

## Establishing the Conventions: *Cleopatra* (1934)

### Introduction

Every cinematic version of antiquity owes something to the films that came before it. In this book, case studies are arranged chronologically to reflect that cultural genealogy. Our approach is to consider the choices that are made when films tell their stories about the ancient world within the social, historical, and cultural contexts of their production. One of the most important contexts will be the evolving discourse of representation created by the films themselves and their audiences. This chapter will focus on the early stages of this process: the introduction of cinematic conventions that make viewers feel that what they see on screen is a 'true' animation of antiquity – the ancient world brought to life.

The process to be described is a highly interactive one, as all evolutionary processes are. A number of factors are working together here, most notably cinema production processes and the preferences and social circumstances of cinema audiences. As commercially-orientated cultural products, the ways in which films depict and interpret narratives and characters are driven by the perceived tastes of their viewers at the time of release: what has proved popular in the past, what novelty can be introduced, and what audiences will not tolerate. This is not a new idea. It is now a commonplace to note that every kind of cultural text is in some way influenced by and reiterates earlier texts. However, the commercial nature of cinema tends to press down the accelerator pedal on this process. Films are expensive to make, and must recoup their costs. As a consequence, they tend towards conservatism in their representations, always seeking to re-use signs and imagery that audiences have responded favourably to. These features need to be highly familiar for the viewer, swiftly recognisable wherever possible. As a result, conventions can become established very quickly, through only a small number of texts. However, films also need to include something new, to pique the viewer's interest and distinguish them from their predecessors and competitors. This balance between conservatism and novelty drives the evolution of representational conventions in cinema.

To understand how these conventions might operate on the viewer's perceptions of the ancient world means considering the viewpoint of the contemporary audience at the time of a film's release. Of course, this

experience cannot be completely recovered: for instance, we can never hope for more than a degree of empathy with an audience that has recently lived through the catastrophic overturning of certainties that follow world-wide war. However, we can be conscious of the need to avoid anachronistic thinking, and take a broad and inclusive approach to the study of context. With these thoughts in mind, this section will illustrate some of the significant factors that shaped early cine-antiquity, before focusing in more detail on how these operated in one early sound example: Cecil B. DeMille's *Cleopatra* (1934).

Ancient Greece and Rome had been popular topics for cinema audiences, literally since the earliest days of movie-making. In early silent films, historical antiquity was useful to filmmakers because its characters and narratives were familiar to a broadly-constituted and popular (that is, non-elite) audience. With no synchronised sound, films could only tell their stories through images, with the occasional explanatory intertitle, and sometimes with interpretative background music provided by an in-house musician or on phonograph. The short lengths of film used for the earliest movies meant that the films themselves were also very brief, lasting from seconds to a few minutes. Audience expectations were cued by their identification with stories and figures from commonly-known narratives such as those of ancient mythology. Prior knowledge of characters and narratives meant a prompt engagement with the on-screen action.

The utility of the ancient world in engaging audiences can be seen in the example of *Cupid and Psyche*, a very short (28 seconds) film produced in 1897 by the Edison Manufacturing Company. The film itself showed little direct evidence of classical inspiration; it was without narrative and consisted of a single sequence filmed with a fixed camera of a young woman and child dancing on a stage at the Sutro Baths in San Francisco. However, through its title, the film elevates itself by playing upon mythic associations. The story of Cupid and Psyche is one of the world's great love stories. It has been a popular subject for artists, including paintings by Van Dyck (c. 1639-40), Gerard (1798), David (1817) and Burne-Jones (1865) and a sculpture by Antonio Canova (1796). In this visual tradition, the pair connoted both innocence and eroticism, with Cupid always depicted as a slim, hairless youth and Psyche always (partly if not fully) nude. These characteristics are well illustrated for example, in Canova's famous sculpture of the pair (1783-93), where Cupid cups Psyche's breast while she offers up her face for a kiss. The statue is simultaneously erotic and dignified; Canova's classicism and the sculpture's status as 'a work of art' validating its nudity and passion.

Such rich associations were useful to cinema. Very early cinema did not enjoy the status of 'art'. At this stage, it was still regarded as a novel demonstration of what modern invention could produce: a mechanical means of reproduction rather than a creative medium. Its appeal lay in the 'shock of the new'. However, film could play upon the cultural prestige

accorded to the classical world. In the case of the Edison film, the mythological allusion is used to legitimise the display of a young woman, costumed in a short (to the knee) dress which she raises to show her petticoats as she dances; the child wears a frilled leotard with small wings attached. They are watched by an audience of male bathers, in various stages of dress or undress. The classical title diffuses any potential problems about this image. It also tells us that we are watching something special. Unlike other famous early titles (like the 1895 Lumière brothers' *Workers Leaving the Lumiere Factory in Lyon*) the film captures an event, something out of the ordinary, something not usually witnessed in everyday life. Thus even in this early and opaque allusion, ways that antiquity could be utilised by cinema begin to emerge: antiquity works as a signifier of exoticism, it legitimates display, it forms bonds of shared knowledge, and it adds cultural lustre.

Antiquity's historical distance and cultural otherness also made it an ideal location for spectacle and fantasy. In France, the showman Georges Méliès used stop-motion effects to turn the features of ancient myth into instruments for supernatural fantasies. In *Pygmalion and Galatea* (1898), stop-motion cinematography not only brings Pygmalion's statue to life, but thwarts the sculptor's attempts to embrace his creation by breaking it in two, with the top half floating across the room to mock its maker. In *The Oracle of Delphi* (1903), a thief enters the tomb of Delphi, intent on stealing a box of jewels. The ghost of the oracle appears and punishes the thief by giving him the head of a donkey: a mythological allusion to the story of king Midas who had his ears turned into the ears of a donkey by Apollo (the principal god of Delphi) for refusing to award him first prize in a musical contest. In these films, the ancient world provides a credible location for incredible events, being both historically and exotically far-removed. This use of antiquity as a site for spectacle in cinema continued traditions found in other popular spectacular forms of entertainment in the nineteenth century. For instance, the 'pyrodrama' was an outdoor entertainment, first staged in the UK, but later popular in the US. These acted out scenes from history or historical novels ending in destruction by fire, which would be represented by a spectacular firework display. Other examples included fairground displays by strongmen who drew on the Labours of Hercules for their acts; early physique displays by bodybuilders like Eugen Sandow (1867-1925), who borrowed poses from classical statues, and *tableaux vivants* in which subjects would pose, often nude or semi-nude, on stage or for photographs, in poses intended to copy paintings or sculptures or to illustrate vaguely classical scenes.

