Orators are indeed permitted to lie about historical matters so they can speak more nobly.

(Quidem concessum est rhetoribus ementiri in historiis, ut aliquid dicere possint argutius).

—CICERO

Mnemosyne

A SURVEY OF THE GENRE

Since the popularization of theatrical film in the first decade of the twentieth century, the wide-reaching world of the cinema has incorporated many different artistic genres, geographical localities, and historical eras, none of which have been any more recurrent, significant, or innovative than the genre of films set in the ancient Greco-Roman and biblical worlds.

Some four hundred feature films set in the ancient world have made familiar to many hundreds of millions of modern people an alluring, historical world well-marbled with graceful columns, gently folded togas, wine-filled goblets, racing chariots, divinely inspired prophets, golden idols of pagan gods, Christian-devouring lions, scantily clad slave girls, and brawny heroes. Classical Greece and Rome, in spite and because of their antiquity, create a popular and inimitable atmosphere on the screen, and biblical Palestine is as much a part of filmdom as it is of Western Civilization and its Judeo-Christian substructure.

Quo animo? Why has the ancient world had such appeal for the cinema? There are several reasons. Ancient warfare with its clashing chariots and hand-to-hand combat provides magnificent spectacle, as do glorious triumphal processions and fiery pagan rites. Seductive royalty like Cleopatra and Salome, powerful historical figures like Julius Caesar and the pharaohs, biblical revolutionaries like Jesus Christ and Moses, and complex mythological demigods and demimortals like Hercules and Helen of Troy are figures whose names are familiar and whose images are impressive to almost everyone. Old Testament patriarchs and the Passion of Christ have always

1 Richard Egan, portraying the Spartan King Leonidas, posed in silhouette for this publicity shot for *The 300 Spartans* (1962). Without action, color, narrative context, dialogue, or even an actor's face, this martial image, with its crested helmet, round shield, and thrusting spear, is immediately recognizable as belonging to the ancient Greco-Roman world.

challenged filmmakers to re-create on the silver screen what their millions of viewers have long since created deep within their own minds. The profoundly human yet ultimately divine plays of Sophocles and Euripides have contributed their own attraction. And the fantastical surroundings of ancient myths—surroundings that belong less to us than to an extinct branch of mankind—allow adventurers, escapists, visionaries, romantics, and intellectuals to lose themselves temporarily in that lost world of classical antiquity. Humans fill the screen, yet they wear different clothes, use different utensils, ride different transportation, pronounce pithy maxims, practice primitive religions (or complex religions in their primitive forms), employ different methods of warfare, order half-naked slaves to do their bidding, and view life and even death with different attitudes: unlike our highly developed modern civilization, biblical and classical antiquity were recently civilized forms of humankind and offered humankind newly conceived approaches to divinity.

Yet after all, the ancient world was of course the very source of our own world. Our modern culture owes its very existence to antiquity. And though the ancient world, like almost every aspect of human life, looks different on the screen, viewers can still see that the ancient world was inhabited with people who acted very much like people in our own world.

Along with these visual and cultural reasons for antiquity's popularity in the cinema is a historical reason: the ancient world never really released its grasp on Western civilization. From before the Renaissance to the last quarter of the twentieth century, through all the postantiquity ages of man, Greek sculpture, philosophy, poetry, comedy, and drama, Roman architecture, language, and historiography have continued to be the roots from which their modern descendants have grown. Whether it be the mundanity of the sandal, sword, and spear or the profundity of Christianity, Judaism, and Socratic wisdom, antiquity's legacy is an inherent, perpetuating part of modern life.

One of the reasons the young cinema immediately adopted antiquity as one of its favorite subjects was that antiquity was already quite popular in the contemporary theatrical, literary, and educational worlds at the end of the nineteenth century. *Ben-Hur, Quo Vadis?* and *The Last Days of Pompeii* were already best-selling novels; Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar* and Sophocles' *Oedipus Rex* were perennial favorites on the stage; the Bible was the basic core of almost everyone's education; and Latin texts were familiar not only to the elite but to the growing middle class. When the pioneers in the cinema looked for filmable subjects and themes, the ancient world was an obvious choice. As early as 1897, Thomas Edison filmed a brief, nonnarrative *Cupid and Psyche*, and overseas cameras captured the theatrical Passion of Christ at Oberammergau in 1897 and Luigi Topi's religious ten tableaux in 1900. Among his early films the French director Georges Méliès filmed a charming *La Sibylle de Cumes* (*The Sibyl of Cumae,* 1898), *Cléopâtra* (1899), *Neptune et Amphitrite* (1899), *Le Tonnerre de Jupiter* (*Jupiter's Thunderbolts,* 1903), *Pygmalion et Galathée* (1903), and *L'île de Calypso* (1905, entitled *Ulysses and the Giant Polyphemus* in English). Other early French films included Pathé's *Samson and Delilah* (1903), *Belshazzar's*

Feast (1905), and *Moses* (1907). Italy produced *Giudetta e Oloferne* (*Judith and Holofernes,* 1906), *A Modern Samson* (1907), and *The Rivals; a Love Drama of Pompeii* (1907). The British director Robert William Paul offered the first film version of *The Last Days of Pompeii* (1900), though this was merely eighty feet of film showing a volcano erupting and people fleeing from a collapsing ceiling. A few sources also report a British *The Sign of the Cross* (1904), supposedly made by the same Sigmund Lubin who directed *The Great Train Robbery* that year.

Although this respectable number of films based on ancient characters or themes was produced in the last years of the nineteenth century and the first years of the twentieth, the virtual birth not only of the ancient world in the cinema but also of the epic cinema as we know it occurred in 1908. That year, Arturo Ambrosio, an Italian optician turned camera enthusiast, produced his first overwhelmingly successful feature film at his Turin studios, *Gli Ultimi Giorni di Pompeii (The Last Days of Pompeii).* With its intriguing plot, classical setting, Egyptian twists, and holocaustic Vesuvial climax, director Luigi Maggi's film became a smashing success for the fledgling industry. In the ensuing so-called Golden Age of Italian cinema, dozens of costume epics set in ancient times were filmed. Ambrosio continued with *Nerone* (*Nero; or the Burning of Rome,* 1909), directed by Maggi, as well as *La Vergine di Babilonia* (*The Virgin of Babylon,* 1910), *Ero e Leandro* (*Hero and Leander,* 1910), *Lo Schiavo di Cartagine* (*The Slave of Carthage,* 1910), *The Queen of Nineveh* (1911), and the partially ancient *Satan* (1912). Ernesto Pasquali produced or directed *Teodora, Imperatrice di Bisanzio* (*Theodora, Empress of Byzantium,* 1909), and *Spartaco* (*Spartacus,* 1913); Giuseppe De Liguoro directed *Martire Pompeiana* (*The Martyr of Pompeii,* 1909), *Sardanapalo Re dell' Assiria* (*Sardanapalus, King of Assyria,* 1910), *Edipo Re* (*Oedipus Rex,* 1910), and *L'Odissea* (*The Odyssey,* 1911); Enrico Guazzoni directed *Brutus* (1910), *Agrippina* (1910), *I Maccabei* (*The Maccabees,* 1910), *Quo Vadis?* (1912), *Marcantonio e Cleopatra* (1913), *Caius Julius Caesar* (1914), and *Fabiola* (1916); Mario Caserini directed *Catilina* (*Catiline,* 1910), *Gli Ultimi Giorni di Pompeii* (1913), and *Nerone e Agrippina* (1913); and Giovanni Pastrone directed *Giulio Cesare* (*Julius Caesar,* 1909), *La Caduta di Troia* (*The Fall of Troy,* 1911), and the immortal *Cabiria* (1914). Other Golden Age Italian sword-and-sandal films featured more tales based on Roman history, the Old Testament, and the passion of Christ: Cines's *Amor di Schiave* (*Love of the Slaves,* 1910), *Rameses, King of Egypt* (1912), *Spartaco* (1914, starring Antony Novelli), and *Christus* (1915); Itala's *Una Vestale* (*One Vestal Virgin,* 1909); Latium's *Spartaco* (1909) and *Poppea ed Ottavia* (1911); Febo Mari's *Attila* (1916); Savoia's *The Triumph of the Emperor* (1914); Pathé's Italian production of Racine's *Phèdre* (1910); and *In Hoc Signo Vinces* (1913), *David* (1912), and *Salambo* (1914).

In these works the cinema overcame the limitations of the stage, which had been so confining to early French and Italian films. They necessitated the replacement of the indoor stage with outdoor location shooting. Gigantic sets began to fill the screen, and hundreds of extras were hired to re-create realistic crowd and battle scenes. The greatest

successes after Ambrosio's *Gli Ultimi Giorni di Pompeii* were Guazzoni's *Quo Vadis?* (1912) and then Pastrone's *Cabiria* (1914). For *Cabiria,* whose story concerns Rome and its second confrontation with Carthage, four cameras, one of them movable, were used to shoot thousands of feet of film on location in Rome, Sicily, and North Africa. Of all the Italian epics of the silent Golden Age, *Cabiria* best demonstrated to subsequent filmmakers how to make a successful, full-length, visually crowded, narratively energetic film sprinkled liberally with bits of historical detail and special effects.

With their early epics Ambrosio, Guazzoni, and Pastrone established an association between the ancient world and films of lavish, gigantic scope, impressive prototypes that subsequent directors and producers often attempted to equal or surpass even decades later. In addition, Pastrone's *Cabiria* inspired a clutch of popular "Maciste" films. Nearly a dozen spin-offs involving *Cabiria*'s strongman Maciste (played by Ernesto [Bartolomeo] Pagano) were produced between 1915 and 1927. This was the first such brood of popular strongman films, the forerunner of *Hercules* and the dozens of sequels, imitations, and combinations that that 1957 film spawned.

