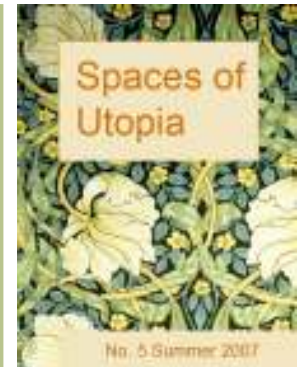


Utopia and the Middle Ages in Popular Culture: A Reading of Ridley Scott's *Kingdom of Heaven*

Maria Bonet and John Style
Rovira I Virgili University, Tarragona, Spain



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1. Introduction: *Kingdom of Heaven* as a large-scale multicultural production

Academic studies of utopia have tried to define their object of study in terms of either form or function, as Ruth Levitas suggests in the introductory chapter of *The Concept of Utopia*. When definition in terms of form is attempted, it governs, among other things, the subject-matter of the field, which tends to fall into two large categories: communal societies and utopian literature. While some academics have restricted their interest only to literary texts, cultural critics of other fields have nevertheless identified utopian elements within their areas of study. In our case, the film *Kingdom of Heaven*, directed by Ridley Scott and released by Twentieth-Century Fox in 2005, has its source in an original screenplay by the American author William Monahan. So, while we are discussing a cinematic narrative, as an object of study it is not far divorced from the literary texts academics of a more restrictive inclination have chosen to study until now.

Functional studies of a utopian text, on the other hand, tend to focus on the conscious or unconscious aims of the text, in terms of its author's intentions, and on the social, historical and political effect of the text as a means of criticising the current state of affairs or of proposing a blueprint for alternative social structures. If considered from a functional point of view, as a filmic narrative, *Kingdom of Heaven* offers the viewer images of collective utopian dreams which fail to be realized, perhaps because they are unrealisable. Set at the time of Saladin's siege of Jerusalem and the lead-up up to the Third Crusade, the film does not aim to attempt a deep historical analysis, or indeed to analyse history as a utopian entity, but rather uses historical elements as utopian and dystopian referents. The documentary on the preproduction process in the Director's Cut version of the film makes clear that the producers were at all times aware that these elements would be seen to allude directly to contemporary world events in the mind of the cinema-goer.¹ As such, *Kingdom of Heaven* is one of those utopian narratives which use the past to confer a certain apparent legitimacy on its vision, and to reinforce the idea that if an attempt to realize the vision had actually happened in the past, it could happen again in the future. Its interest in the past is therefore primarily as a source of historical justification rather than as historical criticism.

Cultural products for mass consumption such as books, films and even video games,² which idealize or reinvent the medieval past as a fertile site where utopian visions prosper, are a well-established and lucrative phenomenon. Part of their success surely resides in the power that the Middle Ages exercise on the collective imagination, where the preferences, dreams and desires of large sectors

of the public can be expressed. It is precisely in this process of idealization or reinvention that utopian visions prosper. According to one of the film's producers, interviewed in the Director's Cut production documentary one of the attractions for the financial backers of Ridley Scott's *Kingdom of Heaven* project was precisely that it was hoped that it would tap into the mass audience's penchant for medieval fantasy and so make a large profit. As it was, the film broke even at the box-office, but did not achieve the kind of enormous success of other epics by the same director, such as *Gladiator*. Considering that Scott had grossed over 100 million dollars with three of his previous films, such as *Bladerunner* (1982), the aforementioned *Gladiator* (2000) and *Black Hawk Down* (2001), the film was seen as a relative economic failure. Suffice it to say, at the production stage, the film promised to enjoy the same success as the other large-scale productions for which Ridley Scott was famous, with which it shared the sense of epic adventure and a similar recreation of a very different world from that of its primarily Western audience.³

At the same time, *Kingdom of Heaven* is a clear example of Ridley Scott's interest in spiritual and religious questions, and in how the individual struggles to be true to their highest ideals when faced with the temptations of power. This theme is also pursued in a positive sense in *Gladiator*, and in a more negative sense in *Bladerunner*. It also fits into a long line of popular films which have combined religion and epic in historical settings, finding the Middle Ages to be particularly fertile for this purpose.

Kingdom of Heaven tells the story of a French blacksmith, Balian, who leaves his home after his wife's suicide and after killing the local priest, to join his father, Godfrey, Baron of Ebelin, on the journey to the Holy Land. While at Messina, Godfrey dies of his wounds, but not before initiating Balian into the knighthood and making him the new Lord of Ebelin. Balian survives shipwreck and a duel to the death in the desert on his way to Jerusalem where he is eventually recognized and meets the king, Baldwin IV, and his adviser, Tiberias. Together with the Muslim leader, Saladin, they ensure that Jerusalem enjoys a period of relative peace, despite the unprincipled behaviour of certain Christians, such as the Templars, led by Baldwin's brother-in-law, Guy of Lusignan, and the spectacularly unscrupulous Reynald of Châtillon. Balian has no interest in political machinations and retires to his castle at Ebelin. There, together with his knights and the people, he sinks new wells and works the land into a fertile property, and he receives the amorous attention of Baldwin's sister, the Princess Sybilla.

After the Templars' attack on a camel train provokes Saladin's revenge on Reynald's castle at Kerak, Balian and a handful of knights face impossible odds by charging the Muslim army headlong, in order to win time for the defenceless people to retreat within the castle walls. Balian, whose reputation precedes him, is captured by the Muslims but released. When Baldwin, dying of leprosy, offers Balian the crown and Sybilla's hand, he refuses, as this would require complicity in the murder of Guy of Lusignan, a crime in which Balian wishes to have no part. So the crown passes to Guy, who declares war on the Muslims and foolishly rides out with the Crusader army to a spectacular defeat at the Battle of Hattin. Balian, left in

charge of the defence of Jerusalem, manages to lead the people for six days in resisting the Muslim assault. Then, with resources diminishing and defeat inevitable, Balian negotiates to surrender the city in return for a free passage to the coast for all the Christian occupiers. Given the honour of both Balian and Saladin, the truce holds, and Balian accompanies the people out of the city. The final scene shows Balian back at his forge in France; and when King Richard the Lionheart rides through, searching for Balian, the heroic defender of Jerusalem, to accompany him on what will be the Third Crusade, Balian rejects the offer by refusing to identify himself as such, and insisting that he is merely the blacksmith.

The Crusades setting, and more specifically, the fact that the film culminates with the fall of Jerusalem to the Muslims and ends with the hero's decision not to join the new Crusade, the critical treatment of some Crusader factions in the film, and the respectful treatment of the figure of Saladin himself are indicative of the director's and screenwriter's desire to be fair to both the Christian and Islamic sides in their account of events. These factors presumably reflect the producers' interest in reaching a Muslim cinema audience as well as the traditional Western European one. In line with this policy was the casting of the Muslim characters, using Muslim actors, and especially the Syrian actor Massoud Ghassan as Saladin. This avoided the politically less sensitive solution of using Western actors in grease paint imitating foreign accents, and reinforced the impression of the film's respect for Islam, which was identified as a key value from the start, according to the production documentary in the Director's Cut.⁴

As it alludes to the beginning of the end of the presence of Crusading Christians in the Levant, the choice of the siege of Jerusalem as a setting and Saladin as one of the main characters would obviously have a strong appeal to the film's potential Islamic audience.⁵ Indeed, the warm reception given the film by a Beirut audience described by Middle East correspondent Robert Fisk, in his article for *The Independent*, suggests that the film managed to engage its projected Middle Eastern audience positively and successfully (Fisk 2005).

