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Momentous

With over 150 complex battle sequences involving hundreds of thousands of soldiers, **Mokhtaar** is believed to be the biggest historic-religious television project in the world. Its all-Iranian crew members were selected from amongst the top television and cinema professionals.

The production crew began work in 2002 on the replication of the 1300 year old town of Kouffeh. Utilising evidence from historical records, they recreated the town's main squares, streets, palaces and houses on a 53 acre site. When the scenes of Kouffeh have all been shot, the buildings will be adapted to resemble the

town of Madaen. A replica of Mecca and Ka'aba, another major location, is currently under construction.

Planning Manager, Massoud Meyami recalls: "Scriptwriters Mohamad Biranvand and Hassn Mirbagheri had only written half the script when we began preparations in 2002, which made the work even more exciting than we had expected. We started shooting in 2004 with more than 200 prominent Iranian actors and actresses and have had to cope with many different locations and diverse geographic environments. The scale of the production is so huge that it will take another year to complete."

The 30 one hour television programmes were commissioned by the Islamic Republic of Iran Broadcasting (IRIB) and recount the story of Mokhtaar Bin Obaid Thaghaffi, one of history's major Shiite personalities. Mokhtaar instigated an uprising to avenge the massacre of Ushoora in which the grandson of the prophet and his apostles were killed by the ruler's army. The unique series is set in a very volatile political era and covers 20 years of Mokhtaar's life.

Production Manager, Mahmood Gholami states that most of the key scenes comprise large battles, one of which involves 42 sequences and 60,000 soldiers. It will take five months to shoot.



Mokhtaar

"A magnificent sequence is the victory of Mokhtaar's revolution, which was shot with a crane and involved scores of leading and many secondary actors, as well as thousands of soldiers," he says. The battle scenes are being shot in a hot and humid area south of Iran - in the desert, alongside large rivers and amongst date palms.

Director of Photography, Azim Javanrooh, chose ARRI BL4 and ARRI III cameras for their portability on the rough terrain and shot in 35mm rather than HD "for better contrast and durability". He used Kodak VISION2 100T 5212 and Kodak VISION 200T 5274 for exteriors; Kodak VISION2 500T 5218 for interiors; and

Kodak VISION 800T 5289 for night shots. "We chose these stocks for their tones and colour ranges and they have produced excellent results," he comments.

Camera Operator Reza Ghaffari adds: "This is an action film in which the camera is in constant motion; there is not a minute when it remains still." Ghaffari indicates that the crane frequently had to be positioned at different heights to achieve the required angles.

Numerous lighting packages are being used to cope with the enormous range of lighting requirements and different locations. "The most difficult sequences are those that begin inside a building



and move outdoors and vice versa," remarks Javanrooh. "There is an immense difference in the lighting conditions, so we have to use a variety of positions to create the right conditions for shooting."

By October 2005, Javanrooh had used more than 1400 Kodak film magazines. Masood Mayami believes that in excess of 3400 will be used by the time **Mokhtaar** is completed in 2006. ■

PHOTOS: MASOUD PAKDEL