiye has suffered multiple deadly attacks attributed to ISIS. The country has had to balance its domestic security needs with its role in international efforts against ISIS, leading to extensive military and security operations both within and outside its borders. Especially the situation in Syria made things getting worse for the neighbor countries. In other words, "the conflict became increasingly internationalized, drawing in a range of regional and international actors, notably Saudi Arabia, Iran, Hizballah, the UK, the USA, Russia and Türkiye. At this time, Syria became an area of proxy competition between Saudi Arabia and Iran and between the USA and Russia."⁸

Within the counter terrorism strategy, Türkiye has implemented strong technological security measures and counter-terrorism laws to combat these varied threats. These measures include extensive surveillance, the detention of suspects and military operations. These operations were necessary in terms of regional and international security and also necessitated international cooperation. Türkiye's geographical position and transnational nature of the terrorist threats it faces mean that international cooperation is crucial. Türkiye is an active participant in NATO and collaborates with various international bodies and stabilize the region, especially concerning the conflicts in Syria and Iraq. This means that Türkiye is a strong actor in sustaining both the regional and international security. In this manner, Türkiye's fight against terrorism is complex and deeply intertwined with its domestic politics and regional dynamics.

Türkiye's location as a bridge between continents and a gatekeeper of vital maritime routes defines its strategic importance. The Bosphorus and Dardanelles Straits connect the Black Sea to the Mediterranean, offering Russia and other Black Sea nations a critical passage to global markets. Control over the straits enhances Türkiye's geopolitical leverage, especially concerning Russia and NATO members in Eastern Europe.

⁸ Simon Mabon & Stephen Royle, *The origins of ISIS*, I.B. Tauris and Co. Ltd. London, 2016.

Besides, Türkiye shares borders with Syria and Iraq, making it a frontline state in conflicts involving ISIS, the Kurdish separatist movements and other regional actors. Its location makes it a significant buffer zone for Europe against Middle Eastern instability and migration flows. As a NATO member, Türkiye provides strategic depth to the alliance's southern flank, particularly against threats from the Middle East and the Black Sea region. The country's strategic location also makes it susceptible to various regional security challenges.

The Syrian War and the rise of ISIS created spillover effects that impacted Türkiye's security. This situation necessitated a robust border security and counter-terrorism efforts. The conflict with the PKK has transcended borders, as PKK affiliated groups in Syria and Iraq continue to challenge Türkiye's security. Military operations such as Euphrates Shield and Peace Spring reflect Türkiye's efforts to counter Kurdish militant groups near its borders. In this manner, Türkiye's strategic importance has shaped its relationships with key international actors. In other words, Türkiye is a key NATO ally due to its geographical proximity to conflict zones and control of strategic assets like İncirlik Air Base. Türkiye's EU candidacy has been marred by human rights concerns but its cooperation remains vital in counter-terrorism and migration management. Energy cooperation through pipelines like TANAP also enhances Türkiye's strategic value. Türkiye and Russia share interests in regional conflicts but are often on opposing sides, such as Syria and Libya. Economic cooperation, particularly in energy underscores a pragmatic relationship despite strategic competition.

Türkiye has conducted several military operations targeting groups it classifies as terrorist organizations like PKK, YPG and ISIS. These operations contribute to international efforts to dismantle terrorist networks and prevent their resurgence. Actually, Türkiye's involvement in Syria and Iraq aims to ensure stability in its immediate neighborhood. This includes preventing the formation of entities that could threaten Türkiye's security or regional stability. On the other hand, Türkiye's involvement in Libya and its military presence in the Eastern Mediterranean influence regional geopolitics, particularly regarding energy exploration and maritime disputes. As a member of NATO, Türkiye's operations have implications for alliance security. Its strategic position is crucial in controlling access to the Middle East, the Caucasus and the Black Sea region as Türkiye serves as a buffer between Europe and Middle Eastern conflict zones,

which is essential for European security interests. Türkiye's cross-border operations reinforce its geopolitical position and assert its influence in regional politics. Türkiye also aims to secure energy resources and routes, particularly in the Eastern Mediterranean which affects global energy markets and European energy diversification strategies.

