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With Sleep Comes a Fusion of Worlds: The Seven Sleepers of Ephesus Through Formation and Transformation

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With Sleep Comes a Fusion of Worlds:
The Seven Sleepers of Ephesus
Through Formation and Transformation

By: Gwendolyn Collaço

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the Degree of Bachelor of Arts
in Medieval and Renaissance Studies and Classics: Latin

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**The Seven Sleepers of Ephesus:
Two Tellings of the Tale**

Gregorius Turonensis
“Passio Sanctorum Martyrum Septem Dormientium apud Ephesum”
Liber in Gloria Martyrum (6th cent.), ch. 94

Septem vero germanorum, qui apud urbem Ephesum requiescunt, haec est ratio. Tempore Decii imperatoris, cum persecutio in christianos ageretur, septem viri comprehensi sunt et ducti sunt coram principe.

Horum nomina haec sunt: Maximianus, Malchus, Martinianus, Constantinus, Dionisius, Iohannes, Serapion; qui diversis verbis temptati, ut cederent, nequaquam adqueverunt.

Imperator vero pro eligantia eorum, ne in momento perirent, spatium tractandi indulget.

At illi in unam se speluncam concludunt, ibique per multos dies habitaverunt.

Egrediebatur tamen unus ex eis et comparabat victus et quae necessaria erant exhibebat.

Revertente autem imperatore in eadem civitate, isti petierunt ad Dominum, ut eos ab hoc periculo dignaretur eruere; factaque oratione, prostrati solo obdormierunt.

Cumque imperator didicisset, eos in hoc antro morari, nutu Dei iussit os speluncae magnis lapidibus oppilari, dicens: "Ibi intereant, qui diis nostris immolare noluerunt".

Quod dum ageretur, quidam christianus in tabula plumbea nomina et martyrium eorum scribens clam in aditu cavernae, priusquam oppilaretur, inclusit.

Post multorum vero annorum curricula, cum, data ecclesiis pace, Theodosius christianus obtenuisset imperium, surrexit hereses immunda Sadduceorum, qui negant resurrectionem futuram.

Tunc quidam civis Ephesius, dum caulas ovibus secum montem ipsum facere destinat ac lapides divolvit ad coaptanda earum septa, ignarus quae agerentur introrsum, patefecit ingressum eius; non tamen cognovit arcanum, quod habebatur intrinsecus. Dominus autem inmisit septem viris spiritum vitae, et surrexerunt, putantesque, quod una tantum nocte dormissent, miserunt puerum unum ex se, qui cibos emeret.

Cumque veniens supra portam civitatis vidisset crucis gloriosae signaculum audissetque per Christi nomen iurare populum, obstipuit; prolatisque nummis, quos a tempore Decii habebat, a mercatore comprehenditur, dicente sibi, quia: "Absconditos antiquitus thesauros repperisti".

At ille negans, deducitur ad episcopum ac iudicem civitatis.

Cumque ab his argueretur, compellente necessitate, absconditum misterium revelavit et

deduxit eos ad speluncam, in qua viri erant.

Cumque ingrederetur episcopus, invenit tabulam plumbeam, in qua omnia quae pertulerant habebantur scripta, locutusque cum eis, nuntiaverunt haec cursu rapido imperatori Theodosio.

At ille veniens, adoravit eos pronus in terram; qui tali colloquio cum eodem usi sunt principe: "Surrexit, gloriosae auguste, hereses, quae populum christianum a Dei promissionibus conatur evertere, ut dicant, non fieri resurrectionem mortuorum.

Ergo ut scias, quia omnes iuxta apostolum Paulum repraesentandi erimus ante tribunal Christi, idcirco iussit nos Dominus suscitari et tibi ista loqui.

Vide ergo, ne seducaris et excludaris a regno Dei".

Haec audiens Theodosius imperator, glorificavit Dominum, qui non permisit perire populum suum.

Viri autem iterum prostrati in terram, obdormierunt; quibus cum Theodosius imperator sepulchra ex auro fabricare velit, per visum prohibitus est, ne faceret.

Viri autem usque hodie palliolis siricis aut carbassinis cooperti in ipso loco requiescunt.

Quod passio eorum, quam Siro quodam interpretante in Latino transtulimus, plenius pandit.¹

¹ Gregorius Turonensis, "De Septem Dormientibus," *Liber in Gloria Martyrum*, edited by Bruno Krusch (Hannover: Hahn, 1969), Brepolis Library of Latin Texts, <http://clt.brepolis.net/cds/pages/Exporter.aspx?ctx=1721300&extra=10> (Accessed September 3-October 15, 2010).

Translation:

This indeed is the account of the seven brothers, who rest near the city of Ephesus. During the time of the Emperor Decius, when a persecution was conducted upon Christians, seven men were arrested and led before the Princeps. These are the names of these men: Maximianus, Malchus, Martinianus, Constantinus, Dionisius, Iohannes, Serapion. When they were incited with various words to submit, they by no means assented.

The emperor, however, on account of the elegance/fine appearance of these men, grants a time of discussion, so that they would not die at that moment. But they shut themselves up in a single cave and there they lived for many days. Yet one of them would come out and collect provisions and produce the things which were necessities.

However, when the emperor returned to the same city, those men prayed to God that He should see fit to free them from this danger; and after making their prayer, they collapsed on the ground and fell asleep. And when the emperor learned that the men were staying in this cave, he decreed through the command of God that the mouth of the cave be blocked with great stones, saying: "There let them perish, who refused to sacrifice to our gods." And while it was being done, a certain Christian, writing the names and martyrdom of those men on a lead tablet, secretly enclosed it in the entrance of the cave before it was blocked up.

Indeed after the course of many years, with peace having been given to the churches, when the Christian, Theodosius, obtained the empire, an impure heresy of the Sadducees arose, who deny the resurrection will happen. Then, a certain citizen of Ephesus, while intending in his mind to make that very mountain into sheepfolds for his sheep and overturning stones for the purpose of joining their enclosures, unaware what was done within, he opened up the entrance of the cave, yet did not perceive the mystery, which was held inside. However, the Lord sent into the seven men the spirit of life and they arose, and, thinking that they had slept only one night, sent out a boy from among them to buy food.

And when, arriving, the boy saw the seal of the glorious cross over the gate of the city and heard the populace swear by the name of Christ, he was amazed; and producing coins which he was holding from the time of Decius, he was seized by a merchant, saying to him: "You have discovered treasures hidden long ago!" But he, denying this, is led to the bishop and magistrate of the city. And when he was examined by these men, with necessity forcing him, he revealed the hidden mystery and led them to the cave, in which the men were. And when the bishop entered, he found the lead tablet, on which everything, which the men suffered was written, and having spoken to them, they reported these things by full speed to the Emperor Theodosius.

But he, arriving, honored them bowing forward to the earth, and they enjoyed the following conversation with the same leader: "A heresy arose, Glorious Augustus, which

tries to turn away the Christian populace from the promises of God, since they say that a resurrection of the dead cannot happen. Therefore, in order that you might know that we must all be presented next to the apostle Paul before the tribunal of Christ, for that reason the Lord ordered us to awaken and tell these things to you. Therefore, see that you are not led astray and shut out from the kingdom of God.”

Hearing these things, the Emperor Theodosius honored the Lord, who did not allow his populace to die. However, the men collapsed on the earth a second time and fell asleep. When the Emperor Theodosius wanted to construct a tomb out of gold for them, he was forbidden through a vision from doing it. The men, however, having been covered in cloaks/robes of silk or flax, rest in that place to this very day.

The passion/passion story of those men, which, by the interpretation of a certain Syrian, we translated into Latin, expands upon it more fully.

Jacobus de Voragine
“Historia de Septem Dormientibus”
Aurea Legenda (1275)

Septem dormientes in civitate Ephesi orti sunt. Decius autem imperator persequens Christianos cum venisset Ephesum, iussit aedificari templa in medio civitatis, ut omnes cum eo miscerentur sacrificiis idolorum. Cum ergo omnes Christianos inquiri iussisset et vinctos aut sacrificare aut mori compelleret, tantus poenarum terror cunctis inerat, quod amicus amicum et filium pater et patrem filius abnegabat. Tunc in illa urbe inventi sunt Christiani septem: Maximianus, Malchus, Marcianus, Dionysius, Iohannes, Serapion et Constantinus, qui hoc videntes nimis dolebant. Et cum essent primi palatii, sacrificia idolorum spernentes in domo sua se celabant et ieiuniis et orationibus vacabant. Accusati igitur ante Decium statuuntur et comprobati veraciter Christiani dato iis respiscendi spatio usque ad reditum Decii dimittuntur. At illi patrimonium suum interim inter pauperos expedientes inito consilio in montem Celion secesserunt et ibi esse secretius decreverunt. Diu ergo sic latentes unus eorum semper ministrabat, et quoties intrabat urbem, figura se mendici et habitu vestiebat. Cum ergo Decius in urbem rediisset et eos ad sacrificandum perquiri iussisset, Malchus minister eorum territus ad socios rediit et iis furorem imperatoris indicavit. Qui cum graviter terrerentur, Malchus allatos panes iis apposuit, ut cibo confortati fortiores ad proelium redderentur. Postquam autem cenabant sedentes et colloquentes in luctu et lacrimis, subito, sicut Deus voluit, dormiverunt.

Mane facto cum quaesiti fuissent et inveniri non possent et Decius doleret, quod tales iuvenes perdidisset, accusati sunt, quod hucusque in monte Celion latuissent et sua Christianis pauperibus erogantes in suo proposito permanerent. Iussit ergo Decius, ut parentes eorum adessent, et comminatus est iis mortem, nisi de iis dicerent, quidquid scirent. Illi autem eos similiter accusaverunt et divitias suas pauperibus expendisse conquesti sunt. Tunc cogitans, quid de iis faceret, nutu Dei iussit os speluncae lapidibus obstrui, ut ibi morentur fame et inopia circumclusi. Quod ministri quidem fecerunt et duo Christiani, Theodorus et Rufinus, eorum martyrium describentes caute inter lapides posuerunt.

Mortuo igitur Decio et tota illa generatione post annos CCCLXXII anno XXX imperii Theodosii pullulavit haeresis eorum, qui negabant resurrectionem mortuorum. Unde contristatus Theodosius Christianissimus imperator, quia fidem tam impie agitari videbat, indutus cilicio sedens in interiori loco per singulos dies nebat. Quod videns misericors Deus consolari lugentes et confirmare spem de resurrectione voluit mortuorum et thesaurum suae pietatis aperiens ita praedictos martyres suscitavit.

Misit siquidem in cor cuiusdam civis Ephesi, ut in illo monte aedificaret stabula pastoribus suis. Caementariis speluncam aperientibus surrexerunt sancti et se invicem salutantes putabant se tantum una nocte dormivisse. Et praedianam tristitiam recordantes interrogaverunt Malchum, qui iis ministraverat, quid de iis Decius decrevisset. At ille

respondit, sicut dixit in sero: "Quaesiti fuimus, ut idolis immolemus. Ecce, quod de nobis cogitat imperator." Respondit Maximianus: "Et Deus scit, quod non sacrificabimus." Cumque socios confortasset, iussit Malcho, ut empturus panes ad urbem descenderet et plures quam heri afferens panes, quae iussisset imperator, rediens nuntiaret. Tollens ergo Malchus quinque solidos de spelunca exit et videns lapides miratus est, sed aliud cogitans parum de lapidibus cogitavit. Veniens igitur timidus ad portam urbis valde miratus est videns suppositum signum crucis. Unde pergens ad alteram portam, dum idem signum invenit, ultra modum miratus est videns omnes portas signo crucis appposito et mutatam civitatem. Signansque se ad primam portam rediit existimans se somniare. Unde se confirmans et vultum operiens urbem ingreditur et veniens ad venditores panum audivit homines loquentes de Christo et amplius stupefactus ait: "Quid est", inquit, "quod heri nemo Christum audebat nominare, et tunc omnes Christum confitentur! Puto, quod haec non est Ephesorum civitas, quia aliter aedificata est, sed aliam civitatem nescio talem." Et cum interrogans audivisset hanc esse Ephesum, errare veraciter se putavit et redire ad socios cogitavit.

Accessit tamen ad eos, qui panem vendebant, et cum argenteos protulisset, mirati venditores dicebant ad invicem, quod ille iuvenis antiquum thesaurum invenisset. Malchus vero eos ad invicem loquentes videns putabat, quod vellent eum trahere ad imperatorem, et territus rogavit eos, ut se dimitterent et panes et argenteos retinerent. At illi tenentes eum dixerunt ei: "Unde es tu! Quia thesauros antiquorum imperatorum invenisti, indica nobis et erimus socii tecum et celabimus te, quia aliter celari non potes." Malchus vero non inveniebat, quid diceret illis, prae timore. Illi vero videntes eum tacentem misso fune in collo eius trahebant per vicos usque in medium civitatis. Et exiit rumor ad omnes, quod quidam iuvenis thesauros invenisset. Congregatis ergo ad eum universis et eum mirantibus volebat iis satisfacere, quod nihil invenerat. Et circumspiciens omnes a nemine cognosci poterat et prospiciens in populum volebat cognoscere aliquem de consanguineis suis, quos veraciter vivere putabat, et nullum inveniens stabat quasi insanus in medio populi civitatis. Quod cum audiisset sanctus Martinus episcopus et Antipater proconsul, qui nuper in urbem advenerat, mandaverunt civibus, ut eum caute adducerent et argenteos eius. Cumque a ministris traheretur ad ecclesiam, putabat, quod duceretur ad imperatorem. Episcopus igitur et proconsul mirantes argenteos interrogaverunt eum, ubi thesaurum incognitum invenisset. At ille respondit se nihil penitus invenisse, sed de sacculo parentum suorum eosdem denarios habuisse. Et interrogatus, cuius civitatis esset, respondit: "Bene scio, quod huius civitatis sum, si tantum haec est civitas Ephesorum." Proconsul dixit: "Fac venire parentes tuos, ut testentur pro te." Quos cum nominasset et nullus eos cognosceret, dicebant eum se fingere, ut aliquo modo evaderet. Et ait proconsul: "Quomodo credimus tibi, quod hoc argentum parentum tuorum fuerit, cum scriptura eius habeat plus quam trecentos septuaginta septem annos et sit primorum dierum Decii imperatoris et in nullo similes sint argenteis nostris? Et quomodo parentes tui ante tantum tempus fuerunt! Tu vero iuvenis vis decipere sapientes et senes Ephesi. Idcirco iubebo te legibus tradi, donec confiteans, quid invenisti." Tunc procidens Malchus ante eos dixit: "Pro Deo, domini, dicite mihi, quod vos interrogo, et ego dicam vobis, quod est in corde meo. Decius imperator, qui fuit in hac civitate, ubi nunc est!" Episcopus dixit: "Fili, non est hodie in terra, qui Decius nominatur, imperator autem fuit ante longum tempus." Malchus autem

dixit: "In hoc, domine, ita stupeo et nemo credit mihi, sed sequimini me et ostendam vobis socios meos, qui sunt in monte Celio, et ipsis credite. Hoc enim scio, quod a facie Decii imperatoris nos fugimus et ego sero vidi, quod ingressus est Decius in hanc urbem, si tantum haec est civitas Ephesi."

Tunc episcopus cogitans in semet ipso dixit proconsuli, quia visio est, quam Deus vult ostendere in iuvene isto. Perrexerunt ergo cum eo et civitatis plurima multitudo. Et ingressus est primo Malchus ad socios suos et post eum episcopus ingrediens invenit inter lapides litteras sigillatas duobus sigillis argenteis. Et convocato populo legit eas et audientibus et admirantibus cunctis. Et videntes sanctos Dei sedentes in spelunca et facies eorum tamquam rosas florentes procidentes glorificaverunt Deum. Statimque episcopus et proconsul miserunt ad Theodosium imperatorem rogantes, ut cito veniret et miracula Dei nuper ostensa videret. Qui protinus surgens de humo et de sacco, in quo lugebat. Glorificans Deum venit a Constantinopoli Ephesum et obviantibus ei cunctis adscenderunt simul omnes ad speluncam. Et mox ut sancti viderunt imperatorem, resplenduerunt facies eorum sicut sol. Et ingressus imperator procidit ante eos glorificans Deum et surgens amplexatus est eos et super singulos flevit dicens: "Sic video vos, tamquam si viderem Dominum resuscitantem Lazarum." Tunc dixit sanctus Maximianus ad eum: "Crede nobis, quod propter te resuscitavit nos Deus ante diem magnae resurrectionis, ut credas indubitanter, quod resurrectio mortuorum est. Vere enim resurreximus et vivimus, et sicut infans est in utero matris non sentiens laesionem et vivit, sic fuimus viventes, iacentes et dormientes et non sentientes." Et his dictis videntibus cunctis inclinantes capita sua in terram obdormierunt et tradiderunt spiritus suos secundum Dei imperium. Surgens autem imperator cecidit super eos flens et deosculans eos. Et cum iussisset fieri loculos aureos, in quibus mitterentur, in ipsa nocte apparuerunt imperatori dicentes, ut, sicut hactenus in terra iacuerunt et ex terra surrexerant, ita eos dimitteret donec Dominus iterum eos resuscitaret. Iussit ergo imperator locum illum inauratis lapidibus adornari et omnes episcopos resurrectionem confidentes absolvi. Quod CCCLXXII annis dormiisse dicuntur, dubium esse potest, quia anno Domini CCCXLVIII surrexerant, Decius autem regnavit uno tantum anno et tribus mensibus, scilicet anno Domini CCLII. Et ita non dormierunt nisi CXCVI annis.²

² Jacobus a Voragine, "Historia de Septem Dormientibus," *Legenda Aurea* (Osnabrück: Otto Zeller Verlag, 1969), 434-438.

Translation:

The Seven Sleepers were born in the city of Ephesus. Now when the emperor Decius, who was persecuting Christians, came to Ephesus, he ordered that temples be built in the middle of the city, so that all might be mixed with him for sacrifices to idols. Therefore, when he had ordered that all Christians be investigated and he was forcing the bound individuals to either make a sacrifice or die, such a great terror of punishment was present in all that both friend was denying friend and father denying son and son denying father. Then in that city seven Christians were discovered: Maximianus, Malchus, Marcianus, Dionysius, Johannes, Serapion and Constantinus, who were suffering much seeing this. And though they were leading men in the palace, scorning sacrifices to idols, they were hiding themselves in their home and were free for both fastings and prayers. Therefore, having been accused, they were placed before Decius and, after a period of coming to their senses had been granted to them, they were sent away until the return of Decius. But meanwhile paying out their inheritance amongst paupers, with a plan having been formed, they withdrew to the mountain, Celion, and there they decided to exist more secretly. Therefore, for a long time hiding thus, one of them always kept them supplied and, whenever he would enter the city, he would clothe himself in the shape and garment of a beggar. Therefore when Decius returned to the city and ordered them to be sought for the purpose of making their sacrifice, their servant, Malchus, returned terrified to the companions and informed them of the fury of the emperor. When those men were deeply frightened, Malchus set the bread loaves he had brought before them, so that, comforted by food, they would return stronger to the conflict. Yet after they were dining, sitting and conversing with grief and tears, suddenly, as God willed it, they fell asleep. With the morning having come, when they had been searched for and were not able to be found, and Decius grieved, because he had lost youths of such great quality, they were accused that thus far they had lain hidden on Mount Celion and, paying out their belongings to Christian paupers, remained firm in their resolution. Therefore Decius ordered that the parents of those men appear, and threatened death to them, unless they told whatever they knew concerning these men. However, they accused them similarly and lamented that they had paid out their riches to paupers. Then thinking what to do concerning them, through the will of God he ordered that the mouth of the cave be blocked with stones in order that they would die there from hunger and need, having been enclosed. Indeed the servants did this, and two Christians, Theodorus and Rufinus, writing down the martyrdom of these men, carefully placed it amongst the stones.

Then, after the death of Decius and that whole generation, 372 years later, in the 30th year of the reign of Theodosius, a heresy sprouted forth of those men who denied the resurrection of the dead. Whence saddened, Theodosius, a most Christian emperor, because he was seeing that the faith was shaken so wickedly, sitting clothed in a blanket, was spinning in a remote place day by day.³ Seeing this, Merciful God wanted to console

³ Occasional alternate reading of “flebat” sometimes used: “...weeping in a remote place day by day.”

the grieving people and strengthen hope in the resurrection of the dead and he therefore awakened the afore mentioned martyrs, revealing the treasure of his goodness.

Accordingly, he sent it into the heart of a certain citizen of Ephesus, that he would build a shelter for his shepherds on that mountain. As the masons opened the cave, the saints rose and they, greeting each other in turn, thought that they had slept for only one night. And remembering the sadness of the day before, they asked Malchus, who had served them, what Decius had decreed concerning them. But he responded, as he said later: "We were searched for so we would sacrifice to idols. Behold, what the emperor thinks concerning us." Maximianus responded: "And God knows that we will not sacrifice. And when he had comforted his comrades, he ordered Malchus to descend to the city to buy bread, and bringing more bread loaves than yesterday, to announce returning what the emperor had ordered. Therefore, Malchus, taking five solid coins, leaves from the cave and seeing the stones, marveled, but thought little concerning the stones, thinking of another thing. Then, coming timidly to the gate of the city, he marveled greatly seeing the sign of the cross placed there. From there, proceeding to the other gate, when he discovered the same sign, he marveled beyond measure, seeing every door fitted with the sign of the cross and the city changed. And marking himself [with the sign of the cross] he returned to the first door, supposing that he was dreaming. From there, strengthening himself and covering his face he enters the city and coming to the bread vendors, he heard men speaking concerning Christ and even more dumbstruck he said: "What is it," he said, "that yesterday no one dared name Christ and now all acknowledge Christ! I think that this is not a city of Ephesians, because it was constructed differently, but I do not know another city such as this." And when, asking, he heard that this was Ephesus, he thought that truly he was mistaken and decided to return to his comrades.

Yet he approached those men, who were selling bread, and when he brought forward silver coins, amazed, the vendors were saying to each other that that youth had discovered an ancient treasure. Malchus, indeed, seeing them talking to each other was thinking that they wanted to drag him to the emperor and terrified, he asked that they let him go and hold onto the bread and silver coins. But detaining him, they said to him: "Where are you from?! Because you discovered the treasures of the ancient emperors, show us and we will be your comrades and we will hide you, because otherwise you are not able to be hidden." Indeed Malchus could not find what he should say to them on account of fear. Seeing him silent, they dragged him by a rope cast onto his neck through the streets up to the middle of the city. And gossip passed to all that a certain youth had discovered treasures. Therefore, when all the people flocked together and marveled at him, he wanted to prove to them that he had found nothing. And looking at all the people, he was able to be recognized by no one and looking out into the people he wanted to recognize anyone from his kin, who he truly thought were alive, and discovering no one, he was standing as if deranged in the middle of the populace of the city. And when the sainted Bishop Martin and Antipater, the proconsul, who had recently come into the city,

heard this, they ordered the citizens to bring him carefully and his silver coins. And when he was dragged by servants to the church, he thought that he was being led to the emperor. Then, the bishop and the proconsul, marveling at the silver coins, asked him where he had discovered the unknown treasure. But he responded that he had discovered nothing at all, but that he had the same *denarii* from the purse of his parents. And when he was asked, of which city he was, he responded: "I know well that I am from this city, if only this is the city of the Ephesians." The proconsul said: "Make your parents come so they might testify on your behalf." When he named them and no one knew them, they were saying that he was pretending only to escape in some way. And the proconsul said: "How do we believe you that this silver was your parents', since its writing holds more than 377 years and it belongs to the first days of the Emperor Decius, and these silver coins are in no way similar to our silver. And how did your parents exist so long a time ago?! Indeed you, youth, want to deceive the wise and old men of Ephesus. Therefore, I will order that you be delivered to the laws, until you confess what you've found." Then Malchus, collapsing before them, said: "By God, my lords, tell me what I ask of you and I will tell you what is in my heart. The emperor, Decius, who was in this city, where is he now!" The bishop said: "My son, today there is no one on earth who is named Decius; however, he was an emperor long ago." Yet Malchus said: "In this matter, my lord, I am thus astounded and no one believes me, but follow me and I will show you my comrades, who are on Mount Celion and believe them. Indeed, I know this, that we fled from the face of the Emperor Decius and I saw recently that he entered into this city, if only this is the city of Ephesus."

Then the bishop, thinking to himself, said to the proconsul that there was a vision that God wanted to show in this youth. Therefore they proceeded with him together with a great crowd of the citizens. And Malchus entered first to his comrades and after him the bishop entering, discovered amongst the stones letters sealed with two silver seals. And he read these to the assembled populace, with all listening and marveling. And seeing the sacred men of God sitting in the cave and their faces blooming like roses, falling prostrate, they glorified God. And immediately the bishop and the proconsul sent word to the emperor Theodosius, asking that he come quickly and see the miracles of God recently revealed. He, rising at once from the ground and from the sack, in which he was grieving, came from Constantinople to Ephesus glorifying God and with all of them meeting him, they all climbed to the cave together. And as soon as the saints saw the emperor, the faces of those men shone brightly like the sun. And having entered the emperor fell prostrate before them, glorifying God and rising, he embraced them and wept over each of them, saying: "I see you in the same way as if I saw the Lord raising Lazarus." Then Saint Maximianus said to him: "Believe us that God raised us because of you before the day of the great resurrection, so that you might believe without a doubt that there is a resurrection of the dead. Truly, indeed, we rose again and are alive, and just as an infant is in the womb of the mother, not feeling harm, and lives, thus we were living, both lying and sleeping and not feeling." And having spoken these words, with all looking on, they bowed their heads and fell asleep on the ground and surrendered their spirits according to the command of God. However, rising, the emperor fell over them, weeping and kissing them warmly. And when he ordered gold coffins to be made, into which they would be put, on that very night they appeared to the emperor, saying, that

just as they lay on the ground thus far and from the ground had risen again, thus he should leave them until the Lord would reawaken them for a second time. Therefore, the emperor ordered that place be adorned with gilded jewels and all bishops trusting in the resurrection to be acquitted. That they are said to have slept 372 years can be in doubt, since they had arisen in the year of our Lord 448. However, as one may know, Decius ruled only one year and three months in the year of our Lord 252. And thus they did not sleep but 196 years.

“As the same thing in us is living and dead, waking and sleeping, young and old. For these things having changed around are those, and those in turn having changed around are these.” - Heraclitus⁴

An Introduction: With Sleep Comes a Fusion of Worlds

When seven young men awoke from their centuries-long slumber they could hardly believe they had transcended the boundaries of time and age from an empire oppressive to their faith to one where Christianity dominated the land. And even in their slumber, they attained an even greater transcendence between life and death, experiencing both the divine and mundane through their miraculous adventure. Just as these men straddled the borders of life and death in their sleep, never quite achieving the complete act of martyrdom, their story likewise becomes one of exploration between and across borders imagined by society. The tale of “The Seven Sleepers of Ephesus” embodies the inherent nature of legends to cross and disregard socio-religious boundaries thus blurring traditions in a story of faith and resurrection.

This notion appears from the start in the story’s origins in Late Antiquity and its formation in the fifth to sixth centuries. In their tale, the Seven Sleepers blend the historical actions of the emperors Decius and Theodosius II with Christian memory of

⁴ Heraclitus, “DK B88,” translated by Daniel W. Graham in “Heraclitus: Flux, Order, and Knowledge,” by Daniel W. Graham, *The Oxford Handbook of Presocratic Philosophy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 175.

