

The Name of the Rose

(aka: "Der Name der Rose")

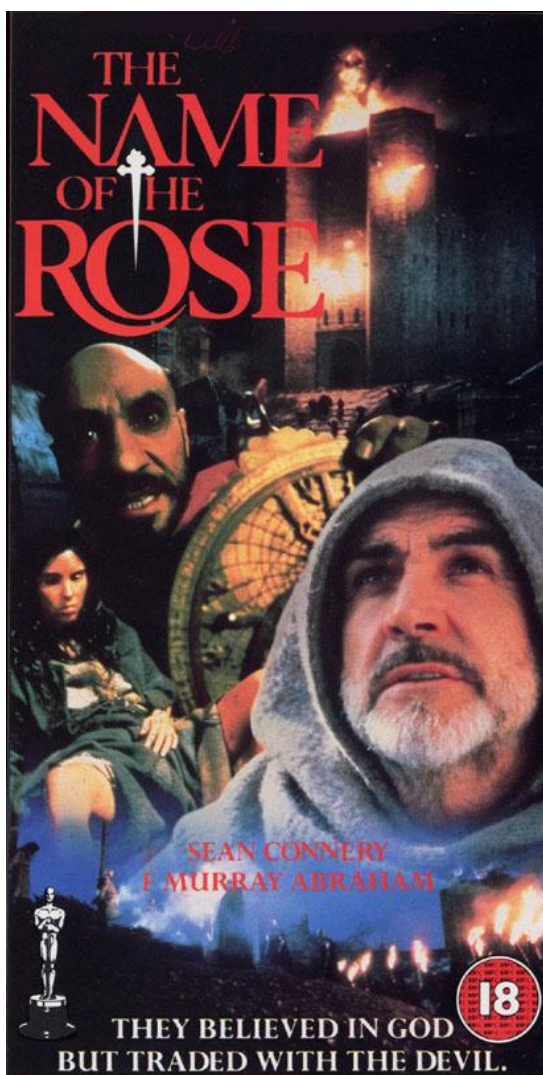
Italy / W Germany / France : 1986 : dir. Jean-Jacques Annaud : 20th Century Fox /
Bernd-Schaefer / Cristaldi / Ariane / ZDF : 131 min

prod: Bernd Eichinger : scr: Andrew Birkin, Gerard Brach, Howard Franklin
& Alain Godard : dir.ph.: Tonio Delli Colli

Sean Connery; Christian Slater; F. Murray Abraham; Michel Lonsdale; Feodor Chaliapin Jr;
William Hickey; Ron Perlman; Helmut Qualtinger; Volker Prechtel; Elya Baskin;
Andrew Birkin; Valentina Vargas; (narrated by Dwight Weist)

Ref:	Pages	Sources	Stills	Words	Ω	8	€	M	♀	Copy on VHS	Last Viewed
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**“ They believed in God
but traded with the Devil ”**





*The film draws power, authenticity and great visual interest from the slanting, stooping, lopsided surroundings of the ancient monastery itself. Connery himself described it as the most gruelling and arduous shoot of his long film career. "Do you think this is a place abandoned by God, master?" Adso asks in one scene; "Have you ever known a place where he **would** have felt at home?" the sage ex-inquisitor replies.* Source: Radio Times

Leonard Maltin's Movie and Video Guide
2001 review:

"Unusual film (to say the least) based on Umberto Eco's best-seller, which places a Sherlock Holmesian monk (Connery) in the midst of a mysterious Italian abbey during the inquisition of the 13th century¹. Too provocative to dismiss, too lumbering to thoroughly enjoy, buoyed considerably by Connery's charismatic performance. ** "

Halliwell's Film Guide review:

"In the 14th century, an English monk's visit to an Italian abbey is soured by a series of murders. Curious, remote, randomly developed and edited, this can never have been an obvious candidate for box office success: yet it did pretty well. * "

"A plodding misfire... sorrowfully mediocre."
- **Variety**

Movies on TV and Videocassette 1988-89
review:

"Turgid screen version of Umberto Eco's surprise best-seller about some killings in a fourteenth century abbey. Connery's murder

investigation has something to do with banned books of humour, something this dank film could have sorely used. Oppressively, this prestige film recreates life among these monks and religious hysterics in the most squalid manner possible, as if physical ugliness were a measure of integrity, a cinematic badge of honour. *1/2 "

