The Word, the Image, and the Message in *'The Message'* (1976)

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Abstract

Artistic representation of both human and animal figures in the Muslim world is, and has always been, a complicated subject to deal with. Both the Qur'an and the Sunnah are strict in their condemnation of all representation of figures. Scholars of different schools of jurisprudence unanimously forbid the depiction or portrayal of any feature of either God or the Prophet. Arnold (1919) observes that "the figure of Muhammad seldom occurs in a picture painted by a Muslim artist, and where it is found the face is generally veiled or the Prophet is symbolically represented by a flame of golden light" (250). This century old observation has been maintained despite changes in perception on the arts in the Muslim world and the technological advancement in artistic productions. This paper attempts to take a close-up analysis of representation of Prophet Muhammad (p.b.u.h.) in 'The Message' (1976), a film by Moustapha Akkad. It puts forward an argument that although the word (the prophetic message or Islam) is let to spread broadly, the image is strongly restricted in 'The Message' to stand by the rule.