

HISTORY, HOLLYWOOD, AND THE CRUSADES

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A Thesis

Presented to

The Faculty of the Department

of History

University of Houston

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In Partial Fulfillment

Of the Requirements for the Degree of

Master of Arts

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By

Mary R. McCarthy

May, 2013

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## **ABSTRACT**

This thesis discusses the relationship between film and history in the depiction of the Crusades. It proposes that film is a valuable historical tool for teaching about the past on several levels, namely the film's contemporaneous views of the Crusades, and the history Crusades themselves. This thesis recommends that a more rigid methodology be adopted for evaluating the historicity of films and encourages historians to view films not only as historians but also as film scholars.

## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

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For my dad who gave practically all he had,

For my mom who always believed in me,

and

For my brother for raising the bar

### Historical Film: A Paradox

The term ‘historical film’ has many definitions. It could refer to a non-fiction documentary film that focuses on a historical subject. Alternatively, it might refer to a film that fictionalizes a historical subject in some way. The definition of a historical film is of great debate but the debate on whether or not film is of value to historians is even more significant. Film is a fascinating and legitimate historical medium in several regards. They can actively depict an interpretation of the past or they can inadvertently reveal things about the film’s contemporary society. Film is valuable for its content and its cinematic elements and should be respected as a valuable historical medium.

Examining film as a historical medium has particularly captured the attention of historians in recent years. Many professional historians are developing relationships with Hollywood and silver screen producers as the film industry consults the past and historians consult the movies. So what, precisely, is the allure of historical films? The answer, in short, is the audience: films and movies reach a vast audience. In 2012 more than 225 million people in the US and Canada went to the movies: 68% of the population!<sup>1</sup> This audience is composed of individuals who may have little to no interest in historical learning or prior historical knowledge so, in many historians’ opinions, films have an obligation to portray the past accurately. Regardless of the question of responsibility, film certainly *is* influential. Gore Vidal, the respected essayist and political commentator, described his realization as a child that “if one saw enough movies, one learned quite a lot of simple-minded history.”<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> “Theatrical Market Statistics 2012,” Motion Picture Association of America, Inc., accessed March 24, 2013, <http://www.mpa.org/Resources/3037b7a4-58a2-4109-8012-58fca3abdf1b.pdf>.

<sup>2</sup> Gore Vidal, *Screening History* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1992), 17.



Whole studies have been devoted to how much the public trusts history as shown in film. In 1989, a group of professional historians and government officials came together to form the Committee on History-Making America. Over the course of several years, these committee members conducted a national telephone survey about how the public is exposed to history. The survey targeted several different areas of interest: the classroom, books, TV and cinema, word of mouth, and so on. The results of the survey, as well as an extensive discussion about the survey's value and prospective improvements, are discussed in *The Presence of Past* by Roy Rosenzweig and David Thelen, both members of the Committee. Compiling and categorizing the results of the survey, Rosenzweig and Thelen found that films, on average, were given a 50% 'trustworthiness' rating by survey participants.<sup>3</sup> Other sources of information about the past that were surveyed included museums, family accounts, conversations with contemporary individuals, college professors, high school teachers, and non-fiction books. Though films were the lowest ranked category, the results cannot be diminished: films are used to interpret the past.<sup>4</sup>

In the past twenty years in particular historical films have captured the attention of historians as a topic of debate. Marnie Hughes-Warrington, a professor of modern history at Macquarie University in Australia, perhaps most poignantly summarized the feelings of historians towards film: "Historians and historical filmmakers appear to be antagonists, with the former protecting history with... fervor and solemnity... and the

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<sup>3</sup> Roy Rosenzweig and David Thelen, *The Presence of Past: Popular Uses of History in American Life*. (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998.)

<sup>4</sup> While the survey is valuable for the information it proposes, it was conducted on an extremely small scale with fewer than 800 total respondents. Modern technologies, hopefully, will help fuel a newer, larger survey in the future.

latter struggling to produce works that are both engaging and economically viable.”<sup>5</sup> The idea that filmmakers and historians are nemeses does not seem to be a stretch since many professional, academic historians are quite frequently willing to publish harsh critiques of historical films. It seems as though every other issue of a historical journal seems to feature the next Hollywood victim. However, change is in the air. Moderates, on both the historical and the filmmaking side of things, seem to be emerging from the woodwork. Many recent historical films have featured a delicate balance of historicity and entertainment, a phenomenon that will be briefly touched upon in this essay.

The leading scholar among historians on the topic of the historical film is undoubtedly Robert A. Rosenstone, a professor emeritus at the California Institute of Technology. Rosenstone has played an active role in integrating history into feature films and films into the discipline of history. His first major project with film and history was writing, consulting, and participating in the creation of a CBS Television documentary on the Spanish Civil War in 1978 which he followed up with numerous other documentary credits. In 1982, however, Rosenstone received critical acclaim in the dramatic feature industry for consulting on, and writing the (hi)story that inspired, the major motion picture *Reds*. *Reds*, directed by Warren Beatty, tells the story of John Reed and, specifically, retells the story that Rosenstone had drafted in his non-fiction book, *Romantic Revolutionary: A Biography of John Reed*. The film propelled Rosenstone into the limelight of filmmakers and historians and introduced him to the complex relationship between film and history.<sup>6</sup> Having made his grand entrance into that confusing world,

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<sup>5</sup> Marnie Hughes-Warrington, *History Goes to the Movies: Studying History on Film* (New York: Routledge, 2007), 1.

<sup>6</sup> Rosenstone discusses his experiences and ‘minor role’ in the production of *Reds* in “Reds as History” in *Reviews in American History* Vol. 10, No. 3 (Sep., 1982) pp. 297-310.

Rosenstone decided to explore the debate about history in film more fully and began to publish profound explorations of the subject.

Though Rosenstone covers a new topic of the film-history relationship in each of his books, his standpoint can be summarized thus: “*A film is not a book... Film is history as vision.*”<sup>7</sup> Though it may seem obvious that ‘film is not a book,’ Rosenstone’s reminder raises an interesting question: how should a viewer evaluate a film? Should the audience address a film solely as entertainment, or solely as history... or something else? The answers, of course, are entirely subjective. Rosenstone and many others believe that there is a happy medium to be found between pure history and pure entertainment, though their formulas differ wildly. Rosenstone’s second point, that film is ‘history as vision,’ requires further discussion.

Film presents history in a dramatically different way than history texts do. It *reproduces* (as opposed to ‘re-enacts’) history through a visual medium.<sup>8</sup> Gore Vidal describes film as an opportunity to *experience* history.<sup>9</sup> Whether a film has been created with the purpose of entertainment or education, it appeals to a different audience than books do. Historically speaking books have been for an elite, educated class while images have been accessible by any person. Images transcend social levels and language barriers. So film, in its most basic elements, is accessible by everyone. Visual representations reveal important pieces of information about the past and about film. A historical film reveals the ideas of its contemporary society towards history.

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<sup>7</sup> Robert A. Rosenstone, *Visions of the Past: The Challenge of Film to Our Idea of History* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1995), 14-15.

<sup>8</sup> I am suggesting that “reproduction” involves interpretation and recreation by an artist (the filmmaker) while “re-enactment” involves directly copying from a record historical source.

<sup>9</sup> Vidal, 17.

The study of history in film should be treated in a similar way to how historiographies are studied: trends in social changes tend to be reflected in contemporary products whether they are film, text, or fashion. When historians examine the historiography of a subject they look for philosophical trends. They may ask themselves, is this a Marxist work? Is this a post-modern look at history? And if a philosophical trend cannot be established, good historians at the very least look at who is creating the history and what audience the creator was catering to. These are the same methods that should be, and increasingly are, applied to historical films.

Take, for instance, D.W. Griffith's *Birth of a Nation*. The 1915 silent film was hailed as a masterpiece in its time and is still revered by the film industry for its innovation. The film tells a fictional story of the Civil War, making it a historical film for both its content and its original release date. Before evaluating the historic value of the cinematic elements, the viewer must first be aware of the film's contemporary society. In 1915, racial equality was an empty issue so the film's portrayal of African Americans as savage brutes did not raise any hackles. Likewise, the film's romantic, heroic portrayal of the KKK did not raise negative reviews. Rather, contemporary audiences hailed *Birth of a Nation* as a testament to white supremacy. Viewing the film today, modern audiences would be shocked by the content and characterizations without the prior knowledge that, in 1915, that's 'the way things were.'

So Griffith's film, and all historical films, should first be examined in their contemporary context. Once the contemporary context has been established, then the filmmaker's *intentions* should be examined. Certainly every filmmaker and producer has an agenda, whether it is to make money or some higher, more idealistic or pedagogical

goal. Even in their quest to make a blockbuster, most producers and directors will use rhetoric to portray themselves as creative truth-sayers using film to create a believable world and a believable story of some sort. Determining a filmmaker's intentions helps establish a way to evaluate a historical film; is it a comedy, a parody, a drama, a biopic, etc?

Only after looking at the film's contemporary society and the intentions of its creators can the historical film's content be evaluated for historicity. The film contents that can be evaluated for historicity include three major categories:

1. The Script: the plot, setting and characters
2. The Performance: how the director and actors portray the dialog and stature of a character
3. The Production: costuming and make-up, film locations, and general mise-en-scène

Creating all of these elements reflects a desire on the part of filmmakers to deliberately recreate the past. To do so they have to have knowledge of the subject they are recreating. Whether they are correct in their knowledge, however, is a question that only historians<sup>10</sup> can effectively answer.

The evaluation of Script, Performance, and Production should be conducted in the same way that a historian would review a book or artifact. When historians evaluate the historicity of a film they need to evaluate each of these categories carefully in the light of the previous discoveries (contemporary audience and filmmaker's intentions). If they do not, if they take the film as a single experience, they will undoubtedly miss something.

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<sup>10</sup> I use the term 'historians' here with some reluctance. I am not referring solely to professionals but to anyone with a particular interest and substantial knowledge of a historical subject. For lack of a better term, I use 'historians.'

Films are, after all, the product of teamwork and while the directors and producers may take the glory or the backlash for a film, numerous individuals played a role in creating the film. The costuming has to be researched by professional costumers who need to know how to recreate costumes and how to insure the actor's comfort. The set has to be built by professional carpenters and artists who have to recreate a believable historical environment. The actors have to portray historical characters; the writers have to write about historical events, places, and people. A historical film has many creators and if historians neglect to observe each cinematic element carefully, they are doing a disservice to the film community and potentially themselves. Many film reviews written by historians focus on plot elements alone, which seems to be a half-hearted way of critiquing a competitive historical interpretation. Historic films should be considered in their *entirety*.

This, sadly, is something that has not been explored by historians looking at film. Robert Rosenstone never touches on the cinematic elements of historical film. Marnie Hughes-Warrington, in her excellent historiography of history in film, never addresses it; nor does Richard Francaviglia or Jerry Rodnitzky.<sup>11</sup> This is a major shortcoming on the part of historians in the discussion about film's relationship to history and history's relationship to film.

Recall for a moment the survey by Rosenzeig and Thelen that revealed moviegoers give historical films a 50-50 trustworthiness rating. Viewers, surely, have formed their opinions by observing (consciously or unconsciously) all of those cinematic

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<sup>11</sup> Professors of history at the University of Texas at Arlington, they have collaborated numerous times on the topic of history and film. Their most notable work is *Lights, Camera, History: Portraying the Past in Film* (College Station: Texas A&M Press, 2007) which features essays from several well-known film historians.

elements. Neglecting to evaluate the cinematic elements reveals the innate antagonism of historians towards film. Perhaps their reluctance to evaluate cinematic elements stems from a lack of knowledge about the production process, but that does not serve as a satisfying excuse.

The lack of extensive evaluation opens the door for future historians. No historical film can ever be properly judged as historical or a-historical without being critiqued in its entirety. While the appreciation of film in history has increased in recent years, it still has a long way to go. Perhaps future generations of film historians will find the perfect balance that Rosenstone and others seek to strike between pure entertainment and pure history.

What makes films particularly valuable to historians is their reach. Films reach a much wider audience than text histories, and they represent a much less elite and much more accessible form of history telling. They are valuable, visual interpretations of history and while they may not always be accurate, they are always revealing. Films are valuable mediums of history because they reveal how the film's contemporary audience viewed the past. They have a vivacity and multi-dimensionality that can never be duplicated by text. That is not to say, of course, that film is better than text. Each has its own specific audience and its specific strengths and weaknesses. Film represents, if anything, a challenge to textual histories and that probably fuels the inherent antagonism between filmmakers and historians. Rosenstone most succinctly summarizes the historical film's role thus: "...this kind of history is a challenge, a provocation, and a paradox."

### The Crusades on the Silver Screen

The Crusades are one of many historical events that have fascinated Hollywood's moviemakers. Each era of major film history has had at least one interpretation of the conflict beginning with a 1911 fluff-piece released by Thomas Edison's studio<sup>12</sup> and continuing until the most recent picture, *Arn: The Kingdom at Road's End*, in 2008 (as of this essay). While there have been a huge number of films depicting the time of the Crusades, fewer deal with the actual conflict.

This is, in part, because of the debate about the very word "crusade." Some would say that any war waged by or for a religion is a crusade, while others might contest that a crusade is simply a fight against some "aggressive... public evil."<sup>13</sup> Neither of these definitions is valuable for a historical discussion. However if one changes the article from "a" to "the" the word crusade becomes much easier to define. *The Crusades* refer, most historians would agree, to a series of conflicts "related particularly to large-scale expeditions to the east and to the Latin settlements in Palestine and Syria"<sup>14</sup> during the Middle Ages. There are some who would expand the definition of *the* Crusades even further, into northern Africa—or even Spain—through the 18<sup>th</sup> century,<sup>15</sup> but Hollywood perpetuates the idea that the Crusades were primarily a medieval conflict.

In recent years there have been a few attempts to study the relationship between Hollywood and Crusade history, most notably the collection *Hollywood in the Holy Land*.<sup>16</sup> This collection of features a variety of essays written almost exclusively by

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<sup>12</sup> John Aberth, *A Knight at the Movies: Medieval History on Film* (New York: Routledge, 2003), 86.

<sup>13</sup> Aberth, 63.

<sup>14</sup> Jonathan Riley-Smith, ed. *The Oxford Illustrated History of the Crusades* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 12.

<sup>15</sup> Riley-Smith, *The Oxford Illustrated History of the Crusades*, 11.

<sup>16</sup> Nickolas Haydock and E.L. Ridsen, eds. *Hollywood in the Holy Land: Essays on Film Depictions of the Crusades and Christian-Muslim Clashes* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland and Company, 2008).



literary scholars ranging in subject from set design and location<sup>17</sup> in medieval historical film to “bodily temporalities.”<sup>18</sup> Many of the contributors look at medieval historical films through the lens of a film scholar, examining the filmmaker’s intentions or various imagery shown. Yet none explores the relationship between the historical record and the historical film in-depth. The contributors are also very quick to use theory such as psychoanalysis and post-colonialism which, though intriguing ideas, are probably not relatable to or identifiable by the average moviegoer. These essays approach films about the Crusades as though the film is only art or only literature; while there is an argument to be made that films are literature, there is an equally strong argument that they are history. Surely the most valuable analysis of historical film would be to approach it as both literature *and* history.

Before delving into the possibilities of film as history and literature we turn back to the Crusades. What is it about the Crusades that appeals to historians, literary scholars, filmmakers and so many others?

There are any number of reasons why the Crusades have attracted individuals for hundreds of years. During the Middle Ages, throughout the duration of the Crusades, the appeal stemmed from a desire for conquest and conversion, or “a piety that may be alien to us but was very real to them.”<sup>19</sup> Scholars during the Enlightenment “concentrated their fire on the moral, religious and cultural aspects of crusading,”<sup>20</sup> while the Romantics found the exoticism of the Orient to be their driving interest. During the First World War

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<sup>17</sup> John M. Ganim “Framing the West, Staging the East: Set Design, Location, and Landscape in Cinematic Medievalism,” in *Hollywood in the Holy Land: Essays on Film Depictions of the Crusades and Christian-Muslim Clashes* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland and Company, 2008), 31-46.

<sup>18</sup> Kathleen Coyne Kelly, “Medieval Times: Bodily Temporalities in *The Thief of Bagdad* (1924), *The Thief of Bagdad* (1940) and *Aladdin* (1992)” in *Hollywood in the Holy Land: Essays on Film Depictions of the Crusades and Christian-Muslim Clashes* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland and Company, 2008), 200-224.

<sup>19</sup> Jonathan Riley-Smith, *The Crusades, A History* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2005), xxxiii.

<sup>20</sup> Christopher Tyerman, *The Debate on the Crusades* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2011), 4.

there was an interest in the heritage of the Ottoman Empire and during the Cold War Crusade history became part of the fight for allegiance between the Eastern and Western blocs.

Entire studies have been devoted to the subject of how the Crusades have managed to maintain their relevance for so long. Christopher Tyerman's *The Debate on the Crusades* chronicles the evolution of scholarship on the Crusades, sharing some of the popular ongoing discussions about the conflict's relevance. Among the most prevalent theoretical discussions about the Crusades are analyses of imperialistic and colonialist tendencies by the Europeans, or militarism by the Arabs. These ideas parallel the theories of the film scholars in *Hollywood in the Holy Land*, which further suggests that these scholarly theories about imperialism, colonialism, or militarism are actually inseparable from a discussion about the Crusades.

