THE MIDDLE AGES IN USA CINEMA

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ABSTRACT

The cinema is today one of the world's most widespread means of entertainment and spreading knowledge. Nowadays, over 3,300 million people live in urban areas. All these people are potential consumers of films from an early age. No scientific discipline can ignore the importance and significance that the seventh art has acquired as a vehicle for transmitting knowledge and wisdom. The Middle Ages is a historical period that the cinema has recreated since its origins and still does in recent epic films. The aim of this article is to examine the vision of the Middle Ages projected through films made in the United States of America.

KEY WORDS

Cinema, Middle Ages, United States.

CAPITALIA VERBA

Ars cinematographica, Medium Aeuum, Foederatae Americae Septentrionalis Ciuitates.

1. Pedagogy of the image and the cinema

The use of the image as a historical document, especially in media such as photography and cinema, is one of the recent novelties in the field of historiography with different types of documentation being ever more frequently used. Together with literary texts and oral testimonies, images also have an important role.[1] At the beginning of the 21st century, most of the planet's population with access to audiovisual media spends more time watching television or cinema than reading. In America, figures from the early nineties show that audiovisual media were used over fifty times more than books.[2] In 2008, these proportions must surely have increased considerably, as there has been a spectacular rise in the audiovisual media globally over the last fifteen years.

Photography and cinema have an extraordinary value for widening areas of knowledge in contemporary history in such fields as the history of mentalities, history of daily life, cultural history, etc. Evoking the historiographical situation of such a relatively recent date as 1976, Jon Solomon stated that, "When I began the first version of this book in 1976, there was little interest in the genre of films that I call, ironically and on purpose, 'old'".[3] One of the main pieces of evidence for these changes is the emergence of research interest into the history of the cinema among specialists from the areas of art history, audiovisual communication and publicity or contemporary history, and the fact that many universities are introducing into their curricula specific subjects dedicated to the history of the cinema and the analysis of contemporary history as seen through film.

This signifies considerable progress compared with the history of the cinema in our universities in recent decades, although there is still a long way to go. On one hand, I believe that the horizons of these studies, work and research should be widened to embrace the vision of medieval times through the cinema, which is the aim of this article. But I also consider it necessary to include knowledge, themes, practical classes, conferences or seminars related to the study of the vision of the Middle Ages through cinema into the specific subjects in the area of medieval history.[4]

The influence the seventh art may have had as a transmitter of knowledge for millions of individuals all over the world during the 20th century needs to be considered. A well-known Spanish politician recognised in his memories that "The

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1. Burke, Peter. *Visto y no visto. El uso de la imagen como documento histórico*. Barcelona: Crítica, 2001: 11.

2. Ferro, Marc. "Perspectivas en torno a las relaciones Historia-Cine". *Film-Historia*, I/1 (1991): 3.

3. Solomon, Jon. *Peplum. El mundo antiguo en el cine*. Madrid: Alianza, 2002: 15.

4. Over the last two years, interesting seminars and courses about the relation between the medieval world and the cinema have been organised. These include the "IV Foro Medieval. Edad Media Made in USA", held in Cortegana, 11 to 13 August 2006 and with specific sessions dedicated to the cinema. The course "La Edad Media en el Cine", from 25 October 2006 to 13 December 2006 in the Universidad de Murcia and "La Edad Media vista por el Cine. X Curso de Historia y Cultura Medieval", held in Albarracín from 20 to 22 September 2007.

cinema was the university of life".[5] For writers and intellectuals of the stature of Gore Vidal, "the cinema shapes our character even from infancy" and this thesis has been the central subject of talks he has given about the role of the cinema in society.[6] The author of *Julian* confessed in his memories that "I was rather a lonely child and didn't look for any type of company apart from books, films and my own imagination".[7] Given the importance of Gore Vidal's role in North American culture and politics, his reflection acquires an extraordinary importance and leads to the hypothesis about the role of the cinema in the United States since the First World War as a vehicle to bring Europe closer culturally and historically; and after the end of the conflict, the capacity of the United States as the first emerging world power to transmit its own culture to the old, refined and outdated European continent through the cinema. We can thus reflect on the cinema as a very powerful vehicle for the Europeanization of the United States and the Americanisation of Europe through popularisation and mass entertainment in the period after the Second World War, and with the effect of ideological rearmament during the Cold War.

Until the outbreak of the First World War, international politics had been decided by a limited group of European powers on a Eurocentric basis.[8] Since the 11th century, part of international politics had been moulded by the interests of the European ruling classes.[9] The European aristocracies[10] went out in search of territorial, religious, economic and cultural conquest of the European continent. From the western expansion beginning in the 11th century and up to the aftermath of the Second World War, European leaders had fought wars outside the natural frontiers of Europe in a process of territorial expansion of Western society that did not end until after the Second World War, with the loss of the colonies that some European nations still held beyond their national frontiers.

Around the beginning of the 20th century, prior to the First World War, old Europe was still anchored in its old African and Asian colonies, while under the Monroe Doctrine, the Protestant Anglo-Saxon oligarchy in the United States had designed a pan-American policy, with the United States as the leading power on the American continent.

The United States of America grew strong on the American continent and Europe was narcotized by the outflow of its essence and the dreams of its old and vast colonies.

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5. Guerra González, Alfonso. *Cuando el tiempo nos alcanza. Memorias (1940-1982)*. Madrid: Espasa, 2004: 67.

6. Vidal, Gore. *Una memoria*. Barcelona: DeBolsillo, 2006: 31.

7. Vidal, Gore. *Una memoria...*:33.

8. Elizalde Pérez-Grueso, María Dolores. "Los años previos a la Gran Guerra, 1870-1914: consolidaciones nacionales, rivalidades imperialistas y reparto del mundo en zonas de influencia", *Europa y Estados Unidos. Una historia de la relación atlántica en los últimos cien años*, José María Beneyto Pérez, Ricardo M. Martín de la Guardia, Guillermo Á. Pérez Sánchez, dirs. Madrid: Biblioteca Nueva, Instituto de Estudios Europeos de la Universidad San Pablo-Ceu, 2005: 33.

9. Bartlett, Robert. *La formación de Europa. Conquista, colonización y cambio cultural, 950-1350*. Valencia-Granada: Servicio de Publicaciones. Universidad de Valencia-Universidad de Granada, 2003.

10. About the concept of the ruling group in the Middle Ages in Western Europe, see: Morsel, Joseph. *L'aristocratie médiévale. Vᵉ-XVᵉ siècle*. Paris: Armand Colin, 2004.

Until 1917, the United States had isolated itself from the problems of the old continent, the "suicidal old Europe" that the new nation's first settlers had fled from not so long ago. Until that year, the Monroe Doctrine, thought up by the Secretary of State Quincy Adams under James Monroe's presidency, stipulated that the United States rejected the presence of the European powers in any territory in the American hemisphere, while agreeing to avoid involvement in European politics and especially in its wars. President Wilson abrogated this doctrine in 1917 with the first participation by American armies on the European continent. American troops are still based on European territory.[11]

The entry of the United States into Europe to fight in the First World War, and the role played by North American powers at the end of the second great international conflict of the 20th century, signified for the United States an opening towards Europe, and for the outdated and stale continent, the beginning of a progressive Americanisation. The end of colonialism and the new position of the United States as the hegemonic world power after 1945 meant a brusque change in world leadership, putting an end to a European leadership forged in the medieval period and consolidated and extended over the following centuries.

The leaders of the international film market in the first two decades of the 20th century were France, Italy and Denmark. The great rise of the film industry in the United States came after the end of the First World War and its dominance was consolidated after the Second World War.[12]

Let us not forget that the history of the 20th century really began with the First World War[13] and the profound changes that the end of the conflict produced among the great powers. The consequences of this conflict mark the rise of a new social and cultural stage, one that fully coincided with the origin and consolidation of the cinema as a mass spectacle.

In this sense, the interest of medievalists in the cinema produced in the United States centres on the handling of the audiovisual media, which is of great value as a teaching tool in the classroom, but also as a means of reflecting on the paths that have led successive generations in the 20th century to forge a more or less stereotyped image of the Middle Ages. I think that Stuart Airlie is exaggerating when he states that "Movies can be dangerous for medievalists".[14] This phrase may have been true in the early 20th century, but nowadays I do not believe that medieval historians find films set in the Middle Ages "dangerous".

In a recent detailed, perceptive and occasionally funny study, Jacques Heers presented the false and ambiguous vision of the period between the 5th and 15th centuries transmitted from the Renaissance down to the 19th century and even into the 20th century, analysing various texts from the last five hundred years about certain

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11. Vidal, Gore. *Una memoria...*: 75.

12. Talens, Jenaro; Zunzunegui, Santos, coords. *Historia General del Cine. I. Orígenes del Cine*. Madrid: Cátedra, 1998: 211.