American filmmakers, too, had begun making films set in antiquity or alluding to ancient subjects. In 1907 the director Sidney Olcott grabbed an armload of Metropolitan Opera costumes to outfit his limited cast at Manhattan's Battery Park for the first film version of *Ben-Hur,* which he followed with the ambitious *From the Manger to the Cross,* shot on location in the Holy Land in 1911 and released by Kalem in 1912. Soon after Olcott's neonatal version of *Ben-Hur,* Edison in 1908 produced *The Star of Bethlehem, Aida,* and, in seven scenes, *Nero and the Burning of Rome.* Vitagraph, an aggressive company formed in Brooklyn in 1908, immediately responded with *In Cupid's Realm,* Oscar Wilde's *Salome,* and *Julius Caesar,* which, with fifteen scenes, was even more luxurious than Edison's *Nero.* Vitagraph's *Antony and Cleopatra,* also made in 1908, starred such luminaries as Maurice Costello and Florence Lawrence. The next year the studio produced and released *Saul and David, The Way of the Cross,* in which a converted Roman and his Christian sweetheart are thrown to Nero's lions, and a five-reel, hand-tinted *The Life of Moses,* which the Parents Company insisted be released in serial fashion, one reel per week. Then followed Richard Strauss's *Elektra* (1910), *The Minotaur* (1910), *Cain and Abel* (1911), and *The Deluge* (1911). Most of these Vitagraph films were directed by J. Stuart Blackton, the British pioneer and a former collaborator with both Edison and Olcott.

Other early American production companies produced additional titles. In 1908 Kalem issued its *David and Goliath* and *Jerusalem in the Time of Christ,* Selig produced *The Christian Martyrs* (1910), with an arena sequence, and Essanay created *Neptune's Daughter* (1912), in which mortal Francis X. Bushman marries Undine (Martha Russell), the daughter of Neptune. Important individuals also produced "ancient" films: D. W. Griffith created the first of several entries with *The Slave* (1909) starring Mary Pickford and Florence Lawrence, and Helen Gardner produced and starred in *Cleopatra* (1912).

No early national cinema was as prolific as the French, no doubt inspired by the

2/3 Maciste (Bartolomeo Pagano), left, stands with Fulvius Axilla (Umberto Mozzato) before the entrance to the temple of Moloch in Carthage, in the groundbreaking *Cabiria* (1914). The huge oral entrance in the background, which stems from medieval visions of Hell, was much imitated, as were Maciste's muscles and chains, in scores of sword-and-sandal films of the early 1960s The medieval portal to Hell is from Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale, ms. fr. 143 (Le Livre des échecs amoureux).

more than five hundred short films made by Georges Méliès from 1895 to 1913. Following the success of Ambrosio's *Gli Ultimi Giorni di Pompeii* in 1908, the next few years brought a spate of "ancient" films from French filmmakers who had a particular preference for mythological subjects. In rapid succession Parisians viewed Neptune and Cupid in Le Lion's *Goddess of the Sea* (1909), the Hydra and the divine Greco-Roman thunderer in Gaum-Kleine's *Hercules and the Big Stick* and *Jupiter Smitten* (1910), and a series of mythological struggles in Emile Cohl's animated *Les Douze Travaux d'Hercule* (*The Twelve Labors*

of Hercules, 1910). At the same time Pathé released a series of films based on ancient subjects, including *Hercules in the Regiment* (1909), in which bullets bounce off the modernized Theban's chest, and the color-tinted *The Legend of Orpheus* (1909). Charles Pathé, whose lengthy, four-reel *Les Miserables* advanced the cause of the historical epic in Europe, also satisfied the French audiences' preference for films set amid the noble and antinoble polarities of ancient Roman history with such releases as the color-tinted *Caesar in Egypt* (1910), *The Justice of Claudius* (1911), *Nero and Britannicus* (1913), and a non-Shakespearean *Antony and Cleopatra* (1913), as well as a farce entitled *Back to Life After 2000 Years,* in which an ancient Roman comes to life in modern Rome. Pathé's biblical entries included *The Birth of Jesus* (1909), *The Slave's Revolt* (1911), which takes place in Egypt under Pharaoh Rameses, the color-tinted *Joseph's Trials in Egypt* (1914), and *The Life of Our Saviour* (1914), an expanded, color version of their *Life of Christ* (1910). All of C.G.P.C.'s releases were biblical: *Cain and Abel* (1911), a color-tinted *Infancy of Moses* (1911), *Abraham's Sacrifice* (1912), and *Saul and David* (1912). Henri Andréani directed a series of both historical (*Antony and Cleopatra, Messalina* [both 1910]) and biblical (*Caïn et Abel* [1911] and *Esther, La Mort de Saül, Rebecca,* and *La Reine de Saba* [all 1913]) films as well.

The largest output was by Gaumont, whose productions of 1910 included *Cain and Abel, Herod and the Newborn King, Esther and Mordecai, Jephthah's Daughters, The Marriage of Esther,* and *Pharaoh, or Israel in Egypt.* In 1911 the studio released *Saul and David; The Christian Martyr,* which includes an arena sequence à la *The Last Days of Pompeii; In Ancient Days,* about an Egyptologist dreams of a Pharaoh who causes his daughter's suicide; *The Son of the Shunamite,* which tells the story of Elisha and his raising of the dead; *In the Days of Nero,* a color-tinted story of palace intrigue and poisoning; *The Hour of Execution,* based on a Damon and Pythias motif set during the reign of Emperor Tiberius; *The Maid of Argos,* in which some romantic hanky-panky gets the better of the High Priest; and another romance, *A Priestess of Carthage.* After 1911 Gaumont produced only one "ancient" film, *Belshazzar's Feast* (1913).

Other early French films include Film d'Art's *The Kiss of Judas* (1909), a Shakespearean *Cleopatra* (1910) in eight scenes, and, most notably, Charles Le Bargy's *The Return of Ulysses* (1908), Hecla's *Oedipus Rex* (1912), Eclair's *The Sacking of Rome* and *The Resurrection of Lazarus* (both 1910) and *Herodias* and *The Prodigal Son* (both 1911). Urban-Eclipse also released a scenario set in Roman occupied Gaul—*The Gaul's Honor* (1910)—as well as *St. Paul and the Centurion* (1911).

The French cinema was negatively affected by the early successes of the Italian *Quo Vadis?* and *Cabiria:* almost no "ancient" titles appeared after 1914. The same is true in England, where after a burst from Dutch director-actor Theo Frenkel in 1911–1912 (*Oedipus Rex, The Modern Pygmalion and Galatea, The Lust for Gold, Esther: A Biblical Episode, Caesar's Prisoners, Telemachus, Samson and Delilah, The Fall of Babylon, Julius Caesar's Sandals, Judith,* and *Herod),* no further titles appeared there either. The positive

impact of *Quo Vadis?* and *Cabiria* on the American film industry, however, was considerable in terms of scope, even if the American predilection for biblical fare still predominated. In 1913 audiences could see such films as Vitagraph's *Daniel;* Eclair's *The Holy City* and *The Crimson Cross,* a twenty-scene biography of Jesus; Famous Players' *The Daughter of the Hills,* in which a gladiator and his wife are converted by St. Paul; Powers's *In a Roman Garden,* where an affluent Roman falls in love with a Christian girl; the American Film Company's drama about the Huns entitled *In the Days of Trajan;* Helen Gardner's *The Wife of Cain,* in which Cain and his wife live in the land of Nod; and Thanhouser's *The Star of Bethlehem* and *Joseph in the Land of Egypt.* In the following year Universal released *Samson* as well as *Damon and Pythias,* and the American Film Manufacturing Company released *The Last Supper,* directed by Lorimer Johnstone and starring Sydney Ayres, which may have been as long as two thousand feet. Paramount's first version of *The Sign of the Cross* appeared in 1914.

None of these films had an impact on the development of the American film industry comparable to D. W. Griffith's two "ancient" spectacles, *Judith of Bethulia* (1913) and *Intolerance* (1916). Hollywood legend has it that after seeing Guazzoni's *Quo Vadis?* Griffith sat in a New York hotel room thumbing through the Scriptures to find the biblical and narrative inspiration for *Judith of Bethulia,* and the influence of *Cabiria*'s set decorations on *Intolerance* is clear. But whereas *Cabiria* and *Quo Vadis?* had been huge popular successes, *Intolerance* was ultimately a financial disaster, preaching untimely peace and tolerance to a bellicose world on the eve of its huge war. Only years later would the film be vindicated, even praised by a small cadre of critics as the greatest film ever made in America.

Often the zenith of a film genre's popularity invites the creation of animated imitations or satires. This period of "ancient" epics was no exception, for Windsor McCay produced his animated *Centaurs* in 1916.

Discouraged by the financial disappointment of *Intolerance* and distracted by the war in Europe, American studios produced few "ancient" films over the next few years. Notable exceptions to this period of relative dormancy include Theda Bara's *Cleopatra* (1917), which displayed the rolling-eyed vamp in fifty costumes, and *Salome* (1918). Also released in 1918 were Victory Films' *The Triumph of Venus,* which domesticizes the gods of Homer's *Odyssey* and focuses on the goddess's marriage to Vulcan and her affair with Mars, and Triangle Films' *The Golden Fleece,* whose protagonist Jason lives in a modern setting.