The one theory that encompasses all of the aforementioned, and overshadows *all* art (film or canvas) about the Crusades is orientalism. Edward W. Said is the foremost authority on orientalism with his seminal work of the same name retains its status as the cornerstone for all discussions on the topic. Said defines orientalism thus:

Orientalism is not a mere political subject matter or field that is reflected passively by culture, scholarship or institutions; nor is it a large and diffuse collection of texts about the Orient; nor it is representative and expressive of some nefarious "Western" imperialist plot to hold down the "Oriental" world. It is rather a *distribution* of geographical distinction ... but also a whole series of "interests" which, by such means as scholarly discovery, philological reconstruction, psychological analysis, landscape and sociological description, it not only creates but also maintains; it *is*, rather than expresses, a certain *will* or *intention* to understand, in some cases to control, manipulate, even to incorporate, what is a manifestly different (or alternative and novel) world.... [My] real argument is that Orientalism is—and does not simply represent—a considerable

dimension of modern political-intellectual culture, and as such has less to do with the Orient than it does with “our” world.<sup>21</sup>

Said has here suggested that orientalism is a Western constructed lens through which to view the “orient.” The geographical area that he later defines as the orient is essentially anywhere not occidental, from the Near (or Middle) East to the Far East. Addressing the Crusades, Said suggests, “Islam is judged to be a fraudulent new version of some previous experience, in this case Christianity” thus fueling the “militant pilgrims.” He further suggests, however, “Not for nothing did Islam come to symbolize terror, devastation, the demonic, hordes of hated barbarians.” While Said does not clarify how Islam actually threatened Christian Europe, he does reiterate that popular images of the orient were “a way of controlling the redoubtable Orient.” The “strangeness,” “difference,” and “exotic sensuousness,” that Europeans attributed to the Orient and to Islam were “always symmetrical to, and yet diametrically inferior to, a European equivalent.”<sup>22</sup>

Said’s critical theory on orientalism has influenced political scientists, literary scholars, and now historians. Orientalism is the most appropriate critical lens through which to view the Crusades because it is all encompassing; there are elements of imperialism, militarism, feminism, racism and countless other theories present in orientalism. And because Said and others have defined orientalism as a purely Western construct it is particularly useful in evaluating Western films about the orient.

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<sup>21</sup> Edward W. Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Random House, Inc., 1994), 12.

<sup>22</sup> Said, *Orientalism*, 58-72.

In 1997 Matthew Bernstein and Gaylyn Studlar published a collection of essays dedicated to observing orientalism in film. *Visions of the East*<sup>23</sup> was the first attempt to analyze orientalism exhibited in film and included several essays on historical context. However, the essays only looked at the historical context of the film's time, *not* the history behind the film's story.

More recently Richard Francaviglia has endeavored to make orientalism in film a historian's prerogative. In his essay "Crusaders and Saracens: the persistence of orientalism in historically themed pictures about the Middle East"<sup>24</sup> Francaviglia proposes historians have an advantage above other scholars to analyze orientalism in film because of their historical knowledge about the historical era being depicted *and* the historical era of the film's release. His essay covers several films about the Crusades which serves as an example of orientalism's applicability to historical films but by covering such a variety of films in so short a report Francaviglia is actually contradicting his thesis. If historians have a duty to observe and analyze orientalism in film, it should be done with a methodology reminiscent of historical scholarship.

Francaviglia's opus was the inspiration for this study. This study seeks to establish a functional rubric for evaluating historical films. The Crusades provide the optimal historical lens for film evaluation for reasons mentioned previously: they have captured the attention of scholars and individuals for hundreds of years. Every major era of film has released a film (sometimes several) on the topic of Crusades, making it a

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<sup>23</sup> Matthew Bernstein and Gaylyn Studlar, eds., *Visions of the East: Orientalism in Film* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1997).

<sup>24</sup> Richard Francaviglia, "Crusaders and Saracens: the persistence of orientalism in historically themed motion pictures about the Middle East" in *Lights, Camera, History: Portraying the Past in Film* ed. Richard Francaviglia and Jerry Rodnitzky (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 2007), 53-90.

wonderful example to observe the evolution of historical knowledge and its application in Hollywood through the years.

Evaluating three films in-depth will show that the only valuable discussion anyone can have about historical films and the relationship between history and film is an extremely detailed discussion that balances historical analysis/scholarship with film critique. Each of the three films discussed here will be examined methodically, in three categories. After a brief summary of the film (*Action*), *History versus Film* will discuss how the film paralleled or departed from the historical sources. Then the filmmaker's intentions will be considered through the lens of a thematic critique (*Themes*), and finally the *Audience* section will discuss the events contemporary with the film's production how they may have shaped the film's inception and making.

The films have been chosen based on their mainstream releases and connections to major production companies. As major releases, they reached wide audiences. The films all feature star-studded casts and well-known directors. They all focus around the events of the Third Crusade, dealing either immediately with that Crusade or the events leading up to it.

The first film discussed was released in 1935 by the (in)famous Cecil B. DeMille. Like his other epic productions, *The Crusades* featured a massive production team. In contrast, the second film—*King Richard and the Crusaders*—was made on a much smaller, though still substantial, scale. Directed by David Butler, the 1954 film starred Rex Harrison and Virginia Mayo among others. The final film was released more than half a century later by Ridley Scott; Scott's *Kingdom of Heaven* is the only motion picture of the three to address an inter-Crusading era: the fall of Jerusalem to Saladin.

Through the multifaceted rubric evaluation, these films will reinforce Rosenstone's and other proponents' belief that "the visual media are a legitimate way of doing history—of representing, interpreting, thinking about, and making meaning from the traces of the past."<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> Robert A. Rosenstone "Introduction" in *Revisioning History: Film and the Construction of a New Past* ed. Robert A. Rosenstone (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995).

*The Crusades (1935)*

*The Crusades* is the quintessential Cecil B. DeMille picture. Known for “biblical spectacles ... the director was a firm believer in showing sin in action in order to effectively condemn it”<sup>26</sup> and *The Crusades* advances that aspect of DeMille’s agenda. Though DeMille is known for his biblical epic, *The Ten Commandments*, he directed several other successful historical epics including *The Crusades* (1935). Paramount studios initially granted DeMille a \$1,040,000 budget, much higher than his previous films.<sup>27</sup> After several delays, however, the cost of the film rose even further with DeMille’s production company covering much of the overage. In total the film cost \$1,376,000<sup>28</sup> to produce, an astonishing figure considering it was a product of the Great Depression. The film was inspired by a history of the Crusades written by Harold Lamb. Lamb was a fiction writer as well as an amateur historian and he collaborated with DeMille on several projects beside *The Crusades*, on which he was a screenwriter.<sup>29</sup> *The Crusades* tells a story about King Richard and the forces that drive him to take part in the Crusades. While ultimately a love story, the film has several layers to keep viewers entertained.

Action

The film begins with a triumphant orchestral prelude that fades into an image of three men trumpeting on horseback wearing shining armor. As the title fades a single, helmeted, knight on horseback appears holding a standard banner. The credits continue

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<sup>26</sup> Robert S. Birchard, *Cecil B. DeMille’s Hollywood* (Lexington, KY: The University Press of Kentucky, 2004), ix.

<sup>27</sup> Birchard, *Cecil B. DeMille’s Hollywood*, 290.

<sup>28</sup> Birchard, *Cecil B. DeMille’s Hollywood*, 292.

<sup>29</sup> Birchard, *Cecil B. DeMille’s Hollywood*, 283.

over images of swords, shields, and armor until fading into an image of flames and then into an illustration of Jerusalem. Text labels the illustration and proclaims “Through the ages the city sacred to men.”<sup>30</sup> The orchestra fades into a somber, slow horn as the images move on to the toiling of half-naked men. A man’s voice is heard singing an Islamic prayer as the camera shifts to a minaret. More titles rise to set the scene: “The year 1187 A.D. The Saracens of Asia swept over Jerusalem and the Holy Land, crushing the Christians to death or slavery.”<sup>31</sup>

The music’s tempo turns frantic as shouts and cries are heard from a crowd; they are cheering pulling down a crucifix and joyfully burning Christian relics and books in a veritable iconoclasm. The first words of the film are spoken by an anonymous woman whose hands are being shackled: “My son! Have they killed my son?” The scene shifts from the solemn marching of shackled prisoners to an auction of semi-naked women wearing crucifixes and praying; they are sold screaming to men in turbans. One begs that she be allowed to kiss a nun’s crucifix before she is sold. Saladin<sup>32</sup> enters, led by drumming horsemen and followed by dozens of masked horsemen, and is suddenly confronted by a Christian hermit. The hermit<sup>33</sup> claims that though Saladin has conquered the Holy Land, he will not conquer the Cross—the faith of the Christians. Then the hermit states that he will go to all the kings of Christendom<sup>34</sup> to raise armies and reclaim Christ’s tomb, the Holy Sepulchre. Saladin bids the hermit to go and spread word of what he has seen, but warns that whoever enters the Holy Land with a sword will not return with it. The crowds bowing before Saladin laugh at the hermit but, “Uplifted and

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<sup>30</sup> Cecil B. DeMille, dir. *The Crusades* 00:02:01

<sup>31</sup> DeMille, *The Crusades*, 00:02:15

<sup>32</sup> Played by Ian Keith.

<sup>33</sup> Played by C. Aubrey Smith.

<sup>34</sup> DeMille, *The Crusades*, 00:05:48



unwearying, the Hermit carries his message through all the Christian nations until a deathless flame is kindled in the hearts of the people.”<sup>35</sup>

The first king shown to pledge his fidelity to the Crusade is Philip of France<sup>36</sup> who then speaks with a man with a pencil mustache—Conrad of Monferrat<sup>37</sup>— who encourages Philip to deal with the threat of Richard the Lionheart before leaving on Crusade. Philip agrees that Richard is a threat, even though he is betrothed to King Philip’s sister, Alice.<sup>38</sup>

King Richard is introduced on horseback, carrying a lance to lilting, playful music. He strikes a wooden dummy several times to the accompanying song of a jester and lyre. Removing his helmet, Richard charges after jester. Running into a smithy, Richard’s attention is captured by a blacksmith<sup>39</sup> who is responsible for making Richard’s sword. They, however, get into an argument whereby Richard asks “well, who do you think strikes the harder blow, a king or a smith?”<sup>40</sup> In a brash challenge, Richard and the smith strike each other to determine who has the harder blow. After knocking the smith unconscious, Richard is greeted by Robert, Earl of Leicester,<sup>41</sup> who informs him of King Philip’s arrival.

Trying to avoid discussion of his betrothal to Alice of France, Richard dodges several attempts by Philip and Alice to toast their potential marriage. When it looks as though there is no way to postpone the discussion further, a messenger announces the arrival of the hermit and crowds of people at the gates. Richard grants them entry and

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<sup>35</sup> DeMille, *The Crusades*, 00:07:03

<sup>36</sup> Played by C. Henry Gordon.

<sup>37</sup> Played by Joseph Schildkraut.

<sup>38</sup> Played by Katherine DeMille.

<sup>39</sup> Played by Montagu Love.

<sup>40</sup> DeMille, *The Crusades*, 00:11:35

<sup>41</sup> Played by Lumsden Hare

hurries outside to avoid King Philip's confrontation. Listening to the preaching hermit, Richard jumps at the news that "all other earthly promises and vows are wiped away"<sup>42</sup> by participating in the Crusade. Recognizing this as an opportunity to break his previous engagement to Alice, Richard joins the Crusade even though he had earlier claimed to have no particular allegiance to God.

Alice, recognizing her difficult situation, follows suit and also takes the Cross. Richard claims that the Crusade is work for men and only men.<sup>43</sup> With sublime timing the blacksmith enters, carrying Richard's sword. The hermit blesses the swords of everyone who has pledged to take to the Crusade and the crowd cheers.

The next scene shows Prince John,<sup>44</sup> King Richard's brother, scheming with Conrad of Montferrat over a game of chess. Conrad hypothesizes that Richard may die at the hand of the infidels and wonders if John, who would become king of England, would support Conrad as king of Jerusalem. Laughing, they shake hands to cement the scheme and as the scene fades the Crusade begins. Hundred of knights, monks, and others are shown exiting the citadel with women and children waving them farewell with triumphant song.

As the scene shifts to the port of Marseille, the crusaders appear exhausted and hungry. A caption appears: "In the seaport of Marseille, exhausted from the long march across Europe, the crusade gathers. Iron men and saints,<sup>45</sup> kings and peasants take ship for the Holy Land."<sup>46</sup> Women wave and throw flowers to the weary men from balconies

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<sup>42</sup> DeMille, *The Crusades*, 00:21:19

<sup>43</sup> DeMille, *The Crusades*, 00:23:07.

<sup>44</sup> Played by Ramsay Hill.

<sup>45</sup> This is the title of Harold Lamb's first volume about the history of the Crusades.

<sup>46</sup> DeMille, *The Crusades*, 00:29:16.

and a new character is introduced, a blonde beauty named Berengaria.<sup>47</sup> Smiling happily, she tells her companion that she wishes she could carry a sword and fight with the men. She seeks the advice of a crusader, Blondel the jester, to locate the King of England and offer provisions to the Crusaders.

The jester directs Berengaria and her maid to where Richard is conducting a catapult through the city walls. As he shouts orders, Berengaria continues to admire him until he punches the blacksmith for injuring the king's horse.

Men begin to protest their hunger outside of Richard's tent as he tries to negotiate with King Sancho of Navarre<sup>48</sup> for food. Sancho offers the marriage of his daughter in exchange for food but Richard adamantly refuses. Persuaded by his men, Richard reluctantly agrees. Later, as the men and Richard feast on food and wine, a monk reminds Richard that he is to be wed that night. Richard refuses to go but sends his fool and his sword instead, claiming "one of royal blood may send his sword in his stead."<sup>49</sup>

Unbeknownst to Richard, Berengaria is the princess of Navarre and while she agrees to marry Richard, she is extremely offended when he sends his sword in his place. Following the ceremony, she furiously throws her wedding veil as a token and declares that Richard will never see her again. As the fool tries to relate what happened at the ceremony to Richard, the king takes the veil as a convenient bandage for his injured horse.

In the morning as the Crusaders ride to the ships, Richard stops below a balcony to compliment the beautiful woman he sees there—Berengaria. She refuses to wish him luck and with a chuckle he rides on, asking his fool who the lady is. When the jester

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<sup>47</sup> Played by Loretta Young.

<sup>48</sup> Played by George Barbier.

<sup>49</sup> DeMille, *The Crusades*, 0:39:02

reveals that it is his wife he exclaims, “Why the devil Judas didn’t you tell me she looked like that?”<sup>50</sup> and rushes back to demand that she accompany him to the Holy Land.

Berengaria reluctantly joins the women’s ship following the Crusaders and is introduced to Alice of France. Discovering that Berengaria wed Richard, Alice threatens Berengaria with a knife but is restrained.

The story moves into Acre with the narrative, “Out of a stormy sea, the crusade draws in to the walled city of Acre, stronghold of the Saracens and gateway to Jerusalem.”<sup>51</sup> When the Christians demand the surrender of the city, an Arab archer shoots him and the scene shifts into an argument between the kings of Europe. Richard enters with Berengaria and presents her to the kings. All but Philip rise for the woman. Saladin enters, again introduced by drumming horsemen, and the kings introduce themselves. Among them are the leaders of Burgundy, the Germans, the Russians, the Norse, the Austrians, Sicilians, and Hungarians. Conrad of Monferrat points out to Saladin that there are many kings, all bent on destroying the Saracen hold in the Holy Land. Saladin appears unmoved as he proclaims that the Christians will fail.

Richard offers a glass of wine to Saladin but the man refuses it and takes water instead. As the water is fetched Berengaria observes lowly to her companion that she had heard Saladin had horns like the devil, but that he surprisingly impressed her. Richard offers the water to Saladin, but Saladin’s companion blocks him from drinking in case it is poisoned. Berengaria moves forward to defuse the situation by testing the cup herself. The other Christian kings mutter to themselves that she was brave and intelligent by

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<sup>50</sup> DeMille, *The Crusades*, 00:46:56

<sup>51</sup> DeMille, *The Crusades*, 00:51:09

defusing the situation. As Berengaria leaves the tent, she bids the kings and the sultan farewell. Saladin returns the wish with a parting gesture.

Richard immediately confronts Saladin and demands the surrender of Acre and Jerusalem, to which Saladin laughs. Affronted, Richard exclaims that they will take the cities by sword and proves his own strength by chopping a metal rod in two. Saladin challenges him to cut a silk scarf in midair to prove his mettle, but Richard refuses. Demonstrating that it is possible, Saladin offers them one more opportunity to cede in peace. As the Christian kings mutter in bafflement they declare they shall go to war. Once Saladin has departed, Philip and Richard argue further about the legitimacy of Richard's marriage to Berengaria.

Richard tries to visit Berengaria in her tent that night but is met with resistance as she swings at him with his own sword. Their fight is interrupted by a declaration that the Saracens are attacking. As the king departs, Berengaria sadly realizes that he might be killed. As shadows of the men flitter by the tent, she kneels to pray. The passage of time is marked by more captions as the scene shifts once more. Conrad of Montferrat enters Berengaria's tent to tell her that she is dividing French and English unity and costing them the Crusade. Conrad openly suggests that she kill herself in order to save the Crusades. As Berengaria enters the tent where the kings are assembled, Philip announces that John has usurped Richard's throne in England and Philip will support John unless Richard renounces Berengaria and marries Alice. In response, Richard crowns Berengaria Queen of England. Outraged, Philip threatens to remove French support from the Crusades. The other kings hurry to convince Richard to annul his marriage but Berengaria rushes to the hermit for help to make peace between them. Even the hermit,

however, is convinced that Berengaria is ruining any chance of the Crusaders' success. Berengaria and Richard share a private moment, however, as Richard prepares to meet the Arab forces; he swears on his sword, the symbol of their marriage, that he will return to her.

The scene shifts to Saladin who has dressed in knight's garb to pass through the Christian defenses. As Saladin rides through the fallen Crusaders between the walls of Acre and the Christian defenses he sees Berengaria who has decided to commit suicide by sneaking past the defenses and get shot by an Arab archer. Seeing her wounded, Saladin rescues her and takes her into Acre. Upon hearing of Berengaria's "abduction" Richard rouses his army and pursues her. As the crusaders attack Acre the Saracens reveal that they have also captured the hermit and are torturing him. The hermit begs the crusaders to continue on their mission.

After a lengthy battle the city of Acre falls to the Christians and Richard interrogates surviving Saracens for information about Berengaria. Several soldiers experience epiphany about seeing and touching the wood of the true cross and as Richard helps one man to see the cross, news arrives that Saladin has taken Berengaria to Jerusalem. Despite protests that he will be vastly outnumbered, Richard rouses some volunteers to go with him to Jerusalem to rescue the queen.

