

QS 20 Q 18:9 – 26

18.9 Or did you imagine that the people of the Cave and al-Raḳīm were a unique wonder among Our revelations?

18.10 Remember when the youths took refuge in a cave, saying: “Our Lord, bring down upon us mercy from on high, and make it easy for us to find the right way to follow in this matter.”

18.11 So We sealed their ears in the cave for a number of years,

18.12 then We brought them forth in order to learn which of the two groups was more accurate as to the time they spent.

18.13. We shall now narrate to you their story, in truth.

They were youths who believed in their Lord, and whom We increased in guidance.

18.14 And We strengthened their hearts when they rose up, saying: “Our Lord, Lord of the heavens and earth! We shall call upon no other god besides Him, else we utter a falsehood.

18.15 These our people have taken to themselves gods apart from Him. If only they could show some manifest proof for them! But who is more wicked than he who fabricates lies from God?

18.16 And now, having abandoned them and what they worship other than God, let us take refuge in a cave, and God will spread out His mercy and make it easy for you to find the prudent path to follow in this matter.”

18.17 And you would have seen the sun, as it arose, veering away from their cave on the right, and, as it set, cutting them out of its path on the left, they being in a cavity therein. That was a wonder of God.

He whom God guides is truly guided; he whom He leads astray, for him you shall find no protector, no mentor.

18.18 And you would have imagined them to be awake as they slept on. And We would turn them from right side to left, as their dog spread its paws across the entrance. If only you had seen them, you would have turned and fled from them, filled with terror of them.

18.19 Thus did We make them rise up again, to question one another.

18.9 Penses-tu que les gens de la Caverne et d’ar-Raḳīm ont constitué une chose extraordinaire d’entre Nos prodiges?

18.10 Quand les jeunes gens se furent réfugiés dans la caverne, ils dirent: «O notre Seigneur, donne-nous de Ta part une miséricorde; et assure nous la droiture dans tout ce qui nous concerne».

18.11 Alors, Nous avons assourdi leurs oreilles, dans la caverne pendant de nombreuses années.

18.12 Ensuite, Nous les avons ressuscités, afin de savoir lequel des deux groupes saurait le mieux calculer la durée exacte de leur séjour.

18.13 Nous allons te raconter leur récit en toute vérité. Ce sont des jeunes gens qui croyaient en leur Seigneur; et Nous leur avons accordé les plus grands moyens de se diriger [dans la bonne voie].

18.14 Nous avons fortifié leurs cours lorsqu’ils s’étaient levés pour dire: «Notre Seigneur est le Seigneur des cieux et de la terre: jamais nous n’invoquerons de divinité en dehors de Lui, sans quoi, nous transgresserions dans nos paroles.

18.15 Voilà que nos concitoyens ont adopté en dehors de Lui des divinités. Que n’apportent-ils sur elles une preuve évidente? Quel pire injuste, donc que celui qui invente un mensonge contre Allah?

18.16 Et quand vous vous serez séparés d’eux et de ce qu’ils adorent en dehors d’Allah, réfugiez-vous donc dans la caverne: votre Seigneur récompensera de Sa miséricorde sur vous et disposera pour vous un adoucissement à votre sort.

18.17 Tu aurais vu le soleil, quand il se lève, s’écarter de leur caverne vers la droite, et quand il se couche, passer à leur gauche, tandis qu’eux-mêmes sont là dans une partie spacieuse (de la caverne)... Cela est une des merveilles d’Allah. Celui qu’Allah guide, c’est lui le bien-guidé. Et quiconque Il égare, tu ne trouveras alors pour lui aucun allié pour le mettre sur la bonne voie.

18.18 Et tu les aurais cru éveillés, alors qu’ils dorment. Et Nous les tournons sur le côté droit et sur le côté gauche, tandis que leur

Said one of them: "How long did you remain thus?"

They said: "We remained for a day, or a part thereof."

He said: "Your Lord knows best how long you remained. So send out one of you, with this your silver money, to the city, and let him find out which is the tastiest of food, and let him bring back to you a provision of it. Let him be discreet, and let no one know of your presence. 18.20 For, if they catch sight of you, they will stone you or force you back into their religion, and thus you will never prevail."

