



The American Dark Ages and the Terrorist Witch in *Season of the Witch*

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Abstract

In this article we argue that Season of the Witch (Sena, 2011) is not to be analyzed according to its faithfulness to the known historical sources, but only by understanding medievalist codes, traditions and (filmic) intertextuality. When read from this perspective, Season of the Witch tried to create new meaning by combining a dominant interpretation of Ingmar Bergman's The Seventh Seal, European traditions on representing medieval witchcraft, contemporary perspectives on the crusades and Susan Aronstein's concept of "Hollywood Arthuriana". However, as this demands a lot of medievalist capital to fully understand, Season of the Witch in the end may have lost its coherence for the audience.

Keywords: *Season of the Witch, medieval film, The Seventh Seal, medieval witchcraft, the crusades, Hollywood Arthuriana*



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The American Dark Ages and the Terrorist Witch *Season of the Witch* (Sena, 2011)

In *Season of the Witch*, written by Bragi F. Schut and directed by Dominic Sena, two fourteenth century knights have to escort a girl accused of witchcraft to an abbey in Severac where the monks will decide on her guilt. When the film was released in January 2011, it was picked to pieces by the critics. The story of the film was considered to be “ridiculous”, flawed with historical inaccuracies and poorly executed mainly due to “unconvincing” CGI and bad acting.ⁱ Despite this poor reception by the critics *Season of the Witch* is a remarkable example of how meaning is constructed in medieval films. Most authors agree that the Middle Ages in the cinema are primarily not a historical period as such, but serve as a “distant mirror” or a “significant other” to contemporary society.ⁱⁱ Essentially, we either feel nostalgic for what we think is missing in our modern society and return to an Age of Chivalry or we congratulate ourselves on what we have outgrown compared with what then becomes the Dark Ages. By studying medieval films we want to understand what specific elements of the Middle Ages still appeal to a contemporary audience and how, although the meaning of these films is always intrinsically bound with the present, the discourse on the medieval past is constructed.ⁱⁱⁱ

In this article we argue that medieval films are not to be analyzed according to their faithfulness to the known historical sources, but that they can only be fully analyzed by understanding medievalist codes, traditions and (filmic) intertextuality. When read from this perspective, *Season of the Witch* tries to create new meaning by combining a dominant interpretation of Ingmar Bergman’s *The Seventh Seal*, European traditions on representing medieval witchcraft, contemporary perspectives on the crusades and Susan Aronstein’s concept of “Hollywood Arthuriana”. However, as this demands a lot of medievalist capital to fully understand, *Season of the Witch* in the end may have lost its coherence for the audience.

The Seventh Seal (*Bergman, 1957*)

The main narrative structure of *Season of the Witch* is highly indebted to Ingmar Bergman’s 1957 classic *The Seventh Seal*. Both films focus on two men returning from the crusades: a disillusioned knight who is struggling with his faith (Antonius Block/Behmen von Bleibrock) and his more down-to-earth Sancho Panza-like side-kick (Jöns/Felson). While returning to their homelands, they arrive in a

plague-stricken land for which a young girl is accused of being the source of this evil.^{iv}

More importantly, *Season of the Witch* closely follows the meaning of *The Seventh Seal*. Although there is a lot of debate on the possible meaning(s) of *The Seventh Seal*, essentially the film deals with a knight who has lost his former certainties and ideals during the crusades and is now struggling to find meaning in life. And although Block's time has come, he stalls Death by engaging Him in a game of chess which enables Block to make "one meaningful act", which is mostly interpreted as him saving the family of the travelling artists from the hands of Death. From this perspective, we follow the interpretation that the main theme of this film is not death, but how to deal with the "terror of emptiness in life".^v The meaning of the plague in this context is therefore most likely to be read as a signifier for a sinful or dysfunctional society on which contemporary feelings of disintegration, deep-rooted fear or pessimism can be projected.^{vi} Just like Antonius Block, Behmen von Bleibbruck is a disillusioned crusader struggling with his faith after having experienced traumatic events during the crusades. These experiences made him desert the crusades, but not much later he gets caught and is condemned to be hanged. However, just as Block, he gets the opportunity to avoid his impending death if he escorts a young girl accused of witchcraft to the abbey of Severac. And as he does not believe the girl to be a witch, he accepts the offer to escort her to Severac on condition that she gets a fair trial which will be his last meaningful act in life. In other words, just as *The Seventh Seal*, *Season of the Witch* essentially focuses on finding meaning in life during a journey that can be seen as spiritual as well as physical.

