

## The Seven Sleepers Legend as a case of universal hagiography The EuTradOr interdisciplinary research project <sup>1</sup>

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### **Introduction PLS**

This paper has the aim to present a project currently underway at the Interdepartmental Research Unit of the University of Florence, entitled *Cultures, texts and traditions of the Christian East in dialogue with Europe and Islam* (EuTradOr). The aim of this project is the critical edition of the texts related to the Legend of the Seven Sleepers of Ephesus, the reconstruction of the history of their textual traditions, and the study of this Legend in all its aspects: religious, cultural, and anthropological. As a matter of fact, the authors think that the study of the textual traditions will give an important contribution to a better understanding of the history of the religious ideas that such texts have transmitted over the centuries. Of course, such an ambitious project needs a team of specialists in various fields. For this reason a Research Unit has been established with the aim of analysing this important legend in as many respects as possible<sup>2</sup>. As is well known, the Legend of the Seven Sleepers has spread not only within the Christian world of both East and West, but it has also assumed considerable importance in the Muslim tradition, due to the fact that it was included in the Quran (*Suratu-l-Kahf* 18, vv. 8-26), which inspired a huge amount of secondary Islamic literature, in the form of commentaries, *Stories of Prophets*, and so on. As far as the Christian tradition is concerned, a homily by Jacob of Serugh, theologian, hymnographer, and Father of the Syriac church who lived in upper Mesopotamia between the fifth and sixth centuries on the one hand, and the hagiographic works by the Merovingian Bishop Gregory of Tours, who in the same period introduces the Legend to Europe on the other, testify that this Legend spread quickly within a very large geographical area early on. The reason of the success of the Legend

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

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

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

### ***The Origin of the Legend PLS***

On the origin of the legend, up until at least the 1950s, the opinions of scholars were not unanimous<sup>4</sup>. That is, until Ernst Honigmann published

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

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

a study in which he reconstructed the times and places where the legend would have begun, based on the results of the archaeological excavations in Ephesus conducted in the 1930s by the Austrian mission directed by Miltner. Contrary to what was affirmed during the nineteenth century, and above all after the studies of Paul Peeters, Honigmann goes so far as to affirm that “the results of the archaeological investigations in the famous cave prove conclusively that the Ephesian legend must be based on some real historical events”<sup>5</sup>. Here Honigmann alludes to a Christian heresy that spread in fifth-century Asia. According to Pseudo-Zacharias Rhetor, an anonymous sixth-century author who wrote a part of the History of the Syriac church, around 446 AD a Christian heresy which denied the resurrection of the body spread rapidly thanks to the work of a bishop of Aegea<sup>6</sup>. One of the reasons for the success of the Legend is the presence of the miraculous *dormitio*, a theme found across literature and folklore<sup>7</sup>. Suffice it to say that even in Greek pre-Christian culture we find a story in which a prolonged and miraculous sleep in a cave – that of Epimenides of Crete<sup>8</sup> – is described. Also noteworthy is the Old Testament apocryphal text known as *The Paralipomena of Jeremiah*, in which we find the same miracle<sup>9</sup>.

### ***The Greek versions and traditions LF EM***

The narration of the legend took many forms in the Greek-speaking world. Halkin’s *BHG* records eleven versions, some of them severely mutilated<sup>10</sup>; the Benedictine Michael Huber, a scholar who taught at the Gymnasium of the small city of Metten in Bavaria<sup>11</sup>, in his detailed monograph on the Seven

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

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

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

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

10 François Halkin, *Bibliotheca Hagiographica Graeca*, II, Bruxelles, Société des Bollandistes, 1957<sup>3</sup>, pp. 223-225 (nr. 1593-1599d).

