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## Qumran and "the Companions of the Cave"

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## QUMRAN AND “THE COMPANIONS OF THE CAVE”

WHILE Jewish and Christian writings have been diligently searched for possible references direct or indirect to the Qumran tradition, the Moslem commentators on the Koran have been neglected as a source of information, and that for the very quality that renders their work most valuable, namely their “uncritical” reluctance to omit from their profuse and repetitive notes any tradition, anecdote, or rumor that might conceivably cast light on a subject. Packed in among their jumbled baggage are many items that bring Qumran to mind. Whether these are significant or not remains to be decided after some of them have been examined.

The most promising place to begin a search for possible glimpses of Qumran is among the commentaries on the “Sura of the Cave” (*Sura XVIII*), and the most promising guide-book is that inexhaustible storehouse of oddities and surprises, AHMAD ATH-THA‘LABI’S “*Accounts of the Prophets*” (1). Following THA‘LABI’S lead, and eking out his reports with those of other commentators, we shall attempt to show that Moslem scholars were convinced that there had once been a singular community of saints living in caves in the Judaeen desert, particularly in the region of Jericho, and that those Cave People had a portentous message for the human race.

As the most fitting commentary to the thesis that all things of this earth are but “dust and dry dirt”, the Prophet refers us to

(1) “Abu Ishaq Ibn Mohammed Ibn Ibrahim ath-Tha‘labi of Nishapur, the celebrated commentator, was the outstanding (Koran) interpreter of his time; he composed a great commentary which was without equal for fullness...”: IBN KHALLIKAN, *Kitab wafayat al-aiyan* (Paris, 1842), I, p. 30. “Ein besonders heiss umstrittenes Feld waren altarabischen, jüdischen und christlichen Legenden des Korans und der Tradition... So kommt es, dass der bedeutendste Koranglehrte deiner Zeit, der im Jahre 427/1036 gestorbene Ahmed eth-Tha‘labi, als bedeutendstes Werk seine “Prophetengeschichten” erfasst hat”: A. MEZ, *Die Renaissance des Islams* (Heidelberg, 1922), p. 190. His “History of the Prophets gives all the stories in very great detail...” *Encyclopedia of Islam* (1934), IV, p. 736. Cf. C. BROCKELMANN, *Geschichte der Arabischen Literatur* (Weimar, 1898), I, pp. 350-351.

the *Ashab al-Kahf wa-l'Raquim*, "The Companions (often rendered simply "People" or "Inhabitants") of the Cave and the Inscription" (*Sura XVIII*, 9-10). This was a group of holy men who had sought retreat in the wilderness in flight from a wicked and godless community and in the expectation that God would guide them in a proper way life, fill them with grace, and provide for their wants; in due time they were hidden from the knowledge of men and their bodies were miraculously preserved in a cave, where they were at length discovered when a youth, by the providence of God, circulated old coins in a nearby town and thereby brought a rush of treasure-seekers to the scene (*Sura XVIII*, 10-22). Such a tradition might well look back to the sectaries of the desert—but there is a catch, for most commentators are agreed that the People of the Cave were the Seven Sleepers of Ephesus. That would settle the matter were it not that the Ephesus tradition itself rests on the flimsiest of foundations, archaeologically and philologically (2). It is "une de ces légendes vagabondes qui n'ont pas d'attache fixe et prennent pied sur les terrains les plus divers, sans qu'aucun fait connu semble justifier le choix" (3). Scholars ancient and modern who have tried to get to the historical kernel of the story have found themselves confronted by countless conflicting traditions, and the Koran and its commentators note that every essential element of the history of the Companions is a subject of hopeless controversy among the People of the Book, who cannot agree as to where the cave was, how many people were in it (4),

(2) BARONIUS and TILLEMONT both declared it spurious. The Austrian archaeologists working at the supposed site discovered "pas un nom ni un symbole, indice d'une tombe vénérée", *Analecta Bollandiana* 55 (1937), p. 351. Philology is no less nonplussed: "...il ne faut pas oublier que les noms de la grotte et de la montagne de la légende ne se retrouvent pas aux environs d'Éphèse", *Ibidem*, 24 (1905), p. 503.

(3) *Analecta Bollandiana* 55 (1937), p. 351. Cf. *Ibidem*, 39 (1921), p. 176, commenting on the "systèmes déjà échafaudés autour de cette littérature foisonnante". There is no apparent reason why the legend should have become the special property of Ephesus, according to BERN. HELLER, *La Légende des Sept Dormants*, in *Revue des Études Juives*, 49 (1904), p. 216, note 6, though it is understandable that the city once in possession should exploit the legend to the fullest.

(4) For location, see below, notes 61-65. The number of sleepers is a subject of endless debate: *Sura XVIII*, 22; AL-NASAFI, *Tafsir al-Qur'an al-jalil* (Cairo, 1936-1942), II, p. 286; AL-HIJAZI, *al-Tafsir al-wadih* (Cairo, 1952), XV, pp. 53-54. It is one of the great mysteries, known to but a few, AL-TABARI, *Kitab jami' al-bayan fi tafsir al-Qur'an* (Cairo, 1910), XV, p. 150; AL-NASAFI, *loco citato*. The Jacobites said there were three sleepers, the Nestorians five, the Moslems seven: AL-QURTUBI, *al-Jami' li-ahkam al-Qur'an* (Cairo, 1935?-1950), X, p. 382; AL-DAMIRI, *Hayat al-hayawan* (Cairo, 1867), II, pp. 353-354 (pages are incorrectly numbered, but we follow the numbers given); AL-NASAFI, *opus citatum*, II, p. 285; AL-BAYDAWI, *Anwar al-tanzil* (Cairo, 1899-1902),

what their religion was (5), how long they stayed there, or in what condition (6). In short, nobody really knows their history.

The main source of the confusion is not far to seek: there was more than one cave story because there was more than one cave—as the extremely popular legend spread abroad in the world the tale had to be adjusted to the interest of local patriotism, which from Andalusia to Persia enthusiastically and profitably exploited local grottoes as the authentic and original sites of the Seven Sleepers or the Companions of the Cave (7). But amid a welter of conflicting legends and claims two main traditions have always been recognized—an Occidental, containing clearly-marked pre-Christian Classical elements as its distinctive ingredient, and an Eastern or Arabic tradition, based principally on Jewish apocryphal lore (8). The clearest distinction between the two versions is preserved by THA'LABI. He knows the Ephesus tradition as well as anybody: the pre-Christian legends of youthful sleeping heroes are well represented in his pages (9); he knows the resurrection

IV, pp. 98-99. YUSUF ALI, a modern authority, says that Mohammed "suggested that the youths were seven in number", *The Holy Qur-an* (New York, Hafner, 1946), II, p. 730, note 2337.

(5) Some say they lived before Christ and were idolaters, others that they were Christians, others that they were Moslems: TABARI, *Tarikh al-Tabari* (Cairo, 1961), II, pp. 6-7, and *Jami' al-bayan*, XV, p. 137; some even that their people were *majus*: DAMIRI, II, p. 353. Yet the Jews have a special claim on them: IBN KATHIR, *Tafsir al-Qur'an al-asim* (Cairo, 1954), III, p. 74. See below, note 37.

(6) Below, note 90, for the length of the stay. As to their condition, the main discussion is as to whether they were sleeping or dead, BAYDAWI, IV, pp. 97-98; QURTUBI, X, p. 388; DAMIRI, II, p. 358, etc. See MICHEL HUBER, *Die Wanderlegende von den Siebenschläfern* (Leipzig, 1910), pp. 79-99.

(7) HUBER, *opus citatum*, pp. 17, 122. Thus after favoring Ephesus (through Ephesus is not mentioned in the Koran), IBN KATHIR, III, p. 75, concludes: "...we are not told what land the cave was in... But Ibn Abbas says it was near Aelia, and Ibn Ishaq says it was near Nineveh, while others say it was in the land of Rum and others that it was in the plain of Balqā (southeastern Palestine), but God knows". See below, note 59.

(8) Discussed by HUBER, *opus citatum* in note 6 above, pp. 552-556. The distinction is clear in HUBER's classification of sources into the Classical Endymion and Epimenides legends (pp. 378-390), as against the Onias-Abimelech-Ezra tradition (pp. 403-447) of the Orient. The Arabic commentators themselves admonish against confusing the two traditions. Thus AL-SHIRBINI, *al-Siraj al-munir* (Cairo, 1868), II, p. 350, assures us that the three pious refugees (below, note 13) are "another group entirely from the (traditional) People of the Cave". Cf. AL-QURTUBI, X, p. 357, and IBN KATHIR, III, p. 75.