18.21 Nevertheless, We divulged their presence, that they might know that God's promise is true and that the Hour shall come, no doubt about it.

Remember when they argued amongst themselves, saying: "Build on top of them a structure – their Lord knows best about them." Those who won the argument said: "Let us build on top of them a house of prayer."

18.22 They shall say: "They were three in number, their dog a fourth." Others will say: "They were five in number, their dog a sixth" – predicting the Unseen. Yet others will say: "Seven, their dog an eighth."

Say: "My Lord knows best what their number was, and none knows it but a few." So do not dispute this issue with them except in a superficial manner, and do not solicit the opinion of any of them concerning their number.

18.23 And do not say of anything: "I shall do this tomorrow"

18.24 unless you add "If God wills." And remember your Lord if you forget, and say: "Perhaps my Lord will guide me to a path nearer than this in righteousness."

18.25 They remained in their cave for three hundred years, to which were added nine.

18.26 Say: "God knows how long they remained. To Him belongs the Unseen in the heavens and earth. How He sees all! How He hears all! Apart from Him they have no protector, nor does He associate anyone with Him in His judgment."

chien est à l'entrée, pattes étendues. Si tu les avais aperçus, certes tu leur aurais tourné le dos en fuyant; et tu aurais été assurément rempli d'effroi devant eux.

18.19 Et c'est ainsi que Nous les ressuscitâmes, afin qu'ils s'interrogent entre eux. L'un parmi eux dit: «Combien de temps avez-vous demeuré là?» Ils dirent: «Nous avons demeuré un jour ou une partie d'un jour». D'autres dirent: «Votre Seigneur sait mieux combien [de temps] vous y avez demeuré. Envoyez donc l'un de vous à la ville avec votre argent que voici, pour qu'il voie quel aliment est le plus pur et qu'il vous en apporte de quoi vous nourrir. Qu'il agisse avec tact; et qu'il ne donne l'éveil à personne sur vous.

18.20 Si jamais ils vous attrapent, ils vous lapideront ou vous feront retourner à leur religion, et vous ne réussirez alors plus jamais».

18.21 Et c'est ainsi que Nous fîmes qu'ils furent découverts, afin qu'ils [les gens de la cité] sachent que la promesse d'Allah est vérité et qu'il n'y ait point de doute au sujet de l'Heure. Aussi se disputèrent-ils à leur sujet et déclarèrent-ils: «Construisez sur eux un édifice. Leur Seigneur les connaît mieux». Mais ceux qui l'emportèrent [dans la discussion] dirent: «Elevez sur eux un sanctuaire».

18.22 Ils dirent: «ils étaient trois et le quatrième était leur chien». Et ils dirent en conjecturant sur leur mystère qu'ils étaient cinq, le sixième étant leur chien et ils dirent: «sept, le huitième étant leur chien». Dis: «Mon Seigneur connaît mieux leur nombre. Il n'en est que peu qui le savent». Ne discute à leur sujet que d'une façon apparente et ne consulte personne en ce qui les concerne.

18.23 Et ne dis jamais, à propos d'une chose: «Je la ferai sûrement demain»,

18.24 sans ajouter: «Si Allah le veut», et invoque ton Seigneur quand tu oublies et dis: «Je souhaite que mon Seigneur me guide et me mène plus près de ce qui est correct».

18.25 Or, ils demeurèrent dans leur caverne trois cents ans et en ajoutèrent neuf (années).

18.26 Dis: «Allah sait mieux combien de temps ils demeurèrent là. A Lui appartient l'Inconnaissable des cieus et de la terre. Comme Il est Voyant et Audient! Ils n'ont aucun allié en

dehors de Lui et Il n'associe personne à Son commandement.