13. Elizalde Pérez-Grueso, María Dolores. "Los años previos a la Gran Guerra...":17.

14.Airlie, Stuart. "Strange eventful histories: the Middle Ages in the cinema", *The Medieval World*, Peter Linehan, Janet L. Nelson, eds. London: Routledge, 2001: 163.

prejudices and stereotyped ideas on feudalism, the church, the peasantry or the Middle Ages as a historical period, discovering and revising the dark legends about the medieval period that have been woven over the last five hundred years.[15]

As happened with the dark Hispanic legend, in Western Europe all this literature helped to consolidate a pejorative and negative vision of the Middle Ages reflected in the expression "The Dark Ages" that we can still find in some textbooks, literary or other works set in the Middle Ages, and even more so in the press. One of the most common and clichéd ways of beginning a film set in the Middle Ages is with a voice-over beyond a dramatic image reminding the spectator that the action is located in the dark period of the Middle Ages.

In general terms, what has marked a difference between the view of the Middle Ages projected from the United States and the one generated in European cinema, is that in the first case, we come across a more idealised, clean, bright, colouristic and utopian vision of the medieval world, in contrast with the dark, cold, harsh, and realist recreation that Europe has done of its own medieval history.

The beginning of the 21st century is the moment for analysis of the vision of the Middle Ages that American cinema has transmitted, together with the influence that this may have had on historical divulgation and reciprocal cultural colonisation between the old and new worlds. This image of the Middle Ages, reflected in hundreds of films, with a greater or lesser impact on the audience, has forged very clear concepts about what the Middle Ages must have been like and what are, for millions around the world, intrinsic aspects related to their personal vision of medieval times. Given that the United States of America is the country that has produced the highest proportion of films set in the Middle Ages, and that these attract the biggest audiences to the cinemas, I consider it necessary to reflect on the image of the medieval world projected by American cinema.

Resorting to a stereotype like the Far West, it is difficult to imagine a vision of the history of the United States in the second half of the 19th century other than the one reflected in the cinematographic *western*, in films by masters such as John Ford, Anthony Mann, Howard Hawks or Otto Preminger. However, the obligation of historians specialised in this period is to reject this false image of the American west and press for a serious and thorough revision of the history of the United States during that period, which does not, however, mean that we can no longer enjoy the image projected by these marvellous films.

Reflecting on the vision of the Middle Ages in North American cinema leads me to pose a question about the extent to which the cinema may have influenced the learning of various generations of students and professionals of history, either directly or indirectly. I am certain that there is an influence, but one which cannot be measured. The cultural evolution of the 20th century has generated a necessary change at all levels of history teaching and writing. In 1920, the Dutch Academy requested from the prestigious historian Johan Huizinga an assessment of the value of a project for an archive of cinematographic documentaries. Huizinga spoke out

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15. Heers, Jacques. *La invención de la Edad Media*. Barcelona: Crítica, 1995.

against the project, claiming that the cinema made no serious contribution to the knowledge of history. The response from this Dutch expert was typical of cinema's infancy when it was still little appreciated by contemporary intellectuals.

At the beginning of the 21st century, the cinema has come of age, and its artistic and pedagogical values are universally recognised, it now being habitual to find references to the seventh art in serious books on historical research.[16]

2. The genres. Historical cinema in the United States

The cinema, in both its artistic conception and its critical analysis, has been structured by genres almost since its very beginnings, and these frames were decisively influenced by North American cinema, especially those dictated by the "majors", the large companies each of which specialised in a specific genre. These, whether westerns, musicals or thrillers, were based on the repetition of characteristic schemes, thematic typologies and characters or even specific technical characteristics —for example, the black and white, more or less constant presence of claustrophobic atmospheres and the great contrasts in the lighting in cine noir, or the wide open spaces, horses and revolvers, the duel or the canteen, as the setting and specific elements of a *western*. Even a company's actors, actresses and directors were orientated towards a specific genre, adapted to the visual characteristics of its stars. Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer used their star Robert Taylor to produce three films set in the Middle Ages, *Ivanhoe* (1952), *Knights of the Round Table* (1953) and *Quentin Durward* (1955), all three filmed by Richard Thorpe using the new techniques of *CinemaScope*. Other companies, such as Warner Bros, with actors such as Humphrey Bogart, used their profile to make excellent police or cine noir films, while Universal Pictures tended towards horror films, and with Boris Karloff in *Frankenstein* (1931) and Bela Lugosi in *Dracula* (1931), created some of the all-time greats of this genre.

When we approach a film that is already framed, or that we decide to place in one of these categories, it is possible to follow the steps that reveal a logic previously inscribed in the film.[17]

The history of historical cinema is very recent in our country. Some pioneers, such as Marco Ferro, have been working in France since the sixties, in the face of the surprise and lack of understanding of companions and colleagues. Despite this, his work has ended up taking root and various schools have arisen in Europe and America that use the cinema as a source of knowledge about, and divulgation of history. In the United States, Robert A. Rosenstone, one of the fathers of the North American school, has undertaken a similar task to Ferro in Europe.

It is necessary to mention their different foci when tackling film as a historical document. Prestigious authors, like the above-mentioned Marco Ferro in history

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16. Barlett, Robert. *La formación de Europa...*: 89.

17. Carmona, Ramón. *Cómo se comenta un texto fílmico.* Madrid: Cátedra, 1993: 54.

and Pierre Sorlin in sociology, use their work to present the analysis of the vision of history through the cinema, while Rosenstone emphasises especially how the films explain and relate to history.

Three ways to approach cinema from the field of history derive from these positions:
1. Cinema as a source of research into the past. Documentation - research.
2. Cinema as a means for study and knowledge of the past, at its most advanced levels, didactic as well as historical divulgation. Teaching.
    2.a. The epoch portrayed in the film.
    2.b. The period when the film was made.
3. Cinema as a vehicle for reconstructing history. Alternative reading. Creation. Art Film.

We can try to offer a simple definition: a historical film is one where the action is set in an identifiable past in relation to when it was made. This identification occurs through the accumulation of historical details or aspects that grant credibility to the audiovisual discourse and in favour of a certain historical sense. In historical films, we move between the description of the past and its explanation or interpretation. Depending on the approach, this can be limited to a mere visualization (sometimes only scenographic) of the past, or a full recreation.[18]

What do we understand by a historical programme? Manuel Palacio, in his excellent article about History on Television, answered this question, "Once again, the best is not to be distracted by debates and to follow the canons most frequented by the dialectic between present and past, the present and history. In the present context, a historical programme shall be one whose content is set at least ten years before the time of broadcast. We shall make distinctions between programmes that are based on a literary adaptation (i.e. Fortunata y Jacinta or La Regenta) and those that are based on an original theme (i.e. Los desastres de la Guerra). In other words, the spectators find a specific scenography (setting, costumes, furnishings, architecture, urbanism, etc) that establishes their perception of the work as a historical discourse or, more appropriately, as a narrative that talks about "the past", independently of whether the original was a literary text.[19]

Through the work of Enrique Monterde, we can define this point more precisely. Historical cinema is characterised not so much because the subject of the discourse —in the form of a representation— belongs to the past, as by the fact that, to access it, one has to pass through another form of representation that goes by the name of history. This means that the legalization of historical cinema is extra-cinematographic, even depending on the historiographical models inasmuch as it is a historical work. Along those lines, several questions arise, related to the nature of

18. Monterde, José Enrique. "Historia y Cine. Notas introductorias". *Cuadernos de la Academia*, 6 (september, 1999)(*Ficciones Históricas*, José Enrique Monterde, dir. Madrid: Academia de las Artes y las Ciencias Cinematográficas de España, 1999):11.

19. Palacio, Manuel. "La Historia en la televisión". *Cuadernos de la Academia*, 6 (September,1999) (*Ficciones Históricas*, José Enrique Monterde, dir. Madrid: Academia de las Artes y las Ciencias Cinematográficas de España, 1999): 139.

the selected historical facts, the development of these in the film, and the structure within which they are presented, etc. In any case, insofar as this representation (on film) of another representation (historical) is concerned, there is always room for a margin, a space, for the development of a historical sense.[20]

Tarkovsky's reflection about his excellent film *Andrei Rublev*, set in the 15th century, is also interesting. About this film, he said that, "I don't understand the historical films that are not pertinent to the present. For me the most important aspect is to use historical material to express man's ideas and create contemporary characters".[21] This idea can lead us to ask whether historical films can be about what we really are, rather than what we were.

Films like *Spartacus* can explain the political situation in the USA in the 1950s and it anticipated the situation of the early sixties, with the struggle for human rights and against the corruption of politicians and the American government. It is impossible to see the treatment that Hollywood gave to the ancient world in titles like *Quo Vadis?* (1951), *Ben-Hur* (1959) and *Spartacus* (1960), without comparing them to Nazis and communists.[22] In the current international context, a film like *Kingdom of Heaven* offered a justification for the invasion of Iraq by the American administration at the time of its release and drew parallels between the supposed collaboration between the crusading armies and the local population and the help that the US army was going to give to the population of Iraq after the conquest of the country.

In a recent work, Juan Francisco González created a classification of epic cinema, cataloguing as historical those films that respond to a conception of history based on specific characters or historical events, and that offer their own view of that event or character. It is less important to adhere strictly to the facts as they really happened; more important is the perspective that the director offers us through specific events and characters.[23]

However, and without questioning this definition, with this criterion we can classify a considerable part of cinematographic production as historical cine. Practically all the films set before the fall of the Berlin Wall put us in a historical context, including the conquest of the American West, the Great Depression, Roosevelt's New Deal, the Second World War, the Cold War, the Vietnam War, etc.