Arguably, the choice of setting and the ideological stance it takes in relation to the plot point to a marketing strategy which aims beyond traditional Western consumer markets at a product designed to be acceptable for the global consumption of entertainment. On the other hand, the positive image of the Muslims in the film is an important element in the plot, for, although Balian, a Christian, is the main defender of the utopian message, the way Saladin is represented paradoxically reinforces this message. At the end of the film, as Saladin enters Jerusalem, he picks up an ornamental cross that has fallen on the floor, and sets it upright again on the altar. If one takes the film's utopian message to be in favour of moral rectitude, defending the weak and against selfish material greed and acts of cruelty, then Saladin's gesture embodies a position of moral strength from which there can be respect for all faiths, and, specifically, a mutual respect between Muslim and Christian cultures.

There is, of course, an alternative reading which is more likely to satisfy the more fundamentalist Christians who expressed their concern during the production process in a series of media interventions that claimed Scott's film would play into

the hands of the “terrorists” by not defending a Christian position against the infidel. Such concerns may have been behind the Spanish Catholic Church’s refusal to allow filming in the Mezquita in Cordoba, which is now a cathedral, forcing the production crew to use the secular Alcázar building in Sevilla for the Jerusalem palace scenes.⁶ Saladin’s final gesture could be seen symbolically as an unwitting unbeliever’s compliance with the inevitable final triumph of Christianity. Such a reading is opposed by the liberal position in favour of religious tolerance espoused by the protagonist and the film as a whole, and clearly was not the way Fisk’s Lebanese audience understood Saladin’s gesture, when they erupted into cheers and applause, as he describes.

The twentieth century has seen the development of dystopian artistic visions as well as the appropriation by dominant power of utopian forms related to the ideal state of happiness. According to Siân Adiseshiah, one of Western capitalism’s utopias has been closely related to commodities and well-being in consumer society.

In relation to the Western commodification of utopian aspiration, Tom Moylan describes utopia as “reduced to the consumption of pleasurable weekends, Christmas dreams, and goods purchased weekly in the pleasure-dome shopping malls of suburbia” (Moylan 1986: 8). Consumption becomes the panacea of unfulfilled desires, whilst yearning in excess of, or outside of, these consumer-focused requirements is stifled and recoded as socially abnormal (Adiseshiah 2005: 184).

Nevertheless, in recent years, there have been more frequent revindications of a spiritual or religious utopia, especially and notoriously in countries where Islam is the dominant faith. However, in the Western world, similar protests have not been absent. Recent neoconservative political aspirations in the U.S.A. have been voiced in Christian terms, and sometimes even used references to the Apocalypse. More extreme forms of expression have combined, for example, American libertarian principles with Christian fundamentalism, as in the case of the Branch Davidians in the 1993 Waco, Texas episode. These new styles of revindication have begun to replace the utopian dreams of a consumer society, and begin to represent a political force to be reckoned with.

At the start of the twenty-first century ideal or utopian images have reappeared in times of conflict, defined within the context of the so-called “clash of civilizations”, the confrontation between religions, and wars and other engagements which aspire to be understood as “just” or even “holy”. While, in contrast, universal peace is seen as a utopian reality and interreligious dialogue as one of the means to achieve it.

All these elements are alluded to or dealt with in Ridley Scott’s film, which offers a utopian understanding of mankind’s destiny. Indeed, the motif which returns over and over again is that of the creation of a “kingdom of conscience” which would lead to lasting peace. Beside this utopian vision which promises to overcome all the difficulties and weaknesses which impoverish societies, the film offers many dystopian elements. These serve as contrast, and reinforce the utopian message, although they also reflect the polarization between dystopian

and utopian visions present in much contemporary discourse and thinking, even, and perhaps especially, when it is religious in its orientation.

The film seems to argue that our world, the world we live in, must be overcome by another reality which is transcendent in character. It is no coincidence that this transcendent reality in the film, both curiously and significantly, is identified with Jerusalem, a city which has of course been the centre of one of the longest disputes in history, articulated in religious terms as Muslim vs Christian, and nowadays as Muslim vs Jew (with their Christian allies behind them) and in political terms as Palestine vs Israel. It is well known that the second *intifada* broke out after a provocative visit by Ariel Sharon, then leader of Israel's opposition, to the esplanade of the mosque at Jerusalem in September 2000. Further contemporary symbolism for the film's historical background is found in the fact that some radical Islamic voices readily refer to the Judaeo-Christian presence in the region as the "Crusaders". The film's plot takes us back to the past to witness once again the struggle for the possession of the city, and despite the fact that it ends with the city falling to the Muslims, peace still does not reign, as the final sentence of the closing titles announces. The implication is, therefore, that such a struggle, then as now, cannot propitiate a lasting peace.

2. The Middle Ages as a utopian referent in popular culture

The Middle Ages emerged as a concept in opposition to Renaissance humanism's aspiration to be a new period of history. In its genesis, it was seen as an alternative, negative element in relation to everything that defined the *Nova Aetas*.

This notion of alterity has persisted among writers in general, and historians in particular, who have presented the period in a positive or negative light. It has depended on ideologies or clichés more related to the writers' contemporary reality than to the past historical moment *per se*. Often therefore, the image of the medieval which developed was partial, distorted and unreal, stereotyping it as "another time", distinct from ours, dark, and dominated by unreason and brute force. Such is the complexity of history, both reality in itself and mirror or contrast to the contemporary world.

It is precisely the apparent distance and greater differentiation in relation to modern times that have contributed to the Middle Ages becoming a frequent setting for contemporary utopias or collective dreams in the area of popular culture. This is, of course, no new phenomenon, given that since Romanticism novels and sagas revived interest in the medieval, an interest which has continued and grown in terms of social repercussion throughout the twentieth century, thanks largely to the rise of cinema.

According to K. J. Harty's critical study of the Middle Ages in film, more than six hundred films have been made that use a medieval setting. In light of this figure, Harty proposes that "medieval films" constitute a veritable genre of their own, similar to the more widely recognised category of Roman or *Peplum* films.⁷ Harty's list witnesses in no uncertain terms to the powerful, almost obsessive, attraction that the medieval period exercises on the popular mind. However, this is not of course the historical period *per se*, so much as a fantasy based on it, and recognition of this distinction has led Umberto Eco to refer to this space in which

such fantasies are projected as the “New Middle Ages” (see Eco 1986: 62-3 and Nichols 2006).⁸ In the nineteen-eighties Eco noted the growth in the success of literary and other works set in the period in question, offering a brilliant analysis of the uses and abuses to which mass cultural productions subject the medieval period, as pretext. Moreover, it would appear that since Eco’s article, if anything, the attractiveness of the Middle Ages in popular culture has increased even more, a fact which requires further reflection (see Nichols 2006: 143).