(9) The Encymion motif, in which E. ROHDE, *Die sardinische Sage von den Neunschläfern*, in *Rheinisches Museum für Philologie*, Neue Folge, 35 (1880), pp. 158-159, 162-163, sees the origin of the Seven Sleepers of Ephesus, is one of the four distinct versions of the Sleepers reported by Tha'labi and others. It is the "Hunting" story in which youthful nobles go forth to hunt and celebrate a great pagan festival only to end up falling asleep in a cave, guarded by

miracle-stories of the early Christian apocrypha (10); he and the other Arabs give an accurate description of the state of the Church both when the Sleepers fell asleep and when they awoke (11); and they know the name of the mountain near Ephesus where they slept—a name which Christian scholars apparently do not know (12).

But knowing the Ephesus version as he does, THA'LABI still gives priority to an entirely different story about a party of three refugees who were looking for a place for their families to settle when "the sky smote them" and they took refuge in a cave, only to be trapped by a rock-slide that sealed the entrance. Being thus caught, each one of them recounted some pious deed he had done in this life-time, and with each successive story a fissure in the wall

their faithful dog. The fullest account of this is in THA'LABI, *Qissas al-anbiyah* (Cairo, 1921), pp. 289-290, 292-293. Cf. IBN KATHIR, III, pp. 74-75; AL-QASIMI, *Tafsir al-Qasimi* (Cairo, 1957-1960), X, p. 4032. Typical of the cycle is THA'LABI's account of Saint George, pp. 299-300.

(10) One of the four versions (see preceding note) is the tale of the Bath Attendant (THA'LABI, p. 293; TABARI, *Tarikh*, II, p. 8, and *Jami' al-bayan*, XV, p. 136; DAMIRI, II, pp. 344-345; QURTUBI, X, pp. 359-360), which consists of familiar motifs from the early apocryphal *Acts of John, Thomas, Andrew, Peter*, etc., see HUBER (*opus citatum* in note 6), pp. 306-310. Also the well-known talking-dog motif, found in all the above-named Arabic sources, is familiar from the pseudo-*Acts of Andrew, Thomas*, etc. DAMIRI, II, p. 344, says that the official story of the People of the Cave was written down by Andrew (Mandrūs) and Thomas (Dūmās), and others say that it was "a righteous ruler of the people called Peter (Bīdrūs)" who ruled for 68 years who discovered the document: BAYDAWI, IV, pp. 87, 90.

(11) The moral decline of the Christians just before the Decian persecution, to which EUSEBIUS and CYPRIAN attribute that persecution, is passed over in silence by Christian commentators on the Ephesus story, but is very well described by the Arabs: THA'LABI, p. 293; TABARI, *Jami' al-bayan*, XV, p. 133; NASAFI, II, p. 284; SHIRBINI, II, p. 351; DAMIRI, II, pp. 339-340. The state of things under Theodosius is equally well described, M. HUBER (*opus citatum* in note 6), p. 567; *Analecta Bollandiana* 72 (1954), p. 265. The risen youths seem to the Emperor like the ancient disciples come to life, and he rejoices in the restoration of the old religion: TABARI *Jami' al-bayan*, XV, p. 147; SHIRBINI, II, p. 362; DAMIRI, II, p. 349. The righteous leader who greets the saints on their awakening sometimes bears the name of Arius: TABARI, XV, pp. 145-147; SHIRBINI, II, p. 361. THA'LABI, pp. 297-298, reads it *Armūs*.

(12) In Greek sources it is Chaos, Chiletan, Chileon; in the Latin, Chilleus, Celius, Mons Celeus, *Analecta Bollandiana* 41 (1923), p. 374; 55 (1937), p. 350. In the Syrian tradition it is always Mount Anchilos, of which HUBER, pp. 222-223, notes that "um Ephesus herum kein einziger Berg einen auch nur halbwegs ähnlichen Namen trägt", surmising that the Christians could readily borrow the name of Mons Caelius near Rome for their Sleepers, "da der Berg selber nicht existierte...", p. 58. The Arabs ring the changes on Anchilos with *Yanjilūs* (BAYDAWI, IV, pp. 85-86, 89), mispointed to read *Banāhiyūs* and even *Manhilūs* (DAMIRI, II, pp. 343, 350), but most commonly written as *Banjilūs* (TABARI, XV, p. 135; SHIRBINI, II, p. 353; IBN KATHIR, III, p. 73), this being nearest to the modern Turkish name for the real mountain east of Ephesus, Panajir-Dagh: *Analecta Bollandiana* 55 (1937), p. 350.

opened wider until they could all escape (13). This tale has nothing to do with Ephesus—the men in the cave tell Jewish stories and do not even fall asleep (14). The violence of the elements, the sliding down of the mountain, and the opening of fissures in the earth suggest an earthquake, and the sequel is that the people settled on the spot, since they left their records there.

The story of the Three is an Arabic contribution, designated by HUBER as the “Raqim” version, that being the uniquely Arabic name for the locale of the Cave (15). Since it is a perfectly plausible tale, one wonders why the Arabs, who insist on placing al-Reqim in Syria or Palestine, bother with Ephesus at all. It is because Ephesus had loudly advertized its claim to the Seven Sleepers ever since the middle of the 5th century, and our commentators are not the men to leave anything out (16). Ephesus, however, gets into the picture only by usurping the much older credentials of Antioch—a circumstance that has been overlooked by researchers. The hero of the Arabic accounts of the Sleepers is one Tamlikh, whose name does not appear in the standard Western lists of the Seven: When he turns up in the Syriac versions his name makes an eighth in the established list, so that the older Syriac and Arabic accounts uniformly, insist that there were really eight Sleepers (17). The origin of the intruder is indicated by the epithet that THA‘LABI gives him of *Ibn Falastin*—the Palestinian (18). His Greek name of Iamblichus usually appears in Latin sources as Malchus while the Arabic writers point it variously as Tamlikh, Yamlikh, and Namlikh: all that remains is Bamlikh to remind us that, as HUBER long ago

(13) THA‘LABI, p. 287, attributing the story to Mohammed. It was *thalātha nafrin*, which can mean either a party of refugees or a military detail. That it was the former may be inferred from the nature of their mission: *yarta-dūna li-ahlihim*, “looking about for some place for their families”—seeking asylum. See DAMIRI, II, p. 341.

(14) The stories have been analyzed by B. HELLER (*opus citatum* in note 3), pp. 199-202, and classified as Haggidic.

(15) “So ist eine genaue *Scheidung* zwischen den Höhlenleuten (of Ephesus) un den Genossen des Er-Raqim festzuhalten...” HUBER (*opus citatum* in note 6), p. 239. See below, notes 61 and 62.

(16) It is now definitely established that the story was first fastened on Ephesus by a “pia fraus” of Bishop Stephanus of that city in the year 449 or 450, according to *Analecta Bollandiana* 72 (1954), p. 265, citing E. HONIGMANN, *Patristic Studies* (Rome, Vatican, 1954).

(17) M. HUBER (*opus citatum* in note 6), pp. 593, 503; *Analecta Bollandiana* 39 (1921), p. 177; 66 (1948), p. 195. The Arabs explain the discrepancy by having the Seven joined by a shepherd on their way to the Cave (THA‘LABI, p. 293). TABARI, *Tarikh*, II, p. 6, BAYDAWI, IV, p. 48 and DAMIRI, II, p. 339, all tell straightforward stories of eight Sleepers, in spite of *Sura XVIII*, 22.

(18) THA‘LABI, p. 292.

suggested, the name Iamblichus-Malchus is simply Abimelech (19). What brought HUBER to that observation was the long-established identity, or at least very close parallel, between the Seven Sleepers and Abimelekh, the friend of Jeremiah who slept for 70 or 100 years (20). Abimelech in turn has long been identified with Onias-Honi the Circle-drawer (21). Onias, Abimelech and Jeremiah all fell into century-long slumbers as they sat in the shade of a tree, and the tree is a peculiar detail which the Arabic writers introduce into their version of the Seven Sleepers (22); and just as Onias was driven with his workmen to seek shelter from a storm in a cave, so the Arabs say the Cave of the Companions was discovered by a shepherd escaping from a storm, who ordered two laborers to open the mouth of the Cave for him (23). This Onias has in our day often been put forth as the leader of the Zadokite forerunners of the Qumran community in the days when they were being persecuted by Antiochus Epiphanes, and even as the founder of Qumran (24). So we have Tamlikh the leader of the Companions of the Cave identified, through Abimelech, with Onias the leader of the Qumran society.