By the conclusion of the First World War the Golden Age of Italian epics set in ancient times had all but run its course. There were admirable offerings produced in 1919, including Pineschi's version of *Spartaco* and *Fedra (Phaedra),* and in 1921 Unione Cinematografica Italiana-Ambrosio filmed Victorien Sardou's *Teodora.* A minor resurgence took place in the 1920s, as several films displayed a brighter, more contemporary sophistication and grandeur. Guazzoni's *Messalina* (1922), Ambrosio's *Quo Vadis?* (1924), and

4 Theda Bara in *Cleopatra* (1917). This pose with diaphanous veil, split dress, and floral ornament hardly stems from ancient Egypt, but Bara's audiences did not pay money to see authenticity. There are no remaining prints of *Cleopatra,* so the American Film Institute has ranked it among its top ten missing films. Check your attic and basement.

Amleto Palermi's *Gli Ultimi Giorni di Pompeii* (1926) were three of the costliest and most ambitious Italian films ever made. The last of these films, Palermi's *Ultimi Giorni*, starring Maria Corda and Victor Varconi, was a spectacular in more than the long-running, multi-extra, history-sweeping cinematic sense. It was a spectacular financial disaster as well, and it can fairly be blamed for the demise of the "ancient" film in Italy. One last *Giudetta e Oloferne* appeared in 1928, but this biblical film was a mere ghost of past Italian glory and a silent film world which was soon to be forgotten almost entirely. Not until the early 1960s would the country's film industry again match the frequency with which such films had been produced in the first years of the century.

America and transalpine Europe produced more successful and artistic films in the 1920s, particularly J. Gordon Edward's *Queen of Sheba* (1921) and *Nero* (1922), the latter in turn inspiring a comical takeoff by Universal in 1925, Alla Nazimova's curious *Salome* (1922); Korda's biblical romance *Samson and Delilah* (1922) and comical romance *The Private Life of Helen of Troy* (1927); Fox's *The Shepherd King* (1923); F.B.O.'s romance about Pharaoh Tutankhamen entitled *The Dancer of the Nile* (1923); the fledgling MGM's *Ben-Hur* (1925), starring Francis X. Bushman and Ramon Novarro; and Raoul Walsh's *The Wanderer* (1925).

The genre now spilled over into Germany as well. Two German films—*I.N.R.I.* (1923) and an updated *Passion Play* (1924), filmed at Oberammergau and Freiburg—continued older traditions, but Germany at this time was also a training ground for a number of filmmakers who soon flocked to Hollywood. Ernst Lubitsch, for example, directed *Das Weib des Pharao* (1922), which was later released in the United States as *The Loves of Pharaoh.*

Coming to the fore in the 1920s was the "ancient" moralizing film, which included both ancient and modern sequences. Several examples of modernized ancients had been produced in the previous two decades, but now more elaborate feature films regularly employed ancient sequences to provide a moral applicable to the modern sequences. Korda's *Samson and Delilah* experimented with this technique, as did *Queen of Sin* (also known as *Sodom and Gomorrah,* 1923), Michael Curtiz's Austrian-produced *Die Sklavenkönigin* (*Moon of Israel,* 1924), and Robert Leonard's *Circe the Enchantress* (1924). Warner Brothers ventured into this style of moralizing film while introducing Michael Curtiz to America in *Noah's Ark* (1929). Another directorial giant had already established his unique feel for the genre with *Manslaughter* (1922), *The Ten Commandments* (1923), and *Made for Love* (1925). The director was Cecil Blount DeMille, the man who was to develop, dominate, and in many ways symbolize the entire corpus of ancient films. His next "ancient" film, *The King of Kings* (1927), was shown, if one includes Sunday morning and weekday evening church viewings, more often than any other movie in that era.

The 1930s added sound to the cinema, and films like Universal's *The Mummy* (1932) and United Artists' Busby Berkeley musical *Roman Scandals* (1933), starring Eddie Cantor, ushered a new era of "ancient" films into the theater. Films that had been made in the silent era were now fair game for the microphone and speaker. Working for Paramount, DeMille first directed a low-budget version of Wilson Barrett's 1895 play *The Sign of the Cross* (1932), which Paramount had first filmed in 1914. For nearly twenty years DeMille had been thumping the Bible while titillating his audiences, but this "talkie" version of *The Sign of the Cross,* with its infamous "lesbian dance" scene, became the focus of an attack on the sinful Hollywood film industry by the Catholic press.[1] DeMille followed the financially successful release of *The Sign of the Cross* with a lavishly impressive version of *Cleopatra* (1934), which had already been filmed in at least nine European and American, Shakespearean and non-Shakespearean versions between 1899 and 1917. DeMille's *Cleopatra* included still another exotic scene in which the Egyptian queen takes a milk bath, but other filmmakers were wary of the Hays Commission and the Production Code: RKO complied with a drastically rewritten, emasculated sound version of *The Last Days of Pompeii* (1935), and Warner Brothers put the inoffensive African-American biblical farce *The Green Pastures* on film in 1936.

For the most part the 1930s belonged to Hollywood itself. There was no need to set romance, hatred, heroics, or decadence in the ancient world because the modern Californian "Babylon" supplied all the wonder and awe that antiquity used to supply. And with renewed moral pressure from the Catholic press in the wake of *The Sign of the Cross,* there was little incentive to make films set in antiquity. One antiquarian film that *was* made in Hollywood, in fact, was actually the product of an Italian film company, La Itala Film Company di Hollywood, which moved to California and produced a film about Helen of Troy, *La Regina di Sparta* (*The Queen of Sparta,* 1931). Europe, meanwhile, produced a few gems: *Golgotha* (1932), *Anna und Elisabeth* (1933), and *Amphitryon* (1935). Perhaps the grandest of all would have been Alexander Korda's ambitious *I, Claudius* (1937), but filming was never completed.

The Second World War reinforced the relative indifference toward antiquity; a historical fantasy world of plastic swords and mock chariots must have seemed absurdly ineffective in a real world menaced by tanks, planes, and aircraft carriers. The only "ancient" films to be made during the war were either light-hearted or inspirational fare: the Three Stooges' comedy two-reeler short *Matri-Phony* (1942); another comedy styled after *Roman Scandals, Fiddlers Three* (1944); and Fox's pseudobiblical *The Great Commandment* (1942).

The end of the war brought a period of economic recovery and a refocusing of film audiences' attentions, two elements that were required to revive the "ancient" genre. Initially, following the lead of Laurence Olivier's production of Shakespeare's *Henry V* (1944), "ancient" cinematic interest focused on dramatic adaptations or farces about ancient subjects—for example, the Stooges' *Mummy's Dummies* (1948), RKO's adaptation of Eugene O'Neill's *Mourning Becomes Electra* (1947), George Bernard Shaw's *Caesar and Cleopatra* (1946), Universal's musical *Night in Paradise* (1946), Columbia's musical *Down to Earth* (1947), in which Rita Hayworth plays the muse Terpsichore helping a Broadway producer, Wiener Mundus's Austrian adaptation of Aristophanes' *Lysistrata* (1948), and

5/6 These two sequential production shots from RKO's *The Last Days of Pompeii* (1935) demonstrate how the cinema magically mimics antiquity. A once static water tank and prop boat with fresh paint and "gilded" oar portals explodes with action as disturbed waters, dense smoke, and a multitude of panicked citizens try to escape Pompeii, re-creating that fateful night in August, A.D. 79. Marcus (Preston Foster) stands on the right of the static photo and heroically helps the lad in the center of the action photo.

Cocteau's *Orphée* (1949), yet another French film based on a mythological subject. But by 1949, a whole new Golden Age of antiquity on film was about to be molded and cast.

If the one acorn from which the mighty oak grew can be singled out, DeMille's *Samson and Delilah* (1949) deserves leading credit for reinvigorating the "ancient" genre. True, the film followed on the heels of the postwar films in the genre, but the overwhelming success of *Samson and Delilah* fostered imitations, adaptations, and re-creations throughout the next decade and well into the 1960s. No doubt motivated by Paramount's success with DeMille's film, MGM celebrated its fiftieth anniversary with its version of *Quo Vadis?* (1951), the third major film version of Henryk Sienkiewicz's Nobel Prize–winning novel. Almost ten years earlier MGM had planned a version starring Orson Welles and Marlene Dietrich, but the project had been shelved; now it was revived and utterly reconfigured for this expensive version starring Robert Taylor and

Deborah Kerr. In the wake of its multimillion-dollar success, Columbia released *Salome* (1953), *Serpent of the Nile* (1953), and *Slaves of Babylon* (1953). Columbia set even a Ray Harryhausen horror film, *Twenty Million Miles to Earth* (1957), amid the ruins of Rome, and later a Pompeian "mummy" appeared in United Artists' release *The Curse of the Faceless Man* (1958). Universal answered with *Sign of the Pagan* (1954), and RKO with a Shavian *Androcles and the Lion* (1952). United Artists visited its cameras upon the expeditions of *Alexander the Great* (1955), and Warner Brothers offered *The Silver Chalice* (1954) and *Helen of Troy* (1955). MGM reentered the fray with *Julius Caesar* (1953), *The Prodigal* (1955), and *Jupiter's Darling* (1955), Fox *David and Bathsheba* (1951), and Lippert with *Sins of Jezebel* (1953). Even cartoons and animated features joined the party: Popeye appeared as Hercules in *Greek Mirthology* (1954), and Bugs Bunny "starred" in *Roman Legion-Hare* (1955).