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

Sleepers listed both the hagiographical texts and the mentions of the legend in Greek authors from Late Antiquity down to the end of the Byzantine age<sup>12</sup>. The same Huber had published in 1905 the first critical edition of the three most important Greek versions of the story<sup>13</sup>. His pioneering work remains a firm basis for all further research. It goes without saying that Huber, in the narrow space of his 1905 booklet, could not provide his readers with all the information they might need. As he explicitly stated, he had to content himself with editing each text in the fullest version that a given manuscript preserved (the so-called *Grundtext*), omitting many variant readings of minor significance and printing (a) the additions of other manuscripts in round brackets, (b) portions of the *Grundtext* omitted in one or more manuscripts in square brackets, and (c) what appears only in the *Grundtext* and is probably a peculiar addition of the manuscript in bold<sup>14</sup>. No one could ask him more than that, in a brief and dense *Beitrag*. Of course, new critical editors are expected, on one hand, to unearth more manuscripts unknown to Huber<sup>15</sup>, and, on the other hand, to provide fuller information and a clearer picture of the different features of each version – by means of either a synoptic edition or a multi-level critical apparatus. It is not possible to deal here with all Seven Sleepers Greek sources<sup>16</sup>. We will therefore limit ourselves to the presentation of Huber's so-called *Pseudo-Metaphrastes-Gruppe*<sup>17</sup>, three different prose versions/redactions

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

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

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

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

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

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

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



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

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

Attested by three mss.:

**N** = Par. Gr. 1454 (10<sup>th</sup> century), *Grundtext*.

**S** = Par. Gr. 1485 (10<sup>th</sup> century).

**V** = Vat. Gr. 1673 (11<sup>th</sup> century).

**S** is the basis of the text printed in PG 115 by Migne, who attributes it to Symeon Metaphrastes (10<sup>th</sup> century), the prolific Byzantine author who collected saints' lives and reworked them according to the more affected style and rhetorical taste of his age; Migne accompanies it with the Latin version of the *Seven Sleepers* by Surius<sup>18</sup>. **V** offers a sort of epitome of the version attested by **N S**. It is also to be noted that **N S** attest to two mostly but not entirely similar versions of the legend<sup>19</sup>. For instance, noteworthy discrepancies are:

- The names of the Seven appear in **N V** *always* in the same order: Maximilianòs, Iamblichos<sup>20</sup>, Martinos, Dionysios, Ioannes, Exakoustodianòs, Antoninos. This is not the case in **S**.
- In **N V** the name of the bishop of Ephesus is Mares, while in **S** it is Stephanos.
- The name of the mountain is Mochlos according to **N S**, Nochlos in **V**; the name of the "lord of the mountain"<sup>21</sup> is Adolios in **N S**, Anatolios in **V**.
- The duration of the Seven's sleep is not the same: 372 years in **S V**, 254 in **N**.

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legend in the group to be somehow related to Metaphrastes.

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

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

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

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

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

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

Attested by four mss.:

**A**: Par. Gr. 1512 (12<sup>th</sup> c.); *Grundtext*.

**K**: Par. Gr. 548 (11<sup>th</sup> c.)<sup>22</sup>

**W**: Barb. Gr. III.37 (11<sup>th</sup>-12<sup>th</sup> c.)<sup>23</sup>

**R**: Vat. Gr. 1170 (16<sup>th</sup> c.)

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

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

A task for modern scholarship is to place these texts in the history of Greek and Byzantine hagiography. While *BHG* 1594 was printed by Migne among the works of Symeon Metaphrastes, Ehrhard and Huber were probably right in rejecting this assumption<sup>24</sup>. *BHG* 1594 is just a slightly different version of *BHG* 1593, not a sophisticated re-writing of it: the style of both texts appears quite different from that of Symeon’s ‘updated’ hagiographies – this does not rule out the possibility that a careful lexical and stylistic analysis may reveal something interesting. On the contrary, the possibility that Symeon has to do with the much more refined diction of *BHG* 1599, considered by Huber<sup>25</sup>, is well worth investigating. At a structural level, one would like to know whether the legend has been influenced by, or even modelled on, the *Fourth Book of the Maccabees* – a text that, albeit excluded from both the Jewish and the Catholic canon, enjoyed enormous popularity in the Greek-speaking world. There too seven young men (seven brothers: the Ephesian youths are not born from the same parents, but their spiritual brotherhood is repeatedly stressed), in that case Jews,