The interest or rather fascination with the Middle Ages was already evident in the work of the ideologues of nationalism, and even during the period of the birth of modern nations in the nineteenth century. This interest consolidated itself as a popular cultural form under the fascist regimes, at the time of the Second World War and its aftermath. Broadly speaking, the highly influential idealism of the nineteenth century and the first third or even half of the twentieth century rediscovered and reinvented the “Middle Ages”, with its kings and deeds, as part of the explanation of the origins of national identity, formulated as a political or even social or ethnic utopia.

This situation reached a paroxysm of idealization with dictatorial regimes such as German Nazism and Spanish Fascism, both of which found the medieval period particularly interesting, developing their own contemporary mythology based on the period.⁹ Medieval films were an important element in Nazi propaganda. For example, Fritz Lang’s 1924 *Die Nibelungen* revealed the roots of the German, or Teutonic, nation (see Harty 1999: 5). In Franco’s Spain, the Middle Ages were, more than any other, a key period of history, especially due to the great event of

the period, the *Reconquista* or recovery of the lands occupied by the Muslims. The mythical figure of the knight reappeared as a powerful icon, as, for example, El Cid, just as did the idea of war as a context in which national purpose and valour receive their full expression, and images of a society's strong sense of national identity under a strong leader.¹⁰

In general terms, stereotypical visions of the medieval period, which first emerged during Romanticism or during the "Idealism" of the nineteenth century, were taken up and injected with new vitality by Fascist movements, but also in popular culture produced in the United Kingdom and the United States in the post-war period and well into the nineteen-fifties.

The image of the medieval knight, as hero and often saviour, is one iconic element that is particularly susceptible to moving fluently between settings in fantasy worlds and versions of medieval times. From the end of the nineteen-thirties and through the forties and fifties a number of novels and films popularised narratives which took their inspiration from medieval times. The moral depression following the Second World War, in particular, produced stories telling of heroes, saviours, dangerous missions and armed struggle in favour of justice, and which were set in a richly-signifying world. They were especially attractive to a public living amid the ruins of the post-war period.

A varied and heterogeneous range of cultural products developed these themes in medieval settings, or made extensive use of iconographic or idealized elements from the period. Comics for young people, and later animated films, and more literary works aimed at a young audience, such as J. R. R. Tolkien's *The*

Hobbit (1937) and the *Lord of the Rings* series (1954-55) are some examples.¹¹ This tendency is also evident in post-war Japan, in the rise in popularity of *manga* comics, which, if they did not share a European medieval setting, often tended to embody the values associated with a medieval knight in the figure of the samurai warrior, or other equivalents. To this period also belong the large-scale film productions, American and otherwise, which to a large extent have contributed to the contemporary popular understanding of what the Middle Ages were.¹² One of the aims of the plotlines of these narratives could be seen to aid the recovery of a sense of moral purpose, for young people who had been traumatized and disillusioned by the effects of the war, and national defeat, as in the case of the Japanese. Frequently, these narratives described attempts to reach a better world, or if not better, at least other, by describing spaces in which utopias could be created, such as Tolkien's "middle earth", between the higher world of the gods and the lower world of the demons and elves.

English nineteenth-century novels found their way into the cinema, as in the case of the medieval trilogy of films by Richard Thorpe, including *Ivanhoe* (1952), *The Knights of the Round Table* (1953), and *The Adventures of Quentin Durward* (1955), which recreated the eternal myth of the knight, and whose success with the US audience depended in part on the fact that the chivalric element is closely related to their own history, in the winning of the Wild West (Barrio 1995: 251-2). One of the prime examples here would be Robin Hood, a character mentioned in Walter Scott's *Ivanhoe*, based on a figure from medieval ballads and other earlier narratives, whose first major cinematic success came with Errol Flynn's

performance in the 1938 film, *The Adventures of Robin Hood*, to be followed by many successive revivals up until recent versions of the 1990s.¹³

The story of Robin Hood in its film versions has generally been presented in accordance with nineteenth-century nationalist ideology, in its description of the struggle between the Saxon people and the Norman overlords, although the return of “good” King Richard at the end brings with it reconciliation of the feuding sides under the crown. Oppressors and oppressed, the abuse of government and social justice, Sherwood Forest as a place of freedom, in contrast with Nottingham Castle and the tyranny it symbolises, these are the familiar components of a utopian tale, although in the end all are subject to the image of the just king. The utopia glimpsed in the Robin Hood myth, which promises justice, brotherhood and common purpose, material needs resolved by living in harmony with nature, a more equitable redistribution of wealth, always acts finally to bolster hegemonic power. Given that under Richard I this power is shown to be more benevolent than under the unfortunate John, the plotline legitimates the reigning order, in the restoration of good kingship. In this way, it finally distances itself from the more radical utopian vision of Robin and his Merry Men, in their grass-roots rebellion against the crown.

Kingdom of Heaven makes use of some of these references. In the opening titles we read:

It is almost 100 years since Christian armies from Europe seized Jerusalem... Europe suffers in the grip of repression and poverty. Peasant and lord alike flee to the Holy Land in search of fortune or salvation... One Knight returns home in search of his son... France 1184.

The medieval world of France which Balian chooses to flee in search of “fortune and salvation” shares dystopian elements with the Robin Hood myth. Above Balian’s village there sits a castle which in the theatrical version of the film remains a gaunt, sullenly silent symbol of oppression from which no sign of authority or leadership emerge, except for Balian’s deceitful brother, the priest. In the Director’s Cut, Balian is imprisoned in the castle for refusing to manufacture arms for the lord, and the lord and his son speculate about claiming Balian’s rightful inheritance, should the latter die on the Crusade. The castle thus comes to symbolize a more actively repressive regime, incapable of any considerations other than its own material advancement.

In line with utopian elements in the Robin Hood story, Balian’s life takes a positive new turn when he joins the marginalized band of Crusaders as they camp in the woods and, after resisting arrest by the sheriff’s men, begins the journey to Jerusalem, becoming their leader along the way. At the defence of Jerusalem, Balian embodies the values expressed in the oath he swore when knighted by his father, Godfrey, and passes these on to all the defenders of Jerusalem: “Be without fear in the face of your enemies. Safeguard the helpless”.¹⁴ And like Robin Hood, the story ends with a cameo appearance of the Lionheart, when King Richard rides through Balian’s village to invite him, unsuccessfully, to join him on the next Crusade. Furthermore, in the case of Balian, he rejects the King’s attempt to identify him with the title “Defender of Jerusalem”, preferring the more lowly description of “blacksmith”, while near the end of Chapter XL of Scott’s novel Robin

Hood prefers the Lionheart to recognize him as the “King of Outlaws, and Prince of good fellows”, and not by his noble title, as Robin of Locksley.

