

1 | Introduction: silent cinema, antiquity and 'the exhaustless urn of time'

PANTELIS MICHELAKIS AND MARIA WYKE

Historical accounts of the relation between silent cinema and antiquity often focus on a handful of feature-length blockbusters such as Enrico Guazzoni's *Quo Vadis?* (Italy, 1913), Giovanni Pastrone's *Cabiria* (Italy, 1914), D. W. Griffith's *Intolerance* (USA, 1916), Cecil B. DeMille's *Ten Commandments* (USA, 1923) and Fred Niblo's *Ben-Hur* (USA, 1925). However, fascination with the worlds of the ancient Mediterranean and the Middle East as a 'classical' and 'singular' antiquity (a privileged site of power and contestation)¹ has been a distinctive feature of cinema right from its emergence in 1896. Within a few months of the first public shows of moving images, George Hatot brought Nero onto the screen trying out poisons on his slaves (*Néron essayant des poisons sur des esclaves*), Thomas Edison filmed the Leander Sisters dancing as *Cupid and Psyche*, and Marc Klaw and Abraham L. Erlanger made more than fifty film strips of biblical scenes (*The Horitz Passion Play*), including 'Adam and Eve', 'The Flood', 'The Crucifixion' and 'The Resurrection'. By the time of the arrival of sound in the later 1920s, more than eight hundred short-, medium- and feature-length films had been made that drew their inspiration from the Bible, ancient Egypt, Mesopotamia, Greece and Rome.

With the exception of a few of those films which have been restored and released on DVD, and a few more which have been briefly brought out of the archive for screening at specialist festivals, the films in question are largely ignored. For example, apart from the handful of celebrated silent epics, they seem to have left scarcely any visible traces on the institutional and cultural memory on which later film practitioners have drawn to screen their own versions of the ancient world. Similarly, film histories and databases have usually been limited to the reproduction of their titles as disembodied and decontextualised entities, devoid of subject matter, cultural context and historical significance.² While the strong cinematic interest in the ancient Mediterranean since the 1950s has resulted in a steady flow of

¹ On the 'classical' as a site of competition and conflict, see Porter 2006, Settis 2006 and Kermodé 1983.

² See, for instance, Solomon 2001a and Dumont 2009.

articles, monographs and edited volumes in recent years, the breadth and persistence of fascination with ancient civilisations so evident in the first few decades of cinema has been almost totally ignored despite its central importance to the development of early cinema and to modern, popular understandings of a past celebrated and debated as ‘classical’.³ And yet, hundreds of these films still survive, some of them in multiple prints with individual variances, in archival collections from Montevideo to Tokyo and from Moscow to Wellington.⁴ The large number of existing prints, as well as production stills, posters, screenplays, press books, trade press and newspaper ads, reviews, and other ephemera scattered in film archives and libraries around the world constitute an enormous field of material that awaits exploration and analysis.

The significant presence of antiquity in silent cinema opens up a number of research questions that are pertinent not only to film history and its processes of archiving but also to classical and religious studies, Egyptology and Middle-Eastern studies, as well as to broader cultural studies. Why did a medium so closely and self-consciously linked with modern life develop such a strong interest in antiquity from its very beginning? How should antiquity films be situated within silent cinema and in relation to later and more dominant forms of cinema such as classical Hollywood? What interrelationships do they have with more familiar representations of the ancient world in nineteenth-century art forms, such as the novel, painting and the stage? Do they constitute a rupture with what came before and what followed, or continuity? How do the films in question relate to other conceptualisations of classical antiquity between 1896 and 1928? What contribution did the worlds of antiquity make to early film? How did perceptions of those ancient worlds change upon their encounter with the new art form? What contemporary aesthetic and political interests did cinema’s ancient civilisations serve? Beyond their archival and historical significance today, in what other ways do they matter? While future studies might probe these questions in detail, our interest here is to sketch out with broad strokes some key issues and possible directions for research in what is a virtually unexplored yet densely fertile field of knowledge.

³ Notable exceptions include Cosandey, Gaudreault and Gunning 1992 and Lindvall 2001 on the Bible; Uricchio & Pearson 1993 and Buchanan 2009 on the Bible and on Shakespeare’s Graeco-Roman world; Lant 1992, 1995a, 1995b and 2006 on Egypt; Mayer 1994 and Wyke 1997 on early toga films.

⁴ For a comprehensive but somewhat outdated list of silent film holdings of film archives from around the world, see the database of ‘Treasures from the Film Archives’ compiled by the International Federation of Film Archives, available in electronic format from *Ovid*.

In early cinema, the spatial and temporal span of the West's ancient worlds ranges from the Bible and Pharaonic Egypt to Mesopotamia, Greece, Rome and late antiquity. The films in question, varying from historical, religious, and mythological epics to adaptations of literature and drama, suggest a preoccupation with antiquity which competes in intensity and breadth with that of Hollywood's classical era. The diverse manifestations of the impact of antiquity on silent cinema are evident not only in historical, mythological and biblical epics but also in comedies, parodies, animated cartoons, trick films, archaeological documentaries, travelogues and newsreels. Both the span and the generic range of this cinematic antiquity are useful as a reminder that terms such as 'historical costume films', 'sword-and-sandal films' or the 'peplum' cannot capture the diversity of the material in question adequately or accurately.

The ancient subject-matter covered by early cinema is not all predictable. More than a dozen films were made about Sappho and, under the collective title 'Aesop's Fables', an animated cartoon series ran to hundreds of episodes (even if their 'sugar-coated pills of wisdom', as their closing title had it, did not always derive from Aesop's stories).⁵ Despite the fact that the cinematic interest in historical epics is very well developed by the time of the arrival of sound, there are no silent films on figures such as Alexander the Great. Today Pompeii may be perceived as the most obvious archetype of the doomed cinematic city, but until the 1920s it competed with other ancient cities such as Troy, Carthage, Babylon and Nineveh as well as with modern cities such as fire-devastated Chicago or earthquake-stricken San Francisco ('no dead ruins' claims a relevant advertisement in 1906).⁶ Epic films set in antiquity begin to be parodied on the screen as early as the Austrian *King Menelaus at the Movies* in 1913 (*König Menelaus im Kino*, dir. H. O. Löwenstein),⁷ and cinema's fascination with Egyptian mummies led to the production of dozens of films, including comedies, from as early as 1910.⁸

A large number of silent films set in the ancient Mediterranean and the Near East were produced in just three countries: Italy, France and the USA. This is not surprising given their leading position in filmmaking for most of the silent period. However, numerous other countries – from Russia to

⁵ On *Aesop's Film Fables*, see e.g. Bendazzi 1994: 57–8.

⁶ The advertisement is reprinted in Bergsten 1971: 243.