When Berengaria awakens after recovering from her injury she sees that Saladin is entertaining her in a lush oasis with serenading musicians. Saladin offers her a rose and professes his love and admiration for her. Before Berengaria replies they are interrupted by news of Richard's approach. Saladin rides to meet Richard, taking Berengaria with him. An extensive battle leaves both sides at an impasse. Richard and his companions

search the bodies after the battle for signs of life, in particular the blacksmith. Richard and the others separate to search more effectively and the scene shifts to Conrad of Montferrat being granted an audience with Saladin. Conrad informs Saladin that his assassins will kill Richard and Conrad will make peace with the Saracens. Insulted that Conrad would interfere with the conflict between kings, Saladin sends Saracens to stop the ambush and save Richard.

Having found and spoken to the dying blacksmith, Richard is surrounded and by ambushed Conrad's men. With the help of mounted Saracens he defeats them and demands to know where Berengaria is. Discovering that she is at Saladin's tent, Richard steals a horse and rushes to her.

Confronting Saladin, Richard demands his wife back but Saladin informs him that Berengaria has agreed to marry Saladin in return for saving Richard. As the two men fight for her, Berengaria tries to negotiate peace between the two of them; "if you fight on, thousands and thousands more will die."<sup>52</sup> As she speaks of the city of God Saladin corrects her, claiming that it is the city of Allah. In response she exclaims, "So what if we call him Allah or God, shall men fight because they travel different roads to him?"<sup>53</sup> Inspired, the king and sultan come to a truce that includes the entry and safe passage of Christians not bearing arms into the city of Jerusalem, for all but Richard, and for the release of Christian slaves and captives. To cement the deal Richard breaks his sword and discards it at Berengaria's feet.

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<sup>52</sup> DeMille, *The Crusades*, 1:52:08

<sup>53</sup> DeMille, *The Crusades*, 1:52:39

Leaving without his wife, Richard prays genuinely for her return. His prayer begins, “I was blind, but now I see,”<sup>54</sup> and begs that he will continue to change if God returns Berengaria to him. He has become less proud and brash.

As Christian slaves and captives are set free the cross that was torn down is erected once more and throngs of pilgrim Crusaders enter the city of Jerusalem peacefully. Watching the procession from outside the city, Richard spies Berengaria travelling into the city. She reveals that she has been freed too and that she will return to him after visiting the Holy Sepulchre. Inside, she lays the broken shards of Richard’s sword at the altar and begins to pray. The screen fades once more onto the shields of the crusaders with a beam of light shining upon the Templar’s single red cross.

#### History versus Film

Cecil B. DeMille and Harold Lamb, and the other screenwriters involved, had very little to say about the historical authenticity of *The Crusades*. Production notes, instead, reveal discussions about thematic approaches. Lamb did, however, make the following note in August 1935 about the history behind the film:

It is the third Crusade with which story is [sic] concerned 1187 A.D. the year Saladin captured Jerusalem. The failure of this crusade was caused by the personal quarrel of the leaders. This, in turn, was due to the bitter wrangle between Richard and Phillip of France, after Richard refused to marry Alice of France, and his strange marriage with Berengaria of Navarre en route to the Holy Land. Aggravated, of course, by Richard’s arrogance and his assumption of leadership over the other princes, the quarrel became an open breach at the capture of Acre. The embittered princes returned home leaving Richard to march on Jerusalem with Hugo of Burgundy and a remnant of the once formidable crusade.<sup>55</sup>

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<sup>54</sup> DeMille, *The Crusades*, 1:57:30

<sup>55</sup> Harold Lamb, “Draft of Letter answering questions about script for *The Crusades*” quoted in Birchard, *Cecil B. DeMille’s Hollywood*, 283-284.



Lamb's note seems to suggest that the rivalry between Richard and Philip was the driving force behind the film, and the greatest obstacle to the Third Crusade. However during a production meeting in January of that year the most pervasive topic discussed was not about Richard or Philip, but about Berengaria. Barney Glazer, a Paramount executive, asked if the dramatization of Berengaria's relationship with Saladin would be offensive to "England and the English colonies. ...It is a daring invention." Lamb defends his fictions by saying that little to nothing is known about Berengaria in the historical records, "on her return after his [Richard's] death, she just disappeared."<sup>56</sup>

Harold Lamb was completely correct on that account. Berengaria, who is perhaps more central to *The Crusades* than Richard, is rarely discussed in the historical record. The Third Crusade was well documented by both European and Arab sources. Of the dozen or so European sources are two very detailed accounts of the Third Crusade: the *Itinerarium Peregrinorum et Gesta Regis Ricardi* and *The Old French Continuation of William of Tyre, 1184-1197*. The former has been a topic of debate because of its unidentified authorship and date while the latter was not composed by William of Tyre (a contemporary of the events) but by some other unknown author. The two records do seem, however, to confirm each other. There are even more Arab sources for the Crusades, almost entirely dedicated to chronicling the deeds of Saladin. The most notable of the Arab sources are Ibn al-Athir's eye-witness account, Baha ad-Din who was also a contemporary, and Imad ad-Din who served as Saladin's secretary.

Yet Berengaria, who plays a central role in the film, is completely unknown to the Arab sources and mentioned only sparingly in the European ones. She is introduced in the *Itinerarium Peregrinorum* as the companion of Richard's mother, Queen Eleanor.

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<sup>56</sup> "Transcription of January 7, 1935" quoted in Birchard, *Cecil B. DeMille's Hollywood*, 284-285

The Queen “brought with her a noble young woman, daughter of the king of Navarre. Her name was Berengaria and she was the king’s intended wife.”<sup>57</sup> They arrived in Messina toward the end of March, 1191 when King Philip of France departed for Acre and though Queen Eleanor returned to England, Berengaria remained with the crusaders, keeping company with Richard’s sister, dowager queen Joan/Joanna of Sicily.<sup>58</sup> The narrative of the *Itinerarium Peregrinorum* leaves Berengaria’s voyage aside until she docks off the coast of Limassol, Cyprus and takes up with her again on 12 May, 1191 when she married Richard. The author describes the event very briefly:

On the following day, a Sunday, on the feast of St Pancras [12 May 1191] King Richard and Berengaria, daughter of the king of Navarre, were married at Limassol. The young woman was very wise and of good character. She was there crowned queen. The archbishop of Bordeaux was present at the ceremony, as was [John] the bishop of Evreux, and the bishop of Bayonne, and many other magnates and nobles. The king was merry and full of delight, pleasant and agreeable to everyone.<sup>59</sup>

Though this account may seem brief, it is extravagant in comparison with the *Continuation of William of Tyre*. The *Continuation* only says, “As soon as he [Richard] arrived he married the maiden whom his mother had sent, in a chapel dedicated to Saint George.”<sup>60</sup> The *Continuation* has nothing to say about Berengaria’s personality though it is not flattering to Richard; the *Continuation* is tilted largely in King Philip’s favor. The *Continuation* introduces Berengaria as a pawn being used by Queen Eleanor because “she hated the heirs of King Louis of France, her former husband, and she had no desire for her heirs to wed his offspring.”<sup>61</sup> Interestingly, Queen Eleanor has much more personality

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<sup>57</sup> Helen J. Nicholson, trans., *Chronicle of the Third Crusade* (Aldershot, UK: Ashgate, 1997), 172.

<sup>58</sup> Nicholson, *Chronicle of the Third Crusade*, 173-174.

<sup>59</sup> Nicholson, *Chronicle of the Third Crusade*, 189.

<sup>60</sup> Peter Edbury, trans., *The Conquest of Jerusalem and the Third Crusade* (Aldershot, UK: Ashgate, 1998), 104.

<sup>61</sup> Edbury, *The Conquest of Jerusalem*, 99.

than Berengaria in the *Continuation* even though she is only mentioned once in a more than passing manner.

Berengaria, then, was a pure fictionalization on the part of DeMille and the screenwriters of *The Crusades*. The film portrays her as pious and loyal, beautiful and intelligent while the only source to attribute some personality to her called her “graceful”<sup>62</sup> and “wise.”<sup>63</sup> She disappeared from all records when Richard departed from the Holy Land and sent the women (Berengaria and Joan) to Jaffa. The film’s inspiration for the character of Berengaria was most certainly not the historical character. But other characters in the film seem to follow a little more closely to the historical sources.

Richard the Lionheart seems half made-up and half accurate in *The Crusades*. The film depicts him as a brash, violent and proud man with no religious zeal (at least at first). The sources, however, suggest that Richard took the sign of the Cross and pledged to Crusade even before he was king.<sup>64</sup> The *Continuation* does support the idea that Richard was brash, however, and claims that he schemed with King Philip against his father, Henry II, and younger brother, John.<sup>65</sup> The *Itinerarium Peregrinorum* does not talk about Richard’s alleged scheming, but admits that “he had an unconquerable spirit, could not bear insult or injury, and his innate noble spirit compelled him to seek his due rights.”<sup>66</sup> The author further praises Richard’s physical strength and military prowess as he describes Richard’s departure for France and the Crusades. Even the Arab chronicler

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<sup>62</sup> Nicholson, *Chronicle of the Third Crusade*, 173.

<sup>63</sup> Nicholson, *Chronicle of the Third Crusade*, 189.

<sup>64</sup> Nicholson, *Chronicle of the Third Crusade*, 142

<sup>65</sup> Edbury, *The Conquest of Jerusalem*, 91.

<sup>66</sup> Nicholson, *Chronicle of the Third Crusade*, 146.

Baha ad-Din extolls Richard's military experience: "The King—God damn him!—who was excitable, valorous and shrewd in warfare...."<sup>67</sup>

When discussing Richard, the sources do not suggest that Richard was particularly pious, yet it cannot be inferred that he was entirely unreligious either. *The Crusades* portrayed him as a pseudo-atheist until the very end, but this was clearly also a dramatization. His behavior at the beginning of the film, however, seems to have been inspired by the historical accounts. Yet, there is nothing to suggest that his behavior mellowed during the Third Crusade, and certainly not because of Berengaria's temperance. Indeed his wedding to Berengaria is the only instance when Richard and Berengaria are recorded as being in the same place at the same time for certain.

The first half of *The Crusades* is driven by conflict between Richard and Philip over Richard's reneging on a betrothal to Philip's sister, Alice. The film seems to vilify Alice as a scheming, proud woman whose motives are unclear. The film further says that it was Richard's father who arranged the betrothal when Richard and Alice were young. While the historical records concur that Richard had been engaged to Alice of France, they suggest that the arrangement was Richard's idea. The *Continuation* suggests that it was Richard's idea of repaying Philip for helping overthrow his father. However, after he was crowned King of England, Richard asked for an extension of the engagement: "Sire, I must tell you that I am a young man and newly crowned king, and as you know I have undertaken the same road as you to go overseas. If it is your pleasure, I would ask that you should put off the marriage until I come back. I shall be bound to you by oath to

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<sup>67</sup> Francesco Gabrieli, *Arab Historians of the Crusade*, trans. E.J. Costello (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1969), 108.

marry your sister within 40 days of my return.”<sup>68</sup> The *Continuation* further suggests that Philip, though injured by Richard’s reneging on his word, was entirely hospitable towards Berengaria:

When King Richard’s wife came ashore [at Acre], the king of France behaved with great courtesy and went to meet them on the shore. He himself embraces Richard’s wife and took her to dry land, and he was careful not to betray his feelings or show any sign of outrage at what King Richard had done to him. For Richard had reneged on the marriage to his sister in order to marry Berengaria.... But he showed his outrage clearly when he got back to France.<sup>69</sup>

The enmity between Philip and Richard is evident in the *Continuation* and the *Itinerarium Peregrinorum*, though Philip is portrayed only vaguely. He is praised as a general, tending to lead excursions before Richard’s arrival. Whatever bitterness there was between Philip and Richard fell by the wayside during major campaigns in Acre and other sieges in the area. Interestingly, the sources are more concerned with the conflict between Richard and Conrad of Montferrat.

Conrad’s character makes a brief appearance in the film. He connives with Philip briefly to make Richard marry Alice, which fails, and then he connives with Richard’s brother, John, to kill Richard and ensure the throne of Jerusalem goes to Montferrat. In truth, Conrad of Montferrat had been in the Holy Land for a long time, before the fall of Jerusalem to Saladin in 1187. Conrad first appears in the *Continuation* as a pilgrim set for Jerusalem but waylaid in Constantinople where he married the Byzantine Emperor’s sister.<sup>70</sup> He later traveled to Tyre where he found the city besieged and provided it with much needed leadership. Somehow Conrad was able to foil Saladin’s attempts to conquer Tyre after his victory at Jerusalem and hold it until the Crusaders arrived. During his

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<sup>68</sup> Edbury, *The Conquest of Jerusalem*, 92.

<sup>69</sup> Edbury, *The Conquest of Jerusalem*, 104.

<sup>70</sup> Edbury, *The Conquest of Jerusalem*, 51.

leadership of Tyre, however, Conrad grew bold. The *Continuation* says that he turned away King Guy of Jerusalem when the king was released from Saladin's custody. The *Itinerarium Peregrinorum* concurs with this narrative, furthering that "no matter how well an enterprise begins, if it ends in disgrace it deserves abuse rather than praise."<sup>71</sup> Conrad's conflict with King Guy influenced King Richard's dealings with the marquis as well. King Guy had inherited the throne of Jerusalem through his wife Sybilla, but when she died his legitimacy to the throne seemed to evaporate. The Christian claim to the throne of Jerusalem fell to Sybilla's younger sister, Isabel. Isabel was married to Humfrey IV of Toron but Conrad forced an annulment so that he could marry her instead... even though he was already married to the Byzantine princess. The sources tend to jump over the details of Conrad's usurping the claim to Jerusalem but clearly do not support his antics.<sup>72</sup> Even the Arab sources agree that Conrad of Montferrat was a despicable character. Baha ad-Din even states that Conrad was willing to defect from the Crusades and help Saladin defeat King Richard in return for territory in the Holy Land.<sup>73</sup> Conrad was clearly despised by his contemporaries and was assassinated in the spring of 1192, the same year the Third Crusade ended. The sources are split on who ordered the assassination, though many suggest it was King Richard or even Saladin himself. In *The Crusades* Conrad simply disappears off screen at Saladin's tent, insinuating perhaps that Saladin was responsible for his death, but his character seems so minor that his demise occurs out of sight and out of mind.

Even Saladin is not quite vilified in *The Crusades*. He is portrayed as regal and wise, though a cunning strategist as well; he shows the same elements of chivalry that the

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<sup>71</sup> Nicholson, *Chronicle of the Third Crusade*, 36.

<sup>72</sup> Nicholson, 102, 121-125; Edbury, 95-97.

<sup>73</sup> Gabrieli, *Arab Historians of the Crusades*, 231.

Christian kings do. Indeed Saladin was respected as a leader by Crusade records, though despised as an infidel. He is recorded as responding viciously to insolence, such as when he killed Reynald of Chatillon for speaking to him rudely,<sup>74</sup> but also showing temperance in negotiations and showering Christian ambassadors with gifts. The last mention of Saladin in the *Itinerarium Peregrinorum* has the sultan agreeing to install and protect Christian priests and deacons in the Church of the Holy Sepulchre as well as in Nazareth and Bethlehem.<sup>75</sup>

Overall the film *The Crusades* has greatly invented its historical characters. Though the characters borrow the names of historical persons, the personalities are blatantly fictionalized and the events utterly fraudulent. Cecil B. DeMille, however, had his own motives for creating a fictional history about the Third Crusade, including a large directorial agenda.

### Themes

Most of Cecil B. DeMille's grand epics have been studied extensively for their themes and directorial motives. No scholarly exploration of his agenda, however, could be more valuable than his own declaration of what is important in *The Crusades*.

Returning to the production meeting that DeMille, Lamb, and Paramount executives attended, DeMille flatly reinforced that some scenes were absolutely vital to his 'agenda' even though the film was extremely lengthy.

E. Lloyd Sheldon, an executive with Paramount, was the first to address the most prevalent theme of *The Crusades*: spiritual impulse. Sheldon worried that "there is a great

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<sup>74</sup> Reynald of Chatillon's history will be discussed in greater detail in the *Kingdom of Heaven* (2005) section of this paper.

<sup>75</sup> Nicholson, 378-379.

dearth of common people....”<sup>76</sup> DeMille did correct this in the film by using his copious amount of extras to wail and weep at Christian torment under the Saracens or Christian relief at seeing the True Cross. The very first action scene of *The Crusades* featured a cross being torn down from a building in Jerusalem; that scene was invented at the production meeting when DeMille proposed, “If we don’t give out that spiritual thing we can start with a Cross and a rope around and it crashes to the street and go to a cut of a great bonfire and sacred books burning and then go to the slave market.”<sup>77</sup>

As much as “that spiritual thing” was the major theme of *The Crusades*, DeMille also realized that “If the Hermit or anyone else goes on talking about God and religion through eleven reels, you are going to be in trouble at the box office.”<sup>78</sup> Though the film was flooded with religious highlights (and lowlights) DeMille was adamant that it was a human-driven story.

Delving into the history of the Third Crusade and comparing it with the film has revealed an interesting point: there is no one, supreme villain in *The Crusades*. Though Philip seems power-hungry, Conrad conniving, John jealous, and Saladin righteous, the consistent conflict of the film is experienced as Richard’s inner turmoil. Beginning as a proud, brash king wanting nothing to do with religion, Richard evolves into a compassionate believer. His transformation is even followed through with the music of the film that begins jovially, in almost a juvenile fashion, to a steady and regal orchestral movement at the end of the film. Richard’s evolution seems to be what DeMille is really aiming for, to encourage human spiritual evolution through experience. Richard is able to

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<sup>76</sup> “Transcription of January 7, 1935” quoted in Birchard, *Cecil B. DeMille’s Hollywood*, 285.

<sup>77</sup> “Transcription of January 7, 1935” quoted in Birchard, *Cecil B. DeMille’s Hollywood*, 286.

<sup>78</sup> “Transcription of January 7, 1935” quoted in Birchard, *Cecil B. DeMille’s Hollywood*, 287.



recognize the divine in Berengaria, just as the Crusaders around him recognize the divine in the True Cross or Church of the Holy Sepulchre.