Balian, Robin Hood and other medieval heroes share values such as the will to save others, to “safeguard the helpless”, to always speak the truth, and a becoming modesty as an element of social resistance which relates them all to the figure of Jesus Christ. The parallel with Christ is appropriate in the sense that all these heroes embody a revolution/submission duality which is also present in Christ’s life. The possible social utopia alluded to in the Gospels is deferred indefinitely into the future after the crucifixion. From that point, it is understood that Christ will save humanity not through the revolt of the Jews against the Romans but with the Second Coming, at the end of history.

Returning to our discussion of filmic representation of the Middle Ages as one of the principal mass cultural products, when the bleak post-war period gave way to the sixties and seventies, a sense of social well-being and, with it, renewed interest in utopias emerged. The image of Saint Francis as an icon of the new times is reflected in Liliana Cavani’s 1966 film on the life of the saint. Even the less politicised film biography by Franco Zeffirelli, *Brother Sun, Sister Moon* (1972), shows the egalitarian and anti-materialist line of thought that was so popular during the period, in accordance with a “hippy” or socialist ideology.

The subsequent disillusion of the eighties, with its reactionary backlash, favoured the renewal of the heroic paradigm of earlier decades, and the regeneration of a contemporary mythological version of the Middle Ages.¹⁵ The spreading of postmodern sensibility also enhanced the attraction that the “new

Middle Ages” exercised on popular culture. Questions raised by postcolonial studies and multiculturalism, and revindicated by gender studies, and postmodern relativism all make their mark on the underlying premises of Ridley Scott’s film, even if they are not thoroughly integrated as fundamental elements of its utopian discourse.

Recent concerns about ecological questions can also be seen behind the use of the Middle Ages in popular culture to represent a conservationist utopia, representing a time where human activity was more respectful of and less harmful to the natural environment. Contemporary films which employ medieval and other earlier settings tend to recreate natural landscapes, where there is relatively little evidence of human intervention. In the case of *Kingdom of Heaven*, the sweeping barren “French” landscape, which was in fact filmed in the province of Huesca in Spain, the deep dark woods where Balian joins the Crusader band, the raging ocean which shipwrecks him and the vast desert where he is washed up, are all iconic natural settings of large dimensions which, through the isolation they afford, allow the hero’s actions and the values he embodies to take on a primal quality, and his survival in them to become epic.

As well as the ideological referents mentioned above, the Middle Ages offer film-makers a setting in which the traditional plot elements of a popular film, love, friendship, intrigue, passion and war, can take on epic dimensions, and *Kingdom of Heaven* not surprisingly contains all these elements. In addition to the use of large-scale landscapes, to confer special significance to the human stories told against them, as just discussed, medieval warfare also provides plenty of opportunity to

express the heroic. Given its stage of technical development, medieval combat still implied men and horses coming into close physical contact in hand-to-hand combat, unlike fighting with firearms. Hence it represents a mode of fighting where sheer physical strength and dexterity were keys to survival, attributes which are commonly taken as heroic in popular culture.

Ridley Scott's film lovingly recreates single combats and vast battle scenes, like the Battle of Kerak and the Siege of Jerusalem, to present war as both a tremendously crude and yet magnificent experience.¹⁶ If warfare in the film is taken as the dystopian pole of utopian projects, brought about by selfish actions of leading Christian players, such as Guy de Lusignan and Reginald of Châtillon, paradoxically it is also the context in which Balian and Saladin show their mettle as leaders. It is in warfare that they reveal themselves as potentially capable of realizing their utopian aspirations, both as individual and collective, intercultural endeavours.

One frequent negative representation of the Middle Ages is of a period of brutality, involving images of cruelty and superstition (Airlie 2001: 165).¹⁷ Representations of such epic violence are one of Ridley Scott's specialities, as *Gladiator* and *Black Hawk Down*, as well as *Kingdom of Heaven*, make clear. Within the context of medieval film settings, Mel Gibson's *Braveheart* (1995) is one further example. This is of course consonant with other American film productions of recent years, where the crudity of warfare is often foregrounded. In fact, since the Vietnam War and other more recent conflicts, critical awareness and popular rejection of war have contributed to increasingly hard and realistic portrayals of

conflict.¹⁸ In addition to the crude and graphic violence of *Kingdom of Heaven*, however, it could be argued that, here, the warfare associated with Balian and Saladin is justified in the sense that, in Balian's case, his declared motivation is to protect the helpless, at the Battle of Kerak and during the Siege, while Saladin's attacks are all in response to unjustified provocation.

Part of the attraction that tales of knights in shining armour exercise on the contemporary imagination is the way in which they embody values traditionally associated with masculinity, such as valour, fighting spirit, physical and moral strength, values which are less readily expressed in contemporary settings. The knight also embodies a spiritual dimension in his individual actions and as a member of a class, in contrast to the materialism which is often seen to impregnate all actions in contemporary society. The lack of clear affirmation of these values in contemporary contexts partly explains why a Middle Ages setting for contemporary mythologizing is so attractive.¹⁹ Moreover, the crusading context allows for the expression of a fear of the "Other" as a way of affirming a social or religious collective identity (Tyerman 2005: 33). The power of these two ideas could also explain the current fascination with military orders, which have been in vogue since at least the nineteen-nineties and which lurk behind the eccentric plotline of *The Da Vinci Code*.²⁰ The figure of the Knight Templar brings together the aforementioned ingredients, as he is brave, fights for ideals and was "unjustly" persecuted, as well as offering the fictive potential of certain still unresolved, esoteric mysteries.

This then is the mirror in which certain parts of contemporary society seem to feel comfortable with their reflection, and it ranges broadly from those nostalgic

for the way things were to those who seek ideals for which to fight, even if they know them to be unrealistic, even if despite their progressive veneer they often prove reactionary in their essence. These aforementioned values reappear in recent successful films which might be categorized within the genre of fantasy, but which undoubtedly take certain defining features, either plastic or contextual, from the Middle Ages. We refer, of course, to recent offerings such as the *Lord of the Rings* series, *The Chronicles of Narnia* and *Eragon*. These films are all set in other worlds, and even in other temporal dimensions. In productions such as these, and others set more specifically in the Middle Ages, with *Kingdom of Heaven* being a particularly apt example, the cinematic vision derives its strength from its representation of an ideal world being elsewhere. Our film shows a fight for an ideal world, in which the peace promised in the Beatitudes as accompanying the coming of the Kingdom of Heaven is shown to be unattainable. The plot suggests that this ideal world is not far from being realized in the real world, but in the end it becomes an ever more distant possibility. It is the evil of some people, the artificers of war, who finally put it fairly beyond the grasp of the world of the film, where, as the final titles point out, it still remains today.

Running through these utopian visions there appears a vein of reactionary thought, in view of the fact that the solutions they provide to current crises are located far in the past, or distant from our own reality, just as occurred with certain medieval religious utopias. Reactionary thinking dominates utopia, as Levitas has warned us. The tendency to the negative occurs when, as her discussion of the concept of utopia indicates, “sometimes the positive connotations are missing

altogether and utopian becomes synonymous with unrealistic. Sometimes utopia is viewed even more negatively and equated with totalitarianism” (Levitas 1990: 156). But utopia also keeps hope alive, as happened with the transcendental vision of life during the Middle Ages.

