

SOCIAL STRATIFICATION OF JERUSALEM SOCIETY DURING THE CRUSADES (1174–1185) AS REPRESENTED IN THE FILM KINGDOM OF HEAVEN

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Abstract

This study critically examines the configuration of social stratification in Jerusalem during the period 1174–1185 as represented in the film *Kingdom of Heaven*. Employing a qualitative methodological framework, the research integrates content analysis and narrative analysis to systematically identify hierarchical structures depicted within the film, including the monarchy, nobility, military aristocracy, urban classes, and non Latin communities. These cinematic representations are subsequently juxtaposed with contemporary historiographical scholarship to evaluate their representational accuracy and interpretive deviations. The findings indicate that, although the film incorporates narrative simplifications and dramatization, it retains the fundamental characteristics of socio-political inequality in the Latin Kingdom particularly the dominance of the Frankish elite, restricted mobility among lower strata, and the interplay of religious authority and political power in sustaining hierarchical order. The study concludes that film functions not merely as a medium of entertainment but as a cultural apparatus capable of shaping public perceptions of medieval societies through selective reconstruction of the past.

Keywords: Social stratification; Crusades; Jerusalem; Medieval society; Film representation.

INTRODUCTION

Social stratification is a core concept in modern sociology that explains how societies are organized into hierarchical layers based on various indicators such as wealth, level of education, access to resources, and social and political status. Contemporary sociological studies emphasize that this division does not occur naturally, but is shaped by social structures transmitted across generations (Macionis, 2021). Societies with high levels of stratification tend to display significant gaps between upper and lower groups, particularly in access to quality education, public services, and opportunities for upward social mobility. As a result, lower social groups often face systemic barriers that make their social position difficult to change, while upper groups are able to maintain inherited privileges. This condition causes social stratification to be widely regarded as one of the main sources of modern social inequality (Grusky & Weisshaar, 2019), as it reveals how power and resources are unevenly distributed within society.

During the early establishment of the Latin Kingdom of Jerusalem (1099–1291 CE), social class divisions were highly rigid and inflexible. This condition was strongly influenced by the European feudal system introduced by the Crusaders and implemented in the Holy Land. Recent historiographical studies indicate that although Jerusalem's society was multiethnic and multireligious, political dominance was firmly held by the Frankish elites from Western Europe (Pahlitzsch & Korn, 2019). Frankish nobles occupied the highest positions as landowners, military leaders, and policymakers. Beneath them were Italian merchants from major trading cities such as Venice, Genoa, and Pisa, who received special privileges due to their economic contributions and naval support. Local populations (including Muslims, Jews, and Eastern Christian communities such as Armenians and Syriacs) were placed in the lower strata of society. They worked as peasants, agricultural laborers, artisans, or domestic workers, and were subjected to heavy taxation as part of

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the feudal structure (Lewis, 2017). Many of these groups lacked freedom of movement or opportunities for social advancement, reinforcing a pattern of domination and subordination between the Frankish elite and indigenous populations.

During the reign of King Baldwin IV (1174–1185), this already rigid social structure became increasingly strained due to political instability and military pressure. Recent scholarship portrays Baldwin IV as a capable ruler despite suffering from leprosy; however, his illness forced him to rely heavily on advisers and elite figures such as Raymond III of Tripoli, who served as regent (Asbridge, 2021). At the same time, the growing threat posed by Saladin, ruler of the Ayyubid Dynasty, significantly altered the political landscape. By successfully unifying Muslim territories in Syria, Egypt, and surrounding regions, Saladin exerted mounting military and political pressure on the Latin Kingdom of Jerusalem. This pressure compelled Frankish nobles to seek military and logistical assistance from Europe. Such conditions deepened the social divide between the Frankish elite and local populations, while competing interests among Frankish noble factions further intensified internal tensions within the kingdom (Phillips, 2019; Asbridge, 2021; Morton, 2020).

Meanwhile, relations between the Frankish population and local communities became increasingly complex. Although indigenous groups were often viewed with suspicion regarding their loyalty, social interaction between communities continued to occur. Studies of Eastern Latin society document instances of intermarriage between Frankish settlers and local populations, producing a mixed community known as the Pullani (Boas, 2020). The existence of the Pullani demonstrates that social identity in the region was not strictly binary, but rather shaped by processes of assimilation, adaptation, and cultural exchange. Nevertheless, this group occupied an ambiguous social position, as Frankish elites often regarded them as socially and politically inferior. Furthermore, the kingdom's social structure was influenced by the Eastern economy, which relied heavily on the trade of spices, textiles, and luxury goods. As a result, Jerusalem's social system reflected a hybrid structure combining European feudalism with elements of an Eastern market economy. Despite these interactions, differences in religion, language, and tradition continued to generate tension and mutual suspicion among social groups (Boas, 2020; Buck, 2021; Morton, 2020).

Based on this background, the primary focus of this research is the analysis of social stratification in Jerusalem during the reign of King Baldwin IV (1174–1185 CE), using Ridley Scott's film *Kingdom of Heaven* (2005) as a representational object of study. This research does not aim to reconstruct historical events in a strictly factual manner, but rather to examine how the social structure of Crusader society is represented, simplified, or reinterpreted through the medium of film.

The research focuses on two main domains. First, it examines the historical social structure of the Latin Kingdom of Jerusalem, including class divisions among Frankish nobles, knights, Italian merchants, the Pullani, and non-Frankish local populations. Second, it analyzes the cinematic representation of this stratification in the film, particularly through characters, dialogue, power relations, and the visualization of social spaces such as palaces, cities, battlefields, and residential areas. Accordingly, this study operates at the intersection of social history, sociological stratification theory, and historical film analysis (Tyerman, 2019; Lapina, 2018).

The temporal scope of this research is limited to the period 1174–1185 CE, corresponding to the reign of King Baldwin IV of Jerusalem. This temporal boundary is intended to focus the analysis on the historical phase most relevant to social stratification, as this period was marked by political instability, internal conflicts among Frankish elites, and increasing military pressure from the Ayyubid Dynasty under Saladin's leadership (Asbridge, 2021; Phillips, 2019). From a sociological perspective, periods of crisis tend to expose social structures more clearly, particularly regarding the distribution of power, the role of elites, and the position of subordinate groups. The expected outcome of this temporal limitation is a contextualized and specific depiction of Jerusalem's social structure, rather than a generalized account of the entire Crusading era. Thus, this research demonstrates how social stratification operates within fragile and tension-filled political contexts, both in historical reality and in the cinematic representation presented in *Kingdom of Heaven*.