Representing Medieval Witchcraft

Although the first evidence of organized witch hunting dates back to 1420 and the most notorious witch crazes took place between 1562 and 1630, the persecution and execution of witches by the church has become intrinsically bound with the Middle Ages in the popular mind. It seems to fit naturally with the superstition, misogyny and intolerance that is so easily linked with the concept of the medieval.^{vii} Despite the fact that witchcraft plays a central role in *Season of the Witch*, the film is not interested in explaining the enigmatic historical occurrence of the (perceived) reality of medieval witchcraft, but instead explicitly connects with the popular traditions of representing medieval witchcraft.^{viii} Already in the opening scene, *Season of the Witch* explicitly refers to the two dominant nineteenth-century traditions that to this day are mostly responsible for the contemporary understanding of European medieval witchcraft: the rationalist and the romantic tradition.^{ix} In this scene, set in Villach in 1235 AD, three women accused of witchcraft and consorting with the devil are led up a bridge to be hanged.

The first witch, a young and innocent looking girl, is desperately crying and out of sheer terror she confesses whatever the priest wants her to confess. The contrast between this poor girl and the merciless church is emphasized by the fact that despite she has confessed all the priest wanted her to confess she still has to hang. Apparently, as the priest explains to her, only her soul can be saved while her body still has to be “consigned to God”. This witch can be seen as a representative of the rationalist tradition on European medieval witchcraft. This essentially anticlerical tradition, with strong liberal-rationalist roots, is most indebted to the works of Wilhelm Gottlieb Soldan (1803-1869) and Henry Charles Lea (1825-1909). Both historians denied the reality of witchcraft and turned the accused witches into innocent victims who, without having committed a crime, were heavily punished by witch trials instigated by a violent, dogmatic and obscurantist church. Examples of this tradition on medieval witchcraft in film can for example be found in *Haxän* (Christensen, 1922) that represented witches as women who were only suffering from “nervous exhaustion”, but who would confess to anything when put under torture.^x Also in *The Name of the Rose* (Annaud, 1986), the so-called witch is just a simple peasant girl whose only crime was being led into a strange ritual by the simpleton and heretic monk Salvatore in exchange for food.

The second witch to be hanged in the opening scene of *Season of the Witch* is an older woman who yells out to the priest that she only made an ointment for a cough out of pigs fat. However she seems to be accused of making some kind of magical potion. She can be seen as a representative of the romantic tradition for which the French historian Jules Michelet (1798-1874) proved to be very influential. The Middle Ages that surrounded Michelet’s view on witches were characterized by intellectual darkness. Because the church believed that all truths already could be deducted from the Scriptures there was no need for additional sciences such as chemistry, mathematics or physics. And whoever disagreed with this “artificial” or even “anti-nature” worldview of the church, was to be burned. According to Michelet, witchcraft was a reaction of the people who fled this world of obscurantism and dogmatism which enabled them to look directly, inductively and empirically to nature. Michelet considered this to be the birth of modern science, completely “against the spirit of the Middle Ages”. More specifically it were the medical sciences who benefited most from this, which in addition gave birth to the still popular notion of the wise woman of the woods.^{xi} An example of a film that follows this perspective is *Sorceress* (Shiffman, 1987) where Elda, a wise woman of the woods and local physician, though illiterate is portrayed nevertheless to be intellectually superior to the Inquisitor Etienne de Bourbon who, blinded by his unquestioned faith in the Scriptures, has lost his touch with reality which results in him accusing Elda of witchcraft.

The meaning attributed to witchcraft is in both traditions comparable.^{xii} Both attest from what Hollister called the “indestructible fossil of the self-congratulatory Renaissance humanism”, implying that we congratulate ourselves

on having outgrown the medieval anomaly that was witchcraft.^{xiii} At the end of *Häxan*, for example, the parallel between the barbaric past and the civilized present is made explicit by emphasising that mentally ill women now are detained in mental institutions or modern clinics which have replaced the “barbaric methods of medieval times”. However, more than only glorifying our modern and civilized society, these films also easily serve as a kind of warning not to let these “medieval” practices return. Or, again, as *Häxan* warns us: “Let us not believe that the Devil belongs solely to the past. [...] isn’t superstition still rampant among us? Is there an obvious difference between the sorceress and her costumer then and now? We no longer burn our old and poor. But do they not often suffer bitterly? And the little woman, whom we call hysterical, alone and unhappy, isn’t she still a riddle for us?”