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

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

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

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

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

### ***The Eastern Christian versions of the Legend PLS***

In 1884 Ignazio Guidi published an impressive study about the Eastern Christian versions of the Legend of the Seven Sleepers<sup>26</sup>. He presented the first edition of texts in five different oriental languages: Coptic, Syriac, Arabic, Ethiopic and Armenian. However, Guidi did not provide an edition of a complete Arabic text. He only gave a very short sample of a relatively recent version in *Karshuni* (Arabic written in Syriac script). Guidi supposed a Syriac source for both the Christian-Arabic and the Muslim-Arabic versions. However, from a recently published study<sup>27</sup>, it clearly emerges that the oldest available Christian-Arabic version attested in an eleventh-century manuscript kept in the British Library (BL Or. 5019) clearly depends on a Greek source<sup>28</sup>. Since the Legend circulated for centuries, a first examination of the manuscript tradition of the Christian Arabic versions is needed. Until today, more than 35 manuscript witnesses

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

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

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

have been identified, all of them are kept in monasteries and university libraries in the East and the West<sup>29</sup>.

### ***Indirect sources of the Christian Arabic Legend PLS***

In Melkite Arabic literature we find numerous works that directly refer to this Legend. To get an idea of the extent to which this legend has influenced Christian religious literature, it is enough to mention a few examples. First of all the *Annals* by the Melkite Patriarch of Alessandria Eutychius (9<sup>th</sup> – 10<sup>th</sup> c.) have to be mentioned<sup>30</sup>, where we can find a short allusion to the Legend as follow:

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

Another quotation of the same content is found in the *Universal history* of Agapius bishop of Manbiğ (Hierapolis) (10<sup>th</sup> c.), whose Arabic name is Maḥbūb ibn Qusṭanṭīn. There is a reference to the story of the Seven Sleepers, which, although much shorter than the quotation from Eutychius, is nonetheless important. Over the centuries, the Arabic-speaking Antiochian Melkite Church continued to translate the Legend, which circulated in multiple versions and adaptations. Euthymius II Karne (1572-1635), Patriarch of the Melkite Church of Antioch who lived between sixteenth and seventeenth century, is known for his tireless activity of translating Byzantine liturgical works<sup>32</sup>. Worthy of mention among others is the *Eulogy* which he translated into Arabic in 1633-34 starting from a Greek edition,

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

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

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

32 Joseph Nasrallah, *Histoire du mouvement littéraire dans l'église melkite du Ve au XXe siècle. IV: Période ottomane 1516-1900*, Louvain, Paris, Peeters, chez l'auteur, 1979, p. 57-58; Bruce Masters, *Christians and Jews in the Ottoman Arab World. The Roots of Sectarianism*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2001, p. 81; Bernard Heyberger, *Les chrétiens du Proche-Orient au temps de la Réforme catholique (Syrie, Liban, Palestine, XVIIe-XVIIIe siècle)*, Rome, École française de Rome, 2014<sup>2</sup>, pp. 467-469.