While such popular classicising entertainments were a widespread phenomenon, one country in particular was making great advances in the creation of cinematic entertainments based on the classical world. That nation was Italy, which from the beginning of its film industry had an intense focus on the production of historical films, drawing on local audi-

ence interests by featuring characters and narratives from ancient Rome. The success of the historical epic made Italy an international player in the developing film industry, reaching its apogee in the acclaimed *Cabiria* (1914), which is described in more detail at the end of this chapter. The film included many of the conventions and cues that would mark out the territory of cinematic antiquity, especially in epic films: excess and spectacle; the opposition of Westernism and orientalism; and the equation of strength and simplicity with morality. Features that started in Italy quickly spread to the rest of the world.

The Italian preference for (and success with) historical, rather than mythological, films draws attention to two shaping factors in the emerging discourse of cine-antiquity; namely the rise of nationalism and the impact of developments in technology. These are factors that we will see time and again influencing film development. As film historians have shown, the popularity of historical narratives with filmmakers and the public was influenced by Italy's own recent history. Following the unification of Italy in 1861 and the colonial war with Turkey in 1911-12, we see a new drive for national identity. Films that depicted the glory and power of imperial Rome helped to satisfy this new appetite. At the same time, such a desire could not have been satisfied had there not been corresponding developments in technology. Developments in film technology made the more complex narratives of historical films possible by enabling the production of longer films. For instance, one of the most successful early Italian historical films, *The Last Days of Pompeii* (original title: *Gli ultimi giorni di Pompei*, 1908) had only 366 metres of film (about 14 minutes of running time) in which to convey its narrative of desire, evil deeds, self-sacrifice, the arena, and an erupting volcano. Two years later *The Fall of Troy* (original title: *La caduta di Troia*, 1910) had more than twice the running time, and two years after that, *Quo Vadis?* (1912) had 2250 metres of film and 120 minutes of running time to tell its story.

A third factor was also responsible for the success of these historical films: their ability to piggy-back on the popularity of a pre-existing genre, namely the historical novel. Both *Quo Vadis?* and *The Last Days of Pompeii* were adapted from immensely popular historical novels. In *Quo Vadis* (discussed in Chapter 2) the personal desires and conflicts of two individuals, Marcus and Lygia, are set against the desires and conflicts of Nero's Rome and early Christianity. *The Last Days of Pompeii* also presented a narrative in which the pure desires of individuals (Glaucus for Ione, the blind slave-girl Nydia for Glaucus) are set against a background of decadence and destruction. In these narratives, the purity of individuals is presented as a microcosm of the purity of the Christian religion which is coming to overturn the decadence of Rome. As the historical film developed in the post-war era, this synecdochic mode, in which a small part stands for the whole, became the most common way to present ancient and modern history on screen: mapping the grand narratives of

history onto intimate stories about individuals with which viewers might empathise.

The preference for fiction over historical writing as source-material indicates the limits of most films' historical ambitions. However, that did not mean that cinema was above using the high cultural status of ancient history to its advantage. The stories might have been fictional, but they always included some historical characters and authentic narratives in their settings, and a degree of research was undertaken to inform decisions about their depictions. Even the early historical films were prepared to boast of their pedagogic credentials, producing press releases that framed the films as educational, and sometimes suggesting activities for schoolchildren like essay competitions. Paramount, for example, produced a Study Guide to accompany *Cleopatra* (1934), including an essay competition with the prize of 'Cleopatra scholarships'. Publicists also emphasised, alongside the on-screen spectacles, the spectacle of the film's own production: the time taken in filming, vast numbers of extras, and authentic locations. From the earliest moment of the cinematic depictions of antiquity we witness the claims that these films were both 'outrageous spectacles in their own right' and 'true to life'. There is obviously a tension between these two claims, but that did not stop them being repeated endlessly over the next century in publicity for films about the ancient world.

By the mid-1920s, many of the conventions that would continue to characterise cine-antiquity throughout the twentieth century had already been established. Cinema faced only one more major challenge for the depiction of antiquity. This came with the advent of sound. How did characters speak in antiquity? What would the ancient world sound like? Sound technology developed swiftly following enthusiastic audience responses to *The Jazz Singer* in 1927, and by 1929 sound pictures were the norm. The transition has been described as 'from the movies to the talkies'. Certainly the need for scripted dialogue meant that new choices had to be made that had not been required for the brief lines provided in intertitles. For instance, what would the register of 'ancient' dialogue be? The high cultural status of classical literature indicated a high theatrical style, and so cinema turned to experienced stage actors to give the necessary gravitas to the characters, especially the historical figures (e.g. Charles Laughton as Nero and Ian Keith as Tigellinus in *Sign of the Cross* (1932), Warren William as Julius Caesar and Keith as Octavian in *Cleopatra*). These actors adopted a theatrical enunciation that more closely resembled an English accent (even if the actors themselves were American), and as the villains in these films tended to be the historical characters, a system of moral coding through accent began to develop. So in *Sign of the Cross*, the 'good, but unknown' Roman, Marcus (played by Frederic March), speaks with an American accent; the 'bad, but famous' Roman, Nero (Charles Laughton) is British. This practice of coding by accent persists even in recent films. For example, Celtic accents are used to indicate the Mace-



donians' outsider status in *Alexander* (2004). Sound in cinema also included music and sound effects. Jon Solomon (2001b) argues that musical scores for these early sound films set in the ancient world rarely aim to reference historical elements (as costumes and settings do), but rather seek to create a mood which will direct the viewer's interpretation of the onscreen action: romantic, orientalisng, exotic, grandiose, or religious.

However, the coming of sound also saw a change in cinematic fashions more generally, turning the tide of fashion against portrayals of the ancient world. The inclusion of dialogue enabled a more naturalistic style of acting, which in its turn promoted contemporary narratives. There is a noticeable decrease in the production of films set in Rome during the 1930s and 1940s when compared to the volume of production for the preceding decades. It was not until after the Second World War that the ancient world on film would regain its widespread popularity. Once again developments in film technology would be crucial, with films like *Quo Vadis* (released in 1951) using spectacular effects made possible by new technology to tell stories of early Christianity, framing them as an allegory for more recent conflicts. In the meantime though, a few films set in antiquity continued to appear, including a number directed by that master of the grandiose, Cecil B. DeMille (1881-1959).

### Background to case study

'How would you like to play the wickedest woman in history?' With this sensational question, the film director Cecil B. DeMille offered the part of Cleopatra to the actress Claudette Colbert. At least, that is the story which we as the audience have been encouraged to believe. Whether it is true or false is debatable: whether it is a good story, one that promotes interest in the film, is not. The very fact that it has become so widely known indicates the popularity of this vision of the Egyptian queen, and draws out the contradictory attractions of Cleopatra for filmmakers: simultaneously an historical figure and a fantasy figure; a focus both for escapism and for debate about the place of women in society.