In *Season of the Witch*, the main character of the accused witch that Behmen has to escort to Severac, is also modelled onto the rationalist tradition. Again, her character is copied from the young girl from *The Seventh Seal* that has been accused of bringing the plague to the lands. The girl from *The Seventh Seal* has in addition clearly been tortured which made her confess anything, but it is clear that she is not to her full senses. Nothing indicates that she is a witch and, as Antonius Block adds, even if she had sought the devil, she has not found him and the last thing she will see on this earth is emptiness.

This character from *The Seventh Seal* has become one of the main protagonists in *Season of the Witch* for it is her that Behmen and Felson should escort to Severac where she will be judged by the monks. Especially during the first half of the film, the girl closely follows the rationalist tradition. For example during the journey, the girl tells the story of what happened to another girl of her village who was also accused of witchcraft and was condemned to an ordeal by water. That girl was cast into the lake and as she remained afloat, this meant that the pure water rejected her which proved that she was a witch and had to be burned. If she had been innocent the pure water would have accepted her, which meant that she should have drowned.^{xiv} In other words, in both cases she would be killed by the church which contradicts our modern understanding of a fair trial. Extra elements also emphasise the girl’s innocence during the journey to Severac. A knight who accompanies Behmen and Felson, for example, even explicitly doubts the fact that the girl can be held responsible for bringing the plague because even without a girl being seen in his village, the plague did come. Later, he goes on to claim that the girl is a victim of a powerless church who needed a scapegoat to save their credibility. And also Behmen, when he first laid eyes on the young girl and was told that she was accused of witchcraft immediately said: “That is not what I see”. Taking her to Severac and guaranteeing her a fair trial becomes for him the one meaningful act. In presenting the young girl in this way, the film tries to evoke the “generic expectation” or in Jauss’ term the “horizon of expectation” that can be expected based upon readings of earlier similar texts.^{xv} Everyone

familiar with the rationalist tradition in representing medieval witchcraft will expect that a girl accused of witchcraft by the church in a medieval context is usually innocent.

An American Twist: the crusades and the “Hollywood Arthuriana”

By closely following the structure and meaning of *The Seventh Seal* and by focusing on the rationalist tradition of representing medieval witchcraft, *Season of the Witch* creates a story in which Behmen, struggling to find meaning in life, evades a certain death which enables him to make one meaningful act in life: guaranteeing an innocently looking girl a fair trial while protecting her from a torturing priest. Yet, despite these clear references, in the end the meaning of *Season of the Witch* fundamentally diverts from *The Seventh Seal* as well as from the rationalist tradition. Two elements are mainly responsible for this shift in meaning. First there is the inclusion of a large segment at the beginning of the film that actually shows the crusades which was completely absent in (and would be irrelevant to) *The Seventh Seal*. And second there is the inversion of meaning where the girl accused of witchcraft is no innocent victim of the church, but guilty as charged.^{xvi} We argue that *Season of the Witch* in the end has to be seen as a recent example of what Susan Aronstein labelled as “Hollywood Arthuriana”.

The lead that connects *Season of the Witch* to this more American form of cinematic medievalism comes from the inclusion of the opening scenes on the crusades. In *Season of the Witch*, we get to see five different battles that according to the film are set in “The Age of the Crusades”: the battle at the Gulf of Edremit (1332 AD), the siege of Tripoli (1334 AD), the battle of Imbros (1337 AD), the battle of Artah (1339 AD) and the battle of Smyrna (1344 AD). In its most commonly used definition, the crusades covered nine military expeditions which started with the call to arms of Urban II at Clermont in 1095 and ended with the fall of Acre in 1291, meaning that the battles shown in *Season of the Witch* take place *after* the crusades. However, although the ninth crusade was already of a very different nature than the first, the idea of crusading persisted after the fall of Acre and many more military actions under official papal instigation were undertaken in the East after 1291.^{xvii} The battles shown in the film are in fact events from several campaigns undertaken by the papacy in the Eastern Mediterranean area that started under Clement V (1305-1314). The last event of these crusades that is shown in the film is the siege of Smyrna in 1344 which occurred in the crusade that was launched by Clement VI in 1342 who organized a “Latin naval league” in order to fight the Turkish emirates in Anatolia.^{xviii} But despite this historical support, *Season of the Witch* only generally refers to these battles as “*The Age of the Crusades*” (italics mine). And although many of the battles were essentially naval expeditions, the film nonetheless uses the more recognizable general iconography of knights and Templars fighting in the desert.