Beyond the successive successes of *Samson and Delilah* and *Quo Vadis?* two other factors spurred on the revival of the genre. The first spur was an important economic one—television. Television had begun drawing customers away from the box office by the millions in the early fifties, and Hollywood desperately needed a gimmick with which to bring back its paying customers. The gimmick was wide-screen projection, and the first CinemaScope film was Fox's *The Robe* (1953). As with *The Last Days of Pompeii* in 1908,

Cabiria in 1914, and *Intolerance* in 1916, when cinematic frontiers were to be crossed, an ancient subject was called upon to provide the weighty narrative and a familiar, absorbing spectacle. What better narrative was there than *The Robe,* a best-selling novel about Rome and Christ? Fox followed this huge success with *Demetrius and the Gladiators* (1954), *The Egyptian* (1954), and *Queen of Babylon* (1956). The revival's second spur was an archaeological one, the widely publicized discovery in Egypt of Khufu's solar boat in the spring of 1954. Just as Howard Carter's 1920s excavation of the tomb of "King Tut" inspired Karl Freund's *The Mummy* in 1932, the discovery of this Fourth Dynasty relic redirected film producers' attentions across the ancient Mediterranean from Rome to ancient Egypt. Within a year, *The Egyptian* (1954), *Valley of the Kings* (1954), and *Land of the Pharaohs* (1955) had made their respective attempts at capturing the aged Nilotic zeitgeist.

Not all imitations of a successful artistic prototype are necessarily of lesser quality, the complaints of film critics in the mid-1950s to the contrary. In the face of calls for a halt to the flood of mediocre cinematic antiquity, Paramount, exploiting CinemaScope, revived interest in Egyptology, and the impassioned vision of Cecil B. DeMille brought the "ancient" film to new heights in 1956 with the still venerable *The Ten Commandments.* But if the recent success of *Quo Vadis?* had inspired a new flurry of "ancients," the moguls of Hollywood recognized that DeMille's expensive and lavish production would be difficult to equal. Only those of vision and fat wallets could successfully rival Paramount's second gigantic "ancient" success in a decade. United Artists released *Solomon and Sheba* in 1959, but it was *Ben-Hur,* MGM's answer to *The Ten Commandments,* that swept triumphantly through box offices that year, reaped eleven Academy Awards, then spawned a whole new cluster of historical and biblical epics.

MGM followed *Ben-Hur* with *King of Kings* (1961) and *Atlantis, the Lost Continent* (1961), the latter borrowing the fire sequences from *Quo Vadis?.* Among the other films of the post-*Ben-Hur* era were Warner Brothers' *Hannibal* (1960), Columbia's *Barabbas* (1962) and *Jason and the Argonauts* (1963), United Artists' *The Big Fisherman* (1959), Universal's *Spartacus* (1960), Paramount's *The Fall of the Roman Empire* (1964), and Fox's *The Story of Ruth* (1960), *Esther and the King* (1960), *The 300 Spartans* (1962), *Sodom and Gomorrah* (1963), *The Bible* (1966), and the controversial and extravagantly expensive *Cleopatra* (1963). Even *The Mummy* (1959) returned to the screen in a Hammer Productions version. Brazil made its contribution to the genre with *Black Orpheus* (1959), and a few years earlier Sweden released an unheralded *Barabbas* (1952) based on Par Lagerkvist's Nobel Prize–winning novel.

And Italy kept its once prolific hand in the newly inspired ancient pie. Even in the politically war-stormed 1930s, Mussolini had created *Scipio l'Africano* (1937) as ancient "proof" that Italy was historically the rightful owner of North Africa—ancient Carthage. In the 1950s a number of Italian films were seen in the United States, notably *Fabiola* (1948, 1951 U.S. release), *Queen of Sheba* (1953), *Two Nights with Cleopatra* (1953), *Sins of Rome* (1954), *Attila* (1954), and *Ulysses* (1955); Hedy Lamarr's Italian *The Face That*

Launched 1000 Ships (1953) was itself never launched. All these films were partially inspired by MGM's location shooting of *Quo Vadis?* in Rome, and such later films as *Sign of the Pagan* and *Ulysses* used Italian crews and cast but featured such American stars as Jack Palance, Jeff Chandler, Kirk Douglas, and Anthony Quinn.

A year or two later, after the American success of *The Ten Commandments* in 1956, Italy was ready to reclaim its ancient cinematic heritage, for from the lofty walls and ketchupy flesh of Cinecittà, *Hercules* (1957) was about to burst boldly into American theaters. Here was a film that earned anywhere from one-eighth to one-third as much as either *Ben-Hur* (1959) or *The Ten Commandments* (1956) yet cost less than 1 percent as much to produce. It offered simple entertainment, lots of action and adventure, hokey romance, half-naked women, and the biceps and sharply defined chest of Steve Reeves. The Italian sword-and-sandal epic was born again, and more than 180 neohistorical and neomythological films would be among the progeny of *Hercules.*

The post-*Samson,* post–*Quo Vadis?* trend was born in the mind of DeMille, grew up with the invention of CinemaScope, and matured in 1956 and 1959 with *The Ten Commandments* and *Ben-Hur.* It then received a mortal wound with the multimillion-dollar failure of *Cleopatra* in 1963. A few years later, after Anthony Mann's *The Fall of the Roman Empire* (1964) and John Huston's *The Bible* (1966)—both of which were already in production before the *Cleopatra* catastrophe—were released, the American four-hour, multimillion-dollar ancient spectacle had for the most part had its last "Hail!" The few films which were still set in antiquity were such foreign productions as the elaborate Polish *Faraon* (1966), based on Boleslaw Prus's 1897 novel; *The Viking Queen* (1967), which was the lone British sword-and-sandal film of the era; *Kureopatora* (1972), a somewhat scandalous animated Japanese rendition of the Cleopatra story, and the quintessentially American Roger Corman offspring, *The Arena* (1973), which matched Margaret Markov and Pam Grier as Spartacus-like gladiatrices.

As often happens at the end of a popular film era, the "ancient" genre had become so commonplace, wearisome, and ripe for ridicule that even a satire of ancient films could be put into an ancient setting, so Richard Lester directed a film version of the hit Broadway musical *A Funny Thing Happened on the Way to the Forum* (1966). Two years earlier, the British *Carry On* team, which had already made nine farces, produced one set in the ancient world, *Carry on Cleo.*

In continental Europe the emphasis was entirely changed. So great was public indifference toward spectacle and ancient swordplay that Italian muscleman films were immediately succeeded by the newly trendy "spaghetti Westerns" of Sergio Leone, who recently had directed *The Colossus of Rhodes* (1961) and had earlier gained valuable experience working on the second unit of *Ben-Hur.* Leone championed popular films, but many of the European masters of late 1960s and early 1970s cinema produced and directed an abundance of artistically and intellectually provocative films based on ancient literature, films like Federico Fellini's *Fellini Satyricon* (1969); Pier Paulo Pasolini's *The Gospel*

7 Arnold Schwarzenegger hoists an Olympian goddess on his newly immigrated, Mr. Olympia–winning shoulders in this publicity shot from his first film, *Hercules in New York*. His voice was dubbed, and his improbable last name was discarded in favor of Strong. Atop the steps is Hercules' father, Zeus (Ernest Graves).

According to Saint Matthew (1964), *Oedipus Rex* (1967), and *Medea* (1970); Rod Whitaker's *Thyestes* (1968); Michael Cacoyannis's *Electra* (1962), *The Trojan Women* (1971), and *Iphigenia* (1977); Roberto Rossellini's *Acts of the Apostles* (1969), *Socrates* (1970, TV), and *Agostino d'Ippona* (*Augustine of Hippo*, 1972); and Luigi Magni's *Scipione Detto Anche l'Africano* (*Scipio, Also Called Africanus*, 1971), starring Marcello Mastroianni and Silvana Mangano. So prevalent was this new European emphasis that Universal's release of *Oedipus the King* (1967) featured an almost entirely British cast and crew, and Charlton Heston had to go to Britain to costar with Jason Robards in *Julius Caesar* (1969) and to direct and play the lead in *Antony and Cleopatra* (1973), which was barely even given an American theatrical release.

Another aspect of the 1960s that stretched into the 1970s was the reemergence of modern adaptations—ancient tales, predominantly Greek myths, retold in modern settings. These productions include such clever contemporary adaptations of Greek tragedies

as Jules Dassin's *Phaedra* (1962) and *A Dream of Passion* (1978)—both starring his wife, Melina Mercouri—the Greek *Aphrousa* (1971), a modernized *Antigone* in *Year of the Cannibals* (1971), Giorgos Zervoulakos's *Lysistrata* (1972), and Costas Ferris's dreamlike *Prometheus, Second Person Singular* (1975). Even behind the Iron Curtain, Czechoslovakia produced a short *Metamorfeus* (1969), which offered a retelling of the story of Orpheus and Eurydice. Less reverent and catering more to the pop-art culture that was developing in the mid- to late 1960s were the film versions of Andrew Lloyd Webber's musical *Jesus Christ Superstar* (1970) and of *Godspell* (1973), as well as Russ Meyer's pop-art setting of Aeschylus's *Eumenides* in *Faster, Pussycat! Kill! Kill!* (1966). Then there was a British horror film, *The Gorgon* (1964), set in modernity but based on the ancient mythological character Medusa, and Americans were offered an updated version of Hercules set in the contemporary United States, *Hercules in New York* (1970), which starred a champion Austrian immigrant bodybuilder with such an improbable name—Arnold Schwarzenegger—that original prints of the film billed him as Arnold Strong.

