

MUHAMMAD

By
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No one knows exactly when Muhammad, who was to become the Prophet of Allah, was born. It was believed to have been during the reign of Khusro Anosharwan, that is before 579, which seems probable. It was said to have been in the Year of the Elephant - the year, that is, in which the birds of the air routed the army of Abraha before Mecca - but that is certainly untrue. The precise date, arrived at by means of some highly dubious calculations, varies between 567 and 573. The most commonly accepted year is 571.

Muhammad, or Mahomet as we sometimes call him, was born in Mecca of a father called 'Abdallah and a mother whose name was Amina. He belonged on his father's side to the clan of Hashim of the tribe of Quraysh. These traditional statements, while not wholly incontestable, may reasonably be regarded as sure.

Mecca lies in a gorge in a range of mountains running parallel to the coast. The mountains are black and yellow, 'unbelievably bare, rocky crags with no scrap of soil, sharp, jagged, broken edges, sheer from top to bottom'. The valley, which runs in a north-easterly direction, has been carved out by a wadi which, in particularly violent rainstorms, still overflows from time to time, flooding the city and its shrine so that the pilgrims have to swim their way out - as happened for instance in 1950. In this arid but well-placed valley, some fifty miles from the sea, is the famous well of Zamzam. The place may have been a sanctuary of long standing. The geographer Ptolemy, in the second century, described the

region as the site of a place he called Makoraba. This could well be a transliteration of the word written in South Arabian characters (which omit the vowel sounds) as mkrb, in Ethiopic mekwerab, meaning 'sanctuary', from which perhaps, by abbreviation, we get the historical name of the city.

At some date - not known to us - Mecca became a trading centre, probably as a result of its admirable situation at the junction of a road going from north to south, from Palestine to the Yemen, with others from east to west, connecting the Red Sea coast and the route to Ethiopia with the Persian Gulf. The sanctuary ensured that the merchants would not be molested. It was held initially by the tribe of Jurhum and afterwards passed into the hands of the Khuza'a. Towards the end of the fifth century, perhaps, a strong man by the name of Qusayy succeeded either by force or trickery in gaining control of the temple. He belonged to the tribe of Quraysh, an assemblage of several clans which, through him, supplanted the Khuza'a. There may be some foundation of truth in the story that Qusayy had travelled in Syria, and had brought back from there the cult of the goddesses al-'Uzza and Manat, and had combined it with that of Hubal, the idol of the Khuza'a. It has been suggested that he may actually have been a Nabataean.

In this way, Quraysh (the name means 'shark' and may have been derived from an ancient tribal emblem) acquired an ascendancy which was to grow unceasingly; and the history of the ensuing five hundred years may be seen in the light of the expansion of this one tribe to the dimensions of a world power. Quraysh was in fact composed of a number of individual clans. They were known as the Quraysh az-Zawahir, the 'outer Quraysh', who dwelt on the periphery, and the Quraysh al-Bata'ih, who settled in the valley bottom, immediately around the well of Zamzam and the curious shrine which stood beside it. This was like a small house, in the shape of a square box, called the Ka'ba, which means the cube. The object of especial veneration was a black stone, of meteoric origin, which may have been the cornerstone. Stones of this kind were worshipped by Arabs in most parts and by the

Semitic races generally. When the young Syrian Arab Elagabalus, High Priest of the Black Stone of Emesa, was Emperor of Rome in 219, he had the holy thing transported solemnly to Rome and built a temple for it, much to the horror of the old Romans. The Ka'ba at Mecca, which may have initially been a shrine of Hubal alone, housed several idols; a number of others, too, were gathered in the vicinity.

Later tradition tells how the four chief sons of 'Abd Manaf, one of Qusayy's sons, divided among themselves the areas where trade could be developed. One went to the Yemen, another to Persia, the third to Ethiopia and the fourth to Byzantine Syria. The tale is probably only legend, but it does reflect the truth. The Banu Quraysh did everything possible to foster the commercial development of their city. As we have seen, they were assisted by outside events. By about the end of the sixth century, their efforts had been rewarded by something like a position of commercial supremacy. Their caravans travelled far and wide to the cardinal points of international trade, represented by the four areas mentioned earlier. The chief merchants of Mecca had grown very rich. Mecca itself had become a meeting-place for merchants of all nations, and a fairly large number of craftsmen were to be found there. The holy place was attracting a growing number of pilgrims, who performed complicated rituals around the Ka'ba and the other small shrines round about. Judicious marriage alliances assured Quraysh of the support of the neighbouring nomadic tribes. There can be no doubt that money and, where necessary, arms provided an added incentive for friendship. Quraysh also had a part to play in international politics. What little we know points to a basic policy of neutrality, tempered by a slight leaning towards the Christian powers, Byzantium and Ethiopia. Abraha marched against the Meccans, however, and his object may have been to break their commercial hold which was damaging South Arabia. During the period 580-590 the Quraysh were at war with the tribe of the Hawazin; a dependant of the Quraysh on one occasion killed a chieftain of the Hawazin, who was leading a caravan for Nu'man, the pro-Persian king of Hilra.

Inevitably, the Qurayshite clans were struggling for supremacy amongst themselves. The principal ones to come to the fore were the clans of Hashim and 'Abd Shams, both of whom were sons of 'Abd Manaf. Hashim's son, 'Abd alMuttalib, seems to have had the upper hand at one time, at approximately the date of Muhammad's birth; but Hashim lost it before long to the family of Umayya, the son of 'Abd Shams.

In general the Qurayshites were wise enough not to allow their internal squabbles to disrupt their unity in the face of the outside world. Decisions concerning them all were taken by a kind of senate, the mala ', an assembly of the chiefs and notables of the principal clans. But this can have been no more than a device aimed at producing agreement by discussion. There was no means of making one clan bow to the decisions of the rest except by persuasion, or compulsion of a more or less pacific nature.

'Abd al-Muttalib may have owed his position to the fact that he was at the head of one of the coalitions formed by the Meccan clans in their struggle for power. Two of these groups were in a state of constant rivalry, while a third remained neutral. 'Abd al-Muttalib traded with Syria and the Yemen and had obtained certain profitable privileges at the shrine of Mecca. It was he who supplied the pilgrims with food and water. He is said to have entered into negotiations with Abraha when the army with its elephants appeared outside Mecca. There may be some reference here to an attempt on the part of one group of clans to win support from outside. He had a number of wives from different tribes who gave him ten sons, Muhammad's father and uncles, as well as six daughters. Some of these we shall meet again.