The spatial scope of this research is limited to the Latin Kingdom of Jerusalem, with a particular focus on the city of Jerusalem and its surrounding areas as depicted in *Kingdom of Heaven*. This spatial limitation is intended to avoid extending the analysis to other Crusader states such as Antioch or Tripoli, which possessed distinct social and political characteristics (Pahlitzsch & Korn, 2019). Jerusalem is selected because it functioned as the political center, a major religious symbol, and a social space where various ethnic and religious groups interacted. Within the film, Jerusalem serves as the primary setting for depicting interactions among Frankish nobles, knights, soldiers, urban residents, and Muslim communities. The expected outcome of this spatial focus is an in-depth analysis of social stratification within a specific social space, demonstrating how cities, palaces, and battlefields function as arenas for reproducing social inequality in both historical reality and cinematic narrative.

The object of analysis in this research is Ridley Scott's film *Kingdom of Heaven* (2005), with particular emphasis on the director's cut version. This limitation is applied because the film represents one of the most influential works of popular culture shaping modern perceptions of the Crusades and twelfth-century Jerusalem (Lapina, 2018; Tyerman, 2019). The film is treated not as a factual historical source, but as a cultural text that represents, interprets, and simplifies past social realities. The analysis focuses on characters, narrative structure, dialogue, and visual representations of social relations. The expected outcome of this limitation is an understanding of how social stratification in Jerusalem is reconstructed through film, including discrepancies between historical social structures and cinematic representations shaped by modern ideological values and narrative demands.

The methodological scope of this research involves a qualitative-descriptive approach using content analysis. This approach is selected because it allows for in-depth interpretation of social meanings embedded in film scenes, visual symbols, and dialogue (Duggan, 2019). Film analysis is contextualized using modern stratification theory and historiographical studies of Crusader society. This methodological boundary is intended to maintain analytical consistency and avoid shifting toward purely aesthetic film analysis or purely historical reconstruction. The expected outcome of this approach is an interpretative analysis that explains how social structures are represented and understood, rather than merely describing what appears on screen. Accordingly, this research produces an analytical synthesis of history, sociology, and film studies in understanding the social stratification of Jerusalem.

The first objective of this research is to provide a comprehensive depiction of the form and characteristics of social stratification in Jerusalem during the reign of Baldwin IV, particularly the organization of social classes within the context of twelfth-century feudalism. The focus extends beyond political hierarchy and power struggles among Frankish nobles, knights, merchants, and local populations to include how power relations influenced access to resources, privileges, and opportunities for social mobility. By positioning Baldwin IV as a central figure ruling amid complex internal and external conflicts, this analysis draws on historiographical studies demonstrating that Jerusalem's social structure was shaped by political legitimacy, land control, and economic dominance by Western elites (Phillips, 2019; Pahlitzsch & Korn, 2019). Through this examination, the study is expected to produce an accurate structural description of historical social stratification, rather than a merely chronological narrative of events.

The second objective is to examine how *Kingdom of Heaven* (2005) represents social stratification in twelfth-century Jerusalem and portrays relationships among the Frankish elite, moderate and radical noble factions, and local populations. The film is treated as a cultural text reflecting modern interpretations of past social structures. The analysis focuses on character representation, elite-mass relations, and visual symbolism that communicates social hierarchy (as simulated through narrative structure and character construction). Through this approach, the research offers a critical interpretation of how historical social realities are simplified or romanticized to serve dramatic and ideological purposes.

The third objective is to identify dominant factors influencing the formation and representation of social stratification in Kingdom of Heaven, including political power, religion, economic structures, land ownership, and moral legitimacy. In sociological stratification theory, these elements are recognized as key determinants of social hierarchy (Grusky & Weisshaar, 2019). Within the film, these factors are shaped not only by historical realities but also by narrative needs, contemporary cultural values, and the director's moral interpretation of social conflict. The outcome of this objective is a clear understanding of how and why the film constructs particular social relations, as well as the implications of these constructions for public perceptions of class structure in the represented era.

The final objective is to evaluate the extent to which Kingdom of Heaven transforms historical social realities for narrative, ideological, and commercial purposes. Historical films frequently reinterpret the past in accordance with dramatic conventions and modern values rather than strict historical accuracy (Tyerman, 2019; Lapina, 2018). This evaluation examines differences between historiographical evidence and cinematic representation, including the simplification of class conflict, reinterpretation of historical figures, and insertion of moral messages. Through this analysis, the study provides a critical assessment of the ideological boundaries of popular media and its impact on public understanding of Crusader-era social stratification.

Through these objectives, this study is expected to make an academic contribution to the fields of Crusade social history, sociological studies of stratification, and historical film studies, particularly in the context of how the past is represented within contemporary popular culture (Lapina, 2018; Morton, 2020).

The first hypothesis of this study posits that the social structure of Jerusalem during the reign of Baldwin IV (1174–1185 CE) was hierarchical, rigid, and feudal in nature, with political and economic power concentrated in the hands of the Western European Frankish elite. This structure was sustained by a feudal system that positioned Frankish nobles and knights as landowners and holders of legal and military authority, while local populations (Muslims, Jews, and Eastern Christians) occupied lower social positions with limited access to resources and restricted opportunities for social mobility. Historiographical studies indicate that social stratification in Jerusalem was shaped not only by religious affiliation, but also by land ownership, patronage networks, and political legitimacy derived from feudal authority (Pahlitzsch & Korn, 2019; Tawfiq, 2021). Accordingly, this hypothesis assumes that social inequality during Baldwin IV's reign constituted a deeply embedded and systemic structure within the kingdom's social order, rather than a consequence of individual conflicts or temporary circumstances.

The second hypothesis asserts that Kingdom of Heaven selectively represents and simplifies the social stratification of twelfth-century Jerusalem by emphasizing values such as tolerance, humanism, and moral leadership that align with modern perspectives. In the film, social and political conflicts of the twelfth century are portrayed through contemporary lenses such as religious pluralism and universal ethical leadership, which do not fully reflect the historical realities of the Crusades. Research on historical cinema suggests that representations of the past are frequently adapted to meet the expectations of modern audiences, resulting in the softening or reduction of structural elements such as class inequality and feudal domination (Tyerman, 2019; Lapina, 2018). Therefore, this hypothesis assumes that Kingdom of Heaven does not aim to present a comprehensive historical depiction of social stratification, but rather constructs a moral narrative that is more accessible to twenty-first-century viewers.

The third hypothesis proposes that representations of social stratification in Kingdom of Heaven are strongly influenced by narrative and ideological interests, leading to the personalization of class conflict and historical social inequality through central characters such as Balian of Ibelin, King Baldwin IV, and Guy de Lusignan. Rather than portraying stratification as a systemic structure affecting all layers of society, the film tends to focus on conflicts between individual characters and their moral choices. Studies in historical film analysis indicate that this strategy is commonly employed to create dramatic and emotionally engaging narratives, but it risks obscuring the structural roots of social inequality (Duggan, 2019; Saadi, 2020). Consequently, this hypothesis

assumes that the film reconstructs Jerusalem's social reality through a personalized approach to conflict, rendering social stratification a narrative backdrop rather than a comprehensive and complex social system.