That is the reason why some authors prefer to maintain the basic structure of the genres and only include among the epic genre those films that intentionally have a historical backdrop, or are set in historical scenarios clearly understandable by any spectator.

This way, we can catalogue *The Searchers* by John Ford as a *western* rather than a historical film. Although historical references are made, such as the end of the American Civil War, the conflict with the Indians, etc., the film is a pure *western*, as

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20. Monterde, José Enrique. "Historia y Cine...": 11.

21. Kobal, John. *Las 100 mejores películas*. Madrid: Alianza, 2003: 85-86.

22. Wyke, Maria. *Projecting the past: Ancient Rome, Cinema, and History*. New York: Routledge, 1997, from Solomon, Jon. *Peplum. El mundo antiguo...*: 16.

23. González, Juan Francisco. *Aprender a ver cine*. Madrid: Rialp, 2002: 35.

the historical aspect is secondary, while the epic of an individual, Ethan Edwards, and his personal adventures in the American West are the central themes of the film.

The birth of epic cinema in the United States was conditioned by the circumstances before and after the First World War. Before the outbreak of the conflict that led to the first military intervention by the United States in Europe, the early epic productions were filmed on the old continent. We can consider the 1908-production *"Gli ultimi giorni di Pompeii"* by Luigi Maggi,[24] the first classic of epic cinema produced in Italy in the context of the Golden Age of Italian cinema, together with other highlights such as *Cabiria* (1914) directed by Giovanni Pastrone, one of the great epic films of the silent period. It was the first great epic film, and with its impressive visual effects, lighting and the colossal nature of its scenes with numerous extras, deeply impressed spectators and film enthusiasts of the time and had a notable influence on pioneers of the genre, such as Griffith, especially in one of his great films, *Intolerance* (1916). The extraordinary success of these Italian super-productions eclipsed French epic cinema, which had been very prolific until 1914. Something similar happened to British historical cinema. The First World War interrupted this golden trajectory in Italy, while large super-productions were still being made in the USA, despite the commercial failure of some of the great works filmed during the First World War, like the above-mentioned *Intolerance*. The war practically put an end to the expectations for the creation of a powerful cinematographic industry in Europe, especially in countries like Italy, with works linked to epic cine and the great super-productions or "colossal" films. After this decline, briefly interrupted by the rebirth of Italian cinema in the twenties, epic cinema grew in America with the incorporation of first sound, and then colour. In the thirties, there was a first apogee of epic cinema in Hollywood, with Cecil B. De Mille's *The Crusades* (1935) being the first great talking film set in the Middle Ages, followed three years later by one of the classics of epic cinema, *The Adventures of Robin Hood* (1938) by Michael Curtiz and William Keighley, the first great super-production filmed in *Technicolor*, starring Errol Flynn, a luxury cast, and the evocative music by Erich Wolfgang Korngold. The result was an excellent film of adventures and romances set in Sherwood Forest, one of the most characteristic scenarios of films on a medieval theme.

Both *Cabiria* and *Intolerance* heralded some of the main characteristics of the genre, epic super-productions in all respects, colossalism, new narrative structures, spectacular special effects and a cast of thousands of extras.

After these pioneers came the directors who set the foundations for the genre, such as Cecil B. de Mille, whose films, set in the classical and medieval worlds, turned him into one of the great directors of epic cinema and especially "colossal" films, and who managed to reinvigorate the "ancient" genre with productions like *Samson and Delilah* (1949).[25]

Cecil B. de Mille, with an industrial conception and spectacle in his productions, seeking spectacular box office hits, used solidly based historical arguments, but on

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24. Solomon, Jon. *Peplum. El mundo antiguo...*: 24.

25. Solomon, Jon. *Peplum. El mundo antiguo...*: 31.

writing the script, placed the love stories, intrigues, violence, passion, etc., at the heart of his history, creating concoctions which might seem indigestible, explosive, histrionic, and even absurd for historians, but which entranced millions of spectators over various generations, even decades after the making of a film, as is the case of the *Ten Commandments* (1956). In *Cleopatra* (1934), he concentrated on the romances of the Egyptian empress, sidestepping any other issue. *The Crusades* (1935) was an authentic skit that used the Crusades as a pretext to present a spectacle of love, passions, violence and the holy and just struggle against Islam.[26]

This way, and with the rebirth of epic cinema in the fifties, the apogee of the epic genre was reached, in a development which was affected by competition from television, which led to enormous losses for the Hollywood studios and forced them to offer ever more spectacular products. This led to the use and triumph of the panoramic screen, used extensively in the epic films set in the classical period and the Middle Ages, *The Robe* (1953) being the first film in CinemaScope. The success, financially, with audiences and with awards from the Academy, of *Ben-Hur* (1959), was the peak of epic cinema. This work by William Wyler used an 1880 literary text which, as the trailers said, "is a story that has moved one generation of readers after another". The film includes the three basic elements of epic films, namely violence, action and love, in this case with the added attraction of the appearance of Jesus. These were some of the keys to the success of the colossal super-productions of a Major study like *Metro Goldwyn Mayer*.

Subsequently and from the sixties, the appearance of *Spartacus* (1960) marks a great difference, compared with previous epic films, showing a "modern sensitivity", as it has been described by specialist critics. It is one of the best epic films and it introduced significant novelties, such as avoiding the religious question, not having a religious martyr. The problems that arose during filming, and the huge costs of *Cleopatra* (1963), practically signified the death sentence for epic colossal cinema, for the great super-productions.

Before the current rebirth of epic cinema, the epic productions took refuge in television, where they found more financial and technical possibilities, as well as an audience avid to see these historical recreations on their television screens. Some of the most important examples for the ancient world are *Jesus of Nazareth* (1977) by Franco Zefirelli or *I Claudius* (1976) by Herbert Wisse. For the contemporary period, there was the great success of the series *Roots* (1977).

Among the numerous productions from the medieval epoch, we might mention *The Adventures of Robin Hood* (1955), *The Legend of Robin Hood* (1968), *Marco Polo* (1982), *Ivanhoe* (1982), *Robin of Sherwood* (1984), *Arthur the King* (1985), *Joan of Arc* (1991), *Charlemagne, le prince à cheval* (1993), *Cadfael* (1994), *Guinevere* (1994), *Desideria e l'annello del drago* (1994), *Ivanhoe* (1997), *Il cuore e la spada* (Tristan e Isolda) (1998), *Merlin* (1998), *Dark Ages* (1999), *Attila* (2001), *The Mists of Avalon* (2001), *Princess of Thieves* (2001), *Merlin and the Queen* (2004), *Robin Hood* (2006) and in

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26. In *The Crusades*, the long list of historical characters includes Saladin, Phillip of France, Richard the Lionheart, Sancho of Navarre, Berengaria of Navarre and the mention of Barbarossa, as well as such spectacular appearances as a nun in her full habit in an Islamic slave market.

Spain, *Pedro I el Cruel* (1988) and *Réquiem por Granada* (1990). This small sample indicates that the potential of television requires a separate analysis of the vision of the medieval world in television productions.[27]

Recently, the success of productions like *Titanic* (1997), *Braveheart* (1995), *Gladiator* (2000), *King Arthur* (2004), *Kingdom of Heaven* (2005), *Alatriste* (2006), *The Last Legion* (2007) or *Beowulf* (2007), has led to the resurgence of epic productions in the format of super-productions or "colossal" films, given that the introduction of new technologies in the film industry has led to a considerable reduction in the previously astronomical costs of producing these films.

We can conclude by stating that historical cinema has found some subjects that simultaneously combine cultural, historical and popular attractions, a rich mine which has been expertly exploited within an artistic style whose special priority has been the colourist mass spectacle rather than an accurate analysis. Nowadays, for the majority of people, the main source of their historical knowledge are audiovisual media, cinema and television.[28] This way, the ancient world in general, but especially Biblical themes, ancient Rome and the Middle Ages, have been the historical scenarios that the film industry has recreated from a specific point of view in order to take millions of spectators from all over the world to the streets of Rome, to the Egypt of the Pharaohs, to the Holy Land occupied by the Crusaders or to the scenarios of the life and passion of Christ.

The literary works that had previously been popularly successful have been fundamental, especially in Hollywood films, in this inspiration which, in the eyes of the magnates of the industry, promised huge audiences to see these films about stories that, as the propaganda of the time said, had been read by generation after generation of readers.

It is thus undeniable that the transmission of general knowledge about history and notable historical phenomena to millions of spectators all over the world is conditioned by the images received through the cinematographic language.

3. The Middle Ages in the United States cinema

The Middle Ages has been present in the seventh art practically since the birth of this popular new form of artistic expression which has reached thousands of millions of spectators around the world. Soon after the earliest beginnings of the cinema, what is now regarded as the first cinematographic production set in the Middle Ages was made. This was *Joan of Arc* by Alfred Clark, filmed in 1895 in the

27. An excellent work, and one which might serve as a model, can be found in Palacio, Manuel. "La Historia en la televisión". *Cuadernos de la Academia*, 6 (September 1999) (*Ficciones Históricas*, José Enrique Monterde, dir. Madrid: Academia de las Artes y las Ciencias Cinematográficas de España, 1999): 137-150.

