



EPHESUS, SEVEN SLEEPERS OF

EPHESUS, SEVEN SLEEPERS OF, Christian legend attested by texts in many languages. A page of the manuscript C2 (preserved in the Turfan collection of the Staatsbibliothek zu Berlin, Preussischer Kulturbesitz, Orientabteilung, and most recently edited by Sims-Williams, pp. 154-57) was identified by Martin Schwartz as belonging to a Sogdian version of the legend.

The Sogdian derives from a Syriac text (Allgeier), which tells how eight young Christians of Ephesus—rather than seven, as in most other versions—fell asleep and were walled up in the cave where they had hidden in order to escape the persecution of Decius (249-51 C.E.). Many years later, during the reign of the Christian emperor Theodosius II (408-50 C.E.), when the church is troubled by heresy, the youths return to life to confirm the doctrine of the resurrection of the body.

The legend is clearly alluded to in the Qur'ān as Aṣḥāb al-kaḥf (18:8-26), where the number of the sleepers (3, 5, or 7; including their dog, 4, 6, or 8) is left open. Many Muslim writers, both in Arabic and in Persian (e.g., Sa'dī, Rūmī), show familiarity with the story, sometimes in its koranic and sometimes in its Christian form (Huber, pp. 18-36, 330-39).



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