Rating the Movies (1990) review:

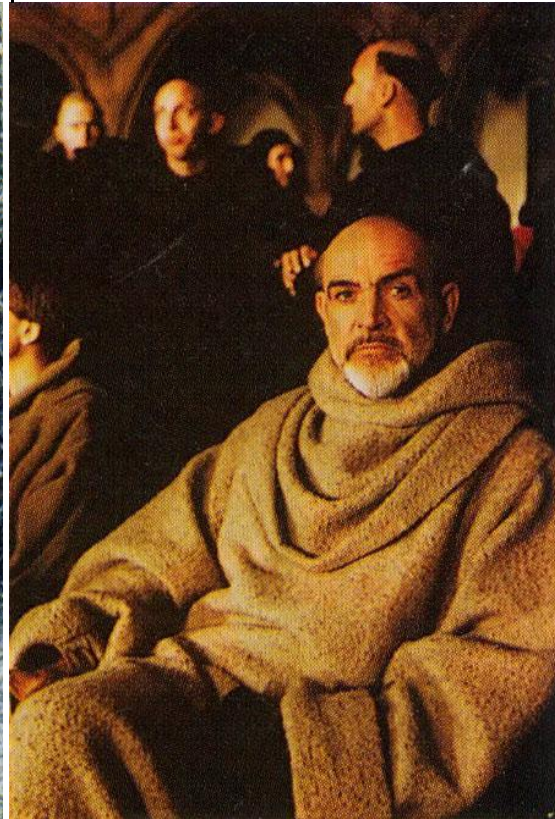
"Franciscan monk William of Baskerville (Connery) visits a Benedictine Abbey to participate in a scholarly debate but becomes involved in solving a series of murders occurring at the abbey. Based on Umberto Eco's difficult but popular novel, the film is slow-moving, with an emphasis on lofty speeches and grandiose performances. Connery's character, however, is skilfully drawn and the authentic mediaeval atmosphere provides much suspense. The eerie calm of the abbey belies the horrors that occur deep inside it, while Connery's handsome face is in sharp contrast to those of the physically deformed monks who inhabit the monastery. Abraham, whose performance is exaggerated as though for the stage, is the film's only major flaw. Though a financial failure in America at the time of release, the film was highly successful in Europe. Also with Christian Slater, William Hickey, Ron Perlman and Michael Lonsdale. *** "

¹ *What's 100 years between critics?*

The Time Out Film Guide review:



"As intelligent a reductio of Umberto Eco's sly farrago of whodunnit and mediaeval



Note how the director resists any temptation to broaden his colour palette from a sea of drabs and browns. The only bright colours are the occasional splashes of blood – and the scarlet finery adorning the fat and lazy papal delegates when they arrive – hauled up the mountain in closed carriages by the duly grateful peasantry Source: Radio Times

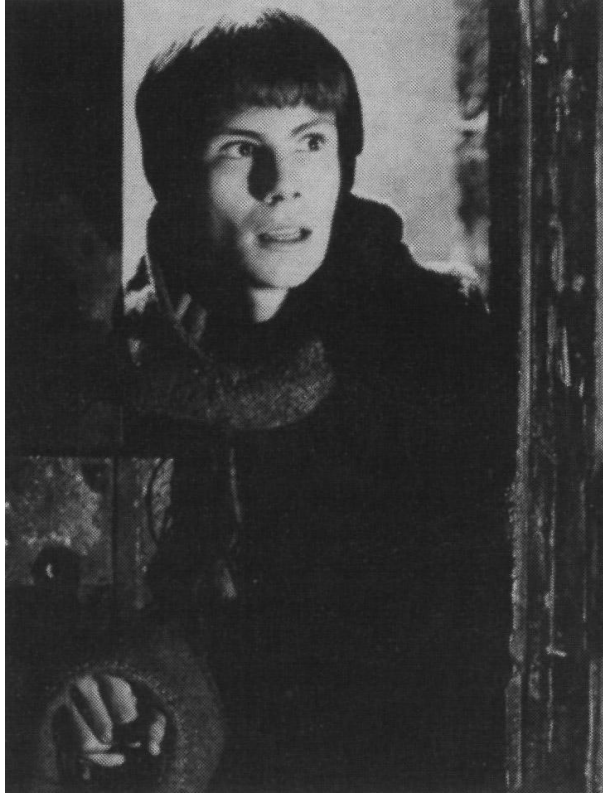
metaphysics as one could have wished for. Just who is killing the monks of an isolated monastery in a variety of vile ways, and why? William of Baskerville is the Franciscan Holmes called upon to point the finger: a complex man, at once the great detective delighted with his own powers of deduction, and a man both defeated by the brutality of his age and enthralled by its mysteries (and it's to Sean Connery's credit that he portrays as much and more). In addition, the film simply looks good, really succeeds in communicating the sense and spirit of a time when the world was quite literally read like a book, with impressively claustrophobic sets, particularly the Escher-like labyrinth of a library with its momentous secret. The monks themselves are marvellous, a gallery of grotesques straight out of Brueghel, and if the film has faults, they are quibbles: the murder mystery is solved too soon, and rather too much plot is crammed into the available space."