Note: All translations listed in the footnotes, unless otherwise indicated, are my own. Translations done by other scholars will be cited as such with the translation in the body of the text.

their effects and hopes for believers throughout the ages. This approach develops a piece both evocative of the reigns of these emperors, while also obscuring their image with charged retrospection and the miraculous. The resulting work of Syriac origin, and first recorded into Latin by Gregory of Tours in the sixth century, leaves the reader in a realm of both obscurity and uncertainty as to the historical basis of the tale, as neither fully invention nor factual. Yet a similar occurrence arises from its literary origins as well, since the plot and motifs draw heavily from Greek myth and Jewish folk tradition. While blending these Indo-European and Semitic traditions, this tale becomes not only a synthesis of cultures, but also a narrative fusion of folktale, legend and myth. And from this eclectic collection of influences, the tale of the Seven Sleepers stands as a story extending into multiple genres and roots, yet belonging entirely to none.

As time progresses through the Middle Ages, this unclassifiable attribute evolves with the story's subsequent abstraction and transformation through magical practice. In this flexible and versatile realm of popular religious tradition, the Sleepers tale comes to signify the marriage of seemingly competing influences in every society and culture with which it comes into contact. Used in spellcraft and prophecy in the most distant kingdoms of both Christianity and Islam, the Seven Sleepers become popular for their narrative associations with divine protection, sleep and resurrection or restoration. Yet in every case of their usage, they bring with them a certain under- or even unacknowledged attribute of coalescence. Far from its geographical origins in Near East, in Anglo-Saxon England the Seven Sleepers represent a melding of Christianity with pagan folk tradition, seen in numerous charms featuring them. All the more, back in the Muslim kingdoms of the Near East, situated in and around modern-day Iran and Turkey, the appearance of the

Sleepers throughout talismanic magic and divination signifies an absorption of Christianity into Islam.

This project will attempt to pull together scholarship done on this story's intrinsic characteristics of synthesis and transformation to trace a larger trend for this tale across both time and geographical distance. While much research has occurred on separate aspects of this topic, such as magical practice concerning the Sleepers in specific societies or genres of literature, very few scholars have connected the trends seen in popular religious practice to the literary tradition of the story across cultures. Louis Massignon comes closest to accomplishing this in his article, "Les Sept Dormants d'Ephèse (*Ahl al-Kahf*) en Islam et en Chrétienté," later expanded into a book of the same title. In his work, he examines the story's usage in both French Christian kingdoms and various Islamic societies of the Near East through cults and pilgrimage of the medieval and early modern era.⁵ His research, however, mainly follows the societal reception of the piece, with magical practice as a minor focus, and does not as equally consider the literary transformation that accompanies this reception. Yet the literary tradition of the Sleepers has had considerable coverage on its own, most notably through P. Michael Huber's book, *Die Wanderlegende von den Siebenschläfern*, where Huber traces the story's incarnations across Muslim and Christian cultures.⁶ Therefore, this investigation into the tale and its later usage intends to find a medium between the approaches seen in the works of these scholars and others like them, creating a fusion of methods from

⁵ Louis Massignon, "Les Sept Dormants d'Ephèse (*Ahl al-Kahf*) en Islam et en Chrétienté: Première Partie," *Revue des Études Islamiques* 22 (1954): 61-110.

⁶ P. Michael Huber, *Die Wanderlegende von den Siebenschläfern: Eine Literargeschichtliche Untersuchung* (Leipzig: Otto Harrassowitz, 1910).

history, literature, religion and art history. In a sense, this work aims to fashion an interdisciplinary melding of approaches as much a hybrid as the story itself.

Thus with this approach, the project will enhance this dominating characteristic of the tale of the Seven Sleepers in synthesis and metamorphosis. For the presence of such a tale in magical traditions in and across both East and West epitomizes the story's inherent ability for inducing cultural mingling. In this feat, the journey of the story itself demonstrates how a simple tale of faith and devotion can illustrate the proclivity for societies and customs to bleed into one another. Thus within its formation and transformation, the tale of the Seven Sleepers of Ephesus accentuates the nebulous boundaries which societies find in and around themselves, despite the hard lines they attempt to demarcate.

Part One:

Synthesis and the Formation of a Tale

Chapter One
Settings of Doubt and Obscurity in the Seven Sleepers of Ephesus:
Christianity under Decius and Theodosius II

Upon investigating the historical origins of the Seven Sleepers of Ephesus, Ernst Honigmann declared, “Among all existing legends, that of the Seven Sleepers seems to deserve the first place for its exemplary indistinctness and obscurity.”⁷ This obscurity he observes derives from the seemingly random selection of time periods given as the settings of the story. A shortage of historical sources concerning these periods adds to this status, creating a backdrop both puzzling and unfamiliar to the modern reader. However, the historical context of the story remains tied to its theme of longing for steadfast faith and loyalty to God and Christian doctrine. So by piecing together the climates of these historical backdrops from the available archaeological and written sources, the reader can find the reasons behind the usage of the reigns of Decius and Theodosius II in this oddity of a martyr tale. And from an investigation into the melding of these time periods and issues of religious doubt, a function for the miraculous arises as a means to reconcile memories of the bitter past with hopes for the future.

Readers first meet the Sleepers during the fleeting two-year reign of the Emperor Decius in the midst of his Christian persecutions from 250-251 A.D. And upon their awakening, the Sleepers find the Christian Emperor Theodosius II as he confronts a little known “Sadducee heresy” over two centuries later, based on the length of the slumber.⁸

⁷Ernst Honigmann, “Stephen of Ephesus and the Legend of the Seven Sleepers,” *Patristic Studies* 1953: 125-168.

⁸Gregorius Turonensis, “De Septem Dormientibus,” *Liber in Gloria Martyrum*, edited by Bruno Krusch (Hannover: Hahn, 1969), Brepolis Library of Latin Texts, <http://clt.brepolis.net/cds/pages/Exporter.aspx?ctx=1721300&extra=10> (Accessed September 3-October 15, 2010).

Yet as disparate as these reigns appear, they hold a joining factor in the doubt they kindled in the burgeoning Christian populace. The originators of the “Legend of the Seven Sleepers” placed the story during two time periods that embody the two strongest types of doubt to which a Christian could succumb or recant: firstly, as a minority facing the external pressures of a larger, authoritative body of nonbelievers, and secondly, as the majority confronting an internal discord caused by theological dispute.

At the same time, the depictions of the reigns of Decius and Theodosius II in the Sleepers tale reveal the impressions each period left on Christian memory by the 6th century. In examining the reigns of these emperors and in particular the sentiments expressed by Christians of each emperor’s reign, the reader can assess how this martyr story expresses discontentment with the historical conduct of fellow Christians. By preserving these impressions in literature, the story also presses its relevance for its later readers while emphasizing a desire for greater expressions of faith within the Church. The Sleepers then fulfill this desire by demonstrating unwavering loyalty to God in both instances. The tale establishes these men as steadfast models for fellow believers when experiencing religious adversity. Thus in the face of enemies familiar or imposing and political climates just as varied, the Sleepers legend evokes the constancy with which Christianity has survived a spectrum of hardships and struggles. Moreover, it emphasizes the need for this resolve in all believers regardless of circumstance. More importantly, it depicts the salvation and rewards awaiting those who emulate the unwavering loyalty of these brave young martyrs in their faith.

The first test of faith occurs during the persecutions enacted under the reign of the Emperor Decius, fresh from winning his throne through mutiny and civil war in a

struggling empire.⁹ In enacting his decree, Decius required all citizens of the empire to make a sacrifice as a demonstration of reverence to Roman tradition and authority, presenting Christians with a problematic situation of choosing between their loyalty to their Christian faith or their pagan emperor. The *libelli* distributed to the citizens who complied illustrates the explicit declaration that many Christians considered a renunciation of God. Forty-four such *libelli* survive from this persecution, dated between the 12th of June and the 14th July 250, found in Egypt. One example reads as follows:

To those appointed commissioners superintending the sacrifices, from Aurelia Ammonarion of the village of Theadelphia, and always as one who customarily offers sacrifice and shows reverence to the gods as well as my children, who are surnamed Aurelii Didymus and Noupheus and Taas, we have completed the declaration even now in your presence, in accordance with the decree we have poured libations and sacrificed, and of the sacred victims we have tasted, and I request of you to issue a certificate to this effect on my behalf. With kind regards. We Serenus and Hermas Aurelius have seen you offering the sacrifices. I, Hermas, certify it.¹⁰

As apparent from the actions mentioned in the *libelli*, such as libations, sacrifices and the tasting of sacrificed victims, the act of proclaiming allegiance to Decius entailed a rejection of God, since a Christian would have to “show reverence to the gods” of Rome. And from this requirement arises the conflict of interests, which brought about actions demonstrating Christian inconstancy and doubt in their faith. This conflict then becomes preserved as the threat of spiritual inconstancy that ties the two halves of the Sleepers tale together. For in this case, the numbers of people who submitted to this edict committed a comparable crime to the heretics later seen in Theodosius II’s reign, as both require an

⁹ Bernard Green, *Christianity in Ancient Rome: The First Three Centuries* (New York: T&T Clark International, 2010), 141.

¹⁰ J.R. Knipfing, trans., “The Libelli of the Decian Persecution,” by J.R. Knipfing, *HTR* 16 (1923): 354-55.

individual to turn away from accepted Christian doctrine, resulting in their own spiritual downfall.

Yet before approaching the legend itself in relation to these events, an examination of the circumstances leading up to the Decian persecutions can provide a context for the story's opening and its distinct appeal as a setting for the Sleepers tale. The larger religious climate in the empire, surrounding the tale's first setting under the reign of Decius, created external pressures for Christianity on a social and political front, making it ideal as a backdrop for the religious inconstancy seen in the Sleepers tale. The first cause came from a general revival in traditional pagan traditions due to the millennial celebrations of the Roman Empire performed under Decius' predecessor, Philip the Arab.¹¹ The fifth century historian, Zosimus, offers one of the few descriptions of this spectacular event. He writes,

This is how we are told the festival was celebrated. Heralds go about summoning everyone to attend a spectacle they have never seen before and will never see again. In summer, a few days before it begins, the Quindecemviri sit in the Capitol and in the Palatine temple on a tribunal and distribute purifying agents[...]When all the people assemble in the above mentioned places and in the temple of Diana on the Aventine, each one bringing wheat, barley and beans, they keep all-night vigils to the Fates with great solemnity for...nights. Then when the time arrives for the festival, which is celebrated for three days and three nights in the Campus Martius, the victims are dedicated on the bank of the Tiber at Tarentum. They sacrifice to Jupiter, Juno, Apollo, Latona, Diana, and also to the Fates, Lucina, Ceres, Dis and Proserpine...Those who participate are rewarded with the first fruits of the wheat, barley and beans, for they are distributed to all the people, as I said.¹²

¹¹ George Thomas Oborn, "Why Did Decius and Valerian Proscribe Christianity?," *Church History* 2, No. 2 (Jun., 1933), 67-77.

¹² Zosimus, *Historia Nova*, translated by Ronald Ridley (Sydney: Australian Association for Byzantine Studies, 2006), 26-27.

The impressive description of the events as the “spectacle [the people] have never seen before and will never see again” denotes the scale of the celebrations. And with such heightened spirits, the millennial celebrations played a significant role in boosting public morale and faith in the gods of Rome, especially needed in a period rife with military revolt and barbarian invasions.¹³ Zosimus even emphasizes how apparently “all the people” participated in these reverences and sacrifices. Additionally, the Roman government offered compensation for participants “with the first fruits of the wheat, barley and beans.” Therefore, these events marked a shift in the religious climate, at least superficially, which could have caused anxiety for Christians of the Empire in this resurgence of the old pagans ways.

Furthermore, such celebrations could have played a role in Decius’ choice to enact such a persecution throughout the empire. Yet as Bernard Green points out, Decius never revealed his motives for these actions or, if he did, they were not recorded for posterity.¹⁴ However, he notes the importance of the millennial celebrations as an influence, writing, “The millennial games of the previous year must have been in [Decius’] mind as he pondered Rome’s and his own future. The millennial games had been a massive, popular affirmation of confidence in the gods’ protection of Rome. In the light of what had happened since, another massive manifestation of homage to the gods was called for”.¹⁵ Thus a major possibility arises that the Decian persecutions may have occurred as a means to unify the empire under the ancient pagan traditions of Rome. In

¹³ Bernard Green, *Christianity in Ancient Rome: The First Three Centuries* (New York: T&T Clark International, 2010), 142.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 143.

doing this, Decius could use the substantial fervor ignited by the millennial celebrations under the reign of his predecessor, Philip, to gain popular support for his own reign and expunge the memory of his mutinous rise to the throne. Additionally, an edict which bound the empire together under pagan tradition could recast Decius as the restorer of the empire to its former glory under the favor of the gods. And such a demonstration of faith in the empire became all the more necessary after the immense disunity, economic ruin and continuous civil war experienced by Rome.¹⁶ These issues, on top of Rome's buckling borders due to barbarian invasion, may have come across to many as indicators of a decline in the relationship between the Roman people and their gods.¹⁷

Therefore, Decius did attempt to take on this role of restorer, as archaeological evidence from Cosa suggests and such a reputation gave strong cause for his role as the challenger of the Christian faith in the Sleepers legend. From one partially preserved inscription from the time of the persecutions, an epithet reveals that Decius considered himself the 'restorer of sacred rites (*restitutor sacrorum*). The title points to how in both policy and public imagery Decius casts himself as the supporter of pagan tradition in Rome. Additionally, in Charles Babcock's analysis of the inscription, he mentions that during periods of struggle between pagans and Christians a number of emperors often acted as *restitutores sacrorum*, including Valerian, Diocletian and Galerius, to name a few besides Decius.¹⁸ However, the chronological placement of this epithet so closely following the millennial celebrations of the Roman Empire carries weight as an overt reference to the religious movement of the period. Such a context magnifies its

¹⁶ Oborn, "Why Did Decius and Valerian Proscribe Christianity?," 68.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁸ C.L. Babcock, "An Inscription of Trajan Decius from Cosa," *AJP* 83 (1962): 147-58.

significance and power as a tactic to legitimize Decius as emperor through religious unification. Also a significant factor, the years before the reign of Decius marked a period of intense political instability. According to the early 6th century Byzantine historian, Zosimus, Decius gained the position of emperor through legions driven by discontent.¹⁹ Therefore, although Decius had military support, he needed to take steps toward solidifying his position as emperor, not usurper, in the eyes of the populace. And by using this title, he manipulates popular interest to gain their trust.

Yet this title could point to another possibility for the cause behind the persecution in the swiftly growing numbers of Christians and their influence in the empire. This factor, along with the subsequent pressure and hardship his edict brought to Christians, contributes evidence for his antagonistic role preserved in literature. The bishop of Carthage during the persecutions, later known as St. Cyprian, accounts for this cause a year after the death of Decius. Writing to his brother, Antonian, in Letter 50.5, he says, "...a tyrant [Decius] and declared enemy to the priests of God threatened everything which was barbarous and terrible; and was so incensed against [the priests of God] that he could have born with more patience the news of a rival Emperor, set up in opposition to him, than the ordination of a Roman bishop."²⁰ This bold statement implies that the Christian church stood as the greatest political adversary to the emperor and that Decius harbored a known resentment towards this powerful group for their influence in the empire. Such resentment gives Decius reason to indirectly strike at Christianity

¹⁹ Zosimus, 1.21-22, *Historia Nova*, 7.

See also, David Potter, *The Roman Empire at Bay AD 180–395* (New York: Routledge, 2004), 241.

²⁰Cyprian, "Epistle LV," *Select Epistles of St. Cyprian Treating of the Episcopate*, translated by Nathaniel Marshall (London: Macmillan, 1922), 51.

through an official edict in support of the traditional pagan tradition, though little evidence remains to prove this one way or another. Even if animosity towards Christian influence did not actually have a significant part in enacting his edict, responses, like those of men as influential as Cyprian, reveal the Christian opinion of Decius during the time. Further cause for this portrayal of Decius may stem from the fact that the persecution of Decius gained renown early on as the first systematic, centralized and empire-wide persecution of Christians in memory, with its predecessors remaining local and restricted.²¹ Moreover, these lingering sentiments could have influenced the creators of the Sleepers tale to use his reign as their first setting.

Although we have no window into Decius' motives, the size of the Church at this time does give some idea of the threat Christians could have posed to the authority of the emperor. By the reign of Decius, the Church had established itself as both a large, and more importantly, an organized power, whose presence became undeniable in the empire.²² Mary Beard addresses this issue, in relation to the letters of St. Cyprian, saying, "Some fourth-century Christians maintain that those who instigated the persecutions were reacting to an increase in the number of the faithful; by that date certainly Christians not only formed the largest voluntary association in the city of Rome (partly due to their active recruitment of converts), but the church had developed a much stronger organization, with a powerful hierarchy of bishops and other officials."²³ The rise of such a solidly structured hierarchy during a period marked in contrast by political instability

²¹ Elizabeth Castelli, *Martyrdom and Memory: Early Christian Culture Making* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004), 37.

²² Mary Beard, John North and Simon Price, *Religions of Rome*, vol. 1. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 243.

²³ *Ibid.*

throughout the empire created a doubly imposing threat for the newly appointed ruler. In light of these factors, the Decian persecutions come across as an ideal method to both bolster the power of the new emperor with pagan support, and eliminate a growing danger to his authority. These sentiments, paired with the afore mentioned pagan revival, also make this period a unique case of religious growth in both faiths, increasing its appeal as a setting for a story concerning religious doubt and loyalty.

Thus with the circumstances surrounding the story's initial setting now established, the Seven Sleepers episode can point to the specific issues of religious doubt raised by this period. In the earliest Latin version, Gregory of Tours opens the tale with the Decian persecutions and addresses issues of religious loyalty within the first few lines: *Septem vero germanorum, qui apud urbem Ephesum requiescunt, haec est ratio. Tempore Decii imperatoris, cum persecutio in christianos ageretur, septem viri comprehensi sunt et ducti sunt coram principe...qui diversis verbis temptati, ut cederent, nequaquam adqueverunt.*²⁴ Since Gregory only briefly summarizes this tale from “a certain Syrian,” he writes with the purpose to outline and record this story for reference and posterity.²⁵ Gregory does not include an overly descriptive account of the persecution. Yet the author decidedly preserves the major factor prompting doubt and fear among Christians both during the time period and in historical memory in how the Sleepers, “when tempted/tried with various words so they would submit, by no means

²⁴ Gregorius Turonensis, “De Septem Dormentibus.”

“This indeed is the account of the seven brothers, who rest near the city of Ephesus. During the time of the Emperor Decius, when a persecution was conducted upon Christians, seven men were arrested and led before the Princeps. These are the names of these men: Maximianus, Malchus, Martinianus, Constantinus, Dionisius, Iohannes, Serapion. When they were incited with various words to submit, they by no means assented.”

²⁵ *Ibid.*

assented.” This excerpt reveals that these seven young men had the opportunity to save themselves from martyrdom by renouncing their faith before Roman authorities. Yet in the eyes of the creators of the tale such an action, even if done superficially, would display a lack of loyalty and sincerity in an individual for their faith. And via this mentality, the numbers of submitters to this persecution facilitate the spread of uncertainty throughout Christendom by openly renouncing God. Thus, the Sleepers act as pillars of religious conviction in the face of an appealing escape from strife that so many individuals took.

Furthermore, Gregory’s account points to the actual procedures observed under Decius during these persecutions. From Gregory’s description above, this tale immediately alludes to a general trend in judicial actions towards Christians often taken by emperors before Decius. This trend dates back to some of the earliest dealings with Christians in the Empire, noted by Pliny the Younger, the governor of Pontus/Bithynia from 111-113 C.E.²⁶ In Letter 10.96, he writes to the Emperor Trajan concerning his methods of interrogation and punishment of known Christians,

For the moment this is the line I have taken with all persons brought before me on the charge of being Christians. I have asked them in person if they are Christians, and if they admit it, I repeat the question a second and third time, with a warning of the punishment awaiting them. If they persist, I order them to be led away for execution; for, whatever the nature of their admission, I am convinced that their stubbornness and unshakeable obstinacy ought not to go unpunished.²⁷

This early example plays out a scene remarkably similar to that given by Gregory of Tours in judicial procedure. And it reveals two key factors in the Sleepers story: first that

²⁶ Lawrence J. Johnson, “Second Century: East,” *Worship in the Early Church, Volume One: An Anthology of Historical Sources* (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 2009), 83.

²⁷ Pliny the Younger, “Letter 10.96,” *The Letters of the Younger Pliny*, translated by Betty Radice (New York: Penguin, 1963), 293-294.

the Roman officials wanted to give the individual every opportunity to submit to their authority and, secondly, that the numbers of people refusing to recant during Pliny's time were significant enough for him to write to the Emperor Trajan for his reassurance and consent for their punishment. Likewise, Roman officials overseeing interrogations near the period of the Sleepers initial setting did not show particular interest in what the people actually believed, so long as they performed the sacrifice as a show of allegiance. The martyrdom of Saints Perpetua and Felicity in Carthage, only about fifty years prior to Decius' persecution, demonstrates this notion. In Perpetua's account of events leading up to her execution during the persecutions of Septimius Severus, she writes,

“We went up to the tribunal. The others being asked, confessed. So they came to me. And my father appeared there also, with my son, and would draw me from the step, saying: Perform the Sacrifice; have mercy on the child. And Hilarian the procurator - he that after the death of Minucius Timinian the proconsul had received in his room the right and power of the sword - said: Spare your father's grey hairs; spare the infancy of the boy. Make sacrifice for the Emperors' prosperity. And I answered: I am a Christian.”²⁸

From this account, it appears that the Roman official puts forth a considerable effort into sparing Perpetua from execution. He appeals to her emotions by urging her to act for her father and newborn child. Moreover, the procurator advises Perpetua to make the sacrifice for a reason entirely unrelated to faith. However, Perpetua did not yield. Yet judging from the Sleepers legend, set about a half century later, the resolution Christians showed toward their faith had weakened and many succumbed to such questioning. As Elizabeth Castelli notes, “...an important percentage of Christian evidence for this persecution produces a portrait not of Christian constancy, but of accommodation,

²⁸ W.H. Shewring, trans., *The Passion of Perpetua and Felicity*, (London: White Friars Press, 1931), 38.

evasion and failure.”²⁹ Thus whether or not, Christians inwardly rejected these sacrifices, their outward display of compliance created a reputation of weakness for this period.

Thus the author portrays these sleeping heroes as exceptions to the Christian populace and this comes across most clearly in the 12th century version of the tale by Jacobus de Voragine as he recounts the reaction of Decius to the flight of the Sleepers into their cave: *Mane facto cum quaesiti fuissent et inveniri non possent et Decius doleret, quod tales iuvenes perdidisset.*³⁰ The descriptor of *tales iuvenes* (youths of such great quality) marks these men as rare and remarkable due to their refusal to relent and deny God. And the fact that Decius “grieved” their escape, most likely refers to how he could not make examples of these men for the rest of the Christian populace either by their punishment or, more preferably, by their eventual renunciation of their faith. In both cases, the astonishing faith of these men set them apart from the rest and made them ideal targets for the emperor’s wrath to shake the Christian faith with their spiritual or physical downfall.

Moreover, in his third treatise, entitled “De Lapsis,” St. Cyprian attests to the large numbers of people who did not exhibit the steadfast loyalty of the Seven Sleepers as an eye-witness to the persecutions. His heated response suggests that these events brought about a period of spiritual turmoil for Christians, which pushed many into states of doubt or even to their own renunciation of Christ. While some did refuse to recant, Cyprian bemoaned the many who brought eternal damnation to themselves and their

²⁹Castelli, *Martyrdom and Memory*, 37.

³⁰Jacobus a Voragine, “Historia de Septem Dormientibus,” *Legenda Aurea* (Osnabrück: Otto Zeller Verlag, 1969), 435.

“With the morning having come, when they had been searched for and were not able to be found, and Decius grieved, because he had lost youths of such great quality...”

loved ones, as the title of the treatise suggests. He paints a stirring image of the effects of their faithlessness, writing,

But to many their own destruction was not sufficient. With mutual exhortations, people were urged to their ruin; death was pledged by turns in the deadly cup. And that nothing might be wanting to aggravate the crime, infants also, in the arms of their parents, either carried or conducted, lost, while yet little ones, what in the very first beginning of their nativity they had gained. Will not they, when the day of judgment comes, say, “We have done nothing; nor have we forsaken the Lord’s bread and cup to hasten freely to a profane contact; the faithlessness of others has ruined us. We have found our parents our murderers; they have denied to us the Church as a Mother; they have denied God as a Father: so that, while we were little, and unforeseeing, and unconscious of such a crime, we were associated by others to the partnership of wickedness, and we were snared by the deceit of others?”³¹

Cyprian’s words aim to rouse guilt within his readers for their betrayal of their religion via his pathos-filled images. His choice of writing in the voices of the lost children makes for an especially heart-wrenching and effective method of expressing his horror at the recanters. As he labels the submitters to the edict murderers, he places the blame of the demise of these innocents on their heads. Though exact numbers of those who submitted do not exist, their number must have formed a group significant and noticeable enough to cause such alarm to the bishop of Carthage. Therefore the portrayal of the Seven Sleepers as *tales iuvenes* picks up on these known sentiments from the persecutions and offers models for the proper behavior in the face of oppression.

However, the Sleepers tale sends a misleading image concerning the rarity of individuals who refused to comply with the Decian edict. This skewing of ratios occurs for the specific purpose of instilling an urgency and need for acts of loyalty. And the story itself provides the ideal example for emulation by the populace. And thus with

³¹ Cyprian, “Treatise III: De Lapsis,” *Ante-Nicene Fathers, Vol. 5*, translated by Robert Ernest Wallis (Buffalo: Christian Literature Publishing Co., 1886), 439.

more demonstrations of devotion, like that of the Sleepers, the Church could combat any doubt in the minds of believers concerning their faith. Evidence alluding to this manipulation of the events exists in the secondary economic aims and results of the persecution. Concerning these issues, George Thomas Oborn suggests,

...there is much satisfactory evidence to show that all of the property of the Christians who were condemned to death, banished, or fled was appropriated by the imperial authorities for the use of the state. It does not appear that the number of those who were condemned to death was large, but the indications are that the exiles were quite numerous. Considering the general prosperity of the Christians it is quite probable that the financial returns from such acquisitions may have been large.³²

From this information, the Sleepers legend magnifies the disparity between those who submitted to the Decian edict and those who refused to make such sacrifices. Despite stretching historical truths, this remolding of history provides insight into the Christian memory of the event, apparent from the Sleepers legend. It suggests that Christian recorders of the event found any compliance with the edict a conscious and serious renunciation of their faith, rather than a superficial act of observance to law. Their memories and interpretations of the persecution paint this period into one of spiritual doubt, making it a prime source for exploration in a literary lesson on faith and loyalty.

Thus the literary response to the Decian persecutions manifests in the most extreme form of religious devotion through martyrdom. Moreover, an act of this sort creates a response both to the external threats of governmental oppression and internal challenges of general disbelief. Anthony O'Mahony addresses how the inherent nature of martyrdom can accomplish this two-fold goal. He remarks, "Martyrdom is more than a religious act; it is a political statement: martyrdom is political act affecting the allocation

³² Oborn, "Why Did Decius and Valerian Proscribe Christianity?," 69-70.

of power between two societies, or between a subgroup and the larger society. That is why, during the first three centuries of Christianity, Roman authorities increasingly considered the movement a direct threat to their authority and acted accordingly.”³³

Therefore, the Seven Sleepers tale represents an unconscious desire to react to the hardships faced by Christians of the past through the fantastic miracle of their slumber. This fantasy thus recasts a past hardship of oppression as a triumph of the underdog. With regards to O’Mahony’s “allocation of power,” the story illustrates how seven lowly men defied an emperor, even escaping death, through the grace of God. On the religious level, this tale celebrates the ultimate act of faith in martyrdom and elevates those who faced larger society with courage and conviction. The Sleepers combat the sentiments of religious doubt surrounding this period with their complete adherence to their faith.

