

'the message', 1976 | historical analysis



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

Abstract

This essay examines the historical accuracy of the 1976 movie, *The Message*. It investigates the historical accuracy of the movie in three categories; the costumes, the historical events shown in the movie, and the beliefs and values taught in the Islamic religion. This movie is considered to be historically accurate in terms of the costumes. The costumes used in this movie are excellent indicators of the rank, personality, and the surroundings of the character portrayed. One can easily learn about the characters by looking at the costumes worn. Most historical events that occurred in the time of the prophet were depicted properly. Major events such as the declaration of the Islamic faith, the first martyr of Islam and the migration to Abyssinia were portrayed accurately without any disrespect to the Islamic religion. The values and beliefs of the characters in the movie greatly influenced their actions. The plot of the movie revolved around the Islamic faith, which taught people many concepts. The Islamic faith declared that everyone is equal in the eyes of god, which tempted many people to convert to Islam, as many people especially slaves, were not treated unfairly. This movie is considered by many critics as a historically accurate representation of the establishment of the Islamic faith.

Muhammad, Messenger of Allah re-titled *The Message* is a 1976 film directed by Moustapha Akkad that chronicles the life and times of the prophet of Islam, Muhammad. This movie is considered to be a very accurate historical representation of the actual events that took place; the topics that will be further explored from this film are: the costumes, the values and beliefs of the Islamic religion and the historical events that were depicted in the film.

This film serves as an introduction to early Islamic history. The Message follows Muhammad's years as a prophet starting with Islam's beginnings in Mecca. The Message focuses on the persecution of the Muslims and the battles and hardships they had to endure to worship freely and peacefully. When actual events are remade into movies, they are usually twisted and changed for the entertainment of the viewer. The Message is a film that stays true to events and is not morphed into the usual Hollywood film. The well portrayed events that are shown in the film are very prominent in the development and establishment of Islam as a well known religion.

The costumes worn by the actors and actresses in this movie said a lot about their character's rank, personality and physical setting. During the time of the prophet servants usually wore loin clothes. In the movie, Bilal and the other slaves wore just that. Common men and women wore tunics that were long and loose with pants underneath. The men wore a large piece of cloth on their heads and fashioned it into a turban to protect them from the intensity of the desert sun (see Appendix I). Women also wore a cloth made out of cotton on their heads; they wore the cloth in an assortment of styles (Notes on Islamic Clothing, (n. d.) Over-garments section para. 1). For the rich, the most common fabrics were silk and linen. In the movie, Hind and Abu Sufyan, the richest people in Mecca, always wore extravagant clothing made out of colourful silk. They also wore immaculate jewels and ornaments. In the movie, the horses and camels that belonged to the rich wore jewellery as well! When the followers of Islam journeyed back to Mecca, they all wore the same clothing, indicating that they were of the same rank, which was one of the main concepts of the Islamic religion. In present day, the clothing

that was worn by the followers of Islam back then is still worn in the yearly pilgrimage of Hajj. In Abyssinia, the wealthy people that live in the palace wore long, loose clothing fashioned out of linen. Their clothing was adorned with golden crosses. This indicated that the people in the palace of Abyssinia were religious and of high rank. The movie portrays the King of Abyssinia wearing long clothing made of linen; he was holding a large gold staff decorated with intricate patterns and crosses (see Appendix II). The clothing worn by the people of Mecca and Abyssinia in the film was an accurate representation of the clothing worn long ago.

There are many important events that occurred during the establishment of Islam as a religion. The Message has portrayed many of these events in the three hour time slot. The movie shows the evolution of Islam through approximately twenty years. The first major event to occur in the film was Muhammad's time in Mount Hira. Muhammad was about forty years old at this time (Muhammad: Prophet of Islam, 2002, p. 15). While he was in a cave meditating, he was visited by the Angel Gabriel who commanded him to recite verses sent by God. Gabriel told Muhammad to read, and Muhammad said that he could not. Gabriel kept telling Muhammad to read but he kept replying with the same answer. He came home to his wife afraid of what was happening to him; it was his relatives that comforted him and told him that he was chosen to spread the message of God as a prophet. (Islam Beliefs & Observances, 2002 pp 15-17) The portrayal of this event in the movie was very well done. Muhammad was not shown in this scene or any other out of respect of the Islamic religion. Whenever Muhammad is present or very close by in scenes, his presence is indicated by soft music. His words, as he speaks

them, are repeated by someone else such as Hamza or Bilal. The next major event portrayed was when the followers of the Islamic religion revealed their faith to Mecca, the city which they inhabited; they were ordered to reveal their faith by the prophet. The film remarkably demonstrated how the people of Mecca were repulsed by the idea of allowing a religion to exist that was not their own. One of the most prominent figures in early Islam was Bilal Ibn Ribah. He was an Ethiopian slave who was the one of the first to convert to Islam (IslamOnline Network - Bilal Ibn Ribah 2004, April 7). Since the prophet was not actually shown, Bilal was one of the central figures characters of the movie. The torture that he had to endure when he declared to his master that he had converted to Islam was accurately portrayed. The method actually used to torture Bilal was to make him lie down on the desert ground and place a large stone on his body (Bilal Islam's First Muezzin, 2009, October 3). This was the exact method of torture shown in the film. When the Muslims did not comply with the rulers of Mecca, the leaders sought to forcibly make the Muslims listen to them. The film shows that many of the people who declared themselves to be followers of the Muslim faith were tortured, which was actually true. The first martyr in the Islamic religion was a young woman named Sumayah. In the movie, it is shown that her limbs were tied to ropes and pulled apart. She then died when she was stabbed, but in reality she was stabbed in multiple parts of her body without being tied with ropes (Sumayah bint Khubbat (n. d.)). In the film, the migration to Abyssinia was also shown. This was a key point in Islamic history because the Muslims were finally accepted and protected. Muhammad told his followers that in Abyssinia, they will find " A king who rules without injustice, and a land of truthfulness until God leads us to a way out of our difficulty"