⁷ Fritz 1992. On film comedies set in antiquity and on their parodying of epic films, see Wyke in this volume.

⁸ For which, see Lant in this volume.

Australia – were more sporadically involved in the production of films related to these ancient worlds. Moreover such films achieved wide and rapid circulation in urban, suburban, small-town, and sometimes even rural environments across Europe, North America and Australia as well as in parts of Asia, Africa and South America. Although not the first medium for the mechanical, mass reproduction of classical antiquity in the modern world, cinema disseminated its representations right across the world.

The significance of silent cinema is difficult to overestimate when looking forward to later types of filmmaking and their conceptualisations of antiquity. First, early films allow us to trace some of the artistic, stylistic, thematic, ideological and technological developments that made possible the emergence of the cinematic traditions of the Hollywood epic and of the Italian peplum. For example, one cannot understand how the so-called ‘classical Hollywood narrative’ became ‘classical’⁹ without considering the emergence and consolidation of narrative cinema in the silent era and its strong preoccupation with both history and neo-Aristotelian aesthetics. Nor can one understand why Aristotle’s *Poetics* became a foundational text for commercial scriptwriting for feature films, as well as for television drama and even computer games,¹⁰ without considering the systematic use of Aristotelian principles in screenplay manuals of the 1910s. ‘The photoplay must have a beginning, a middle and an end’, we read as early as 1913 in J. Arthur Nelson’s guide *The Photoplay: How to Write, How to Sell*.¹¹ Secondly, the experimentation and diversity of early cinema illustrate both the potential of the medium that later mainstream narrative cinema developed only selectively, and the significance of ‘roads not taken’¹² for other conceptualisations of antiquity, such as those associated with art-house, experimental, underground, low-budget and world cinema. The aesthetic richness and ideological complexity of silent cinema’s antiquity films demonstrate the limitations of attempts to impose on film history evolutionary schemes that condemn early cinematic production, exhibition and reception as primitive and naïve.¹³ If these films shed light on omissions, regressions and bifurcations in the history of cinema, they also help put the focus on discontinuities. For example, the burial in archives of

⁹ On the classicism of Hollywood cinema and more broadly of narrative cinema, see especially Bordwell, Staiger and Thompson 1985 and the perceptive analysis in Williams 2000.

¹⁰ See Hiltunen 2002; Tierno 2002. ¹¹ Nelson 1913: 76; see further Thompson 1998.

¹² Gunning 1983: 366.

¹³ On the debate about the ‘primitivism’ of early cinema, see Gaudreault 2006 and Strauven 2006.

most of these films explains why film directors who turned to the aesthetics and technologies of early cinema to articulate their vision of the classical world in opposition to commercial cinema failed to recognise and exploit early cinema's fascination with antiquity. Pier Paolo Pasolini, Tony Harrison and Theo Angelopoulos would be three such examples of directors who sought to conceptualise the 'classical' origins of Western culture by means of the origins of cinema¹⁴ without being able to engage directly with any of the numerous films on Greece, Rome, Egypt and the Bible made in the silent era.

Silent cinema is important not only when looking forwards towards classical Hollywood cinema and its alternatives, but also when looking backwards to the emergence of cinema out of, and in competition with, the art forms of the nineteenth century. While the story of the relation between early film and other art forms is often told as one of slavish imitation or emancipatory rejection, the ancient world of early cinema suggests much more complex, diverse and dynamic forms of interaction between cinema and nineteenth-century arts, commercial entertainment and optical media. Early cinema sought cultural legitimisation by flirting with the canonical status of the ancient world in painting, sculpture, dance, theatre and opera. By 1909, advertising such sources 'had become sound business practice' and 'an index of "quality"',¹⁵ as is demonstrated by the publicity that year for Vitagraph's *Life of Moses* (dir. Charles Kent and J. Stuart Blackton) whose painterly sources were said to include 'Tissot, Gerôme, Gustav-Doré [sic], Edwin Austin Abbey, Briton Riviere, Sir Lawrence Alma-Tadema, R. A. Joseph Israel and Benjamin Constant'.¹⁶ Equally important, however, is that, in the process of seeking cultural and aesthetic legitimisation, early cinema sought to outperform and redefine other arts as well as other media and modes of popular entertainment (the ancient worlds of some of which are as under-researched as those of silent cinema). In cinema, neo-classical statues could be animated, famous paintings could be inhabited, the conventions of proscenium theatre could be violated, and opera could be rendered more accessible, while at the same time still photography could be set in motion and vulgar amusements could be refined and made respectable. For example, the animated statues that feature so often in

¹⁴ On Pasolini, see Viano 1993: 163–5. On Harrison, see his own discussion of his filmmaking in Harrison 1998: xxiii–xxvii. On Angelopoulos, see Michelakis in this volume.

¹⁵ Christie 2005: 711.

¹⁶ *Vitagraph Bulletin* 204, January 1910, quoted and discussed in Uricchio & Pearson 1992: 205–6 and in Christie 2005: 494.

early cinema – to the extent that they become ‘a metaphor for the new medium and its representational powers’¹⁷ – do not simply engage with classical and neo-classical sculpture. They also revisit and challenge what makes such sculpture familiar to early-cinema spectators: statuesque figures in the paintings of academic classicism, poses (often risqué) based on classical sculpture assumed by theatre actors, dancers and photographers’ models, but also engravings, lithographs and, increasingly, photographic reproductions of the sculpture itself, *tableaux vivants* of nineteenth-century popular theatre and museum display and ‘living pictures’ of contemporary vaudeville.¹⁸ Moreover, multi-media spectacles could provide models for exchange between cinema and other art forms based not on imitation or appropriation but on genuine interaction. Early examples of such interaction include *The Horitz Passion Play* (USA, 1897) and the Australian Salvation Army’s *Soldiers of the Cross* (1900), where film strips were combined with lantern slides, lectures, organ music and the singing of hymns to create inter-active, inter-medial religious events.¹⁹ Another example is Alexander Scriabin’s colour symphony *Prometheus, The Poem of Fire* which included as part of the orchestra an instrument that projected coloured lights on a screen (and was first performed with colour lighting in 1915).²⁰

While looking forward to the future of the silent era’s antiquity films highlights questions about film history, and looking backwards to the past highlights questions about cinema and its interrelationship with other more established or familiar art forms and media, looking at the present of their production and dissemination raises another important set of questions about late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century history and culture. What is it about the worlds of the ancient Mediterranean and the Middle East that makes them such a popular topic for silent cinema? Antiquity helped legitimise cinema as an autonomous and competitive form of mass culture artistically, aesthetically and culturally. It provided filmmakers with sanctioned and canonical subject matters and with the licence to use them in a variety of ways that could blur the distinction

¹⁷ Nead 2007: 4.