Yet just as this story makes statements concerning Christianity’s past and sets examples for its present, it provides more significant and urgent messages about its future with their resurrection and how individuals can prepare for their own to come. The second setting of the story, during the reign of Theodosius II, presents a new spiritual challenge for the faithful, which comes in the form of theological discord within the religious community. Creating an equally menacing threat to Christianity and the eternal life of its followers, a heresy causes the Sleepers to awaken from their slumber and become living proof of God’s promise of resurrection. Thus, they once again dispel the doubt within believers and affirm trust in God through their miraculous awakening.

³³ Anthony O’Mahony, “Louis Massignon, the Seven Sleepers of Ephesus and the Christian-Muslim Pilgrimage at Vieux-Marché, Brittany,” *Explorations in a Christian Theology of Pilgrimage*, edited by Craig Bartholomew and Fred Hughes (Burlington: Ashgate, 2004), 128.

However, the time during which the Sleepers slumbered brought major religious changes to Ephesus and the story's creators emphasize this switch from a pagan to Christian Ephesus to indicate a new threat to the Christian faith from within. Gregory of Tours describes this period as follows: *Post multorum vero annorum curricula, cum, data ecclesiis pace, Theodosius christianus obtenuisset imperium, surrexit hereses inmundae Sadduceorum, qui negant resurrectionem futuram.*³⁴ The author puts considerable effort into fully articulating the Christian status of the empire by both mentioning how “peace was given to the churches” and also naming Theodosius as *christianus*. These descriptors express the gains of Christianity on a social level with the churches and on a political level with official, governmental power of the emperor. Immediately, Gregory sets up spiritual conflict of the period with the “impure heresy of Sadducees.” This setting flips the circumstances seen earlier in the story, before the Sleepers fled to their cave, since now Christianity holds the dominant role in Ephesus against a minority group of non-believers or “heretics.” This switch in societal conditions allows the Sleepers to prove the continual need for their unwavering faith in a largely Christian world and identify threats still plaguing Christians despite their power.

Yet questions arise surrounding the major plot point of the “Sadducee heresy” named by Gregory and what specifically he refers to with it. However, its meaning remains central to the spiritual instability the Sleepers confront. Due to the distinct choice of words, this heresy appears to allude to an actual historical event from the period.

Although, as Ernst Honigman notes, modern scholars make a chief objection concerning

³⁴ Gregorius Turonensis, “De Septem Dormientibus.”

“Indeed after the course of many years, with peace having been given to the churches, when the Christian, Theodosius, obtained the empire, an impure heresy of the Sadducees arose, who deny the resurrection will happen.”

this notion: “Nothing is known of this heresy which is said to have broken out during a well-known period of Church history.”³⁵ Yet the term, Sadducee, bore another general meaning for a religious or “family” group gone astray since the fourth century.³⁶

Therefore, Gregory of Tours could have intended the usage of the word “Sadducee” as a derogatory label in this instance. With this in mind, the term “Sadducee heresy” then can refer to a Christian controversy of the time, which rejected the resurrection. In this vein, the most literal translation of Gregory’s words becomes essential, as the “heresy of the Sadducees,” thus most likely alluding to the Biblical Sadducees who also refused to acknowledge the resurrection, noted in Mark 12:24 and John 11:24.

Yet another explanation for the Gregory’s usage of this term may come from a reason contemporaneous to the period in which he wrote. In Book 10.13 of the *History of the Franks*, Gregory relates the pertinence of the “Sadducee” heretics in his own time, writing, “One of my priests revived once more the pernicious doctrine of the Sadducees and expressed his disbelief in the resurrection of the body. When I argued that it was foretold in the Holy Scriptures and that it had the full support of apostolic tradition, he replied: ‘I do not deny that many people believe in it, but we can’t be sure whether or not it is true or not.’”³⁷ While Gregory goes on to persuade this priest of his error in this account, his wariness of further instances of heretical thought of this sort, may have prompted his use of the term “Sadducee heresy” in the *Sleepers* tale. Thus the *Sleepers* themselves may act as a commentary on this issue of religious constancy still prevalent in

³⁵ Honigmann, “Seven Sleepers,” 145.

³⁶ Philip Francis Esler, *The Early Christian World: Volume 1* (London: Routledge, 2000), 377.

³⁷ Gregory of Tours, *The History of the Franks*, translated by Lewis Thorpe (London: Penguin, 1974), 560, 566.

Gregory's time. Furthermore, the reign of Theodosius II may have provided an ideal parallel to this sixth century concern.

One possible contender for this heresy lies in an Origenist revival of the late fourth and early fifth centuries. Though originally a Christian theologian writing from the period of the Decian persecutions, Origen (185–254 C.E.) left in his work a legacy, particularly in the period around the years 300-500 C.E., which brought about numerous “Origenistic controversies.”³⁸ Elizabeth Clark discusses one controversy from several years preceding the reign of Theodosius in his early years, which fits the mold of the “Sadducee heresy” of the Sleepers tale. She writes, “To be sure, previous attacks upon Origen, such as that waged by Methodius of Olympus early in the fourth century, had also focused on the notion of “the bodily” in Origen's theology, but for Methodius the status of the resurrection of the body was the contested point...the late fourth and early fifth-century assailants of Origenism still singled out Origen's teaching on the resurrection for criticism—a teaching that they misunderstood.”³⁹ This misunderstanding of Origen's works appears in Gregory of Tours' account of the Sleepers tale as he describes the heresy as a group of individuals who “deny the resurrection will happen.” The story could have incorporated this fourth and fifth century controversy of the Eastern Roman Empire, mentioned by Clark, as an ideal setting for the awakening of the Sleepers. Their appearance would then provide the ultimate proof and represent the final word on the argument.

³⁸Panagiōtēs Tzamalikos, “Introduction,” *Origen: Cosmology and Ontology of Time* (Leiden: Brill, 2006), 3.

³⁹ Elizabeth Clark, “New Perspectives on the Origenist Controversy: Human Embodiment and Ascetic Strategies,” *Church History* 59, No. 2 (Jun., 1990): 145-162.

However, the misunderstanding of the anti-Origenists comes from the fact that as a Christian theologian, Origen did not “deny” the resurrection; rather he questioned the exact nature in which it would occur. As indicated by Methodius’ focus on “the bodily,” Origen argued for a spiritual, instead of corporal resurrection. In his *Panarion*, also known as *Adversus Haereses*, 64:12-62, Epiphanius preserved the argument of Methodius, which acted as a launching point for fifth century controversies surrounding the resurrection. In it, Methodius presents the summary of Origen’s original works, which encapsulates the major issues of debate. According to him, Origen asserted,

...[The body] will be flesh no longer but whatever was once characteristic of flesh will be characteristic of the spiritual body...So much by the way of summary of the points which Origen endeavored to make in his treatise on resurrection, in proof of a very complex hypothesis...[one] will realize that the resurrection may not be taken to apply to this body which cannot remain unchanged forever, but that it must apply to the spiritual body, in which the very same form that is even now preserved in this body will be retained—so that, as Origen said too, each of us will be the same even in appearance.⁴⁰

From Methodius’ summary, it appears that Origen set out to prove that the resurrection occurred on a solely spiritual level. And in his somewhat convoluted fashion, Origen claims that the spirit will take on the appearance of the flesh to create the resurrected form of an individual. As popular opinion of the time generally accepted a corporal resurrection, many considered Origen’s assertions an affront to the glory of the promise of Christ and even a bold, heretical statement.⁴¹ If taken as a reaction to this controversy, the Sleepers then become a declaration of the full corporal resurrection, obliterating Origen’s original argument concerning how the body “cannot remain unchanged

⁴⁰ Epiphanius, *The Panarion of Epiphanius of Salamis, Volume 2*, translated by Frank Williams (Brill: Leiden 1994), 141-145.

⁴¹ Clark, “Origenist Controversy,” 145-162.

forever.” Their miracle and physical appearance attest to what can become possible with God’s power and grace.

Despite this attractive possibility, this controversy falls a few decades earlier than the calculated awakening of the Sleepers mentioned within most versions of the tale, usually placed between the years 440-446.⁴² And since no Church historian speaks of an important movement in favor of Origen during the period, which the various versions recall, this brings some doubt to the early fifth century controversy as the “Saduccee heresy” of the story.⁴³ However, Ernst Honigmann brings up a significant point in this discussion, which may explain the lack of sources on mid-fifth century Origenists. He writes,

... We must not forget that these years are comparatively little known, as a result of the fact that none of the three Church Histories of Socrates, Sozomenus and Theodoret goes farther than 439, while their continuations by Theodorus Lector, John Diacrinomenus and others are lost. Moreover at this time the great Christological conflicts which brought about the Nestorian and Monophysite schisms stood so much in the centre of interest that a short revival of the already often discussed Origenistic controversy could easily be overlooked or forgotten.⁴⁴

Thus the lack of sources does not necessarily imply that Origen’s works did not maintain interest and support past the early years of the fifth century, rather, that the records pertaining to them remain lost to scholars. Furthermore, the latter part of his statement raises another possibility for the “Saduccee heresy” by calling this period one of “great Christological conflicts.” Though his article searches for a specific controversy to connect to the Sleepers tale, another option could point to a literary creation of a heresy,

⁴² Honigmann, “Legend of the Seven Sleepers,” 126.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 147.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 146-147.

which captured the historical perception of Theodosius II's reign as one of constant and heated, Christian theological dispute.

Since the purpose of the heresy in the story stood to establish Theodosius' reign as one of growing doubt amongst Christians, the creators of the tale could have conflated multiple heresies of his reign into one to express the general tone of the period. Though apparent in earlier versions, the 12th century, Jacobus de Voragine version, emphasizes this usage of the heresy in the most vivid manner, as he also conveys this through the emperor's character and reaction to the heresy. Concerning Theodosius II, he relates, *Unde contristatus Theodosius Christianissimus imperator, quia fidem tam impie agitari videbat, indutus cilicio sedens in interiori loco per singulos dies nebat.*⁴⁵ This surprising image of Theodosius II, presents an emotionally broken man driven into seclusion at the sight of "the faith shaken by impiety." And the images of him performing a meditative and monk-like activity of either weaving or spinning implies that he himself faces an internal struggle in determining how to deal with the growing disbelief in his people. Yet to say that "the faith was shaken by impiety," appears more likely to convey the results of a series or culmination of heresies, rather than a particular one, judging by the historical reign of Theodosius.

When one considers the multiple controversies of Theodosius II's reign, and Honigsmann notes the most prominent, a sense of growing frustration in the Church becomes apparent due to the volume of these controversies. One letter preserved in the *Codex Theodosianus*, issued to Florentius, Praetorian Prefect of Oriens reflects this

⁴⁵ Voragine, "Historia de Septem Dormientibus," 436.

"Whence saddened, Theodosius, a most Christian emperor, because he was seeing that the faith was shaken so wickedly, sitting clothed in a blanket, was spinning in a remote place day by day."

sentiment. Dated May 30, 428, it reads, “The madness of heretics must so be repressed that they shall know beyond doubt, before all else that the churches which they have taken from the orthodox, wherever they are held, shall immediately be surrendered to the Catholic Church, since it cannot be tolerated that those who ought not to have churches of their own should continue to detain those possessed or founded by the orthodox and invaded by such rash lawlessness.”⁴⁶ This letter resounds as a general denunciation of heretics, regardless of the individual groupings. It lumps the various groups together to create a single adversary for the Church to face. Within its expressed frustration and authoritative action, it conveys a strong and unrelenting desire for the unification of the Church under a single doctrine to stand up to this menace, characteristic of the sentiments expressed both by Christian theologians and the government.⁴⁷ Moreover, it sets the tone for the Sleepers tale with its images of churches “taken from the orthodox” and Christian souls “invaded by such rash lawlessness.” Yet despite actions such as those mentioned by this letter and many others, during the reign of Theodosius II “uniformity of Christian belief and faith could not be attained,” as Fergus Millar neatly summed up.⁴⁸

And these sentiments escalated around the most notorious controversy of the period surrounding the former Archbishop of Constantinople, Nestorius, during the Third Ecumenical Council of 431, otherwise known as the Council of Ephesus. However, Nestorius caused a stir not for denying the resurrection but for opposing that “the Holy Virgin is the Mother of God (Theotokos), inasmuch as in the flesh she bore the Word of

⁴⁶ Clyde Pharr, trans., “*CTh XVI.5.65*,” *The Theodosian Code and Novels, and the Sirmondian Constitutions* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1952), 462.

⁴⁷ Fergus Millar, *A Greek Roman Empire: Power and Belief under Theodosius II (408-450)* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006), 130.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*

God made flesh,” as the Council of Ephesus recorded.⁴⁹ Yet due to the pivotal role the city of Ephesus played in this controversy at the height of a string of heresies and so near the period of the Sleepers’ awakening, these factors may have contributed to the story’s use of Theodosius II’s reign and Ephesus itself as the embodiment of spiritual strife within the Church. From the recorded proceedings of the Council of Ephesus, the intense responses to the confusion caused by the so-called heretic still survive. At one point the bishops even explode into an uproar, denouncing Nestorius. According to the proceedings, “All the bishops cried out together: Whoever does not anathematize Nestorius let him be anathema...Whoever communicates with Nestorius let him be anathema! We anathematize all the apostles of Nestorius: we all anathematize Nestorius as a heretic: let all such as communicate with Nestorius be anathema!”⁵⁰ This report from the Council demonstrates the degree to which the controversies agitated the Church, bringing its bishops into a fury, which only exacerbated the issue by extending the punishment beyond the originator. And the punishment of anathema represented the most solemn and extreme form of excommunication the Church could offer, not only cutting an individual off from communion but also salvation itself.⁵¹ Therefore, these outcries and blanket anathemas come across as an extreme and desperate measure to purify and unify the Church, since agreements over doctrine and belief remained an impossibility.

Yet while such goals of unification and steadfast faith did not come about historically, literature and folklore lends its hand to fulfill the desires of Christian

⁴⁹ H. R. Percival, trans., “The Third Ecumenical Council. The Council of Ephesus,” *The Seven Ecumenical Councils of the Undivided Church* (Grand Rapid: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1955), 205.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 198.

⁵¹ William Smith, “Anathema,” *Encyclopaedic Dictionary Of Christian Antiquities* (New Delhi: Logos, 2005), 81.

memory. At the same time it preserves pieces and themes of little known periods of history, while also immortalizing early Christian opinion of them through literature. Likewise, through the Seven Sleepers, these two periods, which challenged the spirit and fortitude of the Christian faith, met their match in these miraculous martyrs. And just as the Sleepers of this treasured tale, the message of the story transcends its historical settings, and later geographical ones as well, to continue to influence readers centuries after its creation.

Chapter Two
A Medley of Slumbering Heroes:
Blending Indo-European and Semitic Traditions
To Create the Seven Sleepers of Ephesus

Although the Sleepers tale stands ever linked to its historical origins, its literary and folkloric basis leaves its mark throughout the text and carries an equally significant weight in its formation. Through the literary journey to its formation, the Sleepers tale reveals how its roots and frame depend on folkloric hero formulas and themes seen time and time again. Yet traditionally, a divide separates elements of folklore from historic legends such as this. The Brothers Grimm originally distinguished folktales (*Märchen*) from local legends (*locale Volkssagen*), characterizing the former as migratory narratives that traveled from place to place and changed in the telling, and the latter as stories that were bound to real localities or attached to historical heroes; moreover, legends were more serious and more historical than folktales.⁵² Yet the Sleepers tale stands as a mixture of these two traditions, drawing both from distinct historical events and similar migratory narratives. In examining the two tales whose influence most overtly shapes the face of this tale, the intricacies in the hybrid nature of the Sleepers tale come to light, also establishing the story's place in its folkloric heritage among "returning hero" tales.

Though innumerable stories lie behind the creation of the Seven Sleepers of Ephesus, two tales in particular stand out as the most prominent inspirations for this legend: the Greek tale of the prophet-philosopher, Epimenides of Crete, and the Jewish story of Abimelech the Ethiopian. Together with the Sleepers tale, all three hold motifs of eternal youth, of withdrawal for protection, and of rebirth, while also falling under the

⁵² Brüder Grimm, *Deutsche Sagen*, 3rd ed. (Munich: Winkler-Verlag, 1956), 7.

same umbrella, called, “sleeping heroes,” by many literary comparatists.⁵³ Furthermore, by exploring these hero motifs and the reoccurring themes of redemption and purification in each case, a thread can be traced through these tales, which connects back to elements within the literary core of the folkloric “returning hero.” Indeed, with regard to story traditions such as folktales and oral narratives, the literary comparatist and folklorist, A.B. Lord, points to these motif elements mentioned above as foundational to such legends, since these tales “are composed of motifs joining together to form themes and themes linking together in thematic chains.”⁵⁴

Therefore, through this comparative approach, the reader can detect where the Sleepers tale drew its major narrative components and skeleton in a tradition stretching across numerous cultures and time periods. And in bringing to light the literary basis for this Christian martyr tale in Greek and Jewish traditions, the results affirm an observation of Stith Thompson, who expresses, “It is always easier to borrow a myth or a tale than it is to construct one.”⁵⁵ Although sufficient evidence does not exist to prove direct influence of these stories, they remain significant to identifying this widespread pattern of narrative, imagery and meaning.

Abimelech

⁵³ David Adams Leeming, *Mythology: The Voyage of the Hero* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 118-120.

⁵⁴ Susan Niditch, *A Prelude to Biblical Folklore* (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1987), 4.

⁵⁵ Stith Thompson, *Motif-index of Folk-literature: A Classification of Narrative Elements in Folktales, Ballads, Myths, Tables, Medieval romance, Exempla, Fabliaux, Jest-books, and Local Legends* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1958), 175-176

Due to the early Christian background of the Sleepers tale, the first area of interest lies in the closest religious and cultural influence of Jewish literary tradition. From this realm comes the pseudepigraphical tale of Abimelech the Ethiopian from the *Paralipomena of Jeremiah* in the text *4 Baruch*. As a text that claims to collect the materials left out of the Book of Jeremiah, it focuses on the fall of Jerusalem and the destruction of the Temple in 586 B.C.E., mostly following its two main characters of Jeremiah, who owns Abimelech as a slave, and his aide, Baruch.⁵⁶ No older than the end of the first century C.E., although more likely from the mid-second century,⁵⁷ this text establishes the narrative skeleton and themes of the story in a form and source both accessible and familiar to early Christians. Furthermore, in his detailed study of the Sleepers tale, Ernst Honigmann already notes, “In my opinion there can be no doubt that this personage or whoever else composed the first report on the miracle was influenced, perhaps indirectly, by older legends of Onias (Khônî) and Abimelech.”⁵⁸ And from the evidence in the motifs of divine favor, protective sleep and resurrection, this tale makes a strong case as a player in shaping the Sleepers tale, while also providing a similar didactic message of how the faithful and loyal receive the salvation of God from sure death.

The beginning of Abimelech’s tale provides the most essential components concerning the moral character of the hero, later apparent in the Sleepers narrative. After the Lord tells Jeremiah of the city’s impending destruction and the hour of the night

⁵⁶ Jens Herzer, trans. *4 Baruch (Paraleipomena Jeremiou)* (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2005), xv.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, xxx

⁵⁸ Ernst Honigmann, “Stephen of Ephesus and the Legend of the Seven Sleepers,” *Patristic Studies* 1953: 125-168, 142.

draws near, Jeremiah begs the angels to halt so that he might speak to God before the mayhem begins. He proceeds to persuade God to spare Abimelech's life as follows:

And Jeremiah said, 'I beseech you, O Lord, show me what I should do to Abimelech, the Ethiopian, for he has done many good deeds to the people and your servant Jeremiah. For he pulled me out of the pit of mud. And I do not want him to see the destruction and devastation of the city. He rather should not be grieved.' And the Lord said to Jeremiah, 'Send him to the vineyard of Agrippa by the mountain (trail). And I will protect him until I return the people to the city.'...Jeremiah sent Abimelech away, saying, "Take the basket and go to the estate of Agrippa by the mountain trail; bring a few figs in it and give (them) to the sick among the people. For the favor of the Lord is on you, and his glory is on your head." And he went away as he told him. And when the morning came, behold, the host of Chaldeans surrounded the city. But Abimelech carried the figs in the heat (of day) and coming upon a tree, he sat down in its shade to rest a while. And leaning his head on the basket of figs, he fell asleep and slept for sixty-six years, and he was not awakened from his sleep.⁵⁹

As a slave to Jeremiah, Abimelech proved his loyalty and benevolent nature by his "many good deeds" and even saving his master from dying in a "pit of mud." Thus Abimelech demonstrates his character and devotion to both his master and to God through his compassionate actions. Due to these traits, both Jeremiah and God deemed him worthy of protection from the mayhem about to unfold. Jeremiah explicitly expresses this to Abimelech before he must leave, saying, "...the favor of the Lord is on you, and his glory is on your head."⁶⁰ As further emphasis of this character definer, Jeremiah even urges Abimelech to continue his altruistic acts by giving figs to the sick. These moments in the narrative distinguish Abimelech as the righteous hero and justify the divine protection expressed in the long slumber.

From these indicators of character arise the qualities of the Seven Sleepers, known for their own loyalty to their faith and spiritual master, God, in the face of another

⁵⁹ Herzer, *4 Baruch (Paraleipomena Jeremiou)*, 7-13.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*

impending destruction of a center of faith. This annihilation of faith did not attack the physical structures of faith, such as the city or Temple of Jerusalem, but rather, it targeted the practitioners of faith, the people themselves, in the form of the historical, empire-wide persecution of Decius, explored in the previous chapter. However, once again the devoted and virtuous disposition of the tale's heroes mark them as figures deserving of God's protection through their faith. While versions of the Sleepers story do not catalogue good deeds proving this point like Abimelech's tale, the single act of defiance against making sacrifices to Roman gods takes the place of such deeds. The importance of acts such as this declaration of faith becomes central in Christian belief from Biblical verses such as John 3:16, which grants eternal life to those who believe in Jesus and also establishes believers as those who stand up against the hatred of the world.⁶¹ In fact, the very act of defiance garners respect even from the Emperor Decius in the late medieval version told by Jacobus Voragine. He writes, *Mane facto cum quaesiti fuissent et inveniri non possent et Decius doleret, quod tales iuvenes perdidisset.*⁶² This preservation of the "virtuous merit" motif from Abimelech, combined with its redressing as the single act of declaring loyalty to God, both marks a link between the heroes seen in these two stories, while also illustrating the ways in which the hero figures absorbed qualities to fit the story's later Christian audience.

Yet a greater connection appears in the purpose of the slumber experienced by these heroes, which serves to bring them to a time of hope for their people. As

⁶¹ John Barton, "The Disciples are Warned against the World's Hatred," *Oxford Bible Commentary* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 989.

⁶² Jacobus a Voragine, "Historia de Septem Dormientibus," *Legenda Aurea* (Osnabrück: Otto Zeller Verlag, 1969), 435.

"With the morning having occurred, when they had been searched for and were not able to be found and Decius grieved, because he had lost youths of such great quality"

Abimelech's tale reads, "...he fell asleep and slept for sixty-six years, and he was not awakened from his sleep."⁶³ This number falls suspiciously close to the period of the seventy-year Babylonian Captivity after this destruction of Jerusalem. Moreover, the translator of this edition, Jens Herzer, notes that the exact length of Abimelech's slumber sometimes varies also between seventy or seventy-seven years in other accounts. A possibility for this variation lies in a "conscious change in tradition to depict that a certain length of time still must expire before the people finally return home." Or in the latter case of seventy-seven years, this could serve in "emphasizing the exile tradition" by lengthening the period of the Babylonian Captivity.⁶⁴ Yet regardless of the exact length of Abimelech's slumber, the chronological association experienced by the reader connects this back to the Babylonian captivity. Thus the preservation of Abimelech and his gathered figs represent the exiled people, and with his awakening, he signifies that their exile has also come to an end and that his master and his people will soon return to Jerusalem.

The Sleepers tale picks up on this motif of the slumbering hero as a harbinger of more favorable times for the Christian people. Every version of this story notes the famous shift from the dangerous times of the Decian persecutions to the reign of the Christian emperor, Theodosius II. Gregory of Tours writes, *Post multorum vero annorum curricula, cum, data ecclesiis pace, Theodosius christianus obtenuisset imperium.*⁶⁵ The

⁶³ Herzer, 13.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 83.

⁶⁵ Gregorius Turonensis, "De Septem Dormientibus," *Liber in Gloria Martyrum*, edited by Bruno Krusch (Hannover: Hahn, 1969), Brepolis Library of Latin Texts, <http://clt.brepolis.net/cds/pages/Exporter.aspx?ctx=1721300&extra=10> (Accessed September 3-October 15, 2010).

reign of Theodosius II marks a period when Christians could safely practice their faith now as the official religion of the empire. Though not without its own challenges, which come into play later in this chapter, it signals a triumph of faith that has come to pass in the greater social arena of the Empire and also expresses a triumph about to occur with regard to the Sadducee heresy confronted by the Sleepers. Elissa Henken discusses this motif as a defining trait of the “sleeping hero,” writing, “These sleeping heroes are often redeemer heroes, whether for a nation or for a religious or economic group. The legend often arises at a time when a group with a distinct sense of itself feels deeply oppressed by outsiders; the sleeping hero is looked to in order to satisfy the yearning for better times, both past and future.”⁶⁶ Thus, the sleepers of each of these stories represent a preservation not only of the individual character, but of the group, or in this case, the religion itself. Whether this happens by surviving the Babylonian captivity to return to Jerusalem or by enduring persecution of an emperor to one day become the dominant religion, the slumber parallels the hardship of the people in length until the time when both the sleeping heroes can taste relief with their people, or even bring that relief about themselves.

Yet to reach this realization of hope, the sleeping heroes must undergo personal challenges concerning their slumber in order to validate themselves before society. After a dazed reentry into the world and his city of Jerusalem, Abimelech meets this challenge in the form of an old man doubting his tale. He rises to this challenge with physical proof

“...after a course of many years, with peace having been given to the churches, when the Christian, Theodosius, obtained the empire.”

⁶⁶Elissa R. Henken, “Sleeping King [Sleeping Hero],” *Medieval Folklore: A Guide to Myths, Legends, Tales, Beliefs, and Customs*, edited by Carl Lindahl, John McNamara and John Lindow (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 389.

of his sleep, saying, “‘Take the figs and see!’ And he uncovered the basket of figs for the old man. And he saw them dripping (with their) milky sap. And when he saw them, the old man said, ‘O my son, you are a righteous man and God did not want to show you the desolation of the city, so God brought this trance upon you. Behold, it has been sixty-six years today since the people were taken captive to Babylon...’”⁶⁷ Only after this moment does an angel appear to transport Abimelech to his master. This moment indicates that the test of authenticating his story remains imperative to bringing the hero to his goal and purpose of informing his people of the exile’s end. It also represents a realization and acknowledgement in the sleeping hero that his miraculous slumber did actually occur after previous expressions of doubt and bewilderment such those Abimelech conveys. When he first sees Jerusalem after his awakening, he rationalizes, “...a great trance has come upon me: This is not the city. I lost my way because I came by the mountain trail when I awakened from my sleep. And since my head was heavy because I did not get enough sleep, I lost my way.”⁶⁸ Yet after he proves his slumber and gains the trust of society, represented by the old man, he assumes his role as hero with his comprehension of the truth. Thus the arrival of the angel of God affirms this recognition and this heavenly creature can bring Abimelech to his destiny.