Then there is the message of religious tolerance that DeMille blatantly sends. Saladin is originally seen as the culprit behind Christian women being sold and countless other Christians being imprisoned, yet very quickly into the film he is also seen encouraging the Hermit to go forth and speak to Christian kings, and discourage them from war. The exchanges between Saladin and the Christian kings are not marked by religious dialogue but by politics; the Christians demand land and Saladin refuses. Though icons were destroyed at the beginning of the film, that is the only destruction that the Saracens seem to commit against Christian symbols. Even the True Cross seems to survive the ordeal of the Crusade. Ultimately, however, it is Berengaria who drives DeMille's message of tolerance. Discouraging Richard and Saladin from prolonging the violence she says, "So what if we call Him Allah or God, shall men fight because they travel by different roads to Him?"<sup>79</sup>

The last theme of *The Crusades* revolves around Richard's sword. The sword represents Richard's brazen, rash, and violent self and the sword seems to evolve as a character just as much as Richard does. It is fashioned by the blacksmith and momentarily hammered by Richard at the beginning of the film. The sword makes a grand appearance as a finished blade when Richard takes the oath of the Crusade. It seems to represent Richard's evasiveness toward commitment and constantly comes between him and Berengaria physically; first with Richard's marriage in absentia, then in Berengaria's feeble attack on Richard, and finally on Richard's oath on the sword that he will return to Berengaria. The sword's demise is representative of DeMille's desire for

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<sup>79</sup> DeMille, *The Crusades*, 1:52:39

peace and tolerance; Richard breaks the sword into pieces and throws them at Berengaria's feet, symbolizing perhaps the presumed end of their marriage. Berengaria, however, is ultimately an angelic figure in *The Crusades* and keeps the sword shards and lays them down at the Holy Sepulchre. The sword, though in pieces, rests in the care of God just as Richard, in pieces of his former self, experiences newfound faith.

Cecil B. DeMille has survived time with the reputation of a grand epic film master, and *The Crusades* maintains that fame. Fully aware of the symbolism and themes he was threading into the film, DeMille used the story of the Crusades to impress the importance of religious tolerance and self-discovery upon contemporary audiences.

#### Audience

DeMille was accomplished at creating films that catered to contemporary audiences. In 1917 he released *Joan the Woman*, a biopic of Joan of Arc, which featured a cry to battle and a sense of urgency that mirrored the United States' call for soldiers in World War I. *The Crusades* had a similar relevance to its contemporary audience. During a time of great Depression, *The Crusades* promoted solidarity and strength in the face of overwhelming odds.

The First World War had a lasting impact on every party it affected, including Hollywood. DeMille reminded audiences of *The Crusades* that the war had been 'the war to end all wars' and that the cost had been extreme loss of life. As Berengaria's character speaks against the loss of further life in the thousands, the reality DeMille was promoting

was avoiding the loss of further life in the millions. The same year that *The Crusades* was released (1935), Adolph Hitler announced the rearmament of Germany.<sup>80</sup>

In the wake of World War II it is not surprising that DeMille chose not to vilify one particular party above another in *The Crusades*. The actions of individuals make them appear less than saintly characters, but not one character seems genuinely evil, or genuinely good for that matter. The Hermit, who calls the Christian kings together, may seem devout but he is ultimately promoting death and dying; Berengaria, who seems to be the most redeeming character, suffers extreme self-doubt and gives in to despair in an attempted suicide. Philip and Conrad, though both antagonistic to Richard, come away as more insecure and jealous than genuinely diabolical. And Saladin, the character behind the whole conflict, is portrayed as honorable and knightly, even kingly. DeMille illustrates, through these characters, that everyone has elements of good and bad within them. Perhaps, if DeMille had released the film just five years later its tone would have changed dramatically.

At the height of the Depression, *The Crusades* promoted hope among the population for better times. The film advertised that the end result (seeing Jerusalem) was worth the trials and tribulations of the conflict. This message must have resonated with contemporary audiences who found themselves in dire economic circumstances, without jobs or homes. In Hollywood during the Depression most extra actors lived on six dollars a week as studios cut large-scale productions.<sup>81</sup> DeMille seemed to be combatting the

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<sup>80</sup> R.R. Palmer, Joel Colton, and Lloyd Kramer, eds. *A History of the Modern World* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 2007), 830.

<sup>81</sup> Birchard, *Cecil B. DeMille's Hollywood*, 289.

Hollywood gloom singlehandedly by providing “Well over three thousand man-weeks of employment for Hollywood’s legion of extras” on *The Crusades* alone.<sup>82</sup>

Though Hollywood did suffer during the Depression, Americans were still flocking to the theatres. Low admission prices (in 1933 the average price of a movie admission was the same as it had been three years earlier—twenty cents)<sup>83</sup> and more free time led to a slight increase in movie attendance during the Depression. DeMille’s reputation and fame almost guaranteed box-office success and his uplifting messages in *The Crusades* kept the production studios interested. Contemporary audiences were sure to want to see another epic film about faith and overcoming great odds.

### Conclusion

In fact, *The Crusades* was successful at the box office even though it suffered a loss of almost \$444,000.<sup>84</sup> Considering the film cost \$1,376,000 the recuperation is impressive. The film appealed to modern audiences seeking some logic to the losses of World War I and the Great Depression and it offered new hope. The compelling love story, though creatively invented, suggested to contemporary audiences that not all hope was lost and that solace could be found in self-discovery and in faith.

Even though DeMille, Lamb, and the other storytellers involved in the making of *The Crusades*, largely invented the history and characters in the film, the film’s contemporary circumstances forgive the abuse of history. Historical films, as with any interpretation of the past, can never and should never be removed from their

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<sup>82</sup> Birchard, *Cecil B. DeMille’s Hollywood*, 289.

<sup>83</sup> Robert Sklar, *Movie-Made America: A Cultural History of American Movies* (New York: Vintage Press, 1994), chapter 10.

<sup>84</sup> Birchard, *Cecil B. DeMille’s Hollywood*, 292.

contemporary context. *The Crusades* may have been set during the Third Crusade and inspired by the events of the Third Crusade, but the story the film relates is one of 20<sup>th</sup> century Americans.

The historical record clearly inspired the writers and DeMille to share a story of the Third Crusade but the film is driven entirely by contemporary agendas. DeMille is postulating that the Crusades, though separated from 20<sup>th</sup> century America by hundreds of years, is still relevant and still a poignant historical event.

In fact, the Crusades are applicable throughout Hollywood's history. DeMille may have started using the Crusades as a foil for 1935 America, but Hollywood has continued to use it as a foil throughout every major era of film. DeMille's interpretation of the Third Crusade suggests that it was a mainly European-driven conflict with conflicting personalities. The history of the Crusades fit into DeMille's mold for what contemporary audiences wanted to know about the past. They wanted, he thought, a story of hope and resilience in the face of treachery and pride so he gave it to them. DeMille considered the historical past, interpreted it in light of his directorial agenda, and portrayed it as best he could to realize and produce *The Crusades*.

*King Richard and the Crusaders* (1954)

*King Richard and the Crusaders*, directed by David Butler and adapted for the screen by John Twist, featured a star-studded cast that included Rex Harrison, Virginia Mayo and Laurence Harvey. It was, according to an oral historian with the Director's Guild of America, an "entertainment picture" that purely aimed to entertain "servicemen, war workers, and the citizens on the home front."<sup>85</sup> Though the film is set during the controversial Third Crusade, no one involved in its production openly admitted to having a political or historical agenda. The movie was created purely to entertain contemporary audiences. The director, David Butler, was known in Hollywood as a man who could deliver movies on tight schedules and bring in the crowds;<sup>86</sup> *King Richard and the Crusaders* was no exception.

Action

Following the traditional film opening of the 1950s, *King Richard and the Crusaders* begins with credits and a stirring overture. Film overtures usually predict the progression of the movie with noticeable changes to the music. While this overture begins with a clashing of brass instruments and clanging bells, it quickly fades into a gentler lullaby of strings. The lullaby lifts and falls before cresting into a triumphant finale. This suggests that the film will begin dramatically, have a lulling middle story, and end in a flurry of action: which is precisely the case.

As the credits fade the image of several travelers leading camels across a barren desert accompanies the narrator's introduction of events. The narrator describes that two

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<sup>85</sup> David Butler and Irene Kahn Atkins, *David Butler* (Metuchen, NJ: The Director's Guild of America and The Scarecrow Press, Inc., 1993), viii

<sup>86</sup> Butler, *David Butler*, viii

crusades have already been fought between Christians and Moslems. The scene shifts again into a cavalry charge of riders in armor and white tunics with a red cross as the narrator declares that the year is 1191 and the “knights of the third crusade rode toward Jerusalem led by King Richard the first of England.”<sup>87</sup> The narrator continues to describe the conflict and King Richard’s obligation to recover the Holy Land from “Saladin, Sultan of the thousand tribes of Araby, master of the arts of desert warfare, genius of the methods of swift entrapment.”<sup>88</sup> Signaled by the narration, the first action scene begins: a group of turban-clad, baggy clothed Arabs leap from behind some rocks into the rider’s path and the two groups begin to combat each other. King Richard<sup>89</sup> features prominently in the fight holding a red shield with three golden lions, yet the undeniable star of the action is a knight clad in brown armor with a recumbent black cat (later defined as a leopard). A third character features during this fight, a man in black armor with the seal of a rearing griffin.

The violence slowly fades, with the echo of triumphant horns, into a camp as the victorious Christians ride in. The camp features a dozen or more huge flagpoles flying a variety of colors, including King Richard’s golden lions and the plain white and red cross some of the knights wore. King Richard silences the cheering crowd and praises the efforts of Sir Giles and his Castellans in defeating the Arabs. For a moment it seems unclear who Sir Giles Amery is as the camera pans from one unidentified face to another before coming to rest on the knight in black armor. Sir Giles<sup>90</sup> accepts the honor of being King Richard’s second-in-command. Dismounting and retiring, King Richard also praises

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<sup>87</sup> David Butler, dir. *King Richard and the Crusaders* (Beverly Hills: Warner Bros. Pictures, 1954) 0:01:54

<sup>88</sup> Butler, *King Richard and the Crusaders*, 0:02:17

<sup>89</sup> Played by George Sanders

<sup>90</sup> Played by Robert Douglas

his bodyguard, Sir Knight of the Leopard. The knight thanks him and wishes him well in Gaelic, which is received with shock and anger by the King. The knight admits that the Scots “refuse to be conquered by England<sup>91</sup>” and sparks tension between the King, the king’s guard, and the Knight of the Leopard. The King demands why the Knight is serving and meets only pert remarks. Distracted, the Knight gazes over the crowd to find a large dog that he greets enthusiastically in Gaelic. Thinking the knight addressed him, King Richard shouts, “Barbarian! Don’t speak to me in your uncouth tongue!”<sup>92</sup> Laughing at the Knight’s brazenness, the King retreats. A gaze of obvious animosity is exchanged between the Knight of the Leopard and Sir Giles as violins play dramatic, dark music.

The narrator continues to illustrate the tensions faced by the Christians during the Crusade, introducing Leopold, Duke of Austria as jealous drunk and King Philip of France as a moody and snobbish monarch. Intrigue, the narrator declares, abounds! The scene cuts to Sir Giles and Conrad, Count of Montferrat,<sup>93</sup> as they murder a guard of King Richard’s and scheme with an archer to use a Saracen arrow to shoot the King.

Presuming the King has died, Sir Giles begins commanding the Teutons, Hospitallers, and Castellan knights to search out the Saracen culprits. The Knight of the Leopard carries the King to a bed as a physician announces that the arrow did not pierce the King’s heart and he lives. The King asks who the Knight of the Leopard is and he reveals his name is Sir Kenneth of Huntington. Sir Kenneth<sup>94</sup> suggests finding the bow

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<sup>91</sup> Butler, *King Richard and the Crusaders*, 0:05:04

<sup>92</sup> Butler, *King Richard and the Crusaders*, 0:05:38

<sup>93</sup> Butler, *King Richard and the Crusaders*, 0:07:50, played by Michael Pate

<sup>94</sup> Played by Laurence Harvey



that shot the arrow, rather than the arrow itself. The crowd mumbles and disperses as the announcement of the assassination attempt spreads throughout the encampment.

As Leopold and Philip begin to vie for power, Sir Giles arises as the King's successor in the crusade. No sooner do the knights begin to agree, however, than King Richard arrives and expresses his disappointment that they scheme against him. He promotes Sir Giles to active general and asks if anyone should dissent; Sir Kenneth steps forth with an adamant objection. Sir Kenneth accuses Sir Giles of persecuting defenseless Moslems, but the King does not believe him.

Returning to his tent, King Richard is surrounded by healers and priests discussing possible remedies as a group of women enter. One woman sobs noisily, disturbing the King who demands who she is: his wife, Berengaria.<sup>95</sup> Standing beside the weeping queen is a stubborn-looking blonde woman who is identified as the King's Cousin, Edith.<sup>96</sup> Edith shoos away the healers and priests and demands the pavilion is emptied with the king applauding her ferocity. The queen and Edith reveal plans to make a pilgrimage to a convent to pray for the king. Wondering at their safety from marauders, the King assigns Sir Kenneth and the Castellans to accompany them.

Sir Kenneth scouts the trail ahead of the pilgrims and nears an oasis. As he does so, another rider in Saracen garb does likewise. Spotting each other the Saracen greets the man in Arabic to which Sir Kenneth simply replies that he accepts "no heathen amity."<sup>97</sup> They continue to charge each other until the Arab shoots Sir Kenneth and dismounts and approaches. Sir Kenneth grabs the man's feet and the fight continues until the Arab,

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<sup>95</sup> Played by Paula Raymond

<sup>96</sup> Played by Virginia Mayo

<sup>97</sup> Butler, *King Richard and the Crusaders*, 0:26:13

laughing, demands peace. The Arab introduces himself as an Emir and a physician<sup>98</sup> offering his services to cure Richard the Lionheart. Sir Kenneth praises the chivalry of Saladin for sending the physician and together they rest at the oasis.

As the caravan approaches, Sir Kenneth advises the physician to hide among the trees of the oasis but the physician is spotted. As Sir Kenneth rushes to help the physician, the Castellans turn on Sir Kenneth who easily wins and escorts the physician to King Richard. Richard gladly accepts the offer of help and Edith closely supervises the physician. The physician uses a talisman that is “powerless unless blessed by faith”<sup>99</sup> with Edith’s help to cure Richard. He claims that the combination of two faiths is enough to overcome the king’s illness.

Fully healed, King Richard commands Sir Kenneth to protect England’s banner. While Sir Kenneth is distracted (by the physician’s marriage proposal to Edith), however, the banner is cut down and Sirs Giles and Conrad frame him for its destruction. The King challenges him to a duel and is about to strike the final blow against Sir Kenneth when the physician speaks out and asks for Sir Kenneth as payment for his services. Sir Kenneth is stripped of his knighthood and travels with the physician to Saladin’s camp.

At Saladin’s camp Sir Kenneth accuses the physician of using the magical talisman to dull his senses, but the physician reveals that it is only a sleeping draught. Sir Kenneth accuses the physician of spying and recommending an attack against King Richard but the physician protests and reveals that the greater threat is from Sir Giles and his schemers who plot to kill King Richard. The physician then reveals his true identity, Saladin.

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<sup>98</sup> Played by Rex Harrison

<sup>99</sup> Butler, *King Richard and the Crusaders*, 0:48:15

Saladin sends Sir Kenneth to serve as an ambassador to King Richard and ask for the lady Edith's hand. While Sir Kenneth pleads with Edith not to accept, King Richard tries to persuade her that accepting would bring peace. As she storms out Sir Giles and Sir Conrad scheme further to abduct the lady and blame the Saracens. As Sir Kenneth confronts Saladin, King Richard arrives and agrees with Saladin that Sir Giles is the culprit. Saladin sends his Saracens to ambush the Castellans while he steals the lady back and Sir Kenneth and the King's knights pursue Sir Giles.

Sir Kenneth kills Giles while King Richard, Saladin, and the lady Edith watch on. Saladin releases the Edith and retreats with his Saracens while King Richard resigns his opposition to Edith and Sir Kenneth's relationship. The last scene shows dozens of knights in white tunics with red crosses riding into the fortress as swelling brass instruments hail the end of the film.

### History versus Film

*King Richard and the Crusaders* is based on a novel, *The Talisman*, by Sir Walter Scott; originally published in 1825 *The Talisman* is a highly fictitious account of the Third Crusade. It follows a young Scottish knight (Sir Kenneth) and his loyal relationship with King Richard the Lionheart. In an introduction to a reprint in 1832, Sir Walter Scott readily admitted: "considerable liberties have also been taken with the truth of history.... It may be said, in general, that most of the incidents introduced in the following tale are fictitious; and that reality, where it exists, is only retained in the characters of the

piece.”<sup>100</sup> The film preserves Scott’s philosophy and, even then, departs dramatically from the original storyline.

While the film seems to split its focus between Sir Kenneth and Saladin, the novel revolves almost entirely around the divisions between the Europeans and King Richard. The film portrays Sir Giles as the ultimate antagonist while no such character appears in the novel. The novel, rather, focuses on Sir Conrad of Montserrat [sic] who Sir Walter Scott believed to be historically “the enemy of Richard.”<sup>101</sup>

Scott’s sources and inspirations are largely indeterminate. In his introduction he claims to have “had access to all which antiquity believed, whether of reality or fable...”<sup>102</sup> and includes on a few excerpts in his notes. There he cites “Ellis’s *Specimens...* Gibbon’s *History...* [and] *Apud Glasgow*”<sup>103</sup> as a few of the sources he used.

Luckily, the Third Crusade was particularly well documented. Two of the most fruitful records of the Third Crusade are the *Itinerarium Peregrinorum et Gesta Regis Ricardi* and *The Old French Continuation of William of Tyre, 1184-1197*. The former, though particularly rich in detail, has been used sparingly by historians “because of disputes over its authorship and dating”<sup>104</sup> while the latter is more contestable because the numerous continuations that have been tacked on to the original manuscript (whose events ended in 1184). The period 1184-1197, which includes details of the Third Crusade, is recorded in an old French continuation housed in Lyon. The Lyon manuscript

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<sup>100</sup> Sir Walter Scott, *The Talisman* (New York: Dodd, Mead and Company, 1943), 11

<sup>101</sup> Scott, *The Talisman*, 11

<sup>102</sup> Scott, *The Talisman*, 9

<sup>103</sup> Scott, *The Talisman*, 357-358

<sup>104</sup> Helen J. Nicholson, trans., *Chronicle of the Third Crusade: A Translation of the Itinerarium Peregrinorum et Gesta Regis Ricardi* (Aldershot, UK: Ashgate Publishing Ltd., 1997), vii

is unique because it is the only continuation of William of Tyre's account that includes the period from 1184-1197. For the sake of clarity, this section has been titled the "Lyon *Eracles*."<sup>105</sup>

In addition to these fruitful European sources there are numerous Arabic<sup>106</sup> ones. Of particular relevance are Ibn al-Athir, Baha ad-Din, Imad ad-Din, and Manaqib Rashid ad-Din. These sources are all particularly reverent of Saladin and only minimally address the European characters and issues.

