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Qur'ānic Stories in Light of Structural Coherence and Theological Objectives: A Critique of the Claim of Influence from Jewish, Christian, and Global Folklore

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ABSTRACT

This study employs a qualitative methodology, drawing on library and documentary sources to conduct a comparative analysis of the Qur'ānic account of the Companions of the Cave in Surah al-Kahf alongside non-Qur'ānic narratives. The primary aim is to challenge Donner's assertion that the Qur'ānic story was influenced by popular tales. This research further examines how the motif of the Sleepers of the Cave—a recurring theme in Greek, Jewish, and Christian mythology as well as global folklore—is rendered with unique originality in the Qur'ānic narrative. The Companions of the Cave are not only integrally connected to other narratives within the surah but also harmonize with the broader thematic and theological objectives present in other Qur'ānic chapters, reflecting the historical context and prophetic biography. However, due to the extensive influence of exegetical traditions shaped by *Isra'iliyyat* (Judeo-Christian sources), some Jewish and Christian elements have permeated Islamic literature despite the Qur'ānic account's distinctive conciseness and internal coherence. A common motif among these various traditions is the exploration of life, death, and resurrection. Yet, in Surah al-Kahf, this motif is intricately intertwined with fundamental Islamic teachings—particularly monotheism (*tawḥīd*), prophethood (*nubuwwah*), and resurrection (*maʿād*)—as well as the central themes of the surah itself. Such thematic unity and depth are notably absent in Jewish and Christian versions of the narrative.

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1. Introduction

The motif of sleep is a recurring theme in world literature—and by extension, in myths, epics, theological narratives, and folk tales. It often involves an individual or group who sleep for a definite or indefinite period before returning to life. The idea that a living being spends part of their waking life in sleep or dreams for various reasons appears in diverse forms across the myths, legends, epics, and folk traditions of different cultures. This sleep frequently represents a form of temporary death, transporting the sleeper from the realm of the living to that of the dead before their eventual return. The crucial distinction lies in the transformation that occurs during this journey: the sleeper often gains new insights or a deeper understanding of themselves and the world upon awakening. In most cases, this newfound awareness stems from revelations or mystical experiences encountered through sleep and dreams.

In the Epic of Gilgamesh, after the gods—angered by Ishtar's rejected marriage proposal—condemn Enkidu to death, Gilgamesh embarks on a visionary dream journey to the underworld, where he encounters the spirits of the dead, including Enkidu. In Greek mythology, Persephone spends six months in the world of the living and six in the underworld, symbolizing the cyclical nature of life and death. In Washington Irving's tale Rip Van Winkle, Rip and his dog vanish into the Catskill Mountains before the American Revolution. He falls asleep and awakens twenty years later to a dramatically changed world: his wife has died, his daughter is married, and society has been transformed. Similarly, in Henrik Ibsen's play Peer Gynt, the protagonist falls asleep in the Rondane Mountains and awakens to a changed reality (Act II, Scene IV). In Charles Perrault's tale Sleeping Beauty, a princess is cursed into a hundred-year slumber, only to be awakened by a courageous prince who breaks through the dense forest surrounding her. In Christian tradition, the story of the Seven Sleepers of Ephesus also explores this motif, as the sleepers awaken after a long slumber, symbolizing resurrection and spiritual renewal.

In the Qur'ān, the story of the Companions of the Cave (Surah al-Kahf) exemplifies this motif, maintaining thematic coherence with both the preceding and subsequent sections of the surah. Similarly, Surah al-Baqarah recounts the story of a man—identified in Islamic exegesis as the Prophet Uzair (Ezra)—who sleeps for a hundred years before being revived, serving as a testament to divine power and the reality of resurrection. In Islamic tradition, the Ikhwan al-Safa, a secret society of mystics and philosophers active in 4th-century Baghdad and Basra, metaphorically referred to themselves as "those sleeping in the cave of our father Adam" (Netton, 2000), further reinforcing the symbolic resonance of sleep as spiritual latency and potential awakening.

In these and numerous other examples, the sleeper typically retreats to an inaccessible location—often a cave or secluded refuge—either alone or accompanied by another person or creature. As Netton observes, "The cave is a theologeme associated with the archetype of the sleeper". The cave frequently functions as a site of spiritual transformation. It is in the Cave of Hira that the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) receives his first revelation, and in another cave that he and Abu Bakr take refuge, with a spider weaving a web at the entrance to conceal them (Surah At-Tawbah, 9:40). Netton further notes that "the history of early Islam demonstrates that the cave functioned both as a site of revelation and as a sanctuary." He also draws a cross-cultural parallel with the story of Robert the Bruce, the medieval Scottish king who, while seeking refuge in a cave on Rathlin Island, found inspiration in the persistence of a spider.

Thus, the act of sleeping in a cave emerges as a recurring motif in myths, folk literature, and, notably, theological narratives such as the Qur'ān. This enduring symbol underscores the idea that sleep—often intertwined with themes of death and rebirth—serves as a powerful medium for transformation, revelation, and renewal across diverse cultural and religious traditions. One of the clearest expressions of this motif in the Qur'ān appears in Surah al-Kahf, which, as will be discussed, reflects roots shared with Greek, Jewish, and Christian traditions. In this surah, members of the Quraysh—prompted by Jewish scholars—approach the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) with a series of probing questions: Who are the Companions of the Cave, and how long did they sleep? What is the nature of the spirit? What is the story of Dhul-Qarnayn? It is said that, due to a delay in revelation, the Prophet withholds a response for several days. Eventually, God reveals the answers through the verses of Surah al-Kahf.

Since themes of death, resurrection, and divine reward and punishment in the afterlife are among the foundational motifs of the Qur'ān, appearing in many surahs, including Surah al-Kahf, the story of the Companions of the Cave is not only consistent with the broader thematic structure of the surah but also closely interwoven with the three subsequent narratives: the parable of the two gardeners, the story of Moses and the righteous servant of God, and the account of Dhul-Qarnayn. With the rise of Biblical studies in the 19th century—particularly under the framework of "Higher Criticism"—Orientalist interest in Eastern texts, especially the Qur'ān, intensified. As a result, some scholars began to trace and analyze recurring themes, motifs, and narrative elements that appeared across the Qur'ān, the Hebrew Bible, and the New Testament. In doing so, they often sought to argue for the Qur'ān's dependence on earlier scriptures, particularly the Bible.