probably printed in Venice during the sixteenth century. In chapter 71 of the *Eulogy* we can find a page dedicated to the Seven Sleepers, invoked by the priest in order to cure the patient from insomnia<sup>33</sup>. Another trace of the diffusion of the Legend in the Ottoman era is the translation into Arabic of important Byzantine hagiographic collections by Makāriyūs III ibn al-Za‘īm, the Patriarch of Antioch who was one of the main protagonists of the Christian Arab literary Renaissance in Syria in the seventeenth and eighteenth century<sup>34</sup>. The Legend of the Seven Sleepers can be found in two main works translated into Arabic by Makarius: the *Kitāb qiṣaṣ wa-siyar wa-’aḥbār ba‘ḍ al-rusul wa-l-ṣuhadā’ wa-l-qiddisāt wa-l-’abrār*, or the “Book of stories and lives and news of some apostles, martyrs, saints and righteous”, which is none other than the Arabic translation of the work of the Cretan monk Agaprios Landos known as Καλοκαιρινή. The other is the *Kitāb al-kunūz al-ḡadīd* or “The new book of treasures”, a new hagiographic collection that includes a total of 29 lives<sup>35</sup>. These examples, although necessarily limited, clearly show how widespread the well-known Legend must have been not only within the hagiographic literature but also in Byzantine Arabic-speaking historiography and liturgy.

### ***The Islamic tradition PLS***

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

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

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

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

that the various passages of this chapter of the Quran have assumed for Muslims, in despite of their confessional differences and local traditions, focusing mainly on the protective and superstitious meaning that the names of the seven young men have assumed in the devotional piety to this day<sup>36</sup>.

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

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

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

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



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

### ***The Ethiopic versions and traditions AB***

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

search of additional witnesses. The Ethiopic traditions of the Legend also include two commemorative texts from the *Sənkəssār*.<sup>61</sup> The first, to be read on the 13<sup>th</sup> of the month of *tərr*, was published in 1884 with an Italian translation by Guidi<sup>62</sup> and critically edited and published with a French translation much later by Gérard Colin in 1990;<sup>63</sup> the second, to be read on the 21 of the month of *nahase*, was edited by Guidi and published in 1912 with a French translation made by Sylvain Grébaut.<sup>64</sup> To conclude this short exposition on the Ethiopic versions of the Legend, we need to mention the hymnographic tradition that, with the exception of a hymn transmitted in the collection *ʿĪgzi ʿabəher nagša* (“The Lord reigns”)<sup>65</sup> published by Guidi,<sup>66</sup> remains largely unexplored, as well as uncharted are the therapeutic (healing and protective) practices that are connected with their veneration in medieval and contemporary Ethiopia, for which we have numerous examples involving other saints.<sup>67</sup>

### *The Syriac versions and Gregory of Tours’ work RF*

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

of Serugh<sup>68</sup>, has led to a very long debate among scholars about the primary source: was the Greek or the Syriac version the original source? On this question it seems possible to conclude that an almost unanimity of scholars considered more likely that the Syriac narrative and that of Gregory are based on an original Greek source, written in the fifth century, which is now lost<sup>69</sup>. In the Syriac tradition, the names and numbers of the Seven Sleepers<sup>70</sup>, as well as the name of the mountain where they found refuge, the name of the city, and the number of years they slept, vary greatly, but the story is mostly the same. During the persecution of Emperor Decius, the boys refused to burn incense to the idols with their hands. As a result, they were forced to flee into a cave, where God “took their spirits and raised them to heaven”<sup>71</sup>. The awakening of the Sleepers took place during a politically and religiously significant period in the reign of Theodosius II<sup>72</sup>. The Emperor was determined to combat paganism, destroy pagan temples, eradicate idolatry and make Christianity triumphant: Jacob of Serugh emphasised that crosses now appeared everywhere<sup>73</sup>. But during his reign, important controversies arose within Christianity concerning the nature of Christ and the resurrection of the body. First of all, the patriarch of Alexandria, Nestorius, spoke about two substances in Christ, two hypostases (in Greek ὑπόστασις) and one person (in Greek πρόσωπον). Moved by the intention of safeguarding the human nature of Christ, Nestorius also denied Mary the title ‘Mother of God’ and spoke in favour of ‘Mother of Christ’ (Χριστοτόκος) or ‘Mother of Man’ (ἀνθρωποτόκος)<sup>74</sup>. Cyril of Alexandria fiercely attacked this concept, maintaining that Mary