In addition to this purpose of authenticating their slumber, the challenge acts more as a means to make the heroes prove their worthiness of the privilege and protection extended to them and, in the case of these two texts, thereby extend this knowledge of divine grace to the populace. Joseph Campbell expands on this aspect of proving oneself as the returning hero in reference to another sleeper tale, Rip van Winkle. He writes,

⁶⁷ Herzer, 19.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 15.

The first problem of the returning hero is to accept as real, after an experience of soul-satisfying vision of fulfillment, the passing of joys and sorrows, banalities and noisy obscenities of life. Why re-enter such a world? Why attempt to make plausible, or even interesting, to men and women consumed with passion, the experience of transcendental bliss?...The easy thing is to commit the whole community to the devil and retire again into the heavenly rock-dwelling, close the door, and make it fast. But...the work of representing eternity in time, and perceiving in time eternity cannot be avoided... The returning hero, to complete his adventure, must survive the impact of the world.⁶⁹

Therefore, when the slumbering individuals return to society and faces the doubt and criticism of humanity, they endure a necessary attestation of their mettle as the returning hero. Since their sleep signifies a “soul-satisfying vision of fulfillment,” this proclaims to the reader that a divine power has already recognized their worth; however, the true test lies in convincing society of that status. Only after this test can the individuals fulfill their role as hero, since they must prove their merit before the critical public and to themselves. Furthermore, without the acceptance of society, their endeavors and experiences up until this point become invalid, as the purpose of the sleeping heroes lies in displaying to society their miracle as an indication and omen of hope and change.

The Seven Sleepers make no exception to this rule, as they also must face the verification of their story and merit. A local Ephesian accuses the dazed and confused Malchus of finding buried treasure when he attempts to buy bread for his newly awakened companions with ancient coinage. This results in an interrogation of Malchus before the bishop and magistrate of the city. During this scene, Gregory of Tours relates,

*Cumque ab his argueretur, compellente necessitate, absconditum
mysterium revelavit et deduxit eos ad speluncam, in qua viri erant.
Cumque ingrederetur episcopus, invenit tabulam plumbeam, in qua omnia*

⁶⁹ Joseph Campbell, *The Hero with a Thousand Faces* (Novato: New World Library, 2008), 218.

*quae pertulerant habebantur scripta, locutusque cum eis, nuntiaverunt haec cursu rapido imperatori Theodosio.*⁷⁰

Like Abimelech, the Sleepers confirm their story with a physical marker of their experience in the cave and tablet bearing their experiences. At this moment, the response of the bishop and magistrate abruptly shift from one of interrogation and suspicion of pretenders to one of urgency to spread the news of these heroes and their miracle. The act of sending word to Theodosius also marks a transition into the moment of fulfillment as the heroes, where the Sleepers can then deliver the truth concerning the resurrection of man and the power of God, much like Abimelech's affirmation via an angel to tell his master of his exile's end.

Thus through these important plot points and motifs of each tale, the stories of Abimelech and the Sleepers read as related pieces, reflective of a greater trend in returning hero, and more specifically, sleeping hero tales. Additionally, the translator and editor of this version of *Paraleipomena Jeremiou* notes an significant point with regard to these stories, saying, "Because other suggestions cannot sufficiently explain the similarities noted, one can conclude that the story of Abimelech's sleep probably served as a significant model for the legend [of the Seven Sleepers]...the book of *4 Baruch* was received within Christian circles, and the Seven Sleepers legend is but one example of this reception. The Abimelech narrative of *4 Baruch* can thus be seen as a link between

⁷⁰ Gregorius Turonensis, "De Septem Dormientibus."

"And when he was examined by these men, through the force of necessity, he revealed the hidden secret and led them to the cave, in which the men were. And when the bishop advanced, and found the lead tablet, on which everything, which the men suffered, was held, having been written down, and when having spoken to them, they reported these things by full speed to the Emperor Theodosius."

the rabbinical Honi tradition and the Christian Seven Sleepers legend.”⁷¹ Through this connection, the status of the later Seven Sleepers tale as a hybrid of both traveling narratives and local legends becomes clear, since it embodies a fusion of religious tradition and both historical/circumstantial adaptation. And perhaps as a product of this process, the Sleepers tale found the popularity and the adaptable nature which allowed it to travel as widely as it did during the Middle Ages, even to the farthest reaches of the known world in Britain.

Epimenides of Crete

An even earlier influence, the story of Epimenides of Crete, already encompasses the themes and motifs of the “sleeping hero,” although in his case, they reveal the gifts and traits of cultic and shamanistic power, rather than Christian or Jewish faith. Drawing from the life of the philosopher and seer from the sixth century B.C.E., the story of Epimenides stands firmly in the tradition of poet-prophet, while he also curiously appears as a half-mythical, half-historic figure, much like the Seven Sleepers in this latter respect.⁷² And within the opening of his story, direct parallels arise between the Sleepers story and the Epimenides’ tale, which are lacking Abimelech’s tale. The version closest to the period of the Sleepers tale appears during the third century C.E. in the biography, *Lives of Eminent Philosophers*, by Diogenes Laertius. In his account of Epimenides, he writes:

⁷¹ Herzer, 89-90.

⁷² Todd M. Compton, *Victim of the Muses: Poet as Scapegoat, Warrior and Hero in Greco-Roman and Indo-European Myth and History* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2006), 174.

One day he was sent into the country by his father to look for stray sheep, and at noon he turned aside out of the way, and went to sleep in a cave, where he slept for fifty-seven years. After this, he got up and went in search of the sheep, thinking he had been asleep only a short time. When he came to the farm, and found everything changed and another owner in possession. Then he went back to the town in utter perplexity; and there, on entering his own house, he fell in with people who wanted to know who he was. At length he found his younger brother, now an old man, and learnt the truth from him. So he became famous throughout Greece and was believed to be a special favorite of heaven.⁷³

Remarkably similar to the narrative leading up to Abimelech's slumber, Epimenides fits the previously mentioned motifs of returning and sleeping heroes. However, this tale departs from its monotheistic counterparts by not demonstrating the character's moral fiber in some way. Yet, like the rest, it counts the slumbering hero as "a special favorite of heaven" (θεοφιλέστατος). And the possibility arises that this older tale may have affected and influenced the later Jewish and Christian slumbering tales with respect to divine favor, with signifiers of moral character being later religious additions or alterations to the base story. Through investigating the features it lends to the Sleepers tale, a reader can, as Jens Herzer points out, "follow an interesting process of reworking a tradition that also provides evidence for a knowledge of Greek classical traditions and their reuse in Jewish circles."⁷⁴ However, even beyond Jewish circles, the geographical origins of this story do not leave it far from Ephesus and Asia Minor, where the Sleepers story supposedly originated.⁷⁵ Its influences still linger in the Sleepers tale throughout some of its most characteristic features.

⁷³ Diogenes Laertius, *Lives of Eminent Philosophers*, vol. 1, translated by R.D. Hicks (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1967), 115.

⁷⁴ Herzer, 88.

⁷⁵ Sidney Griffith, "Christian lore and the Arabic Qur'an," in *The Qur'an and Its Historical Context*, edited by Gabriel Said Reynolds (New York: Routledge, 2008), 130-131.

For instance, the story of Epimenides offers a crucial feature to the Sleepers tale in the setting of their slumber in the cave and its distinct role in defining Epimenides as “a special favorite of heaven” transforming him into a shamanistic hero. According to Todd Compton, numerous epigraphical fragments remember this favored status of Epimenides and emphasize how his fifty-seven-year-long dream taught him divine wisdom.⁷⁶ And cultural views of the cave itself may point to reasons behind this particular gift of divine wisdom. Therefore, from an investigation into the traits of this hero’s divine gift, clues can surface as to how wisdom connects to the power of the cave and likewise the cave’s role in society. Diogenes Laertius expands on the details of the new-found wisdom of Epimenides, cataloguing some of his intellectual accomplishments after his time in the cave. He relates,

He wrote a poem *On the Birth of the Curetes and Corybantes* and a *Theogony*, 5000 lines in all; another on the building of the Argo and Jason’s voyage to Colchis in 6500 lines. He also compiled prose works *On Sacrifices and the Cretan Constitution* also *On Minos and Rhadamanthus*, running about 4000 lines. At Athens again, he founded the temple of the Eumenides, as Lobon of Argos tells us in his work *On Poets*. He is stated to have been the first who purified houses and fields, and the first who founded temples.⁷⁷

From this impressive list of accomplishments, it emerges that the time spent in the cave brought about a complete mental transformation from a presumably simple shepherd to no less than a genius in both philosophy and poetry without any known training. Rather, the experience of the cave itself imbues Epimenides with a knowledge of mind, body and society via an initiation through withdrawal, which Todd Compton among many other

⁷⁶ *Fragmenta historicum graecorum* 457, translated by Todd M. Compton, in *Victim of the Muses: Poet as Scapegoat, Warrior and Hero in Greco-Roman and Indo-European Myth and History* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2006), 176.

⁷⁷ Diogenes Laertius, *Eminent Philosophers*, 116-17.

scholars describes as shamanistic.⁷⁸ Chosen by the gods to undergo this rite, this initiation culminates in kind of reincarnation into a new life and to a new level of awareness.

Though the text itself does not explicitly state these details and shamanistic connections, the implications of them come from known views of the cave setting in Antiquity and the psychological effect of this environment upon humans.

Physical characteristics of the cave give rise to these psychological and societal reactions. Yulia Ustinova goes into a detailed study of these characteristics and how they came to shape ancient Greek perception of the cave, writing,

Cave experiences are many-sided. Caves are sometimes difficult to get into; entering a cave means crossing the border between the worlds of the familiar and the unknown, a very significant action bringing about discomfort, fear, and even true claustrophobia. Disorientation, diminished vision, as well as changes in olfactory and auditory perception make even a short stay in a deep cave different from the routine experience of most people... The frightening cave environment is therefore most suitable for rites of passage, providing the milieu for the three-stage process which comprises crossing the threshold, life-changing trauma in the un-familiar world, and ultimately return to the society in a profoundly different status.⁷⁹

The symbolic association with the cave as the threshold between the “familiar and the unknown” along with the potentially traumatizing effects of it, create the ideal symbolic environment for an initiation in shamanistic rites. Accordingly, the Greek society came to associate cave settings with these dramatic shifts in character and awareness, such as possessions by the gods bringing about divine madness, or, in this case, the bestowing the gift of superhuman knowledge and vatic abilities. Among these kinds of experiences, Ustinova notes that raptures by Pan or of the Nymphs also occurred frequently in caves,

⁷⁸ Compton, *Victim of the Muses*, 174.

⁷⁹ Yulia Ustinova, *Caves and the Ancient Greek Mind: Descending Underground in the Search for Ultimate Truth* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 32.

and therefore many caverns and grottoes became sacred to them.⁸⁰ Thus sleeping hero legends featuring caves do so as a means to denote the hero's favored role in a divinity's mind and a metamorphosis from a simple individual into a hero of society.

Many versions of the Sleepers tale give particular attention to this setting of their slumber, distinguishing it as a powerful part in their experience and later reawakening as markers of their transformation into heroes. Though no longer shamanistic in religious association, the Seven Sleepers pick up on this earlier usage and refashion this for Christian consumption with additional connotations of divine favor in the form of protection. Gregory of Tours establishes the cave as follows:

...illi in unam se speluncam concludunt, ibique per multos dies habitaverunt. Egrediebatur tamen unus ex eis et comparabat victus et quae necessaria erant exhibebat.

Revertente autem imperatore in eadem civitate, isti petierunt ad Dominum, ut eos ab hoc periculo dignaretur eruere; factaque oratione, prostrati solo obdormierunt. Cumque imperator didicisset, eos in hoc antro morari, nutu Dei iussit os speluncae magnis lapidibus oppilari, dicens: "Ibi intereant, qui diis nostris immolare noluerunt". Quod dum ageretur, quidam christianus in tabula plumbea nomina et martyrimum eorum scribens clam in aditu cavernae, priusquam oppilaretur, inclusit.⁸¹

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 58.

⁸¹ Gregorius Turonensis, "De Septem Dormientibus."

"...those men shut themselves up in a single cave. And there they lived for many days. Yet one of them would come out and collect provisions and produce the things, which were necessities.

However, with the emperor returning to the same city, those men prayed to God that He should consider them worthy of escape from this danger; and with their prayer having been made, they fell asleep having been laid on the ground. And when the emperor learned that the men were staying in this cave, he decreed through the command of God that the mouth of the cave be blocked with great stones, saying: "There may they perish, who refused to sacrifice to our gods." And while it was being done, indeed a certain Christian, writing the names and martyrdom of those men on a lead tablet secretly hid it in the entrance to the cave before it was blocked up."

At first, the experience told to the reader gives two different perspectives of the cave: one as shelter and a means of preservation, although from Decius' perspective, this same space becomes the prison of the Sleepers. These men enter the cave in order only to take shelter as fugitives, still good at heart for their defiance, but not yet heroes for their flight. As Decius turns their shelter into their prison and tomb, he then activates a process that allows these men to transform into the heroes the readers find during the reign of Theodosius II. In this moment, Decius seals them off completely from the outside world, intensifying the psychological effects previously mentioned by Ustinova. Even though the Sleepers lie in their deep slumber, this environment signifies their internal isolation with God alone, for as Yulia Ustinova points out, caves "personify the idea of separation from human culture...inducing altered states of consciousness."⁸² Therefore, due to this seclusion, presumably only experiencing God's presence, a new kind of awareness and knowledge of God's intentions for humanity with regards to the resurrection can enter these men. Although the Sleepers had faith in these plans before, the cave experience brings an affirmation and transcendent consciousness of it, which they later spread to society.

When the slumbering individuals emerge from the cave, they rise to embody the sleeping hero's role as the purifier or redeemer of cities and peoples, seen in both cases of Epimenides and the Sleepers. Diogenes Laertius goes into a description of the deeds in this vein which Epimenides performs after his awakening. He writes,

...when the Athenians were attacked by pestilence, and the Pythian priestess bade them purify the city, they sent a ship commanded by Nicias, son of Niceratus, to Crete to ask for the help of Epimenides. And he came in the 46th Olympiad, purified their city, and stopped the pestilence in the

⁸² Ustinova, *Caves and the Ancient Greek Mind*, 57-8.

following way. He took sheep, some black and others white, and brought them to the Areopagus; and there he let them go whither they pleased, instructing those who followed them to mark the spot where each sheep lay down and offer sacrifice to the local divinity. And thus, it is said, the plague was stayed....According to some writers he declared the plague to have been caused by the pollution which Cylon brought on the city and showed them how to remove it. In consequence two young men, Cratinus and Ctesibius, were put to death and the city was delivered from the scourge...⁸³

Through his gifts of wisdom and prophecy, bestowed upon him by the gods, Epimenides rises to this occasion and ends the plague through means incomprehensible and befuddling to greater society. Only through divine aid could he know that the sheep would provide the answer to the city's epidemic, proving his gifts to society by allaying the crisis, the most literal of pollutions in society. However, the other version of this episode, which Diogenes Laertius mentions, takes a more metaphorical approach to this pollution in Athens, which manifests itself in this epidemic. It points to the corruption induced by Cylon during his political intrigues to seize Athens and his failed coup of 632 B.C.E.⁸⁴ By cleansing the city of the lingering wrongdoings of this man, Epimenides demonstrates his ability to heal both the spirit and body of the city, illustrating the extent of his shamanistic capabilities.

Throughout this episode, Epimenides comes to represent the redeemer or deliverer of society, a defining trait of the folk hero that the Seven Sleepers also come to embody. Orrin Klap expands upon the qualifiers of this role, writing, "Delivering heroes characteristically come to rescue a person or group from danger or distress. Whether in the familiar form of the dragon-slayer, or as the defender from human enemies, or as the

⁸³ Diogenes Laertius, *Eminent Philosophers*, 115-16.

⁸⁴ S. Pomeroy and S. Burstein, *A Brief History of Ancient Greece* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 127.

deliverer from impersonal evils such as plagues and misfortunes.”⁸⁵ Both Epimenides and the Seven Sleepers fall easily under the subcategory of deliverers from impersonal evils in the forms of epidemic and religious doubt. The possibility remains that their orientation towards this sort of battle stems from their connection to a certain faith or religious tradition. With regards to Epimenides, his shamanistic influences incline him towards the art of healing and spiritual purification. As for the Sleepers, their intense initial devotion to their faith allows them to become emblems of the truth behind this faith before their fellow Christians, protecting them from straying into heresy. And Klap goes on to clarify this role in terms of saint-heroes, like the Sleepers, saying, “Sometimes defending heroes are thought of as in a special protective status to some group, as the patron saints, or Theseus, patron hero of Athens, who appeared to aid the Athenians in their battles. Legends of sleeping heroes also are found, who will return in time of need to save their people.”⁸⁶ The numerous variants of King Arthur’s slumber on the Isle of Avalon and tale of the Sleeping Frederick Barbarossa, related by the Brothers Grimm, stand as later examples of this. And indeed, the Seven Sleepers live up to this role of “delivering heroes” by saving their faith from corruption.

To expand on the case of the Sleepers, this comes in the form of a Sadducee heresy, which threatens the core of the Christian faith by denying the resurrection of Christ. Gregory of Tours relates, *Post multorum vero annorum curricula, cum, data ecclesiis pace, Theodosius christianus obtenuisset imperium, surrexit hereses inmundae*

⁸⁵Orrin Klap, “The Folk Hero,” *The Journal of American Folklore*, Vol. 62, No. 243 (Jan. - Mar., 1949): 17-25 21.

⁸⁶*Ibid.*

*Sadduceorum, qui negant resurrectionem futuram.*⁸⁷ Even though Christianity overcame one kind of trial seen in the Decian persecutions, a new threat arises from within to deceive believers into renouncing their faith. The awakening of the Sleepers stands as a response to this, acting as physical proof of this divine truth in resurrection. They say to the emperor, who kneels before their miracle,

"Surrexit, gloriosae auguste, hereses, quae populum christianum a Dei promissionibus conatur evertere, ut dicant, non fieri resurrectionem mortuorum. Ergo ut scias, quia omnes iuxta apostolum Paulum repraesentandi erimus ante tribunal Christi, idcirco iussit nos Dominus suscitari et tibi ista loqui.

Vide ergo, ne seducaris et excludaris a regno Dei"

*Haec audiens Theodosius imperator, glorificavit Dominum, qui non permisit perire populum suum.*⁸⁸

With the help of the Seven Sleepers, the Emperor realizes the source of great distress and uncertainty in his land. They identify the heresy causing the faith of Christians throughout the Empire to waver while affirming the eternal future God promised in the Gospels. Therefore, the Sleepers, by their presence and testimony to God's power, save an empire from otherwise allowing heretics to lead them into eternal damnation. And

⁸⁷ Gregorius Turonensis, "De Septem Dormientibus."

"Indeed after a course of many years, with peace having been given to the churches, when the Christian, Theodosius, obtained the empire, an impure heresy of the Sadducees arose, who deny the resurrection will happen."

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*

"A heresy arose, Glorious Augustus, which tries to turn away the Christian populace from the promises of God, since they say that a resurrection of the dead cannot happen.

Therefore, in order so you know, that because we must all be shown before the apostle Paul before the tribunal of Christ, for that reason the Lord ordered us to awaken and tell these things to you. Therefore see, so that you are not led astray and shut out from the kingdom of God."

Hearing these things, the Emperor Theodosius honored the Lord, who did not allow his populace to perish."

with this undeniable proof of the resurrection in themselves, they intend to prevent further misunderstandings or doubt concerning God's plans for the Christian people. At the core of this moment, the Sleepers fulfill the role of the redeeming hero, bringing spiritual purity back to their fellow Christians and obliterating the doubt spread by heresy.

Concluding Reflections

From these comparisons across culture and time, the story of the Seven Sleepers comes to light as a fusion of tales in a tradition, which reaches further back than even the cases investigated here. Furthermore, through considering the story in this manner, a recognition of its rich and varied literary past can come about and perhaps also a glimpse of the underlying patterns and elemental traces which created such a tale. From the elements of exile and moral character seen in Abimelech to the divine gifts and central cave setting lent by the tale of Epimenides, the Seven Sleepers embody a hybrid of traditions, both in culture and narrative genre. As Grant Lewis notes, "Only a few legends depict characters, which are purely creations of the imagination or misinterpretation. Likewise, consciously fabricated legends are relatively small in number, but even these legends gain credulity because they are true to the pattern."⁸⁹ Hence this tradition of borrowing traits and reapplying narrative patterns relates so closely to the immense popularity of the Seven Sleepers. Lending both familiarity and a genuine assurance in theme and purpose, Abimelech and Epimenides, as arguably the tale's largest influences, heralded the sweeping success of the tale to come. With stories such as these behind it,

⁸⁹ C. Grant Loomis, "Legend and Folklore," *California Folklore Quarterly*, Vol. 2, No. 4 (Oct., 1943): 279-297, 281.

the Sleepers effortlessly made their migration to even the farthest corners of Europe and the Middle East, where they could undergo a transformation even beyond its literary roots through magical lore.

Part Two:

The Transformation of a Tale

Anonymous
Edward's Vision of the Seven Sleepers
from the *Vita Æwardi* (11th or 12th century), Bodleian Library MS 297

Cunctis enim qui ad mensam regis sedebant silentibus, et auide post quadragesimale ieiunium commedentibus, rex subito uocem suam in risu exaltauit, nimiumque aperte ridens omnium commedentium oculos ad se prouocauit. Mirantibus itaque cunctis quod sine causa ut putabant risisset, nemo tamen ausus fuit palam interrogare cur hoc euenisset. Peracto autem prandio cum iam in conclaui intrasset et diadema ut moris est deposuisset, Haroldus dux cum duobus proceribus quorum unus erat presul alter abbas secreto dixit ei: 'Rem insolitam, domine rex, hodie uidimus, unde nos omnes ualde mirati sumus.' Cumque rex interrogasset quid fuit hoc, respondit, 'Nunquam te tam aperte ridentem sine causa sicut hodie uidimus.' At ille ait, 'Mira uidi, ideoque non sine causa risi.' Tunc illi tres proceres tantum uirum de uanitate non estimantes taliter risisse, ceperunt suppliciter illum rogare ut occasionem tante leticie dignaretur illis intimare. Cumque multis precibus ab illis coactus fuisset, ait, 'Plusquam ducenti anni sunt ex quo septem dormientes in spelunca in monte Celio apud Ephesum super dextrum latus quieuerunt, sed nunc postquam epulari cepimus super sinistrum latus conuersi sunt, et super illud usque ad septuaginta iiii-or annos iacebunt. Hic nimirum conuersio dirum omen portendit mortalibus. Nam ea qui dominus in euangelio minatur in his lxxiiii-or annis multis modis perficientur, *nam surget gens contra gentem, et regnum aduersus regnum, et terra motus magni erunt per loca et pestilentis et fames terroresquede celoet signa magna erunt.* Bella et oppressiones gentium genus humanum incomparabiliter torquebunt et multorum regnorum mutationes erunt.

...His auditis prefati proceres cum admiratione a rege recesserunt et mox tres legatos unusquisque ordinis sui ad indagandam ueritatem preparare decreuerunt. Haroldus enim dux militem, episcopus clericum, et abbas monachum cum regiis muneribus et litteris sigillo regis Eadwardi signatis direxerunt Manicheti Constantinopolitano imperatori, poscentes ut regis Eadwardi nuntiis iuberet vii-tem dormientes ostendi. Maniches autem imperator legatos cum muneribus de tam longe uenientes benigne suscepit, et deduci eos ad episcopum Ephesiorum fecit, eique ut Anglicis peregrinis predictos dormientes monstraret precepit. At ille per omnia iussis imperatoris obediuit. Nam causam cur Greciam appetissent libenter audiuit, cum clero et populo ad speluncam eos adduxit, et deuote cum aromatibus introduxit, ibique sanctos dormientes eis cum summa reuerentia ostendit. Anglici uero legati ut speluncam ingressi sunt, omnia indicia de sanctis dormientibus qui rex Eadwardus in Anglia retulerat inuenerunt, et oblatis muneribus deo gratias agentes leti ad propria regressi sunt.⁹⁰

⁹⁰ Frank Barlow, ed., "The Vita Æwardi (Book II); The Seven Sleepers: Some Further Evidence and Reflections," *Speculum* 40, No. 3 (Jul., 1965): 385-397.

Translation:

Indeed, when all who were sitting at the table of the king silent and eating hungrily after the fast of Lent, the king suddenly raised his voice in a laugh and laughing far too openly he drew the eyes of all the eating ones to him. And thus with all of them wondering, since they were thinking that he had laughed without cause, nevertheless no one dared to openly ask why this had happened. When the meal was finished and he had entered his private chamber and as usual taken off his crown, Duke Harold, with two nobles, of whom one was a bishop, the other an abbot, said to him in private: "We saw something unusual today, Lord King, by which we all were greatly astonished." And when the king had asked them what this was, he responded, "We have never seen you laugh so openly without a cause as today." But he said, "I saw wonderful things, and therefore I did not laugh without a cause." Then those three nobles, estimating that so great a man did not laugh from foolishness in such a way, began to supplicate him that he see fit to share with them the occasion of so great a joy. And when he was compelled by them with many requests, he said, "It is more than two hundred years from which time the Seven Sleepers rested in the cave on Mt. Celion near Ephesus on their right side, but now after we began to feast, they turned over to their left side, and on that side they will lie for up to seventy-four years. This rotation, without a doubt, predicts a fearful omen for mortals. For those things, which the Lord gives indication of[or threatens/warns of] in the Gospels, will be executed in these seventy-four years in many ways, *for nations will rise against nations, and kingdom against kingdom, and there will be great earthquakes throughout the lands and there will be both pestilences and famine and terror from the sky and great signs.* Wars and oppressions of nations will torment the human race incomparably and there will be changes of many kingdoms....

...With these things having been heard, the aforementioned nobles with wonder withdrew from the king and soon decided to prepare three legates, each one of his own rank, in order to search for the truth. For Duke Harold directed a soldier, the bishop directed a cleric and the abbot directed a monk with royal gifts and letters stamped with the seal of King Edward to Maniches, Emperor of Constantinople, asking that he order the Seven Sleepers to be shown to the messengers of King Edward. Then Emperor Maniches kindly accepted the legates coming from so far away with their gifts, and he saw to it that they were escorted to the bishop of Ephesus, and he ordered him that he show the aforementioned Seven Sleepers to the English pilgrims. And he obeyed in all particulars the orders of the emperor. For he heard gladly the reason why they had approached Greece, with the cleric and the people he took them to the cave, and led them devotedly into the cave with aromatic spices, and there he showed them the seven sleeping saints with the greatest reverence. Indeed, as the English legates entered the cave, they found all signs concerning the Seven Sleepers, which King Edward had reported in England, and after presenting their gifts, giving thanks to God, they joyfully returned to their own land.

Chapter Three
Prelude to Part Two:
The Itinerant Tale and Its Transformation

In its formation, a multitude of influences converged to create the tale of the Seven Sleepers of Ephesus, yet perhaps the greater convergence occurs with the story's geographical journey and later usage as it connected kingdoms from opposite sides of the continent. One tale, or rather, a sequel to the Seven Sleepers legend, embodies the concept behind this story's journey across geography and cultures during the central Middle Ages. Although its earliest manuscript appearance occurs circa 1100,⁹¹ King Edward's vision of the Seven Sleepers in the *Vita Ædwardi* refers to modes of travel between East and West concerning saints' relics and stories that had existed for centuries before this sequel's creation. By pointing to means such as pilgrimage, diplomacy and mercenary soldiery, Edward's Vision of the Seven Sleepers illuminates the prevalence of both material and human exchange between the Byzantine Empire and the West as far as Anglo-Saxon England. Thus this episode from the anonymous *Vita Ædwardi* points to possibilities as to how the expansive dispersion of "The Seven Sleepers of Ephesus" transpired.