POWER BALANCING AND CONSTRUCTIVISM

Türkiye's power-balancing strategies are shaped by a mix of geopolitical needs, historical ties, and strategic pragmatism, often illustrated by its approach to alliances and regional influence. As a NATO member with strong economic ties to Europe, Türkiye balances its Western relationships while also engaging with Eastern actors like Russia and China. This strategic balancing, particularly in the Middle East, allows Türkiye to maintain leverage in regional conflicts and assert its autonomy in foreign policy. Constructivism in international relations provides a useful lens to understand Turkey's power-balancing, emphasizing how identity, historical narratives, and societal values influence its foreign policy decisions. For Turkey, balancing power is not only about responding to material threats but also about aligning with an evolving sense of national identity that values independence and regional leadership. This approach showcases how Turkey's foreign policy is a dynamic construct, shaped by ongoing reinterpretations of its role on the global stage.

Türkiye's history as a balancing power is marked by its strategic maneuvers between regional stability and assertive foreign policy initiatives, shaped largely by its unique geographical location and historical legacy as the successor to the Ottoman Empire. During the Cold War, Türkiye's strategic importance was magnified as it served as a critical NATO ally on the Soviet Union's southern flank, hosting U.S. military bases and participating in collective defense initiatives. This role enhanced its regional security profile while also embedding it deeply within Western security architectures. After the Cold War, Türkiye's foreign policy oscillated between cooperative engagements aimed at integration with European structures and assertive regional policies that often challenge established norms and alliances. Its pursuit to join the European Union exemplified its cooperative stance, whereas its military interventions in Northern Syria and disputes over maritime boundaries in the Eastern Mediterranean showcased its readiness to assert its interests unilaterally. The transition of leadership under President Erdogan marked a significant pivot in Türkiye's role as a balancing power,

with an increased focus on national sovereignty and regional influence. This period has seen Türkiye engaging more actively in its near abroad, influencing conflicts in Syria, Libya, and the Nagorno-Karabakh region, often blending military interventions with diplomatic negotiations to craft favorable outcomes. Throughout its republican history, Türkiye has consistently demonstrated its ability to leverage both its strategic location and military capabilities to influence regional dynamics, making it both a valued ally and a challenging negotiator in the international arena. This dual role continues to define Türkiye's complex position as a balancing power in global geopolitics.

The relations between Türkiye and Syria was not chaotic until the beginning of the civil war. However, ties between the two nations rapidly worsened when the Syrian government decided to employ more brutality and repression on civilians. By the end of 2011, the Syrian National Council was acknowledged by the Turkish government as the legitimate representative of the Syrian people, and the country had fully thrown its support behind the opposition in Syria.⁹ Syria is an example to define Türkiye's influence in regions of historical and strategic interest as it is deeply rooted in its rich history and geostrategic location that bridges Europe and Asia. As a successor state to the Ottoman Empire, Türkiye maintains a vested interest in the Balkans, the Middle East, and the Caucasus, leveraging historical ties and cultural connections to assert its presence and policy. In the Middle East, Türkiye's proactive foreign policy is demonstrated by its interventions in Syria and Iraq, aimed at countering terrorism and managing Kurdish movements, while also seeking to prevent any power vacuum that might threaten its borders. In the Balkans, Türkiye uses diplomatic and economic tools to foster relationships, reflecting its role as a stabilizing force and a counterbalance to Russian and European influences. In the Caucasus, Türkiye's support of Azerbaijan during the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict underscores its strategic objectives to maintain a Turkic alliance and counter Armenian interests. These activities highlight Türkiye's multifaceted approach to maintaining and expanding its regional influence, leveraging both soft power and military capabilities to protect its interests and enhance its status as a regional power.

In the last years of the international conflicts, Türkiye has taken actions as

⁹ Kemal Kirişçi, *Syrian Refugees and Turkey's Challenges: Going beyond Hospitality*, in "Brookings", May 2014, p. 1.

a proof of being a problem-solver actor in the region the country belongs. These efforts showcase Türkiye's commitment to international security, even beyond its immediate region. The membership to NATO has an importance in terms of significant instability in the Middle East and parts of Central Asia. Türkiye's involvement in regional issues, including the Syrian Civil War and conflicts involving ISIS positions it as a key player in managing regional security threats that have the potential to affect Europe and beyond.¹⁰ It is also evident that Türkiye's counterterrorism approach is crucial to regional security. Türkiye's internal security as well as the stability of the Middle East and Eurasian area in the broadest sense are strongly impacted by its geographic location, regional dynamics, and counterterrorism strategies. However, governments must work together and be resolute in order to tackle terrorism; they cannot do so alone. By thwarting cross-border terrorist threats and perturbing terrorist groups' financial and logistical networks, Türkiye's counterterrorism efforts contribute to the preservation of regional stability in this context. Furthermore, regional and international security cooperation is facilitated by Türkiye's participation in NATO and collaboration with other international alliances. It is important to analyze Türkiye's cross-border counterterrorism efforts in light of international law and human rights. Türkiye's international relations and prestige have been significantly impacted by her actions complying with international law, minimizing civilian casualties, and employing proportionate military force. Such strategies have assisted in fostering regional stability in addition to mitigating terrorist risks that directly impact Türkiye's national security.