The earliest mention of the Seven Sleepers of Ephesus is in the *Itinera Theodosi*, 530 Anno Domini, which states that the Seven were brothers, and that their mother was Felicitas (25). When one recalls that one of the first female martyrs was St. Felicitas, who heroically endured the extinction of her seven sons, and that these

(19) "Schon der Name Abimelech weist den Jamlich-und-Malchus hin": HUBER (*opus citatum* in note 6), p. 22.

(20) HELLER (*opus citatum* in note 3), pp. 207, 214.

(21) HUBER (*opus citatum* in note 6), pp. 418-426. See the article *Onias (Honi)* in *Jewish Encyclopedia* (1901), IX, pp. 404-405.

(22) For the three Hebrews, see B. HELLER (*opus citatum* in note 3) pp. 202-206. For the tree episode, THA'LABI, p. 292; TABARI, XV, p. 136; BAYDAWI, IV, p. 86; IBN KATHIR, III, p. 74; QURTUBI, X, p. 359; SHIRBINI, II, p. 355.

(23) HELLER, p. 206; Cf. THA'LABI, p. 295; TABARI, *Tarikh*, II, p. 8; BAYDAWI, IV, p. 87; DAMIRI, II, 357. Down to modern times the Seven Sleepers have been protectors against storms: *Analecta Bollandiana* 68 (1950), p. 248.

(24) Whether a later Onias is preferred (R. GOOSSENS, *Onias le juste... lapidé en 64 avant J.-C.*, in *La Nouvelle Clío*, 1-2 (1949f), pp. 336-353), or the earlier Onias III, circa 170 before Christ (M. BLACK, *The Scrolls and Christian Origins* (New York, Scribner's, 1961), p. 20 there is general agreement on a connection between Onias and Qumran: See H. H. ROWLEY, *The Zadokite Fragments, and the Dead Sea Scrolls*, in *Expository Times*, 63 (1951/2), p. 382; M. H. SEGAL, *The Habakkuk "Commentary" and the Damascus Fragments*, in *Journal of Biblical Literature*, 70 (1951), p. 145.

(25) "...civitas Epheso ubi sunt septem fratres dormientes... quorum mater Caritina dicitur, graece, latine Felicitas", text in *Analecta Bollandiana* 41 (1923), p. 372. Cf. GREGORY of Tours, in MIGNE *Patrologia Latina* 71, col. 787: "Septem vero germanorum..."

seven have been identified in ancient and modern times with the seven young Jewish heroes of IV Maccabees, martyred at Antioch by the brother of Antiochus Epiphanes (26), and that Byzantine Christians also identify the Seven Sleepers with the martyrs of Antioch (27), and when one further considers that Decius, the villain of the Ephesus story, goes by the name of Antiochus in an eastern version of it (28), one begins to wonder if the 5th-century Ephesus story might not reflect a much earlier Syrian version. The confusion of Antioch and Ephesus is apparent in the strange insistence of our Arabic informants that the city of Ephesus changed its name to Tarsus after its conversion from paganism. Scholars have found no explanation for this strange aberration, and indeed it is hard to see how well-travelled men could have confused two of the best-known cities in the world (29). But there is evidence that the name of Tarsus was indeed changed to Antiochia in 171 before Christ in honor of the pagan Antiochus Epiphanes, in which case it was back to Tarsus after his demise (30). ZONARAS in a rhetorical play on words calls the city Epiphanes (31), and one wonders if the confusion of Tarsus-Epiphanes with Ephesus might not be a typical slip: the Arabs knew that the city had once had another name—and what could it have been but Ephesus, since they favored Tarsus as the site of the cave (32)? The year that the name was changed, 171 B.C., also saw a migration of Jews to Tarsus (33), and one Arabic commentator suggests that Tarsus got its name at the time of the Cave People from a group of colonists from Tripolis in Syria (34). At about the same time, it is surmised, the Bene Zadok were first being driven by Antiochus Epiphanes under their leader

(26) The identification is recognized in *Analecta Bollandiana* 57 (1939), p. 39. HELLER (*opus citatum* in note 3) p. 217, believes that the Seven heroes of Antioch are the most instructive of all parallels to the Seven of Ephesus.

(27) Namely at Paphos on Cyprus, *Analecta Bollandiana* 26 (1907), p. 272. The Christians of Antioch built a basilica over the tomb of the Seven Jewish brothers, just as those of Ephesus did at the shrine of the Seven Sleepers: HELLER, p. 217.

(28) In an "Antiochus-Gedicht" of 1527, that ruler is designated throughout as Decius: W. BACHER, in *Jewish Quarterly Review*, 16 (1904), p. 529. "Voilà la fusion des deux légendes", cries HELLER, p. 218, commenting on this.

(29) THA'LABI, p. 287. Some writers simply speak of Tarsus without even mentioning Ephesus: NASAFI, II, p. 282; SHIRBINI, II, p. 358; AL-ZAMAKHSHARI, *al-Kashshaf* (Cairo, 1890), I, p. 469. HELLER, p. 200, note 5, can make no sense of this.

(30) BOHLIG and STEINMANN, in PAULY-WISSOWA, *Realencyclopädie*, IV A, col. 2419.

(31) *Ibidem*, col. 2431.

(32) Below, note 56.

(33) *Realencyclopädie*, IV A, col. 2420-2421.

(34) AL-QASIMI, X, p. 4028.



Onias III (35). Thus there is some evidence to associate the founding of the Cave community with persons, times, places and circumstances that have become familiar in the discussions of the founding of the Qumran community.

While quite aware that the Seven Sleepers story is Christian property, our Arabic informants are inclined to favor a *pre-Christian* date for the Companions of the Cave, explaining that they later became disciples of Jesus and flourished "in the days of the kings of Tawaif, between Jesus and Mohammed" (36). This implies that the society had a fairly long life, a thing entirely out of keeping with the brief and violent episode of the Ephesians. Another thing to note is the dependence of our Arabic informants, especially THA'LABI, on Jewish sources (37). While it was Jacobite and Nestorian leaders arguing about the People of the Cave who first asked Mohammed's opinion on the matter (38), those who really claimed a monopoly of knowledge on the subject were the Jews. According to one account the Quraish sent a delegation to Medina to gather intellectual ammunition against the Prophet from the local Jews, who loudly insisted that they alone were qualified to speak on prophetic matters. They suggested some test questions to embarrass the new prophet, the prize one being about the People of the Cave (39). In another version it is the skeptical Jews themselves who send the delegation to investigate Mohammed (40).

(35) H. H. ROWLEY, *The Covenanters of Damascus and the Dead Sea Scrolls*, in *Bulletin of the John Rylands Library*, Vol. 35, No. 1, September 1952, pp. 137-145; P. KAHLE, *The Cairo Geniza* (London, 1947), p. 19.

(36) See THA'LABI, p. 288; DAMIRI, II, p. 349; TABARI, *Tarikh*, II, pp. 6-7: "Some say they worshipped Jesus... and some say their history... was before Christ, and that the Messiah taught his people about them, and that God woke them from sleep after he had raised up Jesus, in the time between him and Mohammed, but God knows". Cf. QURTUBI, X, pp. 359, 388, and HUBER (*opus citatum* in note 6) p. 21, citing IBN QUTAIBA. DAMIRI, II, p. 357, says they fell asleep, following one tradition, until the land became Moslem; and IBN KATHIR, III, p. 74, notes that if they had been Christians, the Jews, who do not mention such a thing, would certainly have reported it.

(37) See B. HELLER, *La légende biblique dans l'Islam*, in *Revue des Études Juives*, 98 (1934), p. 7, and *Ibidem*, 49 (1904), pp. 202-212. THA'LABI knows of specific Jewish informants of Mohammed, pp. 77, 137, and refers to his own Jewish teachers, pp. 137, 152, 241, 254, 257, etc. He often betrays a distinctly pre-Jewish and anti-Christian prejudice, as in the long story of Jesus' vain attempt to convert a Jew, pp. 276-279. He even knows the Pumbeditha scandal-story that Mary was once a ladies' hair-dresser, p. 131.

(38) "The seyyid and the Jacobite and their Christian companions from Nejran were visiting (*kānū 'inda*) Mohammed" when the matter came up: BAYDAWI, IV, p. 98; Cf. NASAFI, II, p. 285; DAMIRI, II, p. 354.

