The Ancient World in Silent Cinema

In the first four decades of cinema, hundreds of films were made that drew their inspiration from ancient Greece, Rome, Egypt and the Bible. Few of these films have been studied, and even fewer have received the critical attention they deserve. The films in question, ranging from historical and mythological epics to adaptations of ancient drama, burlesques, cartoons and documentaries, suggest a fascination with the ancient world that competes in intensity and breadth with that of Hollywood’s classical era. What contribution did antiquity make to the development of early cinema? How did early cinema’s representations affect modern understanding of antiquity? Existing prints as well as ephemera scattered in film archives and libraries around the world constitute an enormous field of research. This extensively illustrated edited collection is a first systematic attempt to focus on the instrumental role of silent cinema in twentieth-century conceptions of the ancient Mediterranean and Middle East.

Pantelis Michelakis is Senior Lecturer in Classics at the University of Bristol. His research interests are in Greek theatre, literature and culture and in their ancient and modern reception. He is the author of Achilles in Greek Tragedy (2002), Euripides’ Iphigenia at Aulis (2006) and Greek Tragedy on Screen (2013). He has also co-edited Homer, Tragedy and Beyond: Essays in Honour of P. E. Easterling (2001) and Agamemnon in Performance, 458 BC to AD 2004 (2005).

Maria Wyke is Professor and Chair of Latin at University College London. Her research interests include the reception of ancient Rome, especially in popular culture. In both Projecting the Past: Ancient Rome, Cinema and History (1997) and The Roman Mistress: Ancient and Modern Representations (2000), she explored cinematic reconstructions of ancient Rome in the film traditions of Italy and Hollywood. She won a Leverhulme Major Research Fellowship to investigate the reception of Julius Caesar in Western culture, since published as Caesar: A Life in Western Culture (2007) and Caesar in the USA (2012).
The Ancient World in Silent Cinema

Edited by Pantelis Michelakis and Maria Wyke
Contents

List of illustrations [page vii]
List of colour plates [xiii]
List of contributors [xv]
Acknowledgements [xx]

1 Introduction: silent cinema, antiquity and ‘the exhaustless urn of time’ [1]
PANTELIS MICHELAKIS AND MARIA WYKE

PART I THEORIES, HISTORIES, RECEPITIONS

2 The ancient world on silent film: the view from the archive [27]
BRYONY DIXON

3 On visual cogency: the emergence of an antiquity of moving images [37]
MARCUS BECKER

4 Cinema in the time of the pharaohs [53]
ANTONIA LANT

5 ‘Hieroglyphics in motion’: representing ancient Egypt and the Middle East in film theory and criticism of the silent period [74]
LAURA MARCUS

6 Architecture and art dance meet in the ancient world [91]
DAVID MAYER

7 Ancient Rome in London: classical subjects in the forefront of cinema’s expansion after 1910 [109]
IAN CHRISTIE

8 Gloria Swanson as Venus: silent stardom, antiquity and the classical vernacular [125]
MICHAEL WILLIAMS

9 Homer in silent cinema [145]
PANTELIS MICHELAKIS
PART II MOVEMENT, IMAGE, MUSIC, TEXT

10 Silent Saviours: representations of Jesus’ Passion in early cinema  [169]
    CAROLINE VANDER STICHELE

11 The Kalem Ben-Hur (1907)  [189]
    JON SOLOMON

12 Judith’s vampish virtue and its double market appeal  [205]
    JUDITH BUCHANAN

13 Competing ancient worlds in early historical film: the example of Cabiria (1914)  [229]
    ANNETTE DORGERLOH

14 Peplum, melodrama and musicality: Giuliano l’Apostata (1919)  [247]
    GIUSEPPE PUCCI

15 ‘An orgy Sunday School children can watch’: the spectacle of sex and the seduction of spectacle in Cecil B. DeMille’s The Ten Commandments (1923)  [262]
    DAVID SHEPHERD

16 Silent laughter and the counter-historical: Buster Keaton’s Three Ages (1923)  [275]
    MARIA WYKE

17 From Roman history to German nationalism: Arminius and Varus in Die Hermannschlacht (1924)  [297]
    MARTIN M. WINKLER