In terms of the film’s image of the Knights Templars, the director has opted for the “alternative” image of the order, a negative view of its members and their function. At various points in the film, the Templars are shown to be involved in massacres and subject to punishment by hanging by their fellow Christians. Historically speaking, the renewal of hostilities between Muslims and Christians in the Holy Land around 1184 followed a massacre by the Templars under the orders of Reginald of Châtillon, who together with Guy de Lusignan, in the film, personify the misunderstanding, intolerance and eventual violence against the Muslims.²¹ Other episodes in the film, such as the Templars under Reginald attacking a camel train as if it were a sporting activity, which provokes the first Muslim reaction, Saladin’s attack on Reginald’s castle at Kerak, and at one point an assassination attempt against Balian, on Reginald’s orders, have their basis in historical fact (Setton 1969: 581).

The film presents ideological issues such as the contradiction between Christ’s injunctions to love one’s neighbour and the official Church’s ability to sanction the death of the church’s enemies in the Crusades. This is embodied in the film for example when priests are shown exhorting the Crusaders in Messina with the words: “To kill an infidel is not murder; it is the path to Heaven”. Elsewhere in the film, a character notes that “the Templars die for what the Pope obliges them

to do ... but not for Christ or the King”, again showing the distance between the Church and the ideals of its main figure.

Other priests in the film confirm the official Church’s complete lack of scruple. When, for example, Jerusalem is about to fall, the Patriarch of Jerusalem is seen advising the people to “Convert to Islam... repent later!” as a means of saving their necks. This advice clearly confirms the superficiality of his religious convictions, which contrast so strongly with Balian’s. The distance between the Church and Christ’s message confirms the film’s identification of the Church with corrupt worldly political powers, and this hostility can be seen as the film’s ideological affinity with a long line of Protestant denunciation of the Roman Catholic Papacy. Hence, the film’s emphasis on the individual’s conscience as Balian’s touchstone, in his struggle to find faith and to act from his highest convictions, in contrast to the frivolous attitudes of the Church leaders.

While the ideological sympathy for Protestantism against Roman Catholicism seems clearly identifiable in the film, it must also be said that, despite the production’s “respect” for the Muslim characters in the film, certain comments suggest an intuitive implication that Christianity is superior to Islam, as we mentioned briefly before. Such a view comes across, for example, when Sybilla, Baldwin’s sister, differentiates between the two religions by explaining to Balian that “[Mohammed’s] god says submit, Jesus says choose”. The fact that the film was made with mostly US finance may go a long way to explaining the affinities pointed out above, for Protestant quietism *versus* Roman Catholic institutionalism and Christianity *versus* Islam.

Returning to the Templars, historically speaking, Reginald of Châtillon was the person who instigated the breaking of the peace conditions negotiated by the King of Jerusalem with Saladin (Setton 1969: 581). At that time, Gerard of Ridefort was the Master of the Temple and historians have characterised him as an unscrupulous adventurer who advised Guy of Lusignan to attack Saladin at the Horns of Hattin, thus leaving Jerusalem undefended except for what resistance Balian was able to summon up, as the film shows.²² Other episodes in history darken Gerard's image, as he was famous for abandoning his men to their deaths.²³

Such references show how Monahan's script is based on historical elements, such as the role of the Templars in the loss of Jerusalem, and the actual existence of Balian of Ibelin who was in charge of the defence of Jerusalem and negotiated the terms of its surrender, as well as other key figures. The film script opts for enhancing the Templars' negative image, as well as that of Guy of Lusignan. However, it is worth pointing out that these negative images are nothing new, but began to emerge in accounts of the period by authors writing shortly after the events had occurred.²⁴ Therefore, despite the effect of contemporary twenty-first century events on the way in which the past is reworked or even in some cases reinvented, it is interesting how modern scripts share certain details with accounts from the actual period. As we will show now, *Kingdom of Heaven* can be seen to reflect much medieval thinking on spiritual or moral utopia.

3. Utopian and dystopian elements in *Kingdom of Heaven*

The title of the film reveals the utopian orientation of its narrative, given the personal development of its main character and more generally of the Christians' defence of the city of Jerusalem. In it, we see that Baldwin IV identifies himself closely with the city, as when he orders Reginald to kiss his leprous hand with the words: "On your knees... lower. I am... Jerusalem. And you, Reginald, will give me the kiss of peace". Jerusalem, therefore, comes to symbolize the *locus* of Baldwin's will to work for détente between Christians and Muslims, and as such an earthly attempt to embody the peace and love that the realization of the Kingdom of Heaven would bring, according to Jesus' promises throughout the Gospels.²⁵

After the King's death, Balian's defence of the city can be seen as a defence of Baldwin's highest values. However, with the fall of the city to Saladin, and Balian's return to France and final refusal to take up arms again to regain Jerusalem at the end of the film, it reinforces Balian's realization that, above all, the Jerusalem to which he aspired as the expression of Christ's Kingdom of Heaven was ultimately a state of mind rather than a material place. As Balian says to the dying Baldwin, when the latter is tempted to abandon his high ideals for some nasty politicking, "It is a kingdom of conscience, or nothing". Balian also makes clear that if Jerusalem can be understood as a utopian kingdom of conscience, then this understanding will set one free from being forced to take part in a

dialectical view of history. Exhorting the people of Jerusalem to its defence, he argues:

It has fallen to us, to defend Jerusalem, and we have made our preparations as well as they can be made. None of us took this city from Muslims. No Muslim of the great army now coming against us was born when this city was lost. We fight over an offence we did not give, against those who were not alive to be offended. What is Jerusalem? Your holy palaces lie over the Jewish temple that the Romans pulled down. The Muslim places of worship lie over yours. Which is more holy? *[pause]* The Wall? The Mosque? The Sepulchre? Who has claim? No one has claim. *[pause]* All have claim.

By understanding the historical processes which Jerusalem symbolizes and successive attempts to ascribe a definitive meaning to it, Balian effectively adopts a position outside history, a utopian position, which allows him to see the paradoxical truth, stated at the end of his speech, "No-one has claim... All have claim". Claims which can be both negated and universalised are equally meaningless and meaningful, and certainly not worth fighting about. In addition, this realization also appeals strongly to that part of the film's audience which does not identify with either side of the current Middle East conflict but yearns for a peace which would allow Jerusalem to be shared as a sacred symbolic site between Islam, Judaism and Christianity. Balian and Saladin are the two characters in the film who best understand the concept of the Kingdom of Heaven/Kingdom of Conscience as one of spiritual values, symbolized by Jerusalem. With this understanding, the film's critique of those who attach any symbolic value to the material city is reinforced. These main characters also understand how to do away with the fanaticism that this materialist/physical interpretation induces, as the following exchange makes clear:

Saladin: Will you yield the city?

Balian of Ibelin: Before I lose it, I will burn it to the ground. Your holy places – ours. Every last thing in Jerusalem that drives men mad.

