The recent success of Hollywood blockbusters such as *Troy, Alexander* and *300* demonstrates how popular Greek antiquity still is and how well it can be marketed. Today as in the golden age of the *peplum*-genre, its myths, the Homeric heroes, the Attic tragedies, and – less frequently – historical personages such as Alexander the Great or the Spartan king Leonidas represent Hellas.

The authors of this volume highlight the many and varied forms of the reception of ancient Hellas in the history of the cinema, from mythology to Roman Greece, from the era of silent films to the new millennium. In this, they are examining classic films, recent releases, and lesser known and often overlooked productions.

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Hellas on Screen

Irene Berti / Marta García Morcillo

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Cinematic Receptions of Ancient History, Literature and Myth

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HABES

Heidelberger Althistorische
Beiträge und
Epigraphische Studien

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Herausgegeben von
Géza Alföldy,
Angelos Chaniotis
und Christian Witschel

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PREFACE

Films on classical subjects have a much wider range than most scholars and teachers realize. *Spartacus*, *Cleopatra*, *Ben Hur* and now *Troy* and *Alexander* are famous but how many ancient historians realize that there have been Italian films about historical subjects in fourth-century BC Sicily? It is exciting to read this collection of studies which bring so much more to our notice.

I must admit to being a late convert. I was brought up to think that films were only to be watched on wet English afternoons. Otherwise, the cinema was a poor second best to hours spent in the fresh air. I also thought, in ignorance, that "film studies" were a feeble subject (they involved watching, not "self-improving" reading) and that their items of study were so down-market that scholars should waste no time on them. They were for under-powered minds who could not cope with ancient languages and had no idea of facts, contexts and social settings.

I freely admit to a conversion on the road to London's Warburg Institute Library thanks to the blinding light of Hollywood. From 2002 to 2004 I was the historical consultant to the director Oliver Stone on his major movie, *Alexander*. My reward was to lead the Macedonian Companion Cavalry into battle at Gaugamela (in the Moroccan desert) and against Porus's war-elephants (in the big Saraburi Botanical Arboretum in Thailand). I had the dream view from between my horses' ears, and apart from the friendship and spirit of those days I learned so much so quickly. I also realized that the subject unrolling around me was one of exceptional interest and importance. I will now sit through almost anything, including the latest version of the *300*. I have to confess that the cavalry in the recent epic Mongol about Genghis Khan would almost certainly defeat my own.

Here are some central issues. If a film is about named historical persons, can we justly watch it and suspend historical criticism? Ronald Syme tried to draw a line between "historical fiction", centred on fictional characters in a historical period, and "fictional history", centred on historical persons and using paraphernalia of original sources. "Historical fiction" would include War and Peace or Rouge et Noir. "Fictional history", he thought, should include Marguerite Yourcenar's dense *Memoirs of Hadrian*, especially in her editions which cited underlying sources.

I am none too convinced by this sharp line. Syme wished to disparage Yourcenar's widely-read book and "fictional history" allowed him to class it with his other scholarly interest, the wild and often humorous *Historia Augusta*, which was basically (in his view) the work of a late "impostor" and forger. At first sight, "fictional history" is a category which works rather well for Shakespeare. We talk, after all, about the "history plays." But is it really the right category for the novelist Mary Renault when writing about Alexander or his Successors through known contemporaries' "dialogue"? What about Robert Graves's matchless *I Claudius*, frequently based on original sources and seen through Claudius's eyes? Neither

Graves nor Renault thought they were "fictional historians." They thought they were novelists, entertaining, informing and diverting their readers. At most they might say they grasped at an "essence", in some way, which lay behind the gaps, fragments and reticence of historical sources.

I think that Stone's *Alexander* or the 1960s *Spartacus* are fictions too, "historical dramas" perhaps, not historical novels. Ronald Syme detected "fictional history" in the accompanying notes with which Yourcenar's *Memoirs* irritated him. What should we make, say, of Oliver Stone's *JFK* or *Nixon* which were issued with a supporting battery of sources for critics? Perhaps "fictional history" is right for them, as they did overlap with heavily-attested events and known, living persons. However, annotation is not necessarily a claim to "history" pure and simple. A subject from the ancient world actually marks a turning-point here in literary presentation. Shakespeare's "history" plays only survive in the collected Folio editions. The master himself did not issue them one by one, hot after their performances with supporting "sources." It is Ben Johnson who marks the change. His *Sejanus* appeared in 1604 with a text surrounded by historical notes and citations. For the first time a dramatist was claiming to be more than a fictional transposer. His *Sejanus* was claiming to be based on history, a real "historical drama" with back up. Is it therefore "fictional history"? I hesitate still, and prefer to class it as a "historical drama". "Fictional history" seems wrong, somehow.

Are historians, then, advised to keep quiet when filmmakers take leave of historical evidence and produce fictions as bizarre as the Persian King and his army in the recent *300*? I do not think so. If a film or a play directly messes up what we know from historical evidence, historians are right to clamour. In my view they should have clamoured even more about *Gladiator*. What ancient historians have to remember is that they do not know the full picture. We know the main things which Alexander did and we can draw up a chronology and an (approximate) route for his army. We do not know how he talked or what he was really like. If Stone or Lean or Ridley Scott try to fill in such gaps with their own interpretation of an ancient person, we need to be sure we know they are wrong, rather than believing they "must" be. If only Wolfgang Petersen had not invoked Homer, how could historians really object to yet another re-telling of an inherently unhistorical myth about legendary Troy?

Ah, you may say, but we do know the order of Alexander's troubles in India, the troops' refusals, his wounds, the elephant battle and so forth. Stone muddled them up. But Angelos Chaniotis sees the central point here: the film is narrated by a third party, Ptolemy, who is remembering events at least forty years ago. We are watching Ptolemy's version and if there are mistakes in it, they are mistakes of his ageing memory. We cannot point to bits of Ptolemy's existing history, or our scholarly deductions about it, and then deny that Ptolemy ever remembered things in this way. As the film exemplifies, his "remembering" is a work in progress, bits of which are to be cut out before it goes on record.

A third person, interposed between the history in question, gives the script and the spectators more latitude. If Ptolemy's memories had been wildly wrong (the unmade Baz Luhrmann's *Alexander* was playing with a script in which Alexander died in India), then historians can justly protest. In my view, films about antiquity

should be more or less true to the outline of what we know. Directors' fiction, "insight" and sense of drama can then range over what we do not know and can also gain space by using a main narrator at some distance from events.

What about the sets and settings? Archaeologists, museum curators and others often complain about anachronisms or inaccuracies. In Stone's Alexander, Olympias's bedroom includes a copy of the ancient "Ram in the Thicket" sculpture which was found from a distant era by Leonard Woolley at Ur. Wits even suggested that Angelina Jolie was being shown to have plundered Iraq's Museum in the aftermath of the "liberation" of Baghdad. I accept the more thoughtful designers' and set-dressers' rationale: they want to carry an audience with them and sustain the illusion of a particular period. They do not need to have every detail "right", quite apart from the fact that we usually do not know what all the right details were. Archaeology has left us a very patchy, or non-existent, picture of Philip's Pella or Darius's Babylon, let alone of Ptolemy's Library in Alexandria. Film-makers build on existing illusions to create a further coherent illusion. When a big film starts to move, it moves extraordinarily fast, money and budgets being what they are. Last-minute changes and "illusions" are inevitable. If a curator or an archaeologist cannot say exactly what was in Philip's Pella (alas, they cannot), there have to be compromises, and the race against deadlines compounds them.

The illusion of reality does not need reality. It is worth taking issue here with an essay about Roman epic films in Roland Barthes's *Mythologies*. Barthes notices the conventional Roman hairstyle in such films (all "fringes" and no bald men, he claims) and the standard sweat on faces in the crowd ("vaseline", he thinks). He then complains that these conventions are untrue to the subject and even that they are bastardized "signs" with a false, "bourgeois" relationship to what is "signified." This classifying is arbitrary and is only his own hobby-horse: it is not grounded in the objective logic of language. Film-makers would answer that these "signs" help to sustain "illusions" of reality and there is no need to be so earnest and existentialist about "illusions." They have their uses and their own potential.

What about comparisons between a film-director's art and a writer-historian's art? I do not think that a Stone or a Fellini can really be compared with Plutarch. They (not Plutarch) rely in part on fictional dialogue and on actors who are visibly impersonating a known person's looks. They can also imply so much by a silent "cut" or angle or juxtaposition. It is still worth reading Virginia Woolf's essay on first seeing *Anna Karenin* on film. The look of the actress-heroine troubled her and we can still sympathize with this obstacle in history-films. She was also troubled by film's explicitness, not knowing quite how this new medium would develop. Unlike a Plutarch Life, a history film has now evolved as a genre and allows so much to be "said" implicitly by being "shown", in ways which Virginia Woolf could not imagine. In *Alexander*, Roxane, significantly, is shown with snake-images on her body and with a snake-bracelet (all too like Olympias's).They are full of meaning, although nothing is said about them. At Philip's remarriage, a man (who turns out to be the bodyguard, Pausanias) is being sexually abused, face down, by guests behind a pillar. The same man then reappears later and is Philip's murderer. Not even the censors, I think, really saw the first

episode. Viewers have to look carefully to make the links. Subtle though modern readings of Plutarch have become, their interconnections are never so firmly based on an author's own avowed non-verbal aims.

Might films, instead, help us to appreciate ancient historical narratives? I think especially of Roman historians who were heirs to a developed tradition of rhetoric. It is worth considering Tacitus's *Histories* in this light. The recent commentary on Book Two by Rhiannon Ash has much to say about free-floating episodes and the author's scope for "suggestive juxtapositions." Within limits (their sources, their historical sequence), Tacitus does indeed exploit them and his use makes me think at once of the skill of serious directors of historical film. So do his much-criticized battle-narratives, with their generalized clashes, their focus on an individual incident and their characterization of crowds. Film-battles exploit a similar style, but in films we are carried along by it without protesting. Tacitus, by contrast, is still widely considered to be the "the most unmilitary historian", as Mommsen called him.

Tacitus in Hollywood? It sounds like one of his own most mordant epigrams. But I think there is point to it, just as there is still much to be exploited in historians' criticisms of films. There is a rich, open field here, waiting to be cultivated without (I hope) layers of insecure, needless jargon. After all, ancient historians have a special point of contact with this medium: it was already invented by Plato. Plato is not only the inventor of "science fiction": he is also the inventor of the idea of projected images and "special effects" in his marvellous image of the Cave in his *Republic*. While describing it to Hollywood's leading exponents of such arts, I was delighted to find them hailing Plato as a forerunner, the genius who anticipated the very techniques of animation and "special effects" that were then reinvented by Disney and by Lucas' *Star Wars*. If only Plato had patented his inventions as "possessions for all time" and prescribed that all royalties were to go to promoting classical studies. Admittedly, he would have excluded the study of classical art, and Homeric studies would have had to struggle for any funding from him. He might have supported history, of a sort, and he would certainly have endowed classical philosophy. His royalty-payments from film-makers would have entrenched these subjects throughout Europe and put them beyond the reach of narrow modern Rectors and Vice-Chancellors who aim to reduce universities to centres of yesterday's business-techniques, courses which students then refute by learning more relevant practices in their own subsequent careers.

Oxford, July 2008 Robin Lane Fox

INTRODUCTION: DOES GREECE – AND THE CINEMA – NEED A NEW ALEXANDER?

Irene Berti and *Marta García Morcillo*

> "The world's great age begins anew,
> The golden years return…" (P.B. Shelley, *Hellas*)

Cinematic visions of history have traditionally been a challenge and a touchstone for scholars interested in the medium. After decades of decline, the inauguration of a new era of large-scale epics on the ancient world in the wake of the global impact of *Gladiator* (Ridley Scott, 2000) has not only spelt a new lease of life for the genre, it has also provided impulses for classicists and ancient historians.[1] Particular attention among scholars has tended to focus on the problems involved in defining the boundaries of the genre (or genres). To some degree these problems are created by the use of the same terms to refer to productions that are anything but uniform, among them: epic, sword and sandal, *peplum*, *kolossal*, toga movie, etc. The films grouped under these headings are frequently very different indeed. To what extent can we really compare for instance Griffith's *Intolerance* (1916), Cacoyannis' *Electra* (1962), Mankiewicz' *Cleopatra* (1963), Ferroni's *Le baccanti* (1960), Wyler's *Ben Hur* (1959), Leone's *Il colosso di Rodi* (1960), Kawalerowicz' *Faraon* (1966) and the recent version of Miller's comic *300* (Zack Snyder, 2006)? The fact that they are all set in the ancient world tends to mask the significant differences between them in terms of the periods and contexts in which they were produced, the budgets available, the technical sophistication of these films and, of course, the choice of subjects.[2] As it is known, the first attempt to

1 Essential classics on the subject are Jon SOLOMON'S *The Ancient World in Cinema* (1978) – the revised edition of 2001 mirrors the revival of the genre – and ELLEY's *The Epic Film. Myth and History* (1984). See also WINKLER, 2001[2]; 2004; 2007; 2007a. On this revival and its scholarly reception see WIEBER 2007, 19-40 (with further bibliography). On the temporary decline of toga films as of the sixties, see SOLOMON 1996, 113-140. The growing interest on the genre displayed by classical scholars and the incremental role it plays in research is exemplified by the inclusion of the article "Film" by WIEBER-SCARIOT, in *Der Neue Pauly* 13, 1999, 1133-1141, and more recently (2006) by GALINSKY's contribution to the *Blackwell Companion to the Classical Tradition*.

2 Besides the return to old topics and some interest in Greek and Roman history, Italian toga films also explored new territories within the vast landscape of myth, creating a sub-genre nearer to the domain of fantasy. Examples are Mario Bava's "vampirical" experiment in *Ercole al centro della terra* (1961) and the anachronistic and explosive assembly of classical "hemen" in *Ercole, Sansone, Maciste, Ursus – gli invincibili* (G. Capitani, 1964). For a discussion on etymological issues associated with the genre, sub-genres and their allusions to the ancient world, including science-fiction films, cf. AZIZA 1998, 7-11; LANNUT 1998, 72-74; DESSERE 1998, 84-90; and most recently ZAGARIO 2005, 7-14; WIEBER 2007, 26-30;

outline the characteristic features of the genre was Jacques Siclier's article *L'âge du péplum*, written in 1962 for the influential *Cahiers du cinema*.[3] At that time, epic movies were undergoing a major transformation in the course of the transition from the golden age of the Hollywood spectaculars in the fifties to the revival triggered by European low-budget productions at the end of the fifties and throughout the sixties, many of them shot at the Roman studios of Cinecittà. While *Cleopatra* (1963) and in particular *The Fall of the Roman Empire* (1964) are traditionally considered to be final flowering of the colossal Hollywood epic, Pietro Francisci's *Le fatiche di Ercole* / *Hercules* (1957), featuring the muscleman Steve Reeves, was the overture to a new and less pretentious approach to this kind of films. Together with movies such as Pastrone's *Cabiria* (1914), Blasetti's *Fabiola* (1947), and Guazzoni's and LeRoy's *Quo Vadis?* (1913; 1951), they represent key-moments in the history of the genre. If we inquire into the reasons for Hollywood's renewed interest in ancient epics in the new millennium, exemplified by productions like *Troy* (Wolfgang Petersen, 2004), *Alexander* (Oliver Stone, 2004) and the recent *300* (Zack Snyder, 2006), one answer that suggests itself is the so-called technological revolution sparked off by the arrival of computer-graphics.[4] Its contribution to the aesthetic sophistication of these films by merging imperceptibly with the traditional settings, or in many cases actually replacing them, represents an attractive feature for modern audiences in search of increasingly spectacular extravaganzas.[5] The current revival has also been associated with a renewal of interest in older movies. Many of these have been re-issued on DVD and restored to their full-length versions in the last few years, thus facilitating comparative studies on modern and earlier cinematic approaches to subject matter taken from antiquity.[6] For all this, the tendency towards remakes, rehashes of the same material and a lack of thematic originality are characteristic traits of these new cinema and TV productions. Nero, Spartacus, Cleopatra, Achilles, Helena, Odysseus, Heracles, Caesar, Antony, Commodus, Marcus Aurelius, Alexander and Hannibal are some of the stock figures that have been taken up anew and treated in line with new cultural patterns and audience demands. The first thing that strikes us in this connection is the universal fascination with certain charac-

POMEROY 2008, 46-59; and SPINA in this volume. For a discussion of distinctive visual, acoustic and thematic traits, see also SOLOMON 2001, 319-337; MARTIN 2002, 14-38, LINDNER 2005a, 67-85.

3 SICLIER 1962, 26-38.

4 Prior to *Gladiator*, television contributed to the renaissance of the genre thanks with the worldwide success achieved in the 1990s by serials such as *Hercules – The Legendary journeys* and *Xena, the Warrior Princess*. Alongside their spectacular locations, sets, *attrezzo* and costumes, both serials represent an original review of myth and ancient history in line with the preferences of modern audiences and the demands of the fantasy-genre. In the last few years, some TV mini-series on classical topics have also been produced: *The Odyssey* (Andrej Konchalovsky, 1997), *Cleopatra* (Franc Roddan, 1999), *Jason and the Argonauts* (Nick Willing, 2000), *Helen of Troy* (John Kent Harrison, 2003). And noteworthy is the success of the series *Rome* (2005-2007), produced by BBC, HBO and RAI (www.hbo.com/rome), and covering the period from Caesar's campaign in Gaul to Actium.

5 Note also the influence exerted on the aesthetics of these films by the epic subject matter and the technical skills typical of computer games.

6 DVD facilitates access to films of all types, even relatively unknown productions.

ters and topics to the detriment of others. One manifestation of this is the prevalence of Rome over Greece in mainstream cinema – at least over Greek history.[7] Within this overall scheme a number of other tendencies are identifiable. The unequal representation of the Roman Republic in film – with some familiar exceptions such as the period of the Second Punic Wars and the final century – contrasts with the degree of interest in early Empire and those emperors who played a negative role in connection with the rise of Christendom.[8] Apart from the anachronistic image of decadence conveyed by *The Fall of the Roman Empire*, set in the reign of Commodus, the second and third century with late antiquity may be regarded as dark ages in cinematic terms, again only illuminated by the presence of some renowned Christian characters (f. ex. *Costantino il Grande*, 1962).[9]

So, what about Greece? The past and present attention devoted in mainstream film productions to Alexander and his conquests and the Persian Wars (especially Thermopylae) confirms the fascination exerted by certain historical episodes.[10] After achieving a fair degree of prominence in the silent-film era with prestigious filmed version of stage successes – and subsequently lapsing into neglect with the definitive abandonment of theatrical modes by the film industry, – Greek tragedy rose to new heights outside Hollywood in the sixties due to particular film authors such as Michael Cacoyannis and Pier Paolo Pasolini.[11] Mythological characters and subject matter taken from Homer, on the other hand, have received permanent attention and consistent renewal in different epochs until today.

In contemporary imagery, Alexander the Great and the 300 Spartans seem thus to have achieved the universality of myth and epos. Film adaptations of particular historical episodes are nevertheless rather exceptional.[12] The most remarkable of them, all dating from the golden era of the Italian *peplum*, can be readily enumerated: *La battaglia di Maratona* / *The Giant of Marathon* (1959) – again a chapter from the Persian Wars (490 BC); *Sette a Tebe* / *Seven from Thebes* (1963);[13] *Gli invincibili sette* / *The Invincible Seven* (1963) – dealing with the Spartan hegemony in the fourth century BC; *La Venere di Cheronea* / *Aphrodite,*

7 The major attraction for Rome and the problems with ancient Greece on film have been recently analysed by Gideon NISBET 2006, 2-44. As Herbert VERRETH notes in the present volume, 65, this impression is misleading. He indicates that the number of "Greek films" clearly outnumbers the "Roman" variety, especially if we consider those produced during the silent era, which are frequently disregarded in much of the work on history of the genre. This seems also to be the case of children's animation films, see LINDNER, in this volume, 40.

8 On the image of Roman emperors in film, see LINDNER 2007.

9 See further *Fabiola* (A Blasetti, 1947).

10 On films dealing with the ancient Greece, see the filmography by DUMONT 1998, 143-146 and VERRETH 1995, 29-44; updated version: www.arts.kuleuven.be/ALO/klassieke/film.htm.

11 On film versions of Greek tragedy, see MACKINNON 1986; FUSILLO 1996; BERTINI, (ed.), 1997; MCDONALD 1991[2]. MCDONALD – WINKLER 2001[2], 72-89, MICHELAKIS 2000, 377-378; 2001, 241-57.

12 On the general problem of the "un-cinematic" nature of Greek history in comparison with mythology and Roman topics, see SOLOMON 2001[2], 38-47; ÉLOY 1998, 42-47; DE ESPAÑA 1998, 165-194; ALTEKAMP 2002, 751-759; PRIETO 2004, 71-93; BOSCHI 2005, 15-26; NISBET 2006, 2-18.

13 Another work on the subject of the Persian Wars is Aeschylus' drama *Persae*, the basis for the film *Les Perses* (J. Prat, 1961).

Goddess of love (1957) – centring on Praxiteles and Athens before the battle of Chaeronea; *Il colosso di Rodi* / *The Colossus of Rhodes* (1960) – an original attempt to give an improbably Hellenistic view of Rhodes; *L'assedio di Siracusa* / *Archimede* (1960) and *Il conquistatore di Corinto* / *The Centurion* (1962) – two interesting takes on Greeks defeated by imperialist Romans. Further notable movies from this period concerning Greek historical events and characters were original re-workings of literary subjects that had already been taken up in the silent era. This was the case, for instance, with *Frine, cortigiana d'Oriente* (1953), *Saffo, venere di Lesbo* / *Sappho, Venus of Lesbos* (1960) and *Socrate* (1970).[14] Lacking the kind of action typical of toga movies, Rossellini's didactic TV-project on the trial and death of Socrates exemplifies the problematic nature of some noteworthy Greek subjects that not readily lend themselves to adaptation as a potential storyline in mainstream cinema.[15] Obviously, visions of politicians and philosophers living in democratic Athens, such as Cleisthenes, Cleon, Pericles, Socrates or Plato, are bound to be less attractive in cinematic terms than collective or individual epic heroes and warriors, such as Heracles, Achilles, Leonidas and his Spartans and, of course, Alexander.[16] It is however surprising that despite their indisputable potential other episodes and characters in Greek history, such as the Peloponnesian Wars, the captivating Alcibiades and the tyrant Peisistratus, or the long and turbulent period of the Hellenistic kingdoms, have been almost totally ignored in film up to the present day.[17] Unlike Rome, ancient Greece is associated with philosophers, intellectuals and politicians rather than warriors. With some notable exceptions, cinematic heroes are more or less only to be found in mythology and Homer's epic. This shortage of "outsize" personalities stems from modern literary reception and is one of the reasons explaining the preference of the cinema for Roman subjects.[18] Another, of course, is the pre-eminence of early

14 On the various versions of these topics, see VERRETH's filmography.

15 In this regard, see also the interesting cinematic experiment by Jean-Marie Straub *Der Tod des Empedokles* (1987), shot as filmed theatre in various Sicilian settings.

16 On the epic profile of the Greek cinematic hero, see ÉLOY 1998, 43. Choosing the example of *Bill and Ted's Excellent Adventure* (1989) and the figure of Socrates as a "boring intellectual", NISBET 2006, 2-9, 17-18, uses the term "anti-Cinema" to refer to the problem posed by the lack of action in films dealing with classical Greece, as opposed to the much more exciting Roman topics.

17 According to SOLOMON 2001, 40: "Unfortunately, culturally brilliant fifth-century Athens has been ignored by the cinema. No one has thought Pericles, Alcibiades, or the Peloponnesian Wars worthy of the modern cinema." ÉLOY 1998, 41, calls this neglect a "désert cinématographique." One exception is the portrait of Dionysius, the tyrant of Syracuse, in *Damon and Pythias* (1908, 1914, 1962), and also the anachronistic Rhodes of *Il colosso di Rodi*, indeed ruled by a Persian look-alike named Xerxes. Other exceptions worth mentioning in connection with fifth-century Athens are the various and heterogeneous film adaptations of Aristophanes' Lysistrata in the silent era – i. e. *Lysistrata ou la grève des baisers* (Louis Feuillade, 1910) – right through to the new millennium; see *Lisístrata* (2002), Francesc Bellmunt's adaptation of Ralf Königs' comic version of the play.

18 A key role in the modern literary reception of ancient historical characters has been played by Shakespeare, who, basing many of his plays on Plutarch, contributed to the preference for some historical figures over others. On the importance of Shakespeare in the choice of cinematic subjects in the silent-movie era, see PEARSON – URICCHIO 2004, 155-168. On Plutarch's influence on Shakespeare, see THOMAS 1989.

Christendom as an ideal counterpoise to the portrayal of Rome as a totalitarian empire with contemporary reminiscences.

In addition, one problem for modern audiences is that of recognizing the succession of different periods constituting ancient Greek history. The Roman conquest of Greece is particularly well illustrated by *Il conquistatore di Corinto*. With his dreamy nostalgia for a Greece long gone, film-villain Diaeus summarises in a sentence his view on Corinth's imminent capture by the Romans: "What Greece needs is another Alexander!"[19] Alexander emerges here as a model of unity for a divided and decadent Greece. The exemplary nature of the Macedodonian king is also associated with the imperialist idea of conquest and the opposition to an alternative model – that of the Persians –, the same one threatening Greek *koiné* at Thermopylae. Like Homeric Achaeans, the Greeks thus become cinematically interesting as part of an epic story involving resistance to foreign invaders, rather than divided peoples fighting among themselves – as in the Peloponnesian Wars. Accordingly, the cinema has contrived to create an image of ancient Greece that does not entirely square with the one traditionally taught in the classroom – with its emphasis on Athenian democracy. But in many ways it accords with the models transmitted by the Romans and by European classicism. The idealized cultural image of Greece is epitomized by Athens and the Acropolis.[20] But beyond this icon it remains difficult to find a characteristic image of Greece as a distinctive space and territory.[21] No Greek polis – not even Athens – could compete with the architectural splendour of Egypt, Babylon and, of course, Rome.[22] Unlike Rome, Greece thus figures largely as a vague landscape of marble ruins, an ideal space fêted as such by the Roman poets and by Winckelmann, Shelley or Goethe.[23] While Greece primarily belongs to the domain of myth, of intellect and of imagination, imperialist Rome emerges as a tangible historical scenario, complete with power struggles and urban civilization.[24] Faced with the choice between the multi-

19 On this film, cf. M. GARCIA in this volume, 230-232.

20 See NISBET 2006, 8, 37, 39.

21 NISBET 2006, 16, refers to the same difficulties in connection with Roger Corman's *Atlas* (1961). On the problem of finding recognisable and appropriate sets and locations for films dealing with ancient Greece, see ÉLOY 1995, 17-24; and N. GARCIA, in this volume.

22 Herodotus' admiring reports of the Egyptian, Assyrian and Persian cities point up the contrast with the relative modesty of the Greek *poleis*. See, for instance, his description of Babylon, 1, 178-192.

23 On the problem of the territorial definition of ancient Greece and the creation of a fossilised idea of "Greekness" by the Neoclassicism, see PRIETO 2004, 72-73. On the Atheno-centricity of Western cultural images of ancient Greece, see for instance CARTLEDGE 1993, 175-176. Until the nineteenth century, Rome was tangible and real for poets and artists, whereas occupied Greece remained a place of dreams for Western travellers. Goethe, like Winckelmann, evokes Greece as a place for nostalgia. His *Iphigenie* figures as "das Land der Griechen mit der Seele suchend" (I, 1, 12). Shelley's famous *Preface to Hellas* (1822) makes great claims for the Greek cultural heritage: "We are all Greeks. Our laws, our literature, our religion, our arts, have their roots in Greece." See also JENKYNS 1980, on Romantic and Victorian visions of Greece, 60ff., 155ff.

24 The causes for the marginalisation of Roman mythology may be sought in the European and North American education systems, where Roman mythology has been widely considered to be a mere copy of the Greek variety.

faceted image of the polis and the potentialities of the Empire, the cinema has clearly opted for the latter.[25]

In line with this schema, historical characters such as Leonidas and Alexander have assumed a mythical aura in the cinema, whereas legendary Rome, personified for instance by Aeneas, rarely makes an appearance on the big screen.[26] The fact that the best-known adaptations of Homer's Iliad – *Helen of Troy* (1956), *La Guerra di Troia* (1961), *L'ira di Achille* (1962), *Troy* (2004) – tend to omit or severely restrict the incarnation of the gods has not only helped to reconcile modern viewers with the ancient epics, it has also brought these epics closer to the realm of mortals. In a sense, this decision fills the gap left by the low degree of cinematic reception accorded to Greek history.[27] Accordingly, we should always consider the privileged status achieved by the Homeric epos as a milestone in the Greek conception of historical past. In this regard, Athenian drama and its reception have managed to capture the universal character of the Greek myth and epos. For modern viewers – as for the ancient Greek audiences – the deeds of Heracles, Achilles' heroism and the tragic fate of the Atrides have become stock referential touchstones defying the complexity of history and its heterogeneous political scenarios.[28] Thus the cinema seems to agree with Aristotle in its preferences for myth, the epic and tragedy.[29] The cinematic image of the ancient hero ties in conveniently with the universal model proposed by Greek epics and mythology. In addition, the cinema – and Hollywood in particular – has traditionally favoured a stereotypical image of the self-made human hero which is very close to the American dream of progress and liberty.[30] In accordance with this pattern, characters such as the rebel slave Spartacus, the fictitious Maximus in *Gladiator* and the clichéd Christian heroes opposed to the tyrannical power of Rome have very few parallels in the Greek world.[31] Beyond the polarisation between Greeks and Persians as embodiments of ideas like freedom and tyranny, respectively, and the

25 On the problem of imaging Greek monumentality in contrast to the magnetism of "iconic" Rome, see NISBET 2006, 7-8, 37. The geographical difficulties of defining ancient Greece also played a significant part in ancient literature and in historiographic controversies; see PRONTERA 1991, 78-105.

26 The legend of the foundation of Rome has predictably figured in the cinematic reception in Italian productions of the silent era and the sixties. See for instance, *Rea Silva o l'origine di Roma* (A. Degli Abbati, 1910); *Il ratto delle Sabine* (U. Falena, 1910; R. Pottier, 1961); *Romolo e Remo* (S. Corbucci, 1961); *La leggenda di Enea* (G. Rivalta, 1962). See also Franco Rossi's European co-production for cinema and TV *Eneide* (1971).

27 On this choice in connection with *Troy*, see SOLOMON 2007, 97-98, and FITTON 2007, 99, 106.

28 On the popularity of the Homeric epic in the cinema, see WINKLER 2007a, 43-67.

29 Aristotle, *Poet*. 9, 1-3; see FINLEY 1987[4], 11 ff. On the preferences for myth and drama in Greek film-productions see in particular STASSINOPOULOU 2002, 35-43.

30 As SOCCI notes, 2001, 89-105, the construction of archetypical cinematic heroes owed much to icons inherited from the 19th century. In his view, Ben Hur and Spartacus represent the image of the typical Hollywood hero and are consequently "ideologically proteiform."

31 The image of the ascendant hero in accordance with the American ethic as exemplified in *Gladiator* is analysed by WINKLER 2004a, 24: "Such stories can be set in mythical or biblical antiquity, in Roman history and in contemporary society, but for some reason they seem not to work, when they are set in Greece: why?"

world of war and conquests epitomized by Alexander, Greek history has little to offer modern audiences in the way of action and heroism. Yet by giving priority to the representation of the Greeks as a uniform, pan-Hellenic nation in contrast to the Persians, the cinema has been in line with a cultural *topos* that has been in currency from Herodotus to the present day.[32] Contemporary Western views on the east-west conflict – involving first the Communist block and later the Muslim world – have become a central theme for political debate in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries.

Major scholarly attention has been lavished on the traditional debate about the authenticity of historical films. According to Jon Solomon, "Cinematic antiquity belongs first to the demands of film and second to the demands of history."[33] The aim of a historical film is thus not to provide truthful storylines and images of the past but to transmit effectively to its viewers a feeling for history. It is obvious that this concern will not always coincide with scholarly demands for historical accuracy.[34] To a certain degree, the creation of historicity through the visual and narrative mechanisms of fiction as transmitted by the cinema was indeed a significant trend in Greek historiography and in authors such as Herodotus and Thucydides.[35] If fiction and imagination were part and parcel of literary transmission of history from the outset, there is certainly no point in judging films with reference to vague parameters of authenticity.[36]

While films are not historical documents, they are unquestionably recipients of cultural traditions, expression of their own age and of the way(s) contemporaries envisage the past.[37] Accordingly, the *Zeitgeist* emerges thus always as essen-

32 Herodotus bases his idea of Greek *ethnos* on the common language and on *nomoi*, which explains the effective communion between Spartans and Athenians during the Persian Wars. Greek political harmony and the Greek ideal of freedom thus contrast with Persian despotism. This opposition is particularly well expressed in the answer given to Xerxes by the Spartans on a hypothetical pact against the Athenians before the battle of Plataea: 8, 144: "…there is the fact that we are all Greeks – one race speaking one language, with temples to the gods and religious rites in common, and with a common way of life. It would not be good for Athens to betray all this shared heritage. So if you didn't know it before, we can assure you that so long as even a single Athenian remains alive, we will never come to terms with Xerxes…" (transl. A. D. Godley, LCL). On the Greeks' self-definition, see also CARTLEDGE 1993, 12 ff, 61 ff.

33 SOLOMON 2001, 32. See also Solomon's criticism of the way classicists watch and consider films set in antiquity, 2007, 85-98. On the controversy film-history and the idea of cinema as contra-analysis of the society, see FERRO 1993[2], 31 ff.; ROSENSTONE 1995; 2006. The debate on authenticity has been also recently examined in depth by LINDNER 2007, 32-72.

34 According to Anthony Mann, director of *The Fall of the Roman Empire* (1964), "the most important thing is that you get the feeling of history", KOSZARSKY 1977, 336. On the pre-eminence of plot and storyline over historical fact in films, see also WINKLER 2004a, 16-17.

35 The emphasis on story-telling in Herodotus is reflected, for instance, in his account of the Egyptian version of the legend of Helena and Paris, 2, 115-120. See also Thukydides' rhetorical introduction of fictitious speeches into his narratives, 1, 22. Cf. WINKLER 2004a, 17-18.

36 Cf. COLEMAN 2004, 45. On "historical fiction" and its scholarly controversies, see Robin LANE FOX' preface to this volume.

37 SOLOMON 2001, 37; WINKLER 2004a, 22-24. Regarding D.W. Griffith's *The Birth of a Nation* (1915), SORLIN 1980, ix, notes further that, "historians, who try to list historical inaccuracies in a film would be ignoring the fact that their job should not involve bestowing marks for accuracy, but describing how men living at a certain time understood their own history."

tial factor to be taken into consideration in any interpretation of films by critics and scholars. Regardless of their artistic qualities and their fidelity to ancient sources, films mirror both the particular and the general choices made by film-makers, art directors and producers in accordance with the demands of their audiences. Their view of historical episodes transmits certain ideological tendencies, collective values and cultural conventions attested in the context in which the movie has been produced and released. The influence of contemporary ideologies and historical processes in films set in antiquity made in the United States and in Europe has been accorded greater interest in recent scholarly work.[38] Two of the films quoted above, *Helen of Troy* (1956) and *Troy* (2004), both large-scale Hollywood productions with lavish budgets and spectacular sets, transmit different visions of the Trojan War, echoing two different epochs. Whereas the first of them foregrounds the love story between Paris and Helen in accordance with the moral conventions and traditional patterns of the fifties – Homer's unfaithful Helen appears here as the victim of a cruel husband, while Paris is a selfless and courageous hero – war and politics loom large in the later *Troy*. Here romance, marriage and infidelity play a minor role, clearly back-staged by Agamemnon's aspirations to power and Achilles obsession with heroic glory. Accordingly, Helen's betrayal figures here as a mere excuse for organised attack. As Petersen himself admitted, the bellicose attitude of the Achaeans towards the peaceable Trojans is an echo of new-millennium American imperialism.[39] The influence of contemporary politics and ideologies has been detectable in the genre from the outset. Released during the First World War, Griffith's *Intolerance* (1916) represented one of the most remarkable cases of the intentional choice of episodes from the past as a mirror for the present. The story recreating the fall of Babylon by the Persian Cyrus typifies the universal tragedy of war and destruction.[40] On the other hand, the conquest of Carthage in *Scipione l'Africano* (C. Gallone, 1937) clearly evokes Mussolini's invasion of Ethiopia as one of Fascist Italy's major exploits and collective celebration of the *Romanità*.[41] The conflict between the insurgent slaves and the Roman Republic in *Spartacus* (1960) recalls the class-struggle bias displayed by Howard Fast's pro-Marxist novel – he was actually accused during the McCarthy era – through the filter of a classical Hollywood *topos*: the American fight for freedom and independency from the old-fashioned British Empire.[42]

38 See for instance WYKE 1997; 1999, 167-186; JOSHEL – MALAMUD – MCGUIRE 2001, on the visions of the Roman World in twentieth century ideologies. According to Maria WYKE 1997, 24, films are a reflection of existing cultural mentalities, can be indeed considered as modern form of historiography. On contemporary influences and subtext in films dealing with the ancient world, see further POMEROY 2008. On the power of films in constructing and affirming new and revisited collective images and *topoi* of the ancient world, see for instance SCIORTINO 2008, 199-209.

39 On the parallels between *Troy* (W. Petersen, 2004), World War II and the American invasion of Iraq, see AHL 2007, 163-185. On the esthetical and ideological evolution, from the silent era to the 21st century, of Helen as film's character, see WIEBER 2008, 142-157.

40 BOURGET 1992, 19-20.

41 On the ideological background of the film in Fascist Italy, see WYKE 1997, 20-22, 51; 1999, 167-186.

42 Cf. WYKE 1997, 34-72; FUTRELL 2001, 77-118; WINKLER 2007.

In *The Fall of the Roman Empire* (1964), subtexts recall the fight for civil rights in the 1960s, and the ideal of a world's peace under the leadership of the United States. A modern parallel between defeated Troy and the military dictatorship in modern Greece between 1967 and 1974 has been suggested in connection with Cacoyannis' adaptation of Euripides' drama *The Trojan Women* (1971). *The 300 Spartans* (1962) and its World War II and Cold War overtones presents the clash between Persians and Greeks as modern tyranny-versus-democracy and east-versus-west conflicts. A similar parallelism, in a new scenario of violence, cultural and political confrontation involving modern-day Iran, has also been proposed in connection with the recent film *300* (Zack Snyder, 2007).[43]

These examples illustrate one of the perennial elements in films recreating the ancient world: the indication that there is a lesson to be learned from the past. As Stone's *Alexander* clearly indicates, this didactic function normally figures as a complementary strategy alongside the fulfilment of the demands posed by mainstream cinema. Even in films in which accurate and recognizable features of a given historical period have been disregarded, the storyline, the sets and settings, the costumes and the *attrezzo* are invariably vehicles designed to transport audiences away into that distant world that we call History. Intentionally or not, references to the audience's own context are mechanisms indispensable in capturing their attention and making history intelligible for modern viewers.

The articles assembled in this volume deal with a broad spectrum of subjects ranging from the mythological world and Homer's epics to classical, Hellenistic and Roman Greece. As a whole, the volume sets out both to provide an in depth review (and revision) of firmly entrenched preconceptions and to cast light on some less familiar and largely neglected themes connected with the image of ancient Greece conveyed by the cinema.

One of these is the role inevitably played by scenery and architecture in the recreation of history. Nacho García's article analyses some characteristic Hollywood and European productions in terms of mythology, history and drama as exercises in iconography and artistic design. Rather than mere anachronisms or inaccurate clichés, sets and locations are primarily regarded here as options consciously selected by art designers and film-makers in an attempt to transmit recognisable images of ancient Greece that are largely congruent with cultural traditions.

The volume continues with Martin Lindner's contribution on the appeal of cartoon films for children, a huge sub-genre in which mythology and narratives taken from Homer are adapted for young audiences. Deliberate simplification of topics and the absence of historical episodes bring this kind of cinema and TV productions close to the fantasy-genre. Animation's films also display pedagogical leanings associated with social and cultural values.

43 On the media resonance sparked off by the film and the controversy over its hypothetical subtext referring to modern Iran, see the article *300* (film) in the on-line encyclopaedia Wikipedia.

Luigi Spina examines the myth of Heracles-Hercules and its reception as major icon both for satyr-plays and cinema. Heracles' great popularity in the visual arts and in ancient and modern literary traditions explains his prominence in the Italian *peplum* of the fifties and sixties. As the author notes, in bringing the figure of the hero closer to common audiences, the cinema has followed in the footsteps of the satyr-play. It is a symptom of the fatigue affecting the genre that the screen version of Hercules undertakes new travels to fantastic worlds that classical mythology has no knowledge of.

The popularity of Hercules is comparable to the global fame enjoyed by Odysseus. Herbert Verreth focuses on the great diversity of cinematic receptions accorded to this hero, not all of them based on Homeric epic and occasionally transcending the boundaries of the genre. Both post-classical tradition and the cinema illustrate Odysseus' complex and many-sided character by foregrounding not only his virtues but also his vices. Odysseus' film image is however generally positive and omits certain features that accord ill with modern moral values. Verreth's overview of the filmography reveals a large number of silent movies on the subject that are either unavailable for study or have been lost forever.

Despite its prominent status in the filmography on the Greek and Roman world, the silent era still occupies only a marginal place in scholarly approaches to the genre. Pantelis Michelakis' profound scrutiny of *The Legend of Oedipus* (1912) exemplifies the position achieved by silent movies halfway between theatre and later developments undergone by the new medium. In a context of changing audiences and demands, the shocking spectacle of *The Legend of Oedipus* proposes a reinvention of the Sophoclean drama by subscribing to an aesthetic nearer to drama and photography than to the linear narratives typical of the cinema. The film stands revealed as an ambitious experiment anticipating by a number of decades the modern cinematic reversion to the principles of drama in the sixties and the seventies.

A major example of the interest in Greek tragedy displayed by films in this period is the approach to myth via psychology and anthropology taken by Pier Paolo Pasolini. Filippo Carlà offers a telling analysis of this multi-faceted author and his intellectual influences, from Aristotle's Poetics to Freud. In contrasting to traditional classicism, the article explores Pasolini's quest for the roots of myth and his experiments in using the cinema as an appropriate idiom for setting tragedy in a "primitive" context.

The articles on different historical episodes begin with the analysis of the classic *The 300 Spartans* (1961) by Fernando Lillo. This singular production by MGM is considered one of the best recreations of ancient Greece ever filmed. Genuine Greek locations and frequent literary quotations from authors such as Herodotus and Plutarch give the narrative a feeling of realism, while recognisable allusions to the Second World War and the Cold War project the Thermopylae episode into the context of modern controversies and conflicts.

Set in fourth century Syracuse, under the tyrannical rule of Dionysius, *Damon and Pythias / Il tiranno di Siracusa* (Curtis Bernhadt, 1962) was a rare *peplum* proposing an original take on a Pythagorean story already filmed in the silent era. Irene Berti investigates the origins of this account in the ancient literature and its

reception in the Renaissance, in European Romanticism and the Victorian age, where the story of Damon and Pythias became a universal model for virtue and male fraternity. Close to this tradition, the silent-film versions of the story emphasised the patriotism of the protagonists as defenders of liberty. In Bernhardt's film, the portrait of these two figures corresponds instead to modern twentieth-century values. In line with the features of the genre, the Pythagorean secret society here resembles a kind of pre-Christian organization reminiscent of the pacifist movements upheld in the sixties.

Three articles are devoted to the cinematic reception accorded to the myth of Alexander. Anja Wieber investigates the reasons for the unequal fate of the Macedonian king on the screen. After total neglect in the silent era, the cinema later discovered Alexander's potential as a film character embodying a modern hero particularly appealing for his complex psychological profile and the symbolism of his deeds. Robert Rossen's very personal film essay *Alexander the Great* (1956) portrays a visionary Alexander calling for cultural integration and political union between West and East. The film's subtext reveals a critical view of the Western politics during the Cold War. In addition to the many and varied visual and narrative achievements of Stone's *Alexander*, Wieber also explores further adaptations outside Hollywood, such as Theo Angelopoulos *O Megalexandros* (1980) and non-western views of the myth, like the Indian productions featuring Sikander, which testify both to the universality of the figure and the heterogeneous reception accorded to it.

Stone's *Alexander* (2004) is analysed in depth in the contributions by Ivana Petrovic and Angelos Chaniotis. Petrovic's paper identifies an interesting parallelism between Stone and Plutarch's approach to biography. Particularly striking is the way Stone has been directly inspired by Plutarch's narrative mechanisms and symbolic traits in his delineation of Alexander's complex psychological profile. Chaniotis highlights the virtues of Stone's recreation of this controversial historical character, including an appropriate use of ancient sources, current research and iconography, while fulfilling the essential demands of the medium. Unlike scholars, the author notes, film-makers are necessarily constrained to make choices and fill gaps in order to create a consistent and attractive story, a challenge Stone lives up to remarkably, projecting an image of an emotional hero who is both recognisably a denizen of ancient Greeks and at the same a figure modern audiences can identify with.

Contemporary with Alexander and his conquests is the story of the trial of the Greek courtesan Phryne, accused of impiety, and her defence by the orator Hyperides. Eleonora Cavallini examines the classical and post-classical reception of the affair and the construction of a myth around Phryne's legendary beauty and the shocking exhibition of her naked body to the Athenian court. Her elevation to a visual icon in the imaginary of the eighteenth and nineteenth century, particularly by the French painter Jean-Léon Gérôme, later became the main source for the approach to the subject in two Italian movies: Alessandro Blasetti's updated version of the story (*Altri tempi*, 1952), and the early *peplum Frine, cortigiana d'Oriente* by Mario Bonnard (1953), in which genre stereotypes are successfully collated with historical plausibility.

The fate of Greece under Roman rule has been the object of a small number of cinematic adaptations, most of them transmitting *topoi* from the classical and post-classical traditions, such as nostalgia for the loss of former freedom and glory, the negative view of Hellenistic rulers or the image of Greek intellectuals confronted by Roman "barbarians". Marta García analyses these and other constructions of Roman Greeks disseminated by Hollywood and European film, an image largely influenced by the emergence of Christian figures both as protagonists and as favourite victims of cinematic "authoritarian" Romans.

Hellas on Screen is the final product of an international project that had its beginnings in the positive reception accorded to a course on "Antiquity in Film" organized by the Seminar für Alte Geschichte und Epigraphik of the University of Heidelberg during the year 2005. On the long and sometimes quite arduous road leading to the completion of this collection of articles, we have profited from the commitment and encouragement of many different people. Kai Brodersen was the first to believe in the undertaking and supported us with many useful suggestions, thus turning our initial vision into a fully-fledged project with real prospects of success. Martin Winkler and Maria Wyke were in on the project from the outset and proposed some of the participants. Angelos Chaniotis facilitated publication by agreeing to include the volume in the HABES series, contributing enthusiastically to its improvement with constructive criticism and suggestions. We also owe a debt of gratitude to Kai Trampedach, Christian Witschel and the Seminar für Alte Geschichte und Epigraphik of the University of Heidelberg for supporting the edition of the volume. Our thanks also to the Franz Steiner-Verlag and particularly to Katharina Stüdemann and Harald Schmitt for providing us with useful advice. Martin Lindner and Pantelis Michelakis helped us to track down some rare movies and also some of the pictures illustrating the book. Francisca Feraudi-Gruénais and Brigitte Ruck offered us their technical skills. Sebastian Bensch, Volker Buschmann, Filippo Carlà, Sebastian Grumt, Dagmar Hofmann, Anne Wurbs, and specially Helena García provided invaluable assistance by revising the lay-out and undertaking the final formal corrections. Many thanks are due to Janet Adey, Manfred Benner and particularly to Andrew Jenkins for their revisions of the English translations, and to Silke Knippschild, Jon E. and Michael Lendon and Elizabeth Meyer, who contributed, besides, to the progress of the volume with criticism and perceptive remarks. Niels Hennig was generous with support for our project in times of "financial crisis." We should also like to thank the following agencies and institutions for permissions to reproduce the images in the book: Cinetext Bildarchiv, The Kobal Collection; Hamburger Kunsthalle, Best Entertainment AG, DEFA-Stiftung, Dingo Pictures, Bibliothèque du Film (Paris), Bibliothèque Nationale de France (Paris), Österreichische Nationalbibliothek (Vienna) and the Library of Congress (Washington). Finally, we wish to acknowledge our debt to Robin Lane Fox for agreeing to write the preface for the volume.

CLASSIC SCENERIES: SETTING ANCIENT GREECE IN FILM ARCHITECTURE

Nacho García

1. TRENDS, TYPOLOGIES AND STEREOTYPES

Since its beginnings, cinema has been a magnificent vehicle for representing architecture. With few exceptions, physical spaces are resorted to as setting and backdrop to the plot.[1] In the background, the architecture providing this setting may easily be overlooked. Architecture appears first as a three-dimensional physical space – real locations, sets, sceneries, buildings, monuments, etc. – and then as a cinematic space: a two-dimensional image projected onto the screen.[2] In historical films, appropriate architecture, along with locations, costumes, decorations and *attrezzo* create the vital cohesion between character and storyline, being all necessary for comprehensive recreations of a given context.[3] As a consequence, the period depicted needs to be investigated with an – more or less accurate – eye to its literary sources, its arts, and its architecture in order to convey its image as effectively as possible.

Films set in ancient Greece make frequent use of what are nowadays commonplaces of the reception of Classical Greek art and architecture. Predominantly created and transmitted by scholars of the Enlightenment, the early Romanticism and the Neoclassicism, such *topoi* continue influencing Western culture. Even today, in a society focused on science and technology, the formalism and harmony ascribed to Greek art continues to be held in the highest regard. Unlike Rome and its public spaces, dominated by the forum, the curia, the amphitheatre, the circus and the imperial palaces, ancient Greece is usually projected in cinema as the classic image of a Doric temple.[4]

The use of white as predominant colour and a lack of polychromy have been commonplaces of film sets, particularly during the *peplum*'s golden era in the fifties and the sixties. This idea goes back to Winckelmann and his image of the

1 On film architecture, set-design and the dichotomy of physical space versus cinematic space, see ALBRECHT 1986; WEIHSMANN 1988; RAMÍREZ 1993; PUAUX (éd.) 1995; VILA 1997; ORTIZ VILLETA, 1998; *Nickel Odeon* 27, 2002; CAIRNS 2007. On the tradition of monumental sets in toga movies since the era of silent films, see MARTIN 2002, 24-32; MESEURE 2002, 167-172. On the importance of film architecture and monumentality in the projection of a historical imaginary, see LIPPERT 2005, 211 ff.

2 CAIRNS 2007, 8.

3 SOLOMON 2001.

4 Surprisingly (or not), films do not employ recognisable views of Greek poleis and their architecture, dominated by the agora and by public buildings like *stoas*; see MARTIN 2002, 28. On the image of the ancient city in cinema and its commonplaces, see LAPEÑA 2008, 231-252.

pure beauty of Classical Greek art, which the German scholar created without first hand experience. Scholarship has demonstrated since that Greek architecture combined white column bases with brightly coloured capitals, architraves, friezes and metopes. Sculpture in the round was also coloured. Although a few recent mainstream productions set in the ancient Greek world, such as *Troy* (2004) and *Alexander* (2006) have begun to incorporate colour, both the interest in the classical polis and the depiction of its polychrome architecture is still rare in film settings.[5] An exception to this rule is the use of images culled from Greek painted pottery in friezes. A further *topos* in film is the immanent presence of the post and lintel support. Arches, domes and vaults are generally only displayed in interior sets, which appear in the main aesthetically close to Roman architecture, predominantly inspired by Pompeian structural and decorative designs.

These representations are, however, not based in the ignorance of art designers and filmmakers. On the contrary, familiar stereotypes were and are intentionally prioritised over the attempt to reconstruct authentic Greek art. In many cases, budget problems are behind the recycling of film sets, a common feature of European productions of the sixties – mostly Italian – in which ancient Greece could be set in sceneries created for "Roman films."[6] The common denominators of such films are the amalgamation of different styles, the progressive standardisation of sets, a tendency towards the cliché and the abandoning of attention to ancient aesthetics and typologies. As we will see shortly, it was common practise to fit out sets with decorative elements from different periods, styles and even geographic contexts. Anachronisms and artistic contradictions were particularly frequent in those films prioritising typical storylines associated with the genre.

Every film must choose between two possible settings in terms of architecture and scenery: the building of new sets specifically for the film in question or the use of urban/rural real locations. From its beginnings, cinematic fiction has been linked to set, even more so in films framed in historical contexts.[7] The state of preservation of ruined, destroyed or incomplete ancient buildings makes it easier to resort to artificial sets, stages – frequent in early silent movies –, models, real-scale replicas or to the technology of computer graphics.

Not in Hollywood, but in the great European studios of Cinecittà, Palatino (Rome), Pinewood and Shepperton (London) stood the most renowned film sets

5 The current interest in polychromatic iconography is the consequence of the successful broadcasting of archaeological and iconographical studies on Greek architecture, but also of the advances of graphic design techniques.

6 Such as the scene showing the destruction of buildings in *Gli ultimi giorni di Pompei* (1959), which was employed by Sergio Leone in the earthquake sequences of *Il Colosso di Rodi* (1960). The film sets built in Laredo for this movie were reused later in *Goliath contro i giganti* (1961). The spectacular set (400 x 230 m.) recreating the Roman forum built in Las Matas (Madrid) for *The Fall of the Roman Empire* (1964) was later reutilised in Richard Lester's *A Funny Thing Happened on the Way to the Forum* (1966). See GARCÍA DE DUEÑAS 2000, xix, 234-235.

7 One of the most famous and influential early monumental film sets was Giovanni Pastrone's *Cabiria* (1914). On its enormous impact in Hollywood, see ALBRECHT 1986, 30-32: "…*Cabiria* decisively ended the *trompe l'oeil* tradition of Méliès: The constructed set, with few exceptions, now stood as the standard means of representing reality in film design."

recreating the legendary and historical ancient Greece. *Helen of Troy* (Robert Wise, 1956), *L'assedio di Siracusa / Archimede* (Pietro Francisci, 1960), *La guerra di Troia* (Giorgio Ferroni, 1961) and *Damon and Pythias* (Curtis Bernhardt, 1962) were filmed at the famed studios of Cinecittà. In turn, *Jason and the Argonauts* (Don Chaffey, 1963), *Clash of the Titans* (Desmond Davis, 1981), the recent *Troy* (Wolfgang Petersen, 2004) and *Alexander* (Oliver Stone, 2004) used partially the British studios of Pinewood and Shepperton.

2. Epos and Myth

2.1. The Trojan War

My analysis starts with some relevant films recreating Homeric Troy and the Trojan Cycle. Among the countless productions dealing with the Trojan War, I will highlight three: *Helen of Troy* (Robert Wise, 1956), *La guerra di Troia* (Giorgio Ferroni, 1961) and *Troy* (Wolfgang Petersen, 2004).[8]

The art design of *Helen of Troy* was entrusted to the Oscar winner Edward Carrere, responsible for the set of *The Fountainhead* (1949), *Camelot* (1968) and *The Wild Bunch* (1969). Monumental and spectacular views of Troy follow here a style predominantly inspired by Minoan iconography: exterior and interior scenes are lavishly ornamented with horns of consecration, downward tapering columns and wall paintings. In contrast, Sparta is characterized by immense archaic Doric columns and the absence of polychrome colouring of the friezes and walls. The differing representation opposes visual magnificence to austerity. This principle is commonplace in those films intending to associate a specific visual image with the idiosyncrasy of a particular culture. The architectonic splendour of *Helen of Troy* with its gigantic gates and walls, stylised and baroque buildings, geometry and crowded streets, is the film's greatest achievement (fig. 1).

Pier Vittorio Marchi, a popular art designer in Italian toga films (*L'eroe di Babilonia*, 1963, *Il trionfo di Ercole*, 1964), created the sets of *La guerra di Troia*, directed by Giorgio Ferroni. Less spectacular than *Helen of Troy* in terms of the exterior locations, this film displays meticulous detail in its interior sets. Contrasting with the austerity of the city walls, the inside of Priam's palace is exquisitely decorated. The space is here dominated by the intense red colour of the Minoan-Mycenean columns and the pictorial motifs in walls and floors based on Minoan vase decoration. Less appealing are the architectonic solutions resorted to in some buildings. Viewers are faced by tendencies towards syncretism (Minoan, Assyrian) and anachronisms.

The blockbuster *Troy*, directed by Wolfgang Petersen and featuring a noteworthy artistic team, was partially filmed at Shepperton Studios, where impressive sets recreated Sparta and Troy.[9] The prevailing atmosphere of the Mycenean cities

8 For further films on this topic, cf. Verreth: www.arts.kuleuven.be/ALO/klassieke/film.htm.

9 On the film's iconographical influences and models, see Cavallini 2005a, 53-79.

is sombre, rustic and dark. Following some *topoi* attributed to the Bronze Age, the film makes suitable use of austerity and orientalizing designs. A panoramic view on the city of Troy (fig. 2) displays a disjointed structure of the settlement arranged on uneven terraces as attested in Cretan palaces such as Knossos. The city is surrounded by a fortification inspired by archaeological surveys but also recalling the walls of Mycenae. Interior sets convey ornamental typologies ascribed both to Minoan and Mycenean palaces, such as Pylos. Temples feature the typical megarons, but also with oriental – Sumerian and Assyrian – and even Egyptian architectural elements. An example of this syncretism is the temple of Apollo invaded by Achilles (Brad Pitt) and his Myrmidons on the coast near Troy.

On the whole, *Troy* is stylistically influenced by diverse architectonic and iconographical elements attested in the Eastern Mediterranean during the Bronze Age, but also in archaic Greece.[10]

2.2. The Odyssey

Homer's *Odyssey* has inspired countless interpretations in film.[11] Three of the most remarkable are without question *Ulisse* (Mario Camerini, 1954) and the TV productions *L'Odissea* (Franco Rossi, 1969) and *The Odyssey* (Andrei Konchalovsky, 1997).

In my opinion, *Ulisse* may be considered the best adaptation of the Homeric text and one of the best films on the ancient world ever made. *Ulisse* is quite appealing from the visual perspective, in the face of its – on occasion – excessive resort to ornamental barroquism. Flavio Mogherini and Andrea Tomassi were responsible for the artistic design and the sets. The first one was frequently involved in Italian productions of the fifties and sixties. Among his works we find two well known sword and sandals films: *Le fatiche di Ercole* (1958) and *Ercole e la regina di Lidia* (1959), both directed by Pietro Francisci. As far as Tomassi is concerned, *Ulisse* was his most noteworthy work in the medium. Two sets are particularly appealing: the royal palace in Ithaca and the palace of Alcinous on the island of the Phaeacians. The interior rooms in Ithaca are depicted as somewhat rustic, as bare spaces dominated by rectangular pillars, which are placed asymmetrically. The walls are decorated with stucco resembling the art of Minoan palaces, which recreates scenes of daily life and religious processions. On the other hand the set attests to a tendency of imitating geometric vase paintings dating back to the eight century BC. As pointed out above, king Alcinous' palace shows lavish and elaborate settings. Here, various stylistic elements are being combined: oriental details enrich the set and costumes inspired by Minoan and Mycenaean iconography. Sumptuously decorated backgrounds and walls, polished floors, the copious amount of horns of consecration, striated downward tapering columns,

10 This rather realistic recreation of Troy surpasses the topical representation of the city according to aesthetics which resemble classical Greek architecture. Apart from *Troy*, the best reconstruction of the Homeric world to date is perhaps to be encountered in a different medium, in the comics series *Age of Bronze* (1999-2003) by the American author Eric Shanower.

11 See VERRETH'S contribution in this volume, 65-73.

heavy capitals and enormous pillars lavishly ornamented with relieves fully occupy all available space.

The disparity between both settings is due to the reception of Homer's depiction of two contrasting atmospheres: the rustic simplicity and the violence of Ithaca – visible at the end of the story – on the one hand, and the glamour and nobility of Alcinous' realm on the other.[12]

Franco Rossi's *L'Odissea* was a TV-miniseries produced by Dino de Laurentiis for the RAI, the ORTF and the Bavaria Film TV. The film has been broadcasted in different versions and lengths.[13] The aesthetics of the film are close to those of *Ulisse*, even if in *L'Odissea* many sequences were shot on location in the Balkans. Again, the set recreating Odysseus lodgings in Ithaca is somewhat rustic and basic, while exterior views of Alcinous' residence resemble Neoassyrian palaces. For the reconstruction of the citadel of Sparta, architectonical models of the city were set on a spectacular carving in a mountain. Quite original is also the panoramic view of Troy, combining models of Greek temples and buildings resembling Mesopotamian ziggurats. The artistic direction of the film was in the hands of Luciano Ricceri (*Giulietta degli spiriti*, *Una giornata particolare*). Mario Altieri designed the architecture used for the sets, which were realised at the Roman Dino De Laurentiis Studios.

The version directed by Andrei Konchalovsky features magnificent exterior shootings in Malta and Turkey and numerous special effects. The artistic design combines different styles: Minoan architecture, orientalising elements and Archaic Doric columns. The rustic and antiquated Ithaca contrasts here with the opulent Troy, dominated by columns with Ionic capitals.

2.3. *Jason and the Argonauts* and *Clash of the Titans*

Jason and the Argonauts has been considered by film critics to be one of the best classic movies of the fantastic and adventure genre. This British production of the year 1963 was directed by Don Chaffey and supported by a great artistic team, including the special-effects genius Ray Harryhausen.[14] The film combines the use of real locations and scenes shot in studio, particularly at the SAFA in Rome and at Shepperton Studios in Surrey. Two large interior sets recreated the residence of the gods at Mount Olympus and the royal palace in Colchis. The first consisted of large columns headed by golden Corinthian capitals. The palace in Colchis, equally lavishly ornamented with gold and the use of colour, was designed to resemble an oriental ambience, combining Assyrian and Persian iconog-

12 On the recreation of Ithaca inspired by the image of an Archaic *oikos*, see PRIETO ARCINIEGA 2004, 71-93.

13 It appears that, although not indicated in the credits, Franco Rossi's direction was supported by Piero Schivazappa, who had previously worked almost exclusively in TV, and by the celebrated Mario Bava, who was responsible for the Polyphemus episode.

14 Geoffrey Drake was the production designer, while Herbert Smith, Jack Maxsted and Toni Sarzi Braga were responsible of the artistic design, see HARRYHAUSEN; DALTON 2004, 300. On Harryhausen's approaches to the genre, see AGUILAR 2006, 45-75.

raphy. Yet, the biggest achievements of the film are almost certainly the exterior sequences and above all the use of the ruin as a cinematic scenario.[15]

This resort is particularly visible in two scenes. The first one shows the meeting between Hermes (Michael Gwynn) and Jason (Todd Armstrong) as a prelude of their "travel" to Mount Olympus. The coastal scenery of the sequence includes the (artificial) ruins of a circular temple or *tholos*. Although somewhat incongruous, this setting succeeds in creating a romantic atmosphere by evoking the splendour of the past. It further reminds the audience of the fact that the plot is taking place in a chronologically remote world. The second scene is set in Phrygia and narrates the episode of blind Phineus and the Harpies. It was shot on location in Paestum (Poseidonia), the ancient Greek colony south of Naples, where three of the best preserved examples of sixth and fifth century Doric architecture are still standing.[16] Some panoramic and general shots introduce the episode, in which the ruins of the so-called temple of Hera feature prominently.[17] Through the camera frame, viewers can also distinguish the so-called temple of Poseidon in the background. The dark interior of an Archaic Doric temple with a colossal statue of Hera – meant to be Thessaly – at the beginning of the film and the credits imitating Greek wall paintings, designed by James Wines also deserve mentioning.

Clash of the Titans, a film on the myth of Perseus by the same producers of *Jason and the Argonauts,* directed by Desmond Davis in 1981, equally combines real locations and sets. Like *Jason*, *Clash of the Titans* featured the fabulous special effects created by Harryhausen, the so called Dynamation technique. For exterior scenes, the producers chose locations in England (Cornwall), Italy (Naples, Ostia), Malta (Gozo, Cospicua) and Spain (Guadix, Antequera). Interior sets were entirely built at Pinewood Studios (London). Paestum's so-called temple of Poseidon serves as a setting for a key scene of the film: the fight between Perseus (Harry Hamlin) and Medusa (fig. 3). The event follows a combat scene between Perseus and his companions against a giant two-headed Cerberus (here named Dioskilos), guardian of the third Gorgon. After vanquishing the creature, Perseus enters a cave, a scene completely shot in a studio-set. Two main styles predominate here: tapering downward columns imitating the Minoan style (Knossos) and geometric motifs recalling Etruscan art. The oppressive atmosphere of the cave is accentuated by the low roof and the effective use of warm illumination, backlighting and low angle camera perspectives. The "(amphi)theatre" (sic!) of Joppa, scenario of the meeting between Perseus and Ammon (Burgess Meredith), was in fact a real location conveniently redecorated: the Roman theatre of Ostia. The use of both the Doric and Ionic order is a constant of this film; they appear in three specific scenes. The first one is set on Mount Olympus, a place that is characterised by monumental Ionic columns and sculptures close to Persian and Assyrian

15 Shot in different locations in Campania: Cappaccio, Centola, Paestum, Palinuro and Salerno.

16 On the reception of the temples of Paestum as models for classic Greek Doric in 18th and 19th century, see LUTZ 1999; KUNST 2008, 321-331.

17 Particularly striking is the sequence in which the Argonauts stand explicitly on the temple's roof with the aim of hunting the Harpies.

iconography, such as gigantic winged sphinxes. It seems thus that the greatness of the gods was offset by the use of architecture of colossal size.

In the set of Argos the early Doric order dominates temple architecture – a well-known cinematic *topos* – while Ionic is prevalent in the interior rooms of the palace.

A huge exterior set created through the use of models and visual tricks stands for the city of Joppa. In this case, the art designers chose a fusion of ancient Babylonian, Persian, and Greek styles, both for the city gates (inspired by the famous gates of Ishtar in Babylon) and for the decoration of walls and friezes. An example of this is a temple of Thetis displayed at the beginning of the film, and composed of a double Doric colonnade.

A studio-set was also employed for the previous sequence, the cave of the "Stygian witches" or *graiai*. As Solomon has observed, the post and lintel structure of the cave entrance, closed by a triangle and flanked by two pillars, was clearly inspired by the vaulted tomb known as "Treasury of Atreus" of Mycenae.[18]

Clash of the Titans is not only remembered for its excellent and varied settings, but also for being the last remarkable film using the Dynamation technique, which ceased to be employed after the advent of computer-graphics.

3. Drama

Two major names are commonly associated with cinematic adaptations of Greek tragedy: Pier Paolo Pasolini and Michael Cacoyannis. I will refer briefly to the relevance of locations and artistic design attributed to both filmmakers.

3.1. Pasolini's *Edipo Re* and *Medea*

Sets, locations, costumes and *attrezzo* emerge in Pasolini's films as visible symbols and transgressing elements of the plot.[19] Pasolini looked to Morocco for the locations of his *Edipo Re* (1967). The rustic landscapes of Morocco and its local architecture provide a striking visual contrast to film settings drawing on traditional receptions. The pursuit of a deliberate anachronism – a skill also attributable to the art designer Dante Ferretti – is further accentuated by the introduction of scenes shot at the Basilica of San Petronio and the Palazzo Comunale of Bologna and the Piazza Maggiore of Pisa at the beginning and the end of the movie.

In *Medea* (1969), Pasolini isolates again the classical references and – even more deliberately than in *Edipo Re* – makes use of contrasting atmospheres in order to oppose two worlds: the archaic/irrational universe of Colchis/Medea (Maria Callas) and the civilised/rational cosmos of Corinth/Jason (Giuseppe Gentile). Pasolini picks the sceneries of Cappadoce in Turkey to recreate Colchis (fig.

18 See Solomon 2001, 118; Lawrence-Tomlinson 1983[4], 80-84.

19 Cf. Aubert 1995, 168-175, on Pasolini's use of locations. On the symbolism of the settings' choice, see further Carlà, in this volume, 92-93; 101-102.

4). The famous caves excavated in the rocks were even used for some interior sequences. The Medieval fortress of Aleppo (Syria) functioned as setting for the scenes showing the exterior walls of the city of Corinth, whereas Anzio (Italy) was utilised as a frame for Medea's house. The Romanesque architecture of the Piazza dei Miracoli in Pisa was the original location for the majority of exterior shots of Corinth. The twelve-century baptistery was also employed for some interior scenes. For the recreation of the royal palace of Corinth, Ferretti and Pasolini elected to build a set at Cinecittà.

3.2. Cacoyannis' *Electra*, *The Trojan Women* and *Iphigenia*

The modernity of Greek drama plays a major part in the films of Michael Cacoyannis. His trilogy, inspired by Euripides' tragedies (*Electra*, *The Trojan Women*, *Iphigenia*), but also other works like the Academy Award winning *Alexis Zorba* (1964, after Nikos Kazantzakis' novel) broadcast fundamental traits of Greek culture.[20] Cacoyannis' aesthetic concept – situated between naturalism and symbolism – is indeed fairly close to that of Pasolini. His search for reality is visualised through a stylised imagery of Greek landscapes. This approach is particularly clear in *Electra* (1962), starring Irene Papas. The film was shot in rural settings between Athens and Sounion and among the ruins of Mycenae, the residence of Agamemnon and the scenario both of his triumphal return from Troy and tragic death. The "ascetic atmosphere" of the countryside appears accentuated by the use of real rural settlements, by the modest costumes and by the remarkable black and white expressionist photography of Walter Lassaly. The fortress of Mycenae, seat of the Atrides, was also used as a location for some of the first scenes of *Iphigenia* (1976). Just as Euripides presented them in ancient Athens, Cacoyannis filmed the stories in reverse chronological order.

Between the two abovementioned films, *The Trojan Women* (1971) was shot in Spain. The exterior locations recreating the vanquished Troy were filmed in the environs of Atienza, in the Castilian province of Guadalajara.[21] Arid, waste, obscure and lonely sceneries symbolise here the destruction caused by wars ancient and modern and visualise the tragic fate of the Trojan women.

20 On Cacoyannis and his Euripidean trilogy, see foremost MCDONALD 1983, 129-319.

21 Apart from political reasons – the military Junta ruling in Greece between 1967 and 1974 – the different setting's choices are directly connected to the importance of geography in the story. According to Cacoyannis himself, whereas the Greek countryside and Mycenae appeared as ideal scenarios for "pastoral tragedies" such as *Electra* and *Iphigenia*, Troy, instead, could be easier imagined in a foreign country: "I made the film in Spain, where I found a better location than I could in Greece, a huge expanse of walls surrounding a city in ruins." Quoted from MCDONALD – WINKLER 2001^2, 81.

4. HISTORY

4.1. *La battaglia di Maratona*

Set in 490 BC, at the outset of the intended conquest of Greece by the Persians, *La battaglia di Maratona* (1959) was one of the great productions of the Italian Titanus studios. The film was directed by the renowned Jacques Tourneur, who had shot memorable Hollywood titles such as *Cat People* (1942), *Out of the Past* (1947) and *The Flame and the Arrow* (1950). The artistic design of *La battaglia di Maratona*, which appears idealised and heavily decorated along vaguely classicistic guidelines, was entrusted to Marcello Del Prato and Mario Chiari. Chiari is especially known for his collaboration in the sets of *Le notti bianche* (1957) and *Ludwig* (1972), both by Luchino Visconti, and *Barabba* (1961) by Richard Fleischer.

Although the exterior scenes, the sequences in Olympia and the final naval battle, are the most memorable elements of *La battaglia di Maratona*, the film is in fact rather an inside-room-movie dominated by stylised Doric columns and white marble.

Far from historic fidelity, gardens appear here lavishly decorated with statues, bowls, abundant vegetation and fountains. These baroque elements represent Roman gardens far more closely than Greek ones. Post-classical statuary and half pointed niches are constant features of the film, both in exterior and interior scenes. As Michel Éloy has observed, the greatest surprise of *La battaglia di Maratona* is a sequence showing Philippides (Steve Reeves) crowned as winner of the Olympic Games at the foot of the Parthenon.[22] This reconstruction of the Parthenon – containing an eight columns façade and without sculptures at the pediment – challenged all the rules of historicity, standing for a temporal paradox.[23] The best work of Chiari and Del Prato is a kind of *stoa* employed in two sequences. Yet the monumentality of the building approaches it rather to Italian fascist architecture than to the recreated archaic and classical Greek style.

4.2. *The 300 Spartans* and *300*

When Xerxes, king of Persia, invaded Greece in 480 BC, the allied Greek army guided by the Spartan king Leonidas faced the impressive forces of the Persians at the pass of Thermopylae. The historic and military appeal of this episode has not been overlooked by cinema. In the zenith of the toga movies, Rudolf Maté, an already well-known filmmaker and photographer, filmed *The 300 Spartans* (1961), one of the best movies on ancient Greece.[24] Both set design and outdoor locations are particularly notable. Three well known collaborators of the genre,

22 ÉLOY 1995, 20.

23 The classical Parthenon was first built between 447 and 432 BC. On the predecessors of the classical building see GRUBEN 2001[5]; HURWIT 1999.

24 On this film, see LILLO REDONET 1997, 141-158, and his contribution in this volume.

Arrigo Equini (*Le Baccanti*, 1961), Carlo Gentili (*Annibale*, 1959) and Enzo Costantini (*Perseo l'invincibile*, 1963) were in charge of the artistic direction.

The film's first sequences take place in Corinth and Sparta. Interesting from the artistic point of view is a set representing the Corinthian Assembly, where the Greek leaders meet. The building was inspired by the typical architecture encountered in *bouleuteria* – Priene's Ekklesiasterion in particular –,[25] presenting a rectangular structure surrounded by rows of fluted pillars. The next sequence shows the exterior of the building, a courtyard where the Spartan king Leonidas (Richard Egan) and the Athenian Themistocles (Ralph Richardson) converse about the strategy to follow beside a model of the Greek coast. The set is framed by columns with coloured Ionic capitals. Behind the columns, we recognize wall paintings imitating Athenian vases of the sixth and fifth century BC. Whereas the Ionic order, which is not very common in film sets, characterises Corinth, Sparta is typified by Doric architecture. In the outside sequences, we observe rather stylised Doric elements, while a certain archaism – including forms imitating the Mycenean style – can be found in the interior of the royal palace (fig. 5). The figures employed for the wall decoration of the palace resemble the motifs typically used in the early Athenian black figure vases.[26]

The recent success of Hollywood films recreating the Ancient World – as *Gladiator* (Ridley Scott, 2000) or *Troy* (Wolfgang Petersen, 2004) – and even more the current enthusiasm for film remakes and adaptations of comics encouraged the production of *300* (Zack Snyder, 2006). The film adapts the homonym comic by Frank Miller (text and drawings) and Lynn Varley (colour), originally published in 1998.

The aesthetics of the movie – fully designed with 3D computer graphics – emulate the comic in transmitting an apocalyptic darkness far from any realism. To this picture contribute the rustic short Doric columns, the low gable roofs and the narrow passageways. The architectonic film settings also provide an interesting recreation of the Spartan council house, depicted as a kind of circular *bouleuterion* surrounded by fluted Doric columns. The spectacular visual effects of *300* succeed thus in transmitting a powerful image of epic, even if that meant removing any traces of historical accuracy.

4.3. *Socrate*

Roberto Rossellini's *Socrate* (1970), a TV co-production by RAI, ORTF and TVE, was almost entirely filmed on Spanish locations.[27] The movie, set in Athens between 404 and 399 BC, illustrate the political and philosophical controversies

25 Cf. LAWRENCE; TOMLINSON 1983[4], 352-355, ills. 348-350.

26 BOARDMAN 1974, 14-30.

27 Rossellini's original plan was to film *Socrate* in Sicily or in Greece. His personal problems with the RAI and his opposition to the Greek military Junta (1967-1974) brought him to Spain. On the shooting and the connections between Rossellini and Spain, see QUINTANA 1999, 261-271.

led to the trial against Socrates and his famous suicide.[28] Rossellini chose an anachronistic setting for the long dialogues between Socrates and his interlocutors: the irregular streets and pebbled houses with gable roofs of a small rural village in the province of Madrid – Patones de Arriba. The use of real locations in the film contrasts with the artificial sets and models as architectonic backdrops designed by Bernardo Ballester and Giusto Puri Purini. In spite of the predominance of marble, the upper part of the buildings, especially the triglyphs and metopes, appear coloured. The interior sequences are characterised by marmoreal sobriety and pulchritude. Some architectonic details deserve our attention: the barred windows and the circular pilasters with multicoloured capitals. Despite the film's limited budget, the artistic design of *Socrate* achieved a satisfactory level.

4.4. *Damon and Pythias*

The Italo-American production *Damon and Pythias* / *Il tiranno di Siracusa* (1962) was directed by the German Curtis Bernhardt (*Sirocco*, *Beau Brummell*). The story, set around 406-367 BC in the Greek colony of Syracuse, combines adventures and the topic of friendship between the protagonists according to Pythagorean philosophy.[29] The film made in part use of natural locations; sets were built at the Roman studios of Cinecittà. The artistic design was assigned to Alberto Boccianti while Ennio Michettoni planned the sets. The appealing recreation of ancient Syracuse features a city of narrow streets, taverns, gable roofs and vaulted rooms. Exterior sequences were mostly filmed in the coastal towns Gaeta and Terracina, close to Rome. As indicated above, the use of vaults is not very common in recreations of ancient Greece. Among the vaulted interior spaces used in the film, we encounter an authentic ancient setting, which was employed as the secret seat of the dissident Pythagoreans: the Mithraeum of the baths of Caracalla in Rome.[30] As regards the ephemeral sets, the palace of Dionysius has been modelled as a Doric building with golden capitals and wall paintings inspired by the Pompeian style. The council house in Athens, however, appears as circular room surrounded by Ionic columns and decorated with geometric motifs and naturalistic wall paintings.[31]

4.5. *Alexander the Great* and *Alexander*

The life and deeds of Alexander have been filmed – among others – in two major biopics: Robert Rossen's *Alexander the Great* (1956) and Oliver Stone's *Alexander* (2004). Both films disposed of considerable resources and both are extremely

28 An interesting analysis of the story, contents and genesis of the film can be read in GUARNER, 2006[3], 203-210. Guarner himself participated in the film as director's assistant.

29 Cf. BERTI in this volume, 131-145.

30 The use of vaulted spaces resembling catacombs may be explained by the allegories employed by the film, which liken Pythagoreans to early Christians.

31 Besides set-decoration, *Damon and Pythias* stands out because of some technical features, such as the interesting camera passage through the streets of Syracuse.

interesting in terms of their artistic design. The sets of *Alexander the Great* were entrusted to the prestigious Dario Simoni (winner of the Acadamy Award for *Lawrence of Arabia* and *Doctor Zhivago*). The excellent photography in technicolor/cinemascope was Robert Krasker's (Academy Award for *The Third Man*).[32]

The film's distinctive trait is the representation of real rural villages as Macedonian landscapes.[33] As in *Socrate*, the directors used Spanish locations for the exterior scenes of the film, in particular sceneries in the province of Madrid (Manzanares el Real, El Molar and Rascafría) and Málaga. Transmitting a rustic/medieval atmosphere, these anachronistic locations work as visual contrast to the classical *attrezzo* – columns, sculptures, ruins – of the sets designed by Simoni. Outdoor sequences recreating Athens and Pella were accordingly characterised through the use of sets imitating a monochrome version of classical Doric (fig. 6). Most of the sets were based on recognisable iconography, such as the famous Caryatids of the Erechtheum. Interior sets present a prototypical plain white decoration following both the archaic (Macedonia) and the classical Doric style (Athens).[34] Particularly appealing are the immense almost colourless geometric relieves and the intensely colourful decoration inspired by terracotta paintings. All these elements – close to or far from historical authenticity – confer a remarkable visual effect to the film.

