

MOUSTAPHA AKKAD 1930-2005

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Moustapha Akkad was a Syrian-American film producer and director who was best known in America for producing the *Halloween* series of horror films, and in the Middle East for directing and producing *The Message/Al-Risalah* (1976), an English-language enactment of the early history of Islam (*Al-Risalah* is the Arabic language version of the film, which used a different cast than the English language version), and *Lion of the Desert* (1981), a biopic of the Libyan resistance leader Omar al-Mukhtar. In some ways, Akkad also became known for his tragic death at 75 years of age, which made him an object of increased media attention at the time.¹ He died on 11 November 2005 as a result of a heart attack brought on by serious injuries sustained during the terrorist bombing of the Grand Hyatt Hotel in Amman, Jordan, which took place on 9 November 2005.² This terrorist incident also claimed the life of his only daughter, Rima Akkad Monla.

The first time I heard of Moustapha Akkad was in the early 1980s when I was about eight or nine years old. My family was living in Oregon in the US, having emigrated there from the Middle East. My Arab Muslim parents were mindful that it was difficult to educate their five children about their Middle Eastern culture because we were growing up in the US. In order to give us an increased awareness of our own culture, my parents bought for us videos of three of Akkad's films: *The*

¹"Obituaries: Moustapha Akkad," *The Telegraph*.

²Three hotels (Grand Hyatt, Radisson and Days Inn) were bombed on 9 November 2005 in Amman, Jordan. BBC News reported on its website that Al-Qaeda in Iraq claimed credit for the triple bomb attacks, which were carried out by suicide bombers. Approximately 56-60 people died, and 100-115 people were injured. The largest number of casualties was in the Radisson Hotel, at the wedding reception of a local Jordanian couple. After the bombings, several hundred Jordanians marched through Amman to denounce the bombers and the violence. At the time of the bombing, Moustapha Akkad was sitting in the lobby of the Grand Hyatt Hotel with his wife Souha Akkad, while his daughter Rima Akkad Monla was entering the lobby to meet them after arriving in Amman from her home in Beirut, Lebanon. All three of them were injured in the bomb blast. Akkad's daughter, Rima, died immediately on the scene. Moustapha Akkad suffered serious internal injuries, which ultimately caused him to die of a heart attack on 11 November 2005. Akkad's wife, Souha, suffered injuries, but survived. "Jordan Hotel Blast Kills Dozens," *BBC News*.

Message, *Al-Risalah* (the Arabic-language version of *The Message*), and *Lion of the Desert*.³ Because they were high-budget, high-quality epics with Arab protagonists as heroes, these films were immediately accessible and very compelling to us as expatriate Arab Muslim children ranging in age from seven to 14 years old. It is interesting to note that, even in this day and age, Arab films do not use the high-budget Hollywood film technology that Akkad used in his epics. What was even more impressive about Akkad's films was the sheer scale of his epics, which involved him commanding both Arabs and Westerners, including crews numbering in the hundreds and casts of thousands.

Although I never met him, I had known of Akkad and had watched his films over the years. The increased media coverage of Akkad after his death reminded me of the importance of his role as an iconic filmmaker in both the Eastern and Western film industries, including Hollywood. This is reflected in the tribute given to Akkad during the "In Memoriam" segment of Hollywood's 78th Annual Academy Awards Ceremony.

After Akkad died in 2005, there was an increase in official recognition and showings of his movies in the Middle East.⁴ This is interesting because his work did not receive this level of official recognition or visibility during his lifetime, despite his getting recognition and respect from the Arab people whenever he visited the Middle East over the years. Indeed, *The Message/Al-Risalah* was actually banned in most Middle-Eastern countries, including Egypt, despite the fact that Akkad had obtained religious approval from the Islamic authorities in Egypt and Lebanon. In fact, before

³*Lion of the Desert* was known as *Omar al-Mukhtar* in the Arab world, since the Libyan fighter was well known there, unlike in the West.

⁴ This was evident on Arab Satellite Channels like MBC, as well as terrestrial broadcasting on Middle East channels during Islamic Religious Holidays like Eid and Ramadan, which are equivalent to the Christmas season of movies on British/American television.

Akkad's death in 2005, the Egyptian religious authorities had withdrawn their approval, and Akkad was in the process of challenging this in the Egyptian courts.⁵

Despite Akkad's lack of official recognition and visibility, the movies he made about Arab Muslim heroes, despite being huge capital-intensive productions, can be seen as part of the context of the "small media" revolution. According to Annabelle Srebeny-Mohammadi and Ali Mohammadi, "Small Media has become a popular rubric for various kinds of mediated alternatives to state-run broadcasting systems, but the definition of non-mass media has never been very precise".⁶ They add that this medium is a form of 'public communication,' and functions as 'the people's voice' or 'people's voices'. Although Srebeny-Mohammadi and Mohammadi's book is about the use of cassette tape recordings in Iran, pirated videos of *The Message/Al-Risalah* and *Lion of the Desert* seem to have enjoyed a journey similar to the clandestine circulation of religious discourse in Iran.⁷ Many non-Western parts of the world, and particularly the Middle East, do not have strong or enforced copyright laws to deter unauthorized copies of small media products, like audiocassettes, videos and DVDs. This means that sales of cheap counterfeits of these products flourish easily and blatantly. Knowledge of Akkad's films *The Message/Al-Risalah* and *Lion of the Desert* seems to have spread widely due to this. In this way, it has been possible for these films to reach a wider audience than might have been possible through official government-controlled channels.

Akkad was a filmmaker who very much believed in the power of film to reach a wide audience and have a significant social impact. Even more than 25 years after they were made, Akkad's movies continue to be important, and this needs to be

⁵Hebtah, "The Story of The Message".

⁶Srebeny and Mohammadi, *Small Media, Big Revolution*, 20-21.

⁷Srebeny and Mohammadi, *Small Media, Big Revolution*, 24.

explored fully and better understood. In this thesis, I will explore Akkad's life, his creative development and his role as a filmmaker. I will also analyse his films in order to determine how unique and significant these artistic works are. My aim is to explore the ways in which Akkad was a pioneering filmmaker and to understand how effectively he was able to reach a wider audience beyond the Arab Middle East in order to bridge cultural differences between East and West.

1.1 Methodology

My research on Akkad began informally in the summer of 2008, while in Jordan and Egypt. From a number of conversations with Arab Muslims, I discovered that there was great admiration for Akkad and his work, especially his films on Arab Muslim themes which seem to provide a continuing positive representation of the Arab Muslim world. As I continued my research on a more formal basis, I discovered a number of challenges.

First, the circumstances of Akkad's death introduced certain sensitivities to the project. Part of my research consisted of numerous interviews with family members, colleagues and friends of Akkad in Syria and in California. Akkad died only recently, in 2005, and in tragic circumstances, which meant that some of the people I interviewed were still in mourning, and were therefore reluctant to share with me their personal thoughts and memories of the man.

One of those people was Moustapha Akkad's widow Souha Akkad. Initially, contact was successfully made, but then withdrawn at a later stage. I tried to

approach her, through people who could explain my academic work and help my efforts to interview her, but was firmly told that she had politely declined. After a period, I decided to stop trying to contact her because I wanted to respect her decision and her privacy, especially given what she had experienced⁸. It was a particular challenge to win the trust of the people closest to Akkad, particularly his family, and I put in a great deal of effort to ensure that I conducted all interviews with them as sensitively and respectfully as possible.

Another challenge I encountered in researching this thesis was the fact that there is not very much written about Akkad academically.⁹ As my main sources for research on his work, I watched DVD versions of his films, including *The Message/Al-Risalah* (1976), *Lion of the Desert* (1981), *Halloween* (1978) and to some extent the *Halloween* franchise films (1981-2005). My research also included watching the documentaries that Akkad had made about his films: *The Making of an Epic: Mohammed, Messenger of God* (1976) and *The Making of Lion of the Desert*. I researched a number of articles on Akkad on the Internet, as well as an Al-Jazeera documentary that was made about Akkad in 2007, which was also available online.¹⁰ This Al-Jazeera documentary was especially helpful in giving me insight into who to approach for further information and providing me with a basic knowledge of Akkad's life and work, on which I could build academically. However, I of course needed primary sources, so I made contact with the Akkad family directly and conducted both formal and informal interviews with them. These discussions were conducted face to face, through the telephone, and via email correspondence.

⁸ Souha Akkad was in the hotel lobby with her husband and step-daughter, in Amman, Jordan, when the bombs exploded killing them both in 2005, and injuring her.

⁹ In fact, this thesis will be the first academic work written on Akkad. Freek (2006; 2009) has written about *The Message*, but not about Akkad per se.

¹⁰ *From Aleppo to Hollywood*, 2007

Another useful source was a Kuwaiti documentary screened on Al-Watan Television and made by Mohammad Sanousi.¹¹ Sanousi was the Producer on *The Message/Al-Risalah*. This was also available online. It went into more practical day-to-day detail of the pre-production stage of *The Message/Al-Risalah*, the intricate financial deals made with the governments of Kuwait, Morocco and Libya, and finally talked about the production crew who worked with Akkad from the beginning. Although neither documentary gave a complete picture, they did provide a general outline of how *The Message/Al-Risalah* project began, and how Akkad's career as a filmmaker grew.

Initial contact was made with Moustapha Akkad's son, Malek Akkad, who is now the CEO of his father's production company, Trancas International Films, which is based in Los Angeles and has offices in London at Twickenham Studios. Malek Akkad allowed me a generous amount of time to speak with him during what was an intensely busy time for him¹². The interview with Malek Akkad took place in London in November 2008.

Following this, a two-week field research trip was made during late February and early March 2009 in order to gather information in Los Angeles, California, which was Akkad's home city for many years. During this fieldwork trip, Patricia Akkad¹³ was my first point of contact. I was able to arrange an interview with her as a result of my meeting in London with her son Malek, who directed me to her. Patricia Akkad helped me to make contact with and set up interviews with other family members and close friends of Akkad. During this field trip, I discovered that Los Angeles is a city with a strong Arab community, and that Akkad was an important member of that

¹¹"Al Sanousi Yatahaddath."

¹² In his role as producer, Malek Akkad was at that time in the middle of negotiations and the pre-production for the new version of *Halloween II* with Director Rob Zombie that was later released in August 2009.

¹³ Moustapha Akkad's former wife, and the mother of his three eldest children: Taric, Malek and Rima.

community. My accommodation during this period was on the UCLA campus, which was part of the Westwood Village, the place Akkad first made his home when he was a UCLA undergraduate student. Akkad left Aleppo in 1954 and, upon his arrival in the US, he travelled from New York on to his ultimate destination of California on a Greyhound Bus¹⁴. I aimed to visit as many places as possible in Los Angeles that were connected to Akkad's years there. I was able to see the UCLA Theatre Arts Department where Akkad had been an undergraduate, and I also visited the University of Southern California (USC) campus, as well as its famous film school, where Akkad studied as a postgraduate student.

In addition to gaining many useful insights from Patricia Akkad, I also relied on Akkad's youngest brother Nabil Akkad, who was also a long-time resident of Los Angeles. Both Patricia and Nabil provided invaluable information about Akkad's life, including his early years, his migration to California, his time as a student, his role in the Arab-American community, and his family life. Despite her work commitments, Patricia Akkad was particularly helpful, thoughtful and supportive of my work. Nabil Akkad frequently accompanied me on my daily field research trips, and he became my local guide to all the places of importance in his brother's life, filling in the gaps of information as appropriate. An important and very informative aspect of my fieldwork was visiting the Trancas International Films Production Office. This was very useful for understanding Akkad's *Halloween* films, and their importance and contribution to the Hollywood film industry, as one of the most successful film franchises in history. Equally important in gathering information about Akkad were the interviews conducted with a *Halloween* documentary producer,^{15a} Trancas International Films

¹⁴*From Aleppo to Hollywood*, 2007

¹⁵Masi, Anthony, personal interview, 28 February 2009.

production employee,¹⁶ a well-known Hollywood film journalist,¹⁷ and a UCLA professor.¹⁸ Overall, this trip gave me a practical understanding of the film industry in Los Angeles, Akkad's struggles as a young Syrian Muslim student immigrant, and his achievement as a successful Arab-American filmmaker.

In Spring 2009, a ten-day trip was made to Syria, which included fieldwork in Damascus and Aleppo,¹⁹ where Akkad was born and spent his early years. This fieldtrip to Syria was extremely informative and useful in providing an insight into Akkad's early background and formative years. During the time of my visit, Akkad's brothers and sister had a family gathering which I was fortunate enough to be invited to. This provided me with a profound and powerful insight into the family from which Akkad came.

There have been a number of additional challenges in writing this thesis. One of these was the fact that I was only able to spend one year gathering the information available about Akkad around the world (the second year was spent writing the thesis). The subject matter of Moustapha Akkad has many layers and themes, which could benefit from further investigation. Another challenge was the fact that the majority of the interviews I was able to conduct were with Akkad's family and friends. This was useful in that these interviews gave me invaluable insight into Akkad's background and personality, which enriched my analysis of his own personality. However, although these family members and friends tried to be as balanced and objective as possible during the interviews, it is natural for their perspective to be subjective, as it was coloured by their relationship with a family member or friend many of them are still mourning. To counter this subjectivity and

¹⁶Montana, Sammy, personal interview, 25 February 2009.

¹⁷ Waxman, Sharon, personal interview, 26 February 2009.

¹⁸ Abou El Fadl, Dr. Khaled, personal interview, 1 March 2009.

¹⁹Halab in Arabic. A person from Halab is known as a Halabi. Akkad was extremely proud of being Halabi.

try to provide some balance, I supplemented my research by including as many academic sources as were available to me and by including comparisons between Akkad and some of his contemporaries, such as the Egyptian filmmaker Youssef Chahine.

1.2 Outline of Chapters

While researching this thesis, I discovered that many people who are familiar with Akkad's work believe that he is deserving of this attention and should be recognized for his work as a pioneer filmmaker. His sudden and tragic death, along with his daughter's, seemed to contribute to this feeling as many of his admirers still mourn the premature loss of an important man, who was a compelling representative of Arab Muslims, and a challenger of misconceptions about them.

My aim behind writing this thesis is not just to provide a basic biography of Moustapha Akkad's life, but also to gain a deeper academic understanding of him and his work, as well as to explore the impact he had in bridging cultural differences between the Arab Middle East and the West. Thus, I will explore Akkad's life, his film work and his legacy. My thesis will cover the following chapters:

Chapter Two: *The Life of Moustapha Akkad*

In this chapter, I will explore Akkad's life by breaking it down into two categories: Akkad the "Person" and his "Position".

Chapter Three: *Films*

This chapter will analyse the process behind Akkad's films and it will also assess Akkad's films as artistic achievements. This way of assessing Akkad's films will highlight the need to evaluate them not just as creative works, but also as results of complex technical, logistical, political and financial or commercial processes. The financial and commercial processes which Akkad used to create his Arab Muslim

films are especially interesting. Akkad got his funding for *The Message/Al-Risalah* during a time when Middle Eastern countries were making large profits on crude oil in OPEC in 1974. It was the financial support from the oil-rich Kuwaiti government, as well as the Libyan and Moroccan governments, that helped Akkad to make such films as *The Message/Al-Risalah*. For his next film, *Lion of the Desert*, Akkad turned again to the oil-rich Libyan government for funding, and the Libyans proved to be very supportive of this film about their national hero, Omar al-Mukhtar. This was at the start of the Reagan presidency in the US in the early 1980s, which signalled a quieter and less creative time for Akkad's filmmaking career. During this time, he focused instead on his *Halloween* movies, which grew into a lucrative franchise during the 1980s, and he kept a low profile as producer. This quieter time in Akkad's career followed the negative publicity given in the US to the fact that the Libyan government in part funded *Lion of the Desert*, which at the time was an adversary to the US. It was only in the 1990s, when the Democrat Bill Clinton became president of the US, that Akkad started to pursue ambitious projects again that would allow him to play the role of director as well as producer. At this stage, Akkad started to try and raise funding for another epic film about the Muslim hero Salah al-Din (*Saladin*). It is not surprising that Akkad's several attempts to find funding for this film were not successful, especially after the end of the Clinton Administration, with the tragic events of 9/11 and its complex impact both in the Middle East and in the US deriving from George W. Bush's policies on Afghanistan and Iraq. Although it is impossible to know, it is interesting to consider whether an Obama Democrat administration in the White House might have created an easier environment for Akkad to find funding for a film about a Muslim hero like Saladin.

Chapter Four: *Legacy*

This chapter will focus on Akkad's legacy, including not only his films but also his role as a pioneering filmmaker, as an example to others and as someone who challenged and corrected distorted images of the Arab Muslim world. I will also explore how Akkad understood, on a personal and professional level, that there was a lack experienced by educated Arabs like himself who required more sophisticated media than their market was providing. I will look at how Akkad sought to bridge that gap through his films.

Chapter Five: Conclusion

This thesis will conclude by drawing together the strands of the previous sections and by presenting an overarching analysis of Akkad and his work.

Chapter 2: The Life of Moustapha Akkad

2.1 Introduction

Akkad's cultural background as an Arab from Aleppo, Syria was not only very important to him subjectively, but also had a significant influence on his life. Akkad, as I will show in later sections of this thesis, was strongly influenced by a pre-existing network of family, friends and other like-minded people who enabled his success.

To explore Akkad's life and analyse him as a person I need to start with his background. Formal training and education were also especially important in Akkad's life, as they gave him the chance to travel beyond his cultural roots and achieve things that he could not have otherwise have done. Therefore, I will examine Akkad's education and formative years in detail to understand the impact they had in shaping his life. In this chapter, I will also explore Akkad's development as a filmmaker, ranging from his early work in television up to his later work as a director and producer of epic films. Lastly, I will look at Akkad's final years and his untimely death as a result of serious injuries sustained in a terrorist bombing.

It is interesting to note how many parallels there are between certain aspects of Akkad's life and the life of Youssef Chahine. Both Akkad and Chahine were born in the same decade in the Middle East (Akkad in Syria, Chahine in Egypt). Chahine's family roots were in the Levant, which his family escaped at the end of the nineteenth century to get away from economic hardship and Ottoman oppression. His family went to Alexandria and joined a community of Levantine refugees known as 'Syrians'. They both developed successful careers as pioneer filmmakers. In this chapter, I will be comparing and contrasting these two filmmakers in more detail.

The key reason for this is that looking at Akkad from this perspective is a useful way to gain an interesting insight into his life.

2.2 Historical Background

Akkad was born in Aleppo, Syria, between the First and Second World Wars. Different sources and documents indicate a variety of dates for Akkad's birth. According to these sources, he was possibly born in 1930, 1933, or 1934. His marriage certificate to Patricia Shirk, which was issued in the state of California, indicates that Akkad was born in 'about 1934'. However, his death certificate, which was also issued by the state of California, states Akkad's date of birth as '19 July 1933'.²⁰ Given that Akkad was not born in California, the records kept of his birth there may not be reliable. Unfortunately, no records were found of Akkad's date of birth in Aleppo where he was born. However, for this thesis, I am relying on a member of the Akkad family who closely shared Akkad's childhood in Aleppo, Akkad's brother Zohair, who verified that 1930 is in fact the correct date of Akkad's birth.

Prior to Akkad's birth, the Ottomans ruled Syria. The Ottoman Empire heavily influenced the world into which Akkad was born and brought about key developments in the Middle East. This is particularly relevant in the area of education, because the Ottomans brought in Western elements. As Fortna says, "The Ottoman educational endeavour was inextricably bound up with the relationship between the empire and the West. In its very *raison d'être*, its organizational model,

²⁰ Documentation on Mustapha Akkad's Marriage Certificate to Patricia M. Shirk in 1963 and 2005 death certificate were obtained from the Ancestry Website.

and various features of its architectural form and lesson content, the idadi revealed considerable Western influence”.²¹

The dominant geopolitical context of Akkad’s childhood was that, after the First World War, the Ottoman Empire was dissolved in the Levant,²² leaving a vacuum for European colonial expansion in its place. In 1922, the League of Nations had split the Levant between Britain and France. Britain gained Transjordan and Palestine, while France gained mandatory powers over Lebanon and Syria. Hence, Akkad spent his childhood growing up in Syria under French colonialism, and lived through the Second World War under those conditions. Although the French gave the Syrians “a greater political role in the running of their country (with the reintroduction of elections, an assembly, a prime minister, and a president), France maintained real power through the manipulation of elections, the control of military, foreign, finance and monetary policy, and a veto over Syrian initiatives.”²³ Even as early as 1936, well before the start of the Second World War, Syria was trying to negotiate its independence from France. In opposition to colonialism in Aleppo and elsewhere in the post-Ottoman state of Syria, there was an increasing reliance “upon the literary skill, linguistic ability, communal identity and legal training of a group of young, middle-class men – all educated in the West and conversant with the language of modern political participation”.²⁴ Ultimately, the French mandate remained until Syria was finally recognized as an independent republic in 1944. Facing pressure from Syrian nationalists and the British, the French evacuated their troops from Syria in 1946. Finally, a national government was formed and gained control of Syria as a parliamentary republic.

²¹Fortna, *Imperial Classroom*, 163.

²² The Levant includes Syria, Lebanon, Jordan, the Palestinian territories and Israel.

²³Watenpugh, *Being Modern*, 213.

²⁴Watenpugh, *Being Modern*, 219.

The period following Syria's independence was marked by political upheaval and also by rapid economic development. Between 1946 and 1956, twenty different government cabinets had been formed and four separate constitutions had been drafted for Syria. In 1948, Syria was also involved in the Arab-Israeli War and shared many policies with Egypt. A few years later, there was also admiration in Syria for the Egyptian President Gamal Abdel Nasser, especially after the Suez Crisis of 1956. In 1958, this resulted in a union between Syria and Egypt, which merged the two countries into the United Arab Republic. Although this union only lasted until 1961, it demonstrates that there were significant parallels between the two countries, and extensive direct socio-political contacts.

An important characteristic of the Levantine world was the mixture of different faiths, nationalities and ethnic groups into which Akkad was born. In addition to Aleppo's significant Sunni Muslim population, to which Akkad's family belonged, it also had a substantial Arabic-speaking Christian population, an Armenian Christian community and, before 1948 and after, a large Syrian Jewish community.²⁵ This religious, national and ethnic mix was especially present in the schools that Akkad attended in Aleppo during the 1930s and 1940s. Akkad's *American Literary Review Book* (from his time at Aleppo College) from the year 1949 indicates that his fellow classmates included Christian, Jewish, Armenian, Turkish, Greek and Muslim names, and that he was taught by American teachers, as well as Middle Eastern (Armenian and Arab) teachers. Before going to Aleppo College, Akkad had studied at Freres Maristes primary school from 1942 to 1946, where he was taught by Christian French Friars. Before 1942, Akkad studied at an Arab school until the age of 12. This highly cosmopolitan experience during his formative years exposed

²⁵Watenpaugh, *Being Modern*, 9.

Akkad to living and working with others from different ethnic, national and religious groups. This gave Akkad a cosmopolitan perspective and insight, which influenced his work as a director and producer. Akkad's rich cultural experience allowed him to develop a cross-cultural point of view that would later help him, as a filmmaker, to reach culturally diverse groups by using his films to appeal to their systems of shared knowledge and meaning.

The rapid changes of the post-First World War era into which Akkad was born resulted in "greater Syria's" cultivating ties to the West, and meant the establishment of even more Western-style educational and Christian religious institutions in the region.²⁶ After the Second World War, this would create an intellectual awakening among the new generations of Arab youth. As part of this, Akkad was exposed to an educational system that was a legacy of colonialism. The most important aspects of this 'European element' were 'new ideas and new processes'.²⁷ The attitude of the European colonizers in educating the natives was one of superiority: "We, the masters, should seize on our subjects in their early youth. We should change the tastes and habits of the whole people. We shall build up again from the very foundations and teach the people to live a frugal, innocent, busy life after the pattern of our laws."²⁸

In this context, Moustapha Akkad can be seen as part of a whole generation of young Arab males who, like the generations before them, continued to move away

²⁶ The Levant had a history of Christian Missionaries, pre-World War I, who set up Christian schools with Western school systems in major cities like Beirut and Aleppo. Non-Christians as well as Christian children attended, since the schools had money to lavish on education, and was seen as a good opportunity by local Middle Eastern families.

²⁷ Mitchell, *Colonising Egypt*, 75.

²⁸ Mitchell, *Colonising Egypt*, 75.

from traditional Islamic schools²⁹ to foreign Western schools that expanded knowledge of European languages and culture. For many, “[t]he order and discipline of modern schooling were to be the hallmark and the method of a new form of political power”,³⁰ and the “dominant view suggests that in the transition from the Ottoman Empire to its largely secular succession states Islam was supposed to recede from the public sphere.”³¹ However, Western models and methods did not monopolize the post-Ottoman world, because these were “cut... with a strong dose of Ottoman and Islamic elements that were deemed capable of meliorating the deleterious side-effects of Western influence.”³² This further encouraged a fusion of influences.

This transition from traditional Islamic schools to Western-style education was part of a greater change in the Middle East, particularly in Egypt where the aim was to introduce “the European element” which was considered to be “the productive element.”³³ An important aspect of that was that “[e]ducation, as an isolated process in which children acquire a set of instructions and self-discipline, was born in Egypt in the nineteenth century. Before that, there was no distinct location or institution where such a process was carried on, no body of adults for whom it was a profession, and no word for it in the language.”³⁴

This focus on Western-style schooling began even before Akkad’s time and continued for some time until it also influenced the education of his generation. In

²⁹ Traditional Islamic schools from the late nineteenth to mid-twentieth centuries were increasingly abandoned by modernizing elites throughout the region. American schools provided an attractive alternative, as stated by Edward Said, when he compared his English schools in Cairo to his American schools. In particular, Said describes a relaxed atmosphere, and emphasis on essay writing in which creative thought was encouraged. Similarly, Zohair Akkad talks of how his brother Moustapha flourished at Aleppo College, the American educational institution, he attended in Aleppo.

³⁰ Mitchell, *Colonising Egypt*, 75.

³¹ Fortna, *Imperial Classroom*, 1.

³² Fortna, *Imperial Classroom*, 3.

³³ Mitchell, *Colonising Egypt*, 75.

³⁴ Mitchell, *Colonising Egypt*, 85.

1910, only a couple of decades before Akkad was born, his hometown of Aleppo was one of the most important cities of the Ottoman Empire³⁵. The Aleppo which Akkad was born into was characterized by a rising middle class of liberal professionals who, like their counterparts throughout the Ottoman Empire during this time, were generally multilingual, literate and European-centred in much of their cultural activity.³⁶ The members of this Aleppine middle class increasingly focused on Western influences as they “established schools in all the corners of the kingdom... to instruct children in the basics of reading, writing and arithmetic.”³⁷ In this context, it is useful to explore what criteria defined the middle class during this time. In this vein, Wattenpaugh’s definition is useful: “Middle Class: a middle-class lifestyle and culture was one such criterion, leisure activity, and especially the new invention of sport was another; but the chief indicator of actual membership increasingly became, and has remained, formal education.”³⁸

However, it is important to distinguish the middle class in the Middle East from the middle class in Europe. The society of Aleppo that formed the foundation of Akkad’s childhood and early life was very middle class, but in its middle classness it developed a ‘Middle East Modernity’. This Middle East Modernity “describes a mutually reinforced calculus by which to be modern meant to be not like, but again just as modern as, the imagined, idealized middle class and in a transitive sense, the bourgeoisie of Europe.”³⁹

Akkad’s background was also characterized by growth in the economy and an increasing reliance on technology: “As a consequence of technological changes in

³⁵Wattenpaugh, *Being Modern*, 1.

³⁶Wattenpaugh, *Being Modern*, 9.

³⁷Wattenpaugh, *Being Modern*, 5.

³⁸Wattenpaugh, *Being Modern*, 21.

³⁹Wattenpaugh, *Being Modern*, 22.

communication and transportation, the growth of print capitalism, and the introduction of modernist literary forms, a consensual language of social practice that used the perceived behaviour of the Western middle class as a standard was available in the Eastern Mediterranean.”⁴⁰ It was these educational opportunities that broadened Akkad’s perspective and enabled him to grow at ease with Western cultures very different from his society of origin.

2.3 Formative Years

2.3.1 Family Environment: Akkad’s Parents

Moustapha Akkad hailed from a middle-class family that not only supported him but were themselves accomplished in many fields, which is reflected not just in his own accomplishments, but also in those of his siblings. Interestingly, this is something of a parallel with the life of Yourself Chainen, who was also the “son of a petit bourgeois family.”⁴¹

Scholarly literature demonstrates that a solid middle-class society existed in Aleppo at that time:

Families from various middle class categories shared a respect for individual achievement, on which they based their claims for rewards, recognition, and influence. They shared a positive attitude towards regular work, a propensity for rationality and emotional control, and a fundamental striving for independence, either individually or through associations. The middle class emphasized education. General education (Bildung) served as a basis on which they communicated with one another that distinguished them from others who did not share this type of (usually classical) education. Scholarly pursuits were respected, as were music, literature, and the arts.⁴²

⁴⁰Watenpugh, *Being Modern*, 22.

⁴¹ Fawal, *Youssef Chahine*, 1.

⁴²Watenpugh, *Being Modern*, 21-22.

As a product of such a background, when Akkad arrived in Los Angeles to begin his UCLA Theater Arts Bachelor course, he said that, despite not having much money,⁴³ he was rich because of his family values and his upbringing in Aleppo.⁴⁴ His background also opened his eyes to the richness of media and encouraged an engagement with the outside world. Akkad's family bought the first radio and television in his neighbourhood. As a child, Akkad would also regularly go to the cinema with Jean Khaldis, an employee at the local Aleppo cinema, and close family neighbour.

Akkad came from an Arab Muslim family which had some Turkish intermarriage. His mother was half Turkish and half Arab Syrian.⁴⁵ Her parents passed away at an early age.⁴⁶ Akkad's mother was an only child and, as a result of this, he might have had a more protected, supported and nurturing childhood. Akkad's mother married his father when she was 14, which was not unusual for the time. His sister, Layla, remembers their mother as an incredibly strong personality in the family dynamic. Layla also commented on how influential their mother was in the lives of all her children but particularly with her sons, and how she always had high ambitions for all their futures.

Akkad's father, Bakri al-Akkad, was also an only child who lost his parents at a young age. Bakri al-Akkad's mother died when he was a young boy and, when his father remarried, he sent him away to a French boarding school in Aleppo. In the Al-Jazeera documentary about Akkad,⁴⁷ his family talks of the intense discipline which

⁴³ He states he had only US\$ 200 which, accounting for inflation, would be around US\$ 1,500 today. This would have lasted him a few months, after which he started to juggle his many part time jobs around university life.

⁴⁴ *From Aleppo to Hollywood*, 2007

⁴⁵ Akkad, Zohair, personal interview, 10 April 2009.

⁴⁶ Akkad, Dr. Layla, personal interview, 14 April 2009.

⁴⁷ *From Aleppo to Hollywood*, 2007

their father gave them in their childhood, which set them up for future success and which was a key aspect of European boarding schools in the Middle East. As a result of attending the French boarding school, Bakri al-Akkad received a good European education. He was first in his class and could speak and write in French to a high level. When Bakri al-Akkad completed his secondary education, he started to work as a French teacher, the first in the area. However, he did not have an opportunity to go abroad because, as Layla put it, within their family, and in their Aleppo community, someone with his level of accomplishment was needed in his country in those days.⁴⁸ Akkad's father's level of education at that time was seen as an accomplishment, especially since many did not receive formal education at all, let alone a foreign European education.

Later, Bakri al-Akkad sent his two eldest children (Mustapha and Layla) to the foreign schools that were in Aleppo at that time. Having access to education, more specifically Western education, meant a great deal to Akkad's family and other Arabs at this time. Akkad's family were committed to the belief and the expectation that a European-style education would benefit them and give them access to better future prospects.

Beyond their pursuit of education, the Akkad family were fairly untypical in other ways. Unlike other Arab fathers of that generation who were (in the view of Akkad's brother Zohair) typically stern and remote, Bakri al-Akkad would often play football with his eldest sons, and he also enjoyed playing music on his flute. He loved the cinema and would take his children and/or his wife to the movies on a regular basis. Thus, the family unit seems to have been very creative and musical. Bakri al-Akkad's family was also seen by extended members of the Akkad family as

⁴⁸Akkad, Dr. Layla, personal interview, 14 April 2009.

forward-thinking and liberal in their views and behaviour. Even socially, Bakri al-Akkad's family would entertain as a whole family without any separation between the sexes that consigned women to a separate room, as many conservative Aleppo families did at that time. This background gave Moustapha Akkad an enlightened perspective and the freedom to aspire to the untypical dream (for a boy from Aleppo) of being a filmmaker. Even from a young age, he had a picture of the actress Ingrid Bergman on his wall and loved Cecil B. DeMille movies.⁴⁹ Later, he would also look to Alfred Hitchcock and David Lean as inspirations during his youth. It was unusual to aspire to be a filmmaker at that time, but Akkad's family background appears to have helped him make this career choice a reality. Similarly, Chahine's family background also appears to have facilitated this filmmaker's career; both of them benefitted from a family background that placed importance on education and creativity and also "aspired to high society".⁵⁰

In summary, Akkad came from a highly respected and well-educated family, containing writers, government officials and other prestigious occupations. Akkad had a highly educated father and an ambitious mother who gave him opportunities and exposed him to unique experiences that gave him advantages in life.

2.3.2 Family Environment – Akkad's Siblings

In total, Moustapha Akkad had five brothers and one sister. Akkad was the eldest, second was Zohair, third was Layla, fourth was Reyad, fifth was Wael, sixth was Ousama, and the youngest was Nabil.

⁴⁹Akkad, Zohair, personal interview, 11 April 2009.

⁵⁰ Fawal, *Youssef Chahine*, 1.

Unlike Moustapha, who pursued a Western education both in Syria and abroad, Zohair was only interested in attending Arab educational institutions. He studied law at Damascus University and then entered into politics. In his political views, Zohair followed Nasser and the Ba'ath party. In the late sixties (1967-68), Zohair was the Minister of Culture in Syria. He then progressed to being the Syrian Ambassador to Cyprus, Brazil, East Germany, and Spain. The role of a public servant is important to Zohair, who likes to recount a famous Syrian proverb that recommends people contribute "an hour for your heart, and an hour for God". Zohair believed sincerely in his political views, and was at one point imprisoned in Syria, before he began his second career as the country's Ambassador. He is highly regarded and respected in Syria because of his work.

The middle brother, Wael, was captain of the Syrian national football team. In fact, family members state that he is more popular and well known in Syria than his brother Moustapha, the filmmaker, or Zohair, the Government Minister and former Ambassador. The next brother, Reyad, was training to be a doctor in Germany, but changed the direction of his career when he became part of Moustapha Akkad's creative team as the Production Coordinator⁵¹ on the film *Lion of the Desert*. The third sibling, Layla, is a highly regarded professional with a career that includes being an adviser to the Syrian government on women's issues as well as being a professor at universities in both California and Syria. Ousama is also working in the academic field in California. Their brother Nabil is a businessman living in Southern California.

