



Moustapha Akkad

Film Director

Syrian-Born Director Made Commercial Hits and Art

Moustapha Akkad has a unique legacy of films: the immensely successful *Halloween* horror movies and epics about the Prophet Muhammad and the Arab world.

Akkad was born in Aleppo, Syria, in 1930, fell in love with the movies and went off to Hollywood at 19 with his father's blessing, \$200 and a Quran. He worked his way through college and graduate school in Los Angeles and struggled to gain a foothold in Hollywood, eventually proving himself in television.

He began producing movies and was already successful when he put up the money for a little project from writer-director John Carpenter: the seminal "slasher" movie *Halloween*, which set box-office records for an independent film. The *Halloween* titles made

him a beloved figure among teenage fans.

The producer recognized that young audiences would identify with the characters, teenage babysitters who are attacked by an escaped psychopath.

"His mantra was always: 'How does the audience relate to the material?'" said his son, Malek Akkad.

Akkad produced *Halloween* sequels for the rest of his life, but projects involving the Arab world commanded his passion and put him in the director's chair. "Being a Muslim myself who lived in the West, I felt that it's my obligation, my duty, to tell the truth about Islam," he once said.

The first movie he directed was about the prophet. As a Muslim, Akkad knew that to be accepted, the film would have to follow Muhammad's life without showing him or presenting his voice — and even so, it generated such controversy that financing disappeared and filming was moved from Morocco to Libya. The movie, made with two casts in English and Arabic, was released as *The Message* and *Al-risalah*.



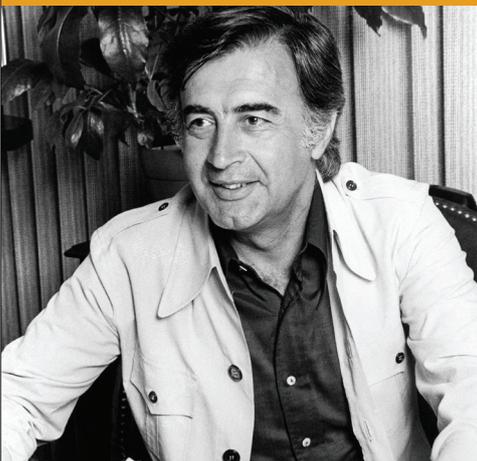
"Financially, it was not an enormous success," Malek Akkad said. "But the success it's had in the hearts of people and in every country it's been translated into, and it's seen worldwide every year — that was a much more satisfying element to the film."

Akkad, the father, also directed and produced *Lion of the Desert*, an epic biography of Libyan independence fighter Omar Mukhtar.

"You could look at those as his legacy, his art, his passion," Malek said. "He threw every bit of himself into those films, and his goal with those films was bridging this gap of misunderstanding between East and West."

Akkad maintained close ties to the Arab world. He and his daughter were visiting Amman, Jordan, in 2005 when they were killed in the bombing of the Grand Hyatt Hotel.

Producer and director Moustapha Akkad, famous for the *Halloween* films, also directed *Mohammad: Messenger of God*. Photos © AP Images



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