Any account of Cleopatra's life must try to steer a course through a vast number of sources, ancient and modern, verbal and visual: and in doing so, must also attempt to untangle the desires and expectations that have been mapped onto her by successive authors. In order to understand DeMille's version, it will be helpful to start with some historical background.

Cleopatra VII Philopater was the last of the Pharaonic rulers of Egypt. She was of Macedonian Greek lineage, the descendent of Ptolemy I (one of Alexander the Great's generals, and himself a 'star' of later cine-antiquity in 2004 played by Anthony Hopkins as the narrator in Oliver Stone's *Alexander*). The early years of her reign were marked by internal politicking in favour of her brother, resulting in her absence from the court at

Alexandria for some time. Julius Caesar's arrival in Egypt gave her the opportunity to gain a useful ally in this local difficulty. She began an affair with Caesar and in 47 BC gave birth to a child named Ptolemy Caesar and nicknamed Caesarion to underline his mother's claims for his paternity, although Caesar never formally acknowledged him. After Caesar's death, Cleopatra avoided overt commitment to any side in the power struggles in Rome: a wise policy in her position as ruler of the wealthiest of the Eastern provinces. After 42 BC, power had settled jointly in the hands of Mark Antony (consul at the time of Caesar's death), Octavian (Caesar's adopted son, and the future emperor Augustus) and M. Aemilius Lepidus. Antony turned to Egypt in 41 BC, seeking funds for a military expedition against Parthia. He summoned Cleopatra to a meeting in Tarsus, and the two initiated a liaison. Antony returned to Rome, and married Octavia, the sister of Octavian (his third Roman wife), but in 36 BC, after his disastrous Parthian campaign, he retreated to Alexandria with Cleopatra. Of their three children, Alexander Helios and Cleopatra Selene had been born in 40 BC and Ptolemy Philadelphus in 36 BC. In 34 BC, in a ceremony that became known as the Donations of Alexandria, Antony 'gave' kingdoms to all three, in addition proclaiming Caesarion to be the legitimate heir of Julius Caesar. This was a direct threat to Octavian's claims to power in Rome, and in 31 BC the rivalry came to a climax, with the defeat of Antony and Cleopatra by Octavian's forces in a naval battle at Actium. Octavian reached Alexandria triumphant. Antony committed suicide. Cleopatra was taken prisoner, but also managed to commit suicide: the tradition being that she used the poison of an asp. Her children by Antony survived, but Caesarion paid the price for the claims for his paternity; Octavian had him put to death. Octavian himself went on to become Rome's first and most successful emperor under the name of Augustus.

Our sources for Cleopatra's life are always somewhat, and sometimes extremely, partial. Like other historical figures, she has been prey to the adage that 'history is written by the winners'. Most ancient sources follow Octavian's version of events, which painted Cleopatra as the undoubted villainess: both female and foreign, doubly 'Other'. In this version, she is a seductress who exercises an almost magical power over the infatuated Antony. The decadence which was rampant at her court turned him into an adulterer and a squanderer of wealth; addicted to luxury; a coward in battle; and lacking all civic responsibility. His defeat by Octavian and ultimately his death is no longer the result of a bitter power struggle; it is almost a kindness on Octavian's part to release him from the erotic bondage in which his Egyptian mistress has kept him. This spin on Cleopatra's history is very much the dominant one in our sources from the ancient world. Through the words of Plutarch, Suetonius, Dio Cassius and Appian, Octavian's preferred narrative glitters.

Lucy Hughes-Hallett (1990, 57) has pointed out that, ironically, Octavian's damning portrait of Cleopatra has probably kept her alive in

cultural history where other less vividly drawn figures have vanished. The glamour that has attached to her as famed seductress and champion of luxury has prompted a constant stream of cultural re-figurings in art, literature, and, more recently, in cinema. As an icon of the emasculating potential of women, Cleopatra is an object of desire, and of horror. Her early appearances in cinema utilise both of these traits. In 1899, for instance, Georges Méliès produced a brief *Cléopâtre* in which Cleopatra's mummy is exhumed and brought back to life: it has become known as one of the first horror films. Later, Theda Bara played the eponymous heroine in *Cleopatra* (1917) as a 'vamp': the contemporarily popular notion of a female who functions like a vampire, in the sense that she uses her sexual allure to drain men of potency. The film is now lost, but Bara can still be seen playing a similar role in modern dress in the 1915 film, *A Fool There Was*. In stills for the 1917 *Cleopatra*, Bara wears heavy eye-make-up and risqué costumes, coupling strategically placed jewellery with transparent gauze. She is associated with exotic animals, perched on leopardskins, wearing a skirt of peacock feathers and snake jewellery: in perhaps the most notorious image, she wears both a snake headdress and breast cups formed from coiled snakes which barely cover her nipples. This film covers Cleopatra's relationships with both Caesar and Antony. Other film versions followed Shakespeare's lead in concentrating on her relationship with the latter. These included a slightly earlier film, *Cleopatra* (1912), produced by and starring the actor-manager Helen Gardner, which also drew Cleopatra as a vamp. Gardner's film was a six-reeler, playing at the unusual (for the time) length of about an hour at its original release. Especially interesting in the context of this book is the fact that it was promoted as an artistic piece, playing in theatres and opera houses rather than the more usual neighbourhood nickelodeons; an early example in US cinema of antiquity being used for cultural validation.

So the 'wicked' attributes an audience would expect to see in a cinematic Cleopatra were well established by the time DeMille offered the part to Colbert. However, there were starting to be limits to Cleopatra's wickedness. The shift which took film screenings in the US from the popular nickelodeon to the more respectable movie theatre also saw a shift in concerns about the kind of content that could be screened. *Cleopatra* was produced in a time when the film industry was under particularly heavy scrutiny. Stories about wild drug parties and sexual licentiousness among those involved in filmmaking prompted public outrage and created a popular notion of the film industry (and by extension, films) as decadent and a potentially corrupting influence. In an attempt to allay public concerns, the Motion Picture Producers and Distributors Association was established in 1922, led by a lawyer named Will Hays. The Association's explicit aim was to rehabilitate the public reputation of the movie industry by self-regulation: more pragmatically they also hoped to pre-empt censorship by local boards, which could result in expensive revisions to film

prints. To this end, Hays produced a list of recommendations as to what should and should not be shown on screen. In 1930, Hays' guidelines were replaced by a more stringent set of restrictions that became known as the Production Code. They were governed by three principles that emphasised adherence to morality and the rule of law. More specific restrictions included the upholding of the 'sanctity of marriage and the home', and made it compulsory to only present adultery and illicit sex as activities that never lead to happy endings. By 1934 the Code was being rigorously enforced, and Hollywood cinema was no longer a place of infinite possibility. However between 1930 and 1934, studios were often successful in finding ways to circumvent these restrictions while acknowledging their existence, making films like Mae West's *She Done Him Wrong* and *I'm No Angel* (both 1933), both films that included racy storylines and risqué dialogue. Films made in this period which demonstrate the strategies used to avoid censorship have become known as 'Pre-Code' productions. They include DeMille's *Sign of the Cross* and *Cleopatra*, both of which used the high cultural status and exotic otherness of the ancient world to enable the screening of sequences that were far from the spirit of the Code – but close to the audience's viewing desires.

