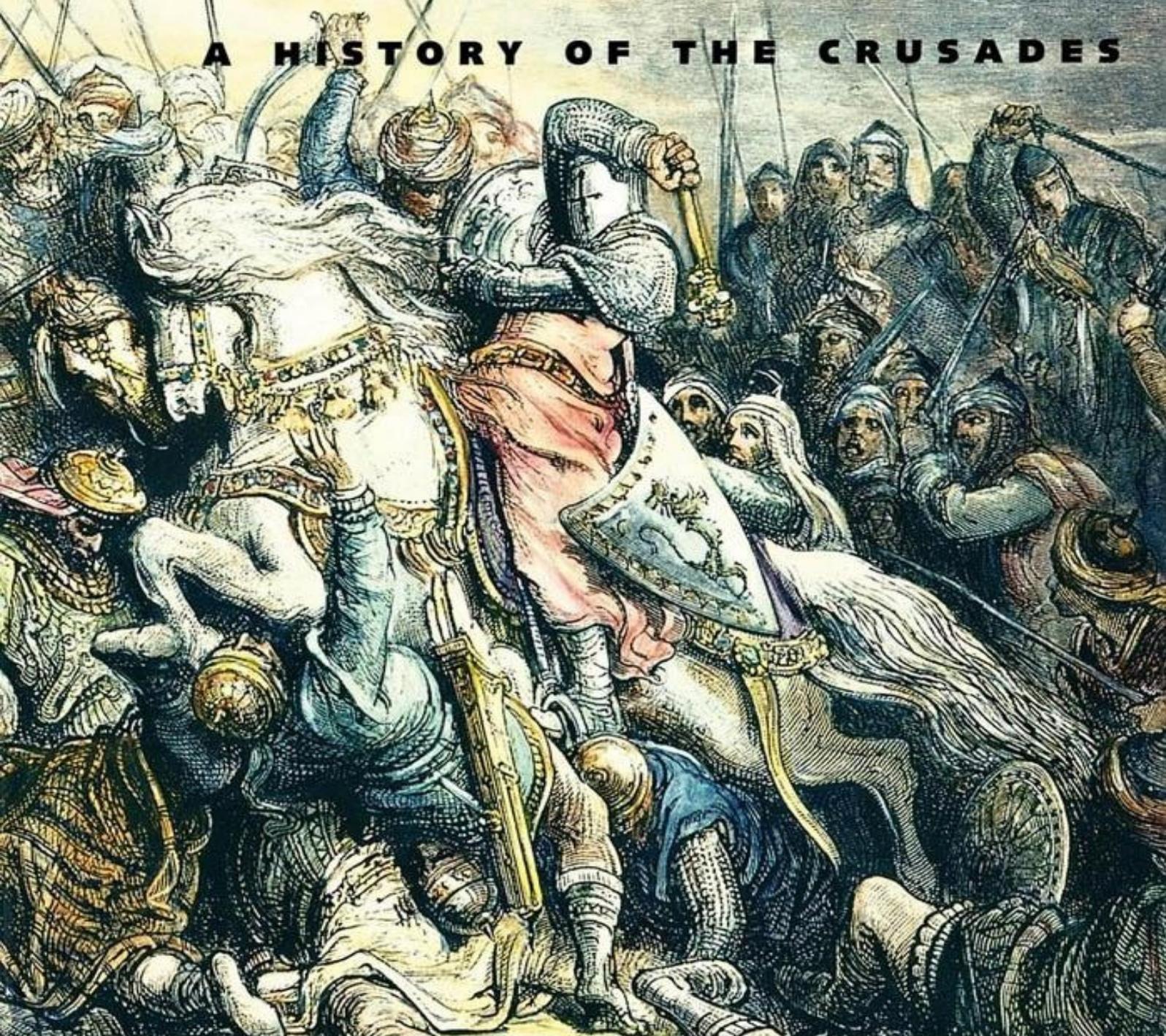


ROBERT PAYNE

The
DREAM
and the **TOMB**

A HISTORY OF THE CRUSADES



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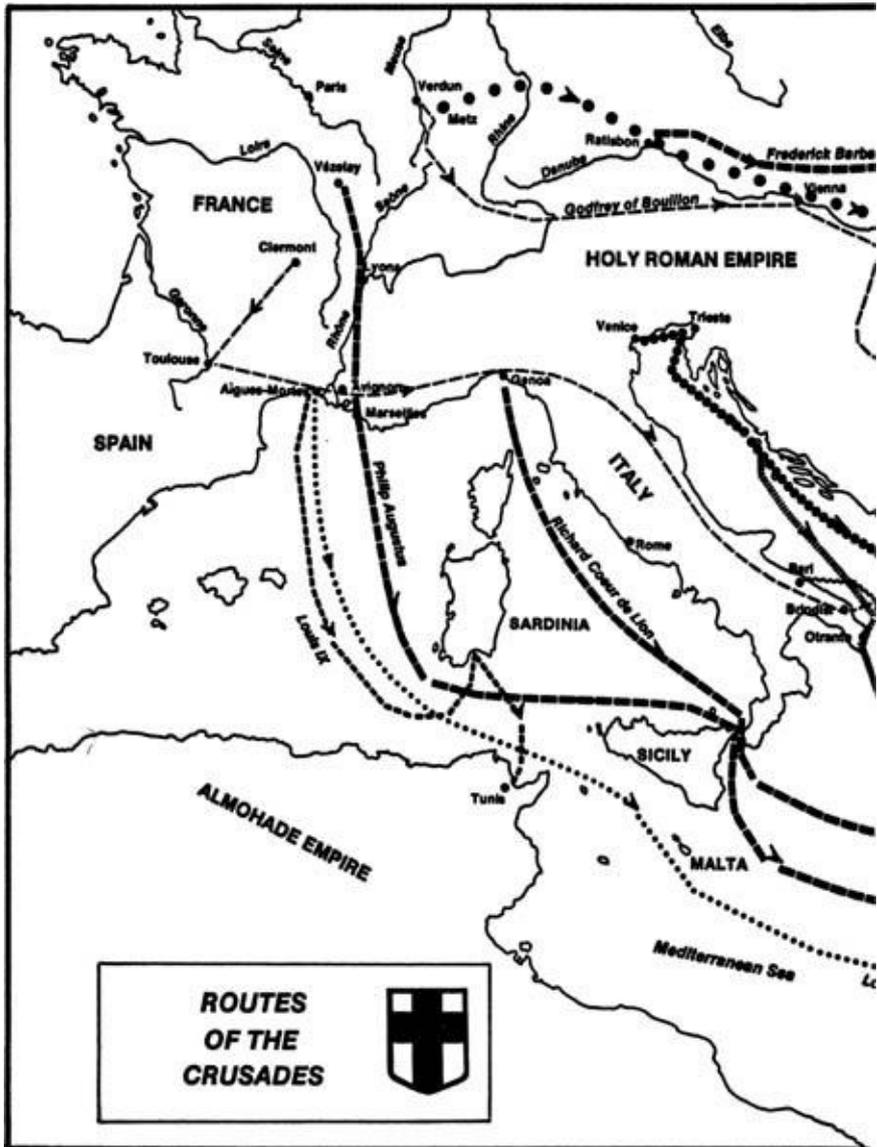