Oliver Stone's *Alexander* is particularly noteworthy as the most spectacular film on ancient Greek history ever made. Monumentality, affluence of details and predominance of colour are characteristic elements of the film. *Alexander* pays special attention to accurate iconographical reconstructions based on archaeological and historical research.[35] Computer graphics substituted the traditional sets for most scenes, while the remaining sequences were shot at Pinewood Studios in London. In these studios the huge sets of the magnificent Babylon of 330 BC were erected (fig. 7). *Alexander*'s Babylon includes, for instance, the celebrated Ishtar gates, decorated with glazed bricks, and one of the Seven Wonders of the ancient world: the Hanging Gardens. The exact design offers to viewers a varied repertoire of artistic, symbolic and mythological references.[36] The opening sequence shows a flash-forward from Alexander's death in Babylon (323 BC) to the city of Alexandria in 283 BC. A wide angle shows the fabled Library next to the legendary Pharos – again a Wonder. An aged Ptolemy (Anthony Hopkins) teaches

32 As DE ESPAÑA points out, the warm colours of the light seems to evocate the red-figure vases, 1998, 184.

33 One of the sequences of the film was shot in the Gothic Isabeline castle of Mendoza.

34 This dichotomy does not correspond to the typical Hellenistic urbanism and the architecture of the Macedonian capital Pella, see for instance LAUTER 1986, 66, ill. 44, 45a-b, 59b. On the oppressive atmosphere of interior sets in Pella, see ELOY 1995, 18.

35 On Stone's interest in historical research and Lane Fox's important contribution as advisor of this film, see CHANIOTIS, in this volume, 185-201.

36 It includes massive sculptures of winged bulls, griffins and other mythical creatures. On the symbolism of these elements in the film, see PETROVIC in this volume, 180. The motifs of the set design follow Assyrio-Babylonian iconographies see FRANKFORT 1970^2, 143-205.

history and dictates his biography of Alexander.[37] The Alexandrian scenes were mostly shot in Malta and partially completed by computer-graphics. The set recreating the Great Library displays a lavish backdrop of golden motifs, mosaics, polychromes and statues. Attentive viewers can even admire among them a particular wall painting illustrating the battle of Gaugamela better known to us as the famous mosaic from the Pompeian House of the Faun (fig. 8).[38]

As for the Macedonian city of Pella, two monumental sets predominate: the palaestra and the theatre, in which Philip (Val Kilmer) is going to be murdered. Both follow classic Doric architecture ornamented with colourful painted walls and statues.

An interesting exterior scene introduces Aristotle (Christopher Plummer) teaching his young pupils, among them a young Alexander (Connor Paolo). The characters are represented in the ruins of a classical marble temple surrounded by a nature. As we have seen, ruins frequently function in films recreating antiquity only as decorative – and anachronistic – background. Yet, in this particular case, viewers face a deeper intentional purpose. Both the setting and old Aristotle highlight the alleged decadence of classical Greece, the realm of Aristotle and his intellectual world soon conquered, occupied and inherited by the Macedonian Empire.

Thus, the film features outstanding sets, including detailed examples of classical and Hellenistic Greek style and of Neo-Babylonian art. Outstanding are the battle scenes recreated in the movie, close to literary and iconographic sources, in particular Gaugamela, filmed in Morocco.

4.6. *Il Colosso di Rodi*

Two particular films set in the Hellenistic period should here be considered: *Il Colosso di Rodi* (1960) by Sergio Leone, and *L'assedio di Siracusa* (1960) by Pietro Francisci. Jon Solomon characterises Leone's film as "artistically engaging and visually bizarre", referring to the "the gloomy atmosphere and the magnificent bronze (actually plastic) colossus that looms gigantically over the harbour."[39] According to Rafael de España, the film's main achievement lies in its unpretentious character, its aim to avoid fidelity to any era or any historical accuracy.[40] Viewers face here an evasive sword and sandal film, enacted in an appropriate historical setting: the Mediterranean island of Rhodes, famous in the Hellenistic era for its harbour and, of course, for the Colossus (Worlds' Wonder number

37 The island of Pharos, the harbour and the Library of Alexandria were also recreated in the monumental sets of *Cleopatra* (J. L. Mankiewicz, 1963).

38 The celebrated mosaic, today in the Museo Nazionale di Napoli, was in fact, according to Pliny the Elder, *Nat*. 35, 110, a Roman copy of a Hellenistic painting by Philoxenos of Eretria. The work had been ordered not by Ptolemy, but by Cassander, future king of Macedonia (316-297 BC). The description of the battle by the Roman historian Quintus Curtius Rufus reproduces the painting in some interesting details, 3, 11, 7-12. On the symbolism of this particular scene, see PETROVIC in this volume, 176-177.

39 SOLOMON 2001, 46

40 DE ESPAÑA 1998, 184.

three). Filmed during the genre's golden age, *Il Colosso di Rodi* could draw on a relatively high budget, which enabled Leone and his team to tackle the enormous challenges of the artistic design.[41] The major part of the film's exterior scenes was shot in Spain, particularly in the harbour of Laredo, at the gulf of Biscay, and in the gardens of the neoclassical palace of La Granja de San Ildefonso in the province of Segovia. Laredo stood obviously for the harbour of Rhodes. Some out of place architectonic elements of the modern port were consequently modified: lanterns were transformed into columns, a fish-storehouse became a temple and modern fishing boats ancient ships.[42] Particularly successful was the spectacular construction of the lower part of a gigantic replica of the Colossus: a twenty-six meters structure of the statue's legs from the feet to the knees. The upper part of the monument, measuring around 20 meters, was built close to Madrid in Barajas (fig. 9). Ramiro Gómez, who had already collaborated with Leone in *Gli ultimi giorni di Pompei* (Mario Bonnard, 1959), in which the Italian director had been officially responsible for the screenplay and the second unit, was behind both the artistic design and the recreation of the statue.[43] According to Gómez, the colossus forced the designers to modify the harbour's entrance by enlarging one of the breakwaters to fifteen meters in order to place the gigantic legs of the statue. The nearby buildings were equally dressed with classic architectonic *attrezzo*.[44] For those sequences showing the whole Colossus, two replicas in miniature were built.[45]

The film's imagery goes beyond classical and post-classical receptions of the wonders of the ancient world by showing the interior of the statue, "ornamented" by bizarre mechanical engines of "tortuous design, almost expressionist"[46]: the ultimate scenario of intrigues and combats.

The sequences showing the Palacio de la Granja highlight the film's inclination toward anachronism. Perhaps we should nevertheless accept that at least the Versaillesque eighteen-century style of the palace gardens worked well on the big screen. Equally remarkable is the set of the tyrant's palace, filled with pillars in Ionic style, architraves, gable roofs, marble statues, red and black figure vases and wall paintings of a vague style.[47] Particularly eclectic is the design of Baal's temple, furnished with statues of winged bulls clearly inspired by Assyrian, Babylonian or Persian motifs. Its interior consists of a labyrinthine mausoleum – where the protagonist gets lost – packed with mummies, stereotypical symbols of cine-

41 AGUILAR 1999, 184.

42 GOROSTIZA 1997, 96.

43 Ramiro Gómez was also artistic designer of *La rivolta degli schiavi* (Nunzio Malasomma, 1960), and later of *Golia contro i giganti* (Guido Malatesta, 1961) and *I Titani* (Duccio Tessari, 1962), among others films of the genre. It is an accredited fact that Leone took over unofficially the direction of *Gli ultimi giorni di Pompei*; see CAVALLINI, in this volume, 217.

44 GOROSTIZA 1997, 137.

45 GOROSTIZA 1997, 96. On the pre-production phase of the film and the building of the colossus see further FRAYLING 2000, 107-109.

46 AGUILAR 1999, 187.

47 The wall paintings resemble in my view the famous Renaissance triptych *La battaglia di San Romano* by Paolo Uccello.

matic Egypt.[48] A further architectonic feature of the film is the set of a typical Roman amphitheatre.[49] In spite of its many historical anachronisms, inaccuracies and incongruent features, *Il Colosso di Rodi* should be considered as reference sword and sandal film and a wonderful escapist movie.

4.7. *L'assedio di Siracusa*

L'assedio di Siracusa / Archimedes, set in Hellenistic Syracuse during the Second Punic War, was characterised by an excess of imagination in the architectonic design. The production design was in the hands of Ottavio Scotti, art director of other *pepla* such as *Nel segno di Roma* (Guido Brignone, 1959) and *Saul e David* (Marcello Baldi, 1964). Ugo Pericoli was in charge of the set design. All structures were built at Cinecittà, including a big square or agora flanked by different buildings and surrounded by walls. Among these stood an unusual pyramidal structure meant to be a palace. It consisted of a quite bizarre four-story building held up by Doric columns with a triangular roof. The design of this building was certainly not inspired by any genuine example of Greek or Hellenistic architecture.[50] The interior of the palace features a lot of marble and multi-coloured wall decorations. The design of a Sicilian country villa, furnished with quadrangular pillars, balconies and a front courtyard, seems to have been inspired by the imagination of the art designer rather than by historical models, too. One of the most intense scenes of the film takes place among the ruins of a huge Doric temple. The building seems to follow the imposing style of the Doric temples of Paestum. The set consists of a Doric peripteral double-column structure with a *cella*. At the back of the *cella*, an opisthodomus serves as scenario for the meeting of the lovers Archimedes (Rossano Brazzi) and Diana (Tina Louise), who are accompanied by the music of Angelo Francesco Lavagnino. The film not only recreates Sicily, but also the Republican Rome of 212 BC, during the Second Punic War. The Urbs is represented by two buildings: the Senate, depicted in a neoclassical style with Ionic columns, and the palatial residence of the consul Marcellus (Alberto Farnese), containing spectacular rooms (exedras, *cubicula*, gardens etc.). The interior space features a marmoreal refinement and appears dominated by an excessive number of Ionic columns. The cultural contrast between Rome and Syracuse is accentuated thus by the classical dichotomy between Doric and Ionic. The spectacular sets and the fact that this Italo-French co-production was filmed in panoramic Dyaliscope definition suggest that the budget of *L'assedio di Siracusa* had been relatively high.

48 According to MARTIN 2002, 29, this set was intentionally designed in order to transmit the idea of Rhodes as an island between East and West, a cultural and geographical meeting point of ancient Mediterranean civilizations.

49 On the visual skills and jumble of styles which characterize *Il Colosso di Rodi* see also NISBET 2006, 20-31; POMEROY 2008, 42-45.

50 Using our imagination, we could possibly find some resemblances with the *frons scenae* of the Roman theatres.

4.8. *Il conquistatore di Corinto* and *Afrodite, dea dell'amore*

A further Italo-French production, *Il conquistatore di Corinto* / *The Centurion* (Mario Costa, 1962) deals with the destruction of the Greek city of Corinth by the Romans in the year 146 BC. The famous episode meant the end of Greek independence and the annexing of Achaea as a Roman province. As main setting of the film, Corinth is represented by two characteristic structures: the city walls with crenellations and the Assembly of Corinth, a building resembling eighteen-century Neoclassicism more closely than the architectonic styles of the second century BC. The interior decoration of the building's walls follows patterns inspired by Athenian red figure vases – some of the iconographies are indeed direct copies of extant vase paintings – but employing white figures on red background.[51] The art designer of the film – according to the credits Antonio Visone[52] – seemed to have been inspired by vase paintings of the fifth and fourth century BC rather than by the wall paintings and mosaics of the Hellenistic period, mostly known to us thanks to numerous Roman copies. The film's distinctive feature is the predominance of Doric whiteness and the lavish baroque elements of the gardens. Densely packed with fountains, craters, statues and tapered columns, they strongly remind us of the bucolic gardens illustrated on Pompeian wall paintings.

Ancient Corinth was also the scenario of a less well known Italian film of 1958. *Afrodite, dea dell'amore* was directed by Mario Bonnard (*Frine, cortigiana d'Oriente*, 1953, *Gli ultimi giorni di Pompei*, 1959). Set in the year 67 AD in the reign of Emperor Nero, *Afrodite* is a typical *peplum* complete with an oppressive tyrant, good looking slaves, Christian martyrs and anti-Roman rebels: an "episodio della storia greco-romana", as the credits assert. Film sets were designed by Saverio D'Eugenio, later known for his artistic contributions to *Romolo e Remo* (Sergio Corbucci, 1961) and *L'ira di Achille* (Marino Girolami, 1962). Once again, marble and tapered Doric columns dominate the interior sets. The visual depth perception of the rooms due to effective camera-frames and the decoration's details deserve our particular attention. As a contrast to curtains, furniture, bronze sculptures, fountains and vegetation, wall paintings present less intense blue and red geometric motifs. The neoclassical monumentality of the exterior scenes – recalling the architecture of Italian Fascism – is accentuated by the use of immense pillars, gigantic stairs and military standards, which symbolise Roman imperialism. The use of contrasting settings is particularly evident in the dichotomy between the "rational" Greek-Roman architecture and the exotic orientalising

51 A typical symposium iconography in Critolaus' palace resembles a similar scene painted on a cup attributed to the Triptolemos Painter, whereas the painting behind Critolaus' throne seems to recreate the fight between Diomedes and Aeneas to be found for instance on the calyx crater by the so called Tyszkiewicz Painter, see BOARDMAN 1975, fig. 305; 186.

52 According to the IMDb (www.imdb.com), Visone was also responsible for the visual effects. Besides *Il conquistatore di Corinto*, he also collaborated in *Le baccanti* (Giorgio Ferroni, 1961) and the parody *Totò contro Maciste* (Fernando Cerchio, 1962).

camp of the slave traders, where some of the most remarkable scenes of the film take place.

5. Conclusions

To conclude, I will draw together some key themes evident in the choice of setting and design in films dealing with the ancient Greek world. In essence, architecture, décor and art design of historical films should above all be regarded both by general and expert audiences as fitting settings of a story – or as "sustainers of illusions" paraphrasing Lane Fox – and only very secondarily as attempts to document genuine settings of past events. Even if we find remarkable aesthetical differences between today's frequent use of computer graphics and the traditional employ of models and architectonic sets, a constant element of the genre is the aesthetic accentuation of cultural differences – between Achaeans and Trojans, Athenians and Macedonians, Greeks and Persians, Greeks and Romans etc. Obvious architectonic *topoi* are the intentional uses of Doric and Ionic order. Doric represents generally classical Athens and Sparta, but also the Macedonian Pella, and the Hellenistic Syracuse and Corinth, standing for a deliberate projection of a typical image of ancient Greece predominantly conveyed by the Neoclassicism. The rare presence of Ionic in "Greek films" may respond to its popular attribution to Rome rather than to classical Greece. Homeric Troy is frequently visualised according to typical architectonic traits of Minoan Crete and some Mycenaean palaces, but also of ancient Near and Middle-East iconographies, contrasting to the archaic Doric and the rustic atmospheres ascribed to the cities of the Achaeans. It could be therefore said that Troy stands commonly in film's imaginary for a cultural and aesthetical crossroad between East and West. Odysseus' Ithaca is in the main convincingly displayed in cinema as a space ruled by a certain primitivism, contrasting to other much more civilized and developed worlds depicted by Homer, such as Sparta, Troy or the reign of Alcinous. Archaism and rural sceneries have been also resorted to as appropriate film settings for Athenian Greek drama and its universal and eternal messages. Visual dichotomies work well in cinema, but eclectic fusions of styles also do: Greek and Hellenistic temples, palaces, theatres, private houses and gardens are recurrently depicted as a kind of Graeco-Roman visual *koiné*. In this respect, films do not commonly let us distinguish iconographic features belonging to Eastern cultures, such as Persia, Assyria or Colchis. This tendency concerns as well the use of costumes – a topic deserving indeed a whole contribution. One of the positive innovations detected in recent productions is the breaking of a commonplace traditionally connected to the genre, which goes back to the silent era: the representation of Greek art and architecture as characterised by marmoreal whiteness. As a contrast, the design of interior decorations – with major or less success – has traditionally displayed polychromy and patterns inspired by the Greek figure vases. A further *topos*, inherited from the Romantic era and still in use, is the employ of ruins as film settings. Their presence as real locations and fictive sets, sometimes as decorative backgrounds, focuses the perception of antiquity as a distant place by modern

viewers, even if this choice means on occasion to overlook striking anachronisms. Cinema's particular appeal to monumentality has found in ancient Greece an ambiguous setting – with the exception of the Parthenon's imposing image. It is actually beyond Athens and Sparta, in the Homeric world and in the Hellenistic period, where viewers most frequently discover the splendorous – and much more striking – architectonic grandeur of the ancient world, represented by Troy, Alexandria and Babylon. Inspiring and featuring a whole film, the superb Colossus of Rhodes – like imperial Rome – exemplifies cinema's old and new ambition of rebuilding the vanished antiquity as a spectacular monumental set to be enjoyed and admired by modern audiences.

COLOURFUL HEROES: ANCIENT GREECE AND THE CHILDREN'S ANIMATION FILM

Martin Lindner

1. INTRODUCTION

Historical epics such as *Ben Hur* (1959) or *Alexander* (2004) have received a lot of attention recently and so have blockbusters dealing with ancient mythology.[1] "Art films", defined in which way whatsoever, from Pasolini's *Medea* to *Fellini Satyricon* profit as well from the current popularity of researching classical antiquity in the cinema.[2] But there are also the less fortunate: The earliest silent films and their elaborate feature shows are hardly ever present in modern analyses.[3] Pornographic feature films are still shunned, even if their simplicity would make some of them perfect case studies for the mechanism of reducing classical tradition to a number of narrative segments.[4] The children's animation film may be among one of the most lucrative genres for studios worldwide, but so far this genre has been widely ignored in academic research dealing with classical topics.[5]

The following pages will try to give a rough overview of the "colourful heroes" of ancient Greece – the way they are presented in children's animation films, the modes of narration and a comparison of contexts and strategies. This is by no means an attempt to summarize all existing data (even my own feeble collection contains more titles than I could ever hope to cover here). Nevertheless, concentrating on a number of significant examples does have its advantages, as it will allow to give an introduction to the background and content of each movie or TV series, some of them quite hard to obtain.

1 With most of the studies apparently inspired by *Troy*, e.g. WIEBER 2005; BOSCHI 2005; CAVALLINI 2005; WINKLER 2007a.

2 To name but a few (apart from the older study of MACKINNON 1986): SCHULZE-GATTERMANN 2000; SULLIVAN 2001; BRÜTSCH – FUHRER 2002; FORST 2002; HEßEN 2002; RENGER 2002; RIEMER 2002; TSOMIS 2002; VÖHLER 2002; ZIMMERMANN 2002; EIGLER 2004.

3 For the feature shows of early cinema see BERG 1989; this lack of interest seems to be motivated by the obstacles of research: hundreds of films – especially from the early years of cinema – have survived in single copies (or fragments thereof) and can only be accessed under special circumstances in media libraries or studio archives.

4 A first attempt in LINDNER 2007.

5 On the animation film in general see BENDAZZI 1994; on the problem of "childist" prejudices against children's fiction see MORRIS 2000, 1-14.

1.1 Definitions

Speaking of "significant examples" poses several problems, mainly finding a working definition of children's animation films and some objective criteria for selection. The first part ought to be easy: Doesn't a whole branch of the film industry promote products especially tailored for children, ranging from toddler to teenager? And "animation", in a nutshell, is nothing more but a series of animated drawings, isn't it?

Although there is some truth in this, both ideas are highly oversimplified. Of course *Nickelodeon* and the *Disney Channel* (mainly) reach non-adult viewers as their audience ratings tell us. But this shouldn't be confused with an overall phenomenon of "popularity": Apart from some viewing figures we do not know very much about the audience of children's animation films, let alone why people watch them. In the late 1990s, quite an uproar was caused among TV producers when the gay movement chose a character from *Teletubbies* as an unofficial mascot – presumably because it was purple, loved to hug strangers or dance with them and it always carried a pink handbag.[6] Unless we want to start with massive empirical research, we should keep in mind that "children's films" means films produced *for* but only supposedly consumed *by* an under-age audience.[7]

For the technical aspect, the following text is based on a wide interpretation of "animation films", also including silhouette films, stop-motion animation, computer-generated imagery and marionette films.[8] The classical comic style is still the most common mode of presentation, presumably because in its simple forms it can be produced quickly and at very low cost. It could be argued that some of the films mentioned below like *Jim Henson's The Storyteller* do not fall under this definition, as several of the key characters are played by real actors. Admittedly, *The Storyteller* is not quite an animation series in a strict sense. But as the animation is a vital part of the film as a whole, it will be included here as a hybrid form of animation and "real" film.

1.2 Films treated

As a colleague from Athens put it, ancient Greece sadly does not have its *Astérix*. This is not to say that there are no attempts to introduce its history and mythology to the children's animation film. (Without claiming completeness, Greek topics seem to outnumber Roman ones on this special occasion.) But while *Astérix* established Roman history in the animation film and helped realizing similar projects, animation films on ancient Greece can be mainly reduced to adaptations

6 Even nowadays production company Ragdoll is eager to point out the real intentions behind the design of each character from *Teletubbyland* (see the FAQ section of their website www.ragdoll.co.uk).

7 For more detailed definitions and a history of the children's film see ERBER-GROIß 1989, 122-125 and 130-145; STAPLES 1997; WOJCIK-ANDREWS 2000, 1-22 and passim; VÖLCKER 2005, 37-48.

8 Cf. THIELE 1981, 15-17; FURNISS 1998, 4-7; WELLS 1998, 10-34; SCHOEMANN 2003, 12-69.

of the Odyssey and the Deeds of Hercules.[9]

Taking this into account, the examples presented here reflect the emphasis on mythological topics[10] but otherwise aim for a broader overview: Firstly, the films and series covered originate from a variety of studios and countries (UK, Italy, Czechoslovakia, Germany, Australia, Japan and the United States). Secondly, the case studies range from full length feature films to short films and TV series. Thirdly, the analysis will include new blockbusters as well as the works of smaller production companies and older animation films.[11]

Each of the following subchapters will start with an explanatory passage giving information on the background of the film or series, followed by a summary of its general structure and narration. At the end of the three main chapters, there is a short résumé comparing the results of these case studies. If a common version of the particular film is available, it is mentioned in the references with distribution label and International Article Number (EAN) to simplify verification of the results presented.

2. HERCULES

The filmic versions of the Deeds of Hercules form the largest section of children's animated films on ancient Greece. While most films reduce the number to less than ten tasks and modify the episodes, the basic structure of the narrative remains intact. None of the following examples distinguishes between the different classical traditions: Hercules is the son of Zeus and he may be confronted with either Bacchus or Dionysus. He is rarely called "Herakles" but almost always subject to the infamous actions of his stepmother Hera. Some films acknowledge that their story does not present everything there is to say about the great *heros* – albeit without sparking a similar series of films on the *argonautai* etc.

9 In 2007 ZYX Music started publishing a new animation series called *Die Abrafaxe in Griechenland*, produced by German DHX Studios. Stories and characters are based on the comic *Mosaik*, first issued in the German Democratic Republic and revived soon after 1990 (cf. KRAMER 2004). So far, only three episodes of about 20 minutes each are available, but this first glimpse indicates an unconventional choice of topics: The historical background of the first episodes include the works of Phidias, the building of the Acropolis and the teachings of Socrates.

10 For a short introduction to Greek (and other classical) mythology in "real" films see AHL 2001^2.

11 As technical requirements for producing an animation film have considerably dropped in price during the last years, many of the relevant examples stem from the recent boom in low budget production. There do exist earlier films like *Die Irrfahrten des Odysseus* (treated below), but most pictures are from the 1990s onwards. It would be interesting to see a study of the early European silhouette films on Greek mythology, most of which are supposedly lost except a few stills – or are kept under lock and key in the depths of public and private film archives.

2.1. Disney's *Hercules*[12]

The late 1990s were a difficult time for producing animation films in "the old way." Experts proclaimed that the future belonged to entirely computer generated animation and the success of *Toy Story* in 1995 seemed to proof them right.[13] When *Hercules* was released in 1997, the non-Disney appearance of the picture surprised the audience: *Hercules* clearly had very little in common with its predecessor *The Hunchback of Notre Dame*, let alone the all time favourites like *Lady and the Tramp* or *Dumbo*.[14] For once, the characters and settings were looking like a colourful adaptation of pictures from ancient Greek vases instead of the naturalistic style of Disney's last pictures (fig. 10). Combined with a lot of jokes working through anachronistic references – e.g. Hercules selling his own merchandising from action figures to soft drinks – and its not really child-oriented humour, the film received rather mixed reactions. Since then, Disney produced some additional "old school" animation films (with only the unsuccessful *The Emperor's New Groove* trying to follow the footsteps of *Hercules*) before abandoning the classical comic style in favour of computer generated imagery.

The story follows Hercules' life from his birth to his entry among the gods. As part of an evil scheme, pursued by Hades to take over Mount Olympus, the baby hero is taken away from his loving parents Hera and Zeus. Hercules escapes extinction and grows up at the house of benevolent farmers. When his true descent is revealed, he persuades Philoctetes, satyr and former teacher of Achilles, to educate him in the arts of being a "true hero". Hercules builds up a reputation by defeating mythological beasts and saving whole cities, but it is the love to Megara that gives meaning to his existence. Meanwhile, Hades forces Megara to trick the son of Zeus into a fatal deal that will rob him of his super-human powers and invulnerability. Hercules survives and risks his life again to rescue Megara from the underworld, finally proving himself to be worthy of his ancestry by this unselfish act. He prevents Hades and the Titans from winning world domination, but in the moment of his greatest triumph gives up his godly rights to continue living on earth with Megara.

Hercules contains a number of alterations to the classical myth which can be also be found in most of the following examples. The Twelve Deeds are reduced to some highlights, especially the fight against the Hydra. His motivation is not to redeem himself or obey some dynastic prerogative, but to restore his godly rights by succeeding in every task presented to him, no matter how hopeless it may

12 Walt Disney Home Entertainment, EAN: 4011846003533, 89 minutes (PAL version).

13 Cf. RONCARELLI 1994; MORITZ 1998b; for the theoretical background see MANOVICH 1997. "Computer generated animation" is used here as a synonym for "reine Computeranimation" as distinguished by SCHOEMANN 2003 (62-69 and 282-287) from "Computer gestützte Animation" (computer based animation). Technically all modern animation films belong to one of these two categories and the transition between them becomes less and less distinct.

14 For an overview of the classical Disney style see THOMAS 1991 and HAHN 1996. These two are good examples for the problems of modern film studies: THOMAS 1991 and HAHN 1996 can draw heavily on archive material and illustrate their explanations with better stills than other competing volumes. The price for this is an uncritical approach which gives both books the character of "educational Disney merchandise".

appear. The Deeds of Hercules are in essence a question of "character building": In the end, it is his altruism and love for others that allow him to complete his quest.[15]

The film differs from other Hercules animation films not so much in the reinterpretation of the hero's family background, but in the fact that it is more than just a mentioned. Making Hades the chief villain clearly is original. But as far as family background is concerned, there rarely ever is a comment on it in other films apart from the occasional "father Zeus" or "stepmother Hera." The children's animation film is interested in Hercules as the famous hero, not in Hercules as the result of an adultery. So to speak, *Hercules* is different in being kind of a *biopic*,[16] i.e. in dealing with a large span of its main character's life. Hercules never meets Deianeira (he does so in some of the films mentioned below) or suffers from the effects of the poisoned robe (he neither has to in all other examples known to me). *Hercules* concentrates on memorable deeds, a love story and an ill-fated coup d'état. The movie does not present its hero as a father of children, but at least it tries to increase identification by showing him as a troublesome youth with some minor character flaws. *Hercules* is no *Bambi*, and that may be the film's biggest problem. The fights are more graphical than anywhere else (that is to say: not all opponents are defeated by simply falling to the ground).[17] Its self-irony, its intertextual references, anachronistic punch lines and very stylized look reveal *Hercules* to be a rather grown-up comedy struggling to work as a children's film as well.

2.2. *Hercules the Invincible Hero – A Legendary Tale*[18]

This version of the Deeds of Hercules was produced by an Italian studio called AVO Film and marketed in English for an international audience. AVO Film also distributes a large variety of other products from westerns to hardcore pornography, with children's animation films forming the major part of the output. A lot of these titles are attempts to jump the bandwagon as soon as a major picture company announces a new film or gives an evergreen a re-release for the home video market: Disney's *Mulan* received a remake under the name of *Mu-Lan* as did *Anastasia* with *La Regina delle Nevi*. *The Little Mermaid* became *La Sirenetta*, *The Jungle Book* was imitated by *Il Libro della Giungla*, *Atlantis: The Lost Empire* had its twin *Atlantide – La Città Sommersa* etc. It seems only logical, therefore, that Disney's *Hercules* should have an unofficial sequel as well. But even though *Hercules the Invincible Hero – A Legendary Tale* was introduced

15 It could be argued that this reduction and moral undertone makes *Hercules* a "typical Disney" after all (cf. ZIPES 1995). But as the following examples will illustrate, the same principles are visible in a variety of non-Disney films – not only because they might be influenced by the successful American prototype (cf. MORITZ 1998a), but also because they are subject to the same technical, pedagogical and economic circumstances.

16 For a concept of *biopics* see CUSTEN 1992 and TAYLOR 2002.

17 For a comparative study of the moral impact of death in Disney films see COX – GARRETT – GRAHAM 2005.

18 AVO Films, EAN: 5034741200417, 41 minutes (PAL).

only months after its predecessor, it is obviously not the standard AVO-remake.

For a start, the appearance of *Hercules the Invincible Hero* is less indebted to the American blockbuster than to a TV series called *He-Man and the Masters of the Universe* that was popular in the 1980s. Hercules itself is an almost exact copy of He-Man, down to his hairdo, weapon and clothes. The rest is an unconventional mixture of myth, fairy tale and fantasy: Hercules lives on earth to fulfil the wishes of the gods and protect the mortals against evil. As a favour to the king of centaurs, he agrees to guide young Cloppy to his "day of emancipation" in the big city of centaurs. On their journey they visit a beautiful castle, Hercules meets princess Deianeira and they fall in love with each other. Unfortunately, Deianeira's father has already promised her to an evil wizard. But when Hercules rescues her from the Nemean Lion, the former betrothal is nullified. Deianeira joins Cloppy and Hercules on their journey only to be drowned by the Hydra Hercules is fighting. Hades abducts her to the underworld but agrees to release her if Hercules returns Cerberus from wherever the evil wizard and his master have taken him. The son of Zeus defeats the villains by letting their shrinking spells backfire, takes Cerberus back to Hades and marries Deianeira in the city of centaurs.

The way in which *Hercules the Invincible Hero* presents its story is an odd rearrangement of elements seeking for a simple narrative suitable for a very young audience. Mythological beasts (except the two mentioned above) only act as chance encounters and are quickly disposed of without any bloodshed. Most of the time is taken up by Deianeira's songs, the wizard sub-plot and a framework narrative of Pan telling the story of Hercules to two young satyrs. Three children's characters, pretty inept villains, simple but colourful animation and a predictable happy ending combine in the attempt to convert Hercules into a harmless fairy tale – leaving behind the more complex elements of the myth and reducing the narration to a love story and an adventurous journey.

2.3. Golden Films' *Hercules*[19]

The label Golden Films stands for yet another series of Disney remakes, including a new *Aladdin* and a second *Beauty and the Beast*, later marketed through GoodTimes Entertainment and Sony Wonder. *Hercules* was published almost simultaneously with the Disney version (in spite of being equally close to *Hercules the Invincible Hero*) and received some re-releases on TV and DVD.

The film is set in 1000 BC – a rare case of historization – and shows Hercules as some kind of fantasy hero, again closely resembling *He-Man* and other comic heroes (fig. 11). Alcmene works as a handmaiden in the king's palace and mourns her husband who has died in battle. The gods take pity in her and Zeus, under circumstances not exemplified in the film, grants her a child that is to marry the king's daughter. Meanwhile Hera questions Faith about the future of her own son, finding out and recognizing Hercules as a potential rival. Assisted by Virgil and Homer, two minor villains taking the roles of Pain and Panic from Disney's

19 Sony Wonder / Best Entertainment, EAN: 4260057812049, 47 minutes (PAL).

Hercules, she tricks Hercules into accepting twelve labours to prove himself worthy to be a king and god. He accomplishes all tasks set to him: rescuing the golden statue of a lion from a labyrinth, killing the Hydra, returning Cerberus to Hades, escaping from a pair of giant spiders and a cyclops etc. Finally, Hera sends down her two-headed dragon to abduct the princess. Hercules risks his own life to return her and is awarded a place among the gods by his father Zeus. Instead of going to Mount Olympus, he decides to marry the princess and rule as a king with her by his side.

The arrangement of the various songs, the commentating statues in the opening scenes, the biographical structure and the idea of proving oneself worthy by unselfish actions, resemble the Disney version. Style and narration have more in common with *Hercules the Invincible Hero* (without suggesting intent). In a few aspects Golden Films' *Hercules* may be closer to the classical tradition than the films treated so far. In the end, it is mainly a standard attempt to combine fantasy and classical myth into a simple story suitable for children of all ages.

2.4. Burbank's *Hercules*[20]

Among the earliest films in the vicinity of Disney's *Hercules* is this Australian picture from Burbank Animation Studios, released for an international audience by Anchor Bay Entertainment (USA) in 1996. There are several VHS versions at eye-level with the mass market DVD from Delta Entertainment which shows a rather poor picture quality.

The story is embedded into a narrative of Hercules as a hoary man trying to teach manners to two young gods: the insolent Mars and the charming Saturn. He reports the story of his mortal life from the moment when Deianeira and their children vanished from the face of the earth. Hercules curses the gods and demands immortality to allow him revenge against the yet unknown foe. The major gods assemble at Mount Olympus to determine Hercules' punishment. Hera suggests Eurystheus as an arbitrator and immediately instructs him to come up with a number of impossible deeds. On his way to Tiryns, Hercules saves Ulysses from the Nemean Lion, much to the annoyance of Hera who continues to send other mythical beasts to keep him from completing his tasks. Eurystheus tells his half-brother to slay the Hydra and Hercules assembles a crew including Jason and Ulysses. On their way they frighten away the Stymphalic Birds with a gong made from the Nemean Lion's hide, finally reaching the "ice lake of Lerna." Ulysses makes Hercules curse Hera again, thus provoking her to send down lightning from the sky. The crew manages to pull the Hydra into the fire where it explodes. When Zeus finds out that Nemesis has intervened on numerous occasions, he concedes Hera to set one last test: Hercules has to defeat Cerberus to become a god or die trying. The son of Zeus succeeds by tricking the heads of Cerberus to battle each other and frees his family from Hera's evil soldiers. Hercules at first declines the offer to join the gods in favour of a life with Deianeira and only becomes immortal many years later after the death of his wife.

20 Delta Entertainment, EAN: 4006408827313, 50 minutes (PAL).

The whole story is a mixture of different myths with the Deeds of Hercules as the basic plot. What makes Burbank's *Hercules* unique is the frame narration including an old Hercules (with some dynastic rearrangements) lecturing on the harmony of the universe and the rule of mind over heart. The strong moral undertone of the Mars/Saturn-elements is contrasted by the very simple humour of the main story. *Hercules* introduces an unusual number of different gods (including names, domains, sometimes even family ties) and has them play an active part in the counsel leading to the famous deeds. In every other aspect the film remains similar to most examples presented here: The violent scenes consist of some blows to the beasts' heads, the narrative is reduced to some tasks set by evil Hera and so on. On the other hand *Hercules* abstains from offering its audience any child characters as a focus of identification.

2.5. *The Invincible Hero Hercules*[21]

Again it was 1997 when Pulse Distribution and Entertainment (UK) and their Dutch co-publishers released this version of the Deeds of Hercules. Since then the film has received various low budget reissues under changing titles, some of them without the specification of a publishing label. The picture quality of the latest 2003 DVD release can be considered mediocre, at best, making the simple style of the animation look even more blurred. The basic plot differs in some characteristic details from the examples presented so far: Hera plans to overpower Zeus (closely resembling actor Sean Connery) because she envies his role as king of the gods and dislikes his close relation to Aphrodite. As a quite arrogant Hercules dominates the games held by Hera's favourite Eurystheus, she initiates a substitute battle on earth between the two, starting with the fight for the hand of princess Deianeira. By accident Zeus drinks the nectar of Hades and falls unconscious. Hera urges Eurystheus to use the same substance against Hercules, who then becomes trapped in feverish dreams and destroys the city of Thebes. Shocked by his own doings, he accepts to be punished. Eurystheus invents a perfidious oracle: Hercules has to defeat the Hydra of Lerna or Deianeira will never wake from her coma. On their journey, Hercules and young Iolaus survive a number of chance encounters (a giant crocodile, the Erymanthean Boar and the cyclops king Augeias). Having arrived at Lerna, the heroes are almost killed by the Hydra, but Hercules tricks the monster to throw itself into a volcano. Back in Thebes, he forces Eurystheus to reveal Hera as the *éminence grise*. Meanwhile, Hera has replaced Zeus with the help of Dionysus and is keeping Deianeira as a prisoner. Hercules ascends Mount Olympus even against the resistance of Ares, Poseidon, Apollo and Hera herself. When Zeus regains conscience, he restores the old order but his son declines an offer to stay among the gods. Deianeira, whom Aphrodite reveals to be her earthly champion, and Hercules are reunited in a mortal life on earth.

The Invincible Hero Hercules is one of the strangest films treated here. On the one hand, it contains the well-known simplifications and alterations: The dynastic

21 Pulse Distribution and Entertainment, EAN: N/A, 48 minutes (PAL).

background is hardly mentioned at all, and the Deeds of Hercules are mainly reduced to the fight against the Hydra. The hero's motivation is not so much the hope to redeem himself, but the wish to rescue Deianeira. The story includes the usual change of character – and in the beginning *The Invincible Hero Hercules* shows the most repulsive Hercules of all children's animation films – even if it is quite an abrupt one. Young Iolaus and especially the tamed Erymanthean Boar seem to be an attempt to create sympathetic characters for an under-age audience, while evil Hera and weak Eurystheus act as plain one-dimensional villains. On the other hand, the story and style are not always what might be called entertainment suitable for children: There are some jokes about an inarticulate Ares and war being hell, a thin-skinned cyclops with personality problems, a fight against the Hydra that stretches over several minutes including a jazz soundtrack and fantasy effects etc. All in all, *The Invincible Hero Hercules* is an extremely free adaptation of the classical myth – but also an inconsistent one in its approach to from the different elements into an independent narration.

2.6. GoodTimes's *Hercules*[22]

One of the few clearly pre-Disney animation films centred on the Deeds of Hercules was produced in 1995 as a cooperation of various Japanese studios for GoodTimes Entertainment. Later it was included in the GoodTimes Home Video Platinum Series and is sometimes also referred to as *Hercules – The Classic Tale Of A Famous Greek Hero* in filmographies and databases.[23]

Hercules starts with a short introduction to the birth of the son of Zeus, sticking closely to classical tradition. Hera is angry at her husband but still feels guilty to punish an innocent baby for the faults of his father. After the failed snake attack, the film jumps to Eurystheus and Hercules competing as two young men of immense physical abilities. The ever victorious Hercules is to be married to Megara, a beautiful blond girl drawn in the style of Japanese *anime* pictures, while the envious Eurystheus becomes king. The day before the marriage, Hera again attempts to punish Zeus for his adultery. Thus, she kills the mother of Hercules. Resulting from this, Hercules, who is feeling guilty as he could not save her, travels to Delphi to question Apollo about his fate. The god proclaims that twelve tasks set by Eurystheus will clear Hercules's conscience. Eurystheus, being influenced vehemently by his devious herald, happily agrees – but the hero is able to succeed with the help of Athena or Zeus himself. Hercules completes the twelve deeds and when the vile servant is chased away, Eurystheus turns out to be a generous king after all. He acknowledges the achievements and offers Hercules his friendship. The hero promises to retreat to a private life. Thus, he wins Hera's respect; she then reunites with Zeus, both planning to make Hercules a god as soon as his time on earth is over. (The act itself is not shown in the film but confirmed by the narrator's voice citing mythological sources).

22 GoodTimes Home Video, EAN: 5012106930742, 48 minutes (PAL).

23 Strictly speaking, the subtitle does only appear on the inlays of the international release packages.

GoodTimes's *Hercules* is probably the children's animation film that keeps most of the classical tradition, although there are still some major modifications and abridgements. On the whole, the film gives a short but clear insight into the dynastic background of the story. It even shows Hercules with his famous insignia, at least mentions the *apotheosis*, includes several examples of divine intervention, as well as all of the twelve deeds and it lets its main character act out of a wish to redeem himself. *Nota bene*: the adventures of Hercules are not employed as a way of emphasizing the moral change in a hero who wants to prove himself. While the son of Zeus remains the loving husband-to-be or devout believer in the wisdom and power of the gods, it is Eurystheus who improves his character throughout the story. There is little violence, a double happy ending with few real villains and an adolescent (at least in his appearance) hero. GoodTimes's *Hercules* offers a rather short version of the underlying myth and mainly concentrates on timeless virtues such as love, friendship or honesty. Even so, the film's narrative in most aspects manages to keep the balance between "accuracy" and child-orientated storytelling.

3. HOMERIC EPICS

When compared to the popularity of Hercules, there seems to be no reason why the Homeric Epics should not have inspired an equal amount of children's animation films. The *Iliad* may be a tricky one, but the basic story of the *Odyssey* ought to be easily transformable into an adventure film that can attract a younger audience. The simple fact is that only a few such adaptations have ever been attempted, two of which will receive a closer treatment here. Even these mere two films, following the six ones on Hercules, are bound to give a wrong impression as the pictures dealing with the son of Zeus outnumber the ones on Ulysses by at least five to one. The fourth chapter on cross-over fiction will include some more examples for elements of the Homeric Epics in the children's animation film, but it should be kept in mind that the famous journey from Troy to Ithaca usually is a side issue at best.

3.1. *Odyssea* / *Die Irrfahrten des Odysseus*[24]

This medium length feature film is one of a handful of animation films from the Deutsche Film AG studios (DEFA) dealing with classical mythology; most of them were produced during the last years of the German Democratic Republic.[25] *Die Irrfahrten des Odysseus* may be seen as a typical example of cooperation in

24 DEFA-Archiv, Mediathek Oldenburg (F 25 pae TT 0353), 68 minutes (35 mm copy, 1947 metres on 6 reels).

25 The extensive filmography compiled by BIEHL 2003 also lists the short films *David und Goliath* (1981, 124 metres), *Sirenen* (1984, 107 metres), *Die Arche* (1987, 140 metres), *Zeus, Adler und Mistkäfer* (1988, 282 metres), *Sisyphos* (1989, 192 metres) and *Noah (Das Volk sind wir)* (1990, 81 metres) as well as the longer *Die Suche nach dem Goldenen Vlies* (1986, 1023 metres).

the movie industry of the Eastern Bloc: Originally created in Prague by Krátký Film and Studio Jiří Trnka as *Odyssea* it was released in 1986 by the DEFA with a German title and dubbing plus a soundtrack played by the Dresdner Philharmonie.[26] So far the film has not been remastered for a home video edition, but several prints from its original copies still exist (partly in black and white) and it had some television screenings in Germany as well (fig. 12).

Odyssea starts with an unusual blending of animation and life action – the waves of the Mediterranean Sea – but soon shifts to a simple animation style overlaid by a lengthy narrator's monologue. This way the first ten minutes give a short summary of the events surrounding the ten years of war and the subsequent fall of Troy. For the rest of the film, it is mainly Ulysses who takes up the part of the voice-over narrator, starting with the fight against the Cicones. The story closely follows the adventurous episodes down to Scylla and Charybdis before entering an alternating double storyline: the years of Ulysses on the island of Calypso and the travels of Telemachus (reunited in the return to Ithaca). Ulysses reveals his true identity by the shot through the axe heads and his son has to save him from the enraged suitors. When the king kills Antinous, the other opponents flee in terror. The film ends with another blending of animation and life action, this time using imagery from Greek vases (from the Bode-Museum in Berlin), again overlaid by a narrator's monologue emphasizing the timeless wisdoms of ancient mythology.

Although *Odyssea* does not strictly follow the Homeric text, it is arguably the losest adaptation of a children's animation film to date. Similar to "real" films on the same topic, like *Ulisse* with Kirk Douglas,[27] the elements are more or less rearranged to a straightened plot concept excluding any framework narrative or flashbacks. But even if *Odyssea* does have a visible strategy for telling a "children's Homer", the result is somewhat inconsistent. On the one hand, there are the simple but original and colourful animations, the elevated role of young Telemachus and the almost complete omission of graphical violence. On the other hand, the film's idea of completeness ends up in a very condensed narrative with a lot of Greek names and rapidly changing settings without a real happy ending. (The final sequence contains no family reunion, only the killing of Antinous). When compared to other children's animation films, *Odyssea* looks like a unique but rather dry and academic approach to its subject.

3.2. *The Odyssey*[28]

At the same time, Burbank Films Australia produced its own version of the Homeric epic, released in 1987. Running only 46 minutes, it has since been marketed as one of the numerous medium length educational films for an under-

26 PETZOLD 2003, 306f.; on the history of animation film in the first decades of the Eastern Bloc see BENDAZZI 1994, 163-179.

27 The main exception from this rule is the rather artificial *Odissea (dal Poema di Omero)* produced in 1969 by De Laurentiis and RAI Televisione Italiana with the support of French, German and Yugoslavian partners.

28 FlexMedia Entertainment, EAN: 4260043122169, 46 minutes (PAL).

age audience. The latest PAL region code zero DVD release was done by FlexMedia Entertainment (under the license of Waterfall Home Entertainment) with very poor picture quality and the original English soundtrack left out in favour of French and German dubbings.

The Odyssey starts with a counsel of the gods on Mount Olympus. Poseidon suggests to annihilate humanity to end the troubles caused by the acts of men. Zeus opposes him and Athena cites the model hero Ulysses, who has just brought about the fall of Troy and is about to return to his homeland. The story continues with Polyphemus assaulting the innocent party on their short stopover. In a second counsel, Poseidon demands revenge for the damage done to his son, but Zeus only grants him the chance to prolong the journey of Ulysses. The following episodes include the magic of Circe, the visit to the underworld, the Sirens, Scylla and Charybdis and the slaying of the cattle on the Island of the Sun. Poseidon denounces Ulysses to Zeus, who kills the perpetrators and destroys their ship. Athena is allowed to rescue the innocent Ulysses from drowning, only to see him stranded in the land of the Phaeacians. When princess Penelope is chosen as the annual sacrifice to Poseidon, Ulysses wrestles down the shape-shifting god, thus winning the princess's life and his own freedom. Penelope and Ulysses marry and return to Ithaca. The story ends with a last counsel of the gods: Poseidon has to renounce his judgement of mankind, Athena and Zeus are amused by the cleverness and frankness of the mortal hero.

Like *Odyssea*, Burbank's *The Odyssey* identifies itself as an adaptation of Homer and very much like its predecessor, it opts for a simplified plot without a framework narrative. Again, there is a large number of episodes, albeit less than in the Czechoslovakian/German version – but as *The Odyssey* runs only 46 minutes, it evokes the same impression of an extremely condensed storyline. The main differences lie in the style of the presentation and the character of Ulysses. Where *Odyssea* uses a more artificial technique (hand-drawn appearance, changes of camera angles, "real" film elements etc.), its Australian counterpart employs a basic comic style and furthermore attempts to lighten the tone of the narrative with supposedly funny one-liners. *The Odyssey*'s Ulysses undergoes a significant reinterpretation as well: He never commits an act of blasphemy or shows any signs of arrogant behaviour. The difficulties he faces on his way back to Ithaca might even be called the result of an accident: Ulysses has to blind the aggressor Polyphemus and abstains from any mockery of Poseidon who merely seeks an excuse to vent his wrath on Athena's mortal champion. In the end, the defeated Poseidon has to acknowledge the integrity of the chivalrous Ulysses who risked his life to prevent a barbaric ceremony of sacrifice. The putative "false" (i.e. non-Homeric) ending only underlines this moral concept.

4. Cross-over Fiction

Often simply applied as a catch-it-all phrase to examples that resist being sorted into one category or the other, the term "cross-over fiction" is used here to describe children's animation films that combine different mythological and/or

historical contents, often in form of a travel between them. This concept is more common among TV series as they have more running time at their disposal that may be used to create a complex narrative superstructure by a series of story segments.[29]

4.1. *Jim Henson's The Storyteller: Greek Myths*[30]

Greek Myths is the second instalment of the *Storyteller* series that was created by Jim Henson Productions in 1988. Its predecessor consisted of nine episodes, each dealing with a legend or fairytale, bound together by a framework narrative of a human storyteller and his talking dog. *Greek Myths* was produced in association with TVS Television in 1990 as a four episode mini-series using the same concept, but this time concentrating on famous classical myths or certain sections from a larger mythological tradition. As stated above,[31] *The Storyteller* is a mixture of puppet animation and "real" film, very much like the other successful products of Jim Henson's Creature Shop (*The Muppet Show*, *The Dark Crystal*, *Labyrinth* etc.).

Each episode has an introduction by the nameless storyteller, a crook from ancient Athens who searches monuments for valuables. He stumbles upon certain objects related to various classical myths and explains their background to his dog by telling the story in question. *Daedalus & Icarus* for example opens with the find of a bust, a model of a winged boy and a mechanical bird. These artefacts lead to a story starting with the tragic death of Talus. Daedalus and his son flee the city the same night, but some years later they are discovered by a soldier in Crete who takes them to Minos. The king reveals the Minotaur to be the result of a terrible family curse and has Daedalus construct a labyrinth for it. After its completion Minos tries to cover up the tracks by imprisoning the master artisan and his son along with the beast. They can escape the labyrinth and Daedalus constructs the two pairs of wings with feathers from a vulture he killed on the shore. Icarus has his wings damaged by the heat of the sun and crashes into the sea, but his father reaches Sicily where he is welcomed by king Cocalus. Minos pursues Daedalus who saves his life by boiling his nemesis in a bath of deadly steam. Although he is allowed many peaceful years at Sicily, Daedalus never recovers from the loss of his son and the fact that he did not behave like a loving father. In a similar way, *Orpheus & Eurydice*, *Perseus & The Gorgon* and *Theseus & The Minotaur* tell the well-known myths with some minor alterations and abbreviations.

Greek Myths clearly shows the dilemma of children's animation films on classical mythology: It struggles to keep as much of the original story as may be shown to a child audience and can be done within a strict 24 minutes design. The

29 The same is true for successful "real" film TV series like *Hercules – The Legendary Journeys* or *Xena – Warrior Princess* (which also received a remake as an animation film: *Hercules and Xena – The Battle for Mount Olympus*). A good example for the mixture of fantasy, science fiction and mythological themes is the animated series *Ulysses 31*.

30 Sony Pictures Home Entertainment, EAN: 4030521704138, 4 x 24 minutes (PAL).

31 Cf. chapter 1.1.

key to the solution is the storyteller, a guide who links together the different episodes. This framework narrative is reduced to a necessary minimum which allows spending more than 20 minutes on each of the four myths and sticking closely to classical tradition. The storyteller only introduces the main facts and sometimes comments on a character's behaviour but he does not intervene or change the story at will. His dog plays the role of a naïve listener, always searching for simple explanations and categories of morality, while the storyteller tries to give even villains such as Medea a fair judgement. Even without much graphical violence *Greek Myths* is more of a series for older children and teenagers because of its rather realistic style, the amount of information presented, the tragic main characters, and the lack of happy endings.

4.2. *Atlantis – der verlorene Kontinent*[32]

Atlantis is the perfect example for modern low cost production in children's animation films. Created by German Dingo-Pictures in 2001 it received a five language DVD release and can be found all over Europe under varying titles. Dingo-Pictures is one of the countless little studios which make a living by copying popular predecessors like *The Prince of Egypt* (DreamWorks) or *Pocahontas* (Disney). Some of these films even recycle their own animation up to the result that the same character may appear as a god, a farmer and an innocent bystander in different scenes (fig.13).

Atlantis tells the story of the boy Petros who lives in a nameless ancient Greek village. When he plays by the sea with his dog Ouzo, a bottle is washed up and turns out to contain a map of the entrance to the lost city of Atlantis. Petros and his grandfather fail to persuade the other citizens and have to start an expedition of their own. After the first attempt fails, a speaking dolphin reveals Petros the secret of surviving for hours under water. Now the boy can dive down to a secret cave, where the entrance to Atlantis is hidden, and he reaches the lost city, only to be greeted by a number of wary Atlanteans. When a little girl confesses to have written the message in the bottle, Petros is no longer treated as a spy and learns the history of the mysterious city: The Atlanteans chose to remain underground after the (Biblical?) Great Flood to live in peace and harmony, far away from the violent "surface people". Their society bloomed and the technical progress allowed them to delegate most of the work to highly intelligent robots. Petros is sent back to his family in Greece under a vow of secrecy. He is welcomed home by his mother and keeps his promise to the Atlanteans, but plans to return to his new girlfriend as soon as possible.

Atlantis is no particularly innovative or inspirational piece of work, aiming at a very young audience. The homemade appearance of animation and sound are combined with a minimum of story and characters, mainly children or talking animals. Yet *Atlantis* deserves a closer look, for it presents an unusual twist on the concept of classical myth and history in cross-over fiction: There are other examples of an Atlantis embedded into ancient Greek history and showing a high

32 Dingo-Pictures, EAN: N/A, 43 minutes (PAL).

technological infrastructure. (The following *Wondrous Myths & Legends* does the same in its last episode). But making classical history the starting point of a cross-over adventure is rather uncommon in children's animation films. Otherwise, *Atlantis* may be called a standard case of children's entertainment with a rather selective approach to classical topics.

4.3. *Wondrous Myths & Legends*[33]

This short lived TV series was produced in 1999 by Sony in cooperation with D'Ocon Films. The underlying family plot suggests that at least two full seasons were projected but only the first one was realized. 13 episodes of about 23 minutes each (30 minutes including commercials) add up to a total running time of more than four and a half hours. The incomplete series was originally distributed by Sony Wonder and has received a European DVD release by Best Entertainment under the license of TV-Loonland. Due to an odd marketing concept, the whole season was split up into six single DVDs, each containing two or three episodes, without keeping their original sequence (fig. 14).

Two teenagers, Lisa and her younger brother Nick, go climbing with their dog Zeus. They come across a crystal cave that turns out to be a passage between several famous stories of myth and history. The first episode sees them rescue Pegasus from a group of bandits. When Lisa and Nick return, they find themselves trapped in the "Cave of Mythos" and realize that there is no way out but through the scenarios they encounter. During the following episodes they solve the riddle of the Sphinx, find the monster of Loch Ness, meet St. George, Midas and a cyclops, witness the fall of Troy, return Thor's hammer, assist the unlucky Cupid, rescue Aztec objects from the Spanish conquistadores, visit Camelot and the world of the leprechauns, and discover the future in the city of Atlantis. The basic plot almost always consists of a quest that has to be completed to let the rest of the story take place the way it is supposed to happen (or have happened). In the gateway cave Lisa and Nick find several clues that set them on the track of a famous ancestor who once visited the same scenarios and by way of time travel still does so. As only the first 13 episodes were produced, there is no conclusion of this background story and a second one – another intruder to the cave tries to sabotage famous legends – never gets beyond the first hints.[34]

Wondrous Myths & Legends is the essence of cross-over fiction, as it not only mixes myth, history and fairy tale, but also transforms the act of crossing between the different elements into a framework narrative of intertextual time travel. This complex approach is contrasted by a simple style of animation, a lot of slapstick humor and a large number of under-age characters with corresponding subplots. (Most stories introduce no more than ten different persons, at least half of them

33 Best Media / TV-Loonland, EAN: 4260057812377, 4260057812384, 4260057812407, 4260057812360, 4260057812353, 4260057812391, 13 x 23 minutes (PAL).

34 In 2003 a German and British co-production picked up the idea under the title of *Adventurers* (*Mission Zeitreise*). The background is a new computer that allows four young students to be "sucked into" various historical settings where they have to prevent the evil "Hacker" from destroying the past.

teenagers or little children.) The episodes have a standard introduction and final credits of one minute each, leaving a net running time of merely 20 minutes. If one subtracts the time needed for continuing the framework narrative, the mythological or historical scenarios are in fact reduced to no longer than 16 to 18 minutes. In consequence, the particular stories have to concentrate on a single event or character and are told in an almost anecdotic way.

5. Conclusion

Most of the eleven examples treated here may be summarized under what Nick Lowe has called *theurgic fiction*, that is "fantasy fiction, which accepts the supernatural machinery and tries to incorporate it into a reconstructed Bronze Age, generally in accordance with the generic tropes of post-Tolkienian fantasy."[35] To be fair, none of the pictures mentioned above aims at historization in the strict sense that is visible in Wolfgang Petersen's *Troy* or other modern "real" films.[36] Nevertheless, there is a certain tendency to it in the children's animation film, especially in cross-over fiction. On the other hand, it is important to emphasize the element of fantasy-/fairy-tale-narration and the frequent anachronistic references. Both originate from the attempt to provide a very basic access to classical myth or history: the first one by applying narrative formations that are common in other story contexts, supposedly familiar to a child audience, the second one by recurring to the "Lebenswelt" of its viewers. Children's animation films can be judged in terms of closeness to classical tradition, albeit with unsatisfactory results. These pictures do not try to transform e.g. Homeric narrative into animated entertainment and if they do, the outcome – like in *Odyssea* – often is a rather problematic one.

The explicit orientation towards a young audience seems to be responsible for most of the alterations made to the classical narrative. The absence of sexual contents and the reduction of graphical violence may be according to the producers' idea of stories suitable for children, but it could also be seen as an economic necessity in the times of movie ratings systems: Anything higher than the likes of "Parental Guidance" would lead to a financial disaster as it would result in a decrease of the target audience.[37] The simplification of plot structures, the reduced number of named characters and places, the commonness of child figures, the mono-causal explanations or the clear moral messages are just some of the examples for the concept of narratives adjusted to a very specialized audience.[38] In another way, this is also true for the choice of narrative segments:

35 Lowe 2004, 234.

36 Cf. Wieber 2005, 156; see also Fitton 2007.

37 It would seem unfair to argue that children's animation films rule out the issue of homosexuality in the ancient world: There are indeed many "real" films, produced for an under-age audience, which include sexual contents or implications but have significant problems with non-heterosexual elements (cf. Kidd 1996). Children's animation films rarely even get to a kiss, but admittedly in all cases the couples are heterosexual ones.

38 Almost all the happy endings also work as a confirmation of "classical" gender and family

TV series designed for children seldom run longer than 30 minutes per episode, the corresponding feature films almost never have more than one hour of running time.[39] Under these circumstances, it would simply be impossible to present "the whole story" of Perseus, Jason, Achilles or Ulysses, down to the last detail from classical tradition.

Children's animation films on ancient Greek history and mythology are an attempt to introduce unfamiliar stories and contexts to young viewers. From a pedagogical point of view, it will be central if and how they succeed in doing so. From a historical point of view, these pictures form a largely overlooked part of the overall phenomenon "Antikenrezeption." It would be interesting to see a closer examination of the existing material based on an extensive comparative approach: intra- and transcultural connections and transfers, choice of contents, parallels to corresponding narratives in other media etc. Children's animation films obviously lack the complexity of novels or dramas (or even most of the comics) on the same subject. But in all their simplicity, they offer an excellent opportunity for studying the principles of our modern reception of classical antiquity.

concepts (the victorious male hero, the devoted wife, the loving parents etc.; cf. LINDNER 2002).

39 For a concept of age-oriented narrative in the children's film see VÖLCKER 2005, 49-76; for practical approaches in the current animation industry see the volume on modern animation edited by Jayne Pilling (PILLING 2001).

BY HERACLES! FROM SATYR-PLAY TO *PEPLUM*[*]

Luigi Spina

Maybe in a couple of decades ancient studies scholars will be in two minds as to whether they should interpret the abbreviation *HF* as *Hercules Furens*, the tragedy by Seneca, or as *Happy Feet*, George Miller's cartoon film of 2006.[1] Once this happens, we will know that a new generation of *film philologists* has arrived on the scene. This generation, under the aegis of M. Winkler,[2] will be essential for the survival and ongoing development of Classical Studies, especially if we remind us that traditional classical philologists tend to expend more and more of their time and efforts on ancient rather than modern cultures. And we can rest assured that the great exegetical heritage that classical philology has bequeathed to modern media technology will never be forfeited, as long as the tenth muse – in her function as goddess of the cinema – continues to display an interest in representations of the ancient world, its history, mythology and poetry, and as long as audiences engage in the critical analysis of its visual and verbal messages with faultless philological expertise.

Before actually engaging with both the ancient and the more modern figure of Heracles, I would like to give my readers one single example of the way in which philological resources can enrich the analysis of a film script containing obvious references to classical (Greek) antiquity. The example is taken from Woody Allen's *Mighty Aphrodite* (1995), in which the hardships undergone by a journalist in search of the mother of his adopted child are punctuated by the interventions of an actual Greek chorus. We encounter this chorus first in the theatre of Taormina, then right in the streets of New York, and finally in the guise of a knock-about music-hall group. Of course, Allen's idea of combining the modern with the ancient or classical had been "in the air" for more than half a century. An Italian humorist, Achille Campanile (1899-1977), had used it in his novel *Se la luna mi porta fortuna* (1928-1930).[3] The plot of the novel runs as follows: The director of the A.P.R.A. ("Agency for Preoccupations and Related Affairs"),[4] whose function it is to worry – for a fee – about other people's problems, is called in to deal with the case of Signor Tancredi, a widower with a guilty conscience. Here is the stretch of dialogue that interests us:

* I am very grateful to Iris Müller for the English translation of my article.

1 The example is not as improbable as it may seem. See SPINA 1999, 33, where I point out that 'B52' in the title of my article title had been misinterpreted as a reference to the *Vorsokratiker* by Diels-Kranz or to verse 52 of the second book of the *Iliad*. In fact, the abbreviation was merely a reference to the B52 bombers used by the Americans during the Vietnam War.

2 WINKLER 2005, 384.

3 CAMPANILE 2001, 373 f.

4 Italian: A.P.A. (Agenzia Preoccupazioni e Affini).

> "We have just what you need", the irreproachable director said. "A Greek chorus. You can hire it for a small sum as no performances are scheduled right now at the theater in Syracuse." "But I wouldn't know what to do with it", said Tancredi. "Rest assured!" replied the director. "It's what the doctor ordered. Nothing is more comforting than a Greek chorus. Whenever you are saddened by the tragedies you have been through, you just say the word and from the two side doors of your reception room men in sandals will come forth with long white beards, dressed in animal skins, crowned with roses, and leaning on long sticks of the kind used by Attic shepherds. At a sign from their leader they will raise their eyes to heaven, spread their arms and utter the following in muted and lachrymose tones: 'O wretched, wretched son! O wretched descendant of the king! O descendant of the hapless monarch! You have lost your wife, your daughter is an abandoned orphan, you are reduced to the pitiful shadow of a man. Weep, alas, weep! You have good cause to weep, O wretched, wretched son!' At this point, the sound of flutes is heard from afar, and you will see the flames of distant fires flickering up into the splendour of deep blue skies and a serene summer sunset."

In the venerable spirit of traditional *Quellenforschung* we might now ask ourselves whether Woody Allen was perhaps familiar with Campanile's novel. Be that as it may, the idea of introducing a Greek chorus into a modern context is certainly one way in which classical culture can be re-incorporated into contemporary culture. It is a method based on "contamination" and the intertwining of different dimensions of time and space, including their mutual influence on each other. An alternative method would be to introduce a plausible image from the ancient world, be it historical or mythological, that corresponds as closely as possible to the sources.

Heracles is one of the figures most frequently represented in ancient iconography (and not only there!)[5] and he has been recalled in both these ways, though it is certainly the second of the two that has the longer tradition to look back on .

There is no shortage of detailed studies on Heracles' career. He is the hero with the club, the son of Zeus and Alcmene,[6] and his career begins in the cradle where at the tender age of 8 months he strangles the snakes sent to finish him off by his father's lawful and divine consort Hera,[7] herself an eternal victim of betrayal and jealousy. It is a career that takes him all the way up to the present day, where he still figures prominently on our television and cinema screens.[8]

A crucial feature of this long (and idealized) career through time and space is without doubt the choice he has to make between two women, a choice related (according to Xenophon) by the sophist Prodicus. This choice turns out in fact to be a choice between the two alternatives open to the young hero.[9] As we know, Heracles had withdrawn to a solitary and secluded place to meditate on the best way to spend his life. The first woman, Eudaimonia (or Kakia, as she is called by her detractors), is the more readily willing of the two to spell out what she has to offer: it is Happiness, the quest for pleasure that transforms itself into Vice. The second woman, the one Heracles ultimately opts for, is Arete (Virtue). The per-

5 See *LIMC* 1988.
6 BETTINI's 1998 analysis and narration take their bearings from this complex birth.
7 Apollod. 1, 4, 62.
8 GALINSKY 1972 and BLANSHARD 2005 are fundamental for the study of various classical and modern contexts.
9 X. *Mem*. 2, 1, 21-33 (transl. E.C. Marchant, London-Cambridge 1953).

suasive discourses of these two ladies can be described as mere listings (reduced almost to the quality of television spots). Eudaimonia's discourse enumerates all the pleasures to be had and insists on the right we have to such pleasures, while Arete's speech emphasizes the duties whose acquittal will eventually lead to the desired results.

> *Eudaimonia*: "You shall taste all the sweets of life; and hardship you shall never know. First, of wars and worries you shall not think, but shall ever be considering what choice food or drink you can find, what sight or sound will delight you, what touch or perfume; what tender love can give you most joy, what bed the softest slumbers; and how to come by all these pleasures with least trouble. […] You shall have the fruits of others' toil and refrain from nothing that can bring you gain. For to my companions I give authority to pluck advantage where they will."
> *Arete*: "You will turn out a right good doer of high and noble deeds. […] For of all things good and fair, the gods give nothing to man without toil and effort. If you want the favour of the gods, you must worship the gods: if you desire the love of friends, you must do good to your friends: if you covet honour from a city, you must aid that city: if you are fain to win the admiration of all Hellas for virtue, you must strive to do good for Hellas: if you want land to yield you fruits in abundance, you must cultivate that land: if you are resolved to get wealth from flocks, you must care for those flocks. If you essay to grow great through war and want power to liberate your friends and subdue your foes, you must learn the arts of war from those who know them and must practise their right use: and if you want your body to be strong, you must accustom your body to be the servant of your mind, and train it with toil and sweat."

We should remember at this point that Arete in her subsequent intervention does not limit herself to a brief response to Eudaimonia. The latter has just pointed out to Heracles that her own path is short and easy, while her rival's is arduous and long. In response, Arete submits Eudaimonia's offer to a long and detailed critique, employing a method we might be inclined to call "comparative advertisement" and thus putting an end to the contest.

But the list of potential vices Heracles might have chosen is not only transmitted in the words of Prodicus or in Xenophon. Authors of comedies and satyr-plays employed them in their works throughout the 5th and 4th centuries BC. As G. Karl Galinsky points out, this makes them one of the most notable repertories of heroic parody[10] (though we know very little about most of these texts, many of which have come down to us only as titles or fragments).[11]

The number of serious dramas in which he has a part is a small trickle compared to the torrent of satyr-plays, farces, and comedies in which Heracles kept entertaining his audiences, and their delight with him does not seem to have known a saturation point. It was in this role that he was known best to the Greeks of both the mainland and the western colonies, and seen in this light, his philoso-

10 On this topic, see my (unpublished) thesis *La parodia dell'eroico. Una ricerca del 'clima' del dramma satiresco*, 1968. A summary of my conclusions can be found in SPINA 1974-1975. The following reflection may be helpful: When I was working on my thesis (under the supervision of Francesco Sbordone), I never thought to draw upon the realm of *peplum*, no matter how popular it was in those years. Back then, the relations between the realm of cinema and that of classical philology – at least in Naples – were no more than suggestions, a hint here and there given during the lecture of some cinema-loving professor such as Francesco Arnaldi.

11 GALINSKY 1972, 81. See also HOSEK 1963.

phical and tragic manifestations seem all the more remarkable. The reasons the latter are generally dealt with in more detail are easy to see. Humour, especially when it is not of a subtle kind, does not become funnier when it is discussed, and ancient comedy was never meant to be pored over and dissected by scholars. Furthermore, only very few of the comedies in which Heracles appeared are fully preserved. The numerous fragments and titles of plays, however, give us a good, if somewhat monotonous, idea of Heracles' comical qualities. They are fortunately supplemented by a host of artistic evidence, mostly in the form of vase painting. From this it appears that Heracles was the most popular character of the satyr-play.

On the other hand, it will suffice to consult one of the more recent annotated editions of fragments of satyr-plays to become aware of the ubiquitous presence of Heracles – and not only in the role of protagonist.[12]

At this point, however, I should like to make an observation that may also be helpful with regard to the second part of this article. Neither parodies nor any other kind of comic treatment lavished on this hero ever lose sight of the vicissitudes that mythology has bestowed on the heroic figure of Heracles. His mythic labours, his never-ending struggles against adversaries of every description, even his amorous entanglements remain clearly visible in the overall design, and for a very good reason. To fulfil their function and achieve the desired comic effect, they must remain recognizable to the audience. So, Heracles is not in fact "removed from [his] original stories",[13] as is sometimes the case in modern cinematographic depictions of the myth.

Of course, among these "original stories" we also have his ultimate admission to the pantheon, which almost seems to signal a caesura, a metamorphosis from the powerful and suffering Heracles of the labours to the new, immortal Heracles. Ulysses is well aware of this during their encounter in Hades:[14]

> "Also I distinguished great Heracles – I mean his ghost. Himself is happy with the Immortal Gods at their festivals, with his wife Hebe of the slim ankles, the daughter of all-mighty Zeus and golden-shod Hera."

But this is only an apparent caesura. Megacleides, a peripatetic philosopher of the 4th century BC, evidently had little truck with the purely warlike image of Heracles, as Athenaeus tells us in the *Deipnosophistae* (12, 512d-513a):

12 KRUMEICH *ET AL*. 1999. Here is a list of authors and satyr plays featuring (or presumably featuring) Heracles or in which he is somehow involved (page numbers in brackets): Pratinas *Palaistai* (77-80); Aeschylus *Dike-Drama* (98-106), *Kerykes* (152-156), *Leon* (161-163); Aristias *Keres* (214-217); Sophocles *Achilleos Erastai* (227-235), as well as the actual *Herakles-Satyrspiele* (259-260): *Epi Tainaro* (261-265), *Herakleiskos* (266-269), *Herakles* (270-274), *Kerberos* (275-276), *Oineus* (368-374); Euripides *Busiris* (413-419), *Eurystheus* (422-430), *Sisyphos* (442-448), *Syleus* (457-463), *Theristai* (476); Ion *Omphale* (480-490); Achaios *Linos* (530-535), *Omphale* (539-542), *Erginos* (543), *Kyknos* (543-544); Demetrius *Hesione (?)* (562-565); Astydamas II *Herakles* (568-573); Dionysius *Limos* (591-592); Sositheus *Daphnis oder Lityerses* (605-613), *Kleanthes-Drama* (614-616); Anonymus *Atlas-Drama* (624-631).

13 DYER 1997, 166.

14 Hom. *Od.* 11, 601-604 (transl. T.E. Lawrence, Oxford-New York 1991).

> "Homer, also, asserts that joy and merry-making are a more gracious end, "when feasters listen to a bard, and the tables beside them are laden." Of the gods he says that they live at ease (that is, without toil), as if to indicate that the greatest evil is hardship and toil in living. This is why, also, Megacleides blames the poets later than Homer and Hesiod, who say of Heracles that he was the leader of armies and the taker of cities: "For he passed his life among men in the enjoyment of the greatest pleasure, marrying very many women, begetting children from very many maidens clandestinely." One may say in answer to those who refuse to accept these traditions: "How does it come about, sirs, that you ascribe to him his devotion to food, or how did the custom come among men, that not a drop should be left in the libation-cup to him, if he did not approve of sensual pleasures? Or why are all men agreed that the warm baths which appear out of the earth are sacred to Heracles, or why are people in the habit of calling soft bedding "Heracles's beds" if he despised those who live in pleasure?" It is this hero, Megacleides says, whom the more recent poets dress up in the guise of a highwayman wandering about alone, carrying club and lion-skin and bow; the first to conceive this was Stesichorus of Himera. Yet the lyric poet Xanthus, who was older than Stesichorus, as the latter testifies himself, according to Megacleides, does not put this garb on Heracles, but rather that which Homer gives him."[15]

In this long passage, Megacleides is obviously influenced by the comic representations that were already in circulation at that time. However, it is interesting to see how he attempts rather to play down Heracles' double nature. What he is trying to pinpoint, both in connection with comedies and satyr plays, is a subject that already existed much earlier and is far from being merely the result of a desire for parody.[16] At least as far as the satyr-play is concerned, scholars have long since outlined the motives for this parodistic bent, independently of the figure of Heracles. In an article that has lost none of its trenchancy and perspicacity, Luigi E. Rossi comes to the following conclusion:[17]

> "From the historical viewpoint, it seems to me undeniable that such rustic elements of the satyr play as the setting and the tendency towards the "gross" and the scurrilous will have been greatly appreciated by those spectators who by then had become a substantial part of the audience: the country people. Thus, the satyr play certainly had an effect on the psychological equilibrium of its audience – both individually and as a whole – but it also functioned as a tool for maintaining a *political* and sociological equilibrium as it re-introduced a rustic element into the theatrical context, which had by then been urbanized. It was this element that acted as a counterpoise to some of the demands that had recently become prevalent at the level of osmosis and demographic distribution. In sum, we can say that the satyr-play did not merely perform a psychological function (i.e. putting the audience at its ease) but a socio-political function as well."

But now it is time to leave Megacleides' Heracles and to look several centuries further ahead at the Hercules of the second half of the 20th century. He is a hero who keeps reappearing in movies generally referred to as *peplum* (or cloak/sword & sandal films, or "sandaloni" – i.e. big sandals –, as script-writer Ennio De Concini, one of the inventors of the genre, prefers to call them).[18]

15 Transl. Ch.B. Gulick, London-Cambridge 1943.

16 On both the differences and the interferences between the comic, tragic, and satirical hero, see JOUAN 1997, 215 f., 224-228, who reminds us of a certain ambiguity in the hero identifiable as early as Euripides' *Alcesti*.

17 ROSSI 1972, 279. See also PAGANELLI 1989, who acknowledges his debt Rossi's reconstruction (217 n. 17).

18 GIORDANO 1998, 39.

This chapter of Italian cinematography, which was soon to be exported to the United States, had an enormous impact on more recent television series and cinema productions all the way up to the very end of the last century. Since the phenomenon has been extensively discussed elsewhere, a brief outline will suffice here. For more detailed information I refer the reader to the bibliography, which has been getting longer every year.[19] As Claude Aziza[20] has shown with great irony and philological expertise, the term *peplum* was created by French cinematographers. In a sense, we may say that the term replaces the earlier definition of "costume cinema." The protagonists in *peplum* movies are invariably clothed in Greek or Roman garb, and these films represent the world of classical mythology and in particular the figure of Heracles. The hero starts out, we might say, from his own mythology, only to be quickly thrust into new dimensions of space and time. It suffices to take a look at the titles[21] (including those of recent productions) to marvel at Hercules' capacity to move between Greece (the two first Steve Reeves *Hercules / Le fatiche di Ercole,* 1957; *Ercole e la regina di Lidia*, 1959) (fig. 15), Pannonia (*Hercules against Rome*, 1964), and New York (*Hercules in New York* of 1970, with Arnold Strong *alias* Schwarzenegger) and to confront not only monsters like the Hydra (*Gli amori di Ercole*, 1960), but even vampires (*Ercole al centro della Terra*, or *Ercole contro i Vampiri*, 1961).

In these late *peplum* films, as well as in those of the last years of the 20th century, Hercules' divorce from his original adventures is total (as opposed to the satyr-plays I referred to earlier). As Cammarota notes, "the *peplum* had the unlimited capacity to place [the hero] in whatever context of space and time, past, present, and future…"[22]

The fact that the first *peplum* films were Italian has occasioned a truly unique cultural osmosis, in the sense that, as far as this genre is concerned, English-speaking classical philologists usually know the Italian bibliography almost off by heart. If they gave equal attention to other sectors of Italian classical phi-

19 In chronological order: LEPROHON 1966, 184-190 ; CAMMAROTA 1987; LAGNY 1992; GRAITSON 1993; ATTOLINI 1990, 453-461; SALOTTI 1997; AZIZA 1998; GIORDANO 1998, 23-85, plus an interview with Umberto Albini; SOLOMON 2001, 1-35, 117-125, 307-323; LA POLLA 2004**;** BOSCHI 2005; NISBET 2006, 45-66**;** CASADIO 2007, 51-75. Another recent instance is the documentary by DELLA CASA 2006, based on short films from the period produced by the Istituto Luce and on interviews with some of the protagonists of the '*peplum* age'. Also very useful is the website *Peplum – Images de l'Antiquité, Cinéma et BD*: http://www.peplums.info.

20 AZIZA 1998, 7-11; CASADIO 2007, 7, who adds the Italian neologism "muscolotici" (muscle-bound).

21 CAMMAROTA 1987, 61-65; CASADIO 2007, 57-75. In the index to SOLOMON 2001, 349 we find more than 30 titles, but as far as the matches between Italian and American titles are concerned the author's remark is pertinent (p. 318): "This variation in titles, along with the accompanying variation in release dates, makes cataloguing these films frustrating today."

22 CAMMAROTA 1987, 22. See NISBET 2006, 46-47: "Hercules himself appears in many unlikely supporting roles (e.g. side-kick to Goliath, Samson or Odysseus) and in various improbable locations (Atlantis, Babylon, Rome; even, with Schwarzenegger, New York). He journeys to the centre of the earth, fights kung-fu villains, fathers Roman gladiators. Hercules is an all-consuming myth – but also an endlessly fragmenting one."

lology – or at least its finest fruits – we might be on the way to reciprocal, rather than just one-sided familiarity with each other's findings.

The various analyses listed in the bibliography below have led to a deeper understanding of many aspects, not only the relationship between the cinema and the classical world,[23] but also the fascination of virility. There may be a dual motivation behind this fascination with "the white man's muscles."[24] "Is this done to appeal to women spectators? Or, under the cloak of ancient customs, is it a way of alluding to the delights of homosexuality?"[25]

Apart from these important aspects, I would also like to emphasize a number of sociological factors apparently reminiscent of the settings and audience of satyr-plays. *Peplum* cinema – one might also refer to it as "myth and muscles movies"[26] – addresses a working-class audience. For reasons of internal immigration, this audience lives mostly in the suburbs of large cities or, to a lesser extent, in smaller towns and more rural areas. Producers and distributors of these movies are fully alive to the genre's populist character, aware that its mass audience associates with the strong and victorious hero a notion of redemption for its own condition of suffering and underdevelopment. We have to view these films as "serious." They are based on simple and well-known values, in the manichean tradition, and as such, albeit paradoxically, are in complete opposition to the function of the ancient satyr-play. Only when the genre starts showing signs of "material fatigue" will parodistic elements creep in.[27] In literature, by contrast, such parody is taken up with great freedom. Here we may recall the figure of Heracles in one of Friedrich Dürrenmatt's radio dramas, the well-known *Hercules und der Stall des Augias*. Here, during a dispute with his secretary Polybius, the hero complains bitterly about his woeful pecuniary situation and the severe tax restrictions preventing him from hiring a poet – as would be fitting – to cast the story of his labours in stylish verse. "I'm not a king", the despondent Heracles declares at one point, "I'm just a national hero. The only thing I can afford are poets for 10 drachmas a month." The subsequent exchange of verbal blows and witty ripostes almost seems to foreshadow (this is 1937!) the nature and the fortunes of the *peplum* films of the future:[28]

> *Polybius*: "But they are your best bet, master. Although their writings on your exploits are by no means "great literature", they are amazingly successful with the people on the streets."