TV Times Film & Video Guide 1995 review:

"Too many grotesques almost spoil the broth in this impressively well-made film version of Umberto Eco's massive best-seller. And the motivation and resolution of the murders that plague an isolated 14th century Italian monastery are never quite sharp enough to focus our attention whole-heartedly on a story that struggles manfully to pull its disparate elements together. Sean Connery is admittedly a great help as the investigator, a sort of Franciscan Sherlock Holmes; and production designer Dante Ferretti deserves high praise for his amazing monastery with its clutter of mediaeval bric-a-brac and the labyrinth that lies within its tower. Visually memorable then, if dramatically dense, the film is on the whole an enjoyable experience. ***"

Variety Movie Guide 1993 review:

"THE NAME OF THE ROSE" is a sorrowfully mediocre screen version of Umberto Eco's surprise international bestselling novel. Confusingly written and sluggishly staged, this telling of a murder mystery in a 14th-century abbey has been completely flubbed by director Jean-Jacques



Annaud and his team of four (credited) screenwriters, as they struggle even to get the basics of the story up on the screen.

Tale has English Franciscan monk Sean Connery and his novice Christian Slater

"How d'you separate the men from the boys in a monastery?" went an old joke. "With a crowbar" was the reply. But those times are no more. Christian Slater stands in here for a "beautiful boy", and because the claustrophobic all-male environment of the monastery hints at sexual goings-on of a box office unfriendly sort, we literally have to spirit the nearest peasant wench through the walls for a good late-twentieth century shagging (woman on top). Adso's narration characterises this as the "great love" of his life, but it amounts to no more than a spot of illicit nooky while his master's attention is elsewhere diverted.



arriving at an Italian abbey in preparation for a conclave. After a series of murders at the massive edifice² Connery, in the style of an aspiring Sherlock Holmes, undertakes an investigation of the deaths while more delegates continue to arrive.

One of the latecomers is F. Murray Abraham, an inquisitor who sees Satan behind every foul deed and who threatens to condemn his old rival Connery due to the latter's insistence on seeking a rational solution to the crimes. Connery lends dignity, intelligence and his lovely voice to the proceedings. His performance, however, along with some tantalising E. M. Escher-style labyrinths in the interior of the abbey, are about the only blessings."

Video Movie Guide 1993 review:

² ie: one – which quickly proves to have been a suicide

"In this passable screen adaptation of Umberto Eco's bestseller, Sean Connery stars as a monkish Sherlock Holmes trying to solve a series of murders in a fourteenth century monastery. Connery is fun to watch, but the plot is rather feeble. Rated "R" for nudity, simulated sex, and violence³. *** "

The Virgin Film Guide review:

"Based on the witty, somewhat scholarly first novel by noted Italian semiotician and journalist Umberto Eco, this mediaeval murder mystery is a little slow-moving at 130 minutes but is ultimately rewarding for the patient. At an Italian monastery in 1327, the Franciscans, who live in religious poverty, and the Dominicans, who enjoy a life of luxury, meet to debate whether the Catholic church should be in the business of accruing wealth. William of Baskerville (Connery), a brilliant English monk (whose Holmesian manner is reinforced by his

³ Does that mean the violence is **not** simulated?

name, taken from "*The Hound of the Baskervilles*"), and his teenage novice, Adso of Melk (Slater), arrive early, and when murders begin occurring, the abbot (Lonsdale) requests that they begin an investigation.