Perhaps the most significant popular development during the 1960s and 1970s was not in theatrically released films but in made-for-television films aimed specifically at American television audiences. The film and television industries had been merging since the late 1950s, when film studios began to open subsidiary television production companies and then lease out many of their old Hollywood films for television broadcast. In the mid-1960s some films considered unworthy of risking theatrical release—like Joseph E. Levine's *Hercules*, or *Hercules and the Princess of Troy* (1965)—were premiered instead on television. Soon other projects were developed specifically as television pilots: William Shatner's *Alexander the Great*, for example, aired on ABC television in January 1968. At this time Shatner was riding the crest of his popularity on television's *Star Trek* (1965–1968), and a decade later it became common practice for the networks to produce inexpensive formula films featuring second-tier or aging box-office stars. Initially all the entries in the ancient genre were biblical: *The Story of Jacob and Joseph* (1974); *Moses, the Lawgiver* (1975), starring Burt Lancaster; *The Story of David* (1976); and Franco Zeffirelli's *Jesus of Nazareth* (1977).

Zeffirelli's lavish *Jesus*, which ran eight hours, was in the vanguard of the multipart made-for-television movie (or "miniseries," as the subgenre was styled) that proliferated in the late 1970s in the wake of the wildly successful *Roots* (1977). Inspired by the Public Broadcasting System's successful importation of the British Broadcasting Company's production of *I. Claudius*, television producers created other lengthy explorations of antiquity—*Masada* (1981), *The Last Days of Pompeii* (1984), and *A.D.* (1985)—most of them aired during Holy Week. *A.D.*, like Fox's *Cleopatra* two decades earlier, was so costly and so unremarkable to both critics and contemporary audiences that it discouraged subsequent productions set in antiquity for nearly a decade. Italy produced one of these, too, a made-for-television *Quo Vadis?* (1985) that featured international stars Klaus Maria Brandauer and Max von Sydow.

Television miniseries were so visible and so financially successful in the mid-1970s

8 Malcolm McDowell recalls an infamous moment in history in Bob Guccione's X-rated *Caligula* (1980). Suetonius (*Calig.* 46) reports that Caligula invaded Britain but abruptly ordered his soldiers to "gather sea shells." Notice that around his neck the mad emperor wears the "little boots" (*caligae* in Latin) for which he was nicknamed as a child. His own gold boots and short tunic are intentionally suggestive of his odd sexual cravings.

that they encouraged producers to make a handful of theatrically released feature films set in antiquity. The first release of this modest renascence in the late 1970s and early 1980s was Ray Harryhausen's *Sinbad and the Eye of the Tiger* (1977), soon followed by his *Clash of the Titans* (1981). Both these films were aimed at the young-teen and preteen *Star Wars* generations, as were the Italian-produced *Hercules* (1983), which attempted to put the bodybuilder Lou Ferrigno, television's Incredible Hulk, into an ancient setting enlivened by special effects à la *Star Wars*. Ferrigno starred in two other films with ancient settings, *The Seven Magnificent Gladiators* (1983) and *The Adventures of Hercules* (also called, as was the fashion at the time, *Hercules II*, 1985).

These films targeted demographically preselected audiences. Comedian Mel Brooks's *The History of the World, Part I* (1981) was specifically aimed at his eager fans, just as the irreverent British ensemble Monty Python satisfied theirs with *Life of Brian* (1979),

which was so controversial that its opening was boycotted by a number of religious groups. The same fate befell a film that dealt much more seriously with the same themes, Martin Scorsese's screen adaptation of Nikos Kazantzakis's *The Last Temptation of Christ* (1988), which portrayed Christ (Willem Dafoe) as a mortal living a genuinely earthly existence. In the film's most controversial sequence, Christ envisions himself making love to a woman. Even "adult" audiences were offered *Penthouse* magazine publisher Bob Guccione's X-rated *Caligula* (1980). And for younger audiences there was a Japanese animated feature, *Winds of Change* (1978), based on Ovid's *Metamorphoses*.

The same period produced a handful of films that contained individual ancient characters or scenes set in antiquity. The early Michael Crichton project *Westworld* (1973) included a Roman environment filled with vacationers acting out orgy fantasies. The same rock-nostalgia crowd that had flocked to see *Grease* in 1978 was offered Olivia Newton-John playing a Greco-Roman Muse in *Xanadu* (1980). And like Brooks's *History of the World,* both *Time Bandits* (1980) and *Bill and Ted's Excellent Adventure* (1988) contained one sequence each set in ancient Greece.

This brief revival in theatrically released feature films was followed by a second wave of made-for-television films. The waters were first tested by *Goddess of Love* (1988), a vehicle created for television game-show celebrity Vanna White, and the BBC's *Chimera* (1991), a political thriller involving a half-man, half-ape beast. Then Turner Broadcasting, a pioneer in made-for-cable programming and an advocate of "family viewing," commissioned and broadcast a series of four-hour films about the lives of the patriarchs and other Old Testament figures: *Abraham* (1994), *Jacob* (1994), *Joseph* (1995), *Moses* (1996), *Samson and Delilah* (1996), *David* (1997), and the Italian-German-produced *Solomon* (1997). Turner's success ultimately inspired NBC's *The Odyssey* (1997), an Emmy Award–winning project that had been initially planned by David Wolper *(Roots)* in the mid-1980s, and *Cleopatra* (1999).

During this same period in the early 1990s, the universe of cable television expanded considerably, creating the opportunity for a wide spectrum of new kinds of television offerings. At the same time satellite technology was expanding international markets, so in the wake of the alluring, body-focused *Baywatch,* a new brood of syndicated television adventure series aimed at the teen audiences spread over the globe. The most successful of these was a concept initiated by the innovative filmmaker Sam Raimi with five made-for-television films starring Kevin Sorbo as Hercules and Anthony Quinn as Zeus: *Hercules and the Lost Kingdom, Hercules and the Amazon Women, Hercules and the Circle of Fire, Hercules in the Underworld,* and *Hercules and the Maze of the Minotaur,* all in 1994. The resulting series, *Hercules: The Legendary Journeys,* was so successful that after one season it spawned a spin-off, *Xena: Warrior Princess,* which was in turn followed by *Young Hercules,* a daily syndicated television adventure drama introduced for the 1998 season by a prime-time pilot film. Completing the 1990s parallel to the Hercules boom of the late 1950s and early 1960s, the revitalized Disney Corporation made the Theban hero the

9 In the 1980s it became fashionable to include at least one sequence set in ancient Greece or Rome. Here Socrates ("sow-crates") discusses the meaning of life with two teenage California time-travelers (Alex Winter and Keanu Reeves) in *Bill and Ted's Excellent Adventure* (1988). The philosopher (Tony Steedman) speaks a bit of ancient Greek before the teens tell him: "The answer is blowin' in the wind."

subject of a major animated feature film release, *Hercules,* in 1997; and this in turn inspired DreamWorks' animated adaptation of the story of the Ten Commandments, *The Prince of Egypt* (1998).

This crop of new films and television programs set in antiquity may signal still another renascence in the genre as a result of the high-tech revolution of the past two decades. Two ingredients are in place: the public is no longer weary of epic "ancient" films, as it was in the late 1960s, and the prohibitive costs of mounting ancient spectaculars have been significantly reduced by the use of computerized animation. That technique not only offers the breathtaking visual and aural effects expected by today's new generations of moviegoers, it costs much less than building monumental sets in foreign locations and insuring film stars and casts of thousands of extras. Films have continued to join the genre in 1999 and 2000. Universal's *The Mummy* (1999), standing on the shoulders of 1994's *Stargate,* puts the ancient Egyptian spoken language into the mouth of several frightening versions of the revivified mummy. Ridley Scott's *Gladiator* (2000) is set — coincidentally, like *The Fall of the Roman Empire* (1964), one of the last major "ancient" films of its era — during the second-century A.D. reigns of Marcus Aurelius (Richard Harris) and Commodus (Joaquin Phoenix).

Julie Taymor, who utterly reformatted Disney's animated *The Lion King* for the Broadway stage, created *Titus* (1999)—an Americanized version of Shakespeare's fictitious, Roman revenge tragedy *Titus Andronicus.* Disney itself revived a classic in *Fantasia/2000* (1999), which included an Old Testament sequence, with Donald Duck playing Noah's assistant. And there were several made-for-television films as well: NBC's *The Odyssey* (1997), ABC's *Cleopatra* (1999), NBC's *Mary, Mother of Jesus* (1999), CBS's *Jesus* (2000), and NBC's *Jason and the Argonauts* (2000).

Besides the hundreds of films that have been set in antiquity or that offer modern adaptations of ancient myths, hundreds of films set in the modern world and based on new stories make references to antiquity. Most often they appear in an isolated but memorable line of script or a single piece of visual decoration. Remarkably, some three hundred such references are to be found in films made from 1986 to 2000, although the tradition goes back to the early days of sound films. In 1929 *Broadway Melody* contained a musical number with a Roman galley scene à la *Ben-Hur,* and *The Hollywood Revue of 1929* placed Neptune amid several underwater effects. In *Start Cheering* (1938) Jimmy Durante puns with a college librarian about a book on the Roman Empire by asking, "Who wants a book about baseball?!" In the noir film *Dark City* (1950), Lizabeth Scott asks Charlton Heston, "Where are we?" while gazing at an urban river. "Across the Styx," Heston replies.