Also the last battle shown in the film, the battle of Smyrna, seems to echo the massacre that followed the siege of Jerusalem in 1099 when the radical and fanatical head of the Templars shouts “Let none survive!” thereby again introducing a massacre. It would appear that it was not the filmmakers’ intent to refer to the specific history of the late Eastern Mediterranean crusades, but they only used these specific battles to activate the contemporary general meaning of “the crusades”.

Already during the First Gulf War (1990-1991) explicit parallels were made between the coalition led by the U.S. and the crusades. And when George W. Bush used the word “crusade” in a speech after the attacks of 9/11, preceding a second invasion of Iraq in 2003, the analogy between the recent tensions in the Middle East and the crusades again became widespread. With *Kingdom of Heaven* (Scott, 2005) this became also visible in the cinema where the film explicitly made the connection between the time of the crusades and the conflict in the Middle East by stating that “nearly a thousand years later, peace in the Kingdom of Heaven remains elusive”.^{xix}

By making this link, the film inscribes itself in the tradition of what Susan Aronstein called “Hollywood Arthuriana”:

A generic tradition [...] based on a politics of nostalgia that responds to the cultural crisis by first proposing an Americanized Camelot as a political ideal and then constructing American knights to sit at its Round Table. In their return to Camelot to provide a vision of national identity and a handbook for American subjectivity, these films participate in America’s continual appropriation of the medieval past which, from the late nineteenth century on, has responded to attacks on traditional models of authority, masculinity, and national identity and legitimacy by retreating into an ideal past.^{xx}

Aronstein argues that especially during times of national crises, such as the “red-scare of the 1950’s, the breakdown of authority in the 1960s and 1970s, the turn to the right in the 1980s, the crisis in masculine and national definition in the 1990s”, there is a tradition in films that proposes an “ideal medieval past as the solution to a troubled present”.^{xxi} Ever since the link between the White House and Camelot was made explicit after the death of JFK, the Arthurian world in the cinema has gained an extra layer of meaning where they allegorically could be read as a commentary on the national and especially the foreign policies.^{xxii}

By referring to the crusades *Season of the Witch* inscribes itself in this tradition that allegorically reflects upon contemporary American society. In line with Aronstein’s definition this film comments upon a moment of national crisis as the wars in Iraq and especially Afghanistan seemed to be never ending and unwinnable, thereby reminding of the American trauma of Vietnam. This is reflected in *Season of the Witch* by representing the battles of the crusades in a

downward spiral under continuing deteriorating circumstances. Just as the war in Iraq in 2003 started triumphantly, the first battle in the film is still enthusiastically fought under a blue and sunny sky by crusaders Behmen and Felson. When the first battle at the Gulf of Edremit commences a vague “hallelujah” even resounds in the background. But as the battles seem to go endlessly on and on, the sky gets darker and the weather gets grimmer. At a certain point both Behmen and Felson start to question what they are doing there. During the battle of Arthah Felson yells that “God has too many enemies”, to which Behmen replies that “being his friend is not so easy either”. During the battle of Smyrna, when Behmen accidentally kills an innocent woman, both Behmen and Felson cannot bare to go on and desert the crusade.

When Behmen and Felson leave the crusades, the film explicitly makes the link to *The Seventh Seal* by including a visual quote of two crusaders returning to their homeland using the same image of the rocky coastline. And by referring to the later crusades in the Eastern Mediterranean, and especially by having Behmen and Felson quit them after the battle of Smyrna in 1344 the film is able to make a direct link to the year 1348, the year of the Black Death and *The Seventh Seal*. By linking itself to *The Seventh Seal*, *Season of the Witch* makes the bridge between the concept of the crusades and the concept of doubt. But where the doubt of Antonius Block can be seen as an existentialist doubt, most probably reflecting Bergman’s personal doubts, the doubt of Behmen reaches much further. From the perspective of the crusades, it can be seen as the doubt of the American society related to the interventions in the Middle East.