28. Rosenstone, Robert A. *El pasado en imágenes: El desafío del cine a nuestra idea de la Historia*. Barcelona: Ariel, 1997: 29.

United States, followed five years later in France by *Jeanne d'Arc* by Georges Méliès, one of the pioneers of cinema and one of the first who sensed the enormous possibilities of the seventh art as a spectacle for mass entertainment. This initial choice of the 15th century French national heroine for the first films set in medieval times was a wise one as, since then, eighteen films have been made about her, and the release has been announced of *Joan of Arc: The Virgin Warrior*, by Ronald F. Maxwell. This is truly a large number for a single person from the medieval period who, from an exclusively historiographical viewpoint, was not among the most important of the time. Some of the most outstanding characters of medieval history, or historical events of great relevance, have hardly made an appearance in the cinema.

The importance of the medieval world is reflected by the figure of over 500 films in our latest, still unpublished, catalogue of medieval films.[29] Those productions that, for various reasons, lack a clear intention to portray an identifiable historical past with greater or lesser credibility have not been included. Our previous definition of historical cinema included "historical indications able to give credibility to the audiovisual discourse and make it work in favour of a certain historical sense". Cartoon productions are excluded under this concept, as are works of comic buffoonery without historical accuracy in, for example, films like *Robin Hood: Men in Tights* (1993) by Mel Brooks, or the many films that repeatedly use the plot of Mark Twain's *A Connecticut Yankee At King Arthur's Court*, with numerous variations. There are two recent examples with the novelty of using popular Afro-American actors as leading characters in the plot on account of their wit. A *Knight in Camelot* (1998)[30] starring Whoopi Goldberg, or *Black Knight* (2001)[31] with the popular actor Martin Lawrence. This type of anachronism is frequent in cinema, with the undeniable attraction given by mixing epochs and characters in the same place and time, for example the clichéd time machines. Another common type of allusion are in the hundreds of new stories set in modern times but which refer to historical periods

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29. Version updated in February 2008. This is an Access database where I have gathered a list of films set in the Middle Ages from various sources. I have included as basic data the name of the director, the name of the film, year of production, the country and I have assigned each work a specific theme, for example Byzantium, Arthurian Cycle, Crusades, St Francis, Joan of Arc, etc. The selection of the titles to be included in the catalogue has been complex, as there is no single source of information that recompiles these works accurately. A starting point was the excellent appendix in the work by Attolini, Vito. *Immagini del Medioevo nel cinema*. Bari: Dedalo, 1993. But, given that the information in that work is insufficient and has not been updated, I have had to extend the search to other bibliographical references and especially the databases that can be found on Internet. The most complex part has been to recompile the information from the silent film period, as there are only fragmentary details available about the directors or names of some of these films. However, this database is still being compiled, as its final presentation requires first seeing some works from the collections in the corresponding national film archives. Because there is no line of Medieval History research into films set in the Middle Ages, there has never been a serious systematic study of these questions in Spain.

30. A computer error sends the leading character into the Middle Ages, to the court of King Arthur in Camelot, where she has to play the role of Fata Morgana.

31. The lead character is working in a medieval theme park, and by a chance accident he is sent back to the 14th century to the castle and court of a medieval king.

such as the Classical period[32] or the Middle Ages. Jon Solomon has found around 300 references of this type in films made between 1986 and 2000.[33] Although they are usually crude and uncouth, there are exceptions in which the combination of modern times with remote epochs can generate moments of great intellectual and aesthetic beauty, as in *The Time Bandits* (1981) or *The Fisher King* (1991), both by Terry Gilliam or they can be hilarious, like *Les visiteurs* (1993) by Jean-Marie Poiré.

Nor have productions exclusively for television been considered, including some excellent and well-documented television series that would merit a monographic study for their peculiarities of style, language and intentionality and which distances them from the typical style of cinematographic productions.[34]

It is useful to clarify the criteria applied in this work and in the above-mentioned database to decide if a film is set in the medieval epoch. The first factor is the chronological question. For the western and eastern Christian and Islamic area, which is basically the Islamic world, Christian Europe and the Slavonic-Byzantine world, the standard chronology of the Middle Ages from the 5th to the 15th centuries has been followed.[35] For the Asiatic world, and especially the representation of Japanese feudalism in cinema, the chronological spectrum has been extended to include the rise of the Tokugawa Shogunate at the beginning of the 17th century, that ended the period of internal wars between the Japanese feudal barons or warlords.

One of the first positive appraisals about the role of the Middle Ages in cinema is that of asserting the importance which this period has had for cinematographic representations. Faced with a consolidated genre like the "Peplum" (toga and sandals films) or films about Romans,[36] whose plots are the history of Rome, the Old Testament and the passion of Christ,[37] one might think that this important model of colossal production set in the Classical period and mainly based on biblical references had eclipsed other historical epochs, such as the Middle Ages. The data offered by Jon Solomon, which mentions "approximately 400 films set in the ancient world" allows us to state that there is clear parity between the number of films set in the Classical period and the medieval world. Faced with this historiographical hegemony and the cinematographic criticism of the relevance of "Roman" films, the role of American films set in the Middle Ages has to be asserted. This article aims to demonstrate this importance and especially to analyse those themes that have

32. Solomon, Jon. *Peplum. El mundo antiguo...*: 39.

33. Solomon, Jon. *Peplum. El mundo antiguo...*: 39.

34. For example, the excellent series *Cadfael* (1994) starring the well-known actor Derek Jacobi, who came to international fame for his performance as the Roman emperor Claudius. The history of the television series in Spain can be found in the excellent work by Palacio, Manuel. "La Historia en la televisión..." : 137-150.

35. For films about the medieval west, we have omitted those set after 1492 and those related to Christopher Columbus, as the discovery of America falls outside the limits of the medieval world.

36. For the impact of cinema about Romans made in Spain see: Aguilar, Carlos. "Romanos en España", *Cuadernos de la Academia*, 6 (September 1999) (*Ficciones Históricas*, José Enrique Monterde, dir. Madrid: Academia de las Artes y las Ciencias Cinematográficas de España, 1999): 205-214.

37. Solomon, Jon. *Peplum. El mundo antiguo...*: 24.

best been shown in films made in the United States and that, in short, have resulted in reconstructing a certain "medieval aesthetic" in Hollywood, a certain way of representing the Middle Ages that undoubtedly has deeply influenced millions of spectators who saw these films in the 20th century.

With regard to the chronological parameters mentioned, we could also propose a division between historical medieval areas and their representation in the cinema. The presence of the Islamic world has not been abundant and is of poor quality, except for some very specific works, and it has been viewed as somewhat exotic, with oriental sensuality and mystery and little or no accuracy, and the interest of being able to project special effects in one of the leading works of universal literature, *The Thousand and One Nights*.[38] One of the first films to make a notable contribution to fantasy cinema, thanks to its spectacular special effects, was *The 7th Voyage of Sinbad* (Nathan Juran, 1958), with special effects by the great stuntman Ray Harry Hausen.

Japan has made an important contribution to cinematographic quality through the works of such a significant director as Akira Kurosawa. The Christian western world has been the most widely represented, possibly because it is western society that has established the closest relations between the Middle Ages and its own history. The Byzantine world has appeared especially in a limited number of Soviet films about the medieval period, but which have had a great impact on film history.

The fact that the Middle Ages as a historical period is a western "invention" justifies the extraordinary interest of western society in medieval times. This attraction never ceases to grow, at least in the more entertaining and less rigorous aspect, in the mass publication of novels and non-fiction works, tourist routes, television and film productions and documentaries. There are also aspects of the medieval centuries which have been given an air of atavistic mystery and that still capture the imagination of millions of individuals. These include the Crusades, the Cathars, King Arthur, the Grail, the Knights Templar, the relics, miracles and medieval saints, etc. In fact, a significant part of this medieval mythology has been set in the context of a number of popular themes transferred to the cinema, such as the Arthurian cycle, the medieval knights, the Crusades, medieval saints such as Joan of Arc and Francis of Assisi, etc.

One of the arguments that has constantly attracted producers, directors, scriptwriters and spectators is this stereotyped vision of the Middle Ages, which views the historical period from the fall of the Roman Empire to the modern world of the Renaissance, the printing press, the discovery of America, etc., as a long dark period. This view was supported by writers, philosophers and politicians from the end of the 18th century and throughout the 19th century, etc., who waxed lyrical about a period they considered shadowy, obscure, dominated by darkness and superstition.