Studies on social stratification during the Crusades have long attracted the attention of historians and sociologists, although no research to date has specifically examined the period 1174–1185 CE through a film analysis approach as undertaken in this study. One of the most influential works on Crusader social structure is Conor Kostick's study (2008), which provides a detailed mapping of social organization during the First Crusade. Kostick not only explains class divisions among nobles, knights, and commoners, but also illustrates how power relations, economic interests, and patronage networks shaped the behavior of social actors in one of the most significant religious conflicts of the Middle Ages. He emphasizes how elite groups employed religious legitimacy and military structures to maintain dominance, while ordinary people functioned as logistical supporters and fighting forces often overlooked in traditional narratives.

Despite thematic overlap in addressing social hierarchy within Crusader society, the present study differs significantly from Kostick's work. Kostick's research focuses on the eleventh century and relies heavily on primary sources such as Latin chronicles, travel accounts, and administrative documents. In contrast, this study examines a later period—the late twelfth century—when the Latin Kingdom of Jerusalem faced critical challenges prior to its fall to Saladin. Furthermore, this research adopts a more interdisciplinary approach by combining historical analysis with sociological perspectives and film studies. Film analysis enables an examination of how social stratification is represented, reinterpreted, or simplified within cinematic media, thereby offering insight into how historical memory and Crusader identity are constructed in modern popular culture.

Research on Crusader societies and the Latin Kingdom of Jerusalem has been conducted from various perspectives, although most studies remain historiographical in nature. A significant contribution is made by Tawfiq (2021), who examines the role of vassal classes within the social structures of the Latin states in the Levant. His study demonstrates that vassals were not merely subordinate groups obedient to feudal lords, but played a crucial role in maintaining military strength and economic stability by providing troops, managing land, and sustaining local economies. While Tawfiq's findings are relevant to this study, his focus encompasses the broader Levant region rather than specifically addressing Jerusalem during Baldwin IV's reign, leaving room for a more targeted analysis.

Another important contribution to the study of Jerusalem's multiethnic society is offered by Pahlitzsch and Korn (2019). They describe the Latin Kingdom of Jerusalem as a territory inhabited by diverse ethnic and religious groups, including Western European Franks, Italian merchants, local Muslims, Jews, Armenians, and Syrians. Nevertheless, within the social hierarchy, Frankish groups occupied the highest positions as political leaders, military commanders, and landowners, while local populations remained at lower levels with restricted rights and economic opportunities. Their findings reinforce the argument that social stratification in Jerusalem was rigid and heavily influenced by European feudal models.

Studies on the Pullani identity further contribute to understanding Jerusalem's social diversity. Boas (2020) examines this community as the product of intermarriage between Frankish settlers and Eastern populations, finding that the Pullani occupied a distinctive social position—neither fully accepted as Franks nor entirely aligned with local communities. Often perceived as culturally and politically impure by Frankish elites, the Pullani nonetheless played an important role in cultural exchange and acculturation processes. This research highlights the complexity of social identity and interethnic relations in Jerusalem beyond a simple dichotomy between Frankish elites and indigenous populations.

In the context of political elites, Jacoby (2025) offers additional insights into how Frankish nobles maintained power through social values, chivalric culture, and patronage networks. Although his study does not specifically address the reign of Baldwin IV, it provides a valuable

framework for understanding how aristocratic classes sustained social and political dominance in the Latin states of the East.

Christopher Tyerman's work (2019) is particularly relevant for understanding how the Crusades are reinterpreted through modern media such as films and documentaries. Tyerman argues that historical films frequently shape new ways of understanding the past by selectively emphasizing or simplifying certain elements. This observation is especially pertinent to the present study, as *Kingdom of Heaven* clearly presents a modern interpretation of tolerance, leadership, and Muslim-Christian relations that does not fully correspond to historical realities.

While Barber's study (2012) offers a comprehensive analysis of the Latin states from political, social, and legal perspectives, much of the existing scholarship remains focused on written historical sources and rarely incorporates media analysis. As a result, scholarly understanding of how the past is represented in popular culture remains limited. In this regard, film studies such as those conducted by Duggan (2019) are crucial. Duggan argues that historical films often alter or simplify social structures to serve dramatic and narrative purposes. Similarly, Saadi (2020) emphasizes that films such as *Kingdom of Heaven* present historical figures in ways that significantly diverge from documented historical realities. Consequently, film analysis serves as a bridge for understanding how modern societies reinterpret the Third Crusade.

Nicholas Morton (2020) further enhances understanding of social dynamics in Latin Jerusalem by emphasizing cross-cultural interaction between Frankish and Muslim communities. Morton demonstrates that Jerusalem functioned not only as a battlefield, but also as a center of trade, diplomacy, and complex social relationships. His findings help explain phenomena such as the emergence of the Pullani and show that social stratification in late twelfth-century Jerusalem was shaped not only by religion, but also by economic factors and everyday social relations.

Jonathan Phillips (2019) provides critical insight into how internal tensions among Frankish nobles weakened the Latin Kingdom toward the end of the twelfth century. He describes how conflicts among aristocratic factions, particularly during the period surrounding Baldwin IV's reign, created political instability that accelerated Jerusalem's downfall. This perspective is relevant to the present study because *Kingdom of Heaven* also portrays internal elite conflict through characters such as Guy de Lusignan and Reynald de Châtillon, albeit in a dramatized form.

Andrew D. Buck (2021) contributes a further perspective by demonstrating that societies in Outremer, including Jerusalem, did not exist in absolute separation between Franks and local populations. Buck finds that economic cooperation and social interaction between groups were more common than traditionally depicted, complicating social stratification by showing that identity was influenced not only by religion or lineage, but also by economic roles and social networks.

Finally, Elizabeth Lapina (2018) examines how modern visual media, particularly film, shapes public perceptions of the Crusades. She argues that historical films frequently incorporate contemporary values such as tolerance and the humanization of adversaries to appeal to modern audiences. Lapina notes that the simplification of social structures in film can produce representations that differ significantly from historical realities, yet exert strong influence on public understanding of the past. These insights are particularly important for this study, as they help explain how *Kingdom of Heaven* reconstructs Jerusalem's social stratification according to narrative demands rather than strict historical accuracy.

Taken together, previous studies demonstrate that research on Crusader social structures has addressed feudalism, interethnic relations, social class roles, cultural identity, and political dynamics. However, most of this scholarship relies on conventional historical sources. No study has specifically examined social stratification during the reign of Baldwin IV (1174–1185 CE) through film analysis. Consequently, this research occupies an important position in expanding the literature by integrating historiography, sociology, and cinematic analysis to understand how Jerusalem's social structure is re-represented in popular culture.