سورة الكهف

أَمْ حَسِبْتُمْ أَنْ أَصْحَابَ الْكَهْفِ وَالرَّقِيمِ كَانُوا مِنْ آيَاتِنَا عَجَبًا (9) إِذْ أَوْىُّ الْفِتْيَةُ إِلَى الْكَهْفِ فَقَالُوا رَبَّنَا آتِنَا مِنْ لَدُنْكَ رَحْمَةً وَهَيِّئْ لَنَا مِنْ أَمْرِنَا رَشَدًا (10) فَضَرَبْنَا عَلَى آذَانِهِمْ فِي الْكَهْفِ سِنِينَ عَدَدًا (11) ثُمَّ بَعَثْنَاهُمْ لِنَعْلَمَ أَيُّ الْحِزْبَيْنِ أَحْصَىٰ لِمَا لَبِئُوا أَمَدًا (12) نَحْنُ نَقُصُّ عَلَيْكَ نَبَأَهُم بِالْحَقِّ إِنَّهُمْ فِتْيَةٌ آمَنُوا بِرَبِّهِمْ وَزِدْنَاَهُمْ هُدًى (13) وَرَبَطْنَا عَلَى قُلُوبِهِمْ إِذْ قَامُوا فَقَالُوا رَبَّنَا رَبُّ السَّمَاوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضِ لَنْ نَدْعُو مِنْ دُونِهِ لَهَا لَقَدْ قُلْنَا إِذًا شَطَطًا (14) هُوَ لَاءِ قَوْمُنَا اتَّخَذُوا مِنْ دُونِهِ آلِهَةً لَوْلَا يَأْتُونَ عَلَيْهِم بِسُلْطَانٍ بَيِّنٍ فَمَنْ أَظْلَمُ مِمَّنْ افْتَرَىٰ عَلَى اللَّهِ كَذِبًا (15) وَإِذْ اعْتَزَلْتُمُوهُمْ وَمَا يُغِيثُونَ إِلَّا اللَّهَ فَاوُوا إِلَى الْكَهْفِ يَنْشُرْ لَكُمْ رَبُّكُمْ مِنْ رَحْمَتِهِ وَيَهَيِّئْ لَكُمْ مِنْ أَمْرِكُمْ مَرْفَقًا (16) وَتَرَى السَّمْسَ إِذَا طَلَعَتْ تَرَاوُرُ عَنْ كَهْفِهِمْ ذَاتَ الْبَيْمِينِ وَإِذَا غَرَبَتْ تَقَرَّبُ مِنْ ذَاتِ الشَّمَالِ وَهُمْ فِي فَجْوَةٍ مِنْهُ ذَلِكَ مِنْ آيَاتِ اللَّهِ مَنْ يَهْدِ اللَّهُ فَهُوَ الْمُهْتَدِ وَمَنْ يُضِلِلْ فَلَنْ تَجِدَ لَهُ وَلِيًّا مُرِيدًا (17) وَتَحْسَبُهُمْ أَيْقَاظًا وَهُمْ رُقُودٌ وَنُقَلِّبُهُمْ ذَاتَ الْبَيْمِينِ وَذَاتَ الشَّمَالِ وَكُلُّهُمْ نَاسِطٌ بِأُورُوقِهِ بِالْوَصِيدِ لَوِ اطَّلَعْتَ عَلَيْهِمْ لَوَلَّيْتَ مِنْهُمْ فِرَارًا وَلَمْلَمْتَ مِنْهُمْ رُعبًا (18) وَكَذَلِكَ بَعَثْنَاهُمْ لِيَتَسَاءَلُوا بَيْنَهُمْ قَالَ قَائِلٌ مِنْهُمْ كَمْ لَبِئْتُمْ قَالُوا لَبِئْنَا يَوْمًا أَوْ بَعْضَ يَوْمٍ قَالُوا رَبُّكُمْ أَعْلَمُ بِمَا لَبِئْتُمْ فَابْعَثُوا أَحَدَكُمْ بِوَرِقِكُمْ هَذِهِ إِلَى الْمَدِينَةِ فَلْيَنْظُرْ أَيُّهَا أَزْكَى طَعَامًا فَلْيَأْتِكُمْ بِرِزْقٍ مِنْهُ وَلْيَتَلَطَّفْ وَلَا يُشْعِرَنَّ بِكُمْ أَحَدًا (19) إِنَّهُمْ إِنْ يَظْهَرُوا عَلَيْكُمْ يَرْجُمُوكُمْ أَوْ يُعِيدُوكُمْ فِي مِلَّتِهِمْ وَلَنْ تُفْلِحُوا إِذًا أَبَدًا (20) وَكَذَلِكَ عَزَّزْنَا عَلَيْهِمْ لِيَعْلَمُوا أَنَّ وَعْدَ اللَّهِ حَقٌّ وَأَنَّ السَّاعَةَ لَا رَيْبَ فِيهَا إِذْ يَتَنَزَّلُ عَنِ السَّمَاءِ نِزْلًا مُبِينًا رَبُّهُمْ أَعْلَمُ بِهِمْ قَالَ الَّذِينَ غَلَبُوا عَلَى أَمْرِهِمْ لَنَتَّخِذَنَّ عَلَيْهِمْ مَسْجِدًا (21) سَيَقُولُونَ ثَلَاثَةٌ رَابِعُهُمْ كَالْبَيْتِ وَأَقْرَبُونَ وَيَقُولُونَ خَمْسَةٌ سَادِسُهُمْ كَالْبَيْتِ وَغَيْرَ ذَلِكَ وَمَا يَدْرِي السَّاعَةَ أَتَىٰ لَيْلِيءٍ أَيْ فَاعِلٌ ذَلِكَ غَدًا (23) إِلَّا أَنْ يَشَاءَ اللَّهُ وَانذَرُكَ رَبُّكَ إِذَا نَسِيتَ وَقُلْ عَسَىٰ أَنْ يَهْدِيَنِّي رَبِّي لِأَقْرَبٍ مِنْ هَذَا رَشَدًا (24) وَلَبِئُوا فِي كَهْفِهِمْ ثَلَاثَ مِئَةٍ سِنِينَ وَازْدَادُوا تِسْعًا (25) قُلِ اللَّهُ أَعْلَمُ بِمَا لَبِئُوا لَهُ غَيْبُ السَّمَاوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضِ أَبْصُرْ بِهِ وَأَسْمِعْ مَا لَهُمْ مِنْ دُونِهِ مِنْ وَلِيٍّ وَلَا يُشْرِكُ فِي حُكْمِهِ أَحَدًا (26)