(39) SHIRBINI, II, p. 351; AL-HIJAZI, XV, p. 54; AS-SUYUTI, *Lubab al-nuqul* (Cairo, 1935), p. 144, emphasizes the boastfulness of the Jews.

(40) IBN KATHIR, III, p. 74; AS-SUYUTI, *loco citato*; SAYYID QUTB, *Fi zilal al-Qur'an* (Cairo, 1953?), XV, p. 81.

But the account favored by THA'LABI is that of a delegation of three holy men who came not to Mohammed but to Omar, looking for a true prophet. These were not the smart, proud, skeptical Jews of Medina but sincere and humble seekers, who gladly accepted the Prophet as soon as they were made sure of his calling (41). The impression one gets is that of Hasidic Jews interviewing the sympathetic Omar during his campaign in Palestine—he calls them “brothers”, and he must send back home for Ali in order to answer their questions (42). The peculiar questions they put to him moreover bear the characteristic stamp of the non conformist sectaries: they ask about the keys of heaven, the moving tomb of Jonah, the warning minister who is neither spirit nor man, the things that walk the earth but were not created in the womb, the speech of animals and its spiritual message, and above all “about the people of a former age who died 309 years, and then God revived them—what is their story?” (43).

That the story of the devout delegates goes back to the early sectaries is indicated in a report attributed to Ibn Abbas, the nephew of the Prophet and the star witness in all matters concerning the People of the Cave: “The followers of Jesus remained on the sacred path for 80 years after his ascension”, and then “Yunus the Jew came among the Christians wearing a hermit's or monk's gown (this well before the days of Christian monasticism)... His devout life produced great confidence among the Christians, and... he said, ‘Send me three of your learned men... that I may a divine secret before each of them separately’”. As a result “the Christians were divided into three sects” forever after—the very sects that argued about the Cave People in the presence of Mohammed (44). Here we have a counterpart both to the three malicious questions that the Jews put to Mohammed (in nearly all the commentators the

(41) THA'LABI, pp. 288-289. B. HELLER (*opus citatum* in note 3) p. 200, believes this story to be a unique contribution of THA'LABI.

(42) Ali and Omar in the story both address the delegates as “brothers of the arabs”, who in turn are “the brothers of the Jews”: THA'LABI, p. 289. The way in which Ali is greeted by Omar as he arrives wearing the robe of the Prophet suggests that he has been summoned from a distance, p. 288. As both the conqueror of Palestine and the would-be builder of the Temple (H. NIBLEY, in *Jewish Quarterly Review*, 50 (1959), pp. 118-220), Omar would be sympathetically received by the “Hasidic” sectaries of the desert.

(43) The questions are given in full in THA'LABI, pp. 288-289. Most Arab writers mention only three questions: “...about the Spirit, the Companions of the Cave, and Dhu 'l-Quarnain”, HIJAZI, XV, p. 54. On the apocryphal-sectarian nature of the questions, see M. HUBER (*opus citatum* in note 6) pp. 454-456; K. AHRENS, *Christliches im Qoran*, in *Zeitschrift der Deutschen Morgenländischen Gesellschaft*, 84 (1930), p. 163.

(44) H. WERNECKE, in *The Monist*, 15 (1905), pp. 467-468. They became “the three chief sects of Syria”, pp. 466-467.

questions are three) and the delegation of three pious Jews that came to him. The oldest Syrian version of the Seven Sleepers, which some hold to be the original, places their history around 60 Anno Domini, thus taking it entirely out of the later Ephesian setting and putting it in the orbit of the early sectaries (45).

THA'LABI is quite at home with certain pre-Christian communities in the desert. He tells us among other things how the infant Mary was taken to be reared by "the priests of the sons of Aaron", and how the priestly society cast lots for her, standing on the banks of the Jordan to see whose rod would sink and whose would float, they being "the reeds with which they used to write the Torah". Zacharias, the father of John the Baptist, and, according to THA'LABI, "the chief of the scholars and their prophet", won the lottery; but when a famine came he could no longer support the child and it was necessary to have another casting of lots, won this time by Joseph the righteous carpenter (46). Since "BROWNLEE argues that the mother of the Messiah is the 'Essene Community' " (47), Mary's prominence in such a community as this may not be without significance. The story of Joseph's winning of Mary is told in the *Epistle of I Clement*, c. 43, and indeed THA'LABI's general familiarity with Clementine motifs should be studied in view of the importance of the latter in understanding the background of Qumran (48). His tracing of Zacharias' genealogy through both a Şaduq and a Şadiq indicates access to early source material (49); and is quite relevant to the Seven Sleeper investigation, since the oldest Western version, that of GREGORY of Tours, reports on the authority of "a certain Syrian" that the mission of the Seven Sleepers was to correct certain errors not of the Christians but of the Sadducees—a term often confused with Zadokite in the early Middle Ages in designating non-conformist sectarianism among the Jews (50). Why

(45) This is JACOB of SARUG, discussed by HELLER (*opus citatum* in note 3) pp. 260-261, who is at a loss to explain the surprisingly early date.

(46) THA'LABI, pp. 260-261.

(47) M. BLACK (*opus citatum* in note 24) p. 149.

(48) THA'LABI, pp. 122-123, also tells the Clementine story of the blossoming staff. On the influence of the Clementine writing on the Koran, see K. AHRENS (*opus citatum* in note 43) pp. 56-60, 64, 174; on their importance for Qumran, see H. J. SCHOEPS, in *Zeitschrift für Religions- und Geistesgeschichte*, 3 (1951), pp. 333-334; 6 (1954), pp. 277-278; 10 (1958), p. 15, and especially *Das Judentum in den Pseudo-klementinen*, 11 (1959), pp. 72-77.

(49) THA'LABI, p. 259. Onias, as the grandfather of John the Baptist, belongs to the same line, that of the Sadiqqim: R. EISLER, *Iesus Basileus ou Basileusas* (Heidelberg, 1930), II, p. 49.

(50) GREGORIUS TURONENSIS, in *Patrologia Latina*, 71, col. 788. On the confusion of Sadducees and Zadokites, see H. H. ROWLEY (*opus citatum* in note 35) pp. 129-132. The Moslems designated non-conformist sectarians as *Zandakiyah*, and though the origin of the word is obscure, a *zindiq* is, according

should the Seven Sleepers of Ephesus be emissaries to the Sadducees, of all things? The Zadokite background of Qumran needs no demonstration.

A significant aspect of the Seven Sleepers' history as told by the Arabs is that nobody ever sees them alive (51). Even in the Western legends the ruler merely embraces the youths as they sit on the ground and after a short and formal benediction by one of them they promptly fall asleep again (52). The miracle that proves the resurrection is never the animation of their bodies, but only their preservation (53); no capital is made of the rich store of

to LANE'S *Arabic-English Lexicon*, I, p. 1285, "One of the thanawiyah [or asserters of the doctrine of Dualism]: or one who asserts his belief in [the two principles of] Light and Darkness: or one who... conceals unbelief and makes an outward show of belief". How well this applies to the dualistic theology and secretive policies of Qumran needs no illustration. Our Arabic commentators often refer to the Companions of the Cave as *thanawiyah*. When a Moslem victor asked some sectarians, "Who are you?" they replied, "Harranites". "Christians or Jews?" Neither, was the reply. "Have you holy books or a prophet?" To this they gave a guarded and confusing answer (*jamjamū*), whereupon the official observed, "You must be Zandokiyah..." So in order to survive they changed their name to Ssabians. D. CHWOLSON, *Die Ssabier und der Ssabismus* (St. Petersburg, 1865), II, p. 15. Sabaeen denotes "irgend eine täuferische Sekte", according to K. AHRENS (*opus citatum* in note 43) p. 154. Could Zandokite and Zadokite not have been as easily confused as Zadokite and Sadducee?

(51) The entire company falls asleep as soon as Tamlikh announces the approach of visitors; the entrance of the cave then becomes invisibles or else all who attempt entry are driven out in terror: THA'LABI, p. 292; TABARI, *Jami' al-bayan*, XV, p. 143. Some say the purpose of the shrine is to keep anyone from entering the cave: NASAFI, II, p. 284; ZAMAKHSHARI, I, p. 724; others that the youths walled themselves in, or were killed in the city and taken to the cave for burial: QASIMI, X, p. 4051. Only one informant reports that they "arose and went out to the king and exchanged greetings", and then returned to the cave and promptly expired; but even he adds that "most of the scholars say" they died as soon as Tamlikh gave them his message: QURTUBI, X, p. 379.