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38. Rubiera Mata, María Jesús. "Las Mil y una Noches y el cine", *Relaciones entre el cine y la literatura: un lenguaje común: 1er seminario*, Juan A. Ríos Carratalá, John D. Sanderson, eds. Alicante: Secretariado de Publicaciones. Universidad de Alicante, 1996: 91-94; Bernabé Pons, Luis F. "La narración y el cine como vida: Pier Paolo Pasolini y Las Mil y una Noches", *Relaciones entre el cine y la literatura: un lenguaje común: 1er seminario*, Juan A. Ríos Carratalá, John D. Sanderson, eds. Alicante: Secretariado de Publicaciones. Universidad de Alicante, 1996: 81-90.

It was especially this 19th-century Gothic and Romantic imagination, which fed 19th century popular culture, but which has served to continue the development of a superficial and banal view of the medieval period still held in some cultural areas, including the cinema or certain not very accurate literature.

The idea that the millennium between the Classical period and the Renaissance was a horrible nightmare, can be illustrated by the example from Quentin Tarantino's *Pulp Fiction* where an angry gangster whispers menacingly to an enemy "I'm gonna get Medieval on your ass."[39]

As Vito Attolini states, medieval times offer the spectators the possibility of going from the creature comforts of 20th-century society to a non-modern, non-electric epoch, without cars, or trains or anything centralised. The names of the Nibelungs, Robin Hood, King Arthur, Joan of Arc or the Crusades, are elements so given to the Gothic and Romantic imagination as the forest, the plague, crossbows, the mist, spears and shields, the heroic deeds, tournaments, the Holy Grail, the knights of the Round Table, etc., viewed from the cinema seat.[40] The producers have known how to use these themes to fascinate millions of people in a film with a "medieval aesthetic". The recent commercial success of a film set in the Middle Ages, like *Braveheart*, as well as the enormous impact that a historical film like *Gladiator* has had, are factors we should value to help us understand this sudden rebirth of the epic or colossal cinema, without forgetting the fundamental role played by the new technologies applied to the filming of super-productions, lowering the, until recently, astronomic and inassimilable costs of contracting thousands of extras for the action scenes, as well as the likewise onerous charge for the reconstruction of castles, the sky-high budget for the horses and riders who are *de rigueur* in any historical production worth its salt set in the Middle Ages. The epic cinema began to a languish when the budget for a colossal film like Mankiewiz's *Cleopatra* shot up and came close to bankrupting the major studio behind the project. Nowadays, shooting a film like *Gladiator* is profitable for the reasons mentioned above.

According to Vito Attolini, the detail, the "micro history" has prevailed in the choice of the medieval themes and characters that the cinema has put on the screen. The seventh art has been less concerned with the "long History", of history with capital letters, in order to concentrate on a medieval period presented as a background, a backdrop, converted into a minor History, a micro History.

A realist, corporal medieval age, typical of American cinema as opposed to a European one based on literary tales, contrasts with the deeply religious and spiritual cinema typical of Nordic film making, epitomised by Ingmar Bergman. There are also certain characteristic dualities of films set in the medieval epoch, a barbarous period against a heroic medieval age, and fantasy contrasted with a realist dimension.[41]

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39. O'Shea, Stephen. *Los Cátaros. La Herejía Perfecta*. Barcelona: Ediciones B, 2002: 25.

40. Attolini, Vito. *Immagini del medioevo...*: 6-7.

41. An example of this realist and rigorous dimension, although not very cinematographic, can be found in *The Message* - (Moustapha Akkad, 1976). For a deeper analysis see: Barrio Barrio, Juan Antonio. "El

I believe that one of the keys for understanding the cinema set in the Middle Ages and produced in the United States is that we generally find a recreation of part of a historical epoch, of some of its characters, tales and events, with the aim of creating a "medieval cinematographic aesthetic" attractive to the public. Thus, these ends are very far removed from historical reconstruction, the ideal that we medievalists would aspire to when planning the production of a film set in the Middle Ages.

Given that certain themes have drawn the attention of both cinematographic producers and film fans, I include below a brief presentation and analysis of some of the questions or characters from the medieval epoch that have been transferred with more interest to the cinema produced in the United States.

3.1 The Colossal of Hollywood. Stories of arms and adventures

A series of basic ideas predominate in the Hollywood cinema set in the Middle Ages. Given the usual hegemony of American cinema, these have given shape to the general or common idea about medieval cinema in the world.

They are stories of arms and love. These North American films have ended up creating a prototype of "film in a medieval setting", with a model of *Colossal* super-production, destined for the greatest international circulation, for example the well-known recreation by Hollywood of the figure of Rodrigo Díaz de Vivar.[42] Although *Braveheart* has a certain air of Scottish nationalism, and had an indirect influence on the Scottish referendum held shortly after its release, it is an American production, with a prototypical Hollywood star, directing and starring in the film.

In these super-productions of arms and love, such as the above-mentioned *Braveheart*, dedicated to maximum spectacle, it is justifiable that imagination prevails over erudition, fantasy over reality.[43] The main sources inspiring these films derive directly or indirectly from chivalrous literature. Some come directly from legends or myths in medieval literature and others, such as Richard Thorpe's *Ivanhoe*, from 19th-century novels inspired by medieval chivalric literature.[44]

Breaking down the list of films set in the Middle Ages, the main themes dealt with in North American productions are the Arthurian cycle, the Crusades, the

nacimiento del Islam a través de Mahoma, El mensajero de Dios", *Historia y Cine*, José Uroz, ed. Alicante: Servicio de Publicaciones. Universidad de Alicante, 1999: 101-117.

42. Barrio Barrio, Juan Antonio. "El Cid de Anthony Mann. A través del cine histórico y la Edad Media", *Historia y Cine...*: 131-152.

43. For a deeper analysis of the film see: Hughes, Brian. "De Wallace a Braveheart: antecedentes históricos de un mito", *Historia y Cine*, José Uroz, ed. Alicante: Servicio de Publicaciones. Universidad de Alicante, 1999: 119-130.

44. I take this opportunity to mention writers whose work has had an enormous diffusion through the cinema, as is the case of Robert Louis Stevenson. Works like *Treasure Island* or *The Mysterious Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* have been filmed frequently. A novel by Stevenson set in the Middle Ages in the War of the Roses *The Black Arrow* was turned into a film in 1948 by the director Gordon Douglas, in a minor film, practically a B series, like most of this interesting director's production, which forms part of the bulk of the so-called "journeymen".

barbarians or invaders, with a special role for the Vikings and the Mongols, to the Islamic world; popular medieval religious characters such as Joan of Arc, the theatre of Shakespeare, or feudal Europe set in France. However, the favourite theme of American cinema are the films set in medieval England and dealing with the Norman / Saxon world and, in second place, and related to the former, the leading role of places or characters from medieval Scotland, such as *Braveheart* or *Quentin Durward*. The recreation of medieval England is what has most drawn Hollywood scriptwriters and producers on a long historical journey, from the time of King Arthur in the 5th century, to the adventures of a young Scot in the court of Burgundy in 1465. From the 5th to the 15th century means traversing all of the Middle Ages, but paying little attention to the chronology, to the peculiarities of the different historical stages that mark the thousand years of the Middle Ages.

Together with these great themes, films have been made that address minor scenarios for Hollywood cinema, such as the recreation of medieval Italy in the well-known character of Marco Polo, or the Spanish reconquest in the persona of El Cid. The principal reflection we can extract from this is that if we summarise the films set in the era of King Arthur and productions placed in the world of Saxons, Normans and Scots, together with the representation of Shakespeare's works, a clear predilection appears for the English medieval world and which, for the American public, represents their recreation of the medieval world.

The choice by the US film industry of the medieval period might seem strange, but it is not: Given that the United States lacks its own medieval history, it has evoked its nonexistent medieval history by means of the cinema, centred on the ideal of chivalry, which is not very distant from its own culture,[45] which, through English literature, had fed the many historical characters and romances that contributed to spreading the cults of medieval heroes in the United States and their own code of honour, and defining England as the main scenario for this recreation of an imaginary "North American medieval history".

The way in which Hollywood transferred this world of knights to the cinema, according to Vito Attolini, was through an uncertain but generous representation of the iconic sources of the past with considerable inventive liberty, educated with a taste that anticipated the post-modernism of the eighties, through an imaginary kind of Pre-Raphaelitism filtered through the glossy pages of the fashion magazine Vogue.[46]

In the fifties, one of the great companies such as Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer, by producing a trilogy filmed by Richard Thorpe and starring Robert Taylor, led to the maximum expression of this ideology, with the films *Ivanhoe* (1952), *Knights of the Round Table* (1953) and *Quentin Durward* (1955).[47] The first and last of these were

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45. Although, to be exact, we should say that this spirit is much closer to the culture of the American *South than that of the North or West*.

46. Attolini, Vito. *Immagini del medioevo nel cinema...*: 20.

47. A classic cloak and dagger comedy set in 15th century Europe and based on Sir Walter Scott's novel. Quentin Durward becomes a pawn in the mortal struggle between two unscrupulous brothers, King Louis XI and the Duke of Burgundy. The film starts in 1465. Abundant firearms appear. At first, it alludes

inspired by the works of Sir Walter Scott of the same name, and the middle one on Arthur from the work of Sir Thomas Mallory.