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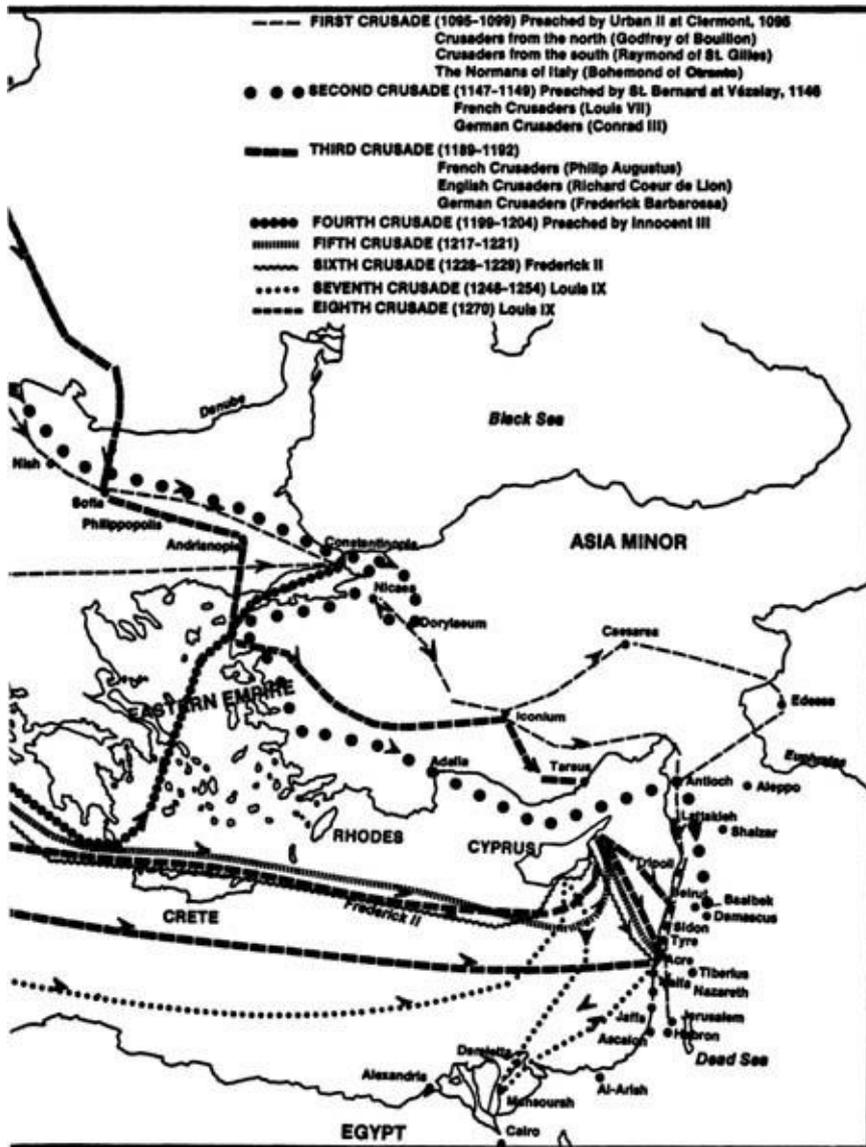
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**THE DREAM
AND THE TOMB**