⁵¹ "Reyad Akkad," personal interview.

2.4 Early Education

For the first few years of his education, Akkad went to a local Muslim Syrian school. However, from the age of eleven, he was accepted in and attended the respected Freres Maristes⁵² French School in Syria. Zohair Akkad describes this school as being strict, and remarks that Mustapha found the discipline to be quite harsh. The school was set up as one of many created by a Catholic missionary organization founded in Lyon, France in 1816, and was one of the growing number of such schools in the 1880s and 1890s.⁵³“The absence of Ottoman schools in Syria had allowed foreign missionaries the unchallenged opportunity to influence the population,”⁵⁴ which had been a concern of the Ottomans. The governor of the province of Syria warned in 1887 that foreign Christian missionaries were “establishing very large and exalted schools in nearly every subdistrict in Syria in the service of the political aims of the states with which they are affiliated...educating Muslim and Christian children... and are corrupting the subjects’ upbringing”⁵⁵. These schools were well-financed by the French government,⁵⁶ tended to follow the French imperial flag and were seen as part of the French colonial presence in Syria at the time.⁵⁷ When the French left Syria in 1946, the Freres Maristes School closed down.

As a result of this, Moustapha went to study at Aleppo College, an American educational college, with a primary, secondary and Junior College with professors, based on the American education system, considered to be the best school in the

⁵²Translated as Marist Brothers.

⁵³Fortna, *Imperial Classroom*, 50.

⁵⁴Fortna, *Imperial Classroom*, 58-9.

⁵⁵Fortna, *Imperial Classroom*, 59.

⁵⁶Fortna, *Imperial Classroom*, 54.

⁵⁷ Information kindly provided by Tom Ricks (University of Pennsylvania) via Debbie Usher (Middle East Centre, St. Antony’s College, University of Oxford).

area. Aleppo College was set up as a result of the ambition of the American Board who inaugurated a mission to Syria at its meeting in September 1818⁵⁸:

“Missionaries to the Levant are recalled by scholars more for their later more secular educational work associated with the Syrian Protestant College (today the American University of Beirut)... than for their initial overtly evangelical enterprise.”⁵⁹

Dr Layla Akkad also studied at the Aleppo College in the girls' section. Both Layla and Moustapha benefited from the many social and sport activities available at this college, as well as a strong all-around education system with French, English, Arabic and Armenian language classes. Dr Layla's view of Aleppo College is that it was a wonderful school where she and Moustapha had wonderful experiences. Both Moustapha and Layla Akkad blossomed and flourished in the American culture of this college, with its many sports facilities, organizations, and college events like, plays, boys scouts, sport events, college magazines, and field trips.

As a result of his background and education, Akkad developed into a highly artistic student. As can be seen from the drawings included in this thesis, Akkad's 1949 Literary Review book from Aleppo College was published with a number of the drawings he made at that time, which reflect his artistic creativity.

When he was 13, during his first year at Aleppo College, Akkad first expressed to his family that he wanted to be a film director.⁶⁰ His brother Zohair talks about how Moustapha never changed his mind about this career aspiration, as did so many other children at this age, and was quite firm in his decision. During this time, Moustapha Akkad also began to collect images from movie magazines and

⁵⁸ Makdisi, *Artillery of Heaven*, 63.

⁵⁹ Makdisi, *Artillery of Heaven*, 8-9.

⁶⁰ Akkad, Zohair, personal interview, 10 April 2009.

make up stories for Zohair and their young friends. Unfortunately, Zohair was unable to provide further details of these stories.

During his years at the Aleppo College, Akkad was also profoundly influenced by his theatre arts teacher, Douglas Hill, an American teacher who gave the young Moustapha hope and encouragement that his aspirations for a film career were not just pipe dreams. This teacher also supported Akkad by giving him advice about applying to American universities and by giving him references. Akkad even credits Douglas Hill⁶¹ for getting him into UCLA when he finally made the move from Aleppo to the US.⁶² Another strong influence on Akkad during this time was a neighbour called Jean Kalidis,⁶³ who worked at the Cinema Opera, one of Aleppo's local movie theatres at the time. Kalidis recounts that Akkad was fond of watching movies regularly.

Mardik Martin, an Armenian-Iraqi⁶⁴ writer and film collaborator who worked with Martin Scorsese on *Mean Streets* and other iconic films, talks about the “dust and sand” of his Middle Eastern childhood and contrasts it with the world of films: “You see Betty Grable in unbelievable Technicolor and the beautiful scenery in the background. It's like another dimension, it's like finding paradise.”⁶⁵ Given the similarities in their backgrounds and their film ambitions, it is likely that Akkad also looked at films in the same way. Both Akkad and Martin left the Middle East and went to America for university studies in the 1950s and 1960s and both came from privileged middle-class backgrounds.

⁶¹ On p.190 of the Appendix to this Thesis (bottom right) is shown a picture of Mr. Douglas Hill, Akkad's teacher from Aleppo College.

⁶² Ford, *The Producers*, 215.

⁶³ *From Aleppo to Hollywood*, 2007

⁶⁴ Mardik Martin was born and raised in Baghdad, Iraq. However, he studied at New York University, where he met and worked with Martin Scorsese.

⁶⁵ Welkos, “From Bagdad to N.Y. to Hollywood”, 2.

Akkad's family and background also instilled in him a sense of discipline and work ethic that had a significant impact on his character. Akkad's boarding school-educated father encouraged his children to follow a disciplined daily routine of hard work and focus on doing their homework. This prepared Akkad well for the intensity of filmmaking and the military-style routine needed for creating films, especially epics.

After Akkad finished his schooling at Aleppo College, his father insisted that he attend a local Arab school in order to give him a well-rounded Arab-Islamic education in addition to his Western education. However, Akkad continued to assert a strong ambition to study film in the US. In referring to his own education in the British schools of Cairo, Edward Said (a fellow Arab-American educated at Victoria College⁶⁶ in Egypt and professor at Columbia University) stated that these schools were "designed by the British to bring up a generation of Arabs with natural ties to Britain".⁶⁷ In the same vein, Aleppo College, like other Western schools in the Middle East at the time, consciously created links between its young Arab students and the country to which the school was affiliated. Thus, Akkad had a familiarity with America before he had ever travelled there. Although Akkad's parents were at first reluctant to let their son move so far away from them, they eventually agreed to let him go to the US. Despite Akkad being from a well-respected and highly educated family, the reality was that Aleppo could only offer him a limited future as a filmmaker. Many young men from Aleppo College travelled to go to university in

⁶⁶Victoria College was considered the 'Eton of The Middle East' and, like Aleppo College, educated a privileged group of males who would become prominent figures: Adnan 'AK' Khashoggi, King Hussain of Jordan, Yusef Chahine, Omar Sharif, among many other names.

⁶⁷Said, "Between Worlds", 3 - 7.

Damascus, Beirut, Cairo, Europe or North America.⁶⁸ However, the vast majority of these young men entered into more conservative careers usually regarded as being much less financially risky.⁶⁹ In choosing to pursue an inherently more risky profession, Akkad's personality and strength of character stood out from that of many of his contemporaries. Akkad's ambition to work in film was seen as a joke in his hometown of Aleppo. In his interview with Luke Ford, Akkad says: "I wanted to be a film director in Hollywood. That was the joke of the town."⁷⁰ However, this only seemed to spur him on and make him want to prove himself by ensuring that he succeeded in his film ambitions.

Akkad was also realistic about his career dreams. He understood that he needed to make his own path in life because he was unable to rely on significant financial support from his family or any support from his community in Aleppo. As Akkad said: "we were an average family".⁷¹ After leaving Aleppo College, Akkad got a job at the British Bank in Aleppo where he worked for one and a half years. During this time, he managed to save money and get the references he needed for applying to an American University. At the age of 24,⁷² Akkad eventually got a place on the UCLA Undergraduate Theater Arts programme in 1954.

There are interesting parallels to be drawn between Akkad's life at this stage and Youssef Chahine's. Whereas Akkad was educated at the locally well-known Aleppo College, Chahine was educated at the equally prestigious Victoria College in Egypt, which is a British-style school, sometimes compared to Eton, and whose

⁶⁸Akkad, Zohair, personal interview, 11 April 2009.

⁶⁹Careers such as doctors, engineers, lawyers, etc.

⁷⁰Ford, *The Producers*, 215.

⁷¹Ford, *The Producers*, 215.

⁷² Different documents state he was 18 or 19 when he went to America in 1954. For the purpose of this thesis, it is assumed that Moustapha Akkad was 24 years old when he arrived in America. This was the age given by his brother Zohair Akkad.

alumni include King Hussein of Jordan, Edward Said and Omar Sharif. Also, both Akkad and Chahine went to California after this formative phase of their lives in local Anglophone educational institutions, to study theatre, television and film. Chahine went to the Pasadena Playhouse and Akkad went to UCLA. Both of them gained experience of Western film techniques and styles which they then used to develop their own filmmaking styles and techniques, which are unique both in the Middle East and the West.

2.5 Training as a Filmmaker

2.5.1 Moving to America

“Aleppo is never far away, it is always in the heart” – Moustapha Akkad⁷³

Of his departure from Aleppo for America, Akkad says: “My father said goodbye and put \$200 in one pocket and a copy of the Koran in the second pocket. ‘That’s all I can give you.’”⁷⁴ Zohair Akkad talks of the great disappointment felt by their father because of Moustapha’s pursuit of dreams that were considered to be both unrespectable and unattainable. The family felt that Moustapha would be lost to them when he embarked on his adventure in the US. This is also a feature of Chahine’s life, for Chahine’s family also feared losing him because he wanted to study in California and they tried their best to dissuade him from following this education and career path.⁷⁵

It may seem rather surprising that Akkad chose to pursue his career in the US instead of going somewhere closer like France or other European countries. In this respect, we should keep in mind that, at the time, America was seen as a friendlier

⁷³*From Aleppo to Hollywood*, 2007

⁷⁴ Ford, *The Producers*, 215.

⁷⁵Fawal, *Youssef Chahine*, 29-31.

country to Arabs than colonial powers like France and Britain. In particular, France's presence in Syria was resented. Also, after the Second World War, Arabs saw America as an opportunity for the good life in a country that still welcomed immigrants from around the world. In leaving Aleppo, Akkad was in fact emigrating from his homeland, for he would later become an American citizen, though in later years he did return to Syria and still considered it to be his home. He also maintained that he had a home in America and talked of the opportunities that this second home had given him. At this time in the US, "[a] socioeconomic profile of immigrants from Arab nations indicates that this was an elite migration; ...their educational levels and income are what one would expect from elite migrants".⁷⁶ In moving to California, Akkad represented one of the first waves of Syrian immigrants to the US, which between 1950 and 1959 represented only 1,091 people.⁷⁷

2.5.2 UCLA and USC

Akkad deliberately chose to start his education in filmmaking at UCLA because "UCLA had the best film program. They had three productions per semester... If you wanted to do a film, you loaded up your wagon and went to shoot."⁷⁸ Akkad studied on a Theater Arts Bachelor Degree course between 1954 and 1960. He studied and worked at the same time to survive financially, like many students, and thus spread his studies over a longer period of time. Little is known of his years at UCLA except that during this time Akkad was able to adapt to life as a student in America quickly. His American education at Aleppo College had given him a good foundation not only academically but also socially. The UCLA School of

⁷⁶ Dinnerstein and Reimers, *Ethnic Americans*, 146.

⁷⁷ Dinnerstein and Reimers, *Ethnic Americans*, 211.

⁷⁸ Ford, *The Producers*, 216.

Theater, Film and Television in Los Angeles is one of twelve schools within UCLA. It is unique because it combines all three aspects of theatre, film and television in one single department. Not much is known about the specific subjects that Akkad studied on this course, but no doubt the standard fare of a film course included such topics as film production, television production, narrative, documentary and screenwriting.

Outside his formal education, Akkad learned to play American football, despite not having the physical frame of a typical American football player, and he joined a UCLA fraternity. He was also the founder and president of the Arab Society at UCLA, a position that he seemed to take very seriously. Akkad's desire to express his Arab identity in such an active way appears to be influenced by his belief in Pan-Arabism and admiration for Gamal Abdel Nasser as an Arab hero. During this time, Nasser was a prominent figure in the Arab world because he had led a revolution in Egypt which overthrew the monarchy, removed the British occupation and heralded a promising new period of modernization, social reform and a profound confidence in pan-Arab nationalism. According to his brother Zohair, Akkad shared with his parents and siblings a strong belief in Arab nationalism and a high admiration for Nasser. Akkad's belief in pan-Arab nationalism and Nasser seems to have been strengthened as a result of the fact that Egypt and Syria had united in 1958, at the beginning of Nasser's presidency of Egypt. Although the union between these two countries did not last, the fact that it happened at all illustrates the desire for a deep connection between Egypt and Syria.

During this time, film students were studying the French New Wave or 'Nouvelle Vague' method of filmmaking, which was all the rage during this period. "The French New Wave has cast a long shadow over world cinema ever since the

legendary ‘Young Turks’ – Francois Truffaut, Jean-Luc Godard, Claude Chabrol and others – burst upon the scene in the late 1950’s, and their films entered the cinematic pantheon.”⁷⁹ New Wave filmmaking represented a radical break from past film methods, for it was concerned with new ways of making films “cheaply, quickly, outside the mainstream”.⁸⁰ Although Akkad studied these acting and film methods, the extent to which they influenced his films appears to be limited. (This will be explored in more detail in Chapter 3 of this thesis).

After UCLA, Akkad spent time as a postgraduate student getting a Master’s degree in cinema studies at the USC, where he was more deeply exposed to the influence of the French New Wave Cinema. Akkad describes this as “the more realistic documentary approach to filmmaking. I wanted to expose myself to that so I went to USC for three years for my masters.”⁸¹ The New Wave started in the context of a movement called ‘Auteurism’, which came to dominate film theory and criticism in the 1950s and 1960s.⁸² In his 1948 essay “Birth of a New Avant-Garde: The Camera-Pen”, the novelist and filmmaker Alexandre Astruc paved the way for Auteurism when he asserted that, “the director was no longer merely the servant of a pre-existing text (novel, screenplay) but a creative artist in his/her own right.”⁸³ The French filmmaker Francois Truffaut also contributed to the start of this new movement, because he criticised previous films made in the ‘tradition of quality’ because he saw these as ‘predictably well-furnished, well-spoken and stylistically formulaic films’ based, merely, on translating classic literature from book to screen.⁸⁴ Truffaut praised what he saw as the vital maverick filmmakers of American cinema

⁷⁹ Vincendeau, “Introduction,” 1.

⁸⁰ Vincendeau, “Introduction,” 1.

⁸¹ Ford, *The Producers*, 216.

⁸² Stam, *Film Theory*, 83.

⁸³ Stam, *Film Theory*, 83.

⁸⁴ Stam, *Film Theory*, 83.

such as Orson Welles, who he considered to have handled filmmaking like the creative process it should be. In this way, Auteurism was concerned with the director who can instil in his films his creativity, his expression and “a recognizable stylistic and thematic personality.”⁸⁵

Auteurism was further developed in the 1960s, when it was introduced to the US by Andrew Sarris in his “Notes on the Auteur Theory” (1962). There was a growing emphasis on style as creative expression: “The way a film looks and moves should have some relationship to the way a director thinks and feels.”⁸⁶ It is worth noting, however, that there were also criticisms of this approach to film theory. These include claims by critics that Auteurism wrongly assumes the director is an unimpeded artist, whereas filmmaking is a very collaborative process requiring significant amounts of money and scores of creative and technical people working over long periods.⁸⁷ The Auteurism methodology also became relevant for third-world film theory, which was also developing at this time. “Third World” in this context refers to “the colonized, neo-colonized or decolonized nations and minorities of the world whose economic and political structures have been shaped and deformed within the colonial process.”⁸⁸

During Akkad’s time of studying film in the US, Third World film and theory were interested in anti-colonial struggles, like those in Algeria. It was soon after this period in 1966 that the critically acclaimed film *Battle of Algiers* was released, with Gillo Pontecorvo as its director. Hence Akkad positioned himself within the network of young filmmakers in California who at the time were interested in pioneering new cinematic genres.

⁸⁵ Stam, *Film Theory*, 84.

⁸⁶ Stam, *Film Theory*, 89.

⁸⁷ Stam, *Film Theory*, 90.

⁸⁸ Stam, *Film Theory*, 93.

At this time, Akkad also met Patricia M. Shirk, an intelligent, beautiful native Californian. Shirk was to become Akkad's wife in 1963, and would provide him the stability and support that enabled him to develop his ideas and build on his filmmaking education and experience. Patricia Akkad spoke to me about how her job as a social worker provided a stable income for the young Akkad family and gave Mustapha a certain freedom to develop his ideas and pursue his career goal of becoming an independent producer, a goal which would take years to achieve.

In 1966, while still at USC, Akkad also met Mohammed Sanousi, who was influenced by Akkad and would later become the producer of *The Message/Al-Risalah*. Sanousi was a Kuwaiti from a privileged background, which gave him the opportunity to study in the US before he went on to become the Minister of Information in Kuwait and one of the founders of Kuwait TV. Like Akkad, Sanousi graduated from USC and had a strong interest in film, but nothing is known about what subjects he studied while at USC. USC was also a fertile environment for creative cinema at the time. Filmmakers like George Lucas, Steven Spielberg and others who later became part of the Hollywood film establishment were either attending USC or gathering at the university's film screenings and social events during Akkad's time there.

2.6 Early Work

After his time at USC, Akkad experienced what he describes as 'the starvation period' when he was not able to find employment to support himself despite applying to "the seven giant studios for work and all TV Studios and all advertising agencies."⁸⁹

⁸⁹ Ford, *The Producers*, 216.

Through the UCLA network, Akkad met the director Sam Peckinpah, who was well-known for making films that blended action adventure and morality tales,⁹⁰ and who was later to become Akkad's mentor in Hollywood. Peckinpah's career was principally active in the 1960s and 1970s, which was a "time of turbulence and change in the movie industry, both as a business and as an art form, with a shifting power base, a changing audience and a radically altered sense of the possibilities of what film could achieve."⁹¹ Peckinpah hired Akkad as a consultant for a film about the Algerian Revolution, but this work never made it to the big screen. However, Akkad went on to work with Peckinpah as a production assistant at MGM studios on the movie *Ride the High Country* (1962). It was about two aging ex-lawmen hired to escort a gold shipment on its way from a mountain mining camp in the sierras to a town in a valley below. While one of the men sees this task as an honourable job, the other man decides to break the law by stealing the gold.⁹² The head of MGM's parent company had backed the film initially but when he saw the finished film called it "the worst picture I ever saw!" However, the film was praised by American and European Critics and went on to win prizes at the Belgian and Mexican film festivals. About this film, Peckinpah said: "It was a real high point in my career."⁹³

When reminiscing about his involvement with Peckinpah, Akkad said:

He took a liking to me... He always used to tell me to start from the top. 'You went to school for seven years. You can't go to work as a messenger boy. Sit down and write something'. I used to sit down and write every day and I'd bring it to him. He'd take it, read it and tear it up. I had applied everywhere for work and I always got the same question. 'What have you done?'⁹⁴

⁹⁰Fine, *Bloody Sam*, xiii.

⁹¹Fine, *Bloody Sam*, xv.

⁹²Fine, *Bloody Sam*, 69.

⁹³Fine, *Bloody Sam*, 75.

⁹⁴ Ford, *The Producers*, 216.

With Peckinpah's encouragement, Akkad was able to get a job with CBS and later moved on to producing a television show called "How Others See Us". Talking about this period of his life Akkad said:

I remember from my days at UCLA, I used to be invited into American homes. They always ask you, "what do you think of the American food?" "what do you think of the American woman?" "what do you think about American education?" Everything you think about America, they like to know. I thought that would be a good subject to do a program – how others see us. I made a small presentation to three TV stations to bring an African, European, Asian and Latin American foreign student with an American moderator and a different topic every week. The CBS and NBC both wanted it as a public affairs program on Sunday afternoons. NBC offered me \$400 a week but no credit. CBS offered me \$100 a week and the producer credit. So I went to Sam Peckinpah and told him about my two offers. He asked which one I was going to take. I said. 'NBC'. He replied, and I've never forgotten, 'you son of a bitch. What do you want the money for? Take the credit'. I took the CBS offer.⁹⁵

Akkad's success with the television show "How Others See Us" led to further success with another television show called "Caesar's World". Describing this process, Akkad said, "[n]ow I was a producer at CBS, I could call anybody and they'd return my call. I called United Artists and sold them a syndicated travel show, 'Caesar's World', hosted by Caesar Romero. Every week we travelled to a different country".⁹⁶ The series was distributed by United Artists and was syndicated throughout the US by more than 100 television stations.

2.7 Akkad's Development as Filmmaker

Akkad took the significant decision to establish his production company in Beirut as well as the US. The years Akkad spent in Beirut during the late 1960s and early 1970s seem to have been a rebirth for him. In Beirut, Akkad rediscovered his Arab roots and found what he had temporarily lost in his journey to assimilate into

⁹⁵Ford, *The Producers*, 216.

⁹⁶Ford, *The Producers*, 217.

American life. Akkad's desire to reconnect with the Arab world is reflected in his decision to base his family in Beirut, including his American wife and two young boys, Taric and Malek. His only daughter Rima was born in Beirut in 1970, soon after the family moved there.

It was during this period of his life that Akkad started to develop an ambition to use his experience to create his own expression of Arab identity. It was this process that eventually resulted in Akkad's most significant films, *The Message/Al-Risalah* and *Lion of the Desert*. In the same way, Chahine also applied his Western-influenced experience to create films that reflect his identity and country.

It has been said of Chahine's films that, "His provocative cinema appeals mostly to thinking audiences, though mainstream audiences often respond to his unique films and stirring themes,"⁹⁷ because he is interested in "shedding light on Egypt in all her moods and dimensions... daring to tell the 'truth' as he sees it."⁹⁸ However, Akkad's creative vision was not concerned directly with modern Arab politics or other issues, but with restoring or recapturing a positive view by reminding his audience of (or recreating for them) religious and historical events and figures to inspire Arab pride. Akkad eventually developed a filmmaking style that suited his creative vision; this was the historical epic style.

In the early 1970s, Beirut was a significant centre towards which many educated Arabs gravitated, and was considered an intellectual and cultural capital of the Arab world. Beirut was also a financial centre for much of the Arab world and continued to be a major commercial and tourist centre until 1975 when the Lebanese Civil War broke out. The years from 1955 to 1975 represented a period nostalgically

⁹⁷ Fawal, *Youssef Chahine*, 2.

⁹⁸ Fawal, *Youssef Chahine*, 1.

called the “Golden Age” in Lebanon: “During this Golden Age, Beirut was a cauldron of boundless vitality... by the mid-1960s Beirut had become a glitzy Mediterranean Metropolis, a mecca for the international set, a haven for exiles”.⁹⁹ Lebanon was also experiencing the benefits of an economic boom during this period (linked to the 1973 oil boom), attracting many financiers and businessmen from around the world.¹⁰⁰

Beirut as a base was very important for Akkad. Akkad’s production company was on Rue Hamra, in Ras Beirut. Beirut was an excellent place to establish oneself as a filmmaker. Journalist Sandra Mackey described the atmosphere of pre-Civil War Beirut as follows:

Life for the affluent Lebanese, foreign diplomats, Western businesspeople, and journalists revolved around ‘Ras Beirut,’ a hilly, sun-drenched peninsula spread out around the American University of Beirut. Ras Beirut was the closest the Arab world ever came to possessing its own Greenwich Village... Colonies of artists, poets, popular writers, and intellectuals clustered in the coffeehouses. [...] It served as a test ground for innovative ideas. [...] The residents of Ras Beirut whirled through an unending round of parties, receptions, and dances. [...] These parties were not mindless social events but provided a quick and efficient way for newcomers to penetrate Beirut’s commercial and government circles. After one of *Time Magazine*’s famous receptions at the Phoenicia, its newly arrived correspondent marvelled, “In one night I met half the people I needed to know in Beirut for the next three years.”¹⁰¹

Akkad’s presence in Beirut enabled him to come into contact with the “political and economic elite who frequented Ras Beirut,”¹⁰² people who would have a significant impact on his work. These included the Khashoggi brothers, Adnan and Essam Khashoggi. The Khashoggi family provided Akkad with vital financial support which enabled the script to be written for *The Message/Al-Risalah*. Adnan Khashoggi, born

⁹⁹Mackey, *Lebanon: A House Divided*, 4.

¹⁰⁰Mackey, *Lebanon: A House Divided*, 8.

¹⁰¹Mackey, *Lebanon: A House Divided*, 10.

¹⁰²Mackey, *Lebanon: A House Divided*, 10.

in 1935, is a Turkish-Saudi businessman involved with numerous international companies. He had a reputation for brokering lucrative commercial deals between US companies and the Saudi government throughout the 1960s and 1970s. His close ties to the Saudi government could be traced to his father's role as the personal doctor to the first King of Saudi Arabia, King Abdel Aziz Al Saud. After studying in a Western-style school (Victoria College) in the Middle East, Khashoggi, like Akkad, studied on the West coast of the US, around the same time Akkad was there. Initially pursuing his studies at the California State University, Khashoggi later studied at Ohio State University and finally Stanford University in Northern California. Anxious to start building his business career, he then left Stanford before completing his studies. By the 1980s, Khashoggi was seen as the richest man in the world, and potentially a powerful film patron. Khashoggi's serious interest in investing in films is demonstrated in the fact that he provided support to the well-known producer of the film *The Godfather*, Robert Evans. Khashoggi also provided Akkad with support and seed money. This enabled Akkad to get the script for *The Message/Al-Risalah* written, and to base his production company in Beirut. Throughout the project, Adnan Khashoggi continued to be involved in Akkad's production company, and was represented by his younger brother Essam as Chairman of the company's board of directors.

With this support, Akkad was able to utilise the best and most talented Egyptian writers to help shape and build the script for *Al-Risalah/The Message*. The Egyptian writers were Tewfik El-Hakim, Abd al-Hamid Jawdat El-Sahhar, Abd al-Rahman El-Sharqawi, Mohammad Ali Maher, and Abdel Hamid Maher. Among the most notable of these writers were El-Sahhar and El-Sharqawi. El-Sahhar was well-known for having written extensively on the life of the Prophet Muhammad, and for

having had some experience in film scripts. On the other hand, El-Sharqawi was a prominent writer in the Arab theatre as well as novels, particularly in Egypt. In addition to using skilled and experienced Egyptian writers, Akkad would also shape the script for Western audiences with the help of the Irish scriptwriter Harry Craig. A graduate of Trinity College, Dublin, Craig went on to live in London where he wrote radio plays for the BBC. He also wrote the Queen's Christmas radio address to the commonwealth in 1958. Craig had excellent training as a former journalist for the Manchester Guardian newspaper, and was a long-time theatre critic for the New Statesman magazine. He gained a reputation as a respected film scriptwriter and became known for his scriptwriting work for large international productions such as *Waterloo* (1970), a historical military film about the Battle of Waterloo by Russian director Sergei Bondachuk, starring Rod Steiger, Christopher Plummer, and Orson Welles. Craig also worked on the scripts of two other historical war films, *Anzio* (1968, starring Robert Michum and Peter Falk) and *Fraulein Doktor* (1969, starring Suzy Kendall and Kenneth More). Other films he wrote for included *Foxtrot* (1976, starring Peter O'Toole and Charlotte Rampling), and *Airport '77* (1977, starring Jack Lemmon, Olivia de Havilland, and James Stewart). These were all high budget films with well-known American Hollywood/European actors.

Another crucial person with whom Akkad would re-connect during his time in Beirut was Mohammed Sanousi, who Akkad first met at USC. Sanousi went on to become the Minister for Media in Kuwait and ensured Akkad had the support of key figures in the Kuwaiti Government, which was instrumental in giving *The Message/Al-Risalah* political clout. Moreover, the support of the Kuwaiti government was important in helping Akkad to gain the support of other Arab governments (like Morocco and Libya's) and the tolerance of the unsympathetic Saudi government.

During his Beirut years, Akkad also worked with his assistant June Bordcosh,¹⁰³ who was a Christian Palestinian with social access to many powerful and wealthy Arabs both in Beirut and London. She was crucial in introducing Akkad to a useful network of people that could support his filmmaking ambitions. This support provided investment money that was essential for establishing offices, writing scripts and attracting a highly skilled and talented crew and cast, some of whom had won Oscars or BAFTA awards. These included the Oscar winner and highly regarded Director of Photography, Jack Hildyard¹⁰⁴ and the composer Maurice Jarre, who won Oscars for *Lawrence of Arabia*, *Passage to India* and *Doctor Zhivago*, and BAFTAs for *Dead Poets Society* and *Witness*. Akkad would also gain access to and work with the renowned Editor John Bloom, who had won an Oscar for *Gandhi*. The ability to work with these people gave Akkad's film projects credibility, which was much needed for an unknown filmmaker at the beginning of his career.

During his development as a filmmaker, Akkad also continued his connection with his mentor Sam Peckinpah. Maurice Landsberger remembers how Akkad used to talk about how he contacted Peckinpah in order to ask his advice during the making of *The Message/Al-Risalah*.¹⁰⁵ Akkad was influenced by the example of how Peckinpah could retain control of his film. In an interview, Peckinpah talks about what holds back a director from taking control: "many things hold him back, usually the fact that somebody knows more, has more control, more money and considers..."

¹⁰³ Akkad, Nabil, personal interview, 28 February 2009.

¹⁰⁴ Jack Hildyard won an Oscar for the movie *The Bridge on the River Kwai* (1957).

¹⁰⁵ Landsberger, Maurice, personal interview, 22 October 2010.

that they have better judgement than he does.” When asked how he handles this, Peckinpah says: ‘I am very careful about compromises.’¹⁰⁶

The network of people that Akkad developed during this period of his life was not only useful in the context of his filmmaking and gathering the financial support he needed. This network also helped Akkad to navigate through the numerous political obstacles and religious controversies that threatened his filmmaking and interfered with his creative vision. Such problems will be more deeply explored in Chapter 3. It is interesting to note here, however, that religious and political controversies are another aspect of Akkad’s filmmaking career also shared by Youssef Chahine. These controversies were possibly even worse in Chahine’s case because his predominantly Muslim audience were at times critical of his Christianity.¹⁰⁷

The 1980s and 1990s saw a deterioration in how the West saw the Arab world. In the revised edition of his book which was published in 1997, Edward Said wrote: “Islam’s role in hijacking and terrorism, descriptions of the way in which overtly Muslim countries like Iran threaten ‘us’ and our way of life, and speculations about the latest conspiracy to blow up buildings, sabotage commercial airlines, and poison water supplies seem to play increasingly on Western consciousness.”¹⁰⁸ In this context, Akkad made films like *The Message/Al-Risalah* and *Lion of the Desert* with the aim of improving the image and representation of Muslim Arabs, not only to the West but also for Arabs themselves, given that this period is also characterised by the rise of radical Islam in the Arab world.

His middle age was a time of great development for Akkad as a filmmaker, not only creatively but also financially. During this period, he was able to develop and

¹⁰⁶Fine, *Bloody Sam*, 79.

¹⁰⁷Fawal, *World Directors: Youssef Chahine*, 188.

¹⁰⁸Said, *Covering Islam*, xi.

hone important skills that made him an astute businessman who understood what worked in the film industry and with audiences and what did not. The most interesting example of this is his ability to capitalise on the commercial success of the first *Halloween* film and turn that series of horror films into a lucrative franchise. It is worth noting that, although he acknowledged that the majority of movie and TV producers in Hollywood were Jewish, he did not see this as an obstacle in making his films: “You can’t be more Jewish than Miramax [operated by Bob and Harvey Weinstein]... they financed me... but probably if I did something about Israel, they would not. So I get financing from overseas, such as when I did *The Message*.”¹⁰⁹ Again, such issues will be discussed in greater detail in Chapter 3.

2.8 Akkad’s Death

— “His death diminishes us all.”¹¹⁰

Moustapha Akkad was killed, along with his 34-year old daughter Rima, as a result of injuries resulting from a bomb blast on 11 November 2005 in the lobby of a hotel in Amman, Jordan. Ironically, Akkad had moved to this hotel from another one in Amman because he had complained that the former hotel’s lobby was too quiet.¹¹¹ It was a family joke, particularly with his children, that Akkad had a tendency to treat hotel lobbies as his “unofficial office”.¹¹² The irony of his death was that his movies, especially *Al-Risalah/The Message*, aimed at improving the image of Arabs and Muslims in the West, and yet he was killed by a terrorist group that used Islamic words and thoughts to justify their violent actions against innocent victims.

¹⁰⁹ Ford, *The Producers*, 215.

¹¹⁰Cole, “The Strange Death of Moustapha Akkad; Zargawi and Halloween”.

¹¹¹ Akkad, Malek, personal interview, 5 November 2008.

¹¹²Akkad, Malek, personal interview, 5 November 2008.

2.9 Conclusion

Akkad's family and educational background gave him opportunities and characteristics which enabled him to develop a career in film. In this context, he was part of a generation of Arab males in the Middle East who were educated in Western schools and given the chance to pursue further educational opportunities beyond the Middle East. Akkad thrived in Western educational institutions, which were less rigid than the traditional old Islamic schools of prior generations. He had access to a full range of extracurricular activities (such as sports, clubs, societies, boy scouts and foreign travel), which together enabled him to acquire useful social networks, understand Western perspectives and develop strength of character and independence of thought. In these ways, we can see the significance of examining Akkad's life, for it will be a useful context for exploring his work in Chapter 3 of this thesis.

Chapter 3: Moustapha Akkad's Films

3.1 Introduction

In this chapter, I will focus on Moustapha Akkad's work as a filmmaker. I will analyse each of Akkad's major films and explore not only the process used by Akkad to make these films but also analyse these films as creative achievements.

3.2 Film as Process

Exploring the process through which Akkad worked gives an interesting insight into how he transcended stereotypes and navigated the many obstacles he faced. In the process of creating his cinematic works, Akkad became very adept at managing, negotiating with and gaining advantages from various governments and public and private institutions, including the Hollywood film industry. This is especially reflected in his first epic film *The Message/Al-Risalah*. As Freek L. Bakker mentions in his book *The Challenge of the Silver Screen*, in films depicting religious figures there are four factors exerting influence on the film: "the religious authorities, the filmmakers, the investors and the audience."¹¹³ In this context, Akkad understood how his films could not be made without the right level of funding from key investors. This influenced his choice of actors, for he knew that big-name actors are more likely to bring big audiences, which would then tempt big financial backers.