This trilogy by Thorpe had the final result that the medieval world, through the direct inspiration by 19th century Romantic literature, and indirectly by knightly literature, was relegated to the background. It became a setting in the foreground of which a "world of adventures" was developed as the main argument of these films, and with a more accessible model for the public in all latitudes. The epitome of this model is the second *Knights of the Round Table* film (1953), which became an unarguable reference for all knightly productions, even its reverse burlesque in the Monty Python film, *Monty Python and The Holy Grail* (1975). In this medieval chivalrous trilogy, some of the characteristic and genuine features of North American cinema were defined. The heroic and individualistic profile of their leading character, who had to face all possible adversities and rivals alone. As the well known American neo-conservative political commentator, Robert Kagan affirms, "...just as Europeans proclaim, the Americans still see themselves in heroic terms, like Gary Cooper in *High Noon*. They defend the people of the town, whether the people want to be defended or not".[48]

In this very famous 1952 film by Fred Zinnemann, Sheriff Will Kane is forced to confront some outlaws who threaten his town, without anyone doing anything to help him. The excellent script by Carl Foreman contains the clearest expression of the fears that tormented Americans in the middle of the Cold War, the possibility of having to defend others, the European people, from the Soviet danger, even against a lack of will and collaboration by the people being defended in western Europe. With this argument we can recall numerous North American productions made during the Cold War, in which the plot is heroic, individualistic, with little help for the long-suffering and tormented champion of good and just causes. There is another traditional interpretation of this film, which is to see it as a reflection of the climate of terror that gripped Hollywood in the context of the witch-hunt begun by the Senator for Wisconsin, Joseph McCarthy.[49]

The last reflection we can make about the vision of the Middle Ages through cinema made in the United States, is that the dominant and hegemonic Anglo-Saxon elite in the United States has chosen the history of Christian western Europe as its own historical model with which to identify and project the vision of their own national history. On one hand, the United States is included in this long history that we qualify as western civilization. The prestigious journalist Timothy Garton Ash, digging out an old 1951 edition of Life, in the midst of the Cold War, reminds us of this common vision of the history of western civilization: A "Picture History of

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to the end of one epoch and the beginning of a new one, the end of chivalrous ideals, and the emergence of gunpowder, deception, cunning and the triumph of high diplomacy. Chancellery courts like those of Burgundy, with a clearly renaissance air. Although the film starts in 1465 and alludes to the Duke of Burgundy Charles the Bold, he did not in fact become duke until 1467.

48. Kagan, Robert. *Poder y debilidad: Estados Unidos y Europa en el nuevo orden mundial.* Madrid: Taurus, 2003.

49. Sand, Sholmo. *El siglo XX en pantalla.* Barcelona: Crítica, 2004: 368.

Western Man" tells of this prodigious evolution that began in 800 AD with a new creature conceived for the brilliant mission of "creating a new civilisation for the world". This man "was fair of skin, hardy of limb, brave of heart, and he believed in the eternal salvation of his soul". He "worked toward freedom, first for his own person, then for his own mind and spirit, and finally for others in equal measure". In this tale, the evolution of western man went "from his first emergence in the Middle Ages to his contemporary position of world leadership in the United States of America".[50]

Such a simple, ingenuous and optimist vision of western man and civilisation, written in the early 1950s, sums up the Eurocentric vision of history that had become a new concept of universal history ruled by a liberating west, which, in the middle of the Cold War, was led by the United States. This ideology and philosophy of universal history holds the historical and ideological substrate of the adventure films set in the Middle Ages and produced in the United States. In these films, the hero is the paradigm of the pristine virtues of western man. The medieval knight who fought in the Crusades, the crusading hero who went to the Holy Land in *Kingdom of Heaven*, was the ancestor of his natural heir, the American soldier and hero who fights against the west's rivals, whether these be Soviets, Vietnamese or, nowadays, the Islamists in Iraq.

Another interesting characteristic of these Hollywood chivalric productions is that they have had an accentuated feminine stamp, both for the role of the women in the films, and for the choice of actresses with a "accentuated femininity" such as Elizabeth Taylor, Ava Gardner, Joan Fontaine, Deborah Kerr or Sophia Loren. This way, the binomial arms-love, adventure-love is perfectly complemented with the task of adventure and warring falling on the male character (*El Cid*), and the female character concentrating on romantic or amorous adventures, on occasions practically alone, as in the above mentioned *El Cid*, in which Sophia Loren, in the role of Lady Jimena, lives her amorous adventure alone, while her husband Charlton Heston (Rodrigo Díaz de Vivar), dedicates himself to adventures and war till the end of his days.

In the first films from the beginning of the 21st century set in the Middle Ages, we see how the medieval heroines have adopted a role in line with modern western society. In the glorious decades of the fifties and sixties, actresses like Elizabeth Taylor, Ava Gardner, Joan Fontaine, Deborah Kerr or Sophia Loren created highly feminine medieval heroines who easily took on their passive roles as romantic and smitten women who waited to harvest the legacy of the warrior. In contemporary cinema, there are young actresses, such as Keira Knightley, who adapt to the prototype of what the average audience expect of 21st century women, both physically, with a profile approaching anorexia, and in their costumes and attitude diametrically opposed to those of the great actresses of the golden age of cinema. Her portrayal of Guinevere designed more to please the modern juvenile audience than act as a

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50. Garton Ash, Timothy. *Mundo libre. Europa y Estados Unidos ante la crisis de Occidente.* Barcelona: Tusquets, 2005: 20.

historical reinterpretation of the character, the film presenting a warrior Guinevere, combative and tough, and little concerned about amorous affairs and romance. The female character played by Aishwarya Rai in the "*The Last Legion*" follows the same principle, also as a warrior.

**Table I. Selection of films set in the middle ages
and produced in the United States**

Year	Director	Title
1917	Cecil B. De Mille	Joan The Woman
1922	Allan Dwan	Robin Hood
1924	Raoul Walsh	The Thief of Baghdad
1935	Cecil B. De Mille	The Crusades
1936	George Cukor	Romeo and Juliet
1938	Michael Curtiz and William Keighley	The Adventures of Robin Hood
1938	Archie Mayo	The Adventures of Marco Polo
1940	Ludwig Berger-Michael Powell and others	The Thief of Baghdad
1947	Orson Welles	Macbeth
1948	Victor Fleming	Joan of Arc
1948	Gordon Douglas	The Black Arrow
1950	Jacques Tourneur	The Flame and the Arrow
1950	Henry Hathaway	The Black Rose.
1951	George Sherman	The Golden Horde
1952	Richard Thorpe	Ivanhone
1953	Richard Thorpe	Knights on the Round Table
1954	Henry Hathaway	Prince Valiant
1955	Richard Thorpe	The Adventures of Quentin Durward
1958	Richard Fleischer	The Vikings
1961	Anthony Mann	El Cid
1961	Michael Curtiz	Francis of Assisi

1962	Cornel Wilde	Lancelot and Guinevere
1963	Byron Haskin	Captain Sinbad
1965	Franklyn Schaffner	The War Lord
1965	Henry Levin	Gengis Khan
1967	Joshua Logan	Camelot
1969	John Huston	A Walk With Love and Death
1974	Gordon Hessler	The Golden Voyage of Sinbad
1985	Richard Donner	LadyHawke
1987	Franklyn Schaffner	Lionheart
1991	Kevin Reynolds	Robin Hood, Prince of Thieves
1993	Leslie Megahey	The Hour of The Pig
1995	Jerry Zucker	First Knight
1995	Mel Gibson	Braveheart
2004	Antoine Fuqua	King Arthur
2005	Ridley Scott	Kingdom of Heaven
2006	Kevin Reynolds	Tristand e Isolda
2007	Doug Lefler	The Last Legion
2007	Robert Zemeckis	Beowulf

3.2 The recreation of one's own cinematographic Middle Ages: the predilection for Medieval England. Robin Hood and Sherwood Forest

In England during the reign of Richard I "Lionheart" (1189-1199), one of the most famous celluloid medieval kings, it seems that there was a benefactor bandit everyone knew as Robin Hood, although his real name was Robert Fizooth, Count of Huntington. The first documented references to the character date from around 1370 with the first appearance of the name Robin Hood in the famous poem *Piers Plowman* by William Langland (1370).[51] Later, in John Stow's *The Chronicles*

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51. In the fifth part of the work, a clergyman who is the personification of laziness states, "I am unable to remember the Paternoster but I do remember the legend of Robin Hood. ("I kan noght parfitly my Paternoster as the preest it syngeth, But I kan rymes of Robyn Hood..."). Reference taken from de

of England (1580), there was a favourable description of the bandit. Obviously a mention three hundred years later might be questioned, given that Stow's own sources were popular legends. Popular ballads inspired by Robin Hood's deeds are known from the mid 15th century.

Nevertheless, we must recognise that this is a character who fluctuates between legend and reality of Richard I's reign, which, despite its brevity of only ten years, has bequeathed us many legends and myths that have fed romantic literature and the big screen.

One of the numerous cinematographic scenarios that have captivated us is Sherwood Forest, and Robin Hood and Maid Marian can be included on the roll of the world's best-loved cinematographic characters.