In other words, Türkiye plays a crucial role in international security, leveraging its strategic geographic position at the crossroads of Europe and Asia and its status as a longstanding NATO member. Its substantial military capabilities and strategic bases are pivotal for NATO operations, particularly in the Middle East. Türkiye actively combats terrorism, targeting groups like ISIS and the PKK, and plays a mediator role in regional conflicts, facilitating dialogue and hosting critical energy transit routes that are vital for European energy security. Additionally, Türkiye's management of one of the world's largest refugee populations, primarily from Syria, influences migration patterns and regional stability. Its complex

¹⁰ Hakan Fidan, *Turkish Foreign Policy at the Turn of the "Century of Türkiye": Challenges, Vision, Objectives, and Transformation*, in "Insight Turkey", vol. XXV, N. 3, Summer 2023, p. 11.

diplomatic engagements, balancing relationships with countries such as the US, Russia, and EU, further underscore its strategic importance. These multifaceted roles enhance Türkiye's position as a significant player in shaping international security dynamics, making it a critical nexus in global geopolitical frameworks.

“Türkiye and the EU at the beginning of the Arab Uprising, shared the same position. Both have the idea of bringing down the Bashar al-Assad regime and replacing it with Sunni Islamist client state, which would satisfy regional and global aspirations of the US, Türkiye and the EU member states.”¹¹ It is clear that the efforts of the Turkish government maintains that its actions are essential for national security and regional stability. It is important to state here that the significance of Turkish intelligence and border security is paramount, given Türkiye's geopolitical challenges and its role as a pivotal nation bridging Europe and Middle East. Turkish intelligence agencies, particularly the National Intelligence Organization (MİT), play a vital role in counterterrorism efforts both domestically and internationally. They focus on gathering intelligence on various terrorist groups that pose a threat to Turkish security, including the PKK, ISIS and affiliated factions. Overall, Turkish intelligence and border security are critical to the nation's defense and regional stability, shaping Türkiye's domestic policies and its international standing. These aspects are essential for managing both conventional and non-conventional threats and for Türkiye's broader strategic and geopolitical goals.

TÜRKİYE AS A REGIONAL ACTOR

“From a historical perspective, how Turkey is geopolitically situated in the inter-national system is a matter of extreme importance for policy-makers.”¹² In recent years, the strategy of the country against the terrorist groups as leaving no space for them contributed to the fight against these groups both technically and psychologically. The synthesis of military operations with real-time intelligence has enabled Türkiye to conduct successful strikes against high-value targets. By monitoring suspected individuals and groups, Turkish authorities have been able to act before these threats materialize into actual attacks. These strategies, especially

¹¹ Zelal B. Kızıllkan, *Changing Policies of Türkiye and the EU to the Syrian Conflict*, in “İktisadi ve İdari Bilimler Dergisi”, vol. XXXIII, N. 1, Ocak 2019, p. 321.

¹² Murat Yeşiltaş, *The Transformation of the Geopolitical Vision in Turkish Foreign Policy*, in “Turkish Studies”, vol. XIV, N. 4, p. 661.

the success in intelligence operations, demonstrates its capacity to address and mitigate diverse and evolving security threats. As Türkiye continues to refine its strategies, the integration of advanced technology and international cooperation, the fight against the terrorist groups gains an important success. Therefore, Türkiye's role as a crucial actor in its region with a strategic geopolitical position becomes an important factor in sustaining international security.

Türkiye's strategic geopolitical position as a crossroads between Europe and Asia significantly amplifies its role on the global stage. Straddling the Bosphorus Strait, Türkiye controls the vital maritime route that connects the Black Sea to the Mediterranean, making it crucial for the energy transit corridors that serve Europe and Asia. Its proximity to the Middle East and the Caucasus places Türkiye at the epicenter of several geostrategic interests, including energy resources, migration routes, and regional conflicts. This unique positioning has historically allowed Türkiye to exert significant influence over trade and military logistics, making it a key NATO ally with substantial leverage in regional security matters. Additionally, Türkiye's ability to manage relationships with both Western powers and regional actors like Russia and Iran further underscores the importance of its geopolitical location. By balancing these relationships, Türkiye not only secures its national interests but also positions itself as a critical player in shaping regional dynamics and influencing international policies.