Even beyond entrepreneurship, it is possible to argue that Akkad was a great risk-taker. He was very careful in calculating the risks he took, but some of these risks were certainly substantial, especially when we consider how difficult it was for someone like Akkad to convince Arab countries like Kuwait, Morocco and later Libya

¹¹³ Bakker, *The Challenge of The Silver Screen*, 5.

to invest in him as a filmmaker and in his high film budgets. This particular process was fundamental to the success of Akkad's work. If this process had gone wrong, his films might have never been made. In this process, Akkad relied not only on his skills of entrepreneurship and persuasion, but also on the support of key allies like Mohammad Sanousi, who was instrumental in helping Akkad to gain the financial, religious and governmental support so necessary for many of his films. The fact that Akkad got his funding from the Middle East, which was outside typical Hollywood funding sources in the 1970s, is very impressive, since it really had not been done on that scale before. Although filmmaking now has huge recognition in the Middle East, with cities like Dubai¹¹⁴ and Doha¹¹⁵ hosting their own glamorous and financially lucrative film festivals, as well as the Dubai Film Market,¹¹⁶ during the time Akkad started as a filmmaker these opportunities for financial and creative support¹¹⁷ were difficult to find.

In examining how Akkad worked, it is important to understand that he was not simply a typical filmmaker in the context of how the West (and particularly Hollywood) understands that role. The unique thing about his role is that he played it successfully not only in the West, but also in the Middle East. Hence the process he followed to create his work was trans-cultural, and allowed him to transcend stereotypes and reach a wider audience than other filmmakers of his generation who were more limited, whether in their Western or Middle Eastern context. Akkad was drawn to the US as a filmmaker for a number of reasons, but fundamentally he understood that "a film released in the United States always had a greater chance of

¹¹⁴"Dubai International Film Festival."

¹¹⁵"Doha Tribeca," Doha.

¹¹⁶"Dubai Film Market."

¹¹⁷"Dubai Film Market – Filmmakers."

being distributed and seen all over the world than those produced in countries with small industries.”¹¹⁸

It is also important to look at the creative filmmaking process, which involved collaboration between crew, production and cast under the ultimate direction of Akkad. In addition to being shaped by his strong California film-school education and US television experience, the processes which Akkad used to create his films were also heavily influenced by filmmakers like David Lean and Alfred Hitchcock. Akkad deeply admired Lean and Hitchcock, seeing them as successful directors who had made their mark on Hollywood despite being thoroughly British. During a brief chance encounter, Lean gave Akkad the advice to “tell the story simply.” This advice seems to have made a deep impression on Akkad,¹¹⁹ for it was reflected in the creative process deployed in many of his films. Akkad even went as far as emulating Lean’s work processes by using many of the same crew and cast members that Lean had used on *Lawrence of Arabia* (for example, Anthony Quinn who Akkad used in both *The Message* and *Lion of the Desert*).

In examining Akkad’s work, I also need to explore his business initiatives. One of his most interesting business ventures was his involvement with studios. It is reported that he “once tried to buy Pinewood Studios from the Rank Organisation.”¹²⁰ There are also sources in the media,¹²¹ as well as accounts from certain people who knew Akkad, which indicate that Akkad owned at least a share of the Twickenham Film Studios in the UK.¹²² For many filmmakers like Akkad, owning a post-

¹¹⁸ Bakker, *The Challenge of The Silver Screen*, 5.

¹¹⁹ Akkad, Malek, personal interview, 5 November 2008.

¹²⁰ “Moustapha Akkad Obituary,” *The Telegraph*.

¹²¹ “Moustapha Akkad Obituary,” *The Telegraph*.

¹²² My phone discussions and emails with Lionel Strutt (a respected and well known British film sound technician who worked with Akkad on *The Lion of the Desert*) confirmed that Akkad had at least partial ownership of Twickenham Studios.

production house or studio would be a key benefit in that it provides a stable income in what is often an unstable occupation. Excellent examples of this are the highly successful directors Tony Scott and Ridley Scott,¹²³ whose commercial success is largely due to owning their own production company called 'Scott Free',¹²⁴ as well as owning Shepperton Studios, which recently merged with Pinewood Studios. In an interview with Luke Ford, Akkad stated: "My base is England. I have a studio there, Twickenham. It's not under my name."¹²⁵ Akkad's involvement with Twickenham Studios appears to have been deliberately low-key. For this reason, it has been difficult to verify the extent to which Akkad had ownership of these studios. A search of the public legal records held at Companies House by the Registrar of Companies¹²⁶ (for all companies registered in England and Wales) revealed that Akkad's son Malek Akkad is currently serving on the Board of Directors of Twickenham Film Studios Limited. There is no record in the Companies House archives of Akkad himself ever having served on the board of this company.

However, when I interviewed Malek Akkad about this, he confirmed that, in serving as Company Director of Twickenham Film Studios Limited, he was following in his father's footsteps. Malek Akkad explained that Akkad brought a large amount of film work to Twickenham Studios and that, in return for this, Akkad was given the role of Company Director. Malek Akkad indicated that the work his father brought to Twickenham Studios made a significant financial contribution to the company at a time when the studios were suffering from low profits. However, Malek Akkad declined to provide any further details of this collaboration and he also stated that his father was not technically an owner of the studios, which contradicts the other

¹²³" Ridley Scott Biography. "

¹²⁴" Ridley Scott", Monsters Movies Website.

¹²⁵ Ford, *The Producers*, 200.

¹²⁶Company's House Website.

statements regarding Akkad's involvement with them. It has not been possible to verify this from the records at Companies House, which simply show that the ultimate owner or parent company of Twickenham Film Studios Limited is Shardub Enterprises NV, an offshore company incorporated in Netherland Antilles by unknown owner(s).

Interestingly, Malek Akkad is one of only three Company Directors of Twickenham Film Studios Limited and, of those, he is the only director whose occupation is film producer/director (the other two directors are a US attorney and a British certified accountant who are on record as providing services to the company). Thus, Malek Akkad is the only director currently serving on the board that comes from a background that is relevant to the business the studios are involved in. It is possible that this might be an indication of the significance to Twickenham Studios of Malek Akkad's role and perhaps even his father's role before him. However, due to the absence of further information and evidence, it is not possible to be certain about this. In the world of films, the Twickenham Studios are viewed as being one of the important film studios in Britain, not only by the British film industry but also in Hollywood. They provide important facilities for shooting scenes, music studios, screening rooms and other spaces which filmmakers need to direct and produce their work. The extent of Akkad's involvement with the Twickenham Studios is not entirely clear, although as described above we can draw certain theories from the information we do have. However, the information gathered does seem to agree that there was indeed significant involvement by Akkad.

To understand how someone like Akkad, a naturalized Arab-American, could have benefited from owning an established studio used by the British and Hollywood film industries, we should look more closely at how these industries work. The

majority of the people who work in these film industries, whether they are actors and actresses, producers, directors, film executives or crew (like directors of photography, designers, editors or sound technicians) are freelance, and work on the basis of short-term contracts. Thus, cultivating a network of long-term working relationships is very helpful in seeking work opportunities in an industry in which there is very little job security. Film studios are one of the few places where film people can maintain contacts, develop working relationships and keep updated on all the new film productions that are shot yearly. A studio like Twickenham, with its established name and facilities, provides a useful base for temporary or out-of-work film workers, a place in which young inexperienced people can possibly get future work, a place in which information can be shared and important lessons learnt. The Twickenham studios gave Akkad a way into the film industry and increased his credibility as a film director and producer. It gave him access to the most creative crew members, as well as insider knowledge and status within the industry. This enabled him to recruit experienced and highly trained cast and crew for his epic film projects.

3.3 Film as Result

Akkad's work covered three decades and includes films about Arab Muslim heroes (two of which were completed and one which was never finished), as well as eight *Halloween* horror movies. I will analyse Akkad's work by dividing it into two separate categories.

Firstly, I will focus on what can be described as Akkad's "desert epics", which are his most compelling and innovative films: *The Message*/*Al-Risalah*, *Omar al-Mukhtar* (*Lion of the Desert* in its English-language release) and the film *Saladin*

which he did not finish before his death. Although these films were reviewed in a number of non-academic magazines and similar sources, they have not received much academic attention. These are the most important of Akkad's works because they were the only films Akkad directed as well as produced (in the other films he was involved with he was only the producer). I am calling these films the desert epics because they were set and filmed in the deserts of the Middle East. They also belong to the genre of epic films, which emphasize human drama on a grand scale using technology that was state of the art at the time (such as Panavision and sophisticated equipment for sound recording) and filming techniques designed to create a larger-than-life effect, like panoramic shots. In particular, Akkad's films are heroic epics because they are devoted to the manufacture of heroes – popular, national, historical, or individual¹²⁷ – and they also present a villain as the vital mirror image that enhances our understanding of the ideological assumptions of this genre.¹²⁸ Also typical of this genre, Akkad's desert epics are ambitious high-budget films. Akkad's desert films are considered epics because this genre is “chiefly designed to entertain in a morally uplifting and instructive manner, by trading on the fears and ignorance of its audience.”¹²⁹ In this context, the words ‘fear’ and ‘ignorance’ can be seen as referring to the stereotypes and one-dimensional views held by a typical white western film viewer about a religion like Islam, or on Middle Eastern culture in general. Islam's western image is of extreme violence and repression of women, while Middle Eastern culture has negative images of erotic belly dancers and extreme corrupt wealth, mixed with the exotic ‘other’. For all these reasons, it is important when looking at each of Akkad's desert epics to analyse

¹²⁷ Rosen, “The Uprooted Cinema: Arab Filmmakers Abroad,” 152.

¹²⁸Rosen, “The Uprooted Cinema: Arab Filmmakers Abroad,” 153.

¹²⁹ Elley, *The Epic Film: Myth and History*, 1.

them in the context of the epic genre. However, before we can do that, it is worthwhile to explore this epic genre more fully and to understand that epic film has a “long history... as an international, global narrative apparatus”¹³⁰ which is “not bound by nation or ethnicity.”¹³¹ The epic genre has attracted many filmmakers like Moustapha Akkad because “it has a surge and splendour and extravagance not to be despised.”¹³²

Moustapha Akkad understood the power the epic genre could have in giving the Western viewer an experience in which they felt themselves in Arabia and emotionally engaged in the case of the story of Islam and the Prophet Muhammad, in *The Message*, and in the case of the *Lion of the Desert*, for possibly the first time, supporting a Muslim Arab man against Western (Italian) colonisers. Unlike other genres, the epic genre aims to enlarge its subject matter, and give it a grand presence that spellbinds the viewer.

Akkad seemed to understand this when he chose the epic as a crucial type of genre to create the Arab Muslim heroes and myths that seemed to have been translated from his idealised dreams to his desert epics. Epic films can serve as “‘organs of memory’ for cultures; they both ‘remember the past and make their resources available to the present.’”¹³³ Their influence is stronger than is usually credited, and their power resonates in society from children to educated liberals: “The persuasive power of the historical epic film to project a compelling mythology onscreen, and its consequent commercial success in doing so, has long been observed by critics.”¹³⁴

¹³⁰ Burgoyne, “Introduction,” 2.

¹³¹ Burgoyne, “Introduction,” 2.

¹³² Sobchack, “Surge and Splendour,” 302.

¹³³ Burgoyne, “Introduction,” 1.

¹³⁴ Cyrino, “‘This is Sparta,’” 27.

Films are a way of detaching the viewer from reality, and creating a different world; Akkad's desert epics were about bringing to life people who had really existed, and showing their lives on an epic level, bonding us to them. That is why films can be magical; they show us and connect us to different worlds. Films can therefore be very powerful, as they can change the way we view things.

It is important at this stage to explore what an epic film is and what the elements are that make up its structure:

“And what do you call an epic?”

“You know, a picture that's real long and has lots of things going on.”¹³⁵

The structure of “genres depend on a spectator's familiarity with its conventions, built upon from knowledge gained from other films of the same genre.”¹³⁶ Indeed, this is generally how film viewers enjoy such films, as something familiar and entertaining.

The Hollywood industry was the creator of the epic film genre to which Akkad aspired. Hollywood created the template for this style of film and the conventions for it with which many film viewers were familiar. Through his education at UCLA and USC, and later with his US film mentor Sam Peckinpah, Akkad was well-trained in this Hollywood epic film style in general and the historical epic film style in particular.

Akkad used this understanding of epics and the skills he learned about the historical epic film genre in his desert epics *The Message* and the *Lion of the Desert*. In both films, he used larger-than-life actors like Anthony Quinn who were familiar to a Western audience.

By choosing an actor with the ‘epic presence’ of Anthony Quinn, Akkad brought to the role of Hamza in *The Message*, and Omar al-Muhktar in *The Lion of*

¹³⁵Sobchack, “Surge and Splendour,” 296.

¹³⁶Jordanova, “‘Rise of the Rest’,” 117.

the Desert a “particular brand of heroic intensity.”¹³⁷ The choice of actor to play a heroic character is one of the most important elements that gives power to an epic film, and can make a movie memorable: “Stars literally lend magnitude to the representation...”¹³⁸

Akkad’s desert epic films were both large-scale productions that required huge budgets because they used expensive large sets and required countless costumes and decorations that were designed for audiences. Akkad also deliberately recruited crew that had previously worked on epic films for David Lean, ensuring that his films would have the benefit of strong experienced film-crews who were well-known talents in the area of epic films. As I will explore further in this thesis, Akkad’s desert epic films reflected other conventions and elements that make up the epic film genre,

“from denotation, in which the set functions as a conventional signpost of genre, ambience, and character; to punctuation, where the set has a specifically emphatic narrative function; to embellishment, where the verisimilitudinous set calls attention to itself within the narrative; to artifice, where the set is a fantastic theatrical image that commands the centre of narrative attention.”¹³⁹

The fact that Akkad was interested in *creating* epic films in historical context is also significant. The power of this particular type of epic film cannot be underestimated: “Indeed, I would suggest that the Hollywood historical epic is as central to our understanding of what we mean by the ‘historical’ and ‘History’ as any work of academic scholarship.”¹⁴⁰

When compared to Hollywood historical epics, ‘academic history’ has a strong ‘institutional legitimation’ that the Hollywood epic does not have. However, the

¹³⁷Hunt, “Heroic Chivalry,” p. 75.

¹³⁸Gjelsvik, “‘Black Blood’,” 310.

¹³⁹Hunt, “‘Heroic Chivalry’,” 69.

¹⁴⁰Sobchack, “‘Surge and Splendour’,” 299.

historical epic film can reflect a historical perspective that is not possible to achieve in the academic world. In fact, in many ways, neither 'mode' of historicizing, of creating History, is 'truer' than the other.¹⁴¹

The real power of the historical epic is clearly described in the following description:

...the phenomenological significance and discursive power of the Hollywood historical epic is not to be found in the specificity and accuracy of its historical detail. Too much specificity and accuracy... 'mires' the film – bogs it down in the concrete and disallows the emergence of something that, through generalization and extravagance, exceeds and transcends the concrete¹⁴²

What Akkad did in his epics was use the tools of epic filmmaking to transcend the 'concrete', and created a space for something 'magical'.

It is worthwhile as background for this thesis to explore the evolution of the epic film genre throughout the years. The epic film genre reached its ultimate peak in production and box office receipts in Hollywood during the 1950s and 1960s, Interestingly, these years represent Moustapha Akkad's formative childhood, and his early youth, when (as is explored later in this thesis) he was exposed to experiences which helped him develop his filmmaking style. In particular, Akkad was exposed to films like *Ben-Hur*, *The Ten Commandments*, and *The Robe*, which were historical epics of a type he was trying to emulate in his own films.

After the 1950s and 1960s, the Hollywood epic film genre went into decline due to a reduction in audience attendance and box office receipts which were not helped by the introduction of television. However, with his desert epics of the 1970s, Akkad was trying to recreate the golden era of epics, but with his own uniquely Arab Muslim perspective. In creating his epic films, Akkad was fulfilling an ambition for

¹⁴¹Sobchack, "'Surge and Splendour'," 300.

¹⁴²Sobchack, "'Surge and Splendour'," 303.

inspiring Arab Muslim pride. Such an aim is consistent with epic filmmaking, which is “usually produced and publicized with the ambition to showcase glorious national history...”.¹⁴³

Akkad wanted the audience to watch his desert epics and be temporarily transported not only to experience a different era, but also to see a different perspective, which is normally so alien to the typical “white Western male view”.

Generally, epic films tend to be profitable in terms of box-office success, especially religious-themed historical epics; the international revenue market is very important, and often ‘the foreign box office is significantly greater than the domestic US market’.¹⁴⁴ For example, “Mel Gibson’s ‘twenty bagger’ *The Passion of the Christ*, was released in 2004, was made for \$30 million...the film returned over \$370 million domestically and made over \$600 million worldwide.”¹⁴⁵ As will be explored in more detail later in this thesis, profitability was one of the characteristics typical of epic films, a factor with which Akkad struggled, for his desert epics did not achieve the box office success that he had hoped for. As further analysed in this thesis, it is ironic that Akkad’s desert films, which used the larger-than-life epic genre intended for a wide cinema screen, were more successful on the small TV and video screens.

Having examined the epic film genre in general, I will also look at the subject-matter and themes of Akkad’s desert epics and explore how, while these films had many of the qualities of Hollywood epics (for example, the film *The Ten Commandments*), they also had an originality reflected in elements that were completely foreign to mainstream Hollywood movies. This highlights Akkad’s unique blend of creativity in filmmaking. Although he was highly educated in Hollywood

¹⁴³Jordanova, “‘Rise of the Rest’,” 113.

¹⁴⁴Jordanova, “‘Rise of the Rest’,” 107.

¹⁴⁵Jordanova, “‘Rise of the Rest’,” 109.

filmmaking techniques from his years at UCLA and USC, he still had the perspective of the immigrant who viewed his host culture through the eyes of an outsider (even though he wanted to belong and to be understood by it). In this way, Akkad was part of the emerging 'New Hollywood post-industrial cinema'¹⁴⁶ of the 1970s onwards, and he belongs in that group of filmmakers who produced "quintessentially American films that were nonetheless suffused with manifest or submerged ethnicity."¹⁴⁷ In his work, Akkad strived to "be Hollywood" all of his life.¹⁴⁸ At the same time, Akkad's desert epics went beyond Hollywood because they had a global appeal, speaking to different people around the world, particularly to Arabs wherever they settled or lived.

Akkad made his desert epics with the main purpose of addressing misconceptions between the West and the Middle East. It is for this reason that he aimed to attract an audience wider than Arabs. It can be argued that Akkad's success in attracting wider audiences was limited, as his films are known mainly in the Middle East where pirated versions of his films remain widely available.

Akkad's son Malek Akkad remembers that his father always used to say: "it's no good to make an arty film that no one sees."¹⁴⁹ Akkad also once remarked that: "This is the mistake of the Arabic or the European cinema – they don't think about the audience."¹⁵⁰ Akkad was more interested in engaging a wider audience than in achieving critical acclaim. Akkad's films are entertaining and involved "engaging... narrative told in the best tradition of the classical Hollywood cinema style."¹⁵¹ Most importantly, the films which Akkad directed and produced (namely *The Message/Al-Risalah* and *Lion of the Desert*) were creative expressions of subjects and themes

¹⁴⁶ Naficy, *An Accented Cinema*, 8.

¹⁴⁷ Naficy, *An Accented Cinema*, 8.

¹⁴⁸ Akkad, Malek, personal interview, 5 November 2008.

¹⁴⁹ Akkad, Malek, personal interview, 5 November 2008.

¹⁵⁰ Akkad, Malek, personal interview, 5 November 2008.

¹⁵¹ Naficy, *An Accented Cinema*, 69.

that were significant to his identity as an Arab. In this, it appears that Akkad may have been influenced by the “auteur” film theory, which as we saw earlier gained attention during the 1950s when he studied film in UCLA. “Auteur” means author in French, and represents the film theory that a director’s films reflect his personal creative vision. This theory was advocated by the famous director and film critic Francois Truffaut in 1954, the same year Akkad first entered UCLA. The “auteur” film theory is also frequently associated with the French New Wave movement. At this time, the New Wave movement had a marked influence on many American filmmakers, including Coppola, Altman, Scorsese and Arthur Penn who made the film *Bonnie and Clyde* in 1967. Akkad was keen to expose himself to the New Wave style of filmmaking which was developing during his studies in UCLA and USC. To him, New Wave meant a “more realistic documentary approach to filmmaking.”¹⁵² This is reflected in the fact that his career began in making the television documentaries “How Others See Us” and “Caesar’s World.” As a result, when he was first considering the idea of making the film about Islam that become *The Message/Al-Risalah*, he was thinking of making it as a documentary. About this subject, he said “I was making documentaries all over the world. I thought I needed to do something about Islam, which is not understood. At first I thought I’d make a documentary. Then I met Irish scriptwriter Harry Craig. He convinced me we should do it as a feature.”¹⁵³

In many ways, Akkad was also influenced by Peckinpah’s filming style in the 1962 film *Ride the High Country*, which Akkad worked on as assistant producer. Sam Peckinpah has a reputation as an important filmmaker partly due to “the

¹⁵² Ford, *The Producers*, 216.

¹⁵³Ford, *The Producers*, 217.

extraordinary influence that the style and content of his films has exerted over later filmmakers.”¹⁵⁴ Those heavily influenced by his style include Scorsese, Walter Hill, Quentin Tarantino and John Woo. One director in 1993 described Peckinpah’s international influence: “There is a chain of inspiration like the Bible... Everything comes from Peckinpah.”¹⁵⁵ One of the most profound aspects of Akkad’s desert epics is the highly sophisticated camerawork and the beautiful way he captures the scenery (especially the sand dunes). This is also something which Akkad shares with Peckinpah, who filmed *Ride the High Country* in Cinema Scope using world-class cameraman Lucien Ballard. Akkad’s method for dealing with the heroes of his epic films is similar to the way that Peckinpah portrayed his hero in *Ride the High Country*, such that “the viewer feels no conflicting emotions but sides wholly with the heroes.”¹⁵⁶

Akkad seems to have been well-trained in battle scenes, for both *The Message/Al-Risalah* and *Lion of the Desert* show excellent fighting and battle techniques that were probably learnt working for Peckinpah. Peckinpah was well known for his effective techniques which render violence on the screen in compelling ways; these included slow-motion action and mixing it with an “extremely kinetic mode of montage editing.”¹⁵⁷ In fact, Peckinpah has developed a “controversial reputation as a poet/exploiter of screen violence.”¹⁵⁸ However, there is an interesting contrast here between Akkad and Peckinpah, for although Peckinpah “embraced the theme of violence in his work,”¹⁵⁹ Akkad was known for not liking blood. This is despite Akkad’s involvement in the violent *Halloween* horror films. Akkad’s desert

¹⁵⁴ Prince, *Savage Cinema: Sam Peckinpah*, xiv.

¹⁵⁵ Prince, *Savage Cinema: Sam Peckinpah*, 229-230.

¹⁵⁶ Prince, *Savage Cinema*, 229-230.

¹⁵⁷ Prince, *Savage Cinema*, 230.

¹⁵⁸ Prince, *Savage Cinema*, 47.

¹⁵⁹ Prince, *Savage Cinema*, 48.

epics were not very bloody in comparison to today's films, but were probably more graphic than the typical film from the Arab world.

It is difficult to categorize Akkad's films. Despite being an Arab, Akkad did not associate his work with Arab cinema or, for that matter, European cinema, and therefore he was not limited by these categories. He saw himself as belonging to a new group of pioneers and defined himself as an international Hollywood-trained filmmaker, but with an Arab heart.

In addition to examining Akkad's desert epics in this chapter, we will also look at the horror films which Akkad produced in the latter stage of his career and which became the *Halloween* movie franchise. In total, Akkad produced eight of these movies, which were highly successful, acquiring a cult following among young people, particularly in the US.

3.4 *The Message/Al-Risalah*

In the first half of the 1970s, Akkad produced and directed two completely separate versions of one epic film about the origins of Islam and the life of the Muslim Prophet Muhammad, with both films being released in 1976. One version of this film was in Arabic (called *Al-Risalah*) and the other was in English (called *The Message*).¹⁶⁰ Both versions of the film were based on one script outline, but there were a number of variations between the Arabic and English scripts. Moreover, Akkad used a separate cast of actors for each of the versions. Akkad thought it important to make two versions because he wanted to give the Western cinema audience a version that they could understand, in their language: "I make films in

¹⁶⁰ When the film was first released in the US it was called *Mohammed, Messenger of God* but Akkad later changed this title to *The Message*.

their language, using their actors and addressing their logic and ideas. I speak to them.”¹⁶¹ Unless I am comparing or contrasting these two films in this thesis (*The Message* and *Al-Risalah*), I will refer to them together as one work: *The Message/Al-Risalah*.

It is not surprising that this huge and amazingly ambitious project resulted in Akkad’s most significant work, which is described in the Internet Movie Database (IMDb) as a “handsomely-mounted historical epic.” This project used an acting cast of hundreds and a technical crew of thousands. The fact that the technical crew outnumbered the acting cast on this project reflects the complexities and scale of the technical work required to create this film. Although the film was not made by Hollywood, “it draws heavily on Hollywood technology, techniques and traditions.”¹⁶²

In 1973, three years before the release of *The Message/Al-Risalah*, the film *Jesus Christ Superstar* “was shown in countless cinemas all over the world and made a deep impression on audiences. Of course, this did not remain unnoticed by Muslims, and an initiative to produce a similar film about Muhammed followed.”¹⁶³ This is reflected in the fact that production for *The Message/Al-Risalah* started in 1974, the year after *Jesus Christ Superstar* was released. Also, although specific information on this is lacking, it is likely that *The Message/Al-Risalah* could have also been inspired by the film *The Ten Commandments*, which was released by Cecil B. DeMille in 1956. Akkad saw the film as a way to bridge the gap between the Western and Islamic world, stating in a 1976 interview:

I did the film because it is a personal thing for me. Besides its production values as a film, it has its story, its intrigue, its drama. Beside all this I think there was something personal, being Muslim myself who lived in the West, I felt that it was my obligation my duty to tell the truth about Islam. It is a

¹⁶¹From *Aleppo to Hollywood*, 2007

¹⁶²*The Making of Mohammed, Messenger of God*, 1976

¹⁶³ Bakker, *The Challenge of The Silver Screen*, 190.

religion that has a 700 million following, yet so little is known about it, which surprised me. I thought I should tell the story that will bridge this gap to the West.¹⁶⁴

3.4.1 *The Message/Al-Risalah* – The Process

3.4.1.1 Creative Development

As mentioned before, when Akkad first started thinking about this subject, he was thinking about a documentary film on the life of the Prophet Muhammad. The role of Akkad's friend Muhammad Sanousi was very important in the development and realization of this idea. Sanousi had met Akkad through a contact from the United Nations in New York and they became good friends due to their shared interest in film and in their common Arabic language and culture.¹⁶⁵ They started working together in 1966 when Akkad was working as a TV Producer on American shows based in Los Angeles under the influence of his mentor Peckinpah. During this time, Akkad trained Sanousi in many aspects of filmmaking (including camera work and editing) and together they started working on the idea for a film about Islam. In this context, it is interesting to explore how Islam was represented in the US at the time. There were a number of significant events and conflicts during this time that exacerbated negative American attitudes toward Islam. Edward Said's *Covering Islam*, published around the same time that Akkad's film was made, summarizes the most important of these events:

[The] Gulf oil producing states suddenly appeared to be very powerful; there was an extraordinarily ferocious and seemingly unending civil war in Lebanon... the Kurdish problem unexpectedly became pivotal and then, after 1975 just as unexpectedly subsided... Iran deposed its monarch in the wake of a massive, wholly surprising "Islamic" revolution... Afghanistan was gripped by a Marxist coup in 1978... a war between Iran and Iraq, the rise of Hamas

¹⁶⁴*The Making of Mohammed, Messenger of God*, 1976.

¹⁶⁵"Al Sanousi Yatahaddath."

and Hezbollah, a series of bomb outrages in Israel and elsewhere, a bloody civil war in Algeria between Islamists and a discredited government...¹⁶⁶

In particular, the 1967 war between the Arab countries and the Israeli state exacerbated the negative images of Islam and Arabs in American and other Western media. Palestinians and other Arabs in this context were seen by the West as “terrorists.”

This sentiment increased due to the 1973 October War, which also fed into stereotypes about existential threats from Arabs and Muslims. The way these events were depicted in the media had a very negative effect on the image of Islam in the West generally and in the US in particular. So little was (and is) known by Americans about this religion, that there was an unquestioned assumption that Islam could be characterized limitlessly by means of a handful of recklessly general and repeatedly deployed clichés. Said mentions that:

Islam has entered the consciousness of most Americans – even of academic and general intellectuals who know a great deal about Europe and Latin America – principally if not exclusively because it has been connected to newsworthy issues like oil, Iran and Afghanistan or terrorism.¹⁶⁷

Against this background, the friendship between Akkad and Sanousi developed. As their friendship grew and their work together continued, they became more ambitious in their aspirations and started to think of the project as an epic film about Islam as opposed to a documentary. Given the powerfully negative representations of Islam in the media at the time, Akkad and Sanousi were very much forward-thinking in their desire to create a film to present a positive image of Islam to the West. Their aim and work was unique during a time when Western media was full of anti-Islamic sentiment:

¹⁶⁶Said, *Covering Islam*, 18.

¹⁶⁷Said, *Covering Islam*, 16.

[The] difficulty is that some occidental readers are still not completely free from the prejudices inherited from their medieval ancestors. In the bitterness of the Crusaders and other wars against the Saracens, they came to regard the Muslims, and in particular Muhammad, as the incarnation of all that was evil, and the continuing effect of the propaganda of that period has not yet been completely removed from occidental thinking about Islam. It is still much commoner to find good spoken about Buddhism than about Islam.¹⁶⁸

During a time when media contained numerous misrepresentations of Islam and when there was no “American expert on the Islamic world whose audience was a wide world”,¹⁶⁹ Said notes that “Not even Carlyle could make the Prophet widely acceptable.”¹⁷⁰ However, with the film *The Message/Al-Risalah*, Akkad was in fact aiming to accomplish just that.

Both Akkad and Sanousi participated¹⁷¹ in the activities of the Islamic Center¹⁷² in Los Angeles, which is known today as the ‘Islamic Center of Southern California’.¹⁷³ On its website, the centre puts forward the image of a tolerant and peaceful Islam, just as Akkad aimed to show in *The Message/Al-Risalah*. It states on its website: “Islam is a universal mercy of God. Muslims identify primarily as Muslims not as an ethnic group, race, color, or tribe. No ethnic activities, or overtones are allowed in the Center.” It also clearly states on the website: “The Center is committed to progressive performance and to the state of the art in all the ways and means of projecting and propagating Islam.”¹⁷⁴ It is significant that when Akkad died it was noted that a “memorial service was held on November 27, 2005, at

¹⁶⁸Watt, “Muhammad,” 30.

¹⁶⁹Said, *Covering Islam*, 17.

¹⁷⁰Said, *Covering Islam*, 14.

¹⁷¹ Akkad, Nabil, personal interview, 24 February 2009.

¹⁷²“Al Sanousi Yatahaddath.”

¹⁷³“Islamic Center of Southern California.”

¹⁷⁴“Islamic Center of Southern California.”

Los Angeles' Islamic Center of Southern California, which Akkad had long supported."¹⁷⁵

Both Akkad and Sanousi were attracted to the idea of creating a film that would counter the problem that Islam "is often misunderstood in spite of the public relations efforts of various organizations"¹⁷⁶ in the US. The way Islam was covered in the American media gave "consumers of news the sense that they have understood Islam without at the same time intimating to them that a great deal in this energetic coverage is based on far from objective material."¹⁷⁷ bThis portrayal of Islam is characterized by "not only patent inaccuracy but also expressions of unrestrained ethnocentrism, cultured and even racial hatred, deep yet paradoxically free-floating hostility."¹⁷⁸ Also around this time, both Akkad and Sanousi had their first children, and it was natural for them to be concerned about how to communicate the true meaning of their Muslim faith to a new generation of Muslims growing up in the West, who would be constantly exposed to the inaccurate views of Islam held by the general public.

In assessing the importance of Sanousi to his work, Akkad said:

I found Mohammed to possess artistic energy, knowledgeable background, and far sightedness; therefore, we became friends and colleagues in the profession. By chance, I was making a documentary series for United Artists around the world and [the idea for a film on] Mohammed started with us. This was an opportunity for him to train in all areas of production from editing to camera work, sounds, and directing... I intended to make this film a documentary because a dramatic work would have had a huge cost. Mohammed insisted that if we go to the Gulf, we would be able to get sufficient funding.¹⁷⁹

¹⁷⁵ Curtis and Samara-Alkhayyat, "Akkad, Moustapha."

¹⁷⁶ Lovell, "Islam in the United States," 93.

This article made this statement based on responses to questionnaires the authors sent in the 1970s and 1980s to various formal and informal Islamic organizations in the US and Canada.

¹⁷⁷ Said, *Covering Islam*, 1.

¹⁷⁸ Said, *Covering Islam*, 1.

¹⁷⁹ "Al Sanousi Yatahaddath."

Sanousi was crucial in persuading the right people in the Middle East to invest enough on the basis of Akkad's training and experience to let him direct and produce the high-budget film that he wanted to make about Islam. The focus on obtaining film funding in the Gulf is significant, because "when the [film] industry in Egypt experienced serious funding issues starting in the 1970s because of governmental budget cutbacks, sponsors from the Arabian Gulf helped produce and finance many film projects, including *The Message*."¹⁸⁰

3.4.1.2 Financial and Political Support

From the beginning, Akkad struggled to raise the large budget he needed for his film. Nothing is known about the potential investors Akkad approached or their reasons for refusing to fund his film. Given the negative attitude prevalent at the time about Islam, it is not surprising that Akkad would have faced Hollywood resistance to his film. There were also creative and cultural differences. Hollywood would have wanted to show on screen figures like the Prophet Muhammad, which is seen as blasphemous in Islam. For these reasons, Akkad had to go outside the US to raise the production money needed for the film.

In 1973, the film *Jesus Christ Superstar* was released and became an important stimulus for Akkad: "It was this film's success... that motivated certain Muslims to finance and start the production of *The Message*."¹⁸¹ To make it easier to seek Middle Eastern funding for the film, Akkad had established a production company, called Filmco, located on Al-Hamra Street in Beirut, Lebanon. His friend Sanousi later also moved to Beirut and became a junior partner in this company. An

¹⁸⁰Maisal, "Film Industry," 154.

¹⁸¹ Bakker, *Challenge of the Silver Screen*, 10.

important step for this project came when the high-profile Saudi Arabian businessman, Adnan Khashoggi,¹⁸² agreed to become a partner in Filmco. Adnan Khashoggi was represented in this venture by his younger brother, Essam Khashoggi, who served as Chairman of the Filmco board of directors. The Khashoggis provided extremely important initial funding that would allow Akkad to start the process of developing *The Message/Al-Risalah*.