Furthermore, such interactions between these distant kingdoms reveal the fluidity of cultural borders experienced by travelers across the continent, the desire for exchange and a belief in the shared ownership of religious stories and sites. Finally, the usage of this story points to metamorphosis of the tale beyond its primarily literary-religious beginnings. An abstraction of the tale begins to take place as it becomes absorbed by

⁹¹ Frank Barlow, ed., "The *Vita Ædwardi* (Book II); The Seven Sleepers: Some Further Evidence and Reflections," *Speculum* 40, No. 3 (Jul., 1965): 385-397.

new cultures over time in the realms of prophecy and magic, now emphasizing the coalescence of traditions even outside of itself.

In this tale, Edward shocks his court by bursting into a fit of giggles during a feast on Easter Sunday. The cause of such a display came from a perplexing and foreboding vision of the Sleepers turning from their right side to their left, which, according to Edward's character, signaled apocalyptic wars and oppressions to come. The vision has often been thought to portend the Norman Invasion of 1066.⁹² Thus, upon the advice of an earl, bishop and abbot, Edward dispatches legates to confirm the vision. Readers can only speculate as to why this portent should cause such an unexpected reaction of laughter from the king. The initial response points to the absurdity of the extreme juxtaposition between this serene image and its threatening meaning as a cause for laughter. However, according to Monika Otter, an important factor lies in the reputation of Edward as a man "who was never known to laugh." And in this narrative, his laughs remain reserved for moments of prophecy, creating a motif Otter calls, "The Propetic Laugh."⁹³ This occurs throughout the text of the *Vita Ædwardi* and highlights the significance of the event with Edward's rare laugh. Frank Barlow notes on another occasion of this in the "Florence" manuscript of the *Vita*,

Edward, when enthroned and holding his court in Westminster Abbey on Whitsunday, broke into unusual and indecorous laughter at the very hour of mass. Asked by his men to account for his behavior, he said that he had a vision of the death of Svein junior, king of Denmark, drowned when embarking to invade and conquer England. The nobles then sent legates to the English fleet ordering the event to be investigated. An expedition to Denmark proved the truth of the vision, and the wonder of this miracle

⁹² *Ibid.*

⁹³ Monika Otter, "Prolixitas Temporum: Futurity in Medieval Historical Narratives," *Reading Medieval Culture: Essays in Honor of Robert W. Hanning*, edited by Robert M. Stein and Sandra Pierson Prior (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2005), 52-53.

caused the prince of Denmark to send hostages to Edward and become his vassal.⁹⁴

This episode holds major similarities to Edward's vision of the Seven Sleepers, first, in the use of the Prophetic Laugh to indicate the coming of a vision and enormity of the event or miracle, and secondly, in the sending of envoys to verify events. Yet oddly, a significant difference arises in the major focus of the Seven Sleepers episode, which centers on the journey of three legates to the Byzantine emperor for confirmation of this vision. This plot point brings up the question of diplomatic exchanges between these two distant kingdoms. In the other instance concerning the vision of Svein junior's death, a dispatch of legates appears feasible, both due to historical precedent for such relations and geographic proximity between these kingdoms. However, as D.M. Nicol notes, "There seems to be little evidence of diplomatic exchanges between the Anglo-Saxon kings of England and the emperors of Constantinople. But one curious tale is told about King Edward the Confessor, who died in 1066."⁹⁵ His "curious tale" refers to none other than King Edward's Vision. Though, at first, this account appears primarily fictional, it may have drawn on known interactions through diplomatic channels between Anglo-Saxons and the Byzantines.

However, that does not lead to considering the story in itself as a historical instance of this. Already, historical issues arise when examining the background of "the Emperor Maniches," to whom Edward sends legates his legates to investigate the vision—a man who was killed in 1043 (the date of Edward's coronation) and never gained control of Constantinople.⁹⁶ Yet by looking at traces of evidence pointing to possible diplomatic exchanges around this period, one can piece together historical

⁹⁴ Barlow, "The Seven Sleepers: Some Further Evidence and Reflections," 391-392.

⁹⁵ D.M. Nicol, "Byzantium and England," *Balkan Studies*, 15 (1974): 179-203, 183.

⁹⁶ Barlow, "The Seven Sleepers: Some Further Evidence and Reflections," 392-393.

precedents for this episode, which could also explain how the Sleepers traveled from the Near East to Britain.

C. Head supports this notion of Edward's Vision as a window into diplomatic procedures of the time. He emphasizes, "While it is easy to dismiss the whole story as fantasy, it is also conceivable given the thinking of the times, that the Byzantine Emperor actually received such envoys and that their glimpse of the holy relics in Ephesus was prompted by tactful diplomacy."⁹⁷ And he says this, despite the claims of Frank Barlow, the editor of the anonymous *Vita Edwardi* and the author of the monograph on Edward the Confessor, who simply denies the existence of any diplomatic relations, saying that "there is no evidence for official contracts in the eleventh century."⁹⁸ However, a lack of "official contracts" only encompasses one type of evidence, which could suggest these contacts. Since diplomatic exchanges during the period usually also included gifts for leaders, this indicates that the focus needs to shift towards archaeological remains of these interactions instead of textual.

Such archaeological evidence does exist for this period in the form of likely imperial Byzantine gifts found in England. As the story goes, the returning envoys confirmed the king's vision.⁹⁹ Encounters similar to the one Edward's Vision depicts may have resulted in an exchange of messages and gifts carried back to Britain by royal envoys from the Greek emperor. Krijna Nelly Ciggaar distinguishes several artifacts as imperial gifts, as opposed to products of trade, found at Westminster Abbey from the period of Edward's reign. Ciggaar remarks, "The king's tomb in Westminster Abbey has

⁹⁷ C. Head, "Alexios Komnenos and the English," *Byzantion* 47, (1977): 187.

⁹⁸ Frank Barlow, ed., *Vita Edwardi* (London: Nelson's Medieval Texts, 1962), 69, n.1.

⁹⁹ Barlow, "The Seven Sleepers: Some Further Evidence and Reflections," 397.

revealed contemporary Byzantine silks and a unique Byzantine enameled pectoral cross. In the 17th century the cross was lost, but it had already been described in detail. On one side it bore the Crucifixion, on the other side a depiction of St. Zachary. The reliquary was intended to contain a fragment of the Holy Cross and must have been, for this reason alone, an imperial gift.”¹⁰⁰ The significance of a relic so closely connected to Christ himself, having even touched his body, makes this an item of extreme wealth only an emperor could afford to possess and give. Furthermore, the usage of St. Zachary on one side of the cross sends a potentially political message through a depiction of the last Greek pope of the Byzantine Papacy, reigning during the mid-eighth century.¹⁰¹ While this piece extends a gesture of goodwill in diplomacy, it also asserts a dominance of Byzantine religious leadership to a kingdom under alternative spiritual influence of the Catholic Church during a period closely following the Great Schism. These factors suggest an official interaction of some sort between Byzantium and Anglo-Saxon England at the royal level. Additionally, the sharing of relics establishes a historical precedent for the relationship depicted in Edward’s vision in connection to divine figures and saints. And through the travels of envoys, bearing such gifts, tales like that of the Sleepers could find a channel to new societies.

Moreover, less than a century later, textual sources appear for exchanges similar to those in the *Vita Aedwardi*, noted in the *Chronicon Monasterii de Abingdon*, establishing an official case for diplomatic interaction. According to this work by an

¹⁰⁰ Krijna Nelly Ciggaar, *Western Travelers to Constantinople: the West and Byzantium, 926-1204* (Leiden: Brill, 1996), 136.

¹⁰¹ Johann Peter Kirsch, "Pope St. Zachary," *Catholic Encyclopedia*, vol. 15, edited by Charles Herbermann Edward Pace (New York: Robert Appleton Company, 1913), 743.

anonymous monk at Abingdon,¹⁰² King Henry I and his wife, Matilda, received a Byzantine embassy sent by Alexius Comnenus, which brought presents and relics. The account tells of Ulfric of Lincoln, an imperial servant and an Englishman at least by his name, who acted as one of the envoys. Greek legates may have accompanied him as Ulfric was acting in line with the emperor's general policy if not at his specific behest, although the precise reason does not appear.¹⁰³ The section reads,

Constantinopolitanus Imperator Alexius litteras et dona Henrico regi et Mathildae reginae per hos dies Angliam direxit. Ipsa legatione Wlfricus, genere Anglus, Lincoliae urbis natus, (ut tantae dignitatis directorem decuerat,) magna cum pompa functus est. Is plurimum familiaritatis ausum circa eundem imperatorem habens, praedictas Beati Johannis reliquias ob suae patriae sublevationem petens, et ab ipso accipiens, Abendoniam commendaturus se fratrum orationibus venit, et eadem sanctuaria cum pulvere, qui de sepulchro Sancti Johannis Evangelistae miro modo fertur scaturire, et de sanctis partim ossibus Macharii et Antonii abbatum, devotissime inibi deposuit. Abbas autem eadem suscipiens, digne solito sibi more condivit.¹⁰⁴

¹⁰² Antonia Gransden, *Historical Writing in England c. 550–c. 1307* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1974), 271.

¹⁰³ Jonathan Shepherd, "The 'Muddy Road' of Odo Arpin from Bourges to La Charité-sur-Loire," *The Experience of Crusading: Defining the Crusader Kingdom*, edited by Jonathan Simon Christopher Riley-Smith (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 22.

¹⁰⁴ J. Stevenson, ed., *Chronicon Monasterii de Abingdon, No. 2, Part 2*, (London: Longman, Brown, Green, Longmans and Roberts, 1858), 46-47.

"Alexius, the Emperor of Constantinople directed letters and gifts to King Henry and Queen Matilde in England during those days. Ulfric, English by birth, a native of the city of Lincoln, performed this legation (as befitted a director of the greatest dignity), with great pomp. He, holding much close friendship initiated with the same emperor, seeking the aforementioned relics of Saint John for the relief of his country, and accepting them from him, came to Abingdon to commend himself to the prayers of the brothers [friars?] and with the dust which is said to gush from the tomb of Saint John the Evangelist in a wonderful way, and some from the holy bones of the abbots, Macharius and Antony, he deposited those reliquaries there with the most devotion. Moreover, the abbot, receiving those things, worthily preserved them in the customary way."

The fact that Ulfric experienced “much close friendship” at the Byzantine court, enough so that he could boldly ask for such relics, suggests that he may have remained in Constantinople for a long stretch of time or made multiple trips such as this. Furthermore, the text does not indicate that Ulfric was the first or only Englishman up until this point to hold this position of legate to the Byzantine rulers and it describes the gifts he brought as a common diplomatic gesture. Additionally, the use of saints’ relics in this capacity depicts a way in which saints could have popularized as far from their original source as England. The news of an incoming relic represented a public message, not only to the king and queen, but to the entire kingdom, which could benefit from such a piece. However, in the case of the Sleepers in Edward’s Vision, the confirmation of the story itself works the same way, as it affirms the prophecy of wars and struggles for power to come. And just as easily as envoys were said to have confirmed this tale, they could have also acted as the means through which it transferred. Still, due to the fact that evidence for diplomatic relations only date as far back as Edward’s reign, another, much earlier channel for the story’s spread to England may speak more to Edward’s and the *Vita*-author’s familiarity with the tale.

The narrative suggests another manner the Sleepers story could have arrived in the British Isles through the textual description of the legates themselves. The story characterizes the legates who investigate the happenings at Ephesus as both “English pilgrims” and “transmarine Saxons.”¹⁰⁵ And although a secondary descriptor in the story, this descriptor of “pilgrim” demonstrates the most likely channel for this story to travel across the continent and sea: via the stream of pilgrimage running throughout the area of

¹⁰⁵ Barlow, “The Vita Ædwardi (Book II); The Seven Sleepers,” 393.

Ephesus. Depending upon the route taken, a journey to Holy Land could take a pilgrim directly through Ephesus. And as Krijnie Ciggaar relates, "...it is not exceptional that a party of Englishmen should have visited Ephesus which was on the land route to Jerusalem."¹⁰⁶ Thus the city and the Cave of the Seven Sleepers acted as both an attraction for its miraculous connection to this tale and an area to rest at before continuing the last leg of the long journey to Jerusalem.

One of the earlier instances of English pilgrimage traffic through this city occurs in the 8th century, when Bishop Willibald, later Saint Willibald, visited the tomb of the Seven Sleepers. In the *Hodoepericon* of St. Willibald, written in the same century by the Anglo-Saxon nun, Huneberc, his travels occurred as follows:

"Sailing from Syracuse, they crossed the Adriatic and reached the city of Monembasia in the land of Slavina, and from there they sailed to Chios, leaving Corinth on the port side. Sailing on from there, they passed Samos and sped on towards Asia, to the city of Ephesus, which stands about a mile from the sea. Then they went on foot to the spot where the Seven Sleepers lie at rest. From there they walked to the tomb of St. John, the Evangelist, which is situated in a beautiful spot near Ephesus, and thence two miles farther on along the sea coast to a great city called Phygela, where they stayed a day."¹⁰⁷

From this narrative, Willibald took the time to make a slight detour from his coastal journey to visit Ephesus. However, an important point lies in the fact that this city held multiple sacred sites, with the Sleepers' Cave as just one of the secondary attractions.¹⁰⁸

¹⁰⁶ Krijnie Ciggaar, "England and Byzantium on the Eve of the Norman Conquest (The Reign of Edward the Confessor)," *Anglo-Norman Studies V: Proceedings of the Battle Conference 1982*, edited by R. Allen Brown (Suffolk: Boydell Press, 1983), 81.

¹⁰⁷ C. H. Talbot, ed., *The Anglo-Saxon Missionaries in Germany, Being the Lives of SS. Willibrord, Boniface, Leoba and Lebuin together with the Hodoepericon of St. Willibald and a selection from the correspondence of St. Boniface*, (London and New York: Sheed and Ward, 1954), 160.

¹⁰⁸ Clive Foss, *Ephesus after Antiquity: A Late Antique, Byzantine and Turkish City* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979), 43.

The account mentions the tomb of St. John, which could have also played a role in popularizing the tale of the Seven Sleepers beyond its local origin. As an author of one of the Gospels, the tomb of St. John held considerable renown throughout Europe.

Furthermore, as Clive Foss notes, “His burial place was revered from the earliest time and became the site of a magnificent church. The tomb also gave rise to a legend...John was supposedly sleeping until the Second coming, he was believed to show signs of life by scattering dust with his breath and driving it upward toward the surface of the tomb.”¹⁰⁹ This notion of St. John’s tomb as the primary sacred site of the city dates back to the earliest pilgrimages to Ephesus. Around 400 C.E., the Gallic pilgrim, Aetheria, planned her journey through Ephesus, with the Tomb and Church of St. John in mind.¹¹⁰ Her narrative stands as the earliest mentions of pilgrimage to Ephesus.¹¹¹ As the main pilgrimage attraction of the city, the tomb of St. John could have bolstered the renown of the Seven Sleepers through its connected miracle theme of sleep and via geographical proximity, standing only a short walk away from each other. So while pilgrims came to Ephesus with the intention of seeing St. John’s tomb, they also could have easily taken note of other sites in the area, thus bringing tales of miracles, like the Seven Sleepers, back to Europe upon their return journey.

Furthermore, such cross-continental travels went in both directions, as evidence suggests that a few Greeks may have even settled in England at least a century before the

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, 36.

¹¹⁰ Clifford Weber, ed., *Itinerari Egeriae: Sive, Titulo Prisco Notati, Peregrinationis Aetheriae Pars Prior* (Bryn Mawr: Thomas Library Imprint, Bryn Mawr College, 1994), 32.

“*De quo loco, domnae, lumen meum, cum haec ad vestram affectionem darem, iam propositi erat in nomine Christi Dei nostri ad Asiam accedendi, id est Efesum, propter martyrium sancti et beati apostoli Iohannis, gratia orationis.*”

¹¹¹ Foss, *Ephesus after Antiquity*, 43.

Vita Aedwardi's creation. One occurrence of this appears in the late 10th century. The *Liber Vitae* of the New Minster at Winchester, mentions an Andreas Grecus amongst its registered and listed inhabitants,¹¹² who is commonly held to be a Greek Monk.¹¹³

Though no reason survives for the journey and subsequent settlement of this Greek monk in Winchester, his presence serves to address the possibility that the Sleepers tale also spread through Greek contacts within England, or at least they may have furthered the story's popularity.

Yet another alternative lies in the body of mercenary soldiers, who most likely played a role in popularizing the tale further, thus returning the discussion back to the original description of the legates in Edward's Vision as "transmarine Saxons."¹¹⁴ J.P.A. Van der Vin expands on this hired force and the wide geographical background of warriors it drew, writing,

Just as the Byzantines conducted their commercial activities through non-Greek merchants, so they were largely dependent for their defense on foreign mercenaries. More and more mercenaries of various European nationalities were incorporated into the Byzantine army. The beginning of this process cannot be traced exactly, but it is certain that from the beginning of the tenth century the Byzantine army offered employment to Scandinavians, Russians, Scythians, Slavs from the Balkans, Normans from western France and from Sicily, Italians, and Anglo-Saxons from England. They all served under their own officers, either in Constantinople or else on the outskirts of the Empire. The most coveted posts were in the Emperor's bodyguard, known as the Varangian Guard; those who obtained a position in this hand-picked corps were assured high pay and considerable standing.¹¹⁵

¹¹² W. de Gray Birch, ed., *Liber Vitae: Register and Martyrology of New Minster and Hyde Abbey, Westminster* (London: Simpkin, 1892), 33

¹¹³ Ciggaar, *Western Travelers to Constantinople*, 130.

¹¹⁴ Barlow, "The Vita Ædwardi (Book II); The Seven Sleepers," 393.

¹¹⁵ J.P.A. Van der Vin, "Soldiers," *Travelers to Greece and Constantinople: Ancient Monuments and Old Traditions in Medieval Travellers' Tales*, vol. 1 (Istanbul: Nederlands Historisch-Archaeologisch Instituut te Istanbul, 1980), 113.

To judge from this description, the mercenary forces of the Byzantine Empire provided an ample opportunity for the men of Western kingdoms to explore the localities of the Empire while on duty. And through interactions with inhabitants of the area or posts, guards could have easily encountered a locally well-known tale like the Sleepers, even bringing such tales with them upon their return home. This includes men serving from kingdoms as distant as England, as Van der Vin mentions, thus allowing the planting of creative seeds for this episode of the *Vita Aedwardi*. In fact, Lynn Jones suggests a combination of this and previously mentioned causes for the dispersion of the Sleepers Legend, writing, “The story most likely entered England through returning pilgrims or former Varangian guards.”¹¹⁶

Even in the story of Edward’s Vision, one of the three legates sent by King Edward to the Byzantine Empire held the title of soldier (*militem*).¹¹⁷ Though the text does not give much else concerning this character’s background, his role as a chosen legate to the Byzantine Emperor leaves a lingering suspicion that he possessed a familiarity with both the empire and the terrain. Thus perhaps his service as a Varangian guard influenced his selection. Furthermore, the text of the *Vita Aedwardi* provides an unusually specific trio of characters to make this cross-continent journey, which supports the previously mentioned hypothesis of Lynn Jones. The author of the *Vita* describes the selection of the legates by the three men who persuaded King Edward to reveal his vision. He writes, *Haroldus enim dux militem, episcopus clericum, et abbas monachum cum regiis muneribus et litteris sigillo regis Eadwardi signatis direxerunt Manicheti*

¹¹⁶ Lynn Jones, “From *Anglorum Basileus* to Norman Saint: The Transformation of Edward the Confessor,” *The Haskins Society Journal: Studies in Medieval History*, vol. 12, edited by Stephen Morillo (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 2003), 113.

¹¹⁷ Barlow, “The Vita Ædwardi (Book II); The Seven Sleepers.” 396.

*Constantinopolitano imperatori...*¹¹⁸ While each man may have simply sent a lower ranking member of their order, this trio of a soldier, cleric and monk represent the three most common types of men to travel into the East. Likewise, their usage as legates for a diplomatic mission encompasses the range of travelers discussed here. Therefore, their inclusion in this tale may draw from long-running traditions of Eastern contact in each of these groups. Therefore, in this selection of legates, the author manages, perhaps even consciously, to indicate the avenues through which the tale of the Seven Sleepers could most likely travel. And in this endeavor, the author continues this tale of exchange and interaction across the continent on both a literary and historical level, emphasizing this shared treasure of faith and legend despite the distances between the Eastern and Western kingdoms.

Yet one development in this episode and continuation requires further attention: the focus of the ominous prophecy uttered by King Edward and its implications for a metamorphosis of the original Sleepers tale in the later Middle Ages. Concerning the rotation of the Sleepers from right to left, King Edward declares, *Hic nimirum conuersio dirum omen portendit mortalibus. Nam ea qui dominus in euangelio minatur in his lxxiiiior annis multis modis perficientur, nam surget gens contra gentem, et regnum aduersus regnum, et terrae motus magni erunt per loca et pestilentiae et fames terroresquede celoet signa magna erunt. Bella et oppressiones gentium genus humanum incomparabiliter*

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 396.

“For Duke Harold directed a soldier, the bishop directed a cleric and the abbot directed a monk with royal gifts and letters stamped with the seal of King Edward to Maniches, Emperor of Constantinople...”

*torquebunt et multorum regnorum mutationes erunt.*¹¹⁹ In this apocalyptic prophecy, the movement of the Sleepers comes to symbolize the turning of fortunes for the world with the catastrophic events mentioned. The intimate connection these sleeping saints hold with God allows them to physically respond to divine will and thus they can act as intermediaries to warn the world of the trials to come. At the same time, the Sleepers now take on a new purpose beyond their original realms of Late Antiquity and fantasy to influence and comment on issues pertinent to this late Anglo-Saxon/Anglo-Norman audience.

Thus this narrative comments not on disasters and troubles long past, as the original text did. Instead, it brings the Sleepers into its host society by commenting on recent events relevant to English political culture. In addition to the largest event of the Norman Conquest of 1066, the editor, Frank Barlow, goes on to mention other historical events, to which this prophecy supposedly alludes. He writes, “In all three manuscript versions of the Vision, Edward's apocalyptic vision is proved by the deaths of Henry I of France (1060), in which year it was thought the vision occurred, of the Emperor Henry III (1056), of Popes Victor, Stephen, and Nicholas (1057-61), and of the Eastern Emperors, Diogenes, Michael, Butinacius, and Alexius (1071-81). There were also the attacks by

¹¹⁹ Frank Barlow, ed., “The Vita Ædwardi (Book II); The Seven Sleepers: Some Further Evidence and Reflections,” *Speculum* 40, No. 3 (Jul., 1965): 385-397, 396.

“This rotation, without a doubt, predicts a fearful omen for mortals. For those things, which the Lord gives indication of[or threatens/warns of] in the Gospels, will be executed in these seventy-four years in many ways, *for nations will rise against nations, and kingdom against kingdom, and there will be great earthquakes throughout the lands and there will be both pestilences and famine and terror from the sky and great signs. Wars and oppressions of nations will torment the human race incomparably and there will be changes of many kingdoms....*”

pagans on the Christian countries in the Middle East.”¹²⁰ The usage of the Sleepers in Edward’s Vision as a means to warn the English people of these events illustrates an absorption of the tale into English culture to the point of reclaiming them as heroes not just of Christianity, but England itself. It implies a certain degree of divine favor toward the kingdom, much like that which God showed the Sleepers in their time of need during the reign of the Emperor Decius. Therefore, by adapting the Sleepers to English interests, the story becomes a part of the cultural fabric.

Yet this absorption of the Sleepers tale into the *Vita Aedwardi* goes beyond fusing the cultures of East and West for it brings about a new synthesis of traditions within England itself and in most societies it touches. And this arises in a sphere closely related to the prophecy seen in Edward’s Vision. Particularly in the realm of magical practice, where stories become abstracted for their themes or rather, magical properties, the adaptability of the Sleepers as transcendent saints makes them ideal for bridging the gap between pagan and Christian charm craft. Likewise, back in the land of the story’s origin, the magical usage of the Sleepers accomplishes a similar merging of Christian and Muslim beliefs, to produce a talismanic and prophetic tradition of unique coalescence. Therefore, through this domain of popular religious practice, where the rules of official religion bend and blur with general ease, the Sleepers tradition could thrive, complementing their own inherent attribute of synthesis.

¹²⁰ *Ibid.*, 389.

Chapter Four

The Metamorphosis of Anglo-Saxon Charm Craft through the Seven Sleepers of Ephesus

Transformations of stories and legends seldom remain confined to text, and often tales find new homes in mediums both abstract and far removed from their original source. Such a notion applies directly to the legend of the Seven Sleepers of Ephesus. Just as the Sleepers tale found itself adopted by numerous societies as it traveled across Europe and the Middle East, it also underwent a metamorphosis from being a solely literary entity to an abstract focus in the magical practice of charm craft. The farthest reaches of this use of the Sleepers extended all the way to the British Isles and flourished there in the late Middle Ages. In this particular environment, the transformation of the Sleepers into magical figures coincides with the morphing of Anglo-Saxon folk magic into acceptable Christian practice.

Through examining the spectrum of usage in charms featuring the Sleepers from this period, the ambiguous nature of charm magic arises, representative of the transition undergone and in progress to accommodate pagan beliefs to Christian doctrine through saint worship. As Sleeper charms build off and in some cases depart from their pagan roots concurrently in this period, they point to a certain volatility of religious tradition, which defined charm craft in the late Anglo-Saxon world. While also considering commentary on magical practice from the time and that shortly following, the question of charm magic with regards to saints and paganism complicates to form an unresolved debate between popular lay practice and both state and official church opinion. This situation marks a religious cultural fusion in constant flux, where the delineations

between traditions blur in magical practice to create greater challenges in restricting it through legislation and force.

These circumstances arise and spread much like the Sleepers tale, as the Anglo-Saxons also brought folk medicine from their continental home. And in due course the medicine of higher Mediterranean culture—Graeco-Roman medicine—significantly modified Anglo-Saxon magico-medical practice in the early Middle Ages to become a fusion of far-reaching geographic influences.¹²¹ This change occurs due to a reverence for ancient wisdom of the Classical world and lore of the exotic East. Moreover, the make-up of most Anglo-Saxon leechbooks or medical remedy manuals reflects this notion. As Don Skemer explains,

Anglo-Saxon leechbooks of the tenth and eleventh centuries were derived from many sources, including earlier manuscripts and unidentified collections now lost. Leechbooks were medical handbooks intended for practicing physicians and melded Christian scripture and liturgy with traditional magic and local folk cures, as well as classical learning from the Mediterranean world in the form of Roman, Byzantine or late antique texts in Latin by authorities such as Pliny the Elder and Marcellus Empiricus of Bordeaux, or Latin translations of original Greek texts such as that of Alexander of Thralles.¹²²

Thus the practice of medicine itself already stood as an intermingling of influences, which served as a link between Christian and pagan folk culture, making it the ideal environment for the Sleepers to further this synthesis through their inherent trait of coalescence. And aside from medical texts and traditions, one large change occurring throughout the central Middle Ages in charm magic lies in the addition of the names of the Deity and of saints, especially the four evangelists, all considered potent against

¹²¹ J.H.G. Grattan and Charles Singer, *Anglo-Saxon Magic and Medicine* (London: Oxford University Press, 1952), 3-4.