23 On this problem in general, see SOLOMON 2001, WINKLER 20012, WINKLER 2005. I myself have treated this problem from a different viewpoint in SPINA 2005.

24 See DYER 1997, 145-183; WYKE 1997a.

25 LAGNY 1992, 171, an article full of stimulating ideas.

26 SALOTTI 1997, 48.

27 For general information on parody in films featuring antiquity, see SOLOMON 2001, 283-305, in particular 297. For Hercules, see CAMMAROTA 1987, 57, incl. the film *Le pillole di Ercole* (1960, directed by Luciano Salce), based on a vaudeville comedy by C. M. Hennequin and P. Bilhaud, which, according to CAMMAROTA 1987, 48, may also have inspired the physical characteristics of the new Hercules of the *peplum*, a pretty-faced, bearded seducer. The film's protagonist is Sylva Koscina, an actress who also appears in *Hercules (Le fatiche di Ercole*, 1957).

28 DÜRRENMATT 1954, 77.

> *Heracles*: "I know. The newspaper stands are crammed with colourful little comic books: *Heracles kills the Hydra*, *Heracles and the giant Anteo*, *Heracles' night of love with the fifty daughters of Tespi*. Did I civilize Greece only to be turned into an idol for chambermaids and errand boys, while people in the literary salons go crazy over such crowned thugs as Theseus, Jason or Ulysses, who are able to afford a better class of poets but who couldn't throw a javelin to save their lives, let alone get the better of a mammoth? As far me, people still think I'm no more than a drunken braggart – and all because of the literature those poets produce about me."

The ancient genre of the satyr-play produced a plethora of Heracles parodies tailored to the expectations of rural audience in search of powerful sensations. The modern cinematographic genre, the *peplum*, has immortalized the serious figure of big, strong Hercules to satisfy the demands of a mass audience eager to find redemption for its difficult living conditions. This trend has carried over into the emergence of the so-called "good giants" that continue to figure in recent sequel movies. One is that of Bambino (Bud Spencer), paired off with the equally strong but fascinating and astute Trinity (Terence Hill). Here too, subsequent sequels have tended to divorce this couple from the original context of the "Western."[29]

Classical tradition thus continues to find new ways of sustaining itself and nourishing modern culture. Classical philologists need to follow up those avenues in order to trace and recognize the various transformation stages and render them visible to a growing audience that no longer derives its acquaintance with antiquity from erudite philological studies. Jon Solomon highlights the positive aspects of this process in an anecdote that he places right at the end of his book:[30]

> "Shaquille O'Neal, the Titan-sized center of the Los Angeles Lakers, was named the National Basketball Association's Most Valuable Player, and in his acceptance speech "Shaq" – the same athlete who a few years earlier had visited Greece and responded to a reporter's question, "Did you see the Parthenon?" with "I didn't get a chance to see all the bars!" – offered the elegant quotation from Aristotle that appears as the epigraph to this epilogue: "From this day on, I would like to be known as "The Big Aristotle", because it was Aristotle who said "Excellence is not a singular act but a habit. You are what you repeatedly do." The classical tradition is indeed alive and well in the twenty-first century, and I assume that *Gladiator* is not an end but a new beginning."

"Not an end but a new beginning." As in Woody Allen's case, we do not know whether Jon Solomon is familiar with Achille Campanile (that Italian again!). In Campanile's short story *Orator fit*, a professor of rhetoric (another heritage from Greek antiquity!) demonstrates to his students that this is precisely the formula to use if you want to be sure of success, whatever kind of discourse is involved, whatever the audience, and whatever point you are trying to make.[31]

Classical tradition is indeed alive and well in the twenty-first century!

29 GIORDANO 1998, 134-136.
30 SOLOMON 2001, 326.
31 CAMPANILE 2003, 1077-1083. See SPINA 2006, 227-229.

ODYSSEUS' JOURNEY THROUGH FILM

Herbert Verreth

The growing number of scholarly publications about antiquity in film and the infinite possibilities of the Internet make it both easier and more difficult to explore the more quantitative aspects of the presence of ancient themes in movies and television productions. For example, every time I browse through the Internet Movie Database (www.imdb.com), I discover lots of new titles related to antiquity, many of them short films, animation films or episodes of television series that were hardly listed in earlier surveys and have thus remained largely unknown. On the other hand, because of the increasingly expanding information, any thematic list is doomed to obsolescence within a few months, while the number of inaccessible films keeps on growing. Despite the extending DVD market that makes many older movies readily available, it is still not evident to get a copy of every title one would like to watch. In the case of Odysseus I know of more than eighty titles from 1905 to the present featuring the famous Greek hero, but I have only managed to actually see one fifth of them, which seriously limits the possibilities of a thematic study. For the remaining movies I usually have to rely on brief descriptions or to be left in the dark about the actual content.[1]

At present my database numbers 2258 movies about subjects ranging from prehistory to the 6th century AD, 627 of them labelled "Greek world." To this figure can be added a number of titles about Amazons, Atlantis, Maciste, Hercules or Xena, which I politely classified in the group of movies whose historical framework is not always clear. With 882 titles the Roman world comes off better, while the figure for Greece is comparable to the 528 titles for Egypt and the eastern world.[2] It has often been said that relatively few movies have been made about the Greek world,[3] but this is only true if one focuses on the American cinema blockbusters, and excludes, say, the 194 adaptations of plays of Aischylos, Sophokles, Euripides or Shakespeare and the numerous "minor" productions. The titles featuring Odysseus cover a large variety of cinema movies, television or video films and (episodes of) television or video series, theatre and opera recordings, cartoon

1 For Odysseus in film, cf. DUMONT 1998, 139-143; SOLOMON 2001, 101-111, 327 and passim; VALVERDE GARCÍA 2002, 21-25 (www.thamyris.uma.es/Ulises.pdf); the website *Peplum. Images de l'antiquité. Cinéma et BD* (www.peplums.info/index.htm, especially www.peplums.info/pep18d.htm); other titles, which I have not always been able to consult, can be found in the bibliographic section of this volume. For Odysseus' "Nachleben", cf. a.o. BROMMER 1983; MOORMANN; UITTERHOEVE 1995, 468-486; HOFMANN 1999, 27-67.

2 An export of my database, made in 2003, can be found at: www.arts.kuleuven.be/ALO/klassieke/film.htm. For more details about the films mentioned in this article, please contact me at Herbert.Verreth@arts.kuleuven.be.

3 Cf. e.g. by NISBET 2006.

or animation films, musicals and short films. I have not taken into account here the documentaries dealing with the Trojan cycle. Furthermore, the adventures of Odysseus are alluded to in more than fifty other movies that have no other links with antiquity, which clearly illustrates Odysseus' "brand-name recognition" in our time.

I

Odysseus, king of the island of Ithaka on the west coast of Greece, was the son of Laertes and Antikleia. In Latin his name is rendered as Ulixes, which has lead to modern variants such as Ulysses, Ulysse or Ulisse. In the *Ilias* and *Odyssea* his father Laertes does not play an active role, but later works such as the mythographical *Bibliotheca*, which was written in the first or second century AD and has been falsely ascribed to the grammarian Apollodoros, consider him one of Iason's Argonautai, which explains his presence in that group of heroes in the films *Le fatiche di Ercole* (1957), *Ercole e la regina di Lidia* (1959), *I giganti della Tessaglia* (1960) and *Jason and the Argonauts* (2000). Because of his high old age, Laertes bestowed his kingdom on his son Odysseus. Though still alive during Odysseus' absence, he was too infirm to protect Penelope from her suitors. It is not surprising that this little heroic detail is left out of the movies. Furthermore, because Laertes' character has usually been excised from the screen versions of the *Odyssea*, it was also necessary to omit the detail that it was actually his shroud that Penelope pretended to be weaving in order to postpone a decision in connection with her suitors.

One of the other Argonautai was Herakles, who also came to Troy on his adventures. According to some myths he saved Hesione, the daughter of Laomedon of Troy, from a sea monster sent by Poseidon. This story is alluded to in the movies *Ercole e la principessa di Troia* (1965) and *Hercules and the lost kingdom* (1993). Surprisingly, however, the former movie also features Odysseus as one of the Greek heroes accompanying Herakles. His presence here is rather anachronistic since Laomedon is the father of king Priamos, who was already an old man when the Trojan war took place, so Odysseus must have been a mere boy when he joined Herakles. Anyway, also the Italian peplum films *Le fatiche di Ercole* (1957) and *Ercole e la regina di Lidia* (1959), mentioned earlier, feature a young Odysseus next to his father Laertes. The success of these first films about Herakles lead to the production of dozens of mainly Italian muscleman movies in the early 1960s featuring other heroes such as Maciste, Ursus, Atlas or Samson, some of whom actually encounter Odysseus as well. In *Ulisse contro Ercole* (1962) the Olympian gods order Herakles to capture Odysseus and punish him for blinding the cyclops Polyphemos, while in *Ercole sfida Sansone* (1964), also known as *Hercules, Samson and Ulysses*, the three heroes have to fight again against a sea monster. Also in other Herakles movies Odysseus plays a role, though the link with the Greek myths is usually tenuous and the scripts easily ignore the fact that Herakles actually died already before the start of the Trojan War. In *The Three Stooges meet Hercules* (1962) the three comedians are transported with a time

machine from Ithaca, New York, to ancient Ithaka, where a man Odius (!) defeats Odysseus with the help of Herakles and himself becomes king of the island; after various adventures involving a Siamese cyclops and king Theseus of Rhodos (!) the Three Stooges manage to put Odysseus back on the throne again. In Disney's *Hercules* (1997) the satyr Phil (short for Philoktetes) boasts to the young Herakles that he has been Odysseus' trainer (thus inverting the difference in their ages), while Penelope's name is rather disrespectfully used for Amphitryon's donkey.[4] Odysseus also occurs in *Hercules and the Odyssey experience*, one of the episodes in the spin-off cartoon series *Hercules* (1998-1999). Close chronology has clearly never been a major concern with scriptwriters dealing with Greek mythology.

In most movies Odysseus' story starts when he leaves for Troy with the rest of the Greeks. As far as I know, the television film *Helen of Troy* (2003) is the only one to describe Odysseus' earlier involvement with the marriage of Helen and Menelaos. Odysseus proposed to cast lots among Helen's suitors to decide who gets to marry her, but he did not join the others in the lottery, because he was already married to Penelope and had a family of his own. In this respect the film takes some liberties with the existing myths, since, in fact, according to Apollodoros, Odysseus was not yet married at that time; instead he helped Helen's father Tyndareos to cope with Helen's suitors, so that the king would return the favour and persuade his brother Ikarios to give Odysseus his daughter Penelope in marriage.

Odysseus and Penelope had a son, Telemachos. In the television film *The Odyssey* (1997) Telemachos is born on the very day that the Greeks came to get Odysseus to join them in their expedition against Troy, which is a nice dramatic touch not found in the ancient sources. None of the movies makes an allusion to the story of Odysseus pretending to have gone mad because he did not feel like going to war, a ruse exposed by the Greek Palamedes. No doubt this subterfuge did not fit in with the image of Odysseus as a cunning and brave warrior, which we encounter in most movies. He is usually cast as a strong man in the prime of life, often without a beard or headgear, despite the fact that most Greek vases depict him with a beard and wearing a pilos or felt cap. In the Italian peplum *L'ira di Achille* (1962), however, Odysseus is rather surprisingly portrayed as a cunning older man with a beard and even starting to go bald; in battle scenes he fights rather furtively than bravely, while he shows no inclination to compete in the festive games organised by Agamemnon; in fact, his main interest seems to be in the loot the Greeks had gathered; on the other hand, his fidelity to Penelope is often stressed.

Once "recruited", Odysseus was sent to look for Achilleus, whose presence in the Greek army has been prophesied as crucial in winning the Trojan War. The young Achilleus was hiding with king Lykomedes on the island of Skyros, dressed as a young girl. Odysseus managed to lure him out of his disguise and Achilleus finally joined the Greeks. I know of no movie that alludes to this story,

4 The full transcript of *Hercules* can be found at: www.angelfire.com/movies/disneybroadway/herculesscript.html.

which clearly illustrates Nisbet's thesis that homosexuality and other gender-related issues were and are not welcome in mainstream epics about the Greek world.

In Euripides' play *Iphigenia at Aulis* Odysseus is significantly presented as the son of the cunning and unreliable Sisyphos (and not as the son of Laertes), while he is portrayed as craving for power and ready to sacrifice Iphigeneia, the daughter of Agamemnon, so that the Greeks can leave and finally plunder Troy. This negative view of Odysseus has clearly been taken up in the impressive film *Iphigenia* (1976) by Michael Cacoyannis, and probably also in two more recent screen versions of the same play (*Iphigenia at Aulis*, 1991 and 1999). The sacrifice of Iphigeneia also figures in the television film *Helen of Troy* (2003), but here Odysseus is merely one of the silent bystanders.

During the Trojan War itself Odysseus was one of the more important Greek warriors, and he features as such in most movies about that war, although the plots of these films usually focus on Achilleus, Hektor and Agamemnon, reducing Odysseus to one of the sidekicks.[5] Accordingly, heroic feats related in the *Ilias*, such as the stealing of the Palladion statue and the horses of king Rhesos, are rarely alluded to. Sophokles' play *Aiax*, on the other hand, in which Odysseus contended with Aias for Achilleus' armour, has been screened twice (*Ajax*, 1987 and 1991). The one thing that assured Odysseus undying fame is the famous ruse of the wooden horse, which is part of almost every movie on the Trojan War. An amusing detail in this connection is that some films go further than Vergilius and try to explain where Odysseus got the idea of hiding some men in such a huge horse. In *The Odyssey* (1997) Odysseus is present at the funeral of Achilleus and happens to look up from the ground to the belly of real horse standing next to him. In *Troy* (2004), on the other hand, he is inspired by a man carving a small wooden horse for his son back home. Every science fiction buff, however, knows that the idea was originally suggested to Odysseus by Doctor Who, who landed with his Tardis time machine on the plains of Troy (*Doctor Who. 3, 6-9. The myth makers:*

5 Odysseus in this connection occurs in films such as *La caduta di Troia* (1908 and 1911); *La chute de Troie* (1911); *Helena, der Untergang Trojas. 1. Der Raub der Helena - 2. Die Zerstörung Trojas* (1924); *Omnibus. 3. The Iliad* (1955); *Helen of Troy* (1956); *La guerra di Troia* (1961); *L'ira di Achille* (1962); *Crayola kids adventures. The Trojan horse* (1997); *Helen of Troy* (2003); *Troy* (2004); see also the adaptations of William Shakespeare's play *Troilus and Cressida*: *The face of love* (1954); *Troilus and Cressida* (1954, 1966 and 1982); the adaptations of John Erskine's novel *The private life of Helen of Troy* (1925): *The private life of Helen of Troy* (1927); *Hélène ou la joie de vivre* (1968); the adaptations of Jean Giraudoux's play *La guerre de Troie n'aura pas lieu* (1935): *Play of the week, 1, 18. Tiger at the gates* (1960); *Trojanskog rata nece biti* (1962); *Der trojanische Krieg findet nicht statt* (1964); *La guerre de Troie n'aura pas lieu* (1967 and 1981); *Estudio 1. No habrá guerra de Troya* (1971); the adaptation of Walter Jens' work *Der tödliche Schlag* (1974): *Der tödliche Schlag* (1975). The characters of the Trojan war have been transferred to a modern setting in the comedy *Ettore lo fusto* (1971), based on the novel by Henri M. Viard and Bernard Zacharias, *Le roi des Mirmidous* (1966). In *Adamo ed Eva* (1949) the modern couple Adamo and Eva see some historical romances that end tragically, including an episode set during the Trojan war, and decide to give their own relationship another try.

Temple of secrets – Small prophet, quick return – Death of a spy – Horse of destruction, 1965).[6]

II

Odysseus becomes a hero in his own right in the many film versions of Homeros' *Odyssea*. The story has all the merits to please the crowds from antiquity to the present: some spectacular encounters with the cyclops Polyphemos, the two sirens and the monsters Skylla and Charybdis, the descent into the underworld, the meeting with Aiolos the king of the winds, a touch of magic with the sorceress Kirke, who turned Odysseus' men into pigs, a lot of romance with the same Kirke on the island of Aiaia, with the nymph Kalypso on the island of Ogygia and with the young princess Nausikaa on Scheria the island of the Phaiakes, and of course the mutual longing of Odysseus and his faithful wife Penelope for one another. One very popular ploy among scriptwriters is to switch back and forth between the situation on Ithaka with Penelope and Telemachos being harassed by the suitors, and one of Odysseus' adventures abroad, finally culminating in Odysseus' return and the massacre of the suitors. Some of Odysseus' feats, however, are almost always banished from the screen; so we hardly ever encounter the Thrakian Kikones, the lotophagoi or lotus-eaters, the man-eating giants called the Laistrygones or the herds of the god Helios.

Directors have always been faced with the practical problem of how to reduce the dozens of stories and characters of the *Odyssea* to a film of palatable length. In general there are three possible approaches. First, a film may deal with only one aspect of the story. Especially the early movies of restricted length had to choose this option and it is therefore no surprise that Georges Méliès' *L'île de Calypso* (1905) – the very first film about Odysseus – focuses on the episodes of the cyclops and of Kalypso. Other titles in this respect are *Telemachus* (1911), *Il canto di Circe* (1920) and *You are there. 3, 5 [70]. The return of Ulysses* (1954).

A second option is to cut seriously in the story and to rewrite the whole of the *Odyssea* to fit a two-hour movie. Already in 1912 an Italian *L'Odissea* was shown, but one of the most famous Odysseus films to choose this course is certainly the Italian *Ulisse* (1954) by director Mario Camerini, starring Kirk Douglas and Silvana Mangano. Some remarkable changes have been made to the scenario in this film: when Odysseus is cast ashore on the island of the Phaiakes, he has lost his memory; gradually he remembers who he was and flashes of his adventures start coming back to him: his ship in a storm, the adventure with the cyclops, the encounter with the sirens and finally his sojourn with Kirke. The order of the events has been altered and many episodes have been cut; a new element, on the other hand, is that Kirke actually combines the features of both Kirke and Kalypso as they figure in the *Odyssea*, while the descent into the underworld has been cleverly changed into a vision of some dead people evoked by the sorceress. An-

6 The full transcript of *The myth makers* can be found at the homepage: bw.edu/~jcurtis/Scripts/Myth/intro.html.

other felicitous touch is to have Silvana Mangano play a double role as both Penelope and Kirke (or even a triple role if one takes into account the deceptive voice of one of the sirens), which the sorceress explains with the words: "Aren't we women all the same?" (fig. 16). However, the film also contains a serious goof: in the cave of the cyclops Odysseus' men make wine by pressing grapes, in defiance of the fact that freshly pressed grapes can only result in grape juice and certainly not in wine; in the *Odyssea* it is Odysseus himself who has brought along a sack of delicious wine with him. In 2003 the Canadian television film *L'Odyssée* came out, and there were apparently plans for the production of a major new *Ulysses* film, written by Spiros Kagadis and scheduled for release in 2008.[7]

A third option is to extend the film into a (television) series. The Italian series *L'Odissea* (1969) consists of eight episodes of some 50 minutes each, plenty of time to tell the whole story in detail; this series was so successful that also a shorter cinema film, *Le avventure di Ulisse* (1969), was edited from the same material. The television series most readily available at present is *The Odyssey* (1997) by Andrei Konchalovsky, starring Armand Assante and Greta Scacchi. In the space of about three hours most of Odysseus' adventures are recounted. The encounter with the sirens is omitted, but certainly the descent into the underworld and the fight with Skylla and Charybdis get more attention than in most other movies. Oddly enough, however, the time-plan of Odysseus' journey has been changed: in the *Odyssea* he stays with Kirke for one year and with Kalypso for seven years, but *The Odyssey* alters this to five and two years respectively for no apparent reason.

In some instances a film is not based on the *Odyssea* itself, but on some "intermediary" play or novel. *Le retour d'Ulysse* (1908) is based on a work by Jules Lemaître (1853-1914) and *Penelope oder die Lorbeermaske* (1958) on the comedy *Die Lorbeermaske* by Heinz Coubier (1905-1993). In Dante's *Divina commedia* (1300-1321) Odysseus is one of the damned souls in the eighth circle of Hell (*Skärseld*, 1975; *Dante's Inferno*, 2006). Claudio Monteverdi's opera *Il ritorno d'Ulisse in patria* (1641) has also been screened on a number of occasions (*The return of Ulysses to his homeland*, 1973; *Il ritorno d'Ulisse in patria*, 1980, 1985 and twice in 2002).

Naturally, Odysseus does not only occur in the genre of the epic or historical movie. *Biblioteca di Studio Uno: Odissea* (1964), for example, is a musical comedy, while the porn-flick *Ulysses* (1998) has also been released under the more graphic title of *As aventuras sexuals de Ulysses*. There are furthermore numerous animation films focusing on Odysseus: the Mexican puppet film *La Odisea de los muñecos* (1975); the German series *Unterwegs mit Odysseus* (1979); the Czech *Odissea* (1986); the Australian *The Odyssey* (1987); the short film *La Odisea. Historia de un viaje imposible* (1994); *La Odisea de Ulises* (1996); the Canadian series about Greek mythology called *Mythic warriors. Guardians of the legend* (1998-2000), with some of its 26 episodes explicitly dealing with Odysseus; *The animated Odyssey* (2000); the German cartoon series *Mission Odyssey* (2002),

7 Cf. www.odysseyworks.biz.

which definitely takes some liberties with the original story, creating a lot of new companions for Odysseus; and the Italian *Ulisse, l'eroe dell'Odissea e le sue avventure* (2002). History is rewritten when Xena and Gabrielle brave Poseidon and the sirens in their attempt to help king Odysseus and certainly when Xena and Odysseus start falling in love (*Xena. Warrior princess. 2, 19. Ulysses*, 1997). Odysseus and his times tend to be popular with time travellers: we have already referred to *The Three Stooges meet Hercules* (1962) and *Doctor Who. 3, 6-9. The myth makers* (1965), but Odysseus also encounters people from the 20th century in the comedy *Maciste contro Ercole nella valle dei guai* (1961) and in the television episode *The time tunnel. 7. The revenge of the gods* (1966).

Episodes and characters from the *Odyssea* have often been placed in a modern setting. In *Circe the enchantress* (1924), based on *La encantadore Circe* by Vicente Blasco Ibáñez (1867-1928), Cecilie Brunner is portrayed as a cynical vamp who, like the mythical character Kirke, brings men to their downfall. In Jean-Luc Godard's *Le mépris* (1963), based on Alberto Moravia's novel *Il disprezzo* (1954), the director Fritz Lang is preparing a film version of the *Odyssea*, and a lengthy discussion ensues about the discrepancy between artistic integrity and commercial demands. In the soft porn *L'amour chez les poids lourds* (1978) the story of Odysseus and the sirens is situated in the French countryside; Odysseus is a trucker and his Penelope runs a café. The German movie *Uliisses* (1982) combines motifs and narrative elements from the *Odyssea* and from James Joyce's famous novel *Ulysses* (1922). The Brazilian television series *O canto das Sereias* (1990) centres around love stories relating the sirens of antiquity with characters such as Odysseus, Orpheus and Helios in a modern setting. In *Nostos. Il ritorno* (1990) a sailor retraces the route of Odysseus' voyage, which takes him to the ancient cultures of the Mediterranean. *Pink Ulysses* (1990) places the return of Odysseus in a homo-erotic context with Penelope played by a male actor. The movie *O brother, where art thou?* (2000), set in the state of Mississippi in the 1930s, can be read as a transposition of the *Odyssea*: the main character is a fraud named Ulysses Everett McGill; the three escaped prisoners meet three "sirens", beautiful women singing in a river, and are "shipwrecked" in a newly formed lake; one character, Pete, is supposedly turned into a toad, while a fat one-eyed man is reminiscent of the cyclops; Everett wants to return to his wife who is being wooed by another man, while a blind old man represents Homeros himself.[8] The short film *The hidden* (2003) recounts the story of Kalypso from her perspective, when a lovelorn combat nurse is forced to give up her sole remaining war hero patient for the greater good.

In the French-Japanese cartoon series *Ulysse 31* (1981) Odysseus' adventures are even set in the 31st century. The hero is a famous space explorer desiring to return to his wife on Earth. He sets out with his son Telemachos in a spaceship named "Odyssey", but on their way they have to fight the Cyclops, a huge robot

8 For a more detailed discussion of this movie, cf. HECKEL 2005, 58-62 (with further bibliography). A draft script of this movie can be found at www.imsdb.com/scripts/O-Brother-Where-Art-Thou%3f.html.

with one eye, and to outsmart the ancient gods of the Olympos who sent them to another universe.[9]

In the epic *Telegonia*, which has only survived in fragmentary form, Kirke bore Odysseus a son named Telegonos. The young man accidentally killed his own father, whom he failed to recognize in time, and later married Odysseus' widow Penelope, while Odysseus' son Telemachos in turn married Kirke. It is hardly surprising that this soap opera plot did not find its way onto the big screen, although there are two other films in which Odysseus' offspring plays a major role. In the Italian peplum *Maciste nella terra dei ciclopi* (1961) the cruel queen Capys, a descendant of Kirke, intends to sacrifice the little son of king Agisandros, the last heir of Odysseus, to the last of the Cyclopes, but the boy is saved in time by the strongman Maciste. In the cartoon series *Class of the Titans* (2006) seven unsuspecting teens discover that they are modern-day descendants of the Greek heroes. In the episode *Trojan horse* the boy Odie (!) has to be as cunning as his ancestor Odysseus to outsmart the evil Kronos.

A lot of movies refer briefly to Odysseus or his adventures without much further comment. Since such allusions in general are meant to be understood immediately by an average audience, they clearly illustrate how widely known our hero is. Here are some examples. Changing people into pigs seems to have been a popular pastime for all kinds of sorceresses since Kirke (e.g. *Der müde Tod*, 1921; *Willow*, 1988; *Spirited away*, 2001). When professor Kantorek tries to persuade his students to go and fight for their country in the movie *All quiet on the western front* (1930), a Greek quotation from *Odyssea*, 1, 1 can be seen on the blackboard, "Tell me, Muse, of the man of many ways, who was driven ..."[10] In various other movies people are also shown learning, teaching or telling about the *Odyssea* (*Amateur*, 1994; *Jude*, 1996; *Son de mar*, 2001; *Dogville*, 2003). The adventures of Sinbad are substantially influenced by Odysseus' travels, since both in *The 7th voyage of Sinbad* (1958) and in *Sinbad legend of the 7 seas* (2003) dangers such as the sirens and the cyclops lie in wait for the hero. The title of the French movie *Heureux qui comme Ulysse* (1970) refers to the poem *Heureux qui, comme Ulysse, a fait un beau voyage* in the collection *Les regrets* by Joachim Du Bellay (1522-1560). Odysseus' "my name is Nobody" has often been copied, e.g. in the westerns *Il mio nome è Nessuno* (1973) and *Dead man* (1995) and in the thriller *Dark water* (2005). *Homer's odyssey* (1990), an episode in the cartoon series *The Simpsons*, centres on Homer Simpson, a very different kind of hero. In *To vlemma tou Odyssea* / *Ulysses' gaze* (1995) an exiled Greek filmmaker returns home and sets out on an epic journey across the Balkans in search of three lost reels of film by some pioneering photographers. Amalfi in Italy is called the land of the sirens (*A good woman*, 2004).

9 The full transcript of the English version of *Ulysse 31* can be found at blue-point.gen.tr/Ulysses31.

10 Cf. WINKLER 2000, 185-187.

III

Odysseus features as a character in more than eighty movies, which makes him not quite as "popular" as Jesus, Nero, Iulius Caesar or Kleopatra, but there is little doubt that he is an important part of the "collective memory" people have about antiquity. The quality of all these movies is definitely very uneven and few of them can be described as major productions, but, as far as I can see, a lot of them are still quite enjoyable. As in antiquity itself, Odysseus' character has not always been favourably judged, and the dividing line between cunning and fraudulence is indeed thin. Though he has frequently been commended for his love for Penelope, it did not prevent him from sharing his bed with Kirke and Kalypso. Moreover, killing Penelope's suitors, who have not – in fact – done anything wrong, is hardly indicative of great mercy or compassion. Perhaps it is this image of a man with both virtues and vices that makes him so recognizably human, while his fantastic adventures will certainly appeal – from one generation to the next – to every new reader or film watcher.

THE LEGEND OF OEDIPUS: SILENT CINEMA, THEATRE, PHOTOGRAPHY*

Pantelis Michelakis

It is common for historical accounts of the reception of Greek tragedy in cinema to begin with a silent film of Aeschylus' *Prometheus* which was produced in Greece in 1927.[1] As the record of a theatre production, the film falls neatly into an evolutionary narrative which wants early film adaptations of Greek tragedy to be tools at the service of contemporary theatre productions rather than serious contenders and, perhaps, to originate from the same geographical region where Greek tragedy was born. However, even a quick look at online catalogues of film archives and collections in Europe and America suggests that between 1908 and 1934 more than twenty-five films of Greek tragedy were adapted for the screen in numerous countries, of which the Delphi *Prometheus* is one of the last. These included adaptations of Aeschylus' *Oresteia*, Sophocles' *Antigone*, *Ajax* and *Electra*, Euripides' *Hippolytus* and *Medea*, and Aristophanes' *Lysistrata*. The two plays which have been most popular with silent cinema are *Prometheus*, of which five adaptations are now known, and *Oedipus Tyrannus*, of which eight are known.[2]

Many of these films are now lost but the few that have survived, together with production stills, posters, reviews, and other ephemera, testify to a fascinating and hitherto neglected chapter in the history of early cinema. Located at the intersection between classics, theatre studies, and film studies, this body of films has a significance which is difficult to overestimate. First, it helps question both essentialist and teleological accounts of film history which privilege later paradigms of cinema and which recycle stereotypical views of the silent era as primitive and naive. Ranging from documentaries of stage performances to ambitious rework-

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1 See, for instance, MACKINNON 1985. The film was the recording of a stage production of Aeschylus'(?) *Prometheus*, produced in Delphi during the first theatre festival to take place in modern Greece.

2 Basic information for most of these films can be found on the Internet Movie Database (www.imdb.com), the database of the Archive of Performances of Greek and Roman Drama at the University of Oxford (www.apgrd.ox.ac.uk/asp/database.htm), and in VERRETH 2003, 28-43.

ings of the original plays for the new medium, the films in question shed light on a diversity of traditions, methods, technologies, and spectatorial positions and practices available to early cinema. Second, this body of films challenges the foundations of the neo-Aristotelian, logocentric tradition, a tradition that celebrates the superiority of the dramatic text over the derivative and ministerial role of its modern enactments and reinforces hierarchies between forms of artistic expression, privileging theatre over other, less classical types of performing and visual arts. Silent cinema does not dispense with the dramatic text but it breaks it down to its constituent parts and recasts it into images, intertitles, music, and prescreening lectures, in ways which have profound implications for the tragic narratives concerned and for their effects on the viewer. What I want to do in this paper is to substantiate some of these claims while also exploring the methodological issues raised by research into lost films with the help of examples drawn from a case study.

I

Between 1908 and 1913 no less than six films on Oedipus were produced in England, France, Italy, and the Netherlands: *Oedipe roi*, directed by André Calmettes (France, 1908), *Edipo Re*, directed by Giuseppe De Liguoro (Italy, 1910), *Oedipus Rex*, directed by Theo Frenkel (England, 1912), *Koning Oedipus*, produced by Franz Anton Nöggerath (Netherlands, 1913), and *Oedipus Rex*, based on Max Reinhardt's stage production, with Martin Harvey in the title role (England 1913). The best-documented, and arguably most important, among the now lost films on Oedipus is the one in which the French stage actor Jean Mounet-Sully starred towards the end of his long career, in 1912.[3] Entitled *The Legend of Oedipus* (*La Légende d'Oedipe*), the film consisted of three sections, in four film reels of fifteen to seventeen minutes of screening time each.[4] The film must have been just over an hour long, that is, longer than any other film of Greek tragedy from this period of which I am aware.

Production stills from the film are scattered in various collections in Paris (Bibliothèque du Film, Bibliothèque–Musée de la Comédie Française, Bibliothèque Nationale). One of them illustrates the scene of Oedipus' encounter with the Sphinx (fig. 17). The arrangement and posture of the two figures in it engage with a pictorial tradition that includes well-known nineteenth-century paintings of Oedipus and the Sphinx such as those by Gustave Moreau and J.-A. Dominique Ingres and which goes all the way back to Attic red-figure vase paintings of the fifth century BC (see, for instance, the red-figure kylix from the so-called Oedipus Painter, ca. 470 BC, Museo Gregoriano Etrusco, Inv. no. 16541). Other stills illustrate Oedipus' arrival at Thebes (fig. 18) and his display of the head of the Sphinx to the people of the city (fig. 19); the supplication of a more mature Oedipus,

3 On Mounet-Sully's life and career, see MOUNET-SULLY 1917 and recently PENESCO 2000 and 2005. On the prominence and significance of the role of Oedipus in Mounet-Sully's stage career, see MACINTOSH 2008.

4 See CHIRAT – LE ROY 1995, no 03830; BUSH 1913; Catalog of Copyright Entries 1951, 601.

played by Mounet-Sully, by the Thebans, as in the opening scene of Sophocles' *Oedipus the King*; the heated encounter between Oedipus and the prophet Tiresias; Jocasta, surrounded by priests and citizens of Thebes, appealing to Apollo to purify the city in a scene also familiar from Sophocles' play; Oedipus' discovery of Jocasta's body after the revelation of his true identity (figs. 20 and 21); and finally the blind Oedipus with his two daughters shortly before he goes into exile (fig. 22). If the first of the stills mentioned above invites comparison with the long pictorial tradition of the encounter between Oedipus and the Sphinx, this last one has a different intertext, a photograph of the stage production of Mounet-Sully as Oedipus predating the film by some ten years, which travelled around the world on the front cover of the French theatre magazine *Le Théâtre*.[5]

Apart from production stills, three posters of the film survive and a brief film extract with Mounet-Sully in the role of Oedipus. One of the posters (fig. 23) is illustrated with four of the photographs mentioned above, and reads as follows: "Monopoly for Austria! On 7 March appears the classical play in four acts King Oedipus, after Reinhardt's performance in the Busch Circus, Vienna! Crowd-scenes, artistic photography, realistic." The three posters have ingeniously but, I believe, mistakenly been attributed to a probably non-existing film version of Sophocles' play which combined the two stage productions directed by Max Reinhardt in the mid 1900s and in the early 1910s.[6] Not only can the illustrations on the posters be identified with the stills from *The Legend of Oedipus* held in film archives and libraries in Paris. One of the posters also lists the film among those for which the Austrian company Philipp & Pressburger had the rights in March 1913: both the production company, Hecla, and the length of the film, 4 reels, are the same as those of the Mounet-Sully film.

In addition to production stills and posters, a brief clip of approximately 45 seconds survives in the Gaumont Archives in Paris, which features Mounet-Sully as Oedipus emerging from the palace after he has blinded himself.[7] As argued below, this extract is a valuable resource for reflection on *The Legend of Oedipus* despite the fact that it probably belongs to an earlier, more "theatrical", version of the same subject and with the same protagonist, entitled *Oedipe-roi*, and directed by André Calmettes in 1908.[8]

The Legend of Oedipus was released in France in December 1912, in the USA in January 1913, and in Austria in March of the same year.[9] Although little is known about the reception of the film in the countries in which it was released, the censorship records of Germany and Austria enable us to catch a glimpse not only of the sensitivities of the time, but also of the narrative structure of the film.

5 This photograph is reproduced in ARMSTRONG 1999 and PENESCO 2005. Some of the production stills of the film not reproduced here can be found in BUSH 1913; TARBOX 1983, 147; PENESCO 2000.

6 WERNER (1987).

7 A few seconds' worth of footage from this extract can be found in the special features of the DVD edition (TF1 Video) of Henry Diamant-Berger's *Les Trois Mousquetaires* (1921).

8 On this film, discussed below, see CHIRAT – LE ROY 1995; BARDÈCHE – BRASILLACH 1938, 44-5.

9 GIFFORD 1991, 141; *CATALOG OF COPYRIGHT ENTRIES* 1951, 601.

In both Austria and Germany, it was deemed unsuitable for children. In Germany no less than six scenes were cut: Oedipus' killing of his father, his killing of the Sphinx, his cutting off of her head, his display of the severed head in Thebes, Oedipus' discovery of Jocasta's hanging body, and Oedipus' blinding of himself.[10]

The Legend of Oedipus was an ambitious film not only in terms of its huge and expensive décors, glamorous costumes, technically demanding outdoor scenes, and its neo-classical atmosphere and meticulous attention to historical accuracy, but also in terms of narrative composition. The film is not the recording of a stage production but, as its title suggests, an attempt to tell the whole story of Oedipus' life. Breaking away from the narrative of the theatrical original and challenging the neo-Aristotelian unity of time and space of contemporary theatre, the film included episodes which are only narrated in Sophocles such as Oedipus' killing of Laius, his encounter with the Sphinx, and his confrontation with the body of Jocasta. Only the second half (or last third) of the film was devoted to the events dramatised in Sophocles' play. But even that displayed a preoccupation with action and with showing rather than telling which is alien to Sophocles' original. Some thirty years after Mounet-Sully's first triumph at the Comédie Française in the role of Oedipus, the star now provided a new and ambitious version of the myth and the character of Oedipus for a different medium. In this, Mounet-Sully anticipated Pier Paolo Pasolini's *Edipo Re* (1967), with its bold condensation of the narrative of Sophocles' play and its reordering of the sequence of events in line with their chronological occurrence, by more than fifty years.

There are many aspects of the film about which no information is available. We cannot know how the interrelation of events and how spatial, temporal and causal relations were organized within and between shots, or what kind of relation there was between images and intertitles, sound effects or music accompaniment. We know nothing about the technological, economic and social context of the film, how it was produced, what distribution it received, how it was screened, in what viewing spaces and with what controls of the narrative by distributors and exhibitors, or what were the actual viewers that saw it and how they engaged with it. Despite all these limitations and gaps in our knowledge of the film, its bold take on Sophocles' play and the paradoxes of its mediated reception make it a powerful vehicle for thinking about different viewing positions and different ways of telling a story about a lost film.

10 Act II: Oedipus kills his father, Oedipus kills the Sphinx and cuts its head off, display of the head of the Sphinx in Thebes. Act IV: Jocasta is found hanged by Oedipus, Oedipus blinds himself: BIRETT 1980, 209 and 341. See also BUSH 1913. The trouble that staging Sophocles' *Oedipus Tyrannus* led into with the British censor provides an interesting (though not exact) parallel: see MACINTOSH 1995.

II

A good example for thinking about the issues raised by the available sources of the film is the still of Oedipus' confrontation of the hanging corpse of Jocasta (fig. 20). The still provides us with a dense and challenging composition with multiple points of focus. Power relations are clearly articulated within the frame, with the visual field divided with the help of door frames, deep staging, frontality, the arrangement and posture of the figures. The eyes of the spectator are invited to focus on the hanging corpse on the right hand side of the frame. However the composition also includes the reactions to the spectacle of Oedipus and the maids. The spectators embedded in the composition provide the external spectator not with one but with two different "visions" of the spectacle on the right, constructed in hierarchical and gender terms. The photograph focuses not only on the visible object but also on the visual act, on gazing, looking, and averting one's eyes. Oedipus' wide-open eyes mirror Jocasta's blank gaze, whereas the covered faces of the maids replicate the darkness clouding Jocasta's vision. Vision is constructed in the photograph not in the Platonic manner of invisible and disembodied objectivity, mastery and control but as an experience involving human bodies caught in unnatural and distorted postures. It is a vision which threatens the collapse of the difference between the object of vision and the viewing subject, a vision in which the spectacle subsumes the spectator. With this fantasy of perception and representation, the camera does not only assault the spectators but also colludes with them. We are invited to look at the composition from the distinct point of view of the camera while also being led to believe that the camera operates not as a controlling gaze, but as a passive eye, like those of Oedipus or the maids who simply receive and register a reality they cannot fully grasp or comprehend.

In Sophocles, the corpse of Jocasta is out of sight, hidden not only in an inner room of the palace whose doors Oedipus must force open but also in a dense verbal narrative by the messenger which demands the spectator's full attention (Soph. OT, 1237-96). In the film, on the other hand, Jocasta's body is in full sight not only lying on the ground (fig. 21), as it is reportedly seen by Sophocles' messenger, but also hanging from the noose (fig. 20). If in the play the verbal narrative by the messenger prepares for the visual display of horror which ensues when the blinded Oedipus finally emerges from the palace, in the film the display of Jocasta's corpse and Oedipus' reaction to it antagonize the subsequent display of the blinded Oedipus. If the play shows too little, and depends on the ability of the spectator to visualize the spectacle in their mind, the film shows too much, assaulting the vision of the spectator with a spectacle which not only represents but also performs on the spectator the impact that the spectacle has on Oedipus and the maids.

The still provides a composition strikingly different not only from Sophocles' play but also from the so-called "classical film narrative."[11] It is not based on

11 On classical film narrative and the ways in which film form in early cinema differs from it, see the seminal essays collected in FELL 1983, ELSAESSER 1990, ABEL 1999, GRIEVESON – KRÄMER 2004.

close-ups or point-of-view shots with a single and central focus. Power relations are not established between frames, through the technique of shot-reverse shot, with the spectator sharing with the protagonist his or her point of view. Rather than showing the body of Jocasta and the reactions it generates in succession, as cause and effect, it displays them simultaneously, in a single composition with multiple centres of attention. If classical film narrative with its temporal arrangement of shots favours temporal continuity over spatial simultaneity and builds psychological empathy and emotional suspense, the still shows how power relations can be articulated with the help of a spatial arrangement which challenges the identification between spectator and protagonist, questions the distinction between spectator and spectacle, and favours shock over anticipation and suspense.

Like the stills of theatre productions, the stills of lost films have a double history, serving different functions before the release of the film and when the film is no longer screened and fades from personal and collective memories.[12] As instruments of the publicity mechanisms of film promotion and distribution, production stills stand for a spectacle yet to be seen. As objects at the hands of film or theatre historians, on the other hand, they become traces of a text which can no longer be read. In the former case, they perform the function of teasing and provoking. In the latter case they appear as incomplete, impoverished fragments.[13] Showing what should not be seen, what prompts Oedipus to blind himself and what is never enacted on stage in Sophocles' tragedy, the still had an important role to play in the publicity campaign of the film. However the scene to which the still refers was censored and could not be shown. If the still promised a scene where the psychoanalytic objectification of the female body acquires a literal and grotesque meaning, a moment where masculine, voyeuristic pleasure is threatened by identification with the otherness of the spectacle, the censor forbade the screening of the relevant scene as one in which social norms break down, where vision threatens to destroy, rather than sustain, bourgeois reality and order. Photography illustrates not what the original spectators of *The Legend of Oedipus* saw, but what they were first promised, and what they were then forbidden to see. In doing so, it provides insights not only into the pleasures and horrors of viewing but also into the regulatory mechanisms of early cinema, which, like the aesthetic possibilities of Greek theatre itself, control and limit the pleasure of viewing.

The still may shed light on a censored scene but at the same time severs the composition it displays from its original narrative context, removing it from cinema and reducing it to a frozen frame. The photograph captures for ever what, embedded in the film, could only shock the spectator in a quick shot, a shot which in order to be effective would have to show too much too quickly. The filmic narrative however is not the only one the still purports to illustrate while effectively

12 On the methodological and interpretive issues raised by research into photos of theatre productions, see HODGDON 2003.

13 In both cases, the production still plays with the notion of death and discloses competing and conflicting takes on it. Like photography in general, stills foreground death both as ghostly and shadowy presence *and* as permanence and fixity. In a self-conscious manner, the still illustrates through the display of the body of Jocasta the playful attitude of photography with death as both permanence and absence.

undermining it. A different version of the same photograph held in the collections of the Comédie Française includes the beams which support the roof of the studio above the sets of the film, breaking the illusion of realism and exposing the constructedness of the spectacle the picture seeks to communicate. If the production still reveals what one must not see (whether one identifies with Oedipus gazing at Jocasta or with the spectator watching the censored version of the film), it also conceals the larger picture of the realities of its own production, circulation and preservation. In its turn, the picture which exposes the workings of the photographic illusion has its own context which, however hard one looks at the picture itself, will not be revealed. Like the theatrical conventions of fifth-century Athens and the regulatory mechanisms of early cinema censorship, the politics of acquisition and public display of pictures in the context of contemporary research in the humanities provides a context in which the desire to know and the pleasure of seeing can be mutually exclusive.

III

If we now move from the micro-level of the production still to the slightly larger level of the shot, and from the scene of the display of Jocasta's body to the scene where the blind Oedipus emerges from the palace, we will encounter a whole new series of methodological issues and interpretative challenges. "When Mounet-Sully appeared in a film entitled *Oedipus*", a history of French cinema of the 1930s informs us, "he refused to omit a single word of the great speeches, and the film showed him grotesquely mouthing and gesticulating as he strode in silence up and down the papier-mâché scenery, quite unable to realize that all his talent counted for nothing in the face of his refusal to admit to the demands of a new medium. This nowise prevented the entire Comédie Française and countless other actors from following his unfortunate example."[14] The creators of the film, it continues, "wanted to elevate cinema, an excellent motive certainly, but it might have been better had they left it to the tender mercy of clowns and jugglers. It was Méliès and Max Linder who developed cinema, not the Comédie Française."[15] Cinema historians of the 1930s and 1940s have used the clip as a paradigm of the inability of a gifted theatre actor to perceive the profound difference between theatre and cinema and to adjust his talent to the demands of the new art-form. The speeches remain too long, his open mouth and gesticulations are grotesque, the scenery and his movement in it unaware of the exigencies of the cinematic medium. All in all an experiment which goes spectacularly wrong and whose impact on the relation between cinema and theatre is long lasting.

A more recent theatre historian and biographer of Mounet-Sully provides an altogether different assessment of the clip: "Of his interpretation, which attained to the sublime and which Mounet-Sully kept to the highest levels until the twilight of his life, we do not have anything except testimonies by his contemporaries, a

14 BARDECHE – BRASILLACH 1938, 44-5.
15 BARDECHE – BRASILLACH 1938, 44-5.

fragmentary sound recording of the text, and a film, mute unfortunately, but precious nevertheless because it restores for us the gestures of the actor as well as the rhythm of his declamation."[16] For a theatre historian, the clip is not an example of bad cinema but a precious, if brief and inadequate, glimpse into a theatrical reality which early cinema had only limited technological means to reproduce and encompass. Such a reading of the clip is certainly supported by the filmic narrative within which the clip has been embedded since 1917 and which has made possible its survival. Preceded by the cemetery scene from Shakespeare's *Hamlet* where Mounet-Sully is shown playing the other great role of his career, and introduced by footage of the septuagenarian actor in conversation, the clip is part of a newsreel produced in the immediate aftermath of Mounet-Sully's death as tribute to his long and acclaimed career as the principal male actor of the Comédie Française.

There is a lot about the clip that can be identified as "theatrical", including the very choice of the subject itself, Oedipus' emergence from the palace after his blinding, arguably the most powerful and shocking scene in any stage performance of the play. Likewise, there is a lot that is not "cinematic." The camera is static, there is no frame movement, no special angles, no close-ups or editing. To make things more complicated, the clip arguably derives from an earlier film on Oedipus which was made in 1908. Film historians assume that this first attempt to render Sophocles' play cinematic must have been unsuccessful and attribute the making of a second film on the subject to the shortcomings of the excessive theatricality of the first.

The question of whether the clip is evidence of good theatre or bad cinema may have been instrumental in its survival, but it has also dominated the history of its interpretations in ways that have obscured its complex relation with *The Legend of Oedipus* and its theatrical and cinematic origins. The clip may not illustrate the film in any straightforward way but its similarities with the production still we have seen above are unmistakable. At the level of narrative composition, the static frame of the shot is split into two, with the Chorus on the left hand side commenting not only on what Oedipus says on the right, which refers back to a moment in the narrative of the film outside the shot itself, but also, and more importantly, on the here and how of the shocking spectacle of his blinded eyes and struggling and convulsed body. Like the spectators in the picture of Jocasta's hanging body, the members of the Chorus in the clip are mobilized not through contemplation of the object of their vision from a distance but through simulation of the bodily symptoms of Oedipus' emotions and thoughts. They look away or hide their faces, recoiling in horror towards the edge of the frame or the background. They come nearer the middle of the frame and stretch their arms towards him, staring with sympathy, curiosity and amazement. And again they look down or at each other with astonishment and disbelief, shuddering and cringing.

To condemn the use of such staging techniques and acting styles as theatrical is to assume, together with earlier film historians and more recent theatre historians, that early cinema is a realistic medium which does not display excessive bod-

16 PENESCO 2000, 45-6.

ily suffering except as a transparent and neutral vehicle for the preservation of a non-cinematic reality. However, Mounet-Sully's subhuman groaning and hyperbolic style in this scene was a trademark of his performance which at least some theatre critics of the time found inappropriate for the stage as well.[17] In defence of his excesses at this point in the play, Mounet-Sully says, "After the horrible misfortunes which overwhelm me, I'm destroyed, crushed, I've lost my sense and reason, and express myself like an unconscious being."[18] If the essentialist framework within which the clip has been received is inadequate for an understanding of the aesthetics of excess and shock of the scene, an alternative framework of interpretation needs to be found. As it has been previously noted, Mounet-Sully's words "cannot help but suggest parallels with Freud's reading of [Sophocles'] work against its conscious, rationalizing grain."[19] But for the purposes of this paper, the scene will have to be reconfigured within a wider cultural framework where the artificiality of excess and the heightening of the effects of shock are performed and simulated compulsively and with increasing sophistication.

IV

This brings us to the issue of the overall narrative framework of the film. The preference for a biographical approach to the story of Oedipus over Sophocles' emphasis on a single day in the hero's life points in the direction of a macro-narrative which very consciously departs from its theatrical source. If Sophocles' play folds a chronologically linear time narrative of action within an alternative, hermeneutic model of storytelling,[20] the film reverts to the simple and irreversible time of the folk tale. The story is propelled "forward point by point, from its beginning to its end", with every episode being connected to what comes before it and what follows paratactically.[21] If the narrative of Sophocles' play creates excitement and anticipation through a number of scenes that culminate in the discovery of Oedipus' identity two thirds of the way through the play, the film stimulates the audience with sequentially arranged scenes which, one after the other, oscillate between distraction and shock. Oedipus is not a detective but more of an action hero, and the narrative of the film is not so much the story of an investigation but the story of an adventure with a twist. How Oedipus is reinvented as an invulnerable hero of popular fiction is evident in scenes like the ones where he first kills and then decapitates the Sphinx and displays its severed head in Thebes in a way quite unique among modern or ancient versions of the myth (fig. 19).[22]

17 The relevant evidence is collected in ARMSTRONG 1999, n.14.
18 VERNAY 1888, 149, quoted in ARMSTRONG 1999.
19 ARMSTRONG 1999; MACINTOSH 2008.
20 See the narratological analysis of the play from the point of view of cinema theory by MULVEY 1989.
21 Quote from MULVEY 1989, 179.
22 In extant Greek literature, the Sphinx is killed by Oedipus in combat only in the poetess Corinna: see further EDMUND (2006) 18 with bibliography. This variation of the myth appears to be completely absent from nineteenth and early twentieth century representations of Oedi-

Aristotle would probably consider the film an example of the episodic plot, the kind of plot that poets wrongly consider coherent because it draws on a single character. As he puts it in the *Poetics*, ch. 8, "Unity of plot does not, as some persons think, consist in the unity of the hero." "For[,] the incidents in one man's life are infinitely various and cannot be reduced to unity; and so, too, there are many actions of one man out of which we cannot make one action. Hence the error, as it appears, of all poets who have composed a poem about Heracles, a poem about Theseus, or other poems of the kind. They imagine that as Heracles was one man, the story of Heracles must also be a unity." The Oedipus of the film may be no Sophoclean hero, but the thematization of unpredictability and astonishment and the oscillation between distraction and shock could support a narrative structure challenging Aristotle's outright dismissal of the episodic plot. The transition from the mythical part of the film to the one based on Sophocles' story could also contribute to a shift from a goal-oriented epic narrative of several parts like the *Odyssey*, where the protagonist remains in control of the narrative through his successful and "systematic choice of goals and strategies",[23] to an epic narrative of several parts of the type of the *Iliad*, where "human weakness [and factors beyond human control] lead inevitably to failure and the frustration of personal goals."[24] If the display of the head of the Sphinx appears to be structurally similar to the display of the corpse of Jocasta, tokens of knowledge and power, which are first possessed as spoils, are later transformed into tokens of knowledge and power to terrify and amaze.

If on a micro-level the still and the clip at which we have looked point towards techniques of narrative composition and modes of spectatorship different from those we often identify with Hollywood, a different picture emerges from the title of the film, its ambitious length, the diversity of episodes illustrated by the production stills, and the number of the scenes which were censored. Early cinema historians have argued for the need to consider the radical transformations taking place in the cinema of the 1910s in the light of pressures by an increasingly middle-class public for films which can compete with other forms of bourgeois entertainment such as theatre.[25] Such pressures could accelerate technological changes from the single reel to the multi-reel film, formal and stylistic changes from spatial continuity to temporal continuity, and thematic changes from simple plots aimed at entertainment to more complex and ambitious plots drawing on the novel and on theatre. The narrative of *The Legend of Oedipus* can be located at the intersection between the new narrative system of linearity and continuity that emerged from this process and an older narrative system of distraction and shock which dominated for much of the first fifteen years of cinema. At one end of the spectrum the stills and the clip show a preoccupation with monstration or showing

pus in drama and iconography such as those by Dominique Ingres, Gustave Moreau, Joséphin Péladan, and Hugo von Hofmannsthal.

23 LOWE 2000, 128.

24 LOWE 2000, 128.

25 For relevant bibliography, see note 11 above.

associated with early cinema. At the other end, the larger narrative of the film shows a preoccupation with telling and temporal movement of a cinema to come.

As a mechanism for safeguarding the morality of an increasingly bourgeois audience and the establishment of an increasingly bourgeois art-form, film censorship does not simply attest to tensions between different narrative systems, but it also plays a very active role in tipping the balance, accelerating as it does formal, stylistic, and thematic transformations. By editing out a whole series of scenes which aim at shocking the spectator, it privileges telling over showing, coherence over discontinuity, suspense over surprise, and emotional control over hysteria. In the process of controlling the meaning of the film and its impact, censorship dismembers the filmic narrative, disrupts its flow, and limits its impact of discontinuity and excess. As well as impoverishing the film, however, it also reveals something of the complex process through which a new narrative aesthetics emerges, a process which brings together story telling, technology, morality, social legitimacy and the engineering of a new mode of spectatorship. What is more, censorship shows how the "waste" produced by this process of regulation and repression can outlive any other dimension of its contribution to the making, or the undoing, of the film. Without the traces left behind by censorship, our understanding of the film would have been much more limited than it currently is.

In Aristotle, "pity is understood … in terms of a movement *towards* the spectacle of destruction on stage…, while fear or terror is a movement *away* from it. In this way, the spectator or reader is torn apart. And it is in this sense that we can say that the tragic is not rationalizable, rather it is an affront to our desires for meaning and coherence."[26] If, as the early-cinema historian Tom Gunning argues, the spectator of classical cinema moves towards the spectacle, "enjoy[ing] … mastery of the narrative thread of the film (able to anticipate future action through her knowledge of the cues and the schema of narrative space and action), the viewer of … [early] cinema … plays a … different game of presence [and] absence, one strongly lacking predictability or a sense of mastery which is more connected to fear. Early cinema … invokes the temporality of surprise, shock, and trauma, the sudden rupture of stability by the irruption of transformation and change."[27] Shock is the kind of violent emotional and mental disturbance which since Aristotle has come to play a decisive role in debates around tragedy, both in terms of its impact on the spectators and in terms of its impact on the construction of the tragic narrative. It is no less central to early theories of cinema (from Vertov to Eisenstein and Elie Faure) which came to define the new art form in terms of its capability to mobilize the masses and to affect change in the real world. In the *Poetics*, the shocking is in danger of contamination with the repugnant, the monstrous and the inhuman. In early cinema the assault on the spectator which will trigger a critical distancing from the spectacle runs the risk of being mixed up with "the figurative violence of the represented", the shock *of* images being subsumed by the shock *in* images.[28]

26 BENNETT – ROYLE 2004, 108, emphasis added.
27 GUNNING 1999, quote from 81-3.
28 DELEUZE 1989, 152.

With the help of bourgeois sensibilities and mechanisms of artistic control, Hollywood cinema moved quickly and decisively away from the aesthetics of surprise and shock, seeking to conceal rather than simulate the contradictions and paradoxes of individualism in modernity. The story of Oedipus would have to wait for half a century before it is rediscovered by the cinematic avant-garde of the 1960s. Like other modernist directors who turned to Greek tragedy, Pier Paolo Pasolini sought to bridge the gap between modernity and antiquity by means of a return not to familiar conventions of archaeological authenticity or mainstream cinema but to the technological primitivism and radical simplicity he associated with early cinema. But like other modernist directors who turned to Greek tragedy in the second half of the twentieth century, he had to draw upon the arsenal of Marx, Freud and Lévi-Straus to mobilize his spectators and to force them to recognize their doubles in the barbaric otherness of the myth of Oedipus.[29] The *Legend of Oedipus* on the other hand could draw on its spectators' fascination with surprise and shock which was evident across a wide range of early twentieth-century cultural forms and practices. If, for instance, Pasolini had to break a cultural taboo in the 1960s with his display of the hanging Jocasta, the repertoire of visual forms available for the display of a corpse in the early 1910s varied from newsreels and fiction films to photography, public executions, and the display of unidentified corpses in mortuaries, complemented in the newspapers of the time by sensual reports of extraordinary detail.[30]

V

The aim of this paper has been to "emphasise the plurality and paradoxes of different, historically distinct viewing positions"[31] and ways of telling a story; to ask whether there is something to be learned from the technologically mediated visions of cinema and photography and the culturally and institutionally mediated visions of film censorship; and to locate *The Legend of Oedipus* within struggles for control between different types of cinema, between different artistic forms, showing and telling, the accumulation and listing of empirically accurate knowledge, and the identification, evaluation, and analysis of this knowledge.

In Sophocles' *Oedipus the King*, the issues of knowledge and vision are juxtaposed in unexpected and challenging ways. These same issues intersect in surprising ways in the methodologies involved in the reception of lost films of Greek tragedy. To talk about *The Legend of Oedipus* one needs to draw not only on Sophocles' dramatic text but also on early twentieth-century theatre, ancient and modern iconography, censorship records, posters, and photography. The film has been transmitted to us neither as a material object nor as a self-contained narrative but through visual and textual traces. None of these traces is directly related to the film itself. Intrinsically implicated in what they show, they often relate to seg-

29 FUSILLO 1996.

30 For a collection of essays on the relation between early cinema and the broader culture of modernity, see CHARNEY – SCHWARTZ 1995.

31 WILLIAMS 1995, 4.

ments of the filmic narrative which were not screened, and they are scattered in a variety of media with their own preoccupations, possibilities and limitations. Far from unproblematic, then, filmic traces hide things they should show and show things they should hide, always concealing at least as much as they reveal.

In the process of their reception, production stills, film clips, and censorship records acquire some the aura that Walter Benjamin associated with the art that precedes mass art: they are "situated in … definite geographical location[s]",[32] they can be fetishized in virtue of their uniqueness, and their "worship" is embedded in the rituals of current research in the humanities such as those surrounding archival collections and academic publishing. One is expected to stand back and contemplate them "from a distance."[33] At the same time, the proliferation of the ritual practices and contexts of current research, and the production of articles and books on an industrial scale makes possible an alternative mode of perception of the objects under consideration and an alternative mode of critical analysis which takes us back to the spectatorial practices of early cinema. Gazing at the material traces of *The Legend of Oedipus*, "look[ing] at [them, glanc[ing] at [them], or avert[ing] [our] eyes from [them]",[34] we can envision our engagement with them as the alternation between incidental attention and moments of acute concentration and surprise.

32 CARROLL 1998, 121.
33 CARROLL 1998, 121.
34 WILLIAMS 1995, 4.

PASOLINI, ARISTOTLE AND FREUD: FILMED DRAMA BETWEEN PSYCHOANALYSIS AND "NEOCLASSICISM"

Filippo Carlà

"In reality, we all take drugs. I do it (as far as I know) making films…"
P. P. Pasolini, *Droga e cultura*, in: *Tempo* 28, December 1968.

It has been noted that cinema versions of ancient Greek tragedies are extremely rare, especially if we bear in mind the innumerable adaptations and re-stagings of those same texts in the modern theatre[1] and the fact that they represent an important subtext to the whole of Western culture.[2] According to Alberto Boschi it is this cultural significance that impedes their representation in the cinema, as if scriptwriters and directors "felt obliged to demonstrate every single time the topicality – or at least the universality – of their subjects."[3]

For reading, staging or re-writing, contemporary approaches to ancient tragedies – and to the myths they stem from – are in fact based on the idea that the messages they contain should be paradigmatic and universal. In complete decontextualization from the historical givens, mythological characters and their deeds, as related in tragedy, are generally not considered in relation to the political situation, the religious meaning of the original, but as a pure and universal representation of Man, the limits imposed on him and – in many psychoanalytically inspired readings – his unconscious.[4]

Exemplary in this sense is the influence of Freud's interpretation of the Oedipus myth on all subsequent rewritings and re-stagings both of the myth itself and of Sophocles' tragedy,[5] but the recent attempt, made by F. Macintosh, to explain

1 See MACINTOSH 1997.

2 BURIAN 1997, 228-229; CANO 1997, 60; SOLOMON 20012, 259-260 (who emphasises that only seven tragedies have been adapted for the screen); BOSCHI 2005, 15-18. While there was an increase in the 1980s (MICHELAKIS 2004, 199-201), Greek tragedy aroused greater interest – especially outside the cinematographic world – in the 1960s. Even Pasolini's movies can be seen in this context: HALL 2004, particularly 1-2.

3 BOSCHI 2005, 19. Greek tragedy is "a particularly prestigious but in many ways intractable heritage" according to BURIAN 1997, 229.

4 HALL 2004, 36-37. On the "psychoanalytical approach" to ancient Greek texts, see PELLIZER 1995, particularly 792-793: "One of the basic postulates on which the psychoanalytical approach to ancient Greek culture is based is the existence of a substantial analogy between the unconscious content of the individual psyche (expressed in the forms of dream, fantasy, lapsus etc.) and the unconscious collective ideas as a whole, expressed in a culture through those traditional tales that we call altogether myths." GOLDHILL 1997, 340-343.

5 MACINTOSH 2004, 315-317. On Freudian readings of the Oedipus myth and tragedy, and on the debate about these readings, see PADUANO 1994, 15-70.

the decline of Oedipus' successes in favour of Orestes in the last quarter of the 20th century "in terms of the struggle elsewhere between Freud and Klein."[6]

The whole complex contemporary approach to tragic literature as a "contemplation" of a universal human model has been mainly suggested to modern and contemporary scholars by Aristotle's *Poetics* – the only (and hence extremely influential) systematic theoretical reflection on tragedy that has come down to us from antiquity. Accordingly, it is impossible to disagree with Diego Lanza when he contends that our ideas on poetics, notably of drama and tragedy, are still based entirely on an Aristotelian way of thinking.[7]

Direct knowledge of Aristotle's *Poetics* is evident – I believe – in Pasolini's *Nota per l'ambientazione dell'Orestiade in Africa*, where the director defines the whole of Aeschylus' trilogy as a preparation for the final *katharsis* of Orestes, using the term in a sense that is quite different from the one generally employed in the discussion of tragedy[8] and applied to the same character in *Poetics*, 1455 b.[9] His idea of the "teatro di parola", expressed in the *Manifesto per un nuovo teatro*, has been designated by Maria Grazia Bonanno as "more Aristotelian than Aristotle's."[10]

In this article, I shall accordingly attempt to analyse the direct or indirect influence of the Aristotelian interpretation of tragedy – including the subsequent literature on that interpretation – and of the psychoanalytic approach on the realization of Pasolini's films based on ancient Greek tragic literature, i.e. *Edipo Re*, *Medea* and the outline of a film represented by *Appunti per un'Orestiade Africana*.[11]

"Necessarily then every tragedy has six constituent parts, and on these its quality depends. These are plot, character, diction, thought, spectacle and song"[12] writes Aristotle in a famous passage of the *Poetics* (1450 a). Lacking the requisite specialist knowledge, I shall leave aside the musical component, though Pasolini himself gave it very close consideration, as a recent contribution by Roberto

6 MACINTOSH 2004, 314.

7 LANZA 1987, 87. For a brief history of the *Poetics*' *Nachleben* see HALLIWELL 1986, 286-323. Throughout this article I will naturally not be discussing the real meaning or the correct interpretation of Aristotle's work, only the most common interpretations of it as known and taught at school in Pasolini's time and hence possibly influencing his work on Greek tragedy.

8 CALVO 2004, 146-147.

9 Pasolini's use of the term *katharsis* at this point seems best explained in a "philological" way, without reference to erroneous or rather "approximate" interpretations of the term, as in BONANNO 1993, 140.

10 BONANNO 1993, 137.

11 CANO 1997, 60: "El mito, por fin, está presente en buena parte de la filmografía universal existente, a partir de las interpretaciones de Freud o de sus discípulos, pero la influencia menos conocida, que la cultura clásica ha aportado al cine, ha sido la teoría narrativa que lo sustenta desde los mas elementales conceptos de mímesis y diégesis a la poética de Aristóteles, primer manual del guionista cinematográfico de prestigio."

12 Unless otherwise indicated, translations from Aristotle's *Poetics* are taken from Aristotle, The Poetics; "Longinus", On the Sublime; Demetrius, On Style, Loeb Classical Library, London 1927.

Calabretto has shown.[13] Instead, I shall attempt to outline Pasolini's intentions with regard to the other elements of tragedy and the way in which Aristotle, his interpreters and Freud may have influenced the realisation process.

1. *Plot*. Myth and tragedy as paradigm and the principles of their setting

I shall begin with a discussion of "plot", as this is the element to which Aristotle assigned the greatest importance and in which, together with "character", he identified the specific object of poetic studies. To a very large extent the tragic plot is based on myth. Though this is not invariably the case, as Aristotle himself underlines,[14] it draws its material from that source in an overwhelming majority of instances, at least in the texts that have come down to us, thus conditioning our knowledge of ancient tragic literature. However, according to Aristotle, tragedy achieves its highest potential precisely by pinning its allegiance to verisimilitude rather than historical fact: "Poetry is something more philosophic and serious than history, because *poetry tends to give general truths* while history gives particular facts" (1451 b; my italics).

I have already referred to the universal nature of myths and the way they represent "a repertoire of illuminating archetypes."[15] It is this feature that gives them their un-historical, emblematic value and their continuously reaffirmed topicality. This approach has strongly influenced the whole Western attitude to Greek tragedy, including Pasolini's. In his tragic output – both the films, considered here, and his plays – his intention was to show "universals in action", paradigms of human behaviour and in particular paradigms of social and political struggle: "Pasolini, more poet than filmmaker, tried to create a 'meta-historical' image of antiquity."[16]

13 Calabretto 2004, also Solomon 2001, 331-333. In Pasolini's "Greek movies", music is associated particularly with the chorus and possibly intended as a "philological" reconstruction of ancient theatrical structures from a "Nietzschean" perspective (Calabretto 2004, 149-151).

14 *Poetics*, 1451 b: "One need not therefore endeavour invariably to keep to the traditional stories with which our tragedies deal. Indeed it would be absurd to do that, seeing that the familiar themes are familiar only to a few and yet please all."

15 Siciliano 2004, 69, but also Solomon 20012, 131: "The world of myth is by nature an unreal world, one in which action and events are either larger than life or more profound than the mundane events that normally take place in our world."

16 Solomon 1996, 115. See also Micciché 1975, 170-171; Christie 2000, 146: "He turned to myth as a new basis to develop a radical critique of bourgeois society and all its taboos." Dottorini 2006, 279-280: "In Pasolini the past is made concrete in images not as an aestheticising quotation – though the director was extremely aware of the 'furore estetizzante' of his work – but as a live, open form, operating as a *myth*, as a *sacred* form opposed to the profanation of power." Fornaro's comment is thus perfectly suited to Pasolini's work (1989, 288): "Myth, more than history, seems today susceptible of this introjection, precisely because of its unhistoricity (which stands for permanence) and because of its plurality of meanings. It is clear that this is possible only if the author can give up the historical event's *hic et nunc*."

In fact, Pasolini does not restrict himself to the appropriation and rewriting of the classical myths transmitted by ancient works. In his films he also re-works Christian (*Il Vangelo secondo Matteo*),[17] medieval (*Decameron*, *I Racconti di Canterbury*) and Arab myths (*Il fiore delle mille e una notte*),[18] even creating "new" myths of his own (*Accattone*; *Mamma Roma*),[19] some of them inspired by and derived from classical mythology (*Teorema*, *Porcile*).[20]

But in his engagement with classical tragedy, Aristotle's indications are perfectly coherent with his methods: "It is not right to break up the traditional stories, […] but the poet must show invention and make skilful use of the tradition" (1453 b). Accordingly, the poet must not adhere slavishly to the ancient text. Indeed, the three movies we are considering are quite definitely not exact transpositions of the texts by Aeschylus, Sophocles and Euripides, but more like original revisions of the mythical plot. Accordingly, *Edipo Re* also shows the events preceding the beginning of the tragedy and includes some parts of *Oedipus at Colonus*;[21] while *Medea*, influenced by other sources and rewritings like Apollonius Rhodius' *Argonautica* and Corrado Alvaro's *Lunga notte di Medea*, diverges from Euripides by not beginning in Corinth, including the Argonauts' expedition and completely suppressing the character of Aegeus.[22]

The choice of location is also consistent with this general approach. Though the three "film tragedies" by Pasolini can readily be considered "faithful" transpositions, in the sense that they are not actualisations or new settings of the texts in other places or different ages (as, e. g., *I Cannibali* by L. Cavani, set in contemporary Milan, or J. Dassin's *Phaedra*),[23] the locations chosen (I shall discuss their political meaning later in this article), i.e. Friuli (set in Sacile, but shot in Lodi),

17 FERRERO 1994², 59; ZIMMERMANN 2002, 62. Talking of this movie, Pasolini said about the Gospels that "the story of Christ is made of two thousand years of Christian interpretations. The wedge of myth has inserted itself between historical reality and myself" (*Il sogno del centauro*, 33).

18 CHRISTIE 2000, 148. The so-called "trilogy of life" (*Decameron*, *Racconti di Canterbury*, *Fiore delle Mille e una Notte*) has thus been called by FERRERO 1994², 123: "a mythic-evocative trilogy of peoples lost to history and recovered to memory."

19 MICCICHÈ 1975, 156: *Accattone* is "the ideologisation of this completely individual crisis, its generalisation as a case typical of at least half of Italy, its mythicisation as motionless prehistory where, in a complete dialectic closing to the world, all the ancient evils (and all the ancient, innocent good of pure life) are lodged", and 159, "social reality […] hypostatized in Myth." Pasolini himself speaks of the "mythic style" of these two films in *Il sogno del centauro*, 98.

20 MICCICHÈ 1975, 170. ANGELINI 2000, 176, notes that "*Porcile* proceeds in the form of a classical tragedy."

21 Pasolini himself says that Sophocles is the source only for the third part of the movie: *Per il cinema*, 2920. See also MIMOSO-RUIZ 1992, 57-58; ANGELINI 2000, 148-149; RIEMER 2002, 80 and 83.

22 E. g. FUSILLO 1995, 100-101; FUSILLO 1996, 153; MANZOLI 2004, 128-131; CHRISTIE 2000, 148-149. For this reason Michael Cacoyannis was prompted to say that "Pasolini did not make Greek tragedy. He made very striking films about the myths on which tragedy is based": MCDONALD-WINKLER 20012, 81. About *Medea* Pasolini said that he had "just taken some quotations" from Euripides' tragedy: *Il sogno del centauro*, 103.

23 BADIAN 1997, 278-279; SOLOMON 20012, 259-274.

Morocco (but with many elements referring to other non-European civilisations), Bologna and Milan for *Edipo Re*, Cappadoce and Pisa for *Medea*, Tanzania for the *Appunti* are very far from being a neat and regular idealisation of classical Greece but create a kind of universal, unhistorical prehistory intended to pinpoint the original archetypal character of the subject, its universality and above all its topicality even for a contemporary audience, whose world and background are evoked in a manner closely modelled on the way the original tragedies evoke the world and background of an Athenian living in the 5th century BC.[24] This result could not have been achieved by adhering to the original settings and costumes, which would rather have provoked curiosity or estrangement, as in Cacoyannis' tragic movies, *peplum* movies or even the more "philological" settings opted for in ancient Greek theatres.[25] "Setting in fact is crucial in decisions about whether the play is to be moved into the world of the audience or the audience moved into the world of the play or whether the play aims to open up a situation related to both the world of the original and that of the audience."[26] The latter was obviously Pasolini's intention. "The setting is neither specifically Greek nor modern, but shifting and cross-cultural, to suggest the universality of mythic experience."[27]

But the main point lies elsewhere. The universality and the paradigmatic nature of the mythic-tragic message are not an end in themselves. In the film production of a committed intellectual like Pier Paolo Pasolini they are taken in a political direction (in the broadest meaning of the term, including social and psychoanalytic aspects). "My specific opinion on this point," said Pasolini, "is that only those who believe in myths are realists and vice versa. The 'mythic' is simply the other side of realism."[28]

24 FUSILLO 1995, 95, who underlines that with its "modern frame" *Medea* is even more unhistorical than *Edipo Re*; FUSILLO 1996, 18-21; WIEBER 2002, 29. "The geographic, iconographic and locative references contribute a strange vacillation between supreme referentiality and pure unreality, they are actual and at the same time unlikely. All this, together with the characteristics noted before, seems to project the action onto a dimension distinguished by the absence of spatiality and temporality", says RIVOLTELLA 1991 about *Medea* (266), while the setting of *Edipo Re* is, according to RIEMER 2002, 82, "in einer raum- und zeitlosen Sphäre." It is "a meta-historical atmosphere, set in no recognizable time or place in the past (or future or present)" according to SOLOMON 20012, 261; "a space outside time, a space that is deserted and chthonic" according to MICHELAKIS 2001, 247. At much the same time, the same idea of the non-historicity of tragic settings was the basis for Cacoyannis' directing options aimed at the reconstruction of a "timeless Hellenism" (MICHELAKIS 2001, 244). On the fusion of elements of the past and present in Pasolini's work and his creation of "pastiches" see DOTTORINI 2006, 279.

25 Examples of movies derived from Attic tragedies and set in ancient theatres are cited in MICHELAKIS 2001, 245-246. To those should be added at least the film *Antigone* (1992) by J.M. Straub and D. Huillet, shot in the Greek theatre at Segesta.

26 HARDWICK 2003, 59.

27 BADIAN 1997, 279. The same effect was sought in the design of the costumes, as a recent interview with the costume-designer Piero Tosi has revealed: MILITELLO 2006, 133-134. The same could also be said of the costumes for *Edipo Re*, which reveal the influence of Aztec and African elements: CAMINATI 2007, 106.

28 *Il sogno del centauro*, 66.

As P. Michelakis has suggested, "the first explicitly political readings of Greek tragedy in cinema were those by Pier Paolo Pasolini. […] Pasolini's cinema marks the beginning of the use of Greek tragedy to address modern issues full-frontally…"[29] Here again, the proximity to Aristotle's theories, intended or not, is unmistakable. The importance of the social and political content of tragedy is underlined by Aristotle when he emphasises (1450 b) the importance of the second constitutive element of poetry, "thought" as referring to "the ability to say what is possible and appropriate" and goes on to stress how 5th century authors "made their characters talk like statesmen."

2. *Thought*. Pasolini's "neoclassicism": aesthetics of a paradise lost

The political message in Pasolini's works is grounded completely on the confrontation between pre-industrial, agrarian society, humankind in a nearly "natural" state, still existing, according to Pasolini, in Third World countries and represented in these movies by archaic Greece or rather by the barbarian element (*Medea*),[30] (fig. 4) and neo-capitalist industrial society, which has destroyed that world by interfering with the cyclical principle that, in Pasolini's view, characterized agrarian life in perfect harmony with nature.[31] With its rationalism, this "new society" sets out to destroy the uneliminable irrational and "barbarian" element in human nature.[32] "This unlimited, pre-national and pre-industrial agrarian world still survived a few years ago and I deplore its demise."[33]

Accordingly, Pasolini's unhistorical Hellenism is definitely not the idealised Hellenism marked by rationality, balance and the struggle against the Titans. On the contrary, it is a world like ours, a world in transition gravitating towards rationality and turning its back on the visceral, irrational world that lies at the root of all political, social and psychological experience. It may be that the genesis of his outlook on antiquity was influenced by the publication (1951 in English and 1959 in the Italian translation) of Eric R. Dodds' *The Greeks and the Irrational*, which may have provided more than a hint to the director.

Evidently then, Pasolini shrinks from a rationalist, idealizing and "reconstructive" neoclassicism,[34] but his aesthetic approach, nonetheless based on the repre-

29 Michelakis 2004, 208.

30 Michelakis 2004, 208.

31 The cyclical nature of agrarian worlds, based on the rhythms of nature, is represented in the human sacrifice shown in *Medea*, which is designed to assure the fertility of the crops. Both in its elaboration and setting, this episode is strongly influenced by Mircea Eliade's theories and Frazer's descriptions of similar rituals: Fusillo 1996, 157-160.

32 Fusillo 1996, 6-7; Caminati 2007, 46-48. In a speech held in 1974 Pasolini used the term "genocide" to define this "destruction and replacement of values" (*Scritti corsari*, 187).

33 *Scritti Corsari*, 46. Also 54: "I have no regret for 'little Italy': I regret the immense agrarian workers' universe prior to Growth, a universe that was transnational in its culture and international in its Marxist choice." On the transposition of these ideas to the films, notably in *Vangelo secondo Matteo*, see Ferrero 1994^2, 54-56.

34 Fusillo 1996, 14; Michelakis 2001, 247.

sentation of a "paradise lost", a sort of primeval condition of which Man has deprived himself. In addition, as we shall see, there is an evident evolution from the hope of possible reconciliation to the awareness of the finality of the loss. In this sense he is a real neoclassicist, in a tradition that has its roots in Hölderlin and upholds a vision of classical Hellenism as "mythical or religious *Bildung*, by now a priori unreachable for modern man, forced to relegate to utopia the dream of the golden dawn of 'quiet conformity and identity' (Vigolo) with nature, now forever excluded from the historical *hic et nunc*."[35]

Pasolini himself situated *Edipo Re* and *Medea* (*Appunti*, being a documentary, is a special case) in the second phase of his cinematographic production, which he defined as "cinema di poesia" (poetic cinema), a term I shall return to later. This second phase was designed to take the place of the first, simpler and more national/popular, at the exact moment when he sensed the coming of neo-capitalist society in Italy, the affluent society with all its destructive effects. At this moment, a new contact with myth and the archetypal was necessary, together with the representation of the clash between "ancient" and "new" laws, a key to interpretation frequently applied to Greek tragedies (e. g. the conflict between sacred law and *polis* law in Sophocles' *Antigone*). Tragedy, Camus said at a conference "On the Future of Tragedy" in Athens in 1955, comes to light when a "sacred" society gives way to a "man-made" society.[36] Even though we cannot say whether Pasolini was actually aware of Camus' theories, his position on this point is strikingly similar:[37] the universalisation of Greek tragedy is the archetypal representation of conflict.