However, funds provided by the Khashoggi brothers were only enough to cover the initial writing/expenses/travel/office activities for the film.¹⁸³ Akkad became discouraged because there did not seem to be any other sources of funding. However, in his role as co-producer of the film, and as a Kuwaiti citizen, Sanousi managed to get the financial and creative support of the Kuwaiti government, which elevated the project from its shaky beginnings to a more solid foundation. This was the turning point in the making of *The Message/Al-Risalah*. One of the key Kuwaiti figures in this process was Abdul Al-Rahman Al-Ateeqi (the Minister of Finance and Oil), who approved not only of the idea of the project but also the script. Al-Ateeqi's support helped to gain the support of Libya, Morocco and other Arab countries. He personally made telephone calls to Moroccan and Libyan government ministers to gather support for the film.¹⁸⁴ The project was structured with Bahrain as the company base, which meant that it was exempt from Kuwaiti taxes and other

¹⁸² Adnan "AK" Khashoggi, as part of the Arab privileged social network having been a Victoria College student in Egypt and later a student of Stanford University, had much in common with Akkad, and so had similar views and outlooks on life.

"Al Risalah: Malem Yuqual."

¹⁸³ This was around US\$ 350,000, which was spent on travel, writers' expenses and other costs for the script-writing process

"Al Risalah: Malem Yuqual."

¹⁸⁴ It is not known exactly to whom these calls were made. However, it would probably be the case that Al-Ateeqi called figures like Jalloud in Libya (who was oil minister as well as Prime Minister of Libya), since Jalloud did eventually become one of the film's supporters.

restrictive laws.¹⁸⁵ This meant that other Arab countries could also get involved in its financing because it freed the company from exclusively Kuwaiti control and changed *The Message/Al-Risalah* from an ordinary film project into a Muslim Arab project that worked for the benefit of the Islamic Middle East. This gave the film a higher level of importance and relevance to the national and religious agendas of a variety of states.

Libya then added its support to the project, through Prime Minister Abdessalem Jalloud, who was the second most powerful man in Libya after Libyan Leader Qaddafi,¹⁸⁶ followed by Morocco. Kuwait, Libya and Morocco each joined the board of directors and each took 25% of company stock.¹⁸⁷ In this way, the company provided 75% of the movie budget from its capital and borrowed the rest in order to fund this movie and, eventually, it was hoped, others. On the company's board of directors, Kuwait was represented by Sanousi and Abd Al-Aziz Khalid Al-Mufarrej,¹⁸⁸ and Libya was represented by its Deputy Minister of Media and Culture Muhammed Al-Zwee and by Abdul Fattah Al-Wasie. Already by the 1970s, "foreign film production ha[d] a long history in Morocco"¹⁸⁹ and in the period "from 1956 to 1980, approximately 30 foreign productions were shot in Morocco", including *Lawrence of Arabia* in 1962 and *The Message* in 1976.¹⁹⁰ Akkad was able to obtain the support of the King of Morocco, who exerted a strong authority on the Moroccan national bank, the Savings and Management Bank, which became a key financial

¹⁸⁵ By law, a Kuwaiti national had to own 51% of any company based in Kuwait "Al Risalah: Malem Yuqual."

¹⁸⁶ Al-Ateeqi gave letters of introduction and had working relationships with these people.

¹⁸⁷"Al Sanousi Yatahaddath."

¹⁸⁸ All these Kuwaiti and Libyan Ministers were in powerful positions in their governments, and were very important in initial funding of the project, and also maintaining the financial stability needed for a project this size.

¹⁸⁹Dwyer, *Beyond Casablanca*, 122.

¹⁹⁰Dwyer, *Beyond Casablanca*, 123.

contributor and served as director on the board of the company that was formed as the consortium between Morocco, Libya and Kuwait to fund the making of *The Message/Al-Risalah*.¹⁹¹ This board of directors met regularly and provided important stability as well as political and financial support to Akkad's work on this film and specifically Akkad's next desert epic, *Lion of the Desert*.¹⁹²

Although they saw the attraction of making a film like *The Message/Al-Risalah*, the board of directors for the consortium of investors at first had misgivings about Akkad's ability to make *The Message/Al-Risalah*, since he had never made this kind of film before. However, these misgivings gradually diminished, initially in recognition of Akkad's film training, later his innovation and creativity in developing the idea for the film, and finally because of his ability to gather around him a large talented crew and cast who were experienced in Hollywood epic productions, many of whom were Oscar and BAFTA winners. One of the key elements for securing financial support for the project was Akkad setting up a production office in the Middle East (Beirut). Another was Akkad's connection with Adnan Khashoggi and Akkad's ability to persuade Khashoggi to provide initial seed money for the project. When this initial seed money ran out, the support of Sanousi was essential to Akkad, as it was Sanousi who went to Kuwait and was able to convince other important people to support the project. One of the important facets of Akkad's filmmaking process was his ability to get financial support that enabled him to produce big-budget epic films on a scale that had not been done before. It is not clear to what extent Akkad was able to succeed in securing this funding while maintaining full creative control. However, based on the information available, it seemed that for

¹⁹¹"Al Sanousi Yatahaddath."

¹⁹²"Al Sanousi Yatahaddath."

Akkad it was a bigger challenge to try and maintain creative control over the strong views of his religious backers.

3.4.1.3 Gaining Religious Support

The subject of the film raised many challenges for Akkad. He was creating a film about Islam, and was likely to be judged harshly by his critics on the grounds that he was an Arab Muslim man who should know the culture and customs of the Muslim and Arab world. One of the key challenges Akkad faced when making *The Message/Al-Risalah* is that, in accordance with the tenants of Islam, it is forbidden for any Prophet (especially the Prophet Muhammad) to be personified, and hence seen or heard on film. Akkad's unique and inventive solution for this challenge was to make the film without ever depicting Muhammad. Under Akkad's direction, "actors addressed an empty space where viewers were to imagine the Prophet."¹⁹³ In fact, in some scenes the audience appears to be seeing through Muhammad's eyes. This is reflected for example in the scene where the character played by Anthony Quinn, Hamza, addresses the camera directly when asking the Prophet for permission to fight against their enemies. The technique of using the camera in this way brings the audience closer and gives a more intimate understanding of Muhammad. This is appropriate since Akkad's main aim was to increase understanding and sympathy for this Muslim hero.

Using a camel to indicate the Prophet's presence is also a clever technique to overcome the problem of not showing a personification of Muhammed on the screen. In the film, we feel the aura of the Prophet as if he is riding his camel (It is a historical fact that Muhammed and Abu Bakr travelled to Medina riding their camels).

¹⁹³"Al Sanousi Yatahaddath."

Interestingly, the religious sensitivity in depicting Muslim prophets was a challenge also faced by the Egyptian filmmaker Youssef Chahine. This issue caused a great deal of controversy in Chahine's 1994 film *The Emigrant (Al-Muhajir* in Arabic). This film was considered by a number of Muslims to be sacrilegious because it told the story of Joseph, even though it was set in the fourteenth century BC, as it appears in the Qur'an.¹⁹⁴ As a result of this perceived offense by Muslim radicals, Chahine's film was banned. Chahine himself was prosecuted in a court of law and charged with blasphemy and the court case attracted a lot of attention:

[T]he scene in front of the courthouse was one of uproar. While hundreds of people were stampeding to get in, two scholars were holding a cross-fire debate... on the steps outside... suddenly a sinister-looking man stretched his neck and threatened in a calm but chilling voice: "Anyone who dares to touch our religion will be dismembered."¹⁹⁵

Although Chahine was eventually acquitted of the charge of blasphemy, many radical Muslims are still critical of his film.

It can be said that controversy and films seem to be always connected in the Arab world. Akkad tried to reduce this risk by consulting with Islamic scholars around the Arab world, before and during the making of *The Message/Al-Risalah*, in order to try to get their approval for the film and to reassure everyone concerned that his film would show a respectful portrayal of Muhammad. Even before starting production, Akkad managed to get the approval of the Shi'a Council of Lebanon and of the Egyptian Islamic scholars of the prestigious Al-Azhar University, which stamped their authorization on the script page by page¹⁹⁶(Al-Azhar put certain conditions on the film, which were seen as normal and did not disturb Akkad's vision

¹⁹⁴ Fawal, *Youssef Chahine*, 169.

¹⁹⁵ Fawal, *Youssef Chahine*, 176.

¹⁹⁶ "Al Sanousi Yatahaddath."

of his project). However, he did not gain support from Wahhabi¹⁹⁷ Islamic scholars in Saudi Arabia, who are generally more conservative in their views than the scholars in Egypt,¹⁹⁸ where there was already a well-established film industry. The film's production started in 1974 and this involved the construction in Morocco of a massive set representing Mecca. The Saudi Arabian Muslim scholars condemned the whole enterprise and "pressured Morocco's King Hassan II (1929-1999) into expelling the filmmakers, using the excuse that the very realistic set of Mecca might confuse true believers travelling to pray in the Holy City and cause them to venture into the bogus Mecca by mistake."¹⁹⁹ It was because of these challenges that Akkad had to change the film shoot location from Morocco to Libya.

Akkad also put a lot of work into making sure that the script of the film represented the Prophet Muhammad and Islam as accurately and respectfully as possible. For this, he went to Cairo to work with the best and most talented Egyptian writers on the script. The process of creating and perfecting the script for *The Message/Al-Risalah* was very long and painstaking.²⁰⁰ Akkad spent many months working with highly respected Egyptian writers like 'Abd al-Hamid Jawadat Al-Sahar.²⁰¹ Akkad also approached the playwright Abd al-Rahman Al-Sharqawi²⁰² and

¹⁹⁷ Wahabism is concerned with bringing Islam back to its roots by removing what are considered innovations in Islam (*Bida'a*). Forms of media like radio, TV and film were often seen negatively by Wahhabist Muslims. As Fazlur Rahman put it in *The Cambridge History of Islam*, "The movement of Muhammad b. 'Abd al-Wahhab... rejected, with... virulence... the intellectualist trends in Islam, which they looked upon with great distrust... they [Wahhabists] did practically everything in their power to discourage the actual tools of positive fresh thinking by rejecting intellectualism" (Rahman, "Revival and Reform," 638).

¹⁹⁸ The majority of Egyptians come from the Sunni Maliki school of thought, which is less strict than the Wahhabi school of thought on things like radio, TV and film.

¹⁹⁹ *The Making of Mohammed, Messenger of God*, 1976.

²⁰⁰ "Al Sanousi Yatahaddath."

²⁰¹ Al-Sahar, born in 1913 and died in 1974, was a well-known Egyptian storywriter, novelist and scriptwriter. He wrote extensively on the life of the Prophet and had extensive experience in scriptwriting for films. Najem, Mohammed, personal interview, 12 June 2010.

²⁰² Al-Sharqawi, born in 1921, was a revered Egyptian writer. He became well known particularly after the publication of his novel *The Earth* (1954). He also wrote the novel *Muhammad – the Messenger of Freedom* (1962). Najem, Mohammed, personal interview, June 12 2010.

Tawfiq Al-Hakim.²⁰³ Both these men were famous Egyptian writers who were among the most important figures in modern Arabic literature. For editing, Akkad worked with Abd al-Mun'im Al-Sawi, who was later made Minister of Culture and Information in 1977. According to the documentary made by Sanousi for the Kuwaiti Al-Watan TV station,²⁰⁴ it seems that a number of other editors, writers and translators may also have been used throughout the long process it took to write the script, but little is known about the identities or details of these people. For the English version of the film, Akkad worked with Harry Craig,²⁰⁵ an Irish Catholic scriptwriter who played an extremely important role in creating *The Message*, for he had responsibility for forming the whole script, a two-year process which he took very seriously.

Although Craig was from a Catholic background, he spent a considerable amount of time reading about and familiarizing himself with Islamic sources to ensure a genuine understanding of Islam came through in the movie. While working on the script, Craig immersed himself in Muslim culture by living in Cairo and studying hundreds of reference books on Islam. During the time when Sanousi and Akkad were establishing the writers and structure of the story, Sanousi would take Craig around to Al-Azhar Mosque and other mosques, Islamic heritage and historic sites, and introduce Craig to Cairo's popular streets. Sanousi came to consider Craig an expert on Islamic thought.²⁰⁶ Interestingly, Craig wrote a book about the first Muslim muezzin, Bilal, which told the story of this key figure in Islamic history

²⁰³Tawfiq Al-Hakim is a great Egyptian writer who is especially well known for his plays and novels (see Brugman, *Introduction to the History of Modern Arabic Literature in Egypt*, 277).

²⁰⁴"Al Sanousi Yatahaddath."

²⁰⁵ According to the IMDb website, Harry Craig (who is also known as H.A.L. Craig) was born in 1921 in County Cork, Ireland and died in 1978. He grew up in an Irish Catholic vicarage, which indicates that he had a religious background, which may have given him a deeper spiritual understanding that would have been useful in his work on *The Message/Al-Risalah* script.

²⁰⁶"Al Sanousi Yatahaddath."

from the point of view of Bilal himself.²⁰⁷ Published in 1977, this book dramatizes the story of Bilal and mixes it with historical notes.²⁰⁸ In this book, Craig is described as having a “deep and sympathetic knowledge of Islam.”²⁰⁹ This is reflected in this statement made by Craig himself when he was interviewed in the film about the making of *The Message*: “My pleasure, my privilege in writing this film was in the fact that I was writing into, and against, the ignorance of the world about this religion.”²¹⁰

The scripts for both the English and Arabic versions of the film are largely the same. However, there are a number of differences, which is not surprising given that the movies were shot separately with different casts. One of the key differences between the English *The Message* and the Arabic *Al-Risalah* appears in the scenes where Gabriel tells the illiterate Muhammad to read, with the resulting miracle that Muhammad can suddenly read. In *The Message*, the voice-over only recites one Quranic *sura* (i.e. verse) during this scene. In the Arabic version, *Al-Risalah*, two *suras* are recited. Also, scenes appear in the Arabic version that were not in the English version; for example, in the Arabic version of the film there is a scene of a good Christian being kind to a Muslim, as well as a scene in the Mecca market in which a powerful corrupt man tries to buy a poor man’s young son as a piece of property or slave. As a result, the Arabic version of the film is a little longer than the English version.

²⁰⁷The book was reprinted recently by Quartet Books Limited (15 January, 2007)

²⁰⁸Craig, *Bilal*.

²⁰⁹Craig, *Bilal*, 1.

²¹⁰*The Making of Mohammed, Messenger of God*, 1976.

3.4.1.4 The Recruitment Process

For both the English and Arabic versions of the film, the same production crew was used. The only difference was the two sets of casts. To make sure he had the best acting and technical film crews possible, Akkad followed a process of recruiting many of his crew-members from Kuwait and sending them off to be trained in skills such as make-up, costumes, lighting, camerawork, sound, acting and directing. Where he could, Akkad recruited people from the Arab world who were already experienced in filmmaking, especially from the established and prolific Egyptian film industry. Akkad also set about getting a highly skilled Western production crew and cast. This combination of Arab and Western personnel was not unknown at the time. There had been various experiments in co-production in Egypt in the 1950s and 1960s, though none were notable successes. There was also an element of co-production in Shadi 'Abd al-Salam's *The Mummy* (1969), where, although the actors were all Egyptian, he also used key technical personnel who were non-Egyptians.²¹¹ However, Akkad's use of co-production on such a large-scale is reminiscent of and perhaps also influenced by the British director David Lean. Lean employed many Arab actors as well as local production crew in Jordan when he filmed *Lawrence of Arabia* in 1962. Akkad had to work extremely hard to convince people to work on this project. One of the most important of these people was Jack Hildyard, a British cinematographer who worked on more than 80 films during his career, including *The Bridge on the River Kwai* (1957) with David Lean, for which he won an Academy Award for Best Cinematography and the British Society of Cinematographers Award. Due to Akkad's efforts, Hildyard became the

²¹¹Shohat, "Gender and Culture," 63.

cinematographer for both *The Message/Al-Risalah* and *Lion of the Desert*. The results were notable:

In [the] 1976 [film] *The Message*, the viewer is witness to long, contemplative shots of the desert and its enchanting, often beguiling beauty. The cinematography is a tip of the hat to Lean who in *Lawrence of Arabia* used wide desert shots to pull the viewer into the sands of Arabia and the heart of the Arab rebellion.²¹²

Another important person recruited by Akkad for his team was the highly talented composer Maurice Jarre, who wrote the music for *The Message/Al-Risalah*. Jarre was especially famous for his film scores and had composed the music to all of David Lean's films from *Lawrence of Arabia* onwards. Due to this work, Jarre won three Academy Awards and was nominated a total of eight times.²¹³ Anthony Quinn, an actor of Mexican-Irish origin who became American, was also a key part of *The Message/Al-Risalah*. Quinn was "the most famous and prolific Mexican American actor in Hollywood. The winner of two Oscars, he starred in more than 150 movies in a career spanning 60 years."²¹⁴ Significantly, Quinn had experience in another earlier desert epic, since he too had worked with Lean on *Lawrence of Arabia*. Akkad cast Quinn to act in the English version of the film both for his highly respected acting talent and for his Hollywood box-office profile. Others who worked for Akkad include Irene Papas, a highly regarded Greek actress who appeared in *Zorba the Greek* with Quinn, and the Syrian-American Michael Ansara, who had a solid career on American television.

²¹²Atraqchi, "An Arab American Director's Legacy."

²¹³In 1985, Jarre won an Oscar for "Best Musical, Original Score" for *A Passage to India*; in 1966 he won an Oscar for "Best Music, Score, substantially original" for *Doctor Zhivago*; in 1963 he won an Oscar for "Best Music, Score, substantially original" for *Lawrence of Arabia*; and in 1978 he was nominated for an Oscar for "Best Music, Original Score" for Akkad's movie *The Message*. Jarre also won two British BAFTA Awards: in 1990, for Best Original Film Score for *Dead Poets' Society*; and in 1986 Best Score for *Witness*. "Maurice Jarre."

²¹⁴Stacy, *Mexico and the United States*, 686.

Michael Ansara was born April 1922, in a small village in Syria. Ansara went to the US with his parents at the age of two, living in New England, until the family's relocation to California ten years later. He was studying to be a doctor when he got into drama classes. Had a stint at Pasadena Playhouse (fellow students: Charles Bronson, Aaron Spelling), which led to stage, TV and film work. He had a starring role (as Cochise) on the popular *Broken Arrow* (1956), which gave him TV fame.²¹⁵ For the Arabic version of the film, Akkad also drew an impressive list of Arab actors with excellent training and experience, including Abdullah Gaith²¹⁶ for the role of Hamza and Muna Wassef²¹⁷ for the role of Hind.

3.4.1.5 Filming Process

A big challenge in filming *The Message/Al-Risalah* was the fact that Akkad had to shoot two films at the same time, one in English and the other in Arabic. This meant that in practice *The Message/Al-Risalah* required double the work needed for one single film and created double the amount of challenges. The process Akkad had to go through to find an appropriate location for shooting the film was extremely challenging. At first, Akkad considered Algeria.²¹⁸ Despite its beautiful locations, the Algerian bureaucracy made this a very difficult option even with the help of the Algerian Cinema Organization. Eventually, Morocco was chosen to be the location for filming, as it had expertise in co-production and foreign filmmaking, especially

²¹⁵ "Michael Ansara."

²¹⁶ Abdullah Gaith, an Arab actor from Egypt born in 1930 and died 12 March 1993. He had a famous actor brother called Hamdi Gaith who died in 2006. Gaith studied theatre in the High Institute of Theatrical Arts and worked mostly in theatre and TV, and less in cinema. His most famous role in cinema was his role as Prophet Muhammad's uncle Hamza in *Al-Risalah*.

"Abdullah Gaith." Wikipedia website.

²¹⁷ Mona Wassef was born on 9 February 1942 in Damascus, Syria and is a famous Syrian stage, film, and television actress. Wassef has a high profile as an actress in the Arab world, and was in *Al-Risalah*.

"Mona Wassef." Wikipedia website.

²¹⁸"Al Sanousi Yatahaddath."

Hollywood productions.²¹⁹ It is not surprising that Akkad chose Morocco since it was gaining an international reputation for film production in the 1970s.²²⁰ As Armes describes, “Moroccan film output has grown steadily for almost forty years, and with the 150 features made by some sixty directors in the period to the end of 2004, Morocco is now the leading film producer in the area.”²²¹ After scouting a number of possible sites, Akkad found a small village about half an hour away from Marrakech to be used for making the film. The village only had a few houses, so the Kaaba was built in the central square of the village. Many practical difficulties had to be overcome to ensure that there was somewhere to house and feed the large number of cast and crew during the many months of the shoot.²²² Everything had to be brought in from abroad and had to be of the highest quality, to ensure the filming work could be done without disruption or problems. Many high-profile producers called Akkad and his co-producer Mohammad Sanousi to say that even the biggest movies “out there” did not have the “momentum”²²³ of this project.

However, as the filming process started for *The Message/Al-Risalah* on location in Morocco, Akkad faced still more challenges. On 24 July 1974, after six months of shooting, pressure from Saudi Arabia increased to the point that King Faisal of Saudi Arabia personally asked King Hassan II of Morocco to stop the filming at once. Akkad tried to avoid Saudi Arabian hostility to the film by shooting it in secret, but the Saudis found out.²²⁴

Hostility to *The Message/Al-Risalah* from many Muslim countries was intense, not only from Saudi Arabia. Various media channels in places like Kuwait, India,

²¹⁹ Some scenes from *Lawrence of Arabia* were shot in Morocco.

²²⁰ Armes, *African Filmmaking*, 41.

²²¹ Armes, *African Filmmaking*, 41.

²²² “Al Sanousi Yatahaddath.”

²²³ “Al Sanousi Yatahaddath.”

²²⁴ “Al Sanousi Yatahaddath.”

Pakistan and Indonesia carried hostile reports on the “Muhammad movie” that was being made. The situation became very tense politically between Saudi Arabia and Morocco. Saudi Muslim scholars considered the film to be harmful to Islam.²²⁵ Morocco was engaged in border disputes over its desert territories (Western Sahara) and could not afford to lose the support of the Saudi Arabian kingdom or any other Islamic or Arabic countries in the United Nations. The ‘Western Sahara’ is a disputed territory in North Africa, bordered by Morocco and Algeria. The desert area was and still is an important issue for Morocco. Also, Saudi Arabia was threatening to boycott the Summit of the League of Muslim Countries, an important conference that was about to be held in Morocco.²²⁶ Pressure was mounting and Akkad was faced with losing the shoot and all the financial investments needed to create his film.

In response, Akkad and his team turned to the Libyan government for support. Libya had a relatively young and idealistic leader in Muammar Al-Qaddafi, who was seen as someone who could be supportive of continuing to shoot the film project in Libya. One of the directors of the Filmco board, ‘Abd al-Fattah Al-Waseeq, was crucial in helping Akkad to win the support of Qaddafi.²²⁷ Akkad explained the situation to Qaddafi and showed him what footage had already been shot. Qaddafi then famously stated “Ahlan wa sahan fee Libya ya Mustapha” (welcome to Libya Mustafa).²²⁸ Qaddafi “was eager to sponsor the film and provided locations in his country.”²²⁹ He also indicated that, from the footage of the film that he had been shown, he could not understand why the Saudis would be against it. Thus, after a

²²⁵ When I interviewed Zohair Akkad in Syria, April 2009, he said the Saudi Arabians informally later conveyed their regret at their taking this view.

²²⁶“Al Sanousi Yatahaddath.”

²²⁷“Al Sanousi Yatahaddath.”

²²⁸*From Aleppo to Hollywood*, 2007.

²²⁹ Bakker, *The Challenge of The Silver Screen*, 191.

stressful six-month wait, it became possible for the filming to resume in Libya. This saved the project from failure, and the film teams were moved from Morocco to Libya on large ships, which took months and created many financial losses.²³⁰ During this time, Akkad had serious worries over losing actors like Anthony Quinn and Irene Papas, who had other commitments. However, despite this, Akkad succeeded in completing the rest of the filming of *The Message/Al-Risalah*. The English version of the film (*The Message*) and the Arabic version of it (*Al-Risalah*) were both shot together in a process that took about a year to complete.

3.4.1.6 Release of *The Message/Al-Risalah*

Both the English and Arabic versions of *The Message/Al-Risalah* were released together in the summer of 1976. The films ran until September 1976. In his memoir, Anthony Quinn says that the film “did virtually no business in the States... outside of a few urban areas with significant Muslim populations, but the wide international release made me a star in the Arab world. It also made a tremendous amount of money for Moustapha Akkad and me.”²³¹ This summary of the financial performance of the film was also confirmed by Akkad’s accountant on this film Maurice Landsberger, when I interviewed him in October 2010. Releasing the film to the public brought new challenges which Akkad had to overcome. Despite everything Akkad had done to get approval from Muslim scholars for the film, it became “one of the most controversial films of the 70s.”²³² When the English version of the film (*The Message*) was released in the US, the UK and Japan, Akkad received death threats from people who were hostile to the film because it was not

²³⁰“Al Sanousi Yatahaddath.”

²³¹ Quinn and Paisner, *One Man Tango*, 404.

²³²Brooks, “Controversial biopic of Muhammad set for remake”.

approved by the Islamic conference in Saudi Arabia. Also, unfounded rumours were circulated by people who had not seen the film saying that Muhammad was depicted in the film by an actor. Indeed, Bakker states that “Rumour had it that the role of Muhammad would be played by Charlton Heston, who played Moses in *The Ten Commandments*.”²³³ Muslims reacted angrily and protested against what they saw as something offensive and disrespectful to Islam. Some Muslims reacted negatively to the original title of the film, which was “Muhammad, Messenger of God.” This resulted in Akkad changing the film’s title to *The Message*.²³⁴ Due to the “opposition it aroused, the film was not shown in many cinemas but can be seen on video or DVD and the main European broadcasting companies occasionally show it on television.”²³⁵ In March 1977, the release of the film sparked a siege in the US when the Black Muslim Militants of the American Muslim Hanafi organization stormed the site of the Jewish B’nai B’rith organization in Washington DC and took 149 people hostage. One of this organization’s demands was that the film be withdrawn because they considered it to be sacrilege.²³⁶ Akkad was stunned by this reaction, saying simply that, “I made the film to bring the story of Islam, the story of 700 million people, to the West.”²³⁷ As a result of the Hanafi siege, a police officer and a radio reporter were killed while others were injured. The hostages were eventually released after a 39-hour stand-off. According to Akkad, “the film’s American box-office prospects never quite recovered from the unfortunate controversy.”²³⁸

²³³ Bakker, *The Challenge of The Silver Screen*, 189.

²³⁴ Bakker, *The Challenge of The Silver Screen*, 189.

²³⁵ Bakker, *The Challenge of The Silver Screen*, 189.

²³⁶ Bakker, *The Challenge of The Silver Screen*, 191.

²³⁷ Akkad told the Associated Press in 1977 and also talked of why he made the movie in the documentary of the film: “The Making of The Message.”

²³⁸ Brooks, “Controversial biopic of Muhammad set for remake”.

The film also appeared to have had a somewhat sceptical response from the satirical British publication *Punch*. In a paraphrased interview between Akkad and David Taylor, the magazine reports that:

Akkad... is persuaded that with a first-class crew, or more exactly, two first-class crews split between the English and Arabic versions, all it takes is determination and superficial nerves of steel. Indeed he scarcely pauses over the fundamental hitch in making a movie on Mohammed, which is that despite having Anthony Quinn on your cast list, it is not permitted to show the face or the back of the neck of the Prophet himself. Not wanting to spend millions on some Islamic version of "The Invisible Man", Akkad claims to have got round that one by having the whole story told through Mohammed's eyes.²³⁹

The English version of the film (*The Message*) was ranked for popularity by users of the Internet Movie Database (IMDb) as one of the top 20 films in the US and UK until 1979, outranking a number of Hollywood and British films like *The Life of Brian*.

Purely in this context, Akkad's film was in a category that included classics like *The Godfather*, *Apocalypse Now*, *Alien*, and *Annie Hall*. However, despite this popularity ranking by IMDb users perhaps suggesting otherwise, the film was not a commercial box-office success, as is reflected by the fact that it is not mentioned on any of the Internet Movie Database Website lists for top grossing films in the US and UK.

Akkad recognized that it was a unique achievement just for this film to get through the completion process and come to exist. When *The Message/Al-Risalah* was shown in London on 2 May 1977, Akkad wrote in a letter to Sanousi that, in his view, his project team "overcame ignorance, hate, and blackmail and by following the example of our noble Prophet Muhammad, peace be upon him, the film became an honorable reality."²⁴⁰

There were a number of Middle Eastern countries which welcomed the release of the film and continued to support Akkad, including Morocco, Jordan and

²³⁹ Taylor "London Charivari," 154

²⁴⁰"Al Sanousi Yatahaddath."

Libya.²⁴¹ However, other countries like Saudi Arabia and Egypt continued to be hostile to the film for some time²⁴², because they considered it too revolutionary, despite its aim of providing a more positive view of Islam and the Prophet Muhammad's life than was then available in the West. Despite support from key figures in the Kuwaiti government for *The Message/Al-Risalah* project, there was a lack of support from the Kuwaiti media, who were suspicious of the project. It seems to have triggered a negative reaction amongst Islamic figures in Kuwait before it was even released,²⁴³ despite having the official support of the Egyptian and Lebanese Islamic authorities. However, this is based on limited evidence, because the only available sources recording the criticism and reactions that *The Message/Al-Risalah* received in the Gulf countries are Mohammed Sanousi's accounts in the Al-Watan documentary²⁴⁴ and the Al-Jazeera documentary.²⁴⁵

3.4.2 *The Message/Al-Risalah* – The Result

The Message/Al-Risalah is Akkad's most significant and ambitious film, since it is the only feature film about the Prophet Muhammad. It is quite impressive as a directorial debut, and Akkad was also the producer of the film. Before exploring the subject-matter, themes and other aspects of this film more closely, I will start with a brief summary of the storyline.

²⁴¹"Al Sanousi Yatahaddath."

²⁴²"Al Sanousi Yatahaddath."

²⁴³"Al Sanousi Yatahaddath."

²⁴⁴"Al Sanousi Yatahaddath."

²⁴⁵*From Aleppo to Hollywood*, 2007.

3.4.2.1 The Storyline

The Message/Al-Risalah tells the story of early Islamic history by following the life of the Muslim Prophet, Muhammad. The story is familiar to anyone acquainted with the history of Islam. A great deal has been written about the origins of Islam (indeed, as Tariq Ramadan puts it, “Countless biographies of the Prophet Muhammad already exist”²⁴⁶), ranging from Ibn Ishaq and Ibn Hisham to more contemporary books like Tariq Ramadan’s own *In the Footsteps of the Prophet*.

The film begins in the holy city of Mecca in the seventh century, where Muhammad lived and where some 300 idols were worshipped in a holy shrine called the Kaaba. While in a cave meditating, Muhammad receives a vision of the Angel Gabriel, who urges him to worship the one true God instead of the 300 idols of the Kaaba. Through this revelation, Muhammad also learns that he is to be the Prophet of the Muslim people and that he must continue to spread the same word of God as was done by the Christian and Jewish prophets before him. This is the “message” which became the title of both the English and Arabic versions of the film.

Muhammad spreads this message to others in Mecca, who become his Muslim followers. The most important of these followers is Muhammad’s uncle Hamza, who offers the fledgling group much credibility and protection from persecution in Mecca. Once the number of Muslim followers becomes large, they leave Mecca for fear of attack and seek refuge with the Christian King of Abyssinia, who protects them once he realizes that they follow the same Abrahamic God that he and his people worship. After some time, the people of Medina invite Muhammad and his followers to live with them and to give guidance on their internal conflicts. While living in Medina, the Muslims fight two battles against the Meccan armies: the

²⁴⁶ Ramadan, *In The Footsteps of The Prophet*, ix.

Battle of Badr (624 AD) and the Battle of Uhud (625 AD). The Muslims continue to teach others about their message from God, and this results in more people converting to Islam. The most significant of these were the conversions of certain Meccans who were initially some of Muhammad's staunchest enemies, such as Kahlid ibn al-Walid and Abu Sufyan.

The Muslims come back triumphantly to Mecca and liberate the city from idolatry in the name of God. Muhammad destroys the false gods in the Kabaa with his cane. The Kabaa then becomes the symbolic place of the one true God. At the end of the film, images of the ancient Muslims reclaiming the Kaaba fade to images of modern pilgrims walking around the Kabaa and shots of modern-day Muslims from all walks of life and ethnic groups praying all over the world from Spain to Indonesia.

3.4.2.2 *The Message/Al-Risalah* as an Epic Film

When Akkad created *The Message/Al-Risalah*, he was using his film-school training and Hollywood connections and aspiring to follow in the footsteps of other Hollywood religious epics such as *Ben Hur*, *The Ten Commandments* and *The Robe*. This is clear from the "tagline" released with *The Message/Al-Risalah*: "In four decades only four... *The Robe*, *The Ten Commandments*, *Ben Hur* and now... For the first time... the vast, spectacular drama that changed the world!" The movie was in the tradition of the early Biblical Hollywood movies like *Moses* and *The Ten Commandments*.²⁴⁷ In their analysis of these types of films, the scholars Bruce Babington and Peter Evans saw three types of the classic Biblical Hollywood movie: Old Testament epic films; films about the figure of Jesus Christ; and the Roman-

²⁴⁷ Akkad, Patricia, personal interview, 27 February 2009.

Christian epics. Of these, we see that *The Message/Al-Risalah* can fit in the second type, as, although it is not about Christ, Akkad's film focuses on the religious figure of Muhammad in a similar vein to the way the Biblical epics focus on Christ. Ultimately, these films strive to "mean most things to most men: literal belief for the believer, a metaphor of human aspiration for the unbeliever."²⁴⁸ In this way, *The Message/Al-Risalah* can be compared with the four key narratives of Christ's life that came out of Hollywood: *The King of Kings* (De Mille, 1927), *King of Kings* (Nicholas Ray, 1961), *The Greatest Story Ever Told* (George Stevens, 1964) and *The Last Temptation of Christ* (Martin Scorsese, 1988). Like *The Message/Al-Risalah*, these films "share an unambiguous directness" of presentation.²⁴⁹ This is reflected in a bold approach to the subject matter, an approach which avoids symbolic obliqueness and which pushes the boundary of what is an acceptable depiction of a religious figure.

Costing US\$17 million, *The Message/Al-Risalah* was a very high-budget movie to make at the time. For example, we can contrast it with movies that came out during the same period and cost less to make, such as *Star Wars*²⁵⁰ and the James Bond film *The Spy Who Loved Me*.²⁵¹ On the other hand, Akkad's film was not as expensive to make as *A Bridge Too Far*, which according to the IMDb Website cost an estimated US\$26 million. True to the epic genre, it emphasizes human drama on a grand scale by using award-winning actors and a sweeping musical score. Akkad also used sophisticated technology to enhance the viewing pleasure of the film for his audience. The film was shot using state of the art Panavision cameras, which provided an extremely wide-screen image.