Delving into an analysis of Walter Scott's *The Talisman* and David Butler's *King Richard and the Crusaders* two things can be established outright: Sir Kenneth was not a historical figure and had no discernible historical counterpart, and Edith Plantagenet was equally fictitious. The other characters discussed in the novel and film did exist in some form.

All of the sources agree that shortly after his arrival, King Richard fell sick. The Arab sources Imad ad-Din and Baha al-Din stress the severity of his illness while the *Itinerarium Peregrinorum* attributes the illness to "the unfamiliar climate of that region."<sup>107</sup> Walter Scott stays close to this story, claiming "he became afflicted with one of those slow and wasting fevers peculiar to Asia"<sup>108</sup> while Butler's film departs dramatically, inserting the intrigue of an attempted assassination. Both the film and the novel then focus on another purely fictional element: the talisman. The novel observes an unsurprisingly vagueness about the talisman, saying only "I [the physician] dip it in a cup

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<sup>105</sup> Peter W. Edbury, trans., *The Conquest of Jerusalem and the Third Crusade: Sources in Translation* (Aldershot, UK: Ashgate, 1998), 3-4

<sup>106</sup> These authors are sometimes also called 'Muslim' sources however neither term is entirely appropriate since some chroniclers were not Arab-born and a few were Christian. I have chosen the term 'Arabic' based on the original chronicle's language. See Francesco Gabrieli's *Arab Historians of the Crusades* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1969) for further discussion.

<sup>107</sup> Nicholson, 204

<sup>108</sup> Scott, *The Talisman*, 85

of water, observe the fitting hour to administer it to the patient, and the potency of the draught works the cure.”<sup>109</sup> The film uses the mysterious object as the basis for a connection between Edith and Saladin (posing as the physician) and adds an element of religious tolerance between a dutiful Christian and a dutiful Muslim.<sup>110</sup> In evident reality, Saladin most certainly did not send a healer to King Richard and as amiably as the European and Muslim sources treat their counterparts the admiration does not fall short of condemning each other to damnation.

King Richard, in fact, is portrayed admirably in all of the Arab sources but not the *Old French Continuation*, which calls him “very devious and greedy” and accuses him of scheming against his own sister (whose character does not appear in the novel or film). Walter Scott’s Richard is a complicated man, “heroic though impetuous,”<sup>111</sup> with no fondness for his companion monarchs. Philip of France, in particular, is painted as a foe. Butler’s Richard, played by the memorable George Sanders, is jovial and fierce, and an adamant opponent of Scots. Contemporary sources suggest that, though physically indisposed, King Richard continued to lead an aggressive campaign against Saladin’s forces and eventually participated in several battles anyway.<sup>112</sup> None discuss tensions between the Crusaders during Richard’s illness, which is what Scott’s novel and Butler’s film focus on.

While the film vilifies Sir Giles (a purely fictional character) and attributes Sir Conrad of Montferrat only accomplice status, the novel focuses exclusively on Conrade

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<sup>109</sup> Scott, *The Talisman*, 215

<sup>110</sup> Butler, *King Richard and the Crusaders*, 0:48:15

<sup>111</sup> Scott, *The Talisman*, 84

<sup>112</sup> Nicholson, 204-214

of Monserrat's [sic] scheming. The historical record paints a very different mercurial picture of Conrad of Monferrat, 'the Marquis.'

Francesco Gabrieli, translator and editor of *Arab Historians of the Crusades*, describes Conrad of Monferrat thus:

The character of Conrad of Montferrat, saviour of Tyre and moving spirit of the Third Crusade, impressed itself upon the minds of contemporary Muslim historians more deeply than any apart from that of Richard of England. ... The survival of Tyre made the Christian military resurgence and the siege of Acre possible.<sup>113</sup>

According to Ibn al-Athir, the Marquis' arrival at Tyre was welcomed by a hopeless population of refugees. Saladin had previously allowed the populations of Acre, Beirut, and other conquered towns to leave freely and most had journeyed to Tyre. Despite its burgeoning population, however, Tyre "lacked a leader to unite it and a commander to lead it in battle." The Marquis promised to defend the city and increased its defenses. al-Athir described him as "a devil incarnate in his ability to govern and defend a town, and a man of extraordinary courage."<sup>114</sup>

The European sources agree that Conrad of Montferrat's preservation of Tyre was admirable and great. That is the end of their praise, however, as they begin to expound upon his aspirations for the throne in Jerusalem. The author of the *Itinerarium Peregrinorum* goes so far as to say, "That marquis—Conrad by name, Italian by nation—was an extraordinary man of action and hard working in all his endeavours. But no matter how well an enterprise begins, if it ends in disgrace it deserves the abuse rather than praise."<sup>115</sup>

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<sup>113</sup> Francesco Gabrieli, *Arab Historians of the Crusades* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1969), 176

<sup>114</sup> Gabrieli, 177

<sup>115</sup> Nicholson, 36

The Marquis' success at Tyre is the only praise that the European sources offer. The author of the *Continuation* says that soon after the fall of Jerusalem to Saladin, the deposed king (Guy de Luisignan), his queen, and some 600 surviving knights retreated to Tyre for safety. "When they arrived before Tyre, the king and queen expected to enter the city as they considered it to be theirs. The Marquis of Monferrat ... refused to let them enter because the people of the city had received him as their lord while Guy was in Saladin's prison."<sup>116</sup>

The *Itinerarium Peregrinorum* cites this as the inspiration for King Richard's antagonism toward the Marquis. The King of France reportedly supported the Marquis and favored him with spoils from successful conflicts. However King Richard was "sympathetic to the plight of King Guy" and openly opposed the Marquis' claim to the throne of Jerusalem.<sup>117</sup> Though the Marquis did win the claim and the right to assume the throne if King Guy should die, King Richard ensured that if they should both die the kingdom of Jerusalem would be his (and not France's) to dispose of. That spat was far from the end of their conflict, however. King Richard, acting as the commander of the Crusade, sent several summons for the Marquis to help the Crusaders to which the Marquis never acquiesced.<sup>118</sup>

The novel and the film both depict a direct confrontation between the protagonists (King Richard and Sir Kenneth respectively) and the antagonists (Sir Conrad and Sir Giles respectively) while the historical records suggest only prolonged disagreement and antagonism. The Arab historians seem almost amused in observing the antipathy between Richard and the Marquis of Montferrat. While those historians occasionally praise

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<sup>116</sup> Edbury, 80

<sup>117</sup> Nicholson, 222

<sup>118</sup> Nicholson, 229



Richard for his prowess, their compliments about the Marquis ceased. It is little wonder, then, that he was assassinated. Baha ad-Din and Imad ad-Din both name Richard as the puppet master behind the order while Ibn al-Athir suggests that Saladin ordered the killing simultaneously with an attempt on King Richard's life. The *Continuation* names only the "lord of the Assassins"<sup>119</sup> who is further defined as the "Old Man of the Mountain [Rashid al-Din Sinan]"<sup>120</sup> in the *Itinerarium Peregrinorum*. The latter then asserts that "out of jealousy, some of the French defamed King Richard over the murder of the marquis"<sup>121</sup> with the additional accusation that he also hired Assassins<sup>122</sup> to murder the King of France.

The only other historical figure to appear in both *King Richard and the Crusaders* and *The Talisman* is Queen Berengaria, wife of Richard. Of the previously mentioned chronicles, however, only the *Itinerarium Peregrinorum* addressed Berengaria's presence, and only fleetingly. She first appears as Richard's betrothed, having been escorted by Queen Eleanor of Aquitaine to Messina. She is described as having a "graceful manner and high birth" and in Richard's sights for years. Her father had finally agreed to the engagement and entrusted her to Queen Eleanor.<sup>123</sup> Though the queen mother returned to England soon after arriving in Messina, Berengaria remained and wed Richard at Limassol<sup>124</sup> in 1191. She was crowned queen and praised for being "very wise and of good character."<sup>125</sup> Berengaria is rarely mentioned afterward. She remained in

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<sup>119</sup> Edbury, 114

<sup>120</sup> Nicholson, 305

<sup>121</sup> Nicholson, 307

<sup>122</sup> The Assassins mentioned here were so called because the Old Man, or lord, was believed to control them with hashish. (Nicholson, 307, note 52)

<sup>123</sup> Nicholson, 172-174

<sup>124</sup> In modern-day Cypress

<sup>125</sup> Nicholson, 189

Limassol for a while before moving to Acre and Jaffa.<sup>126</sup> The last entry about her recorded her departure from Acre in September of 1192, only a few days before Richard.<sup>127</sup>

The Berengaria of *King Richard and the Crusaders* is portrayed as the stereotypical dim-witted, flighty, hyper-dramatic female: a dramatic invention on the part of the filmmakers. It also departed dramatically from Walter Scott's original description. The Berengaria of *The Talisman* is described as an extremely juvenile looking woman who "affected, or at least practiced, a little childish petulance and wilfulness [sic] of manner.... She was by nature perfectly good-humoured" except for the occasional bout of ambition or caprice.<sup>128</sup>

After consulting the sources, Scott's claim that *any* reality was retained in the characters<sup>129</sup> is rather absurd. There is certainly an allusion to historical tensions between King Richard and Conrad, Marquis of Monferrat, but little else remains. Coincidence of character name and historical setting seem to be the few aspects that *King Richard and the Crusaders*, and even *The Talisman*, have in common with reality. Unfortunately, the liberties taken with the characters and the fabrication of historical scenarios by the filmmakers do not engender a sense of historical truth. Keeping in mind, however, that David Butler called himself a "commercial director"<sup>130</sup> it cannot be surprising that historical accuracy was far from the production team's mind. Though, in an interview

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<sup>126</sup> Nicholson, 235-236; Jaffa is referred to as "Joppa" in the source.

<sup>127</sup> Nicholson, 381-382

<sup>128</sup> Scott, *The Talisman*, 198-199

<sup>129</sup> Scott, *The Talisman*, 11

<sup>130</sup> Butler, *David Butler*, viii

with Irene Kahn Atkins, David Butler did confess that “Virginia Mayo<sup>131</sup> was very good, but I thought she was made up a little too much, with the modern hairdressing and all.”<sup>132</sup>

### Themes

Unlike many films, *King Richard and the Crusaders* has very little symbolic imagery or obvious directorial agenda. This may be attributed to the purely commercial nature of the film. When examining a film for themes, one is obligated to look at subtle, perhaps almost imperceptible elements. These elements might be observed in the setting, props, dialogue, or even music of a film. The talisman, a silver or diamond colored prop, is the only physical thematic element of *King Richard and the Crusaders* though there are three additional, abstract, themes.

The physical thematic element, the talisman, appears only a few couple of times in the film, always in the presence of the character Saladin. Though it is initially held to have magical properties, Saladin reveals that it is only a fancy vessel for a sleeping draught. Though the prop may seem trivial, its symbolism is much more significant in light that the most pervasive of the *abstract* themes is that of deception.

There are two types of deception occurring in this film: harmless and malicious. The harmless deceptions are practiced by Saladin in the guise of a physician and Sir Kenneth as he briefly assumes the role of a Saracen ambassador. The malicious deceiver is, to no one’s surprise, Sir Giles. Sir Giles successfully persuades King Richard several times that he is a trustworthy ally. It is interesting to note that though Saladin is the official enemy of King Richard, he and his talisman are harmless and perhaps even

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<sup>131</sup> Who played Edith Plantagenet

<sup>132</sup> Butler, *David Butler*, 256

beneficial to the King. In sharp contrast, though Sir Giles has sworn fealty and yet is the King's true enemy. Deception is perhaps the strongest theme of the film.

Yet, there is arguably a theme of tolerance as well. The film does not actively seek to raise Christians above Muslims or vice-versa, nor does it aim to elevate the European above the Arab.<sup>133</sup> Indeed the exchange of cultural ideals and religious similarities occurs frequently between Saladin and Sir Kenneth with each character acknowledging that the other is unique but not necessarily inferior. This tolerance is less obvious in the novel behind the film, with curt insults gracing most Arab-European conversations, but neither the director David Butler nor the screenwriter discussed this in available records. It is doubtful that they were intentionally diplomatic of the situation, and indeed several negative Arab stereotypes remain, but perhaps the creators were attuned to the need of tolerance in contemporary society (an idea to be further explored in the next section).

The final theme of *King Richard and the Crusaders* is inexorably related to the theme of tolerance: faith. The *faith* that Butler depicts on screen is distinct from any definition of the word that may be dependent upon religion. Rather, the film depicts faith as synonymous with hope. The talisman's effectiveness, according to Saladin when he poses as a physician, is dependent upon the faith and love of those holding it.<sup>134</sup> Then, Sir Kenneth's relationship with Edith Plantagenet is dependent upon his faith that King Richard will accept him as a peer. The last instance of faith as a pervasive theme occurs when King Richard and Saladin join forces to rescue Edith, each believing in good faith that the other would not attack.

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<sup>133</sup> Despite the obvious fact that there are, actually, no Arabs actors in lead or supporting roles.

<sup>134</sup> Butler, *King Richard and the Crusaders*, 0:48:15

The three themes of this film combine to create a peaceful message that mirrors the adage ‘appearances are deceiving.’ Even the deception that was practiced, in addition to driving the story, was slightly more harmless than harmful. So while modern filmmakers may be more inclined to use visual themes as well abstract ones, this commercially driven film does not lack profound elements.

### Audience

David Butler was well known for his direction of comedies including several with Shirley Temple, Bob Hope, and even the *Leave It To Beaver* television series<sup>135</sup> though he also directed a number of dramatic films. In the same year that *King Richard and the Crusaders* was released, David Butler also released a film called *The Command*. He described the latter as “filler” for Warner Bros, and perhaps the term can also be applied to *King Richard and the Crusaders*. Butler had very little to say on the topic of *King Richard and the Crusaders*, saying only that it was “another good picture.”<sup>136</sup> Butler seemed to suggest that the film was created purely for entertainment purposes, and considering Warner Bros also produced this film perhaps it was another “filler.” Other major films released in 1954 included *On the Waterfront*, *The Caine Mutiny*, *Dial M for Murder* and *A Star is Born*, the last two of which were produced by Warner Bros.<sup>137</sup> Regardless of whether or not *King Richard and the Crusaders* was released as a “filler” movie for between blockbusters, its all-star cast gathered some recognition from the box office, pulling in an estimated \$2,100,000 in the U.S.<sup>138</sup>

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<sup>135</sup> Butler, *David Butler*, 274-283

<sup>136</sup> Butler, *David Butler*, 255

<sup>137</sup> Tim Dirks, ed. “AMC filmsite” <http://www.filmsite.org/aa54.html>

<sup>138</sup> Internet Movie Database [http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0047150/?ref\\_=fn\\_al\\_tt\\_1](http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0047150/?ref_=fn_al_tt_1)

Whether or not the film intended to accurately represent the Middle Ages, it certainly revealed its contemporary history. The dialogue of *King Richard and the Crusaders* obviously sought tolerance (of all sorts) and encouraged discussion over rash action. Considering the film was created during the height of the Cold War it is not surprising to see such pacific efforts to calm the mainstream audience.

Yet the film is set in the Holy Land, a place with ethnic and religious strife predating the Crusades. In the 1950s the area (specifically, Jerusalem) belonged to the newly created state of Israel, a state opposed by the former Palestinian population and the surrounding Arab world. In 1952 “the Arab world was 215 times the geographical size of Israel and its population 57 times as numerous.”<sup>139</sup> Tensions ran high between Israel and its Arab neighbors throughout the Cold War with numerous skirmishes between Israeli and Palestinian forces. The argument between the two parties, at the time, was not religiously motivated like the Crusades, but driven by territorial dispute.<sup>140</sup> If the dialogue of the film aimed at pacifying and calming Western audiences about the Cold War, it might also be said that it aimed to encourage those qualities among the Arabs and Israelis.

The very nature of *King Richard and the Crusaders*’ release, as a major motion picture by a major production company with famous actors, allows such discussion to take place. The movie may have been intended as filler, but it carries an important message. The promotion of tolerance, and the caution that anyone can deceive, are vitally relevant to Cold War and Arab-Israeli history.

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<sup>139</sup> Colin Shindler, *A History of Modern Israel* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 115

<sup>140</sup> This is an idea furthered by most historians of the Arab-Israeli conflict including Colin Shindler, David Tal, Ilan Pappé, Leslie Stein, and Alan Dowty. For more information see Stein’s *The Hope Fulfilled: The Rise of Modern Israel* (Praeger, 2003) and Dowty’s *The Jewish State: A Century Later* (University of California, 2001).

### Conclusion

What sets *King Richard and the Crusaders* apart from other popular Hollywood films about the Crusades is the film's nonchalance. Butler and Twist had no greater motivation in the film's creation than to create an entertaining experience.

The film has very few elements of reality, and is not very valuable as a source about the crusades. Its portrayal of historical characters (Richard, Conrad of Montferrat, Saladin, Berengaria) is completely unrelated to the historical record. Any sliver of redemption for the film may be found in likening it to Walter Scott's novel on which it is based. However, the film and novel have profound differences as well. *The Talisman* is a story about magic and conflict between the Europeans with very little contact with the Arabs. The film, in contrast, focuses on a love triangle between Sir Kenneth, Edith Plantagenet, and Saladin.

Though *King Richard and the Crusaders* is not a valuable source about the Crusades, it does present valuable information about its time, the 1950s. The tension about the Cold War, and about conflict in between Israel and its neighbors, is reflected in the calming, encouraging relationship between Saladin and the Europeans. Butler and Twist are encouraging tolerance and understanding, even while acknowledging the difference between cultures. They may not have intended to be pacific and diplomatic, but the film certainly presents those qualities.