The influence of the Code on DeMille's *Cleopatra* will become clear in the analyses to follow. Certainly, this film wasn't DeMille's first foray into the delights of spectacle and on-screen immorality. DeMille started his career as an actor/director on the stage, but shifted his interest to cinema in 1913. He made a name with films that examined gender roles and marital relations, like *The Cheat* (1915), *Male and Female* (1919), *Don't Change Your Husband* (1919), and *Adam's Rib* (1923). However, his talent for putting spectacle on-screen became apparent with his biblical epics *The Ten Commandments* (1923) and *King of Kings* (1927). In 1932, DeMille advanced this use of religious topics for spectacular film with a highly successful version of Wilson Barrett's play, *The Sign of the Cross*. Set in the reign of Nero, the story focuses on a romance between a young Christian girl, Mercia (Elissa Landy) and a Roman patrician, Marcus Superbus (Frederic March). Marcus is also the object of the empress Poppaea's affections (played by Colbert), and is at first spurned by Mercia for his decadent lifestyle. The film included items that were certainly not encouraged by the Production Code, including a highly erotic lesbian dance sequence (later cut for a 1935 re-release); an extended arena sequence showing combats between women gladiators and dwarves, and lions eating Christians; and a plot that is firmly centred around the immorality and decadence of the imperial court. It redeems itself by ending with Marcus' conversion to Christianity, and marriage to Mercia, though this results in their sentence to death in the arena. A few years later, after failing at the box-office with *Four Frightened People* (1934), DeMille was casting around for his next project. Charles Higham's 1973 biography of DeMille quotes Paramount Pictures boss, Adolph Zukor's



opinion; 'Better do another historical epic, Cecil, with plenty of sex.' The earlier success of Theda Bara's *Cleopatra* made the Egyptian queen a potentially profitable subject for such a film. DeMille took the hint and shooting on his *Cleopatra* commenced in 1934.

Apart from the aptitude of Cleopatra's story for validating erotic narrative on-screen, the oriental setting of the court at Alexandria also made it a good choice for the popular audience of the time. Early cinematic iconography, especially for historical films, was largely derived from nineteenth-century history painting. The influence of painters like Jean-Léon Gérôme, for instance, can be seen in a publicity still for the 1917 *Cleopatra* in which Theda Bara copies the exact pose of Gérôme's queen in his 1866 painting, *Cleopatra Before Caesar*. In this genre, the oriental (understood as any culture that originated in the East) was identified with the exotic. The perceived 'otherness' of oriental cultures prompted their use in art to present scenes of eroticism, luxury and sometimes cruelty – a world totally apart from the (allegedly) moral, restrained, ascetic West.

Cinema adapted this flawed but familiar iconographic schema for its own purposes. The discovery of Tutankhamun's tomb in 1922 by Howard Carter had additionally inspired great popular interest in everything Egyptian. This coincided with the growth of the Art Deco movement, which took many of its decorative motifs from Egyptian art. The two came together in the architecture of the dedicated 'movie palaces' that began to appear with the introduction of multi-reel 'feature' films like Helen Gardner's *Cleopatra*, and proliferated in the 1920s and 1930s as cinema audiences increased during the Great Depression. Audiences were perceived to be seeking a cheap escape from the drabness of everyday life; the movie palaces provided them with exotic glamour, both on and off the screen. Cinemas from Grauman's Egyptian Theatre in Los Angeles (opened in 1922) to the Plaza in Stockport, Cheshire (opened in 1932) were elaborately decorated, inside and out, with strikingly painted oriental motifs in bright green, red, blue and gold. Carved friezes of feathered canopies continued the theme, while frontages enticed audiences with their soaring sunray entrances to pleasure. With their luxurious seating and curtains, the movie palaces offered a luxurious environment in which to escape from the worries of everyday life: and, more specifically, they associated that Art Deco luxury with a popular understanding of ancient Egypt. DeMille would continue this trend on-screen. His *Cleopatra* combined ancient Egypt, Rome and modern Art Deco to create a luxury that Depression filmgoers could both identify with, and escape into. [Fig. 4]

Maria Wyke (1997a: 95) describes how the film's narrative is framed with a visual trope that literally invites the viewer to escape into antiquity. In the opening scene of the film, two enormous stones fill the screen, parting to reveal to the audience the world of cine-antiquity behind them – a backlit and nearly naked slave girl, chained and holding aloft two incense burners. The clear inference is that this ancient world will be



4. Luxury, exoticism, spectacle. Cleopatra in Rome, *Cleopatra* (1934).

characterised by the erotic, the exotic, and the sadistic: a view hardly dispelled by the swiftly following first view of the young queen, also bound and gagged, or our first view of Caesar, dispassionately testing deadly new weapons of war. The same stones close again at the end of the film, obscuring our last view of Cleopatra, magnificently costumed and dead on her throne, fixing our idea of her as the image of glamour in death. The stones opening and closing restate the actions of the theatrical curtain used in cinemas of the time, opening and closing on the screen as the feature starts and finishes. As viewers, we are to be permitted access only to eavesdrop on a hidden world, while we sit in the dark, in silent isolation from our neighbouring audience members. The conceit showcases DeMille's own sophisticated understanding of how films operated as viewed texts.

The cinematic ancient world that the cinemagoers entered in *Cleopatra* was, in many ways, surprisingly like their own. Dialogue generally avoided the anachronistic use of an elevated register derived more from the classical stage than the classical world. Make-up and costume (designed by Travis Banton) also combined aspects of ancient dress with more

modern styles and silhouettes. Bias-cut dresses repeated the styles seen on contemporary fashion plates and in department stores. The overall impression was of a highly wearable antiquity – especially attractive to the female audience. By encouraging identification with Cleopatra's flawed femininity the film thus sold a vision of womanhood – and of the goods that could be associated with it.

Certainly, in centring on issues of femininity, the film involved itself in a live contemporary topic. Anxieties about gender roles were fuelled at the end of the nineteenth and start of the twentieth century by what seemed to be a rapid acceleration of changes in the roles women played, both within the family and domestic sphere and, with increasing numbers of women in paid employment, outside it. A further consequence of these changes was that women earning salaries of their own were now able to play a significant role in the retail economy as consumers of material goods in their own right. Merchandising began to be aimed more specifically at women and their particular concerns and desires. The fantasy identities of film characters and the star personae of cinema actresses played a significant part in this process. Marketing encouraged consumers to identify with actresses, on- and off-screen. This process was assisted in the case of *Cleopatra* by the fact that Egyptian decorative motifs were already considered the height of fashion. Among the products sold under the Cleopatra banner were dresses and hats, soap and hair treatments, jewellery and compacts – even cigarettes. The story of *Cleopatra* was being played out not just on the screen, but in billboards, newspaper advertisements, department stores, the home, and the wardrobe.

