

BOOK REVIEW

Ancient Greek Women in Film. Edited by KONSTANTINOS P. NIKOLOUTSOS. Oxford: Oxford University Press, January 2014. Pp 400. 18 illus. Hardcover, \$160.00. ISBN 978-0-19-967892-1.

The amount of scholarship in the area of Classical reception has grown steadily in recent years. In particular, there has been a growing body of work on cinematic and televisual representations of the ancients.¹ Despite this critical mass of scholarly studies on the ancient world in film and television, gaps still remain. The volume under review proposes to fill one of these gaps, with a focus on ancient Greek women in film. It succeeds in this respect. While there have been volumes dedicated to gender in the ancient world more generally (e.g. *Ancient Worlds in Film and Television: Gender and Politics* (2012), edited by Almut-Barbara Renger and Jon Solomon), no single volume has provided an in-depth look at the ancient Greek woman on screen. The most recent works entirely on the cinematic ancient Greeks (Gideon Nisbet's *Ancient Greece in Film and Popular Culture* (2008, 2nd ed. rev.) and *Hellas on Screen* (2008), edited by Irene Berti and Marta Garcia Morcillo) do not focus on women.

Ancient Greek Women in Film, part of the Oxford Classical Presences Series, offers chapters by an impressive line-up of scholars engaged in reception studies. It contains thirteen essays that tackle films over a span of ninety years, from big studio productions to independent films. As Nikoloutsos notes in the introduction (1), the point of the volume is not merely to consider the fidelity of films to ancient sources. Rather the volume, while using ancient source material as a foundation for comparison, considers how ancient Greek women on screen are

¹For instance in the last decade: Blanshard and Shahabudin (2012), *Classics on Screen: Ancient Greece and Rome on Film*, Bristol; Cyrino (2005), *Big Screen Rome*, Wiley-Blackwell; Cyrino ed. (2008), *Rome Season One: History Makes Television*, Wiley-Blackwell; Cyrino ed. (2013), *Screening Love and Sex in the Ancient World*, Palgrave Macmillan; Theodorakopoulos (2010), *Ancient Rome at the Cinema: Story and Spectacle in Hollywood and Rome*, Liverpool; Winkler ed. (2004), *Gladiator: Film and History*, Wiley-Blackwell; Winkler ed. (2006), *Troy: From Homer's Iliad to Hollywood Epic*, Wiley-Blackwell; Winkler ed. (2006), *Spartacus: Film and History*; Winkler ed. (2009), *The Fall of the Roman Empire: Film and History*, Wiley-Blackwell; Winkler (2012), *Cinema and Classical Texts: Apollo's New Light*, Cambridge. This is not an exhaustive list.

constructed to express modern ideas. Examination of these modern ideas provide the reader with insight into not only cultural and political events from the time of film production, but also into cinematic history, for the figures under consideration are often responses to earlier representations, as part of a "chain of receptions" (8).

Scholars in the volume, in general, examine cinematic elements such as camera angles, color, costume design, and set design to support their points. They also often refer to issues of stardom and other works of the producer, director, screenwriter, and actresses. All of these aspects contribute to a well-rounded examination of the Greek women being discussed. There exists a wide range of cinematic material to explore, but the figures and films are well chosen and provide a good base from which to start one's explorations of the many manifestations of ancient Greek women. While there may be points of disagreement with individual interpretations, the volume overall allows the reader to see in a new light the films and their representations of ancient Greek women.

The book is divided into five sections, with the first three on widely-examined figures (Helen, Medea, and Penelope), and the last two arranged thematically, with one section on other mythical women (such as Iole, Omphale, Clytemnestra, Iphigenia, Io, and the Nereids) and the final one on historical women (Gorgo, wife of Leonidas; Olympias, mother of Alexander; and Cleopatra VII).

While all of the essays in this collection have value, I here offer some of the highlights. Ruby Blondell's essay is well grounded in the ancient Helen. She compares the ancient Helen to the one in *Troy* (2004), showing how the film limits the power of Helen by casting an unknown, somewhat ordinary looking actress (at least according to most critics). Edith Hall impressively surveys Penelope over a forty-four year period of cinematic history, from well-known big screen productions to radio plays, from American to Italian to German interpretations. She discusses not only more direct interpretations, but also "echoes" of Penelope in films, such as *Cold Mountain* (2003). Through her extensive survey, she concludes that no film version gives Penelope equal agency to Odysseus. Joanna Paul examines the figures of Penelope and Circe in *Ulisse* (1954) in light of Italian actress Silvia Mangano's playing both roles and her own image in Italian film and Italian culture more broadly. Lloyd Llewellyn-Jones analyzes the various manifestations of Cleopatra (1917, 1934, 1963), questioning the cultural elements at play behind the visuality of her appearances. Jones well connects the

visuals in the films to the fashions and looks of the time periods of film production.

The volume will be of interest to a wide range of scholars in many disciplines. Its interdisciplinary approach will make it appealing to those in American Studies, Classics, Film and Media Studies, and Gender Studies. It is a welcome contribution to the growing literature on the ancients on screen.

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