¹⁸ On films featuring living statues and moving images and their prehistory, see Nead 2007: 45–104 with bibliography. On sculptural poses in dance, see Macintosh 2010b: 6–7 and Albright 2010. See also Dixon in this volume.

¹⁹ On the film strips of *The Horitz Passion Play*, see Musser 1993 and Stichele in this volume. On the *Soldiers of the Cross*, see Kozlovic 2011: 39–40.

²⁰ On Scriabin’s colour symphony, see Peacock 1988: 402–3. On the intermedial relationships of early cinema see, for instance, Gaudreault 2000.

between education and entertainment. On a very basic level, early cinema turned to classical antiquity as a source for ethical, political or sexual models to be emulated, but also antitypes to be confronted. Films such as Louis Feuillade's *Roman Orgy*, produced in France in 1911, indulge fantasies about antiquity that break down the world of the spectators and reassemble it as a spectacle of absolute power at once transgressive and circumscribed. An effeminate emperor, a Senate of women, oriental opulence, and gratuitous acts of violence including a disruption of a banquet by lions provide a spectacle of excess carefully framed both historically and in political and ethical terms: the first title card locates the spectacle within a historically specific, and safely distant, place and time (Rome, 218), while the final couple of minutes restore political and ethical order as the Praetorian guard, disgusted, plunge their spears into the body of the grovelling emperor. But even as excess and transgression are condemned and closure is achieved, the film cannot resist a last-minute display of Heliogabalus' severed head. Another Italian film from 1911, Luigi Maggi's *The Queen of Nineveh*, offers a similarly complex taste of the otherness of antiquity. The Book of Jonah had described Nineveh (the capital of the ancient empire of Assyria) as a wicked city fit for destruction. Where better to perform modern concerns about marital relations, the authority of fathers, the vulnerability of masculinity, and the defiance of women? Location shots of simple pastoral innocence are juxtaposed with the adultery of the exotic royal court and the dark mysteries of its temple rituals. In the end, frustrated by the cowardice of her lover, the queen pulls off her pretty collar of pearls and decorative headband to take up helmet and breastplate. Only she is man enough to fight her husband's avenger. Her necessary punishment with death receives less attention than her transgressions of gender.

However, it is not only the huge number, diversity and topicality of films set in antiquity that demonstrate its appeal to early cinema. Its persistent presence in various discourses *around* early cinema is equally striking. In the 1920s, some of the earliest attempts to theorise cinema through a focus on issues of the aesthetic and artistic value of the new medium explicitly identified cinema as a Muse – the tenth Muse.²¹ Already in the 1910s, comparisons between cinema and popular art forms of the classical past such as Greek theatre were at the forefront of attempts to narrow the

²¹ Marcus 2007.

gap between mass and elite culture.²² Around the same time, hieroglyphics were also seen as a precursor of the cinematic image and were used to challenge the cultural domination of printed and spoken words over visual images.²³ The elaborate architecture of some of the early cinemas was even designed to suggest that the very activity of film spectatorship was defined by entry into a past world. Given that critical discourses of the silent film era commonly conceived ‘of entering the cinema theatre as entering an Egyptian tomb’²⁴ or a cave (be it of Ali Baba, of primitive humanity, or of the Platonic prisoners), it is not surprising that cinema architecture would seek through orientalism and classicism to give concrete shape to the visual seductiveness and aesthetic pedigree of the new medium. Here is a description, for example, of the standing set of the Strand on Broadway, New York, generally considered to be ‘the first palace cinema’:²⁵

The setting suggested the interior of a Greek temple, marble-like pillars supported an airy graceful roof, while to the right and to the left, one looked out from the sides of the temple upon hazy landscapes which made one think of woodland and of meadows. The green garlands wound about the top of the pillars, the profusion of flowers in front of the temple, the harmony of the Greek type of architecture suggest[ed] even in its ruins – all combined to make a noble and striking habitation for the screen.²⁶

The combination of the elements of classicism, nature and a window-on-the-world is not the only template for film projection settings in the 1910s, but it certainly articulates an influential vision of cinema as an antique window through which the audience might gaze back upon ‘all the wonders of the world’.²⁷

It was not only architectural practice and theoretical discourses about cinema that turned to antiquity but also cultural and institutional discourses more broadly. From Apollo Pictures and Argus Enterprises to Venus Film and Vesuvio Films, the names and places of classical antiquity could be found in almost every letter of the alphabet of silent film companies. And huge studio publicity campaigns accompanied the first blockbusters of 1910 and 1911 that were set in antiquity. For instance, the American promotion of the Italian *Odysey* directed by Francesco Bertolini, Giuseppe de Liguoro and Adolfo Padovan in 1911 claimed to have

²² See Canudo [1911] 1988 and Delluc 1921 (quoted in McCreary 1976: 17) discussed in Michelakis 2013: 1–3.

²³ See Lant and Marcus in this volume. ²⁴ As Lant in this volume. ²⁵ Paul 2005: 575.

²⁶ Quoted in Paul 2005: 575.

²⁷ S. Rothapfel (‘Roxy’) quoted and discussed in Paul 2005: 575.

included no less than ‘twenty million pieces of printed matter’ ranging from editions of Homer’s *Odyssey* to posters, postcards, lectures and programmes.²⁸ Film fan magazines fashioned their images of film stars on sculptural representations of Apollo and Venus throughout the late 1910s and the 1920s, thus illustrating the mobility of ideas about the perfection of the classical body from high art to popular culture and consumerism.²⁹ The word ‘cinematograph’ itself, a word adopted by the Lumière brothers in 1895 but coined by Léon G. Bouly in 1892,³⁰ follows the long nineteenth-century tradition of naming new optical devices with the help of neologisms derived from the classical languages: from Joseph Plateau’s phenakistoscope and Simon Stampfer’s stroboscopic disc (both invented in 1832) to Étienne-Jules Marey’s chronophotographs (1882–1904) and Thomas A. Edison’s kinetoscope (1891–5). ‘Cinematograph’ was not abbreviated as ‘cinema’ until after the etymological implications of the word (‘writing in movement’) had begun to be appreciated more widely and the adoption of the ‘correct’ spelling with a ‘k’ had helped give the new medium a more elevated status – as for instance when the British trade journal *Optical Lantern and Cinematograph* was renamed *Optical Lantern and Kinematograph* in 1906 and *Kinematograph and Lantern Weekly* in 1907.³¹ Even the legal and regulatory framework for film copyright in use in much of the world today originates in a drawn-out battle over intellectual property rights regarding the first film adaptation in 1907 of the novel *Ben-Hur*.³²

Silent cinema gained cultural capital from its engagement with antiquity while also developing out of it models for thinking about its own modern workings and processes. In what ways then, in turn, did silent cinema have an impact on understandings of antiquity? Early cinema was not just one among other art forms or perceptual technologies of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. Until the rise of television, cinema was ‘the single most expansive discursive horizon in which the effects of modernity were reflected, rejected or denied, transmuted or negotiated’.³³ By virtue of applying its new technologies to bring antiquity to life and make it move, silent cinema bestowed on it a modern edge and remained for decades the single most influential medium for its celebration.