However, the film's usage of the notion of the 'New Woman' was two-handed. While its luxurious imagery enticed women to spend their money on goods that would make them more like the glamorous queen, the film's narrative simultaneously warned male viewers of the dangers of allowing women their independence. Despite the light touch of Colbert's accomplished comedy acting, Cleopatra remains the woman who used her sexuality to gain power, ruining two Roman generals in the process – and who still preferred suicide to seeing that power relinquished.

### Plot summary

The film opens with Cleopatra (Claudette Colbert) and her tutor Apollodorus being dumped in the desert by Pothinus (Leonard Mudie), the country's scheming prime minister. Pothinus plans to barter Egypt's wealth for the support of Rome to keep him in power. The young queen is more concerned about missing her breakfast than the political consequences of the deed, but is persuaded by Apollodorus that for the good of Egypt she must return. In the meantime Julius Caesar (Warren William) has arrived at Alexandria. In order to get access to him and gain his support for her as queen, Cleopatra has herself delivered to him rolled up

in a carpet. Caesar is at first exasperated, but then charmed by the young queen. After she discovers and kills Pothinus, who has been lying in wait in her chamber, Caesar begins to see that she might be more than just a foolish girl, and they begin an affair. Meanwhile, the affair becomes the topic for gossip among Roman society, who pity Caesar's wife Calpurnia (Gertrude Michael).

Caesar brings Cleopatra to Rome, but is assassinated as he arrives at the Senate. Cleopatra flees back to Egypt, and Rome is placed in the joint charge of Caesar's nephew Octavian (Ian Keith), and the soldier Mark Antony (Henry Wilcoxon). Antony travels to Tarsus and demands that Cleopatra meet him, but she fails to appear. He finds her on her elaborately decorated barge, hosting an extravagant feast in his honour with dancers, acrobats, and wild animals. He reluctantly joins her, and Cleopatra uses her charms to seduce Antony as she seduced Caesar. This time however, she tells Apollodorus that she will not make the mistake of falling in love as she did with Caesar, but will use Antony as a man would use a woman.

Antony settles in Alexandria, but Cleopatra's machinations continue. She is visited by king Herod (Joseph Schildkraut) who tells her that Octavian has declared Antony a traitor, and that her relations with Rome will improve if she kills him. Cleopatra determines to do the deed, and begins to test poisons on prisoners. She is about to administer the poison to Antony in a glass of wine when news arrives that Octavian has declared war on Egypt. Instantly regaining his fighting spirit, Antony leaps into action, and Cleopatra passionately declares her love for him as a woman, not a queen.

Antony's troops refuse to join battle against Rome, but he raises an Egyptian army who prove no match for the Roman soldiers and are defeated at Actium. Cleopatra goes to Octavian and offers him Egypt in return for Antony's life, but in vain. Antony returns to Alexandria and sees Cleopatra leaving the city. Believing her to have transferred her loyalties to Octavian, he stabs himself, but survives long enough to learn his mistake from his lover. Cleopatra now knows that Octavian's entry into Alexandria is inevitable. She settles herself on her throne, in all her royal finery, and is discovered there by the Roman troops, dead by the bite of an asp.

### Key scenes and themes

#### *The ancient world as the modern world*

DeMille's *Cleopatra* was much criticised on its release for its anachronisms: in the colloquial language used in the dialogue and in the attitudes of its protagonists. One sequence that received special attention from the critics was the party hosted by Calpurnia in Rome. The reviewer in *Variety*

describes it as 'like a modern bridge night', while the *New York Times* notes that it is 'done in the modern fashion'. DeMille's previous history as a director of marital comedies might suggest that this sequence defines his approach to historical film as, in Maria Wyke's phrase, 'a comedy of modern manners in fancy dress' (1997a: 91). In fact, the sequence performs a significant structural role in the narrative, and makes revealing comments on celebrity in contemporary society. By explicitly drawing out the similarities between Roman society and contemporary America, DeMille presents the viewer with a sequence which has something interesting to say rather than an accomplished, but ultimately meaningless, historical reconstruction.

#### **Calpurnia's party**

The scene opens on an elegant villa in Rome. A sophisticated group of Roman socialites are sitting around a table playing board games, sketching, and having a gossipy exchange about Caesar's absence in Egypt. They stop their gossip hurriedly as Calpurnia nears, and congratulate her on the success of the party. Calpurnia circulates among her guests, and similar sentiments are heard from other partygoers. As the camera pans across the room, Calpurnia is obscured behind a pillar and a more serious conversation is revealed in the foreground between three conspirators – Brutus, Cassius, and Casca. They fear that Caesar is to marry the Egyptian queen Cleopatra and adopt the title of king. Meanwhile Calpurnia speaks with Octavia (Antony's wife) and her brooding brother Octavian (Caesar's nephew), who asks why Caesar writes to Mark Antony and not him. A fanfare and great excitement heralds the arrival of Antony himself. He is surrounded by partygoers, but silences them to announce that Caesar is entering Rome. He asks Calpurnia to accompany Caesar but she refuses, saying she will wait for him at home. Antony and Octavian argue and are separated by Octavia before Calpurnia tells Antony, 'I know.'

This sequence is the audience's first introduction to DeMille's Rome, which he characterises by its differences with the Egyptian court and its similarities to contemporary America. Partygoers are gathered around a pool around which peacocks strut, their arrogance matching that of the humans watching them. The opulence on display here is more sophisticated and familiar to the filmgoer than the highly decorated and exotic patterns of the Egyptian court, with natural objects including flowers and plants, and white marble statuary all featuring. The exoticism that attaches to Cleopatra is given voice when an ingénue asks, 'Is she black?' to the great amusement of the others. Music follows a similar schema: the same theme as that heard in the Egyptian scenes, but played on a stringed instrument, producing a more gentle and refined sound. Less gentle and refined though are the partygoers themselves, who flirt and gossip about Caesar's betrayal of Calpurnia. In particular, we are shown that not all Roman wives are as faithful as Calpurnia. After a matron at the party

#### 1. Establishing the Conventions: *Cleopatra* (1934)

notes that 'the wife is always the last one to know', a younger woman adds wittily, 'so is the husband, when it comes to that'.