Based on this framework, the research questions addressed in this study are: (1) how was Jerusalem's social structure organized during the period 1174–1185 CE, and (2) what factors influenced the formation and representation of social stratification in the film *Kingdom of Heaven*. The expected outcomes of this study include a detailed depiction of Jerusalem's social structure during the period 1174–1185 CE, as well as an analysis of the factors shaping the representation of social stratification in *Kingdom of Heaven*.

RESEARCH METHOD

This study employs a descriptive qualitative approach, as the object of analysis—a historical film—contains social, symbolic, and narrative meanings that cannot be measured quantitatively. A qualitative approach allows the researcher to examine representations of social stratification in depth through the interpretation of scenes, dialogue, characters, and visual contexts that construct social relations within the film (Creswell & Poth, 2018). In this study, social stratification is not treated as numerical data, but as a social construction represented through cinematic narratives and symbols. Accordingly, a qualitative approach is considered the most appropriate, as it enables an interpretive and contextual connection between the film text, historical context, and social theory. Furthermore, this approach facilitates interdisciplinary integration across sociology, history, and film studies, producing a holistic analysis that is not reduced to statistical description alone (Grusky & Weisshaar, 2019; Duggan, 2019).

This research adopts feudalism theory as the primary framework for analyzing social stratification in Jerusalem during the period 1174–1185 CE. Feudalism is understood as a social, political, and economic system characterized by hierarchical relationships based on land ownership, personal loyalty, and military obligations (Reynolds, 2017). In the context of the Latin Kingdom of Jerusalem, Western European feudalism was not applied in a purely uniform manner, but interacted with Byzantine and Islamic traditions, resulting in a hybrid form of social stratification (Ellenblum, 2020; Prawer, 2021). This theoretical framework is employed to interpret the social positions of characters in the film, power relations between elites and commoners, and the political and moral legitimacy attached to elite classes. By applying feudalism theory, this study seeks to demonstrate that social stratification in the film is not merely the outcome of interpersonal conflict, but rather a reflection of historically rooted hierarchical social structures.

The analytical methods used in this study consist of content analysis and narrative analysis. Content analysis is employed to identify and classify elements of social stratification present in the film, including dialogue, scenes, visual symbols, and character representations (Krippendorff, 2019). Narrative analysis is used to examine how the film's storyline frames social hierarchy, class conflict, and relationships between the Frankish elite and local populations (Riessman, 2021). The combination of these methods enables the researcher to analyze not only what is depicted in the film, but also how and why these representations are constructed. Consequently, this methodological approach provides a clear empirical foundation for interpreting the film as a cultural text that represents social structures of the past.

The primary data source for this study is the director's cut version of *Kingdom of Heaven* (2005), which was selected because it presents a more comprehensive depiction of social and political narratives than the theatrical release (Duggan, 2019). In addition, this research utilizes secondary data in the form of academic books, peer-reviewed journal articles, and historiographical studies addressing Jerusalem and the Crusades in the late twelfth century. These sources are used to provide historical context and to serve as a comparative basis for evaluating differences between cinematic representation and historical reality (Phillips, 2019; Asbridge, 2021). By integrating film data with secondary historical sources, the analysis avoids speculation and remains grounded in credible scholarly literature.

Data collection was conducted through several empirical stages. First, film observation was carried out by viewing the film repeatedly to identify scenes that represent social stratification, such as interactions among nobles, knights, commoners, and Muslim communities. Second, transcription and documentation were undertaken by transcribing key dialogues and recording

visual details and contextual elements relevant to social hierarchy. Third, data categorization was performed by grouping findings according to dimensions of social stratification, including political power, social status, economic position, and religious affiliation (Creswell & Poth, 2018). These stages were conducted systematically to ensure that the collected data could be analyzed in a consistent and structured manner.

Data analysis was conducted through four main steps. The first step involved theme identification, in which key themes of social stratification emerging in the film—such as feudalism, class conflict, and social inequality—were determined. The second step consisted of data coding, whereby dialogues, scenes, and visual elements were coded according to predefined categories of social stratification (Krippendorff, 2019). The third step involved interpretation, in which the meanings of social stratification representations were analyzed using feudalism theory and a sociological framework. The final step entailed comparison with historical context, comparing the film analysis with historiographical studies to assess the extent to which the film represents, simplifies, or reconstructs historical social realities (Tyerman, 2019; Lapina, 2018). This procedure ensures that the analysis is empirical, systematic, and academically accountable.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Social Stratification in Jerusalem (1174–1185 CE)

The social structure of Jerusalem during the period 1174–1185 CE formed a highly stratified and unequal system. Under the reign of King Baldwin IV, society operated within a feudal framework that clearly concentrated power in the hands of specific groups. The social order resembled a pyramid, reflecting rigid hierarchical divisions. The structure of social stratification consisted of several distinct layers. At the highest level of the social pyramid were the king, the royal family (the nobility), and senior church officials such as bishops and Catholic clergy.

The emergence of the king and the royal family as the ruling elite can be traced back to the conquest of Jerusalem in 1099 CE by the Crusader forces. Following the conquest, the leaders of the First Crusade selected Godfrey of Bouillon as the first ruler. However, he refused the royal crown, believing it inappropriate to wear a golden crown in the city where Christ had worn a crown of thorns. One year later, on Christmas Day in 1100 CE, his brother Baldwin I was crowned king in a Latin ceremony at the Church of the Nativity in Bethlehem, marking the establishment of a hereditary Latin monarchy in the East (Kangas, 2023; Gutgarts, 2019). During the reign of King Baldwin IV (1174–1185 CE), despite his youth and suffering from leprosy, political authority remained firmly in the hands of the royal family, supported by the High Court (Haute Cour) composed of senior nobles (Kangas, 2023).

The king and the royal family occupied the highest social position because they were regarded as possessing divine legitimacy as defenders of the Holy Land and as the largest landowners. Their authority, however, was not absolute; it was constrained by feudal law and required the consent of the Haute Cour for major decisions such as declaring war or imposing new taxes. Nevertheless, only the royal family and high nobility were able to determine the overall direction of the kingdom (Morton, 2020).

Their primary responsibilities included leading the military defense of the kingdom, protecting Christian pilgrims, granting land and privileges to vassals and military orders, maintaining diplomatic relations with the Byzantine Empire, Italian city-states, and Western Europe, and serving as a symbolic representation of the “Heavenly Kingdom” on earth (Kangas, 2023).

Their rights encompassed the authority to levy taxes, control royal lands, appoint high-ranking officials, and receive the highest honors in religious and political ceremonies. These privileges reinforced their status as the supreme social and political authority within the kingdom (Jordan, 2019).

At the same time, their obligations involved upholding coronation oaths to administer justice, obtaining the approval of the Haute Cour before initiating major wars or introducing new taxation, and distributing land and rewards fairly in order to maintain the loyalty of their vassals (Morton, 2020).