When Behmen returns to his homelands, we see the same church that launched the crusades harshly persecuting innocent-looking girls on dire accusations of witchcraft and bringing the plague to the land. And by linking this to the rationalist tradition of *The Seventh Seal*, the film tries to raise viewer expectations to the innocence of the so-called witch. Again seen in the light of the contemporary meaning of the crusades, this witch hunt could easily be linked to how the United States seem to deal with the issue of national security regarding terrorism and makes the shift from witch hunting to terrorist hunting.^{xxiii} The meaning of the plague can in this context be seen as the deep-rooted pessimism regarding the conflict in the Middle East or even as the deep-rooted fear of terrorism.

But the meaning of the film makes a crucial shift when the witch at the end of the film indeed turns out to *be* a witch.^{xxiv} Then the role of Behmen can no longer be the one of he who doubts, but he becomes a biblical Job who, although he is heavily tested by God and therefore starts to doubt, in the end will remain faithful to God. This also puts the role of the priest in a different perspective. Throughout the film the priest warns Behmen for the evil of the witch: although the girl seems to be innocent “she sees the weakness that lies in our hearts”. Following the rationalist tradition the audience is led not to believe him, but in the end his advice proves to be right. This is also illustrated by having the witch trick

the knight who openly declared that he did not believe in her guilt, after which she escapes and in the end will cost that knight's life. It is as if the priest is warning that although the intervention in the Middle East seems to be too costly in money as well as human lives compared to the result, it has to continue for the threat remains real. In other words, the priest is the spiritual guide for a nation in doubt (embodied in Behmen). It also justifies the hard measures taken by the church in order to control the threat to the land, be it the plague or the threat of terrorism. Just as George W. Bush in his memoirs *Decision Points* (2010) defended the use of torture in order to save lives, torturing the witch was legitimate in order to save the land before the plague could have reached truly apocalyptic proportions. By making the witch a *real* witch, and thus by making the threat of the plague *real*, the film seems to take up the defence of the country. It is as if the film wants to convince its audience that while the war efforts and "witch hunting" on terrorists might seem to be costly, unjust and very hard, it nonetheless is necessary. As the girl at the end of the film says the plague was "no ordinary fever" that would have passed on its own. Thereby she implies that the heroic effort of the fellowship was just and necessary.

In other words, *Season of the Witch* is a recent example of how in the "Hollywood Arthuriana" the medieval past is revisited in order to "reassure a troubled present". It addresses the pessimism or even the defeatism that is filling the hearts of the Americans and warns them not to grow soft in the war on terror. Doing this, the film emphasises the values that are inherent to a medieval Arthurian world like heroism, loyalty and religion.^{xxv} Behmen and Felson perfectly fit into this picture being the ideal knights who in the end are even willing to give their lives for the safety of the nation. The message, or the solution, the film gives to a nation in doubt is essentially to stand fast and carry on.

Conclusion

Analyzing a medieval film like *Season of the Witch* according to its faithfulness to the known historical sources will not lead to a better understanding of the meaning of the film. In line with Eco's famous remark that before we speak of the Middle Ages we have to "spell out what kind of Middle Ages we are talking about", the meaning of the Middle Ages is more often than not based upon cultural-historical traditions and codes rather than upon a meticulous reconstruction of a historical period. If read accordingly, this film is not only about two fourteenth century knights who have to escort a girl accused of witchcraft to an abbey in Severac where monks can decide on her guilt, but it can be understood as a reflection of and commentary upon contemporary American society. Central in the film is the notion of doubt as borrowed from *The Seventh Seal*, but by linking it to the crusades the meaning of this doubt shifts to the doubt on the ongoing interventions in the Middle East and the witch hunt becomes the hunt for terrorists. By making

the witch *real* in the end the film seems to advocate the hard measures taken by the American government in order to contain the terrorist threat. The question remains, however, as this demands of lot of historical and medievalist capital, to what extent this might have threatened the perceived coherence for the viewer.