But even as William begins looking into the matter, the murders continue, seemingly following the prophecy of the Apocalypse. The more rational clues lead to the monastery's extraordinary library, but before the Englishman can find the truth, the Dominicans and, most important, his old rival Bernardo Gui (Abraham), the Inquisitor, arrive and matters become even more complicated as Gui sees the Devil's hand in the murders. Gifted cinematographer Tonino Delli Colli has given the film an appropriately dark look, and the many odd-looking monks appear as if they have stepped from the set of a Federico Fellini picture. Much of the \$18 million production was shot at Kloster Eberbach, a 12th-century monastery near Frankfurt, West Germany. **"

4-Front Video - VHS 084 230 3 - sleeve notes:

"Who in the name of God is getting away with murder? Based on Umberto Eco's award-winning best seller, **"THE NAME OF THE ROSE"** is a chilling tale of dark deeds and murderous mayhem within the shadowy cloisters and forbidding battlements of a mediaeval monastery. One monk has fallen to his death. Or was he pushed? Another is discovered in a vat of pig's blood. The lifeless body of a third is found in his bath. Is it the work of the Devil ...or some more earthly assassin?

Using his uncanny powers of deduction, Brother William of Baskerville - Sean Connery - vows to unravel the mystery. But he has a rival who is also determined to discover the truth - the Catholic Inquisitor played by F. Murray Abraham; a man of God who uses instruments of the Devil to torture and torment his suspects. Secret passages, forbidden sexual adventures, labyrinths, locked libraries, arsenic, old manuscripts and murder - all the ingredients for a breathtaking whodunnit that will keep you guessing all the way to its grisly climax."

"...A rattling and unforgettable tale powered by first class acting" - **Today**

[no listing in "The Critics' Film Guide", "TV Times Film & Video Guide 1995"]

Radio Times reviews:

"Thrilling mediaeval mystery based on the Umberto Eco best seller, with Sean Connery electrifying as a Sherlock Holmes-type monk (William of Baskerville) investigating a series of murders most mysterious in an Italian monastery in the 1300s. There's a wonderful, eerie feeling of the rigours of mediaeval religion and the squalor of monastic life. Beautifully photographed, imaginatively handled, with some eye-catching support from F Murray Abraham and young Christian Slater as a novice monk. Adult themes [sic]⁴ **** "

"Mediaeval thriller starring Sean Connery, F Murray Abraham. The year is 1327. William of Baskerville, an unorthodox Franciscan monk, arrives at a remote Italian monastery with his young novice Adso. The venue for an important papal debate, the monastery has recently been the scene of a mysterious death. This mix of dark secrets and unexpected violence is based on the best-seller by Umberto Eco."

" **"THE NAME OF THE ROSE"** is a 14th century murder mystery, distinguished by Sean Connery's performance (yes Connery again) as an investigating monk clearly destined to be reborn as Sherlock Holmes."

What's On TV review:

"The Middle Ages are a dark, dank and dangerous time in this compelling one-of-a-kind whodunnit. Sean Connery is a monk whose penchant for detective work comes in handy when he arrives at an Italian monastery beset by a series of murders. Christian Slater is his young assistant and F Murray Abraham is a sadistic inquisitor. Connery's magnetic performance is matched by the director's excellent eye for the harshness of 14th century life in a film that works both as a thriller and as a window into the distant past. 3333"

⁴ Have you ever seen **any** film described as having "juvenile themes"? Lord knows there are plenty of them.

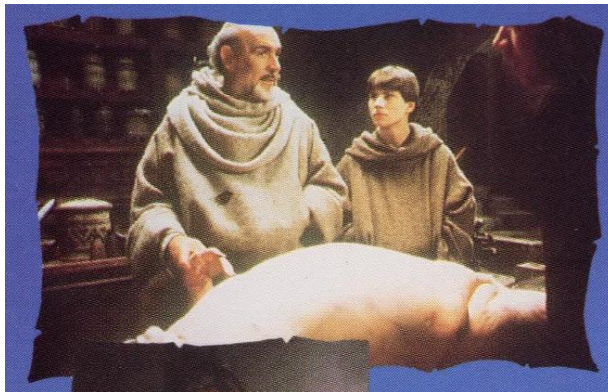
Cast:

William of BaskervilleSean Connery
 Adso of MelkChristian Slater
 Bernardo GuiF. Murray Abraham
 SeverinusElya Baskin
 Jorge de BurgosFeodor Chaliapin Jr
 Ubertino de Casale.....William Hickey