Hollywood found one of its most recurrent historical archetypes in Medieval England and Robin Hood, combining as it does the ingredients of a legendary kingdom, injustice, a good king, a despotic sovereign, together with the Hollywood producers' habitual dose of fantasy and imagination. Combined, this generates a product that is very accessible and interesting for the public at large as these are all the habitual components of the so-called adventure films that have been so successful for the film industry.

On this basis, one of the most popular and best-known films in the history of the cinema came out in 1938, in the shape of a work about the mythical medieval hero, which was to be admired by generation after generation of movie-goers. This was *The Adventures of Robin Hood* (1938), by Michael Curtiz and William Keighley, starring Errol Flynn and Olivia de Havilland.[52] This was not the first Robin Hood, as two silent versions and a cartoon had been filmed previously, all in the United States.

This film, like most of those made about Robin Hood, was not based on the oldest documentary sources about the person in question, but as happens with most films on historical themes, especially those set in the Middle Ages, the scriptwriters fell back on 19th-century literary sources. This is the indirect case of Sir Walter Scott's *Ivanhoe*, a very successful piece in which the character of Robin Hood appears, and which, moreover, was the direct inspiration for the film of the same name. *Ivanhoe* (1819) by Sir Walter Scott reserves many pages for Robin Hood, although always on the level of a legend. It must be remembered that, born in Edinburgh in 1771, Scott became interested in the ballads and legends of the Anglo-Scottish border around

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Langland, William. "The vision of Piers Plowman-Part 05". *Oldpoetry*. Social Design, Inc. 22 Decembre, 2007 < http://oldpoetry.com/opoem/28986-William-Langland-The-Vision-Of-Piers-Plowman---Part-05>.

52. The recent appearance of a very carefully edited version on DVD allows us to appreciate this work again, with its quality the marvellous chromatic power of Technicolor, as well as the various documentaries included, the outtakes from the filming, the importance of this work as the first super-production filmed in Technicolor, and other details that help us to understand how important the film was. Our attention is drawn by the strength, vigour and beauty of the colour in the film and the capacity of Technicolor to retain all the quality of the colours 65 years later. Another curiosity is to see that the setting for Sherwood Forest was an enormous forest that belonged to the studios in California. Obviously, the vegetation in that forest could not be the same as one would find in the 12th-century English woods where the story is set, but does that really matter very much?

the end of the 18th century. These were legends he had heard since childhood and that undoubtedly inspired some of the characters in his works.

The presence of Robin Hood in the above-mentioned work increases towards the end, with the arrival of Richard the Lionheart on English soil. A key moment, and a very cinematographic one, is when Robin says to the king,

> "Call me no longer Locksley, my Liege, but know me under the name, which, I fear, fame hath blown too widely not to have reached even your royal ears—I am Robin Hood of Sherwood Forest."
>
> "King of Outlaws, and Prince of good fellows!'" said the king, "who hath not heard a name that has been borne as far as Palestine? But be assured, brave Outlaw, that no deed done in our absence, and in the turbulent times to which it hath given rise, shall be remembered to thy disadvantage".[53]

In this work, abandoning his traditional Scottish themes, such as *Rob Roy*, Scott turns to a medieval scenario, a conflict between tyrants and liberators that he uses discretely to reflect the struggle between the Scots and the English. Thus, the Saxons who fight for freedom represent the Scots and the Norman tyrants represent the English from the beginning of the 19th century.

Another interesting aspect of the films about Robin Hood or the conflict between Saxons and Normans, is that most were made in the United States, except some high quality works, such as the demythologising *Robin and Marian* (1976) by Richard Lester, or the more recent *Robin Hood* (1991) by John Irvin, where Great Britain appears as co-producer of a North American production. Despite containing interesting elements, such as emphasising the character's aristocratic origins, this film was totally eclipsed by a work of the same year titled *Robin Hood, Prince of Thieves* (1991) by Kevin Reynolds, much more commercial and unreal but with an undeniable box-office appeal due to the spectacular nature of some scenes and the presence of stars like Kevin Costner in the leading role and Morgan Freeman in a historically unconvincing role.

What must also be emphasised about Irvin's film is the realistic production, both in the formal aspects and with regards to the costumes, as well as the concern for daily life and the lives of humble people, against the habitual dominance of the solemn and the heroic. It also touches upon on the contrast that divides the Normans invaders and the Saxon lords, presented as the legitimate owners of the land. Most of the film takes place in Sherwood Forest, an iconography that is very appropriate if we bear in mind the significance that the forest acquired in the medieval world.

Establishing a comparison with some of the most symbolic scenarios of the cinema, we find in Sherwood Forest the paradigm of the medieval place projected by the cinema, like Monument Valley might be for the *western*. It is a shame that Sherwood or other medieval landscapes have not found a John Ford, capable of transferring his masterly vision.

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53. Scott, Walter. *Ivanhoe*. Barcelona: Planeta, 1991: chapter XL.

Reynolds' film, which at no time seeks profound revisionism of the character, is a species of update or a terrible revision of a character closer to the hero along the lines of the one played by Errol Flynn in the thirties. This update results in evident anachronisms, such as with Azim, Morgan Freeman's Muslim character, converted to Christianity and travelling with Robin to England, or Marian, endowed with a "feminist" touch inappropriate for medieval times, or its spectacular invented imaginary prologue, in which Robin is seen in a Muslim prison in Jerusalem in the setting of the Crusades, all for the sake of greater commercial success for the film.

In this film, we find other references to Scott's Robin, such as when the character reaches England and finds the ancestral castle of Locksley in ruins. The name of Locksley is evidently taken from Scott's work.

All these simplifications and liberties respond to a film project aimed at mass audiences all over the world and which, unfortunately, eclipsed John Irvin's much more interesting film.

In the classic *The Adventures of Robin Hood*, the best recreation of Robin Hood, the struggle between the Saxons and the Normans has been seen by some authors as an updated vision of the danger of the Nazis, incarnated by the evil Normans, oppressing the Saxons, who will be freed by the joint action of Robin Hood and Richard the Lionheart.[54] According to this interpretation, the Normans oppress the Saxons in the film much as the Nazis persecuted the Jews. The outlawed Saxons, faithful to the imprisoned King Richard the Lionheart, are the image of the resistance to Nazism in Europe, while the Saxon masses show us the passivity of the bulk of the European population in the face of the advance of Nazism in Germany.

Table II. Main films about normans and Saxons (medieval England)

Year	Director	Title	Country
1912	Étienne Arnaud and Herbert Blaché	Robin Hood	USA - GB
1913	Theodore Marston	Robin Hood	USA
1922	Allan Dwan	Robin Hood	USA
1938	Michael Curtiz and William Keighley	The Adventures of Robin Hood	USA
1946	George Sherman and Henry Levin	The Bandit of Sherwood Forest	USA
1948	Howard Bretherton and Derwin Abrahams	The Prince of Thieves	USA

54. Alonso, Juan J.; Mastache, Enrique A.; Alonso, Jorge. *La Edad Media en el Cine*. Madrid: T&B Editores, 2007: 44.

1950	Gordon Douglas	Rogues of Sherwood Forest	USA
1950	Henry Hathaway	The Black Rose	USA
1954	Val Guest	Men of Sherwood Forest	USA
1991	John Irvin	Robin Hood	USA - GB
1991	Kevin Reynolds	Robin Hood, Prince of Thieves	USA
1998	Mike A. Martinez	Robin Hood	USA

Among series created for television and set in the Middle Ages, productions based on the character of *Robin Hood* have been made with a certain frequency. These have served to recover the full range of clichés about the Middle Ages, Sherwood Forest, Richard the Lionheart, John Lackland, Normans versus Saxons, etc. The 21st century does not hold out hope for great novelties in this respect, given that one of the first big series produced in Great Britain and set in the Middle Ages is *"Robin Hood"* (2006),[55] and one of the latest cinematographic productions in a medieval setting, that came out in 2007—*"The Last Legion"* - has Merlin and Excalibur as its characters in the context of the fall of the Roman Empire and the Germanic invasions, in a film that emulates the recreation, setting and scenarios of the film *King Arthur* (2004).

4. Conclusions

There are no novelties in the current spectrum of films produced in the United States and set in the Middle Ages, nor are there any inspired or original contributions to the films made in the preceding decades or the golden age of Hollywood. For example, some of the most spectacular shots in the final battle in *Kingdom of Heaven*, with the artillery attack on the besieged city of Jerusalem, are identical to those of the siege of the fortress in *The War Lord* (1965). The only contribution worth mentioning of *Beowulf* (2007) is that of converting a mature actor,[56] with a prominent beer belly, a term coined by the press, into a muscular and athletic hero thanks to the use of the new technologies applied to the film.

The sentence "We need heroes, don't we?" which closes the mediocre *"The Last Legion"* (2007), illustrates the lack of ideas in American cinema with regard to epic

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55. Gallo, Isabel. "La Ficción extranjera asalta las pantallas". *El País*, 29 April 2007: 76. In Spain, the series was first shown on 4th January 2008, and was seen by many viewers on the private Spanish channel. It has been a great success in Great Britain with average viewing figures of seven million.