One of these children was 'Abdallah, his son by Fatima bint 'Amr of the Qurayshite clan of the Banu Makhzum. We are told that 'Abdallah was a handsome fellow. His father, no doubt seeking an alliance with the clan of the Banu Zuhra, asked for the young Amina bint Wahb as a bride for his son, and at the same time for her cousin, Hala bint Wuhayb, of the same tribe, for himself.

In accordance with the Arab custom, Amina seems to have remained with her own people and been visited there by Abdallah. Muhammad was the first and only child of this marriage. While it can obviously have no historical value, it may perhaps be of interest here to cite one of the stories which circulated about Muhammad's conception. This is in striking contrast to the Christian concern at making the birth of Christ as nearly as possible unconnected with any sexual relations whatever.

'Abdallah went to the house of another wife he had besides Amina bint Wahb. He had been working in the clay on some land he possessed, and he still had some splashes of clay left on him. He made some advances to her, but she put him off on account of the clay that was on him. He left her and washed himself, and cleaned off the clay. Then he went out again, to go to Amina. He again passed by the other woman, who called to him; but he put her off and went to Amina. He went in to her and possessed her. She then conceived Muhammad, may God's blessing and peace be upon him. Then he went back to the other woman and asked her if she were willing; she said: 'No. When you passed by me there was a white light between your eyes. I called to you and you rejected me. You went to Amina and she has taken away the light.'

Another version of the story makes this woman not another of 'Abdallah's wives but a sister of the hanif Waraqa ibn Nawfal, or another woman who, like Waraqa, was versed in the scriptures. Seeing the light of prophecy upon 'Abdallah, she offered him a hundred camels to gain his favours. He refused her and, when he came away from Amina, the light had gone.

'Abdallah died, either during his wife's pregnancy or shortly after her delivery, while on a business trip to Medina on his way home from Gaza. He left his wife very little, only one slave, five camels and a few sheep. Amina cared for her son; but before long, when the child was only six years old, she too was dead.

Nothing is known for certain about Muhammad's childhood. The void has gradually become filled with legends which grow ever more

beautiful and edifying with the passage of time. Even the earliest and most moderate accounts must be treated with great caution. When Islam became the religion of a powerful state, precepts were needed to regulate social life. Divergent opinions and interests naturally existed. Political parties also grew up, centred round the Prophet's family and Companions. In addition, a great many people - impelled by curiosity, piety or even historical interest - demanded information about Muhammad's life. Men began to appear who were professional repositories of traditions; they would spread a tale to satisfy this curiosity or that piety, or to provide a ruling as occasion demanded; for the Prophet's deeds had an exemplary value. When he acted in a particular way, it was to show his followers that this was the way all men should act, whether in serious matters such as the finer points of laws of succession (the principles of which were laid down by God himself in the Koran), or on the smallest details of everyday behaviour, like proper table manners. Like our modern historians, the keepers of tradition were expected to quote their sources; but these were oral ones. Such a story came from such a one who in turn had it from another, and so on all the way back to one of the Prophet's contemporaries who had seen him do it or heard him say it. It was of course a simple matter to make up false traditions (the Arabic word is *hadith*, meaning 'narratives') to support one's own party or opinion. The great Arab historians and jurists knew this perfectly well. They tried to do away with the false traditions - those, for example, where the chain of authorities cited was manifestly impossible - but they made no claims to any degree of certainty. Instead, they were content to repeat contradictory traditions on the same subject, one after the other, quoting their sources for each. It was up to the reader to decide which one he liked to believe. 'But God knows best,' they would often add.

The oldest collections of historical traditions available to us date from about 125 years after the Prophet's lifetime. Much imagination may have gone to work in the meantime. And yet many facts can be established, as the parties who differ most widely are agreed on the main events of the Prophet's life, the names of his Companions and his wives, their kinship

and genealogy, as well as on a great many other things, even down to details which are far from remarkable which nobody would have deemed worth inventing. But there are many points on which we are very far from certain; in particular, it is clear that little was known about the early years of Muhammad's life, and that much has been made up about it. I shall occasionally quote some of these tales, whose only virtue from an historical point of view is that they create a picture of a world not unlike that in which the young Muhammad must have grown up, besides giving us some idea of the way in which later Muslims pictured the life of their prophet.

According to the Qurayshites' custom, the young Muhammad had a nurse from a nomadic clan. In this way, it was thought, the children of Quraysh would be filled with the pure air of the desert and grow strong. It was also a way of maintaining contact with the nomads- no small consideration, when we remember that foster-brotherhood was regarded as a powerful bond between two men. Muhammad's nurse was a woman called Hallma, of the clan of the Banu Sa'd, a branch of the great tribe of Hawazin. She may have been the one mentioned in a traditional story, which I will quote here simply as a typical example of the amazing liveliness of these tales, which is however no guarantee of authenticity. It is recorded in the history of the Prophet and his Companions set down in writing by Ibn Sa 'd at the beginning of the second century of the hegira (the ninth century A.D.).

We have it from 'Abdallah ibn Numayr al-Hamdani who had it from Yahya ibn Sa'id al-Ansari, that Muhammad ibn alMunkadir used to tell how a woman knocked on the door of the Prophet whose nurse she had been. When she went in he cried out, ' Mother, Mother ! ' and, fetching his cloak, spread it before her, and she sat on it.

There is another tale about how the nurse came to choose the child.

Ten women of the Banu Sa'd came to Mecca to look for infants to nurse. All found them, except for Hialima bint 'Abdallah, who had with her her husband al-Harith ibn 'Abd al- 'Uzza who was called Abu Dhu 'ayb and

their child 'Abdallah ibn al-Harith whom she was suckling and [their daughters] Anisa and Judama, she of the beauty spot who [later] carried Muhammad with her mother and bore him on her hip. The Envoy of Allah was shown to her, but she said: ' An orphan ! And with no money! And what can his mother do?' And the women departed and left her behind. Then Halima said to her husband: 'What do you think? My companions have gone and there is no boy left in Mecca to nurse except this orphan. Shall we take him? I should not like to return home with nothing.' Her husband said to her: ' Take him! Perhaps Allah will make him a blessing to us.' So she returned to the mother and took the child and set him on her lap and gave him her breast until milk trickled down from it. And the Envoy of Allah drank until he was satisfied. And his [foster]-brother also drank. Now this brother was not asleep because he was hungry [because his mother had little milk before this]. And the mother [Amina] said: 'Nurse, question me about your [foster]-son, because he will be great.' And she told her what she had seen and what had been said at the time of his birth.... Halima was happy and rejoiced at all she heard. Then she departed to her own place with the babe. They saddled their she-ass, and Halima mounted, holding the Envoy of Allah before her. Al-Harith rode on their aged camel. They caught up with their companions at Wadi Sirar.... 'Halima,' they said, 'what have you done?' And she answered: ' By God, I have taken the fairest babe that ever I saw, and he with the greatest baraka [a "blessed virtue", a mysterious, wonder-working force coming from God].' The women said, ' Is not that the child of 'Abd al-Mutalib ? ' She answered, ' Yes. ' ' Before we left that place,' Halima added, ' I saw envy in [the faces of] several of our women.'