The AbbotMichel Lonsdale
 SalvatoreRon Perlman
 MalachiaVolker Prechtel
 Remigio de VaragineHelmut Qualtinger
 CuthbertAndrew Birkin
 GirlValentina Vargas



The narrative structure's chief flaw is that it resorts to an entirely conventional climax of rushings about, burnings at the stake and villains meeting suitably grisly ends. The final ten minutes or so could almost have been plucked from a Hammer movie, and looks forced and muddled. Even so, Ron Perlman's "purification by fire" (right) is more affecting than the comparable scene with Oliver Reed in Russell's "THE DEVILS"
 Source: 4-Front video



Announcing itself – to the simple but arresting tones of another fine score from the estimable James Horner – as a *palimpsest* of Umberto Eco's novel, the film immediately lobs an academic spinner over the heads of 90% of its audience. It's as well no-one pays much attention to film credits anyway. A palimpsest, says my Chambers dictionary, is "a *manuscript in which old writing has been rubbed out to make room for new*". The screenwriters are telling us, in the artiest of ways, that they've taken certain liberties with the source text, but since all screenwriters do that as a matter of course, why trouble to mention it?

For myself, I found the film more accessible and engrossing than Eco's book, which was often a tedious wade through obscure intellectual dissertations on schisms in the mediaeval church. Inevitably, the setting in time and place require a deal of expository dialogue (Connery's novice Adso providing a medium for explaining to the audience what is required) but it also requires a readjustment to a different pace of life. To condemn the film as "sluggish" is silly,

as though one would expect a monastery in 1327 to be bustling like a modern stock market, or conversations between the monks to be conducted at a 20th century tempo. Quite the contrary, Michel Lonsdale, William Hickey, and even Christian Slater as Adso, have carefully adopted a different, more deliberate, pace of speech to distance their dialogue from the present day. Sean Connery serves as the identification point for the audience, and so his rhythms and cadence seem more natural to us. He is also the twentieth century rationalist abroad in a world of rampant superstition and slavish obedience to doctrine. “The only

evidence for the Devil I can find here is everyone’s readiness to look for him” says William, a Renaissance scholar out of his time, with his primitive spectacles and astronomical devices. However, it is William who is out of step, as the dialogue repeatedly makes clear to us, and not the monks who set to wailing and gnashing their teeth at the portents of Armageddon. Everyone in 1327 also believed implicitly in witchcraft, just as everyone today implicitly believes in other foolishnesses. If one cannot make the mental leap into the past, there’s little point in watching a film like “**NAME OF THE ROSE**”, which conveys a better sense of its period than most comparable titles.

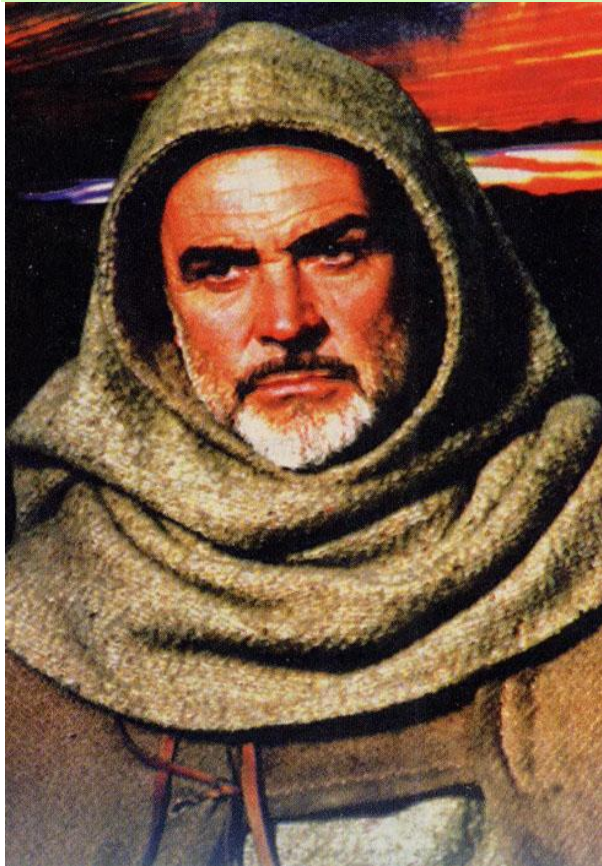
Why does it belong in the archive? The link is tenuous, admittedly, but I’m assuming that the part of Adso, Connery’s rather dull-witted boy sidekick, is strictly meant to be about 14, but had to be cast as an older youth because of the brief sex scene in the kitchen with the nameless village wench, which encounter gives the story its title. In a period when average life expectancy would have been no more than 35, novices I take it were rather younger than Christian Slater. The death which precedes William and Adso’s arrival, what’s more, is that of another “boy” (this one clearly in his twenties) who had submitted to the carnal embraces of an older (suitably repulsive) monk in return for access to the monastery’s secret library. “There was something *feminine*, something diabolical, about the one that died” William is soon told by an even older monk, ravaging up Adso as he speaks, “He had the eyes of a woman, seeking intercourse with the Devil”. Plainly then, intergenerational hanky-panky is offered up as a convenient springboard for the more academic lusts which are the driving force of this mystery. In point of fact, not a single boy is to be found at this monastery (an obvious anachronism, but a very prevalent one in modern historical reconstructions) but they are present, symbolically, in the shape of Slater and the shame-stricken illustrator Adelmo. Slater plays his part surprisingly well, all things considered, scuttling meekly around after Connery, the model of humility and obedience.