Among these scholars, several later European researchers concentrated on Qur'ānic narratives and examined their parallels with Biblical accounts. In this context, Alan Dundes, a prominent scholar in folklore studies, argued in his book Fables of the Ancients? Folklore in the Qur'ān (2003) that the Qur'ān not only incorporates recurring patterns characteristic of oral traditions, particularly in the form of formulaic expressions and idioms, but also draws upon folk tales widely circulated across various cultures and civilizations. Dundes contended that removing these repetitive phrases would eliminate nearly one-third of the Qur'ānic text. However, the validity of his claims remains contested. For example, the Persian translator of his book critically addresses several of Dundes' misinterpretations and inaccuracies in the footnotes (see Horri, 2020).

This article provides sufficient scope to examine the story of the Companions of the Cave—the first of the four narratives in Surah al-Kahf—in order to analyze its similarities and differences with the stories that Dundes classifies as belonging to global folktale types, particularly Type 756, titled "The Seven Sleepers," in the well-known Aarne-Thompson classification system (1961). The analysis of the other two relevant story types will be addressed in a separate context.The primary focus here is to explore how the Qur'ānic account of the Companions of the Cave aligns with or diverges from the global folktale archetype identified by Dundes. By comparing the Qur'ānic narrative with Aarne-Thompson Type 756, this study aims to highlight the unique elements of the Qur'ānic version—particularly its thematic coherence, theological depth, and integration into the broader teachings of Islam. The analysis also seeks to evaluate whether the Qur'ānic account can be meaningfully reduced to a reflection of universal folktale patterns, as Dundes suggests, or whether it exhibits distinct features that resist such classifications. The examination of the remaining story types will be reserved for future discussions.

2. Literature Review

The analysis of the content, meaning, and themes of Qur'ānic surahs, including their narratives has been an ongoing discussion since the time of the Prophet Muhammad, the first recipient of revelation, and his companions. Many interpretations of Qur'ānic verses and stories were primarily transmitted from the Prophet through several groups, notably the Sahaba (companions), Tabi'in (successors), and Tabi' al-Tabi'in (successors of the successors). Among the Sahaba, prominent figures include Abu Hurairah (d. 59 AH), Abdullah ibn Abbas (d. 68 AH), Abdullah ibn Amr ibn al-As (d. 65 AH), and Abdullah ibn Salam (d. 43 AH). From the Tabi'in, key transmitters include Ka'b al-Ahbar (d. 32 or 34 AH), Ubayy ibn Ka'b (whose year of death is disputed), and Wahb ibn Munabbih (d. 114 AH). The intellectual contributions of these figures—especially Ka'b al-Ahbar—gave rise to a tradition in Qur'ānic exegesis broadly referred to as Isra'iliyyat.

In its broadest sense, Isra'iliyyat refers to "religious and legendary literature derived from Jewish, Christian, ancient Persian, and Near Eastern cultural traditions, which serve as sources for interpreting the Qur'ān" (Aydemir 1985, 29). Muhammad Qasimi (2005) identifies two main sources of Isra'iliyyat. The first is the distorted books of the Jews and Christians, particularly the Old Testament, along with the myths and fabricated narratives introduced by newly converted People of the Book. In Jewish tradition, in addition to the Pentateuch, Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy, the Talmud is also considered a major source. The Talmud, which comprises Jewish laws, traditions, historical accounts, and literary heritage, also contains numerous legendary tales. Qasimi argues that the fabricated stories within the Talmud became the primary source of Isra'iliyyat that eventually infiltrated Qur'ānic exegesis (p. 21).

Notably, many of these narrators, particularly from the Tabi'in and Tabi' al-Tabi'in, did not merely transmit Talmudic legends but also infused them with their own imaginative interpretations, often disseminating them in mosques during the Umayyad period (ibid). Tamim Dari (2000) notes that after the Prophet's passing and during the era of the Rashidun Caliphs, certain Jewish and Christian narrators—who outwardly professed Islam—actively spread Isra'iliyyat. These fabricators of hadith and storytellers were even granted permission by the caliphs to narrate stories an hour before the Friday prayer. In doing so, they sought to weave their personal beliefs and ideological perspectives into the form of religious tales. Over time, this practice became widespread, with these storytellers substituting authentic Islamic teachings with their own fabricated accounts, even in religious settings such as mosques (p. 51).

Beyond these comprehensive commentaries, several monographs on Qur'ānic narratives have been written in recent decades, offering fresh perspectives on the subject. These include:

1. *Al-Fann al-Qasasi fi al-Qur'ān al-Karim* (*The Art of Storytelling in the Noble Qur'ān*) by Muhammad Ahmad Khalafallah (1975);

2. *Approaches to Qur'ānic Interpretation* (*Ruhiyyat al-Tafsir*) by Muhammad Abed al-Jabri (2014);

3. *Understanding the Qur'ān* (*Fahm al-Qur'ān*) by Muhammad Abed al-Jabri (2021), which explores Qur'ānic narratives from newer critical perspectives.

These works reflect a broader shift in modern Qur'ānic studies toward more analytical and contextual approaches, distancing themselves from the uncritical adoption of *Isra'iliyyat*. Instead, they emphasize the Qur'ān's internal coherence, literary depth, and theological significance, offering fresh insights into its narratives and their relevance to contemporary Islamic thought.

Regarding the story of the Companions of the Cave, numerous sources and books have been written. Among them is Sattari (1997), who extensively examines both Islamic and Christian narratives related to the Companions of the Cave, offering a symbolic-mystical interpretation of the story. Edward Gibbon, referring to Syriac sources of the tale as recounted by James of Sarug, suggests that the Prophet may have become acquainted with this story during his journey to Syria and the Levant (p. 1330). Mustafa Njozi (2005), in his monograph on the sources of the Qur'ān, discusses the "religious illusion theory" and argues that the precise number of years the Companions of the Cave stayed (309 years) results from the calculation of lunar months, and cannot be a product of the Prophet's imagination but rather has a divine origin (p. 55). Some sources, such as Hosseini (2009), have also analyzed the term "cave" itself and explored its symbolic, allegorical, and mystical meanings. Other scholars, including Netton (2000), have examined Surah Al-Kahf from a semiotic perspective.