²⁴⁸Babington & Evans, *Biblical Epics*, 99.

²⁴⁹Babington & Evans, *Biblical Epics*, 98.

²⁵⁰According to the IMDb Website, *Star Wars* cost an estimated US\$ 13 million to make.

²⁵¹According to the IMDb Website, this James Bond film cost an estimated US\$ 14 million to make.

3.4.2.3 The Key Characters

As an epic film, *The Message/Al-Risalah* is centred around the character of its hero, the Prophet Muhammad. However, as previously mentioned, in Islam it is forbidden for any prophet including the Prophet Muhammad, to be seen or heard on screen.²⁵² Akkad's solution to this problem was to ensure that the Prophet Muhammad never appears in any scene of the film. Visual depictions of religious figures and prophets such as Muhammad, Moses, Abraham, Jesus, the Virgin Mary, and Joseph are conventionally forbidden in Islam and Akkad is not the only filmmaker to struggle with this point. As previously mentioned in this thesis, the Egyptian filmmaker Chahine made a film called *The Emigrant* (1994), which "depicted the prophet Joseph, a 'blasphemy' for which he was taken to court".²⁵³ The prohibition of images or icons of divinity, including the representations of human beings such as prophets, whether in Islam or other religions is known as aniconism: "To deny idols, or still better to destroy them, is like translating into concrete terms the fundamental testimony of Islam, the formula of *la ilaha illa 'Llah* ('there is no divinity save God'), and just as this testimony in Islam dominates everything... so also does the denial of idols."²⁵⁴

Therefore, instead of showing the Prophet Muhammad, Akkad uses camera techniques and profound music composed by Maurice Jarre to indicate his presence. The camera techniques used by Akkad involve handling the camera in such a way so that it takes the place of the Prophet Muhammad. This means that when the characters in the movie talk to the Prophet Muhammad, they are addressing the camera directly. Interestingly, by using this technique, which gives Prophet

²⁵² Muslims believe that to show or to hear the Prophet Muhammad is idolatry.

²⁵³ Chaudhuri, *Contemporary World Cinema*, 59.

²⁵⁴ Burckhardt, *Art of Islam*, 29.

Muhammad the same position as the camera, Akkad is also creating a significant link between the Prophet Muhammad and the audience, since both share the same camera viewpoint. In this way, Akkad manages to get his audience to “see through the eyes” of the Prophet, which is a profound way for the audience, particularly the Western audience, to gain a more intimate understanding of this important Islamic figure. Although technically it was difficult to create, in its finished form the technique was very simple and powerful, in that it made the viewer feel the presence of the Prophet Muhammad. Also, for many audience members, the music which was composed by Maurice Jarre provided an element of profound spirituality that no actor could have achieved in playing the role of the Prophet Muhammad.

However, for some of Akkad’s audience, this innovation did not have the same impact. It seems that the camera techniques Akkad used in this film were not as successful with Western audiences as they were for Arab audiences. Muslim audiences seemed to accept that showing the Prophet is forbidden. However, Christian Western audiences who are raised on imagery of Jesus, Mary, and Joseph did not understand why the main character of the film was not being shown. One of the other ways Akkad aimed to make up for the fact that he could not show Prophet Muhammad was by using other characters to act as the Prophet’s spokesmen. This is especially reflected in the early scenes when the Prophet’s adopted son, Zayd, talks about what Muhammad experienced when the angel Gabriel appeared to him.

Since the Prophet himself does not appear at all in the film, Akkad instead focused the film on another key heroic character, the larger-than-life figure of Hamza, who is played by Anthony Quinn in the English version and by the reputed Egyptian actor Abdullah Ghaith in the Arabic version. Hamza makes a dramatic first appearance in the film with his face masked and his chest covered in lion skin. Like

the cavalry riding in to save the cowboys in a Western film, Akkad shows Hamza riding in on a majestic horse to protect the Prophet Muhammad and the Muslims from their persecutors in Mecca. Another interesting heroic character highlighted by Akkad in this film is Bilal²⁵⁵ (played by Johnny Sekka in the English version and by Ali Ahmed Salem in the Arabic version).

The reason why the character of Bilal is important in Islamic History and in Akkad's movie is that Bilal was a black slave who gained his freedom from slavery and his dignity as an equal when he converted to Islam. This is illustrated in *The Message/Al-Risalah* in a scene when one of the Prophet's followers, Amr, is arrested and brought before the leading Meccans. When the Meccans question him, Amr preaches on the Muslim principle of equality among all people. One of the Meccans orders his slave Bilal to whip Amr, but Bilal refuses to do this. This results in Bilal suffering cruel punishment. He is about to be killed by his master when another of Muhammad's followers, Abu Bakr, saves his life by buying him from his master and setting him free. Bilal shows great courage by refusing to renounce Islam even while he is suffering punishment from his master. As a freed man, he becomes one of the most prominent Muslims. He also has the important role of calling the Muslims daily to prayer in his beautiful reciting voice. Even today among Muslims, the call to prayer is an honour only given to those with a powerful voice. Thus, Islam was and is still seen as a religion that gave people rights, a tradition going right back to the unfair society that existed in Pagan Mecca.

As with other epic films, the heroes in *The Message/Al-Risalah* are in stark contrast to the villains, like the leader of Mecca, Abu Sufyan,²⁵⁶ and his strong-willed

²⁵⁵ Bilal is seen as one of the original Muslim followers, and the first Black Muslim in Islam.

²⁵⁶ Abu Sufyan was played by Michael Ansara in the English version and Arabic version of the film.

and cruel wife, Hind.²⁵⁷ Akkad emphasizes Abu Sufyan's character as the villain and Prophet Muhammad's key adversary. Consistent with how he is seen in Muslim history, Akkad portrays him as a cowardly hypocrite motivated by wealth, in contrast to the brave, sincere and generous Muslims. Even when he converts to Islam towards the end of the film, Akkad shows that he does so reluctantly, out of weakness, and not as an act of true faith. Akkad also focuses on the character of Hind, whose bitterness and cruelty are contrasted to Hamza's valiant strength and kindness. Akkad uses this contrast dramatically by focusing on the scene of Hind's barbaric revenge on Hamza for killing her father and brother and in showing the character of Wahshi, the black fighter, who kills Hamza for Hind, to avenge Hamza killing her family members — as a contrast to Bilal. The film depicts through these characters two opposing ways of life: the fading Meccan traditions on one hand, and the new Medina society on the other.

Akkad also emphasizes the difference between these Muslim heroes and the non-believer villains quite simplistically, in a way that shows the believers as all good without contradictory elements to complicate their characters. For example, visually speaking, the heroic Muslims often appear wearing white clothes (both on and off the battlefield), while the non-believers wear darker colours. Although it may be seen as a crude use of an old-fashioned technique, the use of white/black to symbolize the difference between "good and evil" is a common device used in many Hollywood films, especially in Westerns where the good cowboy would wear a white hat and the villain a black hat. Akkad uses this technique less bluntly and perhaps more subtly here because, although he frequently puts the Muslims in white clothes to reflect their goodness and honour, he does not do this in every scene. Also, instead of just

²⁵⁷Hind was played by Irene Papas in the English version and by Muna Wassef in the Arabic version of the film.

putting the non-believers in black, he portrays them in colourful clothing. This may suggest that there are no absolute rules indicating the difference between “good and evil” in a simplistic way.

3.4.2.4 The Key Scenes

There are two formal battle scenes and one final conquest in *The Message/Al-Risalah*. As these take place between the Muslims and the Meccans, they symbolize extremely important and dramatic turning points in the film. The first is the Battle of Badr, which was the first large-scale engagement between the two forces and which gave the struggling Muslims their first victory against their Meccan enemies. As one of the richest and most powerful cities in Arabia at the time, Mecca had an army that significantly outnumbered that of the Muslims. Akkad uses this historic battle to good dramatic effect by showing it as the triumph against all odds by the righteous “underdog” heroes over their powerful oppressors. Before the battle, Akkad shows how the Meccans ruthlessly confiscated all the property and belongings of the exiled Muslims who went to Medina for sanctuary. Although the Muslims wish to fight the Meccans for this, the Prophet is reluctant to agree to the violence, as shown in the scene when Hamza tries to persuade him without success. In the end, as Bakker puts it, “It is only a revelation from God permitting his followers to take up arms that Muhammed gives in to, but even then he emphasizes that the Muslims must fight in accordance with the ways of God. Self-defence is allowed... God never permits them to initiate a fight.”²⁵⁸

²⁵⁸ Bakker, *The Challenge of The Silver Screen*, 197.

In his film, Akkad shows a scene of the night before the Battle of Badr that clearly contrasts the two sides. The people in the Meccan camp spend their time drinking. They are also entertained by dancing women as if they are attending a party. On the morning of the battle, the Muslims appear wearing white while the Meccans appear on the battlefield wearing darkly coloured clothes. In this way, the film “portrays the battle of Badr not... as a military engagement but as a religious and moral one. It was a struggle between people who believe in God... on the one hand and people steeped in immoral ways of life on the other.”²⁵⁹ The battle begins with the champions from each side fighting each other (Hamza, Ali, and Ubayda on the side of the Muslims) and while Hamza and Ali kill their opponents, Ubayda is fatally wounded on the battlefield. Once the battle starts, the Meccans are defeated. This scene reflects historical accounts of this battle.²⁶⁰

The second battle shown in the film between the Muslims and the Meccan armies is the Battle of Uhud. The Meccans defeated the Muslims in this battle, thereby avenging their losses from the Battle of Badr. Initially, although the Muslims were again heavily outnumbered, they managed to push back the Meccan armies. However, just as they got close to victory, the Muslims made a serious mistake, which resulted in victory for the Meccan armies. Going against their orders, the Muslim archers left their assigned posts, allowing a surprise attack from an army of horsemen led by the Meccan fighter Khalid ibn al-Walid. This caused the defeat of the Muslims, many of whom were killed or badly injured. Historically, the archers posted on the hills thought that victory was imminent for the Muslims and left their post because they wanted a share in the booty, since “war victories were measured

²⁵⁹Bakker, *The Challenge of The Silver Screen*, 197.

²⁶⁰ Ramadan, *In The Footsteps of The Prophet*, 104-105.

in their ancient pagan tradition by the amount of booty gained.”²⁶¹ This battle represents a severe setback for the Muslims, emphasized by the music as well as by staging the dramatic death of Hamza.

The most significant scene of *The Message/Al-Risalah* is the final conquest when the Muslims return home to take over Mecca and to liberate it from idolatry. The choreography of the crowds and use of music is especially effective in reflecting the intensity, drama and emotion of this Muslim victory. The Muslims pour into Mecca as a cast of thousands that is claimed to number 10,000 men.²⁶² Although the Meccans are afraid of being plundered by the advancing Muslims, none of them does any looting. Instead, they ride into Mecca with the happiness of long-term exiles finally returning home to a resounding call of “Allah Akbar” that is repeated many times. This scene is made moving by Maurice Jarre’s powerful music and the use of sweeping camera shots of the Muslim exiles flooding into Mecca, and close-ups of their sorrowful faces bursting into tears of relief at being able to finally come home. Eventually, the movement of Muslims is choreographed so that it leads up to the focal point and conclusion of the film when the Prophet enters into the Kaaba, and destroys all the idols in it. “It is a roughly built cube of stone. Yet, in the beginning, in pre-Islamic times... this cube was stuffed with pagan idols, and exploited by the privileged few to maintain a social order of hideous brutality.”²⁶³ Therefore, when Akkad shows the Prophet Muhammad destroying the pagan idols, he is also showing him destroying a social order based on unfairness and exploitation of the less privileged.

²⁶¹Ramadan, *In The Footsteps of The Prophet*, 125.

²⁶² Bakker, *The Challenge of The Silver Screen*, 198.

²⁶³“*Al Sanousi Yatahaddath*” You Tube.

3.4.3 Conclusion: *The Message/Al-Risalah*

In exploring *The Message/Al-Risalah*, it is useful and interesting to focus on this film as a creative achievement. My analysis highlights a number of Akkad's unique, interpersonal, political, creative, and entrepreneurial qualities. Akkad had ambitions that his film would help develop better communication with the West and less misunderstanding about the Arab Muslim world. Akkad especially wanted this film to help bridge the gap between the Western and Islamic worlds. "The relationship between Muslims and other religions"²⁶⁴ was something that was significant to Akkad. He deliberately brought out elements in the film that would appeal to the Jewish and Christian faiths, so he could attract a wider audience to the film. For example, he has the Christian King address the fugitive Muslims by saying: "The difference between us and you is no thicker than this line." On this point, Akkad says: "for the Western world we were putting in scenes that show the relationship between Muslims and other religions, or between Muslims and Jesus and Mary. All this helped us to advertise the film and attract a non-Muslim audience, towards watching the film."²⁶⁵ It is interesting to contrast this with Youssef Chahine's film *Al-Nasir Salah al-Din (Saladin)*, 1963, where Chahine used two "contiguous sets and alternated between them by turning the lights on and off."²⁶⁶ The effect of Chahine's technique, together with experimental editing, creates a parallel between the Muslim Saladin and the Christian King Richard, who seem to be addressing each other in what appear to be stage dialogues.

The most important purpose driving Akkad and his work is the strong aim to communicate in a way he hoped would be heard and understood. It is not possible

²⁶⁴From *Aleppo to Hollywood*, 2007.

²⁶⁵From *Aleppo to Hollywood*, 2007.

²⁶⁶Fawal, *Youssef Chahine*, 160.

to say whether Akkad succeeded in getting all his audience members to hear his “message” of communication and understanding, because details are not available about where the English-language film was screened, for how long and with what box office earnings. However, when we look at some of the positive reviews of this film, we can see that Akkad succeeded to a certain extent. In the popular magazine *Variety*, the following review appeared about *The Message* in the same year the film was released: “What lingers, along with the message of the Koran, are Jack Hildyard’s stunning photography, especially those Panavisioned and Eastman colored desert vistas, and Maurice Jarre’s scoring which is melodically powerful without being overpowering. Technically, in every department, the film is impressive.”²⁶⁷ That *The Message/Al-Risalah* is an influential film may be seen in the fact that the English version of the film was chosen by the US government to be distributed to American army organizations so that they could familiarize themselves with Islam.²⁶⁸ However, it is difficult to assess whether the film really did influence any members of the US Army.

In the view of Akkad’s son, *The Message/Al-Risalah* is one of the most watched films in the entire Islamic world, dubbed into 30 languages and seen by people who are not even able to read the Quran.²⁶⁹ In terms of numbers, it is doubtful that it reached many Western audiences beyond the Muslim Arab world, but it has undoubtedly served as a powerful teaching aid to those who are willing to listen.

²⁶⁷ Bakker, *The Challenge of the Silver Screen*, 192.

²⁶⁸ *From Aleppo to Hollywood*, 2007.

²⁶⁹ *From Aleppo to Hollywood*, 2007.

3.5 Omar al-Mukhtar/Lion of the Desert

“We were revolutionary types.”²⁷⁰

In 1980, Akkad made *Lion of the Desert*, a film about the Libyan Bedouin leader, Omar al-Mukhtar, who fought for 20 years against Italy’s occupation of Libya. The journey of this desert epic was in many ways as challenging and as interesting as *The Message/Al-Risalah*.

3.5.1 Omar al-Mukhtar/Lion of the Desert²⁷¹

3.5.1.1 Creative Development

By choosing to create a desert epic film about Omar al-Mukhtar, Akkad wanted to highlight the heroic status of this Libyan fighter who was already admired in the Arab and Muslim world for leadership qualities that “elevate his unjust death into martyrdom.”²⁷² By the time Omar al-Mukhtar was finally captured and hanged by his Italian enemies in September 1931, his name was already known across the Middle East, Asia and Africa. Many funerals were held in Damascus, Palestine, Haifa and Tripoli and prayers for the dead were held in many mosques. Moreover, “Sermons called for boycotting Italian products and shops were closed. Thousands of people went out to the streets demonstrating as a reaction to his execution.”²⁷³ Omar al-Mukhtar’s status as a heroic martyr was also immortalized in works by a number of Arab writers. For example, the highly respected neoclassical Egyptian poet Ahmad Shawqi dedicated his most popular elegy to al-Mukhtar. In this translation of Shawqi’s poem by the anthropologist Evans-Pritchard, Mukhtar’s

²⁷⁰ Here, Akkad was talking about himself and his siblings, especially the older Zohair and Layla who were close to him in age and grew up with him in Aleppo. *From Aleppo to Hollywood*, 2007.

²⁷¹ The development of this section of the thesis was enriched by a paper given on ‘Moustapha Akkad and Libya’, in the Summer of 2009, at St. Antonys College (Oxford University) at a conference on Libya.

²⁷² Nassar and Boggero, “Omar al-Muhktar,” 205.

²⁷³ Nassar and Boggero, “Omar al-Muhktar,” 205.

heroic characteristics are described and he is compared to a desert warrior from medieval Arabic poetry:

You, sword unsheathed and raised in the wildness, which gives sharpness forever to the swords of the Arabs, whose Bedouin deserts have been the scabbard of every sword which has been well tried against the enemy.²⁷⁴

Shawqi's elegy also strongly associated Mukhtar with the image of the lion (the word "lion" is repeated seven times). Once Shawqi's elegy about Mukhtar was published, a number of other Arab poets followed his example. Gibran Khalil Gibran and the Tunisian poet Mahmoud Abi Ruqaibah also wrote elegies dedicated to al-Mukhtar. Furthermore, many Libyan, North African and Palestinian poets either dedicated or wrote poetry about Omar al-Mukhtar in the realm of popular culture.²⁷⁵

Through his Syrian childhood and education, Akkad was already aware of Mukhtar as a heroic figure, but also of Khattabi of Morocco and Abd Qader of Algeria, who were important resistance fighters against European colonialism in North Africa. While shooting *The Message/Al-Risalah* in the Libyan desert, Akkad reacquainted himself with the story of Omar al-Mukhtar, and decided to revive it in a film. Akkad was especially attracted by the idea of the romantic hero warrior who refused to give up even at the cost of his life. In this way, Mukhtar was unlike Khattabi and Abd Qader, who went into exile after they were captured. Mukhtar refused to make any agreement with his captors and for that defiance he was hanged. However, it is worth noting that although Omar al-Mukhtar was a symbol of resistance, by the time of his death Libyan resistance to Italian colonization was almost defeated. Omar al-Mukhtar was executed on 16 September 1931²⁷⁶ at Soluk (a large concentration camp where Libyans who were accused of resisting the

²⁷⁴Cited in Nassar and Boggero, "Omar al-Muhktar," 207

²⁷⁵Nassar and Boggero, "Omar al-Muhktar," 8.

²⁷⁶ Santarelli, Rochat, Rainero and Goglia, *Omar al-Mukhtar*, 167.

Italians were interned), in front of some 20,000 Libyan deportees and prominent men assembled for the occasion:

‘The impression produced was enormous,’ wrote General Rodolfo Graziani [leader of the Italian colonial army in Libya], not in the least racked by doubts over his action. The deed set a suitable seal on a policy of brutal repression. France, a more shrewd colonial power, had chosen to commute the death penalties of celebrated military leaders like Abd el-Krim and Abd el-Kader, but Fascist Italy did not refrain from taking revenge, not even for the advantages that might accrue from an act of apparent generosity which would have avoided transforming the legendary seventy-year-old head of Cyrenaican resistance into a martyr of Arab independence and the Islamic faith.²⁷⁷

As he did in *The Message/Al-Risalah*, Akkad again worked with scriptwriter Harry Craig to create the screenplay. To ensure as much accuracy as possible, the script was well researched, using both Italian and Libyan sources.²⁷⁸ Akkad and Craig focused their research on accessing Italian colonial records on Libya, footage from the fascist government and other Libyan sources which were useful in putting together an accurate storyline of Omar al-Mukhtar’s real life.²⁷⁹ Akkad also hired a number of Italian researchers to gather the sources required for this process.²⁸⁰ In Libya, he found first-hand accounts of al-Mukhtar’s life from one of his personal bodyguards and other people who were alive and working with Mukhtar.²⁸¹ Akkad even managed to obtain a transcript of the actual Italian court case in which Mukhtar had been tried and then sentenced to be hanged in 1931.²⁸²

²⁷⁷ Santarelli, Rochat, Rainero and Goglia, *Omar al-Mukhtar*, 93.

²⁷⁸ *The Making of an Epic: Lion of the Desert*, 1987.

²⁷⁹ *The Making of an Epic: Lion of the Desert*, 1987.

²⁸⁰ *The Making of an Epic: Lion of the Desert*, 1987.

²⁸¹ *The Making of an Epic: Lion of the Desert*, 1987.

²⁸² *The Making of an Epic: Lion of the Desert*, 1987.

3.5.1.2 Financial and Political Support

Although *Lion of the Desert* has many characteristics of a Hollywood epic, it was not possible for Akkad, even with his UCLA/USC training and California contacts, to find funding for the film from there. Akkad was able to use the funding structure originally set up for *The Message/Al-Risalah*. However, as the subject matter of this particular film related to a Libyan hero, the majority of the funding came from Libya's Muammar al-Qaddafi, who invested US\$35 million in the film. Akkad was also able to rely on the Libyan government for political and other support for this film, such as providing the filming locations and extras from the Libyan Army.

However, although Akkad managed to persuade the Libyan government to provide this support it lost him an element of creative control over how the film should be made. The Libyan government put one condition on the film: that it should not show the former Libyan King Idris or the Senusi Muslim Order, because in their view these elements are not relevant to the story of Mukhtar. Mohammed Najem²⁸³ talks of how Moustapha Akkad, as a Syrian, and the scriptwriter Harry Craig, as an Irishman, accepted this condition because they did not understand Libyan history fully.²⁸⁴ Akkad and Craig had simply limited their subject matter to Mukhtar himself and, in this way, they lost creative control over a key element of the film.

Italian historical sources show that, during Mukhtar's time, Idris was Chief of the Senusi Order and was recognized as the Emir of the Eastern Libyan region of Cyrenaica.²⁸⁵ When the Italian military campaigns started in Libya, Idris went into exile to Egypt, which then served as the base for a guerrilla war from where men

²⁸³ BBC-trained in fiction direction in London, Mohammed Najem was an Assistant Director on *Lion of the Desert*. Najem was from Benghazi (Eastern Libya) thus giving Akkad local understanding and help on the shoot. Eastern Libya (Cyrenaica) was more involved in the Omar al-Mukhtar Libyan struggle than Western Libya (Tripoli), which was conquered by the Italian Colonizers relatively early and easily.

²⁸⁴Najem, Mohammed, personal interview, 12 June 2010.

²⁸⁵Santarelli, Rochat, Rainero and Goglia, *Omar al-Mukhtar*, 196.

from the Idris' Senusi Order waged a campaign against the colonial Italian forces.²⁸⁶ Mukhtar fought against the Italians on the side of the Senusi Order in his capacity as lieutenant and as someone who served "his lord, the Grand Senusi Idris."²⁸⁷ When the Italians eventually left the country, Idris returned and was made King of Libya, but he was a weak ruler, and was later overthrown by the Libyan government led by Muammar al-Qaddafi. Although the Libyan government sought to identify itself with Omar al-Mukhtar and his struggle to rid the country of the Italian colonialists, it was not willing to align itself with this dethroned monarch, Idris. Thus, due to the influence of the Libyan government, Akkad shows Mukhtar in the film fighting with his men alone against the Italians, without any involvement or authority of Idris' Senusi Order.

3.5.1.3 Recruitment Process

As in *The Message/Al-Risalah*, Akkad followed a painstaking process of recruiting the best acting and technical film crew possible for the making of *Lion of the Desert*. Akkad worked extremely hard to persuade a high-calibre cast of thousands to work with him on this film. Anthony Quinn and Irene Papas worked with Akkad again and this time were joined by the legendary Oliver Reed and the Oscar winners Rod Steiger and John Gielgud. Also collaborating again with Akkad on this film were composer Maurice Jarre and the British cinematographer Jack Hildyard. The cinematography was especially important in showing the beautiful desert and rocky terrains that Mukhtar and his men navigated with such tactical ease, but which were so hostile to the Italian invaders pursuing them.

²⁸⁶Santarelli, Rochat, Rainero and Goglia, *Omar al-Mukhtar*, 196.

²⁸⁷Santarelli, Rochat, Rainero and Goglia, *Omar al-Mukhtar*, 196.

Akkad also found local acting talent in the form of the little Libyan boy, whose character Ali is significant for the strong bond he forms with Mukhtar.²⁸⁸

He also recruited from Libya a number of expert advisors and crew-members, such as Muhammed Najem and Ali Achmed Taram,²⁸⁹ whom he used as Assistant Directors.²⁹⁰ Akkad aimed to support his fellow Arabs and wanted to give them the opportunity of working on such a big epic film production. He enjoyed their company on a personal as well as a professional level, and gave them privileges that others did not have, like watching the daily rushes and going to the screenings in Akkad's Twickenham Film Studios.²⁹¹ Akkad also hired Libyan advisors who could help him to ensure the accuracy and authenticity of the film, including, for example, Omar al-Mukhtar's personal bodyguard Twajeey Abd Jaleel, who was only a 17-year-old boy during the Libyan-Italian war. He made bullets for Mukhtar and his men, and had invaluable knowledge about the types of guns used and the way the war was fought.²⁹²

3.5.1.4 Filming Process

The location for shooting of *Lion of the Desert* was not as difficult to establish as it was for *The Message/Al-Risalah*. With the support of the Libyan government, Akkad decided on a location near the city of Benghazi.²⁹³ For authenticity, Akkad filmed the battle scenes in the locations where the real fighting between the Libyans

²⁸⁸ Najem, Mohammed, personal interview, 12 June 2010.

²⁸⁹ Ali Achmed Taram trained in France in fiction direction and acting. Before working on *Lion of the Desert* he played the role of Bilal in *Al-Risalah*.

²⁹⁰ Najem, Mohammed, personal interview, 12 June 2010.

²⁹¹ Najem, Mohammed, personal interview, 12 June 2010.

²⁹² Najem, Mohammed, personal interview, 12 June 2010.

²⁹³ *The Making of an Epic: Lion of the Desert*, 1987.

and Italians had occurred during the war – the slopes and caves of the Libyan Green Mountain (the Al-Jabal al Akhdar area).²⁹⁴

To add more historical weight, Akkad also inserts into the film segments of original black and white footage or photography showing glimpses of the real events. This technique is especially effective when Akkad shows photographs of the real Mukhtar and footage of the concentration camps built by the Italians, as well as the barbed wire of the barricade built along the Egyptian border. Akkad also put a lot of effort and expense into the props used in filming to make them look as authentic as possible. For example, he made sure that the details of 1930s weapons, vehicles and uniforms were as accurate as possible, although this is somewhat ironic given that the film was to be crucially inaccurate as a result of its lack of any reference to the Senusi order. Many Libyans were involved in the day-to-day filming process. They worked on making the traditional Libyan clothes as authentic as possible, especially the women's clothing, which had changed considerably since the time of Mukhtar. They also ensured that the male Libyan clothes worn by Anthony Quinn were as authentic as possible. During my interview with Najem,²⁹⁵ he talked of how Anthony Quinn always insisted on staying in his traditional Libyan clothes (even when not shooting the scenes) and he did not wear make-up on screen. Anthony Quinn's connection to Omar al-Mukhtar was so deep and real that his wife called Akkad in frustration to complain that, even a year after finishing the film, Quinn still thought of himself as Mukhtar.²⁹⁶

A lot of work was put into making sure that Quinn could portray Mukhtar in a realistic and authentic way. Twajeey Abd Jaleel, who had worked closely with

²⁹⁴*The Making of an Epic: Lion of the Desert*, 1987.

²⁹⁵ Najem, Mohammed, personal interview, 12 June 2010.

²⁹⁶ Najem, Mohammed, personal interview, 12 June 2010.

Mukhtar as his personal bodyguard, was hired to coach Quinn on how Mukhtar dressed, walked, talked, thought and behaved. The attention to detail was high, to the point that they ensured Quinn had an older female horse to ride, since that was the kind of calm horse Mukhtar would have ridden at his advanced age. When asked about the authenticity of the film, Muhammad Najem states that although the events were dramatized here and there for the film, in essence the story and portrayal of Omar al-Mukhtar was an authentic and accurate account of the Libyan struggle against the Italians.²⁹⁷

3.5.1.5 Release of *Lion of the Desert*

When it was first released, *Lion of the Desert* was not as popular at the box office as *The Message* and *Al-Risalah*. The film received negative publicity in the West because it was partially funded by Libya's Muammar al-Qaddafi. This negative publicity may have been the cause of its relatively poor performance at the box office.²⁹⁸

The film fell prey to the popular politics of the times; Libyan leader Muammar Gadhafi had provided some financial backing to the film and allowed it to be filmed in Libya, which was considered an enemy of the US in the late 1970's. The animosity between US President Ronald Reagan's administration and Libya in the 1980's meant the film got very little play in American theatres or on television networks.²⁹⁹

The film's release also raised controversy in Italy where it was banned by the Italian authorities in 1982 because they claimed that, in the Italian government's words, it was "damaging to the Italian Army's honour."³⁰⁰

²⁹⁷Najem, Mohammed, personal interview, 12 June 2010.

²⁹⁸Nasser and Boggero, "Omar al-Mukhtar", 8.

²⁹⁹Nasser and Boggero, "Omar al-Mukhtar", 8.

³⁰⁰ Gazzini, "Assessing Italy's Grande Gesto to Libya".

3.5.2 *Omar al-Mukhtar/Lion of the Desert* – The Result

3.5.2.1 The Storyline

The film follows the story of Omar al-Mukhtar's final years, specifically the end of his 20-year struggle against Italian occupation in the North African area that is now modern-day Libya. In the opening scene, Akkad shows the hero Mukhtar teaching young children in his village. The film then follows the struggles of Mukhtar and his small but brave group against the technologically advanced Italian invaders. A significant turning point is when General Graziani is sent from Italy to Libya by Mussolini to assume leadership of the Italian colonial army. His main brief is to capture Mukhtar and control the Libyan fighters no matter what the cost in human rights or Italy's reputation abroad. Graziani deals with the Libyans very harshly, putting them into concentration camps where many families are torn apart, women are raped, many are hanged, and a large number die of starvation. Mukhtar and his men continue the struggle against the Italian invaders in the Green Mountain region of the country. The battles continue until Mukhtar is captured by the Italians and brought to Graziani, who attempts to agree a compromise with Mukhtar. When Mukhtar refuses to give up his fight to rid Libya of Italian colonialism, a mock trial is hastily set up, ruling that he must be executed by hanging. When he is told this verdict, Mukhtar makes the famous statement: "To God we belong and to him we return." Mukhtar is then hanged in the concentration camp in front of the crowds of his fellow Libyans. Once Mukhtar dies, the Libyan crowds erupt with ululations and cries in celebration of Mukhtar's life and defiance of the Italians. The young Libyan orphan whom Mukhtar had befriended earlier then comes forward to pick up the glasses which had fallen out of Mukhtar's hands when he was executed.

3.5.2.2 *Lion of the Desert* as an Epic Film

Similar to *The Message/Al-Risalah*, *Lion of the Desert* displays many elements of the epic genre. The tagline for this film is “A giant of a man against a general seeking glory... a spectacular adventure of arch enemies in battle.”³⁰¹ This clearly advertises the film in the tradition of the Hollywood epic. This film also belongs in the tradition of Hollywood epics because of its huge budget and the way it was shot, not to mention its use of a dramatic musical score and award-winning actors that can draw in mass cinema audiences. As with his previous desert epic, here Akkad also shot the film using state of the art Panavision cameras to provide an extremely wide-screen image and to enhance the viewing pleasure of the audience. Interestingly, even though this film belongs in the epic genre, a number of scenes include panorama of a landscape that looks like it might not be out of place in a Western. This is reflected not only in the dry scrubland and desert landscapes where Akkad shoots the fight scenes, but also the battle scenes themselves, and the music used for these scenes is reminiscent of Westerns. In this context, Akkad was influenced by his mentor Peckinpah, who was known as being “a great director of Westerns (and one of the last great ones).”³⁰²

3.5.2.3 The Key Characters

The key characters in *Lion of the Desert* are Omar al-Mukhtar (played by Anthony Quinn) and General Rudolfo Graziani (played by Oliver Reed). Akkad draws many strong contrasts in the film between Mukhtar as the hero and Graziani as the villain. Akkad’s decision to use Quinn in the role of Mukhtar is significant

³⁰¹ “Lion of The Desert.”

³⁰²Prince, *Savage Cinema*, xiv.

because he saw that Quinn had an uncanny close physical resemblance to the real Mukhtar, which he wanted to capture in the film.

Akkad emphasizes that Graziani was a young, ambitious and experienced field commander, and a staunch supporter of Mussolini's fascist regime, while Mukhtar is an old man and a teacher who is compelled to fight out of necessity. From the very first scene of the film, Akkad shows us Mukhtar wearing his glasses with a book in his hand teaching the children who sit around him on the floor. Graziani is always shown wearing restrictive military uniforms while Mukhtar is seen mostly in white flowing robes which emphasize the purity of his principles and his uncomplicated quest to avoid Italian control.

Akkad also highlights Graziani's cruelty and callousness in the way he handles the war and the means he uses to pursue Mukhtar. We see dramatic depictions of the ruthless campaign ordered by Graziani against Libyan villagers, including executing them, destroying their crops, burning their dwellings, filling in their precious wells with rocks and cement and herding them into concentration camps. By contrast, Mukhtar is shown displaying honour and compassion; for example, when he hears his men wanting to mistreat captured Italian soldiers because the Italians had done it to them, he states: "they [Italians] are not our teachers."

Interestingly, Oliver Reed's portrayal of the role of Graziani gave this character a softer image in the film, when compared to certain Italian historians' view of him:

Graziani, then vice-governor of Cyrenaica and commander of the troops of that colony, was, as always, the eager executant of Badoglio's orders; and in his version of the event [capture and execution of Mukhtar] he exhibited such dishonesty and vulgarity of mind as to create a false image of the imprisoned leader, notably boasting of how he had refused to shake the hand that the shackled Omar generously extended to him: "He tried to give me his hand,

manacled, but could not because it would not reach. Anyway, I wouldn't have touched it."³⁰³

The real Graziani indeed seems to have shown a lack of humanity, which was different to the way he was portrayed in the film. The screenwriter Harry Craig creates a scene where the main protagonists (Mukhtar and Graziani) have a short but intense discussion of equals before Mukhtar's trial and execution. This scene demonstrates how well films can be used to express a nuanced perspective of reality and can show a complexity in humanity that may not be seen in the historical accounts of actual events.