Dye

Version coranique de la célèbre légende chrétienne des Sept Dormants (étude classique : Huber 1910). Les vv. 8 à 17 semblent combiner deux versions de l'histoire.

Je reprends ici l'analyse de Tardieu 2011.

Plusieurs traits de la légende chrétienne se retrouvent dans le Coran : des jeunes gens (en nombre incertain), persécutés pour leur foi en un Dieu unique, trouvent refuge dans une caverne où ils « dorment » très longtemps ; le soleil ne les atteint pas ; l'entrée de la caverne a été murée puis démolie ; de retour en ville, après leur réveil, ils sont découverts par leur monnaie périmée ; ils sont la preuve de la résurrection des morts. Le Coran sous-entend qu'ils sont l'objet d'un culte de la part des chrétiens.

D'autres éléments coraniques sont absents de la légende chrétienne : la caverne est un lieu non clos ; elle est orientée sud-nord (fond-entrée) – le parcours du soleil ne passe jamais à l'intérieur de la caverne – ; l'ange de Dieu tourne les jeunes gens côté droit, puis côté gauche, selon, peut-on supposer, que le soleil est à l'est ou à l'ouest. La résurrection des corps passe apparemment par leur soustraction au rayonnement solaire. Les éléments qui distinguent le récit coranique des récits chrétiens concernent l'espace-temps des Dormants, notamment la symbolique de l'espace.

Les *Homélies* de Jacques de Saroug (plus ancien témoignage littéraire conservé) parlent d'un veilleur (ange), non d'un chien. Cela ne signifie pas que le veilleur des

homélie est devenu un chien dans le Coran. Il convient de voir les choses à l'inverse. Au début du VI^e siècle, Theodosius (*De situ Terrae sanctae* p. 148, § 26 Geyer), dans son guide de pèlerinage, mentionne la légende et parle du chien, dont le nom serait *Viricanus*. On peut penser que le conte oral, antérieur à la mise par écrit, mentionnait la présence du chien, qui a été supprimée par Jacques de Saroug, pour des raisons dogmatiques évidentes (incompatibilité avec le dogme de la résurrection de la chair). Moins tatillon, plus proche des récits populaires, l'auteur du récit coranique conserve le chien.