Several researchers have also studied the story of the Companions of the Cave. Among them is Alan Dundes, as mentioned earlier. In his book, Dundes references other scholars who have examined this story, including Brown (1983) and Roberts (1993). Hariri (2014) has analyzed the stories in Surah Al-Kahf as a genre of miracles. Additionally, Hariri (forthcoming) has investigated the story of Moses and the righteous servant, examining its connection to folk tales and exegetical traditions. The most recent article on this topic is by Sheikh (2022), who explores the concept of time and timelessness in the story of the Companions of the Cave. Sheikh argues that the ambiguity regarding time serves as a reminder of the limitations of the human mind, even in understanding simple realities such as duration and the number of years (p. 181). This temporal ambiguity is resolved by God, who precisely mentions the duration of their stay in the cave, demonstrating that everything is under God's control. Therefore, according to Sheikh, "true guidance" can only come from God, transcending the limits of human understanding.

These studies collectively highlight the multifaceted nature of the story of the Companions of the Cave, its theological depth, and its connections to broader religious and literary traditions. They also underscore the Qur'ān's unique approach to storytelling, which integrates symbolic, allegorical, and theological dimensions to convey profound spiritual truths.

Brown (1983), who is heavily influenced by Louis Massignon, in his article *Islamic Eschatology,* compares Surah Al-Kahf to the Christian Eucharist, suggesting that it alludes to the theme of the appearance of the Mahdi (peace be upon him) and the battle with Gog and Magog, which will occur at the end of time. He also views Surah Al-Kahf as a microcosm of the entire Qur'ān, characterized by its non-linear and eschatological structure, which references symbolic figures such as Khidr, the Companions of the Cave, and Dhul-Qarnayn. According to Brown, the heart of Surah Al-Kahf lies in the distinction between appearance and reality (*zahir* and *batin*) and between interpretation (*tafsir*) and esoteric exegesis (*ta'wil*) (p. 162). In this regard, Surah Al-Kahf serves as a foundation for the fundamental distinction between *ta'wil* (esoteric interpretation), *tafsir ta'wili* (interpretive exegesis), inner meaning (*batin*), and exegesis (*tafsir*), as well as between prophecy

(*nubuwwah*), wisdom (*hikmah*), and transcendent wisdom (*hikmah muta'aliyah*). It also distinguishes between the Imam in Shi'a thought and the spiritual guide (*pir* or *murshid*) in mystical (*hikmi*) thought (p. 163).

Brown's analysis highlights the rich symbolic and eschatological dimensions of Surah Al-Kahf, emphasizing its role as a bridge between exoteric and esoteric interpretations of the Qur'ān. His work underscores the surah's significance in Islamic thought, particularly in shaping discussions around eschatology, spiritual guidance, and the interplay between outward and inward meanings in Qur'ānic exegesis. This perspective aligns with broader scholarly efforts to explore the Qur'ān's layered meanings and its relevance to both theological and mystical traditions within Islam.

3. Research Method

This study adopts a qualitative research methodology, focusing on the analysis of relevant documents and sources related to various accounts of the Companions of the Cave, with particular emphasis on the Qur'ānic narrative. The primary objective is to highlight the distinctive features of the Qur'ānic account in response to claims that it may have been influenced by earlier or external sources. This issue is particularly significant, as some scholars have noted parallels between the Qur'ānic version and other narratives—parallels that may, in part, reflect transmitted interpretations (*tafsīr naqlī*) from the generation of the Tabiʿīn (Successors of the Prophet).

However, a close reading of the Qur'ānic text reveals that, while certain similarities exist, many of which are unsurprising given the shared cultural and historical context, the Qur'ān presents a unique and inimitable rendering of the story. This article engages a range of primary and secondary sources to provide a focused, text-centered analysis of the narrative.

The study critically examines the Qur'ānic account through its textual structure, thematic coherence, and contextual significance. It also considers the historical and exegetical traditions that have influenced the reception of the story over time. Through this approach, the article aims to demonstrate the originality and theological depth of the Qur'ānic narrative, distinguishing it from its counterparts in Jewish, Christian, and folkloric traditions. Ultimately, this analysis contributes to a deeper appreciation of the Qur'ān's narrative style and its capacity to convey profound spiritual and moral insights through a distinct mode of storytelling.

4. Discussion and Analysis

4.1. The Qur'ānic Account of the Companions of the Cave

Surah al-Kahf, the 18th chapter of the Qur'ān, comprises 110 verses. The story of the Companions of the Cave appears early in the surah, spanning verses 9 to 26, and constitutes one of four central narratives within the chapter. According to widely cited reports concerning the occasion of revelation (*asbāb al-nuzūl*), the disbelievers from the Quraysh, prompted by Jewish scholars, approached the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) with a series of questions, including inquiries about the number of the Companions of the Cave and the duration of their sleep. The delayed revelation of these verses led to mockery and ridicule from the disbelievers, causing the Prophet considerable distress. In response, God revealed the relevant passages of this surah.

The chapter opens with verses 1 to 8, commonly referred to as the verses of warning (*āyāt al-indhār wa al-taḥdhīr*), which establish the surah's overarching themes. These introductory verses emphasize the clarity and integrity of the Qur'ānic message, affirming that it is free from distortion or ambiguity. They also assert God's absolute oneness, denying any notion of divine offspring, and highlight the transient nature of worldly life as a test for humankind. God's sovereign power is illustrated by His ability to transform fertile land into barren wasteland. It is against this theological and moral backdrop that the narrative of the Companions of the Cave is introduced.

The Qur'ānic account depicts a group of young believers who sought refuge in a cave to escape persecution from their disbelieving society. They earnestly prayed for God's guidance and mercy, and in response, God caused them to fall into a deep sleep that lasted for centuries. Upon awakening, the companions were unaware of how much time had passed. They sent one of their number to the city to procure food—an act that ultimately led to the revelation of their miraculous story. This narrative serves as a profound sign of God's power and imparts valuable lessons for future generations.

The Qur'ānic narrative emphasizes themes such as divine protection, the power of faith, and the concept of resurrection. It also highlights the distinctiveness of the Qur'ānic rendition, which, despite some superficial parallels with other traditions, stands apart due to its theological depth, narrative coherence, and moral teachings. This story reminds believers of God's control over time, life, and death, reinforcing central Islamic doctrines of monotheism, resurrection, and divine guidance.

By presenting the story in a concise yet profound manner, the Qur'ān distinguishes itself from versions found in Jewish, Christian, or folkloric traditions, underscoring its originality and divine origin. The narrative of the Companions of the Cave is not merely a historical or mythical account but a powerful theological story that resonates deeply with the broader themes of the Qur'ān and the prophetic mission of Muhammad (peace be upon him).