A slightly less tenuous reason for including the film is that one of its screenwriters is Andrew Birkin, who even puts in an awkward appearance in the shape of gaunt Franciscan Cuthbert, who’s mistaken for a ragged peasant by Ron Perlman. Birkin’s own keen interest in childhood, or more precisely boyhood, is evidenced by his directing credits – “**The Lost Boys**”, “**BURNING SECRET**”, “**THE CEMENT GARDEN**” – and is clearly detectable in his other screenwriting credits, “**THE FINAL CONFLICT**” for example. He penned the equally miserable “**KING DAVID**”, but it’s fairly clear what would have drawn him to that theme, and we must assume the better half of his script was jettisoned before shooting began. Screenwriters have little or no control over how their projects ultimately materialise on the screen.

But “**THE NAME OF THE ROSE**” is interesting on so many levels, and has to be seen as a valiant gamble for the 1980s, preoccupied as it is with obsolete religious disputes – “Did Christ, or did he not, *own* the clothes that he wore?” – and reverence for the power of books. When William of Baskerville finally steals his way inside the forbidden library he erupts in a whoop of sheer delight: “Adso, do you *realise* we’re standing in one of the greatest libraries in all Christendom!” When was the last time you heard a film wax ecstatic on the importance of the written word? That the film pulls it off without looking flatly ridiculous – to a general audience, few of whom will have fifty books in their homes – is some measure of Connery’s command, and the script’s.

The notion of a pre-Conan Doyle Sherlock Holmes is not especially novel. TV has serialised the “**Cadfael**” books (starring Derek Jacoby), which also concern a crime-busting monk using

forensic methods and deductive reasoning that were alien to the world until the late nineteenth century. But where that series was no more than a whodunnit in fancy dress, real effort has been made here to immerse us in a time almost impossibly remote, when knowledge was something the church jealously guarded *against* the common man, not for him, and the end of the world was as vivid and immediate a prospect as it was during the 1960s Cuban missile crisis. The “gallery of grotesques” much commented on above was chosen by the director to assist this displacement. They are faces from the past, their physiognomy tells us at once we’re in a different place and time.



*Connery is a perennial delight. Having successfully laid to rest the ghost of 007 – no mean feat in itself – and despite baldness and a certain limitation of range, he went on in his sixties to become one of the world’s top screen actors, and certainly the UK’s greatest living film star. His sex appeal to women has, by all accounts, enhanced with age, and he has achieved a stature in the industry beyond his wildest dreams as a struggling young Scottish actor. The Oscar so far has eluded him, except as Best Supporting Actor in “**THE UNTOUCHABLES**”, but there’s time yet (just) for him to deliver one great definitive performance, because there’s certainly talent there, if we only glimpse it in flashes.*

Source: indeterminate

A Radio 4 series “*Print the Legend*” considered filmic treatments of history, this one among them, and discussed whether director Terry Gilliam’s description of the Middle Ages as the “toilet training period of history” was justly deserved.

See also “**BADKONAK-E SEFID**” and “**BASHU**” - both recent Iranian films, and subject index under **ARAB WORLD / MIDDLE EAST**.