Saladin: I wonder if it would not be better if you did.

Balian and Saladin speak the same language, as indicated by the reciprocity at the start of this parley:

Saladin: As-Salaam-Alaikum.

Balian of Ibelin: And peace be with you.

And they both have the same assessment of the ultimate value of the city over which they are fighting.

Balian of Ibelin: What is Jerusalem worth?

Saladin: Nothing.

[walks away]

Saladin: Everything!

From the point of view of the Kingdom of Conscience, the physical city is of negligible value; from the point of view of people living in a world of material priority, it is everything. Paradoxically, though they both know the ultimate value of material Jerusalem as a utopian symbol, as agents within the dialectic process of history they still find themselves fighting for it, and recognizing its all-importance to “the world”.

Within the film, as well as the King, Saladin and Balian, other characters express their understanding of the Kingdom of Heaven, and Jerusalem as its symbol. Near the start of the film, Godfrey of Ibelin explains to his son, and the audience, the promise of the Holy Land (“In the Holy Land, a new world awaits you...”) and the possibilities it opens up for an adventurous spirit: “You are not what you were born, but what you have it in yourself to be”. He it is who first

suggests the link between Baldwin's Jerusalem and a utopian vision, describing it as "A better world than has ever been seen. A kingdom of conscience. A kingdom of heaven". With Godfrey's words, conscience makes its first appearance as the guiding principle of right conduct, and peace as the aim of the Kingdom of Heaven.

The fall of Jerusalem, and Balian's negating King Richard's offer to the Crusade, suggests that the world was not ready for a kingdom of conscience. Nevertheless, the film does present the Crusade as providing the chance to find material fortune in a land of opportunity, and thus employs a rhetoric frequently used to describe the United States itself, as figured for generations of immigrants. The journey to Jerusalem is also a journey into one's spiritual interior, for those few who are receptive to such spiritual realities. Balian's journey is clearly one of this second order, being a voyage of initiation of a spiritual and transcendental kind, which allows him to emerge from a crisis of faith and to redeem his sins – which included killing his brother, the priest,²⁶ principally for robbing his dead wife of her necklace and cross – in order to fight for the kingdom of conscience.

Even one as spiritually blind as Reginald of Châtillon is capable of repeating the rhetoric, if not grasping the concept, when he describes in a mocking tone Baldwin's kingdom as one which "will be a place where all will be equal". This egalitarian vision, which was part of some Christian thinking, does not figure in St. Augustine's description of the City of God, which is clearly one of the historical and theological referents for the concept of the kingdom of conscience presented in this film. Other ideals not expressly linked to the Christian concept of the Kingdom of Heaven appear as unobtainable objectives in the film. For example, the better

world to which both Baldwin IV and Saladin aspire is one where peace and equality are available to everyone. This aspiration is based on contemporary intercultural or interreligious thinking, and is emphasised in the final affirmation of the film. As the last title card states:

The King, Richard the Lionheart, went on to the Holy Land and crusaded for three years. His struggle to regain Jerusalem ended in an uneasy truce with Saladin. Nearly a thousand years later, peace in the Kingdom of Heaven remains elusive.

In another dialogue, the dying king, aware that Guy of Lusignan represents a threat to the peace that he and Saladin have maintained, asks Balian to kill Guy and marry his sister. Balian, the perfect knight, refuses of course, and his response (quoted earlier) – “It is a kingdom of conscience, or nothing” – implies that the Jerusalem to which Baldwin and he aspire can only be attained through right action. Corruption is shown to be rife among the Crusaders on various occasions and is by implication connected with the abandonment of the struggle for the high ideals of the real Kingdom of Heaven to which Baldwin embodies. This abandonment leads to disillusion among the king’s loyal followers. For example, Tiberias (Jeremy Irons) describes this gradual replacement of high aspiration by lower needs when he says: “I have given Jerusalem my whole life. First, I thought we were fighting for God. Then I realized we were fighting for wealth and land. I was ashamed”.

Jerusalem, the film suggests, is nevertheless the place where a knight can best manifest his chivalric qualities, as a warrior fighting for an ideal. For example, when Balian is initiated into the knighthood by his father, the oath he swears is as follows, in Godfrey of Ebelin’s words:

Be without fear in the face of your enemies. Be brave and upright that God may love thee. Speak the truth always, even if it leads to your death. Safeguard the helpless and do no wrong. That is your oath.

Balian's spiritual pilgrimage in the Holy Land, as he learns to honour his chivalric oath at any cost and survives a series of tests and temptations, brings him ultimately to be the defender of Jerusalem, and of Baldwin's utopian vision of the Kingdom of Heaven. It is part of Balian's exceptional spiritual maturity that he sees more clearly than anyone, except perhaps Saladin, exactly what it is he is defending at Jerusalem. As he explains to the Christians there, "We defend this city, not to protect these stones, but the people living within these walls". Not only is he therefore honouring the oath he swore as a knight, he is arguably defending the essence of Baldwin's vision, protecting human life and exemplifying brotherly love.

Arguably the film suggests that if, during Baldwin's life, Jerusalem held out a hope for a utopian space in which the main monotheistic religions could live in harmony, then it could do so again in the contemporary world. However, in Balian's description of the aim of the defence, one could argue that the film alludes to the Jewish ethnic vision which refers particularly to its holy city as closely identified with its Jewish inhabitants.²⁷

All these references to the holy city correspond to one of the main political and social theories of the Middle Ages, as proposed by Saint Augustine of Hippo in his *De Civitate Dei* (*The City of God*, 413-427). In accordance with the theories which developed from this book, and especially as a result of the changes effected in the period of the Crusades, Christian understanding of the celestial Jerusalem,

as described in the Revelation of Saint John, was to be identified with the city of Jerusalem, as a prelude to or potential image of the city of God.²⁸

Augustine's well-known vision is based on the idea of the existence of two cities in the world, as set out in *De catechizandis rudibus*, 400:

Two cities, the one of sinners, the other of the saints, will last from the creation of man to the end of time. Now they are mixed physically but separate in their will, and on the day of judgement their bodies will finally separate. All men who love power and the spirit of dominion (...) are united in the same city (...) And, at the same time, all men and spirits who humbly seek the glory of God and not their own (...) belong to one city.²⁹

As Augustine of Hippo says, "I have divided mankind into two large groups. One of them which lives according to man and the other which lives according to God".³⁰ The two cities were not cities *per se* but rather societies, and the ability to discriminate between them would depend on the conscience and will of each individual.³¹ However, it is divine predestination which still determines the quality of the member of the city of God. In our film the idea of the city of God is formulated as the Kingdom of Heaven on Earth, which people can reach guided by conscience. Balian would be a perfect example of such a member of this city, owing to his impeccable conscience and exceptional will. Moreover, the element of predestination manifests through the fact that he is recognized continually through the film as an exceptional person, destined to lead this movement guided by conscience.

Augustine's theories take up propositions which were already present in the Gospels, when Christ makes the distinction between a worldly kingdom – often understood as recognized as worthy of respect, in his command to "Render unto Caesar what is Caesar's" – and his idea of the Kingdom of Heaven – "My kingdom

is not of this world". For Augustine, however, the kingdom referred to in the Gospels is developed as an earthly reality, which, though utopian for the time being, may be achieved within history.