This story functions as an embedded narrative within a larger narrative framework—that of *Surah al-Kahf*, one of the 114 chapters of the Qur'ān. Within this overarching surah, the account of the Companions of the Cave contains verses that serve interpretive roles as embedded narratives themselves. The surah opens with verses 1 to 8, where God issues warnings and admonitions. Even while recounting the story of the Companions of the Cave, the Qur'ān remains focused on conveying theological aims and messages. Notably, the story employs the technique of narrative acceleration, emphasizing key events rather than providing exhaustive detail, unlike exegetical works or Qur'ānic storybooks which often elaborate extensively. This concise, condensed, and episodic storytelling is a distinctive narrative feature of the Qur'ān.

The Qur'ān directly addresses the central theme of the Companions of the Cave—worship of God, monotheism, and the rejection of polytheism—which are foundational teachings of Islam and other monotheistic faiths. It narrates how the companions sought refuge in the cave, the nature of their prolonged sleep and apparent death, and provides a brief description of their physical condition and the cave itself, noting how sunlight shone upon them from the right and receded from the left at sunset. The narrative then offers a concise account of their awakening and changed state, including how one of them is sent to the city to procure food, leading to subsequent developments. Finally, the story touches on the construction of a place of worship, the people's inquiries regarding the exact number of the Companions and the duration of their sleep, and concludes with an instruction to the

Prophet to faithfully convey the revelation, emphasizing the unalterable nature of the Qur'ānic message and the absence of any helper besides God.

This narrative structure exemplifies the Qur'ān's distinctive storytelling approach, which is both concise and profound. It deliberately avoids extraneous detail, concentrating instead on core theological and moral lessons. The story of the Companions of the Cave transcends a mere historical or mythical account, serving as a powerful reminder of God's sovereignty, the significance of faith, and the necessity of ultimate reliance on divine guidance. By embedding this story within the broader framework of Surah al-Kahf, the Qur'ān connects it to overarching themes such as monotheism, resurrection, and the transient nature of worldly life, thereby reinforcing the surah's central message and purpose.

As evident from this brief overview, the embedded narrative of God's warnings and admonitions is intricately woven into the overarching story of the Companions of the Cave. This story, in turn, forms a part of *Surah al-Kahf*, one of the chapters of the Qur'ān. While certain thematic elements—such as seeking refuge in a cave—may bear resemblance to motifs found in other traditions, particularly Jewish and Christian texts, Dundes argues that the motif of sleeping in a cave appears in pre-Qur'ānic Biblical sources and corresponds to folktale Type 756, titled *The Seven Sleepers*. Yet, the themes of sleep, slumber, and return to life are widespread and recur in the myths and epics of numerous cultures.

Accordingly, this study will first examine the mythological, Greek, Jewish, Christian, and global sources of this narrative. These sources provide a broader context for understanding the Qur'ānic account, highlighting both its unique features and its connections to universal storytelling traditions. By comparing these various versions, we can gain a deeper appreciation for the Qur'ān's distinctive approach to this motif and its theological and literary significance.

4. Mythological, Greek, Religious, and Folkloric Sources of the Sleep Motif

4.1. The Sleep Motif in the Epic of Gilgamesh

In the ancient Sumerian epic of Gilgamesh, the hero Gilgamesh embarks on a quest for immortality following the death of his close friend Enkidu. His journey takes him to the underworld, where he encounters the spirits of the dead, and then to Utnapishtim—the sole survivor of the great flood—who, along with his wife, was granted eternal life by the gods. When Gilgamesh asks Utnapishtim how to attain immortality, he is challenged to stay awake for several days and nights. Exhausted from his travels, Gilgamesh cannot resist sleep and falls asleep. Upon waking, Utnapishtim explains that immortality is reserved for the gods, not humans. However, he directs Gilgamesh to a plant at the bottom of the dark seas that can grant eternal life. After enduring great hardship, Gilgamesh finds the plant but loses it when a snake steals it while he bathes in a spring, shedding its skin afterward. Realizing that immortality is beyond human reach, Gilgamesh returns to Uruk, resolved to live the remainder of his life virtuously.

Interestingly, this story shares similarities with the tale of Alexander the Great, who sought the Water of Life. Some interpretations, including that of Abul Kalam (as cited by Ruhi), identify Alexander with Dhul-Qarnayn, whose story also appears in *Surah al-Kahf*. However, Badra'i (2005) argues that "Alexander cannot be Dhul-Qarnayn, neither in the

Jewish Bible nor in the Qur'ān" (p. 8). The motifs present in these narratives—such as the spring of eternal life; Gilgamesh bathing in the spring; the roasted fish that comes to life in the sea where Moses is to meet the righteous servant; the fish reviving in life-giving water; Alexander's journey to the ends of the earth; Gilgamesh's quest for Utnapishtim at the edge of the world; the immortality of Utnapishtim and of the righteous servant (identified in Islamic tradition as Khidr); and the relationship between Moses and Joshua—are deeply interconnected themes that enhance the complexity and richness of *Surah al-Kahf* and its four parables.

These parallels highlight the universal nature of certain motifs, such as the quest for immortality, the transformative power of sleep, and the tension between human mortality and divine eternity. However, the Qur'ānic narratives in Surah Al-Kahf reinterpret these motifs within a monotheistic framework, emphasizing themes such as divine guidance, the transient nature of worldly life, and the ultimate reliance on God. This approach distinguishes the Qur'ānic accounts from their mythological and folkloric counterparts, underscoring the Qur'ān's unique theological and literary contributions.

4.2. Greek Sources

Fender Horst (2015) argues that this story also has parallels in Greek and Roman traditions, citing the example of the 57-year sleep of Epimenides in the 3rd century BCE. Epimenides, a young man from the island of Crete in Greece, enters a cave to search for his father's lost sheep and falls asleep there for an extended period. When he wakes up, he finds that everything has changed, and he eventually learns the truth from his younger brother, who is now an old man. John Koch identifies Aristotle as the first to discuss the concept of sleepers, referencing Aristotle's *Physics*:

Time is not unchanged, for when the state of our mind has not changed, or we have not perceived its change, we imagine that time has passed. This is like the heroes of Sardis who fell asleep and, upon waking, believed that the 'now' before and the 'now' after were the same, thus eliminating the interval between them (*Physics* 4.11, 218b23–26) (cited in Fender Horst, p. 94).