It is to these years spent in the desert that a marvellous experience, assigned by other authors to different points in the Prophet's life, has been said to relate. Two angels came and, opening his breast, drew out the heart which they cleaned scrupulously before returning it to its place. Then they weighed him, putting in the other side of the scales first one man, then ten, then a hundred and then a thousand. Then one said to the

other: 'Let be. Even if you were to set his whole community (umma) in the scale, he would still outweigh it.'

Amina died on the way home from a journey to Medina with her slave Umm Ayman and young Muhammad. The boy was six years old. His grandfather, the venerable Abd al-Muttalib, who was then eighty years old, took him to live with him. But he died two years later. Muhammad was then taken in by one of his uncles, 'Abd Manaf, who is more generally known later by his kunya, or second name, Abu Talib. (An Arab's second or more familiar name means 'father of ', and generally referred to his eldest son.) In fact the meaning of his first name was idolatrous, signifying 'servant of the goddess Manaf'. He was a merchant in comfortable circumstances, the son of the same mother as Muhammad's father 'Abdallah, and is said to have been the person who took over the leadership of the Hashim clan - said to predominate at Mecca at this time - after his father's death.

The story goes that Abu Talib sometimes travelled into Syria leading a caravan. On one occasion, at least, he is said to have taken his nephew. They came to the town of Bostra (Busra), the first big junction on the caravan route travelling in this direction, a meeting place of five important roads, and a great centre of Christianity. A fine cathedral had been built there not long before, and there were other impressive monuments, such as the Roman theatre which can still be seen today, and also no doubt the poor-house erected by Justinian. It was also the official residence of the Monophysite bishop, whose authority extended over the desert Arabs and whose appointment the Ghassanid phylarch al-Harith had obtained from the Empress Theodora in 543. It was at Bostra that an incident is said to have taken place, one version of which the historian Tabari recounts as follows:

When the company halted at Bostra in Syria, there was a monk named Bahira, who dwelt in a hermitage there and who was well-read in the learning of the Christians. There had always been a monk in this hermitage, who used to extract this learning from a book which, they

claimed, had been handed down as an heirloom from one to another. This year, when the caravan halted near Bahira, he prepared much food for them. While he was in his hermitage, he had seen the Envoy of Allah among his companions; and a cloud covered him with its shadow. They came forward, and halted in the shade of a tree that was near Bahira. He looked at the cloud, but the tree gave shade and its branches leaned down over the Envoy of Allah so that he was always in their shade. When Bahira saw this, he came out from his cell and sent word to invite them all. When Bahira saw the Envoy of Allah, he watched him very closely, and noted the details of his person.... When the party had finished eating and were about to take their leave, he questioned the Envoy of Allah about the things he felt when he was awake or asleep. The Envoy of Allah answered him. Bahira found all this according to the description which he had in his possession. Then he examined his back and found the seal of prophecy between his shoulders. Then Bahira said to his uncle Abu Talib: 'What relation is this boy to you ? ' And Abu Talib answered: ' He is my son.' Bahira said to him: ' He is not your son. This boy's father cannot be living.' ' He is my nephew, ' Abu Talib told him then. The monk asked: 'What became of his father?' 'He died while his mother was pregnant.' You speak the truth. Go back then to your own land and keep him safe from the Jews. By Allah, if they see him and get to know what I know about him they will try to harm him.'

The uncle, much impressed, hurried back to Mecca with the precious child. Is there any kernel of truth in this story? We cannot be sure. There can be no doubt that some of the motives behind it are apologetic. It was important to have the Prophet recognized as such by one of the great monotheistic religions from which Islam claimed descent. The Christians took up the legend, seeing the supposedly heretical monk as the Arab prophet's inspiration, so as to deprive him of all originality. There is nothing intrinsically improbable in the journey to Bostra or in any other journeys. Attempts have been made to gather evidence that Muhammad was acquainted with many lands; but on the other hand it has been observed that he seems to have had no first-hand knowledge of the rites of the Christian faith. If he had been present, even once, at one

of its services, it would certainly have left some impression. The Arab poets who visited Hira and its churches describe them with much more animation.

Tradition lays great stress on Abu Talib's fondness for his nephew and his good care of him. It has been suggested that here, too, hagiography may have twisted the facts. At all events, Muhammad no doubt had to perform the small services expected of a child. One day, long afterwards, when some people passed the Prophet carrying the fruits of the arak tree, a thorny bush used to feed camels and other animals, Muhammad is supposed to have told them: 'Take care of the black fruit. It was those I gathered when I used to lead the sheep out to graze.' They said to him: 'Envoy of Allah, were you then a shepherd of sheep?' He answered: 'Yes, and so have all prophets been.' The story was told to humble the pride of the great nomad camelherds, who despised the shepherds of more humble flocks.

This is virtually all we know about the childhood and young manhood of the future Prophet, at least from earlier sources, before the proliferation of legends of all kinds grew out of all reasonable control. Obviously it is not very much, and we are on very shaky ground. And yet it would be interesting and, from a historical point of view, extremely valuable to know what kind of education he had. Muslim tradition insists that he had no dealing with the pagan cults of his native city. This seems unlikely, and there are clear indications in his later life to suggest that, like everyone else, he practised the religion of his fathers. We are told elsewhere that he sacrificed a sheep to the goddess al-'Uzza. One little-known tradition has him offering meat which had been sacrificed to idols to a monotheist, who refused it and rebuked him. He is said to have belonged to the hums, a brotherhood which practised its own special rites at Meccan ceremonies and observed additional taboos. Whatever Arabic tradition may have assumed from a wrong interpretation of a word in the Koran, it seems certain that Muhammad learned to read and write. But except for a few vague and unreliable pointers in his life and

work we have no way of knowing the extent of his learning. More will be said of this further on.