Actually, the presence of international actors in the region and their attempts to broaden their spheres of influence, combined with the authority crises in Syria and Iraq, create an ideal setting for the growth of terrorist groups, necessitating Turkey's presence on the ground as part of its regional policies.¹³ Because of this fact, Türkiye's diplomatic efforts are intricately linked with its military and security initiatives, reflecting a strategic approach that combines soft power with hard power to enhance its regional influence and global standing. Through its active participation in NATO and its own robust military operations, Türkiye has positioned itself as a crucial security player in volatile regions like Syria and Iraq, directly impacting the balance of power and the fight against terrorism. Its military actions, especially against ISIS and Kurdish militia groups,

¹³ Mesut H. Caşın, *Uluslararası Terörizm*, [International Terrorism], Nobel Akademik Yayıncılık, 2008.

align with its broader security goals of maintaining border integrity and regional stability. Diplomatically, Türkiye uses its military engagements as leverage in negotiations, aiming to shape outcomes in its favor, whether it's dealing with the U.S., Russia, or the European Union. For instance, its purchase of the Russian S-400 missile defense system was used as a strategic counterbalance in its relations with Western allies, demonstrating its willingness to diversify its military partnerships.

Furthermore, Türkiye's role in mediating conflicts, such as in Libya and the South Caucasus, showcases its capability to blend military involvement with diplomatic initiatives to influence peace processes and political agreements. Overall, Türkiye's integration of military prowess with diplomatic strategies helps it manage its image as a strong but pragmatic nation, capable of both defending its interests through force and engaging in meaningful diplomacy to address complex international issues. Türkiye's support in regional and international security remains crucial, given its strategic location and active role in counterterrorism and diplomatic initiatives. While its approach sometimes generates controversy, Türkiye's strategic importance and efforts to contribute to regional stability cannot be ignored. Balancing its national interests with international norms will be key to maintaining its role in supporting security.

Over the years, Türkiye has shifted from a policy of having less problems with its neighbors and sometimes interventionist stance. This is mostly because of the reason that the country is positioned as a regional powerhouse and a significant player in key areas of the regions in the broadest sense thanks to its commitment, strategic location, military prowess, diplomatic initiatives, and multilateral security cooperation. Thus, for any government in the region, losing Türkiye's support or being embroiled in a conflict would not be in their best interests. In conclusion, Türkiye's counterterrorism policy is critical to regional peace and security as well as to the country's own security. Türkiye's value for both regional stability and international security is undeniable, as it has previously shown its exceptional ability to act through its dedication to promoting constructive dialogues and contributing to resolution processes on issues like the Syrian civil war, the conflicts in the Caucasus, Cyprus, Libya and Ukraine.

Conclusion

In this new era of counterterrorism, Türkiye's approach reflects a nuanced strategy that goes beyond traditional security measures, integrating a constructivist understanding of identity and regional dynamics. Through const.

In conclusion, Türkiye's new era in counter-terrorism represents a significant shift towards a more integrated and multifaceted approach to security. As the nation grapples with evolving threats on multiple fronts, from persistent insurgencies to emerging transnational terrorist networks, the necessity for innovation in strategy is undeniable. The modernization of Türkiye's legislative framework, coupled with advancements in technological and intelligence capabilities, underscores a proactive stance in preempting and responding to terrorist activities. Here, constructivism provides a framework to understand Türkiye's counter terrorism not just as security-driven but also as a complex interplay of identity, values and the desire to shape regional norms. Through these efforts, Türkiye seeks to construct a role for itself as a responsible, stabilizing force, thereby shaping how it is perceived by both its neighbors and international allies. Moreover, the increasing emphasis on international cooperation highlights Türkiye's recognition of terrorism as a borderless threat that requires collective action. Partnerships with global and regional entities enhance not only the operational capacities but also the strategic reach of Türkiye's counter-terrorism initiatives. However, the journey is fraught with challenges, particularly in balancing stringent security measures with the preservation of civil liberties and human rights. The criticism from international bodies and internal opposition underscores the complex interplay between national security and democratic governance. As Türkiye continues to navigate these turbulent waters, the effectiveness of its counter-terrorism efforts will largely depend on its ability to adapt to the dynamic nature of global terrorism and the geopolitical shifts in its region. The new era in Turkish counter-terrorism is not just about addressing the threats of today but also about anticipating the challenges of tomorrow. This proactive and comprehensive approach may serve as a model for other nations similarly situated in volatile regions, marking a pivotal chapter in the global fight against terrorism.

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