However, John Koch clarifies that there is no definitive evidence to confirm that Aristotle was referring to the sleepers of Sardis. These Greek sources reflect the recurring motif of prolonged sleep followed by disorientation upon awakening, a theme that resonates with the story of the Companions of the Cave in the Qur'ān. While the details and contexts differ, the underlying concept of sleep as a transformative or revelatory experience remains consistent. The Qur'ānic narrative, however, reinterprets this motif within a monotheistic framework, emphasizing divine intervention, the power of faith, and the fleeting nature of worldly life. This distinctive approach sets the Qur'ānic account apart from its Greek counterparts, underscoring its unique theological and literary significance.

4.3. Jewish Sources

Similarly, Fender Horst (2015) references Jewish sources related to the motif of prolonged sleep, citing, for example, the story of Abimelech, a disciple of Jeremiah, who sleeps for 66 years. According to the tale, Abimelech goes outside Jerusalem to gather olives and, overcome by exhaustion, falls asleep beneath a tree. Upon waking, he believes only a short time has passed and feels drowsy, but remembering his promise to Jeremiah, he hastens back to Jerusalem. When he arrives, he finds the city completely transformed and learns

from an old man that 66 years have elapsed since Nebuchadnezzar took the inhabitants of Jerusalem—including Jeremiah—into captivity. Fender Horst argues that this story likely does not have a purely Jewish origin, as its elements align more closely with Christian traditions than Jewish ones. He suggests it may have been influenced by Greek culture, but also notes that since the story appears in various forms across multiple cultures, it probably has a mixed origin rather than being exclusively Greek. Additionally, Horst cites Thompson, who classifies this story under motif 1960D and points to its global roots, a topic we will revisit later.

Similarly, Brown (1983) and Fender Horst (2015) reference other Jewish sources related to this motif. For example, they recount the story of a young man who encounters an old man planting a sapling. When the young man asks how long it will take for the tree to bear fruit, the old man replies, "77 years." Due to unforeseen circumstances, the young man falls asleep there and awakens to find an old man harvesting fruit from the tree. To his amazement, he learns that this man is the grandson of the original planter and that 77 years have passed. Through close analysis, Fender Horst traces the origins of this story back to the 1st century BCE, noting that it cannot predate the second destruction of the Jerusalem Temple in 70 CE. Consequently, Fender Horst suggests that these two stories likely emerged around the same time, between the 2nd century BCE and the 1st century CE (p. 104), concluding that it is difficult to ascertain which story came first.

In summary, Fender Horst identifies several commonalities among these stories and Jewish sources: all are linked to the destruction of the Jerusalem Temple; all depict a complete transformation of Jerusalem; all emphasize the sleepers' perception of a brief slumber despite the passage of decades; and while the places of sleep vary—one in a cave, another by the roadside, and a third under an olive tree—they share the central motif of sleeping and awakening after approximately 66 or 70 years (ibid.). Notably, Al-Tha'labi's *Qisas al-Anbiya* (Stories of the Prophets) recounts two similar stories about the Prophet Ezra, described as "among the descendants of the prophets and a prominent figure of the Israelites" (p. 350), a narrative also alluded to in Surah Al-Baqarah, verse 259.

These Jewish sources underscore the recurring theme of prolonged sleep and the ensuing disorientation upon awakening, often connected to significant historical or religious upheavals. While the Qur'ānic narrative of the Companions of the Cave shares thematic parallels with these accounts, it reinterprets the motif through a distinctly monotheistic lens—highlighting divine intervention, the power of faith, and the transient nature of worldly life. This theological and literary approach sets the Qur'ānic story apart from its Jewish counterparts, underscoring its unique significance within Islamic scripture.

4.4. Christian Sources of the Story

As reported by Fender Horst (2015), in the mid-13th century CE (7th century AH), the Dominican friar Jacobus de Voragine compiled and edited his famous work *Legenda Aurea* (The Golden Legend) in Latin. This work, of which nearly a thousand medieval Latin manuscripts survive, consists of a collection of hagiographies of Christian saints and short treatises on Christian feasts, comprising 175 chapters (p. 93). According to Sattari (1997), the original story was likely written in Latin, translated into Greek and Syriac, and then retranslated into Latin by Gregory of Tours (d. 595 CE) (p. 6). Sattari argues that this story entered Islamic tradition through the Syriac version written by Jacob of Sarug (521-452 CE). The story of the Seven Sleepers of Ephesus, as recounted in *The Golden Legend*, is as follows:

During the persecution of Christians under Emperor Decius (around 250 CE), seven pious young men took refuge in a cave near Ephesus and fell into a deep sleep for an extended period. When they awoke, they believed they had only slept for a short time. One of them was sent to the city to fetch food. Upon entering the city, he found it completely transformed: the buildings had changed, people spoke openly of Christ, and crosses hung on the city walls. Eventually, he learned that the current era was that of Emperor Theodosius, not Decius, and that they had slept for nearly 372 years. The arrival of these seven sleepers sparked celebrations in which even the emperor participated. All who saw these young men thanked God for the miracle, and the cave became a pilgrimage site for many years.

In summary, Fender Horst argues that if we consider the stories related to the destruction of the Jerusalem Temple to have Jewish origins, it is undeniable that Christian scribes were aware of and heavily influenced by these Jewish sources when crafting the story of the Sleepers of Ephesus (p. 110). The Jewish sources of the story are linked to the destruction of the Jerusalem Temple and the exile of the Jews to Babylon, while the Christian source is tied to the persecution and martyrdom of early Christians under Decius. According to both Jewish and Christian sources, the place of sleep is a cave in or near a mountainous area. Both traditions emphasize the return to the city and the astonishment at its complete transformation. In both, there is a dialogue between the sleepers and the city's inhabitants. In both, the sleeper believes they have lost their senses and are disoriented. Fender Horst concludes that by the mid-5th century CE, stories derived from Jewish sources must have been familiar enough to Christian scribes that they sought to adapt them for Christian purposes. In this sense, the story of the Sleepers of Ephesus is essentially the same as the stories derived from Jewish sources (p. 111).

These Christian sources highlight the adaptation and reinterpretation of earlier motifs within a new religious context. The Qur’ānic narrative of the Companions of the Cave, while sharing some similarities with these stories, reinterprets the motif within a monotheistic framework, emphasizing divine intervention, the power of faith, and the transient nature of worldly life. This approach distinguishes the Qur’ānic account from its Christian counterparts, underscoring its unique theological and literary significance.