(52) So in the Syrian and Western tests supplied by HUBER (*opus citatum* in note 6) pp. 118-127, 155-156. The same in THA'LABI, p. 298; IBN KATHIR, III, p. 77; BAYDAWI, IV, p. 90; NASAFI, II, p. 284. THA'LABI also tells this story, but quickly qualifies it by adding that "no man could enter into them", explaining on the authority of Ali, that as soon as Tamlikh went in to his friends God took their spirits and concealed their hiding-place, p. 298. The most convincing of all THA'LABI'S accounts is his vivid description of the greedy citizens and the wild-eyed and bedraggled youth who told them the fantastic story of his grizzly companions in a near-by cave—companions that nobody ever saw alive, pp. 296-297. Here we have a story that bears the marks of plausibility.

(53) "And behold their bodies were completely unchanged, except that there was not breath (*arwah*) in them. So the king said, "This is the sign which God has sent you": TABARI, *Tarikh*, II, pp. 9-10, and *Jami' al-bayan*, XV, p. 147; Damiri, II, pp. 349, 357. Much is made of their eyes being open, giving them a frighteningly lifelike appearance: SHIRBINI, II, p. 356; BAYDAWI, IV, p. 95; NASAFI, II, pp. 280-281; AS-SA'DI, *Taysir al-karim al-rahman fi tafsir kalam al-mannan* (Cairo, 1954-1957), V, p. 10.

Jewish and Christian apocryphal lore, the "Testaments" of various prophets, patriarchs, and Apostles who come to life to tell of wonderful things in the worlds beyond. This remarkable reserve suggests, what many students have pointed out, that the Sleeper stories may well have originated with the actual discovery of human remains in caves. The Mediterranean world had never been without local hero-cults and their grottoes: Arabic writers report visits to a center in Andalusia which had all the fixtures and purported to be the original home of the Companions of the Cave (54), and such a shrine and cult survived at Paphos on Cyprus down to modern times (55). But the cave best known to the Arabs was one near Tarsus, where 13 cadavers in a remarkable state of preservation were annually propped up and groomed—their clothes brushed, the nails manicured, their hair dressed—and then laid down to sleep for another year before a devout host of Christian pilgrims who believed they were in the presence of the Seven Sleepers (56). This reproduces exactly the drama of the original Sleepers in the presence of Theodosius and his people, and strongly suggests a cult of the dead. In the "Hunting" version of the Sleepers story, which has all the marks of the Classical Endymion cycle, our Arabic informants comment on how the spring dried up and the trees all withered while the youths slept, only to be miraculously revived at their awakening (57). Such obvious cult-motifs serve to set the Ephesian tradition apart from the more down-to-earth "Raqim" accounts of the Arabs, which indeed contain rather surprisingly nothing of a miraculous nature.

In a much-cited passage, Ibn Abbas tells how on a campaign with Mu'awiyah or Habib ibn Maslamah he passed by a cave containing bones which were said to be those of the Companions. His friend wanted to take a look, but Ibn Abbas protested that that would be sacrilege; some men who were sent to the cave to investi-

(54) QURTUBI, X, p. 358. HUBER, pp. 231-233, supplies translations of descriptions of this shrine by IDRISI, QURTUBI, and YAQUT.

(55) *Analecta Bollandiana* 26 (1907), p. 272.

(56) AL-BIRUNI, *Kitab al-athar al-baqiya 'an al-qurun il-khaliya* (Leipzig, 1923), p. 290. Many other sources are cited by HUBER, pp. 225-226, 228-231. The extra cadavers were readily accounted for as those of devout monks who had chosen to live and die in the presence of the Seven, *Ibidem*, p. 231. M. J. DE GOEJE maintained that the story of the Seven Sleepers originated with the finding of human remains in a cave near Arabissas in southeastern Asia Minor, the place being known to the Arabs as Afsus—hence Ephesus: *De Legende der Zevenslapers van Efeze*, in *Verslagen en Mededeelingen der Koninklijke Akademie van Wetenschappen*, III (1909), pp. 9-33, of which there is a lengthy summary in HUBER, pp. 233-238.

(57) THA'LABI, pp. 291, 293; HUBER, pp. 276-277.

gate were driven back in terror by a fierce wind (58). Ibn Abbas is quoted as saying that the cave was "near Aelia", and AL-QURTUBI explains that they passed by it on the way to Rum (59). The latter authority also reports that when Ibn Abbas made a few fitting remarks at the cave site a Syrian monk who was standing by observed with surprise, "I didn't think that an Arab would know anything about that!" to which the company proudly replied by introducing Ibn Abbas as their Prophet's nephew (60).

The key to the location of the Eastern Cave is the mysterious name of *al-Raqim*. The great Ibn Abbas confesses that the word is one of the four things in the Koran which he cannot understand, but is quoted by TABARI as saying that Raqim is "a wadi between 'Asfan and Aelia beyond Palestine; and it is near Aelia" (61); while DAMIRI has him say: "it is a wadi between Amman and Aelia, beyond Palestine between the Ghatfan (tribe) and the country beyond Palestine; and this is the wadi in which the People of the Cave live, but Ka'ab says it is their village" (62). Most Arabic authorities locate al-Raqim in the plain of Balq in southeastern Palestine, and the geographer ISTAKHRI mentions a small town by that name in the area, apparently near the Dead Sea (63). Some writers, however, favor the region of Damascus and others that of Amman (64). CLERMONT-GANNEAU noted that the village of al-Raqim 7 km. south of Amman is identified by USAMA with a place called el-Kahf, where there are some remarkable tombs cut into the living rock—hence *Ashab al-Kahf wa l'Raqim*. In December of 1964 the writer visited this site with Mr. Rafiq DAJANI of the Jordan Department of Antiquities, whose forth-

(58) TABARI, *Jami' al-bayan*, XV, p. 143; DAMIRI, II, pp. 338, 353; SHIRBINI, II, p. 365; IBN KATHIR, III, p. 77.

(59) QURTUBI, X, p. 388; DAMIRI, II, p. 352. Though IBN KATHIR, III, p. 77, says the cave was in the *bilad* of Rum, he explains, "We are not told in what land the cave was... But IBN ABBAS says it was near Aelia, and IBN ISAAC says it was near Nineveh", *Ibidem*, p. 75. IBN ISAAC is a notoriously imaginative informant.

(60) QURTUBI, X, p. 388. This may be an embellishment of an older version in which Ibn Abbas expresses some skepticism as to the possibility of recognizing bones 300 years old: IBN KATHIR, III, p. 77; HUBER, p. 233, citing TABARI and THA'LABI.

(61) QURTUBI, X, p. 356; TABARI, *Jami' al-bayan*, XV, p. 131.

(62) DAMIRI, II, p. 342.

(63) AL-QAZWINI, *Al-athar wa 'l-bilad* (Göttingen, 1848), I, p. 161; other sources in HUBER, pp. 235-238, AL-ISTAKHRI, *Al-masalik wa 'l-mamalik* (Cairo, 1961), p. 47.

(64) HUBER, p. 224, citing YAQUT and QAZWINI. About the year 751 there was great excitement throughout the East in anticipation of an immediate appearance of the Seven Sleepers in a cemetery of Damascus, according to AL-BIRUNI (*opus citatum* in note 56) p. 285; cf. *Analecta Bollandiana* 68 (1950), p. 253. On Amman, HUBER, p. 237.

coming book on the subject treats at length the features of the newly-excavated site which render it in our opinion by far the most likely candidate for the original Raqîm. Even HUBER concedes that this was probably the al-Raqim of the Arabic commentators, but hastens to point out that it cannot possibly have been the cave of the Seven Sleepers of Ephesus (65). But then no one says it was—our Arabic authors readily admit that they are dealing with other caves, and what interests us here is not the mystical cavern of Ephesus but real caves in the Judaeian desert.