18 The 1925 Ben-Hur and the ‘Hollywood Question’  [313]
    RUTH SCODEL

19 Consuming passions: Helen of Troy in the jazz age  [330]
    MARGARET MALAMUD

General bibliography  [347]
Index of films discussed  [369]
General index  [373]
Illustrations

3.1 Herbert Schmalz, *Zenobia’s Last Look upon Palmyra*, oil on canvas, 1888. By permission of the Art Gallery of South Australia, Adelaide. [page 39]

3.2 A. H. Payne after Lipsius, Greek Room in the Neues Museum at Berlin, steel engraving, 1850s. [41]


3.4 The Gate of Imgur Bel: four images from D. W. Griffith’s *Intolerance* (1916). Screen captures from DVD © absolut Medien, 2008. [47]


6.2 The courtyard of Belshazzar’s palace thronged with dancers and spectators in D. W. Griffith’s *Intolerance* (1916). Private collection. [95]

6.3 Cover to souvenir programme: Imre Kiralfy’s *The Fall of Babylon*, Boston, 1891. Private collection. [98]

6.4 Triumphant procession as depicted in souvenir programme for Imre Kiralfy’s *The Fall of Babylon*. Private collection. [99]

6.5 Maud Allan performing *The Vision of Salomé*, from a posed photograph, c. 1907. Private collection. [105]

6.6 Gertrude Hoffman as Salomé, in imitation of Maud Allan, c. 1909. Private collection. [106]

7.1 British distributor’s 1911 advertisement in *The Bioscope* for Itala’s *The Fall of Troy*, claiming that its superior scale and realism would guarantee commercial success for exhibitors. [115]

7.2 By 1915, lavishy produced ancient world subjects, such as Cines’ *Julius Caesar*, were an established attraction, as evidenced by this trade show advertisement intended to enthuse local exhibitors. [118]

8.1 Sketch of Gloria Swanson entitled ‘Gloria Victis’ in *Photoplay*, October 1921. [128]
### List of illustrations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Illustration</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>8.2</td>
<td>Postcard featuring Gloria Swanson, released to publicise <em>Her Husband’s Trademark</em> (1922). Personal collection. [129]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.3</td>
<td>Photograph of Gloria Swanson, published in the magazine <em>Picture-Play</em>, September 1922. [130]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.4</td>
<td>‘Ideals of Beauty’, <em>Photoplay</em>, July 1926. [140]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9.2</td>
<td>French poster for Manfred Noa’s film <em>Helena</em> (1924), released in France as <em>Le siège de Troie</em>. From the collections of the Cinémathèque française – Bibliothèque du Film, Paris. [148]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9.3</td>
<td>Odysseus’ ship and its encounter with Scylla in Francesco Bertolini, Giuseppe de Liguoro and Adolfo Padovan’s <em>Odissea</em> (1911). Screen capture from the restored print held at the George Eastman House, Rochester, NY. [149]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9.4.1</td>
<td>Calypso and her female companions find Odysseus asleep outside her cave in Georges Méliès’ <em>L’île de Calypso: Ulysse et le géant Polyphème</em> (1905). Screen capture from DVD © Fechner productions, 2008. [156]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9.4.2</td>
<td>Odysseus faces the threatening hand of giant Polyphemus. Screen capture from DVD © Fechner productions, 2008. [156]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9.4.3</td>
<td>Odysseus blinds Polyphemus. Screen capture from DVD © Fechner productions, 2008. [156]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9.5</td>
<td>Homer in performance at the beginning of Luigi Romano Borgnetto and Giovanni Pastrone’s <em>The Fall of Troy</em> (1911). Screen capture © British Film Institute. [160]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9.6</td>
<td>A stemma providing the genealogy of the surviving film prints for Luigi Romano Borgnetto and Giovanni Pastrone’s <em>The Fall of Troy</em> (1911), after Marotto &amp; Pozzi 2005: 111. [163]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10.2</td>
<td>The Last Supper: Jesus announces that someone will betray him in Pathé’s <em>The Life and Passion of Jesus Christ</em> (1905). Screen capture from DVD © Image Entertainment, 2003. [178]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10.3</td>
<td>The Last Supper in Carl Theodor Dreyer’s <em>Leaves from Satan’s Book</em> (1921). Screen capture from DVD © Image Entertainment, 2005. [183]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11.1</td>
<td>Kalem advertisement for <em>Ben-Hur</em> (1907) in <em>Moving Picture World</em>, December 1907. [190]</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
List of illustrations