4.5. Islamic Sources of the Story

As previously mentioned, the core of the story is what the Qur’ān has revealed in a concise and distinctive manner, organically connected to the overall thematic and structural framework of Surah Al-Kahf and the Qur’ān as a whole, as well as to the era and biography of the Prophet. However, from the very beginning of the Qur’ān’s revelation, attention to the interpretation, explanation, and clarification of its verses, especially those related to narratives, has been a central focus. Due to the lack of written sources, many of these interpretations, sayings, and narrations were transmitted orally from the Prophet and, by extension, through his successors (*Tabi'in*) and their successors (*Tabi' al-Tabi'in*). Among these, some narrators and exegetes, primarily converts to Islam from among the *Tabi'in*, took the opportunity to utilize Jewish and Christian sources in interpreting and explaining Qur’ānic verses, particularly in elaborating on its narratives. Thus, the commentaries or explanations available for the stories in Surah Al-Kahf, especially the Companions of the Cave, are derived from these exegetes and have subsequently entered the tradition of Qur’ānic exegesis in later centuries.

However, in more recent commentaries, such as those by Islahi, Sayyid Qutb, and Tabatabai, rational interpretations based on the internal unity and thematic coherence of the

surah itself have been presented. As Mir (1986) reports, Tabatabai (vol. 13:263) considers the "purpose" of the surah to be the affirmation of monotheism (*tawhid*) and the encouragement of piety and fear of God. Sayyid Qutb (vol. 4:2257) identifies the "axis" of the surah as the reform of beliefs, perspectives, and values by referring to its teachings and doctrines. Islahi (vol. 4:9) views the "pillar" of the surah as twofold: a warning to the Quraysh that wealth and power should not lead them to arrogantly deny the truth, and an instruction to Muslims to remain steadfast in their confrontation with the Quraysh, promising them salvation. Regarding the themes of the surah, Islahi writes:

The story of the Sleepers in the Cave refers to God's assistance to a group of believers and their deliverance from oppressors. The parable of the two gardens speaks of the fate of those whom worldly wealth distances from the true source of wealth, which is God. The story of Adam and Satan compares the Quraysh's disregard for God to Satan's disregard for God and warns the Quraysh of the consequences of this neglect. The story of Moses highlights the virtue of patience and submission to God's wise decree. The story of Dhul-Qarnayn speaks of a correct perspective that material success brings to a person—not pride and arrogance, but humility and submission (cited in Mir 1986: 68).

In addition to these two primary types of exegesis—the early, predominantly narrative-based (*naqli*) interpretations and the later, predominantly rational (*aqli*) ones (for an overview of these two types, see Saeed 2018)—there are also commentaries that blend both approaches. For example, some European scholars have attempted to offer alternative interpretations of this surah while considering both narrative and rational exegesis. Among them are Brown (1983) and Roberts (1993), who also refer to Islamic sources regarding the Companions of the Cave. As mentioned earlier, Brown (1983), following Massignon (1969), describes Surah Al-Kahf as "Islamic eschatology" and seeks to explore various perspectives, particularly on terms such as *zahir* (apparent) and *batin* (hidden), *nabi* (prophet) and *wali* (saint), and the Shi'a concept of the Imam and the Sufi concept of the spiritual guide (*pir* or *murshid*). He also outlines a Shi'a interpretive perspective related to this surah, especially concerning the Companions of the Cave. After providing a complete English translation of Surah Al-Kahf, Brown first highlights its connections with Jewish and Christian sources and then establishes links between the Companions of the Cave, Moses, the righteous servant, Joshua, Elijah, Khidr, Dhul-Qarnayn, Alexander, Gog and Magog, the end-time community, and the prophecies of Ezekiel and the Book of Revelation about the end times (p. 160).

These Islamic sources and interpretations demonstrate the richness and complexity of the Qur’ānic narrative of the Companions of the Cave. While earlier exegesis often relied on external sources, later interpretations emphasize the Qur’ān's internal coherence and theological depth, offering fresh insights into its timeless message. This evolution in Qur’ānic exegesis reflects a broader trend toward contextual and thematic approaches that seek to uncover the Qur’ān's unique contributions to spiritual and moral discourse.

Brown argues that the Qur’ān separates the stories of Moses and Alexander from their Hebrew traditions and elevates them to a transcultural, universal, and historical-global level (p. 161). What is commonly known in Jewish tradition as the story of Moses and Joshua or Elijah and Moses is, in the Qur’ān, transformed into the story of Moses and the righteous servant (*Abd al-Salih*), introducing a new figure, Dhul-Qarnayn. Here, Brown notes that the Qur’ān, in order to establish connections with other revelatory sources, refers to the story of Moses and Joshua, which is also a global folktale type found in the Aarne-Thompson classification (p. 161). However, as previously mentioned, the Qur’ān presents its own

original account of this story and does not mention Elijah or Joshua, instead using the term "righteous servant" (*Abd al-Salih*). Dundes, in support of the idea that the Qur'ān borrowed this story from folk tales, refers to Brown's perspective, which, as we have shown, is not entirely accurate. While we have demonstrated that shared motifs are not the primary focus in the Qur'ān, the way these motifs are framed and presented in alignment with the Qur'ān's theological objectives is what matters.

Brown emphasizes that, unlike Western scholars who focus solely on the similarities between this story and global folktale types or Jewish and Christian sources, one should not limit oneself to the literal meaning of the folk tale. It is essential to look beyond, for example, what Moses sees in the boat, the ruined wall, and the killing of the young boy, and to consider the inner and esoteric meanings. Here, Brown draws attention to the terms *zahir* (apparent) and *batin* (hidden) in Islamic tradition: "The story of the Companions of the Cave led to the distinction in Islamic culture between the literal and apparent meaning of the text (*zahir*) and its deeper, esoteric meaning (*batin*). This distinction in Islamic thought refers to the difference between what appears to have happened (*zahir*) and what is actually occurring (*batin*)" (p. 162).

Thus, Brown distinguishes the Shi'a Imam from the Sufi spiritual guide (*pir*): the Shi'a Imam represents revelation and divine inspiration, while the Sufi guide represents mystical illumination and inspiration (p. 163). According to Brown, Shi'ism offers the most complex mythological interpretation of Surah Al-Kahf, as it believes that the Twelfth Imam, after the minor occultation (*ghaybat al-sughra*), entered the major occultation (*ghaybat al-kubra*) and will reappear at the appointed time, just as the Companions of the Cave returned to life after three centuries of slumber (p. 165). Brown equates the occultation of the Twelfth Imam in Shi'ism with motif D1960.2 in Stith Thompson's *Motif-Index of Folk-Literature*, which tells of a king named Barbarossa who sleeps in a mountain and will one day awaken to aid his people (p. 167).