Distant candidates in Nineveh and Yemen need not detain us, though we should not overlook the suggestion that the Companions were originally wandering artisans (*ṣayāqala*) (66). THA'LABI reports that when writings inscribed on metal plates (and we shall presently see that the "Inscriptions" of the Cave were such documents) were found in a cave in Yemen no one could decipher them until one of these travelling smiths or artisans was consulted (67). This is noteworthy because some scholars have seen in these nomadic craftsmen the descendants of the Rekhabites and hence the possible ancestors of the Qumran community (68). The earliest Oriental versions of the Seven Sleepers stories actually do come from Nejran, the borders of Yemen. MASSIGNON explains this by showing that the feast of the Martyrs of Nejran falls on the same day as that of the Seven Sleepers of Ephesus, making it easy if not inevitable for Jacob of Sarug to confuse the two; and since Ephesus was inconveniently far away, MASSIGNON reasons, Eastern Christians simply moved the shrine to Nejran, whence it was transplanted to "military garrisons and the hermitages of anchorites on the fringes of the deserts" (69). The objection to this theory is that the men of Nejran will have nothing whatever to do with *Seven Sleepers*, but only three or five, which is strange indeed if they imported the magic

(65) CLERMONT-GANNEAU, *El-Kahf et la Caverne des sept Dormants*, in *Comptes Rendus de l'Académie des Inscriptions et Belles-Lettres*, 4<sup>e</sup> série, XXVII (Paris, 1899), pp. 564-574. HUBER, pp. 238-239, accuses CLERMONT-GANNEAU of following a false scent, yet the latter specifies that he is NOT seeking the original cave of the Seven Sleepers but only the favorite Moslem site of it: *Analecta Bollandiana* 19 (1900), pp. 356-257. L. MASSIGNON accepts his location of al Raqim: *Analecta Bollandiana* 68 (1950), p. 254.

(66) DAMIRI, II, p. 340; QURTUBI, X, p. 367.

(67) THA'LABI, pp. 102-103. TABARI (cited by HUBER, pp. 254-255) tells of a shepherd who found an inscribed tablet in a cave, which no one could read but an old holy man of the desert.

(68) R. EISLER (*opus citatum* in note 49) II, pp. 35, 182-184, 190-193, 197-199. On a possible Rechabite Background for Qumran, see H. J. SCHÖEPS, *Theologie und Geschichte des Judentums* (Tübingen, 1949), pp. 247-254.

(69) *Analecta Bollandiana* 68 (1950), p. 254. It was the leaders of the Nejran Christians who first questioned Mohammed about the Cave: NASAFI, II, p. 285, etc.

Seven directly from Ephesus (70). Plainly the Nejran version rests on another tradition.

*Al-Raqim*, so LANE informs us, means writings engraved or scratched on something, "a brass plate, or stone tablet, placed at the mouth of the cave", SALE suggests, though he is not sure (71), or else it is two lead tablets in a sealed copper box—with silver seals (72), or it is simply a book, or even a golden tablet (73), or perhaps it is an inscription over the cave door (74), or else the name of the cave itself, or of the wadi where it is (75), or possibly the mountain (76), or it may have been the stone that blocked the entrance (77), or else it is the ruins near the cave or even the village where the Cave People lived (78); or it may refer to water-holes or running water in the wadi (79). On the other hand, it may refer to coins, or to an ink-stand or writing-desk found on the spot (80); or it may be the dog the guarded the cave (81), or any number of regions claiming to possess the Cave (82). Strangely enough, no one seeking to locate the cave ever mentions the church or mosque that is supposed to have marked the spot with perpetual ritual observances—this most obvious clue of all has no place in the Raqim tradition. Instead we are confronted with a combination of caves, writings, bones, ruins, coins, ink-stands, wadis (there is no mention

(70) Above, note 4.

(71) The quotation is from SALE's note to *Sura XVIII*, 8, though SALE is not sure of the explanation and leaves the word *raqim* untranslated. TABARI, *Jami' al-bayan*, XV, p. 131, says it was a stone tablet.

(72) THA'LABI, p. 298; BAYDAWI, IV, p. 83 (lead or stone). The box was sealed with a silver seal. AL-BOKHARI, *Jami' al-Sahih* (Leyden, 1868), III, p. 276, says there was just one lead plate.

(73) TABARI, *loco citato*, suggests a book, QURTUBI, X, p. 357, a golden tablet.

(74) L. MASSIGNON, in *Analecta Bollandiana* 68 (1950), p. 252, discusses the significance of this.

(75) HIJAZI, XV, p. 50; QURTUBI, X, p. 357; IBN KATHIR, III, p. 73 (it is the wadi); TABARI, *Jami' al-bayan*, XV, p. 131; BAYDAWI, IV, p. 83. AL-RAQIM designates "the people of the Cave who were confined (or trapped) in it" (*ashāb al-ghāri alladhī inṭabaqa 'alayhim*): QURTUBI, *loco citato*.

(76) IBN KATHIR, TABARI, BAYDAWI, *loco citato*.

(77) QURTUBI, IV, p. 357, citing AL-SADDI.

(78) BAYDAWI, IV, p. 83, and QURTUBI, X, pp. 356-358, suggest both.

(79) "It is said that al-Raqim is a wadi beyond Palestine in which is the Cave; (the name) is taken from Raqmah, a wadi with water-holes in it... And Ibn Atiya says, "It is in Syria, according to what I heard from many people; it is a cave with dead people in it": QURTUBI, X, p. 357. It means running water in a wadi; DAMIRI, II, p. 341.

(80) QURTUBI, *loco citato*, suggests both.

(81) QURTUBI, *loco citato*; HIJAZI, XV, p. 50; NASAFI, II, p. 277.

(82) It was the name given to the Andalusian site (above, note 54), and to "a region of Rum where there was a cave containing "twenty-one souls as if they were sleeping", QURTUBI, *loco citato*, who does not believe that this is the Cave.



of a valley in any of the orthodox Ephesus stories), etc., suggesting that the would-be interpreters of al-Raqim all have in mind a type of archaeological site which the modern reader most readily associates with Qumran.

The general consensus is that al-Raqim refers to secret buried writings, containing the history and even the teachings of the Companions, but "whose meaning God has kept from us, and whose history we do not know" (83). These were deliberately hidden away to come forth in a later age when "perhaps God will raise up a believing people" (84). There was a tradition that Jeremiah with the same purpose had hidden such treasures in a cave near Jericho (85), as Peter had done near Jerusalem (according to BAIDAWI it was Peter who discovered the documents of al-Raqim) (86), and the theme of buried holy books has a special appeal to THA'LABI, who carries the custom back to the remotest times (87). The recently recognized possibility that the library of Qumran was deliberately buried in "a solemn communal interment", to come forth in a more righteous age thus supplies another link between Qumran and the Companions of the Cave and the Raqim, while putting a new stamp of authenticity on their existence (88).

Let us recall how the question was put to Omar: "Tell me about the people of old who died 309 years and then God revived them—what is their story?" One wonders in passing why Jews should be so interested in a purely Christian story, and why they alone should claim to know its details, which according to THA'LABI were all to be found in Jewish books: plainly they were not asking about

(83) QURTUBI, *loco citato*. Most commentators (including those mentioned in the following note, No. 84) note that the tablets contained the names and history of the Sleepers, and QURTUBI *loco citato* would even include in the writings "the rule which they embraced from the religion of Jesus" (*al-shar' tamassakūhu bi-hi min dini 'Isa*).

(84) THA'LABI, p. 295; TABARI, *Jami' al-bayan*, XV, p. 135; BAYDAWI, IV, pp. 86-87; DAMIRI, II, p. 344, according to whom the book itself is to come forth as a new revelation.

(85) *II Maccabees* 2, 4-8. At the time of the First Crusade local reports located this cave near Jericho: FULCHER, *Historia Hierosolymitana*, edited by H. HAGENMEYER (Heidelberg, 1913), p. 289. When the Patriarch TIMOTHEUS was informed, about the year 800, of the discoveries of documents in caves near Jericho, he assumed that it was those buried by Jeremiah: J. HERING, in *Revue d'Histoire et de Philosophie Religieuse*, 41 (1961) p. 160.

(86) E. A. W. BUDGE, *The Contendings of the Apostles* (Oxford, 1935), pp. 394-396; BAYDAWI, IV, pp. 87, 90. See Above, note 10.

(87) He takes the custom back to the burial of Aaron, p. 171. He tells of a book sent to David from heaven sealed with gold and containing thirteen questions to be put to Solomon, p. 202; of an apocalyptic writing sealed in an iron box, p. 246; of another buried in a mountain, p. 242; of gold tablets containing the history of a vanished Empire found in a cave in Yemen, p. 102; of magic books dug up from beneath Solomon's throne, p. 35, et., etc.

(88) M. BLACK (*opus citatum* in note 24), p. 12.

