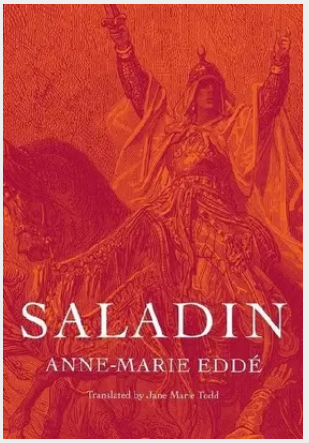
Eddé

Saladin



Working simultaneously on two levels, *Saladin* represents the best kind of biography—a portrait of a man who is said to have made an age, and the most complete account we have to date of an age that made the man. Unlike biographies that focus on Saladin's military exploits, especially the recapturing of Jerusalem from European Crusaders in 1187, Eddé's narrative draws on an incredible array of contemporary sources to develop the fullest picture possible of a ruler shaped profoundly by the complex Arabian political environment in which he rose to prominence. The result is a unique view of the Crusades from an Arab perspective. Saladin became a legend in his own time, venerated by friend and foe alike as a paragon of justice, chivalry, and generosity. Arab politicians ever since have sought to claim his mantle as a justification for their own exercise of power. But Saladin's world-historical status as the ideal Muslim ruler owes its longevity to a tacit agreement among contemporaries and later chroniclers about the set of virtues Saladin possessed—virtues that can now be tested against a rich tapestry of historical research. This tension between the mythical image of Saladin, layered over centuries and deployed in service of specific moral and political objectives, and the verifiable facts of his life available to a judicious modern historian is what sustains Anne-Marie Eddé's erudite biography, published to acclaim in France in 2008 and offered here in smooth, readable English translation.

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