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A History of the Crusades

Robert Payne



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**This book is dedicated to
THE MARTYRS OF ALL WARS**

Acknowledgments

My late husband, Robert Payne, spent close to seven years researching this book, reading both Western and Arab historians. It is, therefore, an unbiased approach to a most complex subject; it is also a vivid and colorful panorama of the first great confrontation between the Muslim East and the Christian West. In an earlier book, *The Holy Sword*, published in 1959, Robert wrote: “Out of Arabia there came a proud and august people who in their time conquered most of the known world, and there is still too little about them in our history books. Sooner or later we shall have to learn to live with them.”

I hope *The Dream and the Tomb* will help people of all faiths to learn to understand each other and to live with each other. For my husband, this book was a work of love and hope.

It is not often that a major book is published so soon after an author’s death. If there are any inconsistencies or omissions, I hope the reader will understand.

I am extremely grateful to Sol Stein and to Benton Arnovitz for overseeing the whole project. I am also very grateful to Patricia Day and to Toby Stein for doing a superb job of editing. My sincere thanks also go to everyone concerned for their help and support. In particular, I would like to thank The Arts of Asia Foundation and The Very Reverend James Parks Morton, Dean of the Cathedral of St. John The Divine.

Sheila Lalwani Payne

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I

THE VOICE FROM THE TOMB

The Dream and the Tomb

IN their hundreds of thousands the Crusaders marched to the Holy Land, some on foot, some on donkeys, some in carts, some in armor and on well-caparisoned horses. Perhaps a quarter of them died on the journey and another quarter died in the wars, and many of them suffered atrociously to defend the small strip of seacoast they called the Kingdom of Jerusalem, a kingdom they held for less than a hundred years. They called themselves *peregrini Christi*, pilgrims of Christ, and in their eyes the miseries of the enterprise were outweighed by the splendor and the glory. They came from all walks of life: kings and emperors, farm boys and laborers, archbishops and priests, knights and foot soldiers. In wave after wave these armored pilgrims were swept forward to the holy cities of the Holy Land, and most especially to Jerusalem, the Church of the Holy Sepulchre and the tomb of Christ.

Landowners abandoned their land, peasants allowed themselves to be uprooted, princes plundered their treasuries in order to make the pilgrimage; and sometimes in old age they would return to Europe in feeble health, having spent half a lifetime in Saracenic prisons, proud and happy that they had been to the holy places. The odds were always against them, and some of their happiness derived precisely from the pact they had made with Christ and from the fact that they had accomplished an impossible task. Jerusalem beckoned them; they answered the call, for her voice was loud and insistent. They marched off to a country they thought they knew intimately from reading the New Testament or hearing it read to them, and they discovered very early that the Holy Land resembled no country they had ever seen or ever dreamed of. The desolation of the Judaeian wilderness came to them like a shock on exposed nerves; nowhere in Europe was there a wilderness like it. Nor, when they first arrived, had they the faintest inkling how to deal with the Saracens, who were sensual to an extraordinary degree and at the same time unbelievably hard, cruel, and ruthless. They entered an unknown land inhabited by an unknown people, and the strangeness of the land entered their souls.