Ephesus at all (89). The length of the famous sleep is reported at anything from 70 to 900 years. The Christians favor 372, while the Moslems accept the 309 years of the Koran (90). The true meaning of the 309 is a great mystery, which only a true prophet can explain (91); it comes from the *beni Israel*, and "the Christians of Nejrán say, 'As for the 300 years we already knew about that, but as for the 9 years we know nothing about it'" (92). But all are agreed that it represents the period of darkness during which the blessed Companions slept, like Onias, to awaken only at the dawn of a new age of faith (93). Such was also, whatever the actual years may have been, the significance of the 390 years of the *Damascus Document* I, 5-6, "the Era of Anger" and darkness. MASSIGNON shows the lengths to which Christians and Moslems will go to see significance in 309; it is the "anagram of the total of the 14 isolated initial letters of the Koran", namely 903, as also, of the name of Jesus: 'Isa = 390 (94). The free juggling of figures does not draw the line at arranging them in any order, just as modern scholars are not embarrassed by the difference between 390 and 393 years or the necessity of adding or subtracting 20 or 40 to suit one's calculations. It has been recognized that the 390 of the *Damascus Document* is a symbolic number having "no more than a schematic value", and the same is held for the Koranic 309 (95).

(89) THA'LABI, p. 288. When Ali finishes his story, the most skeptical Jew confesses that he has not added nor removed a single letter from the account in the Torah; p. 292.

(90) Various estimates are given by HUBER (*opus citatum* in note 6) p. 102. Cf. *Analecta Bollandiana* 72 (1954), p. 266; B. HELLER, in *Revue des Études Juives* 49 (1904), pp. 205, 211.

(91) It "belongs to the secrets of heaven and earth": TABARI, *Jami' al-bayan*, XV, p. 152; SHIRBINI, II, p. 366. The Prophet spent 40 nights trying to comprehend it: AS-SUYUTI, *Lubab al-nuqul...* (1935), p. 145.

(92) QURTUBI, X, p. 386, who quotes TABARI as saying that the Jews also could not agree about it. It could hardly have been a Christian invention, since no amount of manipulating can fit the conventional three centuries of sleep into the century-and-a-half interval between Decius and either Theodosius. Cf. *Analecta Bollandiana* 66 (1948), p. 195.

(93) HELLER (*opus citatum* in note 90) pp. 206-207. Onias slept from the destruction of the First Temple to the completion of the Second: "...the parallel with the Seven Sleepers... is of course obvious", comments *The Jewish Encyclopedia* (1901), IX, p. 405. Some say the Seven fell asleep until the land became Moslem: DAMIRI, II, p. 357.

(94) *Analecta Bollandiana* 68 (1950), p. 351.

(95) H. H. ROWLEY, in *Expository Times*, 63 (1951/2), p. 381; M. H. SEGAL, in *Journal of Biblical Literature*, 70 (1951), p. 146, note 59, and p. 130; YSUF ALI, *The Holy Qur'an*, II, p. 720, note 2337. The 390 and the 20 years "belong to the remote past... Their writers lack any real knowledge of the origin and early history of the sect; hence the: nebulous atmosphere pervading all the documents... the characters... appearing as types rather than individuals": E. WIESENBERG, in *Vetus Testamentum*, 5 (1955), pp. 304-305.

Since both have the same significance and are equally vague, distant, and mysterious, a possible confusion of the two may furnish yet another link between the two societies.

The consensus of opinion that al-Raqim were *metal* plates containing the writings of the Companions, as well as THA'LABI'S preoccupation with metal documents in general, is moved from the realm of pure fantasy by the recent discovery of a number of metal documents in Palestine and Syria, the most notable being the *Copper Scrolls* from Qumran Cave 4. TABARI tells of a shepherd who discovered inscribed tablets which no one could read but an old holy man of the desert—like the Copper Scrolls, these tablets contained lists of buried treasure (96). Another peculiarity of the Companions (which does not fit with the Ephesus scene) is the emphasis put on the formal organization of the society. After individually receiving enlightenment in the shade of a tree—like Onias, Abimelech, and the Buddha—the Seven discover to each other their like-mindedness and resolve to form a community with a near-by cave as their headquarters. They have a president and spokesman, Maximilianus, and a secretary and treasurer, Tamlikh, the star of the play (97). Each member fetches his property from his father's house and after giving lavishly to the poor turns the rest over to a common fund, to be shrewdly administered (98). Such a community of property is one of the best-known features of the Qumran society.

In taking to the wilderness, the Brethren set up (according to the Arabs, but not to the Greeks) at a place where there was a good spring and some fruit trees, subsisting as did many a pious anchorite in years to come on the water and dates of an oasis (99). "They left their homes and lands, families and children... and entered the caves (plural) in the year of the prophets" (100). Here we have a definitive religious movement, as against the adolescent escapade of Ephesus: in the latter case the youths (who are very young) flee to the wilderness expressly to escape the Emperor, while in the former their society flourishes before the Emperor ever hears

(96) Above, note 87. TABARI'S story is discussed by HUBER, pp. 254-255.

(97) THA'LABI, p. 292. They say *nakūnu 'ala amrin wahadin*, TABARI, *Jami' al-bayan*, XV, p. 132, where the last word suggests the much-discussed "yahad" of the Scrolls.

(98) Nearly all Arabic sources mention this. THA'LABI, pp. 292-293, even notes that they gained the repute of being money-changers.

(99) THA'LABI, p. 291. See above, note 79. HUBER, p. 455, sees a Jewish tradition in the spring and the trees, and HELLER (*opus citatum* in note 47) p. 201, notes that the society eschewed pork.

(100) QURTUBI, X, p. 360; NASAFI, II, p. 278. Both mention caves in the plural. Cf. TABARI, *Jami' al-bayan*, XV, p. 132, 151.

of it (101). Part of the heroic allure of the Companions is that they are high-ranking officers in the Imperial army, which seeming inconsistency suits well with the image of the men of Qumran as “dedicated holy warriors” (102).

Considerable emphasis is placed by our Arabic authors on the North-south orientation of the Sleepers, who must face the north to preserve their bodies against the day of their arising. Here is a reminder of the North-south orientation of the burials as Qumran, whatever may be its significance (103). The bodies of the Sleepers were turned from side to side by angelic ministers (to avoid corruption) every seven days, or seven years, or twice a year, or (in most writers) every year on New Year’s Day (104). Also, the sun shines into the cavern on just two days of the year—suggesting the Equinoxes, and it is the sun which finally awakens them (105). The emphasis here on a solar (resurrection) cult and calendar is a reminder that the Qumran people were peculiar for their zealous adherence to an archaic solar calendar (106).

It was in the ancient practice of incubation at healing shrines that E. ROHDE sought the origin of the Seven Sleepers tradition, and indeed our Arabic and Syriac sources tell how God speaks to the Companions as they sleep, and how one calls upon their names for healing dreams (107). It is just possible that Qumran itself may have been such a healing shrine: “...the idea of a place of healing by

(101) On al-Raqim as a going concern, TABARI, XV, p. 135; IBN KATHIR, III, pp. 74-75. In some Western versions Tamlikh is only 12 or 15 years old, and in all of them the youths must fetch all their food and drink from the city—they were NOT self-sustaining. There was a tradition that the activities of the Cave included even dancing, according to QURTUBI, X, p. 466, who describes the pious exercises of the community.

(102) THA’LABI, pp. 289, 294; IBN KATHIR, III, p. 74, who mention the dramatic episode of the stripping of their military insignia by the enraged Emperor. This is a characteristic episode in the cycle of youthful military heroes who are martyred by the Emperor but then come alive to prove the resurrection. Such were St. Mercurius, St. Victor, and St. Sebastian. THA’LABI’S St. George, pp. 299-305, clearly belongs to the cycle.

(103) THA’LABI, p. 291; QURTUBI, X, p. 369; IBN KATHIR, III, p. 75; AS-SA’ADI, V, p. 10, etc. On Qumran, M. BLACK (*opus citatum* in note 40) p. 141.

(104) Once a week (TABARI, cited by HUBER, p. 279); every seven years (QURTUBI, X, p. 370); twice a year (BAYDAWI, IV, p. 94); once a year at New Year’s (THA’LABI, p. 291; NASAFI, II, p. 281; QURTUBI, *loco citato*).

(105) THA’LABI, p. 291; NASAFI, II, p. 281; QURTUBI, X, 369; BAYDAWI, IV, p. 93. IBN KATHIR, III, p. 75, sees astronomical significance in these arrangements. HUBER, p. 295, discusses the awakening by the sun.

(106) S. TALMON, in *Revue de Qumran*, 8 (1960), p. 475; E. ETTISCH, in *Theologische Literaturzeitung*, 88 (1963), pp. 186, 188, 191-192.