Muhammad seems to have remained a bachelor for longer than was usual among his people. The reason for this was probably poverty. He asked, it is said, Abu Talib for the hand of his cousin Umm Hani. Marriages between cousins were approved of in Beduin society; but the suitor was rejected, probably in favour of a more illustrious rival. Long afterwards Umm Hani, then widowed, would have been glad to have her cousin renew his offer, but Muhammad was no longer inclined; they remained, however, on good terms. He was sleeping in Umm Hani's house the night he made his nocturnal voyage to heaven.

Fortune soon favoured him. Without falling into the traditional exaggerations which make him as early as this period a model of physical, intellectual and moral perfection, the qualities he displayed later are enough to show that he must have made a favourable impression on those with whom he came in contact. Even at this stage, people must have been struck by his intelligence, and his calm, confident and balanced manner of conducting himself both in his own affairs and in his dealing with others. It was probably this quality which led Khadija bint Khuwaylid, a widow no longer in her first youth, who had already been twice married and had several children, to engage him in her employ. She was rich, and equipped caravans to travel into Syria to bring back Byzantine merchandise for sale on the Mecca market. Khadija seems to have sent her new employee with the caravans to deal with purchasing. If this was so, Muhammad must have revisited Syria; and this has provided an opportunity for the traditions to introduce more monks, who comment once again on the miracles attending the young Qurayshite's passage and predict a brilliant future for him. What is quite certain is that Muhammad's exertions on Khadija's behalf aroused in her the wish to marry him. She may already have been aware of Muhammad's charm when she engaged him. In any event the lot of unmarried women among the Arabs was not an enviable one. Her father, if he were still alive, could act as her protector, but she had every reason

to regard the future with apprehension. Khadija is said to have been forty, but she had no lack of suitors. Muhammad would then have been twenty-five. The inevitable go-between, Nafisa bint Munya, is credited with saying:

Khadija sent me to Muhammad to sound out his feelings after he came back from Syria with his caravan. I said to him: 'Muhammad, is there any reason why you should not marry?' He told me: 'I possess nothing to marry on.' I answered him: 'And suppose there was someone who had enough for two? And suppose you were summoned to beauty, wealth, and to a position of honour and ease, would you not accept?' 'Who is the woman?' 'Khadija.' 'What must I do?' 'I will attend to all.' 'And I too will do my part.'

Nothing remained but to complete the necessary formalities. Some accounts added that this was not easy and that Khadija had to get her father drunk in order to obtain his consent; but most traditions say that by this time her father was long dead and it was her uncle who represented her family in the marriage.

His marriage to Khadija was the saving of Muhammad and opened the door to a brilliant future. He had no further material anxieties. From the poor relation of a great family, earning his living in the service of others, he became a person of importance. He must have seen God's hand at work in this; and, one day, he heard Allah say to him:

Your Lord has not taken leave of you, nor despised you . . . Did he not find you an orphan and give [you] shelter? He found you erring and guided you. He found you poor and enriched you. (Koran xciii)

It is unlikely that he felt for Khadija the physical passion which was later to procure him, in his old age, the young and lovely women of his future harem. But he always had a great respect for her and a firm affection and gratitude which never wavered. A psychoanalyst has suggested that the frustrations of an orphan, deprived of his mother's warmth at an early age, may have strengthened this attachment to an older woman.

Muhammad used to say that she was the best of all the women of her time, and that he would live with her in paradise in a house built of reeds, in peace and tranquillity. He spoke of her often after her death, much to the fury of his beloved Aisha. 'Aisha described her jealousy of the dead woman, whom she had never met, as beyond what she felt for anyone in the world. One day Khadija's sister Hala came to the Prophet's door, and asked to be let in. He recognized her voice and was thrilled. He cried out: ' My God, it's Hala ! ' ' Then', said 'Aisha, ' I was seized with jealousy and screamed: " Why do you have to be always remembering that toothless old Qurayshite with her red mouth? Fate made her die and God has replaced her with a better! "

Khadija gave Muhammad several children. There were four daughters of whom we shall have more to say, Zaynab, Ruqayya, Fatima and Umm Kulthum. But what for an Arab was then, and still is, a great misfortune, all her sons died at an early age. Tradition lists them variously. One was al-Qasim, who is said to have died when he was two and from whom his father took the kunya of Abu l-Qasim, which he was to retain. There also seems to have been an 'Abdallah, who may in fact have been named 'Abd Manaf, in token of respect to the deity Manaf whom his parents were soon to reject. At about this time Muhammad adopted his young cousin 'Ali, whose father, Muhammad's uncle Abu Talib, was experiencing some business difficulties. Khadija also made Muhammad a present of a slave whom her nephew had bought in Syria - a young man from the tribe of Kalb, of strong Christian affiliations, whose name was Zayd. Muhammad gave him his freedom and adopted him as a son.

Now that he was prosperous he certainly continued in business. His language was always studded with commercial terms. He was well thought of by his colleagues. His daughters later made respectable marriages - right and proper, and according to custom. Ruqayya, and perhaps Umm Kulthum as well, married their cousins on the father's side, sons of Abu Lahab. He was one of Muhammad's uncles and later to become one of his greatest enemies. However, he seems at this time to have been in an excellent social position, taking over from his brother

Abu Talib as leader of the clan of Hashim. Another daughter, Zaynab, married her maternal cousin, Abu l- 'As.

The following story, if true, would be an indication of the regard in which Muhammad was held. Unfortunately it has certainly been embellished and may even be an outright invention, whose purpose was apologetic. The Ka'ba had fallen into disrepair and people had taken advantage of its dilapidated state to steal its treasures. The Qurayshites, at the height of their financial prosperity, decided to rebuild it, but hesitated to touch the sacred stones in order to carry out the demolition work initially required. Moreover they lacked materials and skilled workmen. The timely wreck in the Red Sea of a Greek ship, carrying wood to Abyssinia for the building of a church, seemed to them like a sign from heaven. They appropriated the cargo washed up on the shore of the Hejaz and also a Coptic carpenter named Pacomius who happened to be on board. The rebuilding proceeded at a good pace, after the initial panic when a bold man took it on himself to strike the first blow with his pick at the old building. The whole town spent an anxious night expecting him to be struck down by supernatural powers; but in the morning he was still in excellent health, and the work went on. At last the time came to replace the Black Stone at the corner of the building. The four tribal groups all laid claim to the honour and in the heat of the argument were on the point of coming to blows. They decided to appeal to the first man who came into the sanctuary as arbiter. This was Muhammad. He sent for a cloak and, placing the sacred stone inside, made a representative of each tribe hold one of the four corners. They raised the cloak and carried the stone to its place. Then he himself set it in position.