The treatment of other social groups varied significantly. Military orders were respected yet also feared because of their military power. Frankish knights and Latin settlers were treated as privileged brethren, enjoying relatively low taxes and urban charters. Indigenous Christians were protected but remained second-class subjects. Muslim populations were generally allowed to reside in rural areas but were burdened with heavy taxation. Jewish and Samaritan communities were closely monitored but protected from mob violence in exchange for special taxes, while enslaved individuals were treated purely as property (Hamilton, 2016).

The second position in the social stratification pyramid of Jerusalem was occupied by the military orders, namely the Knights Templar and the Knights *Hospitaller* (A Christian military order that initially provided medical care for sick pilgrims and later evolved into a defensive force for the Holy Land, enjoying privileges such as tax exemption and autonomous judicial authority).

Military orders such as the Knights Templar (the Order of the Temple of Solomon) and the Knights Hospitaller (the Order of Saint John) constituted the most privileged group after the king and the high nobility. By the mid-twelfth century, these orders were often described as “a superpower state within a small kingdom,” as they were frequently wealthier and militarily stronger than the king himself.

The origins and institutional positions of the Hospitaller Order can be traced to the Amalfitan hospital in Jerusalem prior to the Crusades, later becoming a formal military order between 1113 and 1130 CE. The Templar Order emerged in 1119–1120 CE, when Hugues de Payns and several knights vowed to protect pilgrims, subsequently establishing their headquarters at the Al-Aqsa Mosque and receiving official recognition in 1129, followed by a papal bull in 1139. By the reign of Baldwin IV, both orders had become exceptionally wealthy and powerful (Barber, 2016).

The military orders occupied this elevated position because they were directly subject only to the Pope rather than to the king or the Latin Patriarch. They received substantial donations from across Europe, controlled massive frontier fortresses such as Krak des Chevaliers, Safed, Belvoir, and Toron, and maintained elite military forces that, by the 1170s, often exceeded the size and effectiveness of the royal army. The Grand Masters of both orders were permanent members of the Haute Cour and frequently played a decisive role in shaping major political and military decisions of the kingdom (Morton 2020; Kangas 2023; Boas 2017).

Their primary duties included protecting pilgrims along sacred routes from Jaffa to Jerusalem and the Jordan River, defending frontier castles, providing elite troops in every major military campaign (where they typically formed the vanguard and rear guard) operating large-scale hospitals (the *Hospitaller* complex in Jerusalem could accommodate up to 2,000 patients at once), and functioning as international bankers for pilgrims and European monarchs (Riley-Smith, 2017).

The privileges enjoyed by the military orders were extensive. They were completely exempt from secular taxation, authorized to collect tithes independently, entitled to operate their own courts over members and villagers residing on their lands, permitted to build chapels and appoint priests without episcopal approval, and, following the papal bull of 1139, immune from interference by any secular authority, including the king himself (Burgtorf, 2016).

Their obligations, however, included providing troops when the king issued a general call to arms (*arrière-ban*), attending sessions of the Haute Cour, and adhering to the monastic vows of poverty, obedience, and personal chastity, despite the immense institutional wealth accumulated by the orders (Morton, 2020). In social relations, the military orders were respected by the king and the royal family but were also widely feared and resented. Latin bishops often regarded them with hostility due to their perceived arrogance and independence. Frankish knights admired them but were sometimes exploited by their influence. Indigenous Christians were frequently reduced to the

status of peasants working on order-controlled lands. Muslims were intensely hated and feared, while Jewish and Samaritan communities were treated in a largely neutral manner. Enslaved individuals, meanwhile, were often subjected to forced labor under the authority of the orders (Barber, 2016).

The third position in the social stratification pyramid of Jerusalem was occupied by Frankish knights and Latin settlers, including the urban burgesses (bourgeois). This group constituted the only non-military-order segment of society that fully enjoyed privileged legal status as “Franks” (Franci) in the Holy Land. The emergence of this social group began after the conquest of Jerusalem in 1099 CE, when a significant number of knights from the First Crusade chose to remain in the region rather than return to Europe. During the reigns of Baldwin I (1100–1118 CE) and Baldwin II (1118–1131 CE), small fiefs (knightly holdings) and urban charters were granted to these settlers in order to ensure a sufficient permanent armed Latin population. The first burgess charter was issued for Jerusalem around 1120, followed by Acre in the 1140s, and later Tyre, Beirut, and other cities. This class continued to grow through waves of limited immigration from France, Normandy, northern Italy, and Flanders during the reign of Baldwin IV (Boas, 2017; Theron & Oliver, 2018; Kangas, 2023).

They occupied this position because they were the only group entitled to full Latin legal privileges (*ius francorum*), including the right to bear arms, to hold feudal land, and to be judged in Frankish courts. They were regarded as “brothers of the same nation” by the king and the high nobility. Without this group, the kingdom would have lacked a sufficient standing military force and a stable Latin urban population (Ellenblum, 2019). Their primary duties varied according to status. Frankish knights were obligated to provide between 50 and 200 days of military service per year to their lord or directly to the king. Urban burgesses were required to pay relatively low municipal taxes, maintain city walls, and supply urban troops (sergeants). Italian merchants—particularly Venetians, Genoese, and Pisans—were responsible for transporting troops and goods from Europe, providing warships, and paying commercial taxes that constituted one of the main sources of royal revenue (Kedar, 2017; Morton, 2020).

The privileges enjoyed by this class included significantly lower taxation than that imposed on the indigenous population—often limited to 10–15 percent of agricultural or commercial output—urban charters granting broad autonomy (Jerusalem in 1120 CE, Acre in the 1140s, Tyre in 1124 CE), the right to inherit and sell land without requiring the consent of the original lord, and trial by fellow Franks in the *Cour des Bourgeois*. Italian merchants, in particular, were granted autonomous quarters governed by their own laws and magistrates (Boas, 2017).

Their obligations included participation in royal military calls (*arrière-ban*) for knights, while burgesses were required to guard city walls and pay annual municipal taxes. Both groups were expected to remain loyal to the king and were formally prohibited from marrying Muslims without royal permission, although this regulation was frequently violated in practice (Murray, 2016). In terms of social relations, the king and the high nobility were heavily dependent on and often favored this group. Military orders were respected but sometimes viewed with condescension. Indigenous Christians were regarded as socially inferior, Muslims were widely hated and feared, Jews and Samaritans were treated with neutrality or instrumental pragmatism, and enslaved individuals were treated merely as property (Theron & Oliver, 2018).

The fourth position in the social stratification pyramid of Jerusalem was occupied by indigenous (non-Latin) Christian communities. These groups included the Melkites (Greek Orthodox), Jacobites (Syriac Orthodox), Armenians, and Maronites, who had resided in Jerusalem and its surrounding regions long before the arrival of the Crusader forces in 1099 CE (Pringle, 2022).