It is thus no mere coincidence that Pasolini's first contact with classical Athenian tragedy was with Aeschylus' *Oresteia*, the representation of the need to transform Erinyes into Eumenides, to accept them in civil society and thus to sublimate and integrate irrational experience, admitting that it cannot be simply ig-

35 FORNARO 1989, 52. See also *Il sogno del centauro*, 58 for the explicit admission of nostalgia for a "paradise lost of human brotherhood" sought through the representation of what J. Duflot calls "a mythical mankind", and 65, for a re-evaluation of Rousseau's myth of the "noble savage."

36 "In history, the great periods of tragic art take place in centuries of transition, in periods in which the existence of peoples is heavy with glory and threat. […] When one examines the movement of ideas in these two periods, as in their tragic works, one finds a constant. The two periods mark a transition from forms of cosmic thought, completely impregnated with the notion of the divine and sacred, to other forms inspired by individual and rationalist thought. [...] It seems indeed that in the western world tragedy is born whenever the pendulum of civilisation is equidistant from a sacred society and from a society built around man": CAMUS 1962, 1701-1710.

37 As we shall see, the similarity between Camus and Pasolini is also striking on the subject of the possibility of contemporary tragedy inspired by the excessive rationalism in the world of the 20th century. Camus writes that "the world that the people of the 18th century believed they could subjugate and mould with the use of reason has taken a new form, a monstrous one. Both rational and excessive, this is the world of history. But at this level of excess, history has taken on the role of destiny. Man believes that he cannot dominate it but only fight it." As CHIUCHIÙ 2006, 181, underlines: "'The Eumenides succeed the Erinyes', writes Camus. But this is the movement that the modern world forbids. Technology has disrupted the tragic balance."

nored.[38] "The meaning of the tragedies of Orestes is solely and exclusively political", Pasolini writes in the *Nota del traduttore* to his Italian translation of Aeschylus' trilogy, adding his own personal summary of the work and its significance: "The plot of Aeschlyus' three tragedies comes to this: a primitive society is dominated by primeval, instinctive, obscure feelings (the Erinyes), always on the point of overwhelming rough and ready institutions (Agamemnon's monarchy), acting under the maternal sign of the uterus, conceived precisely as shapeless and undifferentiated forms of nature. But reason (still conceived of archaically as a male prerogative: Athena is not born of a mother but directly from her father) rises up against those archaic feelings and prevails against them, creating new modern institutions for society: the assembly, suffrage.[39] Nonetheless, some elements of the ancient world should not be completely suppressed and ignored, but rather reacquired, re-assimilated and naturally modified. In other words, the irrational represented by the Erinyes should not be eradicated (which would be impossible) but simply curbed and dominated by reason, productive and fertile passion. The maledictions are transformed into benedictions. In evolved society the existential uncertainty of primitive society remains as a category of existential woe or of fancy. This, and nothing else, is the plot of the *Oresteia*. And its political allusiveness is more striking than in any other classical text, 'for an author such as I would like to be.'"[40]

When Pasolini translated Aeschylus' *Oresteia*[41] in 1959/1960 at Vittorio Gassman's request, he was certainly acting not as a "traditionalist" blindly attached to nostalgia for a universe lost forever but as someone searching for the possibility of a reconciliation; and he felt that this reconciliation was possible only in the Third World, still rooted in a primeval agrarian form of society but at the same time on the threshold of development. Here, Pasolini believed, an alternative route could have been taken.[42] His attention was particularly attracted by Africa. He dreamed of an "African democracy", completely human in the fullest sense. In the *Nota per l'ambientazione dell'Orestiade in Africa* Pasolini writes that "however effective and universal it is, such a subject might run the risk of appearing outdated if transposed to present-day Europe. But there is a world in which it is

38 Cf. FUSILLO 1996, 17 and 183-186.

39 Though completely outdated today, the interpretation – deriving ultimately from from G. Thomson – of Aeschylus' tragedies as political texts, "a metaphor of the transition from an archaic tyrannical regime to a new and more just democratic regime" has clearly a major influence on Pasolini's theories: BONANNO 1993, 138; GALLO 1995, 37-38; FUSILLO 1996, 186-187; ANGELINI 2000, 61; MEDDA 2004, 114-116.

40 *Orestiade*, 177-178. My italics.

41 So it is not true that Pasolini's "attachment" to Greek tragedy only dates back to 1967 (MIMOSO-RUIZ 1992, 57).

42 "Not for nothing do I spend as much of my time as possible in Third World countries, where it [the pre-industrial agrarian world] still survives, even if the Third World is now coming into the orbit of so-called growth" (Pasolini, *Scritti Corsari*, 46). The aim, says Pasolini, of the narrator in the *Appunti per un'Orestiade africana,* is to reach the moment at which "the Furies are transformed by Athena from goddesses of ancestral fear into goddesses of dreams, of that irrationality which persists alongside the rational democracy of the new State." (*Per il cinema*, 1178).

the central subject of modern history: the African world.[43] The *Oresteia* is the synthesis of the last hundred years of African history, the abrupt and divine transition from a savage to a civic and democratic condition. The sequence of kings who ruled over the African territories in the dreadful, age-old stagnation of a tribal and prehistoric culture – dominated in their turn by black Erinyes – was disrupted almost over night. More or less *motu proprio,* Reason has established democratic institutions. Here we must add that the really pressing problem now, in the 1960s – the years of the Third World and *négritude* – is the 'transformation of the Erinyes into Eumenides', and on this point Aeschylus' genius can only be called prophetic."[44]

It is therefore absolutely not a mere coincidence that the attempt to transpose the *Oresteia* to the film screen with a script based on the translation of 1960 was set in Africa.[45] The idea is not to illustrate the genesis of post-colonial Africa (though decolonisation is, once more, a transformation process in line with Camus' view of the tragic),[46] but to indicate to the neo-capitalist and rationalist Western world the possible integration into a new form of society of the Erinyes as Eumenides, the primeval goddesses of the continent,[47] conceived and represented not in an anthropomorphic way (as in Aeschylus) but as natural elements,[48] thus emphasising the principal feature of pre-capitalist society, harmony with nature. "But, are you sure that everything you know in the Western world is completely positive and everything you have left behind is not?" Pasolini asks a group of African students living in Rome in the *Appunti per un'Orestiade africana*. The most meaningful answer is one spoken in French: "Il faudrait qu'il [the African individual with a knowledge of Western culture] transpose, mais d'une manière

43 The phrase "coincidence of ancient Greece with Africa" also appears in the introduction to chapters 36-40 on the Argonauts in *Petrolio*, Pasolini's final, posthumous and unfinished work.

44 *Per il cinema*, 1199-1200.

45 MEDDA 2004, 109-111. In the *Appunti per un'Orestiade africana* Pasolini says: "I believe I have identified some analogies between the situation of the Oresteia and that of present-day Africa, particularly with respect to the transformation of the Erinyes into Eumenides. In other words, I believe that African tribal society is like archaic Greek society. And Orestes' discovery of democracy, which he brings back to his country Argos in the tragedy, and to Africa in our movie, is, in a certain sense, Africa's discovery of democracy over the last few years." (*Per il cinema*, 1181). The choice of Tanzania as a location is also interesting. Pasolini himself explains it as follows: "For Aeschylus' Oresteia I have chosen an African nation which I believe to be typical, a nation with socialist, pro-Chinese tendencies, but whose definitive choice has yet to be made because beside the attraction of China there's another, no less fascinating, alternative: the American, or rather the neo-capitalist option" (*Per il cinema*, 1177). Pasolini insists on the juxtaposition of villages like Kosulu, "nearly prehistoric" and originating at a spot where a few years earlier there had been nothing but a simple market-place, with "modern" Africa, the Africa of schools and factories. According to the director, modern Africa began with the encounter between Stanley and Livingstone, represented accordingly as an act of genuine deconsecration for the whole continent (*Per il cinema*, 1180).

46 This is the interpretation suggested by MICHELAKIS 2004, 208. On the reception of classical texts in post-colonial contexts see HARDWICK 2003, 110-111.

47 SOLOMON 20012, 268.

48 FUSILLO 1996, 238; MEDDA 2004, 118-121.

plus humaine, ce qu'il a appris dans le monde occidental, chez lui." In this way "the Eumenides can be created without the Furies disappearing."[49]

In the course of time Pasolini became increasingly sceptical about the possibility of such an integration. The tragedy *Pilade* (1966), the nearest of all to Greek theatre, even in structure,[50] shows that serious doubts in this sense have arisen. The alliance between Orestes and Electra leads to Pilades' exile, while the Eumenides split up, partly reverting to their status as Erinyes ("We should have known, says Orestes, that at the very root of things what causes us pain would get mixed up with what had given us hope. And that every victory is also a defeat"),[51] a literary transposition of the "right-wing revolution" ushering in a fully neo-capitalist consumer society.[52] And while *Edipo Re* is mainly based on psychoanalitic, individual aspects,[53] though, as we shall see, it does not neglect political elements, the *Appunti per un'Orestiade africana* (conceived in 1968,[54] shot between December 1968 and February 1969[55] and only presented in its present form in 1973) is the "fossil" of a film that never came to fruition because the ideal requirements for its realization had been forfeited.

It is of little consequence whether the film is genuinely unfinished[56] or whether Pasolini had been planning an "open" form, a sort of "non finito", from the outset.[57] In either case, what is transmitted to the audience is a sense of incompleteness,[58] of inability to achieve an effective final reconciliation, the trans-

49 *Per il cinema*, 1193-1194.

50 ANGELINI 2000, 183.

51 *Teatro*, 297. See CASCETTA 1991, 146-147; BONANNO 1993, 144-148; MELE 1995, 199-203; FUSILLO 1996, 217-220; ANGELINI 2000, 183-191; SICILIANO 2004, 71-73.

52 FERRERO 1994[2] also regards the year 1966 as a time of crisis in Pasolini's politic ideals, connecting it with the realisation of *Uccellacci e uccellini* and *La Terra vista dalla Luna*: "The end of history and the tarnishing of reality, both of them neutralised by the neo-capitalist, technological rationalism that the author rejects and relegated to a mythical "Third World" that seems unattainable, leave a void to be filled – or at least he deludes himself into thinking that it can be filled – with tales that become ever more allusive and distant" (74-75).

53 FUSILLO 1996, 27.

54 *Per il cinema*, 2935-2936: In an interview with L. Peroni, Pasolini refers to his intention of making a movie about Orestes set in Africa. On Pasolini's reinterpretation of the *Oresteia* in *Pilade* and *Appunti* see further BERTI 2008, 105-115.

55 The chronology proposed by ANGELINI 2000, 214, which puts the *Appunti* after *Medea*, in 1969-1970, is clearly inaccurate.

56 BONANNO 1993, 154; FERRERO 1994[2], 116; FUSILLO 1996, 182; CAMINATI 2007, 68 asserts that the projected film was not realised, though he correctly insists on the completeness of the *Appunti* as a film genre (57-58).

57 Thus Siti-Zambaglio, in *Per il cinema*, 3135; MEDDA 2004, 118, in consideration of the fact that Pasolini said in 1968 that his next film, possibly about Orestes, was a movie "in the making" (*Per il cinema*, 2936). It is difficult to concur with the contradiction present in ANGELINI 2000, who speaks of "a movie about a movie in the making" (87) and immediately after of "the material for a movie he was never to realise, at the same time considering the material as the only possible movie" (88).

58 Pasolini himself, as narrator in the movie, says that it is "not a documentary, not a movie, all I did was to shoot some notes for a movie" (*Per il cinema*, 1177). But it is not possible to rule out the eventuality that a real movie might have followed. At another point, Pasolini talks of "this movie of mine, for which these are nothing but notes" (*Per il cinema*, 1185). It is also

formation of the Erinyes into Eumenides (or at least of major scepticism about the feasibility of the "project"), in spite of the final scene, in which the utopian synthesis might seem to be symbolised by the wedding dance.[59] The possibility had already been forfeited, as we can see from the scenes in which Pasolini addresses the problem of the film's setting to a group of African students living in Italy, whether the film should be set in contemporary years or some years before, during the period of decolonisation at the beginning of the 1960s, when all eventualities were still open.[60] And it is no coincidence that this was the very time when he first engaged with Aeschylus' texts! The voice of one student asserts itself over the others, strongly advocating the second choice because "today Africa is becoming modern, therefore it's becoming similar to Europe, it's losing some of its typical, African character."[61] And this is indeed the choice Pasolini opts for, adding very pessimistically that the ending must accord with the prevalent ideology of the time. The other option has been forfeited.[62] Europe has brought Africa "formal democracy" but not "real democracy."[63] Pasolini had lost his belief in the Eumenides, even in a Third World perspective.[64] With reference to the transformation of the Erinyes into Eumenides, one African student says: "I don't believe that this transformation could be achieved completely."[65]

true that in another written note published as *L'Atena bianca*, Pasolini expressly states that for the *Appunti* he would be using "the same 'notes for a movie in the making' technique already employed for my movie about India", revealing the largely documentary character of the work: "an outline for a documentary about modern black Africa", *Per il cinema*, 1202.

59 FUSILLO 1996, 240-242; MEDDA 2004, 126. The dance was devoid of meaning, "just as light relief ", to quote Pasolini himself (*Per il cinema*, 1194), who says a little later that "there is no final conclusion, it's merely suspended" (*Per il cinema*, pag. 1196). CAMINATI 2007, 75-76, underlines the absence of a conclusion but places it in a "pedagogical" perspective, suggesting that for Pasolini questions were more important than answers. I believe that in Pasolini's pessimistic view questions are more important than answers simply because there are no answers left.

60 *Per il cinema*, 1181.

61 *Per il cinema*, 1181. Pasolini's pessimism also becomes evident at another point in the film, when he postulates the disappearance, and not the "re-absorption", of the Furies: "With them the world of the forefathers, the ancestral, ancient world disappears; and in my movie, part of ancient Africa will disappear with them" (*Per il cinema*, 1183): see RUSSO 1995, 141-142. A parallel can also be found in the script for *Il padre selvaggio*, written in 1962-1963. This movie was also designed to show the hope in a new African democracy, but this hope disintegrated and the film never came about, see CAMINATI 2007, 118-120.

62 *Per il cinema*, 1194. See also FERRERO 1994^2, 116-117. When Pasolini says that his movie will be "out of date", this is a reference to the setting in the early 1960s, and not to a contemporary setting that would soon have disappeared, as ANGELINI 2000, 217 suggests without even mentioning the problem of setting addressed in the *Appunti*.

63 *Per il cinema*, 1181-1182.

64 By contrast, BONANNO 1993, 150-151; TRIMARCO 1995, 252-253. RUSSO 1995, 141-142 and ANGELINI 2000, 87-88 and 214-218, believe that the inspiration for the film is "optimistic."

65 *Per il cinema*, 1193-1194. In general, as CAMINATI 2007, 72-73 has shown, the African students seem unconvinced by Pasolini's project, but their interviews were inserted in the film all the same, maybe because of the pessimism that Pasolini had developed about the likelihood of a genuine African democracy, rather than as a claim to the intellectual's right to elaborate interpretations and theories, as Caminati thinks.

And indeed, the *Appunti* is followed immediately by the complete realisation of *Medea*,[66] the full demonstration of the impossibility of reconciling the irrational, primeval, nature-based culture represented by the Colchian witch, whose "barbarian" and "matriarchal" religiosity is delineated in a form strongly influenced by Mircea Eliade's theories,[67] with the Greek rationalism and "civilization" of Jason.[68] "Medea is the confrontation of the archaic, hieratic, clerical universe with Jason's world, rational and pragmatic."[69] In an interview in 1969 J. Duflot asked Pasolini to explain "the fact that with every new movie of yours the impression of a new apocalypse becomes increasingly potent. *Teorema*, *Porcile*, *Medea*… are all more like parables of the end of the world." "The end of *a* world, rather", was Pasolini's answer.[70]

Exceptionally important in this connection is the first part of the film, which is Pasolini's own invention. Jason is reared (in a lagoon set in Grado) by the centaur Chiron who[71] initially impresses on him the sanctity of nature, natural cycles and seasonal resurrections (celebrated by the Colchians with human sacrifice).[72] Later, when "Jason has begun to rationalise and deconsecrate everything he had previously considered ontological and sacred",[73] the centaur admits that this sort of teaching is no longer of interest to the growing boy.[74] Transformed into a human, the centaur subsequently instructs his charge on the rationalisation and de-

66 The work on *Medea* was actually begun before the journey to Tanzania to shoot the *Appunti*.

67 "Oddly, this work [Medea] is based on theories of religious history: M. Eliade, Frazer, Lévy-Bruhl, modern ethnological and anthropological works" (*Il sogno del centauro*, 103). Eliade is also explicitly mentioned in the first version of the script for the movie (*Vangelo-Edipo Re-Medea*, 483) and in *Il sogno del centauro* (66 e 82). It is important to stress that in the making of the movie Pasolini consulted the religious historian Angelo Brelich (Siti-Zambaglio in *Per il cinema*, 3140. See also CAIAZZA 1995, 177-178; FEICHTINGER 1997, 109-110; ZIMMERMANN 2002, 65.

68 The difference between the two worlds is evident from the first scenes of the film, which contrast Jason's rationalist, neo-capitalist and deconsecrated upbringing at the centaur's "hands" with the sacred rite *par excellence*, human sacrifice celebrated in Colchis, FUSILLO 1996, 157-163. On this sacrifice see also RIVOLTELLA 1991, 270-271.

69 *Il sogno del centauro*, 103.

70 *Il sogno del centauro*, 54. Italics in the original text.

71 The centaur is a symbol of parenthood, representing both the father and the mother: *Il sogno del centauro*, 105.

72 *Vangelo-Edipo Re-Medea*, 544: "All is holy, all is holy, all is holy. There's nothing natural in nature, my boy, bear that in mind. When nature looks natural to you, it will be the end of everything – and something new will begin." The idea that agrarian civilisations find nature unnatural is taken from Mircea Eliade: *Il sogno del centauro*, 82. It is worth noting that the idea of "de-naturalisation" or "culturalisation" of nature is also very prominent in Pasolini's semiological studies: cf., e. g., *Empirismo eretico*, 280 and 284. CAMINATI 2007, 37, is therefore completely mistaken in believing that nature is "unnatural" in the modern, industrial and neo-capitalist world, but not in its agrarian counterpart.

73 *Vangelo-Edipo Re-Medea*, 483.

74 *Vangelo-Edipo Re-Medea*, 545: "Maybe you have found me not only mendacious but also overly poetic. But what can I do? For ancient Man, myths and rituals are concrete experiences accompanying him even in his corporal, daily existence. For him, reality is such a perfect unity that the emotion he feels, say, in the face of the silence of a summer sky is fully equivalent to the most interior personal experiences of modern Man."

consecration of religion.[75] In the first version of the script, the *Visioni della Medea*, only part of which found its way into the finished movie, Pasolini writes about the moment when Jason leaves the centaur's house to go to Iolchus: "Here, everything is ready for Jason's illuminist, laicised and worldly fate."[76] As Euripides himself underlined, Jason is convinced that his rationalist, laicised civilization is superior to Medea's.[77] And in *Petrolio* Pasolini later interprets the landing of the Argonauts in Colchis as the imperialist invasion of the Third World.[78]

As Jon Solomon has noted, even the Golden Fleece, the object of the Argonauts' search, is magical only for the Colchians because of its ritual significance. It has no influence at all on Jason and his rationalist culture.[79] When he brings back the fleece, Jason himself says to Pelias: "If you want my honest opinion, away from its country this goat-skin is bereft of all meaning."[80]

The reconciliation between the two worlds is sought through *eros*, which at a certain point seems to permit a new kind of sacred approach to reality.[81] But a complete reconciliation is impossible because it would imply the suffocation of the irrational (Medea's "barbarian" nature), its suppression in a rationalist context.[82] Hence, as the Centaur attempts to explain to Jason, Medea is the victim of a "spiritual catastrophe", of the "bewilderment of an ancient woman in a world that does not believe in any one of the things in which she always believed… The poor creature was converted back and never recovered."[83] Even the final sexual encounter between them, when Medea has already dreamt of the death of Glauce and Creon, cannot re-establish or sublimate a balance that simply does not exist.

75 CAIAZZA 1994, 155-156; TORRACA 1995, 87; ZIMMERMANN 2002, 63. In the first treatment of the script, Pasolini writes (*Vangelo-Edipo Re-Medea*, 484): "He [the Centaur] goes on with his lessons about the history of the religions, insisting on rationalisation and demythicisation. Jason listens with complete equanimity, neither astonished nor scandalised, but naturally inclined to believe it all." In the movie, the Centaur refers to crops and the resurrection of vegetation: "What you see in cereals, what you understand from the re-birth of seeds, is meaningless for you, a distant memory no longer of interest. Indeed, there is no God." (*Vangelo-Edipo Re-Medea*, 546).

76 *Vangelo-Edipo Re-Medea*, 487, also 490-491; *Il sogno del centauro*, 103.

77 *Med*., 536-544. In the earlier *Pilade,* Orestes is proud to have brought a superior civilization to Argos, despite the suffering this has caused him (*Teatro*, 311).

78 In the *Visioni della Medea* the Argonauts are called "*predoni*", i.e plunderers (*Vangelo-Edipo Re-Medea*, pp. 493-494; 501): FUSILLO 1995, 108-109; FUSILLO 1996, 163. See also FEICHTINGER 1997, 110-111; FORNARO 1997, 129; ANGELINI 2000, 193.

79 SOLOMON 20012, 272.

80 *Vangelo-Edipo Re-Medea*, 549.

81 *Vangelo-Edipo Re-Medea*, 507, has this to say about the first sexual encounter between Jason and Medea: "In love she becomes human and suddenly finds a substitute for her forsaken religiosity; in sexual experience she regains her lost sacred relation to reality." See FUSILLO 1995, 109; TORRACA 1995, 89.

82 FORNARO 1997, 129: "Eros is merely a temporary shelter, it disintegrates little by little." Later: "[Medea] clings to Jason for an extreme form of self-justification, which *eros*, repeated without any sense of the sacred, fails to provide."

83 *Vangelo-Edipo Re-Medea*, 514. Also *Il sogno del centauro*, 104. The death of Absyrthus, similar in the *sparagmos* to human sacrifice, is very different. It marks the "conversion" of Medea and instead of being a death that propitiates life, it is a death that spawns death and disruption: CAIAZZA 1994, 156-159; FUSILLO 1995, 110-111.

On the contrary, in comparison with Euripides, *eros* in Pasolini's film is largely deprived of meaning, notably from an anthropological perspective. In fact, in the Greek tragedy its function, as Fusillo has shown,[84] is to lighten Medea's responsibility by depicting her as swept away by uncontrollable passion.

Even the choice of setting is of major significance for the political meaning of the film. While the scenes set in Colchis were shot in Cappadoce, a landscape whose characteristic kind of settlement alludes to the "prehistoric" and the "archetypal", Corinth is set in Pisa, more precisely in the Piazza dei Miracoli. Michelakis believes that the Italian city represents "reality"[84] but this interpretation is not entirely convincing. The anachronistic setting is unreal, as is the representation of the religious buildings of the Piazza as buildings of the Greek city. More especially, even the barbarian Colchis is not unreal but simply belongs to a different culture. However, the "seafaring republic" and its famous Romanic buildings clearly represent a way of life and a cast of mind marked by money (commercial power) and rationalism (the buildings).[85] In the first treatment for the movie, Pasolini conceived of the external view of Corinth (then shot in Aleppo) in these terms: "A grassy hill, geometrically furrowed and eroded by the rain, rears up starkly towards the sky. Equally starkly, almost abstractly, the symmetrical walls of the city rear up at its top."[86] Symmetry and geometric precision are obvious symbols of the extreme rationalism of urban culture.

So Fusillo is right in saying that Pisa represents "dawning bourgeois society",[87] though I do not believe that at this early stage the synthesis between the rational and the barbarian, unaccomplished then and precluded now, was still possible.[88] In fact, the very possibility of synthesis appears to be precluded for Jason and Medea, rather than forfeited at that exact moment by the two characters and their societies. Jason is already part of an "oberflächliche, fantasielose, säkularisierte" civilisation.[89] Accordingly, nothing could have brought about a "happy ending" and we must avoid all exaggeration in the interpretation of Medea's last words, which are not a declaration of universal loss but refer to the disenchantment of a woman who had personally believed that her own cultural heritage would not be an impediment to her prospects of acclimatisation in Greece: "No. Don't go on insisting, it's useless! Nothing is possible any more!"[90] This is much more explicit than Euripides' v. 1404 ("Impossible: in vain you speak") and is possibly contaminated with v. 1064 ("All is arranged and cannot be avoided").

The two sons, another instance of the impossibility of reconciliation between the barbarian culture of the mother and the "manly" reason of the father, cannot

84 MICHELAKIS 2001, 251.
85 CHRISTIE 2000, 152.
86 *Vangelo-Edipo Re-Medea*, 508.
87 FUSILLO 1995, 101-102; FUSILLO 1996, 140.
88 So FUSILLO 1995, 114; FUSILLO 1996, 179.
89 FEICHTINGER 1997, 110.
90 *Vangelo-Edipo Re-Medea*, 560. "Don't go on insisting" refers not to a desire for reconciliation but merely to Jason's request to see the corpses of his sons.

survive because their existence is in itself impossible.[91] Ettore Cingano's comment on Euripides' tragedy is equally apposite with regard to Pasolini's film: "An important trait frequently foregrounded in modern rewritings of the myth, emerges here: Medea is absolutely alien, both in a cultural and in a geographic sense. She comes from 'another' world that she cannot return to, having betrayed and killed her family. She is foreign to the Greek cities she travels through – from Iolchos to Corinth, from Corinth to Athens, in a long series of murders – without any prospect of settling there.[92] She is an alien barbarian who has given birth to sons who, as half Greek and half barbarian, have no legitimate status in Athenian law."[93]

"The mistake of the rationalist society represented by Jason, then, is the exclusion of the sacred from the new social dynamic."[94] The rupture is irremediable, the Erinyes will remain as they are forever.[95] As Pasolini says in *Preghiera su commissione*, a short poem written in March 1969 during the work on *Medea*: "Am I wrong, or has the age of the Gatherers (so good) returned, and is a whole religious system breaking down? Am I wrong, or must we believe that the mille-

91 Accordingly, I cannot concur either with the interpretation proposed by FORNARO 1997, 130, "They are sons loved and cared for in a scene of tormented sweetness preceding the next murder, a case of euthanasia in the face of the danger not of lynching, but of rejection and degradation in a new world full of despair", or the view expressed by CAIAZZA 1995, 184-185. Though the killing may well be conceived of as a new sacrifice, I do not see it merely as Medea's reconciliation with the sacred as a sort of compensation for Absyrthus' death. The two sons cannot live because they stem from cultures that are too different and hence irreconcilable. That is the reason why their existence is impossible.

92 It is important to emphasise that in the film Jason and Medea leave Iolchus without having killed Pelias (an eventuality admitted in the first version of the script, *Vangelo-Edipo Re-Medea*, 507). They leave after that the women of Iolchus have decked Medea out in Greek dress, holding their hands as if to found a new world that will obviously fail.

93 CINGANO 2006, 64.

94 FUSILLO 1996, 137. See also FUSILLO 1995, 100. Accordingly, I do not share Rubino's interpretation, which is linked to the subject of immigration: "The clash of cultures, the powerless isolation into which 'civilised' society forces those who come from other communities and the eventual violent reactions of those thus marginalized seem today to be the adumbration by a prophetic genius of what is perhaps the most disruptive problem of the last thirty years in Europe" (RUBINO 2004, 101-102).

95 FERRERO 1994^2, 113; ALBINI 1995, 22-24; CAIAZZA 1995, 188-189; CHRISTIE 2000, 153; SOLOMON 20012, 271; ZIMMERMANN 2002, 64-65. I do not agree that the movie shows that "the element of mediation must be sought in a logic of power" (RIVOLTELLA 1991, 276). At this stage Pasolini's pessimism completely ruled out the eventuality of mediation, as he himself admitted, saying that he wanted to represent "the mutual irreducibility of two civilizations" (*Il sogno del centauro*, 104); In 1972 Pasolini rejected Hegel's dialectic, insisting that his own was not ternary but binary: "There are only oppositions and they are irreconcilable" (CAMINATI 2007, 41-42). So the end of the film is definitely not a "triumph of the sacred" (thus MIMOSO-RUIZ 1992, 63). Medea is not victorious, she has nowhere to go (Euripides' Aegeus is completely absent from Pasolini's movie), she is rootless both now and forever. I do not believe that Medea commits suicide at the end of the film, as both MIMOSO-RUIZ 1992, 64 and ZIMMERMANN 2002, 65 suggest (may she have been burnt when the house catches fire? This solution is also rejected by FUSILLO 1995, 112, who speaks, more convincingly, of an intentionally open conclusion). But even if this were the case, it would certainly not entitle us to speak of the "vengeance of the sacred."

nary interval is closed and that the problem of the peasants is a problem that concerns the foreign ministers?"[96]

3. *Character*. Myth and psychoanalysis: family, roots, alienation

As already noted, the "psychoanalytic" interpretation of classical (and especially Greek) mythology has powerfully asserted itself in the 20th century, thanks to Freud's readings. It has been particularly influential for the approach to a number of specific myths, chief among them the story of Oedipus. The mythological element has been described as "a lost archaeology to which man turns, in the dark maelstrom of his own crisis, as to an immemorial remembrance, supremely present and present as myth."[97] Moreover, the view of myth as a psychoanalytic archetype is in accord with Aristotle's precept that the characters have to manifest themselves on stage not by words but concrete actions: "La inseguridad, que la lectura psicoanalítica del mito aporta al carácter de Edipo, se nota en sus vacilaciones y su nervisionismo en las reacciones ante la Esfinge y Layo."[98]

Pasolini was definitely not averse to the psychoanalytic approach and "a psychological line" has been seen, e. g., by Gambari in his films (though with reference, in particular, to *Teorema* and *Porcile*).[99] An approach of this kind to classical myths is evident in some passages of *Poeta delle ceneri* (published in *Nuovi Argomenti*, July-December 1980, but written in 1966-67), in which he proposes a psychoanalytic reading of Heracles' death as described in Sophocles' *Trachiniai*: "The father does not want the son's death but his love. He becomes the son and in the son, a boy, he maybe sees the father and he loves him. He does not want to kill him but to be killed by him, not to possess him but to be possessed."

Of the three "Greek films", *Edipo Re* is obviously the one displaying the largest number of connotations of this nature.[100] But elements of a psychoanalytic reading are also present in the *Appunti* and in *Medea*. In the first case, in particular, is evident Pasolini's dependence on Freud's and Bachofen's interpretation of the *Oresteia*, according to which Aeschylus' trilogy represents the transition from matriarchy to patriarchy, and this is admitted explicitly by the director in the *Nota alla Traduzione*[101] referred to earlier. The clash of civilisations is superimposed on the contrast between maternal authority – the barbarian, irrational and pre-capitalist element – and the paternal alternative associated with neo-capitalist rationalism.[102] Also, we know that in terms of his own biography this superimposition is strongly rooted in Pasolini's thinking. In *Edipo Re* is set off the rural Friuli of his beloved mother at the beginning of the film (set by no means coincidentally

96 *Vangelo-Edipo Re-Medea*, 565. See also *Il sogno del centauro*, 54.
97 Siciliano 2004, 76. See e. g. Vv. Aa. 1980; Alford 1992.
98 Cano 1997, 65.
99 *Vangelo-Edipo Re-Medea*, 459.
100 Solomon 20012, 260.
101 Fusillo 1996, 186; Angelini 2000, 61.
102 Fusillo 1996, 183-184.

in the 1930s) against the urban life of Bologna, where he was born and which he associated with the memory of his father, with whom he had a very tempestuous relationship[103] as Pasolini himself admitted in an interview for the *Cahiers du Cinéma*.[104]

It is also possible to suggest a psychoanalytic interpretation of *Medea.* Pasolini himself said that Jason and Medea were, in a certain sense, two aspects of the same character, "the epiphany of the double inside us (coexistent), of what was (the sacred) and what is (the deconsecrated)", to use Pasolini's words.[105] The same idea of an internal conflict between the "barbarian" and the "rational" is also clearly discernible in Jason's upbringing and in the presence of two Centaurs, one sacred and one deconsecrated, that appear together when Jason is about to leave Medea and marry Glauce to tell him that they are both a part of him, a vision that he himself engenders.[106] At this moment only the man speaks, while the real Centaur, the sacred one "under whose sign" Jason stills love Medea, speaks no more because his logic is no longer comprehensible to Jason, even though he is still present.[107] As Fusillo has suggested, it is possible to see in Pasolini's interpretation of Jason and Medea the *ego* and the *id*, respectively, the first trying to control and organise reality, the second irrational, barbarian and maternal.[108]

The clash of civilisations, therefore, corresponds to an internal human conflict in which, according to Freud, the repressed material in the unconscious (*id*, Erinyes, Medea) strives to achieve the level of consciousness. This dynamic is opposed by the resistance mechanisms of the "ego-ideal" (*super-ego*, Athene, not

103 "There was between us [Pasolini and his father] a sort of permanent conflict, in which is not impossible that I may have mistaken hostility for hatred…" (*Il sogno del centauro*, 20).

104 "I'm certainly nearer to Oedipus' myth – the son's love for the mother, the hatred for the father – but even in this case I have to specify that I'm nearer because I lived it out, but I'm farther away because I got over it…" (*Per il cinema*, 2918). In the same interview Pasolini also says that he has projected his own mother on to the character of Jocasta's, 2924. He also spoke of "an excessive passion, which for long I considered a monstrous form of love" for his own mother in *Il sogno del centauro*, 20. The autobiographical component in *Edipo Re* is in effect taken for granted by J. Duflot in his interview with Pasolini (*Il sogno del centauro*, e. g. 19; 22). On the importance of the autobiographical element in *Edipo Re* see also BRUNETTA 1986, particularly 388-390; FERRERO 1994[2], 89; GIGANTE 1995, 73-74; FUSILLO 1996, 38; RIEMER 2002, 80-81; CAMINATI 2007, 98. It is important to note that Pasolini also admitted the presence of the autobiographical element in many other films, including *Medea*: *Il sogno del centauro*, 105.

105 *Endoxa* (28 April 1969): *Vangelo-Edipo Re-Medea*, 576. RIVOLTELLA 1991 (274-275) also talks of a psychological clash between two different psychic types, which is, at the same time, a collective clash between two civilisations.

106 *Vangelo-Edipo Re-Medea*, 550.

107 *Vangelo-Edipo Re-Medea*, 550: "You knew the two of us, one sacred when you were a child, one deconsecrated when you had become an adult. But what is sacred remains alongside what has been deconsecrated. And now here we are, the one next to the other!" See also *Il sogno del centauro*, 76 and 104-105. See MIMOSO-RUIZ 1992, 62-63; CAIAZZA 1995, 187-188; FUSILLO 1996, 135-136; FEICHTINGER 1997, 111; CHRISTIE 2000, 151. In the original treatment Pasolini also thought of splitting up Medea into two figures during her two dreams: *Vangelo-Edipo Re-Medea*, 519 and 524; see CAIAZZA 1994, 165.

108 FUSILLO 1995, 98; FUSILLO 1996, 134.

born of woman, the Greek Corinth, which does not accept Medea).[109] Pasolini surely knew of Freud's conviction that the *super-ego* develops as a set of ideals and values at the moment when the Oedipal stage is forsaken. This may be the connection with the third "tragic" film, *Edipo Re.* Here, the psychoanalytic perspective is surely predominant over the political slant but the beginning is set in Sacile, Friuli (barbarism, mother, *id*) and the scenes in Bologna (explicitly defined as "bourgeois")[110] and in the industrial suburbs of Milan (neo-capitalism, middle and working class, father, *super-ego*), come immediately before the last scene, again set in Friuli, the old and abandoned sites of childhood.[111] This too seems to suggest a transposition of personal conflict to the plane of social, cultural and political conflict.[112] In this respect it is interesting that an initial location in Romania was later forsaken for the Moroccan setting because in Romania the industrial revolution had already destroyed the "old wooden villages." According to Pasolini, Oedipus must live in a "barbarian", "pre-capitalist" world.[113]

Oedipus is ignorant of himself and irrational, motivated by impulse and as such very different from Sophocles' intellectual character. In a certain sense he is "barbarian":[114] the whole process that leads him to knowledge, or rather to destruction through knowledge, makes him lose his innocence and changes him into a "rational", adult man, harking back to the time when he was still blissfully unaware. In short, the historical process that leads to neo-capitalist societies is not so different from individual growth via the "Oedipus complex."[115] It is at this point

109 The conflict might also be read in terms of the masculine (Jason and the Argonauts) and the feminine (Medea, her servants): ANGELINI 2000, 196.

110 *Per il cinema*, 2927. See also *Il sogno del centauro*, 101: "the city where I found myself naturally integrated into the bourgeois world." RIEMER 2002, 81 is clearly wrong in saying that the film begins and ends in Bologna.

111 FERRERO 1994[2], 92-93: "All that remains is to come back to the family home, to die in the bosom of a nature in which, from the outset and aside from all historical dialectics, happiness and conviction were enshrined"; CAMINATI 2007, 100-101.

112 CAMINATI 2007, 98-100. Perhaps overstating the case rather, the "political" meaning of *Edipo Re* has been described by R. Laurenti as being more significant than the "psychoanalytic" aspect: CANO 1997, 65. Cano himself (64) refers to the movie as "un largo *flashback* hacia los orígenes de la civilización." The death of Laius is, not least, an act of rebellion against authority. In the script, Pasolini talks explicitly of "threatened dignity" (*Vangelo-Edipo Re-Medea*, 392): FERRERO 1994[2], 91-92; PADUANO 1994, 204-205; PADUANO 2004, 84; CAMINATI 2007, 99.

113 *Per il cinema*, 2922: "The Romanians had asked me to shoot a movie with them and I went there to carry out a survey. But I didn't find what I was looking for because, though the country made a great impression on me because of the incredible presence, as in China, of the industrial revolution in the open countryside, which makes it a genuinely poetic country, this same presence made my task impossible. The old wooden villages have been completely destroyed. There's nothing 'old', in the 'rustic' meaning of the word, left today in Romania. Actually, Romania is a country in the course of freeing itself from the myth of Oedipus, from agrarian rituals, from the myth of the King of Rain and from others, in short from the myth of the Father."

114 FUSILLO 1996, 77; BADIAN 1997, 280-281.

115 "Oedipus is, therefore, a path from a psychologically, culturally and sociologically existential condition, on which the mass media and consumer society have spread with devastating and pestilential effects, to the chance of finding – in the territories of tragedy and myth – a series

that we understand the Moroccan setting for the movie, filled with elements of non-European cultures (Aztec, Japanese etc.),[116] another reminder of the "barbarian" and "irrational" roots that should not be jettisoned but integrated into the development towards rationalism. One definitely meaningful feature is the fact that the later Oedipus, who has understood and learnt, becomes an artist[117] and as such cannot be fully integrated into the new bourgeois society represented by the cathedral and the factory.[118]

Quite clearly, psychoanalytic interpretation – and not only Freud's[119] – of Sophocles' tragedy, though regarded as outmoded in the most recent work on Oedipus, was a major influence on Pasolini.[120] On occasion the author in person attempts to play down the impression made on him by the psychoanalytic reading of the tragedy ("The other reason for which the movie was shot with 'aestheticism and humour' is that Freud's quest motif is no longer of much interest to me […] In the arbitrary mixture of Freudian and Sophoclean suggestions, the latter win. […] As for Freud, I've put him in the movie in a rather amateurish way")[121] and only admits to a prominent Freudian component in the episode of the Sphinx ("Freud wins, by contrast, in the Sphinx episode, the only passage completely changed", in which the Sphinx, instead of asking questions or posing riddles says to the importunate Oedipus: "It's useless, it's useless, the abyss in which you plunge me is inside yourself!").[122] But in other passages he defines the film as a Marxist-cum-Freudian interpretation of the myth[123] and Freud actually wins out over Sophocles throughout the film and imposes important changes on the Sopho-

of answers to a series of questions about existence and individual fate" (BRUNETTA 1986, 389). FUSILLO 1996, 34: Here the author indicates a difference between *Medea* ("a representation of cultural dynamics") and Oedipus ("subjective dynamics"). Pasolini himself said that "society has not solved the mystery of its own existence any more than Oedipus did" (*Il sogno del centauro*, 54).

116 In particular, music "has the function of going beyond history, making the historical localization disintegrate. In this case, music is atemporal and increases the undefinable mystery of myth" (*Il sogno del centauro*, 109). Once again it is a way of "universalising" the myth.

117 According to Pasolini a "decadent poet", then a "Marxist poet" (*Per il cinema*, 2920).

118 FUSILLO 1996, 62-63.

119 The character of Jocasta seems also to be influenced by Ferenczi's theories: FUSILLO 1996, 103-105. Ferenczi is explicitly mentioned as an authority by Pasolini in *Scritti Corsari*, 92.

120 MIMOSO-RUIZ 1992, 58; PADUANO 1994, p. 205 (where the author speaks correctly of a "vulgarisation of Freudianism"); GIGANTE 1995, 70; FUSILLO 1996, 38-39. CAMINATI 2007, 104 underlines how in Pasolini's film the problem of Oedipus' guilt is of secondary importance compared with the description of Oedipus' psychological development in the face of his own destiny.

121 *Vangelo-Edipo Re-Medea*, 319.

122 *Vangelo-Edipo Re-Medea*, 319. On the episode of the Sphinx, see also the 1967 interview for *Cahiers du Cinéma*, in *Per il cinema*, 2921-2922. See also MIMOSO-RUIZ 1992, 59.

123 "The spur was a Marxist-cum-Freudian development of the Oedipus subject," said Pasolini in an interview with *Cahiers du Cinéma* in 1967 (*Per il cinema*, 2919). See also *Il sogno del centauro*, 100: Here Pasolini calls the first scenes of the film a crystallisation of the Oedipus complex, the whole film "the projection of that psychoanalytic fact onto the mythic plane" and the last part, set in the 1960s, a depiction of "what Freud refers to as the moment of sublimation."

clean tragedy,[124] e.g. when the child Oedipus listens to his parents having sexual intercourse,[125] when Sophocles' verses about the dreams of incest that many people have is moved to a position following the first "perception" of the truth and transformed into a sort of justification of incest,[126] or when the rejection of Tiresias' words is explicitly portrayed as a process of repression or rather resistance.[127] In an even more significant way, Pasolini completely shifts the accent with regard to responsibility, the biggest problem in the interpretation of the classical Oedipus, changing Sophocles' "deeds of a man more sinned against than sinning"[128] (*Oed. Col.*, 266-267), to its opposite, "desired, but not imposed, by Fate."[129]

Psychoanalytic over-interpretation of Sophocles' tragedy is also evident in Pasolini's interest in the "Laius complex", which was not unknown to him personally.[130] The father's jealousy and fear of his son, which generate hatred and the desire for humiliation, and in particular Laius' fear that the new-born Oedipus will steal Jocasta's love from him, feature in the fifth scene, when Laius' inner voice (represented in the film by intertitles)[131] says: "You're here to take my place in the world, to reduce me to nothing and steal everything I've got… And the first thing you'll steal from me is the woman I love… Or rather, you're already stealing her love from me!"[132]

What is important is the fact that Pasolini makes a great effort to make his characters complex and to explore their motives in detail, which is in complete accordance with the Aristotle's dictum in the *Poetics.* In the Greek films psychoanalysis of the subjects is elaborated in accordance with the psychoanalytic interpretation of myth and tragedy prevalent at the time, in order – once again – to universalise the myth as a *paradeigma* of all mankind, or more specifically the historical and emotional processes operative in the human mind.

124 It has also been noted that the actual film is much more Freudian than the original script: Siti-Zambaglio in *Per il cinema*, 3114.

125 FUSILLO 1996, 44-45.

126 PADUANO 1994, 208-209; FUSILLO 1996, 117-119; PADUANO 2004, 96. Pasolini even emphasises that during sexual intercourse with Jocasta after Tiresias' words Oedipus could not ignore who she was: "But who is this woman to him? He must now have understood and if he has not, he has at least heard. Teiresias' words were exceedingly clear" (*Vangelo-Edipo Re-Medea*, 418): PADUANO 1994, 208.

127 PADUANO 1994, 207-208; PADUANO 2004, 91-92.

128 Translation by F. Storr.

129 *Vangelo-Edipo Re-Medea*, 439.

130 FUSILLO 1996, 45-48; RIEMER 2002, 86. In *Affabulazione*, a play written in 1966 and in which the shade of Sophocles is one of the characters, we are faced with the opposite of Oedipus, a father who is attracted by his own son and ends up killing him: CASCETTA 1991, 144; FUSILLO 1996, 49-60; ANGELINI 2000, 156.

131 In an interview, Pasolini said clearly that the intertitles were used to express the characters' thoughts: *Per il cinema*, 2928. See also MIMOSO-RUIZ 1992, 60.

132 In the original script the text was longer and more complex: *Vangelo-Edipo Re-Medea*, 356.

4. *ELEOS KAI PHOBOS*: *KATHARSIS* ACCORDING TO PASOLINI

"Tragedy is, then, a representation of an action that is heroic and complete and of a certain magnitude – by means of language enriched with all kinds of ornament, each used separately in the different parts of the play: it represents men in action and does not use narrative, and through pity (*éleos*) and fear (*phòbos*) it effects relief (*kathàrsis*) to these and similar emotions," says Aristotle in his *Poetics* (1449 b). Thus, the formal definition of this literary genre accords high status to the concept of "purification", the literal meaning of the Greek *katharsis*, which is not any more clearly defined by the ancient philosopher anywhere else in his works. Consequently much effort has been expended on defining this concept and discussing the means by which this purification might be achieved.[133]

It is of course beyond the scope of this article to take up a position in the long and complex discussion about the real meaning of Aristotelian *katharsis*. It will suffice to recall that in the history of this debate the prevalent idea has been that "purification" through pity and fear is a subjective phenomenon taking place in the soul of every single spectator, not least due to the influence of Lessing's *Hamburgische Dramaturgie.*[134] In the late 19th and the 20th century the interpretation proposed by Bernays was extremely influential. He suggested that this "purification" was a kind of therapeutic process that "cured" the spectator, in a Hippocratean way, by contrasting the similar with the similar.[135]

The idea, in short, is that in contemplating scenes that move us to pity and fear, scenes that make us feel that the same fate could befall anyone (fear) and thus instil in us a feeling of solidarity caused by misfortunes that could equally well be our own (pity) (*Poetics*, 1453 a),[136] we "sublimate" these emotions in ourselves and are thus "purified". This interpretation of Aristotle's phrase has been central to all theories of tragedy since the Renaissance.

"Fear and pity sometimes result from what is seen on stage and are sometimes aroused by the actual arrangement of the incidents, which is preferable and the mark of a better poet […] anyone hearing of the incidents happening thrills with fear and pity as a result of what occurs. So would feel them anyone who heard the story of Oedipus" adds Aristotle (1453 b). Since the 16th century, and thanks to the influence of classicism and the use of Seneca's tragedies as a model,[137] the representation of violent and bloody stories, as in so-called "Senecan" drama, par-

133 CALVO 2004, 146-149: "It has become difficult to escape this confrontation, even if we may justly suspect that the 'theory' of tragic *katharsis* stems more from the commentators than from Aristotle himself."

134 UGOLINI 2002, 23. On the idea of *katharsis* as "a straightforward form of moral exhortation" prior to Lessing, see HALLIWELL 1986, 300-301.

135 UGOLINI 2002, 24-25; LOSCALZO 2003, 68-70; CALVO 2004, 149-152.

136 "… one being for the man who does not deserve his misfortune and the other for the man who is like ourselves – pity for undeserved misfortune, fear for a man who is like ourselves": CALVO 2004, 169-171.

137 HALLIWELL 1986, 302: "If a dominant classical influence on the tragedies of the sixteenth century had to be identified […] Seneca's entitlement to this status could not be disputed"; BURIAN 1997, 232.

ticularly successful in the English world ("Elizabethan" drama), has frequently been thought a convenient way of arousing such emotions. In Francesco Robortello's famous commentary on Aristotle's *Poetics*, a key text in the history of modern European culture, we find the following passage: *per misericordiam et terrorem conficiens talium perturbationum purgationem. Cum enim tragoedia contineat res lugubres et atroces, inde enascatur oportet commiseratio et terror...*[138] The result is social "sublimation", a sort of alleviation of present tensions and violent impulses by the vision of dreadful images of death, pain and suffering.

In this way the representation on stage of deaths and violent acts, completely eschewed by Greek tragedy, becomes a typical characteristic of modern tragedy and Pasolini's movies are hardly an exception.[139] It will suffice to recall the double deaths of Glauce and Creon in *Medea*, rendered even more tragic by being transformed into suicide. In the "first death", Medea's dream, Euripides' text is accurately adhered to, but in the "second death", the real one, Glauce jumps off the city walls, not because of the pain from the poisoned dress but because of her own sense of guilt, once again suggesting a psychoanalytic interpretation of the myth.[140] And Creon, who in Euripides' drama and in the previous scene simply hugged his daughter and died from the same poison (vv. 1204-1221), now sees Glauce's corpse and jumps after her.

So Pasolini appears to be keeping relatively close to these interpretations of the function of tragedy, explicitly adding the idea that scenes of violence and of war help to instantiate the un-historical nature of myth and tragedy, that universality and paradigmaticity that, as we have already said, are their main characteristics and that are stressed even more, in Aristotle's view, by fear (and pity). In the *Appunti per un'Orestiade africana* that confronts us with very harrowing images of

138 LOSCALZO 2003, 67.

139 RIEMER 2002, 83.

140 MIMOSO-RUIZ 1992, 62; CAIAZZA 1994, 160-161; CAIAZZA 1995, 181; ZIMMERMANN 2002, 65. This is evident in Pasolini's description of Glauce: "She is still a child. Her neurosis has kept her from growing up and from becoming impervious to the world's necessities, in the face of which she always clearly feels dismayed and guilty", *Vangelo-Edipo Re-Medea*, 509; and Creon's words to Medea: "My fear is not occasioned by hatred for you or for suspicion about your difference as a barbarian arriving in our city with the signs of another race… it's because of the fear of what my daughter could do: she feels guilty towards you and, knowing your pain, feels a pain that doesn't give her rest", *Vangelo-Edipo Re-Medea*, 556). Even in the treatment of the scene of Glauce's death we find no references to pain or magic treatments but to "neurosis" and something happening "in that poor soul" (*Vangelo-Edipo Re-Medea*, 534). Is it then possible that, in reality, Medea has no magic powers, or doesn't want to use them, and Glauce's death is, once again, a sort of psychoanalytic interpretation of the myth with reference to her sense of guilt? Pasolini's descriptions of Glauce, and this literary solution, seem to be heavily influenced by Corrado Alvaro's *Lunga notte di Medea*, a play of 1946 in which Glauce doesn't even touch Medea's gifts because Jason tells her they could be poisoned and commits suicide by jumping from a tower in the city walls (the analogy with Pasolini's movie is evident) when she sees Jason and the whole Corinthian mob going to Medea's to kill her because "she refused to become a woman" (CIANI 1999, 252): FUSILLO 1995, 98.

the Biafran conflict[141] designed to symbolise the Trojan War, Pasolini says that "nothing is farther from our common idea of Greek classicism than these images. But pain, death, grief, tragedy are eternal and absolute elements that can perfectly link these harrowing images of the present with the fantastic images of ancient Greek tragedy."[142] Though Pasolini reaches the ultimate heights of violence and cruelty in some of the scenes in *Salò*,[143] no spectator will be left unaffected by the human sacrifice in *Medea*, represented with immense intentional savagery made even more effective by its contrast with the objective and anti-septic documentary style of this part of the movie.[144]

Returning to Aeschylus' trilogy, the ancient argument says, in the section in which Cassandra prophesies her own death and then enters the house, that "this part of the tragedy generates astonishment because it has adequate fear and pity." In fact, *ékplexis* and *hòiktos* are synonyms for *éleos* and *phòbos*, as Pasolini knew, not only because he was (moderately) familiar with Greek, having studied it at the Liceo Classico, but also because this passage is translated as "suscita compassione e terrore" ("generates pity and fear") by Mario Untersteiner, whose translation Pasolini tells us he used in 1960.[145] So Pasolini knew that in antiquity this particular part of the *Agamemnon* was thought to be particularly likely to affect *katharsis.* Accordingly, it is no coincidence that he greatly accentuates the violent and cruel aspects in his 1960 translation, as Fusillo has noted.[146] In the film this section is sung by jazz singers to the music of Gato Barbieri, thus giving full rein to the emotional nature of the situation.[147]

5. *Diction and spectacle*. From tragedy to cinema: new techniques and new poetics

There is not much to be said about the linguistic element in Pasolini's "Greek movies." As the director himself tells us in his *Nota del traduttore* to Aeschylus' *Oresteia*, he was fully convinced that the language of Greek tragedy – and of Aeschylus in particular – was "civil", formal and argumentative: "The general linguistic trend has been to change the sublime diction into civil parlance, a ten-

141 The Biafran war was used in that same year 1968 as the setting for *Oedipus the King* in the play *The Gods are not to blame* (by O. Rotimi): Hardwick 2003, 79. See also Angelini 2000, 216-217.

142 *Per il cinema*, 1185. Many violent and harrowing scenes were written but not filmed. In *Medea* a second human sacrifice appeared as Medea's first dream, with the killers eating the victim's heart and drinking his blood (*Vangelo-Edipo Re-Medea*, 516); in *Edipo Re* the original script had Oedipus killing Laius and his soldiers in a much more bloody scene, which involved the crushing of Laius' head (*Vangelo-Edipo Re-Medea*, 393-394).

143 Ferrero 1994^2, 153.

144 In the original treatment, the *Visioni della Medea*, we find a note referring to a first religious ritual which was in the end not shown, explaining the will to represent this rite "as in a documentary, in its unexplainable details" (*Vangelo-Edipo Re-Medea*, 483).

145 *Orestiade*, 175.

146 Fusillo 1996, 201-203.

147 *Per il cinema*, 1185-1187. See Fusillo 1996, 239.

dency typical of the classicist persuasion. Hence the preference for prose, a low-key, rational form of address. Aeschylus' Greek seems to me neither elevated nor expressive. It can readily be exploited, sometimes even descending to an elementary and rigid austerity, a syntax without the halos and the echoes to which Romantic classicism has accustomed us, a permanent orientation of the classical text to paradigmatic classicism, historically abstract."[148]

Pasolini's position was thus to avoid classicist diction and archaisms in his translations and scripts. His movies (and theatrical texts) had to have the civic and political pertinence that were characteristic of the ancient Greek tragedies. They were designed to address spectators of every degree of culture and therefore had to be written in "civil", logical and argumentative Italian. This at least was his theoretical stance. But in Pasolini's scripts, as in his translation of Aeschlyus, the stylistic level is never "low" or prosaic and passages full of elevated lexical devices are not rare.[149] Most of the time, however, the general tone displays the characteristics he ascribes to Aeschylus' Greek and is neither arcane, metaphorical or pompous. Certain linguistic devices are employed in some scenes to suggest the incomprehensibility originating from communicative deficiencies. One example is the scene on the beach in which Medea reacts to the "casual" way the Greeks have camped. In the *Visioni della Medea* Pasolini explicitly says that "Medea says this in broken, incomprehensible sentences (first because the intensity of her feelings makes her obscure but also because the concepts she uses are completely foreign to those men)."[150]

In re-writing and adaptation, therefore, Pasolini actualises his use of language in a way designed to bring the ancient texts closer to today's spectators, e. g. through the use of words more suitable for contemporary western culture, like "church" instead of "temple" or "God" instead of "Zeus."[151] One notable example is Medea's prayer to the Sun. Originally (as we learn from *Visioni della Medea*) he planned to have this monologue recited in Euripides' original Greek version with subtitles providing a literal translation.[152] However, the final script gives priority to intelligibility for every kind of spectator and the prayer is not only spoken in Italian but also much abridged and "actualised" in accordance with the principles discussed above.[153]

148 *Orestiade*, 176; see also *I poeti a teatro*, an interview with Pasolini, in TODINI 1995, 260-261. See GALLO 1995, 39-41; RUSSO 1995, 119-121 and 127-133; FUSILLO 1996, 195-196; ANGELINI 2000, 59-60.

149 FUSILLO 1996, 196-197.

150 *Vangelo-Edipo Re-Medea*, 504.

151 GALLO 1995, 40.

152 *Vangelo-Edipo Re-Medea*, 518-519.

153 *Vangelo-Edipo Re-Medea*, 552-553. For example "Oh Zeus, oh Dike dear to Zeus, oh light of the Sun!" becomes "Oh God, oh Justice dear to God, oh light of the Sun!" and is repeated three times during the monologue, while in the original text it only appears once. "Listen to my plans: they are new, and very serious, too" becomes "Listen then to my plans." In the final version, the dialogue with Jason, originally cast in indirect speech and thus more complex syntactically and less immediate in its effect, is presented in direct speech.

More interesting and possibly more controversial is the realisation in Pasolini's films of what Aristotle calls "spectacle". In a famous passage in the *Poetics* (1451 b) Aristotle says that poetry is "more philosophical" (*philosophòteron*) than history because poetry represents universals while history refers to particulars. Talking about the "philosophical" nature of genres and art forms, Pasolini is equally adamant that cinema is certainly a philosophical experience, not merely a linguistic one: "Cinema is not just a linguistic experience. Just like linguistic research it *is a philosophical experience*" (*Poeta delle ceneri*, 1966-1967).[154]

Talking about "diction and spectacle" Aristotle engages in a lengthy debate about the polarity of vision and hearing, often identifiable in ancient literature, even from a moralistic viewpoint. As Luigi Spina has recently shown, the superiority of vision is generally admitted in the ancient world. What we see is more persuasive than what we hear, a conviction expressed already by Solon (fr. 15 Gentili-Prato).[155] Aristotle's stance is quite similar: "The spectacle (*òpsis*) in fact dominates everything else: character, plot, diction, song and thought in the same way; but the most important of these is the arrangement of the incidents."[156] Though he suggests that spectacle, despite its power of attraction, is "quite foreign to art and has nothing to do with poetry" (1450 b) because "to produce this effect by means of an appeal to the eye is inartistic and needs adventitious aid" (1453 b), Aristotle goes on to concede the persuasive power of vision, adding that "in constructing plots and completing the effect by the help of the dialogue the poet should, as far as possible, keep the scene before his eyes" (1455 a).[157]

This standpoint is not all that different from Pasolini's. According to the Italian director, the poet must be a poet of "things" because there is no other poetry than the real action and its representation and perception via the sense of sight: "As a poet, I will be a poet of things. Action is all that will be communicated and that action will be poetry because, I repeat, *there's no other poetry than real action* (you tremble only when you find it in verses, or in prose, if the evocation is perfect)."[158] The same view is expressed in *Empirismo eretico*, where Pasolini tells us that action is the first and most important language of man and in this perspective cinema is the representation of reality: "*Human action in reality*, then, as the first and principal human language. […] Written and spoken languages are just integrations of this first language. I get my first information about a man from the language of his physiognomy, his behaviour, his customs, his rituals, his physical bearing, his actions and only then from his written and spoken language. In this sense, reality is reproduced by cinema."[159]

154 FUSILLO 1996, 9. This viewpoint corrects a previous stance taken up in 1965 in an article entitled "Il cinema di poesia", in which Pasolini had written that "at this moment cinema is an artistic language, but not a philosophical one" (*Empirismo eretico*, 172).

155 SPINA 2005, 198-201.

156 Here I follow not Fyfe's translation but Lanza's interpretation (LANZA 1987, 136-137)

157 On this "ambiguous marginal position" of spectacle in the *Poetics* see LANZA 1987, 33-35.

158 FUSILLO 1996, 10-11.

159 *Empirismo eretico*, 199-200 (italics in the original). See also 205-207 and Il *sogno del centauro*, 24-25.

The "Greek films" are part of the "second period" of Pasolini's movie production, where "the balance between "technique" and "myth", the two tensions informing Pasolini's cinema, a balance always difficult to achieve and maintain, cracks and breaks up in favour of the second pole of attraction."[160] There is a remarkable temporal coincidence between the way he gets closer and closer to Greek culture and tragedy (he translates Aeschylus, re-reads Plato,[161] thinks about theatre in explicit connection with Greek drama,[162] writes the *Pilade*), his abandonment of cinematographic realism and his work on the concept of "cinema di poesia", with cinema now becoming his primary and most important activity.[163] He saw no radical breach in this development because, for all the reasons set out above, poetry and cinema are extremely close. In 1970 Pasolini was able to say that he had made his films "as a poet."[164]

Pasolini defines his "poetic cinema" as operating on two levels, the first of which he calls "continuous visual *mimesis*."[165] This complete immersion in the characters (also called "free indirect subjective") is remarkably reminiscent of Aristotle's *Poetics*: "according to our own nature we practice imitation" (1448 b), while tragedy as the most elevated form of poetry is "the imitation of a serious and accomplished action, having a certain magnitude" or, some lines later, "the imitation of an action performed by persons who act" (1449 b). And cinema is obviously the easiest way to "imitate" reality, as "the linguistic, or grammatical, institution of the cinematographic author is made up of images. And images are always concrete, never abstract."[166] But – again in perfect accord with Aristotle – cinema is verisimilitude not reality and "more philosophical" than history because it uses a language which, in its concreteness, is completely oneiric ("The linguistic instrument on which cinema is established is therefore of an irrational type and this explains the profoundly oneiric quality of the cinema, as well as its absolute and indispensable, in fact its conceptual, concreteness"), and is thus subjective and objective at the same time.[167] Cinema can also eliminate the principal weakness of theatrical representation, the unrepeatability of performance.[168]

Though there are some obvious differences from the Aristotelian conception of representation (e. g. the minor significance Pasolini attaches to the spoken word, as opposed to long and meaningful silences,[169] a prominent feature of his "poetic cinema"), the impression we get is that in that period (1960-1970) not only Plato – also cited at the beginning of an article on cinema: "La lingua scritta

160 FERRERO 1994², 63. On "cinema di poesia" see FERRERO 1994², 81-88.
161 *Il sogno del centauro*, 129. Pasolini tells us that he re-read Plato's dialogues in 1965, when he was ill.
162 CASCETTA 1991; BONANNO 1993, 137; ANGELINI 2000, 146.
163 FUSILLO 1996, 8.
164 *Al lettore nuovo*.
165 *Empirismo eretico*, 183. See CAMINATI 2007, 102-103.
166 *Empirismo eretico*, 172.
167 *Empirismo eretico*, 169.
168 BONANNO 1993, 153, where a parallel between Pasolini's cinema and Aristotle's *Poetics* is briefly drawn.
169 ZIMMERMANN 2002, 64.

della realtà", dating from 1965 –[170] was a fresh memory very present in Pasolini's mind, but also Aristotle, whom he either re-read or remembered from school. Accordingly, I believe that we must assume that Aristotle left a major mark on the realisation of his three "tragic" films. More generally, the attempt to create a form of cinema in which the imitation and representation of action is the supreme form of poetry appears "very Aristotelian."[171] This brings us back to the presence and function of myth, the "root" providing Pasolini's "ancient" movies with substance drawn both from Aristotle (who at 1451 b admits the possibility of tragedies with "new" contents but says in other passages that "at first poets accepted any plots, but today the best tragedies are written about a few families", 1453 a, and that "it is not right to break up the traditional stories", 1453 b) and from Freud, to propose a universal model of man and society. The language of cinema, says Pasolini, is a pre-human language, a language "that can be presupposed for a series of natural archetypes of communication" and accordingly is able to eternalise, to create myths. If Camus was right and tragedy makes its appearance when a new society takes the place of an older one (Pasolini's knowledge or ignorance of Camus' theories is unimportant but he was entirely convinced that a new society was coming into being), then this new society needs new archetypes, new myths, new "roots" and this can also be achieved by adapting old myths to new contents. That was the aim of Pasolini's work.

170 *Empirismo eretico*, 198.

171 The superiority of cinema to literature in the 20th century is explicitly posited by Pasolini: *Empirismo eretico*, 186.

SPARTA AND ANCIENT GREECE IN *THE 300 SPARTANS*

Fernando Lillo Redonet

1. *THE 300 SPARTANS* WITHIN THE CONTEXT OF *PEPLUM*: MAIN FEATURES

The influence of cinema and television has powerfully contributed to setting cultural icons, having been for most people the unique channel towards the knowledge of history. This applies certainly both for ancient Rome and for classical Greece, although Greek history has not deserved as much attention as Rome in the medium.

Cinema establishes a very particular dialogue with the past. The image of Greece in films often provides rather more contemporary views and ideas of the Greek world than pictures of the "real" Greece.[1] The image of cinematic Greece is therefore an artificial one, following the demands of genre, audiences and market, and being not always coincident with the "historical truth."

The 300 Spartans is no exception. The film shows an image of Sparta near to Western cultural *topoi*. Even if it makes accurate use of Greek sources such as Herodotus or Plutarch, clear references to the production's age are here recognisable. The movie broadcasts indeed a reinvented picture of historical Sparta according to the cultural taste and the historical context of 1961. The opposition between free Greek cities and the tyranny of the Persian Empire, transmitted by Herodotus, turns into a paradigm about the resistance of Western civilization against the Eastern menace. This antagonism leads to many political lessons, as we will see. Both historical fidelity and the multiplicity of lessons comprise valuable issues for a film's didactical analysis.[2] The fact that *The 300 Spartans* was an American production filmed in Greece contributed to the originality of the film, in which Greek and American interests joined. In this regard, Twentieth Century Fox was indeed at that time managed by the Greek-American Spyros P. Skouras, who was also responsible for the film locations in Greece and for the collaboration of the Royal Hellenic Army in the battle scenes. Besides, in 1955 a statue honouring Leonidas sponsored by Americans had been erected at the Thermopylae. Attending the fact that Greece was geographically nearer to the Warsaw Pact countries, the influence of Communism over Greece was considered as a plausible risk at that time.

For the same reason, Greeks were interested in the film as an issue to reinforce their Nationalism. Consequently, Leonidas is regarded rather as a Greek than as a Spartan. Greece is also presented as a united territory, nearer to the im-

1 Above all, historical films provide information of the production's age. About the incidence of the spirit of the age in films concerning the Roman antiquity, see WYKE 1997.

2 LILLO REDONET 1997, 141-158; 2004.

age of the modern country than to the real dispersion of the classic *poleis*. For Americans, the film was an adequate vehicle of propaganda to face the Communist enemy and recalled the decisive importance of the American intervention in the Second World War, when National Socialism menaced Western civilization. Besides, the Thermopylae-episode performed similar topics as the audience could find in *The Alamo*, directed by John Wayne, which had a successful première in 1960.

As an American production, the film enjoyed a bigger budget than other *pepla* of that time, which could be appreciated in its quality. We can observe this by comparing the film with *The Giant of Marathon* (*La battaglia di Maratona*, J. Tourneur, 1959), entirely produced with Italian capital and including all the genre's commonplaces.[3] *The 300 Spartans* shows instead an improved version of them.[4]

One of the *peplum*'s traits is the unavoidable love story. Here it is sketched by the relationship between Leonidas and Gorgo, and particularly by the secondary characters Phylon and Ellas. Being a *topos* of the genre, the inclusion of the love story is merely understandable in terms of the audience's demands, since this is in my view one of the weakest points of the film, which would have been better without it.[5]

A further trait of *pepla* is a way to classify characters according to the scheme heroes-villains and good-immoral female characters, as Siclier notes.[6] Typical *peplum*-heroes were muscular actors facing multiple dangers. A prototype of such a hero may be Philippides in *The Giant of Marathon*, featuring Steve Reeves, ex Mister Universe and usual actor in toga movies. Richard Egan, who played Leonidas in *The 300 Spartans*, was also well-known as a judo-fighter, but his physical presence was far from that of muscular heroes. Compared with the idea of the individual hero such as Philippides, and even if Leonidas plays a relevant part in the film, *The 300 Spartans* accentuates above all the collective values of the Spartan people.

In films dealing with Greek and Roman *topoi* women used to be represented according to a dichotomy between the good and innocent on the one hand and the seducer and wicked on the other. Thus, *The Giant of Marathon* offers a polarised image between the fragile Andromeda and the immoral Karis, who will die by trying to help Philippides. The women of *The 300 Spartans* are in some way also

3 LILLO REDONET 1997, 126-140.

4 On typical characteristics of *peplum*, see LILLO REDONET 1994, 13-16; 1997, 21-29.

5 For instance, among the unfortunate sentences attributed to Phylon, we find the following: "This is a really good war. They say Xerxes has brought 100 nations with him. Isn't that wonderful?"

6 SICLIER 1962, 30: "Depuis cinquante ans, les personnages des films historiques restent coulés dans les même moules. Tout en ayant des caractéristiques morales définies par leur physique (les héros sont jeunes, beaux, musclés, regardent bien en face; les traîtres sont noirs de poil, barbus, cauteleux et regardent de côté; les vamps se reconnaissent à leur maquillage et leurs allures lascives, les ingénues à leur oeil pur et leur mise décente) ces personnages doivent correspondre à une idée populaire de l'Histoire, qu'elle soit antique, médiévale ou plus récente."

portrayed according to this scheme, but with a certain touch of originality. Gorgo and Ellas personify purity and innocence, whereas Artemisia is shown as a *femme fatale* until the end of the film, when her real identity as a Greek spy is revealed to the viewers.

The stereotype of the villain in *peplum* uses to be libidinous and cunning, being mostly represented as a tyrant or usurper. Good examples are the Neronian despot in *The Colossus of Rhodes* (*Il colosso di Rodi*, 1960) or the usurper Pelias in *Hercules (Le Fatiche di Ercole,* 1957) and *Jason and the Argonauts* (1963). Beside caricaturised adversaries, we find more elaborate characters, such as Antinous in *Ulysses* (*Ulisse*, 1954) and King Darius in *Alexander the Great* (1956). Darius is presented as a noble character, moving the audience into compassion when he is murdered by his own men. In Oliver Stone's *Alexander* (2004), King Darius is depicted with a certain respect, too, avoiding the caricature. In this case, King Xerxes appears as a genuine tyrant, although David Farrar's performance shows no traces of the histrionic tendencies attributed to the typical villains of the Italian *peplum*.

A distinctive feature of this kind of films was also the introduction of amazing adventures and spectacular action pieces. In films dealing with myth a muscular hero is expected to face multiple dangers, including fabulous monsters and impressive warriors. Such heroism is used to accentuate individual performances, like Philippides in *The Giant of Marathon*, whose almost superhuman force was going to play a decisive role in the battle. Although Leonidas appears as the leader of his troops, in *The 300 Spartans* heroism is the result of collective efforts. In addition, the negligible credibility and doubtful quality of the battle scenes in *The Giant of Marathon* or *Alexander the Great* contrast with the authenticity observed at Thermopylae in *The 300 Spartans*. Nevertheless, they can not be compared with the realism and historic fidelity of the recreation of Gaugamela in Oliver Stone's *Alexander* (2004), without any doubt the best Greek battle-scene ever filmed.

The influence of comics and their aesthetics in the stylization of characters and the creation of distinctive *peplum*-prototypes[7] should not be forgotten, too. In our case, the characters are depicted schematically and prototypically in a moderate rate, and they even succeed in transmitting their feelings. The influence of comics is manifest in the recent production *300* (Zack Snyder, 2006), based on the work of the same name by Frank Miller. Miller had been deeply touched indeed by *The 300 Spartans* as a child, and the film later became the source inspiration for his own work

Summing up, *The 300 Spartans* towers above other contemporary productions. Its heroes appear convincing to us, albeit several stereotypical depictions.

7 As SICLIER 1962, 31 points out regarding *La guerra di Troia* (G. Ferroni, 1961): "C'est Homère adapté pour le comic-strips et toutes les phrases du dialogue pourraient s'inscrire au-dessous de la tête des personnages, dans ces petits ballons que les Italiens appellent *fumetti* et qui avaient, d'abord, donné leur nom aux romans-photos sentimentaux. Tous les films à péplums sont conçus dans l'optique de la bande dessinée; c'est ce qui leur donne leur style général."

Exterior locations in Greece and the battle scenes further provide a touch of authenticity to the viewers. The photography by Geoffrey Unsworth, the soundtrack by the Greek composer Manos Hadjidakis (1925-1994) and the format of cinemascope contribute to the quality of the film, too. This film is one of the best works directed by Rudolph Maté, a respected cinematographer who had already filmed a low-budget Italo-American *peplum* called *Revak, lo schiavo di Cartagine / The Barbarians* in 1960.

As already quoted, many political lessons are found in the film. One of them is declared in the promotional paper, in which the movie's background is associated with the Second World War. "Like D-Day", said Richardson in this, "the Battle of Thermopylae was a turning point in history, one of those happily infrequent moments when the forces of freedom and those of totalitarianism square off for a final showdown. And in both cases the armies of tyranny had the upper hand."[8] Moreover a parallel between Xerxes and Hitler is drawn here:

> "History has seen "world conquerors" come and go – Alexander, Julius Caesar, Napoleon, to name a few – but only Hitler had blacker intentions when he set out to rule the world than a man named Xerxes, the Emperor of Persia 24 centuries ago. In the fourth century BC (sic), the Persian Empire, located east of the Mediterranean Sea, controlled all the known world except Greece, a tiny peninsula made up of numerous city states. Xerxes decided to invade this last outpost of freedom with the largest army the world has ever seen. He amassed a military force of five million soldiers and advanced on Greece to be met at the narrow pass of Thermopylae by a token force of 300 Spartan soldiers."[9]

M. Éloy[10] compares the film's subtext with the Greek resistance during the Second World War, which suggests an obvious parallelism: As the sacrifice of the 300 Spartans enabled, by winning precious time, the final victory over the Persians at Salamis, so the German army wasted too much time in occupying Greece. With five weeks of delay, Hitler was obliged to postpone the planned invasion of the Soviet Union, which resulted in the well-known catastrophe. In addition, even in 1941 the Thermopylae had been the scenario of a military resistance by Greek and Australian troops against the III. Reich.

On the other hand we must consider that the film was produced in the early sixties. The defence of a Western democratic resistance facing the tyranny of the old Eastern world ruled by Persians implies here a reading in terms of democratic statements during the Cold War.[11] Furthermore, for American audiences the heroic resistance and death of the three hundred Spartans transmitted an image comparable to the one of the defenders in *The Alamo*.[12]

Even more didactic proposals are aimed towards American viewers in the film's pressbook, for example in a "Radio contest": "Local afternoon radio-shows for ladies will be interested in this gimmick: have a contest inviting letters dis-

8 PRESSBOOK 1962, 2.
9 PRESSBOOK 1962, 2.
10 ÉLOY 2005 a.
11 DE ESPAÑA 1998, 174.
12 HENDRYX 2002: "The battle of Thermopylae presents a clear parallel to the saga of Travis and his Texians, a comparison that was obvious immediately to observers in 1836, who dubbed the Alamo 'America's Thermopylae.'"

cussing "How America's domestic problems might be solved by adopting more Spartan customs." Also a so-called "Kids' Essay Contest" is proposed: "Either in conjunction with your local newspaper or with public school history departments, sponsor a contest for the best essay on one or more of the following topics: (1) What if the Persians had conquered Greece? (2) How do the customs of ancient Sparta compare with ours? (3) How were modern military strategies influenced by the Battle of Thermopylae?"[13]

The final scene of the film showing the monument of the Unknown Soldier at the Sintagma-Square in Athens reminded Greeks of all their centuries of fighting and in particular of their war of independence against the Turkish invader coming from the East.

2. Analysis of the film and its sources

In this chapter, we will follow the scenarios of the film's action, identifying certain quotes from Herodotus and Plutarch. Literary quotations are frequent in the movie and provide a classic flair to the movie.[14]

2.1 Preamble and invasion of Greece

While several icon-like images of Greece are shown to the viewers (the Acropolis as a symbol of western culture, the commemorative pillar at the Thermopylae with Semonides' epitaph on the fallen soldiers and scenes of Spartan warriors), the narrator connects the Greek past with the present:

> "Greece, that hard and timeless land where even the stones speak of man's courage, of his endurance, of his glory. And none more eloquently than this lonely pillar in a desolate pass some 200 miles north of modern Athens. Across the hush of 24 centuries, this is the story of a turning point in history. Of a blazing day when 300 Greek warriors fought here, to hold with their lives their freedom and ours."

Further views of the Acropolis and the Parthenon follow, accompanied by the martial music composed by Manos Hadjidakis. The next scene shows the Persian army:

> "In the year 480 BC, King Xerxes of Persia set in motion his enormous slave empire to crush the small group of independent Greek states –the only stronghold of freedom still remaining in the then known world..."

Both images and introductory texts attempt to lead modern spectators to history. They also transmit a global idea of liberty opposed to tyranny. All possible interpretations of the film are indeed channelled into this ideological scheme.

13 Pressbook 1962, 5.

14 Solomon 2001, 40: "The ancients loved their aphorisms, and a generous sprinkling of them – whether genuinely venerable or crafted to seem so – helps create an "ancient" atmosphere on film."

The Persian army is represented in all its extension crossing Greece during seven days and seven nights. The incessant parade of soldiers accentuates the overwhelming superiority of the Persians and makes the heroic resistance of the 300 Spartans even more admirable. According to modern historians, there have been around 7.000 Greeks from different *poleis* at Thermopylae – among them 1.000 Spartans, including the famous 300 and 700 Perioecian hoplites. In contrast to the Greeks the Persian forces disposed of around 300.000 soldiers. Only the 300 are however mentioned in the film – with the exception of the testified support of Thespians – which accentuates even more the courage of the Spartans facing a much higher number of enemies.[15] The number of 300.000, even already remarkably high, contrasts even more with the exaggerated five million Persians proposed by the advertising promotion of 20th Century-Fox. In an interview included in the pressbook Sir Ralph Richardson corroborated this amount, too:

> "However in many ways Thermopylae was the more rugged test of freedom's ability to survive. The ancient Greeks were surprised by an army of not less than five million soldiers – the largest ever seen – and at first they could only muster 300 men in their defence. These 300 soldiers were hastily called from the city-state of Sparta to defend the narrow pass of Thermopylae....and had they not put up the most heroic fight in the annals of warfare the Persians would almost certainly have subdued Greece and erased western civilization at its very beginning."[16]

These words put emphasis on the numeric disproportion and the significance of the battle for Western civilization. The number of five million Persians is actually stated in Pseudo-Plutarchus' *Parallela Minora*.[17]

In the next scene, the figure of Xerxes is introduced to the viewers speaking and acting as a tyrant:

> "Whip them on if they are slow. I am anxious to avenge my father's defeat. (...) It was my father's dream: one world, one master. But at Marathon, 10 years ago, he sent a mere wave. I am leading an ocean!"