Many filmmakers are well aware of film history, and whatever traditional education they might have had is supplemented by their familiarity with films set in antiquity several decades ago. Some make references to such well known mythological characters as Helen of Troy: *Highlander II: The Quickening* (1991), *Night and the City* (1993), and *Switch* (1991). Some invoke Hercules: *Bad Boys* (1995), *The Nutty Professor* (1996),

The Phantom (1996), and *Paradise Road* (1997). Still others allude to such famous historical personages as Julius Caesar: *Conquest of the Planet of the Apes* (1972), *JFK* (1991), and *National Lampoon's Loaded Weapon I* (1994). But a variety of classical allusions are used in different ways, some with great effect. Horace's well-known poetic admonition *carpe diem* from his first book of *Odes* is the motivating philosophy taught by Robin Williams's character to his students in *Dead Poets Society* (1989), and the truth about the mysterious but educated Richard Gere character in *Sommersby* (1993) is deduced from his several references to the *Iliad*. In these instances and in many others, screenwriters employ classical allusions at poignant moments, and usually they are the only literary allusions in the films.

The ancient Greek language itself appears only occasionally, as in *The Thin Red Line* (1998) and even *Bill and Ted's Excellent Adventure* (1988), but a number of films employ Latin. Sometimes the purpose is etymological, as in *Malcolm X* (1993), where Elijah Muhammad explains the original sense of the word *adorare*. Elsewhere Latin is used as a motto, as in Ovid's *amor vincit omnia*, quoted in *The Fisher King* (1991), or to describe a character's feelings: in *Fat Man and Little Boy* (1989), Robert Oppenheimer describes the confusion he feels about the atomic bomb by reciting (while on horseback) Catullus's "Odi et Amo." Often Latin is used to humorous effect, as in the verbal duel in *Tombstone* (1993) or on the tombstones in *The Addams Family* (1991). In the ever-inventive Zucker-Abrahams-Zucker team's *Top Secret!* (1984), a priest reads the Latin rites to a prisoner on death row ("*Gallia est omnis divisa in partes tres . . . corpus delicti, habeas corpus . . . hic haec hoc, huius, huius, huius . . .* ") and finishes in pig Latin. Latin also suggests an attitude: in *National Lampoon's Loaded Weapon I* (1994) Charlie Sheen uses the phrase *quid pro quo;* asked what the Latin means, Sheen responds, "It means I'm pretentious."

Allusions to ancient history appear frequently as well, be it a mobster's conscious, vivid re-creation of the suicide of Seneca in *Godfather II* (1974), Robert Duvall's statement that "I am at Thermopylae and the Persians shall not pass" in *Rambling Rose* (1991), Harrison Ford's brief Annapolis lecture on ancient Athenian naval power in *Patriot Games* (1992), or *The Warriors* (1979), a film based on Sol Yurok's novel about New York gangs clearly modeled on Xenophon's *Anabasis*.

There have also been a number of conscious visual references, even in earlier periods. In the height of the 1950s epic era, Audrey Hepburn's character in *Funny Face* (1957) models a dress with a flowing scarf in front of the Louvre's Nike of Samothrace. A few years later, in Alfred Hitchcock's *Psycho* (1960), when Norman Bates (Anthony Perkins) talks with Marion Crane (Janet Leigh) in a room off the lobby of the now infamous hotel, the instant the conversation turns to the subject of Norman's mother the camera angle changes dramatically to focus on his face in the foreground and a reproduction of Titian's *Venus at Her Toilet* in the background. This painting, which depicts Venus with her doting son Cupid, sits on the wall that separates them from the room that Norman, dressed as his mother, will enter to stab Marion to death. Hitchcock himself highlighted the poignant

10 A handful of Greco-Roman monuments are so widely recognized that a film can use them to make compelling visual statements. Here Audrey Hepburn in *Funny Face* (1957) models a gown and scarf in sharp perspective with the Hellenistic Nike of Samothrace ("Winged Victory") along the Louvre's broad marble stairway leading up to the Gallerie d'Apollon.

11/12 Janet Leigh shares her last meal with Norman Bates in Alfred Hitchcock's *Psycho* (1960). As soon as she begins discussing Norman's mother, she strikes this odd pose. The next shot reveals Norman sitting in front of a copy of Titian's *Venus at Her Toilet* (1552–1555), which portrays the goddess in a similar pose. The keen viewer suspects immediately that Norman Bates and his mother have as irregular a love relationship as Cupid and his mother. The painting is used again in Gus Van Sant's 1998 remake of the film.

parallel here between Norman, his mother, and Cupid in a trailer to the film. Gus Van Sant's 1998 remake of *Psycho* featured Titian's painting again, though hanging on a different wall, and the temptation to use ancient images in films has flourished in the 1990s. After Meryl Streep shoots Goldie Hawn with a shotgun and blows a four-inch hole clear through her abdomen in *Death Becomes Her* (1992), Hawn falls into a modernized *impluvium* decorated with a Venus *pudica* statue. Hawn has already drunk a magic potion, however, and as she rises from the waters "born again," we see the statue of her classical exemplar directly through the hole in her belly. The next year in *Boxing Helena* (1993), a replica of the Venus de Milo ironically falls on Julian Sands after he has surgically removed the arms and legs of Sherilyn Fenn. Filmmakers also employ some of the darker visual images from antiquity. One of the initial images of *Flatliners* (1990), the story of daring medical students who are "flatlining" and then resuscitating each other for several minutes to achieve a temporary death, is a colossal bust of Hermes Psychopompos set beneath the dark rotunda of their medical school (actually Chicago's Museum of Science and Industry).

Classical themes abound. There is Homeric imagery in *The Natural* (1984), Land of the Dead imagery in Mary Lambert's *Siesta* (1987), and a clever modernization of the Platonic "split-aparts" in *The Butcher's Wife* (1991), to name just a few. Oedipal themes are

important elements in *The Empire Strikes Back* (1980), *Voyagers* (1991), and Woody Allen's "Oedipus Wrecks" in *New York Stories* (1989). Allen often uses classical imagery; he even had an ancient Greek dramatic chorus make Greek-choruslike commentary intermittently throughout *Mighty Aphrodite* (1995), and included a blind Teiresias character (Jack Warden) as well. Jon Voigt also played a Teiresias-like prophet in Oliver Stone's *U Turn* (1997).

One of the most interesting methods of adding a classical allusion to a contemporary film is via reference to older, easily recognized films set in antiquity. *The Crimson Permanent Assurance,* a short subject preceding *Monty Python's The Meaning of Life* (1983), opens with a sequence clearly modeled after the galley scene of *Ben-Hur.* When Paul Hogan dies and goes to the gates of heaven in *Almost an Angel* (1990), none other than Charlton Heston is there to greet him. Henry Wilcoxon—Cecil B. DeMille's son-in-law and Rameses' general in *The Ten Commandments* (1956)—plays a miraculous round of golf to the music of *The Ten Commandments* in *Caddyshack* (1980), and, similarly, in David Zucker's *The Naked Gun 2½: The Smell of Fear* (1991), when Leslie Nielsen is having sex, among the assemblage of relevant film clips is the erection of the obelisk for Sethi's jubilee in *The Ten Commandments.* The most frequently used reference to a film set in antiquity is the "I'm Spartacus" sequence from *Spartacus* (1960), used in *Monty Python's Life of Brian* (1979), *Punchline* (1988), *That Thing You Do* (1996), *In and Out* (1997), and *The Mask of Zorro* (1998); additional notable *Spartacus* references occur in *The Bird Cage* (1996) and *Clueless* (1995).

Another iconic scene from the genre is the chariot race in the 1959 *Ben-Hur.* But because this scene would be so prohibitively expensive to reproduce, there are only rare adaptations. There were two in the film's fortieth anniversary year: one was the stunning, wide-screen film-within-a-film sequence at the home of a cunning football coach in Oliver Stone's *Any Given Sunday* (1999). The other was a veritable homage—the pod race in George Lucas's *Star Wars: Episode I, The Phantom Menace*—which included echoes not just in the lap counters and crowd scenes but in the climactic struggle at the end of the race in which the Messala figure is destroyed while trying to destroy the Judah figure.

In making the hundreds of films set in the ancient world, the producers, directors, and their staffs have confronted challenges that do not so consistently face films in other genres, especially noncostume films. Most important, when the film's subject is a character with whom the viewer might be familiar (Julius Caesar, Spartacus, Hercules) or a story the viewer may know intimately (the Passion of Christ, stories from the Old Testament), the film has to find a delicate balance between historical authenticity and dramatic effectiveness. "Historical authenticity" may necessitate a reverent depiction of the Christ, a carefully delineated, complex political character such as Caesar or Cleopatra, or an architectural setting that actually belongs to the period being filmed. Unless the film is a comedy or a farce, Julius Caesar should not be a romantic fool, nor should Bronze Age Greek settings have classical-era, linear vase paintings on the walls, as is the case in many Italian muscleman films. Dramatic effectiveness, on the other hand, demands a dynamic film portrait of the Christ, a lively, emotive, and even romantic Caesar and Cleopatra, and

13 Kiefer Sutherland stands in front of a colossal head of Hermes in *Flatliners* (1990). The plot takes young medical students into the Land of Death, and Hermes Psychopompos (Leader of Souls) is the appropriate Greek god to guide the journey.

14 A snake-goddess from Knossos, Crete. Made circa 1600 B.C., this faience idol's garb is highlighted by tight sleeves, open chest, and segmented dress. The fashion was imitated precisely in the costumes for *The Warrior Empress* (1960) and *Ulysses* (1955), except for certain adjustments to the bustline.

an architectural setting that is pleasing or interesting to look at and creates the general atmosphere desirable for a particular scene.

