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Histoire de Judas

Story of Judas

Rabah Ameur-Zaïmeche

Producer Rabah Ameur-Zaïmeche, Rémi Burah. **Production companies** Sarrazink Productions (Montreuil, France); Arte France Cinéma (Paris, France). **Director** Rabah Ameur-Zaïmeche. **Screenplay** Rabah Ameur-Zaïmeche. **Director of photography** Irina Lubtchansky. **Production design** Rabah Ameur-Zaïmeche. **Costume** Alice Cambournac. **Make-up** Magalie Dumas. **Sound** Bruno Auzet. **Music** Rodolphe Burger. **Sound design** Nikolas Javelle. **Editor** Grégoire Pontecaille.

Cast Nabil Djedouani (Jesus), Mohamed Aroussi (Barabas), Rabah Ameur-Zaïmeche (Judas), Marie Loustalot (Bethsabe), Patricia Malvoisin (Suzanne), Elliott Khayat (The Scribe), Régis Laroche (Pontius Pilate), Xavier Mussel (Menenius), Roland Gervet (Centurion), Nouari Nezzar (Caïphe).

DCP, colour. 99 min. French.

Premiere 6 February 2015, Berlinale Forum

A man ascends a barren summit. It is Judas, come to collect Jesus and carry him down the mountain on his back, joking and panting as he does so. After bathing in the river and taking part in a henna ceremony, Jesus leaves for Jerusalem. Judas is concerned for his friend's safety, since the Roman occupiers look upon the prophet as an insurgent.

The wind rustles in the palms; the rock formations in the Arabian desert are shot with breath-taking beauty. Rabah Ameur-Zaïmeche's version of this oft-interpreted biblical material places an emphasis all of its own. The physical dimension of the landscape and the bodies within it is accentuated. In passing, the film also notes the coexistence of the religions at this early juncture. The relationship between the two men is close, with no trace of betrayal. Here, Judas is as much a victim of the power games played by the Romans, the high priest and the Pharisees as Jesus is. Even when the headache-plagued Pontius Pilate knowingly sentences an innocent man to death who deploys words rather than weapons to champion freedom, the tone of this period film remains gentle and muted. This makes it resonate all the stronger in the present.

Birgit Kohler

The true adventure of Judas

For two thousand years, the Jews have been considered Christ's murderers. We are all aware of the grief, tears, and suffering this slanderous accusation has caused them. Oppressed by hatred, they have been tortured and exterminated in countless numbers. As a symbol of the anti-Semitism that burgeoned over the centuries like a never-ending, delusional stigma, Judas has crystallised this hatred of others, as well as self-hatred. He is the renegade, the snake in the grass, the villain and informant, of whom we can only fear the worst. His appearance is hideous, his soul corroded by cupidity, marked by base intentions and inhabited by the Devil. Having been accepted for centuries as the man who denounced and sold Jesus to his persecutors, Judas is also he whose despair drives him to suicide, since he is unable to carry the burden of his deceit. His name remains a synonym for betrayal. He symbolises the hatred directed at the Jewish people.

With a modern historical approach to ancient Judaism and early Christianity, our aim is to rehabilitate Judas.

Intensive and meticulous research into this crucial era has shown us that there are in fact very few sources of information on the first Christian community.

A rehabilitation

In our plausible and exhilarating hypothesis, Jesus appears in the middle of sumptuous, arid landscapes as an accomplished master; alert, powerful, and bearing the torch of the Torah. As for Judas, he is the impeccably heroic figure yearning for the sublime in action. Rooted in the land of Judea, he appears in broad daylight as a loyal, beloved disciple, entrusted with keeping the master's spiritual secrets. The ultimate confidant, he is the guardian of his master's inspired and living words.

Far from the temptation toward abstraction of so-called experimental cinema, our approach favours experiential cinema, calling not only on the endless possibilities of a story that is straightforward and simple, but also on the powers of the body. Thus, the film becomes the full-scale experimentation of ideals and values within an ephemeral community. It opens up a space of sharing to a multitude of sensibilities present, a communal space where the human being ventures through movement, word, smile and gaze, and engages in an overwhelming infinity. *L'Histoire de Judas* is an authentic adventure with its physical risks and psychological challenges and has no claim to say anything that can be separated from its particular experience.

Our ambition is simply to encounter what is there, the appearance of reality, in order to reveal its complexity and ambiguity. Inspired by the idea that knowledge derives from confrontation with the unknown, we want to explore uncharted zones of the imaginary by accepting not knowing, to be pre-empted by forces that escape us, so that the film might in turn embrace them.

By upsetting historical spaces, we attempt to restore to the past its quality of former present, its uncertain dimension where everything seems possible and where everything occurs as if for the first time. Capturing the imperceptible, bringing out the invisible, apprehending what only passes by, touches on the poetic foundations of cinema as an art in the present.

Rabah Ameur-Zaïmeche



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Rabah Ameur-Zaïmeche was born in 1966 in Beni-Zid, Algeria. He and his family emigrated to France in 1968, and Rabah Ameur-Zaïmeche grew up outside of Paris. After studying social sciences, he founded Sarrazink Productions in 1999. In 2001, he directed his first feature film, *Wesh wesh, qu'est-ce qui se passe?*

Films

2001: *Wesh wesh, qu'est-ce qui se passe? / Wesh Wesh, What's Going on?* (Berlinale Forum 2002, 83 min.). 2006: *Bled Number One / Back Home* (100 min.). 2008: *Dernier maquis / Adhen* (93 min.). 2012: *Les chants de Mandrin / Smuggler's Songs* (97 min.). 2015: *Histoire de Judas / The Story of Judas*.