Muhammad would then have been thirty-five years old. He was given, it is said, the name of al-amin - the sure man, in whom one could trust. He was rich, or at least comfortably off, surrounded by affection, respected by all and with a part to play in his own small sphere. He might have gone on living like this, quietly and happily. Everything was in favour of it.

And yet he was not satisfied with this humdrum existence, day in, day out. He had an underlying restlessness. He wanted something more. His fundamental psychology in every detail will always be a mystery; but, while laying no claim to any impossible and almost certainly misleading analysis, yet, taking into account the trends of human behaviour pointed out for us by Freud, it is possible to make some observations on which to build some kind of psychological hypothesis.

In general, Muhammad gave the impression of a sensible, deliberate and well-balanced man. All his life we find him thinking before taking a decision, conducting his public and private business efficiently, knowing when to bide his time and when to retract, and capable of taking the necessary action to ensure the success of his plans. His physical courage, although perhaps acquired rather than instinctive, was adequate to enable him to figure creditably in the various battles of his lifetime. He was a remarkably able diplomat, and capable of reasoning with clarity, logic and lucidity. And yet, beneath this surface, was a temperament which was nervous, passionate, restless, feverish-filled with an impatient yearning which burned for the impossible. This was so intense as to lead to nervous crises of a definitely pathological kind.

Muhammad had, as the phrase goes, everything to make him happy, and yet he was not happy. Happiness, with its limitations, its calm or eager acceptance, its resignation to things as they are, is not made for those who are always looking beyond what they are and what they have, whose questing spirit is always reaching out for the next thing to be desired. And a poor, deprived, orphan childhood such as Muhammad's was bound to foster the growth of this endless capacity for desiring. Only success on an extraordinary, one might even say superhuman, scale, would satisfy it.

Muhammad was certainly dissatisfied. Were there more tangible reasons for an attitude of mind without which his later development cannot be understood, and if so what were they? We can glimpse them faintly. Strange as it may seem to us, one of the things which affected him most

was the fact that he had no male heir. With the Arabs, as with the Semitic peoples in general, this was a source of shame; and men who suffered it were called by the name of abtar, which means roughly 'mutilated'. One day, in the early days of his prophecy, Muhammad the abtar heard a voice from heaven declaiming to him these vengeful lines:

Yes, we have given you abundance. So pray your Lord and sacrifice; It is your enemy who is the abtar!

(Koran cviii)

Khadija's inability to give him male heirs no doubt provided an additional reason for some dissatisfaction with his excellent wife. One recalls Ammianus' comments on 'the passion with which the two sexes abandon themselves to love among this nation [the Arabs]'. And, of the doctors of the Talmud, Rabbi Nathan declared that nowhere in the world was there such a propensity towards fornication as among the Arabs, just as nowhere was there any power like that of Persia, or wealth like that of Rome, or magic like that of Egypt. The same observed that, if all the sexual licence in the world were divided into ten parts, then nine of these would be distributed among the Arabs and the tenth would be enough for all the other races. All around him Muhammad saw the wealthy Qurayshites using and abusing the pleasures of love. Each man, merchants and travellers especially, was allowed by custom to take wives for a limited period. Polygamy was perhaps less widespread than has been suggested, but divorce was simple and frequent. Outright prostitution, not readily distinguishable from temporary marriage, also occurred. Religious rites seem to have involved occasional ritual copulation. Young and beautiful slave-girls were easily bought. But Muhammad was wedded to Khadija and to her alone. It is possible that their marriage contract involved an obligation on his part to take no second wife. The wealthy Khadija was in a position to make demands. But, as a man known for his belief in fairness and moderation, Muhammad was bound to the mother of his children by ties much stronger than any written undertaking. Even so, knowing what we do of

his amorous proclivities later on in life, we can scarcely imagine that there were not plenty of times when he, in the Gospel phrase which would probably have astounded him, 'committed adultery in his heart'. He must have thrust away temptation many times, perhaps even with deceptive ease. But whether they appeared easy or hard, we know now what these victories may have cost him and what a sense of frustration they may have left behind.

Yet another cause of dissatisfaction, and one less often remarked, was the driving spur of ambition - legitimate ambition, due to a very clear consciousness of his own worth. Muhammad no doubt considered himself an exceptional person from a very early age. He saw few of the people around him take any interest in the religious, moral and intellectual questions which occupied him. The rich Qurayshites, his relatives and friends, acquired political influence by virtue of their wealth, their capacity for intrigue and their apparent competence in dealing with public affairs. Muhammad's interests at the time must have gained him the reputation of an inoffensive idealist, quite unfitted to cope with practical matters. And yet he had a deep inner conviction that what he knew and what he foresaw was more important than all the complex calculations of political men, even in the worldly perspective of effective guidance of the Meccan community, and perhaps beyond it, in that of the Arabs as a whole.

The troubles of a man mocked for his lack of male heirs, the frustration of a highly sexed man whose own moral conscience prevented him from realizing his desires, the suppressed fury of a man fundamentally sure of himself but treated with contempt by practical politicians - all these things were capable of creating a personality thirsting to turn the tables in each particular, but still keeping strictly within the normal bounds of the society in which he lived. There was something in Muhammad which made him overstep those bounds.

This something was a certain pathological element in his make-up. Perhaps the stories about the angels who came and took him and opened

his heart while he was pasturing flocks belonging to his nurse's family actually developed from accounts of some kind of seizure. H. alima is said to have come up on him one day standing amazed and stupefied. When questioned, he told a story of two men in white robes who came to him and opened his breast and touched 'something, I know not what'. His foster-father was worried and said: ' Halima, I fear that this boy may have had an attack. Take him back to his family before his disease declares itself.' Muhammad, it will be remembered, was no more than six years old.

This story may be a complete fabrication. It may be, too, that as a child Muhammad had some mental experience of the kind known to many shamans of north and central Asia, and also to Australian magicians: at the moment of their initiation they feel that a spirit has taken away their internal organs and replaced them with fresh ones. However that may be, the Prophet certainly suffered from attacks of some kind in adult life. Hostile Christians put it down to epilepsy. If this were so, it was a benign form. What is much more probable is that Muhammad's psychophysiological constitution was basically of the kind found in many mystics.