Indigenous Christians such as the Melkite, Jacobite, Armenian, and Maronite communities had lived in the Holy Land for centuries prior to the Crusader conquest of Jerusalem in 1099 CE (Jotischky, 2017). Following the conquest, many of them were expelled from major urban centers, although they were gradually permitted to resettle in rural villages beginning in the early twelfth century (Pahlitzsch, 2018). During the reign of King Baldwin IV (1174–1185 CE), these communities

constituted the majority of the population outside the principal cities and formed a stable social class of Christian inhabitants who were not part of the Latin elite (MacEvitt, 2019).

They occupied this position because, although they were Christians and therefore enjoyed a higher status than Muslims and Jews, they did not follow the Latin rite and were consequently regarded as inferior to the Frankish population (Kedar, 2017). The Frankish king and nobility depended heavily on their labor and tax contributions to sustain the kingdom, yet restricted their access to weapons and high office in order to maintain political control (Morton, 2020). Under Baldwin IV, this position became more clearly defined, as the growing threat posed by Saladin encouraged increased tolerance toward indigenous Christians in the interest of social stability and internal cohesion (Hamilton, 2016).

Their responsibilities included cultivating agricultural fields and rural estates to ensure sufficient food supplies for the kingdom (Ellenblum, 2019). Some among them—particularly Armenians and Maronites—served as light auxiliary soldiers known as *Turcoples* (Light cavalry units recruited from local populations, often of mixed ancestry or converts, who served primarily as mounted archers and reconnaissance troops) to support frontier defense (Morton, 2020). In urban centers such as Acre and Tyre, they worked as merchants, artisans, or physicians serving the daily needs of Frankish society (Pahlitzsch, 2018). They were also required to pay higher taxes than the Franks to support the war against Saladin (Kedar, 2017).

Their rights included the freedom to practice their religious traditions and maintain their own priests and bishops (Jotischky, 2017). They were permitted to own houses and land in rural villages and to elect their own village leaders, known as *ra'is* (A local leader of Muslim or Eastern Christian communities in rural villages, functioning as a vassal with considerable autonomy due to the frequent absence of Frankish landowners) (Ellenblum, 2019). Certain Armenian families were allowed to intermarry with Franks, enabling their descendants to inherit feudal land rights (MacEvitt, 2019). As Christians, they were protected from enslavement and permitted to engage freely in urban market trade (Hamilton, 2016). Their obligations included paying higher taxes than Franks, refraining from bearing arms unless explicitly authorized, and remaining loyal to the king without access to high administrative or political offices (Jotischky, 2017).

Indigenous (non-Latin) Christians were generally treated with tolerance and protection by King Baldwin IV and the royal nobility, as their support was crucial in resisting Saladin's expansion (Hamilton, 2016). The Frankish high nobility regarded them as useful allies in rural areas but continued to impose heavy taxation and restrict their access to weapons (Morton, 2020). Latin bishops permitted them to worship according to their own rites, though they frequently encouraged conversion to the Latin rite in major churches (Pahlitzsch, 2018). Military orders such as the Templars and Hospitallers treated them primarily as peasants on order-owned lands, providing security while demanding high taxes (Ellenblum, 2019). Frankish knights and Latin settlers interacted with them daily through trade and occasional intermarriage, yet continued to view themselves as socially superior (Kedar, 2017). Muslim populations often regarded indigenous Christians with suspicion, perceiving them as collaborators with the Franks, which contributed to tensions along frontier regions (Christie, 2020). Jewish and Samaritan communities generally maintained neutral relations, interacting mainly through shared commercial spaces (MacEvitt, 2019). Enslaved individuals had little direct interaction with indigenous Christians; however, some native Christians owned slaves themselves and were clearly positioned above them in the social hierarchy (Christie, 2020).

The fifth position in the social stratification pyramid of Jerusalem was occupied by Muslim communities. Prior to the arrival of the Crusader forces in 1099 CE, Muslims constituted the majority population of the Holy Land and lived under the rule of the Fatimid and Seljuk dynasties as peasants, merchants, and urban residents (Christie, 2020). Following the conquest of Jerusalem, most Muslims living in the city were massacred or expelled. However, beginning in the mid-twelfth century, Muslims were gradually permitted to return to rural areas as an essential labor force (Morton, 2020). During the reign of King Baldwin IV (1174–1185 CE), Muslim communities had

become firmly established in villages, although their presence in urban centers remained limited due to strict Frankish regulations (Kedar, 2017).

Muslims occupied the fifth level of the social hierarchy because they were regarded as infidels or non-Christians and were therefore ranked below all Christian groups. Nevertheless, they remained above Jewish communities and enslaved populations due to their crucial role as agricultural producers who sustained the kingdom's economy (Ellenblum, 2019). Frankish rulers relied heavily on Muslim labor and taxation to maintain the kingdom, yet simultaneously restricted their rights to prevent rebellion, particularly amid the growing threat posed by Saladin (Morton, 2020). Under Baldwin IV, this position became increasingly tense as continuous warfare fostered suspicion, and Muslim villagers were often viewed as potential spies or collaborators (Christie, 2020).

The responsibilities of Muslim populations during this period primarily involved agricultural labor as rural peasants (*fellahin*), producing harvests that constituted the kingdom's main source of taxation (Ellenblum, 2019). Some also worked as artisans or small-scale traders in rural markets, though they were rarely present in urban centers (Kedar, 2017). During Baldwin IV's reign, they were required to pay heavy *kharāj* taxes—often amounting to up to half of their agricultural output—to finance the war against Saladin. (Christie, 2020).

Their rights included residence in their own villages with limited autonomy, such as the ability to appoint local judges (*qadi*) to oversee internal communal affairs (Morton, 2020). Muslims were allowed to practice their religion and maintain small mosques in rural areas, although the construction of new mosques in cities was prohibited (Christie, 2020). During Baldwin IV's rule, they were entitled to protection from violence as long as taxes were paid, yet their freedoms remained severely restricted, including strict prohibitions on bearing arms (Kedar, 2017). Their obligations included paying heavy *kharāj* taxes—sometimes reaching half of their agricultural output—refraining from carrying weapons, and enduring constant suspicion as alleged supporters of Saladin, which meant that their villages could be attacked at any time (Christie, 2020).

Muslim communities were treated with pragmatic tolerance by King Baldwin IV and the royal nobility, who permitted their continued existence in rural areas primarily for taxation purposes. However, Muslim villages were frequently subjected to raids or punitive actions when suspected of aiding Saladin (Hamilton, 2016). Frankish high nobles imposed heavy taxes on Muslim peasants, viewing them simultaneously as a vital economic resource and a potential security threat (Morton, 2020). Latin bishops often ignored Muslim communities or attempted to convert them, regarding them as infidels whose presence was tolerated only for the sake of stability (Pahlitzsch, 2018). Military orders such as the Templars treated Muslim populations harshly, frequently seizing land and demanding excessive taxation in territories under their control (Ellenblum, 2019). Frankish knights and Latin settlers interacted with Muslims primarily through trade but remained deeply suspicious, particularly following military defeats such as the Battle of Montgisard in 1177 (Kedar, 2017). Indigenous Christian communities engaged with Muslims through economic cooperation in shared markets, though religious tensions persisted (MacEvitt, 2019). Jewish and Samaritan groups generally maintained neutral relations, limiting interactions to commerce without significant conflict (Jotischky, 2017). Enslaved populations—many of whom were Muslim—had little direct interaction with free Muslim villagers but were often perceived as fellow victims of social marginalization (Christie, 2020).