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- ⁱ See for example Andrew Barker, “Stubble, stubble, toil and trouble,” *Variety*, January 10-16 (2011): 25 & 29. Egon Endrenyi, “Which way is up in ‘Season of the Witch’? Good question,” *USA Today*, January 7 (2011), www.usatoday.com. Consulted on June 14 2012. Rafer Guzmán, “Cage casts a spell in ‘Season of the Witch,’” *Newsday*, January 7 (2011), www.newsday.com. Consulted on June 14 2012. Wesley Morris, “Nicolas Cage’s ‘Season of the Witch’ is no place for women,” *Boston Globe*, January 8 (2011), www.articles.boston.com. Consulted on June 14 2012. Joe Neumaier, “‘Season of the Witch’ review: Nicolas Cage conjures up another undignified performance,” *Nydailynews*, January 7 (2011), www.nydailynews.com. Consulted on June 14 2012. James Berardinelli, “Season of the Witch,” *Reelviews*, January 8 (2011), www.reelviews.net. Consulted on June 14 2012. Jeanette Catsoulis, “Deserters from the Crusades,” *The New York Times*, January 6 (2011), www.movies.nytimes.com. Consulted on June 14 2012. Stephen Whitty, “‘Season of the Witch’ review: Cage plays medieval man on a mission,” *EverythingJersey.com*, January 7 (2011), www.blog.nj.com. Consulted June 14 2012. Peter Travers, “Season of the Witch,” *Rolling Stone*, January 6 (2011), www.rollingstone.com. Consulted June 14 2012. Carmen Gray, “Season of the Witch,” *Sight & Sound. The International Film Magazine* 21, 3 (2011): 73-74.
- ⁱⁱ See for example Greta Austin, “Where the peasants really so clean? The Middle Ages in Film,” *Film History*, 14 (2002): 136-141 (136-137). Christian Amalvi, *Le goût du moyen âge* (Mesnil-sur-l’Estrée: Plon, 1996), 221-225. Catherine Brown, “In the Middle,” *Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies* 30, 3 (2000): 547-574. Laurie Finke and Martin B. Shichtman, *Cinematic Illuminations: The Middle Ages on Film* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2010), 4 & 13. James J. Paxson, “The Anachronism of Imagining Film in the Middle Ages: Wegener’s *Der Golem* and Chaucer’s *Knight’s Tale*,” *Exemplaria* 19, 2 (2007): 290-309 (295). Arthur Lindley, “The Ahistoricism of medieval film” *Screening the Past*, 3 (1998): 1-14. Arthur Lindley, “Scotland saved from history: Welles’ ‘Macbeth’ and the Ahistoricism of medieval film,” *Literature Film Quarterly* 29, 2 (2001): 96-100.
- ⁱⁱⁱ See for example Mark T. Burnett and Adrian Streete, “Introduction: documenting the Renaissance,” in Mark T. Burnett and Adrian Streete, eds., *Filming and performing Renaissance history* (Houndmills: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), 1-15 (7). See also François Amy de la Bretèque, *L’imaginaire médiévale dans le cinéma occidentale* (Paris: Champion, 2004), 12. Corneliu Dragomirescu, “Le cinéma à l’épreuve des représentations médiévales: l’enluminure et le théâtre,” *Babel* 15 (2007): 135-175 (135). Norman F. Cantor, *Inventing the Middle Ages: the lives, works and ideas of the great medievalists of the twentieth century* (New York: Morrow, 1991), 30. Chris Wickham,