56. Ray Winstone, born 19 February 1957.

films, and a cry of anguish from both the industry and the scriptwriters, at having to fall back on the same well-tried characters, scenarios or historical clichés in order to be able to complete a film with a medieval setting. Thus, the cinema produced in the United States and set in the Middle Ages has offered nothing new in these early years of the 21st century. Two films that closed and opened the 20th and 21st centuries respectively and which, although not set in the Middle Ages, talked intelligently about history and historians, are "*Le déclin de l'empire américain*" (1986), and "*Les Invasions Barbares*" (2003) by Denys Arcand. Although set in the time they were produced, they say more about history and the past than many of the films that pretend to be set in a remote period of history. These two excellent Canadian films talk fluently about the human being, his historical dimension and also his transitory nature and vulgarity in the day-to-day development. They are stories about flesh-and-blood humans who, as Robert Fossier expresses so well in his latest book,[57] breathe, eat, defecate and copulate. Humanity and everyday life of a kind lacking in many of the cardboard characters in some of the recreated histories in the films set in the Middle Ages.

Appendix 1. List of films produced in the United States and set in the middle ages[58]

Joan of Arc. (Alfred Clark, 1895).
Merlin the Magician. (Frederick S. Armitage, 1899).
Parsifal. (Thomas A. Edison, 1904).
Romeo and Juliet. (J. Stuart Blackton, 1908).
Richard III. (J. Stuart Blackton; William V. Ranous, 1908).
Macbeth. (J. Stuart Blackton, 1908).
The Viking's Daughter: The Story of the Ancient Norsemen. (J. Stuart Blackton, 1908).
King Lear. (J. Stuart Blackton; William V. Ranous, 1909).
Justinian and Theodora. (Otis Turner, 1910).
Romeo and Juliet. (Barry O'Neil, 1911).
Ivanhoe. (Herbert Brenon, 1911).
Richard III. (F. R. Benson, 1911).
The Knight Errant. (Francis Bogs, 1911).
The Black Arrow. (Oscar Apfel, 1911).

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57. Fossier, R.; *Gente de la Edad Media*. Madrid: Taurus, 2007.
58. Films about the medieval west set after 1492 and those related to Christopher Columbus have not been considered, as the discovery of America falls outside the framework of the medieval world. Those films that present a totally fantastic, imaginary and unbelievable view of the Middle Ages, due to their lack of historical accuracy, have been omitted from this list. The decision to include some films which match this definition is based on their cinematographic quality or their capacity to evoke historical reflection about medieval times. This is the case with such an excellent film as Excalibur by John Boorman.

Lady Godiva. (J. Stuart Blackton, 1911).
Romeo and Juliet. (Barry O'Neil, 1911).
Aladdin Up-to-Date. (J. Searle Dawley, 1912).
Richard III. (André Calmettes; James Keane, 1912).
Robin Hood. (Étienne Arnaud, Blaché, H., 1912).
A Princess of Bagdad. (Charles L. Gaskill, 1913).
Robin Hood. (Theodore Marston, 1913).
Ivanhoe. (Herbert Brenon, 1913).
Ivanhoe. (Leedham Bantock, 1913).
The Oath of a Viking. (J. Searle Dawley, 1914).
Il Trovatore. (Charles Simone, 1914).
The Viking Queen. (Walter Edwin. 1914).
Romeo and Juliet. (Francis X. Bushman; John W. Noble, 1916).
Macbeth. (John Emerson, 1916).
Romeo and Juliet. (J. Gordon Edwards; Maxwell Karger, 1916).
Romeo and Juliet. (Francis X Bushman; John W. Noble, 1916).
King Lear. (Ernest C. Warde, 1916).
Joan The Woman. (Cecil B. De Mille, 1917).
Aladdin and the wonderful Lamp. (Chester M. Franklin; Sidney Franklin, 1917).
Ali Baba and the Forty Thieves. (Chester M. Franklin; Sidney Franklin, 1918).
Robin Hood. (Allan Dwan, 1922).
The Hunchback of Notre Dame. (Wallace Worsley, 1923).
The Thief of Bagdad. (Raoul Walsh, 1924).
Romeo and Juliet. (Reggie Morris; Harry Sweet, 1924).
Marco Visconti. (Aldo De Benedetti, 1925).
Lady Robin Hood. (Ralph Ince, 1925).
The Beloved Rogue. (Alan Crosland, 1927).
The Viking. (Roy William Neil, 1928).
The Taming of the Shrew. (Sam Taylor, 1929).
The Crusades. (Cecil B. De Mille, 1935).
Romeo and Juliet. (George Cukor, 1936).
Romeo and Juliet. (George Cukor, 1936).
The Adventures of Robin Hood. (Michael Curtiz; William Keighley, 1938).
The Adventures of Marco Polo. (Archie Mayo, 1938).
If I Were King. (Frank Lloyd, 1938).
Tower of London. (Rowland V. Lee, 1939).
The Hunchback of Notre Dame. (William Dieterle, 1939).
Ali Baba and the Forty Thieves. (Arthur Lubin, 1942).
Arabian Nights. (John Rawlins, 1942).
A Thousand and One Nights. (Alfred E. Green, 1945)
The Bandit of Sherwood Forest. (George Sherman; Henry Levin, 1946).
Son of the Guardsman. (Derwin Abrahams, 1946).
Sinbad the Sailor. (Richard Wallace, 1947).
Macbeth. (Orson Welles, 1947).

Joan of Arc. (Victor Fleming, 1948).

The Black Arrow. (Gordon Douglas, 1948).

The Prince of Thieves. (Howard Bretherton; Derwin Abrahams, 1948).

Prince of Foxes. (Henry King, 1949).

Bride of Vengeance. (Mitchell Leissen, 1949).

The Adventures of Sir Galahad. (Spencer Gordon Bennet, 1949).

Rogues of Sherwood Forest. (Gordon Douglas, 1950).

The Black Rose. (Henry Hathaway, 1950).

The Flame and the Arrow. (Jacques Tourneur, 1950).

The Golden Horde. (George Sherman, 1951).

Tales of Robin Hood. (James Tinling, 1951).

Aladdin and his Lamp. (Lew Landers, 1952).

Son of Ali Baba. (Kurt Neumann, 1952).

Ivanhoe. (Richard Thorpe, 1952).

Knights of the Round Table. (Richard Thorpe, 1953).

The Golden Blade. (Nathan Juran, 1953).

Siren of Bagdad. (Richard Quine, 1953).

Decameron Nights. (Hugo Fregonese, 1953).

Sign of the Pagan. (Douglas Sirk, 1954).

King Richard and the Crusaders. (David Butler, 1954).

Men of Sherwood Forest. (Val Guest, 1954).

The Black Shield of Falworth. (Rudolph Maté, 1954).

The Black Knight. (Tay Garnett, 1954).

Prince Valiant. (Henry Hathaway, 1954).

The Saracen Blade. (William Castle, 1954).

Lady Godiva. (Arthur Lubin, 1955).

The Dark Avenger. (Henry Levin, 1955).

The Adventures of Quentin Durward. (Richard Thorpe, 1955).

Son of Sinbad. (Ted Tetzlaff, 1955).

Kismet. (Vincente Minelli, 1955).

The Conqueror. (Dick Powell, 1956).

The Court Jester. (Norman Panama, 1956).

The Vagabond King. (Michael Curtiz, 1956).

Saint Joan. (Otto Preminger, 1957).

Omar Khayyam. (William Dieterle, 1957).

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Sabu and the Magic Ring. (George Blair, 1957).

The Vikings. (Richard Fleischer, 1958).

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Francis of Assisi. (Michael Curtiz, 1961).

El Cid. (Anthony Mann, 1961).

Tower of London. (Roger Corman, 1962).

The Magic Sword. (Bert I. Godon, 1962).

Lancelot and Guinevere. (Cornel Wilde, 1962).
Taras Bulba. (J. Lee Thompson, 1962).
The Siege of the Saxons. (Nathan Juran, 1963).
Captain Sinbad. (Byron Haskin, 1963).
The Castilian. (Javier Setó, 1963. Spain).
Becket. (Peter Glenville, 1964).
Hamlet. (Bill Colleran. John Gielgud, 1964).
Hamlet. (Joseph Papp, 1964).
The War Lord. (Franklyn Schaffner, 1965).
Ghengis Khan. (Henry Levin, 1965).
The Sword of Ali Baba. (Virgil W. Vogel, 1965).
Camelot. (Joshua Logan, 1967).
A Walk With Love and Death. (John Huston, 1969).
Marco. (Seymour Robie, 1973).
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Dragonslayer. (Matthew Robbins, 1981).
The Sword and the Sorcerer. (Albert Pyun, 1982).
Lady Hawke. (Richard Donner, 1985).
Arthur the King. (Clive Donner, 1985).
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Discovering Hamlet. (Mark Olshaker, 1990).
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Macbeth. (Paul Winarski, 1998).
The Incredible Adventures of Marco Polo. (George Erschbamer, 1998).
The 13th Warrior. (Michael Crichton, 1999).
A Knight's Tale. (Brian Helgeland, 2001).
King Arthur. (Antoine Fuqua, 2004).
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