As well as being the source of a fundamental political theory during the Middle Ages, above all because of the concept of the divine origin of power, Augustine's *City of God* was read in other ways. If previously the city of God was understood to be scattered through the world, at the time of the Crusades the idea of Augustine's city became more specifically identified with the celestial Jerusalem. Therefore, the first Crusade, the one which captured Jerusalem and the Holy Sepulchre, was even considered apocalyptic in some sense. For all these reasons, this Crusade has been taken as *the* model Crusade, even arguably for some scholars the only one which meets the basic criteria for consideration as such (Flory 2003: 343, 349).³²

The Crusade movement was always understood to provide spiritual benefits to its participants and Scott's film reflects this search for salvation through violence in the name of the Church. Moreover, *Kingdom of Heaven* suggests that the loss of Jerusalem is a result of another holy war, a *Jihad*, with its corresponding spiritual benefits, aimed at attaining its holy city of *Al-Quds*.³³ In the end, the destruction of Baldwin's multiethnic city is the loss of utopia, both as the end of peace and the end of the kingdom of conscience. Perhaps, in Scott's appreciation, interreligious understanding is still a first step to the achieving of both goals, even though, as indicated above, in the quote from the final title card Scott considers that peace

and the kingdom of conscience which makes the endurance of peace a possibility are still, one thousand years after his story, as elusive as ever.

Ridley Scott's film, *Kingdom of Heaven*, is an excellent witness to the range of utopian referents which have been applied to or recognized in the medieval past in popular culture. Spiritual utopia must bring peace to mankind, while at the same time renewing the conscience of individual people. The desires of masses of people in contemporary society find expression and reflection in referents of medieval origin, such as religious wars, the knight as saviour or redeemer, celestial Jerusalem, the journey to the Crusade as almost a rite of initiation. These visions often range in character from dystopian to utopian on the grand scale, a range which the film successfully manages to allude to in its account of the fortunes of Jerusalem. The protagonist's apparent refusal to pursue any collective utopian endeavour at the end of the film suggests, as in many other manifestations of utopia in popular culture, that it is ultimately unattainable. In which case, the film can be understood to imply that effective utopian movement only ever manifests in a transitory fashion. Therefore the idea of utopia basically seems to serve to maintain the status quo, by containing the populace's present aspirations under the illusion that the future is full of promise.

Notes

¹ The Director's Cut version of *Kingdom of Heaven* was released in a four-disc box set in May 2006, and contains a version of the film which is 30 minutes longer, as well as documentary material about the production process on two further DVDs.

² For example, at Box Office Mojo's website listing the genre "Medieval Times", it names 29 US and UK film releases since 1981, which together have grossed almost a thousand million dollars; among the plethora of computer games set in the Middle Ages are Sega's *Medieval: Total War Gold Edition* (2006), Monolith's *Get Medieval* (1998), Zakren's *Medieval Britain: Volume One of the Middle Ages Trilogy* (2006), *Knights of Honour* by Black Sea Studios (2005), Sierra's *Lords of the Realm III* (2004), Firefly's *Stronghold Crusader* (2002). To our knowledge no-one has yet attempted to calculate the current total of video game productions with a medieval setting, so it is difficult to estimate the true extent of the phenomenon. However, the fact that "medieval" is a generic indicator in games' catalogues suggests its current popularity.

³ Settings for the other Scott films mentioned being respectively: Los Angeles in the year 2019, now only twelve years in the future, Imperial Rome in the second half of the second century CE, and civil war-torn Mogadishu in 1993.

⁴ Englishman Laurence Olivier as the Mahdi in *Khartoum* (1966) and Welshman Huw Griffiths as the Arab horse trainer in *Ben Hur* (1959) are, in our opinion, but two embarrassing examples of the "greasepaint" solution to casting Arabs in epic war films.

⁵ C. Tyerman, an expert on the crusades, has highlighted the attraction the crusades exercise on popular culture. For example, he notes how President Assad of Syria, the father of the current president, raised a sculpture of Saladin in Damascus, representing the defeat of the Christians, as "part of his own imperialist game". This is a testament to the mythical status the figure of Saladin enjoys in the Muslim world, as saviour and hero, especially in the Middle East area. Even in Western popular culture, as for example the Ladybird books' history series, Saladin's sophistication is contrasted with Richard the Lionheart's brute strength (Tyerman 2005: 16-19).

⁶ *The New York Times* reported on the fears of religious activists and ideologues about Hollywood's dealing with a theme which might provide arguments for justifying contemporary conflicts with historical antecedents, according to Nichols 2006: 144.

⁷ K. J. Harty provides a thorough repertoire of films which use a medieval setting (Harty 1999: 1-9). For closer studies of the cinematic use of medieval history see Barrio 2005 and Airlie 2001.

⁸ The transformation of the past is so marked in the filmic treatment of the past that G. Duby claimed that "film did not yet possess a form or language capable of transmitting historians' ideas of past society" when he wished to make a film of the Battle of Bouvines (*apud* Airlie 2001: 163).

⁹ As an indication of the attraction of the medieval period for politicians, consider Hitler's particular interest in Parsifal and the search for the Holy Grail, and even the anecdote that he was painted dressed as a medieval knight (Fontana 1998: 219).

¹⁰ The director of the CSIC, the principal Spanish centre for historical research, affirmed that historians should not concern themselves with recent history, according to Fontana (1998: 219; 2002: 88-89) and Manzano (2000: 48-56). And of course, the term "crusade" was used by Franco's followers to describe the war subsequent to his military uprising.

¹¹ In Spain the comics *El Guerrero del Antifaz* (1944) by M. Gago and *El Capitán Trueno* (1956) are two well-known examples dealing with medieval adventures and warfare, following the style of Hal Foster's *Prince Valiant* published from 1940 onwards, although the Spanish comics were freer in their treatment of the historical content, according to Jorge Sobrado at <http://muchocomic.com/guerreredelantifaz.html>. As the author indicates, these comics were escapist stories for young readers.

¹² Eisenstein's *Alexander Nevsky* (1938), MGM's *Ivanhoe* with Robert Taylor (1951) and an eponymous late 50s TV series starring Roger Moore, *El Cid* with Charlton Heston (1961) are among many examples.

¹³ US film productions on the theme of Robin Hood include *The Bandit of Sherwood Forest* (1946), *The Prince of Thieves* (1948) and *The Rogues of Sherwood Forest* (1950) among those mentioned in K. Harty and J. A. Barrio, and it was not until the 1990s that Hollywood returned to the theme. In the meantime, however, other countries had continued to produce series for television based on the subject (Harty 1999: 225-241; Barrio 2005: 261-2).

¹⁴ In the film, the oath continues: "Never lie, even if it leads to your death". At this point, the comparison between Balian and Robin Hood breaks down, because unlike Ridley Scott's noble hero, Robin is also in the long folklore line of tricksters, who use disguise and cunning to further their aims.