The sixth position within the social stratification pyramid of Jerusalem society was occupied by Jewish and Samaritan communities. These groups had existed as small communities in the Holy Land prior to 1099 CE—particularly in Jerusalem, Acre, and Nablus—under Muslim rule with *dhimmi* (A legal status assigned to non-Catholic populations—such as Muslims, Eastern Christians, and Jews—as second-class subjects with limited rights but guaranteed protection, comparable to systems of tolerated minorities under Islamic governance) status (Kedar, 2017). Following the Crusader conquest, most Jews in Jerusalem were massacred, but gradual resettlement was permitted from the 1120s onward, particularly in port cities (Ellenblum, 2019). During Baldwin IV's

reign (1174–1185), these communities remained small yet stable, primarily in Acre and Tyre for Jews and in Nablus for Samaritans (Jotischky, 2017).

Jewish and Samaritan communities occupied the sixth level of the social hierarchy because they were regarded as non-Christians, similar to Muslims, yet were considered less economically significant due to their smaller numbers and limited involvement in large-scale agriculture (MacEvitt, 2019). Frankish rulers protected these groups primarily for the purpose of collecting special taxes, while simultaneously restricting their rights because of persistent religious prejudice (Kedar, 2017). During Baldwin IV's reign, their position was shaped by ongoing warfare: they were viewed with suspicion, but not perceived as a military threat comparable to Muslim communities (Hamilton, 2016).

The primary roles of Jewish communities during this period included working as merchants, physicians, and artisans in urban centers, providing essential services—such as medical care—to Frankish society (Jotischky, 2017). Samaritan communities in Nablus, by contrast, were largely engaged in agriculture and artisanal labor and were required to pay annual taxes (Ellenblum, 2019). Under Baldwin IV, both groups were obligated to pay *jizyah*, or a special head tax, to support the kingdom (Kedar, 2017).

Their rights included the ability to reside in designated urban quarters and to maintain synagogues and religious leadership, such as rabbis (MacEvitt, 2019). They were permitted to own small amounts of property and to engage in trade, with royal protection against mob violence or pogroms (Kedar, 2017). During Baldwin IV's reign, they also had limited access to Frankish courts in cases involving mixed communities, although such access often involved higher legal fees (Jotischky, 2017). Their obligations included paying *jizyah* or other special taxes, refraining from bearing arms, and accepting restrictions on their presence in Jerusalem, which was regarded as a sacred Christian city (Kedar, 2017).

Jewish and Samaritan communities were protected by King Baldwin IV and the royal nobility primarily to ensure the continued flow of tax revenue, although their presence in Jerusalem remained strictly limited (Hamilton, 2016). Frankish high nobles imposed special taxes on them as urban merchants, viewing them as economically useful yet socially inferior (Morton, 2020). Latin bishops frequently criticized Jews as “Christ-killers,” though they rarely engaged in direct persecution (Pahlitzsch, 2018). Military orders generally treated Jewish and Samaritan communities neutrally, interacting with them only minimally, mainly in marketplaces (Ellenblum, 2019). Frankish knights and Latin settlers engaged in trade with these groups but occasionally resented the medical expertise of Jewish physicians (Kedar, 2017). Indigenous Christian communities maintained largely neutral relations, sharing marketplaces without significant conflict (MacEvitt, 2019). Muslim populations tended to regard Jews and Samaritans as fellow non-Christian minorities, often engaging in economic cooperation (Christie, 2020). Enslaved populations rarely interacted directly with these communities, although some Jewish households owned slaves themselves (Jotischky, 2017).

The seventh and lowest level of the social stratification pyramid in Jerusalem was occupied by enslaved populations. Most slaves were Muslim prisoners of war captured during Crusader battles or individuals purchased from slave markets in Acre and Tyre following the conquest of 1099 CE (Christie, 2020). Throughout the twelfth century, their numbers increased as a result of continuous warfare, and during the reign of King Baldwin IV (1174–1185 CE), many new slaves were acquired from major engagements such as the Battle of Montgisard in 1177 (Morton, 2020). This class constituted the lowest social stratum because enslaved individuals were legally regarded as property rather than free persons, and the majority were non-Christian Muslims deprived of personal liberty (Ellenblum, 2019).

Enslaved populations occupied this position because they possessed no legal rights and were fundamentally distinct from all free social groups. Their predominantly Muslim background made them particularly vulnerable within the Frankish social order (MacEvitt, 2019). Frankish rulers relied on slave labor to compensate for chronic labor shortages but did not grant enslaved

individuals any form of civic status or social mobility (Kedar, 2017). During Baldwin IV's reign, this group's position deteriorated further as ongoing warfare generated increasing numbers of captives who were absorbed into the system of enslavement (Hamilton, 2016).

The primary duties of enslaved individuals included forced labor on sugar plantations, domestic service in Frankish households, and rowing galleys in Mediterranean ports (Ellenblum, 2019). Many were employed as laborers in castles, agricultural estates, or construction projects, contributing to the kingdom's economy without compensation (Morton, 2020). During Baldwin IV's reign, enslaved labor was also used extensively in the construction and maintenance of fortifications designed to defend the kingdom against Saladin (Christie, 2020).

Their rights were extremely limited. In certain cases, slaves could obtain freedom through conversion to Christianity, although such instances were relatively rare (Jotischky, 2017). They were permitted to marry other enslaved individuals with the consent of their owners, but they held no legal rights to property or family autonomy (Kedar, 2017). Under Frankish law during Baldwin IV's era, slaves were theoretically protected from excessive physical abuse; nevertheless, they remained legally classified as property rather than persons (MacEvitt, 2019). Their obligations were absolute and included obeying their owners at all times, performing labor without limitation, refraining from resistance, and accepting the complete absence of legal rights over property, family, or personal freedom (Christie, 2020).

King Baldwin IV and the royal nobility treated enslaved individuals primarily as assets of war, distributing them as rewards to vassals following military victories (Hamilton, 2016). Frankish high nobles employed slaves for domestic and agricultural labor, often subjecting them to harsh treatment while remaining heavily dependent on their labor (Morton, 2020). Latin bishops encouraged the conversion of slaves to Christianity as a path toward manumission, though they rarely intervened directly in cases of abuse (Pahlitzsch, 2018). Military orders used enslaved populations as laborers in castles and estates, demanding intensive forced labor (Ellenblum, 2019). Frankish knights and Latin settlers owned slaves as household servants, with treatment ranging from severe exploitation to relatively routine supervision (Kedar, 2017). Indigenous Christian communities rarely interacted with enslaved individuals, although some households owned slaves themselves (MacEvitt, 2019). Muslim communities often regarded enslaved individuals as fellow victims of oppression and expressed sympathy toward their condition (Christie, 2020). Jewish and Samaritan communities also occasionally owned slaves, treating them primarily as economic property (Jotischky, 2017).