In his continued interpretive analysis, Brown associates the number seven (the seven sleepers) with the seven Imams of Ismailism, who are said to be hidden in the cave, the "womb of Fatima" (peace be upon her), and protected by Imam Ali (peace be upon him). Alternatively, he links the rise of the Fatimids in Egypt during the 3rd and 4th centuries AH to these sleepers in the cave (ibid.).

In conclusion, Brown asserts that pious Muslims need not worry about similar elements from other traditions finding their way into this surah. Surah Al-Kahf is a perfect model of Islamic convergence. The Qur'ān is not a translation or adaptation of the legacies of Greek, Jewish, or Christian traditions. The Qur'ān does not need to borrow from other civilizations to establish a new civilization; the fact that it has been able to transform the imagination of the masses is sufficient—masses who are shaped by and shape culture and folk tales (p. 169).

(For an overview of various Muslim interpretations of this surah and the Companions of the Cave, see prominent commentaries such as *Al-Mizan*, *Noor*, *Majma' al-Bayan*, among others.)

Brown's analysis highlights the Qur'ān's ability to reinterpret universal motifs within a uniquely Islamic framework, emphasizing its theological depth and literary originality. This approach underscores the Qur'ān's role not only as a religious text but also as a transformative cultural and civilizational force.

4.6. Global Sources of the Story

As Dundes (2003) notes, the global sources of this story are classified under Type 766, titled The Seven Sleepers, in the well-known Aarne-Thompson classification (1961), described as "a miraculous sleep lasting for years." The Aarne-Thompson system also references similar stories from various cultures worldwide, including German (Brothers Grimm, No. 202), Finnish, Swedish, Irish, English, and American (notably the story of Rip Van Winkle). Citing Brown (1983:166), Dundes identifies the Jewish source of this story as motif D1960.1 (p. 265). However, Dundes points out that what Brown terms a "folktale type" is, in Thompson's classification, actually a "motif." Furthermore, Dundes argues that this motif and its associated events do not constitute a folktale but rather a "legend" containing a kernel of historical truth (p. 62).

After referencing scholars who have commented on this surah, including Louis Massignon (1969), Brown (1983), and Roberts (1993), Dundes writes that none of these scholars have highlighted the widespread circulation and transmission of this story among global folktales. However, this claim is not entirely accurate. For example, if we examine the asbāb al-nuzūl (occasions of revelation) of Surah Al-Kahf, and consider that many asbāb al-nuzūl share characteristics typical of folktales, such as adaptability, variability, and transmissibility, we find that the narrations, sayings, and occasions related to this surah were recorded in traditional commentaries long before the Aarne-Thompson classification system was developed, even if these commentaries drew extensively from Jewish and Christian sources.

In fact, it is precisely because of these fabricated *asbāb al-nuzūl* that Dundes' claim about the Qur'ān's influence from folktales—whether in recounting the story of the Cave, other stories in Surah Al-Kahf, or Qur'ānic narratives such as the story of Solomon and the ants (which Dundes likens to Type 670, *The Language of Animals*)—may be seriously questioned. A more accurate assessment would acknowledge that some themes in Qur'ānic narratives may resemble global folktales, which is natural. However, the way the Qur'ān presents these stories, in connection with the overall thematic and structural coherence of the surahs, the Qur'ān as a whole, and especially in relation to the Prophet's biography, is distinctive and unique to its storytelling style.

The Qur'ānic approach is not merely about recounting events but about embedding these narratives within a broader theological and moral framework. This method sets the Qur'ānic accounts apart from their folkloric counterparts, highlighting their originality and divine purpose. While similarities with global motifs exist, the Qur'ān's reinterpretation of these motifs within a monotheistic context underscores its unique contribution to spiritual and literary traditions.

5. Discussion

The reality is that the story of the Seven Sleepers does not appear directly in the Bible (Torah and Gospel) but is mentioned in Christian and Jewish interpretive and narrative texts, as noted by Fender Horst and others. Given the numerous Jewish and Christian manuscripts—especially from the Eastern Church tradition—and the fact that many early Islamic narrators, hadith scholars, and exegetes, including the Tabi'in and Tabi' al-Tabi'in, were Jewish converts to Islam, it is natural that some Jewish and Christian origins of the story of the Sleepers of the Cave found their way into Qur'ānic interpretations. This is particularly true because many asbāb al-nuzūl (occasions of revelation) for Qur'ānic verses,

especially the narratives, were transmitted by these individuals, leading to what is known in the exegetical tradition as Isra'iliyyat. A brief examination of some commentaries that narrate the asbāb al-nuzūl of the Qur'ānic story of the Companions of the Cave—from sources such as Ibn Ishaq, Ubayy ibn Ka'b, Wahb ibn Munabbih, and others—reveals the extensive influence of Jewish and Christian narrators and scholars.

However, Roberts (1993) argues that this story should be considered a blend of three traditions—Jewish, Christian, and Islamic—that share the common themes of life, death, and revival. What distinguishes these traditions is how the theme is framed within the context of death and resurrection: it is less prominent in the Jewish tradition, more pronounced in the Christian tradition, and dominant in the Islamic tradition. Most importantly, within the Islamic tradition—particularly in Surah Al-Kahf—this theme is organically connected to the core teachings of Islam, especially the principle of resurrection (ma'ād), the central themes of the Qur'ān, the main subjects of Surah Al-Kahf itself, and the era and biography of the Prophet.In Surah Al-Kahf, the reference to the Companions of the Cave, though concise, symbolic, and allegorical, emphasizes fundamental Islamic doctrines such as monotheism (tawḥīd), prophethood (nubuwwah), resurrection (ma'ād), the Day of Judgment, the reckoning of deeds, divine reward and punishment, the insignificance of worldly wealth and beauty, and the ultimate return to God. These themes are presented coherently and integratively within the surah, aligning with the broader theological objectives of the Qur'ān. This thematic coherence, structural unity, and integration of form and content are not found in Jewish and Christian sources. Indeed, not only is the storytelling of the Companions of the Cave unique, but the Qur'ān's theological framing of the narrative is also distinctive and unparalleled.

Returning to Surah Al-Kahf, we can further appreciate its formal and thematic brilliance along with its distinctive features. The surah's structure, centered around four parables—the Companions of the Cave, the parable of the two gardens, the story of Moses and the righteous servant, and the story of Dhul-Qarnayn—demonstrates profound interconnectedness. Each narrative reinforces the central message of the surah: the transient nature of worldly life, the importance of faith and divine guidance, and ultimate reliance on God. The Qur'ān's ability to weave these stories into a cohesive theological framework highlights its unique literary and spiritual contribution.