¹⁵ Nichols mentions among others *The Rule of Four*, the screen adaptations of *Lord of the Rings*, Clive Donner's *Stealing Heaven*, Kevin Reynold's *Robin Hood*, and Richard Donner's *Ladyhawke* (Nichols 2006: 143).

¹⁶ It is well-accepted among medieval war historians that medieval warfare was chiefly characterized by skirmishes, sieges and other activities designed to wear down the enemy's resistance, rather than large-scale battles. However, within the tradition of twelfth-century historiography, the loss of Jerusalem and the preceding battles of Kerak and Hattin were given a lot of emphasis, because of their potential symbolic character.

¹⁷ A key film in the public's perception of this epoch is Ingmar Bergman's *The Seventh Seal* (1950), as well as other European films of the nineties.

¹⁸ Hanson defends Western supremacy in the military field, in a book of questionable quality (2004: 38). He justifies it because war as waged by the West is lethal precisely because it is amoral and rarely constrained by considerations of ritual, religion, ethics or tradition. Its guiding principle is military considerations alone. This argument can be reversed, as in the case of suicide attacks, which justify their mission on religious grounds, for example. All things considered, it is an interesting point as it reflects the duality that has always existed in how warfare is understood, as the film shows.

¹⁹ The redefinition of chivalry as a model of contemporary behaviour goes back to the nineteenth century with the recuperation of Malory as part of the English Gothic Revival (Harty 1999: 4). Generally speaking, the knight symbolizes the dominion of the natural, not only through his physical strength but also in his skill and determination in the mastery of his horse. As he strives for the benefit of social power and control, he gives an image of power in plenitude. The recent film, *Eragon*, offers a suggestive and revealing variant on the above theme, as it is men who ride dragons in order to protect and serve their fellows.

²⁰ Directed by Ron Howard for Columbia Productions in 2006.

²¹ Contemporary writers of the time were very critical of Guy of Lusignan, as the person accused of losing Jerusalem, as they were of his follower Reginald of Châtillon and other ambitious and unscrupulous individuals. However, the modern version of events suggests that their behaviour was not exceptional in any sense, and that the difficulties were largely due to the situation of virtual civil war which afflicted the kingdom at the time (Setton 1969: 603).

²² In the court of Jerusalem, records show that there was a nobleman called Balian of Ibelin, who participated in the major confrontations of the period and managed to escape from Saladin after the Battle of Hattin. He also was in charge of the defence of Jerusalem and negotiated the conditions of surrender of the Christian defenders (Setton 1969: 613, 616). In order to achieve those conditions, Balian in fact threatened Saladin with the destruction of the city and the murder of its Muslim inhabitants.

²³ After the Battle of Hattin, Saladin executed 230 Templars, leaving only twenty in the Convent of Jerusalem, figures which give insight into the numbers involved at the time, notably different from the impression given in cinematic versions of such military events. However, it is worth noting that even in works such as Setton there are references to as many as 20,000, a figure which seems more typical of chroniclers of the time, in order to give importance to the army as a presence (Setton 1969: 609).

²⁴ At the end of the twelfth century Walter Map criticised the Templars in the Holy Land for “tak[ing] up the sword for the protection of Christendom, which was forbidden to Peter for the defence of Christ. There Peter was taught that peace should be sought by patience: I do not know who taught these to overcome force with force” (Forey 1992: 204-241). See also Nicholson on the liability of the Temple to criticism from contemporary writers at the time (1995: 129-135). The poor reputation of the Templars as defenders of Jerusalem is especially due to more recent authors, who present the loss of the Holy Land as indicating God’s displeasure and as the beginning of the end of the Templars’ reason for being. Such blameworthiness, veiled or not, certainly is strongly alluded to in the film.

²⁵ The Kingdom of God or Reign of God is a foundational concept in Christianity, as it is the central theme of Jesus of Nazareth’s message in the synoptic Gospels. The phrase occurs frequently in the New Testament, and is defined almost entirely by parable. According to Jesus, the Kingdom of God is within people, it is approached through understanding, and entered through a spiritual rebirth, and by doing God’s will. It is a kingdom of the righteous and contrasts the kingdom of earthly things, under the command of Satan.

²⁶ This relationship only emerges clearly in the Director’s Cut.

²⁷ The Old Testament books of Ezra and Nehemiah reflect these ideas, not only as regards the Jews’ effort to repopulate but also to rebuild the city-wall, and the reference to Jerusalem as the Holy City established by the leaders of the Jewish people, as in Nehemiah (11,1). For Islam, of course, Jerusalem is also the second most important religious site, because Mohammed ascended into heaven from its holy mount.

²⁸ “Even after the loss of the city, in the contemporary imagination, the place of Jerusalem and the Holy Land remained stubbornly entrenched in Western medieval mentalities” (Tyerman 2001: 144).

²⁹ *De catechizandis rudibus*, 31 PL 40: The original states: “Duae itaque civitates, una iniquorum, altera sanctorum, ab initio generis humani usque in finem saeculi perducuntur, nunc permixtae corporibus, sed voluntatibus separatae, in die iudicii vero etiam corpore separandae. Omnes enim homines amantes superbiam et temporalem dominationem cum vano typho et pompa arrogantiae,

omnesque spiritus qui talia diligunt, et gloriam suam subiectione hominum quaerunt, simul una societate devincti sunt; et si saepe adversum se pro his rebus dimicant, pari tamen pondere cupiditatis in eandem profunditatem praecipitantur, et sibi morum et meritorum similitudine coniunguntur. Et rursus omnes homines et omnes spiritus humiliter Dei gloriam quaerentes, non suam, et eum pietate sectantes, ad unam pertinent societatem. Et tamen Deus misericordissimus, et super impios homines patiens est, et praebet eis paenitentiae atque correctionis locum". From http://www.sant-agostino.it/latino/catechesi_cristiana/catechesi_cristiana_libro.htm

³⁰ *De Civitate Dei*, XV 1 CCL 48, 453. The original: "ipsius generis humani, quod in duo genera distribuimus, unum eorum qui secundum hominem, alterum eorum, qui secundum deum vivunt".

³¹ Previous to Augustine, these ideas were thoroughly formulated in other works, like the anonymous *Letter of Diogenes* (second century) and Origen's *Contra Celso*. For, according to Origen, "inside us there exists a certain natural law which recriminates each and every one of us and suggests the evil things we have done" (Origen, 185-255).

³² This medieval historian affirms that a crusade was a holy war which aimed to liberate Jerusalem, a comment which shows how even in the 21st century the term "liberation" is still used to describe the brutal and blood-thirsty conquest of Jerusalem in 1099.

³³ Even though it is not an aim of the current article, it is worth pointing out that contemporary Muslim chronicles on Saladin's attacks in Palestine presented them from a profane point of view and that even in a Christian source such as William of Tyre religious motivation for the attacks remains unclear (Kedar 1996: 349). However, some Muslim sources of the period exhorted fellow believers to follow the Christian example, who had given up their worldly goods, in order to wage war on Islam.

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