Xerxes' interrogation of the Spartan spy Agathon in the next scene highlights the film's main ideological message: Persian tyranny versus Greek liberty. Once again, this dialogue and the previous words of the Great King could be perfectly transferred to the twentieth-century context by replacing Xerxes with Hitler:

> "Xerxes: Tell me, is it true that the Spartans are the bravest warriors in all Greece?
> Agathon: You will find that out for yourself...
> Xerxes: Fool! You have but few men. Your little country is divided. You have no single ruler. How can you defy me, the master of the whole world?
> Agathon: That's not for you to understand, sir. For you are the master of slavery. And you know nothing of freedom."

The scene is based on a dialogue by Herodotus in which Xerxes faces Demaratus, Spartan king in exile.[18] In the film, Xerxes spares Agathon's life for the following reason:

15 ÉLOY 2005 b.
16 PRESSBOOK 1962, 2.
17 Plut. *Mor.* 306c.
18 Hdt.VII, 101-104.

> "Xerxes: I have spared your life, but not out of pity. I am told the Greeks are holding some assembly at Corinth. Go there, and tell them what you have seen here. The power that neither man nor the gods can thwart."

These words epitomise the Persian *hybris*, the determination of overcoming the gods, which, according to the Greek mentality, was considered to be one of the reasons of the Great King's breakdown.

Again from Herodotus, the film shows a dialogue between Xerxes and Demaratus.[19]

> "Xerxes: Demaratus, you were once king of those people. Tell me, do you really believe that Sparta will fight?
> Demaratus: Do you wish for a truthful answer or an agreeable one?
> Xerxes: Tell me the truth. I shan't hold it against you.
> Demaratus: Sparta will fight, even if the rest submit.
> Xerxes: How can they do anything together when they have two kings ruling them?"

2.2 Assembly in Corinth

The next film-scenario is an acceptable *bouleuterion* at Corinth, where the Greeks have been assembled. During the assembly, two positions are confronted: the independence of the Greek cities or their unity. The words of one of the speakers are eloquent per se:

> "As I said before, the independence of our cities is the cornerstone of our freedom. Therefore I propose that each city deals with this problem independently without surrender of its dignity. But also without futile heroics which can only end in the mass suicide of the Greek race."

Facing this view, Themistocles defends the unity of Greece. Overtones recall here the Second World War or the Cold War: for instance: "The whole of Asia" = III. Reich / the countries of the Warsaw Pact; "tide of tyranny" = Hitler / Communism:

> "The whole of Asia is descending upon us. Many times more men than there are Greeks. These men are fierce, savage, bloodthirsty, merciless. But that is not the reason why we

19 Hdt. VII, 101, 2-102: "So tell me: will the Greeks offer battle and oppose me? I think that even if all the Greeks and all the men of the western lands were assembled together, they are not powerful enough to withstand my attack, unless they are united. Still I want to hear from you what you say of them". To this question Demaratus answered, "O king, should I speak the truth or try to please you?" Xerxes bade him speak the truth and said that it would be no more unpleasant for him than before. Demaratus heard this and said, "O King, since you bid me by all means to speak the whole truth, and to say what you will not later prove to be false, in Hellas poverty is always endemic, but courage is acquired as the fruit of wisdom and strong law; by use of this courage Hellas defends herself from poverty and tyranny. Now I praise all the Greeks who dwell in those Dorian lands, yet I am not going to speak these words about all of them, but only about the Lacedaemonians. First, they will never accept conditions from you that bring slavery upon Hellas; and second, they will meet you in battle even if all the other Greeks are on your side. Do not ask me how many these men are who can do this; they will fight with you whether they have an army of a thousand men, or more than that, or less." Translated by A. D. Godley, Loeb.

> should fear them. That is not the source of their power. Their power lies in their unity. Unity! Remember that one terrible word which will surely destroy Greece, unless we counter it with a unity of our own. A unity of free men fighting together resisting this united tide of tyranny."

The opposition between diversity and unity is also transferred to the religious sphere. Themistocles' contender makes a conscious use of the first part of a Delphic oracle to prevent the Greeks from a sure defeat:

> "Fly to the world's end, doomed ones. Leave your homes. For fire and the headlong god of war shall bring you low."

Yet, showing his rhetorical abilities, Themistocles completes the prediction and offers a plausible interpretation:

> "Here is the rest of the prediction: "Then far-seeing Jove grants this to the prayers of Athene: safe shall the wooden wall continue for thee and thy children."
> "Our new Athenian ships, manned by the bravest sailors in the world. There is our wooden wall."

The film's oracle is again based on two different answers from Delphi transmitted by Herodotus[20].

During the assembly we are present at the personal union between Leonidas, King of Sparta, and Themistocles, who are going to establish a common strategy standing in front of an improbable but didactical map of Greece. In terms of World War II, we identify Leonidas with the Americans and Themistocles with the Britons (and allies), building a perfect alliance against the common enemy. As D. Elley points out, this image is reinforced by both actors and their physical presence: "Richard Egan's Leonidas and Ralph Richardson's Themistocles form a perfect contrast of body vs Mind, Dorian vs Ionian – the twin tensions in Greek life – albeit in Anglo-Saxon terms (Egan's physical American vs Richardson's suave Englishman)."[21] On the other side, the strategy proposed by both characters has been adapted from Herodotus[22] again.

The Corinthian assembly, where diverse opinions are discussed and decisions are taken according to the majority, contrasts with a parallel scene between Xerxes and Hydarnes in the camp of the Great King. Xerxes answer to his adviser gives evidence of his tyrannical mode: "It's my war and I'll conduct it my way."

2.3 Sparta

The third location is Sparta. The first image shows a column of young warriors marching among buildings in the Doric style, traditionally associated with virility. The recognition ceremony of Philon as a Spartan warrior follows, in which Gorgo entrusts him with the shield and recalls to him the Spartan laws (fig. 5):

> "Gorgo: Are you ready to hear the laws sacred to a Spartan warrior?
> Phylon: Yes, Queen Gorgo.

20 Hdt. VII, 140-143
21 ELLEY 1984, 69.
22 Hdt. VII, 175-177.

> Gorgo: Here they are. You must treasure freedom above life. Shun pleasure for the sake of virtue. Endure pain and hardship in silence. Obey orders implicitly. Seek the enemies of Greece wherever they may be, and fight them fearlessly, until victory or death."

The scene of the shield is accompanied by these words:

> "Gorgo: Now taking the place of your dead mother, I'm giving you this shield. There are but these five words to remember: *e tan e epi tas*.
> A Spartan woman: What does it mean?
> Ellas: With this or on this. Either come home victorious with this shield, or dead on it."

The didactical purpose of this dialogue is to explain to modern audiences the Spartan *topos* of coming back with or on the shield transmitted by Plutarch.[23]

In the next scene, Leonidas speaks to a Spartan council of five members. It is not clear whether the council corresponds to the *gerusia* (council of seniors) or to the *ephoros* (council of five members). The council refuses in any case to support Athens, displaying in this way the attested tensions between the Greek *poleis*. Leonidas introduces here his dream of one united Greece:

> "Leonidas: But the council must act quickly.
> Xenathon, Spartan Isolationist: Why?
> Leonidas: In order that we Spartans may reach the first line of defense in time.
> Xenathon, Spartan Isolationist: And where might that be?
> Leonidas: The Pass of Thermopylae.
> Xenathon, Spartan Isolationist: Thermopylae, of course. That's the pass that protects Athens.
> Leonidas: No! It's the pass that protects Greece! Mere cities don't matter now. It is Greece that counts! Only by being united can we hope to avoid slavery. Now, I am no politician, but I will plead this cause with you until the moon wanes and the night brings forth a new day!"

This idea appears again in a private dialogue between Leonidas and his wife, who tries to convince him to remain in Sparta. Leonidas' words seem here to project future visions of Greek history.

> "Gorgo: Thermpopylae? But that's so far away from Sparta.
> Leonidas: To a Greek, no part of Greece is far away."

The Council finally decides to support Athens, but only after the celebration of a festival. Their members have also consulted the Delphic oracle, in which a prediction of death for one of Sparta's kings has been prophesied. The answer given by the oracle in the film is based on Herodotus:[24]

> "Dwellers in glorious Sparta, hear now the words of your fate. Either your famous city goes down in front of the Persians, or if your city is spared, the land of Sparta must mourn for the death of one of her kings."

Nevertheless, Leonidas and his personal guard, three hundred Spartans, decide to leave in the hope of being followed by the whole Greek army.

A further scene shows the liberty and vigour *topoi* attributed to Spartan women:

23 Plut. *Mor.* 241f: "Another, as she handed her son his shield, exhorted him, saying, 'Either with this or upon this'." Translated by Frank Cole Babbitt, Loeb.

24 Hdt. VII, 220.

> "Gorgo: Sparta gives her women more freedom than any state. In return it demands strength.
> Ellas: How can I be strong? I love him.
> Gorgo: You must be strong. Remember the mother who killed her son when he returned with a wound in his back."

This anecdote is based on several testimonies about Spartan women transmitted by Plutarch in his *Sayings of Spartan Women*.[25]

Other well known *topoi* on the Spartan society are revealed in a later scene by a goatherd who meets Phylon at the Thermopylae:

> "Phylon: Have you not heard of Sparta?
> Goatherd: They speak little, fight much. Eat that black broth that turns up the stomach and their girls go about naked."

The goatherd summarises in this way the Spartan laconism, symbolised by the short speech-form, the image of a martial society, the black broth and the bigger liberty conceded to their women.[26]

Plutarch's Moralia probably also inspired the last dialogue between Leonidas and Gorgo showing a Spartan saying:[27]

> "Gorgo: A mere 300 men.
> Leonidas: Since when have Spartans started counting numbers going into battle?"

Philon, who is in love with Ellas, Leonidas' niece, is obliged then to retire from the army for his father is suspected to be a traitor. Yet, Ellas convinces him to take his shield and follow the Spartans to the Thermopylae.

At the bay of Locris, Leonidas meets Themistocles again. We notice here once more Themistocles' Pan-Hellenism and the perfect symbiosis between politics and weapons embodied by both characters:

> "Themistocles: I'm nothing but a sentimental old fool desperately in love with a dream: one free united Greece.
> Leonidas: I thank the gods I am only a soldier.
> Themistocles: And I thank them I'm a politician. Between us we may make our dream come true."

2.4 Thermopylae

The last scenario is the pass of Thermopylae. In his tent Xerxes is informed that the Spartans are repairing the wall and getting their weapons ready for the battle. In the meantime, Phylon and Ellas are received by an old goatherd and his wife. Among them lives the mysterious Ephialtes, who furtively listens to the old man reporting to Phylon the existence of a path surrounding the mountains, which could put the Greeks in danger. Leonidas is later informed of that and gives instructions for the path to be kept under surveillance. Leonidas prepares a nocturnal assault against the Persian camp in order to win time. This episode is inspired

25 Plut. *Mor*. 240f-241a.
26 These last two features are referred to by Plutarch in his *Life of Lycurgus*: Plut. *Lyc*. 14, 12; 14, 2-8.
27 Plut. *Mor*. 225c.

in Diodorus Siculus 11, 10;[28] yet the Greek historian contextualises the facts after the Greeks had been betrayed and not before. Diodorus tells us the attack was headed by Leonidas himself, provoking a great disorder among the Persians, who confused many of their men with the enemy. The anecdote, however, isn't mentioned by Herodotus and modern historians consider the episode improbable. Although the attack fails, it leads to Phylon's rehabilitation by saving the life of his future father-in-law, Pentheus.

A messenger from Sparta communicates the Council's decision not to send the whole army. Before the imminent battle begins, another plutarchian dialogue between Leonidas and one of his soldiers takes place.[29]

> "Spartan soldier: The Enemy is on the move. Drawing nearer to us.
> Leonidas: Good, It also means that we are drawing nearer to them."

After the first Persian offensive has been rebuffed, the Persians send Hydarnes to negotiate with the Spartans.

> "Hydarnes: Yesterday, we only probed your defences. When we attack today, our arrows will blot out the sun!
> Leonidas: Then we will fight in the shade.
> Hydarnes: But this slaughter is useless. Surrender your arms and my king will spare you and your Spartans. What shall I tell him?
> Leonidas: Molón labé! Come and take them!"

This dialogue goes over two Spartan proverbs written by Plutarch.[30] Herodotus attributes, however, the anecdote of the arrows to a Spartan called Dieneces.[31]

28 Diodorus Siculus 11, 10: "The soldiers, then, in accordance with the orders given them, forming in a compact body fell by night upon the encampment of the Persians, Leonidas leading the attack; and the barbarians, because of the unexpectedness of the attack and their ignorance of the reason for it, ran together from their tents with great tumult and in disorder, and thinking that the soldiers who had set out with the Trachinian had perished and that the entire force of the Greeks was upon them, they were struck with terror. Consequently many of them were slain by the troops of Leonidas, and even more perished at the hands of their comrades, who in their ignorance took them for enemies. For the night prevented any understanding of the true state of affairs, and the confusion, extending as it did throughout the entire encampment, occasioned, we may well believe, great slaughter; since they kept killing one another, the conditions not allowing close scrutiny, because there was no order from a general nor any demanding of a password nor, in general, any recovery of reason. Indeed, if the king had remained at the royal pavilion, he also could easily have been slain by the Greeks and the whole war would have reached a speedy conclusion; but as it was, Xerxes had rushed out to the tumult, and the Greeks broke into the pavilion and slew almost to a man all whom they caught there. So long as it was night they wandered throughout the entire camp seeking Xerxes—a reasonable action; but when the day dawned and the entire state of affairs was made manifest, the Persians, observing that the Greeks were few in number, viewed them with contempt; the Persians did not, however, join battle with them face to face, fearing their valour, but they formed on their flanks and rear, and shooting arrows and hurling javelins at them from every direction they slew them to a man. Now as for the soldiers of Leonidas who guarded the passes of Thermopylae, such was the end of life they met." Translated by C. H. Oldfather, Loeb.

29 Plut. *Mor.* 225 b.

30 Plut. *Mor.* 225b-d: "When someone said, 'Because of the arrows of the barbarians it is impossible to see the sun,' he said, 'Won't it be nice, then, if we shall have shade in which to fight

To face Leonidas' challenge, Xerxes sends his Immortals to the battle, being also rebuffed by the Spartans. At this point, it is interesting to examine both the battle and the equipment and tactics attributed to Spartans and Persians in the film.[32] In opposition to Solomon "Maté created one of the most exciting and authentic ancient battles ever put on film",[33] I can't completely agree with this opinion anymore. Although it is true, that this was by long the best ancient battle filmed until that moment, it is clearly inferior to the historic reconstruction of the Gaugamela-battle in *Alexander* (O. Stone, 2004). Conveniently fitting in the fashions of the production's epoch, Spartans are here represented as carefully shaved warriors. They also wear short hair, which contrasts to the report by a Persian spy reported by Herodotus: "He saw some of the men exercising naked and others combing their hair."[34] In Frank Miller's comic and recent cinematic adaptation, *300*, the Spartans are shown with long hair and even beard, but they fight almost naked instead of wearing the characteristic armour and greaves.

Two types of helmets, with and without nose guard, are used in the film. The latter are chosen here for the main characters in order to make them recognizable to the audience. At that time, however, hoplites were dressed with the typical closed-forehead helmets. For it was essential that the enemy saw the hoplite as a war-machine and not as a man. This inhumane aspect of closed helmets was typical in gladiatorial fights, too.

Spartans are correctly dressed with bronze armour whereas Thespians wear the *linothorax*, a much lighter protection. Historically, the *linothorax* was commonly used at Thermopylae and heavier armours would have been merely employed as relics of the past or by conservative Spartans. In this way, the film draws attention to the differences between Spartans and Thespians by emphasising the conservative character, the strength and resistance of the former, suggested by their armours. Spartan shields are depicted with the lambda of Lacedaemonia, transmitting an image of uniformity, which was indeed far from reality. Each soldier supplied actually his own equipment, which was individually decorated. The introduction of the lambda seems to have been posterior to this epoch, dated perhaps between 475-450 BC. The idea of uniformity in the film contributes to the message of Greek unity and the thought of a compact group fighting for collective instead of individual principles.

them?; When Xerxes wrote again, 'Hand over your arms.' He wrote in reply, 'Come and take them.'" Translated by Frank Cole Babbitt, Loeb.

31 Hdt. VII, 226: "The Spartan Dieneces is said to have exhibited the greatest courage of all. They say that he made the following speech before they joined battle with the Medes: he had learned from a Trachinian that there were so many of the barbarians that when they shot their missiles, the sun was hidden by the multitude of their arrows. He was not at all disturbed by this and made light of the multitude of the Medes, saying that their Trachinian foreigner brought them good news. If the Medes hid the sun, they could fight them in the shade instead of in the sun." Translated by A. D. Godley, Loeb.

32 I am grateful to Prof Fernando Quesada, member of the Department of Prehistory and Archaeology of the Universidad Autónoma of Madrid, for his useful ideas on Spartan military tactics and weapons.

33 SOLOMON 2001, 40.

34 Hdt.VII, 208, 3.

Particularly striking is the red colour of the Spartan cloaks, excellently photographed by Geoffrey Unsworth. At certain moment of the film, Phylon says: "The red war-cloaks are so becoming to men. This way no enemy will ever see Spartan blood." Nevertheless, it is almost certain that the cloak was not used during the battle.

Concerning the tactic, the scenes showing the Spartans throwing themselves on the floor in the first combat and Phylon setting fire to the straw in the fight against the Immortals have been clearly invented for the script. On Spartan war tactics Herodotus tells the following:

> "The Lacedaemonians fought memorably, showing themselves skilled fighters amidst unskilled on many occasions, as when they would turn their backs and feign flight. The barbarians would see them fleeing and give chase with shouting and noise, but when the Lacedaemonians were overtaken, they would turn to face the barbarians and overthrow innumerable Persians. A few of the Spartans themselves were also slain. When the Persians could gain no inch of the pass, attacking by companies and in every other fashion, they withdrew."[35]

Spartans used to fight in a phalanx-system in which each warrior protected the companion on the left side with his own shield. Yet, in the film we almost find a single row of soldiers, which in fact wouldn't have been very helpful against a Persian attack. The real force of the Spartan phalanx relied on its compact superposed structure, usually composed of a row of eight-soldiers deep. This configuration enabled a much more effective pressure on the enemy's defences.[36] Moreover, spears were held above the shields and not, as shown in the film, beside them.

Sounds of flutes and war songs were usually used by the Spartans during the battle. This feature is reflected in the movie during the journey to Thermopylae and the final battle.

The final part of the film begins with the treason of Ephialtes in revealing the secret path to the Persian king. Whereas Leonidas and his army are being surrounded by the Persians, Phylon and Ellas succeed in leaving the camp. This choice gives the viewers a small happy-ending contrasting to the predicted tragedy to come. In the final combat, the Spartans attack using a V-shaped formation, which had been announced in the film's posters: "See the first use of the flying wedge!"; a clear allusion to American football[37] (fig. 26). During the battle, Leonidas dies and the rest of his men, refusing to surrender to the enemy, are enclosed and killed by the Persian arrows. The rain of arrows falling on the Spartans, one of the most beautiful scenes of the film, provides a dramatic backdrop to their heroic resistance.

35 Hdt.VII, 211, 3. Translated by A. D. Godley, Loeb.

36 The clash between the phalange and the enemy is succinctly displayed in the film *300* (Zack Snyder, 2006). The scene shows Leonidas encouraging his soldiers to push against the Persians. Nevertheless, the rest of the battle is nearer to heroic fantasies than to historical facts.

37 PRESSBOOK 1962, 3, 4, 6.

2.5 Epilogue

The off-voice of the narrator remembers the famous epitaph by Semonides evoking the fallen Spartans. The audience is then told about the victorious end of the war against the Persians, turned into a paradigm of any confrontation between democracy and tyranny:

> Narrator: "Oh, Stranger, tell the Spartans that we lie here obedient to their word. This last message of the fallen heroes rallied Greece to victory, first at Salamis, as predicted, and then at Plataea. But it was more than a victory for Greece. It was a stirring example to free people throughout the world of what a few brave men can accomplish once they refuse to submit to tyranny."

The moral message appears thus obvious. It shows the universalism of the fight for freedom facing oppression. This is indeed a topic always inspiring cinematic approaches, as the new film on Thermopylae, *300* (Zack Snyder, 2006) proves. Making use of aesthetics nearer to comics and videogames, *300* brings the historical episode closer to new generations of audiences.

"A RARE ENSAMPLE OF FRIENDSHIP TRUE": THE STORY OF DAMON AND PYTHIAS

Irene Berti

1. 1962: DAMON AND PYTHIAS IN THE GOLDEN AGE OF THE *PEPLUM*

Night in Syracuse. The streets are deserted, every window is closed as the patrolling guards pass by. The town cringes under the yoke of Dionysius the First's cruel tyranny. But somewhere, in what looks like a catacomb, a number of people are planning resistance.[1] It is a secret meeting of the Pythagoreans, who believe in brotherhood and peace and have committed themselves to non-violent opposition against the tyrant.

Thus begins the film by Curtis Bernhardt, *Damon and Pythias / Il tiranno di Siracusa* (International Motion Pictures / Metro Goldwin Mayer, 1962), an Italo-American co-production starring Don Burnett in the role of Pythias and Guy Williams (better known as Disney's Zorro) in the role of Damon.[2] The movie is based on a famous ancient anecdote.

In the late 1950s and early 1960s Hollywood was engaged in the production of long and expensive epic films about the ancient world. The main American studios competed with one another in the production of movies on historical, mythical or biblical subjects. MGM released *Ben-Hur* (1959), Warner Bros *Hannibal* (1960), Universal *Spartacus* (1960), 20th Century Fox *The 300 Spartans* (1962), Columbia *Jason and the Argonauts* (1963) and so forth. In 1963, one year after *Damon and Pythias*, the financial flop suffered by the multimillion-dollar production of *Cleopatra* was to slow down the production of movies on ancient subjects for many years to come and put an end to the golden age of the *peplum* genre.

Damon and Pythias is a rather boring *peplum*, characterised by a moralizing tone and pretentious dialogue.

Pythias is an Athenian Pythagorean who moves to Syracuse in spite of opposition from his pregnant wife Nerissa (Ilaria Occhini) in order to guard over the security of Arcanos (Andrea Bosic), one of the highest members of the sect, and

1 On a venue for the shooting of the Pythagorean meeting in the Roman Baths of Caracalla, see N. GARCIA in this volume, 31.

2 Curtis Bernhardt, whose real name was Kurt Bernhardt, was born in Worms and started his career in Germany, where he directed major stars like Marlene Dietrich. After the Nazis took over power, he moved to France and later to the United States, where he worked in Hollywood from 1940 to his death in 1981. He became one of the most important directors of the Warner Bros. Studios and directed famous stars like Humphrey Bogart (*Conflict*, 1945; *Sirocco*, 1951) and Bette Davis (*A Stolen Life*, 1946; *Payment on Demand*, 1951).

bring him back to Athens, where he is to take over from his predecessor, now dead, as leader of the sect. Arcanos is a kind of "pre-Christian" apostle who lives in concealment and is persecuted by the tyrant Dionysius the First (Alberto Lupo). As soon as Pythias arrives in Syracuse, he falls into a trap set for him by Damon, a sort of gentlemen-thief and double agent who first robs him, then saves him from the guards of Dionysius and takes him to his place, where they become friends. Damon promises Pythias to help him find Arcanos. Though Damon is not insensitive to the Pythagorean ideals of fraternity embodied by Pythias, he later decides to denounce Pythias and Arcanos in return for a horse. Suddenly regretting this betrayal of his friend, he saves the lives of the two Pythagoreans and when Pythias is finally captured he offers himself as a surety, in order to enable him to pay a last visit to his wife, who is seriously ill and seems likely to die. Thus Damon is imprisoned and Pythias moves to Athens. When it is time to return, Pythias' desperate wife, who has had her baby and is now fully recovered, tries to stop him, but he is too faithful to his ideals to leave Damon to die in his place. On his way back to Syracuse, Pythias has to escape to Dionysius' guards, who try to kill him, in order to prevent him from saving his friend and thus proving the power of friendship. In Syracuse everything is set for Damon's execution but Pythias arrives in time to take his place. The enthusiastic crowd and the little son of Dionysius plead for the release of the two friends and the tyrant lets them go.

2. PREDECESSORS

The film had a number of predecessors in the silent-movie era. In 1909 a film with the title *Damon and Pythias* by an unknown director was produced in Great Britain by Rayleigh & Robert.[3] In the same year, the Italian director Luigi Maggi, who had just scored a great success with his *Gli ultimi giorni di Pompei (The Last days of Pompeii)*, directed *L'ostaggio (Damone e Pizia)* produced by Arturo Ambrosio (Turin). A French film version of the story, now probably lost, was made in 1911 under the title *Le Tyran de Syracuse* by Louis Feuillade, a famous French silent-movie director who made many films about ancient history and mythology, before finally turning to his favourite subjects: vampires.[4] In 1908 and 1914 the American Otis Turner[5] directed two silent movies with the same title: *Damon and Pythias.*[6]

3 I could not find any other information about this movie. A complete list of the movies on the subject can be found in AZIZA 1998, 144-145; and VERRETH: http://www.arts.kuleuven.be/alo/klassieke/docs/film.doc, 28-43.

4 The majority of Feuillade's films are lost; among many others, he directed *Prométhée* (1908), *La Vierge d'Argos* (1911), *Héliogabale* (1911) and *L'Agonie de Byzance* (1913).

5 Otis Turner's best known film is *Sheridan's Ride* (Universal, 1912). He was famous for his crowd scenes, in which he used hundreds of extras and transcended the limits of a theatrical representation.

6 I could not find the version of 1908; P. Michelakis kindly helped me to find a copy of the 1914 film.

The 1914 six-reel epic movie produced by Universal, was one of the first feature films made at Universal City, the new Hollywood Universal Pictures Studios. It involved a cast of thousands of extra and starred some famous actors of the period, like Ann Little (Calanthe) and Cleo Madison (Hermione), one of Universal's busiest leading ladies. The role of Dionyios was taken by the later film director Frank Lloyd.

Produced on a scale commensurate with the biggest of the contemporary Italian epics (or so the producers claimed), *Damon and Pythias*, written by Ruth Ann Baldwin[7] and adapted by Allan Dwan, was an enormous financial success and remained on circuit for several years.[8]

The plot is relatively simple. Dionysius, the commander of the Syracusan army, secretly aspires to the throne and has fallen in love with Calanthe, betrothed to Pythias (Herbert Rawlinson), one of his bravest generals. Pythias' older friend Damon (William Worthington) is a senator (!), who tries to thwart Dionysius' claim to power. Sicily is under threat from the Carthaginians, who are close to Agrigentum and about to take the town. When the commander of the Greek forces in Agrigentum calls for help, Dionysius seizes the chance of sending Pythias away from Syracuse and Calanthe. "Men make war and women weep", says intertitle 13, opening a section that shows the saddened Calanthe with her maids. Meanwhile, the Carthaginians have been defeated and Pythias is the hero of all Sicily. Coming back on a Carthaginian ship, he learns from Damon that Dionysius is conspiring with some of the senators to set himself up as king. When Pythias returns to Syracuse in triumph, Dionysius fears that his reappearance will be an obstacle both to his plans for becoming king and his designs on Calanthe. The citizens of Syracuse organize festivals in honour of Pythias and Dionysius plots to rob him of his victory by pitting the best charioteer of Sicily against him. But Pythias wins the race and is crowned as victor by Calanthe in person. The wedding of Pythias and Calanthe is proclaimed. Dionysius decides not to wait any longer. Knowing Damon will be at his friend's marriage, he plans a secret meeting in the Senate. On their wedding day, Pythias and Calanthe entertain themselves in a lovely room with a nice pool, that recalls a painting by the contemporary Alma-Tadema (fig. 24).[9] Damon arrives to join to the festivities and embraces the young man under the jealous glances of Calanthe, who evidently dislikes this close friendship between the two men. Meanwhile in the Senate, the followers of Dionysius propose to crown him king and dissolve the Senate. Senators loyal to the cause of freedom send a warning to Damon, who hurries to the Senate but finds that Dionysius' guards have blocked the entrance. So he sends his slave Lucullus to fetch Pythias. Understandably enough, Calanthe does not want

7 Writer, journalist and film director Ruth Ann Baldwin was the first woman to direct a western, in 1917.

8 Another movie about Damon and Pythias was produced in the 1950s for American television (*The Story of Damon and Pythias (tv)*, NBC, 15.5.55, "The Hallmark Hall of Fame", USA, 1955). As the subject of this book is cinema and not television, I will not discuss this movie here.

9 For instance, the Roman bath-scene in Alma-Tadema's *A favourite custom* (1909, Tate Gallery, London).

Pythias to leave her alone on their wedding day. "Calanthe, pity me!" cries the courageous Pythias. "Can I like a selfish coward stand? My friend is in danger! Go I must! It is a cruel fate that tears me hence!" (Intertitle 27). He rushes to Damon's aid. In the Senate he outfaces Dionysius' followers with lofty words: "I am his sword, his shield, his helm. I do but enclose my heart's blood when I stand before him thus!" (Intertitle 28). In the general confusion, Damon conceals a sword in his cloak and enters the Senate. Here, the animated discussion that follows comes to a head in a clash with the tyrant and Damon is arrested. Pythias offers himself as a pledge in order to allow Damon to say goodbye to his family and the tyrant grants him time till sunset. Calanthe is desperate. While Damon visits for the last time his son and wife in his country villa and takes leave in highly emotional scenes, Dionysius decides to test the famous friendship between Damon and Pythias. Disguised as an old man, he persuades Calanthe that he has a plan for freeing the captive. Together, they visit Pythias in prison and try to convince him to escape (fig. 25). But Pythias resists the temptations of freedom. He is a man of honour and will not betray his friend or break his promise. Meanwhile, Damon has to overcome some unexpected obstacles on his way back to Syracuse. His faithful slave Lucullus has slaughtered his horse to prevent him from arriving in time to be put to death. Furious, Damon runs towards the town, seizes the horse of a traveller on the way and rides at breakneck speed until the horse collapses beneath him. The sun is already setting, and Pythias, who has never doubted that his friend will come and save him, is taken to the scaffold. Wounded and exhausted, Damon arrives just in time. Dionysius, who is present at the scene still disguised as an old man, is moved by the power of friendship, reveals his identity and sets both friends free. Damon rushes back home to tell his wife the good news. In the final scene, Pythias and Calanthe are seen walking through a garden, finally reunited.

3. The ancient sources on Damon and Pythias

The story of the two friends is well known from the ancient sources. The main source is Iamblichus, who in his *Pythagorean Life* prizes friendship as one of the most important virtues of the Pythagoreans. As an example of perfect friendship, he refers to the story of the Pythagoreans Damon and Phintias,[10] and the way in which Damon offered himself as surety for the return of his friend, who was condemned to death:[11]

> "This was the story of how a man stood surety for death; and this is how the surety came to be offered. Some of Dionysius' associates […] often mentioned the Pythagoreans, but mocked and disparaged them: they called them boasters, and said their famous dignity and their pretended faithfulness and indifference to pain would soon be knocked out of them if

10 In the ancient tradition, the name of Pythias is usually rendered as Phintias (D.S. 10, 4, 3; Val. Max. 4, 7; Cic. *off.* 3, 10, 45; Iamb. *VP* 33, 234). I am using the modern form Pythias throughout so as, to avoid confusion.

11 Iamb. *VP* 33, 234-237 (transl. Clark). A very similar but less detailed account of the story can be found in Porph., *VP* 59-61.

> they were really frightened. Others disagreed, and a quarrel arose, so a plan was made against the followers of Phintias. Dionysius sent for Phintias, and said, in the presence of one of his accusers, that he had been discovered conspiring with others against him; those present bore witness, and showed most convincing anger. Phintias was astonished at the charge. But when Dionysius said outright that it was clearly proved, and Phintias must die, Phintias said that if Dionysius had so resolved, he asked for the rest of the day to settle his own affairs and those of Damon. These men lived together and shared everything, but Phintias, as the Elder, had taken most of the household cares on himself.[12] So he asked to be released for that purpose, naming Damon as his surety […]. Dionysius said he himself was astonished, but the others, who had initiated the test, jeered at Damon, saying he would be left in the lurch – and, they mocked, a deer had been substituted for the victim. As the sun was setting, Phintias returned to die. Everyone was astounded and subjected. Dionysius […] flung his arms around them and kissed them and asked to make a third in their friendship, but they would make no such agreement, despite his entreaties."

Though this source is quite late, the story itself is, according to Iamblichus, old, dating back to the philosopher Aristoxenus, who heard it from Dionysius the Second himself in Corinth.[13]

Cicero refers twice to the famous couple. In his *De Officiis* he tells us briefly that the Pythagoreans Damon and Phintias were linked by such an ideally perfect friendship that, when Dionysius had condemned one of them to die and the condemned man asked for some days' respite in order to be able to put his family in the hands of friends, the other stood surety for his return, with the understanding, that if his friend did not come back, he himself would be put to death. When, at the appointed time, the condemned reappeared to face death and set his faithful friend free, Dionysius was so amazed, that he asked to be admitted as the third partner in such a friendship.[14] In his *Tusculanae Disputationes* Cicero refers to the two friends once more, relating the story of the tyrant Dionysius, who was cultured, rich and powerful, but could not trust anyone and lived all his life in fear of being murdered and sorely missed the presence of a true friend.[15]
Diodorus Siculus tells the story as follows:[16]

> "While Dionysius was tyrant and a certain Phintias, a Pythagorean, who had formed a plot against the tyrant, was about to suffer the penalty for it, he asked Dionysius for time in which to make such disposition as he wished of his private affairs; and he said that he would give one of his friends as surety for his death. And when the ruler expressed his wonder whether such a friend had to be found as would take his place in prison, Phintias called upon one of his acquaintances, a Pythagorean philosopher named Damon, who without hesitation came forward at once as surety for his death. […]. At the appointed hour all the people ran together, anxious to learn whether the man who had provided a surety for himself would keep faith. When the hour drew closer and all were giving up hope, Phintias unexpectedly arrived on the run at the last moment, just as Damon was being led off to his fate. Such a friendship was in

12 See also Porph. *VP* 60. These are the only ancient sources that say that Damon and Pythias lived together and shared their possessions, as in the strictest Pythagorean tradition.
13 Iamb. *VP* 33, 233-236. See also Porph. *VP* 61. These are the only sources that explicitly mention Dionysius the Younger. The story is usually attributed to the time of Dionysius the Elder. On the difficult relations between the Pythagoreans and tyranny, see also MUSTI 2005, 148-187; 237-241, especially 172 and 238-239.
14 Cic. o*ff.* 3, 45.
15 Cic. *Tusc.* 5, 22, 63.
16 D.S. 10, 4 (transl. Oldfather).

> the eyes of all men a thing of wonder, and Dionysius remitted the punishment of the condemned men to include himself as a third in their friendship."

A similar version of the story is recounted by Valerius Maximus, who speaks of the ties of friendship and how truly loyal friends can best be recognised as such in times of adversity.[17]

In Poliaenus we come across a version of the story with different protagonists and some different narrative details:[18]

> "The Parii, followers of Pythagorean philosophy, lived in various parts of Italy. Dionysius, the Sicilian tyrant, negotiated by herald with the Metapontinians and the other Italians about a treaty of friendship. Euephenus advised his young students and their fathers never to trust a tyrant. Dionysius became very angry at this, and so was eager to capture him as he crossed from Metapontum to Rhegium. When he captured him, he brought a formal accusation against him in the council chamber and demonstrated that because of him he had failed in a great enterprise. […] Dionysius condemned him to death. Euephenus, unperturbed, said to him: 'I will obey the verdict, but I have an unmarried sister in Parium, whom I would like to give away in marriage, travelling back home, and I will return quickly and die.' Everyone laughed at this speech. Dionysius wondered and asked, 'What guarantee would there be?' 'I will give you a surety' he said 'for the death.' He summoned Eucritus and offered him as the surety. Eucritus very gladly agreed to be the surety for the death on the condition that Euephenus leave and return within six months, while he stayed there waiting under guard. The matter was already remarkable, but it became even more so. For in fact after six months Euephenus, having given his sister in marriage, returned to Sicily, surrendered himself, and asked that his surety be released. Very impressed by the courage of both, Dionysius released them both, […] and asked if they would accept him as a third into their friendship."

With Hyginus the two friends are named Moerus and Selinuntius, but the story is more or less the same. Moerus tries to kill the tyrant Dionysius but is captured in the attempt and condemned to be crucified. In order to organize the marriage of his sister, he asks for three days' respite and leaves Selinuntius as guarantee. When the time is over, Moerus has to overcome some unexpected hindrances on his way back home and comes just in time to save his friend.[19]

The great majority of the ancient sources do not mention any adventures; only Hyginus' account enriches the basic plot with some hindrances – a tempest and a flooded river – delaying the return of the absent friend and thus heightening the suspense.[20] Broadly speaking, the ancient sources emphasize the Pythagorean way of life; the close friendship between Damon and Pythias is placed in the context of their philosophical ideals. Friendship is here above all a bond of solidarity bond between members of an exclusive and closed group.

In the post-classical sources the Pythagorean background tends to disappear and the example of the two friends takes on a universal value. Already in late antiquity, the first Christian writers admired examples like that of Damon and Pythias, seeing in the story a precursor of the Christian attitude to the martyrdom and giving thus the Pythagorean example a more general purview. Lactantius pro-

17 Val. Max. 4, 7.
18 Polyaen. 5, 2, 22 (transl. after Krentz - Wheeler).
19 Hyg. *fab.* 257, 3-8.
20 Hyg. *fab.* 257, 3-8. On the sources, see also GASSE 1911, 607-615.

poses it as an example of non-utilitarian justice in pagan philosophy;[21] Ambrosius compares Damon and Pythias with the Christian martyrs, though ultimately prizing the superiority of Christians who die for the sake of God and not just for a mere mortal.[22]

4. Modern reception

Though the names of Damon and Pythias were never completely forgotten and were repeatedly referred to as an example of true friendship in late antique catalogues of famous couples, for many centuries the subject seems to have been ignored until, at the beginning of the fourteenth century, its moral and ethical significance came to be recognized by a monk, Jacobus de Cessolis.[23] He published a moral allegorization of the game of chess, known as *De ludo scachorum*, in which the various chess figures symbolize different classes of society and the movements of the figures illustrated all the relations and conditions of men. Among the mass of material he used, was the story of Damon and Pythias.[24] The work had a great fortune and soon appeared in French, German and English translation. Notably in the English Renaissance the story of Damon and Pythias achieved high currency. One of the first works to appear in the Elizabethan age was Richard Edwards' *Damon and Pythias*, which the prologue declares to be a "tragicall-comedie" and "a rare ensample of Friendship true."[25] Later plays reworked the theme: the glorification of friendship between men is one of the typical ideals of Renaissance.[26] In some cases, the celebration of pairs of friends from antiquity has slightly homosexual overtones. In the Renaissance, homoeroticism is mostly expressed implicitly rather than explicitly.[27] The image of the male friend was in theory an image of intimacy between men that contrasted strongly with the illicit intimacy of homosexuality. But the border between the two categories is fuzzy, so that in the Tudor epoch the language of friendship covers a vast range of signifi-

21 Lact. *inst.* 5, 17, 22. See also Freyburger 1997, 87-93.

22 Ambr. *virg.* 2, 34-35.

23 Raschen 1919, 105-109; see also Gasse 1911, 607.

24 On Jacobus de Cessolis' book and more generally on the allegorical use of chess in the Middle Ages, see also Ferm – Honemann 2005; Bejczy – Nederman 2007.

25 Published in 1571 and 1582. Reproduced in facsimile, 1908: see *The Tudor facsimile Texts. Damon and Pythias*, by Richard Edwards, New York 1970. See also Stretter 2005, 345-365.

26 Wright 1927, 510-514; Chaplin 2001, 266-292.

27 The definition of homosexuality as a gender and social category before the nineteenth century is a very complicated question: I use homosexual here to refer to homosexual behaviour. On this subject, see Smith 1991; Summers 1992, 2-22; Giantvalley 1981, 9-24, who prefers to speak of homoeroticism. By exploring different kinds of homoeroticism in a large variety of poetic works, these authors reveal the pervasiveness of male homoeroticism in Renaissance literature and society and point especially to the depiction of homosexual desire in works by canonical authors like Spencer, Marlowe and Shakespeare. See also Di Gangi 1997 and Chaplin 2001, 266-292.

cances – from political relations and patronage to homosociality – and does not exclude homosexuality.[28]

In the English Renaissance society there was a major disparity between the extremely severe punishments prescribed by law for homosexual practices and the tolerance, even positive valuation, of homoerotic desire in the visual arts and in literature. A great responsibility in the apparent tolerance towards homosexual behaviour is of course to be found in the revival of classical culture, which provided, at least for the educated, a rich body of discourse about homosexuality.

In the works of Plato, Catullus, Virgil, Ovid, and many others ancient authors, same-sex behaviour was depicted without the moral and religious hysteria that characterized discourse on this subject in the Christian era. Greco-Roman history and mythology supplied many examples of homosexual behaviour, including figures and couples whose homosexuality was more or less explicit, like Socrates and Alcibiades, Heracles and Hylas, Zeus and Ganimedes, Apollo and Hyacinth, Alexander and Hephaistion.[29] One famous couple lending itself to a homosexual interpretation was Damon and Pythias. While is it true, that the majority of the Tudor plays about Damon and Pythias are not plays about sodomites, it is also true that the characters could be seen by the contemporaries as sodomites, as in Thomas Dekker's *Satiromastix* (1602): "They shall be thy Damans and thou thy Pithyass'", where the name of Pythias is satirized as "Pythiasse", a pun on "ass."[30] A much less explicit example can be found in Book 4 of Spenser's *The Faerie Queene*, where Scudamor arrives at the temple of Venus, in the beautiful garden of which he sees "thousand payres of lovers" (4.10.25) and separated from them a different class of lovers, all male friends, which he finds even more admirable. Among them he observes prominent classical pairs of friends, like Heracles and Hylas, Theseus and Pirithous, Orestes and Pylades, and Damon and Pythias (4.10.26).[31]

Because homoeroticism in the Renaissance was always circumscribed by homophobia, even the most evident symbols of homoeroticism were often rendered innocuous. This was easy, as most of the above-mentioned examples also symbolized less dangerous virtues, like military valour, loyalty and selflessness. Male friendship was frequently stripped of its sexual features to serve as an apologia for homosociality rather than homosexuality.[32]

By contrast, it could happen that a couple like Damon and Pythias, which in the classical sources represents the typical Pythagorean ideal of friendship between members of a closed group, with their relations of solidarity and common life without any apparent reference to homosexuality, becomes a homoerotic model.

Starting from the Renaissance revival, this story of one friend's readiness to sacrifice his life for the other figured largely in the modern age and inspired thea-

28 BRAY 1994, 40-61.

29 SUMMERS 1992, 7-8; on the references to the ancient homoerotic tradition see also GIANTVALLEY 1981, 10.

30 DI GANGI 1997, 64.

31 SUMMERS 1992, 13-14; CHAPLIN 2001, 267-268.

32 SMITH 1991, 13-14.

tre plays, romances and poems. The best-known modern treatment of the ancient romance is Schiller's ballad *Die Bürgschaft*, written in 1799 and based on the medieval *Gesta Romanorum* version. Here, as in the 1914 movie, it is Damon who is sentenced to death, not Pythias. Differently from the majority of ancient sources, where the conspiracy against Dionysius is in reality a plot by Dionysius himself against the two friends, this early romantic poem makes Damon into a freedom fighter who is really out to kill the tyrant and liberate the city from his reign of terror. After being condemned, Damon asks for three days' respite, in order to organize his sister's marriage. He leaves a friend behind as a guarantee, whose name is not mentioned anywhere in the ballad, but we know it must be Pythias. As soon as Damon has settled his affairs, he hurries back to Syracuse to free his friend and die. But during the journey home a number of setbacks delay his arrival. First, as in Hyginus' version, he has to fight against nature in the form of a tempest that stops him from crossing the river. After he finally manages to swim to the other side, he is attacked by bandits. Having put them to flight, he nearly dies of thirst under the hot Italian sun. He is already sunk to his knees when he sees a spring and drinks avidly before starting to run again. But the sun is already going down when he finally reaches Syracuse. His slave Philostratus tells him that the time is up and as he can no longer save his friend, he should at least try to save himself instead. But Damon will have none of it. If he cannot save his friend, then he intends to die with him:

> "Des rühme der blutige Tyrann sich nicht, / dass der Freund dem Freunde gebrochen die Pflicht, / er schlachte der Opfer zweie, / und glaube an Liebe und Treue" (The bloodthirtsty tyrant shall not boast / that one friend broke his word to the other. / Let him sacrifice two victims / and believe henceforth in the power of love and loyalty).

When Damon finally arrives, his friend is just about to be executed. The scene is dramatic indeed. The two friends weep and embrace each other, the crowd is moved to tears, even the tyrant is deeply touched and asks them to include him in their bond of friendship:

> "Ich sei, gewährt mir die Bitte, in eurem Bunde der Dritte" (Let me – pray hear my plea – be the third in your alliance).

The ballade ends with these words and we never find out whether Damon and his friend fall in with Dioysius' request or not.

As is clearly evident, the Romantic version of the ancient romance highlights the elements of sacrifice and selflessness. The two friends rival each other in their loyalty, their sentiments are pure and generous, their virtue is unshakable. Damon is a typical romantic freedom fighter, giving full rein to his noble urges.

Schiller's ballad quickly achieved immense fame and transported the ancient story of the two friends throughout the world. Even in late 19th century Japan the story was familiar. A famous short story by Osamu Dazai and a children's tale by Miekichi Suzuki are both based on the famous anecdote.[33] Dazai modelled his story on a Japanese translation of Schiller's ballad and on the annotations of the

33 MASAHIRO 1999, 39-59.

translator. But he also added some new elements,[34] notably changing the protagonist, who is characterized as a simple and honest person, into a village shepherd.

In 1821 the Irish poet John Banim wrote a play (*Damon and Pythias*) based on the ancient romance. Here we already find some of the characters also figuring in the 1914 movie, like Pythias' fiancée Calanthe, her mother Arria, the faithful slave Lucullus and Hermion, the affectionate wife of Damon. The play can certainly be considered a direct source for the movie. The storylines are similar and occasionally the movie intertitles recall the cues in the play. Here, Damon at least is a Pythagorean, while Pythias has already become the brave soldier we find in the film. As in the movie, Dionysius in disguise and Calanthe try to rescue Pythias, who resists, thus saving his honour. With lofty words and profuse tears, male friendship and the masculine virtues – honour, selflessness – which are connected with it, are praised above all else. Even the love for the promised bride – just a woman! – cannot compete with Pythias' adamantine feelings for his best friend and the pride of honour: "I do prefer the certainty of death unto the possibility of dishonour!"[35] Yet here, unlike in Schiller's ballad and in the movie, where the condemned man never doubts of his friend right to the very end, Pythias takes his leave of Calanthe, despairing that Damon will come.[36] When Damon finally appears they vie with one another in selfless nobility and each of them is ready to die for the other. Dionysius sets them both free. Banim's drama was a great success and was republished in 1870. In 1897 the play was still running at a theatre in Chicago.[37]

During the last decades of the 19th century the legend of Damon and Pythias became a model of male virtues and solidarity between men. As such it was also taught to school boys. A chapter of *Little Men*, the famous novel by Louisa May Alcott published in 1871, bears the title "Damon and Pythias" and tell the story of the young boy Dan who charges himself of theft to spare his friend Nat the humiliation of false accusation. Though if the story of the two boys has nothing much in common with the original, Damon and Pythias are recalled not only in the title but also later, when the teacher quotes the ancient romance as an example of true friendship and explicitly compares the boys to the protagonists of the ancient legend. The episode in the children's book proves that at this time the story of Damon and Pythias was a recognized model of virtues that every young reader could easily identify with and was proposed to schoolboys as an example of honesty, solidarity and altruism, all capital virtues in the education of boys in the Victorian age.[38]

During the centuries, the story of Damon and Pythias also became a symbol of solidarity and fraternity between members of an order or society. Probably inspired by his familiarity with Banim's play, J.H. Rathbone founded the fraternal

34 Dazai's text is based on an earlier version of *Die Bürgschaft*, where, as in Hyginus, Damon is called Moros, which in Japanese becomes Meros.

35 I quote from the edition of 1870, *Damon and Pythias*: *a play; in five acts*, act III.

36 *Damon and Pythias*, act V.

37 http://www.whenmoviesweremovies.com/hoosiersilent.html.

38 On the influence of the Greek heritage on Victorian culture, see JENKYNS 1980; TURNER 1981; CARNES 1990; SUSSMAN 1995.

order of the Knights of Pythias in Washington in 1864. As in the case of many other fraternal movements, the founders of the Knights of Pythias insisted on a fictional origin for their order that dated back to ancient times. The historians of the order claimed that Pythagoras himself was the first Pythian.[39] After a few years, the new order already counted many lodges and more than 400,000 fellows.[40] The declared aim of the order – which is still in existence, though its popularity has declined – is to encourage friendship, charity and benevolence.

After the beginning of the twentieth century, the story of the two friends lapses into obliviation. One last echo appears in the ironic political work of the German theatre director and writer Thorsten Becker, who in 1985 re-presented the story of the two friends in his novel *Die Bürgschaft*, liberally based on Schiller's famous ballad and set in East Berlin.[41]

The protagonist is a West German writer, who during a trip to East Germany comes into contact with an artist named Schlitzer, whose hobby is drawing pornographic cartoons. The West German writer offers to publish one of the cartoons in his new book, but Schlitzer declines, because he is waiting for government permission to spend some time working in Vienna and does not want to spoil his chances by publishing something in the West, which is, of course, prohibited. The writer decides to steal the cartoon and publish it without Schlitzers permission, thinking that nobody in the East would have access to the West German book and find out who the author of the cartoon was. But when he returns to East Berlin to bring the cartoon back, tell Schlitzer the surprise news that the book is a success and give him his share of the proceeds, he is arrested. The State Security inspector Lärisch, himself an intellectual, suggests him a deal: he will not arrest the writer for the theft of the cartoon, on condition that he spies on Schlitzer, who has been given the requested permission to work in Vienna, but is now suspected of anti-communist ideals, not least because of his friendship with the West German writer and the publication of the cartoon. The writer has no alternative but to agree, setting off a complicated double game that ends with the three protagonists meeting in Lärisch's office for a new deal. The West German intellectual, who has always wanted to spend some time in East Berlin as a citizen and not just as a tourist, agrees to stay there without any documents for the length of Schlitzer's sojourn in Vienna, as a guarantee that the friend will come back. If he fails to do so, the German Democratic Republic will just keep the West German writer instead and not lose any citizens. So the writer stays and his friend leaves for Vienna. But on the day, when he is due back, Schlitzer is not on the plane. Panic seizes the writer, who sees himself condemned to stay here forever. But Schlitzer turns up in the end. He merely missed the flight and returned by car. Lärisch's surprise is great and he is deeply moved by Schlitzer's loyalty. As in the ancient romance, the "tyrant" wants a share in this wonderful friendship. The Stasi inspector decides to resign from his job and to leave his wife and country, "die er zwar noch liebte,

39 WEEKS 1874; CARNES 1989, 22.
40 CARNES 1989, 1.
41 T. Becker, *Die Bürgschaft*, Zürich 1985 (Ammann Verlag).

aber nicht mehr ertrug" (which he still loved but could no longer bear).[42] The three of them escape together abroad. After a period in each other's company, the ex-Stasi inspector and disillusioned communist Lärisch moves to South America, where he finally dies like a hero, hunting ex-Nazis. Now in possession of an Austrian passport, Schlitzer comes back to the German Democratic Republic, where he finally decides to live.

In Becker's novel the story has much clearer political contours than in the ancient sources. The friendship between the West German writer and Schlitzer is rather superficial – they meet because they have a mutual acquaintance. This is neither a close tie between old friends, nor solidarity between members of the same secret society. At the end, the real reason for Schlitzer's return is that he is not such an anti-communist renegade as the Stasi inspector had suspected.

5. Conclusions

Summarising, modern versions of the Damon and Pythias legend are concentrated especially in two historical periods. In the English Renaissance the story was rediscovered together with many other classical myths and presented as a model for homosociality, occasionally ambiguously, with slightly homoerotic overtones. Between the late Romantic and the Victorian age the story became famous again. In a society where gender roles were extremely clear cut and completely different models of behaviour were proposed for men and women, the legendary friends were a perfect embodiment of the public virtues of manhood.[43] A final echo of this mentality can be discerned in the 1914 movie.

In the modern film-reception, the very simple plot of the ancient sources is changed into a complicated romance with a love story and a number of adventures. In Otis Turner's movie there is no trace of Pythagorean philosophy. The Greek Syracuse is "romanized" and though the film is set in the 4th century BC, under the tyranny of Dionysus the First, we actually find that the town is ruled by something like a Roman republican Senate.

In the silent movie, the two protagonists are doughty patriotic heroes fighting for the Greek homeland and for freedom. At this time, there is no place for an ambiguous character like the good bandit Damon of Curtis Bernhardt's film. Damon and Pythias both passionately love their affianced brides, but even more they love honour, pride, politics and, of course, they love each other. The power and generosity of the friendship between men far outweighs any feeling they may have for a woman or a woman for them. This clear distinction between genders and the one-sided characterisation of male and female emotions – fearless and generous the one, fearful, childish and family devoted the other – is a legacy from the late nineteenth century. The old story of the two friends who are ready to sacrifice themselves for each other perfectly embodies the contemporary ideals of

42 T. Becker, *Die Bürgschaft*, Köln 1987 (Kiepenheuer & Witsch), 160.
43 Stearns 1993, 36-74.

manhood and is a good moral example for the new moral films that were becoming popular around 1914.

In the *peplum* of 1962 love of women and devotion to the family of both friends play a greater role: according to the new ideas of the time, which allowed free love and extra-marital sex, Damon does not even have a real wife; he lives as an "irregular" couple with a girl he dearly loves and who is very devoted to him. While in the oldest film the war against the barbarian invaders comes to the fore, and opposition to Dionysius is only a secondary element, functional to the plot, political opposition against the tyrant is an important theme in the later film and the Pythagoreans are not only portrayed as something like pre-Christian philosophers, but also resemble some of the pacifist movements that were spreading in the early sixties. Arcanos' sermon to the members of the sect ("Even your enemy is your brother, more, he is a part of you, if you kill him, you yourself die") almost literally recalls the famous passage from John Donne's *Meditation XVII*, which in that period became a true emblem of pacifism: "No man is an island, entire of itself […], any man's death diminishes me, because I am involved in mankind; and therefore never sends to know for whom the bell tolls; it tolls for thee." When Damon explains to Pythias that he has sold him to the tyrant because he has no morals and to him every man is an enemy, Pythias replies: "And to me every man is a friend." Even Dionysius is aware of the revolutionary power of love. Philosophy is dangerous, he explains to his little son, because it makes slaves brothers to their masters and soldiers brothers to their enemies.

The reception accorded to the myth of Damon and Pythias in the early movie production seems to gel with the peculiar cultural pattern of the time. As we have seen, the theme of male friendship with its collateral virtues of courage and selflessness is a typical motif in the Victorian boy education – at least in America and in England – propagating qualities every adult male is supposed to possess. As changes in this educational system did not appear until the early 1920s, we may assume that Otis Turner's film still reflects this ideal world. It is certainly no coincidence that the period between the late nineteenth century and the First World War is also the golden age of secret societies. The masculine bonding proposed by the ideals of the time and reproduced in the film achieves its finest realization in the solidarity and mutual aid typical of a secret society.

The war of the Greek civilization against the Carthaginian invaders – which are depicted as uncultivated barbarians running in pelts and raping women – is a mirror of the pre-war mood and embodies the nationalist and colonialist ideals informing world politics just before the First World War.

The movie was produced for a cultivated audience, who probably knew already the story of Damon and Pythias from the school education and from theatre going. In this period, movie-making was changing from the cheap amusement including "vaudeville" acts productions of the beginnings into a more intellectual art with moral pretensions. Coeval with these transformations in the subject-matter of movies, came the transformation of the nickelodeons into movie-palaces, with a change in the public who was going to the cinema and the increasing involvement of the middle class. Around 1908-1913 the majority of American movie-theatres started showing more "committed" films, with overtly moralizing

plots. The filming of classic works of literature and religious or historical subjects assured the intellectual value of the films addressed to a respectable middle-class audience.[44]

But Otis Turner's movie might also be interpreted in a more ambiguous way that would reveal it as an icon for a completely different sort of audience. In the English Renaissance already, stories of male friendship were used as an expression of crypto-homosexuality. At the beginning of the 1910s the idealization of such relations became again very popular in connection with the birth of the homosexual movement, which in those years was beginning to establish its own identity, and assert himself with increasing self confidence.[45]

While the silent movie is very closely connected with the literary reception of the legend and is based at least in part on the play by John Banim, the 1962 production invents a new plot that has nothing in common with the reception of the ancient story in the literature and is based directly, albeit if with a great deal of imagination, on the ancient sources. Unlike many blockbusters of the time, which were reproductions of the great hits of the silent-movie era, like *Cleopatra* or *Ben Hur*, the Curtis Bernhardt's *Damon and Pythias* is not a real remake.

The movie reflects the ideology of the 1960s, especially in its construction of the personality of Damon, who is no longer a hero or a senator as in the modern reception of the story, and not even a Pythagorean as in the ancient sources, but a thief. Damon is a typical product of his time. Poor and "outlaw", but selfless and loyal to his new friend, he embodies the American myth of the good bandit whose hard life has taught him to lie and steal in order to survive, but has not corrupted him or changed his simple, altruistic nature. The spirit of the early 1960s is also palpable in the representation of the Pythagorean movement as political opposition to Dionysius. The same anti-authoritarian ideals are to be found underlying a film like Stanley Kubrik's *Spartacus* (Universal, 1960), while few years later A. Mann's *The Fall of the Roman Empire* (Paramount, 1964) shows the ideal of a pacified world and the fight for civil rights.

It remains difficult to say why the director chose to film such an old-fashioned story, which is also not fitting at all in his production. *Damon and Pythias* is the only attempt he made to film a *peplum*. While I have no positive proof for the idea, it is suggestive to think that Curtis Bernhardt may have been familiar with the secret society of the Knights of Pythias. The symbol of the Pythagorean order shown in the movie – two triangles, one inside the other, and a circular element inscribed in the smaller triangle – looks like one of the many gems associated with the real order, displaying the same two triangles, albeit with the apexes in opposite directions and without the circular element.[46]

44 BOWSER 1990, 18-20; 39-40; 256; GUNNING 2004, 146-154; PEARSON – URICCHIO 2004, 155 – 168.

45 FOUCAULT 1976, 58-59; GREENBERG 1988, 347-454, especially 397-433; SUMMERS 1992. On the role of ancient Greek culture in defining homosexual identity among the educated members of the upper class between the end of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth century, see JENKYNS 1980 280-293.

46 www.phoenixmasonry.org/masonicmuseum/fraternalism/knights_of_pythias.htm

Nisbet writes that Greek philosophy is mostly un-cinematic.[47] The story of Damon and Pythias shows that this is not entirely true. Even a minor philosophical *exemplum* has functioned trough the centuries as a catalyst for a wide range of different emotions and served as a model for an equally wide range of ideals, in theatre plays, poetry and movies.

47 NISBET 2006, especially 2-44.

CELLULOID ALEXANDER(S): A HERO FROM THE PAST AS ROLE MODEL FOR THE PRESENT?[1]

Anja Wieber

> "Myths are an international political power and are tied closely to the politics of commemoration. Their media and scope reach from Hollywood via the internet to everyday talk, their characters from Alexander via Jesus to Hitler. Their metaphors influence scientific theory and discourse. Using myths, the media bestow history and social relations with a sensual shape. Thus, they offer handy interpretations and disguised concepts of the future. Historical characters reappear as digitalised movie stars, journalists are embedded in tank crews: Because the media short-cut temporal or spatial distance, they offer experiences of certainty. At the same time, myth fuels anxiety and prejudice, and serves psycho-dynamic mechanisms of defense. Myth reduces complex events and power-related processes to a visibility that mass audiences are supposed to believe in."[2]

What seems to be a thesis based upon film studies actually proves to be an announcement for a German-Greek workshop (Crete 2005) on political psychology. The quotation can nonetheless outline the thematic issue of this essay: the Macedonian king, Alexander the Great, had already reached mythological status in ancient times, mainly through the loss of many contemporaneous sources and through the tradition of the so-called *Alexander romance*.[3] When Alexander and Hollywood met, two myths were intermingled, the age-old myth of the Greek conqueror and the relatively new one of the cinema. As a result, the cinematic Alexander appears to be a person of flesh and blood. And besides, psychology[4] plays an important role in constructing the star Alexander.

The present paper starts with a brief sketch to explain why Alexander was not mentioned in early movies. Then the great Hollywood productions about Alexander: *Alexander the Great* (Robert Rossen, 1956) and *Alexander* (Oliver Stone, 2004) are examined. Attention is thereby focused on the question of whether, and how far, the films encapsulate modern mentalities. The study closes with an overview of the cinematic Alexander beyond Hollywood productions.

1 My thanks go to the following for their help in the preparation of this paper: Theo Lindken, Gesine Marwedel, Sigrid Mratschek, Stefan Sandführ. Special thanks to Judith Rhodes and Shaun Worth for grappling with my English language.

2 Cf. http://www.politische-psychologie.de/kreta.html; http://hsozkult.geschichte.hu-berlin.de/tagungsberichte/id=825 (1.4.2008).

3 FRENZEL 1983, 29-32; WILL 2004, 771-777.

4 In Alberto Moravia's novel *Il disprezzo* (1954) is described how psychologisation can be an important tool when turning an ancient text into a film script. Interestingly, it is the German director called Rheingold who interprets the Homeric Odyssey in the very psychological light of a modern marriage drama.

1. A KINGDOM FOR A PART?

Films that illustrate a historical person's journey through life belong to the genre "biographical picture" (abbreviated to biopic). In these films, the main character is often an eponymous hero, i.e. her or his name appears in the title.[5] Taking that into consideration it is a surprise to find out that one can trace no Hollywood biopics featuring Alexander the Great other than the aforementioned films (1956 and 2004).[6] The same phenomenon was even repeated in European film production. This is astounding, taking into account the introductory quotation or using as a comparison Julius Caesar, Alexander's Roman counterpart in Plutarch's *Parallel Lives*: from the silent movie era onwards films about Caesar are abundant.[7] The same is true of other historical characters from antiquity, such as the Emperor Nero.[8]

Although Alexander the Great plays an important part in many 19th century novels,[9] his life and deeds are not the subject of silent movies at all. The national identities of the countries producing the first epics may account for this. At the beginning of the silent movie era Italy had the leading film industry.[10] However, the Italians preferred Roman or biblical subjects. When filming epics turned into big business because of the enormous production costs, the heyday of the American film studios began. But for years American film-makers were not interested in Alexander's life as a story of simultaneous success and failure. Other historic celebrities from antiquity, such as Spartacus,[11] Caesar or Cleopatra[12] – who failed in the end – were nevertheless favourite film characters because their failure coincided with the values of the countries in which they were produced. In fact, from the very start epics served the purpose of confirming viewers in their self-affirmation, primarily in their nationality, but also in their religious and gender-specific identities. Therefore the death of an Oriental femme fatale, whose reign stood out as an exception, put an end to any gender confusion. By the assassination of the dictator Caesar, Republican ideals – in which the Americans see their roots from the founding fathers' days onwards – seemed to be saved. Spartacus,

5 WEINSHEIMER 2002, 76.

6 Herbert Verreth has kindly sent me material from his database covering "Alexander the Great in film, popular fiction and comics." For a short overview see REAMES-ZIMMERMANN 2004; she mentions a Swedish silent movie from 1917 *Alexander den store* which is actually a Swedish-Danish comedy, taking place in a hotel of the same name and featuring the famous actor Harald Madsen (*Pat & Patachon*) (http://www.cyranos.ch/pata-e.htm; http://www.pothos.org/alexander.asp?paraID=66&keyword_id=19&title=Alexander%20den%20store%20(1917) (both 1.4.2008).

7 TODE (forthcoming).

8 WIEBER 2005a.

9 FRENZEL 1983, 32; WILL 2004, 777.

10 For general information about the history and genre of ancient epics cf. WIEBER 2002 and 2007.

11 WYKE 1997, 34-72; WINKLER 2007.

12 WENZEL 2005.

cast as a pre-Jesus, and other biblical epics offer hope for a better world to come, with Christianity an essential pillar of American society.

In particular, early American cinema helped an immigrant nation to strengthen national identity via the binding power of film pictures. For many immigrants did not share a common language, which did not, of course, pose a problem for watching silent movies. The further America expanded geographically, the more the Americans were interested in the rise and preservation of empires. But until well into the 20th century the story of Alexander, as a conqueror of a multi-ethnic empire that fell to pieces shortly after his death, did not answer that demand. The 50s, however, brought about a change.

2. Alexander 1956 and 2004 – from Cold War times to the present

2.1. *Alexander 1956* – "father and son" during Cold War times

The 1956 trailer for *Alexander the Great*[13] presents the film with slogans typical in epics. To start with, the technical data – the film was produced in widescreen Cinemascope and in expensive Technicolor. Furthermore, the trailer praises the work in every possible way as a filmic embodiment of greatness and thus of Alexander's epithet, using for that purpose pseudo-Greek letters so as not to confuse the viewer. The portrayed and the mode of portrayal correspond to one another: as a result, the "conqueror of the conquerors" and "the colossus who conquered the world" becomes the leading character in "the colossus of motion pictures."[14]

The beginning of the film offers more details about how it was made and how to read it. It starts with a classical-style medallion à la Wedgwood featuring the main character "Alexander." The portrayal looks as if a cast were taken from an ancient coin of the idealised Alexander-Heracles type clad in a lion's skin. Then, to the accompaniment of typical war tunes, a voice is heard off screen. Quite often in epics a commentator introduces the film by sketching the historical background or the film's message; this time it is the leading actor's voice, i.e. Richard Burton's:

> "It is men who endure toil and dare dangers that achieve glorious deeds. And it is a lovely thing to live with courage, and to die leaving behind an everlasting renown."

By a combination of the pictorial elements and that general remark, the audience learns that the plot is about Alexander's life and death as a person – a person worthy to be honoured, for all the risks endured and the enormous success achieved. Then the historical illusion changes to the reality of film production by fading to the cast list. Now the special circumstances under which the film has been produced become obvious. Instead of sharing responsibilities, Robert Rossen not only

13 All the following references in brackets refer to the German-English DVD released by Metro Goldwyn Mayer in Germany in 2003 (130 min.).

14 Two versions of the film's poster are available at: http://www.filmposter-archiv.de/html/anzeige_gr.php3?id=7771.

wrote the film script, but was also the director and producer. Political reasons lie behind this personal union. For the political climate had become very tense in America after the Second World War, and therefore the film industry and the cultural agenda changed too. The previous fight against National Socialism was replaced by the Cold War and a struggle against Communism.[15] In those days, communists were believed to be the enemy within.[16] From 1947 the "House Un-American Activities Committee", chaired by Senator Joseph McCarthy, scrutinised the so-called communist infiltration of the film industry.

Robert Rossen had been a member of the Communist party for a short time. So, despite being a successful author and director up till then, he was blacklisted in 1951 and then went to Italy where he wrote the film script for *Alexander*.[17] About his hero he is believed to have said, "(that he) was a man in advance (of) his time, (...) who was the first to (seek) unification between the peoples of Asia and Europe."[18]

Carrying *Alexander* in his luggage Rossen came back to the States in 1953 and got his work permit in exchange for denouncing party members. Subsequently, he struggled for reinstatement in the American film industry and therefore he had to produce and also to direct *Alexander*.[19] Besides, an ancient film subject would have seemed, more than any modern plot, perfectly harmless and politically correct at the same time.

Back to the film: the opening credits fade to the establishing shot, a sight of a Greek city with marble columns. Apart from the sound of drums, silence. An insert reads:

> "It is the year 356 B.C. In a troubled, exhausted, divided, bloody Greece …"

The setting in space and time is given. At the same time, the future Macedonian conquest of Greece might be understood as a step forward to unification, and it invokes a positive connotation. Nevertheless, the next scene presents the Athenian Demosthenes as an opponent to this development, and the cross-cutting to the cruel war of conquest proves the idea of peace to be an illusion.

Alexander as successor to his father bears the mark of ambivalence. On the one hand he is portrayed as a unifying figure for the Greeks, so that his victory over the Persians will guarantee the formation of Greece (0:43). In particular his

15 Cf. Winston Churchill's on his American tour in 1946: "From Stettin in the Baltic to Trieste in the Adriatic, an iron curtain has descended across the Continent." (http://www.cnn.com/SPECIALS/cold.war/episodes/02/documents/churchill/ ; 1.4.2008).

16 KUZNICK – GILBERT 2001, MAY 1989, WHITFIELD 1996.

17 http://www.spartacus.schoolnet.co.uk/USArossen.htm (1.4.2008).

18 The quote given by KADIVAR 2001 could not be verified; the idea of Alexander enforcing worldwide fraternisation goes back to TARN 1948, who wrote the book originally under the influence of the times shortly after the First World War, with the concept of the League of Nations in mind (see WILL 2004, 779).

19 In 1954 he directed *Mambo* which was produced by the Italians Dino de Laurentiis and Carlo Ponti (IMDb); NISBET 2006, 91, calls it Rossen's modus operandi to write, direct and produce a film and gives two other examples, but Rossen's 'career' as a producer started after the 2nd World War, when the climate began to change (IMDb).

fight against Persia had become a mission he had already devoted himself to, in his younger days as Aristotle's pupil.[20] When the important decision has to be made whether to go on fighting against the Persians or go back to Greece, Alexander addresses the troops:

> "For if she" (looking at the men from the city of Athens) "will not lead in this holy war, then she must follow. For I will embrace in my cause any man – Greek, Carian, Lydian, Ionian - who believes in it." (1:14)

As Persia stands metonymically for the East, such a concept goes perfectly well with the ideology of Cold War times. Alexander's speech might be compared to a line from the Italian feature film *I Mongoli* (1960), saying that the danger from the East might be banished, if the nations of Europe stood together.[21] As a result, it seems at first sight as if Robert Rossen was encouraging the strict censorship of the McCarthy Era.

But on closer inspection, Alexander's portrayal as a conqueror and a tyrant has critical undertones. The problem of freedom and its curtailment is twice described from the city of Athens' point of view, with Demosthenes as the voice-over, by cross-cutting to pictures of bloody conquest (0:03; 0:35). The Macedonian noblemen's loss of freedom is mentioned throughout the film (e.g. 1:36ff.). Although Alexander is cast as an ancient tyrant, the subtext bears a modern dissident message, criticising the curtailment of civil liberties during the Cold War. The film comes to an end before Alexander's death, with the mass matrimony at Susa, a voice-over by Ptolemy emphasising the uselessness of conquest if the people's hearts have not been won – Alexander had finally come to understand that, we are told (1:42). In the film, diplomacy and integration have ended military confrontation, a concept which is completely different from the political agenda of the 50s.

Another important film topic is father-son competition. Consequently, the German cinema poster presents Philip and Alexander as the two main characters. They frame the illustration, portrayed in similar proportions and at corresponding spots. Both take up a conqueror's pose which is marked by the iconography of the male triangle their legs form.[22] But although they are seemingly fighting the same cause, they have turned away from each other and are looking in opposite directions. A father-son conflict is apparent. Young Alexander therefore is portrayed as an impatient young man eager to get involved in politics and war (0:10), and during his parents' marital rows he puts special emphasis on not being their "pawn" (0:23). Talking to his father's young future wife, Eurydice,[23] (0:33-0:35) he lets her (and the audience) know that his father's polygamy and the uncertain succes-

20 The young Alexander speaks with reverence of Persia (0:09); Aristotle calls it a "holy mission" (0:11) and Alexander talks of a "divine mission to bring Greek culture to all the world" (0:43).

21 Translation of the German dubbed version, being half summary, half quotation; LEXIKON DES INTERNATIONALEN FILMS 1991, Bd. 5, 2635.

22 RIEDEL 2002, 64-65; see above, footnote 14.

23 Actually her name was Cleopatra – Eurydice was the wife of Philip III; see BADIAN 1998 and 1999.

sion are the reason for the court's competitive atmosphere. After Philip has married Eurydice, the father-son conflict escalates during the wedding reception; when Alexander feels himself denounced as a bastard, he becomes violent and strikes back. Then the drunken father falls, and the son can feel only contempt for his old age and feebleness (0:48-49). With his mother, Alexander goes into the exile from which he is called back for the campaign against Persia, while in the meantime we are witness to court intrigues orchestrated by his mother. Then Philip is assassinated (0:50-55).

It takes half the film for Alexander to become Philip's successor (0:55). Although that seems to be an important concern of the plot, it should be taken into consideration that the original film version was more than half an hour longer than the German DVD version available on market.[24] Surprisingly, the father-son conflict is still present throughout the ensuing Persian campaign – in fact Alexander faints during a council of war when someone mentions how his father would have acted. What might be understood as a reference to Alexander's supposed epilepsy[25] is presented as a flashback showing that the young king is overwhelmed by reminiscences of his father (1:12). At first, even the Persian king Darius shows himself to be a father figure by telling Alexander in a letter that he would not fight against boys ("Go back to the bosom of your mother Olympias (…)"; he also promises to send him toys to play with (1:16)). Alexander's mistress Barsine lets the young king know that her only rivals in the competition for his love are his own mother and his eagerness to outdo his father. (1:32).[26] When the heavily drunk Alexander argues with Cleitus (1:37ff.), it adds fuel to the fire that Philip is praised, while Alexander is indirectly accused of being responsible for the death of his father as well as those of Attalus and Parmenion (A.: "There is no man alive who can throw a shadow on my glory." C.: "There are dead man who can, and do! Philip, Attalus, Parmenion"). Finally, his mother Olympias is said to be the executive murderer together with Pausanias. Because of all this, Alexander loses control and kills his companion with the words "Go now, to Philip … and Parmenion and Attalus" (1:40).

What do the ancient sources tell us about the father-son conflict? Plutarch says that Alexander was anxious that the successful father would not leave him opportunities to excel.[27] Polygamy, the absence of succession patterns and the resulting competitive climate at the Macedonian court can be verified historically,[28] and many film scenes correspond to the ancient sources. Alexander's quarrel with Cleitus is worth closer inspection.[29] Arrian relates that all the people

24 http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0048937/alternateversions (1.4.2008).

25 http://www.epilepsiemuseum.de/alt/body_prominented.html versus (1.4.2008). http://www.pothos.org/content/index.php?page=myths-trivia (both 1.4.2008).

26 Arrian (7, 9) tells us that Alexander when addressing the mutinying troops at Opis speaks first of Philip's successes, then reminds them how he outdid his father.

27 Plut. *Alex*. 5, 4.

28 CARNEY 2000, 23-27.

29 Arr. 4, 8-9; Curt. 8, 1, 4-5; Plut. *Alex*. 50-51; see BERVE 1926, 206-208; KOFLER 2006 compares Curtius Rufus' report with Stone's version of this scene.

involved were heavily drunk and that Cleitus denied Alexander any admiration, that he accused him of not acknowledging the Macedonian's share in Alexander's victories and finally that he praised Philip's deeds compared to Alexander's accomplishments. Comparable to the film scene, in Curtius Rufus' report Cleitus begins his speech by praising Philip's deeds. Also, Curtius' Alexander says when killing his companion "Go now, to Philip and Parmenion and Attalus." So in the ancient source it is only Alexander and not Cleitus who refers to his father as a dead man, which does not necessarily imply that he (i.e. Alexander) is the mastermind behind the assassination. As in the film Cleitus accuses Alexander of being responsible for murder, but only of Attalus, who was the uncle of Alexander's stepmother Cleopatra. But Curtius Rufus lets us know that Alexander was especially furious about the defence of his former general Parmenion, who had been executed together with his son for having conspired against the king. In Plutarch's narrative, the quarrel between Alexander and Cleitus is already prefigured in one of Alexander's dreams. When the row starts, Cleitus accuses Alexander of denying his human father by claiming to be a god himself, a point that is also to be found in the film and which is hinted at by Curtius Rufus. Besides, Plutarch's Cleitos chiefly complains that Persian customs would curtail Macedonian liberty and that Alexander does not appreciate his soldiers' accomplishments. As a result, it can be said that Rossen combined the various reasons that different ancient authors offer for the escalation of the companions' quarrel, and spiced them with allusions to murder within the family.

Admittedly, the ancient sources tell of a correspondence[30] between Alexander and Darius III. But there are no sources proving that Darius so infantilises Alexander that the latter's Persian campaign turned into an act of initiation.[31] The cinematic Alexander constantly opposes his father and wants to take over from him; whereas Philip does not miss a chance to make the younger man look a fool and does not lose his grip on him even after death. All this rather reminds the viewer of the generation conflict typical of the western industrial nations of the 50s. When *Alexander the Great* was released in the spring of 1956, James Dean had already turned into a role model for the rebellion of angry young men against their fathers, reinforced by his premature death in a car crash.[32] Hence it follows that Rossen enhances ancient conflicts and interprets Alexander's relationship with his father in the light of modern attitudes that may relate to Freud's impact on theories about the family.[33]

30 Arr. 2, 14, Curt. 4, 1, 2 and 4, 5, 21; as is common in ancient historiography, it is unsure whether the letters are genuine.

31 This is a Shakespearian reminiscence: The French dauphin sends tennis balls as a present to the English king Henry (who is laying claim to the French throne) and thereby alludes to Henry's youth (*Henry* V, act I, sc. 2); for the Shakespearian influence on film epics set in ancient times cf. WIEBER 2002, 28, for Rossen and Shakespeare cf. NISBET 2006, 93 and 95-96 and for Shakespearian motifs in Stone's Alexander cf. Angelos CHANIOTIS in this volume.

32 WULFF 1990.

33 For general interest in the father-son conflict of Alexander and Philip at about 1900 cf. Thomas Theodor Heine's caricature in the satirical magazine *Simplicissimus* (ser. 3, no. 15, 1898,

2.2. *Alexander 2004 – a difficult childhood*

The generation conflict of the 60s had already turned into history when Alexander finally returned to the film studios. As is common with film history in general, many ancient epics also prove to be remakes of older thematically identical films, especially if the director is the same. In fact, Cecil B. de Mille repeated his subjects from the silent film era in his sound movies and later on in his colour films. Also, film studios tend to quote their own earlier film productions: for example, Wolfgang Petersen's *Troy* (USA 2004; Warner Brothers) refers in its opening scene to *Helen of Troy* (USA 1956; Warner Brothers).[34] Obviously, there is no such connection between the production process of Rossen's *Alexander*, as he produced the film himself, and Oliver Stone's *Alexander*, produced by Warner Brothers and others. Nonetheless Stone sometimes quotes passages from the earlier film,[35] although in fact the new project derives from quite different roots.

Not for the first time in his career as a director and producer, Stone has chosen a historical subject. Before this, however, he preferred contemporary American history, as films about Kennedy and Nixon demonstrate. In 1998 he produced the documentary *The last days of Kennedy and King*, also labelled an independent film.[36] Up to now, Stone's unconventional, challenging interpretations of history have provoked controversy and comment among historians, resulting in discussion panels and subsequent scholarly volumes. As a result, Stone wrote an exhaustive answer to those controversies in *Oliver Stone*'s *USA. Film, History and Controversy*.[37] For his review of the book, Paul Mitchinson chose the title "Natural born Historian,"[38] alluding to the director's historical interests as well as to his well-known film *Natural born killers* (1994), an aggressive road movie about a killer couple and the simultaneous deconstruction of the American mass media. Reviewing this film, the German film scholar Georg Seeßlen says about Stone's thematic issues:

> "Die Filme von Oliver Stone beschreiben Möglichkeiten und Begrenzungen des Hollywoodfilmes; beinahe alle gehen zentrale Widersprüche der amerikanischen Kultur an, reiben sich an Mythen und Medien, beschreiben das Gewaltopfer für amerikanische Sünden. Er spricht vom Kapitalismus (*Wall Street*), von der Macht der Medien und dem Verschütten der Verantwortung (*Talk Radio*, *Salvador*), von der Pop-Passion (*The Doors*) und immer wieder von Vietnam."[39]

120) which portrays, in the style of Greek pottery, Alexander weeping about his meaninglessness, because his father enjoys such tremendous success as statesman and general.