¹²² Don Skemer *Binding Words: Textual Amulets in the Middle Ages* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2006), 77.

evil.¹²³ Furthermore, by the late medieval period, almost all the charms employed in England appear decidedly religious, calling upon the help of Christ, the Virgin or some appropriate saint or martyr whose physical ordeal corresponded to that of the patient.¹²⁴ Therefore, after the Seven Sleepers journeyed westward, they became commonly used in charms in this manner, since their story held themes both relevant and useful in everyday Christian life: protection, sleep and restoration. Thus magico-medical practitioners often referenced their names and story as these themes also loosely apply to stages of healing and further prevention of ailments.

For instance, the overarching theme of divine protection in the Sleepers tale lends itself to common usage in healing charms and especially those used to combat ailments associated with fantastic beings of pagan folklore. In reference to God saving the Sleepers from the heathen emperor Decius, individuals drew upon the same grace the Sleepers received on behalf of their own loved ones in danger. Such uses usually reconcile religious traditions by recasting folk magic with Christian elements. One case in point appears in an eleventh century collection of medical texts and prayers called, the *Lacnunga*, in MS. B.M. Harley. 585. In folio 167a and b, a puzzling charm labeled “Against a Dwarf” invokes this trait of the Sleepers tale in conjunction with healing intents. The exact medical purpose of this charm and meaning of “dwarf”, discussed later, remains in question, yet it demonstrates a distinct usage of the Sleepers as guardians and essential elements in healing talismans. It reads,

¹²³ Wilfred Bonser, *The Medical Background of Anglo-Saxon England: A Study in History Psychology, and Folklore* (London: Wellcome Historical Medical Library, 1963), 226.

¹²⁴ Carole Rawcliffe, “Introduction,” *Sources for the History of Medicine in Late Medieval England* (Kalamazoo: TEAMS, 1995), 90.

Man sceal niman VII lytle oflætan swycle man mid ofrað and written þas naman on ælcra oflætan: Maximianus, Malchus, Johannes, Martimianus, Dionisius, Constantinus, Serafion. Þænne eft þæt galdor þæt her æfter cwæð man sceal singan, ærest on þat wynstre eare, þænne on þæt swiðre eare, þænne ufan þæs mannes moldan. And ga þænne an mædenman to and ho hit on his sweoran. And do man swa þry dagas. Him bið sona sel: Her com ingangen in spider with. Hæfde him his haman on handa. Cwæð þæt þu his hænegest wære, Legde þe his teage an sweoran. Ongunnan him of þæm lande liþan. Sona swa hy of þæm lande coman, Þa ongunnan him ðah þa colian. Þa com ingangan deores sweostar. Þa geændode heo and aðas swor Ðæt næfre þis ðæm adlegan derian ne moste, Ne þæm þe þis galdor begytan mihte, Oððe þe þis galdor ongalan cuþe. Amen, fiat.¹²⁵

In this case, the Sleepers themselves act as physical markers of protection and amulets used to counter the physical ailments caused by magical possession of the “dwarf.” Their presence, implied by “little offerings,” or wafer hosts used for communion,¹²⁶ invokes God’s attention to the charm’s sickly target and acts as intermediaries to God’s favor and

¹²⁵ Anonymous, “No. 7: Against a Dwarf,” in *Anglo-Saxon Magic*, by Godfrid Storms (Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1948), 166-167.

“One shall take seven little offerings, such as one has worshipped with, and write these names on each of the offerings: Maximianus, Malchus, Iohannes, Martimianus, Dionisius, Constantinus, Serafion. Then afterwards one shall sing the charm that I say hereafter, first in the left ear, then in the right ear, and then above the top of the man's head. And then a maiden must go and hang it around his neck, and do so for three days; he will soon be well:

Here he came in walking, in spider form. He had his harness in his hand, he said that you were his steed, he put his traces on your neck. Then they began to travel from the ground; so soon they came from the ground, then their limbs began to cool. Then came in walking the beast's sister; she put an end to this then and swore oaths that this would never harm the sick one, nor that one who might find this charm or knows how to recite it. Amen. So be it.”

¹²⁶ *Ibid.*, 167.

protection. However, the main recitation of the charm appears independent of the Sleepers reference as it does not even allude to it. Instead, it names the “beast’s sister” as the true cause of the cure, and that “she put an end to this then and swore oaths that this would never harm the sick one.” This detail reads as a distinctly pagan magical trait, since it uses a counter-demon to rectify the malady caused by another fantastic being.¹²⁷ In fact, the charm’s creator may have simply inserted the opening featuring the Sleepers onto existing material, making for what Bill Griffiths observed as, “an intriguing combination of overt Christian material, and potentially pagan or at least popular material.”¹²⁸ Accordingly, the use of the Sleepers in this charm marries Christian and local folk beliefs in an effort to render the folk material acceptable in an increasingly Christian society. Otherwise church officials could well consider the recitation as heathen witchcraft on its own due to its dependence on solely fantastical beings.

Indeed, this fusion of beliefs, or rather an overlay of Christianity over folk tradition, demonstrates a conscious trend in England leading up to the tenth and eleventh centuries, as Christianity strove to establish itself throughout the British Isles. Carole Rawcliffe notes this trend, writing, “In the early Middle Ages a good deal of ‘white’ magic had been readily absorbed by the ecclesiastical authorities in a spirit of compromise designed to eliminate far more sinister activities. So there was a legacy of collaboration between priest and magician, which still remained strong where medicine was concerned.”¹²⁹ Rather than opposing pagan folk practices, so closely integrated into

¹²⁷ Felix Grendon, “The Anglo-Saxon Charms,” *The Journal of American Folklore* 22, No. 84 (Apr. - Jun., 1909): 105-237.

¹²⁸ Bill Griffiths, *Anglo-Saxon Magic* (Frithgarth: Anglo-Saxon Books, 1996), 188.

¹²⁹ Carole Rawcliffe, “Introduction,” *Sources for the History of Medicine in Late Medieval England* (Kalamazoo: TEAMS, 1995), 91.

the society, the church officials strategically absorbed them, thereby gaining the influences they had over society as well. Already a part of everyday life and a believed necessity in medical circumstances, magical practice become another way for the Church to extend Christianity and itself into the lives of individuals. And particularly by finding a connection in healing, Christianity gained a significant influence through its large personal and societal role.

However, in the case of “Against a Dwarf,” the exact medical usage remains open to vast speculation due to its vague nature and issues of translation. Problems begin in the title itself, as it leaves obscure the identity of the disease in question. Existing interpretations range immensely and Godfrid Storms, a modern editor of this collection of Anglo-Saxon spells, acknowledges this while naming some of the leading possibilities. He relates, “Possession by a dwarf may mean anything. Cockayne translates it by ‘a warty eruption,’ by misreading *wearh* for *dweorf*; Wülker suggests a tumor; Grendon some paroxysmal disease; Skemp agreed with Grendon; Gratton called it the ‘the nightmare charm,’ which explanation was rejected by Magoun, who suggests it is against fever.”¹³⁰ As for the ailment itself, the only description given reads in a highly metaphorical and narrative manner: “He [the dwarf] had his harness in his hand, he said that you were his steed, he put his traces on your neck.”¹³¹ The only possible physical indicator in this section of a known disease, if any, remains the mention of “traces on your neck,” although, even this could point to any number of symptoms. The word, *teage*, usually translated as traces, remains problematic since it gives an ambiguous

¹³⁰ Storms, *Anglo-Saxon Magic*, 167.

¹³¹ “No. 7: Against a Dwarf,” *Anglo-Saxon Magic*, 166-167.

image of “tie” or “rope.”¹³² While it fits the image of the sick individual as a “steed,” it does not provide a symptom for a known illness. Still, Wülker’s suggestion of a tumor does fit the description offered by the charm itself best out of the leading interpretations, since it could perhaps refer to the swelling or sores caused by such harnesses or ties, pulled by the dwarf. Yet in conjunction with the odd and puzzling description of the sick individual as the “steed” of the dwarf, the true meaning of the charm remains a mystery.

However, the use of the Seven Sleepers in this spell could point to further symptoms to aid in diagnosing the disease, while also shedding light on how the story Christianizes a pagan folk-spell. A.R. Skemp suggests, that since “the victim is then dwarf-ridden,” the charm acts against a convulsive disease because it invokes the Seven Sleepers, saying, “The magic names in our charm are those of the Seven Sleepers; so that the disease is probably violent or spasmodic in its effects.”¹³³ Since, in the Sleepers story, God granted respite to the seven young men from the evils and tribulations of the world through sleep, later magical-medical practitioners often alluded to this aspect of the story on behalf of their patients, suffering their own physical trials in this world. Moreover, the sleep gained through this release from suffering would leave the sick individual restored and revived, further referencing the story’s resurrection following the slumber. With this in mind, the addition of the Sleepers makes the Christian reference the actual cure of the disease, while it relegates the dwarf’s sister to merely a means to expel the creature. This move also attempts to devalue the dwarf-sister’s original role as protector in favor of the Sleepers as healers. Furthermore, considering this symptomatic treatment associated with

¹³² T. Northcote Toller, “Teáh,” *Anglo-Saxon Dictionary* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1898), 972.

¹³³ A.R. Skemp, “The Old English Charms,” *Modern Language Review* 6, no. 3, (July, 1911): 294-5.

the Sleepers, Skemp's analysis does make a decent case with the description of the "dwarf-ridden," but it does not take into account the "traces" left on the neck of the victim. Therefore, the charm, "Against a Dwarf," invites further investigation into its diagnostic possibilities, which would consider both parts of the charm.

Additionally, the multiplicity of uses for just this aspect of the Sleepers tale in magic could complicate Skemp's argument concerning this charm. Another late medieval Anglo-Saxon spell, preserved via a seventeenth century transcript of a leechbook in MS. Harley 464, applies the same usage of the Sleepers tale for a much simpler ailment.¹³⁴ Also, contrasting with the previous charm, this case represents an entirely Christian-based invention, calling upon various and well-known holy beings to drive away symptoms plaguing the ailing individual. In relation to the previous charm, this instance demonstrates how the Sleepers come to appear at both ends of the spectrum of charm craft, from the overtly pagan to the wholly Christian. In folio 177, the author presents a charm to bring both sleep to the sickly person and relief from their chills and fevers. Although this charm remains unfinished in its last sentence,¹³⁵ it depicts a definite shift in both primary religious tradition and approach from the previous charm. It reads,

*Dis mæg wið gedrif. Genim IX oflætan and gewrit on æclere on þas wisan:
Jesus Christus. And sing ofer IX pater noster, and sylle ætan ænne dæg
III, and oðerne III, and ðriddan III; and cweðe æt ælcon siæan þis ofer
done mann:*

*In nomine domini nostri Iesu Christi, et in nomine Sanctae et Individuae
Trinitatis et in nomine sanctorum VII dormientium, quorum nomina haec
sunt: Maximianus, Malchus, Martinianus, Ionnes, Seraphion,
Constantinus, Dionysius.*

¹³⁴ Storms, *Anglo-Saxon Magic*, 276.

¹³⁵ *Ibid.*

Ita sicut requiescat dominus super illos, sic requiescat super istum famulum dei N.

*Conjuro vos frigora et febres per deum vivum, per deum verum, per deum sanctum, per deum, qui vos in potestate habet, per angelos et archangelos, per thronos et dominationes, per principales et potestates, per totam plebem dei, et per sanctam Mariam, per XII apostolos, per XII profetas, per omnes martyres, per sanctos confessores, per sanctas virgines, et per IIII and per XIII seniores, et per CXLIII or milia qui pro Christi nomine passi sunt, et per virtutem sanctae cruces, adiuro et obtestor vos dioboli ut non habeatis ullam...*¹³⁶

From the symptoms battled, the charm appears to combat common cold or a flu-like illness.¹³⁷ Here, the Sleepers hold a central role in this charm since they remain separated from rest of the catalogue in a primary position with only the Trinity itself preceding them. This further distinguishes them as the direct liaisons to divine power and intervention. And fittingly, the magical practitioner uses them explicitly as facilitators of rest and restoration for the subject, bringing some relief to their plight before turning their attention to battling the symptoms themselves. And in the second half, the charm depends on an impressive number of solely Christian beings to achieve its ends. Therefore, although most likely used around the same time as “Against a Dwarf,” this charm

¹³⁶. Anonymous, “No. 36: Against Fever,” *Anglo-Saxon Magic*, 276.

“In the name of our lord, Jesus Christ, and in the name of the holy and indivisible Trinity and in the name of the saints, the Seven Sleepers, whose names are these: Maximianus, Malchus, Martinianus, Ionnas, Seraphion, Constantius, Dionysius.

Thus just as the Lord brings sleep over them, thus he brings rest over this servant of God.

I swear to you, chills and fevers, by living God, by the true God, by the holy God, through God, who holds you in His power, by the angels and archangels, by thrones and domains, by chiefs and powers, by all common peoples of God, and by holy Mary, by the twelve apostles, by the twelve prophets, by all the martyrs, by the holy confessors, by the holy virgins, and by the four and the fourteen elders, and 144 thousand who suffered on behalf of the name of Christ, and the virtue, holy crosses, I swear and implore you, devils, that you do not hold any...[Storms suggests ‘power to hurt this servant of God’]”

¹³⁷ Alison Blenkinsopp, *Symptoms in the Pharmacy: A Guide to the Management of Common Illness*, (Malden: Blackwell, 2005), 19-20.

thematically and referentially identifies as one of exclusively Christian influences. Yet the existence of charms like this one, reveals the vacillating nature of charm magic between religious influences, particularly in charms associated with saints.

The set-up of these focuses further distinguishes this charm as a fully Christian product. The inventor of the charm considers the Seven Sleepers tale in the most literal sense, by utilizing their nominal and narrative connection to sleep itself. Additionally, the author aims to recreate the account of the divine grace experienced by the Sleepers when God saved them from Decius. This occurs most clearly in the phrase, *Ita sicut requiescat dominus super illos, sic requiescat super istum famulum dei N.*¹³⁸ Such a formula in magic constitutes the commonest type of charm: a narrative charm. Usually wholly Christian, with a clear bipartite structure, it names the ‘epic precedent’ or anecdote concerning the sickness or suffering of Christ or of saints, followed by a comparison and prayer according to the basic formula ‘Just as ... in the past, so now may ... in the present.’¹³⁹ In a sense, this formula attempts to attract God’s attentions and graces by reminding Him of a similar instance in which he intervened on a believer’s behalf. These procedures occurred in hopes of repeating these actions and events for another’s well-being.

Furthermore, the following part of the charm targeting chills and fevers (*frigora et febres*) also benefits from the presence of the Sleepers in the first section to make a cohesive unit of holy forces. Here, the next section expands upon and fortifies the

¹³⁸ Storms, *Anglo-Saxon Magic*, 276.

“Thus just as the Lord brings sleep over them, thus he brings rest over this servant of God.”

¹³⁹ Tony Hunt, *Popular Medicine in Thirteenth-Century England: Introduction and Texts* (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 1990), 81.

secondary magico-medicinal properties of the Sleepers. Not only does their presence soothe the individual with the rest they are famously known for, but the Sleepers also have connections to magic dealing with afflictions like fevers and chills. As W. Bonser notes, “The names of the Seven Sleepers of Ephesus occur in various charms of the Middle Ages. They are usually, as might be expected, to secure sleep, but some cases are to be employed against fever. This also is natural, since restlessness and delirium are especially symptoms of fever.”¹⁴⁰ Thus, the second half does not merely act as an independent charm attached to the Sleepers passage, rather it follows to support the potency of the Sleepers in their secondary usage for fevers. Moreover, the subsequent catalogue of holy beings supplements the Sleepers’ power in both numbers and intensity, from the highest archangels to the many martyrs, creating an army of holy forces.

However, the specificity given to the numbers in this charm may in fact point to another decidedly Christian means of driving away afflictions. Having already named the two most important divine numbers of three and seven in the first half of the poem via the Trinity and the Sleepers, the author takes no chances by strengthening these references with further mention of secondary divine numbers. The writer instructs to swear “by the twelve apostles, by the twelve prophets... and by the four and the fourteen elders, and 144 thousand who suffered on behalf of the name of Christ”¹⁴¹ All the numbers mentioned by this charm hold significance in Christian numerology either in and of

¹⁴⁰ W. Bonser, “The Seven Sleepers of Ephesus in Anglo-Saxon and Later Recipes,” *Folklore* 56, No. 2 (Jun., 1945): 254-256.

¹⁴¹ “No. 36: Against Fever,” *Anglo-Saxon Magic*, 276.

themselves or as sums or products of primary divine numbers, mathematically increased to yield higher magical numbers.¹⁴²

Seven, the number of the Sleepers, as the primary magic number of this charm holds particular significance according to the English monk, Byrhtferth of Ramnsey, who composed a “handbook of the Christian exegesis of numbers” in his manual on computus, the science of time-reckoning and calendar construction.¹⁴³ In it he states, “...the number seven commences with unity (that is, from one) and thus it proceeds reverently, with complete holiness, to the triumph of its perfection.”¹⁴⁴ F. Wallis explains this passage as, “...seven is meaningful because it is the sum of three, the number of the Trinity, and four, the number of the Gospels, and because the gifts of the Holy Spirit are seven.”¹⁴⁵ At the same time, the numbers used in this charm also point to a popular belief that attributed the existence of fever or chills to the presence of demons, which authors numbered anywhere between seven and seventy, each responsible for a unique type of fever.¹⁴⁶ So by inserting as many divine numbers into this charm as possible, the creator could both invoke the power of Christian numerology and combat an assortment of demons, which could have brought on these afflictions initially.

Moreover, the power of the sheer quantity of holy references in this single charm, numbered or otherwise, embodies the main tactic of fully Christian, Anglo-Saxon healing

¹⁴² Skemer *Binding Words*, 142-143.

¹⁴³ F. Wallis, “‘Number Mystique’ in Early Medieval Computus Texts,” in *Mathematics and the Divine: A Historical Study*, edited by T. Koetsier and Luc Bergmans (Amsterdam: Elsevier B.V., 2005), 181.

¹⁴⁴ Peter Baker and Michael Lapidus, ed., *Byrhtferth’s Enchiridion* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), 208.

¹⁴⁵ Wallis, “Number Mystique,” 182.

¹⁴⁶ Derek Rivard, *Blessing the World: Ritual and Lay Piety in Medieval Religion* (Washington D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 2009), 185.

charms, noted by Felix Grendon. He distinguishes this genre from its pagan predecessor in this way, writing, "...demons were driven out, not by threatening them with the ire of a protecting genius or of a potent counter-demon, but by intimidating them with the power of God or of the angelic kindred,"¹⁴⁷ Particularly in light of the previous charm, "Against a Dwarf," this logic holds true. Still holding onto its pagan roots, its main force against its ailment came from the presence of a counter-demon, "the beast's sister," who "put an end to this then and swore oaths that this would never harm the sick one."¹⁴⁸ Yet the charm against fevers and chills directly addresses the ailment as *vos*, later generalized as *diaboli* and launches its steady stream of holy references and numbers as a method of "intimidating" these symptoms into leaving their victim. Though markedly dissimilar in influence, both these charms suggest the spectrum of Christian charm craft and its degrees of acceptability for what counted as "Christian" magic.

However, within this spectrum, it remains important to note that uses of the Seven Sleepers in charm magic extended beyond the medical realm to include spells concerning general forms of protection. And as a use characteristic in many saints, the investigation of one such charm can provide insight into a major aspect into the cult of saints and the transformations it brought to Anglo-Saxon charm forms. For instance, in the eleventh century leechbook, MS. Regius 2 A XX, a similar narrative approach appears in folio 52 for the purpose of common protection from evils. It reads,

*In Epheso civitate in monte Celion requiescunt sancti septem dormientes,
quorum ista sunt nomina:*

*Maximianus, Malchus, Martinianus, Dionisius, Iohannes,
Serapion, Constantinus.*

¹⁴⁷ Grendon, "The Anglo-Saxon Charms," 145.

¹⁴⁸ "No. 7: Against a Dwarf," *Anglo-Saxon Magic*, 166-167.

*Per eorum merita et piam intercessionem dignetur dominus liberare famulum suum N. de omni malo. Amen.*¹⁴⁹

In this case, the construction of the charm does not draw on the specifics of the Sleeper story, hoping for a recreation of a particular aspect for the subject, such as sleep or a restoration/resurrection from ills or troubles. Instead, it seeks one of the overarching themes of the tale in protection for the faithful through the “merits” and “intercession” of the saints. Therefore, this charm reads more like a prayer asking for a blanket blessing to protect the individual “from all evil” with these saints acting as intermediaries to God. The use of the term *suum famulum* to distinguish the charm’s target also emphasizes the individual’s devotion to God by taken the label of “servant.” And indeed this prayer-like form depicts how blessings come to “replace enchantments,” as Leslie Arnovick notes. Yet she also emphasizes that even with this rising trend, “we cannot deny the hybridity of the charms that actually survive.”¹⁵⁰ These factors, with regard to the previous charms mentioned, become indicative of the beliefs behind the cult of saints as a sphere which encompassed pagan folk practices and the more established Christian conventions. By achieving this, it also holds a role in slowly altering these folk practices to increasingly Christian methods, bringing a continuous fluidity to this tradition.

Moreover, the inclination to persistently name all of the Sleepers throughout most of their appearances in charms points to societal-religious views of saints as protectors

¹⁴⁹ Anonymous, “No. 38: [Septem Dormientes],” in *Anglo-Saxon Magic*, by Godfrid Storms (Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1948), 276.

“In the Ephesian city on Mt. Celion, the holy Seven Sleepers rest, the very names of those men are: Maximianus, Malchus, Martinianus, Dionisius, Iohannes, Serapion, Constantius. By the merits and pious intercession of those men, may the Lord consider his servant worthy to be freed from all evil. Amen.”

¹⁵⁰ Leslie Arnovick, *Written Reliquaries: The Resonance of Orality in Medieval English Texts* (Philadelphia: John Benjamins Publishing Co., 2006), 103.

and their appeal for charm craft. Godfrid Storms notes the usual organization of good and evil in spells with respect to the importance of naming. He writes, “The evil forces were brought together under the heading ‘devils’, while the good forces were kept apart as individuals; the names of the devils fell into oblivion, while every saint was endowed with a special activity. The names of the Seven Sleepers are the usual ones.”¹⁵¹ All the charms seen thus far follow Storms’ point, where the Sleepers hold importance and efficacy through their naming. Especially if each charm acts as a petition to God for His favor, their effectiveness remains linked to reminding God of whom specifically he had helped in the past. With the Sleepers, a practitioner naturally had the power of seven names which they could use to petition to God for a singular purpose related to their tale. And in the case of the Sleepers, their names call to mind not only their “special activity” of the great slumber, but also the loyalty they showed and the protection granted by God due to it. True to form as well, the negative forces of this charm in MS. Regius 2 A XX only receive the title of “wickedness/evil,” completing the construction of concrete individuals against an amorphous, and therefore weaker, foe.

Additionally, the range in usage of the Seven Sleepers across the charms seen so far point to the influence of the cult of saints in the everyday lives of individuals and the connection society felt with them. This connection may point to the immense effectiveness of saints as a link between Christianity and paganism. As Derek Rivard notes,

Saints most frequently appear in blessings having to do with either preventing or partaking in some physical danger to the faithful Christian. Having once lived as humans, the sainted dead and their relics may have

¹⁵¹ Storms, *Anglo-Saxon Magic*, 276-77.

been more accessible to the celebrants and laity than the angels, who were after all incorporeal, spiritual beings. Those who themselves had suffered illness, faced dangers of a lengthy pilgrimage, and confronted the violence of the human world head on, knew best how much aid and succor the living required on a day-to-day basis.¹⁵²

The popularity in direct usage of these figures emphasizes the commonality believers found within them through human experience and suffering. Thus the saints acted as a source of sympathy and empathy, yet they also had the ability to bring these emotions and concerns to the attention of God himself as individuals, the most devout of believers, already favored by God. Therefore, by appealing to them, Christians believed that the saint, having been empathetically moved, could speak on their behalf with far greater success than if the individual had offered a single prayer as one of the many undistinguished believers. However, an even larger draw stems from the fact that a number of these saints simply stood in as Christianized versions of local gods.¹⁵³

Yet despite the accepted nature and popularity of beseeching saints and the appearance of entirely Christian-based charms, the practice of charm magic, even that working within the cult of saints, received criticism and even opposition. The connections appeared too close to pagan lore for official church opinion, causing both anxiety and mistrust. For instance, during the reign of King Edgar during the latter half of the tenth century, legislation arises, which specifically targets charm magic and the worship of humans, such as saints. Edgar's canon reads as follows:

And wē lærað þæt prēosta gehwīlc crīstendōm geornlice ārære, and ælcra hæðendōm mid-ealle ādwæsce; and forbēode wil-weorðunga and lic-wīglunga and hwata and galdra and man-weorðunga, and þa gemearr þe

¹⁵² Rivard, *Blessing the World*, 191-192.

¹⁵³ Bernadett Filotas, *Pagan Survivals, Superstitions and Popular Cultures in Early Medieval Pastoral Literatures* (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 2005), 97.

*man drīfð on mislīcum gewīglungum and on frīð-splottum and on ellenum
and ēac on oðrum mislīcum trēowum and on stānum and manegum
mislīcum gedwimerum þe men ondrēogað fela þæs þe hī nā ne scoldon*¹⁵⁴

From the nature of the magic described, the canon singles out talismanic and charm magic as it notes the use of “power...in other various wood[s] and in stone” amongst the “magics/spells” connected to “heathendom.” Yet an intriguing point lies in how the canon describes heathendom through both the worship of human beings or objects *and* specifically through the use of charm magic. Thus even spells using Christian saints, such as the Seven Sleepers, became prohibited as they fell under the broader category of “enchantments.” Furthermore, the forbidding of the loosely phrased, “worship of human beings,” could indicate an attack on lay reverence given to the cult of saints as it simply replaced the worship of pagan gods. The placement of this prohibition directly following the enchantments lends to this interpretation, since the two remain inextricably linked in magical practice. Yet as a practice that occurs both in paganism and Christianity, it appears odd that a canon would brand charm magic as an entirely heathen act. However, this legislation may point to a shift in the relationship between the Church and lay views of magic.

Though much pagan lore became absorbed into Christian magic during the Middle Ages, this canon seeks to purge Christianity of its pagan influences to exact

¹⁵⁴ “Canons Enacted under K. Edgar,” *Ancient Laws and Institutes of England* (London: Eyre and Spottiswoode, 1840), 249.

“And we encourage that each priest to spread Christendom zealously, and destroy every heathendom entirely, and forbid well-worshippings and necromancies and auguries and enchantments and the worship of human beings and the error/vanity that man drives into various magics/spells and into ‘frith-splots’ and into power also in other various wood[s] and in stone and many various illusions that men perform many of these things, which they should not perform.”

greater influence for the Church over society as the true intermediary to God. Felix Grendon notes this trend, writing, “As time went on and the Church tightened its grasp on the minds of men, more and more drastic measures were taken to extrude Heathenism from Christian worship...The ecclesiastical authorities were finally driven to issue peremptory condemnations of clerical partiality to such evident forms of heathendom as charm songs and amulets.”¹⁵⁵ Though the laity had redressed many old charms and spells to adhere to Christian beliefs, like the previously mentioned “Against a Dwarf,” the act of charm casting itself retained obvious references and connections to pagan folklore. And by this point after centuries of Christianization, the Church no longer needed to concede such privileges to maintain believers as it did during its beginnings in England. The severe language used in Edgar’s canon supports this interpretation when it calls on priests to “spread Christendom zealously, and destroy every heathendom entirely.”¹⁵⁶ Since the cult of saints depended so largely on integrating pagan traditions, it garnered anxieties and suspicions from the higher clerics and Church officials.¹⁵⁷ Edgar’s canon acts upon these sentiments in an effort to purify the Church of these lingering pagan affiliations, while asserting the prominence of the Church in everyday life through priests. And indeed, the canon stresses the importance of “each priest” in bringing about this cleansing of the faith.