In all societies and among all races individuals are found who, because of something in their constitution or their personal history which it is the psychiatrist's job to unravel, find it difficult or even impossible to adjust to the roles which society expects of them. In some cases their behaviour brings them into violent conflict with their environment. Others succeed in making some kind of adjustment, especially since many societies have allotted exceptional roles to these exceptional people. This often takes the form of making those with a particular kind of abnormality responsible for contacts with the supernatural world, the world of gods and spirits.

Some of these individuals possess exceptional gifts. They see things which others do not see, hear things which others do not hear. A feeling they cannot explain makes them utter words and gestures which are

quite outside the normal behaviour patterns of ordinary people. All this is naturally put down to their contact with another world - the world of powers which, while they cannot normally be seen or heard, can perform what to the common run of mortals is impossible. Some of these extraordinary beings are, of course, very far from normal; while in others the strangeness and abnormality manifests itself only rarely, in particular circumstances, and in the course of everyday life they behave just like everyone else. There are some whose inferior mental capacities are not enhanced by their special peculiarities; others, on the contrary, possess complex and powerful personalities with a capacity for rich and original thought.

Pre-Islamic Arabia had its own share of such men. Arab poets were believed to be inspired by a spirit. Above all, there was the kahin or soothsayer, a word etymologically related to the kohen or priest of the Jews. The kahins had visions; but, what was more important, they also possessed familiar spirits, which they called companions or friends or 'seers' and which spoke through their mouths. The spirits' inspiration took the form of a vague mumbling or of short, staccato rhymed phrases, with repeated oaths which called freely on the names of the stars, morning and evening, plants and animals - all delivered in a breathless, rhythmic voice which made a great impression on the audience. While they were prophesying in this way, the kahins would cover themselves with their cloaks. They were highly respected, appealed to and consulted as oracles and advisers in both public and private matters.

Muhammad had many traits in common with the kahins, as his contemporaries could not fail to notice. Physiologically and psychologically he belonged, undoubtedly, to the same type. Like them, he was liable to emotional attacks, with a tendency to see, hear and feel things beyond the reach of other people's senses. It may be that the deep-rooted dissatisfaction, which was both the cause and effect of his temperament as he approached the age of forty, helped to strengthen his natural predisposition. But because he was endowed with a vastly richer and more powerful personality than that of the average kahin, this

dissatisfaction also led him to think deeply. Alongside the effects of his innate temperament and of his private emotional life, a complete intellectual structure was developing. And this intellectual development was something quite exceptional.

Muhammad was not a kahin. He did not find lost camels or interpret dreams. Nor did he set himself up as a professional seer, adviser in supernatural matters to a particular tribe or prince, although such a post might carry a good deal of prestige. But again, this would have been to associate himself and his particular psychic gifts with the whole social and intellectual framework of Arab society, which, unconsciously, he was trying to transcend. He remained an ordinary trader, a good husband and father and a prudent sensible man; but he was learning and thinking all the time. Little by little his spirit was advancing along the road which was to lead him far beyond the limits of his own time and place.

The questions he asked himself came to him above all in their religious aspects. Once again war had broken out between the great powers of the day, Persia and Byzantium, and this time the conflict was assuming unexpected proportions. To a highly placed civil servant like Procopius its political and economic foundations were perfectly clear, but in the eyes of the masses the struggle was first and foremost an ideological one. As we have seen, the war had begun again in 572; but in 591 the new Persian King of kings, Khusro II, called Abharwez, 'the Victorious', who had gained the throne with the aid of the Romans, had made peace on terms highly favourable to his protectors. Before long he was burning to get back what he had ceded. Khusro's friend, the basileus Maurice, had been deposed and killed in 602 by a revolt of the army which brought to power a brutal and quick-tempered officer named Phocas. The king of kings seized on this as an excuse for reopening the war. The Persians made rapid and astonishing progress. One army overran Roman Armenia, went on to invade Asia Minor and, in 610, its advance scouts reached the Bosphorus within sight of Constantinople. Another army moved into Syria, and the cities of northern Mesopotamia fell one after another. Antioch was under siege. The Monophysites of Syria were up in

arms. The Jews took advantage of the confusion and of the Persian advance to take their revenge. Acting in collusion with the political and sporting anti-government faction, they killed the pro-imperial Patriarch of Antioch. Faced with imminent disaster, the malcontents raised to power another soldier, this time a man of real ability, Heraclius; he entered Constantinople in October 610. Phocas was put to death. While Heraclius was slowly gathering his army for the counterattack, the Persians continued their successful advance. Antioch fell in 611 and then, the ultimate disaster, on 5 May 614, the holy city of Jerusalem itself. The Patriarch and the inhabitants were taken into captivity, the churches burned and the most sacred relic of the True Cross removed with great ceremony to Ctesiphon. In 615 the Persian general Shahan took Chalcedon, across the strait from Constantinople. Between 617 and 619, the Persians occupied Egypt, the granary of the empire and of the capital in particular. The Avars and the Slavs were menacing in the west. Byzantium was at the lowest ebb.

There were some Christians on the Persian side. Khusro had a favourite, a Christian girl from Syria whose name was Shiren; the story of their love has provided material for endless romances in every language of the Muslim east. The Nestorians continued to support him. His high treasurer, Yazden, was a Christian who was constantly building churches and monasteries. The Monophysites, who were the dominant sect in Syria and Egypt, if they did not actually help the Persians because of their alliance with the Nestorians, made no effort to defend the empire. For two centuries at least they had been in a state of moral secession, religious differences serving to accentuate and bring out purely local difficulties such as the quasi-nationalist feelings of rebellion against Greek dominance, feelings which were encouraged by a progressive economic decline. However, viewed from a distance, it was the attitude of the Jews which more than anything gave the conflict, to some extent at least, the appearance of a war of religion. This was how the tale was told with embellishments in distant Gaul.

A Burgundian chronicler, writing some thirty or forty years after the event, described Heraclius as 'pleasant to look on, with a handsome face, tall and very active and a valiant warrior. Alone and unarmed, he would often kill lions in the arena and wild boars in remote places.' When the Persians came in sight of his capital, he proposed to their emperor, Cosdroes, to settle the quarrel by single combat. Cosdroes sent a gallant nobleman to fight for him; Heraclius killed him by a cunning trick, whereupon the Persians fled. But Heraclius was 'well versed in letters', and had therefore studied astrology. Thanks to this art he had learned that his empire would be devastated by peoples who practised circumcision. Concluding that this must refer to the Jews, he 'sent to Dagobert, king of the Franks, to entreat him to give orders that all the Jews in his realm should be baptized in the Catholic faith; this Dagobert instantly performed. Heraclius ordered that the same thing should be done throughout all the imperial provinces; for he had no idea whence this scourge would come upon his empire.'