11.2 Pain’s *Last Days of Pompeii*, Manhattan Beach, card, c. 1900. [194]
11.3 Intertitle from *Ben-Hur* (1907). Screen capture from a film print in a private collection. [198]
11.4 Photo of *Ben-Hur* (1907) exhibition. Unknown provenance. [201]
12.1 The inspiring angel appears to strengthen Judith’s resolve in *Giuditta e Holoferne* (1908, dir. M. Caserini). Screen capture © British Film Institute. [212]
12.2 The strategic construction of Judith (Renée Carl) as seductress in *Judith et Holopherne* (1910, dir. L. Feuillade). Screen capture © British Film Institute. [216]
12.3 Judith the widow in still and cloistered seclusion in *Judith et Holopherne* (1910, dir. L. Feuillade). Screen capture © British Film Institute. [217]
12.4.1–5 Blanche Sweet as Judith in emotional turmoil over Holofernes’ sleeping form in D. W. Griffith’s *Judith of Bethulia* (1914). Screen captures from DVD © Bach Films, 2010. [221]
12.5.1–2 Judith and her maidservant’s liturgical rite of self-cleansing in D. W. Griffith’s *Judith of Bethulia* (1914). Screen captures from DVD © Bach Films, 2010. [224]
12.5.3 Judith and her maidservant gesturally aligned. Screen capture from DVD © Bach Films, 2010. [224]
12.5.4 Judith breaks from alignment with her maidservant. Screen capture from DVD © Bach Films, 2010. [224]
12.5.5 Judith exults in her own desires and desirability. Screen capture from DVD © Bach Films, 2010. [224]
12.5.6 The maidservant’s ongoing piety serves as the reminder of the identity Judith has left behind, prompting her guilt. Screen capture from DVD © Bach Films, 2010. [224]
12.6.1 Judith is feted in the streets of Bethulia as a conquering hero in D. W. Griffith’s *Judith of Bethulia* (1914). Screen capture from DVD © Bach Films, 2010. [226]
12.6.2 Judith reeled back in to her position looking out on the world through a mediating window. Screen capture from DVD © Bach Films, 2010. [226]
12.6.3 Judith recommits herself to an ongoing life of secluded piety. Screen capture from DVD © Bach Films, 2010. [226]
13.1 Cover of the programme for *Cabiria*. Private collection. [231]
List of illustrations


13.3 Entrance to the temple of Moloch in Carthage. Illustration from the programme for Giovanni Pastrone’s Cabiria (1914). Private collection. [240]

13.4 Palace in Carthage, Cabiria (1914). Screen capture from DVD © Kino Video, 2000. [242]

13.5 Elephant pillar in the palace of Carthage in Giovanni Pastrone’s Cabiria (1914). Published in Alovisio & Barbera 2006: 314. [242]

13.6 Egyptian forms for the palace of Cirta in Giovanni Pastrone’s Cabiria (1914). Production still published in Alovisio & Barbera 2006: 13. [244]


15.1 Aaron at work on the calf while Miriam collects gold from a besotted Dathan in Cecil B. DeMille’s The Ten Commandments (1923). Screen capture from DVD © Paramount Pictures, 2006. [267]

15.2 Miriam remains devoted to the Golden Calf and tantalisingly out of Dathan’s reach in Cecil B. DeMille’s The Ten Commandments (1923). Screen capture from DVD © Paramount Pictures, 2006. [268]

15.3 Miriam finally kisses the Golden Calf in Cecil B. DeMille’s The Ten Commandments (1923). Screen capture from DVD © Paramount Pictures, 2006. [270]

15.4 Orgiastic and fetishistic revelry in the Israelite camp in Cecil B. DeMille’s The Ten Commandments (1923). Screen capture from DVD © Paramount Pictures, 2006. [270]