Yet legislations such as that of King Edgar had little effect on lay practices in charm magic, since many took these intermittent attempts at folkloric purges as barely

¹⁵⁵ Grendon, “The Anglo-Saxon Charms,” 147.

¹⁵⁶ “Canons Enacted under K. Edgar,” 249.

¹⁵⁷ Filotas, *Pagan Survivals*, 98-99.

more than cautionary notices. Don Skemer expands on these shortcomings of anti-charm legislation and literature supporting it, saying,

Ecclesiastical disapproval of textual amulets also found expression in cautionary sermons and moralistic tales aimed at discouraging forbidden textual elements and commerce in sacred power. These strictures suggest that textual amulets existed to some extent throughout the Middle Ages despite sporadic efforts to curtail their use. Local diversity in religious observance and imperfect penitential enforcement created an environment in which textual amulets could be quietly dispensed and used.¹⁵⁸

Therefore, the use of charm magic proved too enmeshed in society to submit to critics and opposing legislations. And as Skemer notes, the pervasiveness of magical practice combined with “imperfect penitential enforcement” made a purging of folkloric practices impossible. Thus, prohibitions, like that of King Edgar’s, remained largely ignored by Anglo-Saxon and later Anglo-Norman society. Yet while these legislations strove to carry out the will of the Church, they appear half-hearted attempts on the part of the government to combat a practice so much a part of England’s cultural fabric. Either due to the low-priority nature of this issue or a certain ambivalence or even indifference to changing a working system of compromise between Christianity and paganism, many rulers passed over these concerns of local magical practice. In fact, only four instances, including King Edgar’s, comprise all extant Anglo-Saxon legislation as well as penitentials and ecclesiastical admonitions, pertaining to charms.¹⁵⁹ And just twenty-two other laws from the Anglo-Saxon period concern witchcraft and heathendom, making the pagan/Christian divide a relatively minor concern in the Anglo-Saxon world, particularly in comparison to other crimes such as bodily harm and monetary issues.¹⁶⁰

¹⁵⁸ Skemer *Binding Words*, 72.

¹⁵⁹ Grendon, “The Anglo-Saxon Charms,” 140.

¹⁶⁰ *Ibid.*

Furthermore, use of charm magic receives support from inside the religious community both from continental Europe and the British Isles, legitimizing its existence in the face of accusations pointing to heathenism or devilry. By the mid-thirteenth century, Thomas Aquinas, an Italian scholastic philosopher and theologian, attempts to answer the question concerning the place and virtue of charms and amulets in Christian society. In his *Summa Theologiae*, 2.2.96.4, argues for the intent behind the usage of magic, saying,

*Videtur quod suspendere divina verba ad collum non sit illicitum. Non enim divina verba minoris sunt efficaciae cum scribuntur quam cum proferuntur. Sed licet aliqua sacra verba dicere ad aliquos effectus, puta ad sanandum infirmos, sicut, pater noster, ave Maria, vel qualitercumque nomen domini invocetur...Ergo videtur quod licitum sit aliqua sacra scripta collo suspendere in remedium infirmitatis vel cuiuscumque nocumenti.*¹⁶¹

In short, Christians were supposed to appeal directly to God or indirectly through the intercession of the Virgin Mary and helpful saints, and God had free will in responding to appeals for aid. Aquinas produces a theological rationale, as if one were needed, for what Don Skemer calls, the “legitimate use of textual amulets under certain circumstances.”¹⁶² Instead of calling such magic a deviation from faith, he suggests that it stands more as a demonstration of faith. And since the intent behind the usage of magic stems from the benevolent goal of healing believers of their ailments, in actuality, it stands as a valid

¹⁶¹ Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, vol. 40 (London: Blackfriars, Eyre and Spottiswoode, 1964), 80.

“It seems it is not unlawful to hang divine words on the neck. No indeed do divine words have less power when they are written than when they are uttered. But it is permitted to speak particular sacred words for particular effects, for instance, purely for the healing of sick people, like “pater noster”, “ave Maria”, or in whatever manner the name of the Lord is invoked... Therefore it seems that it is permitted to hang any sacred writings from the neck for a remedy of an illness or whatever nuisance.”

¹⁶² Skemer, *Binding Words*, 64.

means to allow God's kingdom to prosper. Thus the natures of spells including the Sleepers fits into this argument of legitimacy as their usage always connects back to a purpose such as "a remedy of an illness or whatever nuisance."

Around the same time, the English philosopher, Roger Bacon, not only points out the legitimacy of magic's usage, but also praises it and even denounces its critics. In the *Opus Maius* (1266-67), an encyclopedic text prepared at the request of Pope Clement IV, Roger Bacon speaks highly of the use of a textual amulet (*cedula* or *scriptura*), similar to those featuring the Seven Sleepers.¹⁶³ This particular case uses two verses containing the names of the Three Kings (Caspar, Melchior and Balthasar) and Bacon tells the story of a boy who prepared this textual amulet for an epileptic man whom he had happened upon in the fields. It reads,

*Et novi hominem qui cum fuerat puer invenit hominem in campis qui ceciderat de morbo caduco, et scripsit illos versus ac posuit circa collum eius, et statim sanatus est; et nunquam postea ei accidit donec post multa tempora uxor eius volens eum confundere propter amorem clerici cuiusdam quem amavit fecit eum n[udari] ut saltem balnei tempore propter aquam deponeret cedulam de collo suo ne per aquam violaretur. Quo facto statim arripuit eum infirmitas in ipso balneo; quo miraculo percussa mulier iterum ligavit cedulam et curatus est. Quis erit ausus interpretari hoc in malum, et daemonibus ascribere, sicut aliqui inexperti et insipientes multa daemonibus ascripserunt quae Dei gratis aut per opus naturae et artium sublimium potestatem multoties facta sunt? Quomodo enim probavit mihi aliquis quod opus daemonis fuit istud, quoniam nec puer decipere sciebat nec volebat? Et mulier, quae decipere volebat non solum virum sed se per fornicationem dum abstulit scripturam, viso miraculo pietate mota cedulam religavit. Malo hic pie sentire ad laudem beneficiorum Dei quam praesumptione magna damnare quod verum est.*¹⁶⁴

¹⁶³ *Ibid.*, 62.

¹⁶⁴ Roger Bacon, *The Opus Majus of Roger Bacon*, vol. 3, edited by John Henry Bridges (London: Elibron Classics, 2005), 123-4.

"I also know a man who, when a boy, found a man in the fields, who had fallen from the 'falling sickness' [epilepsy], and the boy wrote those verses and placed them around his neck and immediately he was cured; and nothing happened to him afterwards until some

This instance of applying charms and talismanic magic glorifies the legitimated usage of magic stated before by Thomas Aquinas. Yet Roger Bacon goes further in his vehement defense than the tentative permission given by Aquinas. The wondrous story he relates provides evidence of two miracles of faith caused by a single *cedula*, which saved both a man from his physical ailment of epilepsy and his wife of her sinful, adulterous ways. He outright declares these results of Christian magic as miracles “which are done many times through the graces of God” and exist in “praise of the favors of God.” Through these statements, he confirms what Aquinas only hints at: he asserts the role of magic as an expression of faith by believers in times of need. He rounds off his argument by accusing those who oppose this “truth” as doing so “with great presumption/stubbornness.” Furthermore, he brings his argument back to the intent behind the usage of magic, in this case, how “the boy neither knew to deceive nor did he want to deceive” in his actions. Thus from this passage, the relationship between the English people and charm magic appears to remain closely intertwined through the late Middle Ages, despite attempts at opposition.

time later his wife, wishing to destroy him on account of her passion for some clerk whom she loved, made him strip so that when he took his bath he would take off the "cedula" from his neck because of the water, so it wouldn't get harmed by it. When this was done, he was immediately stricken with illness in the bath. Shaken by this miracle, his wife again tied on the cedula and he was cured. Who will have dared to interpret this in accordance with evil and ascribe this to demons, just as some inexperienced and foolish people ascribed many things to demons, which are done many times through the graces of God or through the works of nature and the atrium, the power of those raised on high. How indeed did anyone prove to me that this work itself was of a demon, since the boy neither knew to deceive nor did he want to deceive? And his wife, who was willing to deceive not only the man but herself through fornication when she took the writing off, with the miracle having been seen, she bound the amulet fast with her piety having been stirred. I prefer here to piously see in praise of the favors of God, than damn with great presumption/stubbornness, what is true.”

Yet perhaps this arrangement endured since aspects of Christianity and pagan popular beliefs in magic had to remain inextricably linked. In fact, the need to delineate one influence from another may go against the very nature of religion during this period.¹⁶⁵ Carl Watkins suggests a realignment in thought when approaching religious culture of the medieval world. He proposes, “First, we need to think of medieval religious culture as a co-mingling of unofficial and official belief that varies over space and time—forming not a series of cultural compartments, but a spectrum. This spectrum comprehends, albeit at the opposite ends, the beliefs of peasant and prelate alike.”¹⁶⁶ Therefore, although government and church officials appeared to counter the influences of paganism over Christianity, their opinions only stand at one extreme of the spectrum of belief during the later Middle Ages, instead of standing entirely at odds with the rest of society. As the pervasiveness of charm craft reveals, these varied layers of Christian practice could and did coexist. The practice of charm craft shifts and alters to keep up with the changes within these demands and influences, always adding and building onto its corpus in a tradition of constant flux.

¹⁶⁵ Carl Watkins, “‘Folklore’ and ‘Popular Religion’ in Britain during the Middle Ages,” *Folklore* 115, No. 2 (Aug., 2004): 140-150.

¹⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 147.

The Seven Sleepers of Ephesus in the Qur'an
Sura 18: Sura al-Kahf
The Cave

Excerpt: Companions of the Cave 18:13-29

13[Prophet], We shall tell you their story as it really was. They were young men who believed in their Lord, and We gave them more and more guidance. 14We gave strength to their hearts when they stood up and said, 'Our Lord is the Lord of the heavens and earth. We shall never call upon any god other than Him, for that would be an outrageous thing to do. 15These people of ours have taken gods other than Him. Why do they not produce clear evidence about them? Who could be more unjust than someone who makes up lies about God? 16Now that you have left such people, and what they worshipped instead of God, take refuge in the cave. God will shower His mercy on you and make you an easy way out of your ordeal.'

17 You could have seen the [light of the] sun as it rose, moving away to the right of their cave, and when it set, moving away to the left of them, while they lay in the wide space inside the cave. (This is one of God's signs: those people God guides are rightly guided, but you will find no protector to lead to the right path those He leaves to stray.) 18You would have thought they were awake, though they lay asleep. We turned them over, to the right and the left, with their dog stretching out its forelegs at the entrance. If you had seen them, you would have turned and run away, filled with fear of them. 19In time We woke them, and they began to question one another. One of them asked, 'How long have you been here?' and [some] answered, 'A day or part of a day,' but then [others] said, 'Your Lord knows best how long you have been here. One of you go to the city with your silver coins, find out where the best food is there, and bring some back. But be careful not to let anyone know about you: 20if they found you out, they would stone you or force you to return to their religion, where you would never come to any good.' 21In this way We brought them to people's attention so that they might know that God's promise [of resurrection] is true and that there is no doubt about the Last Hour, [though] people argue among themselves.

[Some] said, 'Construct a building over them: their Lord knows best about them.' Those who prevailed said, 'We shall build a place of worship over them.' 22[Some] say, 'The sleepers were three, and their dog made four,' others say, 'They were five, and the dog made six'— guessing in the dark— and some say, 'They were seven, and their dog made eight.' Say [Prophet], 'My Lord knows best how many they were.' Only a few have real knowledge about them, so do not argue, but stick to what is clear, and do not ask any of these people about them; 23do not say of anything, 'I will do that tomorrow,' a 24without adding, 'God willing,' and, whenever you forget, remember your Lord and say, 'May my Lord guide me closer to what is right.' 25[Some say], 'The sleepers stayed in their cave for three hundred years,' some added nine more. 26Say [Prophet], 'God knows best how long they stayed.' His is the knowledge of all that is hidden in the heavens and earth— How well He sees! How well He hears!— and they have no one to protect them other than Him; He does not allow anyone to share His rule.

27[Prophet], follow what has been revealed to you of your Lord's Scripture: there is no changing His words, nor can you find any refuge except with Him. 28Content yourself with those who pray to their Lord morning and evening, seeking His approval, and do not let your eyes turn away from them out of desire for the attractions of this worldly life: do not yield to those whose hearts We have made heedless of Our Qur'an, those who follow their own low desires, those whose ways are unbridled. 29Say, 'Now the truth has come from your Lord: let those who wish to believe in it do so, and let those who wish to reject it do so.' We have prepared a Fire for the wrongdoers that will envelop them from all sides.¹⁶⁷

¹⁶⁷ M. A. Abdel Haleem, trans., *The Quran* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 183-185.

Chapter Five The Transmission and Literary Conversion of the Sleepers through Art

Far from the shores of England, back in the homeland of the Seven Sleepers in the Near East, a strikingly similar abstraction of the Seven Sleepers tale occurs in the charm craft of popular religious practice. However, instead of pagan folklore, the story works to embrace existing Christian traditions into the Islamic faith. Following this metamorphosis, its Islamic adaptation continuously transformed to fit the agendas of magical practitioners, Sufi mystics and sultans, traceable through the art pertaining to each purpose. These various adaptations build off each other as literary interpretations of the Seven Sleepers become more esoteric in the growing sects of Islam. Therefore, its artistic interpretations range from the most practical level of household magic, in the form of a bronze mirror, and progress through mysticism, as seen in a set of lusterware tiles, and finally to confirming Isma'ili Shiism of the Safavid Empire in manuscript illustrations of the *Falnama*, or Book of Omens. Yet regardless of the adaptation, the artists and patrons always maintain at least one of the three main themes within the story—loyalty, faith and divine protection—maintaining the core of the tale despite its changing faces and uses.

Yet behind this abstraction of a tale lies a melding of religious traditions, so characteristic of the tale itself in this synthesis. Though originally a Christian tale dating back to at least the 6th century, the story of the Seven Sleepers holds significance to Islam from *Sura* 18 of the Qur'an, otherwise known as *Sura al-Khaf*. And the transmission of the story into Islamic religious texts accounts for the unique portrayal of the legend, which comes through in its artistic interpretations. This portrayal places particular

emphasis on God, the provider of actual guardians for believers and the Sleepers themselves as the signalers of the coming Apocalypse. Such points facilitate the use of the story in magical practice since individuals could easily apply them for purposes of protection and divination. Thus before approaching the objects and pieces of art inspired by the story, the formation and local origin of this version of the tale requires attention.

As the best-known pre-Islamic account of the Seven Sleepers in the area, the poetic *mêmrê*, or liturgical homily, attributed to Jacob of Serugh, stands as the major influence on the Qur'anic adaptation. Sydney Griffith notes the degree of the story's circulation by the time of the Qur'an's creation, writing, "The narrative circulated first among the Arabic-speaking, "Jacobite" Christians in the Ghassānid confederation in the Syro-Jordanian steppe land as well as in the environs of Najrān in southern Arabia. From these centers it would have circulated among Arabic-speaking Christians throughout Arabia."¹⁶⁸ Thus from this significant transmission, this 6th century Christian-Syriac work sets up the central themes to appear in the Qur'an and those that later artists carry into works of art pertaining to magic and divination. In this version, the Sleepers enter the mountain and implore God, saying:

"We beseech you, Good Shepherd, who has chosen His servants,
guard your flock from this wolf who thirsts for blood."
The Lord saw the faith of the blessed lambs,
And He came to give a good wage for their recompense.
He took their spirits and brought them up to heaven,
and He left a watcher to be the guardian of their limbs."¹⁶⁹

¹⁶⁸ Sidney Griffith, "Christian lore and the Arabic Qur'an," in *The Qur'an and Its Historical Context*, edited by Gabriel Said Reynolds (New York: Routledge, 2008), 121.

¹⁶⁹ Jacobus of Serugh, "The Youths of Ephesus," translated by Sidney Griffith, in *The Qur'an and Its Historical Context*, edited by Gabriel Said Reynolds (New York: Routledge, 2008), 128.

Within this passage, a few details set the Syrian version apart from the popular Latin accounts. These represent the main elements of the tale, which the Qur'an absorbs in its succinct retelling. Here, the Sleepers do not suddenly collapse, put to sleep by the power of God, distant in heaven, but God personally handles their spirits and thinks to provide a "watcher" for their bodies, making for an intensely intimate image of a caretaker and parent. Jacobus of Serugh depicts God as protector of his worshippers in a far more active and personal rendering than other Christian adaptations of the tale, such as the Latin version of the same period by Gregory of Tours. Furthermore, the watcher becomes a significant role in the Qur'anic tradition since it receives a wide range of interpretations due to its vague description. Additionally, it turns into a central figure in later, especially Shiite, portrayals of the Sleepers due to interpretations of the watcher's presence as "the guidance of one already closer to the Divine Presence."¹⁷⁰ And as individuals that roused such a compassionate response from their almighty God, the Sleepers made ideal intermediaries between the common man and God, thus inspiring their use in magical practice to achieve this connection.

Also important to note, the *mêmrê* includes lines, which indicate the Sleepers' purpose as heralds of the future resurrection and proof of its possibility. They say to Emperor Theodosius in the homily, "For your sake...our Lord, the Messiah, awakened us / so you could see and affirm that there is truly a resurrection."¹⁷¹ The Sleepers say this to encourage spiritual preparation in the Emperor and people of Ephesus. Although, more importantly, they indirectly address the readers of the homily to remain aware of what God intends. In foretelling and confirming the resurrection, they establish their roles as

¹⁷⁰ Patricia Barker, *Islam and the Religious Arts* (New York: Continuum, 2004), 173.

¹⁷¹ Serugh, "The Youths of Ephesus," 124.

confidants of God, knowledgeable of his secrets for the future and end of times. Not surprisingly, this position makes the Sleepers appealing to the many believers also desiring to know details of their own futures. Thus many individuals use their story to achieve similar results in divination.

The Qur'an adapts these features seen in Jacob of Serugh's homily, also keeping the nurturing character of God established in this work. Verses 11 and 18 in the Qur'an attest to God's overt favor toward them: "We sealed their ears [with sleep] in the cave for years... We turned them over, to the right and the left, with their dog stretching out its forelegs at the entrance."¹⁷² Here, God himself cares for their dormant bodies, doing what some referred to as "rocking" the Sleepers, as one would rock a baby or a patient in need of comfort. And just as a parent, he protects his children, "seal[ing] their ears," from the evil words of the nonbelievers and establishes the dog as their loyal guard. Additionally, the choice of the dog creates a distinct exception to pre-Islamic culture's perception of the dog as evil in Arab mythology and the later Islamic attitudes sometimes attributed to Muhammad.¹⁷³ Despite the unusual choice of guardians, all these actions echo the aforementioned details of Jacobus of Serugh's work in God's protection and expression of nurturing care and even build upon them to create a more vivid, intimate image of God. Even in verse 21, the Sleepers confirm the same message of the coming Apocalypse as God tells Muhammad, "In this way, We brought them to people's attention so that they

¹⁷² M. A. Abdel Haleem, trans., *The Quran* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 183-184.

¹⁷³ Khalid Abou El Fadl, "Dogs in the Islamic Tradition and Nature," *Encyclopedia of Religion and Nature* (New York: Continuum, 2004), 498-500.

might know that God's promise [of resurrection] is true and that there is no doubt about the Last Hour, [though] people argue among themselves."¹⁷⁴

Such close similarities in this story across faiths could suggest a motive for conversion behind these literary trends within the later Qur'anic version. As Sidney Griffith notes of the Qur'anic adaption,

... the Qur'an on the one hand removes the Christian frame of reference and on the other hand provides an Islamic Qur'anic horizon within which the legend takes on a whole new hermeneutical significance... It would seem that much Christian lore in Syriac lies behind the Qur'an's evocation of Christian scriptures, the beliefs and practices of the churches and their homiletic traditions, as they must have circulated among many Arabic-speaking Christians in the Qur'an's original audience in the time of Muhammad...¹⁷⁵

Therefore, in recalling such details from Jacobus of Serugh, the Qur'an creates a pluralistic literary piece, pulling inspiration that would have the greatest impact upon non-believers. This adaptation also follows Griffith's point as it "removes the Christian frame of reference" by decidedly omitting the detail that the Sleepers were specifically Christians, thus portraying them instead as the "believers" of devout faith. As People of the Book, Christians needed to see that the Qur'an did not contradict or oppose their faith, but rather continued and completed it. Thus as Griffith goes on to state, "... [this intertextual approach] enhances our knowledge of the social, cultural and religious complexity of the Arabic-speaking audience addressed by the Arabic Qur'an and in the process it discloses the Qur'an's own detailed awareness of folklore of that audience's

¹⁷⁴ Haleem, *Quran*, 184.

¹⁷⁵ Sidney Griffith, "Christian lore and the Arabic Qur'an," in *The Qur'an and Its Historical Context*, edited by Gabriel Said Reynolds (New York: Routledge, 2008), 130-131.

Christian members, whose patristic and liturgical heritage was distinctly Syriac.”¹⁷⁶ And from the adaptation of the tale, it appears that the creators of the Qur’an took such issues into consideration. In particular, Sura 18 supports the latter part of Griffith’s earlier point as it “provides an Islamic Qur’anic horizon” for a Christian tale through its unique foretelling of resurrection and Apocalypse. Indeed, it follows up the story with exhortations and ways to prepare for this through the practice of the Muslim faith.

The sura then emphasizes its purpose and goal by overtly stating the power of Islam after this pluralistic tale. It reads, “[Prophet], follow what has been revealed to you of your Lord’s Scripture: there is no changing His words, nor can you find any refuge except with Him.”¹⁷⁷ The strategic placement of this declaration of Islam as sole “refuge” following a tale of such explicit intertextuality points to the objectives of the piece as a whole. It aims to draw in the readers, perhaps of a Christian faith, with a text both familiar and even sacred to them and then realign and claim both reader and text for Islam. So while the end goal of the story in both Islam and Christianity remains essentially the same by proving the resurrection and assuring the people of their God’s intended future, each version suggests its own doctrines to prime believers for this event. Yet the manner in which the two versions of the story speak to one another suggests a greater commonality and shared notion of tales, which causes boundaries between religions to blur.

These subjects and themes addressed in both versions propel the story through numerous interpretations in their appeal to human fears of both the world’s evils and future. And particularly in the Qur’anic version resulting from this tradition, the Sleepers

¹⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 131.

¹⁷⁷ Haleem, *Quran*, 185.

receive considerable attention both in writing and art. Although a simple tale, the story exudes elements of unwavering faith by depicting the persecution of the Sleepers, extreme loyalty in their flight, and divine protection, as God spares them from death. And from the third category of divine protection there sprang a tradition of the story's use in magical practices, which grew to also encompass the two other aspects associated with the tale. Such use of the Sleepers illustrates itself through the talismanic objects which aided in magical endeavors. One of these talismans comes in the form of a bronze mirror, dating back to the 13th century.

Currently at the British Museum, this largely ignored bronze mirror includes the names of the Seven Sleepers inscribed on the rim of its face, along with magic squares, the 'seven signs,' and letters and numbers. Each section ends with a cartouche with rows of magical numbers and letters. The back consists of a raised rim with a pierced knob in the center, surrounded by four winged sphinxes in low relief on what could be a floral and vegetal background. A magic formula inscribed in Kufic Arabic frames the back. Unfortunately, no translation of the formula has been made (Figures 1 and 2).¹⁷⁸ However, by looking specifically at the usage of the Seven Sleepers in this instance, the transformation of the story occurs from literary tale of faith to a means of divine invocation. At the same time it displays a characteristic effect of Islamic written art, noted by Oleg Grabar, in its calliphoric, or beauty invoking, effect as a decorative piece

¹⁷⁸ See Appendix for Image.

British Museum, "Collection Database," http://www.britishmuseum.org/research/search_the_collection_database/search_object_details.aspx?objectid=215344&partid=1&searchText=mirror+inscription&fromADBC=ad&toADBC=ad&titleSubject=on&physicalAttribute=on&productionInfo=on&numpages=10&orig=%2fresearch%2fsearch_the_collection_database.aspx¤tPage=7; Internet, accessed April 18, 2010.

while also becoming terpnopietic by bringing pleasure.¹⁷⁹ As mortal believers saved from certain death by divine grace, by including names of the Sleepers, magical practitioners may have hoped to gain similar favor from God in their everyday lives. Their convenient connection to the holy number of seven also increases their appeal, which could additionally explain their inclusion with the ‘seven magic signs,’ further enhancing their magical capabilities.

Yet the question remains of how individuals used such an object and to what end, and moreover, how society viewed this use of a Qur’anic story in a magical context. Francis Maddison and Emilie Savage-Smith speak to this as they note the accepted connection between magic and Islam. They go on to state, “Most magic in the Islamic world was protective in nature, asking for God’s general beneficence. Occasionally, His intervention against other powers—the evil eye, assorted demons (*shayātin*) and the *jinn*.”¹⁸⁰ Therefore the story of the Seven Sleepers as a tale of divine protection becomes a literal adaptation of this theme in practice. And thus, the possibility arises that this mirror could have served as a talisman in a kind of protection charm. Furthermore, by having the names written along the rim of the object along with the symbols and signs, the holder had to turn the mirror in order to read them and meditate on the other markings. Therefore, the act of reading the names became part of the action in casting such a protective charm, engaging the practitioner in the task at hand and fully experiencing the object as a piece of art. This could additionally account for the fact that the pierced knob, where one would hold the mirror, was placed in the center rather than

¹⁷⁹ Oleg Grabar, *The Mediation of Ornament* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992), 59.

¹⁸⁰ Francis Maddison and Emilie Savage-Smith, *Science, Tools and Magic: Part one. Body and Spirit, Mapping the Universe* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), 59.

on the side. Many other instances, a pierced opening on the side indicated that a handle could be inserted, implying a need for holding rather than turning.¹⁸¹ Additionally, these ritualistic actions of rotation could have been used in conjunction with a type of chant, perhaps the inscription on the back, or those mentioned by Ibn Kathir.

In his *tafsir* of the Qur'anic tale, Ibn Kathir (1301-1373) relates the various ways in which *sura* 18 could invoke protective powers. Throughout his Qur'anic interpretation, Ibn Kathir uses the *hadith* to explain verses of the Qur'an. Concerning the *Surat al-Kahf*, he writes,

Recite this and it will bring peace (*sakina*); 'Whoever memorizes ten verses from the beginning of *Surat al-Kahf* will be safeguarded from the liar or cheat (*dajjal*)'; 'Whoever recites the last ten verses of *Surat al-Kahf* is safeguarded from the liar'; 'Whoever recites the beginning and the end of *Surat al-Kahf* has light from his feet up to his head'; and finally, 'Whoever recites *Surat al-Kahf* on a Friday is protected for eight days from any trouble (*fitna*) and if the liar were to come out during that time he would be safeguarded from him (the liar).¹⁸²

His works stress the use of memorization of the Qur'anic verses. Thus, with this in mind, the reason for an inscription including the Sleepers' names surfaces. By having the names on the mirror, the user marks a direct connection between the talismanic aid and the words spoken, without having to breach the protocols of memorization mentioned by Ibn Kathir, thereby enhancing the effectiveness of the act. And so, from his works, the emphasis on the spoken word gives credence to the object as an intermediary to the meaning of the text through the names inscribed. This idea coincides with Oleg Grabar's sentiments on writing in Islamic art, stating, "Writing is not simply, within semiotic theory, a signifier of something signified, the expression of an object or of a thought. It is

¹⁸¹ *Ibid.*

¹⁸² Isma'il b. 'Umar b. Kathir, *Tafsir al-Qur'an al-azim*, vol IV (Beirut: Darussalam, 1987), 363-64.

in fact twice removed from its subject matter, as the word, spoken or recalled, comes between the object and its written form.”¹⁸³ Through this network of intermediaries, the user of the talisman finds the thought behind the *sura*, signified by the inscription on the object: the divine protection and grace of God. Even by simply having the names inscribed on the edge, they carry the connotations of invoking the entire story.