(107) E. ROHDE, in *Rheinisches Museum für Philologie*, Neue Folge, 35 (1880), pp. 157-159, 162-163. Their names have great “valeur prophylactique” throughout the Moslem world: MASSIGNON, in *Anal. Boll.* 68 (1950), pp. 249-250; for their healing offices, *ibidem*, pp. 247-248, and dreams, HUBER, p. 135.

the Dead Sea was well established in Jewish tradition and gives added reason for the Essenes' ('Physicians') choice of Qumran (Mesillah) for their desert home" (108). In this connection, ALLEGRO dwells on the ancient designations of Qumran as meaning "shady", "sheltered"—which puts one in mind of the elaborate arrangements described by the Arab scholars for keeping the sleeping Companions in the shade (109), though admittedly far-fetched.

The one truly moving episode in the history of the Seven Sleepers as the Arabic commentators tell it is the manner of their falling asleep. The indefatigable Tamlikh returns from the town in tears of anxiety to report to his friends that the monster (*jabbar*, a Jewish word) has returned to Ephesus and is coming out against against them. This calls for a general lamentation until Tamlikh tells the brethren to dry their eyes, lift up their heads, and "eat what God has given", an expression suggestive of an exhortation to martyrdom. Accordingly, we behold the Brethren of the Cave partaking of their last sorrowful supper as the sun sets (the setting of the sun receives special emphasis), and then, as they sit upon the ground, preparing and exhorting one another in holy conversation, quietly yielding up their souls to God (110).

The celebration of a last supper and love-feast as the sun sets brings to mind PHILO's account of an Egyptian branch of the Essenes holding their solemn feast at sundown (111), as well as AL-BIRUNI's report that the Jewish sect of the Maghariba celebrated their rites at sunset—a circumstance which could easily lead him to omit the single *nuqtah* that makes the difference between Maghariba ("Sundown-people") and the familiar Maghariyah or "People of the Caves" (112).

The reference in *Sura LXXXV*, 4 to "the people of the pit" (*ashabu 'l-ukhdud*) deserves mention because in the past it has commonly been interpreted as referring to the persecutors of the Christians of Nejran. This explanation was seriously questioned, and the now familiar designation of the "people of the pit" in the Dead Sea Scrolls indicates an earlier origin of the concept (113).

(108) J. M. ALLEGRO, *The Treasure of the Copper Scroll* (New York: Doubleday, 1960), p. 73. The Essenes specialized in "Traumdeute- und Weissagekunst"; R. EISLER, (*opus citatum* in note 49) II, p. 17.

(109) ALLEGRO, *opus citatum*, pp. 70-71. Cf. THA'LABI, p. 291; NASAFI, II, p. 280; QURTUBI, X, p. 369; AS-SA'ADI, V, p. 10.

(110) THA'LABI, pp. 294-295; TABARI, *Jami' al-bayan*, XV, p. 134; DAMIRI, II, pp. 339-340; SHIRBINI, II, pp. 352-353; BAYDAWI, IV, pp. 85-86: "...lift up your heads, eat, and trust in God". On the Hebrew origin of *jabbar*, see K. AHRENS (*opus citatum* in note 43) p. 19.

(111) EPIPHANIUS, *Adv. haer.*, Haer. 29, no. 5, in *P. G.*, Vol. 41, col. 397.

(112) AL-BIRUNI, *opus citatum* in note 56, p. 284. The added evidence of the Companions of the Cave tips the scales against the reading *maqariba*, favored by N. GOLB, in *Journal of Religion*, 41 (1961), pp. 42-44.

(113) This expression puzzled HUBER, p. 283, as the only purely Christian

At the same time it vindicates the Christian Nejran tradition as an authentic echo of the old desert sectaries: it was the Christians of Nejran, it will be recalled, who first mentioned the Companions of the Cave to Mohammed.

The name given by the Companions to their settlement, according to the Arabic sources, was Hiram or Khiram, meaning "sectarians" or "separation", but also an appropriate designation for forbidden ground (114). The wonderful dog that spoke with a human voice and faithfully guarded the threshold of the Cave usually goes by the name of Qatmir, though we also find him sharing the well-nigh universal name of Raqim, explained by DAMIRI's note that the Arabs often called a dog Raqmah, meaning a wadi with water in it, which he believes to be the source of the name Raqim (115). Since the name of the dog is thus confused with that of the society, the cave, the valley and what-not, one wonders if the second commonest name of the dog might not represent a like confusion—for the name is Khumran, the closest parallel yet to "the meaningless Arabic name Qumran" (116).

Let us now briefly summarize some of the main points of resemblance between Qumran and the Companions of the Cave. First of all, the experts favor a pre-Christian origin for both; each begins its history with a persecution and migration under (possibly) Antiochus Epiphanes, as a time when both societies seem to have the same leader; both have ties with wandering artisans—the ancestors and/or descendants of desert sectarian groups; they have the same apocalyptic-mystic teachings, familiar alike from the early Jewish and the early Christian apocryphal writings; both have connections with a priestly society on the Jordan before the birth of Christ; the activities of both are reflected in the Clementine writings; both are identified with the Zadokites by name; both are near Aelia and even nearer to Jericho; both left behind the same peculiar combination or archaeological litter; both engaged in the odd practice of burying sacred records to come forth at a later time as a witness; both make use of metal plates for such records; each thinks of itself as the righteous remnant; the numbers 309

tradition in the Koran, where it is according strangely out of place. But J. HOROVITZ, in *H. U. C. A.*, 2 (1925), p. 178, showed that "it is by no means assured that... Mohammed really meant the martyrs of Najran", and that the only reason for such an assumption is lack of evidence as to what else the "People of the Pit" could refer to. The Dead Sea Scrolls now supply that evidence.

(114) BAYDAWI, IV, p. 91 (Khiram); DAMIRI, II, p. 350 (Haram, Khadam); QURTUBI, X, p. 367 (Khiwam). The usual difficulty with pointing is apparent.

(115) DAMIRI, II, p. 341. NASAFI, II, p. 285, also says the dog was Raqim. THA'LABI, p. 290, gives a list of suggested names, not including this one.

(116) IBN KATHIR, III, pp. 73, 78; QURTUBI, X, p. 360. The quotation is from ALLEGRO (*opus citatum* in note 108) p. 70.

and 390 have for the Companions and Qumran respectively the same significance; both societies are well organized and practice a community of property; each community has its buildings, spring, and fruit-trees as well as its caves; both were ritually oriented, dedicated to good works and religious exercises, controlled by special solar calendar; in both the dead were laid away facing the north; both practice healing and incubation and seem to have had a solemn ritual feast at sundown; the members of both are dramatized in a military capacity; both sites are linked in later times with the mysterious word Khumran-Qumran. In both cases everything is very vague, far away, and strangely portentous.

The great mystic and symbolic appeal of the Sura of the Cave, which is recited every Friday in every mosque, rests on the concept of the Seven as intercessors for man in a wicked and dangerous world (117). But there may be more than abstract symbolism or allegory involved here. Scattered references in Jewish and Christian writings such as the Karaite texts and the letter of Bishop TIMOTHEUS, indicate at least a dim awareness down through the centuries of the existence and the peculiar significance of writings found in caves near Jericho. When the red herring of Ephesus is removed we are faced with the very real likelihood that the people who left those records were those very "Companions of the Cave and the Writing" who made such an indelible imprint on the Islam.

The purpose of this brief exploratory study has been to raise rather than settle issues. The Arabic commentators cited are of course only a sampling, since the Arabic sources available at present in the far West are limited, though increasing very rapidly, thanks to the titanic efforts of Professor Aziz S. Atiya. But they have given us enough to indicate that many questions still await and deserve investigation. We have not even touched upon the knotty and intriguing question of the identification and status of the all-knowing THA'LABI, nor have we examined the possible paths by which the Qumran tradition reached him and other Arabic writers; nor have we considered the wealth of literary tradition and folk-lore that surrounds the wonderful dog Qatmir, nor sought to trace the mysterious and significant line of Zadok in the Arabic sources; nay, we have not even mentioned the many other possible references to the Qumran tradition in the Koran itself. What we have done is simply to indicate the possibility that echoes of Qumran still reverberate in the pages of many Moslem writers, who may yet prove valuable informants to students of the Dead Sea Scrolls.

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(117) This has been discussed by MASSIGNON, in *Anal. Boll.* 68, pp. 245-255.