Also introduced here are a number of key figures to the film's reading of *Cleopatra*, though she will only meet two of them. Brutus, Cassius and Casca are all characters that will be familiar to the audience from Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar*. Their function here is to explain the political problem Caesar poses in terms that the audience will understand. By pointing to Caesar's alleged plan to announce himself king, the film draws on America's notion of itself as a true democracy. In the 'Land of the Free', who will not empathise with Cassius' impassioned plea to his fellow conspirators: 'Was I not born as free as Caesar? And you?'

Calpurnia and Octavia offer two models for faithful wives; visually (both are blonde) and in their behaviour they present a contrast with the Egyptian queen. They will be discussed in more detail below. The final key figures, Antony and Octavian, also present a contrasting pair. Octavian is sullen, unsympathetic, and misogynistic – and, in his misogyny, delineated as the true villain of this female-focused narrative. Mark Antony is dashing, heroic, and impulsive. More interestingly though, he is presented as a modern celebrity, mobbed by partygoers, especially young women. His arrival at the party is framed as a mock triumph (echoing Caesar's own arrival in Rome in the next sequence). He is spectacularly dressed in crested helmet and gilded breastplate, heralded by fanfares and triumphal music and, in place of the reins of a triumphal chariot, he holds two giant mastiff dogs on a leash. In allegorical terms, if Rome is Hollywood, then Antony is precisely the kind of impulsive, sensation-seeking, magnificent movie star that the public loves, but the Decency League hates. As so often in this film and others, DeMille plays both sides: at the same time giving the public what they want, and critiquing it to placate cinema's morality guardians.

#### *Seduced by spectacle*

Cinema's popularity during the Depression Era of the 1930s has usually been explained by the desire for escapism. While this is clearly not the whole story (there were many successful films which showed a tougher social realism) it is certainly true that a large number of films from this period focus on luxury, fantasy, and spectacle. As a setting for film, the ancient world offered an apt canvas for such extravagant display. Its historical and cultural distance engendered an air of legend that legitimised the inclusion of fantastic opulence to entertain the Depression audience.

It is impossible to read the scene on *Cleopatra's* barge [see box: 'Cleopatra's barge'] as anything but a wholesale depiction of multiple seduction. Most obviously, Antony is seduced into an affair with Cleopatra. The sequence is littered with symbols of eroticism and troubling sexuality: the



**Cleopatra's barge**

Antony boards Cleopatra's barge with the intention of taking her back to the public square for their arranged meeting. Tying up his mastiff dogs at the entrance, he advances suspiciously into a palatial setting. Lyre music plays, and slave girls lay feather fans under his feet as he walks towards Cleopatra, who reclines in an undulating bower of more feathers, fanned by two male slaves, and covered in pearls. It is revealed that the men sent to fetch Cleopatra have already succumbed to this luxury, being 'awfully drunk'. Antony is resistant, and Cleopatra acknowledges her plan of seduction, announcing that she is 'dressed to lure you', and that she hoped he would be 'dazzled'. This gambit succeeds: Antony relaxes and is drawn in to the luxury that surrounds him with exotic foods, large goblets of wine, and spectacular entertainments. These include dancing girls, dressed in diaphanous gowns, who perform a sinuous dance around a garlanded bull. 'Clams from the sea' are dragged up in a net by black slaves: this opens to reveal more barely-clothed girls, draped in seaweed, the clamshells they hold filled with jewels. Cleopatra carelessly casts these out amongst the dancers and slaves, and invites Antony to do the same. Another dance has girls dressed in leopardskins staging a catfight. Antony's mastiffs can stand no more; they slip their collars and run off into the night. A trainer cracks his whip, and the cat-girls jump through flaming hoops. As the night goes on, the frantic pace begins to calm and Cleopatra's maid Charmian sings a hymn to Isis. As Cleopatra and Antony kiss, slaves draw a curtain across them and petals fall. The hortator sounds a steady rhythm and the oarsmen begin to row: in, out; in, out.

pearls that cover Cleopatra; the clamshells offered by the 'mermaids'; the feathered tunnel in which the Egyptian queen is found; the flaming rings through which the cat-girls leap. The arousal of Antony begins with scantily-clad and gyrating dancing girls, and is consummated with the pounding beat of the hortator. The cinema audience is also the subject of a seduction with cinematographic techniques used to draw the audience into DeMille's vision of opulence. Shots are centred so that our viewpoint mimics Antony's: we are with him as he enters the fantastic luxury of Cleopatra's barge, filled with feathers and pearls, precious stones and gold. (There was an extra-cinematic story around the film's release that DeMille had insisted on real gold for the goblets – despite the film being in black and white.) Feather fans intermittently obscure both Antony's and our viewpoint, teasing us with the spectacle that will embrace us. This spectacle proves to be one of extreme and careless excess to the point of wastefulness: a mass of roasted tiny 'reedbirds from the Nile', each one a single bite; a huge joint of meat, bitten into then discarded in favour of another; giant goblets of wine, emptied and refilled. Above all, this excess is represented by the clamshells filled with jewels that the mermaids present. When Cleopatra persuades Antony to join her in casually strewing them amongst the slaves and performers, it is perhaps a more

1. *Establishing the Conventions: Cleopatra (1934)*

significant turning point than the sexual seduction that ends the sequence. Antony has relinquished the discipline of Rome: the Depression audience joins him, immersing itself in the luxury of waste.

*Games of gender*

As a role model for women, Cleopatra, as an adultress, possible murderer and eventual suicide victim, remains a dubious choice, even for a contemporary audience. However, at the time of the film's release, she was used to sell all sorts of consumer goods, the advertisement of which invited their purchasers to identify with the Egyptian queen. DeMille achieves this by putting Cleopatra's dangerous aspects to the service of a glamorous reputation, while simultaneously domesticating her character development. Thus Cleopatra can provide the female audience of the 1930s with an alternative model to the 'New Woman' to aspire to – in both their real lives and their fantasies.

The film traces the development of Cleopatra as a woman, in two ways: literally, as she grows from a girl to a mature woman; and narratively as she changes in the audience's estimation from 'the wickedest woman in history' to a model who will stand by her man even unto death. Cleopatra starts the film as a frivolous young girl, who heedlessly uses her sexual allure on Caesar to her own advantage without thought of the political consequences for him, or sisterly regard to the suffering of his saintly wife Calpurnia. After Caesar's death, she is more serious – but her new worldliness leads her cynically into a similar situation with Antony. When it becomes politically necessary, she actively investigates ways to rid herself of him, showing a distinct lack of proper feminine sentiment for her man. It is only when he is provoked back into action that she reverts to what is deemed to be the 'natural' (that is, subservient) role for a woman, as shown in the scene described [see box: 'Antony becomes a man'].