34 WIEBER 2005b, 150.

35 LINDNER 2005, 56-57; however, NISBET, 2006, 128-129, takes Stone's Alexander to be "practically a scene-for scene remake" of Rossen's.

36 IMDb s.n.

37 Stone on Stone's image (as presented by some historians), 40-65, and Part III: Stone responds (On Seven Films/On *Nixon* and *JFK*), 219-298, all three chapters in TOPLIN 2000.

38 Paul Mitchinson: http://linguafranca.mirror.theinfo.org/0004/inside-stone.html (1.4.2008).

39 http://www.filmzentrale.com/rezis/naturalbornkillersgs.htm (1.4.2008); for the general impact the Vietnam experience had on Stone's oeuvre see TOPLIN 2000.

Taking that into consideration, one could call Stone's *Alexander* an auteur movie on which the characteristics of the director's whole opus are imprinted.[40] In her essay about the myth of Alexander in film, the archaeologist Ruth Lindner demonstrates this, by revealing how Stone's earlier film about Jim Morrison, lead singer of The Doors (*The Doors* 1991), has impacted on his Alexander project.[41] Both films show remarkable visual correlation by the choice of colours and settings in space (i.e. desert scenes, archaic cave scenes) and share a certain symbolism (i.e. the eagle and the serpent).[42] In addition to that, Jim Morrison was famous for his obsession with Alexander the Great and portrayed himself as a reincarnation of Alexander. The two films are also connected by casting, as Val Kilmer, who played the rock musician as a second Alexander, is cast as Alexander's father Philip.

Stone's Alexander definitely recalls the way Jim Morrison is characterised in the earlier movie: a man forever searching and on the run, constantly testing his limits with ecstasy (drugs/alcohol) and paying for that with premature death.[43] Oliver Stone says that he had already fallen under Alexander's spell when he was a student, not just when he started the film project about The Doors. In those days he had actually dreamed of shooting a documentary about the Macedonian king and his campaigns.[44] To devote himself to Alexander's life was not just the director's youthful dream (or should we say a boy's dream?). Even the historical advisor, the famous Oxford historian and classicist Robin Lane Fox, literally follows in the footsteps of his idol:[45] he agreed to advise on the film in exchange for two rewards – "a place in the first 15 of every major cavalry charge to be filmed in Alexander's company and the words 'and introducing' in front of my name in the credits."[46]

However, Stone not only wants to realise a long-dreamt-of project but also intends to convey an awareness of history with his movie:

> "Unglaublich ist an Alexander, dass er alle griechischen Mythen kannte und sie dann selbst auslebte. Er wurde von vielen Dämonen angetrieben, die man auch aus modernen Gesellschaften kennt. Eine der Hoffnungen, die ich mit diesem Film verbinde, ist, dass "Alexander" den Menschen ein Gefühl für Geschichte zurückbringt (...)."[47]

40 GROB 2002, 46-50.
41 LINDNER 2005, 51-54.
42 For a thorough analysis of Stone's visual symbolism in *Alexander* see Ivana PETROVIC in this volume, 170-183.
43 To emphasize Alexander's excessive nature may relate to Stone's historical consultant Lane Fox and his version of *Alexander* (LANE FOX 2004a, e.g. 661-665; see below); for Stone's comment on Jim Morrison: "He's a Dionysian cultural figure", see his chapter in TOPLIN 2000, 238.
44 PRESSEHEFT 2004, 8.
45 He started his research about Alexander in the 70s, his controversial biography about Alexander was edited in 1973 for the first time, its new edition earned publicity with the release of the film. The monograph *The search for Alexander* was originally published in 1980.
46 LANE FOX 2004b, see also id. 2004.
47 PRESSEHEFT, 9.

Obviously, Stone is aiming at a viewer who relates to the film on an emotional level. Such a concept of history presumes that modern and ancient mentalities resemble each other. The main characters' behaviour, therefore, does not deny modernity – typical as it is for most period films. The historical difference is confined to scenery and costumes, which become a touchstone of authenticity. Experts have partly praised the film for archaeological details: for example, the experimental archaeologist Marcus Junkelmann speaks in high terms of the battle of Gaugamela and is quite happy with the weapons and armour.[48] Ruth Lindner reveals that Philip's make-up and his insignia refer to the findings archaeologists made in the 70s when they discovered the royal tombs of Vergina – this is the reason why Philip wears a golden wreath, and his scarred face is a forensic reconstruction of the skull found in the so-called "Philip's tomb."[49]

The way Stone's Alexander acts is psychologically motivated by the parent-child relationship. As a result one of the American cinema posters presents the adult king as torn between his parents, his mother Olympias in the foreground and his father Philip in the background (fig. 27). They form a triad, but their totally alienated positions (although physically connected, each is looking away from both the others) reveal their difficult relationship. In the film, we watch young Alexander being traumatised. The child Alexander witnesses his father's drunken attempted rape of his mother. (ch. 3, esp. 0:9-0:10:30).[50] In film science this type of cinematic narration is called "backstorywound."[51] Actually, Stone's modus operandi in quite a number of his films is to explain the main character's actions by modern psychoanalysis, especially by focusing on a difficult parent-child relationship.[52] Also, the historian Jeanne Reames-Zimmermann points out that with the above-described family tableau Stone is obviously quoting the opening scene from Mary Renault's Alexander novel *Fire from Heaven* (1969).[53] Flashbacks during the film shift from Alexander's adult life to his late youth, presenting the drama of a teenager partly unloved, partly overwhelmed by his possessive mother (ch. 21 and 23). Whereas the 1956 Alexander had a troublesome relationship with his father, the new Alexander suffers more from his mother. To take Stone at his own words, she could be called the worst of his demons.[54] Nevertheless Stone

48 JUNKELMANN 2005, 48-49, see also ÉLOY 2005a, Nr. 7 "la reconstitution": "Les scènes de bataille sont, à tout les points de vue, une des plus incontestables réussites du film."

49 LINDNER 2005, 61-62; on closer inspection interior decor seems to be more Roman than Greek in style (cf. ibid. 56-57), probably so as not to scare off viewers used to a certain style in ancient period films.

50 All the following references in brackets refer to the director's cut from 2004 (166 mins.), released on DVD by Warner Home Video; deleted scenes are specified.

51 Filmlexikon des Benderverlages: http://www.bender-verlag.de/filmlexikon/index.php (1.4.2008).

52 See e.g. TOPLIN 2000, 16-17.

53 REAMES-ZIMMERMAN 2005.

54 See the quotation on page 155; in the documentary *Hollywoods Lieblingsrebell* (D 2006), Stone compares his relationship with his own mother with Alexander's mother-son relationship and says that he feels the demon from his mother, too.

also seems to flirt with this concept in interviews, when he dedicates the film to his own mother and compares her with Olympias.[55]

In Babylon we witness a conversation between Alexander and his lover Hephaistion:

> Hephaistion: "I wonder sometimes, if it's not your mother you run from. So many years, so many miles between you. What is it you fear?"
> Alexander: "Who knows these things? When I was a child, my mother thought me divine, my father weak. Which am I, Hephaistion? Weak or divine?" (ch. 16, 1:02)

So the mother-son conflict lies behind Alexander's restlessness, and the parents' disagreement explains his self-doubts as a conqueror who flees from himself. This dialogue, and a conversation held with Ptolemy before the Indian campaign (ch. 24), can be compared with a voice-over from Ptolemy (introductory to the conversation with Ptolemy; deleted in the director's cut) who quotes the eunuch Bagoas' words: "I remember a remark of Bagoas once, 'that love eluded Alexander as much (as), if not more than, finding the end of the world.'"

An oedipal motif (and motive!) is already hinted at in one of the early scenes (ch. 3), when we see young Alexander in his mother's bed.[56] Later his wedding scene with the Sogdian princess Roxane speaks in a more expressive language: Roxane is a second Olympias (ch. 20). Not only her darker complexion but also her serpent bangle – shown in extreme close up (1:16) – connect her visually with Olympias, who appears in the following scene as well as in other scenes with her pet serpents. And both women share a strong, sharp accent.[57] In the middle of the film Alexander tries to free himself from his mother through marriage, and this is why he takes the serpent bangle away from Roxane's arm when they have sex. Again the conflict is visually emphasised, this time by the technique of cross-fading images from the wedding night into images of Olympias who orders her son to come home from Asia to Macedonia, or at least to Babylon. Alexander's sad comment while looking at his wife after the wedding night ("If only you were not a pale reflection of my mother's heart." (1:19)) makes us believe that his attempt at emancipation has failed.

55 ÉLOY 2005a, Nr. 3.1: *Bonjour Dr. Freud!*; Nr. 3.2 *Madame Bovary, c'est, moi*; for the psychological subtext see also CHANIOTIS in this volume and against an overly simplistic reading of the film cf. LINDNER 2005, 54; for further possible readings of the film cf. ÉLOY 2005a, Nr. 2.2: "Regard croisés: (…) le film est construit sur deux vecteurs, intérieur et extérieur. Intimiste et épique. Le premier brosse un portait psychologique (…) Le second se situe dans l'espace-temps et retrace l'homme politico-militaire." For the film's epic-tragic subtext see PETROVIC in this volume, 170-183.

56 Cf. also the second flashback to Philip's assassination after Alexander has been wounded (ch. 32): in a quarrel Olympias tells Alexander that he is her own creation, whereas he accuses her of having brought him up with hate ("You murdered me in my cradle, you birthed me in a cycle of hate.") and having murdered his father. Although they have a terrible row, they end up hugging each other.

57 For Angelina Jolie's accent and its connotations see ÉLOY 2005a, Nr.6 "Politique contemporaine", footnote 17.

His parents pursue Alexander around the world as demons:[58] during the quarrel with Cleitus, his image will fade into Philip's (ch. 26; esp. 1:47). Moreover, we see Philip watch Alexander's troops withdrawing from India. (ch. 33, 2:21). Olympias' insult, which is not mentioned in the ancient sources at all, is also of importance during the quarrel with Cleitus and makes Alexander lose control completely (ch. 26, 1:48; Cleitus: "You and your barbarian mother live in shame"). When Alexander strikes his wife Roxane in a dreadful quarrel, he suddenly sees flashbacks of his parents' row (ch. 35) and in the end he recognises his mother's image in the bottom of his wine goblet during the last symposium before his death (ch. 36, 2:29). Even on his deathbed he is haunted by his father and his mother (ch. 37, 2:32-33).

The psychological interplay of the characters dominates other interpretations of the film and contributes to its modernisation. Ancient patterns of behaviour such as political conflicts that are typical of dynasties, or religious beliefs such as identification with mythical exempla, fade away compared to an Alexander with personal problems – does the political become private?[59]

On the other hand, the depiction of Alexander as a conqueror bringing culture to the conquered and guaranteeing understanding among "nations"[60] – modern as it is in many ways[61] – can be understood as a politically-charged issue if one thinks of the USA's missionary zeal since September 2001. Again an ironical reading might be possible, because the film does not in any way glorify war. Instead, Alexander's Indian campaign with such awful weather, and other problems resulting from fighting in the jungle, reminds the viewer of American jungle warfare in Korea and Vietnam (ch. 25; 30-31).[62] How Stone, who is a Vietnam veteran, quotes his Vietnam movies in these scenes (e.g. the colour coding) should be dealt with in another analysis.[63] Reviewers have commented on the few battle

58 During an interview Oliver Stone calls the story of Alexander's parents the dynamite of the whole film (*Resurrecting Alexander* = one of the special "making of" features).

59 This perception of Alexander might also relate to some of Lane Fox's interpretations; in her review of LANE FOX 2004b, Sabine Müller criticises that the author gives more a psychogram of Alexander instead of focusing on politics: http://www.sehepunkte.de/2005/04/7745.html (1.4.2008); ÉLOY 2005a (Nr. 1 "Un film historico-hagiographique?" footnote 7) quotes an interview with Stone saying: "Je crois que j'ai une interprétation de la vie d'Alexandre qui se tient. Je pense avoir trouvé quelques clés qui permettent de comprendre sa personnalité, aidé notamment par les notations psychologiques de l'historien français Jacques Benoist-Méchin." For Benoist-Méchin being a collaborator with the Nazis during the German occupation and for his romanticising historiography see ÉLOY 2005a (Nr. 10.2 "Ouvrages de référence").

60 Introduction by the aged Ptolemy (ch. 2, 0:04), but also his criticism of Alexander's dreams (ch. 38, 2:36); Alexander as a second Prometheus in his conversation with Hephaistion in Babylon (ch. 16, 1:00-02) and his visions at Hephaistion's deathbed (ch. 34, 2:26-27; his address to the soldiers on the occasion of his wedding (ch. 19, 1:11-1:12).

61 To understand Alexander as a hero of globalisation is a very contemporary way of revisiting ideas of the 1920s (see above, footnote 17) which are no longer *communis opinio* in research; however this is a very modern approach, which would never have been considered in ancient times; see also ÉLOY 2005a, Nr. 3.3.1 "Après l''Internationale', la mondialisation."

62 See also LINDNER 2005, 60 and CHANIOTIS, in this volume, 194.

63 There is a considerable difference between Stone's public war criticism and the war enthusiasm popular in the mass media and used by the studio for promotional purposes; contrast for

scenes in *Alexander* 2004 (two battles here, as against three battles and one encounter in Rossen's *Alexander the Great* (1956) and six battle scenes each in *Troy* and *Gladiator*).[64] The film ends with an Alexander wounded, nearly translucent (the broken "Prometheus") looking like an anti-war hero rather than a successful conqueror. The voice-over by Ptolemy says about India: "It was the bloodiest of his battles. Pure butchery." Not for nothing, he talks of having lost humanity: "We would never be men again" (ch. 31, 2:13).

3. Beyond Hollywood?[65]

Is there no cinematic Alexander other than the tamed and domesticated Hollywood type? If we look for films outside Hollywood production and the genre of biopics, we get quite a different result.

The British-American co-production *The man who would be king* (1975) is an adaptation of the famous short story by Rudyard Kipling that tells the story of Daniel Dravot and Peachy Carnehan, two deserters from the British Indian Army. The two of them decide to march off into legendary Kafiristan – a land where no white man has set foot since Alexander. There Daniel succeeds in being worshipped by the inhabitants as a second Alexander. The original plan to flee with the local treasure is cancelled when Daniel enjoys being a ruler of an archaic society and decides to marry a certain Roxane (!). The film has a double subtext, both ancient and modern (19th century). On the one hand, the colonial adventure alludes to Alexander the Great and raises an ancient topic like apotheosis, which is fiercely argued about by the two friends. On the other hand, the conqueror Alexander betokens the problems of British imperialism.

A reborn Alexander also plays the main part in the Greek-Italian film by Theo Angelopoulos from 1980: *Alexander the Great* (*O Megalexandros*).[66] The four hour epic is about a bandit, whose outward appearance (especially his suit of armour) and his habits make him a new Alexander, successor to a certain freedom fighter from the times of the Ottoman Empire, as well as to the ancient ruler. Set in a small village around 1900, he fights in the style of Robin Hood for peasants' rights. Rapidly life in the utopian village turns into a dictatorship and in the end the bust of Alexander is lying in the dust – the myth has been brought down from the pedestal. The myth of Alexander is again used to answer the question of how

example Stone's interview with Katja Nicodemus in *Die Zeit* 50, 2.12.2004, 45. (http://zeus.zeit.de/text/2004/50/O_Stone_2fInterview) with the documentary *Becoming Alexander* (UK 2005) that somehow celebrates the military endeavours behind the movie and a campfire nostalgia as essential to a man's life.

64 Junkelmann 2005, 46.

65 See also Éloy 2005a, Nr. 9 "Alexandre le Grand à l'écran"; for the 1964 television pilot with William Shatner as Alexander, and the different Alexander projects that have not been realised so far see Nisbet 2006, 101-125.

66 http://www.bergenfilmklubb.no/Arkiv/CINEMATEKET_USF/vaaren_2005/MEGALEKSANDROS.html (1.4.2008).

far power entails corruption. This version of Alexander is actually much more critical than the idolatry that sprang up in the 1990s, when the Greeks (during the conflict with the Republic of Macedonia) declared Alexander an original Greek national hero as opposed to a Slavic identity, not caring one bit for ancient discourses about the Macedonian barbarians.[67]

Similarly, Alexander has been idealised in discourses in the newly-founded independent Republic of Tajikistan. Its democratically-elected President Emomali Rahmonov has been portrayed as a political successor to the Persian Samanid dynasty and to Alexander the Great. At the end of the 90s there were rumours in Tajikistan about an Alexander film project. At the end of 1998, Tajikistan hosted an international symposium entitled "Alexander the Great and Central Asian civilisations":

> "Shahobiddin Dustov, (…) the symposium's main sponsor, said that recalling the life of Alexander will help Tajiks to think about their own place in ancient history and their position in the present. These recollections will help Tajiks to restore their national pride and international status."[68]

Consequently, we can see that the people of Tajikistan are trying to define their nation, and that by virtue of their Alexandrian heritage they are attempting to connect themselves culturally and economically to the West.

In the search for other nations' representations of Alexander in film I came upon an interesting phenomenon. In the 50s Greek cinema, especially in rural areas, was dominated by Indian feature films. Critical Greek voices in the 60s argued that this was harmful to the progress of the whole nation and its modernisation; they thought that the success of Indian films was somehow a belated revenge for Alexander's Indian campaign.[69] After discovering this, I began to seek Alexander specifically in Indian films. In fact, Alexander turned out to play an important role in Bollywood (the nickname for the Indian film industry in Bombay/Mumbai). Right from its beginning in the 1920s Indian cinema suffered censorship from the British colonial power, which forbade any film content critical of so-called "white civilisation" and colonial rule.[70] Thus the 1941 film *Sikander* (Alexander's Indian name) is very significant. As is common for Indian films but not for an ancient epic of Western origin,[71] this period film is a musical, telling of Alexander's Indian campaign. The campaign comes to an end through the diplo-

67 For the keen interest Greek expatriates show in Alexander's ethnic and national identity, as well as in his sexual orientation, when it comes to film projects about the ancient ruler see NISBET 2006, 117-125; see also LINDNER 2005, 55-56, and ÉLOY 2005a, Nr. 6 "Politique contemporaine"; for further popular discussions about whether ancient Macedonia was a part of Greece or not, see the message board of IMDb for the film *Alexander the Great from Macedonia* (announced for December 2007).

68 Salimjon Aioubov, Tajikistan: President Glorifies Alexander The Great (18.9.1998); the original link is dead now, see instead http://omega.cohums.ohio-state.edu/mailing_lists/CLA-L/1998/09/0644.php (12.4.2007).

69 ABADZI 2003.

70 SCHULZE 1998, 115-119.

71 For musicals set in ancient times see *A Funny Thing Happened on the Way to the Forum* (USA 1966) and *Jupiter's Darling* (USA 1955).

matic endeavours of Rukhsana (i.e. Roxane), who falls in love with the Greek king, and also through the eloquence of the Indian king Porus. The anti-colonial subtext of the film, that words achieve more than violence, reminds us of Gandhi's peaceful resistance movement and resulted in its being forbidden in British army cinemas. After India gained independence the film enjoyed a lengthy success and was revived in 1961 during the further fight for independence in the Portuguese enclave of Goa.[72] Songs from the Alexander film *Sikandar-e-Azam* of 1965 are still played today in an Indian patriotic song cycle – its most important song roughly translates *Land with golden sparrows in the trees*, thus citing India's epithet of colonial times.[73] The film itself resembles on a visual scale European B-movies from the same time and uses, for example, equally the ahistoric wrist-bands as a sign of the ancient hero.[74] And not surprisingly, the Greek invaders are cast as quite unsympathetic, alluding to the Indo-Pakistani conflict and the Pakistani aggressors.[75] In autumn 2004 the Indian film production firm Bokadia announced a TV series about Alexander; apparently it was to be shown in 180 parts but unfortunately no other information has so far been made available. And in 2008 cinema advertisements offer Alexander's reincarnation in *Royal Usav*, a story about the conqueror being reborn and returning to India to fall in love with an Indian woman.[76]

Alexander's "campaign" reaches even further than India. So, for example, he is the hero of a Japanese animated series for adults from 1997, entitled *Alexander Senki* or *Reign: The Conqueror*.[77] The episodes mix science fiction elements with the history of the Macedonian king.

There are legions of documentaries about Alexander from a wide variety of countries. Influenced by their different perspectives and the various times and countries of origin, some criticise him, some extol his virtues as a military and strategic genius[78] and some make him a hero of cultural integration and globalization.[79] For the last of these the following comment comes from a Japanese-produced documentary, broadcast by Mitteldeutsche Rundfunk (*Die märchenhaften Städte Alexanders des Großen*):[80]

72 http://www.upperstall.com/films/sikander.html (1.4.2008); see also IMDb s.n. Sikandar.

73 http://www.mouthshut.com/review/Ten_Best_Patriotic_Songs-43392-1.html (1.4.2008); many thanks to Hervé Dumont for translating certain passages and songs of this film.

74 For ahistoric wrist-bands in ancient period films in general see JUNKELMANN 2004, 121.

75 The film and the songs are now distributed on a two-volume video CD in India by Indus Video Private Limited.

76 http://www1.economictimes.indiatimes.com/search.cms (1.4.2008); http://royalutsav.com/ (official website; 22.6.2008).

77 http://www.animenewsnetwork.com/encyclopedia/anime.php?id=2276 (1.4.2008).

78 Remarkable (but nonetheless a panegyric) is the documentary series by Michael Wood *In the Footsteps of Alexander the Great* (GB 1998); see also BORZA 1998; for a partly critical voice concerning Discovery Channel's *Alexander* see MORISON 2006.

79 For the much-debated theories surrounding whether Alexander or his successors initiated the spread of Hellenism, see GEHRKE 2003, 133-135.

80 http://www.tomodachi.de/html/ant/service/jpn_movies/alexander.html (1.4.2008). (year of production unverified).

> "Vor 2200 Jahren trugen die von Alexander dem Großen gebauten Städte dazu bei, die Zivilisationen Asiens und Europas zu vereinen. Die lange Geschichte des riesigen eurasischen Kontinents stellt uns die herausfordernde Frage, ob wir es auch schaffen werden, grundsätzlich die Verschiedenheit der Kulturen zu tolerieren und in Zukunft friedlich zusammenzuleben."

One of the original questions, "Are there no film roles for the king?", can now be answered by an emphatic "There are plenty of film roles for him!" And with that, are Alexander's conquests complete? One special subgenre which has not been mentioned so far is children's films;[81] for example, Alexander is the hero of an episode in the educational French animated series *Es war einmal… die Entdeckung unserer Welt* from 1997.[82] This episode is clearly derived from Rossen's *Alexander*, thereby proving the latter's cinematic influence.

If we can trust information from the Internet Movie Database,[83] we have Alexander's cinematic puberty still to come in the form of an American-English-Greek-Egyptian TV co-production about the young Alexander.[84]

Judging by one of the taglines of this film, "Some are born great", we can look forward to the combination of power, greatness and puberty. Surely every country and every time has its own Alexander, whatever the field or genre; perhaps we now find that every life-stage has its own Alexander too. Considering, as we have been, the medium of film, one can truly say: "We shall see!"

81 For that special subgenre see the text by Martin LINDNER in this volume.

82 *Alexander der Große oder Bis an die Ufer des Indus*; http://www.trickfilmwelt.de/eswarmensch.htm (1.4.2008).

83 Worldwide release had been announced for 2007. http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0390197 (1.4.2008). See also the information on the film by the British Film Council: http://www.britfilms.com/britishfilms/catalogue/browse/?id=D5D44D521b20024A02YrM26CC37A (1.4.2008); and the website of one of the producers, the Salkind Company: http://www.ilyasalkindcompany.com/alexander_fullfeature.html (1.4.2008).

84 This is typical of a current trend to attract younger audiences, especially young males; see also *Young Hercules* (USA 1998-1999) and WIEBER 2005b, 157-162.

PLUTARCH'S AND STONE'S *ALEXANDER*

Ivana Petrovic

1. PLUTARCH'S FILMOGRAPHY

Of all Greek prose authors, Plutarch is the one with most entries in *The Internet Movie Database*, an online catalogue of films that boasts to be "the biggest, best, most award-winning movie site on the planet."[1] This is not to say that Plutarch is the only ancient Greek screenwriter in this database – Thucydides,[2] Xenophon,[3] and Herodotus[4] do have their entries, but Plutarch's filmography boasts seven films (four of them on Cleopatra). Obviously, the film producers are not treating the ancient authors fairly[5] and primarily credit them with documentaries, probably in order to heighten their credibility. Rare are the examples of film makers who credit the ancient writers as sources of inspiration for their plots. One such honourable exception is Mankiewicz's *Cleopatra* (1963) which proudly boasts Plutarch, Suetonius and Appian as its screenwriters (along with C.M. Franzero, J.L. Mankiewicz, R. MacDougall, and S. Buchmann).[6] If this were a common practice, Plutarch's entry could easily rival and surpass the most prolific contemporary script authors. Actually, if the reception of Plutarch in Western art and literature were to be taken into account, virtually all biopics would have to credit him! Not only are his biographies among the earliest extant examples of the genre, but he was also among the most popular and influential writers in Europe for centuries.[7] Plutarch's popularity drastically diminished in the 20th century, but he had been one of the most read Greek authors ever since the Latin translation of the complete edition of the *Parallel Lives* was published in 1470. In the 15th century, *Lives* were published in Italian and Spanish, and the German, French and English translations were published in the 16th century. The *Lives* were used as a rich mine of sources for tragedies, novels, operas, paintings, sculptures and, lastly, films in the twentieth century. However, the twentieth century witnessed a decrease in the popularity of Plutarch's books, although he is still the first choice for script writers who want to try their hand at ancient topics.

1 http://farm.imdb.com/ (1.5.2007).
2 Thucydides is credited as an author of the TV drama *The War That Never Ends* (1991).
3 Xenophon and Aristophanes are listed as co-authors of a historical documentary *The Battles That Changed the World: Peloponnesian Wars* (1998).
4 Surprisingly, Herodotus is not even listed as a writer, he only got a thank-you for real-time strategy game *StarCraft* (1998).
5 On Plutarch's influence on Hollywood films see BOURGET 2000.
6 http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0056937/ (1.5.2007).
7 On the immense popularity and influence of Plutarch from the renaissance to the 20th century see GOLDHILL 2002, 246-293 and LAMBERTON 2002, 188-195.

This is not surprising, as Plutarch's method in writing his *Lives* has a lot in common with the cinematic approach. As he famously stated at the beginning of the *Life of Alexander*, he was not interested in recording history:

> "It is not Histories that I am writing, but Lives; and in the most illustrious deeds there is not always a manifestation of virtue and vice, nay, a slight thing like a phrase or a jest often makes a greater revelation of character than battles where thousands fall, or the greatest armaments, or sieges of cities."[8]

Plutarch did not intend to present his readers with historical treatises, but aimed for a lively and vivid representation of characters, as he believed that reading about the exploits of noble men is not only interesting, but also could help to educate and improve the soul.[9] Reading Plutarch's *Lives* was supposed to be an incentive for emulation of the great men. Nowhere is this more apparent than in the *Life of Caesar*. Not only did Plutarch pair Alexander with Caesar, inviting the reader to compare and contrast the two great conquerors, but he also actually represented Caesar striving for greatness as a *result* of his reading about Alexander:

> "We are told that in Spain, when he was at leisure and was reading from the history of Alexander, he was lost in thought for a long time, and then burst into tears. His friends were astonished, and asked the reason for his tears. 'Do you not think', said he, 'it is matter for sorrow that while Alexander, at my age, was already king of so many peoples, I have as yet achieved no brilliant success?'"[10]

The chain of emulation thus ends with Caesar vying with Alexander, but the Macedonian hero was not an entirely "self-made man" himself – as Plutarch lets us know in the *Life of Alexander*, his favourite hero was Achilles, whom he strove to emulate, not only on the battlefield, but also in politics and in the bedroom. I shall return to Alexander's emulation of Achilles, but for now it will suffice to point out that Plutarch's concept of emulation is by no means a simple one. Both Caesar and Alexander are represented as characters that are ultimately led astray by the very examples of men they seek to surpass. We witness Caesar imitating Alexander's expedition and venturing across the sea as the first Roman to conquer the Britanni, only to discover that "there was nothing worth taking from men who lived in poverty and wretchedness."[11] Caesar's significantly more perilous and ultimately "fatal striving for the royal power"[12] can perhaps also be interpreted as an *imitatio Alexandri*. According to Plutarch, Alexander's own nemesis was his attempt to resemble Achilles too closely: he becomes "cruel and inexorable, since he loved his reputation (*doxa*) more than his life or his kingdom";[13] he represented himself as a god; he could not control his anger and anguish and, finally, he enraged a powerful god, Dionysus, whose vengeful wrath – and Plutarch uses a very

8 Plut. *Alex*. 1, 2. All translations of Plutarch are by PERRIN 1919.
9 On the moral aspect of Plutarch's Lives see DUFF 1999.
10 Plut. *Caes*. 11, 3.
11 Plut. *Caes*. 23, 3.
12 Cf. Plut. *Caes*. 60, 1: *thanathophoron ep' auton ho tes basileias eros.*
13 Plut. *Alex*. 42, 2.

resonant, epic word, *menis*, to designate this rage[14] – ultimately leads him to perdition.

When assessing the method and the purpose of character representation in Plutarch's *Lives*, perhaps the most telling passage is the first chapter of his *Life of Timoleon*:

> "I began the writing of my "Lives" for the sake of others, but I find that I am continuing the work and delighting in it now for my own sake also, using history as a mirror and endeavouring in a manner to fashion and adorn my life in conformity with the virtues therein depicted. For the result is like nothing else than daily living and associating together, when I receive and welcome each subject of my history in turn as my guest, so to speak, and observe carefully "how large he was and of what mien", and select from his career what is most important and most beautiful to know."

Regarding the manner of Plutarch's writing, but also very significant to the art of lessons one should learn from the lives of the great men, *selection* is the key word. From the multitude of sources he had at his disposal, Plutarch was picking and choosing the material most suitable to his vision of a given character. Thus, his biographies are an even more subjective representation than history, as Plutarch is hinting that the process of selection was not according to what he thought might have probably happened, but what he thought might be most important and most beautiful to know. *Beautiful* is in my opinion to be understood as referring not so much to the essential quality of the characters represented, but to the educational purpose of Plutarch's endeavour, since the study of good deeds automatically incites the reader to imitate them, and the observing of bad deeds serves as a clear warning and is thus also good in the educational sense.[15] This is one of the main reasons why Plutarch's *Lives* are such an exciting read – none of his characters is virtuous throughout, and Plutarch is not presenting them as ideal men. On the contrary, he lets his reader witness the good and the bad things, and usually a biography progresses from good and virtuous beginnings to questionable and often even tragic endings (no wonder Shakespeare used the *Lives* so often for his plots).

In this paper I shall discuss Oliver Stone's depiction of Alexander and argue that his method in portraying the character has many similarities with Plutarch's approach. Stone's treatment of sources and the narrative patterns of his script as well as the usage of metaphors and symbols in the film are largely indebted to Plutarch's depiction of the ancient conqueror.

2. Plutarch and Oliver Stone – *Parallel Lives*?

Even though the lives of the philosopher, diplomat, priest of Apollo, and writer from Chaeronea and that of the Vietnam veteran and three-time Academy Award-winning film director and screenwriter could hardly have less in common, there is

14 Cf. Plut. *Alex*. 13, 3.

15 See for instance the introduction to the *Lives of Demetrius and Antonius* (obviously not very good examples!) where Plutarch explains that a bad example can be as educational as a good one (*Dem*. 1).

actually one important and striking connection – their interest in biography. Roughly half of Plutarch's opus are biographical writings (twenty-three pairs and four unpaired lives are transmitted; Plutarch certainly wrote more). Oliver Stone has written 22 screenplays;[16] ten of these are biographical films: *Alexander* (2004); *Comandante* (2003);[17] *Evita* (1996); *Nixon* (1995); *Heaven and Earth* (1993);[18] *JFK* (1991); *The Doors* (1991); *Born on the Fourth of July* (1989);[19] *Scarface* (1983);[20] and *Midnight Express* (1978).[21] Oliver Stone also co-authored the screenplay for *Conan the Barbarian* (1982) which is in a way a biography of the fictional character.[22] Of the 21 films Oliver Stone has directed thus far, ten are biopics.

Plutarch explained the purpose of his *Lives* in the aforementioned passages. Apart from the practical and very feasible concrete results regarding such lofty goals as the freedom of information[23] or less elevated goals like box office earnings,[24] let us pose a question even more notorious than Stone's conspiracy theories: What was the intention behind Stone's biopics?

One answer to this question is to be found in Robin Lane Fox's informative and witty book on the making of *Alexander*. He quotes Stone stating the following:

> "I am amazed at the uproar my films have caused since 1986, but only a moron would consider them documentaries… But neither are they to be excused as "only a film" from "only an entertainer." I write and direct with the purpose of seeking out the truth as best I can, using the tools of the dramatist … I have no overriding ideology beyond that of, let's say, "common sense"… I would not know how to motivate a convincing drama from ideology."[25]

Now this is a very blurry statement of purpose. Seeking the truth with the tools of the dramatist is something of a contradiction in terms; add to this the intent to portray the lives of politicians without an overriding ideology, and we have a per-

16 It is notoriously difficult to establish the authorship for Hollywood scripts with certainty as collaboration on a script or engaging of the script-doctor is a common practice. Most Hollywood scripts – and Stone's are no exception – are actually a result of collaboration. For *Alexander*, Stone shares the screenwriting credits with Christopher Kyle and Leta Kalogridis. I shall refer to Stone as dramatist for the sake of convenience. For a detailed overview of the process of naissance of the *Alexander* script, see LANE FOX 2004, 33-46.

17 A documentary about Fidel Castro.

18 Film based on the true story of a Vietnamese village girl Phung Le Ly Hayslip.

19 The film is based on the autobiography of Ron Kovic.

20 The film is fictional and depicts Antonio "Tony" Montana's criminal career in Miami.

21 "Inspired from and dramatized upon a true event", this is a story of drug-smuggler Billy Hayes who ends up in Turkish prison.

22 Not really the same as Plutarch's lives of Heracles, Theseus or Romulus, since the ancients considered them historical characters, but still a compelling parallel.

23 In 1991, Oliver Stone showed the film *JFK* to Congress on Capitol Hill, which helped lead to the passage of the Assassination Materials Disclosure Act of 1992. On this see http://thomas.loc.gov/cgi-bin/bdquery/z?d102:SJ00282:@@@D&summ2=m& (1.5.2007).

24 Unlike Plutarch, Oliver Stone has to work for a living. The box office scores of *Alexander* (2004) are often misrepresented – they were disappointing in America, but the world-wide intake was far better. For the detailed break down of the earnings of *Alexander,* see http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0346491/business (30.5.2007).

25 LANE FOX 2004, 36.

fect explanation for why artists should restrict themselves to speaking only through their works.

Stone makes a somewhat clearer assertion in the foreword of Lane Fox's book. This time, he is referring to his reasons for filming *Alexander* only:

> "He made me believe in heroes. And for this, he must be remembered – as an icon, at the very least, of a young person breaking through the barriers of our personal lives. Nor should we overlook, as both students and participants in history, the eternal sense of possibility in Alexander's idealism. Such men are the great invigorators of history."[26]

Here at last, we have something a classicist can work with: The famous opening sentence of Herodotus' *Histories* pinpointing the memory and glorification of great deeds as the purpose of historiography merged with an interest in problems of cultural identity, and finally a nod to Plutarch by presenting an idea that we can learn from great men. The slightly disquieting Hegelian overtones should be analysed by another expert.

Indeed, Stone presents a somewhat idealized Alexander and the film does have a slightly annoying, didactic overtone at times. However, to judge a film on the basis of this is to be arrogant – as a classicist, I do not need as much introductory information as the general audience. To present the astonishing achievements of Alexander is to eulogize (to a degree). However, Stone's hero progresses from very noble beginnings to the tragic end, very much in the manner of a classical tragedy – as indeed does Plutarch's *Life of Alexander*.[27] So should we perceive Stone's biopic as a modern-day version of Plutarch, as a mirror? Should we endeavour to fashion and adorn our lives in conformity with the virtues therein depicted? Perhaps the members of the political elite of Plutarch's day could even find practical lessons in the *Lives*, but what can we possibly learn from Alexander now? The abyss between the men of the 21st century and the demi-god of old seems too wide, and his life as relevant to the present day as the achievements of Conan the Barbarian.

Perhaps in an attempt to breech this abyss, Stone introduced an element into his story of Alexander that cannot be found in any of the ancient sources: he shaped a hero in desperate need of Freudian psychoanalysis.[28] In a true manner of a resourceful dramatist, Stone concentrated on Alexander's (well-attested!) troubled relationship with his parents and interpreted it along the lines of Freudian psychoanalytical theory in a very persuasive way.[29] Had he focused solely on Alexander's relationship with his parents, this strategy might not have worked so well, but Stone went further and interpreted some of the key characters of the film

26 LANE FOX 2004, iv.

27 On the tragic overtones of *Life of Alexander* see MOSSMAN 1988.

28 As a child, Sigmund Freud idolised Alexander the Great and even persuaded his parents to name his brother Alexander. See on this JONES 1953, 18. A fascinating question I cannot pursue here is to what degree Freud's concepts such as the Oedipus complex and the castration were actually *influenced* by his childhood fascination with the figure of Alexander the Great – the Freudian interpretation of Alexander is somewhat suspiciously unforced. For one such attempt at psychoanalysis of Alexander the Great see THOMAS 1995.

29 See also WIEBER in this volume.

along these lines: quite persuasively, he portrays Cleitus as Alexander's substitute father, Roxane as his mother-figure and the murder of Cleitus and sexual congress with Roxane are represented as transference.[30] Stone even interprets Alexander's conquests and the institution of many Alexandrias as a classic case of sublimation.[31] The depiction of Oedipus in the cave in Pella is a clear representation of Alexander's own internal conflict; the battle in India is correspondingly represented as the climax of his death-drive.

Now, we might not all conquer kingdoms, cross the boundaries of the known world or establish cities to bear the glory of our name, but most of us have a problem or two with our parents. The important conversation on the balcony of the royal palace in Babylon is an invitation to observe Alexander as a complex mixture of "larger than life" hero and just a man troubled and scarred by his relationship with his parents. "Which am I, Hephaistion, weak or divine" (1.13), is a question Alexander poses to his friend, and Stone to the viewers of his film.

3. SE NON È VERO, È BEN TROVATO – THE SOURCES OF STONE'S *ALEXANDER*

Stone's treatment of sources has often been criticized, and he was accused of presenting historical inaccuracies, especially in the films *JFK* and *Nixon*.[32] Since Alexander's exploits were already controversial in antiquity, and the extant sources offer different, often clashing reports,[33] it was quite obvious from the start which aspect of the film might be scrutinized by the critics. Perhaps anticipating yet another debate, Stone enlisted the help of eminent expert Robin Lane Fox, who agreed to collaborate on the film as a historical consultant. LANE FOX 2004 is a record of this collaboration; its result is a film too accurate, too historical, and last, but not least, too clever for its own good. The U.S. movie critics ruined the film's chance of success at the box-office by complaining about Stone's too rigid adherence to history ("dry and academic" were the worst insults that probably scared most of the audiences away). Paradoxically, whereas previously Stone tended to be criticized for his lax treatment of historical sources, now it was his adherence to them that was objected to.[34] The academic reviewers displayed an unsurprising lack of understanding for film as a medium and concentrated on the

30 See on this also WIEBER in this volume.

31 Hephaistion to Alexander on the balcony in Babylon: "Some say these Alexandrias have become extensions of Alexander himself" (1.13).
I quote the film scenes according to the first edition of the German-English DVD released by Constantin Film in 2004 (which is identical with the cinematic version). Two further (different) versions of the DVD have been released: *Alexander – Director's Cut* released by Warner Home Video in 2004 and *Alexander Revisited - The Final Cut* released by Warner Homer Video in 2007.

32 Stone published annotated versions of the screenplays of both films citing references for his claims. On the controversy of Stone's depiction of historical characters see also WIEBER in this volume.

33 On sources for *Alexander* see HAMMOND 1983 and 1993 with further literature.

34 For a good overview of reviews, see http://www.metacritic.com/film/titles/alexander/ (30.5.2007).

number of battles and the aptness (or unsuitability) of the props and costumes.[35] However, Stone's treatment of the sources was rarely criticized.[36]

Oliver Stone claimed to have been fascinated by Alexander since childhood[37] and to have wanted to tell his story in a film ever since his student days at New York University's Film School in 1969.[38] When producer Thomas Schühly first contacted him and asked him to direct a film on Alexander in 1989, Stone responded: "A brilliant theme for a character study."[39] The time for Plutarch has come.

Stone read Renault's novels as a child, but for his film he decided to adhere to what he refers to as "Robin Lane Fox's school of Alexander."[40] Lane Fox's monograph *Alexander the Great* from 1973 was aimed at the general public but has also enjoyed significant academic acclaim. His hero is very much like Plutarch's – in the words of a reviewer: "For Lane Fox, Alexander is a Homeric hero, a romantic always striving for greater conquests, supremely confident in his own ability, not brooking opposition but not the resentful, suspicious, maniacal figures whom some have pictured."[41]

Remarkably for a present-day scriptwriter, but typical for Oliver Stone, he did not stop with Lane Fox, but consulted the ancient sources as well. This is clearly evident in the film, and is also recorded in Lane Fox' account of their collaboration and in Stone's interviews.[42] The fact that the ancient accounts did not merely serve as a source of information for Stone is significant: he sometimes modelled the plot of his script according to the way the events were portrayed in the ancient texts. Lane Fox relates how he complained about the order of some events in the script, only to have Stone retort: "But they are not narrated in sequence in Arrian, either."[43]

In a recent interview, Stone mentioned Plutarch, Curtius Rufus, Diodorus of Sicily and Arrian as his sources.[44] He sums up his methodology by stating: "I took from many sources, but I shaped the Alexander that I saw inside those sources."[45] Whereas the ancient historians such as Curtius Rufus, Diodorus and Arrian concentrate on historical events, Plutarch is the only one who expressly proclaims it

35 See the summary in NISBET 2006, 129-135.

36 The jungle battle in India being a notable exception. On Stone's admittedly idiosyncratic approach to the filming of this scene see LANE FOX 2004, 157.

37 See the interview on MySpace presentation of the film: http://www.adddev1.com/1myspace/alexander/alex-archive.html (25.05.2008).

38 LANE FOX 2004, 7.

39 LANE FOX 2004, 12.

40 http://www.adddev1.com/1myspace/alexander/alex-archive.html (25.05.2008).

41 BRISCOE 1976, 234.

42 Cf. for instance Stone questioning Lane Fox about Roxane: "Did she really poison one of Alexander's other Persian wives?", Oliver wondered. I had forgotten this allegation, though Oliver had found it at the end of Plutarch's life: it may be a rumour, put about by her many enemies." LANE FOX 2004, 39. (Plutarch is not mentioning poison, but simply states that Roxane killed (*apekteine*) Stateira (*Alex.* 77, 4).

43 LANE FOX 2004, 42.

44 http://www.adddev1.com/1myspace/alexander/alex-archive.html (25.05.2008).

45 http://www.adddev1.com/1myspace/alexander/alex-archive.html (25.05.2008).

his goal to devote himself "to the signs of the soul in men, and by means of these to portray the life of each, leaving to others the description of their great contests."[46] Even though he quotes no less than 24 authors in the *Life of Alexander*, it is obvious that in order to provide a character sketch, Plutarch had to shape the Alexander that he saw inside those sources, too.[47]

I shall argue that Plutarch's complex interweaving of tragic and epic motifs, as well as his usage of symbols and allusions to point out the major driving forces that shaped Alexander, are very similar to Stone's approach.

4. Plutarch's depiction of Alexander the Great: the tragedy of an epic hero

Plutarch is the only ancient author used by Stone who provides a continuous narrative from Alexander's birth to his death.[48] His story is distinctly more "literary" than the historical accounts of Arrian, Diodorus and Curtius. It is a subtle and carefully structured biography that uses visual imagery, quotations and allusions to effectively shape the life of Alexander into a drama and cast him into a tragic hero. But tragedy is not the only patterning Plutarch uses in his *Life of Alexander* – his hero is very similar to Homeric Achilles and the epic reminiscences throughout the text serve to stress this similarity.[49]

Obviously, Plutarch is not the only author who compared Alexander with Achilles[50] and it is highly probable that Alexander himself promoted this connection. However, Plutarch does not restrict himself to mentioning Alexander's lineage[51] or relating the episodes involving Alexander's love of Homer[52] and his imitation of Achilles,[53] he also employs epic narrative techniques, such as foreshadowing and uses allusion in order to endow his biography with an epic tone.[54]

Another dominant tone in Plutarch's *Alexander* is the tragic one. Plutarch introduced tragic motifs in several Lives, most prominently in *Demetrius* and *An-*

46 *Alex*. 1, 3.
47 For Plutarch's sources see Hammond 1993.
48 Even though the end *of Life of Alexander* is not transmitted, it does contain the account of Alexander's death. It is however improbable that Plutarch would end the biography without relating the fates of Roxane and Olympias. See on this Hamilton 2002, 217.
49 For tragedy and epic in Plutarch's *Alexander* see the brilliant study of Mossmann 1988.
50 See Mossmann 1988, 83-4.
51 *Alex*. 2, 1.
52 *Alex*. 8, 2: Alexander always kept Aristotle's edition of the *Iliad* under his pillow; 15, 4: visits Troy and honours the grave of Achilles; 26: places the *Iliad* in the precious casket, the most valuable object from Darius' camp; Homer appears to him in a dream and advices him on the proper position for building Alexandria; 28, 2: quotes the *Iliad* mocking his divine ancestry.
53 *Alex*. 5, 5: Lysimachus calls himself Phoenix, Alexander Achilles and Philip Peleus.
54 Mossmann 1988 persuasively argues that the taming of Bucephalas alludes to the Homeric epithet *hippodamos* "tamer of horses"; that Philip's drunken attempt to attack Alexander foreshadows the death of Cleitus; that the description of Alexander's arming before Gaugamela (32, 5-7) evokes the arming of Achilles. The pinnacle of the epic tone in *Alexander* is his mourning for Patroclus.

tony and these are precisely the heroes whose downfall was not caused by external, but by internal factors.[55] What genre is better suited to tell a story of a great man who destroys himself than tragedy? The evil omens and unfinished and futile sacrifices[56] directly precede the murder of Cleitus, which is represented in a very dramatic mode: at the symposium, Cleitus provokes Alexander who orders him to leave, but then, in a true tragic fashion, Cleitus enters again "by another door, very boldly and contemptuously reciting"[57] the iambics from Euripides' *Andromache*. Cleitus' last utterance was tragic verse and he dies as a tragic hero.

Mossman argues that the mentions of Dionysus also belong to the tragic patterning, but I see them rather as a merging of the tragic and the epic motifs in Plutarch's biography. The most significant passage for the understanding of the Dionysian motifs in the *Life of Alexander* is Plutarch's description of Alexander's remorse after the destruction of Thebes:

> "And certainly the murder of Cleitus, which he committed in his cups, and the cowardly refusal of his Macedonians to follow him against the Indians, whereby they as it were robbed his expedition and his glory of their consummation, he was wont to attribute to the vengeful wrath of Dionysus."[58]

The anger (*menis*) of a god is propelling Odysseus to the ends of the world. In the *Iliad*, it is the anger of Achilles that drives him to desist from fighting and thus robs him of glory and of his companion Patroclus. For Plutarch's Alexander, it is his and divine anger that brings his downfall and the pattern is always the same: unfortunate events are preceded by heavy drinking. It is at the symposium that Philip and Alexander have a terrible row after which both Alexander and his mother leave Macedonia;[59] after heavy drinking Thais incites Alexander to burn down the palace at Persepolis;[60] the murder of Cleitus also takes place at the symposium.[61]

Alexander's own death is foreshadowed by several instances of excessive drinking and by a series of bad omens: the return from India is described as an endless symposium:

> "Not a shield was to be seen, not a helmet, not a spear, but along the whole march with cups and drinking-horns and flagons the soldiers kept dipping wine from huge casks and mixing-bowls and pledging one another, some as they marched along, others lying down; while pipes and flutes, stringed instruments and song, and revelling cries of women, filled every place with abundant music. Then, upon this disordered and straggling procession there followed

55 MOSSMANN 1988, 92.
56 *Alex*. 50, 2-3: Cleitus breaks off the sacrifice because Alexander summoned him; the sacrificial animals follow him; the soothsayers proclaim this a bad omen; Alexander orders them to sacrifice for Cleitus' benefit and remembers a bad dream he had two days before.
57 *Alex*. 51, 4-5.
58 *Alex.* 13, 3.
59 *Alex*. 9.
60 *Alex*. 38.
61 Cf. *Alex*. 50, 1: The murder of Cleitus "did not happen of set purpose, but through some misfortune of the king, whose anger and intoxication furnished occasion for the evil genius of Cleitus."

> also the sports of bacchanalian license (*paidia bakchikes hybreos*) as though the god himself were present and conducting the revel."[62]

The sense of impending doom could not be stronger. And indeed, doom was to follow: soon Alexander arranges a contest in drinking pure wine. The winner and forty-one contestants die of a violent chill as a consequence.[63] This was but a foreshadowing of the worst tragedy Alexander had to endure. When he reached Ecbatana, Hephaistion fell ill, drank "a huge cooler of wine" and died.[64] Incidentally, Alexander was "occupied with theatres and festivals" at the time. Plutarch even introduces the tragic irony in the *Life of Alexander*, since besides the *Iliad*, his hero is constantly reading and quoting the tragedies and organizing theatrical contests,[65] but is obviously unable to understand his own role in his personal tragedy.

The scene is thus set for Alexander's own death which is preceded by a series of warnings and bad omens. The Chaldaeans advised Alexander to keep away from Babylon; ravens clawing one another were seen as Alexander arrived at the city-walls; the sacrifice conducted by the seer Pythagoras in order to learn Alexander's fate was very unfavourable as it transpired that the sacrificial animal's liver had no lobe – I shall come back to this – and, finally, the largest lion in Alexander's menagerie was kicked to death by a tame ass. Chapter 73 containing all these omens is noteworthy, since this is the scene in which many narrative patterns and symbols employed throughout the text come together. For instance, the lion is used as a significant symbol for Alexander: Before Alexander's birth, Philip dreamed that he was putting a seal – a figure of a lion – upon his wife's womb. The seer Aristander's interpretation of the dream was that Olympias was pregnant with a son whose nature would be bold and lion-like.[66] Later, when describing the destruction of Thebes, Plutarch compares Alexander's rage with a lion's[67] and he also narrates the famous lion-hunt which Craterus commissioned to be sculpted and dedicated at Delphi.[68] The lion not only underlines Alexander's bravery and hot temper, but is also a very resonant epic motif. Homeric heroes are often compared to lions, most of all Achilles. On the other hand, the lion was a symbol of nobility and royal power and a famous attribute of Alexander's other great ancestor, Heracles.[69]

62 *Alex*. 67, 2-3.
63 *Alex*. 70.
64 *Alex*. 72.
65 *Alex.* 8, 2-3: At Alexander's request, Harpalus sends him "a great many of the tragedies of Euripides, Sophocles and Aeschylus, and the dithyrambic poems of Telestus and Philoxenus"; 10, 4: when Pausanias complained about Philip's allowing Attalos to dishonour him, Alexander quotes Euripides' *Medea* advising him to revenge himself on the "giver of the bride, the bridegroom, and the bride" (v. 289); 29, 1: Alexander organizes splendid contests of dithyrambic choruses and tragedies in Phoenicia.
66 *Alex*. 2, 2-4.
67 *Alex*. 13, 2.
68 *Alex*. 40, 3-4.
69 See HAMILTON 2004, 2 (comm. ad loc.) for references.

Already Alexander's excessive mourning over Hephaistion's death (chapter 72) has heavy epic overtones – not only is Alexander as inconsolable in his grief as Achilles was, but his helpless fury also results in the merciless slaughter of the Cossaeans, just as Achilles sacrificed the Trojan youths.[70] Plutarch is the only ancient author who describes this act as a massacre (72, 3: *pantas aposphatton*),[71] he comments on the act as follows (lest anyone missed the epic parallel): "This was called an offering (*enagismos*) to the shade of Hephaestion."[72] After this episode, Alexander defies all warnings and bad omens and rushes to the very place where he was to meet a certain death – just like Achilles famously decided to stay in Troy, even though he knew he was going to die there. Like his ancestor, Alexander too "loved his reputation more than his life or his kingdom."[73] It is here, in Babylon, that the epic and tragic patterns form a unity and the revenge of Dionysus is finally fulfilled. Alexander was taking part in an athletic exercise, when his companions "beheld a man seated on the king's throne, in silence, wearing the royal diadem and robes. When the man was asked who he was, he was speechless for a long time; but at last he came to his senses and said that his names was *Dionysius* (my italics), and that he was a native of Messenia; in consequence of some charge brought against him, he said, he had been brought thither from the seaboard, and for a long time had been in chains; but just now the god Serapis had come to him and loosed his chains and brought him to this spot, bidding him put on the robe and diadem and sit on the throne and hold his peace."[74]

Even though Arrian[75] and Diodorus[76] both mention this omen, neither of them provide the name of the man – Dionysius is to be found in Plutarch only.

In a true tragic manner, imminent death cannot be withheld and, whereas previously Alexander was incredulous towards oracles, he now surrounds himself with seers, sacrificers and purifiers.[77] But it is too late for oracles. Alexander is unable to understand the true nature of the curse threatening him and, much like Pentheus, he even pursues his pursuer:

> "He laid aside his grief and betook himself once more to sacrifices and drinking-bouts. He gave a splendid entertainment to Nearchus, and then, although he had taken his customary bath before going to bed, at the request of Medius he went to hold high revel with him, and here, after drinking all the next day, he began to have a fever. This did not come upon him after he had quaffed a "bowl of Heracles", nor after he had been seized with a sudden pain in the back as though smitten with a spear; these particulars certain writers felt obliged to give, and so, as it were, invented in tragic fashion a moving finale for a great action (*hosper dramatos megalou tragikon eksodion kai peripathes plasantes*). But Aristobulos says that he had a

70 See MOSSMANN 1988, 91.
71 See HAMILTON 2004, 201 (comm. ad loc.).
72 *Alex*. 72, 3.
73 *Alex.* 42, 2.
74 *Alex*. 73, 3-4.
75 *An.* 7, 24.
76 17, 116.
77 *Alex.* 75, 1.

> raging fever, and that when he got very thirsty he drank wine, whereupon he became delirious, and died on the thirtieth day of the month Daesius."[78]

Plutarch is here criticizing the adherents of the so-called "tragic history", Hellenistic writers who appealed to the emotions of the readers and (ab)used the tragic motifs in order to bestow their narratives with pathos.[79] Even though he blended the epic and tragic techniques himself, Plutarch often criticises the tragic historians[80] simply because they invented things in order to bestow their narratives with a tragic note. Mossman 1988, 91 comments upon the quoted passage as follows:

> "The emphasis, I think, must be on plasantes; there was no need to fabricate a pathetic end to Alexander's life, says Plutarch: and he substitutes for the absurdities of the 'tragic' historians an account which far exceeds theirs in pathos and which has the additional merit of being true – or at least culled from the royal journals."

The other possibility is that Plutarch takes a sudden u-turn before committing himself completely to a single explanation of Alexander's death. He leads his reader to believe that Alexander was pursued by Dionysus, but what did Plutarch think of this? If we retrace our steps, we shall see that he does not assert that this was indeed the case, it was Alexander himself who attributed his many misfortunes to the wrath of Dionysus.[81]

After offering the tragic version of the Alexander story, Plutarch coolheadedly quotes the court journals: there is no drinking or wild revelry here, only sober conversations with Nearchus, a violent fever, and what looks like a perfectly natural death.[82] But no story about Alexander would be complete without a conspiracy theory, and Plutarch delivers one in the following chapter:

> "But those who affirm that Aristotle counselled Antipater to do the deed (sc. to kill Alexander, my remark) and that it was entirely through his agency that the poison was provided, mention one Hagnothemis as their authority, who professed to have heard the story from Antigonus the king; and the poison was water, icy cold, from a certain cliff in Nonacris; this they gathered up like a delicate dew and stored it in an ass's hoof; for no other vessel would hold the water, but would all be eaten through by it, owing to its coldness and pungency. Most writers, however, think that the story of the poisoning is altogether a fabrication; and it is of slight evidence in their favour that during the dissensions of Alexander's commanders, which lasted many days, his body, although it lay without special care in places that were moist and stifling, showed no sign of such a destructive influence, but remained pure and fresh."[83]

So Plutarch obviously does not support the conspiracy theory. Or does he? Alexander, the Macedonian *lion* killed by an *ass*'*s* hoof would be the fulfilment of the Babylonian omen: "The largest and handsomest lion in his menagerie was attacked by a tame ass and kicked to death."[84] Plutarch seems to want his reader to consider this possibility, too.

78 *Alex.* 75, 3-5.
79 The classic discussions are WALBANK 1955 and 1985.
80 See on this DE LACY 1952.
81 *Alex.* 13, 3.
82 *Alex.* 76.
83 *Alex.* 77. 2-4.
84 *Alex*. 73, 3.

Finally, we are left wondering what really happened to Alexander. Was it the wreath of Dionysus that killed him? Or was it simply an illness? Perhaps he was poisoned? Or was Alexander destined to die young, after coming closer to the gods than any man before him, just like his predecessor Achilles? Perhaps he was more like his other ancestor, Heracles, and did not die at all, but has joined the gods – as the wondrous story of his body remaining unspoiled after his death suggests? Plutarch operates with several symbols and archetypal heroes and pursues several narrative patterns in his story, leaving the end open and the reader wondering about the true nature of Alexander – just like his successor, Oliver Stone, as I hope to demonstrate in the following chapter.

5. Stone's Alexander: An epic on a Freudian tragic hero

As argued in the previous chapter, Plutarch used many sources for his *Alexander* and presented a biography with an open end in which the epic and the tragic patterns were intertwined. His hero is a true descendant of Achilles, valuing honour (*doxa*) above his own life and his kingdom, but he is also a tragic hero, since he is unable to control his hot temper and he insults a powerful god thus causing his own perdition. We cannot interview Plutarch in order to find out how he searched for his Alexander or what made him represent him in this way. However, we can get these answers from Stone. Two remarks of his deserve special attention in this context:

> "I think the film is about honor, and a man willing to fight to the death for his honor, his fame, his self-consciousness, as Achilles did in *The Iliad* and Odysseus in the *The Odyssey*, etc. Classical times seem to emphasize this strong pre-Christian concept, and this is why I think *Gladiator* did so well for a mass audience, because I think honor is a viable concept, a design for life that modern people would still like to believe in. But because this concept has become so dangerously perverted in a technology-obsessed and selfish modern world (think Hitler, Stalin, Mao, Bush), this ancient figure in search of the great myth of life has been deeply misunderstood as nationalistic. This is balderdash. If you think badly on Alexander, 'honni soit qui mal y pense.'"[85]

We shall return to the Homeric moments of the film shortly. But what about the Dionysian pattern? Was Stone inspired by the tragedy, too?

> "In order to write the material I had to return to the dramatic dimension, and I did refresh myself in Greek drama, particularly Euripides' *Bacchae*. But what impressed me the most about Greek tragedy is the directness of the language and the search for the truth in the experience of living. Greek drama cries aloud for meaning and is filled with a great yearning over the human condition. I find it still very moving, and I tried to use some of the methods that I saw there."[86]

In order to understand Stone's view of Alexander, it is necessary to pay attention to the symbols he is using to highlight certain motifs, shape parallel narratives or offer alternative interpretations of certain events. Whereas Plutarch operated with

85 http://www.adddev1.com/1myspace/alexander/alex-archive.html (25.05.2008).
86 http://www.adddev1.com/1myspace/alexander/alex-archive.html (25.05.2008).

allusions on the level of words, Stone often used visual "clues". His Alexander is represented as Achilles and Heracles which Stone highlights by using an image of a lion; but he is also a Prometheus whose symbol is an eagle and he is pursued by Dionysus who is represented as a bull.

The beginning of the film features its most important symbol, the flying eagle whose representation is merged with numerous ancient portraits of Alexander. The first scene takes us to Alexander's death bed in Babylon. Above the bed is the *Faravahar* or *Farohar*, an ancient symbol of the Persian god Ahura-Mazda who has the upper body of a man holding a ring and the wings and a lower body of a flying eagle. Beneath the eagle, we see Alexander already delirious, as he raises a ring towards the eagle and then drops it on the floor.

In Plutarch's *Life*, before we encounter Alexander, we are presented with the narrator's "statement of purpose" (*Alex*. 1-3). In Stone's film, we first see this very puzzling scene which raises our awareness for the symbolic level of the narrative. It is in the second scene that we encounter our narrator, Alexander's general Ptolemy, now ruler of Egypt, who is a brilliant choice not only because he witnessed Alexander's career from the very start and followed him to India, but also because he wrote one of the lost *Alexander Histories*. He not only introduces the subject of the film, but also offers a clever little instruction manual for its viewing: we see him dictating his account to the slave in the Library as he walks past several statues.[87] (fig. 8) As Ptolemy begins his narrative, we see behind him a statue of Hermes which stresses Ptolemy's role as an interpreter of Alexander's life. Next we see Ptolemy's son with his family, standing in front of the statue of his father. Ptolemy mentions India and the camera shows a mosaic of Alexander charging the elephants. "He was a god, Cadmus, or as close as anything I've ever seen" says Ptolemy (3.33) and we see behind him a statue of Apollo, reminding us how fatal a divine origin turned out to be for Achilles. "He was Prometheus, a friend to men" (3.53), asserts Ptolemy and he explains that Alexander spread the Hellenic civilization and that his kingdom was open to all. Behind him, we see a statue of Zeus, perhaps highlighting Alexander's assertion that he was a son of Zeus, or perhaps as a reminder of the price Prometheus had to pay for his benefactions on human kind. As Ptolemy recalls his youth as a general under Alexander, he walks by a statue of a hoplite; then he touches the statue of Heracles and says: "When Alexander looked you in the eye, you could do anything, anything". (4.40). "In his presence, by the light of Apollo, we were better than ourselves" (4.52) he says and walks past the statue of Apollo. "Surely, I've known many great men in my life, but only one Colossus" (5.03), asserts Ptolemy and walks past the statue of Athena, the famous protector of the epic heroes, "and only now, as an old man do I understand who this force of nature really was"(5.14) "Or do I? Did such a man as Alexander really exist?" (5.18) (Now we see a mosaic of the battle of Gaugamela) "Of course not. We idolize him, make him better than he

87 In this paper, I shall not concentrate on identifying the reconstructions of the ancient objects, nor shall I comment their correctness. I shall interpret their meaning in the film.

really was. Men, all men reach and fall, reach and fall" (5.34). Behind Ptolemy, we see Zeus again.

This important scene uses the statuary not as mere decor, but as symbols for aspects of Alexander's character or as parallels or even alternative views of the narrative.

In the next scene, Alexander is a boy, lulled to sleep by his mother. Two large paintings are visible on the wall of her chamber: Zeus hurling a thunder-bolt and Achilles dragging Hector's corpse. These two paintings are neat symbols of the two patterns the film is following – tragedy and epic.

While a voice-over narrates the story according to which Alexander was a son of Dionysus or Zeus (7.02) the camera focuses on the picture of Zeus, clearly choosing the preferred version. The picture of Achilles is very significant, not only because Olympias constantly reminds Alexander of his legendary predecessor, but also because this painting represents the hero at the pinnacle of his *hybris*, at his most blood-thirsty and insolent, foreshadowing the destiny Alexander could not escape either.[88]

Handling her many snakes, Olympias introduces the motif of tragic *hybris*, stating that Philip "makes a mockery of Dionysus every night" (8.50). The camera shows a bull and a statue of Dionysus. The snake shall from this scene feature as a symbol of Olympias, whereas the bull, an ancient symbol of Dionysus shall follow Alexander all the way to Babylon, the place where he was destined to die. We shall see winged bulls flanking the entrance gates of Babylon three times: as Alexander is entering the city for the first time (1.1), as he is returning (2.26) and immediately after his death – this time the bulls are not embedded in the narrative at all, but are a part of a series of images Alexander sees on his death bed (2.35).
Philip's drunken attempt to rape Olympias oddly reminds one of the Homeric combats, as the combatants dully present themselves.[89] After they have been separated, Olympias roars on all fours (11.40) – like a lion? – and proclaims her imminent revenge. The epic theme has thus been introduced along with the Dionysian one.

The following scenes feature Alexander's training under Leonidas[90] and his education under Aristotle,[91] both stressing the Homeric motifs, the one introduc-

88 Curtius Rufus (4, 6, 29) relates the story of Achilles dragging Betis, a governor of Gaza around the city with his horses as a punishment for his insolent behaviour and comments: "Then Alexander's horses dragged him around the city while the king gloated at having followed the example of his ancestor Achilles in punishing his enemy." In this film, there are numerous allusions to the events related by the ancient authors, but not in the film. Some scenes, like the representations of Achilles, are perhaps too iconic to be interpreted as alluding to extradiegetic narratives, but some are tantalizingly lucid and cannot be a product of a chance. For instance, the girl Philotas grabs at Attalus' wedding is called Antigone and she is never mentioned in the film again. However, Plutarch relates that it was Philotas' mistress Antigone who "leaked" the story about the conspiracy to Alexander after which Philotas was arrested and executed (*Alex.* 48).

89 Olympias exclaiming "I am of Achilles, royal blood" and Philip retorting: "And blood of Heracles runs in my veins" (10.37).

90 Cf. Pl. *Alex.* 5, 4.

91 Cf. Pl. *Alex*. 7-8.

ing Hephaistion and the other featuring Aristotle discussing Achilles' lack of restraint and selfishness as he allows himself to become crazed with grief and endangers his army, thus foreshadowing Alexander's own future actions. The taming of Bucephalas, entirely taken over from Plutarch,[92] introduces a further important symbol, the eagle. As Alexander mounts the horse an eagle appears in the sky (20.2). This is a very significant moment, mostly because Alexander gets his father's recognition, and is thus acknowledged as a future king.

Interestingly, Plutarch recorded that the eagle was said to have appeared above Alexander before the battle of Gaugamela.[93] What was probably meant to be a symbol of royal power and Zeus' protection, Stone reshaped into a powerful and ambivalent symbol of the glory and the tragedy of power, as he introduced a Promethean note in the interpretation of the eagle. The full meaning of the eagle is explained in the following scene, featuring Philip elucidating the paintings in a cave to young Alexander. Plutarch would not like it, as it is entirely fabricated and in the best tradition of the "tragic" history, but it is of immense importance for the understanding of Stone's *Alexander*. In a way, this scene is self-referential, a film's nod to its ancient predecessor, as the mythological scenes could be perceived as an ancient equivalent to the moving pictures. But most of all, it is Stone's nod to epic and tragedy. The first scenes feature paintings of Achilles, and, whereas Alexander explains that this hero is his favourite, as he strove for glory, Philip introduces an important *Leitmotif* of the film – there is no glory without agony; great men are punished by the gods and all suffer horrible deaths. Each of the myths represented in a cave has a direct reference to Alexander's fate – Achilles became glorious, but had to lose his friend and die young; Prometheus, "a friend to men" is represented as suffering his horrible punishment, with the eagle eating his liver; Oedipus tore out his eyes as he realized that he murdered his father and married his mother; Medea and Heracles are depicted slaughtering their children.

The eagle will follow Alexander to his great battles[94] and finally to his deathbed as the symbol of the suffering royal power brings. At the slopes of the Hindu Kush Alexander shall even face Prometheus – in the moment Ptolemy says "Zeus chained Prometheus up there, in one of these caves" a huge face is clearly visible in the slopes of the mountains (1.39.18). Even though Alexander was compared to Achilles, Heracles and Dionysus in antiquity, the Prometheus parallel is not to be found in the ancient sources and seems to be Stone's invention.[95]

92 Plut. *Alex*. 6.

93 Plut. *Alex*. 33, 2: "Aristander the seer ... pointed out to them an eagle which soared above the head of Alexander and directed his flight straight against the enemy, at which sight great courage filled the beholders, and after mutual encouragement and exhortation the cavalry charged at full speed upon the enemy and the phalanx rolled on after them like a flood."

94 He appears before the battle of Gaugamela (46.30; 48.39; 51.22) and vanishes after Darius' retreat (59.03).

95 In LANE FOX 2004, 5 Stone writes about Alexander: "A brilliant military commander who never suffered defeat in battle, he risked his life numerous times, yet remained a visionary of remarkable and generous spirit, who sought to live a life modelled on the great mythological Greek figures of Heracles, Dionysus, Achilles, and, *to my mind* (my italics), Prometheus."

The story of Oedipus underlined the discussed Freudian interpretation of Alexander's life, as indeed does Medea. Even though the murder of Philip is represented as a flash-back in the film, immediately following Alexander's murder of his father-figure Cleitus, Alexander is not explicitly portrayed as involved in the conspiracy. However, it is clear that he *wanted* the death of his father, and from a psychological perspective, this is as detrimental – if not worse – than direct involvement.[96] However, Olympias is portrayed as a direct accomplice of the deed which haunted Alexander to his death, as is clear from Alexander's last conversation with her, when the cave-representation of Medea briefly flashes in front of our eyes (2.2.56), and from one of the final scenes, when Olympias sees the omen announcing the death of her son: an eagle bitten by a snake. (2.36.34). This provides the meeting point of the Freudian and the tragic plot in the film - as voiced by Ptolemy (2.36.35), from the Greek point of view, even if he did not have anything to do with his father's death, by blood Alexander *was* guilty.

But what of Heracles? How does the murder of his children fit into the story of Alexander? This parallel is the result of another piece of poetic licence taken by Stone. He represents Alexander accusing Roxane of Hephaistion's death,[97] attacking her and wrestling her, as she proclaims "I have a child, Alexander" and the cave representation of Medea appears (2.30.47). But this time around, it is Alexander who is murdering his unborn child, both by physically assaulting his pregnant wife and by discrediting her in the eyes of his generals, thus weakening her position after his death. As Roxane exclaims: "We'll have a son!" (2.31.8), a cave representation of Heracles killing his children appears on the screen.

Finally, Alexander repeats all the mistakes his parents and his mythical predecessors have made and fulfils his father's prophecy – by becoming the greatest king, he suffers the greatest pains. Stone not only presented his life as a tragic history, he shaped it into a super-tragedy.

But there are also some strong epic moments in the film. Alexander's constant emulation of Achilles reaches its peak in his relationship with Hephaistion and in the representation of his valour in battle. In the Gaugamela battle, Alexander even surpasses his ancestor, as he doesn't let himself get carried away by his wish for glory as Achilles did in a decisive moment of the battle[98] and desists from pursuing Darius in order to save Parmenion.[99] The battle of Gaugamela is not only historically the most accurate depiction of an ancient battle ever made, it is paradoxically also very Homeric: The scenes of the battle are not stylised so as to look almost beautiful as in the most modern action films, they are ugly and terrible,

96 After the assassination, Alexander reproaches his mother saying: "You've unleashed the Furies, you don't even know their power" (2.1.31) She responds: "Now who is exaggerating ... Even if it was the wish of your heart" (2.1.36).

97 And even suggests that she was guilty, as Alexander's conversation with Roxane bears an uncanny resemblance to his conversation with his mother right after the assassination of Philip: Alexander accuses both of having "unleashed the Furies" (2.1.31; 2.30.44).

98 *Il*. 21, 595ff. Apollo assumes the shape of Agenor and urges Achilles to chase him, thus leading him away from the battlefield and allowing the Trojans to retreat from what could have been their peril.

99 Cf. also Plut. *Alex*. 33.

with soldiers losing their limbs and being stabbed, wounded and slaughtered in the most horrible ways. Alexander is wearing a helmet with a crest between two large white feathers, just like the one described by Plutarch.[100] The helmet is in the shape of a lion's head, neatly alluding to the famous Homeric simile. Even more conspicuous is the sound effect: Immediately after Alexander finishes his speech for the soldiers with the words: "Conquer your fear, and I promise you, you will conquer death", the roaring of a lion can be heard (47.52).

Alexander's ancestry is mentioned by Olympias[101] and the narrator[102] many times; the edition of the *Iliad* Alexander kept under his pillow is mentioned by Cassander (38.42) and shown in the wedding-night scene (1.29), but the most poignant epic moments of the film are those in which no direct comparison is made: Alexander's promise to Hephaistion to be with him always (1.15.48) foreshadows Hephaistion's earlier death. Alexander obviously sees his encounter with Roxane as repeating Achilles' falling in love with the Amazon queen Penthesilea. Contrary to Plutarch's patterning, in which epic reminiscences stress the positive side of Alexander's character, in Stone's film they also highlight the negative: when entering Babylon, at the pinnacle of Alexander's fame and glory, a lion in a cage is shown and Alexander gazes at it in slow-motion, as the voiceover states "Babylon was an easier mistress to enter than she was to leave" (1.2) (fig. 7).

As Alexander became a king of Asia and entered Babylon, we see the representations of many mythical creatures: Faravahar – a mixture of an eagle and a man – on the gates of the city (1.2.2); griffins flanking the gates of Babylon (1.2.57) and the stills of Faravahar (1.3.8) and a creature with the body of a lion, the head of a man and the wings of an eagle (1.3.14). The voiceover states: "Alexander was now king of all."

These creatures symbolize the new man Alexander has become – not only a hero pursuing his glory, but a king, responsible for the fates of many. In a way, they could even symbolize the way the film mixes the motifs of epic (lion), tragedy (the promethean eagle) and biography (man).

Upon entering Babylon, we hear Alexander warning his companions of excessive luxury as we see the lions fighting men on the walls of the palace and a Faravahar over Alexander's bed (1.5.4).

But Alexander has not become the king he should have been. His wish for glory pushes him further, and the soldiers are getting tired of his Homeric ideals. During the mutiny of the soldiers, Alexander's talk of immortal glory (2.17) only worsens the situation, as the soldiers' suspicion that Alexander is on "some crazed quest to imitate the glory of Heracles" (1.45) is strengthened, which results in full-blown riots.

The most Homeric moment of the film, however, is the last battle in India. In this moment, Alexander represents the negative side of the Homeric hero, as de-

100 Plut. *Alex.* 16, 4.

101 Olympias says to Alexander: "You are like Achilles, cursed by your greatness" (27.26); "We are of Achilles' royal blood" (1.32).

102 Ptolemy compares him with Achilles upon entering Babylon (1.1.51); in Asia (1.45.11); after Alexander's death (2.35).

scribed by Aristotle at the beginning of the film – he is selfish, fights for his own glory and endangers his companions. The battle is a desperate one, and as Alexander prepares for a charge, Bucephalas is reluctant, perhaps alluding to the prophecy of Achilles' divine horses in the *Iliad*. Alexander asserts the similarity by stating: "Come, Bucephalas, you and I together – one last time" (2.17.36). He rushes into what looks like certain death and addresses his men thus: "Isn't that a lovely thing to live in courage and to die leaving an everlasting fame!" (2.17.43). After a horrible massacre, both Alexander and Bucephalas are hit and fall. The wounded Alexander is raised on a shield (2.21.30) which is an exact replica of the shield Achilles is carrying on the painting in Olympias' room.

This is the last of the epic reminiscences in the film, and the rest is pure tragedy: in Babylon, Hephaistion dies after excessive wine drinking (2.26), a diagnosis further strengthened by the still of grapes and a cup of wine by his bed at the end of this scene (2.30.4). Alexander rushes to Roxane and recognizes himself as Heracles,[103] the murderer of his own, as yet unborn, child.

The following scene is Alexander's last symposium, which opens with a man dressed as Dionysus holding grapes. Alexander is wearing a lion's head and drinks from a huge cup (much bigger than those he uses in the rest of the film). Here I think Stone deliberately went for the "tragic history" effect and has portrayed Alexander in the way Plutarch did not wish to see him: drinking from a huge cup (bowl of Heracles) (2.32.23) "and immediately after drinking the cup up, being seized with a sudden pain in the back (2.32.54), as though smitten with a spear" (Plut. *Alex.* 75, 3).

Stone did not merely take over a version of history that Plutarch discarded, he did indeed "invent in tragic fashion a moving finale for a great action" (*Alex.* 75, 3) as he added a Freudian dimension to it: before drinking his huge cup, Alexander sees in it the face of Olympias resembling Medusa (2.31.53). Our suspicions that Dionysus is pursuing and killing Alexander – possibly because he compared himself with the god in India and even toasted him as a hero instead of as a god (1.46.4)[104] – are strengthened as the end of the scene features the man dressed as Dionysus.

The dying Alexander sees a statue of Dionysus from his mother's room (2.34.41) and a Faravahar above his bed turns into an eagle flying towards him. The Promethean struggle has come to an end.[105] The last still of this scene shows the bulls in front of the gates of Babylon.

At the end of this film, we know as much about Alexander's death as after reading Plutarch's life. Stone, too, offers several explanations for it: Ptolemy, who often compares Alexander to Heracles, notes that Alexander should have died in India and that Heracles died of a poisoned shirt given to him in error by his jeal-

103 See above.

104 This is during the symposium in India, directly preceding the murder of Cleitus – another act which, according to Plutarch, Alexander ascribed to the wrath of this god.

105 Here we can perhaps recall the omen Plutarch described as announcing Alexander's death: the sacrificial victim's liver had no lobe. It all fits in perfectly with Stone's motif of the eagle eating Alexander's liver.

ous wife (2.25.1). On the other hand, he asserts that Alexander conquered death (2.36.11) and admits that the generals killed him (2.37.44), but then orders Cadmus to write down a new explanation: "He died of fever and a weakened condition" (2.38.46).

Significantly he finishes his story standing by the statue of Dionysus with the words: "His tragedy was one of increasing loneliness and impatience at those who could not understand" (2.39).

Alexander – weak or divine? As Achilles, Alexander too had to learn the hard way what it means to be human, which is precisely the reason why his ventures are worthy of an epic and his passions of a tragedy. Paradoxically, neither the Hellenistic epics on his conquests nor the histories of his contemporaries were deemed worth handing down. Stone's film was not a failure, but the director was obviously not satisfied with it himself, as he produced two director's cuts. The first director's cut from 2004 doesn't contain much new material, but the order of scenes was changed, most probably in order to facilitate the understanding of how Alexander's relationship with his parents influenced his later actions. The second director's cut *Alexander Revisited* (2007) contains 45 minutes of new material and with a three-and-a-half-hour running time (with an intermission at the two-hour mark) resembles the epic films from the 1950s and 1960s.