There can be no doubt that in Arabia, too, these events made a great impression. Among the Jews and the various Christian sects, propaganda was rife. The social conditions which favoured its growth have already been described. Anyone in Mecca who was interested could easily find Jews and Christians who were only too ready to explain the basic tenets of their faith. In the case of the Christians it was unfortunate that they knew very little about their own religion. They were for the most part poor folk - traders, butchers, smiths, blood-cuppers, pedlars, wine-sellers, adventurers and slaves. They had no organized community, no priests or churches. They belonged to different sects, each convinced that the rest were heretics. They were certainly none too well up in theology. Their religion was the popular faith of simple people. They probably had a few prayers, and were certainly acquainted, in somewhat garbled versions, with the beautiful stories of the Old and New Testaments. The Jews, on the other hand, whose activities as agricultural settlers have already been noted, were numerous and well organized throughout Arabia. But their communities were tightly knit and closed. In Mecca - where people suffered from their commercial competition

and feared the potential power of such busy and energetic bodies, and where they wondered at their curious habits, such as their reluctance to eat such foods as camel-hump lard, which everyone else liked, and mocked their clumsy Arabic, full of words culled from Hebrew or Aramaic - Jews seem to have been comparatively rare. Even so, they too were not averse to recounting, for the benefit of curious idolaters, the biblical tales we find in the Talmuds and the whole body of Midrashic works, which had been expanded and embellished by writers of Hellenistic and Roman times. Some of them seem to have had the idea of bringing the revelation and its sequels within the reach of Arab hearers by giving some events an Arabian setting, or by giving a Jewish angle to popular Arab tales.

We have irrefutable evidence from the text of the Koran itself that Muhammad was accused of listening to men who spoke a foreign language (Koran xvi, 105) and who told 'legends about the ancients' (Koran xxv, 5). These were certainly stories that he listened to most carefully. By their light he gradually pieced together a picture of the world and its history. Jews and Christians told him about the same God, Allah, 'the Divine One', who was also worshipped in Arabia alongside other gods. He it was who had created heaven and earth; to him were due the wonders of nature, such amazing phenomena as storms, lightning and rain. His were the miracle of the human body, the mysteries of animal reproduction, the secrets of the vegetable kingdom. He would resurrect the bodies of men after death and be sovereign judge of all mortals, rewarding them according to the manner of their lives on earth, either with the delights of a celestial garden or the sufferings of a place of torment. In this way the mysteries of the world were resolved around us, and its injustices set right. This vision of the world was clearly superior, both intellectually and morally, to that of the pagan Arabs in which dozens of minor gods contended capriciously, yet without decisive influence upon the decrees of Allah or Fate, and, above all, where Justice did not emerge triumphantly from all this universal anarchy.

Moreover, Allah had thought to make himself known to men and to make known his will. Several times he had sent men, the prophets, to expound his revelation to his chosen peoples. Already Adam had received such a message, and after him the patriarchs listed by the Hebrews - not all of whom were, strictly speaking, Jews, as the Christians did not fail to point out: Noah, the ancestor of all living men, Abraham, who, according to the accepted explanation of the story of Ishmael and Agar, was the ancestor not only of the Jews but also of the Saracens (hence the name of Agarenians, by which they are designated in the writings of the period). Jacob, Joseph and above all Moses had all been charged with messages for Israel. The great prophets had made little impression on the popular imagination, but it did retain from Jewish sacred history the kinds of things simple folk would remember: David overcoming Goliath, the wisdom of Solomon, Lot disputing with the Sodomites, Jonah and the whale, Elijah contending with the prophets of Baal, Job on his dungheap . . .

The Christians, too, spoke of Jesus, whom they believed was the son of God and a god himself, and of other highly involved and, to unsophisticated minds, incomprehensible matters. In addition, they argued furiously among themselves as to the divine and human natures of the Messiah, even going to the point of waging war over it. Yet Jesus too had been charged with Good News, a Gospel for mankind. He was very like the prophets; he had associated himself with them and had been regarded as such. He was, to be sure, a highly remarkable prophet, a most superior prophet, when one thought of all the delightful and fascinating stories that were told about his mother, Mary (and wasn't there a virgin Mary who sang hymns of praise in the story of Moses ? Surely she would be the same ?), and of his miraculous birth. Why reject such a good story, as the Jews did? If it was hard to believe that he was the son of God, without falling back into the Arabic polytheism which was just what one was trying to get away from, or plunging into incomprehensible theological arguments on nature, person, essence and hypostasis, could one not simply look on him as one of the prophets, the greatest and most wonderful of them all?

There was another belief very widespread throughout the east which added still more prophets to all these. Mani (216-277), a native of Babylonia, was the founder of a new religion, Manichaeism, which also had its days of glory and expansion. Mani claimed to be one of a series of messengers sent from God to the different peoples. In his own words:

Wisdom and good works have been brought in perfect succession from age to age by the messengers of God. They came in one age through the prophet called Buddha in the region of India, in another through Zaradusht [Zoroaster] in the land of Persia, and in yet another through Jesus in the lands of the west. After this came the revelation, and prophecy manifests itself in this latter age through myself, Mani, the messenger of the True God in the land of Babel.

Mani inherited his ideas from those of various dissident Christian sects of Gnostic inspiration. According to the apocryphal Acts of the Apostles, the Apostles had divided the different regions of the world between them so that each should have its share in the Gospel.¹⁴ It seemed a flagrant injustice for one country to have escaped the teaching of the divine word.

The Arabs who listened to all these tales would then recall the legendary stories of the former inhabitants of the peninsula, to whom were attributed the ancient monuments found there. They talked of vanished peoples, of 'Ad and Thamud and of the catastrophes which had struck them. Surely it was conceivable that these catastrophes might have come as a punishment for rejecting the prophets who were sent to them? In just this manner had the Flood punished those men who were deaf to Noah's warnings; and Jesus had threatened Jerusalem, 'that killeth the prophets', with a similar fate.

Arabs like Muhammad heard these stories, and reflected upon them. Jews and Christians were sustained by worldwide empires and belonged to rich and powerful organizations. Their claims rested on sacred books sent from heaven in ancient times, revered for their antiquity, their worth proven by miracles. They knew the secrets of Allah, they knew how he

wished to be worshipped, what prayers and sacrifices, what fasts and processions he required if he was to look kindly on men. The Arabs did not know these secrets, the Arabs were set apart from Allah. They must learn from those who knew, from the People of the Book, and so try to come closer to Allah.

