Peter of Cluny

Petrus Venerabilis, Peter the Venerable

**DATE OF BIRTH** 1092 or 1094
**PLACE OF BIRTH** Montboissier, Auvergne
**DATE OF DEATH** 25 December 1156
**PLACE OF DEATH** Cluny, Burgundy

**BIOGRAPHY**

Peter of Cluny, known as Peter the Venerable since the end of the 12th century, was the ninth abbot of Cluny (1122-56). Born into a Montboissier family of the middle aristocracy of Auvergne, Peter became an oblate at the Cluniac monastery of Sauxillanges in the Auvergne, then followed a typical *cursus honorum* within the Cluniac church: choir monk at Cluny, schoolmaster at Vézelay, and prior at Domènes. In 1122, he was elected abbot of Cluny after the abdication of Pons de Melgueil, which initiated a crisis. Peter strove to restore order in the mother abbey and in its network of dependencies, and to defend the Cluniac model against attacks from new monastic models (notably the Cistercians).

Peter never promoted or preached crusade, as did his contemporary Bernard of Clairvaux, though in various letters he praises the Templars for their relentless war against the Saracens and offers prayers for the success of Louis VII of France and Roger II of Sicily in their wars against Muslims. Peter is the author of numerous letters and treatises, including a triptych of texts meant to defend the church against its enemies: heretics (Peter of Bruys and his disciples), Jews and Saracens.

In 1142-43, Peter travelled to Spain and decided to commission the first full Latin translation of the Qur’an, by Robert of Ketton (q.v.), along with translations of a number of other works related to Muhammad and Islam. He hoped in this way to provide Christendom with an instrument to be used in the fight against the ‘Saracen heresy’, in the form of an *armarium*, a “bookshelf” or ‘arsenal’ that would permit him to wage war in the field of ideas.
With this collection, Peter hoped to furnish the intellectual arms necessary to attack Islam at its base. His correspondence with abbot Bernard of Clairvaux shows that he hoped Bernard would take up his pen against Islam. Bernard declined to do so, and it was finally Peter himself who composed a pair of polemical works against Islam, based on the contents of his armarium.

**MAIN SOURCES OF INFORMATION**

*Primary*


*Secondary*


J.J. Sanford, 'Peter the Venerable', in J.B. Gracia and T.B. Noone (eds), *A companion to philosophy in the Middle Ages*, Oxford, 2003, 532-33