In conclusion, while the story of the Companions of the Cave shares certain thematic similarities with Jewish and Christian traditions, the Qur'ānic account stands apart through its theological depth, structural coherence, and integration with the broader teachings of Islam. The Qur'ān's reinterpretation of universal motifs within a monotheistic framework underscores its originality and divine purpose, making it a timeless and transformative text.

This article focuses on Dundes' perspective that certain Qur'ānic stories, such as the speaking ant in Surah An-Naml, the Companions of the Cave, Moses and the righteous servant, and Dhul-Qarnayn, are derived from specific global folktale types found across various cultures. Dundes specifically argues that the story of the speaking ant corresponds to Type 670 ("The Language of Animals"); the story of the Companions of the Cave to Type 766 ("The Seven Sleepers"); and the story of Moses and the righteous servant to Type 759 ("The Angel and the Hermit") in the Aarne-Thompson classification (1961). While it may not be surprising that some Qur'ānic themes resemble those in other literary traditions, as Dundes demonstrates, it is important to recognize that the Qur'ān—being a text that claims to guide humanity—naturally employs familiar human themes and motifs. However, the

Qur'ān's use of these motifs is not mere repetition or imitation but rather a purposeful and transformative reinterpretation within a monotheistic framework.

Dundes does not approach the Qur'ān with animosity; rather, he acknowledges in the final chapter of his book that "if God Himself emphasizes the use of parables (stories in the modern sense) to guide and instruct humanity, we mortals are in no position to deny it or reject the presence of stories in the Qur'ān" (p. 71). However, the suggestion that the Qur'ān borrows directly from folktales risks undermining its originality and divine nature. Therefore, Dundes' claims warrant careful reconsideration and reevaluation.

This reevaluation is necessary for two reasons. First, the Qur'ān openly employs various forms of speech, thought, and examples to convey its messages. It even uses the example of a gnat or something smaller (Surah Al-Baqarah). As evident from its verses, the Qur'ān—especially through its parables—uses familiar, ordinary, and even mundane examples and objects from daily life. These are used purposefully and effectively, in alignment with the thematic and theological objectives of the surahs. Among these examples, some may resemble narratives found in other sources, particularly Biblical texts. This similarity is not surprising, as the ultimate source of all revealed scriptures is God. It is as if God, as the omniscient author, reiterates His messages in different forms across various scriptures. Therefore, if the motif of the Sleepers in the Cave resembles similar themes in Biblical commentaries, it is not particularly unusual.

Second, if these messages, sayings, and stories—or, as Dundes calls them, folktales—resemble themes in other scriptures, one possible reason is the influence of Jewish and Christian interpretive traditions rather than direct borrowing by the Qur'ān or the Prophet. What matters most in the Qur'ān is the manner in which these messages are presented, which is unique and distinctive in several important ways.

Divine Origin and Authenticity: These stories or messages are directly revealed to the Prophet through the Angel Gabriel, and the Prophet transmits them without addition or omission. Thus, these stories have Qur'ānic authenticity and are not borrowed from any external source.

Theological Purpose: These stories are not for entertainment or amusement but serve the Qur'ān's theological objectives. The Qur'ān does not aim to entertain through storytelling but to convey profound spiritual and moral lessons. At the same time, God describes Himself as the best of storytellers (*ahsan al-qasas*), as seen in Surah Yusuf (12:3), which refers to both the best stories and the best method of storytelling. This dual function explains why more than a quarter of the Qur'ān consists of storytelling, with God presenting the best and most diverse narratives.

Contextual and Structural Coherence: These stories, which are among the best of their kind, are placed within surahs that align with their theological goals. God, as the storyteller, selects portions of a story that fit the context and requirements of each surah. This selective narration often involves repeated phrases and idioms, a feature of Qur'ānic expression known in Islamic rhetoric as *tasreef fi al-bayan* (variation in expression), which distinguishes Qur'ānic style from monotonous repetition. These phrases are specific to each surah and cannot be removed, as Dundes suggests, without disrupting the surah's structure. Moreover, these narrative fragments are intertextually connected within the surah and across other surahs, forming complementary clusters. For example, Surah Al-Kahf forms a triad with Surahs Al-Isra and Maryam, functioning in a complementary relationship.

Historical and Prophetic Context: These narrative fragments are not only connected to the overall themes of the surahs and the Qur'ān but also to the historical context of the Qur'ān's revelation and the life of the Prophet (peace be upon him). For instance, Surah Al-Kahf, which contains these stories, was revealed in response to the Quraysh's challenge to the Prophet. Its themes directly address the arrogance and defiance of the disbelievers, their neglect of the Day of Judgment, their obsession with worldly wealth, and their disregard for the poor.

In conclusion, while some Qur'ānic themes may resemble global folktales, the Qur'ān's approach to storytelling is unique in its divine origin, theological purpose, structural coherence, and historical context. The Qur'ān reinterprets universal motifs within a monotheistic framework, emphasizing its originality and transformative power. This approach underscores the Qur'ān's role not only as a religious text but also as a literary and spiritual masterpiece.

6. Conclusion

In summary, this article aimed to demonstrate that Dundes' claim regarding the influence of certain Qur'ānic narratives, such as those in Surah Al-Kahf on Jewish, Christian, and particularly folkloric sources is not entirely accurate. The Qur'ānic account of stories like the Companions of the Cave is deeply rooted in the overall structure of the surah, the theological objectives of the Qur'ān, and the life of the Prophet (peace be upon him). What early Qur'ānic commentators and narrators derived from these stories and incorporated into their transmitted (naqli) interpretations was often influenced by Jewish and Christian sources, particularly Isra'iliyyat.

More importantly, modern rational (aqli) interpretations have introduced new dimensions to these stories, some of which were discussed in this article. Future research could examine the stories of Surah Al-Kahf in relation to one another and to other parts of the surah, including the story of Satan and Adam, which also appears here. Such analysis would further highlight the Qur'ān's unique approach to storytelling, its thematic coherence, and its ability to reinterpret universal motifs within a monotheistic framework.

The Qur'ān's narratives are not mere repetitions or borrowings from other traditions but transformative reinterpretations that serve its divine purpose. By embedding these stories within a broader theological and historical context, the Qur'ān distinguishes itself as a unique and unparalleled text—both spiritually and literarily. This approach underscores the Qur'ān's originality and its role as a guide for humanity, transcending cultural and temporal boundaries.

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