Although Akkad reflects a significant contrast between Mukhtar and Graziani as the two opposing sides, he also emphasizes the humanizing elements in the war. This is especially shown in the more minor characters, where we see that not all the Libyans were honorable people and not all Italians were brutal oppressors. Sharif El Gariani (played by Sir John Gielgud) is an example of a dishonorable Libyan, for he collaborates very closely with the Italians and he tells Mukhtar to give up against the Italians, while Colonel Diodiece (played by Raf Vallone) is an example of a sympathetic Italian. He is seen talking of how the local Libyans scattered from the Italian violence are starving, and despite having no way of taking care of them, we see him trying to help them. In this way, Akkad accurately reflects the real history of the Italian occupation of Libya: just as there were Libyan collaborators who sold information and cooperation to the Italians for bribes, there were also Italians who openly admired the heroism of Mukhtar even though he was their enemy:

For many of us who cannot fail to admire the heroism even of our enemies, and who frequently give vent to such feelings even when pure logic tends to lead us to quite different conclusions, the figure of Omar el Mukhtar seems to

³⁰³Santarelli, Rochat, Rainero and Goglia, *Omar al-Muhktar*, 174-175.

us to be enveloped in a glow of legend, daring and epic achievements. Omar el Mukhtar was always our enemy.³⁰⁴

3.5.2.4 The Key Scenes

The battle scenes are crucial as they came to stress how the Libyan revolt defied a modern army like that of the Italians', and also the many setbacks which the Libyan revolutionaries (led by Mukhtar) had suffered.

The sequence of scenes showing the capture of Mukhtar by the Italians and his imprisonment area powerful and dramatic turning point in the film. Akkad shows us a haunting image of Mukhtar bound in chains surrounded by his Italian captors in a pose that almost exactly mirrors the real-life photograph of this event. We also see a profound scene where Mukhtar is sitting humbly on the floor in jail and, when asked if he needs anything, he simply replies that he wants some water so he can do his ablutions and pray.

Also important is the scene in which Mukhtar is taken to meet Graziani in his office. Here Graziani fails to reach any compromise with Mukhtar because the fighter refuses to give in to Italian control. Quinn's acting ability is clear in this scene, as he seems to overwhelm the character of Graziani by sheer strength of character. The strength of presence of Quinn and the depth of his acting is also reflected in the scene of Mukhtar's trial where he says the famous last words: "To God we belong and to him we return."

However, perhaps the most dramatic and compelling scene is that of the death of Mukhtar, which Akkad represents as symbolizing the fact that the struggle

³⁰⁴Santarelli, Rochat, Rainero and Goglia, *Omar al-Muhktar*, 192.

of the colonized people will not end even though their hero dies. Akkad reflects this visually by choreographing the Libyan crowds who watch Mukhtar's execution. When Mukhtar first steps onto the platform for his execution, sitting before him on the ground in awed silence there is a sea of his fellow Libyans, wearing predominately white and blue clothing. At the moment Mukhtar dies, the crowd of Libyans erupts with sound and movement like a wave, which threatens to engulf the Italians who leave the scene quickly. Akkad's use of sea and wave symbolism here is a powerful representation of the struggle against colonialism, and a symbol of the Libyans' future independence. In particular, this symbolism indicates that colonialism will be swept away by the ocean-like waves of indigenous nationalism. Then, Akkad builds on this symbolism with a final profound moment. As the crowd of Libyans sweeps through the scene, the little orphaned boy who shared a bond with Mukhtar comes forward and picks up Mukhtar's reading glasses, which had fallen to the ground when the hero died. In this moment, Akkad shows us a symbol of the younger generation picking up the mantle of their heroes and continuing the struggle against their oppressors. As Mukhtar states in the film: "We will never surrender, we will only die. And don't think it stops there; we will have the next generation to fight and then the next and then the next." It is also very interesting to note that the particular object that Akkad chooses for the young boy to pick up is not a gun, a sword or any other instrument of violence. Instead, we see the boy picking up reading glasses, and through this image Akkad seems to be saying that the most important legacy from our heroes is not violence but vision and the ability to gain knowledge.

3.5.3 Conclusion: *Lion of the Desert*

It is interesting to compare and contrast *Lion of the Desert* with the film *The Battle of Algiers* (Pontecorvo 1966). *The Battle of Algiers* is based on the events that happened during the war (1954-1962) between the Algerian people and their French colonial rulers. The film was directed by Gillo Pontecorvo and is highly regarded. *The Battle of Algiers* was based on a book called *Souvenirs de la Bataille d'Alger* by an Algerian writer called Saadi Yacef who wrote it while he was a prisoner of the French. During the struggle for independence, this book became an inspiration and gave moral support to Algerians fighting against the French. Upon independence, Yacef joined the new Algerian government, which supported the creation of a film from the memoirs of Yacef.

The Battle of Algiers, similar to *Lion of the Desert*, was funded mostly by government money; where *The Battle of Algiers* was funded by the Algerian government after gaining independence from French colonialists, the *Lion of the Desert* was funded by the Libyan government after gaining independence from Italian colonialists. It is also interesting to mention that both *The Battle of Algiers* and *Lion of the Desert* were banned in Europe. *The Battle of Algiers* was banned by the French for five years.³⁰⁵ *Lion of the Desert* was banned by the Italians in 1982.

One of the strengths of *The Battle of Algiers* is its realism, which was enhanced by using real people instead of professional actors. The film had only one professional actor; the rest of the cast were non-professional Algerians chosen by the director. *Lion of the Desert* has a more Hollywood feel to it since it used a big budget and included high-profile stars like Anthony Quinn and Irene Papas. Akkad put a lot of effort into creating a realistic vision of Libya during the historic wars with

³⁰⁵ Mellen, *Film Guide to the Battle of Algiers*, 22.

Italian colonialists, by using make-up, customs, and props that gave his film an authentic feel. However, Akkad's film also included inaccuracies because he bowed to political interference and excluded the former Libyan King Idris and the Senusi Muslim Order because he was asked to do so by his funder.

The most striking element of both films – especially for an Arab audience – is that they inspire a sense of pride and hope for newly formed nations that freed themselves from colonialist exploitation and established idealist new governments in the post-colonial era. In choosing to focus on Omar al-Mukhtar as the subject of this epic film, Akkad was very consciously focusing on an important hero widely admired in the Middle East. The cause of Mukhtar and his execution by Italian colonialists made him a martyr and a celebrated symbol in the Arab world of the struggle against oppression. The following text clearly expresses how Mukhtar's death was perceived by Arabs (it comes from a secret document found in Italian colonial archives that was written by the Libyan resistance on the anniversary of Mukhtar's death):

“The commemoration of Omar al-Mukhtar, martyr of the Arab nation”

On this day in the year 1931 (16th September) the brave warrior and hero Omar al-Mukhtar was condemned to death... The Fascists believed that the condemnation of Omar al-Mukhtar to death would make it easier for them to occupy the country, but unfortunately for them the souls of the martyrs are an eternal flame which inspires the national spirit in the hearts of the people still living.

The martyr of the Tripoli-Barce nation is not dead, for he has left his people with an immortal monument of heroism which will be inherited by future generations. This sad monument, built by the Fascist assassins' hands, will remain forever and will never be forgotten because it has left mortal wounds in our hearts.

Injustice is short-lived, whereas reason is strong, and the oppressors will not escape their destiny.³⁰⁶

³⁰⁶Santarelli, Rochat, Rainero and Goglia, *Omar al-Mukhtar*, 155.

Although *Lion of the Desert* was initially not very popular at the box office, it appears that the film is now beginning to receive critical acclaim.³⁰⁷ The film is considered a blockbuster in the Arab world and newspapers indicate that it is presently enjoying a new popularity.³⁰⁸ This is no doubt partly due to the power of film in portraying the legendary Omar al-Mukhtar as “a martyr of Arab independence and the Islamic faith.”³⁰⁹ *Lion of the Desert* seems to have filled an educational vacuum in the Middle East, by teaching people about the historical figure of Omar al-Mukhtar.

It is also interesting to note that *Lion of the Desert* was unexpectedly shown on the Sky Italy satellite channel in June 2009, during Qaddafi’s historic first state visit to Italy. The Italian government had only removed its ban on the film in that month in 2009. On this visit to Italy, Qaddafi made a point of taking a special guest with him:

On his arrival in Rome, Gaddafi escorted down the steps of his plane Muhammed Omar al-Mukhtar, the son of Omar al-Mukhtar, a Libyan national hero who was executed by Italian colonial authorities for leading an uprising against the Italians in the 1920s and 1930s. Pinned to Gaddafi’s uniform was a faded, black-and-white photo of the late hero chained by his Italian captors.³¹⁰

Prior to this, in 2008, the Italian government had offered this formal apology:

At Benghazi [Libya] on 30 August 2008, Prime Minister Berlusconi apologised to the son of Omar Mukhtar and the Libyan people. “It is my duty to express to you, in the name of the Italian people, our regret and apologies for the deep wounds that we have caused you [during the Italian-Libyan War/Second War II].³¹¹

In his own words, Akkad states why he made the film *Lion of the Desert*:

After the success of *The Message*, I thought to do something that symbolizes the Arabic struggle and resistance... I chose Omar Al Mukhtar for the reason that I found in him the stories of all the resistance fighters [Abdul-Kareem Al

³⁰⁷Nassar and Boggero, “Omar al-Mukhtar”, 207.

³⁰⁸Nassar and Boggero, “Omar al-Mukhtar”, 215.

³⁰⁹ Santarelli, Rochat, Rainero and Goglia., *Omar al-Mukhtar*, 93.

³¹⁰“Gaddafi in Historic Visit to Italy.” *The Times*

³¹¹Mendola, “Sicilians and Libyans - Of Lions and Deserts.”

Khatabi; Abd al-Qadir³¹²; Sultan Al Atrash; Saad Zaghloul] who fought with honor and who ended up in exile, only Omar Al Mukhtar refused to go to exile.

3.6 *Saladin*

Once he finished filming *Lion of the Desert*, Akkad began making plans for creating a third desert epic film, this time about Saladin (Salah al-Din al-Ayyubi). Saladin, a well-known historical figure, was the main character in the movie made by Youssef Chahine in 1963 called *Al-Nasir Salaheddin*. In Chahine's movie, it was produced at the height of Gamal Abdel-Nasser's glory and has 'overtones' of Arab nationalism³¹³ throughout the movie. Another Crusader movie that had the historical figure of Saladin was 'Kingdom of Heaven' released in May 2005 directed by Ridley Scott. In Scott's version, Saladin is not the main character in the movie.

In the case of Akkad with his Saladin Crusader movie, he died in 2005 before he had a chance to complete this planned project. Akkad considered that he could make a compelling heroic film about the life of this notable figure who led the Muslims against the Crusaders and eventually recaptured Palestine from the Crusader Kingdom of Jerusalem. In an Al-Jazeera.net article on Akkad, the journalist Firas Al-Atraqchi wrote:

Akkad thought the invasion of Iraq was analogous to the political climate in the 11th century before Jerusalem was sacked. He said the current geopolitical chessboard reminded him of all the Muslim city-states which colluded with the Crusaders and allowed not only the fall of Jerusalem, but also led to Muslim infighting.³¹⁴

Akkad planned to make the film into an international, English-language epic and had his eyes on top actors in the English-language movie industry for the lead character. Before he died, Akkad "had already got the iconic Sean Connery on board to star as

³¹² Ruedy, *Modern Algeria*, 59.

³¹³ Elbendary, "Heaven on Earth".

³¹⁴ Atraqchi, "An Arab American director's legacy."

the legendary Kurdish hero born in Iraq who would reclaim Jerusalem from the crusaders in the twelfth century.”³¹⁵ Akkad had also already decided that the film would be filmed in Jordan.

Unfortunately, Akkad’s *Saladin* encountered many delays and obstacles. He especially struggled in trying to find financial support and funding for this film, which was estimated to cost US\$80 million. It was normal for him to find no sources of funding in the West; however, on this occasion he also could not find any Arab funding despite the fact that this had been possible for his previous desert epics: “He believed he was unable to gain Arab financial backing because the period leading up to the rise of Salahuddin too closely mirrored current events in the Arab world.”³¹⁶ Due to the lack of funding, Akkad was compelled to leave the *Saladin* project on the back burner to pursue other projects that would provide him with more financial stability (for example the *Halloween* franchise and his involvement with Twickenham Studios).

During the 1990s, Akkad tried again to get funding to enable the making of the film *Saladin*. However, again he found it impossible. Although he was close many times to securing the needed funding, financiers would always put conditions on his creativity, to a level which would interfere with Akkad’s control, and he refused to accept this. It is regrettable that this film was never made. All we have of it now are Akkad’s own words about what would have been his message in this film:

Saladin exactly portrays Islam. Right now, Islam is portrayed as a terrorist religion. Because a few terrorists are Muslims, the whole religion has that image. If there ever was a religious war full of terror, it was the Crusades. But you can’t blame Christianity because a few adventurers did this. That’s my message.³¹⁷

³¹⁵Atraqchi, “An Arab American director's legacy.”

³¹⁶Atraqchi, “An Arab American director's legacy.”

³¹⁷“Remembering Moustapha Akkad: Pioneer in Hollywood Film Industry”.*Focus News*

3.7 The *Halloween* Films

Although he is best known in the Middle East for his desert epics, Akkad became best known in the West for producing the series of *Halloween* films. These are independent, low-budget, horror movies featuring the character Michael Myers as a serial killer who wears a mask. Akkad and his family credit him with starring the *Halloween* films and for seeing the great potential in them.³¹⁸

3.7.1 The Process of the *Halloween* Films

The first *Halloween* film was released in 1978 as an independent film, with Akkad as a key investor, John Carpenter as director³¹⁹ and Debra Hill as the writer. It proved to be highly popular and became the first iconic film in a long-running franchise that produced seven further variations on the original horror-film theme. As one journalist who writes on the Hollywood film industry commented, the *Halloween* films developed into an important franchise in the industry.³²⁰ Akkad was an executive producer³²¹ of the *Halloween* films (he was the only producer to participate

³¹⁸ Akkad, Nabil, personal interview, 27 February 2009.

³¹⁹ John Carpenter was also an USC Film School graduate.

³²⁰ Waxman, Sharon, personal interview, 1 March 2010.

³²¹ The role of an executive producer is usually taken by an older filmmaker when investing in a younger filmmaker's project. The role is to ensure the project runs smoothly, and to use their expertise and contacts in the film industry.

in all eight of these films). Although Akkad did not start the *Halloween* franchise, he later became the owner of it.

These horror films have limited comparative value to Akkad's desert epics in helping us to explore Akkad's creativity as a filmmaker. He only produced these films (as opposed to the desert epics which were directed as well as produced by him). The movies are somewhat Hitchcockian in style and used suspense instead of visual violence to create fear in the viewer. Violence and horror movies are intertwined, and over the years the violence in this genre has become more explicit. Akkad, even amongst his crew and cast, was seen as being part of the old school of filmmaking, and in fact was not fond of blood at all. He considered this horror franchise as harmless³²² and a way of giving scary movies to a young generation of American youth, who connected it greatly to the Halloween holiday every year on 31 October. However, Akkad's contribution to the development of the *Halloween* films was in recognizing the novelty, innovation and popular appeal of the storyline and providing the financial support vital for making these films. As the only producer who worked consistently on all the films and as the owner of the *Halloween* franchise, Akkad was able to exercise a great deal of control over them through his company Trancas International Films.³²³ Akkad used this control to influence the *Halloween* storyline and the development of the character Michael Myers.

The *Halloween* horror films provided invaluable opportunities to inexperienced and unknown directors, writers, cinematographers, actresses, actors and other important production personnel. Many people were given their first 'break' in these *Halloween* movies (the first *Halloween* film is credited with launching the careers of

³²² Akkad, Nabil, personal interview, 27 February 2009.

³²³ Akkad, Nabil, personal interview, 28 February 2009.

director John Carpenter and actress Jamie Lee Curtis). The *Halloween* franchise is also credited with initiating the slasher genre of films in the 1980s.

3.7.2 The Result of the *Halloween* Films

At the time of their release, the *Halloween* movies broke many box-office records and drew legions of fans over the course of the years. Coming after the high-budget filming of *The Message/Al-Risalah*, the *Halloween* films also gave Akkad financial stability, since they were highly profitable low-budget films. Their financial success enabled Akkad to work as a producer from the 1980s until his death in 2005. In particular, the first *Halloween* film became one of the most financially successful independent low-budget movies in Hollywood history. It was produced on a budget of US\$320,000 and grossed US\$47 million at the box office in the US, and US\$60 million worldwide, becoming one of the most profitable independent films globally. This record was only beaten by the low-budget horror film *The Blair Witch Project* over 22 years later.³²⁴ According to the obituary printed about him by the New York Times online,³²⁵ Akkad had remarked in 1998 that he turned to these highly profitable horror films because he found it hard to raise money for his desert epic films.

The storyline of the *Halloween* films is based on the character of Michael Myers, a serial killer who wears a mask. The background to this story is that, when he was six years old, Michael Myers murdered his older sister and was locked up in a psychiatric hospital. Many years later, Myers emerges from the hospital and starts to kill again. The *Halloween* films were influenced by Hitchcock, in that they rely

³²⁴ "films and movies with highest return on investment." <http://www.filmproductioninvestments.com>

³²⁵ "Moustapha Akkad, 75, Who Produced Religious and Horror Films, Is Dead". *New York Times*

heavily on the use of suspense, without showing a great deal of blood or gory details. The use of music was fundamental in creating suspense in these films. The same frightening suspenseful music was used in all the *Halloween* franchise movies so that it became a hallmark of these films, instantly recognizable to fans and famous in its own right.

Akkad did not enjoy watching *Halloween*, because he did not like blood.³²⁶

Akkad was more focused on showing a positive view of the Muslim World.³²⁷

However, Akkad saw great potential in the *Halloween* movies. The first *Halloween* film was one of the original suspenseful horror films that were inspired by Alfred Hitchcock's *Psycho* (1960). Taken as a whole, the *Halloween* franchise films were certainly more lucrative than Akkad's desert epics. However, the creative value of the *Halloween* films appears to relate more to engaging and entertaining young audiences than dealing with complex issues like religion or colonial struggle, such as in Akkad's desert epics. However, this impact and Akkad's role in it should not be underestimated: "Far from the Middle East, Akkad is also considered a cinematic pioneer for introducing a horror/slasher genre that has spawned numerous copycats and spoofs. From films such as *Nightmare on Elm Street* to *Hostel*, *Saw* and *I Know What You Did Last Summer*, Hollywood – and horror fans – can trace the beginning to the indomitable character of Mike Myers, *Halloween*'s protagonist."³²⁸

Without Akkad's support and financial input, this work might not have made it to the cinema. In this way, he took on the role of the "godfather" of these *Halloween*

³²⁶Akkad, Nabil, personal interview, 28 February 2009.

³²⁷Akkad, Nabil, personal interview, 28 February 2009.

³²⁸"Halloween producer's epic plan." *Al Jazeera Website*

movies. To the crew and cast of the *Halloween* movies, he became a “genuine father figure.”³²⁹

3.8 Conclusion

“Moustapha Akkad is a first class Producer.”³³⁰

When exploring Akkad and his achievements, the most useful of Akkad’s films for this study are his desert epics, because these are the only films that he not only produced but also directed. Typical of the epic genre, Akkad’s desert epics were devoted to the manufacturing of larger-than-life popular, national or historical heroes,³³¹ as well as villains.³³²

Akkad pursued extremely high ambitions and created large-scale epic films about Arab and Muslim subjects such as were never made before or since. He was also a pioneer in the way he insisted on using Hollywood expertise, technology and capabilities so that he could try to make his desert epic films engaging to an international audience. Akkad became skilled at creating epic movies that filled the screen and used every cinematic trick that was available to the Hollywood film industry. In this way, Akkad’s desert epic films developed beyond the traditional category of “Arab cinema”,³³³ which speaks in Arabic, is focused on reaching an

³²⁹ “Moustapha Akkad 1933-2005”, Halloween Movies Website

³³⁰“Lionel Strutt” (Here he is referring to his work experiences on Akkad’s Desert epics.)

³³¹ Rosen, “ The Uprooted Cinema: Arab Filmmakers,” 152.

³³² Rosen, “ The Uprooted Cinema: Arab Filmmakers,” 153.

³³³ Arab Cinema is a large industry with a long history. The country that dominates is Egypt, since three quarters of all Arab movies are produced there. Egypt is considered the ‘Hollywood of the East’ and its golden age was the 1940s and 1950s. Today, Egyptian movies fall into two types, art-house movies that are popular abroad, and popular films (usually broad comedies) that are popular at home. Few movies bridge the gap of high artistic quality and popular appeal, but *The Yacoubian Building* (2006) is one of the few that did bridge that gap. Other countries such as Algeria, Lebanon, Morocco, the Palestinian territories, Syria and Tunisia are showing more and more movies to the English-speaking world, but this is not always consistent. Higher quality direction, film equipment and plot have ensured that contemporary Arab movies have more appeal, and there are now numerous film festivals in the Gulf that market the films and support the filmmakers.

Arab audience and usually only reaches a small Western audience of critics and intellectuals.

In all his films, the desert epics and the *Halloween* franchise, Akkad was very much focused on reaching his audience as effectively as possible. He said: “You need to know your audience and how to talk to them. I speak to the Western audience in a different way than I do when speaking to an Arabic one.”³³⁴ Akkad also had a very clear aim to reach a mainstream Western audience, especially for his desert epics. If they are even watched by a Western audience, films by Arabic filmmakers can sometimes be marginalized or seen as “alternative” by the Western world. For that reason, their impact on Western perceptions of the Arab world is limited. However, Akkad consistently produced works which tried to challenge this limited Western viewpoint, because his films did not fit within it but nevertheless aimed to engage with it.

³³⁴*From Aleppo to Hollywood*, 2007.

Chapter 4: Legacy

4.1 Akkad's Legacy as a Pioneer

“There is nothing in creativity that is called international or national.”

“Anybody who wants to be a filmmaker should regard themselves like David Lean and Hitchcock, who are normal people.”³³⁵

In this chapter, I examine Akkad's legacy, for that is the most important and lasting element of leadership. A legacy is defined as some achievement or effect handed down or received from a predecessor which in some way continues to be relevant in the present time. Unsurprisingly, Akkad's most important legacy is his films, the desert epics (*The Message*/*Al-Risalah*, *Lion of the Desert* and the unfinished *Saladin*) and to a lesser extent his *Halloween* franchise movies. Since I explored Akkad's films in chapter 3, here I will look at the legacy of Akkad beyond the films themselves.

I will start by exploring Akkad's legacy as a pioneer who inspires others. Much of what Akkad did continues to be innovative and unique by today's standards. It is also important to look at Akkad's legacy as a cultural bridge between the West and the Middle East. His desert epics in particular aimed to counter Western misconceptions and stereotypes by representing Arab and Muslim heroes in ways that a Western audience could understand. Lastly, I also look at Akkad's legacy in terms of Arab and Muslim pride, which was buttressed by the portrayal of Muhammad, Omar al-Mukhtar and Saladin, in emotive and positive ways.

³³⁵From *Aleppo to Hollywood*, 2007.

4.2 Trailblazer

By leaving his homeland in Syria to act on his ambition to study film and create a space for himself as a credible filmmaker, Akkad was a true trailblazer, an example to be followed by others who aspired to be filmmakers, and who sought to master the sophisticated filmmaking technology available in the US or UK. It took many years for Akkad to establish himself as an 'insider' in the US and British film industries. Akkad was always aware that, "It is necessary to be an insider to some degree to even be allowed in, to exist"; and later, once established in a career, "you have to be even more of an insider to rise through the hierarchies".³³⁶

Puwar talks of the types of work environments which rely heavily on social capital:

As social capital is a durable network of more or less institutionalized relationships of mutual acquaintance and recognition... they are trusted to give their word on the capabilities of a particular person because their own reputation is bound up with these relationships. Clearly, if the colleague or pupil does not deliver, they risk losing some of their own weight in the field.³³⁷

In my experience, these personal working relationships are especially acute and prominent in the Hollywood and British film industries, which are heavily built on reputations and recommendations since the industry relies less on permanent employees and more on temporary or freelance workers.³³⁸

During his career, Akkad developed a durable network of relationships with teachers at UCLA and fellow student contemporaries who helped him as a filmmaker. One of his most important relationships was with Peckinpah, who

³³⁶Puwar, *Space Invaders*, 119.

³³⁷Puwar, *Space Invaders*, 122.

³³⁸ This view comes from my own work experience in the British film industry, based in London's Film/TV/Commercials Media Centre Soho and Panico film workshop training under the Doyle Brothers (skilled technicians who worked with Monty Python and later Terry Gilliam). Also, my understanding of Hollywood films and the American film industry comes from two years working as an advisor for the Arab Film Festival in California 2003-2005, and general experience from technical training at the National Film & Television School.

became his mentor, 'advocate' and 'most powerful protector.'³³⁹ Peckinpah was an influential high-profile filmmaker, who during Akkad's formative years in the 1960s and 1970s used the most high-profile stars in his movies, including Ali McGraw, Charlton Heston and Steve McQueen. As a complete outsider to the film industry, a foreigner and an Arab, Akkad was especially dependent on Peckinpah's support. As Puwar puts it:

In order to rise in hierarchies, everyone needs advocates to vouch for the fact that they are a trusted and respected pair of hands. Those who don't fit the traditional somatic norm in the higher echelons of the public realm... most especially need advocates.³⁴⁰

Akkad had to work hard to establish himself as a credible film student (and later filmmaker) and to build a reputation for himself as a 'safe pair of hands'. Akkad's role as both president of the Foreign Students' Association at UCLA, and as a member of a male fraternity at UCLA in 1950s America were very important social building blocks that helped to build his reputation within UCLA and later also with his USC contemporaries, who eventually became part of the Hollywood film establishment.

4.2.1 Akkad as a Mentor and Example for Others

When Akkad ultimately succeeded as a filmmaker, part of his legacy was to help and mentor others just as he had been supported by Peckinpah. Akkad gave opportunities to many established film workers through his desert epics. However, his most significant legacy was in giving significant opportunities in California to unknown directors, actors and crew-members which they might not otherwise have had. The first *Halloween* film was particularly important in this regard, as it was the

³³⁹ Puwar, *Space Invaders*, 121

³⁴⁰ Puwar, *Space Invaders*, 121.

film which triggered an important franchise and launched the careers of director John Carpenter,³⁴¹ screenwriter Debra Hill,³⁴² Director of Photography Dean Cundey³⁴³ and actress Jamie Lee Curtis.³⁴⁴ In discussing the opportunity given to her by *Halloween*, Curtis said: “*Halloween* struck a chord with teenage girls and it gave me a very lucrative career... I can trace my entire career back to my *Halloween* movies.”³⁴⁵ Moreover, *Halloween* to all intents and purposes signalled the real start of John Carpenter’s career. After directing this film, Carpenter was examined by critics not just as a good director, but as part of a whole “school” of young Hitchcock-inspired directors which included Steven Spielberg (*NightGallery* (1970-73), *Duel* (1971), *Jaws* (1975)) and Brian de Palma (*Carrie* (1976), *The Fury* (1989)).”³⁴⁶

³⁴¹ John Howard Carpenter was born on 16 January 1948 in Carthage, New York, educated at Western Kentucky University, and then USC film school in Los Angeles. He is primarily known for making horror films and is known as the ‘Master of Horror’. He began making short films in 1962 and won an Academy Award for Best Live-Action Short Subject in 1970 for *The Resurrection of Broncho Billy*. He has worked as writer, actor, composer, producer, and director since the 1970s and composed the famous theme song for *Halloween* (1978). “John Howard Carpenter.”

³⁴² Debra Hill was born on 10 November 1950 in Haddonfield, New Jersey, USA. She died 7 March 2005 in Los Angeles, California. She was producer on *The Fog* (1980), *Halloween II* (1981), *Halloween III: Season of the Witch* (1982) and Terry Gilliam’s *Fisher King* (1991). She is known for working with John Carpenter on his early films. One of Hollywood’s best known and popular female producers, she became a member of both the Producers Guild of America and the Executive Committee of the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences producers branch. She was honoured by Woman in Film in 2003 and was a member of the dramatic jury at the Sundance Film Festival in 1989. “Debra Hill.”

³⁴³ Dean Cundey was given one of his first professional Director of Photography jobs on the movie *Halloween*, and continued working on the *Halloween* franchise, and from it his career blossomed, as he later became Director of Photography for Spielberg’s *Jurassic Park*; *Who Framed Roger Rabbit*; *Hook*; *Death Becomes Her*; *Romancing the Stone*; *Apollo 13*; *Back to the Future*; *Trilogy*; *The West Wing*; etc. “Dean Cundey.”

³⁴⁴ Jamie Lee Curtis was born on 22 November 1958, Los Angeles, California, USA. Daughter of legendary actors Janet Leigh (*Psycho*) and Tony Curtis (*Some Like It Hot*), she got her big break at acting in 1978 when she won the role of Laurie Strode in *Halloween* (1978). After that she became famous for roles in movies like *Trading Places* (1983); *Perfect* (1985); and *A Fish Called Wanda* (1988). She starred in the big action film *True Lies* (1994), for which she won a Golden Globe for her performance. In 1998, she starred in *Halloween H20: 20 Years Later* (1998), in which she reprised the role that made her famous back in 1978. She was also the goddaughter of MCA-Universal CEO Lew Wasserman and a member of the Jury at the Cannes Film Festival in 1992.

“Jamie Lee Curtis.”

³⁴⁵ Hobson, “Scream Queen Jamie Lee Curtis comes full circle as Michael Myers’ prey Laurie Strode”, 1.

³⁴⁶ Muir, *The Films of John Carpenter*, 16.

The *Halloween* film franchise had a pioneering influence on the “slasher” horror movie genre because it became the original successful example that was followed by other movies franchises that came afterwards.³⁴⁷ *Halloween*

prompted a spate of imitator ‘slasher’ films... Among the myriad imitators were *Friday the 13th* (1980), *Prom Night* (1980), *Mother’s Day* (1980), *Christmas Evil* (1980), *My Bloody Valentine* (1981), *Graduation Day* (1981), *New Year’s Evil* (1982), *Silent Night, Deadly Night* (1984), *April Fool’s Day* (1986) and *Bloody New Year* (1987).³⁴⁸

This success could not have happened without Akkad, who completely financed the original film and became the only producer involved in all eight *Halloween* films. However, this ‘important franchise’³⁴⁹ had amazing box office success, earning approximately US\$517 million as of 2008. When the *Halloween* franchise is compared to other top-grossing horror franchises,³⁵⁰ it ranks as the fourth highest grossing in the US. This shows that Akkad left behind an important legacy, not only for his work in the Arab world, where he is famous for his desert epics, but also in the California film industry which has a worldwide impact. This part of Akkad’s legacy continues even now³⁵¹ with Akkad’s son Malek taking over his father’s role as producer.

The *Halloween* films may be criticized for not having much substance beyond engaging an audience with an entertaining combination of horror and suspense.

³⁴⁷Masi, Anthony, personal interview, March 1 2009.

Anthony Masi is a Documentary/Short Film Producer, who created the first *Halloween* movie convention, and worked for Moustapha Akkad on the *Halloween* website at Trancas International Films in LA.

³⁴⁸ Muir, *The Films of John Carpenter*, 16.

³⁴⁹ Waxman, Sharon, personal interview, February 28 2009.

³⁵⁰Such as *A Nightmare on Elm Street*; *Child’s Play*; *Friday the 13th*, the Hannibal Lecter series (starting with *Silence of the Lambs*), *Psycho*, *Saw*, *Scream*, and *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre*.

³⁵¹The *Halloween* franchise was part of Miramax Films. The Weinstein brothers took the *Halloween* franchise with them, under the Dimension Films label, when they left Miramax Films in September 2005 to establish the Weinstein Company. Hence, *Halloween* is seen as an important franchise built by Moustapha Akkad, as the Weinstein brothers are seen as powerful and savvy people in the Hollywood film industry who understand *Halloween’s* importance. Thus, the *Halloween* franchise has been at the heart of innovative filmmaking, cutting edge conceptually, and lucrative financially. This is a direct result of the foundation that Moustapha Akkad laid in the past.

However, we should understand that the *Halloween* movies belong to a genre that is given serious analysis and credibility by academics. The “teen slasher film came into its own in the late 1970’s and quickly became one of the most popular subgenres of horror in the decade that followed... Scholars generally agree that *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre* (1974) and *Halloween* were the original films that generated the cycle.”³⁵² The genre:

initiated the tradition of having a group of young, often teenage people as victims.... introducing the youth-focused element that marked the arrival of the teen-oriented slasher film franchises... They originated the trend toward spin-offs, sequels, and imitators, sparking off a rash of successful slasher-film franchises.³⁵³

The fact that the slasher horror films could be criticized for being predictable or formulaic did not diminish their popular appeal:

It became obvious at a very early stage [in the slasher film’s cycle] that every spectator knew exactly what the film was going to do at every point, even down to the order in which it would dispose of its various characters, [yet] the film’s total predictability did not create boredom or disappointments. On the contrary, the predictability was clearly the main source of pleasure, and the only occasion for disappointment would have been a modulation of the formula, not a repetition of it.³⁵⁴

However, the popularity of this film genre hardly guaranteed critical credibility. In Valerie Wee’s article: “Resurrecting and Updating the Teen Slasher: The Case of *Scream*” two academics (Clover and Pinedo) are very negative in their views of the horror genre. For many scholars the slasher film verged on the pornographic due to the genre’s obsession with graphic violence, putting them “beyond the purview of respectable criticism,” as Clover notes.³⁵⁵ Pinedo, another cinema academic,

³⁵²Wee, “Resurrecting and Updating the Teen Slasher,” 52.

³⁵³Wee, “Resurrecting and Updating the Teen Slasher,” 52.

³⁵⁴Wee, “Resurrecting and Updating the Teen Slasher,” 52.

³⁵⁵Wee, “Resurrecting and Updating the Teen Slasher,” 52.

similarly observes that the slasher film is generally considered “the most disreputable form of the horror film.”³⁵⁶

However, despite the “narrow constraints of the genre’s familiar conventions and the often controversial portrayals of violence and brutality,”³⁵⁷ the *Halloween* films have received serious academic attention. Film scholars like Ryan and Kellner, Pinedo and Williams focused on the ‘link’ between ‘slasher films’ and ‘real life’.³⁵⁸ Ryan and Kellner argue that these ‘slasher films’ that *Halloween* was pioneering indicated a social disease by showing ‘violence’ and ‘terror’. This kind of movie indicated “heightened levels of anxiety in the culture, particularly with regard to the family, children, political leadership, and sexuality.”³⁵⁹ Resultantly, some see them as valuable diagnostic tools for understanding the ‘zeitgeist’ of their era.³⁶⁰ These horror movies became part of the cultural fabric of the US, and reflected significant social concerns, “including rising divorce rates, changing family structures, and evolving cultural emphases on adults’ needs at the expense of children and youths.”³⁶¹

Critics and academics have also focused on the role women played in the *Halloween* films. The *Halloween* movies in particular, and slasher movies from the late 1970s to the 1980s in general, are symptomatic of changes in women’s status in society. It is interesting to note in this context that the mid-1970s was characterized by the rise of the feminist movement in the US. “We can trace the evolution of the 1990’s slasher film’s tough girl to her predecessors who populated the genre in the

³⁵⁶Wee, “Resurrecting and Updating the Teen Slasher,” 52.