This domestication of Cleopatra is doubly important because throughout the film we have seen what a disastrous effect she has on men. Octavian is particularly misogynistic, but there is some truth when he describes her as 'this poisonous snake that saps our men'. In fact, we have seen what a bad influence she can be on upright Roman males early on when Caesar is late after his first night with Cleopatra ('the first morning he's been late since the day he was born'). Cleopatra saps men of their self-discipline, and more – think of Antony's mastiffs, the embodiment of his masculinity, running away from the overt femininity of the barge. The film's dialogue also notes the loss of Antony's masculinity, with Cleopatra condescendingly urging him to 'Be a good boy'. This is in particular contrast to Antony's earlier description of women: 'They can't think – they can't fight – they're playthings for us.' The words come back to haunt him at his suicide, when he makes judgement upon himself before driving the sword in: 'Antony – the plaything of a woman!'

**Antony becomes a man**

Tipped off by King Herod that the powerful factions in Rome would look more kindly on her if Antony were eliminated, Cleopatra determines to poison him. However, Herod also tips off Antony. As they sit down to dine, Cleopatra pours wine but Antony refuses to drink. To allay his suspicions, she drains a cup of the same, but then drops poisoned petals into his cup. As he is about to drink, a messenger arrives declaring, 'Rome have declared war! Mark Antony is a traitor.' Antony leaps into action, shouting orders, striking out physically, and dismissing Cleopatra contemptuously. Cleopatra is transfixed: she falls to her knees, declaring 'I've seen a god come to life! I'm no longer a queen – I'm a woman.' [Fig. 5]



5. The 'New Woman' surrenders.  
Cleopatra and Antony, *Cleopatra* (1934).

1. *Establishing the Conventions: Cleopatra* (1934)

If Cleopatra is dangerous to men, her relationship with other women is more complicated. As discussed previously, the film's moral stance with regard to Cleopatra as a woman is established at Calpurnia's party, where both Calpurnia and Octavia (representatives of Rome and the Western tradition) are implicitly compared with the Egyptian queen. If the film is to conform to the Production Code, viewers should be encouraged to take the side of these wronged (or about to be wronged) wives and against the adulterous Cleopatra. It is hard to see why we should root for the rather silly Octavia, but Calpurnia is a different matter. A model hostess, her admission at the end of the sequence that she knows about Caesar's adultery forces us to reassess thoughts that she is simply naïve and downtrodden. Her sad pragmatism regarding her husband's betrayal and selfless plea to him not to go to the Senate on the fateful day – 'not for me – but for you!' – should also turn the viewer against Cleopatra. However, at the moment when the film threatens to fall into a simple moral dichotomy of the virtuous Calpurnia and the wicked Cleopatra, DeMille inserts a complication. We soon discover that Cleopatra is herself the naïve one: truly in love with Caesar and failing to understand that his reasons for marriage are more political than romantic. When Apollodorus tells her that Caesar 'didn't love you', Cleopatra, as much as Calpurnia, is drawn as victim of romantic love. Cleopatra is not only 'the other woman', she is also 'everywoman', ultimately dependent on the love of a man.

Cleopatra, then, is quite a woman, but it is worth noting that there is one aspect of womanhood that is denied to DeMille's Cleopatra: 'the maternal'. The casting of Colbert meant a Cleopatra who was almost boyish in her figure, as was appropriate for the fashions of the day. She's fashionable, but not fertile. Unlike Elizabeth Taylor's Cleopatra almost thirty years later, the fecund roundness of a figure that had borne four children was not part of this version of the story, and nor were the children themselves. Cleopatra's reproductive powers are limited – to cultural reproductions of herself.

**Suggested further viewing**

*Cabiria* (dir. Pastrone, 1914)

This silent film, set in Carthage during the Second Punic War between Carthage and Rome, was innovative for its time, and included many of the features seen as characteristic in later films set in the ancient world. *Cabiria* is a young girl, sold into slavery in Carthage and subsequently presented as a sacrifice to the god Moloch, a fate from which she is rescued by a Roman nobleman, Fulvio Axilla and his slave Maciste. Maciste was played by a former dock worker (Bartolomeo Pagano) as a strongman figure, becoming the cinematic ancestor of the bodybuilder Hercules that defined the Italian peplum cinema of the 1950s and 60s. The depiction of the temple of Moloch, with its repugnant practice of child sacrifice, identi-

fied evil with the Oriental, a standard assumption for films to come. The film was one of the first to use tracking shots (known afterwards for some time as 'Cabiria shots'), in which the camera was moved on a 'dolly'. In contrast to the more usual static viewpoints, tracking shots produced more dynamism and a greater sense of audience involvement in the action. The film's scriptwriter, the poet and Italian nationalist Gabriele D'Annunzio, had great ambitions for *Cabiria* as a cultural product rather than mere entertainment. Released shortly after the Italo-Turkish war, it claimed ancient Rome as direct ancestor and legitimising authority for the current Italian political regime, presaging the use of Roman symbols by the Italian Fascists.

*Sign of the Cross* (dir. DeMille, 1932)

DeMille's first film set in ancient Rome was based on the stage play by Wilson Barrett, already well-known to popular audiences. It presented the conflict between Rome and early Christianity, personalised through the romance of the Christian girl Mercia (Elissa Landi), and the Roman prefect Marcus Superbus (Frederic March). Marcus is also desired by Poppaea (Claudette Colbert), wife of the Roman emperor Nero (Charles Laughton). His declared preference for Mercia makes her the target for Poppaea's vengeance. The film responded to the more loosely-enforced guidelines of the early Production Code with open eroticism and violence, authorised by the allegedly educative value of the ancient historical setting. This flouting of the guidelines included the lesbian 'Dance of the Naked Moon' and Poppaea's revealing asses' milk bath. There is also an extended arena sequence which establishes many of the staple features of such scenes in films to come, including multiple combats (one between Amazons and pygmies), Christians killed by wild animals (including crocodiles and lions), and implied death by bestiality. In 1944, the film was re-released for a Second World War audience with a number of cuts to remove any traces of pre-Code licentiousness, and a new prologue introduced by an army chaplain on a military flight over Rome.

*The Last Days of Pompeii* (dir. Schoedsack, 1935)

Edward Bulwer-Lytton's 1834 novel, *The Last Days of Pompeii* had been a great success with readers before being adapted for stage, opera and as a pyrodrama (spectacular stage show with added pyrotechnics). It was produced as a film by Italian filmmakers, twice in 1913 and again in 1926. However, the 1935 Hollywood film had little in common with the book other than the title. Rather it adapted the currently popular gangster film (e.g. *Little Caesar* (1931), *The Public Enemy* (1931)) to the ancient world. Marcus (Preston Foster) is a blacksmith who becomes a gladiator in an attempt to raise money to save his injured wife and son, but after their deaths continues in the cynical realisation that 'It's easy to get money – all you have to do is kill!' The film follows Marcus' various moneymaking

careers as gladiator, slave trader, and eventually arena owner in Pompeii, taking in a journey to Judea where his adopted son Flavius is healed by Christ. In the final scenes, a grown-up Flavius has himself been condemned to death in his father's arena, but the fighting is halted by Vesuvius erupting. Flavius is saved, and Marcus is finally redeemed by saving others, though he perishes himself. The special effects were accomplished by Willis O'Brien who had recently done the same for *King Kong* (1933) and later became Ray Harryhausen's mentor.