The worlds of classical antiquity which cinema disseminated across the globe were inhabited by living human bodies, set in physical landscapes or in landscapes filled with increasingly three-dimensional, purpose-built (and

²⁸ *The Moving Picture World*, 10 February 1912, 504. See further Michelakis in this volume.

²⁹ Williams in this volume. ³⁰ Soulard 1963; Mannoni 2005: 34.

³¹ Bottomore 2005. ³² See Solomon in this volume. ³³ Hansen 1995: 365.

spectacularly demolished) sets, projected both on a large scale and in close detail. Cinema disseminated an animated antiquity, moving in real time. The intensity of the experience was further enhanced by music; silent cinema was almost never silent as the projection of films was accompanied by recorded or live music varying in ambition from phonographically reproduced sound effects to single-piano improvisations to full-scale orchestras performing specifically commissioned scores.³⁴ The intensity of the cinematic encounter with antiquity could also be enhanced by colour: the silver screen was not always silver as, from the very beginning, various methods of colouring were employed to convey the sensory experience of a colourful antiquity, from tinting to hand colouring.³⁵ Cinema, then, could bring back to life what was thought to be dead, set in motion what was thought to be immobile, and present in all its glory what was thought to be in ruins and decay. It could offer a sense of *being in* history, an engagement with the past that is sensorial rather than cognitive.³⁶

Thus, by 1915, B. L. Ullman (classicist and editor of the *Classical Weekly*) could argue for the benefits of cinema not only in support of a broader role for the ancient world in the modern but more specifically for Classics as a discipline: ‘Moving pictures are an excellent means of showing that the Classics are not dead . . . As classical teachers, let us seize an opportunity . . . the cause of the Classics will be greatly benefited, for the people as a whole will become familiar with classical life and history.’³⁷ The huge educational potential of cinema was exploited by the Church even earlier: films with appropriate biblical themes were projected in many countries as part of religious services from around 1910, if not earlier.³⁸ The accumulation of hundreds of titles in the hands of a single cleric (the Abbé Joye) who then used them regularly as teaching tools in a Swiss seminary provides a measure of the spread of such practices during the period.³⁹ But the educational potential of cinema was recognised and eagerly anticipated as early as 1897. ‘That is what the Biograph or its successors will assuredly do’, proclaims an article in *New York Mail and Express* with enthusiasm and conviction:

It will abolish the past, or rather, the past will speak through it to the present, and a thousand years will be unto this marvellous device of man’s brains as a single day.

³⁴ Cf. Pucci in this volume. ³⁵ See Dixon in this volume.

³⁶ As Gilles Deleuze, Roland Barthes and Vivian Sobchack have argued in relation to the genre of the historical film: see Burgoyne 2011a: esp. 3.

³⁷ B. L. Ullman, quoted in Winkler 2001: 5. ³⁸ Lindvall 2001.

³⁹ On the Joye collection, see Dixon in this volume.

What a lesson there would be taught if the great scenic events of antiquity were thrown upon the stage as nightly the events of this time are thrown before the audiences of the town's theatres!⁴⁰

Excitement about the cinematic antiquity to come was also conveyed succinctly and aptly in that 1897 newspaper article: 'To see a Roman triumph – commander, chariots, and captives – trailing through the streets of the ancient capital would be as if the flood of ages had been arrested and were returning into the exhaustless urn of time.'⁴¹ Less than two years after the first public shows of moving images, the article heralds what would become cinema's longstanding association with the spectacular. And it does so by turning to the Roman triumph which symbolises and encapsulates the new medium's promise to capture 'the flood of ages' and to return them into 'the exhaustless urn of time'.

However, early films also help conceptualise an alternative, and similarly persistent, way of thinking about the past, associated with what cannot, should not or must not be represented. 'Yesterday I was in the kingdom of the shadows',⁴² claims Maxim Gorky in his well-known response to the Lumière films in 1896. 'It is terrifying to watch but it is the movement of shadows, mere shadows. Curses and ghosts, evil spirits that have cast whole cities into eternal sleep come to mind.'⁴³ As Laura Marcus points out, 'for many of cinema's first spectators, the realism of "indexicality" of early films, combined with their unlikelike absence of sound and color, seems to have provoked, in the film historian Yuri Tsivian's words, "the uncanny feeling that films somehow belonged to the world of the dead"'.⁴⁴ Trick films, disaster films, sensational melodramas, slapstick comedies, horror films, adventure and fantasy films, and animation would capitalise on film's elusive and spectral materiality to construct an antiquity associated with magic, ghosts, mummies, miracles, demons, angels, gods, terrestrial and cosmic catastrophes, and human bodies tortured, dismembered and put on display. Even early religious films would find cinema's 'absence of presence' liberating in their fight against the accusation that they degraded religion and irreverently displayed actors playing

⁴⁰ Unattributed article entitled 'Where the Past Speaks', *New York Mail and Express*, 25 September 1897, quoted in Bergsten 1971: 28.

⁴¹ 'Where the Past Speaks', *New York Mail and Express*, 25 September 1897, quoted in Bergsten 1971: 28.

⁴² Gorky [1896] 1988: 25. ⁴³ Gorky [1896] 1988: 25.

⁴⁴ Marcus 2010: 196 quoting Tsivian 1994: 6.

the role of Christ.⁴⁵ Reviews of *The Horitz Passion Play* exhibited in the autumn of 1897 praised its film strips for being ‘instinct with life and physical movement but with an entire absence of flesh and blood and vocal concomitants’.⁴⁶ Cinema’s ancient worlds, then, could be brought back to life again and again, but their presence on the flickering screen was momentary, fragmentary and discontinuous.⁴⁷ On the one hand, cinema was associated with the triumph of realism and invested with the ability to bring the past into the present. On the other hand, it was associated with the uncanny and the abject, taking the present back into the past, giving unnatural access to a world of death and the supernatural. The moving image brought into sharp focus dimensions of an encounter with antiquity related not only to sensual pleasure, sexual desire and humour but also to suspense, shock and horror.