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

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

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

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

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

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

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



should be defined as the ‘Mother of God’ (Θεοτόκος), not because she had bestowed divinity upon Christ, but because she had generated the Logos according to the flesh<sup>75</sup>. The question of Mary’s divine motherhood was closely linked to Cyril’s Alexandrian Christology and is the key to interpreting the mystery of the Incarnation, which made the union of the two natures possible according to the hypostasis. Following the position of Nestorius, Eutyches, presbyter and archimandrite at Constantinople, affirmed that before the Incarnation there were two natures, but after the Incarnation there was only one nature, the divine nature, derived from the union of the two natures. Human nature was absorbed into the divine one. The Council of Chalcedon (451), convened by the Eastern Roman Emperor Marcian (392-457), condemned Monophysitism<sup>76</sup>. Although it is not easy to classify the Christology of Jacob of Serugh because of his irenic position, it is evident that he was an anti-Chalcedonian, who stressed the unicity of the hypostasis in Christ<sup>77</sup>. His formula in one of his letters claims: “the one nature that becomes a body” or “the one embodied nature”<sup>78</sup>. Jacob of Serugh opens his poetic version of the legend, evoking the “Son of God, whose door is open to whoever calls on him”<sup>79</sup>. The divine Sonship is again mentioned in the following narrative along with a proclamation of Trinitarianism. In contrast to Zeus, worshipped by pagans, the Seven Sleepers proclaimed their faith in the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit: “Your king is Zeus and Apollo, along with Artemis. Our king is the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit”<sup>80</sup>. The Trinitarian formula becomes a confession of faith in the one true God<sup>81</sup>. But there is something more. Jacob’s version reads the legend in close connection with the problem of

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

the resurrection of the body. In fact, not only God, after the pagan era, wanted to awaken them, but the Emperor Theodosius, impressed by this miraculous story, offered to build a temple on the spot. The boys declined, affirming that this event has happened to prove the truth of the resurrection: “For your sake has Christ our Lord awoken us, so that you might see and hold firm that the resurrection truly exists”<sup>82</sup>. In this way, the boys, with their living bodies, became witnesses to the belief in the resurrection<sup>83</sup>. It is no coincidence that the centuries in which the legend comes to life were marked by a debate on the resurrection of dead bodies. If Origen, master of Alexandria and promoter of the allegorical exegesis of the Holy Scriptures, and the Origenists had put forward the idea that the physical body would be replaced by a spiritual one, the legend of the Seven Sleepers testifies that the same physical body that died will be resurrected by God<sup>84</sup>. The fact that the legend of the Seven Sleepers ended up being closely linked to eschatological questions in the Christian context is shown by the story given by Gregory of Tours in the late sixth century. He offers two different versions of the text: a small redaction, inserted in his *Liber in gloria martyrum* (ch. 94), and a longer redaction, a *passio* conceived of as a *libellus*<sup>85</sup>. At the end of the chapter 94, Gregory affirms that he gave access to the text thanks to a source, written in Syriac (*quam Syro quodam interpretante in Latinum transtulimus*)<sup>86</sup>. Is this a reference to the Syriac version of Jacob? Did Gregorius ask a Syrian interpreter to translate for him the text into Latin?<sup>87</sup> While maintaining the framework of the legend, Gregory does not fail to include original insights into his version. In particular, his retelling aims to demonstrate the physical resurrection. In fact, in his version, he expressly affirms that the bodies and the clothing of the Seven Sleepers remained intact (*integra atque inlaesa*), and that the Lord resurrected the youths to show the whole world that there will be a resurrection of the bodies. Soon after the Emperor entered the cave, the