La légende des Dormants fait partie de la classification internationale des contes de tradition orale (n°766 Aarne-Thompson). Un autre passage de cette sourate (vv. 59–81, où Moïse rencontre un mystérieux personnage), appartient aussi au genre des contes de tradition orale (celui du sage ou du prophète déconcerté par les cheminements de la justice divine).

Grodzki

The Islamic tradition, followed by some Western scholars, attempts to explain the ambiguity of the numerals 300 and 9 in verse Q 18:25 as the difference between the solar and lunar calendars. Interestingly, the phrase *wa-izdādū tis'an* may also well mean an imperative form: “and add nine [more to that number]” apart from its understanding as “and they added nine [more to that number]” which doesn't seem to make much sense. Would this mean an instruction to the editors/readers? What is its sense being mentioned here? The *wa-izdādū tis'an* is not a later insertion, because it plays well with the rhyme of the preceding and following verses.

Pregill

The treatments of Griffith (2008) and more recently Reynolds (2010: 167–185) are convincing to me. This passage is of prime interest from a methodological perspective because it illustrates the variety and scope of late antique literary materials drawn into and evoked by Qur'ānic discourse, repurposed in pursuit of its particular goals and message. The clear Syriac precursors for the story of the *aṣḥāb al-kaḥf* are particularly interesting given the compelling argument of van Bladel (2008) about the dependence of the subsequent narrative about Dū'l-Qarnayn on the *Syriac Alexander Legend* and the particular time and place the latter seems to have been produced. The proximate sources of both of the main narratives in the *sūra* seem unusually transparent.

Vv. 21–26: A striking expression of intertextual self-consciousness; those who have tarried uselessly over superfluous details of the story are condemned, while believers are enjoined to cleave to the clear essence of the story's message and not investigate the obscurities too deeply (cf. Q 3:??). The pioneering study of Madigan (2001) gives us a clear idea of the Qur'ān's self-conception, but a comprehensive examination of inner-Qur'ānic hermeneutics – that is, of the metatextual passages in

which the Qur'ān explicitly instructs its audience about how it should be approached and interpreted – is still a clear desideratum in the field.

The famous command to never say “I will do it tomorrow” without adding “God willing!” has an obvious precedent in James 4:13–16, where the context is likewise an admonition against valuing one’s own power and autonomy over God’s determination of everything (the theme of knowledge providing the critical link to the story of the *aṣḥāb al-kaḥf*). In James, the warning is specifically against saying “We will go to a certain town and spend a year there” – ironic, since the sleepers may have had such plans, and yet spent far more than a year in the cave.

Reynolds

The dog (v. 18) is a brilliant example of how closely connected the Qur'ān is to the Christian culture of the late antique Near East. In Jacob of Serugh’s (d. 521) account of the Seven Sleepers of Ephesus he presents them as lambs, threatened by a wolf (the devil) but protected by the good shepherd (Christ) who “left a *watcher* to be the guardian of their limbs” (Guidi 1885: 20). One suspects (in light of the metaphor employed) that the watcher would be a guard dog. Sure enough the pilgrim Theodosius—who traveled to the region of Ephesus in 530 – describes Ephesus as the city of “the seven sleeping brothers, and the dog Viricanus at their feet” (Theodosius 1893: 16).

Rippin

It is hard to avoid the impression that vv. 25 and 26 are out of place here. V. 26 picks up directly on the disputation theme of v. 22, whereas vv. 23 and 24 at best might be viewed as wanting to leave the resolution of all disputes – especially those regarding the future – to God. But vv. 23 and 24 seem to fit better with what comes after, verses which seem to be providing general guidance in their moral impact and then moving into the picture of the hereafter. The relationship between v. 25 and v. 26 also needs considering: is v. 26 a revision of v. 25 (as Bell [1991: I, 486 (=v. 25)] suggests) or is this a dispute between some people who say it was 300 years and others who say it was 309?