Beyond reflecting its contemporary circumstances, however, the film has little to offer. Whether or not the film was meant as a "filler" it certainly seems to be one, lacking content substance. Butler's opinion of the film as a "good picture" hints at his apathy towards its historicity. If a director does not aim to portray the past accurately in any way

his film has little chance of reflecting the past accurately at all. There is nothing accurate about the Crusades of *King Richard and the Crusaders* so the film actually provides an excellent example of how history and Hollywood are at odds.



*Kingdom of Heaven* (2005)

Unlike the previously discussed films, *Kingdom of Heaven* does not deal with King Richard and the Third Crusade. Rather, it focuses on the Fall of Jerusalem to Saladin that led to the Third Crusade. Directed by Sir Ridley Scott and written by William Monahan, the film debuted in the spring of 2005 and was released on DVD later that year. In 2006 *Kingdom of Heaven: The Director's Cut* was announced featuring an extended film with significant character changes. Examining both films (and their creators' intentions) and the primary sources behind the film will clarify how far *Kingdom of Heaven* does, or does not, depart from history. The film tells the story of Balian:<sup>141</sup> a humble blacksmith who discovers he is the illegitimate, but only son, of Godfrey<sup>142</sup> of Ibelin. The film follows Balian from a recently widowed, hopeless man to the protector and last defender of Jerusalem.

Action

The film begins silently; a black screen with the words, "it is almost 100 years since Christian armies from Europe seized Jerusalem." These words fade before the next statement appears: "Europe suffers in the grip of repression and poverty. Peasant and lord alike flee to the Holy Land in search of fortune or salvation." Finally, "one Knight returns home in search of his son." Only the wind can be heard as the film fades in to a dark cross against a dark blue sky. "France 1184" sets the scene. Soft guitars serenade the silhouettes of a group of riders as the title rises over a black screen. The screen then fades into a panoramic view of mountains, a soft snow flurry. The audience can hear

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<sup>141</sup> Played by Orlando Bloom.

<sup>142</sup> Played by Liam Neeson.

someone using a shovel. The camera pans to a wheelbarrow and several men near a stone cross. The camera pans up the body of a loosely wrapped corpse. A strong wind blows away the gauze across the head to reveal a woman.

The woman has committed suicide. She had been grief-stricken by the death of her infant and died shortly after him. The priest<sup>143</sup> who oversees her burial steals a small cross necklace from her and reminds the gravediggers that, as a suicide, she must be decapitated. As a party of Crusaders travel closer to the gravesite, the music becomes triumphant with a full orchestra and choir. The camera examines each Crusader's face: a black Moor, a Hospitaller,<sup>144</sup> a German soldier, and Godfrey of Ibelin. Godfrey, the audience learns in the Director's Cut, is the younger brother of the lord of the province. He had made his way to the Holy Land some years ago and become Baron of Ibelin.

The audience meets Balian in a dark smithy, forging something with intensity written across his face. He pounds away furiously at his object. The woman who was buried was his wife. Godfrey and the Hospitaller ride by, observing the blacksmith; they approach and announce their need of a blacksmith. Balian scowls on, his expression dark but numb. He wordlessly accepts the business. The first words Balian speaks translate an inscription in his smithy, "what man is a man that does not make the world better."<sup>145</sup>

Godfrey confesses that he is Balian's father and that he is seeking absolution. If Balian wants, he will have a right to everything of Godfrey's in the Holy Land. Balian initially refuses, but once Godfrey and his men have departed Balian is confronted by the priest who buried his wife. The priest, who the Director's Cut reveals to be Balian's cruel

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<sup>143</sup> Played by Michael Sheen.

<sup>144</sup> Played by David Thewlis.

<sup>145</sup> Ridley Scott, dir. *Kingdom of Heaven*. (Beverly Hills: Twentieth Century Fox Home Entertainment, 2005) 0:05:24

half-brother, slanders the memory of Balian's wife, taunting and goading Balian about her fate in Hell. Balian, in a fit of rage, runs the priest through with a newly made sword and throws the man into the forge fire. Balian then flees, chasing after Godfrey.

Godfrey sympathizes and encourages Balian to join them after Balian admits to the murder. They make their way to Messina but not before Godfrey is mortally wounded in a fight against his French kin when they demand the custody of Balian. In Messina, Godfrey knights Balian with the following oath: "be without fear in the face of your enemies. Be brave and upright that God may love thee. Speak the truth, always, even if it leads to your death. Safeguard the helpless and do no wrong."<sup>146</sup>

After Godfrey's death, Balian journeys by ship to the Holy Land; however, the journey is perilous and Balian becomes the sole survivor of a shipwreck. Struggling across the desert, Balian is discovered by two Arabs who demand Balian surrender his horse. When Balian refuses one man, who is supposedly a lord, challenges him. The other Arab,<sup>147</sup> supposedly a servant named Imad, translates the threats for each and encourages them to end the violence. Balian, however, kills the Arab lord and causes Imad to be thrown from his horse. Balian spares Imad's life, demanding only to be taken to Jerusalem. When they arrive in the Holy City Balian releases Imad and gives the man his horse. Grateful, Imad declares to Balian, "Your quality will be known among your enemies before ever you meet them."<sup>148</sup>

After burying his wife's crucifix necklace on the hill where Jesus was crucified, Balian goes to the Ibelin house in the city. There he meets Princess Sibylla,<sup>149</sup> the

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<sup>146</sup> Scott, *Kingdom of Heaven*, 2005. 00:25:10.

<sup>147</sup> Played by Alexander Siddig.

<sup>148</sup> Scott, *Kingdom of Heaven*, 00:34:30.

<sup>149</sup> Played by Eva Green.

beautiful sister of King Baldwin IV. He encounters her again at court where he discovers she is married to Guy de Lusignan.<sup>150</sup> Guy is a querulous, power hungry Templar whom Balian had encountered several times before on his journey to Jerusalem. Guy's animosity towards Godfrey, and Godfrey's towards Guy, was evident. No love is lost between Guy and Balian either.

Balian is summoned to meet King Baldwin IV,<sup>151</sup> the Leper King of the Christian lands. Baldwin, like Godfrey, encourages Balian to protect the helpless and do only what his conscience tells him to. Baldwin then commands Balian to go to Ibelin and protect the pilgrim's road for all are welcome in Jerusalem.

At Ibelin, Balian continues his evolution from bastard blacksmith to gracious nobleman. With his residents<sup>152</sup> Balian finds and mills water, turning Ibelin from a dusty but extensive holding to a lush paradise. The relationship between Balian and his 'residents' is not one between a lord and his serfs, or even a landowner and his tenants. Balian is inexorably involved in improving Ibelin. It might be inferred that because of his humble origins as a blacksmith he has no need to flaunt his new position over others. Sibylla visits him shortly afterward, sharing a romantic encounter that is conveniently ended by a report of imminent violence between Saladin, the Saracen leader, and Reynald of Chatillon,<sup>153</sup> a berserk nobleman bent on violence towards Muslims of any kind. Saladin's march toward Kerak, Reynald's stronghold, was sparked by Reynald's ambush of a group of Muslim pilgrims on their way to Jerusalem.

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<sup>150</sup> Played by Marton Csokas.

<sup>151</sup> Played by Edward Norton.

<sup>152</sup> The distinction between serfs, tenants, men-at-arms, and others is fuzzy in the film. I use 'residents' to maintain the ambiguity of the relationship.

<sup>153</sup> Played by Brendan Gleeson.

Reynald, however, was not alone in promoting the attack of the civilian caravan. Guy de Lusignan was also present and encouraging, though he demanded that he be distanced from the event so as to remain in favor at court. The attack broke the peace between the Christian lands and the Saracens, as Guy and Reynald intended and Saladin<sup>154</sup> began his march toward Kerak. In response, King Baldwin also amassed an army and rode to meet Saladin's forces. Though Baldwin was discouraged by his advisor Tiberius to journey with the army, Baldwin did so and spoke with Saladin directly.

Prior to the conversation between Baldwin and Saladin, Balian and his men-at-arms confronted the advancing Arab force. Though they were outnumbered and eventually captured, Balian and many of his men were not killed. This is because the commander of the Arab charge was none other than Imad, the supposed servant Balian had provided with a horse. In return for Balian's earlier kindness, Imad spares Balian and Balian's men and they await the decision of their leaders, Baldwin and Saladin. Baldwin swears to imprison Reynald and Saladin acquiesces to disband his army. As Baldwin rebukes Reynald, however, he also removes his glove and demands that Reynald kiss his leprous hand. Obviously revolted but even more terrified of his fate, Reynald does so.

Returning to Jerusalem, King Baldwin's health fails and he dies after leaving his kingdom to Sibylla and his army to Balian. Sibylla is crowned queen of Jerusalem and the other Christian lands and she, in turn, crowns Guy de Lusignan. The Director's Cut clarifies why Sibylla does this: Sibylla has a son whom Guy threatens if she does not crown him. He reminds her that, "You need my knights or his [Baldwin V's] rule will be

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<sup>154</sup> Played by Ghassan Massoud.

bloody and brief.”<sup>155</sup> Guy is not above murdering his own son for power. However the Director’s Cut also clarifies that after Baldwin IV, the Leper King, dies Sibylla’s son Baldwin V is crowned king. Too young for sole rule, Sibylla is declared regent. Unfortunately, Sibylla discovers that her son too has leprosy. Unable to see her son go through the same fate her brother did, Sibylla euthanizes her son. Upon Baldwin V’s death, Sibylla crowns Guy with a cold, yet blank, expression.

Once crowned, Guy frees Reynald of Chatillon from prison and tells him to “Give me a war!” Replying, “That is what I do,”<sup>156</sup> Reynald then attacks and kills a Muslim party that includes Saladin’s sister. Inevitably, Saladin sends messengers to King Guy to demand the return of his sister’s body and to demand the lives of those who were involved. Guy refuses and assembles an army to seek out and destroy the Saracens.

Meanwhile Balian, who was given control of the army by King Baldwin IV, finds himself ambushed by assassins. He survives and returns to Jerusalem to advise Guy that an army must move with water to be effective. If Guy keeps the army at Jerusalem, they might hold the city. Guy refuses, leaving Balian to defend the city alone.

As Balian predicted, Guy’s army is unable to survive the search for the Saracen army without water. The force is decimated by the Saracens. King Guy and Reynald are captured and briefly entertained by Saladin. Saladin offers water to Guy, who passes the cup directly to Reynald. By offering water to Guy, Saladin was treating him as an equal and a worthy, defeated opponent. It is obvious that Guy is oblivious to the subtle politics of Saladin’s gesture as he passes the cup immediately on. Reynald drinks deeply and Saladin, offended by the man’s audacity, immediately kills him and briefly chides Guy

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<sup>155</sup> Ridley Scott, dir. *Kingdom of Heaven: Director’s Cut*. (Beverly Hills: Twentieth Century Fox Home Entertainment, 2006) Disc 2, 00:09:10.

<sup>156</sup>Scott, *Kingdom of Heaven*, 01:27:05.

for being a hopeless king. Saladin refuses to kill Guy, however, because he believes a king does not kill another king. Saladin then moves on Jerusalem.

Balian evolves into a strategist as he prepares Jerusalem for the siege. He calculates distances and readies his men-at-arms for battle. The Patriarch of Jerusalem,<sup>157</sup> however, expresses his doubts about victory. The Patriarch, spiritual leader of the Crusader states, has always seemed to cower in the background before. Now, however, he seems passionate for the first time. Without knights, the Patriarch declares, there cannot be victory. In reply, Balian orders the men of Jerusalem to kneel. He knights them with the same oath to which Godfrey had him swear. The Patriarch demands, “Does making a man a knight make him a better fighter?” Balian’s reply is adamant: “Yes.”<sup>158</sup>

The siege of Jerusalem sees the lowly rise as knights and the high fall. King Guy is paraded naked, crowned on an ass by the Saracens. Queen Sibylla dramatically shaves her head and becomes a nurse, symbolizing the cleansing of the Holy Land. In contrast, Balian, born a blacksmith, becomes the protector of Jerusalem. The siege goes on for several days and nights until, finally, Balian presents himself to Saladin. Balian declares that those in Jerusalem would burn the city and its holy places to the ground before surrendering it. Saladin offers safe passage for every man, woman, and child to Christian lands if they surrender the city. Balian agrees and, returning to the city, is met by cheers. Travelling with the masses from the city, Balian sees that Sibylla has given up her position as queen and is walking with the commoners.

The film concludes in France as Balian explores his burned smithy. The trees are blooming again. He encounters a train of knights and King Richard on their way to

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<sup>157</sup> Played by Jon Finch.

<sup>158</sup> Scott, *Kingdom of Heaven*, 01:42:59.

reclaim Jerusalem. They ask for “Balian, who was defender of Jerusalem” to which Balian replies stubbornly, “I am the blacksmith.”<sup>159</sup>

### History versus Film

Ridley Scott was fascinated by the Crusades at school and beyond because “it was so colorful and violent.”<sup>160</sup> Scott had teamed up with William Monahan, writer of *Kingdom of Heaven* on another project and asked Monahan if he had any stories about the crusades. Monahan had one in particular: he had been fascinated by the story of the leper king. Monahan, Scott, and other producers, worked to create a film that would tell a unique story about the leper king. The result was *Kingdom of Heaven*.

Though the Leper King is hailed as the inspiration behind *Kingdom of Heaven*, Baldwin IV is not the main character. Rather, Scott and Monahan decided to focus on the story of Balian of Ibelin. Balian is a historical figure who was responsible for the negotiation and surrender of Jerusalem to Saladin. He is discussed at length in the “Old French Continuation of William of Tyre, 1184-1197,”<sup>161</sup> which was not actually written by the Archbishop of Tyre but was an addendum by some anonymous writer or writers. Balian is also discussed in the “Chronicle of Ernoul,”<sup>162</sup> who it is largely agreed was Balian’s own squire. Unfortunately, Ernoul does not discuss Balian to the extent one would like, a shame considering Ernoul would probably been the most valuable account.

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<sup>159</sup> Scott, *Kingdom of Heaven*, 02:13:55.

<sup>160</sup> Ridley Scott “Development,” in *Kingdom of Heaven: Director’s Cut*. (Beverly Hills: Twentieth Century Fox Home Entertainment, 2006.) Disc 3, 00:00:20

<sup>161</sup> “The Old French Continuation of William of Tyre, 1184-97” in *The Conquest of Jerusalem and the Third Crusade: Sources in Translation*, ed. Peter W Edbury (Aldershot, UK: Ashgate, 1998) 11-145.

<sup>162</sup> “Selected Sources” in *The Conquest of Jerusalem and the Third Crusade: Sources in Translation*, ed. Peter W. Edbury (Aldershot, UK: Ashgate, 1998) 149-182.



The Arabic sources that mention Balian are by Ibn al-Athir and Imad ad-Din, who both refer to Balian of Ibelin as Balian ibn Barzan.

William Monahan, writer of *Kingdom of Heaven*, consulted numerous historical sources on Baldwin IV and the fall of Jerusalem. He focused on, “all original sourcing,”<sup>163</sup> and built the film on the historical record. But how strictly did he follow history?

Balian of Ibelin, according to the “Old French Continuation...” was the younger brother of Baldwin of Ibelin, lord of Ibelin. The Ibelin family was possibly the most prominent of the nobility in Jerusalem, having been established shortly after the First Crusade and continuing well into the fourteenth century.<sup>164</sup> Ibn al-Athir adds that Balian of Ibelin “was almost equal in rank to the King.”<sup>165</sup> While the Ibelin family can be roughly followed throughout contemporary chronicles, Balian and his immediate kin fade in and out of the record.

The contemporary Christian chroniclers introduce Balian in an unimpressive manner. Baldwin of Ibelin had appeared at court to swear fealty to the King (King Guy<sup>166</sup>). When Baldwin refuses to pay homage and swear fealty he declares he will leave the kingdom and bequeathed custody of his son to Balian, his brother.<sup>167</sup> Balian does not reappear in the chronicles until King Guy assembles his army and calls them to Nazareth in preparation to besiege Tiberias, a county that had not paid homage to the new king.

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<sup>163</sup> Scott, “Development,” Disc 3, 00:09:03.

<sup>164</sup> Jonathon Riley-Smith, *The Feudal Nobility and the Kingdom of Jerusalem, 1174-1277* (London: MacMillan Press, 1973) 21.

<sup>165</sup> Ibn Al-Athir, “Jerusalem Reconquered” in *Arab Historians of the Crusades*, ed. Francesco Gabrieli (Berkeley: University of California, 1969) 139.

<sup>166</sup> Baldwin IV, the leper king, had died in 1183 and was succeeded by his nephew, Baldwin V. Baldwin V was the son of Sibylla, Baldwin IV’s sister, and her first husband William Longsword. (Edbury, 12). Baldwin V fell ill and Sibylla was crowned queen (Edbury, 25-26). In turn, she crowned her second husband, Guy de Lusignan.

<sup>167</sup> “The Old French Continuation...” 28.

Balian asks the King why he has raised the host and what the King is planning to do with them, warning that “winter is coming on and this is no time to keep up an army.”<sup>168</sup> King Guy admits that he has acted on the advice of the master Templar. The enmity between Balian and the Templars is evident when he then says:

It is a bad decision. No wise man would ever have given you such counsel, and you well know, sire, that you would never have brought the men here on my advice nor on the advice of the barons.... You should know that... as soon as you start the siege Saladin will come to its aid with a great army.<sup>169</sup>

Unfortunately, none of the records describe the origins of Balian’s dislike of the Templars, if indeed his comments can be strictly applied to the Templars. From Balian’s comments, at least, the source shows that he is a level-headed advisor. As a result, the king disbands his army and sends Balian to make peace with the lord of Tiberias.

The following spring, however, King Guy commanded his barons, archbishops and bishops to meet him in Jerusalem and to prepare for an invasion by Saladin. Saladin was marching on the Count of Tripoli, Prince Reynald de Chatillon, who had earlier ambushed a caravan travelling from Cairo to Damascus. The caravan had among its members the sister of Saladin. This seizure and lack of repentance, was the pretext of the fall of Jerusalem, the chroniclers state.<sup>170</sup>

The chroniclers take great note of the fact that, on his way to Nazareth to meet the army, Balian stopped in a different city to observe “an important festival”<sup>171</sup> and go to Mass. Afterward, Balian gathers the Count of Tripoli and takes him to Jerusalem to make peace with King Guy. There, King Guy amasses the army once more, with the Holy

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<sup>168</sup> “The Old French Continuation...” 29.