Some of the films about the life of Christ lean too much toward historical authenticity or aim at an uncinematical reverence. Zeffirelli's *Jesus of Nazareth* (1977) and the otherwise magnificent *Golgotha* (1932) are typical examples, and *Sodom and Gomorrah* (1963) makes the same mistake. The inevitable result is cinematic boredom and—even more detrimental to the intended effect—the type of cheap piety at which many people in a crowded theater are apt to laugh. Then again, a total lack of reverence or historical accuracy is no more desirable. *Solomon and Sheba* (1959), *The Fury of Hercules* (1960), and *Cleopatra* (1999, TV) turn the Old Testament, Greek mythology, and Roman history for the most part into romantic and military mishmash, erasing the historicity of the characters. This in turn takes away our centuries-old admiration for them, and ultimately the drama becomes a mere pageant of unheroic characters. The costumes begin to look silly, and the whole film leans toward absurdity—more absurdity than one could achieve in a bad noncostume film.

The balance between historical authenticity and dramatic effectiveness is not an easy one to find. The critical viewer has almost as much responsibility as the director in establishing this balance; some viewers might be more critical than others. For example, the great Babylonian banquet hall in Griffith's *Intolerance* includes Assyrian, Persian, and ancient

15 The Roman *testudo* (turtle). A well-trained group of soldiers held their shields above their heads and around the sides of the rectangle they formed. Moving in unison, the formation was completely covered by this "shell" of shields. This particular testudo was carved in Trajan's column about A.D. 100, and the maneuver was reenacted for the battle of Alexandria in Fox's 1963 *Cleopatra*.

16 Caligula (Emlyn Williams), Messalina (Merle Oberon), and Claudius (Charles Laughton) in Alexander Korda's unfinished *I, Claudius*. The costumes and decor are a fine blend of authenticity and cinematic license. The chairs in the background are absolutely authentic in design, while the whip in Caligula's hand is a fitting attribute for an emperor who would make his horse a consul.

Indian architectural motifs in addition to the proper and authentic Babylonian art. But at least Griffith remains within the ancient Orient, and the viewer who can distinguish between Assyrian, Babylonian, and Persian decor is a rare one indeed. Griffith's set shows a workable balance between historical authenticity and cinematic atmosphere, and it should be accepted as such. Only in very rare cases is letter-perfect authenticity either possible or desirable.

DeMille was another director who often found the correct balance. His special talent was the exploitation of historical possibility. His temple of Dagon in *Samson and Delilah* (1949) was decorated with Minoan and Sumerian paintings. DeMille's research department would have told him that Delilah's Philistines were historically "sea peoples," whom scholars believe to have come to Philistia from Minoan Crete, and they would have told him that the Sumerians had a strong influence on all of the ancient East. DeMille therefore combined Minoan and Sumerian decor in recreating a Philistine temple about which scholars otherwise know very little. Though the decor of such a temple would have been neither purely Minoan nor purely Sumerian, DeMille's combination of the two styles has a historical basis. More important, DeMille's temple creates an atmosphere that is vivid and pleasing to look at, yet plausibly authentic.

DeMille occasionally emphasized this plausible authenticity by focusing on a particular object. In his 1956 version of *The Ten Commandments* he focuses on a scale: first he has young Rameses (Yul Brynner) put weights on a scale as he details Moses' crimes—feeding the Hebrew slaves and giving them a day of rest; then Moses explains that this makes the slaves stronger so they can make better bricks, and he places a brick on the scale, clearly outweighing Rameses' accusations.

Finding this balance does not result from accident. Griffith, DeMille, Fellini, Pasolini, John Huston, and many other directors of "ancient" films were well read in the subjects they filmed, and Griffith, DeMille, and Fellini especially provided themselves with tomes of historical and architectural research before embarking on their respective works. Mervyn LeRoy began *Quo Vadis?* (1951), his lone venture into the genre, by reading Hugh Gray's specially prepared volumes of research about Neronian Rome and its appearance, customs, and eccentricities. Robert Rossen spent three years preparing his *Alexander the Great* (1955), and the same emphasis on historical accuracy was essential to Josef von Sternberg's unfinished *I, Claudius* (1937). Even cheap Italian productions like *Hercules* (1957) and *Ulysses* (1955) have properly inverted Mycenaean columns, and Fox's *Cleopatra* (1963), for all the scandalous hullabaloo about the torrid on-set love affair between stars Elizabeth Taylor and Richard Burton, offers the most authentic ancient naval battle in filmdom and a marvelous re-creation of a Roman army's *testudo* ("turtle") formation. In brief, it is rare that a film director has not delved into the history, architecture, dress, jewelry, artifacts, and customs of the period that is to be filmed. If a film does not reveal some evidence of careful historical research, the chances are excellent that the dramatic aspects of the film received just as little care.

The balance is most delicate. When directing *I, Claudius*, Josef von Sternberg asked his costume designer to create costumes for the Vestal Virgins of ancient Rome. The designer proceeded to several libraries and museums ("musea," as long as the discussion is about historical authenticity) and found that the half-dozen priestesses of Vesta were cloaked in thick capes and crowned with tiaras. When he conveyed this information to von Sternberg, the director weighed the merits of historicity and dramaturgy and then admonished his cautious designer, "This won't do; I want sixty of them! I want them naked! And I want them on the set tomorrow morning!"[2] Films about ancient history must consider current events as well—specifically, such matters as shooting schedule, budget, and the ultimate financial consequences of each decision on the set. Von Sternberg ended up with a large group of diaphanously veiled females carefully positioned on a flight of steps; they created a soft, mysterious atmosphere for the rest of the set, which already included authentic reproductions of Augustus's Ara Pacis, a marvelously decorated Roman audience hall (on matte), and authentic characterizations of stuttering Claudius, wicked Caligula, and the aging Livia—or if not authentic, at least faithful to the portrayals by the novelist Robert Graves and his Roman source Suetonius. Thanks to these prevailing authenticities, a few extra lightly clad Vestal Virgins did not undermine credibility. After all, a film like *I, Claudius* is art, not document.

Sometimes a director purposely avoids an historical reality either for dramatic effectiveness or to please a misinformed audience. George Stevens planned to shoot *The Greatest Story Ever Told* (1965), his version of the life of Christ, in the authentic Holy Land. When he flew to Lebanon and Israel to survey the Levantine topography, he found it disappointingly dull, dry, and unimpressive. He chose instead to shoot the film in Utah, where the magnificent sandstone mesas would create a staggering backdrop for the Passion. Whether his decision was valid is completely a matter of personal judgment. But critics should at least acknowledge that Stevens was aware of the actual locale and that he had his reasons for disregarding the authentic scenery and moving to scenery that *looked* more authentic.[3]

As for pleasing a misinformed audience, biblical scholars are reasonably sure that in Roman crucifixions the convicted criminal carried only the cross-beam *(patibulum)* to the place of execution. The vertical part of the cross was permanently installed at the site of execution. Once the convict arrived at the site, the cross-beam would be fitted to the vertical beam, and the criminal would be tied and/or nailed to the already erect cross, there to suffer through the agony and asphyxiation of crucifixion. But throughout the history of European painting almost every pictorial representation of Christ bearing his cross shows him dragging the whole cross, so movie directors, hesitant to contradict the age-old iconography, generally feel compelled to show Christ dragging the whole cross. It might be more authentic to have him drag only the cross-beam, but the shock or uneasiness that this change in iconography might cause among the movie audience would undermine the advantage in authenticity. In fact, some viewers would no doubt claim immediately that the film was inauthentic.

Similarly, Old Testament priests going authentically barefoot inside their temples would strike many moviegoers as silly and "inauthentic." A potentially shocking authenticity avoided studiously by filmmakers is the nose-ring often worn as jewelry by Old Testament–era women. D. W. Griffith dealt with the problem of "inauthentic authenticity" in a characteristically distinctive fashion. In filming the fall of Babylon for *Intolerance* he was so worried about audience reaction to his use of obscure but authentic cuneiform documents instead of the less accurate but widely read *Book of Daniel* that he included explanatory footnotes.

Historical authenticity should never be the sole factor in evaluating a film about the ancient world. Even if it were, authenticity is not always a clear-cut matter, but is often open to judgment and relative values. As with DeMille's temple of Dagon, for example, even the most dedicated historians and archaeologists can be quite ignorant of how a particular monument looked. Most historians, archaeologists, Egyptologists, classicists, or biblical scholars who have made a careful study of the everyday life of the ancients have encountered many dead ends. One may know much about the philosophy of Plato or the theology of Sophocles but have little or no idea what color or style of *chiton* (tunic) or what style of sandal Plato or Sophocles used at the Academy or at the theater, what type of paper, pen, desk, or lighting they used while composing dialogues or poetry. Similarly, the

garment Julius Caesar wore at leisure: was it a toga? a tunic with a leather girdle? The exact type of table at which Christ ate his Last Supper—did he sit or recline? These are lost historical facts about which the most highly educated scholars can only speculate.

But the director, the set decorator, the costume and art designers of a film about the ancient world must make exactly the sort of "certain" judgments unavailable to those scholars. In this difficult task they usually turn to historical advisers, who may be classicists or historians such as Hugh Gray *(Helen of Troy, Ulysses, Quo Vadis?)* or Will Durant *(The Fall of the Roman Empire),* and may use primary and secondary literary and archaeological sources, paintings and renditions by the European masters, or the advice of colleagues. When they are "wrong" about something and the movie seems inauthentic, the "error" may be merely a matter of judgment and not of fact. Knowledgeable movie viewers must remember that the historical adviser or the director has generally tried to make a thorough investigation of the relevant historical material. More than once, a Ph.D. has scoffed at an "inauthenticity" in a film only to find later that it indeed *was* authentic.