Stewart

The rhyme-words *hudā* (v. 13) and *ḡadā* (v. 23) do not match the form of the rhyme words in the other verses, which are mostly of the pattern *fa'alā*, sometimes *fa'ilā*, *fu'ulā*, with the accent on the first syllable, the ante-penultimate in the verse. However, *hudā* and *ḡhadā* would have to have the accent on the penultimate, unless that they are combined as far as accent is concerned with the previous words. This is not entirely farfetched, because it clearly occurs in *mā-hiyah* and *awḥā-lahā* elsewhere. But is the text meant to be read *dālika-ḡadā*, with one accentual contour, or even

less likely *zidnāhum-hudā*? Another alternative is to suggest that these are not, in fact, intended to be the endings of verses, so perhaps they should be joined to the following verses thereby removing the problem.

For the same reason, the final word in v. 18 *ru' bā* should be read *ru'ubā* instead.

One must supply medial vowels in order to create the appropriate rhyme and rhythmical form.

In v. 22 mention of different numbers of sleepers and their dogs suggests an awareness of alternative or competing versions of the story.

In v. 25 *talāt mi' at sinīna* This phrase not idiomatic, even in the Arabic dialects. It strongly suggests that the text is drawing on a text written in another language. In this case, the idea that there are traces of another language behind passages of the Qur'ān, just as Aramaic usage is detectable in the Greek of the New Testament, seems justified. The mention of 309 years is another indication of a close connection. The other versions of the story have many different numbers of years, but most of them are 300 and something.

Tesei

Within the story of the Companions of the Cave, the Qur'ān refers twice (vv. 12, 19) to the common topos about the impossibility to correctly perceive the length of time between death and the resurrection (cf. Q 2:259; 10:45; 17:52; 20:103–104; 23:112–114 30:55; 46:35). The idea that the dead fall completely unconscious until the Day of Judgement is strictly connected to the doctrine of the sleep of souls taught by late antique Syriac theologians (cf. Andrae 1955: 165–7; O'Shaughnessy, 1969: 69–70). In particular, it is worth remarking that a few years before the period assumed for Muḥammad's preaching, Babai the Great (d. 628) referred to the miracle of the Seven Sleepers to illustrate his doctrine about the soul's dormant state (1912: 30–31). As in the case of other Syriac writers (e.g., Ephrem and Narsai), in Babai's teaching the belief in the soul's sleep is intimately connected to his strong affirmation of the physical resurrection of the body on the Day of Judgment. Babai opposes his creed to Ḥenana of Adiabene (d. 610), whom he polemically accuses of professing Origenist doctrines and to deny “not only the resurrection of Our Lord's body, but also the general resurrection of the body of all men” (1915: 195). What is interesting is that the Qur'ān refers to the same miracle of the Sleepers with much the same theological purposes: to illustrate the post-mortem condition of the dead – characterized by a complete oblivion – and to affirm the final resurrection of the body. Indeed, in the account of the Companions of the Cave the aim to demonstrate God's ability to resuscitate the dead is evident (cf. v. 21). It might also be observed that the Qur'ān often refers to the topos of the post-mortem forgetfulness in passages that specifically argue against the denial of the resurrection. Thus, it seems that not only the Qur'ān refers to a theological concept very similar to that of the sleep of souls taught by the Syriac theologians, but that it also uses it with roughly the same theological and po-

lemical purposes, namely as an answer to those who deny the reality of the physical resurrection.

Toorawa

Sidney Griffith (2008: 125–127) has dealt masterfully with the question of the meaning of the hapax, *al-raqīm* (v. 9), namely “inscription” (or even “tablet”). As for the hapax *fağwa* (v. 17), this refers to a part of the cave, where the wondrous sleep took place, rendered by the form-hapax *ruqūd* (v. 18, “asleep”); the only other attestation of this root being *marqadinā* (“resting-place”) at Q 36:52. Hapaxes are often to be found in close proximity, even in the same verse: this is the case with the strict hapax, *ayqāz* (“awake”), which also appears in v. 18.