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

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

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

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

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

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

boys talked with him at length about the resurrection<sup>88</sup>. According to Gregory, he told the legend of the Seven Sleepers to counter the “impure heresy of the Sadducees”, who were ready to deny the resurrection of the body (*volens evertere spem resurrectionis*)<sup>89</sup>. Although it is difficult to identify these enemies (they are only mentioned in Gregory’s version), it is clear that he evokes an active debate on the issue in his time. Interestingly, the same question also occupies the last book, the tenth, of his *Histories*, which centres on eschatological issues. Here, we have a dialogue with a priest, who doubts the resurrection of the flesh. The priest is presented as a promoter of the false doctrine of the Sadducees, and according to him, the resurrection of bodies that have long since decomposed seems unlikely<sup>90</sup>. The aim of the dialogue is to show that the body we use on earth is the same one that will be resurrected. By evoking such stories and dialogues, Gregory is suggesting a response to those who question a fundamental aspect of Christian doctrine: the resurrection of dead bodies<sup>91</sup>. In contrast to the Greco-Roman world, where the body and its needs were subordinated to the Stoic ideal of ἀπάθεια (impassibility), the Christian way of dealing with physical suffering was linked to the new concept of corporeality that Christianity was maturing: the belief in the resurrection of the flesh<sup>92</sup>. Willy Rordorf has noted that the *quid* of the martyrs’ testimony was not in words but in deeds, to demonstrate the resurrection of the body in order to get eternal life<sup>93</sup>. In this regard, we must not forget that the core of the Christian mystery is the eschatological event that began with the Incarnation of Christ and culminated in his crucifixion, resurrection and glorification. Rich in theological implications, the fascinating legend of the Seven Sleepers becomes an important text in Christian theological debates, because it clearly shows that the boys resurrected with their own earthly bodies and with their bodies they were able to contemplate God.

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

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

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

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

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

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

## European receptions in the Middle Ages

### *The reception of the Seven Sleepers' legend in Spain SVG*

The legend of the Seven Sleepers spread in medieval Spain through two different channels: in the Christian kingdoms of the north and centre of the Peninsula, it circulated thanks to the *Legenda aurea* of Jacobus de Voragine<sup>94</sup>, where, as in the rest of Europe, it was expanded by including numerous lives of 'local' saints<sup>95</sup>; and in al-Andalus, where it penetrated through Arabic versions that were part of the commentaries on Sura 18 of the Koran. This double channel of reception, as a result of the particular political-cultural situation of the Iberian Peninsula at that time, is reflected in the versions that have been preserved to the present day. In the territories under Arab rule, the vitality of this legend is confirmed by the survival of three recensions in Arabic: two unpublished, contained in the ms. 5379 of the National Library of Spain and in ms. LXI of the Royal Academy of History of Madrid<sup>96</sup>, and a third one, recorded on folios 116r-138r of a manuscript preserved in the Library of Arab Studies of Granada, which was edited and translated by the Arabist José Vázquez Ruiz, who dates it to the end of the fifteenth century.<sup>97</sup> Furthermore, as the legend spread in the Islamic Arab world, local legends also emerged in al-Andalus which alluded to the existence of the cave of the Seven Sleepers near the city of Córdoba (in whose famous mosque the seven young people were apparently painted)<sup>98</sup> and, especially in Loja, a small town near Granada.<sup>99</sup>

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

sleeping brother martyrs“ He focused on the various opinions of Latin, Greek and Christian authors in order to discern how much truth there was in it.<sup>100</sup> In the second half of the seventeenth century the story was taken up theatrically by the playwright Agustín Moreto, who, in *Los siete durmientes o los más dichosos hermanos*, transformed it into a peculiar “comedy of saints” with a love plot and the presence of the Devil<sup>101</sup>; a very different version of the tragicomedy in the Latin language was *Septem dormientes*, composed by Alexander Luzón de Millares, “*Canonici Regularis Ecclesiae B. Mariae in Viridi Valle*”, and published in 1666, in Brussels, together with a treatise on the resurrection of the dead, a central theme in the legend from its origins.<sup>102</sup>