Perhaps the most vital concept to keep in mind when viewing a film about antiquity is that film directors are artists, and as artists they have every right to adapt, change, or eliminate matters of history in deference to their cinematic art. In this sense, DeMille's fondness for exploiting the slightest thread of historical possibility, Griffith's occasional insistence on the most specifically footnoted historical reality, and Pier Paolo Pasolini's creation of his own world of "meta-history" instead of authentic history, are all possible approaches to cinematic antiquity. Cinematic antiquity belongs first to the demands of film, and second to the demands of history.

Cicero's statement cited as the epigraph for this chapter should be applied to this context. It indeed is "permitted" for film directors, as for "orators," to "lie," if that is what the art behind their "ancient" film demands. The essential question must be: "What are the directors trying to do, and are they succeeding?" If historical authenticity is part of what they are trying to achieve, then it must be factored into the equation; if not, then in all fairness, dramatic criteria alone must be used. But when directors look in both directions and achieve that delicate balance between historical authenticity and dramatic effectiveness, then they have indeed produced a brilliantly artistic re-creation of history, overcoming the greatest difficulties and transfigured historical problems and dramatic pretense into "ancient" cinema at its grandest.

Examining the balance between historical authenticity and dramatic effectiveness is only one method of evaluating an "ancient" film. But measuring the success of "ancient" films with other methods is no easier than evaluating the success of films in other genres. The corpus of work is large and varied. Clearly, most of the post-*Hercules* Italian muscleman epics of the early 1960s are of a lower standard and should not be weighed against expensive Hollywood studio productions. Other films of the genre are virtual milestones in the history of the cinema: *Ben-Hur* (1907, 1925, and 1959), *The Last Days of Pompeii* (1908), *Quo Vadis?* (1912 and 1951), *Cabiria* (1914), *Intolerance* (1916), *The Ten Commandments* (1923 and 1956), *The King of Kings* (1927), *The Sign of the Cross* (1932), *Samson and Delilah* (1949), *The Robe* (1953), *Cleopatra* (1963), and, broadening the perspective, *I, Claudius* (1976), *Caligula* (1980), *The Last Temptation of Christ* (1988), and the made-for-television Hercules films of 1994.

Despite the importance, innovation, and influence of these films, there are viewers who despise the entire genre. They cringe at the belabored historicity as well as the inauthenticities, the costumes, the pageantry, the grandeur, the maxims, the portrayals of religious icons, and the relative lack of psychological relevance for the modern world, not to mention the three- or four-hour running times. This is no surprise. "Ancient" films usually offer a lot to swallow, and some viewers decline to immerse themselves in the reconstructed waters of the past. *De gustibus non disputandum est.*

But a number of films about the ancient world have been adored by audiences. Nine films about the ancient world used to rank among the top money earners of all time: *The Ten Commandments* (1956), *Ben-Hur* (1959), *Cleopatra* (1963), *The Robe* (1953), *The Bible* (1966), *Spartacus* (1960), *Quo Vadis?* (1951), *Hercules* (1957), and *Samson and Delilah* (1949). Each earned over $11 million, an enormous gross if we take into account inflation and several decades of population growth. *Ben-Hur* (1959), budgeted at $15 million, was the top moneymaker of 1959, grossing $70 million during its theatrical release. And then there is DeMille's unique *The King of Kings* (1927), which in addition to its paid admissions was shown free—and without rental charge—to millions of churchgoers.

But the industry changed drastically in the 1970s. Filmgoers, particularly teenagers, began to see popular films two, three, or ten times, the number of screens in theaters mushroomed, and there were new aftermarkets in satellite, cable, and home video. To illustrate the contrast between films made before and after *Jaws* (1975), Disney's animated *Hercules* (1997) earned $245 million worldwide—more than three times the amount *Ben-Hur* earned—and yet its earnings paled in comparison to the top three films of 1997 *(Titanic, The Lost World: Jurassic Park,* and *Men in Black),* which earned approximately $3 billion combined. Of the top 133 money-making films, only two were made before *Jaws*—Disney's animated *Bambi* and *101 Dalmations,* both of which have been rereleased since 1975. Still, if it is any consolation to those who yearn for earlier days, *Ben-Hur* has subsequently earned another $37 million in video rentals.

If critics' awards are valuable criteria, "ancient" films earned nine berths on the *New York Times* annual "ten best" lists: *Ben-Hur* (1925), *The King of Kings* (1927), *The Green Pastures* (1936), *Julius Caesar* (1953), *Ben-Hur* and *Black Orpheus* (1959), *Electra* (1962), *Cleopatra* (1963), and *The Gospel According to Saint Matthew* (1966). *Ben-Hur* (1959) won eleven Academy Awards, including the major Oscars for best picture, best director (William Wyler), best actor (Charlton Heston) and best supporting actor (Hugh Griffith), as well as awards for color cinematography, color art direction, sound, film editing, music, color costume design, and special effects. No film has ever won more Academy Awards. Another seventeen Oscars have been claimed by *Spartacus* (1960: best supporting actor [Peter Ustinov],

costume design, art direction), *Cleopatra* (1963: special effects, costume design, art direction, cinematography), *Black Orpheus* (1959: foreign-language film), *The Ten Commandments* (1956: special effects), *The Robe* (1953: costume design, color set decoration), *Julius Caesar* (1953: black-and-white set decoration), *Samson and Delilah* (1950: art direction, set decoration, costume design), *Cleopatra* (1934: cinematography), and *The Prince of Egypt* (1999: best music, song). Most of these are technical "minor" Oscars, but costume design, art direction, set decoration, special effects, and cinematography are in one sense the most important awards an "ancient" film can win: they create the atmospheric essentials that can convincingly reproduce the "antiquity" in a film about antiquity. To our preconditioned modern eyes—so conditioned since 1907—an "ancient" film often needs the pictorial splendor and broad scope in order to look as if it is really taking place in antiquity. Not all "ancient" films are or should belong to the epic genre, but vivid and effective visual and aural enticements are certainly part of the attraction of antiquity in the cinema. Six "ancient" films also received Oscar nominations for best film—*Cleopatra* (1934 and 1963), *Quo Vadis?* (1951), *Julius Caesar* and *The Robe* (1953), and *The Ten Commandments* (1956)—another five actors and actresses were nominated for best actor or best actress, and Martin Scorsese was nominated as best director for *The Last Temptation of Christ* in 1989. Still another eight films set in antiquity were nominated for various Academy Awards—*Electra, The Gospel According to St. Matthew, The Fall of the Roman Empire, The Greatest Story Ever Told, The Bible, Jesus Christ Superstar,* and *Hercules* (1997)—as were another twenty-two films set in the modern world but containing important classical allusions, two of which—*The English Patient* and *Braveheart*—won the best picture Oscar. In addition, of the made-for-television films and miniseries, *I, Claudius, The Last Days of Pompeii, Joseph,* and *The Odyssey* each won at least one Emmy award.

In general, "ancient" films have always demanded special care, huge costs, and top-rate actors and directors. In terms of cost, *Quo Vadis?* (1912), *Cabiria* (1914), *Intolerance* (1916), *Quo Vadis?* (1951), *The Ten Commandments* (1956), *Ben-Hur* (1959), *Cleopatra* (1963) were, at their specific eras, the costliest films ever made, and the same can be said of *Masada* (1981) and *A.D.* (1985) among television films. The names of directors that worked on "ancient" films themselves make up an epic list: Academy Award winners William Wyler, George Stevens, Joseph L. Mankiewicz, John Huston, Michael Curtiz, Robert Wise, Martin Scorsese, and Frank Borzage, as well as King Vidor, Raoul Walsh, Howard Hawks, Stanley Kubrick, Cecil B. DeMille, D. W. Griffith, Federico Fellini, Pier Paolo Pasolini, and many others. Academy Award–winning actors who have starred in films about the ancient world include Marlon Brando, Ernest Borgnine, Charlton Heston, Peter Ustinov, Hugh Griffith, Yul Brynner, George C. Scott, Anthony Quinn, Charles Laughton, Burl Ives, Rex Harrison, Broderick Crawford, Dean Jagger, George Sanders, Sir Laurence Olivier, Fredric March, H. B. Warner, Anthony Hopkins, Anne Bancroft, Sophia Loren, Elizabeth Taylor, Susan Hayward, Vivien Leigh, Claudette Colbert, and Jessica Lange.

Ultimately, considering the massive historical material that directors of "ancient" films must digest, the weighty, maxim-filled scripts they often must use, the popular expectations and hoopla that they must satisfy, the religious and theological parameters that they must respect, and the complex decisions about decor, properties, costumes, and settings that they must make, not to mention the multimillion-dollar corporate investment for which they are responsible, it is clear why "ancient" films are rarely if ever perfect. An ancient film inherently presents a greater challenge than most other films; so much can go wrong in a large costume production with lions, elephants, horses, thousands of extras, huge sets, and location shooting, in addition to all the human and historical problems. The handful of triumphant ancient films that have succeeded in overcoming these Herculean challenges and presenting realistic and powerfully dramatic re-creations of the ancient world truly belong on the lofty and ratified heights of filmdom's Olympus.

Jon Solomon

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To Lois, *quasi quasar universi mei*