Several rhyme-words in this passage are also of interest, all hapaxes of one sort or another

‘*ağabā* in v. 9 is reprised in v. 63;

rašadā in v. 10 is reprised in v. 24;

‘*adadā*, *amadā* and *šaṭaṭā* also appear in Q 72;

kaḍibā in v. 15 reprises v. 5, and is also in Q 72;

mirfaqā is a form-hapax, but *murtafiqā*, formed from the same R-F-Q root, appears in vv. 29 and 31;

muršidā in v. 17 is a form-hapax;

aḥadā in v. 19 is reprised in v. 22.

Younes

Devin Stewart brings up an interesting point about the rhyme scheme of the verses in this passage, with the *fa'alā* (*fa'ilā*, *fu'ulā*) pattern found in all of them except vv. 13, and 23. It is worth noting that these two verses play the same role: interrupting the flow of the story with the insertion of a lesson or a moral about piety.

This suggests that the passage may in fact consist of two layers, with the first layer forming the original story, and the second the addition of pious lessons to be drawn from it (*those who believe will receive more guidance from Allah*, and *don't say “I am doing something tomorrow”* [since everything is in the hands of Allah].)

Zellentin

The magisterial article by Griffith (2008) has shown the famous Qur'ānic story of the sleepers to have many points of contact with the respective Christian tradition, which heralds the triumph of Christianity over a pagan Roman Empire. One may now go further by trying to read the Qur'ānic story in turn as a perceptive polemic against the new Christian rulers of *al-rūm*, “Rome,” substituting the Christian for the

pagan Roman Empire, and Christianity for paganism. (This would parallel a similar rabbinic technique of accusing the Roman Christian Empire as effectively remaining in the footsteps of their idolatrous forbearers, see Zellentin 2013b). A close reading of the Qur'ānic account in dialogue and contrast with the Christian one suggests a specific polemic against a concrete narrative, perhaps epitomized by the homily on the sleepers by Jacob of Serugh, and a broader polemic against the entirety of the Syriac Christian tradition on the sleepers.

Jacob of Serugh, through the eyes of a group of youths who go to sleep in Diocletian's time and wake up under Theodosius, conjures the miracle of the Christianization of Rome after the persecutions. Jacob portrays the youths as fleeing to the cave because they piously reject the "pagan" (*ḥmp'*, Bedjan 2006:53 and 73; see the comment by Pregill on QS 10 on the Qur'ānic use of the term) emperor's decree to burn incense to the idols, contrasting impiety of the pagan emperor with the piety of the Christian one. The Qur'ān, by contrast, depicts the sleepers as lamenting that "our people have taken gods besides Him" (v. 15) and as fleeing to the cave in order to dissociate themselves from "their people" and "from what they worship except God" (v. 16), formulations the Qur'ān elsewhere associates with Jesus-worship. The Qur'ān's language makes best sense if "their people" are Christian, exchanging the accusation of pagan worship for that of Christian *širk*. The Qur'ān makes it clear that while the Christian Romans may nominally worship one God, their new idolatry is to worship Jesus besides Him. It delivers its hardest blow by announcing that should "their people," i. e., the Christians, prevail over the sleepers, they would surely stone them to death, or force them back "into their *milla*, 'creed'—and then you will never be saved (v. 20)."

More broadly, the Qur'ān opens its narrative frame by indicating that an argument persists between two unnamed parties (*ḥizb*) about the number of years the youths effectively slept (v. 12), and closes it by mocking disputes about how many sleepers there were (v. 22, they include the dog!). Such differences of detail cannot of course be found within Jacob's homily. Yet vis-à-vis the Christian tradition as a whole, the Qur'ān seems to imply that the Christians miscalculated the years of sleep and engage in a futile argument about the number of sleepers, since in effect, "God knows best their number" (v. 22) and "God knows best how long they remained (v. 25)." Intriguingly, already the pre-Qur'ānic Syriac manuscripts show a wide variety of years of sleep, and can be grouped in two families arguing for seven or eight sleepers respectively, as noted by Brock (2007:16 and 20). The Qur'ān may then indeed best be understood as assuming its audience to know at least about various Christian versions of the account, and as artfully turning a central Christian narrative about the Christian triumph over pagan Rome into an anti-Christological polemic.