What justifies the separation of films related to the worlds of the ancient Mediterranean and the Middle East from films related to other historical (or even prehistoric) periods or from films treated under the more general label of ‘historical film’? And, conversely, what justifies the grouping together, under the banner of antiquity, of films with different thematic preoccupations and arguably distinct generic histories such as, say, films of the New Testament, of Pharaonic Egypt, and of a Graeco-Roman history that might even be mediated through Shakespeare? Urban filmgoers would have been familiar with an antiquity that was marked off by a distinctive and ‘powerfully recognisable visual iconography’⁴⁸ that silent cinema was expected to evoke, pay tribute to or appropriate. Nonetheless, silent cinema also drew on the visual novelty and shock value of new archaeological discoveries around the Mediterranean and the Middle East. Those discoveries could be understood paradoxically as both modern⁴⁹ and, at the same time, pre-classical, archaic, or primitive. They became a great source of inspiration for film practice and theory but also themselves needed the authentication as history that cinema’s reconstructions could give them. The widespread recycling of plots, motifs, sets, costumes, and even actors, directors and production houses across silent films set in the ancient Mediterranean and the Middle East often collapses the differences between ancient cultures into a singular and undifferentiated antiquity. It is precisely this blending of different eras and cultures and their transformation into a discrete (and versatile) style, oscillating between classicism and

⁴⁵ See Musser 1993 with further bibliography and Stichele in this volume.

⁴⁶ From the *Boston Herald*, quoted in Musser 1993: 438. ⁴⁷ See Becker in this volume.

⁴⁸ As Lant puts it in this volume. ⁴⁹ See Marcus in this volume.

orientalism or antiquarianism and modernism, that sets silent cinema's antiquity apart. Cinema is not the first medium to aspire with the help of antiquity to a totalising aesthetic that blends, among other things, classicism and orientalism. Consider, for instance, similar practices in the literature and the pictorial and performing arts of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, or Richard Wagner's influential concept of the total art work in the not-so-distant prehistory of cinema.⁵⁰ Yet cinema is arguably the first to show how such an aesthetic – through its combination of different arts, styles, cultures and historical periods – can claim for itself a role within a larger discourse of popular culture.

In Giovanni Pastrone's *Cabiria* (to take one of the most celebrated antiquity films of the silent era), barbaric Carthage becomes an oriental counterpoint to the classical settings of civilised Rome. Yet, propelled by a nationalist ambition for a modern, Italian empire in the Mediterranean, this drive to separate out the cultural identity of different ancient civilisations is simultaneously accompanied by the converse practice of stylistic hybridity.⁵¹ The Carthage of *Cabiria* is exclusively defined by its opposition to the hyper-classical world of Rome, combining motifs and styles from various ancient cultures as well as from their modern traditions of visual representation (including those of Assyria, Mesopotamia and India) in order to support a stridently colonialist narrative of rescue – the eponymous young girl must be courageously stolen back by her fictive Roman hero ('Fulvius Axilla') from foul Carthaginian imprisonment. *Cabiria* thus draws on a familiar antiquity of cultural conflict, stylistic hybridity and narrative causality that facilitates a focus on individual characters and allows an imperialist ideology 'to work, all the more effectively, underground'.⁵² In contrast to this style of film-making which paves the way for later, more mainstream forms of epic narrative, in films such as D. W. Griffith's *Intolerance* or Buster Keaton's *Three Ages*, distinct historical periods and parts of the world (ancient and modern) are narrated in parallel, in a way that foregrounds the heterogeneity of different ages and cultures while also inviting unsettling reflection on how to compare or contrast them.⁵³ The presence within these latter film narratives of a classical antiquity that operates in continuous interplay with different periods, cultures and styles invites a particularly complex viewing experience, one based on a 'web of possible, often

⁵⁰ On Wagner and the history of media, see, for instance, Packer & Jordan 2001.

⁵¹ As Dorgerloh argues in this volume. ⁵² Hansen 1991: 137.

⁵³ See Wyke in this volume.

overdetermined, often indeterminate, ambiguous, and contradictory relations, a many-layered palimpsest'.⁵⁴

While later, commercial cinema is often associated with theories focusing on the spectator's passivity and scopophilia, in early film the mobilisation of the visual image was tightly bound to the mobilisation of the viewer.⁵⁵ One can debate whether the mass-produced and mass-consumed antiquity of silent cinema encouraged or paralysed 'the viewer's associational and interpretative competence',⁵⁶ whether its emancipatory potential ever materialised, or whether it was contained by forces of social control, censorship and propaganda.⁵⁷ A more productive question to address, however, is how the sensorial antiquity of a medium that aspired to commercial success on an unprecedented scale and flirted with patriarchal, nationalistic, elitist and racist values, could at the same time invite audiences to search for elements of subversion, critique or at least self-awareness.⁵⁸ The representation of antiquity in early cinema often assists in marking out emerging, new and/or troubling forms of gender, class and ethnic identity in terms of orientalist excess while nonetheless offering to viewers a time and a place where it is possible to act differently.⁵⁹ It can also serve as a catalyst for the shaping of new forms of community and solidarity: whether one considers Italian immigrant audiences in New York watching Caesar's Gallic conquests during the First World War, the modern woman of the 1920s watching the consumer-oriented appeal of Helen of Troy,⁶⁰ or regional and state elites around the Mediterranean watching documentary footage of themselves as theatre spectators watching stage revivals of classical drama or dance.

There are three sets of factors that make possible and indeed necessary the re-evaluation of early cinema at this particular historical juncture. First is the resurgence of cinema at the beginning of the new millennium, following anxieties about its death around its hundredth birthday. Closely linked with that resurgence is cinema's renewed interest in antiquity which was triggered by the release of Ridley Scott's *Gladiator* in 2000 and Mel Gibson's *The Passion of the Christ* in 2004 after a whole generation during which antiquity was lost in the wilderness of cable and network television. Second is the emergence of the digital age and its impact on the study of

⁵⁴ Hansen 1991: 136. ⁵⁵ Nead 2007: 173. ⁵⁶ Hansen 1991: 140.

⁵⁷ Hansen 1991: 140.

⁵⁸ On early cinema spectatorship, see Hansen 1991 and more recently Cooper 2005, Cratton 2005, and Grievson 2005 with further bibliography.

⁵⁹ See Wyke 1997: 90–7.

⁶⁰ See also Buchanan in this volume on Judith and Lant on Cleopatra.

film. Digital technologies have created new possibilities for the storage, retrieval, dissemination, analysis and restoration of early cinema. Equally importantly, they have made it conceptually possible to imagine early cinema not as an archaic, obscure or naïve medium but as one that was technologically, culturally and aesthetically experimental and dynamic. We can say that we are ‘looking at the origins of the cinema with eyes and minds sharpened by current issues of software and hardware, data-storage and industry-standards’.⁶¹ And, at the same time, we can see ‘the new electronic media across a moment in time when the optico-chemical media of photography and film were “new”’.⁶² Third is the consolidation of both film studies and reception studies. Various ideas and practices regarding the study of film and the reception of antiquity have come to be organised into what are currently discrete disciplines. The two disciplines need to address not only the question of what the study of cinema and of antiquity is or ought to be but also the question of why an important and complex chapter in their joint history has been neglected for so long.