However, the major problem of the film was not the arrangement of the scenes or its length. In my opinion, the major problem of this film is its topic. A German scholar famously described the figure of Alexander as "a bottle that can be filled with any wine."[106] Precisely because the ancient testimonies are late and provide a fragmented, ambivalent portrait of him, the figure of Alexander became open to different interpretations and ultimately but a projection of the aspirations and/or horrors of a generation or an individual.[107] Alexander himself was well aware of the importance of image management, but although he took great pains to control not only the texts about him,[108] but also the visual representations,[109] and was even said to have envied Achilles since he had a worthy poet to depict him,[110] in the end, it is precisely the lack of a reliable contemporary source on Alexander that increases our fascination with him. He was and remains a riddle, a vessel that can be filled with many different meanings: Alexander the ultimate Greek, Alexander the Macedonian, Alexander the Albanian, Alexander the imperialist, Alexander the tyrant, Alexander the promoter of brotherhood of men, Alexander the homosexual, Alexander the bisexual, Alexander the trisexual,[111]

106 HEUSS, 1954, 102.

107 On scholarly interpretations of Alexander see BADIAN 1975.

108 Alexander's court historian, Callisthenes of Olynthus wrote with the aim of glorifying the king. His court poet, Choerilus of Iassus was lavishly rewarded for (bad) epic poetry about Alexander's conquests (cf. Suid. s.v. *Choirilos*).

109 According to Plutarch, *Alex.* 4, Alexander only allowed Lysippus to sculpt him, and Apelles to paint him.

110 Arrian 1, 12, 2.

111 This interpretation is offered by Oliver Stone in the Commentary of *Alexander, Director's cut* (2004, 0.53.3). Stone explains that Alexander had sexual relations with men, women and eunuchs and was thus trisexual.

Alexander the hero, Alexander the god, Alexander the man… All these Alexanders can peacefully co-exist – that is, until someone attempts to offer an ultimate, final interpretation. What can be more threatening than a great Hollywood production that reaches millions all over the planet? The truth is that Stone offered a sophisticated and provocative view of Alexander's character. But it was his view, and it necessarily clashed with many other Alexanders that exist in the world. So his Alexander turned out to be too blond, too gay, too straight, too imperialist, too romantic, too Greek *and* too Irish. In my opinion, the audience embraced this film as a representation of history too readily, instead of perceiving it as a biography, an attempt to choose one among many different Alexanders and present his character. "It is not Histories that I am filming, but Lives," is a statement of purpose that could have spared Stone a lot of grief. There are still many things one can learn from Plutarch.

MAKING ALEXANDER FIT FOR THE TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY
OLIVER STONE'S *ALEXANDER*

Angelos Chaniotis

Achilles had his Homer; Alexander his Kallisthenes; Oliver Stone his Robin Lane Fox. The making of Stone's Alexander – an enterprise of epic dimensions – has been more meticulously and competently documented than that of any other historical film inspired by ancient Greek history.[1] No discussion of this movie can ignore Robin Lane Fox's account of how the film was made, based on interviews and personal participation, or the director's commentary on the DVD-version.[2] But a discussion of the film exclusively based on these accounts would be doomed to be as pseudo-historical as an account of the early Principate exclusively based on Augustus' *Res Gestae*. Narratives of the "history" of a movie, especially when authored by persons involved in the project, are as selective as any historical narrative and as subjective as any eye-witness-report or autobiographical account. Besides the selectivity of what is presented, such narratives focus on the intention of the maker and do not consider the effect on the viewer; intention and effect can differ substantially – and this is so in the case of *Alexander*. In this short article I will neither discuss the commendable and, generally, very successful efforts of the director and his collaborators to produce images which appear authentic nor present a large-scale analysis of the film. I will rather focus on the question why Stone's *Alexander* can and should be watched by historians and students of history.

1. NOT ALEXANDER: STONE'S PTOLEMY'S ALEXANDER

> "Who is Alexander? God, if I know! All we know is the way his story is told through history by different types of people. ... Who was Alexander the Great?" (Oliver Stone's last comment in *Alexander, Director's Cut*).

1 LANE FOX 2004.

2 This discussion is based on *Alexander, Director's Cut* (160 minutes, Warner Home Video, UK, 2005), but it also includes material from *Alexander Revisited: The Final Cut* (205 minutes, Warner Home Video, UK 2007). Compared with the *Director's Cut*, the longer version changes the sequence of several scenes (e.g. the battle at Gaugamela is presented earlier), expands many scenes included in the shorter version, thus giving more space to secondary characters (Alexander's generals, Aristotle, and Bagoas), and includes additional scenes (e.g. an eclipse of the moon before the battle at Gaugamela, Alexander mourning Kleitos's murder in his tent, Alexander's death). The relationship between the story of the campaign and the flashbacks is more balanced in *Alexander Revisited* and the contrast between Macedonian and foreign customs clearer.

A lot of discussion and criticism after the release of the theatrical version in 2004 have been devoted to the relationship between Stone's *Alexander* and the "historical" Alexander – especially in connection with Alexander's sexuality. All these discussions were largely superfluous because they failed to recognize a very simple and ingenious device used by the director to save him from accusations of anachronism and historical inaccuracy: the film is not presented as *the* narrative of Alexander's life and campaigns but as *Ptolemy's* narrative of it. It is a story told by an eighty year-old man, forty years after Alexander's death.[3]

Who can expect old Ptolemy to accurately narrate developments which had occurred up to seventy years earlier, such as Alexander's childhood, or dealings, such as the relationship between Philip and Olympias or Alexander's relationship with his mortal parents and his friend, for which his only sources could have been second-hand accounts, good guesses, palace gossip, and soldiers' rumors? Who can expect Ptolemy's retrospective not to be influenced by knowledge of what happened after Alexander's death and to be free of projections of contemporary views (of c. 282 BC) onto past history? How could someone who continually fought over a period of forty years – longer than Alexander's short life —, risked his life on the battlefield as Alexander did, founded his own kingdom, received divine worship by Greek cities as Alexander did, traced back his family's roots to the same divine ancestors as Alexander, was Alexander's direct successor as the Pharaoh of Egypt, shared Alexander's interest in science, and lived at a short distance from Alexander's mummified body, present a dispassionate image of Alexander which did not mirror personal views, emotions, and experiences? In the first introductory scene, Stone has Ptolemy say:

> "'Tyrant', they yell so easily. I laugh. No tyrant ever gave so much. What do they know of the world, these schoolboys? It takes strong men to rule."

This is not just a vindication of Alexander. Here, Ptolemy is defending his own autocratic rule as much as he is defending Alexander.

With this device Stone has not only placed himself beyond the potential criticism of unimaginative historians, but also confronted the film's more attentive viewer with the three most important and thorny issues concerning the study of Alexander: the problem of sources, the role of emotions and psychology in understanding his life, and later projections in accounts and interpretations of his actions. Ptolemy, again:

> "Did such a man as 'Alexander' exist? Of course not. We idolize him, make him better than he was."

In the final scene in Alexandria, we are also confronted with the genesis of a source. When Ptolemy narrates the aftermath of Alexander's death, he hesitates about the date of an event: "Five years, no, it was six years later ..." Then he indirectly reveals that Alexander was murdered:

> "But the truth is never simple, and yet it is. The truth is, we did kill him; by silence we consented. Because..., because we couldn't go on. That's the truth of his life. The dreamers exhaust us. They must die before they kill us with their blasted dreams."

3 Cf. LANE FOX 2004, 22.

And then he orders his scribe: "Oh, just throw all that away, Kadmos." Historical sources have their history and are biased. In this respect, Stone's *Alexander* is indirectly as instructive an essay on history, its methods and limitations, as Akira Kurosawa's *Rashômon*[4] or Ian Pears' *An Instance of the Fingerpost*.[5]

2. Sources and interpretations

The problems concerning the sources for Alexander's life are notoriously complex and vexed, the more so, when one wants to penetrate Alexander's thoughts, plans, and emotions. Let me mention only one example. In 1997 the Greek historian Miltos Hatzopoulos published a new edition of a very fragmented document, which at first sight seems of little relevance for Alexander's plans.[6] It is a letter of envoys sent by the city of Philippi in Macedonia to Alexander; the affair concerned the status of land near Philippi. In this letter, the envoys inform their city about the king's decision: Philotas and Leonnatos, two officers in the circle of Alexander's closest collaborators, should deal with this issue. The text must have been composed earlier than 330 BC, i.e. before Philotas was convicted and executed. It is for this reason that most historians who have discussed this document date it to the time before the beginning of Alexander's campaign, while Philotas and Leonnatos were still in Macedonia and could indeed devote themselves to this dispute concerning land (c. 335 BC).

What does this have to do with Alexander's plans of empire? Only four letters are preserved in the first line of this inscription; they are known only from a drawing by the epigraphist Charles Edson. If Edson's reading of these letters (ΡΣΙΔ) is accurate, then it is quite certain that they are part of the geographical name Persis (ΠΕΡΣΙΔΟΣ). But then the letter can only have been sent during the campaign, after Alexander's victory over Dareios (331 BC) and the king's arrival in Persis (January or February 330 BC), perhaps even after the burning of Persepolis, allegedly as an act of revenge for the destruction of Greek sanctuaries by the Persians in 480 BC. This was the time at which Alexander released the troops from his allies among the Greek cities – this is certain. This had a symbolic significance: the campaign of the Greek alliance to liberate the Greek poleis and to take revenge had come to an end. If the restoration of the name Persis is correct, then we may infer from this letter that Alexander did not only plan to send his allies from the Greek cities home; at the moment at which the envoys formulated the letter, he also planned to send two of his most important officers to Macedonia. Philotas was commander of the most important unit of the cavalry, Leonnatos, a relative of the king, one of the "bodyguards." If this restoration is correct, we have to conclude that after Persepolis' capture Alexander intended to send a substantial part of his troops, including Macedonian units, to Greece. Such an intention can

4 *Rashômon* (Japan 1950), directed by Akira Kurosawa and written by Shinobu Hashimoto and Akira Kurosawa, based on Ryunosuke Akutagawa's stories *Rashômon* (1915) and *In a Grove* (1922).

5 Ian Pears, *An Instance of the Fingerpost* (London 1997).

6 HATZOPOULOS 1997 (*SEG* XLVI 787).

hardly be reconciled with Alexander's alleged plan to continue his campaign to the end of the world. Hatzopoulos suspects that the news about the revolt of the satraps in the northeast of Iran made Alexander decide to continue the campaign, which brought him to Afghanistan and India. The theory that Alexander followed from the very beginning a plan to conquer the entire *oikoumene* – a theory best formulated by Johan Gustav Droysen's in his path breaking *Geschichte Alexanders des Großen* (1833) and tacitly followed by Stone and several modern historians – would, thus, collapse because of the reading, restoration, and interpretation of four letters. The image of the passionate conqueror who accepts no compromise and aspires to total victory can hardly be reconciled with the image of the bureaucrat-king, who deals with a property dispute in Philippi from Persis, defends the royal revenues against the exploitation of a forest near Philippi by others, and can afford to have two important officers deal with this matter.

Of course, all modern historians are aware of the problem of the sources for Alexander. In the case of other larger than life personalities who significantly changed the course of history – e.g. Caesar und Augustus – we have a fair number of contemporary sources, and even texts in their own words. Leaving aside the apophthegmatic utterances of Alexander in late sources, usually of an anecdotal character, the only words which can more or less authentically be attributed to him are his laconic dedication on the Athenian Acropolis after the battle at Granikos ("Alexander, son of Philip, and the Greeks, except for the Lakedaimonians, from the barbarians in Asia") and the two letters to Chios, written either by him or by the staff of his chancery.[7] The question of intentions, so crucial in the life of a man who conquered a great empire and reached lands that no other man from the Greek world had ever reached before, cannot be answered in a satisfactory way with the sources available now, and perhaps will never be answered. Modern historians can write more or less reliable accounts of the times of Alexander and of his campaigns, not of his life.

Modern historians have the luxury of being able to verbally differentiate between secure conclusions, probable inference and plausible speculation. But neither a film nor a fictional biography can consist of the theme "we may assume that" with variations ("most probably", "likely", "we may infer that", "we cannot exclude the possibility that", etc.). The author of a fictional biography, the author of a script, the director have to make choices. And their choices confront us in a more direct way than historical studies with the problem of interpretations.

Stone and his collaborators have done their reading of the sources and exploited as well as they have been able the archaeological material.[8] A lot of the film's fascination lies precisely in this effort to achieve accuracy in small details (see below). These details, despite occasional shortcomings, remind the historian of all the subjects he can choose not to treat in his historical studies, but which persistently demand treatment in a fictional reconstruction of antiquity, whether in

7 The dedication: Plut., *Alex.* 16.18. The letters: HEISSERER 1980.

8 A very good description in LANE FOX 2004, 79-98.

a historical novel or a historical film.[9] The historian need not worry about the wedding of Alexander and Roxane in Bactria, and need not know more about Roxane's looks than the information given in ancient sources that she was regarded as one of the most beautiful women in Asia.

What did a Bactrian wedding look like? What were the linguistic skills that allowed Roxane to communicate with her husband? What kind of music was played during a wedding in fourth century Macedonia is what Stone asked an anonymous – but recognizable – expert in Oxford; the correct answer ("we simply do not know") could not satisfy the director:[10]

> "Professor, I'm offering you a chance to impose your view of ancient music on millions of people for the next ten years, and are you trying to tell me that you do not even know what it was?"

I might have responded differently to such a temptation. This story (or anecdote) shows both the tremendous power of the motion picture, the tremendous responsibility of the serious scholar, and the dilemmas of a director.

Stone had to give Roxane not only a dress, but also a face, a voice, a character. The face is not only that of an actress (Rosario Dawson) from Lower Manhattan with Puerto Rican, Cuban, Afro-American, and Irish origins[11] – the exotic touch needed for a foreign princess, although certainly the wrong exotic touch –, it is also a face reminiscent of that of Olympias (Angelina Jolie).[12] This resemblance is one of the subtle ways by which a psychological subtext is introduced into the film.

3. BEWITCHED, BOTHERED, AND BEWILDERED: THE PSYCHOLOGICAL SUBTEXT

Pothos ("desire", "longing") was a word often used by our sources,[13] possibly even by contemporary historians, perhaps by Alexander himself,[14] in connection with some of the king's decisions which seemed hard to explain or even irrational. No matter how we translate this word of irresistible longing – an external force conquering the conqueror (*pothos elaben*) – it is a word conyeying strong emotionality. And no matter how adventurous and unreliable psychological interpretations may be in history, the more so when dealing with human beings who lived more the two thousand years ago, fictional biographies and films remind the modern historian that the human actors of history were no less subject to emotional

9 LANE FOX 2004, 33: "As historians, our responsibility is to study the surviving evidence: it guides what we write. For film-makers, precise questions force themselves forwards, irrespective of the evidence, when they try to visualise a scene."

10 LANE FOX 2004, 89-91.

11 LANE FOX 2004, 68.

12 LANE FOX 2004, 55 and 68. Stone's comment on the wedding-night scene: "Her talk reflects Angelina's outsideness, her ethnicity... Ironically, she has the same snake-bracelet type as his mother."

13 E.g., Arrian, *Anab.* 3, 3, 5; 2, 3, 1; 3, 1, 5; 3, 3, 1; 4, 28, 4, 5, 2, 5; 7, 1, 1; *Indike* 20, 1.

14 EHRENBERG 1938, 52-61; this is rejected by BOSWORTH 1980, 62.

impulses and influenced by past experiences than Hitler, Churchill, Billy Clinton, Silvio Berlusconi, George Bush Jr., Lady D, the Queen, our neighbour, the taxi-driver, the professor we like or the colleague we hate, Oliver Stone, the reviewers of his film, Robin Lane Fox, the author of these lines, and his readers.

The very first word of Greek literature is a word describing strong emotion: *menis*, wrath (*Ilias* 1.1). And the very first personal voice in Greek poetry, that of the lyric poet Archilochos around 650 BC, is the voice of a man addressing his *thymos*, his spirit; he urges himself to feel neither too much joy nor too much sorrow, but rather to understand the rhythm of life (frg. 128 ed. West.). Emotions may not have been the only factor that determined the life of the Greeks, but they are of crucial importance for understanding their social, political, and cultural life.[15] Emotions can be restrained, theatrically displayed, or unintentionally revealed; they should never be left out of consideration, even if they are difficult to grasp for an ancient historian. In the case of Alexander, the description of his emotions plays an important part in ancient narratives – as it does in Droysen's *Alexander der Große* – and it is as important in ancient exegesis of his adult deeds as in accounts of his childhood and education.

Stone's *Alexander* is primarily a film about emotions: love, ambition, hope, envy, jealousy, distrust, anger, insecurity, sense of honor, disappointment, hatred. One of the fascinating aspects of Stone's *Alexander* is the predominance of the hero's emotionality, but also that of the men and women who surround him. In some respects Colin Farrell was not the obvious choice for this part – he lacks Alexander's youthful appearance, and even as a teenager he looks older than his celluloid mother; if the film had been made a few years earlier, Tom Cruise would have been the obvious choice,[16] and I would have cast Gael García Bernal. That having been said, Farrell has managed to portray the emotional depth of Alexander, which makes for most of the drama.

Historians have often portrayed Alexander as divided between East and West, between two cultures, two thrones, two concepts of monarchy, between his mortal existence and his claim to a divine ancestry. At least as important as that is another rift in his formative years: the one between his mother and his father. This is of course mentioned in the sources and not concealed in scholarly discussions – with a clear tendency to demonize Olympias and stress Philip's cunningness and ambitions –[17] but references to this conflict are usually limited to discussion of Alexander's youth. There are good reasons for this, since Philip was murdered when Alexander was 20 years old and two years later he left Macedonia and his mother, never to return.

"He will never be yours, never!" shouts Olympias at Philip, after her drunk husband has intruded in her chamber and almost raped and killed her before his son's eyes. When Alexander confronts her with his suspicions after Philip's murder, she asserts: "Your soul is mine." After Alexander has tamed Boukephalas, Philip cries out: "My son!"

15 E.g., HARRIS 2001; KONSTAN 2006; CHANIOTIS 2008, with further bibliography. More generally, see MACMULLEN 2003. Cf. LANE FOX 2004, 168-169.

16 Mentioned by Stone in his commentary; cf. LANE FOX 2004, 42 and 47.

17 For a good critical assessment of studies on Olympias, see CARNEY 1987.

As Stone explains in his commentary, in this scene Olympias is presented anticipating that Alexander will come to her after his achievement, but then Philip grabs the boy and lifts him up.

Alexander is divided between his two parents emotionally. Educationally, the two parents do their best to draw Alexander's attention to the darkest aspects of life. In her chamber Olympias teaches the boy Alexander not to trust people and to conquer his fears. In a dark cave under the palace Philip's short survey of the bloodiest stories of Greek mythology confronts the adolescent Alexander with the envy of the gods, a son who kills his father and marries his mother, a man who – as Alexander will do later – marries a barbarian woman who kills her own children out of jealousy, and the Titanic nature of the human race, which becomes a recurring theme in the film. The main message is to distrust gods, men, and above all women:

> "It's never easy to escape our mothers, Alexander. All your life, beware of women. They 're far more dangerous than men."

We meet the contrasting forces of the two parents again in the balcony scene in Babylon:

> "[Alexander to Hephaistion] When I was a child, my mother thought me divine, my father weak."

Unlike historical narratives, which usually leave Alexander's experiences in childhood and adolescence aside the moment the campaign begins – with the exception of the reference to the enquiry in Siwa concerning the punishment of Philip's murderers and the portrayal of Parmenion as a man with Philip's mentality –[18] in Stone's film both parents follow Alexander throughout his life, not merely in the flashbacks. Philip is present in the comments of generals and soldiers:

> "Your father taught you never to surrender your reason to your passion [Parmenion before the battle at Gaugamela]."
>
> "Whatever our differences, know this day your father would be very proud of you [Parmenion in Babylon]."
>
> "You now sound like Philip [a general in Babylon]."
>
> "That wasn't your father's mission [Parmenion to Alexander, concerning the continuation of the campaign]."
>
> "Your father must be turning in his grave. After all this, a hill chief's daughter! ... I pray to Apollo you realize how far you've turned from your father's path [Parmenion on Alexander's wedding]."
>
> "I remember a time you hated how your father drank [Hephaistion to Alexander during a banquet in *Alexander Revisited*]."
>
> "To the memory of Philip. Had he lived to see his Macedonians transformed into such a pretty army. To Philip, to a real hero ... Who planned the Asian invasion when you were still

18 The theme of the conflict of generations is prominent in the film, e.g. in Philip's profound pessimism in the scene in the caves under the palace as opposed to Alexander's optimism. In Bactria, Alexander says to Parmenion: "I have taken us further than my father ever dreamed [repeated in the mutiny scene]. Old man, we're in new worlds." In Stones' phrase, these words of Alexander's represent "the height of a generational difference."

> being spanked on your bottom by my sister Lanice? Was it not your father? Or is his blood no longer good enough? [Kleitos, just before he is killed by Alexander in *Alexander Revisited*]."
>
> "They speak of Philip now as if I were a passing cloud soon to be forgotten [Alexander to Hephaistion after Kleitos' murder, in *Alexander Revisited*]."
>
> "What would your father say? ... You desecrate your dead father's memory [voices of soldiers during the mutiny in India]."

Philip follows Alexander as a ghost on his expedition. His first appearance is in the banquet scene, spitting blood, and reminding Alexander of his murder, immediately after Kleitos has alluded to it ("you and your mother live in shame") – Hamlet greets Alexander. If the first time Philip appears it is as an Erinys, in his second ghostly appearance in India he approves of Alexander, who has finally come to deserve a kingship which originally fell into his hands through murder.

> *"*He is so right for once. His father would love him and he would love his father as a ghost, because he finally understood his father and he finally became what his father wanted him to be [Stone's comment]."

He appears for a third time, again in a very emotional scene, this time after Hephaistion's death, when Alexander attacks Roxane and tries to strangle her, with the image of Philip trying to strangle Olympias in the background – a scene we have already seen in the part of the film devoted to Alexander's childhood. Now, finally, Alexander has become his father (in Stone's words).

The presence of Olympias is equally strongly felt, not only through her letters to Alexander (more so in *Alexander Revisited*) but also through Alexander's reflections, Roxane's similarity to Olympias, and Olympias' antagonism to her son's wife. In the balcony scene at Babylon Alexander designates himself a "cracked mirror of her (Olympias') dreams", after Hephaistion has confronted him concerning his relationship with his mother: "I wonder sometimes if it's not your mother you run from."

It is a fact that Alexander spent the last eleven years (or one third) of his life away from his mother and making no effort to bring her to Babylon. What does this tell us?

After Roxane's similarity to Olympias has been suggested by the snake bracelet and her accent, Olympias' antagonism becomes apparent, but also Alexander's realization that his wife is his mother's pale reflection.

> "[Olympias in a letter to her son] Who is this woman you call your queen, Alexander? Do not confuse us. ... It is I who love you more than any."
>
> "[Alexander to his sleeping wife] If only you were not a pale reflection of my mother's heart."

Alexander had more scars than those left by his wounds in battles. It is not the task of modern historians to detect them; this is beyond our reach. But it is beneficial to be reminded of their existence.

The second prominent psychological subtext concerns the relationship between Alexander and Hephaistion. Near the beginning of the film, immediately after the scenes of Alexander's childhood (Philip attacking Olympias in her cham-

chamber, the taming of Boukephalas), Hephaistion is introduced with Ptolemy's comment: "It was in friendship that Alexander found his sanity."

Alexander's relationship to Hephaistion is a difficult subject to treat, and Stone's originality – and departure from the treatment of the subject by historians – is that *Alexander Revisited* is more about Hephaistion's affection for Alexander, represented in the background of all major scenes, than about Alexander's feelings. Modern homosexual love is very distant from the socially constructed homoerotic relationship between men which existed in ancient military societies.[19] The subtleties of this relationship are adequately expressed with the ambiguous word "love" – it would have been *philo* in Greek – which can comprise both friendship and erotic desire.

> "[Alexander to Hephaistion in Babylon] All I know is I trust only you in this world. It is you I love, Hephaistion. No other."

Stone's comment is quite right:

> "It is so cynical if 21st century minds make fun of the hug or the virtues men can really bring to each other. It need not be homosexual in that sense of the word. It's men loving other men. And that was more important than men having sex with other men."

The 21st century perspective - that to which Oliver Stone is no less bound than his viewers, his critics, and the author of these lines.

4. Contemporary projections, or How Alexander finally conquered the entire world (including Manhattan and Vietnam)

The gay community in the U.S. criticized Stone for not showing Alexander kissing Hephaistion.[20] It was a good thing he did not. Only Alexander and Hephaistion really knew anything about their relationship, and I very much doubt that they talked about it to others. But this reaction is typical of the way modern concepts are projected onto the past. The gay community's response to the movie was certainly inspired by the film's psychological subtext. It can be best demonstrated in the scene in which the 19 years old Alexander opens his heart to his mother: "Hephaistion loves me, as I am, not who."

Olympias's response is that of any traditional Mediterranean mother, projecting her own ambitions and unfulfilled dreams on to her only son, when encountered with a homosexual son's "coming out": "Loves? Loves?"

The first word is said by Angelina Jolie with incredulity, the second with contempt and latent aggression – there goes my dream of a dynasty. This is a very modern scene. On a very superficial level the triangle of Philip, Olympias, and Alexander calls to mind a broken Manhattan family. The father, violent, alcoholic, and with no respect for women, attacks the mother, intelligent, ambitious, strong-willed, and almost rapes her in front of the boy's eyes. Are we surprised that this boy will later seek the love of a man?

19 See, e.g., Gehrke 1997, 63-68; Schnapp 1997; Porter 2003.

20 Mentioned by Stone in his comments.

Although Stone and Lane Fox repeatedly assert that the film is not a story of homosexual love – and indeed Hephaistion's role in the film is as important as it must have been in real life – Alexander's sexuality is the most common theme in Stone's comments and in Lane Fox's account.[21] The same applies to the theme of the broken family, with which some of the participants associated their own experiences.[22]

Modern projections in this film are not only of a psychological nature. The battle scenes in India – made in Thailand – strongly recall *Platoon*: the troops slowly proceed in thick vegetation; it rains; the troops are attacked by poisonous reptiles; one cannot clearly see the enemy and only hears him at a distance, behind the trees. The scene with the wounded Alexander – made on infrared footage – is reminiscent of the cinematography in *Heaven and Earth*, and in his comment Oliver Stone compares this scene with the last scene of *Platoon*, when the wounded soldier is carried to the helicopter. Stone refers to *Platoon* in several other instances in his commentary, and Vietnam and *Platoon* are frequently mentioned in Lane Fox's book.[23] Oliver Stone's experiences in Vietnam certainly represent another important subtext in the film, together with the subtext of the broken family (see note 22). The two themes – parent and Vietnam – are brought together when he comments on the dedication of the film to his mother Jacqueline:

> "And I think mothers have a lot to do with these stories, as do fathers, too. They shape our destiny. They shape our limitations, too. So it is not Vietnam, as some people say. It is way before that. I think it is when we are five years old, or six."

Perhaps together with Martin Scorsese, Oliver Stone is the most "historical" of American film directors. In addition to his Vietnam trilogy (*Platoon* in 1986; *Born on the Fourth of July* in 1989; *Heaven and Earth* in 1993), he has treated historical and biographical themes in *Salvador* (1986), *JFK* (1991), *The Doors* (1991), *Nixon* (1995), and *World Trade Center* (2006); less known are his film on the Palestinian-Israeli conflict (*Persona non grata* in 2003) and his two films on Fidel Castro and the Cuban Revolution (*Comandante* in 2003; *Looking for Fidel* in 2004); a fourth film on Vietnam and the massacre at Mai Lai (*Pinkville*) is forthcoming. A director with such a range and such a devotion to themes of contemporary history cannot avoid projecting contemporary themes onto Alexander. I select some of his comments in *Alexander: Director's Cut*:

21 For the theme of sexuality see, e.g., LANE FOX 2004, 27f., 33, 34, 41, 53, 55, 67, 134, 167. Cf. *ibid.*, 25 (Lane Fox talking to Stone): "you can accept that Alexander and his world are so much more varied and interesting than your own imagination. You won't turn him into a frustrated American movie-star or a Californian caught between his astrologer and his boyfriends." To characterize Alexander's sexuality Oliver Stone uses in his comments the terms "bisexual", "trisexual", "pansexuality", and "polymorphous sexuality."

22 LANE FOX 2004, 55 (on Colin Farrell): "In the family quarrels he found himself drawing on his own memories of a past which had split his own family, the turbulent family holidays presided over by his father or the moments as a thirteen-year old boy when he found himself advising his own mother." *Ibid.,* 31: "we talked more personally, of our schooling, our memory of our parents (like Philip and Olympias, Oliver's parents had quarreled when he was young)." On family tensions as a major theme of the film, cf. LANE FOX 2004, 167-169.

23 LANE FOX 2004*,* 8, 13, 100, 103f., 109.

> "This is an East-West story, just as what's going on today. You know, what America did with Osama Bin Laden. Alexander would never have abandoned the pursuit of Bin Laden. He would have gotten him. He would have crossed over to Pakistan if necessary [on the aftermath of the battle at Gaugamela]. He would have never diverted his resources from the front like Mr. Bush did in Iraq. You go for your first objective, Osama Bin Laden, and you don't fight a war in Iraq [on Alexander's campaign in northeast Iran]."

Another prominent theme, throughout the film, is the merging of cultures.[24] This has often been discussed in histories of Alexander, especially under the influence of Droysen (see below), but one may suspect in this film a more personal tone. Stone is a man between cultures. The son of a Jewish father, a Roman Catholic mother, and himself a convert to Buddism, Stone is (very much like Alexander) a man who has crossed cultural boundaries.

I should also stress here Stone's interest in so-called "micro-history", a recurring theme in Stone's work, in *Salvador*, the Vietnam trilogy, and *World Trade Center*. In the scene in the camp hospital after the battle at Gaugamela, where a mortally wounded young soldier is put to death, one gets a glimpse of how war affects the life of anonymous men in history. Such aspects of "micro-history" – what happened with invalids in antiquity? – sometimes more easily become a subject of reflection when seen on screen. There is a scene in Mel Gibson's *Apocalypto* in which the captives of a Mayan tribe are sold in the slave market; we have seen them earlier as human beings with names, dignity, dreams, and social standing; we see them again as anonymous merchandise. This was the fate of hundreds of thousands of women and children in Greek history, when a city was captured either by other Greeks or Romans (or pirates), and although we do register the numbers of individuals killed and sold, we do not register the emotional effect on those who experienced their transformation from members of free citizen families to objects exchanged in commercial transactions:

> "They [the Alexandrias] draw people into the cities to make slaves of them. [Hephaistion about the cities founded by Alexander]."

Hephaistion's words, said with the ancient mega-city of Babylon in the background, may appeal to the stressed inhabitant of Manhattan or L.A. In fact, the large avenue of Babylon with the *jiggurat* resembles Fifth Avenue with the Empire State Building. For the Irish Colin Farrell, we are told, the conflict between Macedonians and Greeks is perceived as a conflict between classes, with Greeks looking down on the northerners, like the English looking down on the Irish.[25]

Alexander's campaign in Afghanistan was not a war against Islamic fundamentalists, his war in India was not Vietnam, although it may have been comparably bloody, and Gaugamela – in the celluloid version a desert in Morocco – is not operation "Desert Storm." Stone knows this and he keeps his distance. To hear Alexander launching his plan for the "freedom of the world" may bring to the mind of the (very) educated viewer Droysen's imagined Alexander, a champion of freedom and progress in a clash of civilizations, an agent of the *Weltgeist*.[26] To

24 LANE FOX 2004, 8.
25 LANE FOX 2004, 54.
26 CHANIOTIS 2004, 715, 718-721, 736.

some of the (more numerous) viewers who have not read Droysen it unintentionally brings George Bush's Jr. slogans to mind.[27]

> "[Stone's Alexander] These people want, need change. ... To free the people of the world, such would be beyond the glory of Achilles, beyond Herakles, a feat to rival Prometheus, who was always a friend to man."
> "[Droysen's Alexander] Exactly as on the first day of creation god separated light from darkness and from night and morning the first day was made, in the same manner the first day of history separated for the first time the people from Orient and Occident directing them to everlasting enmity and an everlasting longing for reconciliation ... [In the context of Alexandria's foundation] Alexander wanted more than to subdue; under the aegis of the Greek way of life, the people of his kingdom should now be given back the right to enjoy and to be conscious of their own 'ethnicity' ["Volkstümlichkeit"], violently and for this reason unavailingly suppressed by the Persians; (they should regain it), in order that the great idea of a complete merging of the two could more easily gain space and might. ... So the army of Alexander started to adopt the Asian way of life and to reconcile itself and merge with those, whom the verdict of centuries had hated, despised and called barbarians; Orient and Occident started to penetrate each other and to prepare a future, in which both should disappear."[28]

This is wishful thinking shaped by a spirit of Eurocentricity in a time of conflict and war. Droysen, the statesman, later (1848) representative in the National Assembly in Frankfurt, was reflecting on the meaning of history and on his own times as much as he was reflecting on Alexander. Similarly, I wonder whether Stone's vindication of Alexander is not a projection of the dreams of a generation, which fought a lost war in Vietnam and now watches its sons' generation fighting another doomed war in Iraq and Afghanistan: "Yes, he killed, but he killed in the cause of peace, and he brought peace" [Stone].

Yes he killed, but to fulfil his own ambitions; he also killed driven by insecurity, wine, and a sense of honor. And no, he certainly did not bring peace.[29] Like his Ptolemy, Stone idealizes Alexander:

> "He made me believe in heroes. And for this, he must be remembered – as an icon, at the very least, of a young person breaking through the barriers of our personal lives. Nor should we overlook, as both students and participants in history, the eternal sense of possibility in Alexander's idealism. Such men are the great invigorators of history.[30] I hope young people take away an idealism. You know, there's been no young people in the sixties, young people

27 Mentioned by Stone in his comments on the battle at Gaugamela: "Some people said that sounds like George Bush."

28 DROYSEN 2004 (reprint), 1: "Wie an dem ersten Schöpfungstag Gott das Licht von der Finsternis schied und aus Abend und Morgen der erste Tag ward, so hat der erste Tag der Geschichte die Völker aus Abend und Morgen zum ersten Male geschieden zu ewiger Feindschaft und dem ewigen Verlangen der Versöhnung;" *ibid.*, 345: "Indes wollte Alexander mehr als unterwerfen; es sollte den Völkern seines Reiches der Genuß und das Bewußtsein ihrer durch die Perser gewaltsam und darum vergebens zurückgedrängten Volkstümlichkeit unter der Ägide des griechischen Lebens zurückgegeben werden, damit der große Gedanke einer völligen Verschmelzung beider desto leichter Raum und Kraft gewönne. ... So begann sich Alexanders Heer in das asiatische Leben hineinzuleben und sich mit denen, die das Vorurteil von Jahrhunderten gehaßt, verachtet, rohe Barbaren genannt hatte, zu versöhnen und zu verschmelzen, es begann sich Morgen- und Abendland zu durchdringen und eine Zukunft vorzubereiten, in der beide sich selbst verlieren sollten."

29 On the endemic wars following his death see, e.g., CHANIOTIS 2005.

30 From O. Stone's foreword to LANE FOX 2004.

> to come close to power – political power. It doesn't happen often, actually. Fidel Castro and Che Guevara, that group were under thirty when they took power, but it doesn't happen often [Stone's comment in *Alexander: Director's Cut*]."

Sometimes we think that we contrast our times with antiquity. In reality, we are only contrasting two modern constructs: our constructed perception of ourselves and our constructed perception of the past. The more we are aware of this problem, inherent and challenging in historical studies, the better we can approach antiquity as a "strange country" which needs to be explored on its own terms.

5. DRAMATIZING AN EPIC STORY

> "There are things that we simply know – 'history' isn't all subjective – and you must know them. If you go against them, you have to know that you are going against them, and you must have good reasons – not just your ego – for doing so. Think of Alexander's history as a half-finished building which has all the beams and girders in place, but all the gaps unfilled (Robin Lane Fox)."[31]

In one of the most interesting sections of his history, in the "Melian dialogue", Thucydides presents the inhabitants of the small island of Melos defending their neutrality and refusing to join the Athenian alliance (416 BC); the dialogue between the Melian authorities and the Athenian representatives is a comment on imperialism and the conflict between the laws of nature and the laws of men.[32] When the Melians refused to submit to Athenian power, they were attacked and defeated, all the men were killed, and the women and children were sold into slavery. Thucydides is regarded, rightly, as one of the greatest historical minds in world history. Yet, does he report "subjectively" what happened in Melos? Did he only fill gaps in his narrative, or did he also "correct" some of the beams and girders? An Athenian inscription, a section of the "Tribute Lists", which record the tribute to be paid by the Athenian allies, lists Melos among the cities assessed to pay tribute in 425 BC. Were the Melians fighting for their neutrality, or were they rebels? It is even possible that at the beginning of the war Melos contributed to the war funds of the Spartans. Things were certainly more complex than Thucydides' phrase "they had refused to join the Athenian empire like the other islanders" allows us to assume. Many historians and classicists would prefer to find other explanations for the apparent discrepancy between the documentary evidence and Thucydides account than to accept that the great historian "corrected" what actually happened for dramaturgical reasons and in order to show more clearly the effects of imperialism.[33] It is not difficult to find similar cases in ancient historiography, in which events are invented, omitted, merged, or their sequence is reversed. Even a historian who claimed that he had composed his history *sine ira et studio* could not resist this temptation.[34]

31 LANE FOX 2004, 25.

32 Thuc. 5, 84-116.

33 For the evidence and the controversy see GOMME – ANDREWS – DOVER 1970, 156-158.

34 ECK – CABALLOS – FERNÁNDEZ 1996, 109-121 (especially 116-117), on Tacitus' change of the sequence of events concerning the lawsuit against Cn. Piso.

A director, who not only has to keep audiences in their seats for three hours but also has to take into consideration budgetary constraints, takes more liberties in a film, which is not a documentary but a dramatisation. Entire sections of history have to be skipped. I very much regret the disappearance of Alexander's stay in Egypt, which was in original versions of the script,[35] as it is in Egypt that we best observe the essential elements of Alexander's personality and his political *modus operandi*: the foundation of a city, the acceptance of local political, cultural, and religious traditions, his divinity and his religiosity, his irrational *pothos* to visit the oracle at Siwa, and his implicit feelings of guilt for his father's murder. Egypt's impact on Alexander is only indirectly present in the film, in Ptolemy's balcony in Alexandria, in Ptolemy's wish to return there, and in the ring found by Hephaistion in Egypt and given to Alexander on his (or their?) wedding night. In addition, events have to merge into one – e.g. the battle in India is a combination of the battle at Hydaspes and the battle against the Malloi; episodes are relocated – Kleitos saved Alexander by cutting off the arm of a Persian assailant in Granikos, not in Gaugamela; protagonists appear where they should not be – Nearchos (from Cretan Lato) among Aristotle's disciples at Mieza, Philotas fighting with the infantry at Gaugamela and Antigonos Monophthalmos following Alexander in Iran and India. All these modification were not mistakes because of negligence, but conscious choices, explained and justified by Oliver Stone in his commentary.[36] Unintentionally, through this treatment of historical facts Stone comes very close to the predominant historiographical trend during and after Alexander's time, "tragic historiography" with its interest in dramatic changes and descriptions rather than in accuracy. Interestingly, an analogous interest in unexpected changes of fortune, the visual aspects of descriptions, dramatic accounts of battles, and scenes of extreme emotionality also characterizes Droysen's early version of Alexander, written when the historian was 25 years old, as old as his hero when he defeated Dareios at Gaugamela.[37]

Alexander - Director's Cut is advertised as "a breathtaking new version of the action-packed epic movie;" action-packed it is, yet closer to a drama than to an epos. Of course, Alexander's model was an epic hero; he theatrically staged important moments of his life – his landing in Asia, his mourning for Hephaistion – following this epic model. But although he was and is represented as a larger than life figure suitable for an epos, Oliver Stone is more interested in making a tragic hero out of him. Aristotle, in the scene at Mieza, warns Alexander of the effects of *hybris*, without using the word: "Beware of what you dream for. The gods have a way to punish such pride."

It is *hybris* that Ptolemy refers to, when, at Alexander's moment of greatest glory, in Babylon, he comments: "None of you fear that this great fortune may drive us all to destruction."

It needs more than *hybris* to make a drama. According to Aristotle's definition of tragedy, the viewer should feel fear (*phobos*) and compassion (*eleos*). In

35 LANE FOX 2004, 35 and 39.

36 Cf. LANE FOX 2004, 45, 117, 139, 157-169. I will reveal no other inaccuracies. It would be a good exercise for students in seminars on Alexander to look for mistakes.

37 CHANIOTIS 2004, 720-724.

order to achieve his, in order to make Alexander a role model, despite his failures and limitations, Stone has to make his Alexander human. A man who from his childhood continually faced conflicts, with his father, his mother, his generals, his soldiers, his wife, is a mortal man who can appeal to a modern audience. Indeed, so much so that Colin Farrell found himself unable to detach himself from the role. Robin Lane Fox describes him after the making of the scene in which Alexander murders Kleitos:[38]

> "Colin sat for an hour in costume, and neither Claudine [his sister] nor his trusted dresser, Tom, could coax him out of the role. He kept going over what he had done, while staring at the trailer's floor."

170 years ago, Droysen felt the same compassion when describing the very same scene:

> "The king's wrath was broken; awareness, pain, despair overcame him. They say that he pulled the spear from Kleitos' chest and propped it on the ground to take his own life on the corpse. The friends held him back, they brought him to the camp. There he laid weeping and lamenting and cried out the name of the murdered man and the name of his nurse, Lanike, Kleitos' sister: this is a fine reward he is paying to his nurse ...."[39]

"The work of a historian, who has read and analyzed the sources of Alexander without ever dreaming of him, can only be boring. That Alexander appeared in Droysen's dreams, of this I am convinced", is what I wrote in a reprint of Droysen's work, which was released sometime before the film's theatrical version.[40] I was intrigued to read that when Colin Farrell visited the museum at Vergina, he did so *being* Alexander:

> "He sat before Philip's ceremonial shield, his decorated breastplate and silver drinking cups and found himself talking to them, to the museum-attendant's surprise. "I've had to become what you never dared to be," he found himself saying to his father's relics."[41]

This effort to bring Alexander close to the modern viewer, bridging the gap of centuries and creating the illusion of "being there", is also effectively served by the strong interest in details, whether authentic or not. Modern audiences, accustomed to the embedded reporters of modern wars, need this feeling of intimacy with historical events. In this respect, *Alexander* sometimes recalls the works of the Victorian painters, Lord Frederic Leighton, Sir Lawrence Alma-Tadema, and the early John Waterhouse, with their effort to present almost photographic images of antiquity based on the findings of contemporary excavations. The bed that decorates Olympias' room is inspired by the *kline* found in the royal grave at Aigai. Alas, we also notice an unwelcome intruder: the 'Ram in the Thicket' from

38 LANE FOX 2004, 54f.

39 DROYSEN 2004 (reprint), 463: "des Königs Zorn war gebrochen; Bewußtsein, Schmerz, Verzweiflung überwältigten ihn; man sagt, er habe den Speer aus Klitus' Brust gezogen und gegen den Boden gestemmt, um sich auf der Leiche zu ermorden; die Freunde hielten ihn zurück, sie brachten ihn auf sein Lager. Dort lag er weinend und wehklagend und rief den Namen des Ermordeten und den Namen seiner Amme Lanike, der Schwester des Ermordeten: das sei der schöne Ammenlohn, der ihr Pflegling zahle..."

40 CHANIOTIS 2004, 739.

41 LANE FOX 2004, 56. Cf. *ibid.*, 57: "I'd give it all up now, just for one thing... to spend five minutes with Alexander himself."

the royal graves at Ur (c. 2600 BC), which miraculously found its way into Olympias' chamber. Contrasting Aristotle's "king's English" (Christopher Plummer) to the Irish accents of the Macedonians (and the Scottish of Krateros)[42] – in a similar manner the Romans in *Ben Hur* have British accents, the Jews American – evokes the great diversity in the Greek world. Stone follows the sources in many small telling details, when for instance Kleitos is killed with a spear's backside, when Stateira, Dareios' daughter, takes Hephaistion for Alexander, or when Pausanias (Philip's murderer) is rejected, insulted, and raped during a banquet.

There is, however, a problem with this hero: Stone's Alexander has no sense of humor – I do not mean the French *esprit* or Monty Python's humor, but the aggressive jokes of soldiers, expressions of superiority and concealment of fear, the boasting of Homeric heroes in battle (*kertomein*), their aggressive and contemptuous laughter.[43] Sling bullets from the lifetime of Alexander, inscribed laconic texts, give us an impression of soldiers' humor in battle: "eat this as a desert" (*trogalion*), "it rains (bullets)" (*hyse*), "(get this and) get pregnant" (*kye*).[44] Stone, as a former soldier, is certainly not indifferent in this respect:

> "[Dialogue with Robin Lane Fox] "How did they swear?" This question is not easy to answer. "'To the crows,' they would say."
> "We can't," Oliver retorted, "it doesn't sound credible."
> "Then try 'to hell' (*pyri*, 'to the fire'), but also any obscene word which attributed to an opponent the passive role in sexual intercourse would do."

Alexander's soldiers occasionally make jokes (more so in *Alexander Revisited*), but the closest their king gets to a joke is when (in Babylon) he describes himself as "a king of air", as long as Dareius lives and is the legitimate king of Asia. A soldier may follow a leader because of religious, national, or political fanaticism, but I honestly do not think that the Greeks and Macedonians would have followed Alexander if he had not been in a position to make a good joke at the expense of an opponent, e.g. during the exhortation of his soldiers before a battle. The sources do attribute such jokes or ironical comments to Alexander, even phrases that reveal a sense of self-irony. When his wound was bleeding, his ironical comment was: "this is blood, not *ichor*", the fluid in the gods' veins.[45] There is a scene in which Alexander makes an ironical remark – reported by the sources. During a banquet in Macedonia, Philip tried to attack Alexander and fell. Alexander reportedly commented:[46]

> "And this is the man who is going to take you from Greece to Persia? He can't even make it from one couch to the next."

Colin Farrell does not utter these words with the aggressive sarcasm of a Homeric hero or with contempt but with the anger and sadness of a disillusioned son. In Alexander's wedding Pharnakes says: "Those who love with irony last." Is this the explanation for Alexander's short life?

42 LANE FOX 2004, 54 and 71.
43 Quoted by LANE FOX 2004, 31.
44 CHANIOTIS 2005, 95.
45 Plut. *Alex,* 28.3; cf. 20.12-13; 28.4; 39.2.
46 Plut. *Alex.* 9.10.

6. ALEXANDER CONQUERS THE 21ST CENTURY

> "This is not a documentary. It is a dramatisation, though it should take history as its starting point (Oliver Stone)."[47]

This film should be judged as such: as a dramatisation, not as a documentary. But the historian and the student of history have a lot to learn by studying and reflecting upon this dramatisation, and historians of war will have a lot to think about regarding our ability to reconstruct ancient battles.

If Monty Python's *Life of Bryan* is the best film ever made inspired by an ancient subject, because it ingeniously captures the *Zeitgeist* of a historical period, no film treating subjects of ancient Greek history can rival Oliver Stone's *Alexander*. It will certainly not change the modern's historians perception of Alexander and his times, but it will make them think about what the sources report and even more about what they do not. With Alexander attacking an Indian elephant on horseback, his eyes unnaturally big and full of fury – as in the mosaic in Naples – Stone has encapsulated in a single image the apparent irrationality of his campaign, the strangeness of the new worlds to which he brought his army, and the unexpected nature of his victories.

As a child in Greece, I often heard the legend of the mermaid, Alexander's sister – it must have gone out of fashion now, I guess. She is believed to ask sailors on the seas if Alexander the Great is alive. If they deny it, she sinks their ship. The correct response is ζει και βασιλεύει και τον κόσμο κυριεύει ("he is alive, and he rules, and he conquers the world"). Oliver Stone has guessed the correct answer, and he has ensured that Alexander is alive and still conquering the world in the 21st century – including Manhattan and Vietnam.

47 Quoted by LANE FOX 2004, 31.

PHRYNE: FROM KNIDIAN VENUS TO MOVIE STAR

Eleonora Cavallini

The biographical data antiquity has bequeathed to us about Phryne, the 4th century BC Greek courtesan, is so romanced (and romanticized) that it makes it very difficult for modern scholars to distinguish reality from fiction with any real accuracy. However, I think that doubts about the historical authenticity of this fascinating yet disquieting female figure would be excessive. Similarly, the scepticism some scholars have recently expressed about traditional data, such as Phryne's famous trial, seems to be too radical.[1] Careful evaluation of the sources is of course mandatory, especially if one considers that most of them (with the exception of the comic poets Timocles, Amphis and Poseidippus, whom we will discuss later)[2] date from the 1st to the 4th century AD – therefore, not only were they written at a much later date than the events they narrate, but they also presumably reflect a penchant for anecdotal and sensational stories that was common among erudite authors of the Hellenistic-Roman period.

In fact, when examining ancient documents about Phryne, one gets the impression that her "myth" was first forged not by a biographer or a poet, but by the woman herself, with her skilful use of provocative statements that were bound to cause a sensation, especially among conformists, as well as a series of carefully contrived, spectacular public appearances. Moreover, the sources emphasize Phryne's tendency to "celebrate" her own beauty by having expensive images of herself put up[3] in "strategic" places, such as Eros' temple in Thespiae, her hometown, or even the Delphic sanctuary, where a golden statue of Phryne made a fine show next to the simulacra of kings and queens.[4]

1 For a critical re-reading of the sources relating to Phryne's figure, see the recent studies by COOPER 1995, 303-318 ROSENMEYER 2001, 240-260.

2 Note that Poseidippus (3rd century BC) already describes Phryne as "by far the most famous (*epiphanestate*) of the *hetaerae*." Her fame as *hetaera* is confirmed by the great number and variety of sources (which even include the Latin elegiac poet Propertius) containing references to her. The rhetorician Alciphro later returned to Phryne's celebrity, and to her equally famous trial, in one of his fictitious *Letters of Courtesans* (see *infra*).

3 At her own cost, of course, although the statue at Delphi officially bore a dedication by the inhabitants of Thespiae that read "Phryne, daughter of Epicles, Thespian" (see Athenaeus 591c; on the two statues, one of Aphrodite, the other of Phryne, sculpted by Praxiteles for the city of Thespiae, see also Pausanias IX 27,5; Alciphro, *Letters of Courtesans* IV 1). Phryne's extraordinary beauty is explicitly referred to by the two 4th century comic poets Timocles (fr. 25 K.-A.) and Amphis (fr. 23 K.-A.), both mentioned by Athenaeus, 567d-f and 591d; the theme of *Phryne tam multis facta beata viris* see also Propertius, II 6,5-6.

4 There would should be no doubts about the existence of these statues (Plutarch, among others, mentions them in his *Dialogue on Love* 753ef, having seen them personally). Nonetheless, one can only imagine what a scandal these monuments are likely to have aroused, espe-

However, it is not unlikely that such brazen exhibitionism helped create a generally hostile atmosphere around Phryne. Nor can the animosity of conformist Athenians be ruled out as one of the causes prompting the *hetaera* to risk capital punishment in a trial full of uncertainties and unexpected turns of events, paradoxically ending with the definitive consecration of this extraordinary woman and her disturbing appeal.

Actually, according to the tradition, Phryne was acquitted thanks to the passionate defence of her lover, the democratic party orator Hyperides, known for his uncompromising opposition to the imperialist policy of Philip of Macedonia and his son Alexander. The trial against Phryne became very famous, especially on account of some spicy implications that Hellenistic and Roman anecdotalists dwelled on and clearly revelled in, maybe also adding a couple of evocative details of their own. However, I would not feel like sharing the diffidence expressed by some scholars (C. Cooper in particular)[5] about the sources that relate this event, of which at least one (fr. 13 K.-A. by the comic poet Poseidippus) dates back to only a few decades after the event.

According to the tradition, the charge against Phryne was brought by one Euthias, depicted by some authors as the woman's spiteful, vindictive former lover. The rhetorician Alciphro mentions him in the fourth of his fictitious *Letters*, which, he imagines as being sent to Phryne by another *hetaera* named Bacchis:

> "Then expect from him (i.e. Euthias) entreaties, pleas and a lot of money. Don't compromise, my dear, the cause of us courtesans; don't yield to Euthias' requests, lest Hyperides give the impression that he has made the wrong decision; don't listen to those who say that, if you hadn't torn your tunic and bared your breasts to the judges, the counsel would have been useless for you. As a matter of fact, his defence gave you the chance of doing this just at the right time."

Aside from the reference to Phryne's famous *coup de théâtre* of undressing herself in front of the judges, which I will discuss later, a considerable part of Alciphro's narrative appears to be the product of his imagination. In particular, even supposing that Euthias had really been Phryne's lover, as Hyperides himself apparently insinuated (fr. 172 Blass – Jensen), it is unthinkable that he would resort to legal action against her solely on account of his jealousy. That Phryne and Hyperides were almost strangers at the time of the events appears even less likely. In fact, from the few fragments left of Hyperides' speech (*frs.* 171-179), it transpires

cially if one considers that it was uncommon to erect a statue to a hetaera, least of all in a sacred place. The statue at Delphi, in particular, was probably regarded as an extremely serious provocation, since one philosopher (Crates according to Plutarch, *Mor.* 401a, Athenaeus 591b; Diogenes the Cynic as claimed by Diogenes Laertius, *Lives of the Philosophers* IX 60) described it as a "monument to the Greeks' incontinence." If we credit the tradition, both statues were sculpted by Praxiteles, whom several sources allege to have been Phryne's lover. However, it is likely that the love story between the two was invented *a posteriori* by the biographers, who were impressed by the remarkable number of works the sculptor reportedly created at Phryne's behest, or having Phryne as his model (in particular, the *hetaera* was supposed to have lent her features to the famous Aphrodite of Knidos): on this topic see HAVELOCK 1995, 39-54; ROSENMEYER 2001, 244f.

5 COOPER 1995.

that he had long entertained in a relationship with the *hetaera* and, he was in fact ultimately suspected of complicity (fr. 171).

There is legitimate doubt that the action brought by Euthias against Phryne may actually have been a pretext used by Hyperides' political opponents to damage the orator himself, who must have been a difficult, awkward presence not just for the members of the opposing philo-Macedonian party, but also for many others who, although they were hostile towards Philip, and later towards Alexander, did not always agree with Hyperides' radical attitude. At all events, the opponents of Hyperides involved in the affair, whoever they may have been, were very careful not to expose themselves, resorting instead to a minor figure like Euthias, who was famous in Athens for being a "sycophant", i.e. a professional accuser, one of those people paid to act as figureheads for others in trials (Hyperides, fr. 176).[6]

The very fact that Phryne was accused of impiety – a crime that could result in capital punishment – raises a number of issues. Some have suggested that the charge levelled against Phryne was a different one – e.g. treason (*graphé eisangelías*), an extremely vague[7] charge that could be invoked even more easily than the *graphé asebeías.* At any rate, one has to be very careful when evaluating the sources, which are for the most part late, and also prone to "embellishing" the facts with picturesque details aimed at stirring the readers' imagination.

First of all, the little we know about Euthias' oration leads us to believe that the charge of impiety (assuming it was not *eisangelía*) may also have been based on rather vague, specious arguments. Essentially, the allegations Phryne had to face were the following (*Attic Orators* p. 320 Sauppe): 1) indulging in noisy, licentious, indecent parties; 2) organizing orgiastic feasts with both men and women (nothing easier than that – but where did the impiety lie?); 3) introducing a "new god." As it turns out, this was a "foreign god" (maybe the Thracian Isodaites, a deity connected with mystery cults),[8] allegedly worshipped by "public, anything but virtuous women" (Hyperides, fr.177).

In other words, it was no more than superstitious slander levelled at a woman whose behaviour was no doubt transgressive, although, in essence, more blatant self display than a true offence against public institutions. Why, then, hold such a grudge against a woman who was just a courtesan?

Setting aside Euthias' specious arguments, one can reasonably suppose that the attempt at eliminating Phryne (she actually risked being sentenced to death!) was caused by deeper, more far-fetched motives. In particular, it is likely that the *hetaera* caused discontent among the most conservative, traditionalist Athenians for her uninhibited lifestyle, and, above all, for the way she brazenly showed off her wealth – almost a slap in the face for many female Athenian citizens from

6 On the likelihood of political motivations behind the trial against Phryne, see again COOPER 1995, 305f., as well as n. 10.

7 See Cooper's accurate observations, 1995, 310ff.

8 Although 'alternative' to the official religious cult, mystery cults were generally tolerated, unless they openly threatened public order. The worship of Isodaites, who can easily be identified with Dionysus (see Plutarch, *Mor.* 389a) probably involved sinister rituals and, possibly, bloody sacrifices, which, however, were not so different from those carried out in the sanctuary of Delphi itself (see KERÉNYI 1976, 218ff.).

good families, for whom, in the mid 4th century, not only the well-being and the luxurious life of some foreign courtesans were beyond their means, but even an acceptable dowry.[9] Phryne, however, paid no attention to such criticism. On the contrary, she did everything she could to attract even more attention. For instance, she was reputed to have managed to include in her cohort of parasites one Gryllion, a member of the most ancient and prestigious Athenian law court, the Areopagus (Athenaeus XIII 591de). Moreover, Phryne did not shrink from exposing herself with outrageous statements, for instance when she promised to rebuild the city of Thebes (razed to the ground by Alexander the Great in 335), provided the Thebans would engrave the following inscription in the walls: "Alexander destroyed it, Phryne the *hetaera* made it rise again" (Athen. XIII 591d).[10]

Although this was a clear provocation, it should not be interpreted as impromptu, humorous witticism. Phryne's words really betrayed the violent anti-Macedonian spirit Hyperides used to express in his speeches, which often contained (not by chance) references to Thebes's tragic lot:

> "They indeed saw the Thebans' city miserably wiped out of human society, its acropolis put under the Macedonians' surveillance, the inhabitants reduced to slavery, while the others shared out the territory. The situation was such that the terrible things that were offered to their sight gave them the firm courage to promptly face up to the danger (Epitaph. 17)."

Phryne's was, therefore, a "political" statement – almost a *slogan.* But it was also an outright challenge to the morals of the conservative elite, for whom it was unconceivable that the name of a *hetaera* could be engraved on a public building. Seen from this perspective, Phryne must have caused a sensation even some time before, when she had posed naked for the famous Knidian Aphrodite by Praxiteles – an unusually audacious act, not only because traditional iconography depicted the goddess all dressed up and adorned, but also because a courtesan lending her physical appearance to the simulacrum of a deity was viewed as an irreverent gesture.

So, there were several reasons why Phryne had to face the charge of impiety, first of all her provocative exhibitionism. Showing respect, at least on a formal level, for the gods of tradition, was regarded as fundamental in safeguarding the institutions of the *polis* and the unity of the state in general. Besides, one can as-

9 A significant reflection of this situation can be seen in the trial against Neaera, which probably took place some years before that of Phryne, and pertained to a case of usurpation of civil rights by a Corinthian courtesan and her cohabitant, an orator of modest stature. In the prosecutor's speech – included in the Demosthenic *corpus* (59) – we read the following words (chap. 113): "Think of the Athenian women, too, consider that daughters from poor families will no longer find a husband. Today, even if a woman is destitute, the law still provides her with a sufficient dowry, as long as nature has given her an acceptable appearance. But once you have acquitted this woman, trampling upon the law and depriving it of its efficacy, the profession of prostitution will most likely spread among the citizens' daughters, at least among those who will not be able to get married because of their poverty."

10 In fact, Thebes was rebuilt in 316 by Cassander, one of the Diadochi. However, Phryne's provocative joke was destined to live on in the memory of posterity. In fact, as late as the Augustan age, Propertius remembered "Phryne, who could have reconstructed the razed Thebes, since she had been made rich by so many men" (II 6,5-6).

sume that the open challenge to the powerful Macedonian lords also contributed to cause heated reactions in at least one part of the Athenian people – which would suggest to date the trial shortly after 335.[11]

The case was highly controversial. According to the tradition, Hyperides was beginning to fear that Phryne would be convicted, so he allegedly resorted to the expedient that was destined to make the trial uniquely famous. According to Athenaeus, the orator "led the woman to a point where everybody could see her, and, tearing her undergarments off and baring her breasts, introduced, with studied rhetorical artifices, lamentations in her defence while everybody beheld her. He filled the judges with superstitious awe for that minister and priestess of Aphrodite, so that they yielded to pity and did not kill her." Athenaeus further relates that although Hyperides' defence was successful, it aroused bitter controversy, so that later "a decree was passed, which forbade every orator who spoke in defence of someone to raise laments, and stated that the accused, male or female, could not be judged by being exposed to the gaze of everybody."

The testimony of Athenaeus (who draws from the Hellenistic biographer Hermippus),[12] is perhaps the most detailed to be found on the subject, but certainly not the only one.[13] A reference to Phryne's undressing is actually made by several other authors, such as the Pseudo-Plutarch (*Dec. Orat.* 849d-e, who describes the scene with almost the same words as Athenaeus).[14] Moreover, Quintilian (2,15,9), Sextus Empiricus (*Adv. Math.* 2,4), as well as the aforementioned Alciphro, attribute this theatrical gesture to the accused herself, rather than to Hyperides. Finally, the scene crops up again in a couple of anonymous rhetoric treatises (4,414, as well as 7,335 Walz). So we face here a "vulgate" version – a favourite with the biographers and rhetoricians of the Roman-Hellenistic age, although not documented (at least not explicitly documented) in the earliest source in our possession, i.e. the fragment from the comedy *Ephesia* by Poseidippus, mentioned above (fr. 13 K.-A.). In this play (which can be approximately dated shortly after 290 BC) the trial of Phryne is evoked as a sensational event, while the actual narration of the facts appears much more restrained:

> "Once upon a time, Phryne was by far the most famous
> Of all the hetaerae. Even you, who are much younger
> Than those who lived back then, have no doubt heard of her trial.
> Even if people thought that she had caused too severe damage
> To the lives of men, she conquered the court because of her body,
> And, clasping the judges' hands one by one,
> Barely saved her own life by crying."

11 The thesis of a later dating (at least after 338, the date of the battle of Chaeronea) is also shared, for other reasons, by COOPER 1995, 306-307 n. 10.

12 For a chronology of Hermippus, see WEHRLI 1974, 7s.

13 GAMBATO 2001, 1509, wrongly claims that: "la presente, e sconcertante, versione dei fatti è fornita dal solo Ateneo." [this bewildering version of the facts is only given by Athenaeus]

14 On the Pseudo-Plutarch's dependence on Hermippus himself, see COOPER 1995, 304f., as well as n. 7.

Although the sentence βλάπτειν τοὺς βίους has been interpreted by someone as "damaging the possessions, the substance" (referring to the crime of extortion),[15] it seems clear from Poseidippus' words that the crime Phryne was charged with was actually a more serious one, subject to capital punishment ("she barely saved her life"). For this reason, being fully aware of the risk she was taking, the *hetaera*, well-known for her impudent pride, allegedly presented herself in the typical supplicant pose, crying and clasping "the judges' right hands one by one." Because it was common for supplicants to tear off their own garments and beat their breast, it is likely that Phryne, probably following Hyperides' advice, resorted to such a ruse in order to move the judges to pity and, at the same time, to make herself desirable in their eyes by showing her beauty. See, for instance, the version reported in an anonymous treatise on rhetoric dating from the Imperial age (7,335 Walz): "Hyperides… was losing the suit, so he introduced the *hetaera* in a supplicant pose, beating her chest after she had torn off her *chiton*, and the judges, moved to pity by her sight, acquitted her."

The problem that remains is why Poseidippus preferred to skip a detail that certainly would have been very tasty for a comedy writer:[16] unless we take the peculiar expression τὴν ἡλιαίαν εἵλε περὶ τοῦ σώματος ("conquered the court because of her body", i.e. "because of her life", where, however, the use of σῶμα instead of the more common ψυχή does not seem casual),[17] as an artful *double-entendre.* Indeed, in legal jargon, αἱρεῖν is the same as "to convict", "to obtain a conviction against one",[18] whereas in Poseidippus' passage the opposite happens, since it is the accused who wrings the acquittal from the judges, thus depriving the accuser of the privilege of "demonstrating her guilt" (gr. αἱρεῖν, lat. *convincere*).

A similar, and equally peculiar, *abusio* of legal terminology is already to be found in Euripides, *Andromache* 284ss., where the three goddesses, coming to Mount Ida for the fatal *judgement* on the beauty of their bodies (v. 285s. αἰ-/γλᾶντα σώματα), are forced to bow to Aphrodite's pre-eminence (vv. 289ff.):

> δολίοις <δ'> ἔλε Κύπρις λόγοις,
> τερπνοῖς μεν ἀκοῦσαι,
> πικρὰν δε σύγχυσιν βίου Φρυγῶν πόλει.

The Euripidean passage deserves closer analysis. Aphrodite "conquers" (ἔλε) the favour of the *judge* (in this case, Paris) thanks to her "deceitful speech"

15 See GAMBATO 2001, 1513.

16 Poseidippus' silence leads COOPER 1995, 314, to assume that the detail of Phryne's undressing may be an invention dating from a later period than the comedy's *mise en scène*. Still, why should the trial cause such a sensation as to make Phryne ἐπιφανεστάτη πολὺ τῶν ἑταιρῶν? And why should Athenaeus (or better, his source) mention a decree that, following this event, supposedly prohibited physical exposure of the accused to the judges? On the other hand, in the 3rd century, Phryne's ups and downs were "popular" enough to inspire a salacious parody (already identified by HEADLAM 1922, 92, and referred to by COOPER himself, l.c.) by Herodas, whose second *Mimiamb* depicts a pander who, having sued a group of hoodlums for violence, shows the judges the scratched, yet still shapely, body of a young prostitute.

17 For the legal expression περὶ τοῦ σώματος ἀγωνίζεσθαι, "fight for one's life" in lawsuits for capital crimes, see Lysias 5, 1.

18 See LSJ 41-42, and the documentation mentioned here.

(δολίοις….λόγοις), but also, obviously, thanks to the beauty of her body (σῶμα). Similarly, Phryne, subjected to a far more frightening judgement, probably relied not only on Hyperides' specious reasonings, but also on the charms of her body, thus winning (εἶλε)[19] the favour of the reluctant judges. Phryne's "body", therefore, was probably not just the *object* to be defended (meaning, of course, her "life"), but the very *means* of her defence: in other words, her beauty,[20] upon which the Heliasts may well have focused their attention. As a result, Poseidippus' ambiguous, subtly allusive narration seems to oscillate between a potentially fatal *graphé asebeias* and a witty, worldly 'duplicate' of Paris' mythical judgement, where the hetaera, known to everybody as the model for Praxiteles' Knidian Aphrodite, probably presented herself as a convincing embodiment of the goddess[21] in the (this time very risky) contest περὶ τοῦ σώματος.[22] And if Aphrodite, just to satisfy her vanity, did not shy away from "subverting the life" of the city of Troy (σύγχυσιν βίου Φρυγῶν πόλει), Phryne, for her part, enjoyed a reputation for "ruining the life" (βλάπτειν τοὺς βίους) of many men with her greed.[23]

Phryne's well-known proclivity for spectacular *performances* (such as, for example, her dramatic immersion in the sea on the occasion of Poseidon's festival at Eleusis – cfr. Athenaeus 590f) had probably led later authors to emphasize the original implications of the episode, underscoring its erotic nuances, and turning Phryne into a legendary, aggressive *sex-symbol,* destined to leave her mark on the modern imagination.[24]

The most significant evidence for the lasting influence of Phryne's "myth" is to be found in visual art. It is worth noting how the renewal of attention towards this female figure, almost ignored during the Renaissance (which seems to have

19 Moreover, the comparison with the Euripidean passage favours the transmitted version εἶλε rather than the conjectural εἶδε (Bothe).

20 For a specific usage of the term σῶμα referring to the physical beauty of a woman (or better, of a *hetaera*), see Xenophon, *The Memorabilia of Socrates* 3, 11, 10 (which contains a description of the amazingly beautiful Theodote).

21 We should not forget that, in Hermippus' version, as reported by Athenaeus 590e, Hyperides introduces Phryne expressly as ὑποφῆτιν καὶ ζάκορον Ἀφροδίτης.

22 The conjecture that Poseidippus' fragment might contain some hint at Phryne's undressing is already evoked by VAN HERWERDEN, 1903, 231, who corrects περὶ σώματος as διὰ σώματος. Nevertheless, if this were the case, the artful double meaning that seems to be the comic *pointe* of the passage would be lost.

23 The correction νέους (in place of βίους) proposed by KOCK 1888, 339, and taken up by SEMENOV, 1935, 275, referring to a hypothetical crime involving the corruption of youth, is not very persuasive.

24 It is worth observing that, even if we set aside the more or less romanced re-readings of the late antique writers, the trial caused a sensation for other, more serious reasons, too. Aside from this specific case, the event actually betrayed the uneasiness of the average Athenian citizen faced with the gradual, and unstoppable, evolution of morals, which were becoming less and less compatible with the rigid selection and exclusion criteria Athenian society was founded upon. In those times even marginalized individuals, be they poor citizens or *hetaerae*, tried, with some success, to achieve acceptable social status. It was no coincidence that, probably a few years before the trial of Phryne, the trial of another courtesan named Neaera had taken place (see n. 9).

had a preference for "heroines" such as Lucretia, or even Cleopatra),[25] increased especially towards the end of the 18th century, and coincided with a wider, more general interest in the classics. It is interesting to observe how modern re-readings of Phryne's figure are independent of Praxiteles' Knidian Aphrodite, still figuring in pseudo-Lucian's *Erotes* (4th century BC),[26] and known to us only from literary sources and several Roman copies. The Aphrodite of Knidos, in fact, survived as a completely autonomous work, as the prestigious incunable of a typical iconography, strictly linked to the figure of Aphrodite/Venus. Conversely, when portraying the woman who, according to the tradition of antiquity, had been chosen as the model for the famous statue, modern artists have resorted to entirely different modes of representation.

The earliest examples of a modern pictorial rendition of Phryne as a character are probably two paintings by Angelica Kauffmann (1740-1807), *Praxiteles Showing Phryne the Statue of Cupid* (oil on canvas, 1794, Museum of the Rhode Island Art of Design), and *Phryne Trying to Seduce the Philosopher Xenocrates* (oil on canvas, 1794, private collection). The first of these paintings is a typical example of the sentimental, somewhat affected classicism displayed by the Swiss painter, who portrays Praxiteles as a young, fervent lover gazing languidly at Phryne, who is (unbelievably) a chastely dressed maiden with a demure look. The second painting, *Phryne Trying to Seduce the Philosopher Xenocrates*, is more coherent with the tradition. It is inspired by an ancient anecdote, which narrates how Xenocrates (396-314 BC.), a disciple of Plato known for his restraint and contempt of material goods, had been the target of a seduction attempt by Phryne who, failing to achieve her goal, commented: "That's not a man, that's a statue!"[27] In Kauffmann's representation, Phryne is this time sumptuously dressed up according to the neoclassical fashion, sly and provocative, both in her look and in her attitude, and placed next to Xenocrates, whose adamantine impassibility could be doubted.

The wonderful composition by J. M. W. Turner, *Phryne Going to the Public Baths as Venus. Demosthenes Taunted by Aeschines* (oil on canvas, 1838. London, Tate Gallery) can be placed on a totally different level. Turner's work doubtless presupposes some knowledge of antique sources (above all Athenaeus), although the data provided by these sources have been considerably altered. According to Athenaeus (XIII 590f), "it was not easy to see Phryne naked. She used

25 A (not very significant) reference to Phryne is to be found in the rhetorical manual of Hortensius Landus, entitled *Paradossi cioè sentenze fuori del comun parere* [Paradoxes, or sentences outside the common opinion] (XXV: *Che la donna è di maggior eccellenza che l'uomo* [That women are more excellent than men]): "Non si vidde anche nella bella Frine un eccellente animo poi che si offerse di ridificare le gran mura di Tebe pur che si contentassero e Tebani che il nome suo fusse nelle predette mura scolpito? era questa una spesa infinita, essendo Tebe città sì grande che appena cento porte le bastavano" [Did not the beautiful Phryne also reveal an excellent soul, she who offered to rebuild the great walls of Thebes, as long as the Thebans would agree to carve her name in the aforementioned walls? That was indeed an infinite expense, the city of Thebes being so big that a hundred gates were hardly enough].

26 Chs. 13-15.

27 See Diogenes Laertius, *Lives of the Philosophers* IV 7.

to wear a tunic fit close around her body and did *not*[28] attend the public baths": in short, the contrary of what we are shown in the painting, where Phryne actually wears a tight, but scanty, tunic. Moreover, the specific mention of Venus ("as Venus") seems to have been suggested by a subsequent reference (Athenaeus XIII 591a) made to Phryne as a source of inspiration for Apelles and his Aphrodite Anadyomene.[29] One is tempted to suggest that the subject of the work is taken from a schematic, inaccurate summary of the passage in Athenaeus, which Turner most likely did not consult himself.[30] Also, the scene includes Demosthenes and Aeschines. Although Phryne was their contemporary, she apparently had no relationship with neither of them (unlike Hyperides, whose love relationship with the *hetaera* was renowned), and the architectural scenery is purely imaginary. As is often the case with Turner, the classical reference appears fairly instrumental, while the protagonist role is played by nature and landscape, in particular the magnificent tree that dominates the whole composition and the sky, characteristically flooded by sunlight.

Hardly hinted at in Kauffmann's small paintings and ignored by Turner's austere muse, the erotic overtones of Phryne's figure explode in a triumphant parade in the work of the French academic painters of the Second Empire. Outward magnificence (generally supported by exceptional technical skills), the frequent introduction of an appealing yet clichéd exoticism and the complacent, subtly morbid use of the nude are the elements that contributed to the extraordinary success of the *pompier* painters.[31] It is therefore no wonder that a character like Phryne, famous for her imaginative grandeur and her adventures, worthy of a novel heroine, attracted their attention.

After *Phryne* (1850) by Gustave Boulanger, an academic painter widely appreciated in the Parisian *Salons*,[32] one of the most renowned and celebrated representatives of *l'art pompier*, Jean-Léon Gérôme (1824-1904), conquered the French public with his painting *Phryne before the Areopagus* (oil on canvas,

28 My italics.

29 The information is, however, far from reliable. According to Pliny the Elder (*NH* XXXV 87), the model for the Aphrodite Anadyomene was Pancaspe, Alexander the Great's favourite.

30 At the time the painting was done, the only complete translation into a modern language was the French translation by J. B. Lefebvre de Villebrune (Paris 1789-1791).

31 On the so-called "*pompier art*", or "l'art pompier", extremely appreciated by its contemporaries but later disparaged as dull and lacking in inspiration, see HARDING 1979; LUDERIN, 1997.

32 Yet destined to become the target of merciless criticism by Émile Zola, who reviewed the 1866 *Salon* (under the pseudonym of C. Beaurin); see C. B., "Revue du XIXe siècle" 3,1, 1866, 470s.: "Son tableau historique: *Catherine 1re chez Méhémet-Beltadji, discutant le traité du Pruth*, n'a pas precisément caractère et valeur historiques. Catherine debout, et Méhémet assis, font les gestes de deux personnages qui discutent un marché, non un traité. Changez les costumes, et vous aurez deux propriétaires qui débattent entre eux le prix de quelques hectares de terre. Le besoin de familiarité, qui dicte trop exclusivement le style de M. Gustave Boulanger, se pervertit en vulgarité." Zola/Beaurin, among other things, criticized the *pompier* painters, especially Jean-Léon Gérôme, for their immaterial nudes, lacking a bone structure, and, in general, for their tendency to "plastic dissolution" (p. 469). Zola came back several times to this topic (see *infra*, as well as n. 35).

1861. Hamburg, Kunsthalle) (fig. 28). Compared to Boulanger's arbitrary interpretation,[33] Gérôme's work adheres more strictly to the antique evidence, especially Athenaeus (XIII 590de), even though the court of Heliaea, mentioned by the sources, is transformed into the more famous Areopagus (which was actually only responsible for judging blood crimes). The scene shows us the orator Hyperides performing the crucial act of unveiling Phryne's charms before the eyes of the judges, who are partly astonished, partly bemused. The woman covers her face in a rather dubious, if not paradoxical, gesture of restraint, for her body is entirely bare, an inconceivably indecent pose even for antique sources, according to which Hyperides restricted himself to baring Phryne's breasts (see *supra*). Despite this touch of spicy enticement, the painting remains fatuous and rhetorical, betraying the predominant aims of French painting at the time – captivating the eye of the spectator with impeccable technical mastery, but without any study of the underlying historical problems and their psychological or ethical implications. Several years later, Émile Zola, still annoyed by the prevalence of works by Gérôme at the Parisian Exposition (as opposed to the almost total lack of interest in artists such as Courbet), ironically commented: "Tout le monde se souvient de sa Phryné devant l'Aréopage, une petite figure nue en caramel, que des vieillards dévorent des yeux; le caramel sauvait les apparences" (*Lettres de Paris: L'École française de peinture à l'Exposition de 1878*).[34]

Gérôme's painting nonetheless caused quite a stir, and became a "classic" of sorts, soon destined to attract many followers.[35]

However, after Gérôme's successful portrait, Phryne became little more than a pretext for impressive, as well as purely aesthetic exercises in the virtuoso style. This cliché even affects a sumptuous composition by Polish-born painter Henryk Siemiradzki, (1843-1902), *Phryne at the Festival of Poseidon at Eleusis* (1889, oil on canvas. Saint Petersburg, Russian State Museum). The source is, once more, Athenaeus, more precisely 590f -591a (already mentioned *supra*): "At Poseidon's festival in Eleusis, under the look of all the Greeks, Phryne bathed in the sea after removing her cloak and letting her hair down – and Apelles took her as a model when he painted his Aphrodite 'raising from the sea.'" This time the painter not

33 In his representation of Phryne, Boulanger underlines, not without effectiveness, the arrogant sensuality of the character, but (intentionally?) makes the mistake of transforming Phryne, an elegant hetaera from central Greece, into an odalisque with heavy, almost vulgar traits, languishing among clichéd, orientally inspired furniture.

34 In *Lettres de Paris; Notes parisiennes; Le sémaphore de Marseille, 1871-1877. Émile Zola ; cronache d'arte raccolte e commentate da Margherita Elia Leozappa*, Lecce 1981.

35 As a matter of fact, the work of the French painter inspired the statue by Francesco Barzaghi (1839-1892) *Phryne* (marble, around 1863, Milan, Galleria d'Arte Moderna), which was presented with great success at the Paris Exposition in 1867. As in the painting by Gérôme, the *hetaera*, richly adorned with jewels, raises an arm above her head, but keeps the other hand in a more demure position. On the whole, this is no more than another example of academic stylization, albeit extremely pleasing in its levigated, elegant sensuality. Later, Gérôme's *Phryne* probably also inspired the key scenes of the two Italian movies *Altri tempi* (*Times Gone By*) and *Frine cortigiana d'Oriente*, as well as the sequence in which Laura Antonelli's undress in the film *Trappola per un lupo* (*Dr. Popaul, High Heels*) by C. Chabrol (1972), to which we will return later.

only adhered closely to Athenaeus' narrative (which had been available for some years in the practical edition by G. Kaibel, Lipsiae 1887-1890), but the archaeological-antiquary reconstruction is more accurate than usual (although it shows an inevitable degree of approximation, such as the generalized use of the cheiton as an item of male clothing). This was possibly due to the progress archaeological research was making at the time.