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- Framing the Early Middle Ages. Europe and the Mediterranean, 400-800* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 4 & 7-8. Barbara W. Tuchman, *A Distant Mirror. The Calamitous 14th Century* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1978), xix. John Van Engen, "The Christian Middle Ages as an Historiographical Problem," *The American Historical Review* 91, 3 (1986): 519-552. Andrew A.B.R. Elliott, *Remaking the Middle Ages. The Methods of Cinema and History in Portraying the Medieval World* (Jefferson: McFarland and Company, 2011). David Williams, "Medieval Movies," *The Yearbook of English Studies* 20 (1990): 1-32 (4). Bettina Bildhauer and Anke Bernau, "Introduction: The a-chronology of medieval film," in Anke Bernau and Bettina Bildhauer, eds., *Medieval Film* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2009), 1-19 (1). Nicholas Haydock, "Shooting the Messenger: Luc Besson at War with Joan of Arc," *Exemplaria* 19, 2 (2007): 243-269 (243). Stuart Airlie, "Strange eventful histories: the Middle Ages in the cinema," in Peter Linehan and Janet L. Nelson, eds., *The Medieval World* (London: Routledge, 2001), 163-183 (165). Tison Pugh and Lynn T. Ramey, "Introduction: filming the 'other' Middle Ages," in Lynn T. Ramey and Tison Pugh, eds., *Race, class and gender in 'Medieval' Cinema* (Basingstoke: Palgrave MacMillan, 2007), 1-12 (2).
- ^{iv} In addition both films also include the passage of a group of flagellants in the city and the crossing of a dark forest which will claim a life.
- ^v Frank Gado, *The Passion of Ingmar Bergman* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1986), 196.
- ^{vi} René Girard, R. (1974). 'The Plague in Literature and Myth,' *Texas Studies in Literature and Language* 15 (1974): 833-850 (835). Raymond H.P. Crawford, *Plague and Pestilence in Literature and Art* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1914): 39. Samuel, K. Cohn Jr., "The Black Death: End of a Paradigm," *The American Historical Review* 107, 3 (2002): 703-738 (703). Christine M. Boeckl, *Images of Plague and Pestilence. Iconography and Iconology* (Kirksville: Truman State University Press, 2000). John Aberth, *A Knight at the Movies. Medieval History on Film* (New York: Routledge, 2003), 207-208.
- ^{vii} Peter Dendle, "The Middle Ages Were a Superstitious Time," in Stephen J. Harris and Bryon L. Grigsby, eds., *Misconceptions about the Middle Ages* (New York: Routledge, 2008), 117-123. Howard R. Bloch, *Medieval Misogyny and the Invention of Western Romantic Love* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1991), 7. Régine Pernoud, *Pour en finir avec le Moyen Age* (Paris: Seuil, 1997), 86-100.
- ^{viii} Christa Tuczay, "The nineteenth century: medievalism and witchcraft," in Jonathan Barry and Owen Davies, eds., *Witchcraft Historiography* (Basingstoke: Palgrave MacMillan, 2007), 52-68. De la Bretèque, *L'imaginaire médiévale*, 654. William E. Monter, "The historiography of European Witchcraft: Progress and Prospects," *The Journal of Interdisciplinary History* 2, 4 (1972): 435-451. Malcolm Gaskill, "Historiographical Reviews. The pursuit of

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^{ix} Other films that follow these traditions on the representation of medieval witchcraft are for example *Black Death* (Smith, 2010), *The Hour of the Pig* (Mehegany, 1994), *The Name of the Rose* (Annaud, 1986), *The Seventh Seal* (Bergman, 1956), *Häxan* (Christensen, 1922), *Monty Python and the Holy Grail* (Gilliam & Jones, 1975), *Sorceress* (Shiffman, 1987), *The Hunchback of Notre Dame* (Dieterle, 1939).

^x This thesis already dates back to 1563 by Johann Weyer in *De Praestigiis Daemonum*, but was only translated into French in 1885. Peter Elmer, “Science, medicine and witchcraft,” in Jonathan Barry and Owen Davies, eds., *Witchcraft Historiography* (Basingstoke: Palgrave MacMillan, 2007), 33-51 (36).

^{xi} Michelet addressed the issue of witchcraft a first time in his *Histoire de France*, especially the Introduction to the section on the Sixteenth Century, but especially his book entirely devoted to medieval witchcraft, *La Sorcière* (1862) became very influential. Jules Michelet, *La Sorcière* (Paris: Garnier-Flammarion), 112 & 284-285. Jules Michelet, *L'Agonie du Moyen Age* (Brussels: Complexe, 1990), 3. See also Richard Raiswell, “The Age before Reason,” in Stephen J. Harris and Bryon L. Grigsby, eds., *Misconceptions about the Middle Ages* (New York: Routledge, 2008), 124-134. Charles Rearick, “Symbol, Legend, and History: Michelet as Folklorist-Historian,” *French Historical Studies* 7, 1 (1971): 72-92 (76-84). Qinna Shen, “Feminist Redemption of the Witch: Grimm and Michelet as Nineteenth-Century Models,” *Focus on German Studies* 15 (2008): 19-33 (26 & 29).