The modernity of antiquity has been anchored to different periods and stages associated with ideologies such as colonialism, socialism and fascism, movements such as literary or artistic modernism, and disciplines such as historiography, psychoanalysis and anthropology. At issue is not just the choice of focus on this period or that stage but also the status of such competing, overlapping, or intersecting versions of antiquity.⁶³ The absence of silent cinema from this competition needs to be analysed, and the positions it can occupy in it need to be debated. The persistent presence of antiquity in silent cinema raises questions about the modernity and popularity of a media culture that flirts with classicism and orientalism, and through them competes with more sanctioned art forms such as theatre, opera and the pictorial arts, while nonetheless pursuing the thrills of amazement and shock that make cinema’s antiquity so modern.

This collection of essays is a first step in addressing the importance of antiquity to silent cinema and of silent cinema to antiquity. Drawing extensively on archival research, the contributions to the volume examine a wide range of films and film-related materials and propose specific critical models for further research. The contributors engage with disciplines ranging from film history and theory to classical reception studies, literary criticism, art history, architecture, religious studies, archaeology, gender studies and musicology. The result of these disciplinary frameworks is a

⁶¹ Elsaesser 2006: 15. ⁶² Elsaesser 2006: 15.

⁶³ Cf. Hansen 1995: 363 on the choice of focus on different periods and stages of modernity.

double focus on film analysis (issues of narrative structure, technique, technology and style) and on contextual issues of production and exhibition (Christie, Solomon), spectatorship (Malamud, Williams, Michelakis, Scodel), national, religious, or gender identities (Stichele, Buchanan, Dorgerloh, Pucci, Wyke, Winkler, Shepherd, Scodel), film criticism (Lant, Marcus, Becker), history and historiography (Dixon, Winkler, Wyke), and of exchanges between cinema and other art forms (Mayer, Dorgerloh, Becker, Pucci). While in some ways still exploratory and tentative, the work undertaken in this volume draws on and applies to antiquity films in their specificity the rich seam of academic research on silent cinema which includes studies of the history of film (Musser, Usai), national cinemas (such as Abel on France), cinema architecture (Lant), Shakespearian adaptation (Uricchio & Pearson, Buchanan), relations to nineteenth-century theatre (Brewster, Mayer), sound (Altman), race, gender and sexuality (Higashi, Gaines, Kuhn) and spectatorship (Hansen) as well as broader studies of historical representation in film (White, Rosenstone).

Silent cinema is far from homogeneous, including as it does a wide range of modes of production, distribution, exhibition and reception – from early cinema's preoccupation with spectacle to the emergence and consolidation of the so-called 'classical narrative', and the simultaneous development of alternative modes of filmic representation in Europe and elsewhere. While always retaining a focus on antiquity, this volume nonetheless reflects silent cinema's heterogeneity. The first half of the volume (*Theories, Histories, Receptions*) consists of contributions that take a broadly thematic approach to a variety of key issues, whereas the second half (*Movement, Image, Music, Text*) consists of contributions on specific films arranged roughly in the chronological order of their production (with some glances back, forward and sideways in time). All together they invite the reader to reflect on the ways in which a history of antiquity in silent cinema might be configured in terms of the development of (as well as the discontinuities, ruptures and paradigm shifts in) specific cinematic conventions, the broader cultural formation of cinema, and the rich traditions for the representation of classical antiquity in other media.

Our starting-point is the film archive and the earliest history of cinema. Bryony Dixon argues for the importance of understanding the business practices of the industry prior to 1914 – the point at which the production and distribution of feature films became routine. Few scholars are familiar with the first wave of antiquity films which were made before then and largely remain buried in film archives (after arriving there often by the most esoteric of routes). Hundreds of these shorter films have survived in

multiple but, frequently, damaged prints. Industry catalogues and trade publicity reveal that they were exhibited as part of variety programmes (like those of vaudeville or the music-hall). Dixon makes a strong case for the full restoration of these very many cinematic ancient worlds – that is, not just their duplication for access, but their proper identification, cataloguing, editing, cleaning and recolouring. Such restoration is necessary in order to do full justice to silent cinema's reconstructions of antiquity as aesthetically rich and technologically innovative (as well as intriguing in historiographic terms).

The next three chapters investigate the interrelationship of early cinema with other more traditional media for engaging with antiquity, and examine how its distinctiveness has been and should be theorised. Marcus Becker explores these issues in terms of previous mechanisms for ensuring the power of visual images of antiquity over viewers. Their cogency mattered greatly because classical antiquity was so frequently called upon by European societies to shape national self-conceptions. Cinema's images, he argues, made a drastic intervention into the mutually legitimising network of nineteenth-century historical painting, panoramic spectacle, drawing, engraving, photography, and the museum display of archaeological finds. These media sought validity for their representations by virtue of their stasis and the contemplative mode of perception it invited. Cinema, however, offered an evanescent, discontinuous and fast-changing sequence of images to its spectators at the same time as it took away the control over viewing audiences experienced in the theatre. Thus cinema created a radically new representation of the ancient world in motion wholly suited to modern, urban living.

In counterpoint, according to Antonia Lant, Egyptian antiquity gave to cinema a perfect platform on which to play out the new medium's temporal flexibility. At the beginning of the twentieth century, ancient Egypt was cast as the remotest recorded culture (seemingly eternal yet only freshly understood), the birthplace of human society and home to the migration of souls. Silent cinema's multiple dimensions of time (in shooting, storytelling, editing, projection and consumption) could thus be vividly disclosed through a whole catalogue of Egyptianate narratives, such as time-travelling optical tricks with artefacts or mummies, reanimations of Pharaonic characters into contemporary life or into modern erotic dreams, trans-millennial love, or even ancient objects casting curses upon their modern possessors. The dimensions of time past and present that are so dislocated and transgressed are both external (material objects and the documentary record) and internal (individual memory and erotic desire).

Cinema's new, revolutionary idioms merge with Egyptology not only within film narratives but also within early film theory and criticism. Film was understood to be both utterly modern *and* archaic – a new hieroglyphics or universal picture-language waiting to be deciphered. Laura Marcus explores these suggestive convergences through the writings of a poet-artist and an Egyptologist, both of whose investigations into film's aesthetics were further stimulated by the opening of Tutankhamun's tomb in 1922. The slow, spectacular revelation of its treasures was observed, in turn, as if caught on film.

