

Under the Sign of the Seven Sleepers

with illustrations by Dino Cavallari

The Seven Sleepers legend was spread by cult through the Christian and Muslim worlds and is still alive in Europe and the Middle East in a number of rites and pilgrimages, street names and invocations. It tells of seven Christian young men and their dog who left their town of Ephesus and hid in a cave on nearby Mt. Celion, rather than forsake their faith to worship the idols of Emperor Decius. The Emperor's soldiers persecuted their families and thereby found their hiding place and sealed them into suffocate. Over a century later according to Christian tradition, over three centuries later according to Muslim tradition, they were awakened by God and came forth and were seen by Ephesus townspeople. They were venerated thereafter as pre-figures of the Resurrection.

The sources used are Koran 18; Legenda Aurea; a Breton Gwerz; L. Massignon, Les sept dormants d'Ephese en Islam et en Chretiente, Paris, 1955-1961.

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