Today, when we look back at the Crusaders, we find ourselves marveling at their audacity and gallantry and their resourcefulness in building castles and fortresses that were works of art. When we ask ourselves why they went off in the hundreds of thousands, we discover that we do not always know why they went, or what it was all about. Certainly it was not always what the scribes and chroniclers said it was about. The more we find ourselves looking at the Crusaders, the more we shall discover that totally conflicting aims and motives were involved. There was the thirst for power and the thirst for land; there was humility and pride; there was the desire for blessedness and the desire to cut the

throats of the pagans; there was malice and envy and all the remaining deadly sins. Rarely were men more sinful than when they set out to conquer the Holy Land, and rarely were they more deeply religious, more certain of their faith. Amid all the confusions and uncertainties surrounding the Crusades there existed the one absolute certainty: the Christian faith. Everything else could be argued about, but the existence of Christ as the lord of the worlds was beyond argument.

We look back at the age of the Crusades with a sense of unappeasable longing, for the world was simpler, all questions were answered, every virtue could be measured, and every vice had its appropriate penalty. The world was ordered, finite, crystal clear. However chaotic were men's lives, they fitted into an acceptable and credible pattern. Men lived the sacramental life to a degree that we can now scarcely comprehend. Christ walked by men's sides and was present in the air they breathed. One reason why it is so difficult for us to put ourselves inside the skins of the Crusaders is precisely because we lack the energy of their belief.

There was a directness in the twelfth-century mind which is lacking in our own. They were trained to it, and did not think of acting otherwise. We shall see in their wars how little they debated strategy: they were more likely to hurl themselves on the enemy than to engage in feints and ambushes or to devise elaborate stratagems. Although they were direct, logical and reasonable, they found not the slightest difficulty in believing in miracles, wonders, portents and apparitions, and the closer they came to the Holy Land the more readily they believed in them. Being simultaneously reasonable and unreasonable, they acted with an exact sense of the real world and were not in the least put out if a miracle took place in front of their eyes. They expected to see miraculous things and eagerly awaited them, while remaining the most practical of men.

Each Crusader had his own reasons for going on a Crusade; each had his own vision of what he expected to find when he reached the Holy Land. Above all, he expected to find holiness in a concrete form, something that could be seen, touched, kissed, worshipped, and even carried away. Holiness was in the pathways trodden by Christ, in the mountains and valleys seen by Christ, in the streets of Jerusalem where Christ had wandered. They had no feeling for the changing aspect of the city: the Jerusalem they saw was Christ's Jerusalem, unchanged and eternal; it never occurred to them that Jerusalem had been razed to the ground after Christ's death. The disciples had slept under the same olive trees on the Mount of Olives that the Crusaders saw. On the Mount of the Ascension they could kiss the footprint left by Christ before he ascended to heaven, and in the Church of the Holy Sepulchre they could gaze upon his tomb. All over Jerusalem there were places associated with him and with his disciples, and their closeness to these places gave them the sense of an abiding presence. He belonged to time and was outside time. Indeed, time for the Crusaders existed under two aspects: a system of dates and calendars informed them that more than a thousand years separated them from Christ, and their knowledge of Christ informed them that he was still present, that he was their contemporary, and the thousand years were as nothing.

There were fifty places in Jerusalem associated with Christ, but there was only

one they regarded with absolute reverence and awe. This was Christ's tomb. To the medieval mind Christ was most present in the empty tomb. They were not obsessed with the tragedy of his death, they rarely dwelt on the Crucifixion, and the manner of his death was perhaps the least important thing about it. What absorbed their imaginations was less the tragedy of his death than the triumph of the Resurrection. This was the supreme miracle, the miracle that gave meaning to Christian life. In this small space God, wearing the shape of a man, having died, returned to life.

The tomb therefore acquired in their imaginations a very special significance: It was the relic above all relics, the icon above all icons. Here he lay dead; here he threw off the linen bands; here he sprang into the eternal life promised to all Christians. It was almost as though the shadowy tomb was a machine generating eternal life.

There was, however, something very strange and disturbing about the tomb, which had been discovered by Bishop Macarius of Jerusalem after digging through the rubble of the ancient Roman Temple of Aphrodite. The tomb had been found, according to Eusebius, "against all hope" in A.D. 325. In that same year, the Empress Helena, the mother of the Emperor Constantine, came to Jerusalem and discovered three crosses in an underground cavern about eighty feet away from the tomb. Constantine ordered a rotunda to be placed over the tomb and a basilica to be placed over the cavern. The rotunda was called the *Anastasis*, the "Resurrection," and the basilica was called the *Martyrion*, the "Place of Martyrdom." Both were sumptuously decorated with gold and jewels, and both were razed and rebuilt several times between the Persian invasion of A.D. 614 and the arrival of the Crusaders.

