



### Valentino: Themes and Variations

**Pamela Golbin**  
Rizzoli, Hardcover \$75.00  
(300pp)  
978-0-8478-3172-2

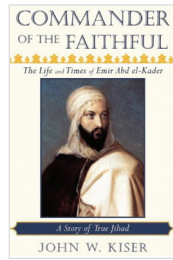
What celebrity has ever gone wrong with a Valentino gown on the runway? The designer himself admits that he has never been revolutionary, but instead he strives for “an elegance that transforms borders,” a goal that has served him well for nearly fifty years.

Born in 1932 in Italy, he was named for Rudolph Valentino, the leading American heart-throb of the day. It was while watching Lana Turner, Hedy Lamarr, and Judy Garland films that he realized his destiny was to create beautiful gowns. At the age of eighteen, Valentino Clemente Ludovico Garavani moved to Paris to study fashion at the École de la Chambre Syndicale de la Couture Parisienne. After graduation he worked for Jean Dessès, whose clients included Aristotle Onassis. Later, he was invited to work at the house of his former coworker, Guy Laroche. At the same time, designers including Yves Saint Laurent, Karl Lagerfeld, and Christian Dior were sweeping Paris, creating a new, youthful look. With money from his parents, Valentino moved back to Rome to realize his dream of opening his own fashion house. Soon he was dressing Italian actresses and impressing American buyers, and just a few years later, showing his collection at the Waldorf-Astoria Hotel in New York. An entire wardrobe designed for Jacqueline Kennedy sent his career into orbit and every generation since has embraced the color and grace of Valentino’s collections.

The story of his success is told here in less than twenty pages; the remainder of the book is dedicated to full-color images of some of his most striking pieces, including a short orange cocktail dress from 1959 with twirls of tulle and orange button roses, as well as the narrow black gown with cascading white ribbons that Julia Roberts wore to accept her Oscar in 2001. Many of Valentino’s gowns are timeless and readers may not be able to guess without looking which era they date from. Such is the case with a slender white suit with a vest adorned with pearls and braids. It was part of his spring/summer 1968 collection, but would look right at home on today’s runways.

Golbin is curator-in-chief for the fashion and textiles collections at Les Arts Décoratifs in Paris. She is the author of *Fashion Designers* and *Balenciaga Paris*. Her latest book is a beautiful tribute to Valentino, who put away his drawing board in January and retired from his \$2.6 billion empire. (September) *Whitney Hallberg*

## BIOGRAPHY & AUTOBIOGRAPHY



### Commander of the Faithful: The Life and Times of Emir Abd el-Kader

**John W. Kiser**  
Monkfish, Hardcover  
\$28.95 (384pp)  
978-0-9798828-3-8

If a prospective reader had “seen the movie”—no, there isn’t one—or even heard someone talk about this book on TV, they might be likely to have a close look at it in a bookstore. But as things are, a book about a figure in Middle Eastern history, “about a jihadist” can’t be expected to arouse much interest in this country, except among the learned and the open-minded.

Which is too bad. It’s true that Abd el-Kader led a *jihad*, not a *crusade*; the latter, by definition Christian, is commonly regarded in the West as a thoroughly respectable undertaking, while the former, by definition Islamic, is at best open to question.

But Abd el-Kader stands at an extreme opposite to what a Westerner might expect of a “jihad” leader. The name he was given at birth by those who would groom him for manhood and leadership translates as “servant of the Almighty,” and Kiser rightly devotes more space than might ordinarily be considered necessary to his subject’s early life and education, by way of accounting for the qualities he would exhibit in manhood, winning widespread respect, both secular and non-secular.

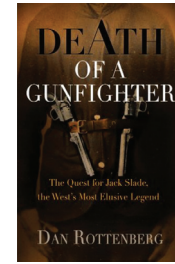
So striking were his abilities and character that at the age of twenty-four he was called upon to lead a jihad against the French, who had invaded and occupied Algiers. The fifteen-year struggle that ensued would dramatically change the course of his life. France clearly was determined not to yield, and sought to demoralize Abd el-Kader by means of brutal retaliation against tribes that were supporting him. He responded by surrendering.

Later, exiled in Damascus when Turkish authorities undertook what amounted to a pogrom against some 10,000 Christians and diplomats, Abd el-Kader risked his life to protect them, facing down an angry mob that was overpowered by the force of his personality.

This is a strikingly good biography, and an important one as well. If John Kiser’s subject had been an American, he would be known to all of us; though it should be mentioned in this context that he was once so widely admired and lavishly honored that a town in Iowa adopted his name ([www.elkader-iowa.com](http://www.elkader-iowa.com)).

Although Kiser wrote this book for a general readership, it is the result of more than a decade of scholarly research and includes extensive chapter notes, assuring it of a place in specialized

academic libraries as well. (November) *Harold Cordry*



### Death of a Gunfighter: The Quest for Jack Slade, The West's Most Elusive Legend

**Dan Rottenberg**  
Westholme Publishing,  
Hardcover \$29.95 (528pp)  
978-1-59416-070-7

“Of gougers fierce, the eyes that pierce, the fiercest gouger he.” —*The City of the Saints*, Richard Francis Burton.

The above quote is a description of the infamous American gunslinger Jack Slade, cited by Dan Rottenberg in this superb biography. Slade was an enigmatic character of contradictions. Known as a vicious drunk and cold-blooded, heartless killer, he was also described by Burton as, “the most gentlemanly, quiet, and effective officer on the Overland Service.”

Jack Slade was also “the most celebrated freighter on the plains.” His reputation was so great that he was hired to keep the stage-coaches and the U.S. mail running on schedule within his division from Missouri to the Pacific Coast. Regardless of bandits, hostile Indians, or inclement weather, he succeeded beyond the expectations of his bosses and was instrumental to the beginnings and continued success of the Pony Express. Rottenberg writes, “In the last month leading up to the inaugural Pony Express run, Slade supervised the completion of stations, distributed stock, assigned riders to their posts.... Slade drove his men relentlessly to finish by the April 3 deadline.”

Slade’s uncanny gun-fighting skills, excellent freighter driving abilities, his indomitable will to get the job done, and a “Jekyll and Hyde” reaction to alcohol made him a legendary figure in the Old West. Like all legends, his stories have been much embellished. For example, author Mark Twain (Samuel Clemens) writes of his experience with Slade in his book *Roughing It*: “A high and efficient servant of the Overland, an outlaw among outlaws and yet their relentless scourge...” Rottenberg points out that Twain took poetic license when it came to Slade: “The real Slade Clemens met for perhaps an hour... was but a pale shadow of Twain’s overheated imagination.” A later description of Slade by Twain almost matches Burton’s, “He was so friendly and so gentle-spoken that I warmed to him in spite of his awful history.”

Because such illustriousness makes it difficult for a serious biographer to distinguish between fact and myth, Rottenberg had to exhaustively sift through Slade’s life from his Illinois birth in 1831 to the after-effects of his pointless and ironic death by execution. The author has written nine other books and is the editor of Broad Street Review, an arts and culture Web site.