There must have been some at least who thought in this way and yet did not become either Christians or Jews. We have seen the considerations of national pride which prevented many Arabs from accepting such a conversion. Perhaps they were already becoming known as *hanifs* towards Allah - a word derived, most probably, from a misinterpretation of an Aramaic word meaning 'unbelievers'. This came to mean that they were seeking to draw closer to Allah without becoming enrolled in the ranks of the recognized religions. They may already have begun to observe that, by the Jews' and the Christians' own accounts, before the foundation of Judaism by Moses, men like Abraham (Ibrahim in Arabic) whom they revered had held much the same attitude. The Bible itself said that Abraham was the ancestor of the Arabs through his son Ishmael. Surely it was natural therefore for the Arabs to follow their ancestor's example and worship Allah independently of the established religions ?

Both Jews and Christians despised the Arabs, regarding them as some kind of savages who did not even possess an organized Church like civilized people. It may have been pride that made the Arabs adopt the name of *hanif* ('pagan' or 'infidel') put upon them by their 'civilized' neighbours. They were infidels, and as infidels they sought God. Many of them were actuated by a certain spirit of revolt against the pretensions of the other nations who humiliated them at every turn. On a political plane, too, as we have seen, the Byzantine emperor Maurice had demolished the Arab phylarchy of the Ghassanids. Across the border, Khusro Abharwez had grown suspicious of his Arab vassal in Hira, Nu'man III, a Christian famous in Arab poetry, and in 602 or thereabouts he had him imprisoned and put to death. The crown taken from the Lakhmid family was bestowed on a man chosen from a remote tribe

with no tradition of government, with, in addition, a Persian inspector to keep a close eye on him. However, the new 'king' of Hira promptly sent word to the shaikh of the Arab tribe of Bakr, which was also an auxiliary of the Persians, to ask for money, weapons and a thousand shields which had been left with him by Nu'man before his imprisonment. The Arab chief refused. Khusro sent a large army against him, made up of Arab auxiliaries with a thousand Persian horse. The battle which took place near the well of Dhu Qar, not far from what was later to be Kufa, resulted in the rout of the Persians, who lost both their generals, and of their Arab allies. On learning the news at Mecca Muhammad was said to have exclaimed: 'This is the first time the Arabs have avenged themselves on the Persians.' It was not to be the last.

However, both the Arabs' mortifications and this first flicker of revenge were only incidents in an overall picture rich in apocalyptic hues. The struggle between the two great powers was reaching its climax. The fall of the Second Rome might be the outcome. The Jews were taking their revenge on the Christians. Everywhere foreign war was accompanied by internal troubles. All this was known in Arabia. As so often in history, many people thought it heralded the end of the world. The Arabs themselves were humiliated abroad while wickedness triumphed at home. The rich and powerful oppressed the poor. The immemorial laws of tribal solidarity were broken daily. The weak and the orphan were sold into slavery. The old unwritten code of decency and morality was trampled underfoot. The people no longer even knew which gods to worship. Were not matters worse than in the days of Noah ? Was not all this a foretaste of another imminent catastrophe perhaps even of the great Last Judgement described by Jews and Christians?

The Jews had prophecies which forecast that the end of the world would come at the end of the fifth century, and then, when the date had to be put forward, in the year 531. This new date too had to be deferred. But the great wars between empires, coupled with a fresh rising of the Jewish people, seemed sure signs. People said: 'When you see kingdoms fighting among themselves, then look for the footsteps of the Messiah.

Know that it will be so because so it was in the days of Abraham. When nation made war against nation [Genesis xiv] then was redemption granted to Abraham.' There were a number of texts forecasting that a great war between the Romans and the Persians would come just before the end. One Targumic text ran:

Rejoice, exult, O Constantinople, city of wicked Edom [another name for Rome and the Romans], built on the soil of Romania, possessed of the countless armies of the people of Edom! For thou also shalt be chastised. The Parthians [the Persians] shall ravage thee, the accursed cup comes to meet thee and thou shalt be made drunken and cast out. And then shall thy sin be expiated, O community of Zion ! Thou shalt be delivered by the Messiah thy King and by Elijah the priest.

How could anyone doubt that these things were about to come to pass?

Whenever such a situation occurs, there are always men ready to get up and proclaim that the catastrophe is imminent and to urge sinners to make their peace with God in readiness for the great day. There was no shortage of such prophets among the Arabs. Two names that crop up are those of a Khalid ibn Sinan, who was sent to the tribe of 'Abs, and a certain Hanzala ibn Safwan. One of the best known was Maslama of the tribe of the Banu Hanifa in the Yamama, in the very middle of Arabia. Muslim tradition has set out to ridicule him, attributing his success to conjuring tricks and putting the date of his emergence as a prophet very late. But information preserved by Arab historians contradicts this picture. Maslama preached in the name of a God he called Rahman, which means 'merciful'. We know now from inscriptions that this was the name given by the South Arabians to the God of the Jews and to God the Father in the Christian Trinity (following the Hebrew and Aramaic usage), using the form Rahmanan, that is, with the South Arabian definite article as a suffix, 'the Merciful'. We are told that Maslama himself was called by the name of Rahman, after his God. Now Muhammad was accused of obtaining his knowledge from someone called Rahman of the Yamama. Some sources also claim that Maslama

began his work before Muhammad and later made him a proposal to divide authority between them. It would seem, therefore, that we have here evidence of another prophet who was also preaching in Arabia at this time, with ideas very similar to those of Muhammad.

All this had its effect on him. Dissatisfied, he was on the verge of something which would give meaning to his life and guarantee his revenge on the rich and powerful. He was familiar with the basis of the new ideas brought by the Jews and Christians, and sympathized with the tendency towards monotheism; but he remained an Arab with no intention of cutting himself off from his Arab brethren. He was horrified by the evils which had resulted from the recent social changes and by the sorry state of prevailing moral standards. With his own vivid memories of his years of poverty and humiliation, he could feel for the sufferings endured by the victims of these changes. He was appalled by the great upheavals which were shaking the world, and wondered if they should not be seen as signs of the approaching end of time and the great heavenly reckoning. He saw prophets arise, claiming to be sent from God to summon men to repent. Pride, and a real sense of his own worth, combined to suggest to him that he too might have his part to play in the drama of the Last Days. His natural predisposition made him ready for the great cataclysm which would reveal God's ways to him.