# Notes

## Introduction

- Fantasies about Rome: Orgies, see Blanshard (2010): 48-64; Roman salute, see Winkler (2009a).
- Classical art, the Renaissance, and the artistic tradition: Bober and Rubinstein (1986); Haskell and Penny (1981); Coltman (2009). History painting: Rosenblum (1967) contains an excellent introduction to neo-classical history painting.
- Julius Caesar as model commander: Wintjes (2006). For Caesar more generally, see Wyke (2006a).
- Pompeii and its impact: Hales and Paul (2011).
- Leighton and Alma-Tadema: Dunant (1994) and Becker et al. (1997): esp. essays by Prettejohn, Morris, and Whiteley.
- Impact of *Hercules Furens*: Riley (2008).
- Shakespeare and the Roman world: Martindale and Taylor (2004): esp. essays by Roe and Braden; Miles (1996); Chernaik (2011).
- Cambridge Greek Play: Easterling (1999). Rome in popular entertainments: Malamud (2001a).
- Gérôme in the cinema: Gotlieb (2010) cf. Beeny (2010).

## 1. Establishing the Conventions: *Cleopatra* (1934)

- Cleopatra in film: Wyke (1997a): 73-109; Cyrino (2005): 121-58; Hughes-Hallett (1990): 329-64; Hamer (1993): 117-32; Winkler (2009b): 264-81; Llewellyn-Jones (2002); Solomon (2001a): 62-78.
- Early film industry: Monaco (2009): 256-70. Cultural status of early cinema: Perkins (1972): 9-27.
- Ancient world in silent cinema: Solomon (2001a): 3-10.
- Pyrodramas: Mayer (1994): 90. Strongmen and *tableaux vivants*: Dutton (1995): 119-22.
- Early Italian historical epics: Bondanella (2009): 8-11; Brunetta (2009): 34-8. *Cabiria* (1941): Winkler (2009a): 94-121; Landy (2000): 33-9.
- Socio-historical influences on Italian cine-antiquity: Wyke (2006b): 171-9 (for a case study on Julius Caesar's role in this).
- Synecdoche and historiophoty: White (1988): 1193-99.
- Cine-antiquity as education: Wyke (1997a): 92, 94 (on the Paramount Study Guide for *Cleopatra*).
- Moral coding through accents: Wood (1975): 184; Joshel et al. (2001): 8-9. Cf. Levene (2007): 389-94.
- Music in cine-antiquity: Solomon (2001b): 319-37, esp. 324-6.
- Primary sources for Cleopatra: The most influential accounts are those found in Plutarch, *Life of Antony*. Cf. Plutarch, *Life of Caesar* 48-9 and Suetonius, *Life of Julius Caesar* 35, 52 and *Life of Augustus* 17 as well as the accounts of Dio Cassius and Appian.

## Notes

Cultural reception of Cleopatra: Hughes-Hallett (1990); Hamer (1993).  
The Production Code and Pre-Code Hollywood films: Leff and Simmons (2001); Doherty (1999); Higham (1973).  
Influence of nineteenth-century paintings: Dunant (1994): 82-93; Wyke (1997a): 120-3.  
Art Deco cinema architecture: Curl (1994): 212-20; Montserrat (2000): 89.  
Cinema viewing as voyeurism: (in *Cleopatra*) Wyke (1997a): 95; (more generally) Mulvey (1975) 6-18.  
The 'New Woman' and merchandising: Wyke (1997a): 90-9; Stacey (1994): 177-223; Hamer (1993): 121-3; Hartigan (2002) on the uses of antiquity in advertising more generally.  
Denying her a 'maternal' dimension: Hamer (1993): 120.

### 2. The Roman Epics of Classical Hollywood: *Quo Vadis* (1951)

*Quo Vadis* (1951): Wyke (1997a): 138-46; Cyrino (2005): 7-33; Scodel and Bettenworth (2009); Morey (2008): 43-52; Winkler (2001b): 55-62; Babington and Evans (2003): 177-205; Solomon (2001a): 217-21.  
Roman historical epic films: Wyke (1997a); Elley (1984): 76-135; Cyrino (2005); Solomon (2001a): 47-99; Fitzgerald (2001): 23-49; Babington and Evans (2003).  
Film as commercial enterprise: Maltby (2003): 113-87; Eldridge (2006): 37-42.  
Showcasing the power of the studio system: Wood (1975): 184; Sobchack (1990): 24-49.  
Epic as film genre: Maltby (2003): 74; Neale (2000): 85. Toga dramas: Mayer (1994).  
Ancient epic and epic films: Elley (1984): 13-24; Winkler (2007a): especially 43-57; Price (2008): 117-32.  
Predominance of Rome over Greece: Elley (1984): 52; Nisbet (2006): vii-x, 2-44.  
*Alexander* and *300*: Cartledge and Greenland (2010); Cyrino (2011).  
Political sub-texts in epic films: Wyke (1997a); Winkler (2001b): 50-76 and (2009a): 141-50.  
*Quo Vadis*? as metaphor for Polish oppression: Wyke (1997a): 117.  
*Quo Vadis* (1913) and (1924): Wyke (1997a): 118-30.  
Mixed critical reception for *Quo Vadis*: Morey (2008): 47.  
Primary sources for *Quo Vadis*: Sienkiewicz (1997, first published in book form, 1896); Tacitus, *Annals*; Suetonius, *Life of Nero*; Petronius, *Satyricon*.  
*Quo Vadis* in reception: Scodel and Bettenworth (2009); Wyke (1997a): 110-46.  
Religious films: Babington and Evans (1993): 177-205; Elley (1984): 115-35; Fitzgerald (2001): 25-6.  
Hollywood narrative: Bordwell et al. (1985): 1-84.  
Economic advantages of filming in Europe: Wyke (1997a): 145; Hall and Neale (2010): 137.  
Validating cine-antiquity through research: Eldridge (2006): 127-51; Wyke (1997a): 139.  
Merchandising and box-office: Hall and Neale (2010): 137-9; Wyke (1997a): 145-6.  
Rossen *Alexander* (1956): Shahabudin (2010).

### 3. Peplum Traditions: *Hercules* (1958)

*Hercules*: Solomon (2001a): 119-22; Elley (1984): 21-2; Blanshard (2005): 149-63; Spina (2008).  
Italian peplum films: Bondanella (2001): 158-60; Brunetta (1994); Dyer (1997):