The next three chapters exemplify the pioneering directions that research on silent cinema's ancient worlds can take and the contribution it can make towards understanding how antiquity's reconstructions substantially affected early cinema in most of its aspects, from production to consumption. David Mayer is concerned to investigate the integral role art dance played in the spectacular ancient world *mises-en-scène* of early cinema. While decorative dancing might occasionally be glimpsed in Hollywood's later epics, silent cinema regularly offered to its spectators dances that were atmospheric, narrative-driven (at least in part) and conspicuous. Modern or 'art' dance sought to break away from the strict formalities of ballet and frequently did so, paradoxically, by adopting the postures to be found in classical art (under the impetus of investigations by classicists and anthropologists into ancient Greek and Near Eastern dance as ritual). Mayer traces the migration of such dance and its practitioners from the stage to ancient world film. There art dance enhanced the vaunted historical authenticity of the sets in which it was performed, while its expressive movements, attitudes and gestures, accompanied by appropriate music, added erotic and exotic colour, as well as emotion, to early cinema's ancient worlds.

The persistence of critical disdain for popular representations of classical antiquity, in Ian Christie's view, has resulted in a failure adequately to engage with the admiration and sheer excitement that such early film reconstructions aroused. Evidence from Britain and elsewhere would suggest, moreover, that antiquity films played a decisive part in the transformation of film production, distribution and exhibition in the period from 1910 to 1915. From around 1910, distributors began to sell exclusive rights to the exhibition of longer, prestige films in progressively larger and more luxurious cinemas, at higher ticket prices and for extended runs. A number of influential films took, particularly, Romano-Christian antiquity for their subject and repeatedly offered to audiences by that means the simultaneous appeal of stunning spectacle, eroticism, the decline of empire and the

apparent triumph of morality – a winning combination of ‘high-class’ entertainment and a lively education. While Christie delves into the early trade press and local cinema programmes and newspaper reports to disclose antiquity films at the centre of changing industry practices (the scale, the look, the place and the audience of cinema), Michael Williams analyses studio press books and film-fan magazines to reveal a classical vernacular articulating the concept of stardom from the 1910s into the late 1920s. Through the close examination of promotional photographs, Williams demonstrates the fluency with which critics and film fans read such manufactured images in terms of an actor’s acculturation into Graeco-Roman myth and art. Carefully composed as a sculpted Venus, an American film actress could accrue radiance, divinity, desirability and a European sophistication. Yet such publicity also worked to imply the superior power of cinema’s mute performers over classical sculpture: more radiant, complete, modern, democratic and alive.

Research on the role of antiquity in silent cinema should belong, Williams argues, not just to film history but also to classical reception studies. Rounding off Part I of this volume, Pantelis Michelakis provides an example of how such research can challenge some of the assumptions held in both disciplinary areas. Exploring how the new art form approached Homer’s *Iliad* and *Odyssey* (the earliest works in the canon of Western literature), Michelakis compiles a catalogue of the many respects in which early film adaptations might not always conform to the conventions that have been recognised for film epic (including the triad of monumentality, antiquarianism and ethical judgement): casual play with their source materials, optical tricks, mundanity, internationality, fantasy, parody, burlesque. The assorted grouping of early ‘Homer’ films also sets a challenge to the perceived primacy and distinction of the epic poems’ textual receptions. Early cinema’s totalising aesthetic could claim to embrace as one the textuality of written epic, the visuality of pictorial representations, and the orality of performance. When Michelakis returns us at the end of his chapter to Dixon’s opening concern with the conditions of early cinema’s survival, we find that the issue of preservation is complex. Like the Homeric poems, silent cinema’s antiquity films are not fixed but fluid entities. Widely exhibited across Europe and North America, they experienced repetition, variation and a precarious transmission. It is not always possible or appropriate to seek after single, definitive ‘master’ copies.

The second half of the volume comprises closer readings of individual silent films. The first three chapters of this kind explore some of the less well-known shorts produced in the 1900s as well as looking on to and

beyond the rise of the celebrated epic reconstructions of classical antiquity that emerged in the following decade. Films concerning the life of Christ were so popular throughout the silent era, Caroline Stichele observes, that they were frequently recycled, recoloured, fragmented, expanded or remade. She compares sequences from the Passion narrative of two such films made in France and Denmark that, respectively, almost top (1905) and tail (1921) the output of Christ films in the silent era. Their reverential *tableaux vivants* are obviously dependent on the gospels as source material but also draw on the New Testament's reception in Western art, photography, drama and devotional imagery. Promoted as both cinematic attractions and quasi-religious experiences, the two films diverge from each other as a result of technological change and the differing confessional traditions in which they were produced and consumed. One single, thirteen-minute antiquity film made in 1907, Jon Solomon argues, stimulated several years' worth of legal debate about cinema as a new art form and established copyright law in the United States thereafter for adaptations of literature to screen. In order to judge whether an early film version of the novel *Ben-Hur* infringed copyright guidelines, the courts had to decide if it constituted an exhibition of still photographs in sequence, a dramatic performance, some form of written narrative, or an entirely new (and therefore exempt) artistic product. As Solomon picks through the details of the complex case, he also demonstrates the grave difficulties in documenting even the most basic data about silent film production and gives a flavour of the practicalities attached to the cinematic reconstruction and exhibition of antiquity. Like Stichele, Judith Buchanan compares a selection of biblical films (Italian, French and American) that span the divide between shorts and features. The apocryphal story of Judith – the pious widow who transforms into murderous vamp and triumphant general before returning to the confines of home – was a more explosive story to capture on film than the life of Christ. Buchanan discerns an intense burst of interest in Judith across the arts of the early twentieth century, propelled by urgent 'real-world' debates about public roles for women. She argues that cinema, under growing pressure from its twin concerns to edify as well as thrill, developed techniques of psychological narration that were able subtly to express the gender subversions of Judith's story (such as stop-motion special effects, interpretative sets, costumes and colours, a closer focal length for the camera and acting that was, correspondingly, more facially expressive).