³⁵⁷Wee, “Resurrecting and Updating the Teen Slasher,” 52.

³⁵⁸Wee, “Resurrecting and Updating the Teen Slasher,” 52.

³⁵⁹Wee, “Resurrecting and Updating the Teen Slasher,” 52.

³⁶⁰Wee, “Resurrecting and Updating the Teen Slasher,” 52.

³⁶¹Wee, “Resurrecting and Updating the Teen Slasher,” 53.

1970's and early '80's, [where] the '90's version has been revised to reflect more contemporary concerns."³⁶²

It has been stated that slasher films sometimes have a "complicated relationship with gender."³⁶³ However, as Clover observes in Valerie Wee's article: "the independent, low-budget [horror] film tradition has been central in the manufacture of the new 'tough girls' that have loomed so large in horror since the mid-seventies."³⁶⁴ In this way, the progress of women's growing position in American society is seen as reflected by the development of female characters in the *Halloween* franchise. Clover argues that the character of Laurie Strode, in *Halloween*, became empowered as the film's 'Final Girl' by 'fighting' off Michael's monstrous attacks long enough to be rescued. However, the reality is that by the end Laurie is rescued by a 'male figure', who is Michael Myers' psychiatrist, which weakens the argument. It is only later, when the character of Laurie Strode is older in '*Halloween: H20* (1998)', that Laurie becomes empowered as a 'Final Girl', by taking on Michael's own 'masculine weapons' and 'lust for violence' in finally defeating the monster.³⁶⁵

In addition, these films reflect a link between sex and punishment, though the strong connection in horror films, and later the sub-genre slasher films, is nonetheless an old one: "This tradition [of illicit sex or behaviour being punished], originally associated with literature such as Nathaniel Hawthorne's *The Scarlet Letter*, runs through modern horror films from *Psycho* through the last movie in the *Friday the 13th* series."³⁶⁶

³⁶²Wee, "Resurrecting and Updating the Teen Slasher," 57.

³⁶³Wee, "Resurrecting and Updating the Teen Slasher," 57.

³⁶⁴Wee, "Resurrecting and Updating the Teen Slasher," 52.

³⁶⁵Connelly, "Defeating the Male Monster," 13.

³⁶⁶Connelly, "Defeating the Male Monster," 15.

From another perspective, it is interesting to note a study by Molitor and Sapolsky which challenges the idea that 'slasher films' like *Halloween* feature females as the 'targets' of slashers:

A content analysis of 30 slasher films released in 1980, 1985, and 1989 reveals that females are not featured most often as the targets of slashers; a significantly higher number of deaths and injuries were suffered by males. However, females are shown in terror for longer periods of time. Sex and violence are not commonly linked in slasher films; a death or severe attack of a female during or after depictions of sex occurred infrequently.³⁶⁷

In Hollywood, the most important criterion for most filmmakers is box-office success. With the success of the *Halloween* franchise, Moustapha Akkad achieved that important Hollywood credential. *Halloween* grossed US\$47 million from a small budget of US\$325,000 and it set up a lucrative franchise, and new records for profitability that were later broken only by *The Blair Witch Project*.

We can see the important contributions and achievements Akkad made through his key support of the *Halloween* films. However, in looking at Akkad's legacy, we should also examine the extent to which he was an inspiration and example of success for new Arab filmmakers. Akkad's son Malek remarks that there are "hundreds of young Arab filmmakers now taking the helm in Hollywood",³⁶⁸ following in the footsteps of the filmmakers that came before them, like Akkad and others. Akkad became a prominent figure in the Californian film industry through his work on the *Halloween* films and in the British film industry through his involvement in Twickenham Film Studios, a key British institution. According to Akkad's son Malek, Twickenham Film Studios invited Akkad to serve on its board of directors in recognition of his commercial contribution in bringing revenue to the studio through

³⁶⁷Molitor, "Sex, violence, and victimization", 233.

³⁶⁸Al-Atraqchi, *Halloween Producer's Epic*."

his desert epics during a time of financial difficulty for the studios.³⁶⁹ I could not find any official documentation verifying this. However, as previously mentioned, the official records at Companies House by the Registrar of Companies for England and Wales³⁷⁰ show that Malek Akkad is currently serving on the board of directors and is one of only three directors of Twickenham Film Studios Limited. Though I could find little direct evidence that Akkad might have used his filmmaking skills, power and position actively to help any of the “hundreds of young Arab filmmakers,” he nonetheless stands out as a pioneer figure for more contemporary Arab filmmakers.

Akkad’s relationship with Mohammed Sanousi³⁷¹ does, however, suggest a tangible influence from Akkad. During Akkad’s lifetime he continued to be an active mentor to Sanousi. As Sanousi states in his documentary,³⁷² Akkad trained him in all areas of camerawork, editing and sound in the 1960s when Akkad was producing television shows for American networks. Eventually, Sanousi became his co-producer and partner on *The Message/Al-Risalah*, even though Sanousi was junior and less experienced than Akkad.

According to the *Al-Watan* documentary,³⁷³ Sanousi’s achievement of becoming the Kuwaiti Minister of Media was at least partly due to his involvement in the making of the successful *Message/Al-Risalah*, as well as to his high-profile TV

³⁶⁹ Akkad, Malek , email message to author,29 October 2010.

³⁷⁰Akkad, Malek , email message to author,29 October 2010.

³⁷¹Mohammed Nasser Al-Sanousi was born in Kuwait in 1938 and is the former Minister of the Ministry of Information and Media (in 2006). He received his Undergraduate Degree from USC and studied at the Higher Institute of Dramatic Arts in Egypt. He was heavily involved in building up Kuwaiti Television from 1960 onwards. In 1964, he became General Manager of television programmes in Kuwaiti TV and then Deputy Assistant for Television in the Kuwaiti Television for Government ministry until 1985. Later, he had a talk show dealing with social issues in Kuwait to improve community and avoid bad behaviour. The Kuwaiti Diplomat Fawaz Bourisly confirmed to me that Sanousi is a well-liked personality in Kuwait for being a “pioneer, light-hearted, spontaneous & visionary”. He is hated by Islamists and also by some liberals in Kuwait. Sanousi comes from a “prominent family” that is well known in Kuwait socially
Bourisly, Fawaz, email message to author,25 September2010.

³⁷²“Al Sanousi Yatahaddath.”

³⁷³“Al Sanousi Yatahaddath.”

career in Kuwait. Sanousi's TV career was launched when he produced and directed eight television episodes for United Artists starring César Ribeiro, about the Gulf region in 1967. The training and experience which Akkad gave Sanousi and the success of *The Message/Al-Risalah* which Akkad had shared with Sanousi helped build a strong foundation for Sanousi's career and allowed him to flourish in a way that he could not have done without Akkad's influence.

Unsurprisingly, Akkad also greatly influenced his son, Malek, as a filmmaker. As a result of his father's inspiration, Malek Akkad is now a rising filmmaker who has the necessary training, experience, and work ethic to help him make the kind of films he wants to make. Malek Akkad followed his father's path in graduating from the USC film school. After that, Malek worked for many years in the Los Angeles music video and advertising industry³⁷⁴ before going on to work for his father at the Akkad film company in Los Angeles, Trancas International Films,³⁷⁵ as a producer. Malek has accumulated twenty years' experience in the entertainment industry and now has the role of Chairman and CEO of Trancas. Under Malek's guidance, Trancas has evolved into a diverse Hollywood entertainment company involved in production, distribution, management, music publishing and merchandising. Akkad has produced the last three instalments of the *Halloween* franchise, distributed by Dimension films, and has also produced films including *Walking After Midnight*, *Made in Brooklyn*, and *The Psychic Murders*, which he also directed. Although these were not blockbuster films, they were successful. As a director, Malek Akkad has also developed numerous commercials and music videos, including for clients such

³⁷⁴Working in TV or music videos/commercials is a common path for inexperienced young filmmakers, before breaking through to low budget films and, as experience grows, into larger film projects with bigger budgets.

³⁷⁵"Trancas International Films."

as Coca Cola, artists like Lo-Ball, and the Arab artists Simon Shaheen³⁷⁶ and Kazem.³⁷⁷ Malek Akkad is currently developing *The Princess of Alhambra*, a sweeping historical epic set in medieval Spain, based on a script by Oscar-winning screenwriter Robert Bolt. Most recently, Malek Akkad has produced two remakes of *Halloween*, both with writer/director Rob Zombie in 2007 and 2009. The 2007 *Halloween* film was ranked number one at the US box office on its opening weekend, and holds the record for the highest grossing Labor Day opening in history. It has gone on to gross over US\$100 million worldwide. It is not surprising that, in the years following Akkad's death, the Syrian press reported that there was a new Moustapha Akkad in the making, his son Malek. Malek Akkad has helped to preserve his father's legacy by continuing and building on his father's unique success in the California film industry.

Moustapha Akkad's unique success as a California filmmaker came as result of his efforts to fit into and develop within that environment. Akkad also assimilated into American society by joining a fraternity at UCLA, playing American football and marrying an American woman. However, despite this, Akkad always maintained his identity as an Arab Muslim. He had a tight-knit group of Arab friends (many of whom emigrated and settled in Southern California at the same time as him) and, as he has got older, has made a point of returning annually to Syria to connect with his

³⁷⁶ Simon Shaheen is a highly esteemed Palestinian-American composer and musical virtuoso who first started to play the oud at the age of five and the violin a short time after that. He is well known for his work in traditional and classical Arabic music. He has also participated in many cross-cultural musical projects, including performing with producer Bill Laswell, Colombian singer Soraya, Henry Threadgill, Vishwa Mohan Bhatt, and with Jewish klezmer musicians The Klezmatics. In 1994, he received a National Heritage Fellowship from the National Endowment for the Arts. "Simon Shaheen."

³⁷⁷ Kazem Al Saher was born on 12 September 1957 in Iraq. He is a celebrated singer, composer and poet. He has established himself as one of the most successful singers in the Arab world, having sold millions of albums since the start of his career, including romantic ballads, political songs, pop and Arabic classical music. Due to his fame, he is commonly called the "Emperor of Arab Music" and "Elvis of the Middle East". "Kazem Al Saher."

birthplace. Thus, a key aspect of the legacy which Akkad left is the importance of not losing Arab identity or a focus on Arab issues.

However, it is not entirely clear to what extent and how Akkad's experiences and perspective influenced the Arab filmmakers that came after him. For example, it is not yet clear whether certain well-known Arab directors are following Akkad's example or simply following their own creative paths when creating films that employ Western film industry training and experiences. These include Ziad Doueiri, a Lebanese-American who wrote and directed the film *West Beirut*, which won the Prix Francois Chalais at the Cannes Film Festival in 1998. Another example is the female Arab-American Director, Cherien Dabis, whose movie *Amreeka* (2009), received great attention and awards.³⁷⁸ Like *The Message/Al-Risalah*, Dabis succeeded in getting her film released in the US. Again, there is no direct evidence to suggest that in this success she was inspired by or was following Akkad's example. However, it is possible that Amin Matalqa, who does directly cite Akkad as a key inspiration and influence, speaks for his entire generation.³⁷⁹ Matalqa wrote and directed the 2007 film *Captain Abu Raed*, which won prizes at numerous film festivals including the Sundance Film Festival, Heartland Film Festival and the Dubai International Film Festival. As he put it, "Moustapha Akkad is looked up to by all Arab filmmakers for his great accomplishments as an Arab filmmaker in Hollywood whose work ranged from the commercial epics like *The Message* and *Lion of the Desert* to starting one of the most successful horror franchises in history, the

³⁷⁸ At the Cannes Film Festival (2009), *Amreeka* won the FIPRESCI Prize at "Director's Fortnight". It also won other awards at Western and Arab film festivals around the world.

³⁷⁹ Others, like Dina Saba, Founder of the Arab Film Festival in California (USA), stated she was 'proud' that Akkad made it in Hollywood, and well known film actress HEND Sabri stated that Akkad was an 'inspiration' to her. Saba, Dina, email messages to author, 10 December 2010 and Sabri, HEND, email messages to author, 2 December 2010.

Halloween films. He is both looked up to and respected as an artist and as a kind and generous human being.”³⁸⁰

It seems that instead of walking in Akkad’s footsteps, it might be more accurate to say that these filmmakers deal with issues which are similar to those which Akkad and many other Arab filmmakers address, especially if they are interested in their work reaching a Western as well as an Arab audience and if they are concerned about applying Western film training and experience to their films. As well as addressing issues of common concern to the Arab world and the Arab diaspora, these filmmakers also struggle with the same obstacle that Akkad faced: the difficulty in getting funding for films. Omar al-Qattan remarks that the Arab filmmakers struggle because there is no domestic market in the Arab world itself:

a market that speaks the language of the film, that's naturally interested in the subject matter of the film – when that market is weak, and the Arab market is weak, it's a massive handicap for any filmmaker, because you're pleading your case for funding with international backers not the natural domestic market.³⁸¹

This means that many Arab filmmakers struggle to find funding to make films. This difficulty in obtaining funding is a key obstacle many Arab filmmakers encounter in trying to make the high-budget films which have more of a chance of reaching and engaging a more global mass cinema audience.

In this context, I can say that an important legacy of Akkad is the fact that he raised the creative and technical standard for Arab filmmakers and showed that an Arab filmmaker does not have to be limited by his/her circumstances or handicapped by a lack of funding. Against great odds, Akkad insisted on using the best Hollywood expertise, technology and capabilities that he could find to pursue his aim of making

³⁸⁰Matalqa, Amin, email message to author, 29 October 2010.

³⁸¹“Middle East”.

his desert epic films engaging to an international audience. This is not to say that Akkad necessarily found a universal solution to the persistent problem of funding Arab cinema. In an interview with Maged Hebtah on 9 August 2004, Akkad mentioned that he had many important projects planned, but that these were suspended until the appropriate funding came in. When Hebtah asked Akkad why he chooses this “passive” approach, Akkad replied:

I’m but a single individual and the filmmaking industry involves giant foundations. I’m not passive as you might say because I still persist in trying to find the finance. If I fail, I shouldn’t be the first one to be blamed because it is primarily the failure of the Arab officials to see the importance of carrying out these projects and their making promises they don’t keep.³⁸²

With his desert epic films, Akkad wanted to transcend the limiting Western category of “Arab cinema,” which tends *not* to reach a wide Arab audience, but usually only a small Western audience of critics and intellectuals, albeit an audience that includes many well-educated and influential members of the Arab diaspora.³⁸³ In the context of the Western film festival venue, Akkad’s films can be seen as a response to the patronizing views of critics and intellectual fans of Arab cinema who say “it is useless to approach the cinemas of struggling countries with aesthetic criteria. A burning subject matter doesn’t always allow for refined packaging.”³⁸⁴ Like the work of other talented Arab filmmakers, like Youssef Chahine, Akkad’s desert epic films especially show that it is not useless to apply aesthetic criteria to the work of Arab filmmakers, and that they should hold themselves and be held to a high standard so that they will not be marginalized as being too “third-world.” Akkad said: “If we keep saying this

³⁸² Hebtah, “Moustapha Akkad.”

³⁸³ The view stated here is the perception of Arab films usually classified as ‘arthouse films’ in the Western (world) film market. Many of these films are made by filmmakers who straddle both the Western film market and the Eastern film market. ‘Arab Cinema’, which is produced in the Arab world for an Arab audience, at times overlaps with filmmakers like Akkad, but the term usually delineates a different kind of cinema. Akkad was a pioneer of Arab-American ‘Arab Cinema’ such as has had a strong presence in the Arab World.

³⁸⁴ Bachmann, “In Search of Self-Definition”, 48.

passes and that passes...we will be just like the others [filmmakers]”³⁸⁵ He believed that high-quality films were the ideal way to challenge the distorted images of the Arab Muslims that are spread by the Western film industry. He stated:

We can surely afford to establish international high-quality cinematic production centers. In very plain language, I declare that Muslims will achieve nothing with their arsenals, ammunition, condemnations, or denunciations. There is no solution but the media, only the media.³⁸⁶

In many ways, an important message that can be taken from Akkad’s work is the importance he placed on challenging himself as a filmmaker and challenging the status quo of the Western view of Arabs. However, although these concerns are very important, they are not entirely unique, being shared by many Arab filmmakers who came before and after Akkad. The significance of Akkad lies in the uniqueness of his vision and in the very particular way that he chose to address those same issues that confront so many other Arab filmmakers. In his desert epics, Akkad can certainly be seen as an impressive example of an Arab filmmaker who handled the complexities of and obstacles to his work in a unique way.

4.3 Akkad’s Legacy as Bridge between the Middle East and the West

“The Arab problem with the other is nothing but a problem of information.”³⁸⁷

As we have seen, at the core of Akkad’s working life was the strong desire to counter the misconceptions and stereotypes encountered by Arabs in the Western world. This is very clear in his desert epics, where he shows Islamic and Muslim heroes to Western audiences in a different, more positive light. This is what makes Akkad a good example of a leader—he worked to improve the poor communications

³⁸⁵*From Aleppo to Hollywood.*

³⁸⁶ Hebtah, “Moustapha Akkad”.

³⁸⁷Hebtah, “Moustapha Akkad.”

between the Middle East and the West. Unfortunately, Akkad did not fulfil his full potential in this goal because he died before his time and before completing his third desert epic, *Saladin*. Akkad's achievements can be seen simply as a start towards a new beginning, and in this way should be treated as an open invitation to other Arabs involved in media to continue his work:

Some people think that once they make a film or two our cause has changed... no no... we are talking about a program for years but there needs to be a studied plan and it should not only be films but television, journalism, and in all media aspects in general.³⁸⁸

It is interesting to note that, even in these present times, filmmakers are trying to work on films dealing with the same subject matter that Akkad addressed.³⁸⁹ In 2008, producer Oscar Zoghbi, who worked on *The Message/AI-Risalah*, announced that he had plans to do a remake of the original film that would be called *The Messenger of Peace*.³⁹⁰

Another key element of Akkad's legacy is that his work succeeded in bridging significant gaps between the West and the Middle East. When describing the purpose behind his work, Akkad said: 'I am an Arab artist who tried to reach the Western mind'.³⁹¹ His two films educated many people in the West, and continue to do so now. Indeed, it is evident that his films, whatever their shortcomings in the mainstream box office, have been accepted by the West as credible educational sources.

For example, in *Teen Spirit: One World, Many Paths*, Paul B. Raushenbush mentions both *The Message* and *Lion of the Desert* as useful sources for information

³⁸⁸*From Aleppo to Hollywood.*

³⁸⁹ At the time of writing, two film projects have been announced of life stories of the Prophet Muhammad: "Prophet Mohammed film planned."

³⁹⁰Brooks, "Controversial biopic."

³⁹¹*From Aleppo to Hollywood.*

on Islam.³⁹² His endorsement of Akkad's work must be given some weight on account of Raushenbush's position as Associate Dean of Religious Life at Princeton University, and his reputation for providing teenagers with non-judgmental information about major religions. *The Message* is also mentioned in a more recent educational book that came out in 2009 by William Benedict Russell III. Here *The Message* is mentioned in a section on religion along with *Gandhi*, *The Last Temptation of Christ* and *The Ten Commandments*, all films which "help provoke thought and discussion".³⁹³ Russell's book is aimed at teachers of the secondary and college level, and he intended it to be "a resource for those interested in promoting discussion, analysis and critical thinking in the classroom through the examination of social issues using film."³⁹⁴

Another educational reference can be found in a book by Sandra Ponzanesi, which highlights the importance of *Lion of the Desert* as a "post colonial response to the fascist representations."³⁹⁵ It is also interesting to note that *Lion of the Desert* appears in a book on biography by Daniel S. Burt,³⁹⁶ in the section that discusses recommended biographical films.

What I see by exploring this sample of references to Akkad's desert epics is that they are seen as credible sources for education and for promoting constructive discussions. In this educational market, there seems to be a true niche for Akkad's desert epics and a significant legacy for coming generations. In this way, Akkad's desert epics have gone beyond just entertaining and engaging a Western audience. They are being used as effective tools to help educate and dispel misconceptions

³⁹² Raushenbush, *Teen Spirit*, 234.

³⁹³ Russell, *Teaching Social Issues*, xiii.

³⁹⁴ Russell and Waters, *Reel Character Education*, xii.

³⁹⁵ Ponzanesi, *Paradoxes of Post-Colonial Culture*, 225.

³⁹⁶ Burt, *The Biography Book*, 303.

about Islam and Arabs that are common in the West. This is exactly what Akkad intended, and is probably the reason why he chose to make *The Message* and *Lion of the Desert* as epic films. With their large-budget productions, sophisticated cinematic technology and sweeping music, epic films appeal to a general audience's emotions more than any other films. In this way, they can encourage a "willing suspension of disbelief"³⁹⁷ or a "breaking of the fourth wall"³⁹⁸ for the audience, which makes it easier to address any prejudices, stereotypes or misconceptions that they may have.

It is possible to argue that the true niche for Akkad's desert epics is the educational arena where they appear to have more lasting impact than in the area of "pure entertainment" — Hollywood's typical forte. Although they appear in mainstream television and other media in the Muslim Arab world, these films do not have the same prominence in the West, but they do play a meaningful role in key educational contexts.

Akkad understood the power of using films to challenge prejudices, stereotypes and misconceptions about Muslim Arabs because he saw the power of films in perpetuating these negative things. Akkad believed that what would improve Middle Eastern relations with the West was positive media, not wars and weaponry:

We spend billions on buying tanks and jet fighters but never see a single bullet fired against our enemies. Only 10 percent of our armament budget would be sufficient to create miracles. War now is but a media war. Unfortunately, we seek solace in talking among ourselves but never try to convey our ideas and true image to the world. We are not in need of military weaponry to change the horrible image that Muslims are struck with. It is more important to know how to use the most effective weapon in the modern world, the media.³⁹⁹

³⁹⁷Ferri, *Willing Suspension of Disbelief*, xiii.

³⁹⁸Darlington, *Through the Fourth Wall*, 11.

³⁹⁹ Hebtah, "Cinematic Armament is the Arab's Last Chance." IslamOnline, 1.

As Jack Shaheen states,⁴⁰⁰ live images on big screen and television go beyond a thousand words in perpetuating stereotypes and clichés. In his book, Shaheen surveys more than a century of Hollywood's projection of negative images of Arabs and Muslims. Based on a study of more than 900 films displaying Arab characters, Shaheen shows how moviegoers are led to believe that all Arabs are Muslims and all Muslims are Arabs. The moviemakers' distorted lenses have shown Arabs as heartless, brutal, uncivilized, religious fanatics through common depictions of Arabs kidnapping or raping a fair maiden, expressing hatred against the Jews and Christians and demonstrating a love for wealth and power.⁴⁰¹ In his analysis, Shaheen also shows how widely these misconceptions have spread in the world:

Because of the vast American cultural reach via television and film... the all-pervasive Arab stereotypes have much more of a negative impact on viewers today than it did thirty or forty years ago. Nowadays, Hollywood's motion pictures reach nearly everyone. Cinematic illusions are created, nurtured, and distributed worldwide, reaching viewers in more than 100 countries, from Iceland to Thailand. Arab images have an effect not only on international audiences, but on international movie makers as well.⁴⁰²

When one observes the current situation in cinema, one notices first that it is dominated by American output, which has imposed on the whole world its aesthetics, its genres and its heroes.⁴⁰³ It could be said, therefore, that Akkad's films come, as it were, "from the belly of the beast."

Out of the over 900 feature films that Shaheen analysed, he only found "a handful of heroic Arabs" and those only appeared in 5% of the total number of films reviewed. In this small group, Shaheen includes Akkad's desert epics,⁴⁰⁴ which he

⁴⁰⁰Shaheen, "Reel Bad Arabs," 171.

⁴⁰¹Shaheen, "Reel Bad Arabs," 171.

⁴⁰²Shaheen, "Reel Bad Arabs," 174.

⁴⁰³Hennebelle, "Arab Cinema," 7.

⁴⁰⁴Shaheen, "Reel Bad Arabs" 176.

singles out as films that are “of very high quality indeed,” and which successfully debunk stereotypes. According to Shaheen:

Ethnic stereotypes do not die off on their own, but are hunted down and terminated by those whom the stereotypes victimize. Other groups, African-Americans, Asian-Americans and Jewish-Americans, have acted aggressively against discriminatory portraits. Arab-Americans as a group, however, have been slow to mobilize and, as a result, their protests are rarely heard in Hollywood and even when heard, are heard too faintly to get the offenders to back off. Another reason is lack of presence... One reason, simply put, is that there are not many Arab-Americans involved in the film industry.⁴⁰⁵

By celebrating Muslim Arab heroes in his desert epics, Akkad contradicted “discriminatory portraits” of Arabs and Islam. Through his powerful role in the *Halloween* franchise, he created a presence and space for himself in the Hollywood film industry as a Muslim Arab filmmaker. In this way, we can see that a key legacy of Akkad was to bridge the significant gaps between the West and Middle East that are caused by ignorance, misconceptions and the lack of presence or visibility of Arab Muslims. Through the success of his films, Akkad helped in some way to rectify the lack of understanding and respect between the two cultures.

4.4 Akkad’s Legacy of Arab Muslim Identity and Pride

We cannot say there are no Arab and Muslim terrorists. Of course there are. But at the same time, balance it with the image of the normal human being, the Arab-American, the family man. The lack of anyone sharing the other side makes it stand out that in Hollywood, Muslims are only terrorists.⁴⁰⁶

Perhaps Akkad’s most interesting legacy is the way his desert epics provide Arab Muslim audiences with a sense of pride and a notable positive interpretation of Middle Eastern culture from their own viewpoint, as insiders. Akkad’s desert epics

⁴⁰⁵Shaheen, “Reel Bad Arabs”, 190-91.

⁴⁰⁶ Akkad cited in Goodstein, “Hollywood Now Plays Cowboys and Arabs”.

challenge the distorted Western views with which Arab Muslim audiences are inundated in cinemas and have to a certain extent internalized. In this way, Akkad's desert epics can also be seen as a challenge to Orientalism, as defined by Edward Said in his book of the same name.⁴⁰⁷ Said defined Orientalism as "a school of interpretation whose material happens to be the Orient, its civilizations, peoples and localities"⁴⁰⁸ and which is based on Eurocentric false assumptions and prejudice against Muslim Arabs and their culture. Said highlights examples of Orientalism in film and television where "the Arab is associated either with lechery or bloodthirsty dishonesty... slave trader, camel driver, moneychanger, colorful scoundrel: these are some traditional Arab roles in the cinema."⁴⁰⁹ Akkad's desert epics counter such Orientalism because they reinterpret Arab Muslim culture in positive ways, and because they are large-scale cinematic celebrations of great Arab Muslim heroes like Omar al-Mukhar and the Prophet Muhammad.

Orientalism in film is especially dangerous because of how widely it is subsequently distributed throughout the world and how strongly it appeals to mass audiences. The Orientalist vision in films is even widely distributed in Africa and the Arab world, perpetuating with it a power relation vital to the preservation of the colonial order.⁴¹⁰ At the beginning of his book, Said includes a reference to Marx and suggests that one element of Orientalism is the idea that the Orientals "cannot represent themselves; they must be represented."⁴¹¹ Akkad's desert epics show that Arab Muslims can successfully represent themselves in cinema. Akkad said: "We must make films about the Middle East, Islam. We can't ask Hollywood to make our

⁴⁰⁷Said, *Orientalism*.

⁴⁰⁸Said, *Orientalism*, 203.

⁴⁰⁹Said, *Orientalism*, 286-287.

⁴¹⁰Rose, "The Uprooted Cinema", 152.

⁴¹¹ Said, *Orientalism* (This appears at the very beginning of Said's book, on an unnumbered page).

films for us – we need to change our own image.”⁴¹² This is important because it is necessary to ensure a more balanced view than is usually provided of Arab Muslims through the mainstream Western film industry. This more balanced view is not only needed for Western cinema audiences, but it is also crucial for Middle Eastern cinema audiences, which struggle to define their culture and identity in the face of their distorted image. Akkad’s feelings about this seem to be best encapsulated in the words his sister Layla remembers him saying in order to urge the Arabs to challenge their distorted image: “A little anger o Arabs.”

Judging from my own personal experiences, Akkad’s desert epics are an important part of the viewing patterns of many young Arabs. Akkad’s desert epics have become classics on Arabic television, frequently aired during special occasions and religious holidays, like the Muslim Eid. This influence is incredibly powerful, as “young people in the Arab world spend on average more time watching satellite broadcasts than they spend in school or with their families.”⁴¹³ This research was based on 17-26 year olds in Egypt, Jordan, the United Arab Emirates and Palestine. Thus, Akkad’s desert epics fill a vacuum for Arab youth in terms of their identity, especially in relation to the Western world and the negative Arab imagery from Hollywood movies and television shows that get shown around the world either on satellite TV⁴¹⁴ or on DVDs.

⁴¹²“Halloween Producer’s Epic Plan.”

⁴¹³ Karam, *Arab Media and Political Renewal*, 80-92.

⁴¹⁴ MBC4 in particular transmits mostly American (sometimes British) films, shows and programmes in the English language with Arabic subtitles. American movies, TV sitcoms and programmes like *Oprah* and *Dr. Phil* are very popular.

Chapter 5: Conclusion

In concluding this thesis, we should remember that its purpose has been to explore Akkad in a number of ways. In Chapter 2, I looked at Akkad's life both as a person coming from an Arab background to the West and as a filmmaker. I also examined the elements in his life that shaped him, influenced him and helped his development as a filmmaker. In Chapter 3, I explored the most significant aspect of Akkad's life, his films. In particular, I examined the processes that were used to create these films and also the films themselves as creative results. Following on from that, I reviewed Akkad's legacy in Chapter 4 where I showed the important role that Akkad played as producer with his financial support of the *Halloween* movies. I also explored Akkad's desert epics and whether these films succeeded in achieving Akkad's goal of bridging the gap between the Western and Islamic world that he stated in a 1976 interview.⁴¹⁵ I focused on three main areas in this context. One of these areas involved looking at how Akkad's desert epics have a place in the education market where they are used as a tool to teach Western students about Islam, a religion many of them know little about. Another area of success for Akkad's desert epics relates to how they are viewed by people in the Arab Muslim world as a positive representation of their identity and a source of pride. This is especially significant, since the widely available mainstream Western media tends to represent the Arab Muslim world in negative ways. Another area I explored relates to how successful Akkad's desert epics were in reaching a Western audience.

Akkad was a filmmaker who very much believed in the power of film to reach a wide audience and have a significant social impact. In many ways, this thesis

⁴¹⁵*The Making of Mohammed, Messenger of God*, 1976.

shows that Akkad was a pioneering filmmaker who was able to reach a wide audience of Arabs and Muslims. However, his films struggled to reach a Western audience, and for this reason they also struggled in trying to bridge cultural differences between East and West.

When they were released in cinemas in both the Middle East and the West, Akkad's desert epics often created controversy and were even banned in certain countries, so they were generally not successful at the box office. However, in the Middle East, the popularity of Akkad's desert epics was helped, somewhat ironically, by the availability of pirated copies that were part of the "small media" revolution. Consequently, Akkad's films *The Message/Al-Risalah* and *Lion of the Desert* seem to have reached a wider audience in the Middle East than might have been possible through official government-controlled channels. Especially after he died in 2005, there was an increase in official recognition and showings of Akkad's movies in the Middle East.⁴¹⁶

It also has to be stated in my conclusion to this thesis that I do not claim an 'objective position'. Denscombe states that, "values and experiences are not something to be bracketed away as if ashamed by their entry into the process."⁴¹⁷ My values and religion are similar to Akkad's, as well as to the people I interviewed. As an Arab, I obtained easier access to research opportunities than would have been the case otherwise, and I also had an understanding of the culture and rules on a deeper psychological level than someone who could be seen by the interviewees as an 'outsider'.

⁴¹⁶ This was evident on Arab Satellite Channels like MBC, as well as terrestrial broadcasting on Middle East channels during Islamic Religious Holidays like Eid and Ramadan, which are equivalent to the Christmas season of movies on British/American television.

⁴¹⁷ Denscombe, *The Good Research Guide*, 61.

Although I am not Syrian or ‘Halabi’⁴¹⁸, I tried to give a balanced view in this thesis and challenge my views and assumptions on a daily basis. I challenged my assumptions by talking with fellow students who were from different backgrounds and faiths to try and make sure I was more balanced in my perceptions and views. Academic research has not reached a stage of understanding that the ‘researcher’ is not an ‘objective neutral force’ but is part of the process, and is a ‘social actor.’ This insight gave depth to my research that I think an ‘outsider’ might not have been able to achieve.

In my field research, my background of growing up on the West Coast of the US⁴¹⁹ and working at the Arab American Film Festival⁴²⁰ for two years was very helpful to me in making the necessary preparations for interviews and carrying out my research in a time-limited research trip to California. In addition, my field research trip to Syria was helped by my Arabic background and my ability to speak colloquial Arabic, as well as my travel experiences in Libya, Tunisia, Egypt, Jordan, and the United Arab Emirates. Although seen as a closed country in the West, I found that Syria was a relatively easy country to navigate. The Akkad family – in the form of former Ambassador and Government Minister Zohair Akkad – was also extremely accessible and helpful to me, as was Layla Akkad. Both had lived and studied or worked abroad in the US, Brazil, Spain, Lebanon, Cyprus, and Egypt.

Being Libyan by birth, I found that my background brought interesting elements to my research. Akkad’s films and his career were more connected to Libya than I realized when I first embarked on my thesis. My Libyan background

⁴¹⁸Someone from Halab (as it is known in the Arab world) or Aleppo (as it is known in the West).

⁴¹⁹ I spent ten years during my formative development living and studying in Oregon, US.

⁴²⁰ I worked as an Advisor for the festival.

may have affected the way people interacted with me while doing my research, which I tried to be aware of when interviewing and researching.

On an unconscious level, my journey for this thesis began in 2006 when I saw the BAFTA⁴²¹ and the 78th Annual Academy Awards⁴²² ceremonies, a few months after Akkad was killed with his daughter in Jordan. These events sparked my interest in this Arab filmmaker and drove me to find out more about him. Syria is where I felt I found out most about Moustapha Akkad, especially in his hometown of Aleppo. Meeting his family in Los Angeles gave an insight into his American life, but Syria, as he always said, was where his heart was, no matter where he went, and that was where he is fully honoured. Aleppo has many ways of honouring its son, in the form of a girls' school, memorial sites on streets and universities, streets in Aleppo and Beirut that are named after him and a museum that his sister told me was being developed and would open soon. Also, an official stamp has been issued, commemorating Akkad and showing that his fame had grown to iconic proportions.