<sup>169</sup> “The Old French Continuation...” 29-30.

<sup>170</sup> “The Old French Continuation...” 29-30.

<sup>171</sup> “The Old French Continuation...” 33.

Cross, to face Saladin.<sup>172</sup> However, “the king trusted more in his own power and in his men than in the virtue of Jesus Christ and the Holy Cross, and because of this things went ill for him later.”<sup>173</sup> They made preparations to do battle at the Horns of Hattin, four miles from Tiberias.<sup>174</sup> At the battle of Hattin the Christian forces were decimated and Reynald of Chatillon and King Guy were captured.<sup>175</sup>

Balian of Ibelin was supposedly in the rearguard of the Christian forces at Hattin, but had escaped with a few others. He had retreated to Acre, which was shortly surrendered to Saladin. Balian, however, was acquainted with Saladin and had asked the Saracen king to escort his wife and children from Jerusalem to the Christian lands. Saladin agreed, on the understanding that Balian would only spend one night in Jerusalem.<sup>176</sup> Interestingly, this deal is only mentioned in the Christian sources. The Arab sources proceed with the seizure of Acre and the march toward Jerusalem.

Though the Christian chroniclers portray Balian as a man of his word, he was apparently absolved of his oath by the Patriarch of Jerusalem and was asked to govern and protect the city.<sup>177</sup> Saladin then began to besiege the city. After several days, the Christians in the city announced to Balian and the patriarch that they would rather die in defense of the city than let the Saracen host have it. Here, however, the Patriarch sets himself apart by reminding the populace that the Saracens will not spare the women and children. “If we can arrange things with Saladin so that we can all get out of the city and

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<sup>172</sup> “The Old French Continuation...” 35.

<sup>173</sup> “The Old French Continuation...” 37.

<sup>174</sup> “The Old French Continuation...” 47.

<sup>175</sup> The battle of Hattin/Hittin is particularly explored by Ibn al-Athir in Francesco Gabrieli’s *Arab Historians of the Crusades*. (Berkeley: University of California, 1969) 119-125.

<sup>176</sup> “The Old French Continuation...” 49.

<sup>177</sup> “The Old French Continuation...” 49-50.

go to the Christian-held lands, that would seem better than going out to fight.”<sup>178</sup> The Arab sources for this event do not shed light on Balian and the patriarch’s discussion. Ibn al-Athir, however, includes Balian’s threat to Saladin that the Christians will kill each other, burn their possessions, and destroy the holy Muslim places before they surrender the city.<sup>179</sup>

After negotiating extensively, Balian and Saladin agreed on a ransom for the Christians to evacuate the city. Those who could not afford to pay, however, would be enslaved.<sup>180</sup> After the coffers had been emptied and the ransoms exhausted there were still 40,000 poor.<sup>181</sup> Saladin gave 1,000 to his brother later who released the slaves “for the sake of God.”<sup>182</sup> The Patriarch and Balian pleaded with Saladin to release the remaining persons so Saladin gave them 2,000 slaves; he gave the Templars 10,000; the Hospitallers 10,000; the burgesses 10,000; and freed many more. Saladin stopped releasing the poor, however, when one man was caught smuggling gold from the city in a gourd. Eleven thousand Christians remained in Jerusalem, prisoners of Saladin.<sup>183</sup>

It is clear that Monahan read the original sources, but it is equally clear that he took many liberties with the historical record. The Balian of *Kingdom of Heaven* is not the Balian of the historical accounts. As with any secondary source of history, *Kingdom of Heaven* is a product of its contemporary events and ideas.<sup>184</sup>

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<sup>178</sup> “The Old French Continuation...” 58.

<sup>179</sup> Al-Athir, “Jerusalem Reconquered,” 142.

<sup>180</sup> “The Old French Continuation...” 59-60. Also: Al-Athir, “Jerusalem Reconquered,” 142. Ibn al-Athir adds that the Christians were given forty days to come up with the ransom. Those who could not by the expiration date would be enslaved.

<sup>181</sup> “The Old French Continuation...” 62.

<sup>182</sup> “The Old French Continuation...” 63.

<sup>183</sup> “The Old French Continuation...” 63.

<sup>184</sup> The film’s philosophy will be discussed in greater detail in the [Audience](#) section of this paper.

*Kingdom of Heaven* portrays Balian as an amalgamation of ideas and personalities discussed in the original sources. The sources do paint a clear picture of Balian's heritage. He was not the bastard blacksmith from France that the film created, but definitely the younger brother of the Lord of Ibelin. He does not seem to have committed fratricide, as the film suggests, and the sources make no mention of his interactions with Sibylla. Rather, the sources seem to paint an image of a strategic knight, a gentlemanly kind of fellow who is interested in protecting his family but is not averse to protecting the masses either. He appears to be religiously inclined, though the sources may have taken liberties with that. There is no mention of his actions at Ibelin, and no mention of ever interacting with Baldwin IV, the leper king.

*Kingdom of Heaven's* Balian does have his moments of accuracy. Balian of Ibelin does seem to have been a loyal advisor to his king, though the film focuses on Balian's interaction with Baldwin IV as king rather than with Guy de Lusignan. The film does, however, tip its hat to cooperating with King Guy as Balian advises King Guy to defend Jerusalem rather than to seek out Saladin's army.<sup>185</sup>

Balian's fate is not mentioned in any of the historical records. While extremely unlikely that Balian went to France with Queen Sibylla, the film offers closure to its narrative that will never be available from the primary sources. But what about the other characters in *Kingdom of Heaven*? Did William Monahan continue to fictionalize historical figures?

Sibylla was daughter of King Amaury and sister to Baldwin IV. She had married William Longsword, the son of the Marquis of Montferrat, in 1176 and given birth to a son: Baldwin V. She was widowed in 1177. She later married Guy de Lusignan but may

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<sup>185</sup> Scott, *Kingdom of Heaven*, 01:30:46.

not have had any children by him. She inherited the Crusader states in 1186 and appointed Guy de Lusignan her co-regent. The Patriarch of Jerusalem is said to have commanded her to take the crown “and give it to such a man as can govern your kingdom.”<sup>186</sup> Monahan may have taken this line to heart; on his deathbed Baldwin IV offers Balian his sister’s hand in marriage. Balian, however, protests that Sibylla is already married and he could not be the death of Guy. Sibylla’s life after the fall of Jerusalem is not addressed by the primary sources, but Monahan provides the summation that she and Balian live happily together.

Guy de Lusignan does not have a strong personality in any of the sources. The *Continuation* hints that he was a poor, unwise ruler whereas the Arab sources leave no mention of him after the battle of Hattin where he is humiliated. He does not seem to be particularly ‘good’ or ‘bad’ in the primary sources but Monahan has created a true foil of Balian’s character. *Kingdom of Heaven*’s Guy is a power hungry, vicious man who is not above murdering his step-son, assassinating Balian, or using his wife.

Prince Reynald de Chatillon, or Prince Arnat of al-Karak, is a fascinating character both in the sources and in the film. He is generally regarded to be bloodthirsty and strongly anti-Saracen. The sources all agree that he was responsible for the death of Saladin’s sister, an event which is largely regarded to have prompted the Saracen crusade to reclaim Jerusalem. The film humanizes Reynald a little, creating an almost sympathetically insane character. He accounts for himself only once by saying, “I am what I am. Someone has to be.”<sup>187</sup> Reynald’s death, however, seems completely accurate to the historical record. All the records agree that immediately after the battle of Hattin,

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<sup>186</sup> “The Old French Continuation...” 26.

<sup>187</sup> Scott, *Kingdom of Heaven*, 01:27:21.

Saladin offered a cup of water to the captured King Guy. King Guy passed the cup to Reynald, who drank from it. While the words of Saladin's response vary by source they amount to indignation at the madman for taking a cup that was not offered to him. Saladin then stabbed Reynald and he was dragged from the scene. Such a poignant scene in the film might be mistaken for the writer's or director's vision, however it is unmistakably true to the sources.

Saladin is an equally fascinating character. *Kingdom of Heaven* holds him to be a calm, wise leader who is not zealous but clearly faithful. He seems to be patient, but not a fool who will miss opportunities. The Christian sources hold Saladin in high esteem. Saladin is held to be charitable and kind, freeing the Christians who were unable to ransom themselves, and minimizing the casualties. The Arab sources, not surprisingly, also hold Saladin on high. They, however, portray him as a true zealot who is ridding the land of the infidels and promoting the will of Allah. The film's Saladin seems a perfect mélange of these images. He is respectful toward the Christians, even erecting a fallen altar crucifix once he has taken Jerusalem, but he is also a hardened general. Saladin is, perhaps, one of the most charismatic characters in *Kingdom of Heaven*.

Then, of course, there is Baldwin IV: the inspiration for *Kingdom of Heaven*. Baldwin IV was crowned king at the age of 13 after the death of his father, King Amalric or Amaury. He remained king until his death in 1195. His eleven year reign seems to have been marked by a tenuous but sincere attempt to create a kingdom of co-habitation. Baldwin was diagnosed as a leper at the age of nine by none other than William of Tyre,

the chronicler. He was reputed, however, to have been a great man despite his illness and a fair king. William of Tyre in particular praised the young king's attributes.<sup>188</sup>

The theatrical release of *Kingdom of Heaven* excluded a potentially pivotal character: Baldwin V. The Director's Cut, however, presents him as the beloved child of Sibylla. His patronage is not addressed but Guy's lack of affection is obvious. In fact, Baldwin V was the son of Sibylla's first marriage. Baldwin V did not have a long reign, but the cause of his death is unknown. Monahan, and Ridley Scott in later interviews, believed and presented the idea that Baldwin V was a leper as well and his mother, rather than seeing her son suffer the same fate as her brother, euthanized him. Though the sources don't negate this possibility, they also add nothing to its feasibility. Baldwin V's demise is truly unknown.

Monahan has clearly tweaked the stories of the historical characters, and blatantly created (or recreated) others. There is no record of a Godfrey of Ibelin, supposedly Balian's father in the film, nor is there a record of encounters between Balian and noble Saracens. The liberties Monahan has taken, however, do not necessarily negate the film's value. That so many elements have remained true to the historical record is encouraging.

The Director's Cut, interestingly, is far more historical than the theatrical release. The inclusion of Baldwin V, as well as the references to historical sources creates a much more accurate and believable film for the academic community. The reason why the Director's Cut was not, in fact, the theatrical release is expressed in the "Development" section of the Director's Cut DVD set. The producing companies believed the Baldwin V storyline was unnecessary and that audiences would be unlikely to sit through a film

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<sup>188</sup> Bernard Hamilton, *The Leper King and His Heirs: Baldwin IV and the Crusader Kingdom of Jerusalem*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000).



longer than three hours. The outcome is obvious; the Director's Cut was released on DVD a year after the theatrical release.

### Themes

Sir Ridley Scott is undoubtedly a cinematic visionary. Regardless of the reputation of his other films, he is passionate and intense about creating believable worlds. *Kingdom of Heaven* has poignant themes. Perhaps the most important would be the cycle of life and death.

The film begins with death. Balian's wife is being buried at a crossroads. It does not take a great leap in reasoning to see that Scott has set up the entire film in this one sequence. As a suicide, Balian's wife will have no rest in the afterlife and by being buried at a crossroads she will have no direction; Balian will have no peace in his life until he journeys to the Holy Land and makes the 'right' decisions to lead him through life. Balian's journey and decision at the 'crossroads' lasts the entire film. While the film begins with death, the film concludes with new buds on a tree and Balian in a new, rich life. Scott has woven an elaborate and masterful tapestry.

In a more literal examination of the life and death cycle, several scenes propel the action of the film. Balian kills his brother and joins Godfrey; Godfrey dies and Balian becomes lord of Ibelin... the losses and victories continue to escalate in intensity until the climax of the film: the siege of Jerusalem. The oath that Balian gives Godfrey upon becoming Baron of Ibelin is another theme that is present throughout the film. Balian swears to be fearless, upright, truthful, and to safeguard the helpless. From the onset of the film Balian is fearless (by fighting his arrest), speaks the truth (in admitting to

murder), upright (by refusing to kill Imad or Guy), and protecting. Though he swears to the oath twenty five minutes into the film, Balian's character holds true to it from the beginning. The good characters are separated from the villains by these actions. Reynald, for instance, shows fear when he is being scolded by King Baldwin. He then lies about deliberately attacking the pilgrims. He is certainly not upright, and not concerned in the slightest about protecting people. Likewise, King Guy is portrayed as a lying coward with no redeeming feature. While the oath may have been spoken less than thirty seconds in the film, it touches every moment of the film.

In a film about the Crusades it is not surprising to see religious imagery and religious themes. Scott, however, goes above and beyond background symbolism. The unnamed "Hospitaller" character is, fascinatingly, a God-like character. Scott and Monahan ensured that the Hospitaller appeared wise. He is not overly zealous, opting instead for religious tolerance. Those traits in themselves would not make the Hospitaller necessarily a mirror of God, but Scott has created several scenes that leave no doubt. In the *Director's Cut* Balian sits in the rocky desert, throwing rocks at a bush. He is clearly conflicted about having declined King Baldwin's offer to marry Sibylla. An overhead shot shows that Balian and his horse are alone. Yet in the blink of an eye, the Hospitaller appears with a few comforting words. Ignoring him, Balian throws a rock at bush that then catches alight. "There's your religion," Balian tells the Hospitaller, declaiming that a bush spoke to Moses. The Hospitaller replies, "That does not mean there is no God." As the Hospitaller turns and walks away the camera shoots to the burning bush... and suddenly another bush nearby catches fire. Balian turns to see it, but as he turns back

towards the direction of the Hospitaller, the Hospitaller has disappeared.<sup>189</sup> The Hospitaller later appears after Balian has defeated assassin Templars and lies unconscious in the desert. The Hospitaller lends a single finger out to Balian's temple and Balian awakens. Scott clearly intended to imply that God touches the *temple* of man, the mind. These scenes, however, were all removed in the theatrical release. The Hospitaller's departure from the film is common in both films, though not nearly as weighty without the 'God scenes.' After the Battle of Hattin, in which King Guy and his men were devastated, Balian surveys the casualties and the camera shows that the Hospitaller has been beheaded yet his eyes are peacefully closed.

One last theme that Monahan and Scott have created is that the kingdom of Jerusalem is very much a "kingdom of conscience."<sup>190</sup> The idea that a man is not who he was born, but what he has it in him to become is vital to every aspect of the film. Balian would never have been able to become a nobleman without the premise, a peace would never have been tenable between the Saracens and Christians in Jerusalem, and Sibylla would never have been able to abdicate her crown and elope with Balian. This idea of a kingdom of conscience, though, is indubitably a 21<sup>st</sup> century imposition. The presence of so many 21<sup>st</sup> century ideas does not, however, diminish the value of *Kingdom of Heaven*.

### Audience

*Kingdom of Heaven* is a product of its time. Its special effects and cinematic direction are certainly typical of millennial films, but the philosophies expressed in the plot and by the characters also reflect about the thoughts of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Production

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<sup>189</sup> Scott, *Kingdom of Heaven: Director's Cut*, Disc 2, 00:21:48-00:23:11.

<sup>190</sup> Scott, *Kingdom of Heaven*, 00:22:00.

on *Kingdom of Heaven* began only a few years after the September 11, 2001 Al Qaeda attack. Tensions between Western and Islamic worlds were incredibly high. Both cultures suffered losses during the aftermath of September 11, and both cultures suffered great losses during the Crusades. Both historical events remain politically charged. Neither Monahan nor Scott wanted to create a film that would spark tensions and alienate audiences. As a result, neither the Christians nor the Saracens were truly vilified in *Kingdom of Heaven*.

Rather than portraying the Christians or the Saracens as barbarians, Scott and Monahan created detestable characters on both sides. On the side of the Christians there is certainly Reynald and Guy, while one of Saladin's young advisors (Mulluh)<sup>191</sup> is portrayed as angry and violent. Certainly King Baldwin and Saladin are admirable, great men even as Balian and Imad are portrayed as less important (politically) but similarly minded individuals. The traits these characters possess may be entirely fictional as none of the sources address the individuals in depth.

In addition to reflecting the tensions between the West and the Middle East at the time of productions, *Kingdom of Heaven* must also be considered for what it is: not simply a film and not simply a history. It is an historical film created appeal to the general public. Its audience wants to be entertained, yet it also wants to *believe* these events happened and these people existed. Historical films are not created solely for didactic or scholarly purposes, yet neither are they created to be fantasy. They must reflect a reasonable interpretation of reality (history) and present it in an appealing, attractive, and engaging manner (so as to entertain). Neither Monahan nor Scott claimed

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<sup>191</sup> Played by Khaled Nabawy.

the film was historically accurate. They wholeheartedly admitted that the film was a hybrid of fact and fiction. Their goal was to share one possible story of the Crusades.

In recent decades the topic of history in films, and the role of films in history, has been explored significantly. In what is perhaps his most notable work, *History on Film/Film on History*,<sup>192</sup> Robert A. Rosenstone establishes that “we must admit that film gives us a new sort of history, what we might call history as vision.” Rosenstone suggests that films provide a new medium to historical discussions. Appealing visually and enticing with drama, films may reach much wider audiences than a typical historical study in text. Yet, good films that blend story<sup>193</sup> with history cannot necessarily be relied upon as accurate histories. Film writers and film directors blend truth with non-truth (such as ‘stretching’ the truth or omitting information rather than outright fictionalizing) to achieve their goals.

Indeed, *Kingdom of Heaven* presents its audience with some hybrid of fiction and history. It is not entirely factual, yet it is not entirely fictional either. Monahan and Scott have created something else and its value should not be discounted by historians nor by film professionals.<sup>194</sup> Rosenstone nicely summarizes film’s influence thus:

...people always want to have some knowledge, however imperfect, about where they and their ancestors came from, literally and figuratively. ...As long as screens, large and small, are a major medium for showing and telling us about our world, then film will be one way of rendering the past.<sup>195</sup>

The academic standard that historical films are held to should not be the same standard historical books are held to. Indeed, those individuals who discuss film as a

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<sup>192</sup> Robert A. Rosenstone, *History on Film/Film on History* (London: Pearson, 2006).