Yet an alternative, and more likely, magical purpose for this mirror arises from the manner in which the names of the Sleepers appear on the rim of the piece, pointing to a usage in divination. Concerning this function of the Seven Sleepers, Louis Massignon traces this specific thread throughout several works of al-Ghazali, the prominent 11th century theologian-jurist turned philosopher-mystic. He writes, “Al-Ghazali maintains that it is important to know their names because they understand God’s secrets and can read the secrets in peoples’ hearts.”¹⁸⁴ Thus, the function of scrying in the form of mirror divination explains the composition of the piece, since it only features magical inscriptions on the back and on the edge of the front, framing the mirror-face instead of obscuring it. This arrangement departs from the common tradition of talismanic mirrors described by Maddison and Savage-Smith, where magic squares and symbols would appear on the main face of the mirror.¹⁸⁵ In the case of this bronze mirror, the inscription does not sacrifice the practical functionality of the object for its magical purposes. Such a situation could point to the fact that the functionality played a role in the magical purposes. Thus by looking into the mirror-face the practitioner could “read the secrets in people’s hearts.”

¹⁸³ Grabar, *Mediation of Ornament*, 62.

¹⁸⁴ Louis Massignon, “Les Sept Dormants d’Ephèse (*Ahl al-Kahf*) en Islam et en Chrétienté: Première Partie,” *Revue des Études Islamiques* 22 (1954), 72.

¹⁸⁵ Maddison and Savage-Smith, *Science*, 59.

Al-Ghazali's corpus of writing inadvertently goes on to expand the societal uses of the Seven Sleepers story through his work to legitimize Sufi practices to the general Islamic populace and authority. Na'ama Brosh notes this development, which brings about differing interpretations of the Sleepers story in art, writing, "from the 11th century onward, Abu Hamid al-Ghazali (d. 1111) and others succeeded in bridging the ever-widening gap between the mystics and the orthodox...[he] traced the roots of mystical thought to the Koran and Islamic teachings and, by so doing, enabled the Sufis to become part of the official religious establishment."¹⁸⁶ With this acceptance of Sufism into the proper religious body, it grafted onto the government systems of dynasties as well, leading to the royal patronage of art, which expressed its adherence to Sufi tradition.¹⁸⁷ And as a story receiving the attentions of prominent Sufi scholars, such as al-Ghazali, the Seven Sleepers of Ephesus became a popular choice as a subject of royally commissioned art.

Furthermore, the Sleepers and the story itself acted as an intermediary to God's grace in Sufi thought. And al-Ghazali especially speaks to this use in his autobiography, "Deliverance from Error," concerning his personal discovery of Sufism. In it, he acknowledges the need for men like the Sleepers and other fervent mystics as intermediaries to God. He writes, "For they are the pillars of the earth and by their blessings divine mercy descends upon the earth dwellers as is declared in the tradition of the Prophet and because of them you receive rain, and thanks to them you receive

¹⁸⁶ Na'ama Brosh, *Biblical Stories in Islamic Painting* (Jerusalem: The Israel Museum, 1991), 21.

¹⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 22.

sustenance, and among them were the Companions of the Cave.”¹⁸⁸ His statement gives saints a prominent role in gaining God’s favor for mankind or “earth dwellers.” This notion makes the Seven Sleepers appealing to rulers, since they have the ability to gain God’s good will not only for the individual, but also for entire kingdoms, especially in the most basic necessities of rain and sustenance. As a means of invoking this “divine mercy” upon a kingdom, the Sleepers became a necessary addition to royal artwork to further solicit God for his blessings.

One of the many ways the Seven Sleepers made their way into the artwork of kings came in the form of luster tiles. A certain set at the British Museum came from the shrine of Imamzadeh Yahya at Veramin, Iran, dating to the 1260s. The tiles, probably made in Kashan, consist of both 8-pointed star and cross tiles with a central vegetal designs of cobalt blue, white and turquoise in a loose geometric arrangements. Thick, white bands surround the main image, which include inscriptions of Qur’anic verse in *naskhi* script (Figure 3).¹⁸⁹ One 8-pointed star, on the bottom left, includes verse 110 of the *Sura* of the Cave, which translates in English to: “Say, “I am no more than a human like you, being inspired that your god is one god. Those who hope to meet their Lord shall work righteousness and never worship any other god beside his Lord.”¹⁹⁰ This line completes the *Sura* of the Cave, alluding to the tale without directly compelling an image of it. It rather evokes the matter at the heart of the tale—devout faith, which the Sleepers embody. The verse approaches the tale from a Sufi perspective as it highlights the intent

¹⁸⁸ Richard Joseph McCarthy, trans. *Freedom and Fulfillment: An Annotated Translation of al-Ghazali’s al-Munqidh min al-Dalal and Other Relevant Works of al-Ghazali* (Boston, 1980), 77.

¹⁸⁹ Venetia Porter, *Islamic Tiles* (London: British Museum Press, 1995), 35.

¹⁹⁰ Rashad, Khalifa, trans., *Qur’an: The Final Testament (Authorized English Version)* (Capistrano Beach: Islamic Productions, 2005), 239.

or *niyya* behind it,¹⁹¹ striking the most intimate and essential theme of the story. Thus, the verse invites further meditation beyond its meaning at first glance, if the viewer realizes the reference. In doing this, it creates layers of interpretation for the viewer to ponder, transcending its surface purpose of protection and invoking God's grace.

Also in this instance, the inscription not only carries meaning, but also by simply adorning the tile, it adds value to the tilework itself as the inscription distinguishes it as a piece in praise of God. Yet this idea of multiplicity in interpretation and function harkens to the notion that scholars, such as Patricia Barker, put forth. She writes, "Similarly artists illustrating other works closely associated with Sufi thought would have assumed that the reader might well interpret both text and depictions on two levels"¹⁹² Therefore in approaching this reference to the Sleepers story, an analysis beyond the typical interpretation for Islamic art is required. And this becomes doubly significant in order to also account for the Shiite influences and the connotations added by their emphasis placed on esotericism. Thus the artwork invites viewers to consider the Sufi and Shiite implications of the piece, as well as the artistic effect in the beauty it adds to the space.

Created under the Mongol Il-Khanids, influenced strongly by Shiite theologians, this particular display of tiles spoke strongly to the more arcane aspects of Sufism. Barker expands upon this idea by focusing on the color-play of tile sets; she states: "According to some thinkers, certain colours had symbolic significance in theory if not in practice, and evidently several Sufi writers sought to explain the individual's progress on the spiritual path in terms of colour. By that extension, it could be argued that the

¹⁹¹ Scott Alan Kugle, *Sufis & Saints' Bodies: Mysticism, Corporeality, & Sacred Power in Islam* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2007), 277.

¹⁹² Barker, *Islam and the Religious Arts*, 181.

extensive use of coloured glazed tiles as architectural decoration contained hidden meaning.¹⁹³ With regards to this tile set, the colors of turquoise blue and white dominate the piece with darker blue accents. According to Barker the turquoise signifies “a soul satisfied with knowledge of God,” while white proclaims, “a soul purified, at one with God”¹⁹⁴ These notions strongly coincide with Sufi practices, since the notion of being at one with God comes from the goal of *fanā*, or the annihilation of the self so that one is completely submerged in the Godhead.¹⁹⁵

With great ease, the Seven Sleepers fit this description as an allegorical tale for the attainment of *fanā*. The choice of including last line of the *sura* in particular also carries the suggestion of attainment or completion. It remains unclear if these tiles exist to encourage this state or declare the achievement of such a status, most likely by the patron or dedicatee. However, the underlying political purpose lies in establishing a public connection to Sufism and God’s grace through the Sleepers, and thereby declaring acceptance and support of the Islamic state. This concept increases in importance due to the fact that the Il-Khanids, a Mongol khanate, were relatively new converts to Islam during this period.¹⁹⁶ Their circumstances gave them more need to assert their alliances to the religion of the masses they governed, in this case Islam, with strong influences from the Sufi integration into its structure.

Furthermore, since the Il-Khanids identified specifically with the Shiite branch of Islam, the influences from this background must also be taken into consideration. And

¹⁹³ *Ibid.*, 180-181.

¹⁹⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁹⁵ Robert Forman, *The Innate Capacity: Mysticism, Psychology, and Philosophy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 105.

¹⁹⁶ Seyyed Hossein Nasr, *Islam: Religion, History, and Civilization* (New York: Harper Collins, 2003), 129.

because Shiism stresses the hidden meaning behind the Qur'an's words,¹⁹⁷ the act of inscribing a tile with the most arcane verses in the story makes the tiles themselves intermediaries to that esoteric meaning, though viewers may not necessarily grasp it. Grabar makes mention of this in his discussion of writing as an intermediary, stating,

From the very beginning, the act of writing is at the same time a means of transmission and the only way one can even attempt to become aware of the limitations of man's perception of the divine. Practical and mystical themes will play their role in the interpretation of writing in Muslim lands and even more in contemporary interpretation of that writing, but the more important point is that, as writing was the vehicle for God's message, so God's message became a hallowed piece of writing.¹⁹⁸

And by creating a "hallowed piece of writing" the tiles add spiritual legitimacy to the space they occupy. Just as the inclusion of the names of the Sleepers provided an enhanced link to the message of divine protection, this instance of the incorporation of the last verse of the *sura*, enhances the idea of occult knowledge and devout faith through this indirect link. In doing this, the tiles reinforce the tenets of Shia Islam while praising God through integration of the Sleepers in architectural decoration, expressing the veiled and revealed at the same time.

Such uses of the Seven Sleepers story then pave the way for its further artistic interpretation by other Shiite rulers to come. Following the Il-Khanids, the Safavid rulers in the sixteenth century take the story to new levels of interpretation in manuscript form, causing an explosion in instances of the story's usage in augury books. And since no manuscript depictions of this subject are known until the second part of the sixteenth century, its usage here links to the immense rise in popularity of divination in intellectual

¹⁹⁷ Me'ir Mikha'el Bar-Asher, *Scripture and Exegesis in Early Imāmī-Shiism*, (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, The Hebrew University, 1999), 91.

¹⁹⁸ Grabar, "Writing," *The Mediation of Ornament*, 64.

life during the same time.¹⁹⁹ One of the most visually powerful of these Safavid illustrations lies in the dispersed *Falnama*, or The Book of Omens, one of which currently is at the Smithsonian. In this text, the painting depicts a large, dark cave in which the interlocked figures of the Seven Sleepers form a crescent around the peaceful, slumbering dog. Outside of the cave, Satan along with Decius and his men arrive to find that their hunt to apprehend and punish these men occurred in vain (Figure 4). Colored rocks in hues of muted orange, light blue, salmon, and pink surround the cave like, what Massumeh Farhad describes as, “a protective aura and [the colored rocks] are anchored by three small trees.” She also notes that in the *Falnama* painting, “the artist transformed the cave into a circular space and, moving center stage, has artfully intertwined the slumbering figures into an arc around the dog.”²⁰⁰ This interpretation presents the most iconographic of the artistic interpretations yet, though not without meditated motives behind this decision. Indeed the choice to create an iconographic image of the Sleepers better facilitates the application of symbolic meaning to features of the tale for the political purposes of the Safavid Empire.

Such symbolic depictions derive from the need for pro-governmental imagery with the rise of a new empire, accounting for the spike in images of the Sleepers in the auguries of the nobility. Though continually seen from a religious viewpoint, the interpretation of the story shifts to accommodate these Isma’ili Shiite authorities. Norman Brown discusses this interpretation, writing that “The Sleepers hidden in the cave are the Koranic authority for the Shiite notion of the Ghayba, or occultation, of the Hidden

¹⁹⁹ Rachel Milstein, *Stories of the Prophets: Illustrated Manuscripts of Qiṣaṣ al-anbiyā* (Costa Mesa: Mazda, 1980), 153.

²⁰⁰ Massumeh Farhad and Serpil Bağcı, *Falnama: The Book of Omens* (Washington, D.C.: Arthur M. Sackler Gallery, Smithsonian Institution, 2009), 160.

Imam...the Seven Sleepers are Seven Imams of the Ismaili Shiites hidden in the cave, the womb of Fatima, and guarded by their watchdog, Ali.”²⁰¹ Though versions of this story have often varied, with the rise of the Safavid Empire, depictions standardized to conform to this interpretation, repackaged for a new generation and empire of Isma’ilis, with attention to the inclusion of the dog. Particularly in this composition of the *Falnama* image, the enclosed “protective aura” evokes the image of a womb with the intertwined Sleepers forming a fetus-like shape in their crescent arrangement. The decidedly fleshy color scheme highlights this reference, while the dog’s place as separate and in front of the crescent of sleepers marks him as their protector. And especially since the Isma’ilis identified under the title of Shiite, the story easily acts as a metaphor to the Seven Imams. The importance of the cave in the story attests to that the most. Both Anthony O’Mahony and Louis Massignon note this, saying, “The word ‘cave’ (*kahf, ghar, magharat*) is used in the Qur’an to designate a place of refuge for the faithful or a locus of intimate contact with God.”²⁰² Therefore, viewers can consider the Sleepers in the cave as imams, due to their occult knowledge of God through this intimate contact, also evoking God’s protection of them.

With these observations in mind, images of the Seven Sleepers, such as this one, become propaganda for the Safavid and Isma’ili rulers, establishing their power indirectly through this image. The usage of the Sleepers in the *Falnama*, or Book of Omens, gives the story considerable weight as it transfers to the Safavids all the associated properties of

²⁰¹ Norman Brown, “The Apocalypse of Islam,” *Social Text*, No. 8 (Winter, 1983-1984), 165-166.

²⁰² Anthony O’Mahony, “Louis Massignon, the Seven Sleepers of Ephesus and the Christian-Muslim Pilgrimage at Vieux-Marché, Brittany,” *Explorations in a Christian Theology of Pilgrimage*, ed. Craig Bartholomew (Burlington: Ashgate, 2004), 135.

the story mentioned before: protection, loyalty and intimacy with God. In a sense then, the story also carries talismanic abilities in addition to its overt political messages by bringing these properties to the Safavids. It also returns to its use in magic and divination due to its placement in a book used for predicting the future. Additionally this relates to a point that Rachel Milstein makes, “Eschatological themes prevail in Safavid painting and seem to constitute the theological ground for the dispersed *Fāl-nāmā*...,” later continuing this notion by saying, “...spiritual association with the Safavid dynasty was the basis for their claims of legitimacy.”²⁰³ Thus by planting these images throughout these important written works of the empire, the government disperses a message to the literate population, garnering their support through this silent declaration of power. For in the act of viewing this image, the audience must acknowledge Safavid might.

Furthermore, the organization of the *Falnama*, with images always on the right and text on the left, as one reads Persian from right to left,²⁰⁴ makes the reader first consider the image and its significations before the text. Therefore, having established this purpose of evoking the protection, loyalty and intimacy with God for the Safavid rulers, the audience can find a subtle reassurance of it in the following text. For the section of the *Falnama* corresponding to this image explains:

O augury user, know that the cavern of the People of the Cave and the sign of the sheepdog that accompanied them (according to the theologians and historians, the name of that dog is recorded as Qitmir) and the pursuit by the king of the age Daqyanus [Decianus, a Latin form for Decius] and

²⁰³ Rachel Milstein, *Stories of the Prophets: Illustrated Manuscripts of Qiṣaṣ al-anbiyā* (Costa Mesa: Mazda, 1980), 37.

²⁰⁴ Laurence Paul Elwell-Sutton, *Elementary Persian Grammar* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1963), 1.

their abiding in secure and tranquil protection and being rescued from the wickedness of the enemy have appeared in your augury.²⁰⁵

This message reads with the distinct intent of making the augury user feel a sense of honor by featuring these heroes in their book. Moreover, by emphasizing God's divine favor in saving the Seven Sleepers, this message transfers that same grace and protection onto the owner of the *Falnama*. Yet paired with the preceding image, it also carries a sense that the protection comes not only from God, but also from the rulers protected by God and alluded to in the arrangement of the image. Thus it acts doubly as a reminder of the imperial rulers God set in power and trusted to protect its subjects as He did with the Sleepers.

Yet the same image, which introduces this message, also lends itself to alternate interpretations of talismanic purpose, which focus more on the notion of healing. Derived from this portrayal in the dispersed Safavid *Falnama*, another version of the same text highlights a slightly different aspect of the story by focusing in on the depiction on the Sleepers in their serene sphere and position. This portrayal appears in the Ottoman *Falnama* of the same century, Topkapı H. 1702, where the artists, in a similar style to the Safavid version, depict only the cave the Sleepers, without Satan, Decius or his men searching outside the cave.²⁰⁶ By concentrating the story on the Sleepers in their crescent, the image no longer carries the same idea of protection, as the reader does not perceive the dangers of the world outside the cave. Rather, the augury user must consider God working within the cave and the Sleepers themselves to save them from an internal danger upon them of either the physical, mental or spiritual variety.

²⁰⁵ Farhad and Bağcı, "Appendix A.1," *Falnama*, translated by Wheeler M. Thackston, 260.

²⁰⁶ Milstein, *Stories of the Prophets*, 37.

Such a refocusing of the image brought Rachel Milstein to consider a new purpose for this version, saying, “In this iconographical scheme the story no longer matters; only the symbol and reference to the power of healing (*fāl*) are important.”²⁰⁷ With a concentration on the power which God has over the individual, this notion turns the image of the Sleepers’ cave into more of a refuge for the person in need of healing. Indeed, the intimacy suggested by solely portraying an image reminiscent of the womb conveys a theme of nurturing a beloved. And in experiencing this, the individuals can emerge from their refuge into the world as whole and healthy beings. Perhaps also drawing from the original story’s theme of resurrection, the talismanic use of this image can allow an individual to arise anew from the evils they battled. A gentler image of God arises from this choice of arrangement, not as the defender seen in the Safavid *Falnama*, but the caretaker and loving parent. For in this image, the reader finds the Sleepers as close to God as any human can come, embraced in a womb of his devising, unaware of all outside God’s presence.

And so, even after a journey through some of the most diverse depictions of the Seven Sleepers story, from the abstract to the iconographic, the core elements of the story remains constant as well as a continual, loosely talismanic effect. Perhaps this attests to the reverence to the word of God or the resilience and power within the story itself. Therefore, no matter the form of the tale, it not only remains at the very least recognizable, but also inseparable from these aspects of loyalty, faith and protection from the Divine. Forms can only act as intermediaries to these attributes, illustrating how all

²⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, 37.

things never cease linking back to Allah, the source of all human needs and agendas, as well as the stories that fuel and aid them.

A Conclusion **Miraculously Natural: Synthesis and Transformation**

A collision and merging of traditions has manifested itself as the defining trait of the Seven Sleepers of Ephesus from the story's inception. Yet at the same time, the tale accomplishes this transformative feat in surprisingly understated means, depicting such coalescence as the most natural evolution of literature and society without a sense of conflict in beliefs nor even a degree of self-consciousness. And perhaps this trait arises from the very nature of the miraculous at the heart of the story that allows for such melding as an accepted sign of the divine. Even in the early fifth century, Augustine pinpoints this notion in Book Three (4-10) of *De Trinitate*. While Augustine focuses on mainly on miraculous changes of the body, his words also become applicable to more abstract metamorphoses occurring in society. In this work, he suggests that God produces what appear to be miraculous transformations in the natural world as a means of revealing Himself, and He may make use of agents as angels and saints to do so.²⁰⁸ As members of the latter category, the Sleepers exemplify this concept of the miraculous transformation of traditions as a window into these facets of the divine, as varied and rich as the civilizations that hold them. Moreover, it demonstrates the capability of humanity to find ways to reconcile interests and influences with expectations of society.

The use of the miraculous both in the story itself and its application in magical practice encourages this process time and time again, facilitating this effect of synthesis. Indeed, in the realm of the miraculous, the human mind finds a certain ease and acceptance within the bending and blurring of boundaries, making it an ideal theme in

²⁰⁸ Augustine, *The Trinity*, translated by Stephen McKenna (Washington D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 1963), 98-105.

both saints' magic and charm craft. Karen Louise Jolly discusses this matter within Anglo-Saxon magic, stating, "Christian charms fit exactly there, in the middle, not at either end of the spectrum stretching between these dualities, but as a shared product...they exist at an intersection of ideas."²⁰⁹ And as seen throughout the previous chapter, such a concept applies just as readily to Islamic charm craft, where this placement "in the middle" of religious spectrums comes through in the artistic usage of intermediaries in magic. Therefore, in these environments as versatile as the Sleepers tale itself, usage of their story could flourish, rejecting the dualities of Christian and pagan, East and West, Islam and Christianity, as well as medicine and magic. Helpful as these terms are in tracking their integration in the realm of popular religion, they do not stand as representative of the culture and practice itself.

Thus, in a sense, the formation of the Sleepers tale parallels that of its later home in popular religion, furthering this continual transformation and fusion of worlds. For how fitting it appears that a story, which melded both Indo-European and Semitic cultural influences *and* stood as a narrative union of folktale, legend and history, should also bring about this same coalescence in each society it touches. Magic in popular religion provided the ideal environment for this to occur, but perhaps these instances of synthesis in both literature and society also speak to each other as indicators of the constant exchange that needs to occur in a world of imagined borders. For even in nature, the meeting and mingling of seemingly opposite concepts becomes accepted, not even as miraculous, but as inherent—just as life and death become entangled and indistinguishable in the blurred realm of sleep.

²⁰⁹ Karen Louise Jolly, *Popular Religion in Late Saxon England: Elf Charms in Context* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1996), 3.

Image Appendix for Chapter Five:

Figure 1.



Bronze Mirror-front. Iran, 13th c. British Museum. 1963,0718.1. ("Collection Database," *British Museum*, http://www.britishmuseum.org/research/search_the_collection_database/search_object_details.aspx?objectid=215344&partid=1&searchText=mirror+inscription&fromADBC=ad&toADBC=ad&titleSubject=on&physicalAttribute=on&productionInfo=on&numpages=10&orig=%2fresearch%2fsearch_the_collection_database.aspx¤tPage=7 (accessed May 7, 2010).

Figure 2.

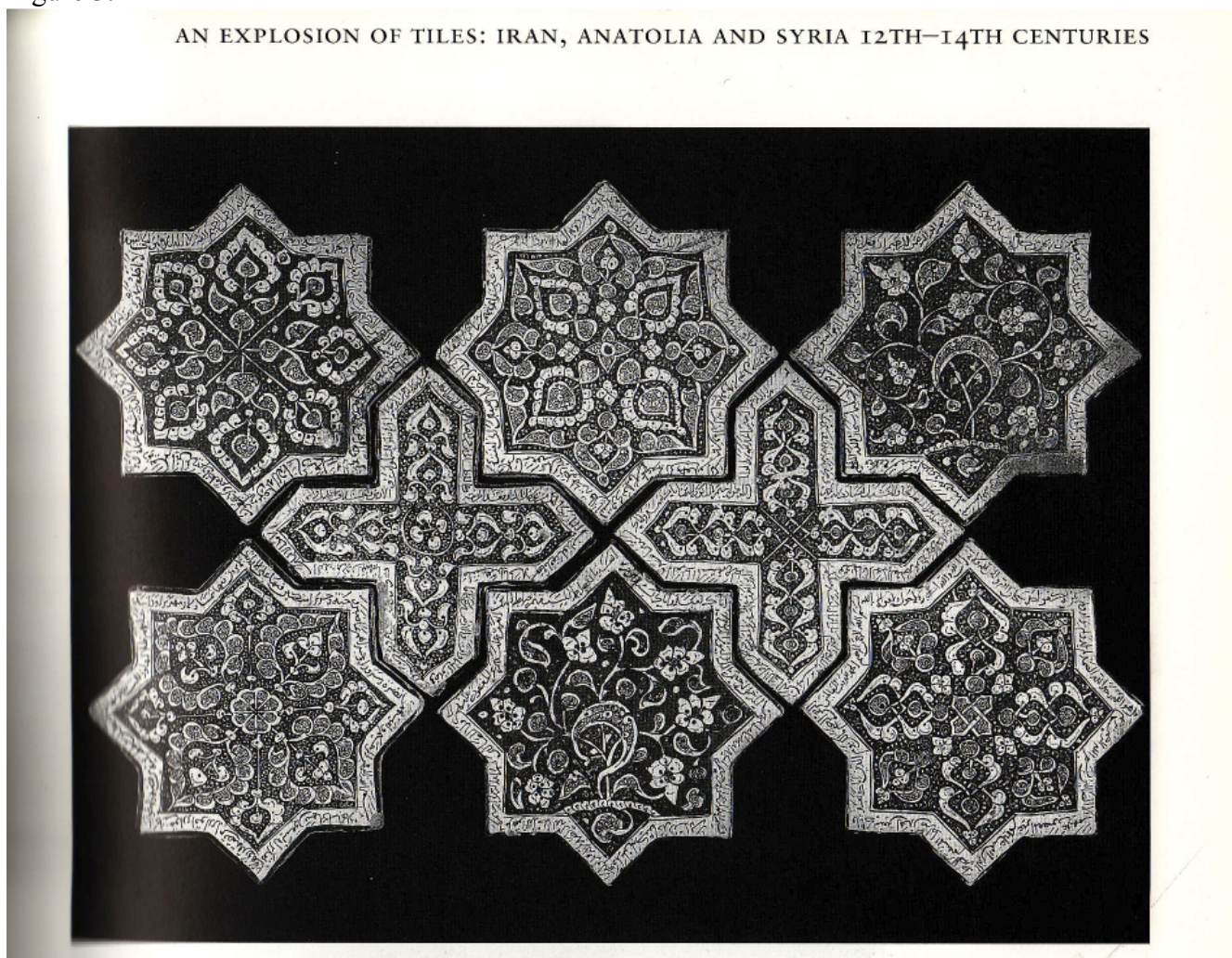


Bronze Mirror-back. Iran, 13th c. British Museum. 1963,0718.1.

“Collection Database,” *British Museum*,

http://www.britishmuseum.org/research/search_the_collection_database/search_object_details.aspx?objectid=215344&partid=1&searchText=mirror+inscription&fromADBC=ad&toADBC=ad&titleSubject=on&physicalAttribute=on&productionInfo=on&numpages=10&orig=%2fresearch%2fsearch_the_collection_database.aspx¤tPage=7 (accessed May 7, 2010).

Figure 3.



Ceramic tiles, luster painted. Shrine of Imamzadeh Yahya at Veramin, Iran, 13th c. British Museum.
Venetia Porter, *Islamic Tiles* (London: British Museum Press, 1995), 35.

Figure 4.



Manuscript Illustration. *Falnama*, Iran, 16th c. Smithsonian Museum
Massumeh Farhad and Serpil Bağcı, *Falnama: The Book of Omens* (Washington, D.C.: Arthur M. Sackler
Gallery, Smithsonian Institution, 2009), 160.

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Chapter One: Settings of Doubt and Obscurity in the Seven Sleepers of Ephesus: Christianity under Decius and Theodosius II

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Chapter Two: A Medley of Slumbering Heroes: Blending Indo-European and Semitic Traditions to Create the Seven Sleepers of Ephesus

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