Whether the well-known *exemplum* of the monk and the little bird derives from the Legend is probable, albeit not certain. Since the 12th century, it is found in three Cistercian monasteries (Armenteira and Leire, in the north of Spain, and Vilar de Frades, in Portugal) to whose primitive monks<sup>103</sup> it appears to have been attributed as a hagiographic adaptation.<sup>104</sup> It was also incorporated, in the 13th century, into the collections of Marian miracles from the Galician-Portuguese poetic version contained in the *Cantigas de Santa Maria* by Alfonso X the Wise (cantiga 103)<sup>105</sup>, and it spread widely in the fifteenth century thanks to *El libro de los exemplos o Suma de exemplos por A. B. C.* by Clemente Sánchez de Vercial, a collection of around five hundred short stories to be used by preachers<sup>106</sup>, which survives orally until today in the northwest of the peninsula<sup>107</sup>. According

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

to José Filgueira Valverde, who has studied this exemplum by closely examining the ancient legends of the sleepers, the narrative of the monk and the little bird, of which the first textual link has been lost, did not come directly from the legend of the Seven Sleepers, as it was often believed. He believes, instead, that it was the creation of some ecclesiastical writer from the West, familiar with the Hebrew legends of Choni Hameaghel and Abimelech the Ethiopian (which were also widely spread in the Islamic world in the commentaries on Sura 2:126 of the Quran), with which, without any doubt, it is related<sup>108</sup>.

### ***The Legend in Portugal MG***

In Portugal the canticle 103 of Afonso X the Wise, king of Leon and Castile, is not the first trace of the legend, but this lyric poem that makes part of his *Cantigas de Santa Maria* (Canticles of Holy Mary) composed at his court in the 13<sup>th</sup> century, which forms the largest collection of medieval poems written in Galician-Portuguese language, contributed to the circulation of the legend in the following centuries. Nevertheless, canticle 103<sup>109</sup> gives us a cause to doubt right away, because we do not find a clear reference to the Seven Sleepers in it but rather to another story: a monk who slept for three hundred years to the song of a little bird by the will of Holy Mary. So we have one of the most ancient reinterpretations of the legend that will continue to circulate in Portugal in other texts of modern age as the legend of the monk and the little bird. The first serious studies in this regard date from the last century, respectively in 1903-1905 by Leite de Vasconcelos<sup>110</sup> and in 1919 by José Joaquim Nunes whose works attest to the reworking of the Portuguese legend from the Legend of the Seven Sleepers. In other words, for many centuries the most popular theory was the Christian origin of the Portuguese legend because the Seven Sleepers legend entered in Portugal in the Medieval age through Jacobus de Voragine's *Golden Legend*, of which the National Library of Lisbon preserves a manuscript copy of the 13<sup>th</sup> century (1276)<sup>111</sup>, which belonged to Alcobaça Monastery

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

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

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

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

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



(one of the first foundations of the Cistercian Order in Portugal). In addition, the Seven Sleepers legend is included in *Martyrologium Romanum* (that was translated in Portuguese from Latin in 1591)<sup>112</sup>, in the *Menologion of Basil II*<sup>113</sup> and in *Passio Sanctorum Martyrum Septem Dormientium apud Ephesum*<sup>114</sup> by Gregory of Tours; texts that were transmitted to Portugal. In 1922 Pires de Lima<sup>115</sup> was the first to support the hypothesis of the Muslim origin of the Portuguese legend, on the basis of the coexistence between Christians and Moors since the 8<sup>th</sup> century and the circulation of Eastern and Western texts in the Iberian Peninsula. So the Portuguese circulation of the Seven Sleepers legend might have occurred through two ways: a northern way thanks to the texts of Gregory of Tours and Jacobus of Voragine, and a southern one through Arab poets who arrived in the Iberian Peninsula from North Africa.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

### **Some (not) conclusive remarks (PLS)**

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

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

<sup>117</sup> G. Scarcia, *Nelle terre dei sette dormienti*, Perugia, Graphe, 2018