It was, however, with the advent of the cinema that Phryne was finally set free from the stereotyped academicism to which the visual art of the 19th century had seemingly relegated her. In 1952, Italian cinemas showed Alessandro Blasetti's film *Altri tempi* (*Times Gone By*), whose eighth, and last, episode bears the title *Il processo di Frine* (*Phryne's Trial*). The episode is taken from the eponymous short story by Edoardo Scarfoglio (1884).[36] The story focuses on the legal vicissitudes of a buxom young peasant woman from Abruzzo, guilty of poisoning her husband and her mother-in-law, killing the latter. Scarfoglio's short story, informed as it is by cynical, condescending verism, portray the beautiful Mariantonia as the caricature of a woman brutalized and degraded by the consequences of poverty and ignorance, with the instincts of an animal and almost completely devoid of intelligence. Although incapable of denying her crime, Mariantonia nonetheless shows a gleam of cunning by entrusting her defence to solicitor Pietro Saraceni, a self-centred intellectual who sets out to win the case not so much because of his feelings towards her wretched client, but rather on a strange, narcissistic whim. Despite Mariantonia's confession and the overwhelming evidence (such as the victim's guts, displayed in court with lugubrious, Lombrosian complacency), Saraceni manages to show that his client fell victim not so much to her own lust, but rather to poverty and hunger, which forced her to provide sexual favours in exchange for food, or rather, for more tasty dishes than the ones usually served on the table of her peasant husband. Saraceni closes his peroration with a reference – actually nothing more than an artifice – to Phryne's story and to Greek morals, which, in the simplistic yet effective harangue of the pettifogger, were founded on aesthetics: "Ora questa donna, o signori, voi lo vedete, è bellissima: un tribunale greco la rimanderebbe senz'altro libera."[37] [Now gentlemen, as you can see, this woman is extremely beautiful. A Greek court would certainly set her free]. The solicitor's argument, albeit captious, turns out to be effective, for the murderess is sentenced to a very lenient punishment on the grounds of "partial insanity."[38]

Blasetti's film fragment, shot at least seventy years after the short story, avoids the more sinister aspects of Scarfoglio's text, turning the dark story into an irresistible, *strapaesana* farce, admirably carried off by Vittorio de Sica in the role of the defending counsel. Mariantonia herself, who, in the short story is still a very attractive woman, although she is about to lapsing into a slothful obesity, is turned into a sunny creature, oscillating between disarming ingenuity and subtle,

36 A new edition of this short story has recently been published, edited by Remo Cesarani (Palermo, Sellerio 1995).

37 See SCARFOGLIO 1884, 67.

38 See SCARFOGLIO 1884, 69.

insinuating slyness. The character is played by the gorgeous Gina Lollobrigida, as overwhelming as she is restrained, both sensual and innocent at the same time. Mariantonia/Lollo responds to the judge's complains on her excessive availability with almost blasphemous impudence: "We are all good Christians. How can you say no?"

For his part, the counsel/De Sica, pushing far beyond Saraceni's captious loopholes, does not hesitate to resort to the trick made famous by Hyperides, wrapping the defendant in a large cloak, which he removes abruptly, with a sudden, peremptory gesture inspired not by the antique sources, but by the "classical" Gérôme painting,[39] extolling the dazzling charms of the marvellous poisoner. Nor does Blasetti's counsel content himself with requesting a reduction of punishment for Mariantonia due to "partial insanity." On the contrary, in sharp contrast to the expression "minorato psichico" (mentally disabled), which is still listed in articles 88 and 89 of the Italian penal code (and is often used as an expedient for obtaining an easy acquittal), he creates the expression "maggiorata fisica" (physically endowed), which was destined to leave its mark on a whole epoch and set off resounding echoes throughout the fifties and sixties.

In those years, Italy saw the spread of the *péplum* genre,[40] and there are reasons to believe that it was the success of Blasetti's film, with its modern adaptation of Phryne's famous mishap, that prompted the Cinecittà studios to take a serious interest in the figure of the Greek *hetaera*. In the following year a *péplum* was produced, entitled *Frine, cortigiana d'Oriente* (fig. 29) (not a very appropriate title, since the protagonist came from central Greece).[41] The director, Mario Bonnard, had earned a remarkable fame, ever since the age of silent movies by focusing on the easy emotional effect of languid sentimental plots (*Anima perversa*, 1913; *Colei che tutto soffre*, 1914; *L'amor tuo li redime*, 1915). Subsequently, in the late post-war period, he turned to history, creating a series of films of some interest (*Margherita da Cortona*, 1949).[42] As early as the fifties, however, Bonnard had taken a young filmmaker under his protection, the son of director Roberto Roberti (the pseudonym of Vincenzo Leone) and the actress Bice Valerian.[43] It was, of course, Sergio Leone, who, in the film credits for *Frine, cortigiana d'Oriente,* appears not only as assistant director, but also as co-writer (next to

39 It is not by chance that the protagonist of Blasetti's film wrongly talks about Phryne being subjected to the judgement of the Areopagus. This oversight may actually be attributable to the title of the painting by the leader of *l'art pompier*.

40 The term *péplum* refers to the genre of historical-mythological films – especially those that appeared in Italy during the fifties and sixties – and is due to French criticism, which was the first to study this genre seriously. See in particular n. 131 of the "Cahiers du Cinéma" (1961), which contains three articles on the topic, among them *L'age du péplum* by J. SICLIER.

41 The unlucky choice of title was probably due to commercial considerations (the Orient has always attracted the public more than Greece – just remember the trend of movies set in ancient Egypt).

42 For Mario Bonnard's filmography, see RONDOLINO 2000, 93 and 369.

43 A concise but accurate biography of Leone can be found at this web site: http://www.associazionesergioleone.it/saggistica/ilgiovaneleone.htm (complete with a bibliography).

Bruno Baratti, Mario Bonnard, Cesare Ludovici, Nicola Manzari and Ivo Perilli).[44]

Despite its unfortunate title, the film is one of the most interesting of its genre. The use of black and white is an intelligent device, for it allows not only to avoid the gaudy chromatic effect typical of the *péplum* genre, which is, in general, not very pleasing to the modern eye (since the age of Winckelmann, we are accustomed to imagining Greece as made of white marble),[45] but also to mix, in an ultimately harmonious whole, the forms and colours of the different pieces of furniture, which are not always convincing if taken individually.[46] The interiors of the private houses are beautifully rendered (although they look too sumptuous to be Greek, even if they belong to rich people), and the costumes are pleasingly stylised and, in general, not ridiculous, apart from an exaggerated use of long coats and oriental-looking headgears.[47] As far as history is concerned, it would be too much to expect an in-depth analysis of the sources (which even scholars find hard to interpret). Nonetheless, the plot is far from arbitrary and, although it uses shortcuts and adjustments, it reconstructs Phryne's ups and downs with a degree of coherence, while not losing sight of the literary evidence.

Phryne is presented as a young woman of noble birth, on the run from Boeotia[48] to Athens following complex political events. Despite the introduction of romanced details – such as the plot against the girl's parents –, such a premise might not be so far from truth,[49] if we leave out the fact that, in the film, the beginning

44 Ivo Perilli collaborated, among other things, on the screenplay for the films *Ulisse* by M. Camerini (1954) and *La Bibbia* by J. Huston (1966). Sergio Leone's presence as a co-writer of *Frine, cortigiana d'Oriente* escaped the otherwise extremely accurate editors of the Internet Movie Database (see http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0045792, where, however, the great filmmaker is mentioned as an assistant).

45 Greek statues and temples were in fact very colourful. However, computer-aided reconstructions of ancient monuments mostly bother the modern eye. A paradoxical example is the recent film *Alexander* by Oliver Stone (2004), which shows, in the theatre of Aigae (4th century BC), a brand-new statue dressed in a gaudy red: but this statue, a *kore*, actually dates back two centuries earlier. In a black and white movie this mistake would be more likely to pass unobserved.

46 For example, Athens in the film seems to pullulate with statues of the naked Aphrodite. In fact, we know that the Aphrodite of Knidos was one of the earliest, if not the very first, examples of this type of statue (up to then, the goddess was invariably rigurously dressed and adorned: see SETTIS 1966).

47 However, one should not forget that, in the 4th century, Athens was full of metics, freedmen and slaves from all over. The Oriental-style costumes were, however, widely employed in historical and mythological films at Cinecittà, no matter where they were set, as they were regarded as "good for all uses."

48 In the film, Phryne apparently comes from Thebes, the capital city of the region, instead of the smaller Thespiae. Her real name (Mnesarete), as well as her father's name (Epicles) lead us to suppose that she was of noble origin, or at least that she was born free and not a slave.

49 On the beginnings of Phryne's "career", see CAVALLINI 1999, 57s. A very questionable choice in the film is the name Afra (instead of Mnesarete, about which see Athenaeus 591e) as Phryne's real name. The epithet sounds Latin rather than Greek, but evidence of it can nonetheless be found in an epoch later than the narrated events. The screenwriters may have had Saint Aphra in mind, a Christian martyr of the Diocletian age who, according to a dubious and unreliable tradition, was a prostitute born in Cyprus or Crete, who later converted to

of Phryne's career coincides, not very plausibly, with the destruction of the city of Thebes by Alexander the Great (335 BC). This dating is no doubt pushed too forward, and is hardly compatible with the chronology of Praxiteles who, in the film, plays a predictably prominent role.[50] In Athens the young woman, helped by a clever, but treacherous pimp, becomes an avid, haughty and, soon, incredibly rich courtesan (the merchant reduced to rags is excellently characterised, recalling fr. 25 K.-A. by the comic poet Timocles).[51] However, she generously uses her riches to help the refugees from Thebes and (in accordance with the tradition) even offers to rebuild the town at her own cost, provided that her name is carved on the gates. The *basileus* archon refuses the offer and the courtesan, ill-advised by the wicked pimp, tries to impress the people by posing, sacrilegiously, as a priestess of Aphrodite at the festival in Eleusis.[52] Hence the famous trial (this time correctly held before the Heliaea, not the Aeropagus!), and all related events, until we reach the inevitable *happy end*.

The film no doubt contains mistakes and ingenuities.[53] For instance, the use of ancient writing is approximate, to say the least, as in almost all other films of the *péplum* genre.[54] Moreover, the character of Lamachus is anything but convincing (actually, he may be the true weak point of the film). He is a stereotype villain, and plays, hardly credibly, the twofold role of the traitor of Phryne's parents and of the woman's pimp. Besides (despite his Spartan name!), he is characterized as an underhand schemer with Phoenician/Punic traits,[55] in accordance with a stereotype that goes back to the times of the colossal movie *Cabiria* (1914), and reflects the diffidence, widespread in "popular" Italian culture, towards some civilizations of Oriental origin, in particular of Carthage, the traditional enemy of Rome.[56]

However, despite these flaws (which were, anyway, a commonplace in films of the time), the solid screenplay and the excellent narrative rhythm seem to sug-

Christianity after meeting bishop Narcissus of Gerona in the city of Augsburg (see SCHAD 1993).

50 A more reasonable hypothesis has Phryne's family seek refuge in Athens after the battle of Leuctra (371 BC), when Thespiae's inhabitants became the targets of suspicion and retaliation on the part of the Thebans. On the chronology of Praxiteles' life see Plinius, *NH* XXXIV 50, who places the *akmé* of the sculptor in the years 364-363 BC.

51 On Timocles' fragment, and on the probable connection between the comedy writer's criticism of Phryne and the serious charges he brings against Hyperides, see CAVALLINI 1999, 57s.

52 This episode actually seems to have no direct connection with the trial, as can be inferred from the evidence regarding Euthias' harangue (see *supra*).

53 For example, a 'senate' that is totally out of place.

54 Not even the generally acclaimed *Gladiator* by R. Scott (2000) is immune from ludicrous use of ancient writing.

55 Of course the presence of a Greek-speaking Phoenician in Athens in the 4th century BC is not a mistake as such, as evidenced by Zeno, the stoic philosopher of Citium, who was active in Athens right at the end of that century.

56 It should, however, be remembered that in 20th century Italy, historical research mostly followed the neo-humanistic approach, thus showing a marked tendency to contrast the Greek-Roman world with the Oriental civilizations. This attitude prevailed well into the seventies (see CAVALLINI 2004, 87-91).

gest that Leone's presence was stronger than the credits might lead us to believe.[57] Particularly beautiful is the sequence where Phryne runs away in the woods, especially the shot where she bends over a stream to drink. The close-ups of the extras are intense and evocative (as is the case in all Leone's later films). The dance scenes are beautifully crafted (albeit rather stereotyped), and vaguely reminiscent of symbolism and the Parnassian school. A particularly effective scene, although it is not confirmed by any anecdote from antiquity, is the one where for a few drachmas Phryne purchases her own "battle name" from an ordinary prostitute of the city square,[58] who also wishes her good luck in a disinterested and touching way.[59] Finally, what is unusual for the *péplum* genre is the presence of black slaves and courtesans, which betrays the film authors' intention to present the city of Athens in the 4th century as a "multiethnic" society, which in fact anticipates a situation that was more appropriate for the Hellenistic-Roman world.

The most bitter disappointment is precisely the "climax scene" of Phryne undressing before the judges. In order to escape the fetters of censorship, the directors could not think of anything better than to show the beautiful Elena Kleus's back and keep her in the background, thus avoiding to emphasize the emotional reaction both of the woman herself and the onlookers. Finally, we reach the end, which is really too edifying – Phryne puts her clothes back on with dignity and decorum, obtains from the archon the permission to rebuild Thebes on behalf of the whole city, and finally starts a new life with Hyperides. However, it is worth noting how even here the iconographic model for the (restrained as it is) scene is the painting by Gérôme, not the story narrated by the antique sources, knowledge of which must have been rather limited at the time, not least because of the lack of an Italian translation of Athenaeus.[60]

With these two fifties movies, Phryne finally entered the universe of modern communication by full right. In 1976, Claude Chabrol, in his film *Trappola per un lupo* (*Docteur Popaul / High Heels*), introduced a Boccaccio-style scene where a statuesque Laura Antonelli, caught in an embarrassing situation to say the least, covers her face with her hands, leaving her plump, provocative forms perfectly visible. Once again, this scene reveals the all-pervasive influence of the leading figure transmitted by the Eighteenth-century *art pompier*. In even more recent times, the popularity of Gérôme's painting found yet another confirmation in what

57 On this subject, see my recent interview with Elena Kleus at: http://www.mythimedia.org/sergio_leone.html. Besides, it is well-known that it was Leone, not Bonnard, who directed *The Last Days of Pompeii* (1959).

58 In fact, other courtesans called themselves Phryne, despite the derogatory meaning of this nickname ("toad"): see CAVALLINI 1999, 58 as well as n. 27.

59 The film repeatedly insists on a *topos*, widespread in Greek literature, but also shared, in essence, by modern collective imagination (e.g. Marguerite Gauthier) – solidarity among courtesans. Reality, however, was more nuanced, as is shown, for example, by the exchanges of insolences between the *hetaerae* in the Alexandrine comic author Maco, or between Demetrius Poliorcetes' lovers in Plutarch's *Life of Demetrius*.

60 Such translations, incidentally, were not available until very recently: see Ateneo di Naucrati, *Il banchetto dei Sapienti.Libro XIII: sulle donne*, edited by E. CAVALLINI, Bologna 2001; AA. VV., *Ateneo: i Deipnosofisti. I dotti a banchetto*, I-IV, Rome 2001.

is perhaps the most saucy and irreverent among the visual re-readings of the character of Phryne – an illustration taken from the book *The Model* by Milo Manara, where the *hetaera* is evoked as Praxiteles' model, even though the character portrayed next to her is Hyperides – or, to be more precise, Gérôme's Hyperides, scathingly parodied by the artist. For the creator of the Italian "pin-up art",[61] this is yet another example of his kaleidoscopic citationism. From the point of view of contemporary mass culture, it is a confirmation of the everlasting success of the most ancient model whose name has been handed down to our times.

61 See MANARA 2002.

GRAECIA CAPTA? DEPICTIONS OF GREEKS AND HELLAS IN "ROMAN FILMS"

Marta García Morcillo

1. THE GLORY THAT WAS GREECE

One of the opening sequences of the renowned BBC television series *I, Claudius* (1976) shows a luxurious Roman banquet headed by the emperor Augustus (Brian Blessed), accompanied by his family and Marcus Vipsanius Agrippa (John Paul). The banquet is to celebrate Octavian's naval victory (the fleet was under Agrippa's command) over the allied forces of Antony and Cleopatra at Actium (31 BC).[1] The festivities include an epic recitation of the events of the battle by the (fictive) Greek historian Aristarchus.[2] His name, white beard, manners and white *himation* are characteristic of the typical cinematic Greek intellectual in sharp contrast to the coloured opulence of the Roman banquet.[3] Like the marble statue of a philosopher, Aristarchus embodies Greece's ancient glory and dignity, and elicits a statement of Augustus' appreciation for Greek culture, thus simultaneously conveying it to modern viewers: "they are always inventing. Why are they so clever?"[4] The emperor's reflection is interrupted by his young nephew Marcellus (Christopher Guard), who offers a pragmatic refutation couched in political and territorial terms: "If they're so clever, why are they our province instead of vice versa?" Marcellus thereby attests to the real fact of the subjugation of Greece and its culture by the superior authority of imperial Rome.[5]

Aristarchus' lyrical account of the battle and its main actors announces the transcendence of the episode and its status as a milestone in Rome's collective memory: "…your names and theirs in history will be forever intertwined." Al-

1 Actium was publicly celebrated under the Julio-Claudians as the inauguration of the Augustan era; see GURVAL 1995.

2 On the strong oral component in Greek history, see THOMAS 1992.

3 The name evokes the famous astronomer and mathematician Aristarchus of Samos (310-230 BC), known for having proposed a heliocentric model of the solar system; but also Aristarchus of Samothrace, the Homeric scholar who lived in the second century BC and became director of the famous Library of Alexandria.

4 Augustus refers in the scene to a new type of prose introduced by Greek authors. On literary innovations in the age of Augustus and the influence of Greek culture, see, for example, WILLIAMS 1978, 101-152.

5 The scene also includes conversation between Aristarchus and the herald who introduces him to the guests about the current difficulties for theatre and actors in Rome. Herald: "The theatre isn't what it was." Aristarchus: "No. And I'll tell you something else. It never was what it was." Aristarchus' introspection on the origins and fate of drama appears as something incomprehensible to Romans, and also therefore to modern TV-audiences.

though he does not agree with Aristarchus' description of the events, an admiring Augustus acknowledges the contribution of his "poetic licence" and his talent in recitation: "what a gift you Greeks have!"[6]

The scene enacts the idealization of classical Greek culture found also in the Augustean tradition and in authors such as Horace, Ovid, Virgil and Vitruvius.[7] The intellectual authority of Aristarchus also evokes Horace's image of captive Greece conquering her conqueror.[8] Augustus' admiration for Greek literature mirrors the archetypal western view of the ancient Greeks inherited from the Romans and later transmitted by the Renaissance, the Romantic movement, and the Victorians.

I, Claudius was broadcast on television in Europe and the United States in the late seventies and early eighties. Despite its theatrical modus, the brilliant performances of the actors and the striking mixture of politics, crime and palace intrigue in imperial Rome assured the worldwide success of the series. Both the series and the original novels by Robert Graves, based on Suetonius' biographies of the first twelve emperors and Tacitus' *Annales*, present an intimate picture of a dissolute Rome as the world's ruling power.[9] Yet curiously, both the banquet and the figure of Aristarchus are not even mentioned in Graves's novels.[10] The scene was thus included by the creators of the series as a didactic introduction to the main characters and their historical background.[11]

This sequence also illustrates a major obsession of modern historiography: the cultural and military confrontation between Greece and Rome.[12] The ancient glory of Greece, once Greece had been reduced to a Roman province, was visible to Romans only as an imagined landscape of arts and ideas. The Romans accepted and perpetuated an idealised vision of Greek culture and claimed for themselves a privileged position as legitimate custodians of its inheritance, as we indeed do too.[13] Yet in cinema as in television, this topic has traditionally played no role, neither in Hollywood epics nor in European productions. In films about Rome,

6 Augustus also shows himself to be interested in poetry: "I write a little poetry myself. Could I show it to you sometime?"

7 On the idealization of classical Greece in Augustean literature, see LITTLE 1982, 254-370.

8 Horace, *Epist*. 2, 1, 156-157: "*Graecia capta ferum victorem cepit et artis intulit agresti Latio*."

9 Robert Graves' novels *I, Claudius* and *Claudius the God* (1934) were clearly influenced by the political and cultural atmosphere of the post-World War I period in Britain, and particularly by the crisis of the British Empire. The result is the decadent portrait of Roman rulers. On *I, Claudius* as "domestic spectacle", see JOSHEL 2001, 119-161.

10 Actium is here recalled in order to explain the political and dynastic consequences of the conflict between Augustus and Antony.

11 The scene is at any rate in keeping with the "spirit" of the novel, in which Roman intellectuals are depicted as followers and admirers of Greek culture. In this sense, Claudius himself, who writes his autobiography in Greek, pretends to emulate the great Greek historians Herodotus and Thucydides. On Graves' recreations of the Ancient World in *I, Claudius* and *Claudius the God* see the recent approach by LLABRÉS RIPOLL 2006, 29-88.

12 See for instance PETROCHILIS 1974; WARDMAN 1976.

13 On the influence of Augustan classicism in the arts, see ZANKER 1990^2, 240-263; LA ROCCA 2002, 627-655.

marginal references to the Greeks evoke predominantly their glorious past, their intellectual culture, their freedoms-thought, and the Greek-sounding names may be given to slaves or to inhabitants of a distant eastern province.[14]

It is not the aim of this paper to supply an exhaustive analysis of all "Roman films" in which this minor theme appears. I will instead focus on some representative movies providing characteristic images of Greeks and Greekness under Roman rule, characteristic as defined by Western cultural traditions and the demands of the medium.

In spite of some well-known exceptions, the Hellenistic period rarely features in cinema.[15] The story of the last Ptolemaic queen is ubiquitous, but otherwise Rome's military expansion in the Mediterranean is showcased in few films. Predominant here is the confrontation between Rome and Carthage in the Second Punic War, usually focused on the major figures of Hannibal and Scipio Africanus.[16] To this war belonged the conflict between Rome and Sicily, which culminated in the renowned battle of Syracuse (211 BC), recreated in the splendid *Cabiria* (Giovanni Pastrone, 1914), and especially in *L'assedio di Siracusa / Archimede / The Siege of Syracuse* (Pietro Francisci, 1960). A further defining moment of Roman imperialism was the destruction of Corinth by Lucius Mummius (146 BC), filmed in *Il conquistatore di Corinto* / *The Centurion* (Mario Costa, 1962). These movies are all characterized, as we shall see, not only by a relatively accurate use of literary sources, but also by a quite favourable view of Roman imperialism, regarded as an admirable episode of Italy's past. Hollywood's low level of interest in Rome's subjugation of the Hellenistic world can be explained, to a degree, as the consequence of its greater concern with representing Christians as the victims of Rome's supposed totalitarianism.[17]

As a result, a substantial number of films on Roman topics present Greek characters only as slaves or conquered provincials who become Christians and

14 A good example of Greek-sounding but also allegorical names is found in *A Funny Thing Happened on the Way to the Forum* (Richard Lester, 1966). In this homage to Plautus and Greek New Comedy, names reflect the personal qualities of those who bear them, such as the young master Hero and the house's mistress Domina. We also find here slaves named *à la Grecque*, such as Hysterium and Pseudolus, as well as the courtesan Philia.

15 The most remarkable example of a "Hellenistic" movie is *Il colosso di Rodi* (Sergio Leone, 1960). For further "Hellenistic" films, see DUMONT 1998, 144-148, VERRETH 1995, 29-44, and www.arts.kuleuven.be/ALO/klassieke/film.htm.

16 Cf. for example, *Scipione l'Africano* (Carmine Gallone, 1937), *Annibale* / *Hannibal* (Carlo Ludovico Bragaglia, 1959), *Cartagine in fiamme* (Carmine Gallone, 1959); *Scipione detto anche l'Africano* (Luigi Magni 1971). On cinematic approaches to the Roman Republic, see further LAPEÑA 2006, 707-714.

17 On the frequent identification of modern Americans and persecuted peoples, see BOURGET 1992, 18. Both slaves and Christians (Americans) are thus opposed to the Roman (old-world European) oppressors, frequently depicted in cinema as modern dictators, see WYKE 1997, 23: "In such narratives, a hyperbolically tyrannical Rome stands for the decadent European Other forever destined to be defeated by the vigorous Christian principles of democratic America." On the archetypical overtones connecting imperial Rome with colonial Britain and Nazi Germany on the one hand, and Americans with early Christians on the other, cf. WINKLER 1998, 167-196.

then face imperial domination morally armoured in their new religion. The illuminating Christianity and its shadowed antithesis – embodied by Roman emperors such as Nero – was a Leitmotiv in Hollywood and European movies during the fifties, but declined in the sixties, a consequence of the exhaustion of the theme and the rising popularity of other film-genres.

2. Greeks, Romans and Christians

In films dealing with early Christianity, Greeks are commonly presented as slaves or conquered inhabitants of the eastern Roman provinces attracted to the new religion. Some movies draw deeper portraits of Greek Christians. A remarkable example is the depiction of the Greek slave Demetrius in *The Robe* (Henry Koster, 1953), featuring Victor Mature. Demetrius is introduced here as a cultivated Greek from Corinth who has fallen into slavery. Before his sale in the marketplace, he proclaims the right of all men to be free. An exchange between the slave and the Roman tribune Marcellus (Richard Burton), who has bought him at the auction, displays the Greek character of Demetrius' elevated moral values:

> Marcellus: "You could have run away. Why didn't you?"
> Demetrius: "I owe you a debt, sir. I pay my debts."
> Marcellus: "Not a slave's reason. More like a Roman's."
> Demetrius: "A Greek's."
> Marcellus: "Yes, I know. In the great days of Greece, we Romans were no more than barbarians."

The scene conveys to audiences the Greek sense of morality inherited (or usurped) by Romans and, again, the *topos* of Greece's ancient glory. In admitting that Romans were barbarians, Marcellus evokes here the construction of a cultural identity based on dichotomies, an aspect of Greek thought as early as Herodotus and Aristotle, and later adopted by Roman authors.[18]

In echoing the contemporary American *Zeitgeist*, this dialogue propagates a false image of ancient Greeks as enemies of human slavery.[19] It is thus not difficult to construct a parallel here between Greek Christians and modern Americans, both defenders of liberty and opponents of totalitarian empires.[20] Demetrius' later

18 According to Éloy 1998, 43, this exchange exemplifies the *topos* of Greeks being always and everywhere intellectually superior to Romans. On the topic of ancient Greeks' cultural identity, see Cartledge 1993, 3 ff.

19 Herodotus attributes to the Greeks the idea of freedom, and contrasts it with the tyranny characteristic of non-Greek cultures, in particular that of the Persians; he does not introduce the idea as an absolute and use it to condemn human slavery. Modern popular culture has erroneously attributed the idea of human freedom to ancient Greeks, and contrasted it with their tragic role as subjugated victims of imperial Rome. The film *Spartacus* (Stanley Kubrick, 1960) provides one of the best examples of this contrast in cinema. On the association of the idea of freedom with ancient Greece, see Patterson 1991.

20 On the attribution of modern conceptions of liberty and tyranny to the confrontation between Christians and Romans, see Winkler 1998, 168 ff. The influence of the *Zeitgeist* (seen in the

conversion to Christianity appears as the natural consequence of an intellectual revelation, while the Roman Marcellus will only embrace the new religion after repenting his sins.[21] The film's idealizing depiction of Greeks and Christians, consonant with dominant Western traditions, allows for the identification of the modern audience of 1953 – North American in particular – with Demetrius' character.

The Silver Chalice (Victor Saville, 1954), from the novel of the same name by Thomas B. Costain, was intended by Warner Bros. as the next Hollywood blockbuster about early Christianity. The film, however, failed, because of its unfortunate storyline and its highly stylised and anachronistic sets. Despite the failures of the central story about the Holy Grail, however, the movie incorporates an appealing view of Hellenistic culture facing the challenges of early Christianity. The action takes place in Antioch during Nero's principate. Antioch is described in the movie's credits as a flourishing city, famous for being a strategic commercial centre where Rome and the East meet. We are also introduced to the inhabitants of this Graeco-Syrian metropolis who preferred "to leave politics to Rome, religion to the gods, and history to historians." There then follows a sentence with patently modern references: "in those times as in ours people only really cared about their own businesses." Antioch, so the movie proclaims, enjoyed at that time a great reputation in arts and manufacturing. This particular aspect of the city plays an important role in the movie's story, and is directly relevant to the figure of the Greek sculptor Basil(ius) (a young Paul Newman), who is to produce the famous Christian relic. The apostle Joseph will require Basil's talent as a renowned artist, entrusting to him the project of sculpting a worthy silver cover for the relic. At the beginning of the film, Basil's adoptive father adumbrates the concept that Greek identity is fundamentally rooted in the arts and, indeed, embodied in the young sculptor: "we are Greeks, we possess a great inheritance of art and beauty to offer the World." Later, when Basil meets the Graeco-Christian Lucas of Bethany for the first time, he will criticize Christians for rejecting the aesthetic values of art. After he follows his mystic path towards conversion, guided by the Grail's symbolism, Basil will finally accept that art's intrinsic qualities mirror Christian morality.

The conflict between Greek aesthetics and Christian moral principles was the central theme of the Italian production *Afrodite, dea dell'amore* (Mario Bonnard, 1958). As in *The Silver Chalice*, a Greek sculptor, here named Demetrius Hellenus, tries to discover the secrets of ideal beauty.[22] The last scene of the film is one of great symbolism, showing an unfinished sculpture abandoned by the artist, who has been seduced instead by Christian virtues.

Henryk Sienkiewicz's popular novel *Quo Vadis?* (1896), several times adapted to film, similarly shares this vision of the defeated Greek world illuminated by the new light of Christianity. In contrast to the successful large-scale

depiction of totalitarian Rome) is particularly clear in Lloyd C. Douglas' novel *The Robe*, published in 1942.

21 According to the film, Pontius Pilates entrusted to Marcellus the crucifixion of Jesus.

22 See below.

version by Metro Goldwyn Mayer (Mervyn LeRoy, 1951), the recent adaptation of the classic by the prestigious Polish director Jerzy Kawalerowicz (2000) follows the book quite faithfully. A mere secondary character in LeRoy's film, the Greek spy and burglar Chilo Chilonides is portrayed by Sienkiewicz and Kawalerowicz as a pagan sinner and future devotee of the new religion. Born in Pontus Euxinus, Chilonides is introduced as a former philosopher compelled to take up a dishonest life. He describes himself as "a physician, a sage, a soothsayer who knows how to read people's fates and predict the future." When interrogated by Petronius about which philosophical school he belongs to, Chilonides admits to being a Cynic, a Stoic and even a Peripatetic.

A depiction of Greeks, Romans and Christians that accords with these by now well-established western traditions is summarised in an exchange between Saint Peter and the young tribune Marcus Vinicius, found in the novel and the 2000 film, but omitted in the 1951 Hollywood version:

> Vinicius: "Greece created beauty and wisdom, Rome created power; but they – what do they bring? Tell, then, what ye bring. If there is brightness beyond your doors, open them."
> Peter: "We bring love."

Sienkiewicz's narrative, like Hollywood's toga movies of the fifties, envisages early Christendom as the legitimate heir to, and indeed improver of, Hellenism, and portrays imperial Rome only as an obsolete and corrupted world.[23]

3. Intellectuals and Barbarians

While the depiction of the protean, changeable, and criminal Chilo Chilonides conveys an image of decadent Greeks living among Romans, Aristarchus' portrayal as a Greek intellectual in *I, Claudius* conveys an ideal picture of classical Greece. The admired Greece brought to mind by the figure of Aristarchus appears not only integrated into Rome by conquest, but also as a fundamental part of Rome's cultural identity. Augustus' interest in Greek poetry reveals to audiences that Hellenism was immanent in the Roman intellectual profile. Traces of this *topos* can be also found in postclassical traditions. An illustrative example is provided by Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar*. In 1953, the acclaimed director Joseph L. Mankiewicz staged the play in a modest black-and-white cinematic version produced by MGM.[24] Both the play and the film pay particular attention to the moment in which Caesar, before the masses assembled at the theatre, dramatically

23 On Roman imperial decadence contrasted with Greeks and Christians in Hollywood productions see further Fitzgerald 2001, 24-26.

24 Resisting the increasingly spectacular tendencies of the "sword and sandal" genre, Mankiewicz attempted here to follow the rules of drama, focusing on the actors' performances and practically omitting exterior locations. An intellectual artist well known for his work in theatre, Mankiewicz was convinced – against mainstream Hollywood opinion – of the huge possibilities Shakespeare offered on film. In this regard, see Davies – Wells 1994, 146-162.

refused a royal crown several times. When Cassius inquires, Casca reports Cicero's reaction to the scene:

> Casca: "Ay, he spoke Greek."
> Cassius: "To what effect?"
> Casca: "Nay, and I tell you that, I'll ne'er look you I' th' face again. But those that understood him, smil'd at one another, and shook their heads: but for mine own part, it was Greek to me…"[25]

Shakespeare emphasises here Cicero's intellectual talents, demonstrated by the Greek language in which he expressed his resistance to Caesar's monarchic tendencies. On the other hand, the fact only some understood him reveals Shakespeare's awareness of the Greek language in Rome as a sign of exclusive cultural status. If we think Shakespeare's own cultural context was significant here, we can further postulate that the author may have been referring to the fading knowledge of ancient Greek among Elizabethan intellectuals.[26] Instead of being introduced as a recognizable expression of high culture, Greek in Shakespeare is something incomprehensible to the majority of Romans, as it must have been to Elizabethans, and to modern viewers.

Mankiewicz's interest in Shakespeare's main source, Plutarch, resulted some years later in his gigantic *Cleopatra* (1963), produced by Twentieth Century-Fox. Despite its extremely long, accident-prone and scandalous shooting, *Cleopatra* has won a deserved place in film history as the quintessential over-reaching blockbuster and one of the most expensive films ever made.[27] Together with Antony Mann's *The Fall of the Roman Empire* (1964), *Cleopatra* is often identified not only as an epilogue to, but even as a main cause of, the collapse of Hollywood's Golden Era. Yet if we direct our attention exclusively to the film's artistic qualities – despite the disastrous editing, during which entire scenes were eliminated and mutilated – Mankiewicz' *Cleopatra* is undoubtedly the most valuable cinematic adaptation of this classic tale. The introductory credits mention explicitly that the film was "based upon Histories by Plutarch, Suetonius, Appian, and other ancient sources…" Also mentioned is *The Life and Times of Cleopatra* by C. M. Franzero.[28]

In keeping with a cliché already established by Augustan propaganda, Cleopatra and Alexandria are here opposed to Romans and Rome. Yet the film departs from traditional portraits of the Ptolemaic Queen as embodiment of oriental barbarism and cultural decadence (as trumpeted in particular by Augustan poetry and

25 Shakespeare, *Julius Caesar*, Act one, scene 2, 22-29.

26 Shakespeare made use of Sir Thomas North's translation of Plutarch's *Lifes*: *Parallel Lives of the Noble Grecians and Romans* (1579), itself translated from a French translation of the Greek made by Jacques Amyot de Melun in 1559. On Shakespeare's uses of Plutarch see THOMAS 1989; MIOLA 1987, 69-76. On Shakespeare's recreation of Antiquity, see for instance VELZ 1978, 1-11.

27 For an analysis of the film see WYKE 1997, 73-109; SILVEIRA CYRINO 2005, 121-158.

28 On the cinematic use of Plutarch see Oliver Stone's *Alexander*, and PETROVIC in this volume.

the postclassical tradition)[29] by emphasizing that Cleopatra was not just an Egyptian Queen but also the last member of a Hellenistic dynasty founded by one of Alexander's generals. This important detail about the Queen's ancestors is mentioned in one line of dialogue between Caesar and his generals: "we are informed of Cleopatra's Macedonian descent." In this way, Caesar (and audiences) are learned of her Hellenistic origins and her connection to Alexander. These will then appear as a central Leitmotiv of the story.

For in addition to the employment of certain Egyptian paraphernalia and some Egyptian ceremonials performed in the film, Cleopatra herself is above all characterised as an embodiment of the Hellenistic world and a primary heir to its cultural traditions. The intellectual qualities of the queen are noted, as are those of her counsellor and teacher, the scholar Sosigenes (Hume Cronyn). *Cleopatra* captures, further, the monumental grandeur of Alexandria and its architectural wonders, including the Pharos and the famous Library, epicentre of the Hellenistic cultural heritage.

During the episode of the burning of the Great Library by the Roman army, Sosigenes evokes the human dimension of the tragedy by referring to some of the immortal original works forever lost:

> "The Great Library: Aristotle's manuscripts, the Platonic commentaries, the plays, the histories, the testament of the Hebrew god, the book of books."

This comment conveys to modern viewers the image of Hellenistic Alexandria as a custodian of both the western classical and the Christian traditions. Both in political and cultural terms, Alexandria thus appears opposed to Rome.[30]

In the following scene, a furious Cleopatra denounces Caesar's insensitive strategy of trying to win the battle for Alexandria by ignoring its "collateral" consequences – meaning the burning of the Library. For this attitude, Caesar and the Romans are called barbarians by Cleopatra. The uncultured nature of the Romans in the film contrasts with the Augustan image of a barbarian Cleopatra, depicted as the opposite of all Roman virtues.

The virtual presence of Alexander the Great in the film also recalls Egypt's Hellenistic legacy. The Macedonian King is here evoked not only by his renowned mausoleum, but also by Cleopatra's claim to Alexander's greatest inheritance: his dreams of conquest and world hegemony, which she tries to share with Caesar and Antony.[31]

Antony's affection for Greek culture is well attested in literary sources. In the movie, this feature appears for the first time in the magnificent scene of his meet-

29 On Cleopatra's depiction as barbarian in the Latin literature, Virgil, *Aen.* 6, 847 ff.; 8; Horace, *Epod.* 9; Propertius, *Eleg*. 3, 11, and see WYKE 1992, 98-140. On the cultural opposition between East and West, see COBET 1996, 405-419.

30 In this regard, the movie seems to follow Plutarch, *Ant*. 28-29, but also Shakespeare.

31 Caesar: "I have enough of you pretenders parading on ruins of past glories." Cleopatra: "Alexander understood it, that from Egypt he could rule the world."

ing with Cleopatra in Tarsus.[32] As in Plutarch's *Vita*, Antony's attraction to Cleopatra will drive him into patent cultural conflict with Roman tradition, and finally into an irreversible progress towards the East.[33] Plutarch sets out clear differences between cultural Greekness and the excesses and extravagances attributed to orientalizing versions of Hellenism, as Mankiewicz does.[34]

The Fall of the Roman Empire (Anthony Mann, 1964) situates Rome in a later period and a different historical controversy. Following Edward Gibbon's influential *Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* (1776-1778), the movie – like *Gladiator* (Ridley Scott 2000) almost four decades later – recreates the last days of the emperor Marcus Aurelius (Alec Guinness) and the reign of Commodus (Christopher Plummer). One of the achievements of this late example of the *Kolossal* genre is the use of contrasting architectural settings: a monumental marble Rome is here opposed to the oriental splendour of the Armenian quarters and the austere fortress on the Danubian Limes where Marcus Aurelius will find his death.[35] The dramatically different settings and locations contribute to a visualization of the geographical and military grandeur of the Roman Empire. The cultural diversity of the world ruled by Romans is displayed at the beginning of the movie by a military parade before a decisive battle on the Danubian border. Proconsuls, governors of provinces, and kings of allied nations march in procession and render their services to the Emperor and his Empire.[36] Despite cultural and religious differences, all of them – as Marcus Aurelius points out in his speech – represent the unity and greatness of Rome. Unique foci of resistance to Rome are the northern barbarians and the eastern Persians. But where here are the traces of Greece? The past scenarios of conquest and cultural polarization have been left far behind, for *The Fall of the Roman Empire* celebrates a hegemonic Rome, guided by a Stoic philosopher whose ideals of peace and harmony are shared by his Greek advisor Timonides.

After Marcus Aurelius' death, Timonides tries to transmit his message of integration and peace to Romans and barbarians. Yet Timonides, who declares that he himself has become Roman by choice, is not welcome in the Roman senate.

32 To Cleopatra's remark on Antony's Greek dress, he replies: "I have a fondness for almost all Greek things." Cleopatra: "As an almost all-Greek thing, I am flattered." The scene alludes both to Antony's cultural immersion in Hellenism and to the Greek origin of the Queen.

33 Antony's distancing of himself from the Roman ideal is regarded by Plutarch as a progressive decadence, a moral and physical detachment from Rome. In this regard, see Plutarch's description of Antony's Asianism, *Ant*. 24; WYKE 1997, 75; CYRINO 2006, 156.

34 In an earlier passage, Plutarch describes Antony positively, as benefactor of Athens and a Philhellene, *Ant*. 23: "Toward the Greeks, then, Antony conducted himself without rudeness or offence, at least in the beginning, nay, he indulged his fondness for amusement by listening to literary discussions and by witnessing games and religious rites. In his judicial decisions also he was reasonable, and delighted to be called a Philhellene, and still more to be addressed as Philathenian, and he gave the city very many gifts" (Transl. B. Perrin, LCL). In cultural terms, Greece occupies for Plutarch a midpoint between Rome and Alexandria, Plut. *Ant*. 33.

35 On the intelligent use of sets for atmospheric recreation in this film, see SOLOMON 2001, 83-86.

36 Among them a certain "Pericles, proconsul of Athens."

The hostile reaction to Marcus' ideal of "human frontiers" turns against the scholar himself:

> Senator: "Equality, freedom, peace. Who is skilled in the use of these words but Greeks, Jews and slaves?"

In the words of a senator, we discover once again Greek ideals of freedom anachronistically enunciated according to modern ideological conceptions inspired by the French Revolution. With such a clear echo of the *Zeitgeist* – one of the film's contexts had been the fight for the civil rights in North America – audiences could easily identify with those marginalized and oppressed by Roman rule.[37] Despite political opposition and internal disintegration, both Timonides and Marcus broadcast the ideal of a new Rome influenced by the Greek culture.

4. Syracuse and Corinth: Depictions of Conquerors and Conquered

The capture of Syracuse (211 BC) and the sack of Corinth (146 BC) represent, according to Roman historians, key episodes in the conquest of the Mediterranean world and the cultural clash between Rome and the Greek east.

The colossal *Cabiria* (Giovanni Pastrone, 1914), milestone of the genre in its early stages, included, among other episodes, Roman attacks on Cirta and Syracuse during the Second Punic War. *Cabiria* recreated, through astounding visual spectacle, the brilliant operation of the inventions of Archimedes against the Roman fleet.

L'assedio di Siracusa (*Archimede) / The Siege of Syracuse* (Pietro Francisci, 1960) provides a broader view of this Sicilian episode. Apart from the inevitable love story and some cinematic licence typical of the genre, the movie makes coherent use of ancient sources and constructs interesting characterizations of historical figures such as the mathematician Archimedes (Rossano Brazzi), who was advisor to the tyrant Hiero II (Gino Cervi), and the consul Marcus Claudius Marcellus (Alberto Farnese).

In a film's early scene, the tyrant Hiero assumes that Sicily will become a theatre of war between Carthage and Rome for the control of the western Mediterranean, and predicts Syracuse's inexorable fate as victim of Roman imperialism. Hiero's stance of remaining neutral in the conflict does not however correspond with the pro-Carthaginian politics attributed to Syracuse by the sources.[38] In echoing Italian revisions of their own history, *L'assedio di Siracusa* transmits no negative view of Roman imperialism, and refers to fate, and to a personal conflict be-

37 On the Cold War overtones of the film see Wyke 1997,187-188.

38 They attest the breaking of a previous alliance between Syracuse and Rome provoked indeed by Hieronymus, son and successor of Hiero, a historical character ignored in the film. On Syracuse's support for Carthage, see, for example, Polyb. 8, 3.

tween Archimedes and the consul Marcellus, as the immediate causes of Syracusan involvement in a Roman-Carthaginian war.[39]

By contrast, the portrait of Archimedes' genius transmitted in the literary sources inspired the characterization followed in *L'assedio di Siracusa*. His talent in mathematics, geometry and astronomy, as well as his gift for inventing military engines, were admired by ancient historians, just as they also praised Marcellus' virtues and *clementia*. In his *Life of Marcellus*, Plutarch admires Archimedes' ability to translate scientific theory into practice. As an example, he refers to Archimedes' successful experimentation with the laws of mechanics and geometry.[40] The film, like the sources do, emphasizes Archimedes the universal scholar rather than Archimedes the politician and adviser to Hiero.[41]

The climax of the movie is the assault on Syracuse by the Roman fleet, commanded by Marcellus, and the effective resistance of the Syracusans made possible by Archimedes. The film recreates the siege and some of the military engines employed at the battle (narrated by, among others, Polybius, Livy and Plutarch) with fair accuracy.[42] In addition to the famous *sambuca*, a ladder used by the Romans for wall-assaults from vessels, *L'assedio di Siracusa* also depicts Archimedes' legendary reflecting mirrors, which fired the Roman ships and caused the retreat of the fleet. Even so, the version of the final capture of Syracuse offered by the film differs from the history as told by ancient authors. For although the ancient sources report Marcellus' successful attack on the city by land in 212 BC and his pain at Archimedes' death, the movie prefers to leave Archimedes alive and to honour Marcellus as a martyr of Rome.[43]

The focus on Archimedes' scientific spirit epitomises one characteristic view of Hellenism transmitted by Roman chroniclers, and correctly displayed in *L'assedio di Siracusa,* where viewers distinguish cultivated Hellenistic Syracusans from imperialistic militarised Romans. The *Zeitgeist* of 1960 can be discerned here in the positive depiction of both the Syracusans and the Republican Romans as heralds of future Empire and with it the genesis of modern Italy.

39 The conflict is indirectly provoked, as often happens in toga movies, by a woman, the pretty dancer Diana/Artemis (Tina Louise), who, because of an unfortunate case of amnesia, marries Marcellus after having borne a son to Archimedes. The only character depicted negatively in the film is the immoral manager of the dancers, the Phoenician Gorgias (Enrico Maria Salerno). The attempt to harmonise a cinematically attractive but improbable fiction with historical facts is a typical feature of the genre and indeed the signature of the film's director, Pietro Francisci, creator of *Hercules* / *Le fatiche di Ercole* (1957), *Ercole e la regina di Lidia* (1958) and *Saffo, venere di Lesbo* (1960), see DE ESPAÑA 1998, 187-190.

40 See Plut. *Marc*. 14. Both Plutarch and Polybius point out the underestimation of Archimedes' genius by the Romans, see Polyb. 8, 3: "but in this they did not reckon with the ability of Archimedes, or foresee that in some cases the genius of one man accomplishes much more than any number of hands;" 8, 7: "Such a great and marvellous thing does the genius of one man show itself to be when properly applied to certain matters" (transl. by W. R. Paton, LCL).

41 In an illustrative scene, Archimedes teaches his pupils the principles of hydrostatics and of the lever.

42 Polyb. 8, 3-7; Liv. 24, 34; Plut. *Marc*.14-18; Dio 15, 4-5 (epit. Zon. 9, 4-5).

43 This is again license taken by the script, in order to 'save' the romance between Archimedes and Diana.

> "In the year 146 AD (*sic!*) Greece was held within the sphere of Roman influence. But the Aegean (*sic!*) League – a loose federation of the Greek city-states – refused to face the twilight of the ancient glory of Greece, and, instead, closed ranks behind Critolaus, governor of Corinth, the most fanatic advocate of open rebellion against Rome."

The credits of *Il conquistatore di Corinto* (Mario Costa, 1961) summarise – despite inaccuracies – the historical setting of this Franco-Italian co-production. The introduction to the historical context conveys again a patently pro-Roman reading of the facts that ended with the tragic destruction of Corinth and the reduction of Achaea to a Roman province. Following the ancient sources (and particularly Polybius) relatively faithfully, *Il conquistatore di Corinto* attributes the fate of Corinth and the Achaeans not to the Greek people or to the imperialism of Rome but to the fatal policies of the *strategoi* Diaeus and Critolaus, chiefs of the Achaean League.[44] The introduction announces the tragic dimension of the destruction of Corinth and the misfortunes of once glorious Greece, also reported in Graeco-Roman literature.[45] Because of its history, its prosperity, its strategically privileged location, its famous Isthmian Games, and the splendid temple of Aphrodite on Acrocorinth, this notorious *polis* on the Isthmus maintained its reputation as capital of Achaea and "the Light of all Greece" until its conquest by the Romans.[46]

Critolaus (Gianni Santuccio) and in particular Diaeus (John Drew Barrymore) portray in *Il conquistatore di Corinto* the negative side of Greek resistance to Rome's growing influence. The movie introduces other historical characters, such as the consuls Quintus Caecilius Metellus (Gordon Mitchell) and Lucius Mummius (Andrea Fantasia), as well. The Romans here exhibit a laudable inclination to reprove the proud Achaeans. The additions to the fiction from the usual *topoi* of the genre – love story, hero with noble purposes, *femme fatale* and depraved vil-

44 Polybius reports the chaos and confusion brought by the leaders of the League to the inhabitants of Corinth and other poleis, and laments Greece's misfortunes, Polyb. 38, 3-11: "For in times past the Greeks had met with reverses or indeed complete disaster, either from internal dissensions or from treacherous attacks of despots; but in the present instance it was from the folly of their leaders and their own lack of wisdom that they experienced the grievous misfortunes which befell them" (transl. E. S. Shuckburgh). See also Strabo 8, 6, 23 and Livy, *Ep*. 52; Florus 1, 32 (2, 16) mentions explicitly Critolaus and his aggressive politics against the Romans as *causa belli*. As for the *topos* of the destruction of Corinth as symbol of Greece's tragic fate, see for instance Diodorus Siculus 32, 26: "Never in all the time that men's deeds have been recorded in history had Greece been a prey to such calamities. Indeed, so extreme were her misfortunes that no one could either write or read of them without weeping…" (transl. F. R. Walton, LCL).

45 On the *topos* of a Greece in decline captured by Rome, see ALCOCK 1993, 1 ff.

46 *Totius Graeciae lumen*, in the words of Cicero, *Man*. 5, 11. Florus 1, 32 (2, 16), describes Corinth as *caput Achaiae*. On the geographical, cultural and economic importance of Hellenistic Corinth, surpassing even Athens and Sparta, see Strabo 8, 6, 20: "Corinth is called 'wealthy' because of its commerce, since it is situated on the Isthmus and is master of two harbours, of which the one leads straight to Asia, and the other to Italy; and it makes easy the exchange of merchandise from both countries that are so far distant from each other…" (transl. H. L. Jones, LCL); Pausanias 7, 14; Orosius, *hist*. 5, 3, 5. In this, see ENGELS 1992, 14 ff.

lain – do not in this case affect the historical narrative much. A fictive character, Callicrates (Nando Tamberlani), is a pro-Roman advisor of Critolaus. He tries to prevent Critolaus from challenging the emerging power of Rome and endangering the delicate political and military situation of Corinth and Greece:

> Callicrates: "what will happen to the civilization of Greece, to the civilization of the Western world if Rome perishes? The peril comes from the East. Did the invasions of the Persians and the Dacians teach nothing?"

Callitrates' words thus offer a moral justification for Roman imperialism based on military conquest. They also convey the idea of Rome as protector and leader of a necessary western alliance against the menacing East. We meet here a typical Cold War subtext.[47]

According to the ancient sources, the offence against the Roman ambassadors sent by Metellus to negotiate with the Corinthians triggered the crisis and provoked the Roman attack. This episode is preceded in *Il conquistatore di Corinto* by an interesting scene of the Corinthian assembly, at which the Roman emissary Sextus Iulius Caesar requests the dissolution of the League and the submission of Corinth to Rome. Critolaus' response evokes Corinth's historical right to decide its own destiny and Rome's historical irrelevance:

> Critolaus: "In the name of the assembly, I deny the request of Rome…because it is an outrage against the dignity and the self-determination of our people…And what of the rights of Corinth? And of all Greece itself? Rights earned by our glorious past, by our achievements in every field, by the masterworks of our sons, by our influential civilization, which was already great before Romulus first traced the outlines of his village, within which we will again confine Rome one day."

In the face of Callicrates' advice to be prudent, Critolaus and Diaeus recall the dignity and freedom of Greece, disregarded by Rome:

> Critolaus: "You exaggerate their [Roman] power. I would like to remind you that the Senate of Rome has often preferred to ignore our challenges; that's what you like to call tolerance."
> Diaeus: "Corinth is at the turning point of its entire history….freedom is not something given to us as a gift. It is ours to take."

A further scene insists on Greece's legitimate pride:

> Critolaus: "Corinth is standing at the crossroads of its history. If Romans cross the Isthmus they will be exterminated."
> Callicrates: "there is no wall strong enough to protect us from the anger of Rome."
> Diaeus: "What Greece needs is another Alexander to recover its dignity."

Diaeus' nostalgic desire for a new Alexander recalls the political division of the Hellenistic world, and evokes the dream of unity embodied by the Macedonian king and his empire as counterbalance to the growing influence of Rome. The

47 As we saw as regards *The Fall of the Roman Empire*. A similar message is found, for instance, in *The 300 Spartans* and the recent *300*. On the modern echoes of the cinematic opposition East-West, see DE ESPAÑA 1998, 190; PRIETO 2004, 93, and LILLO REDONET in this volume, 117 ff. On Cold-War overtones in *The Sign of the Pagan* (D. Sirk, 1954), see further WIEBER 2005, 59-101.

answer of the Roman senate reveals that its increasingly aggressive policy towards the Corinthians was thought necessary:

> Mummius: "It is becoming obvious that the magnanimity of Rome towards the people of Greece is only interpreted as a sign of our weakness."
> Metellus: "the fate of Corinth will teach a lesson to others. Maybe we should destroy it with fire and sword."

Recalling the fall of Troy and transformed into a symbol of Greece's tragic conquest, the dramatic capture and burning of Corinth became a key episode in the Romans' collective memory.[48] Despite his erroneous politics, Critolaus' principles, defending the Greek ideal of freedom until the very end, are depicted in the movie as noble:

> Critolaus: "since I am not destined to live as a free man, I will meet death here as a soldier of Greece."

Il conquistatore di Corinto has no place for the dark side of the capture of the city: the episodes of plundering and the destruction of sacred places, votive offerings and famous works of art, all allowed by Mummius and described by Polybius, are omitted.[49]

Because of its strategic position and economic networks, Corinth was refounded as a Roman colony by Caesar in 44 BC. The new city preserved its reputation as the heart of Greek culture and continued to be known as the city responsible for the famous Isthmian Games. The Roman city was equally famous for the successful missions of the apostle Paul, becoming as a consequence one of the epicentres of Christianity. The Pauline missions, together with the visit of the emperor Nero in AD 66-67, are the historical background for *Afrodite, dea dell'amore* (Mario Bonnard, 1958).[50] One of the themes of the movie is the construction of the famous channel through the Isthmus of Corinth, planned by Nero and entrusted to the governor of the city, the archon Antigonus (Ivo Garrani). The achievement of this monumental work, envisaged by Nero as the symbol of a

48 The parallel between Corinth's tragic end and the capture of Troy by the Achaeans was, for example, the topic of lyric epigrams, see: Polystratus, *Antologia Graeca* 7, 297: "Lucius has smitten the great Achaean Acrocorinth, the Star of Hellas / And the twin shores of the Isthmus. / One heap of stones covers the bones of those felled by the spear; / And the sons of Aeneas left unmourned by funeral rites the / Achaeans who burnt the house of Priam." (trans. W. R. Paton, New Cork 1919), *apud* ENGELS 1991, 15. The parallel is strengthened by the fact that the scenes of the fire have been reused from *La Guerra di Troia* (Giorgio Ferroni, 1961); see DE ESPAÑA 1998, 190.

49 Polybius 39, 2. As Strabo reports, 8, 6, 23: "Polybius, who speaks in a tone of pity of the events connected with the capture of Corinth, goes on to speak of the disregard shown by the army for the works of art and votive offerings; for he says that he was present and saw paintings that had been flung to the ground and saw the soldiers playing dice on these. Among the paintings he names that of Dionysius by Aristeides…" (transl. H. L. Jones, LCL). See further Diodorus Siculus 32, 26; Pausanias 16, 7-10; Florus 1, 32; Cassius Dio 21, 31 (epit. Zonaras 9, 31).

50 Bonnard had also directed *Frine, cortigiana d'Oriente* (1953) and *Gli ultimi giorni di Pompei* (1959); in both as in *Afrodite*, he was assisted by Sergio Leone. On *Frine,* see CAVALLINI, in this volume, 214 ff.

Greek renaissance (Antigonus: "Io voglio rifare la Grecia"), obliges Antigonus to undertake unpopular measures, such as the confiscation of estates, the imposition of severe taxes, and the destruction of the famous temple of Aphrodite. The reconstruction of the temple in a different location is assigned to the young sculptor Demetrius Hellenus (Antonio De Teffè), well known for his artistic contributions to Nero's *domus aurea*. Searching for inspiration for his statue of the goddess Aphrodite, to be placed in the temple, Demetrius meets the beautiful Christian girl Lerna (Isabelle Corey), and falls in love with her.[51] In order to placate the increasing anger of the people of Corinth at Antigonus and his unscrupulous methods, the archon declares the Christians enemies of the gods and orders that they be sacrificed during the festival in honour of Aphrodite. Antigonus' cruelty is contrasted with the dignity of the Roman proconsul Quintus Rufus (Massimo Serato) – a fictive figure –, who will assume power in the province after Nero's death and stay the executions at the last moment.

As a fictive character, the archon Antigonus embodies the many negative features of other Hellenistic rulers, be they anti-Roman officials, tyrants, or autocrats.[52] Unlike other movies in which Christians confront Nero, *Afrodite* arranges an interesting collage of love, courtesans, treason and Christian martyrs around a historical fact: Nero's visit to Achaea and the project of the Isthmus channel, aborted by his premature death.[53] Nero made his admiration for Greece manifest in his eastern policies and his famous crowd-pleasing gestures, like his participation in Panhellenic festivals and his famous speech at Isthmia proclaiming the liberty of Greece, in which he imitated Flamininus.[54]

The fact Nero spent a long time in Achaea but not in Sparta or Athens underlines the historical fact of the importance, both symbolic and real, of Corinth at that time. The temple of Aphrodite on the Acrocorinth – depicted in the film as a

51 Bonnard (or perhaps rather Leone) seems here to have been inspired by his older film *Frine, cortigiana d'Oriente* (1953) featuring Phryne as model for Praxiteles' Aphrodite. See CAVALLINI in this volume, 214 ff.

52 The senatorial province of Achaea and its capital, Corinth, were at that time governed by a proconsul and not by an archon. The figure of the archon evokes indeed other cinematic tyrants, fanatic defenders of the Greek liberty such as Critolaus in *Il conquistatore di Corinto* and Hieron in *L'assedio di Siracusa*, or oriental despots, such as king Xerxes in *Il colosso di Rodi*.

53 The episode is reported by Suetonius as one of Nero's typically extravagant gestures, Suetonius, *Nero* 19, 2: "In Achaea, he undertook to cut a canal through the Isthmus and addressed the praetorian soldiers, encouraging them to begin the task. Then when the trumpet sounded the signal, he himself was the first to strike the earth with his mattock and to carry off a basketful on his shoulders" (transl. C. Edwards, LCL). For other accounts of digging the canal, see Dio 62, 8, 2-3; 62, 16, 1-2; Philostratus *VA* 4, 24; Pliny, *Nat*. 4, 4, 10-11. On Nero's expedition to Greece, see ALCOCK 1994, 98-127.

54 See Suetonius, *Nero* 24: "Then, on his departure, he bestowed freedom on the entire province, at the same time giving the judges Roman citizenship and substantial sums of money. He himself announced these benefits, standing in the middle of the stadium on the day of the Isthmian games" (transl. C. Edwards, LCL). Further references to the 'liberation' are reported by Plutarch, *Flam*. 12, 8; Pliny, *Nat*. 4, 6, 22; and Pausanias 7, 17, 3. Nero's proclamation is also attested in the epigraphic record, see *SIG*^{3} 814, ENGELS 1991, 19; ALCOCK 1994, 99.

romantic ruin – and the famous festivals honouring the goddess are reported in the ancient literature as being in Roman times an attraction for visitors from all over the Mediterranean world.[55] Even when it was reduced to a provincial city, Corinth's cultural and religious significance preserved the essence of the glory that was Greece.[56]

Aphrodite and her symbols – the temple, the festivals in her honour and Hellenus' sculpture – form the background for the confrontation between the pagan goddess and the Christians, culminating in the sacrifice of the latter during the pagan celebration.[57] Less traumatic is the transformation of Hellenus' ideal of beauty, initially consistent with the classical aesthetic canon, into a Christian concept of moral purity, embodied by Lerna.[58]

In spite of the simplicity of characters and plot, *Afrodite, dea dell'amore* reflects an intelligent use of sources and historical facts. In setting the narrative in the historical context of Roman Achaea, the film provides audiences with an original view of one city in Rome's provinces. Although physically absent, both Nero and Rome are virtually present, as the implied opposites of Christians and of Corinth. *Afrodite, dea dell'amore* also depicts the decadence of Greece, incarnated in the pagan cult of Aphrodite and the tyrannical power of Antigonus. His portrayal as an enemy of the Christians and as an eccentric dreaming of a new, free Greece makes him similar to the stigmatised figure of Nero. The negative depiction of both Antigonus and Nero contrasts, nonetheless, with the striking absence of criticism for Roman imperialism, and the unquestioning acceptance of the legitimacy of Rome's authority.[59] Indeed, the favourable portrait of the proconsul Quintus Rufus validates attitudes of toleration for Christians and loyalty to the Roman senate and Galba. Once again, an Italian production, in contrast to Hollywood's traditional image of Rome the oppressor, offers a revisionist inter-

55 On the city, its monuments and the temple of Aphrodite on the Acrocorinth, see Strabo 8, 6, 20-21. Pausanias' detailed account of the citadel, including Aphrodite's temple, was intended as an itinerary for visitors, 2, 5, 1. As icons of the city, the temple on the Acrocorinth together with the legendary Pegasus appear on the reverse of a coin dated in the second century AD, STEVENSON – ROACH SMITH – MADDEN 1964, 284. In an echo of the famous festivals and the sanctuary of the goddess, Corinth was also called the "City of Aphrodite", Aelius Aristides, *Pos*. 24.

56 Pausanias' description of Roman Corinth in the second century AD calls to the reader's attention its past splendour, emphasised by the still surviving monuments, 2, 2, 6: "The things in the city worth mentioning include the antiquities that still remain, but the majority of them were made in the period of its latter-day prosperity." (transl. W. Hutton). On Pausanias' nostalgic view of ancient Corinth, see HUTTON 2005, 145-174.

57 One of the anecdotes transmitted by the Christian tradition about the famous cult of Aphrodite in Corinth was that sacred prostitutes participated in the rituals honouring the goddess. Yet, the testimony of Strabo quoted above confirms that this practice no longer existed in Roman Corinth. See in this regard ENGELS 1991, 97.

58 Hellenus turns away from the "classical" beauty of the courtesan Diala (Irene Tunc), model for his sculpture. As in *The Silver Chalice* (see above), the artist discovers the intrinsic virtues of beauty associated with Christian ideals.

59 On the relative tolerant Roman rule in Greece and the attested continuity of many cultural features and institutions, see ALCOCK 1993, 3 ff.

pretation of Roman imperialism. The conventional cinematic polarisation of Christians and Romans is here replaced by the victory of the first over the pagan world, symbolised by the moral decadence of Romanised Hellenism.

5. Conclusions

Antigonus, Archimedes, Aristarchus, Basil(ius), Callicrates, Chilo Chilonides, Critolaus, Demetrius, Hellenus, Hieron, Sosigenes, Timonides: all of these film characters – historical or fictional – embody typical modern views of menaced, defeated, captured, Romanized and Christianized ancient Greeks. They exemplify, with greater or lesser success on the big screen, the fate of Hellenism under Roman rule. From the portrait of the despotic Hellenistic tyrant to the intellectual philosopher, from the brilliant scientist to the slave, from the artist to the thief, cinema has depicted Greeks according to Western cultural traditions. The cinematic portraits of Cleopatra and Archimedes are universal icons transmitted to us by Graeco-Roman authors such as Plutarch or Polybius. The negative view of Hellenistic rulers – who are infrequently but strikingly portrayed in film – contrasts with the deep admiration for Greek culture and for Greek philosophers and artists attested in Roman and post-classical literature and arts, which is also reflected in cinema. The dominating presence of Christianity in films about ancient Romans explains the relatively scant attention given to the military and cultural confrontation of Greece and Rome. To this latter category belong only Italian productions (and co-productions) such as *L'assedio di Siracusa* / *Archimede* or *Il conquistatore di Corinto*, which paid particular attention to the rise of Republican Rome and its impact on a declining Greek world. As clear concession to the *Zeitgeist* of the fifties and sixties, these films usually depicted the transformation of oppressed Greeks into new Christians. The characterization of the Greek intellectual in the *Fall of the Roman Empire* personifies dreams of Romanization as a communion between Greek philosophy and the ideals of peace, an amalgamation clearly inspired by the Christian tradition and peace movements of the sixties, and providing a model not only for Romans in the film to imitate, but also for modern viewers. As we have seen in *The Robe*, cinema identifies the Greek idea of *eleutheria* with a modern concept of freedom as a fight against human slavery, with that institution attributed paradoxically only to the Romans and not to the Greeks.

The nostalgic image of conquered Hellenism evoked by Aristarchus' account of Actium, by Sosigenes' lament during the fire of the Great Library, by the genius of Archimedes, by the Alexandrian dreams of an united Greece and by the destruction of Corinth, echoes the eternal verses of Horace. As a shadow of its former glory, Roman Greece interested contemporary Romans – as it has interested filmmakers – only to a limited extent. Yet Hellas's *artes* and spirit, the heirs of her splendid past, have endured until today as a touchstone for modern cultures by renewing themselves perpetually, "like wrecks of a dissolving dream…"

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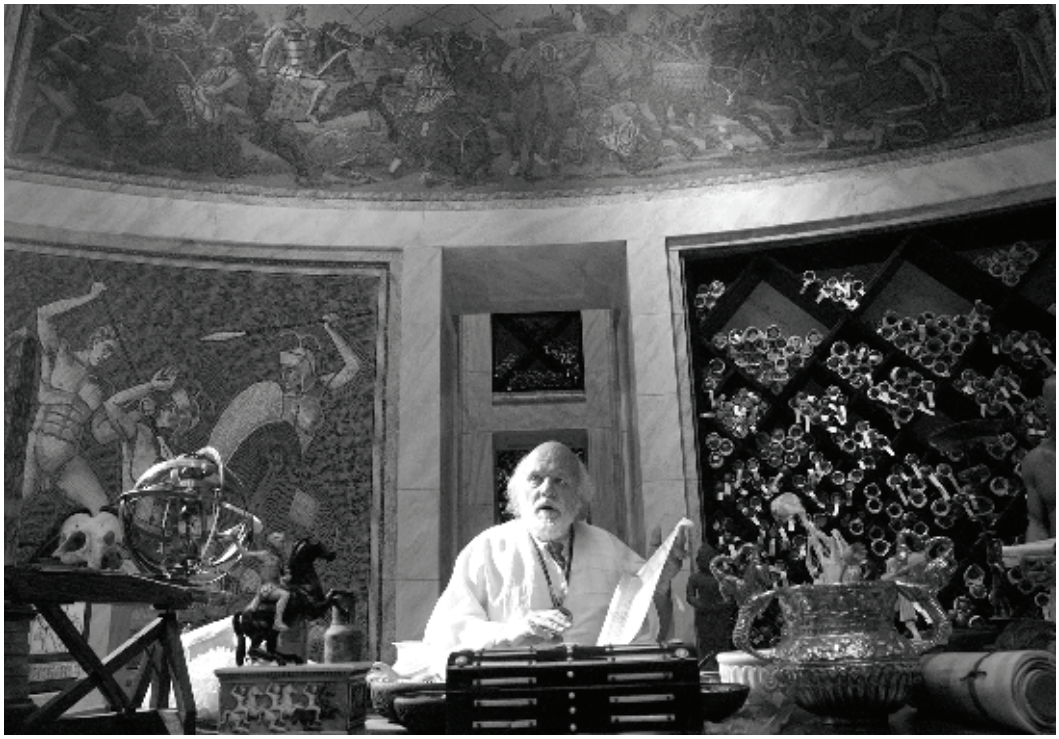

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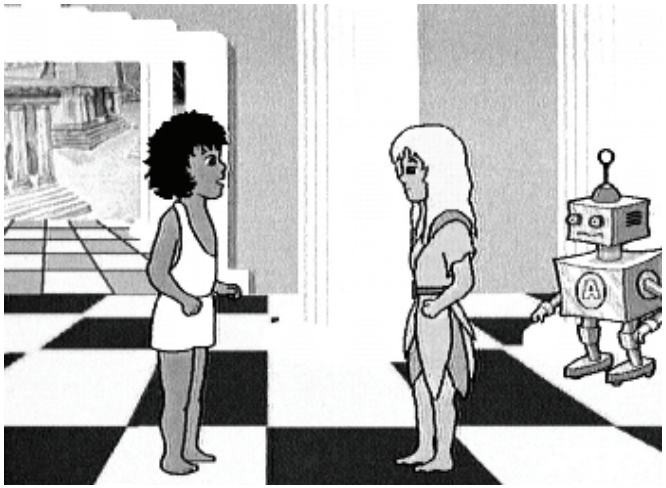

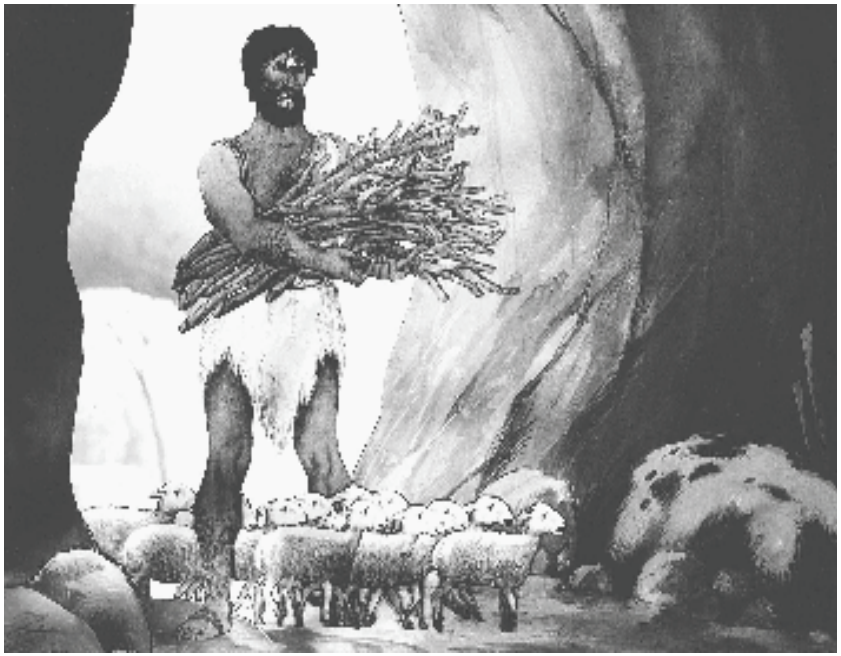

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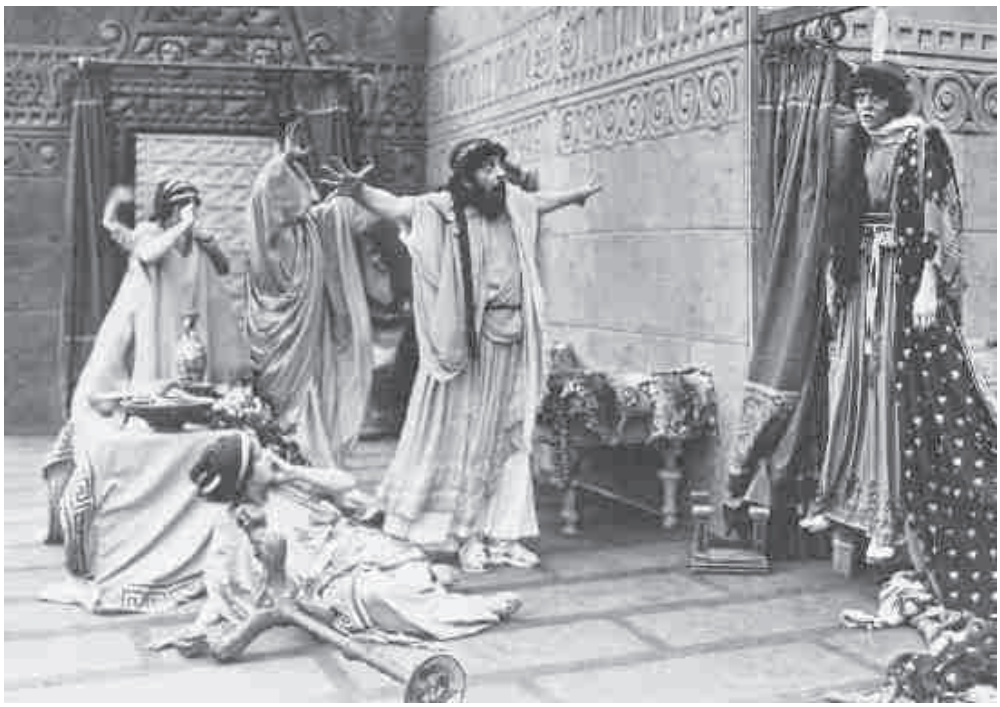

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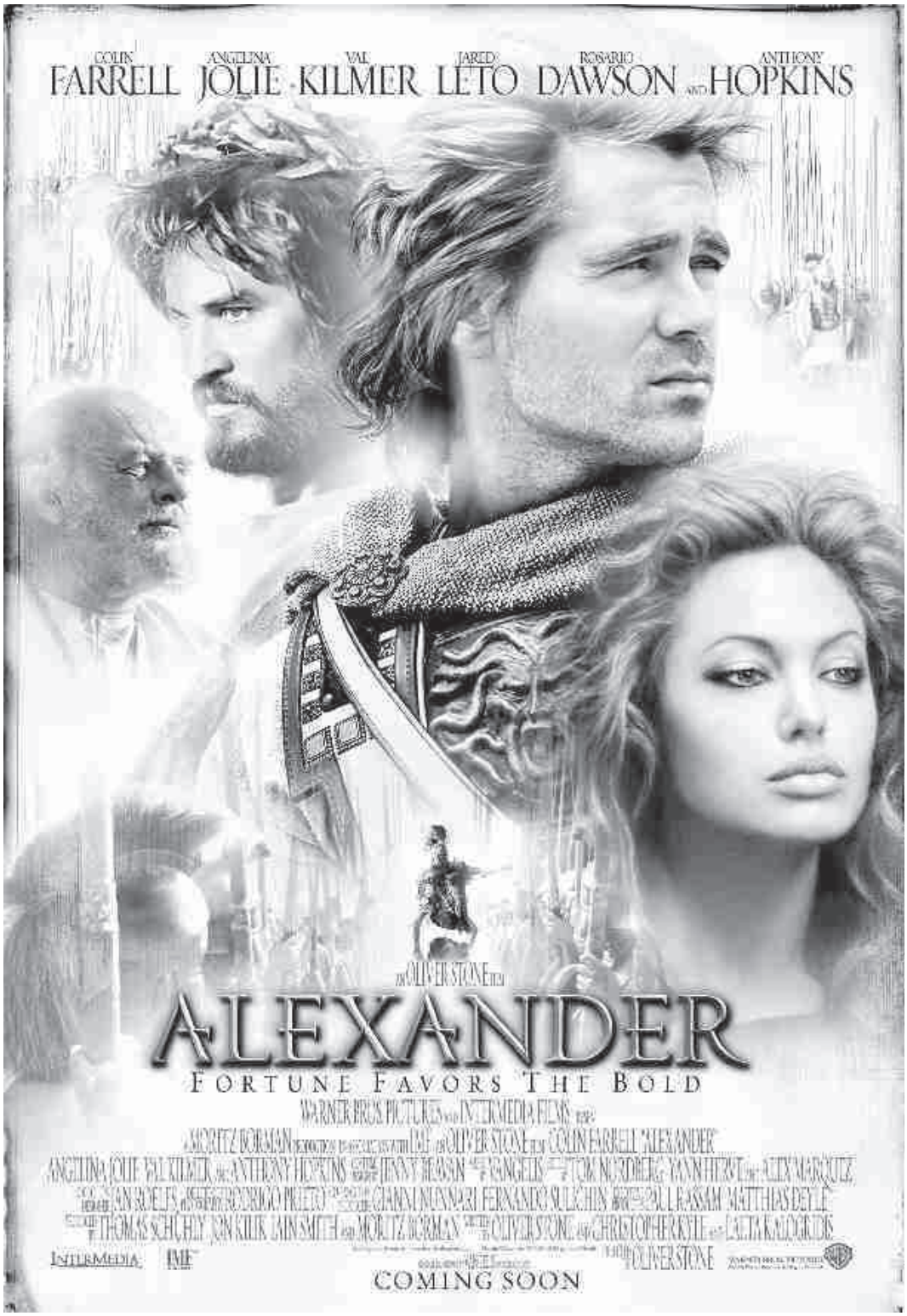

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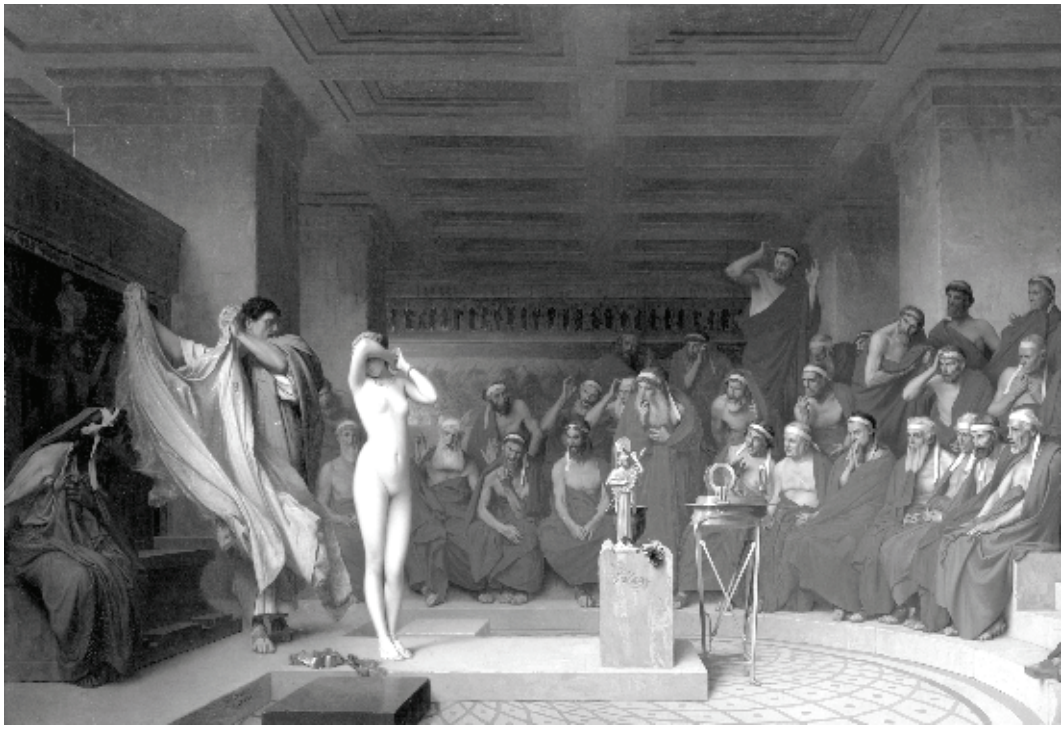

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