Factors Shaping Social Stratification in Jerusalem (1174–1185 CE)

The second research question in this study examines how specific factors influence the formation of social stratification as depicted in the film *Kingdom of Heaven*. This research employs a qualitative approach using content analysis and narrative analysis. Content analysis is conducted by identifying elements such as narrative structure, dialogue, characters, and visual imagery in the film that indicate social hierarchy. Narrative analysis, meanwhile, examines how the film's storyline constructs intergroup conflict and highlights social inequality. Data are obtained through repeated observation of key scenes, transcription of significant dialogue, and categorization based on dimensions of stratification such as economic status, social rank, and political power. The findings of this analysis are then compared with secondary historical sources to assess the accuracy and interpretive deviations present in the film's representation, given that qualitative and narrative analyses are inherently interpretive and depend on the researcher's reading of cinematic narratives and visuals (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Krippendorff, 2019; Riessman, 2021).

The first factor shaping social stratification in the film is feudalism, which serves as the foundation for the distribution of power and land. In *Kingdom of Heaven*, feudalism is portrayed through the journey of Balian of Ibelin, who begins as an ordinary blacksmith in Europe and rises to noble status after his father, Godfrey, knights him and grants him land in Ibelin. This narrative illustrates how lord–vassal relationships within feudalism allow for social mobility, even though historically Balian was already born into the nobility. Visually, the film emphasizes the contrast

between the luxurious palaces of the Frankish elite and the impoverished villages of the local population, symbolizing the dependence of lower classes on elite landowners. Narratively, feudalism is used to underscore that land ownership is not merely a source of wealth but also a means of maintaining elite dominance over indigenous populations. Historical scholarship confirms that hybrid feudalism in Jerusalem produced a rigid hierarchy dominated by Frankish elites who controlled land and military power (Barber, 2012). However, the film simplifies this reality by incorporating dramatic elements such as Balian's rise to appeal to modern audiences (Saadi, 2020).

The second factor is religious difference, which functions as a primary divider between ruling and subordinate groups. The film portrays religion not only as a belief system but also as an instrument of power, conveyed through dialogue and character interactions. King Baldwin IV is depicted as a tolerant ruler who seeks peace with Saladin, the Muslim leader, while radical figures such as Guy de Lusignan and Reynald de Châtillon exploit religion to justify violence against Muslims. The scene in which Reynald kills Saladin's sister exemplifies how religious prejudice intensifies social inequality, positioning Latin Christians at the top of the hierarchy while Muslims and Eastern (non-Latin) Christians are marginalized. Visually, religious hierarchy is reinforced through costume and setting: Frankish nobles wear ornate armor, while Muslim characters appear in simpler attire in markets or rural settings. Narratively, the film emphasizes that religion itself is not the root cause of conflict, but rather a tool used by elites to preserve power, as illustrated by Balian's liberation of Muslim slaves who later become his allies. Historical studies indicate that religion indeed reinforced hierarchy in the Latin Kingdom, where Frankish dominance was legitimized by papal authority (Lewis, 2017). Nevertheless, the film simplifies these dynamics by portraying Muslim-Christian relations as more harmonious than they were historically, in order to convey a modern message of tolerance (Duggan, 2019).

The third factor is internal political conflict among the nobility, which weakened the kingdom and deepened social inequality. In the film, rivalry between the ambitious and radical Guy de Lusignan and the more moderate Raymond III of Tripoli forms a central narrative axis. Court scenes illustrate how this conflict affects the entire society: elite nobles compete for influence over the ailing King Baldwin IV, while ordinary people suffer from wars provoked by elite ambition. From a content analysis perspective, dialogues such as Sibylla's request that Balian kill Guy demonstrate how struggles for the throne generate internal friction that leaves lower classes increasingly vulnerable. Narratively, the film frames internal elite conflict as a key cause of Jerusalem's downfall, suggesting that aristocratic politics disregarded the welfare of the broader population. Historical research supports this depiction, showing that internal noble rivalries during Baldwin IV's reign significantly weakened the Latin Kingdom and facilitated Saladin's advances (Asbridge, 2021). The film uses this theme to emphasize how political instability reinforces stratification, allowing elites to remain protected while lower classes bear the costs of war.

The fourth factor is military capability as a determinant of social status. The film emphasizes that valor and competence in warfare can elevate an individual's position, as seen in Balian's rise through his battlefield leadership and engineering skills. Scenes such as the Battle of Kerak and the Siege of Jerusalem depict Balian leading common people against Saladin's forces, earning respect across social and religious boundaries. Visually, the film distinguishes Frankish knights equipped with advanced weaponry from poorly armed local fighters, reinforcing military hierarchy. Narratively, military prowess is portrayed as a pathway to social mobility, although historically such mobility was rare, as feudal systems prioritized lineage over individual achievement (Kostick, 2008). The film simplifies this reality by presenting Balian as a heroic individual, a departure from historical fact in which he was already a noble by birth (Taufiq, 2021).

Overall, factors such as feudalism, religious difference, internal political conflict, and military power are interconnected in the film and collectively shape an unequal social structure. Through content and narrative analysis, it becomes evident that Kingdom of Heaven blends historical realities with modern interpretations to highlight conflict and injustice. Despite its simplifications, the film's representation reflects the core inequalities of the Latin Kingdom of

Jerusalem (Tyerman, 2019). Thus, Kingdom of Heaven functions not only as entertainment but also as a cultural medium that invites audiences to understand how these factors shaped medieval society (Morton, 2020).

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that the social structure of Jerusalem during the period 1174–1185 CE, as represented in the film *Kingdom of Heaven*, was hierarchical and organized into a rigid social pyramid dominated by Western European Frankish elites. This stratification was shaped by a hybrid feudal system combining European traditions with local Middle Eastern conditions, resulting in clear class divisions among rulers, nobility and military orders, Latin settlers, non-Latin Christian populations, Muslims, Jews, and the lowest social groups. The film portrays these inequalities through narrative and visual strategies that emphasize disparities in power, access to resources, and limited social mobility among subordinate groups. The formation of social stratification in the film is influenced by feudalism, religious difference, internal political conflict, and military power, although these factors are selectively represented and simplified to foreground modern values of tolerance and humanism. Consequently, *Kingdom of Heaven* functions not only as entertainment, but also as a cultural medium that reconstructs and shapes public understanding of social dynamics and power relations during the Crusading era.

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