(Muhammad the Prophet of Islam, 2008, June 9). This event was very well portrayed. The movie depicts the King as being a kind and benevolent ruler (see Appendix II). The Message shows how the King provided a safe haven for the Muslims in their time of need, which is indeed correct. Crucial events such as the Battle of Badr and Battle of Uhud are also depicted. During the battles of Badr and Uhud represented in the film, Hamza was in command even though the actual fighting was supposed to have been led by Muhammad. These battles were excellent indicators of the Muslims strength and intelligence. Although the Muslims lost many men in the Battle of Uhud, a verse in the Quran indicated that the Muslims' disobedience and desire for loot as the cause for setback. Losing the battle of Uhud was a punishment from God as well as a lesson for the Muslims (The Holy War, (n. d.)). In the film, the Muslims were depicted taking the loot of the opposing group when they were not even sure that the battle was over. (The Holy War, (n. d.)). This scene was very well done in the film; even the location of this scene was accurate, it was shown that the battle took place on a large sandy hill (see Appendix III). The major events that were depicted in this film were done with great accuracy and care; and in reality, these events helped shape Islamic history.

One of the film's focal points was the struggle of opposing religious groups. What is religion exactly? " Religion is considered to be a set of beliefs concerning the cause, nature, and purpose of the universe, religion contains a moral code that aids in the governing of human affairs" (What is " religion"? 2009, August 29). The introduction of Islam into Mecca's society caused unrest for the city dwellers. Mecca was a place where people did not

believe in social equality. When Islam was introduced, the prophet had stated that everyone was equal in the eyes of God. This was one of the reasons that people began to convert to Islam; they saw equality in this newly founded religion. “ Islam embraces every aspect of life, such as family relations, inheritance, taxation, purification and prayer” (The Beliefs and Laws of Islam (n. d.)). The idea of having a religion that addressed all of these concepts was enticing to the people of Mecca, especially the slaves. Bilal Ibn Ribah converted to Islam when he realized the truth of the prophet’s words. Bilal’s master had laughed at him when Bilal told him that the prophet was preaching for equality. Bilal’s master did not like the ideologies that were “ poisoning” Bilal mind, so he ended up torturing Bilal to stop him from believing this “ nonsense”. Islam addressed slavery in ways that previous religions did not. The prophet Muhammad encouraged the freedom of slaves; he even went as far as buying slaves and then freeing them. Although slavery was not completely abolished during the prophet’s time, slavery was practiced in a different way than in neighboring areas (Introduction to Islam, 1995, pp. 6-9). The beliefs of the newly converted Muslims were shown and put to test when they fought in the battles of Badr and Uhud. Hamza, the prophet’s uncle, declared his faith to God and began the battle; that is what is usually done when Muslims go to war; they declare their allegiance to the prophet and their faith in God (The Holy War. (n. d.)). In the movie, when a young boy declared to his parents that he had converted to Islam, his mother was surprised. He told his mother that in Islam, newborn females were not to be buried alive, as this was a custom back then. His mother marveled and was grieve stricken at the same time at this idea, as her sister was buried alive and so she realized the positive

change Islam would bring to society. This scene showed the power and truth of the Islamic religion. Although this scene is a work of fiction, it was an excellent example of Muslim beliefs. Islam addressed all the conflicts that were going on and provided easy solutions to them. The values and beliefs that were learned from the Islamic religion were very well portrayed in this film; and in reality these ideologies helped revolutionize many parts of the world.

The accuracy of this film is unparalleled, the costumes, the values and beliefs taught in the Islamic religion and the historical events shown in this film were excellent. The director of this movie was respectful of the Islamic religion. The prophet, his wives, and his daughters were not shown. The costumes worn in the movie were accurate, one can easily tell the social ranking of a character, the richer characters like Abu Sufyan and Hind wore colourful silk clothing while the slaves like Bilal wore loin clothes and the common people wore colourful cotton clothing. All of the costumes were long and loose which helped protect the people from the desert sun. Events such as the declaration of Islam to Mecca, the migration to Abyssinia, and the battles of Uhud and Badr were all shown with accuracy. The values and beliefs of the Islamic religion are what attracted some people to convert to Muslim; the people that converted to Islam saw equality and peace in this religion. This film helps preserve the memory of the events that occurred in early Islamic history and teaches the viewer the truth of Islam. The accuracy of this movie is unmatched and it is an outstanding representation of Islamic history. The overall historical accuracy of the film remained unhindered by

the entertainment aspects of it, which is why this film is considered a great success.

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