The most moving experience during my research trip in Syria was when his sister Layla and brother Nabil took me to pay my respects to their brother at his grave, in a quiet part of Aleppo. Layla graciously agreed to accompany me to the site of Akkad's grave. She told me that many people have come to her and her family to express their condolences and pay their respect since the passing of their brother in 2005. Nabil Akkad also joined us in visiting the grave in what was a familiar ritual to both of them. When we reached the grave, Nabil and Layla recited Surat al-Fatiha.⁴²³ I also recited the same words from this section of the Quran,

⁴²¹ BAFTA hosted a showcase of contemporary Arab cinema in March 2006. The event also included a tribute to Akkad commemorating his work.

⁴²² The 78th Annual Academy Awards in Hollywood presented a memorial sequence featuring Akkad and other well-known film industry people who died in 2005-6.

⁴²³ This is the first chapter of the Quran which says "In the name of Allah, The Beneficent, the Merciful,

which so many Muslims know by heart. Once I left Syria, I realized that unconsciously I was trying to find Moustapha Akkad on my research trips. My journey ends with the completion of my thesis — by finally paying my respects in person to someone who inspired me, and so many others like me. Akkad created a space for himself that we did not even realise we needed. Only when we examine the facts of his life do we realize what he managed to achieve.

Moustapha Akkad's death in 2005 came at a time in which 9/11 still cast a long shadow over the Arab and Muslim world. What his tragic death did do was crystallize and make clear the importance of his film work, and the important role his generation played for the younger generation of Arabs, whether in the diaspora or the Arab world. He was seen as a hero in the Arab world and the journey his body made from Amman, Jordan to his birthplace Aleppo, Syria, in 2005 was worthy of a statesman or king.⁴²⁴ The people holding candles and pictures of him who crowded around his body in Amman, or when his car passed, and finally in Syria, where he was given a hero's burial, showed that he was genuinely loved, respected and admired. Official recognition came from the Syrian government and Syrian President Bashar al-Assad signed a decree awarding Akkad, an American citizen, Syria's most prestigious civil medal on the basis of "his Arab nationalist stances".⁴²⁵

Akkad enriched others through his work and gave the world a positive Arab role model, someone who understood the West and East but never betrayed who he was and where he came from. He also did it with considerable style, sophistication

Praise be to Allah, Lord of the Worlds, The Beneficent, the Merciful, Master of the Day of Judgement. Thee (alone) we worship; Thee (alone) we ask for help. Show us the straight path, The path of those whom Thou hast favoured; not the (path) of those who earn Thine anger nor of those who go astray".

⁴²⁴*From Aleppo to Hollywood.*

⁴²⁵ " Syria Buries Hollywood Producer", *Gulf News*

and charisma. He was called Caesar⁴²⁶ by his Oscar-winning British crew, and seemed to be king of his set. The respect from the British crew did not diminish his position with the Arab crew, who were as talented as their British counterparts. He managed to film two movies in a revolutionary country like Libya, which has a volatile leader in Colonel Qaddafi, at the height of turmoil in the 1970s.

In his final years, Akkad was putting together the production for his last film *Saladin* and giving interviews. It seems fitting that his last project should be about Saladin, a man who was known for having an 'outstanding character.'⁴²⁷ Perhaps Akkad's greatest achievement was to reflect back to his Arab Muslim audiences his view of what is positive about them and their culture. For that, Akkad is 'revered'⁴²⁸ in the Muslim world. In seeking to make *Saladin*, Akkad was again focusing on a subject that could be used to bridge differences between the West and the Muslim Arab world, for Saladin is an Arab hero who is also respected in the West.⁴²⁹ This shows that, even if his attempts to bridge differences between the West and the East were never totally fulfilled, Akkad still thought that this aim important to keep striving for in life. As he said, he was only one man (although an extremely strong character who was hard working, charismatic and talented) and we need an organised programme to achieve this immense goal, maybe even a new generation.

Dr. Alford Carleton, Akkad's Aleppo College Principal, own words on page five in 'Our President's Message' in the 1949 Aleppo College 'Literary Review Book' seem deeply profound of Akkad's future achievements:

⁴²⁶Akkad, Zohair, personal interview, 11 April 2009.

⁴²⁷ El-Aref, "Salaheddin"

⁴²⁸El-Aref, "Salaheddin"

⁴²⁹El-Aref, "Salaheddin"

.....that fifty years from now he can turn its yellowed pages and relive these days with joy because the best promise of his College years has been fulfilled, in life.⁴³⁰

⁴³⁰These words were taken from the 1949 Aleppo College 'Literary Review' Book, under 'Our President's Message' on p.188 of this thesis.

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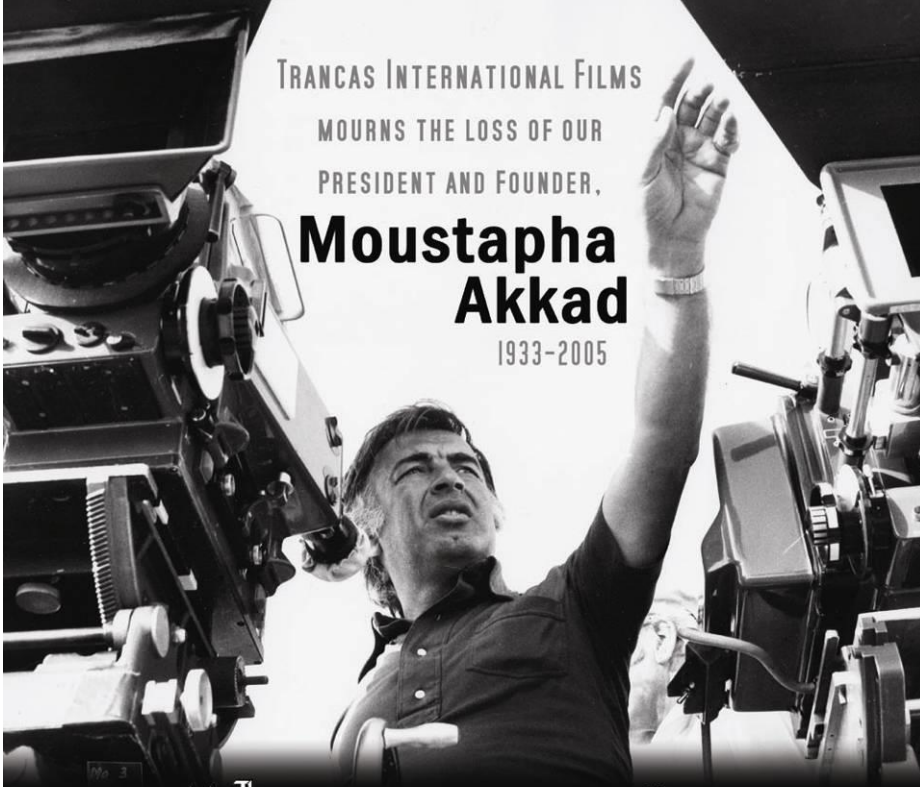
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Appendix




TRANCAS INTERNATIONAL FILMS
MOURNS THE LOSS OF OUR
PRESIDENT AND FOUNDER,
Moustapha Akkad
1933-2005

The Message HALLOWEEN *SON OF THE DESERT*

MOUSTAPHA AKKAD MEMORIAL SERVICE
WGA THEATRE - JANUARY 19, 2006 - 10:30AM TO 3:30PM
(135 S. DOHENY DRIVE, BEVERLY HILLS, CA)

 Trancas International®

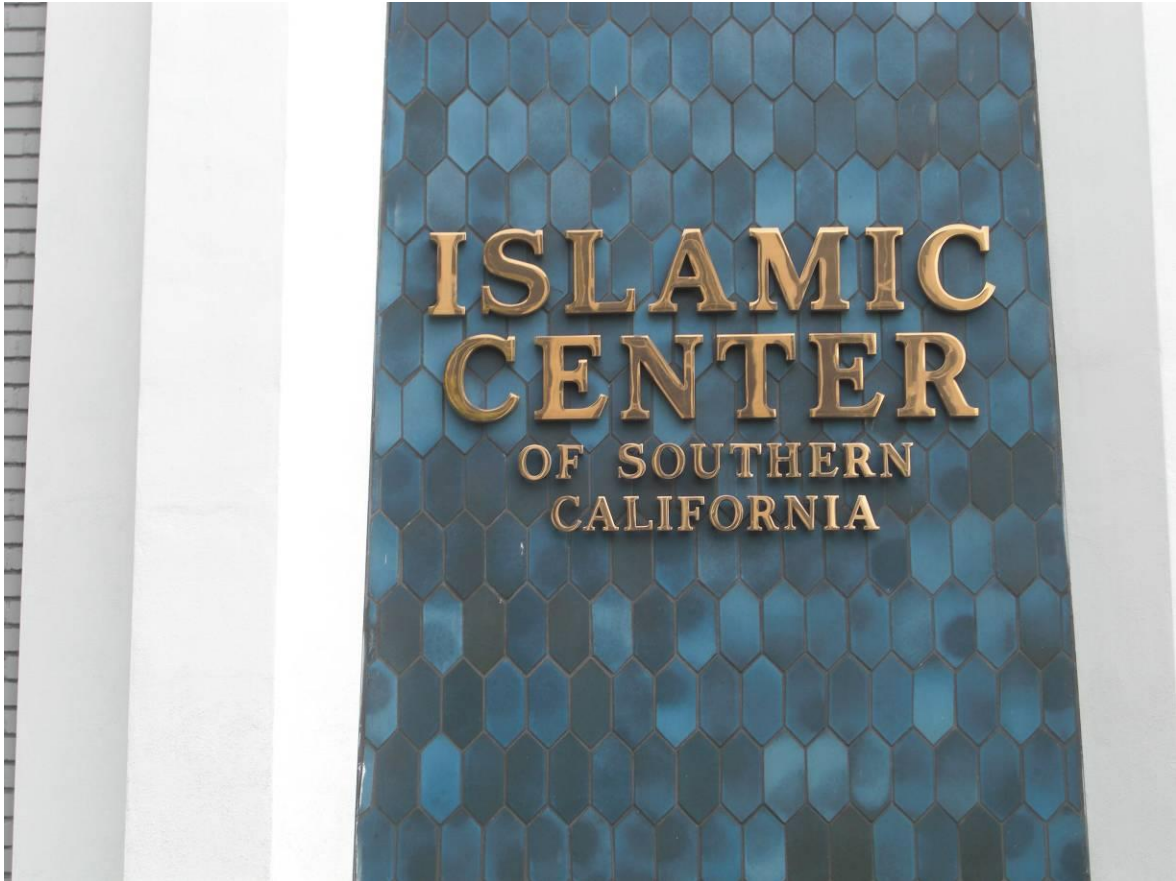


To attend the Memorial Service, please RSVP to 310-553-5599 or rsvp@trancasfilms.com

Variety Ad – Courtesy of Anthony Masi. 2006



Trancas International Films Production Company. Los Angeles, California. March, 2009
(picture taken by author).



The Islamic Center in Los Angeles, California. This is where the local Arab-American Community held a Memorial service for Moustapha Akkad with the Akkad family. March, 2009 (picture taken by author).



Memorial Site for Moustapha Akkad in Aleppo, Syria. April, 2009 (picture taken by author).



Girls' School named after Moustapha Akkad in Aleppo, Syria. April, 2009. (picture taken by author).



Grave of Moustapha Akkad in Aleppo, Syria. April, 2009 (picture taken by author).



Grave of Moustapha Akkad in Aleppo, Syria. April, 2009 (picture taken by author).

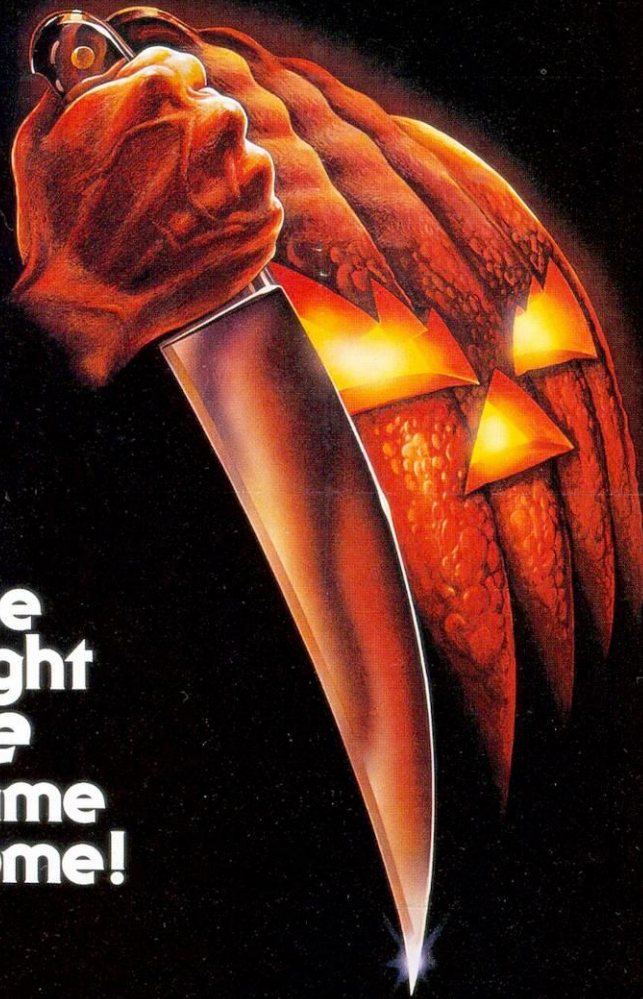


Street in Aleppo, Syria, named after Moustapha Akkad. April, 2009 (picture taken by author).



Young Malek Akkad with his father Moustapha Akkad, on the set of *Lion of the Desert* in Libya, 1980 (picture provided by Patricia Akkad).

HALLOWEEN



The
Night
He
Came
Home!

MOUSTAPHA AKKAD PRESENTS DONALD PLEASANCE IN JOHN CARPENTER'S "HALLOWEEN"
WITH JAMIE LEE CURTIS, P.J. SOLES, NANCY LOOMIS · WRITTEN BY JOHN CARPENTER AND DEBRA HILL
EXECUTIVE PRODUCER IRWIN YABLANS · DIRECTED BY JOHN CARPENTER · PRODUCED BY DEBRA HILL

PANAVISION

A COMPASS INTERNATIONAL RELEASE



TV-14 RESTRICTED

The Original Halloween Movie poster (1978). Internet Movie Database (www.imdb.com)



The original Michael Myers mask (from *Halloween*) – Trancas International Pictures, Los Angeles, California. March, 2009 (picture taken by author).

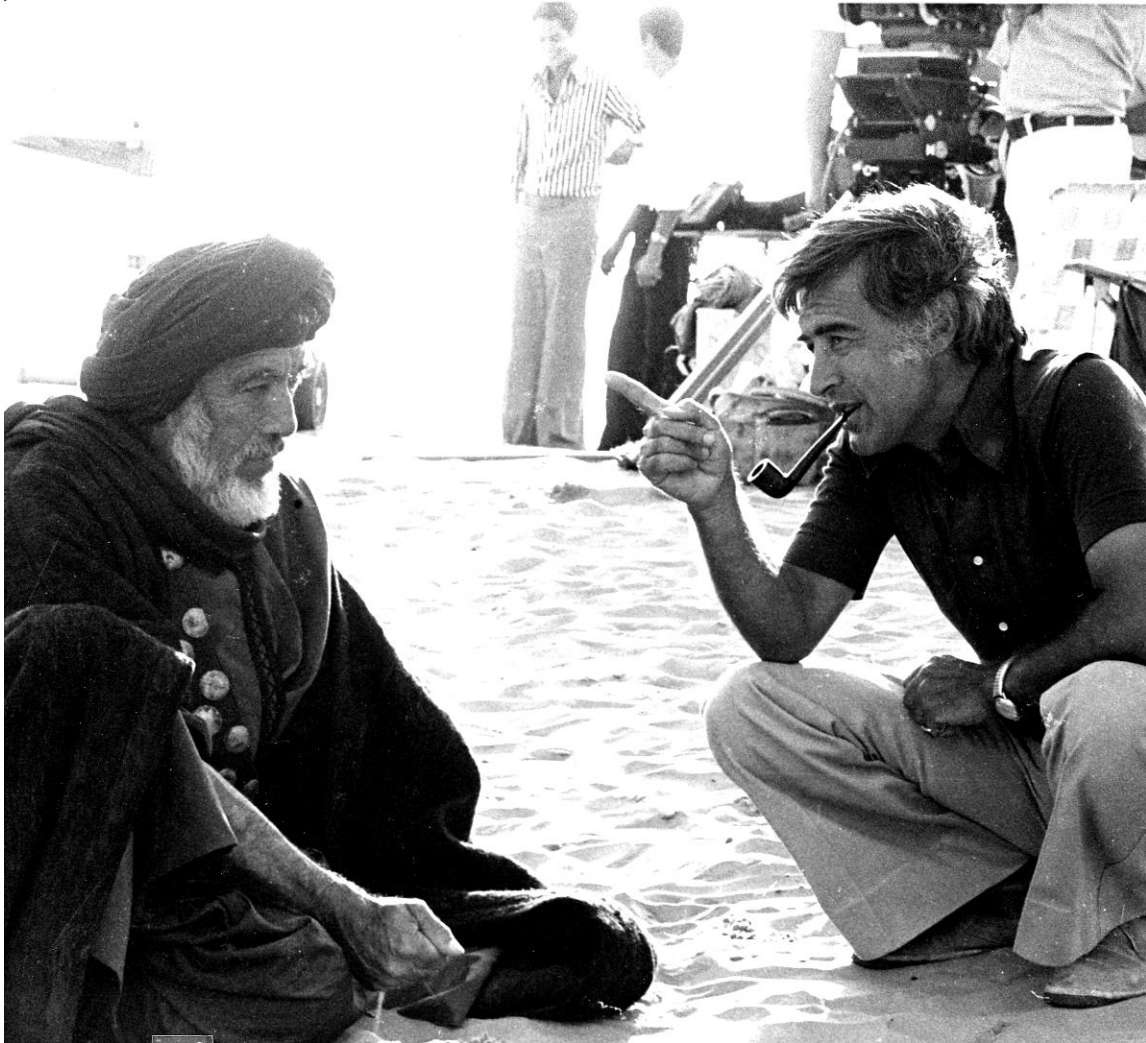


Al-Risalah Movie Poster, 1977. Internet Movie Database (www.imdb.com).



Left to right: Anthony Quinn, Irene Papas (English Cast: *The Message*), Moustapha Akkad, Mona Wassef, Abdullah Gaith (Arabic Cast: *Al-Risalah*) Morocco, 1976.

(picture provided by Zohair Akkad)



Iconic picture of Moustapha Akkad with his Hollywood star Anthony Quinn on the set of *The Message/Al-Risalah*, 1977.



Akkad sitting in a hotel lobby in the Middle East, holding court in his 'unofficial office', 2003 (picture from Dr. Faraj Najem).



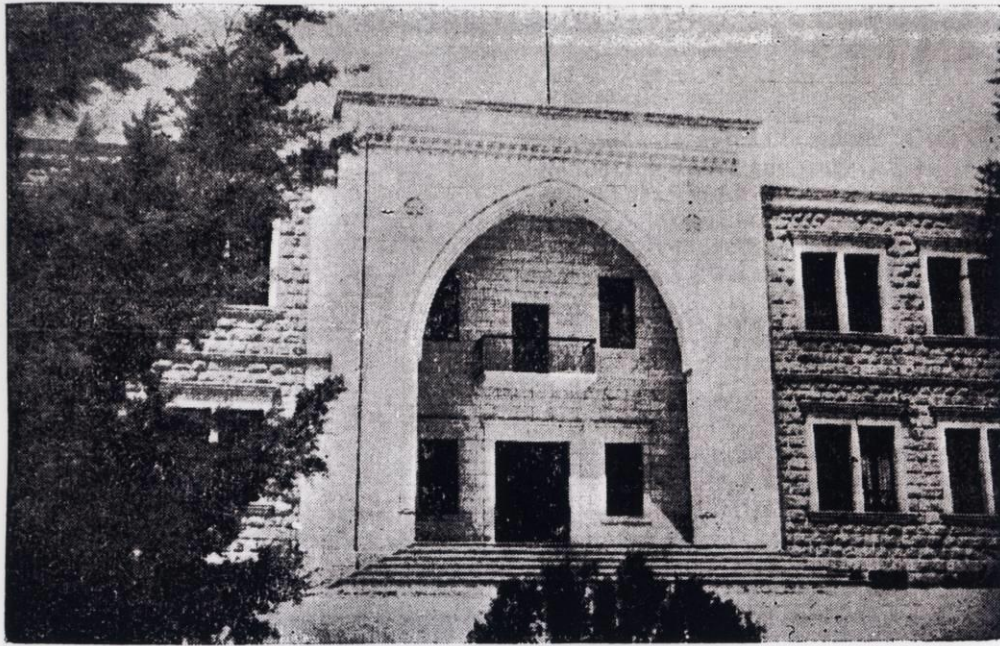
Anthony Quinn as Omar al-Mukhtar with Moustapha Akkad on location in Libya, 1980 (picture provided by Zohair Akkad).



The real Omar al-Mukhtar during his Italian Court Case, 1931
(<http://www.libyanet.com/omar11.htm>).



Moustapha Akkad on location for *Lion of the Desert* with his Assistant Director Mohammed Najem (wearing the modern cap and jeans jacket) and assorted Libyan crew and advisors, 1980 (picture provided by Mohammed Najem).



ALEPPO COLLEGE

From the town and from the mountain,
From plain and hill,
Come Thy sons as to a fountain
To drink their fill,
Day by day Thou wilt befriend us,
From all ill and wrong defend us,
Then to noble service send us
With heart and will.

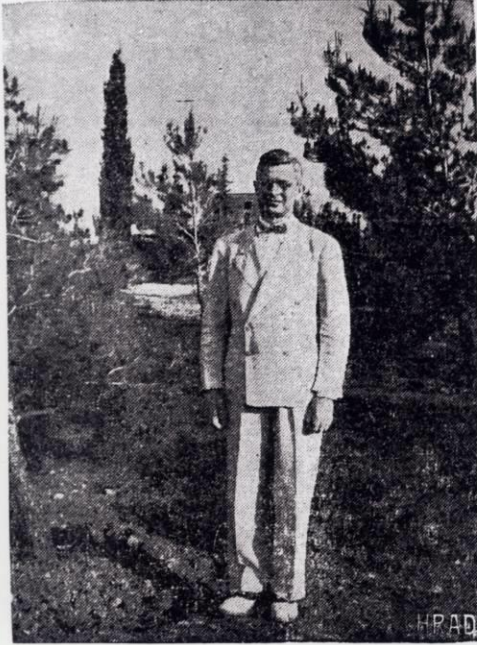
— 3 —

Aleppo College, Akkad's American School in Aleppo, Syria (Literary Review, 1949)
(book from Zohair Akkad).



Moustapha Akkad standing in front of Aleppo College before leaving for UCLA in 1954.

OUR PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE



Students naturally spend a lot of time looking ahead and very little time looking back. What is past is past, and not very interesting. What is yet to come is very exciting. Life is ahead, with plans for a career and for wealth and for adventure. There are dreams to be dreamed, and ideals to be worked out.

As the years go by, however, the past will become more interesting. The events of this school year, which now seem very ordinary and commonplace, will be seen in better perspective from the point of view of middle life. That is why such a book as this is valuable for every student. With the passing of the years it will grow in value as a record of the companionships, the struggles, the victories, and the dreams of the years in school. Every picture in it will bring its memories and its questions :

I wonder what became of.... ?
What a good friend he was !
Who ever thought that fellow would be famous ?
He was the finest teacher I ever had !
Why did I leave singing when I left the Glee Club ?
Do you remember that funny thing that happened when... ?
I always knew he would be a good radio announcer !
and so it will go through all the range of lessons, of student activities, and of companionship with teachers and students.

And then there should be a second volume. Let it be compiled fifty years later. In it put the faces of those living from the students of Aleppo College of 1949. Let it show their activities. What are their sports now ? Have they interesting hobbies ? Where do they stand in the community ? Have they learned to study, yet ? Who are their friends ? What do they think about when they are alone ? Has the promise they showed in the 1949 Year Book been realized ?

The second volume cannot be printed now — probably it never will get down on paper. But the first volume is here. May each student cherish his own copy, and look it over from time to time, and save it carefully, and hope that fifty years from now he can turn its yellowed pages and relive these days with joy because the best promise of his College years has been fulfilled, in life.

President and Principle Dr. Alford Carleton showing the college atmosphere in the Literary Review book (1949) (book given by Zohair Akkad).



Akkad with Patricia Akkad, Zohair Akkad and a family friend in front of Aleppo College, on one of his annual visits home to Aleppo, Syria (picture provided by Zohair Akkad).



Mr. Farajallah AZRAK

Physics

"Energy is eternal delight."

Mr. Souren BABIKIAN

Vector Analysis

"Let every man be fully
persuaded in his own
mind."



Dr. Alford CARLETON

Political Science

"Optimism is the faith that leads to
achievement."

Mrs. Mary CARLETON

English

"Good humor makes all
things tolerable."



Mr. Ibrahim HANNOUSH

Mathematics, Mechanical Drawing

"If you want a thing well done,
do it yourself."

Mr. Douglas HILL

Economics

"I hold the world but
as the world,
a stage where every
man must play his
part."



Aleppo College (Junior College) Teaching Staff 1949. (Literary Review 1949) (book from Zohair Akkad). Mr. Douglas Hill (bottom right), the professor that encouraged Akkad to apply to UCLA in 1954.

Dr. Alford Carleton, the principal and president (middle left), along with his wife Mrs. Mary Carleton (middle-right), were American Missionaries who were an important part of creating a welcoming American-style atmosphere⁴³¹ at the highly respected college in which Akkad flourished.

⁴³¹ Information gathered from Judd W. Kennedy and his Bachelor of Arts thesis, "American Missionaries in Turkey & Northern Syria and the Development of Central Turkey and Aleppo Colleges, 1874-1967" (2008) at the College of William and Mary in Virginia. Judd W. Kennedy, Emails to author, January 2011.

Cheer You, Aleppo College !



In true harmony with the foliage of its trees, the College, our College, remains evergreen through the years, through time which dulls other things, but only enhances more and more the fame of our school. Situated on a hill overlooking the city, our College dominates the town not only physically but also intellectually.

Any passer-by will be attracted by the external beauty of our school which is due to the panorama of the trees surrounding it. Anyone who enjoys this gift of nature should trace back its history, for every achievement has its beginning, has been the result of a need. Once upon a time, these trees were small, bearing little prophecy of their present maturity. Little by little they grew, in spite of the cold and the heat, as if they had a purpose in mind — that of perseverance, inspired by their planters. However, the grandeur of the trees does not lie in their size, but in the kind of fruit or leaves they produce.

We can liken the story of the founding of Aleppo College to that of its outer scenery. The College is a product of some cooperative, farsighted persons. The young, unknown, lonely school has grown into the most popular one in the city. It has ascended the mountain of popularity slowly but so surely that finally it must arrive. Every student should understand well that the greatness of Aleppo College does not lie in its campus, athletic fields, buildings, but in the kind of education it gives to its students, in its ideal. The ideal is that of teaching cooperation among all nations and classes. Its instruction teaches us to disregard all possible religious or national differences and to march onwards towards the goal of learning.

Then cheer you, Aleppo — College, for your struggle has been a worthy one !
Cheer you, for your sons will keep your glory.

K. PALANJIAN

SECTION A



Kevork Ajamian



Abdallah Alameddin



Moustapha Akkad



Avedis Arslanian



Kareem Ayyub



Vartkes Boghossian



Mouhammad
Dallal-Bashi



Makhul Boutros



Dikran Chapanian

A young Moustapha Akkad (top left) in 1949 with his fellow Aleppo College classmates⁴³². (Literary Review, 1949) (book from Zohair Akkad).

⁴³² Many would later become doctors, engineers, politicians and emigrate to the USA. Judd W. Kennedy, Emails to author, January 2011.

THE FIFTH SECONDARY



Drawings done by the young Moustapha Akkad for the Literary Review (1949) (book from Zohair Akkad).



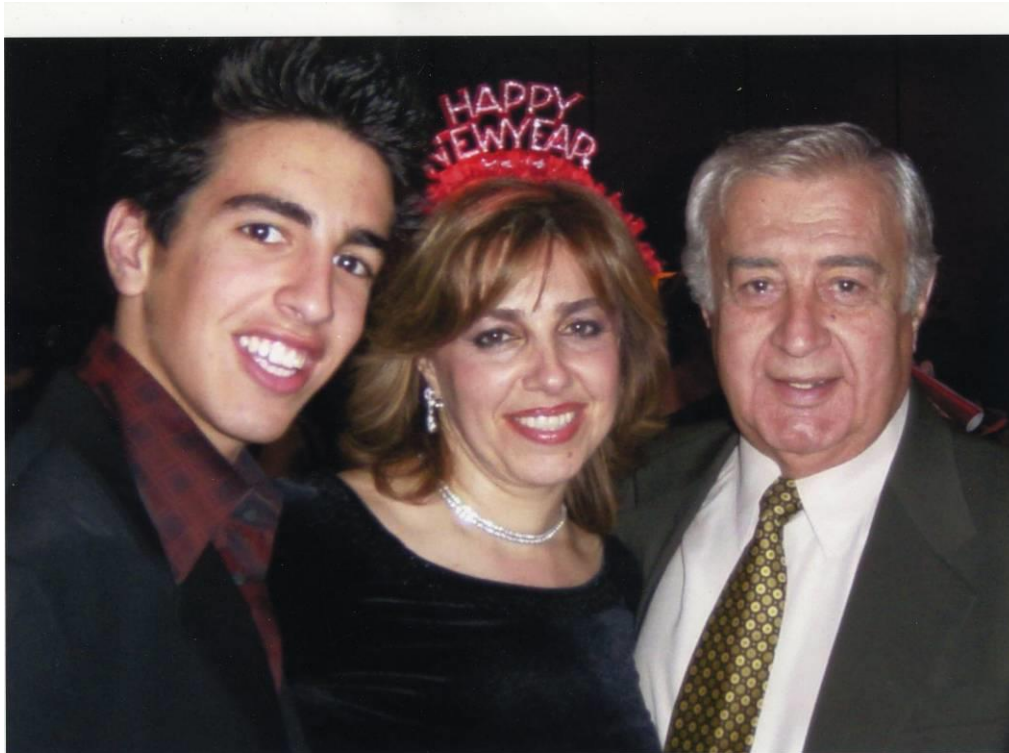
Drawings done by the young Moustapha Akkad for the Literary Review (1949) (book from Zohair Akkad).



Moustapha Akkad with his Director of Photography, Jack Hildyard for *The Message/Al-Risalah* and *Lion of the Desert*, 1977 (picture provided by Zohair Akkad).

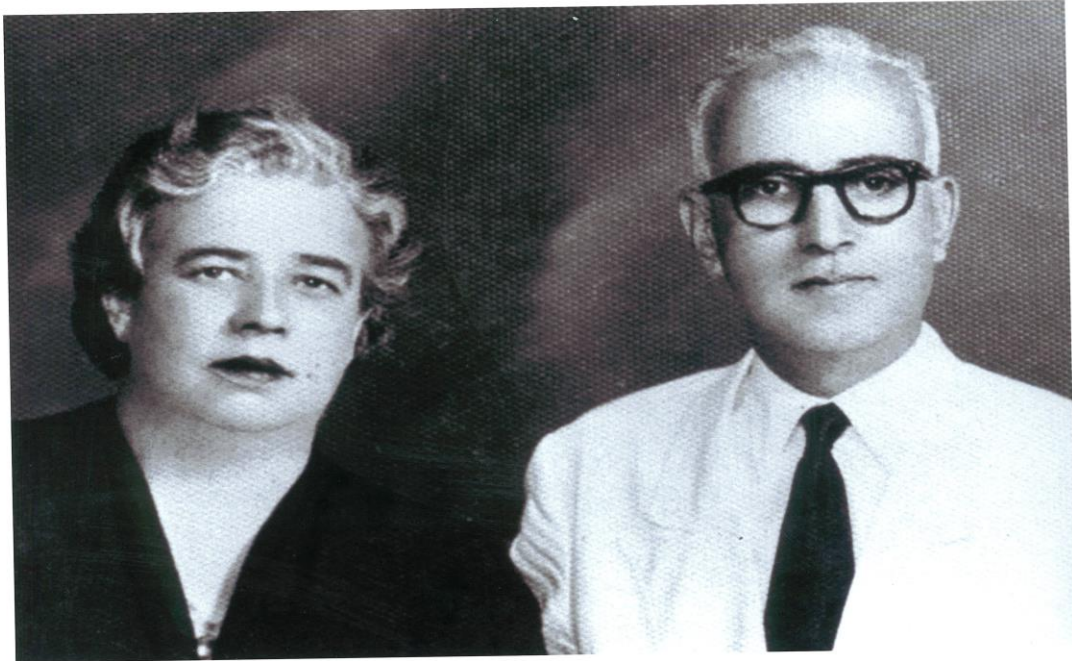


Moustapha Akkad with King Hussain, Queen Noor and friends, Jordan, 1977 (picture provided by Zohair Akkad).



(Above) Souha Akkad with Moustapha Akkad and their youngest child Zade Akkad.

(below) Akkad Family Gathering, 2003. Left to Right: Reyad, Wael, Layla, Ousama, Nabil, Zohair, and Moustapha (pictures provided by Patricia Akkad).



Moustapha Akkad's Parents (top).



Young Moustapha with his grandfather, who he was named after (bottom) (pictures provided by Zohair Akkad).



Young Akkad family in Aleppo, Syria before Moustapha Akkad emigrated to the USA in 1954.



Akkad family in 2003. (From Left to Right) Moustapha, Zohair, Layla, Wael, Reyad, Ousama, and Nabil (picture provided by Zohair Akkad).



Left to Right: Taric, Moustapha, Patricia, Malek, and Rima. California, 2002 (top).

Rima Akkad Monla on her wedding day with her father Moustapha in the Middle East, 1999 (bottom) (pictures provided by Patricia Akkad).



Bakri Akkad with his father Moustapha Akkad.



Young Moustapha Akkad standing next to a drawing of his principle and Aleppo College President Dr. Alford Carleton, a missionary who was known to have a 'deep understanding of interfaith and intercultural realities'.

<http://www.oberlin.edu/archive/holdings/finding/RG30/SG385/biography.html>



Moustapha Akkad with his grandsons from his daughter Rima Akkad Monla (left: Moustapha, right: Tarek) in Los Angeles, California, 2004 (picture courtesy of Patricia Akkad).



Official Syrian Stamp of Moustapha Akkad, 2009.