^{xii} As both traditions deny the reality of witchcraft the traditional witch-iconography of a broomstick riding old wretch or sexually seducing young woman, as was introduced in the fifteenth century by artists such as Albert Dürer and Hans Baldung Grien, is not followed in the cinema. However, both the rationalistic as well as the romantic tradition keep the gendered image of the witch. The witch from the tradition of Michelet is usually a slightly older

- woman and is easily shown between her plants which essentially aims at giving her a wise woman look. The rationalist witch on the other hand is usually a younger and innocent looking girl to enhance the contrast between her and the violence of the church. Although they were not as much inspired by the witch hunts as by humanism, they have created both the image of the young and sexually attractive witch, such as in Dürer's *Four Witches* (1497) as well as the old and ugly witch on the broomstick like in *Witch Riding Backwards on a Goat* (ca. 1500). See Margaret A. Sullivan, "The Witches of Dürer and Hans Baldung Grien," *Renaissance Quarterly* 54 (2000): 333-401 (333-334 & 354). Charles Zika, *The Appearance of Witchcraft. Print and visual culture in sixteenth-century Europe* (New York: Routledge, 2007): 1-9. Jane P. Davidson, *The witch in northern European art 1470-1750* (Freren: Luca Verlag, 1987). Margaret A. Sullivan, "The Witches of Dürer and Hans Baldung Grien," *Renaissance Quarterly* 53, 2 (2000): 333-401.
- ^{xiii} Hollister, "The Phases of European History and the Nonexistence of the Middle Ages," *Pacific Historical Review* 61, 1 (1992): 1-22 (7). See also Michelet, *La Sorcière*, 284-285.
- ^{xiv} According to the story the girl tells in the film, the priests put stones in the pockets of the other girl so she would certainly drown. But as she even then remained afloat, she was burned.
- ^{xv} Steve Neale, "Questions of Genre," *Screen* 31 (1990): 56-57.
- ^{xvi} Even all three girls accused of witchcraft in the opening scene of the film, were in fact witches.
- ^{xvii} Jonathan Riley-Smith, *What Where the Crusades?* (London: Macmillan, 1977), 12-13. Jonathan Riley-Smith, "The Crusading Movement and Historians," in Jonathan Riley-Smith, ed., *The Oxford History of the Crusades* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 1-14. Norman Housley, *Contesting the Crusades* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2006).
- ^{xviii} Norman Housley, *The Avignon Papacy and the Crusades, 1305-1378* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1986), 12 & 32-34.
- ^{xix} Christopher Tyerman, *Fighting for Christendom: Holy War and the Crusades* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 8, 198 & 209. Aberth, *A Knight at the Movies*, 71.
- ^{xx} Susan Aronstein, *Hollywood Knights. Arthurian Cinema and the Politics of Nostalgia* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), 1-2.
- ^{xxi} Aronstein, *Hollywood Knights*, 2.
- ^{xxii} De la Bretèque, *L'imaginaire médiévale*, 161. Finke and Shichtman, *Cinematic Illuminations*, 156-180. Valerie M. Lagorio, "King Arthur and Camelot, U.S.A. in the Twentieth Century," in Bernard Rosenthal and Paul E. Szarmach, eds., *Medievalism in American Culture. Papers of the Eighteenth Annual Conference of the Center for Medieval and Early Renaissance Studies* (Binghamnton: State University of New York, 1989), 151-169. Kathleen Coyne Kelly, "Hollywood

Simulacrum: The Knights of the Round Table (1953),” *Exemplaria* 19 (2007): 270-289 (283).

^{xxiii} Zika, *The Appearance of Witchcraft*, 9. Robert Rapley, *Witch Hunts: From Salem to Guantanamo Bay* (Montreal: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2007). Muhammad S. Awan, “From Witch-hunts and Communist-hunts to Terrorists-hunts: Placing Arthur Miller’s *The Crucible* in the Post-September 11 Power Politics,” *Pakistan Journal of American Studies* 25 (2007): 1-22.

^{xxiv} In fact, at the end of the film the girl turns out to be possessed by a demon which makes her, technically speaking, not a witch. We argue that this nonetheless does not change anything fundamental to the meaning and the reading of film.

^{xxv} Williams, “Medieval Movies”, 9. Aronstein, *Hollywood Knights*, 8. Martha M. Driver & Sid Ray, “Preface: Hollywood Knights,” in Martha M. Driver & Sid Ray, eds., *The medieval hero on screen: representations from Beowulf to Buffy* (Jefferson: McFarland & Company, 2004), 5-18 (5).