When the Crusaders arrived in Jerusalem, they found only the rotunda. The tomb had vanished; there was no hollowed-out rock; there was only empty space surrounded by a jewel box of delicate columns with mosaics on the circular wall. Lamps burned perpetually over a raised slab of marble intended to represent the tomb. But in the eyes of the Crusaders the tomb was still there. For them the representation corresponded to the reality. Their faith was strong enough to permit them to believe in the physical existence of a tomb that no longer existed and therefore could not be seen. They saw it with the eyes of faith.

They saw it too with the eyes of men who had traveled far to see it. They had fought their way to it, waded through blood and suffered starvation and wounds in order to come to this place, and their faith was colored by the hardships and dangers of the journey. Having suffered so much, they found what they expected to find. If the Christian doctrine was true, if Christ was lord of the worlds and the gate of eternal life, then it was necessary for the tomb to exist. According to Pope Urban II, God willed the Crusade in order that the Holy Sepulchre should be wrested from the pagans and placed firmly in the hands of the followers of Christ. God had not willed that the tomb itself should survive. God had willed that the pilgrims should be brought into the presence of Christ's death and Resurrection, and in the minds of the Crusaders there was not the least doubt that it had happened here in this small corner of Jerusalem. They did not ask for precise outlines and verifiable shapes. They asked for Christ, for they believed in him,

and they knelt at his tomb, for they believed it could be nowhere else.

We understand the Crusaders better when we realize that, to them, the tomb was not of this world, that it was a divine mystery, and that they were the partakers of the mystery. The tomb was destroyed, and the tomb remained. Its destroyers hammered it into many pieces and the rubble was carted away, and because it was broken and scattered, the tomb lived all the more. Men seek shelter in the shade of a dream. The Crusaders found shelter in a tomb that was also a dream.

Thunder out of Arabia

IN Mecca, eight hundred miles south of Jerusalem, in a landscape as bleak and parched as the Judaeen wilderness, there existed another empty tomb. This was the *kaaba*, or “cube,” where according to Islamic tradition Ishmael and his mother, Hagar, Abraham’s Egyptian concubine, were buried. Originally built by Abraham, it was later used as a temple for the worship of Hubal, the red-faced god of power, and al-Uzza, the goddess of the morning star, together with three hundred other gods and goddesses who formed the pantheon of the Arabs before Muhammad destroyed them. Then the *kaaba* was dedicated to Allah, the One God, lord of all universes. There was nothing in it except silver lamps, brooms for sweeping the floor, and the three teakwood columns that supported the roof. Fragments of a black meteorite were inserted in the southeastern wall, and these are kissed by the faithful who walk, and run, around the *kaaba* in obedience to Muhammad’s command.

The *kaaba* is a statement of religious belief—four-square, sharp-edged, emblematic of the power believed to reside in the Arab people. Those qualities were already present in these people before the coming of Muhammad. It was their sharpness of intellect and solidness of purpose that were to make them a world power, and Muhammad was therefore justified in retaining that strange unornamented box, which had once housed so many gods, as the symbol of his own powerful faith in Allah, the One God.

The faith of Muhammad was unlike any other that existed at that time. It was compounded out of visions and dreams, the apocrypha learned along the camel routes from Mecca to Damascus, stray bits of learning and tradition, and a vast understanding of the human need for peace and salvation. The Koran, meaning “the Recitations,” reads strangely to Western ears. It is a work of fierce intensity and trembling urgency. God speaks, and what he has to say is recorded in tones of absolute authority by a mind singularly equipped to reflect the utmost subtleties of the Arabic language. The message Muhammad delivers is that God is all-powerful, his hand is everywhere, and there is no escape from him. Just as he is everywhere, so is his mercy. Into this mercy fall all men’s accidents and purposes. It is not that God is benevolent—the idea of a benevolent and helping God is foreign to Muhammad’s vision—but his mercy is inevitable, uncompromising, absolute. In this assurance Muhammad’s followers find their peace.

Muhammad ibn-Abdullah, of the tribe of Quraysh, was born in Mecca about the year A.D. 570. His father died before he was born and his mother, Amina, died when he was a child. As a youth he traveled with the caravans that traded between Mecca and Syria, and he was twenty-five when he married Khadija, a rich widow fifteen years his senior. He was about forty when he first saw visions