<sup>193</sup> In the sense of action and driving forces, whether through narration, images, fiction or non-fiction.

<sup>194</sup> It is, I believe, more likely to have encountered critiques from historians. Ridley Scott is widely respected and admired in the film industry.

<sup>195</sup> Robert A. Rosenstone, *History on Film/Film on History*, (London: Pearson, 2006) 160.

historical medium often remind their followers that the debate is applicable to historical books as well. Often historical books written for the public audience differ dramatically in language, tone, and sourcing from those historical books written for professionals. Films, likewise, should be examined in the context of their intended audience; a standard of analysis, however, has not yet been commonly established. As the academic debate continues hopefully a common standard will be established and historical films can be analyzed for their historical value more easily.

*Kingdom of Heaven*, and other films about the Crusades, plays a unique role in interpreting history. Having consulted primary and secondary sources, Scott and Monahan created a third interpretation of events: they created a tertiary source. So how valuable is the *Kingdom of Heaven*, as a tertiary source about the Crusades, to the global public?

### Conclusion

*Kingdom of Heaven* is not intentionally didactic. Scott wanted to create an entertaining, moving cinematic experience about the Crusades. He did not, at first, seem to care how many historical facts were involved in the telling of his story. The end result, however, is a brilliant mélange of fact and fiction. Though Scott's Balian is heavily fictionalized – not the vague man of the sources – Scott's creation reflects 21<sup>st</sup> century humanist ideas. The film avoids playing with political fire in a particularly sensitive time. The other characters, too, depart dramatically from the historical sources. Drama, however, is the intent. Scott brings these characters to life and presents the audience with a solid rendition of history.

As a visual medium, however, film must take liberties with the past. Actors must enact (not necessarily *re-enact*) history using their skills at body language, facial expression, and language to *interpret*, not mimic, the historical character. Even the environment must differ, whether through time, or space, or both.

When evaluating *Kingdom of Heaven*'s historicity it is important to keep those thoughts in mind. It is also important to remember that Orientalism helped to drive the film. The Saracens in Scott's film appear to be reasonable and sage, justified in their violence. Even Sibylla, though European in appearance, is sensual and exotic in Arab garb. And Jerusalem, the 'kingdom of conscience' is some otherworldly place. It is not only a Holy City, it is also a peaceful place of co-habitation between conflicting cultures.

So while not entirely accurate to the historical record *Kingdom of Heaven* is still a valuable film. It retains and is inspired by many historical facts, allowing the history to provide the framework of the story. As a film its mastery exceeds expectation. Its themes are relevant, persistent, and engaging to 21<sup>st</sup> century audiences. *Kingdom of Heaven* is an attractive (tertiary) history because of its visual appeal, its dramatic and emotional appeal, and its thematic appeal. It is a legitimate medium of historical pedagogy.

### Final Thoughts

Films have become an integral part of American society. In 2012 alone 225 million people went to the movies in the United States and Canada: 68% of the population.<sup>196</sup> Films have become an inseparable part of American culture, and film culture should be on the lips of every film historian. Every historian, actually, should be a film historian. If a film (fictional or documentary) or television show has been produced about a historian's subject, that historian should treat the media as a secondary source. The historical film has the unique ability to transcend time barriers; it can portray the past as well as its contemporary society, which may well be far removed from the present of the viewer.

Take, for example, Cecil B. DeMille's *The Crusades*. Though inspired by historic persons during a historic period, it reflects the mentality and (hi)story telling of the 1930s. Watching *The Crusades* in the 21<sup>st</sup> century only adds to the complexity, but also illustrated an amazing fact: everything is history.

Historians have long since mastered the art of historiography. They are well trained to read theories and histories about the past as well as primary sources, but by neglecting films historians are missing a vital piece of the discussion. Hollywood has postulated (and invented) as many histories as there have actually been, turning Hollywood and its films into an obvious cornucopia of historical interpretation. While historians have learned, almost intuitively, how to treat historical interpretations in text there has not been a standard established to deal with the treatment of historical interpretations in film.

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<sup>196</sup> "Theatrical Market Statistics 2012." Motion Picture Association of America, Inc. Accessed March 24, 2013. <http://www.mpa.org/Resources/3037b7a4-58a2-4109-8012-58fca3abdf1b.pdf>.



This essay has proposed that historical films cannot, and certainly should not, be removed from the filmmaker's intentions. Since historical events or persons inspire historic films they should be compared to the historical sources and they should *also* be considered in light of what the filmmakers had access to. For instance William Monahan, writer of *Kingdom of Heaven*, claims to have access to most of not all of the historical texts about the Fall of Jerusalem while Sir Walter Scott, author of *The Talisman*—the inspiration for *King Richard and the Crusaders*—claimed to have only a few secondary sources. *Kingdom of Heaven* is comparatively a much more historically accurate film than *King Richard and the Crusaders* for this very point. The filmmakers approached the films with different emphases and created dramatically different historical experiences.

And historical film is, after all, all about the *experience*. The particular advantage to film over text in telling history is that films allow the audience to *experience* the film. Films invite the viewer into the world; showing the viewer things as they were then (whether accurate or not) and helping the viewer establish a visual connection with the past. In addition to the sight of a created world, the music of a film also builds a bond. Music bonds the viewer emotionally to the historical film, encouraging happiness, sadness, and excitement through carefully composed soundtracks. While text has the ability to allow the reader to imagine history, film imagines it for the audience.

Just as text histories are evaluated eagerly for bias, so are films. Historians in particular seem to be eager to remove films from any discussion of legitimate history. A prime example of historian's revulsion at historical films can be found in Jonathan Riley-Smith's scathing review of *Kingdom of Heaven*. Riley-Smith takes particular issue with Ridley Scott's pacifism and philosophizing saying that "will confirm for the nationalists

that medieval crusading was fundamentally about colonialism.... At a time of inter-faith tension, nonsense like this will only reinforce existing myths.”<sup>197</sup> Riley-Smith, however, has fallen prey to ignorance. He did not approach *Kingdom of Heaven* in the same way he would have approached a new history of the Crusades; he watched the film but did not evaluate it. Film needs to be evaluated with the same scrutiny as text histories, but they also need to be evaluated with the same acceptance that a piece of literature or work of art would. Riley-Smith looked at *Kingdom of Heaven* through only a historian’s lens, but if historians are going to be valuable to Hollywood the historian’s lens needs to evolve. It needs to take historical films seriously as films as well as histories.

It is shocking to note, then, that no historian has seriously proposed a rubric with which hold historical films accountable. Robert A. Rosenstone, the major authority of film and history, has written copious amounts about how history is valuable to film and vice versa but has not once proposed how to approach the relationship. Hayden White, in response to a 1988 essay by Rosenstone, at least had the forbearance to add a level of sophistication to the debate of history in film. White declared that history in film should be called “*historiophoty* (the representation of history and our thought about it in visual images and filmic discourse).”<sup>198</sup> Defining the discussion of history in film as *historiophoty*, however, was the extent of White’s contribution. Though numerous historians have examined history in film since 1988, still no one has established a methodology for approaching it.

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<sup>197</sup> Jonathan Riley-Smith, “Truth is the First Victim,” *UK Times*, May 5, 2005, online edition accessed March 25, 2013, <http://archive.is/m53N>.

<sup>198</sup> Hayden White, “Historiography and Historiophoty,” *The American Historical Review*, 93.5 (1988): 1193.

This essay has proposed a solution to the sorely needed rubric for the evaluation of historical films. It begins by proposing a comparison of the film's action and characters to those recorded in history. Historians who look at films do this already, but then they stop. They fall short of examining the other, equally important, aspects of a historical film. Just as important as comparing the film's portrayal of history to historical records is the director and filmmaker's intentions. The director's agendas are understandable in an examination of the film's themes. Here, a historian should endeavor to read the film like a piece of work, channeling the art historian within. The film historian should look at each motif and each cinematic element as an opportunity to read what the director and filmmaker wanted the audience to perceive. Tony Barta perhaps put it most eloquently when he explained that "A writer codes an interpretation by choosing and ordering words just as film or television has interpretations coded into it."<sup>199</sup>

Perhaps most importantly, however, a film historian must remember and examine the contemporary history surrounding the production of a historical film. Films are absolutely the product of their time and are obviously influenced by contemporary events and passions. The intended audience of a film is perhaps even more telling than a director's notes. Knowing, for instance, that DeMille's *The Crusades* was released during the Great Depression suggests that viewers were looking for a story that they could relate to, and that DeMille thought they could identify with the characters of *The Crusades*. Likewise, *King Richard and the Crusaders* promotes a tolerance that was being sought not only in the conflict of the Third Crusade but also in the contemporary Cold War and

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<sup>199</sup> Tony Barta, "Screening the Past: History Since the Cinema," *Screening the Past: Film and the Representation of History* (Westport, CN: Praeger, 1998), 15.

Arab-Israeli conflicts. *Kingdom of Heaven* most obviously identifies as a post 9/11 film seeking to entertain and admire at the same time.

Examining Cecil B. DeMille's *The Crusades* revealed an intriguing trend in Hollywood. DeMille's large-scale historical epic played more on the conflict of inner turmoil (self-conflict) than it did on religious conflict. Though oppression of the Christians by the Saracens set events in motion in *The Crusades*, the story focuses only on the human emotion and very human journeys experienced by the characters. Richard, the protagonist, would have been violent, rash, and majestic if DeMille had restrained himself to the Richard of the primary sources. Setting that Richard aside, DeMille created a much more complex Lion-king on a journey of self-discovery more than a journey to conquer the Jerusalem. Berengaria, too, experiences an evolution in *The Crusades*. DeMille and the screenwriters chose created Berengaria from *tabula rasa*. The sources suggest that she was wise and fair, but that is all. DeMille's Berengaria is wise and fair, but also pious, chaste, feisty, and adorable. Though DeMille has fictionalized the characters in *The Crusades*, his had made them more personable and relatable. Some might suggest that by assigning undue characterization DeMille has created "false memory"<sup>200</sup> while others would defend his creation as art and suggest that it "provides immediacy."<sup>201</sup> Ultimately only a viewer can decide whether or not *The Crusades* is valuable. It may inspire viewers to investigate the historical realities, or it may leave theme satisfied with DeMille's interpretation.

*King Richard and the Crusaders* has the unique ability not only to inform historians about how the Crusades were received in the 1950s, but also how they were

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<sup>200</sup> Nickolas Haydock, *Movie Medievalism* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland and Company, Inc., 2008), 27.

<sup>201</sup> Martha W. Driver, "What's Accuracy Got To Do With It?" *The Medieval Hero On Screen* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland and Company, Inc., 2004), 19.

received in the early nineteenth century. Using Sir Walter Scott's *The Talisman* as inspiration, *King Richard and the Crusaders* maintains Hollywood and literary stereotypes of 'good' versus 'evil.' Sir Giles is very obviously the devious 'bad guy' while Sir Kenneth is very obviously the naïve 'good guy.' Though *The Talisman* and *King Richard and the Crusaders* invent characters and events, the setting remains historical. King Richard's first illness during the Crusades may have inspired the novel and the film, but the inspiration bloomed into a veritable love story. Perhaps most interestingly, however, is how the director, David Butler, includes contemporary messages. Catering to a Cold War audience, Butler includes plotlines about deception and tolerance, constantly promoting the idea that everything is not as it seems. Walter Scott, too, promoted the ideas of deception and tolerance in *The Talisman*, though perhaps more genuinely as an innocent plot element. There is very little about *King Richard and the Crusaders* that could be called historical, or even relatable. Yet it is an important film in the portfolio of Crusade films for those very reasons. The film was created with only entertainment in mind. The film is, perhaps, best called a *coincidental* Crusade film. The characters and story would have easily fit into any other time period or historical conflict. The choice, first by Walter Scott and then by David Butler, to place the story into the Crusades is intriguing. There are no redeeming historical references, and very little to discuss in the way of themes, in *King Richard and the Crusaders*, but somehow it was a box office hit, pulling in a reported \$2,100,000 in the United States.<sup>202</sup> Somehow, despite its flaws in light of analysis, it drew in audience members and entertained them.

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<sup>202</sup> "King Richard and the Crusaders (1954)" *Internet Movie Database*, accessed February 23, 2013, [http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0047150/?ref\\_=fn\\_al\\_tt\\_1](http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0047150/?ref_=fn_al_tt_1).

Of the films discussed here, *Kingdom of Heaven* is perhaps the most historically accurate. Though the film exaggerates and embellishes historical personalities, it focuses on historical events to drive the story. It invents a few characters and dramatizes relationships, but it also has a clearly relationship with the historical records. *Kingdom of Heaven* is not nearly as far removed from historical reality as either *The Crusades* or *King Richard and the Crusaders*. Ridley Scott has created not just a new, tertiary source for the Fall of Jerusalem but also a spectacular blockbuster. Like *The Crusades* it focuses on the humanity of the characters, portraying them complexly (with the exception of Reynald of Chatillon whose character is without redemption). Scott did not approach *Kingdom of Heaven* like a financial endeavor; he approached it like a work of art. His cyclical theme of life and death is perhaps more demonstrative of his directorial agenda. As the protagonist, Balian, floats from lost opportunity (death) to new opportunity (life) again and again the story unfolds. Though Scott approaches the philosophy of the Crusades, life, and death with the mentality of a 21<sup>st</sup> century man *Kingdom of Heaven* gains impact. Audiences, concerned with the interminable East-West/Muslim-Christian conflicts relate to the human struggles depicted in the film.

These films demonstrate an emotional connection, forged by drama and conflict, that the historical text never could. They perpetuate a fascination with the Crusades that has driven historical scholarship as well as film scholarship. In recent years medieval cinema has become a particular topic of interest among historians and other scholars eager to analyze the 'medievalism' of the cinema. They still lack, however, a methodological approach to their analysis. The more recent scholarship focuses on either the use of history or the use of themes in storytelling, not both. Historical film, however,

cannot be considered in isolation. The film must be considered, yes as a *film*, but *also* as history.

The future of the historical film discussion is clear: since film has become an inseparable part of Western culture and civilization it has coincidentally or accidentally become a source for knowledge about the past. Film is now used in the classroom at all levels of education, for emphasis or illustration. The necessity for a structured and methodological approach to historical film has hit and will continue to impact teachers and educators long before the professional historian.

In 2007 *The History Teacher* journal ran a series of articles dedicated to the discussion of film in the classroom. One of the articles, written by Dawn Marie Hayes of Montclair State University, specifically addressed the Crusades in film, focusing on *Kingdom of Heaven* and a contemporary production by the History Channel. Over the course of a semester she instructed her students on the history of the Crusades, providing them with background information and primary sources. The students' work culminated in essays evaluating the historicity of the two films, with the overwhelming majority of students appreciating the "not biased" History Channel production. Hayes' main point of contention with *Kingdom of Heaven*, and her hypothesis as to why her students distrusted it, was because *Kingdom of Heaven* set the stage with fiction. Hayes supposes that because "there were historical inaccuracies concerning the age, occupation, and place of birth of the main character" the entire film was affected negatively. Interestingly, Hayes did not show any other films about the Crusades, giving her students access only to the primary sources about the Fall of Jerusalem and the two cinematic approaches to the

event. Though Hayes does not disclose what her teaching method was precisely she “was pleased overall with the results of [her] overall strategy.”<sup>203</sup>

Hayes, however, had the advantage of experienced students. Her experiment involved upper-level undergraduate college students, students who presumably had been taught how to think critically in general if not about film in particular. A more interesting case was brought forth by a middle school teacher, Adam Woelders, who *did* create a rubric... but a rubric for using film to *teach* history rather than how to evaluate a film’s historicity. His case study, however, is particularly intriguing. Using inquiry-based activities Woelders prompted his middle school students to evaluate scenes, compare scenes, stories and characters to primary sources, identify explicit and implicit messages in a film, and identify missing historical elements. Woelders’ overall message is that using film properly and critically in the classroom can “help encourage students’ critical viewing habits”—the same habits that Hayes’ students picked up innately. Surveying his class, Woelders also found that 82.8% of his class said “Watching a film helps me to better understand what I read in textbooks and primary sources.”<sup>204</sup>

Recall for a moment the survey that Rosenzweig and Thelen conducted in the early 1990s. Participants in that survey said that historical films had a 50-50 likelihood of portraying the past accurately. Textbooks and non-fiction books, which Woelder’s middle school students found so confusing, were given a trustworthiness rating of 6.4/10.0—not so much greater than films. Considering how many people attend the movies, at least once, during a year and considering how much trust people actually have for historical

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<sup>203</sup> Dawn Marie Hayes, “Harnessing the Potential in Historiography and Popular Culture When Teaching the Crusades,” *The History Teacher*, Vol. 40, No. 3 (May, 2007), 349-361.

<sup>204</sup> Adam Woelders, “Using Film to Conduct Historical Inquiry with Middle School Students,” *The History Teacher* Vol. 40, No. 3 (May 2007), 363-395.



film, film plays a large part in informing the public about the past. Audiences may not walk away from a film believing it entirely, but they walk away with one new interpretation of the past in their minds.

The experience of the historical film's audience has evolved over the years, from reading actors' exaggerated emotions in silent films, to admiring constructed props and scenes, to the most recent cinematic inventions of computer generated images (CGI) and 3-D movies. Film offers layers of experience that textual histories cannot and while that does not necessarily make films the superior source for historical information, it does not necessarily negate them either. Films offer viewers the unique opportunity to participate in and observe history (accurate, exaggerated, or invented).

Since popular films have become an integral part of today's society historians and scholars need to be prepared to deal with film and new media in a scholarly, fair fashion. The rubric proposed here—to include not just a comparison of historical film plot and characters to history but to also note the filmmaker's intentions and contemporary influences—should be a stepping stone for further discussion. Key elements of film critique, namely setting, props and music, have been neglected in the film analysis sections of this paper but those elements may shed additional light on understanding film's role in history-telling. The strategy proposed here is by no means absolute, but hopes to incite historians to view film in a new light: as valuable historical tools.

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