Set in a long period of conflict between the Roman and Carthaginian empires for control of the Mediterranean, *Cabiria* (1914) was acknowledged

at the time of its international distribution and in subsequent histories as a – or even *the* – film that finally lifted cinema to the level of ‘high’ art. Adding to the already substantial scholarship on this Italian epic, Annette Dorgerloh contends that its colonialist narrative was played out not just through scale, plot, performance, costume, camera movement, location shooting, and the use of enormous three-dimensional sets, but also through its decor. In the silent era, decor (that is spatial layout and design, furnishings and properties) was a particularly significant mechanism by which to create a credible ancient world and to shape its interpretation. Thus, working against the scant archaeological record, *Cabiria*’s designers purged its ancient North African cities of any Graeco-Roman features and, instead, deliberately orientalised them through an exotic mix of Assyrian, Indian and Egyptian motifs. Giuseppe Pucci explores a later Italian epic of 1919 concerning the life of the emperor Julian that (unlike *Cabiria*) is little known. Yet, in many respects, this epic works intriguingly against the conventions for reconstructing ancient worlds on screen that were by now both established and celebrated. Like Dorgerloh, Pucci draws attention to the importance of film decor, in this case an audacious interpretation of late antiquity that blends the style of ancient mosaics and Art Nouveau. And, like Buchanan, he finds that the film’s narrative focus and its topicality can be better understood as part of a whole network of late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century representations (in novels, plays, paintings, poetry and even, here, in scholarship). Yet, above all, the film is striking for the degree to which it integrates music with image and word. An original score containing parts for both a soprano and a chorus was composed to accompany its projection. Captions were sung or lyrics visualised to give greater emotional intensity to the epic film’s recreation of an intense struggle between paganism and Christianity, Church and State.

David Shepherd’s chapter returns us to the more familiar territory of lavish, big-budget Hollywood epics and to Cecil B. DeMille’s silent version of *The Ten Commandments* (1923) as obvious precursor to the sound version the director released during the Cold War. Yet, Shepherd argues, the earlier film’s opening prologue based on Exodus, and its Golden Calf sequence in particular, demonstrates a nostalgic return to the dominance of spectacle over story that had been favoured earlier in the century. In comparison to the style of the rest of the film, the flashback prologue utilises for the creation of thrilling spectacle a primarily static camera, slower editing, frequent long shots, fewer intertitles, and colour processing. As the sister of Moses dances erotically and self-consciously for the Calf,

the cinema spectator is coaxed into the 'perverse' pleasures of the show. The sequence playfully endorses the original cinematic hierarchy of image over word when each commandment (the divine Word) is visualised hurtling towards the film viewer from out of the sky. Also made in Hollywood in 1923, Buster Keaton's *Three Ages* exhibits an equally sophisticated sense that a history of its own now attaches to historical film-making. But here there is reverence neither for antiquity nor for its modern representations. Maria Wyke explores the comic strategies by which Keaton insistently parodies and renders absurd the dominant historiographic forms of monumentality, antiquarianism and ethical judgement. While American film directors often set the ancient alongside the modern world within a single film narrative in order to tell a cautionary tale, Keaton disturbs such moral ambition by violating period consistency across his 'Stone', 'Roman' and 'Modern' ages, and by rendering the distant past as merely the present in laughable disguise. Antiquity once again provides a playground in which to explore and challenge contemporary social relations and gender expectations (here slapstick, as well as parody and anachronism, unsettles old-fashioned, heroic masculinity). Wyke suggests that silent cinema's comic antiquities should be further excavated as sites of satiric reflection on the modern world's representations of distant pasts.

The last three chapters in this volume all explore 'the present tense' of silent cinema's antiquity films. That is, they examine the ancient world reconstructed on screen in relation to the modern world of the 1920s in which the films in question were produced and consumed. Their focus is on questions of identity, whether national, religious, cultural or gendered. Martin Winkler's analysis of a little-known German film from 1924 which depicts the victory of its ancient tribes over Roman invaders provides a useful reminder that Hollywood did not have a monopoly over the production of antiquity films in the 1920s (nor did it, in fact, at any other time). Small in scale and impact, and forgotten soon after its release, the German film nonetheless invites attention for its use of an apparently authentic location (one marked since the mid nineteenth century by a colossal statue of the victorious German chieftain Arminius), its focused appeal to the provincial community living near the historic battle site, and its inter- and extra-filmic devices to stimulate intense emotion. Embedded into the programme notes, a poetic prologue declaimed at the regional premiere, and many of the film's intertitles, were terms of extreme nationalistic currency during a time of French occupation, such as Germanic 'resistance', 'unity', 'leadership' and 'freedom'. While Solomon explores

the first film adaptation of the novel *Ben-Hur* from the point of view of film production and exhibition, Ruth Scodel provides a socio-political context for evident modifications made to the novel's narrative when it was transferred again to screen in 1925. Although authorised by momentary glimpses of gospel text, Christianity in this Hollywood epic is rendered broadly inclusive and undogmatic. In casting, costume and action, no clear cultural, racial or religious distinctions are made between first-century Jews and other peoples oppressed by the cruel Romans. In clear contrast to the strategies of the novel, all are equally exotic and equally available to spectators for identification. Scodel imputes these changes to a deliberate policy on the part of the film's Jewish producers wishing to maximise profit from ticket sales and to protect the reputation of present-day Jews (who were now experiencing greater visibility in American culture than in the late nineteenth century but also greater vulnerability). Finally, like Scodel, Margaret Malamud investigates the adaptation to screen of a novel set in classical antiquity. But where Buchanan and Wyke had found gender subversions at play in silent cinema's ancient worlds, Malamud discloses the relative conformism of Alexander Korda's comedy *The Private Life of Helen of Troy* (1927). Whereas the source novel published in the previous year depicts Helen as a passionate woman emancipating herself from the social and sexual restraints of middle-class, small-town American life (thinly disguised as ancient Sparta), the film constructs a vain, fashion-conscious coquette posing in a variety of gorgeous sets. The scriptwriter's apparent attempt at political critique is overwhelmed by the material spectacle and the witty, colloquial dialogue of the intertitles which together reduce the film to a form of bedroom farce. The significant commercial success of this sex comedy (at the very close of the silent era) can be put down to the irresistible invitation it offered to its American spectators. By now predominantly female, they were seemingly eager to participate – however vicariously – in the joys of a consumer age.

The final chapter, like many chapters in this volume, also draws attention to the difficulties that attend research on silent cinema (only a third of Korda's film remains for viewing). Antiquity films, many of which were first exhibited more than one hundred years ago, often survive only in part or in poor condition. They, and documents about them, sit in archives and libraries scattered all over the world. These difficulties have had inevitable consequences in the preparation of this volume. Since high-quality stills are frequently inaccessible or non-existent, many of the illustrations here included are, by default, screen captures. Such images, unfortunately, cannot do full justice to the aesthetic richness of the cinematic ancient

worlds as they were originally witnessed. Across this volume, readers will also spot discrepancies in, for example, the titles of films or the dates of their production. This is because the same film might be released under different titles at different times in different countries, but also because current cataloguing of silent films does not permit complete accuracy. Until a comprehensive, detailed database can be collated from all the archives in which silent cinema's antiquity films now reside, it is not possible to provide a reliable filmography. The *Antiquity in Silent Cinema* research project holds this as one of its next goals. Finally, we should clarify that, throughout the volume, films have been identified primarily by their directors for the sake of consistency. In the silent era, however, films were often understood as the product of the studios which made them and the stars that appeared in them, rather than the directors whose personal vision they might have been.