*Kennington Bioscope presents*

**A programme of ‘Antiquities’**

The films in this programme demonstrate how silent cinema had an important role to play in bringing the classical world out of the distant past and the schoolrooms of the upper classes, instead putting it on show for millions of spectators across the globe. Ancient Greece and Rome gave cinema cultural prestige and a remarkable set of stories about gods on earth, persecution, murder, love, slavery, war and the destruction of cities. Films from the early twentieth century make that distant past come alive through their attractive use of gesture and facial expression, exotic sets and extravagant costumes, colour, movement and emotive live music. They invite their audiences to enter the ancient world and experience it across the boundaries of time and space. They make the claim for cinema that it can offer an experience of the classical past of as much value as a tourist trip to heritage sites in Greece or Italy, a visit to a museum or an art gallery, or an education in Classics – and, perhaps, one more affordable and far livelier.

***Visit to Pompeii*** (dirs. George A. Smith and Charles Urban, Warwick Trading Co., UK, 1901). From the BFI National Film Archive.In long panning shots, the camera sweeps around and over the ruined buildings and streets of the celebrated site, as well as the people moving through it. It then follows the tracks of the railway that ferries tourists up to the crater of Vesuvius. Sitting on the back of a carriage, the camera too rides up to the top. It documents the smoke billowing from the crater and the tourists who are brought down from it on sedan chairs. The film reveals the state of the excavations at Pompeii at the start of the twentieth century, but also the hierarchies of class and nation that operated there: Italian labourers, shepherds and local sedan-bearers at work; as well as leisured tourists who stare right back at the camera.

***In Ancient Greece / Dans l’Hellade*** (dir. Charles Decroix, Pathé Frères, France, 1909). From the collection of Christopher Bird. Starring the famous French dancer Stacia Napierkowska in a modish ‘ancient Greek’ ballet that had been choreographed by Sacha Dezac. While the British trade paper *The Bioscope* admired the film for its charm and artistry, the American trade paper *Variety* considered picture house audiences incapable of appreciating anything ‘classical’. Instead it expressed gratitude that the principals in this seductive dance were not too scantily dressed and conformed to basic standards of decency.

***Julius Caesar*** (dir. William V. Ranous, Vitagraph, USA, 1908). From the BFI National Film Archive. Vitagraph made a number of adaptations of Shakespeare for the silent screen. Utilising key scenes from the plays, they were designed to lift up the status of the new art of cinema and draw in middle-class audiences. Mark Antony offers Caesar a crown three times. Brutus is thereby persuaded to join a conspiracy to assassinate the would-be king. On the Ides of March, Calpurnia tries unsuccessfully to persuade her husband not to go to the Capitol where a soothsayer also tries to warn him of the danger. Caesar is murdered and Mark Antony delivers his famous ‘Friends, Romans, countrymen’ speech in pantomime over the corpse. Later, on the eve of battle, Brutus has a vision of Caesar who warns him of his imminent death. In defeat, Brutus falls on his sword. Mark Antony takes the corpse of this noble Roman and burns it on a pyre.

***Private Life of Helen of Troy***(dir. Alexander Korda, First National Pictures, USA, 1927).From the BFI National Archive**.** A burlesque of the Trojan myth based on a novel by John Erskine that turns Greek epic into a story of everyday people with marriage problems. ‘Queen Helen of Troy, piqued by her husband’s lack of interest in her, elopes with Paris to Sparta. Menelaus, her husband, egged on by his henchman, starts a war with Paris, finally effecting the return of Helen. The time-honored custom demands that he have the pleasure of killing her, but her seductive loveliness restrains him. And so at the end of the story, we find Helen engaging in a new flirtation with the Prince of Ithaca’ (*Moving Picture World*, 17 Dec 1927). Only two fragments of this film survive - the start and the end. In these precious sequences we can glimpse the elaborate art deco sets, and the remarkable costumes designed for Maria Corda by Max Rée. The film demonstrates the close relationship that existed at the time between cinema and the retail industry. The screen operates like a shop window for spectators.

INTERVAL

***The Odyssey******/ L’Odissea***(dirs. Francesco Bertolini, Adolfo Padovan, & Giuseppe de Liguoro, Milano Films, Italy, 1911). From the Eye Filmmuseum, Amsterdam. Odysseus leaves his family in Ithaca to go to war against Troy. Later, when Odysseus is believed to be dead, suitors for his wife Penelope demand that she choose a new husband. After Troy’s fall, on his way home, the Greek hero experiences many adventures and, eventually, in a beggar's disguise, arrives at his palace. He then demonstrates his prowess, reveals his identity, and kills the suitors. Husband and wife are reunited. The film uses the special effect of double exposure imaginatively to present the appearance on earth of the gods, the hero’s transformations, and his daring escape from the monstrous one-eyed giant.

***Bending Hur / Roaming Romeo***(dir. Lupino Lane, Educational Pictures, USA, 1928). From the collection of David Glass. This spoof on Roman history stars the American comedian Lupino Lane as a galley slave. He escapes to a Roman villa where he experiences - and suffers - multiple adventures, including fighting as a gladiator, falling in love with a married woman above his humble station and being chased and threated with death by her husband. So hot do things become at the villa, he decides to return onboard ship to the brutal life of a galley slave. Thanks to the film epic *Ben-Hur* (1925) released a few years earlier, this comedy can play with the by-now cliched elements of Roman history on film – games, togas, banquets, star-crossed love, masters and slaves.

A person in a dress

Description automatically generatedThis film screening is associated with the AHRC-funded research project *Museum of Dreamworlds* (2023-2027). We ask how did silent cinema design its Greek and Roman dreamworlds? What did cinema gain from recreating the distant past? What did the past gain from being recreated in moving images? We also consider how these films were once used as instruments of education and what educative potential they might have today. Our project is very committed to obtaining the views of audiences at screenings. We would therefore like to ask the Bioscope audience for feedback on your experience of watching the films by answering some questions, if you are interested, on postcards that we will provide or via the QR code on our posters.

You can follow the project at:

[www.instagram.com/museumof\_dreamworlds/](https://eur01.safelinks.protection.outlook.com/?url=http%3A%2F%2Fwww.instagram.com%2Fmuseumof_dreamworlds%2F&data=05%7C02%7Cm.wyke%40UCL.AC.UK%7Cf2d38ce88b98404d095c08dd04e164fb%7C1faf88fea9984c5b93c9210a11d9a5c2%7C0%7C0%7C638672088296615878%7CUnknown%7CTWFpbGZsb3d8eyJFbXB0eU1hcGkiOnRydWUsIlYiOiIwLjAuMDAwMCIsIlAiOiJXaW4zMiIsIkFOIjoiTWFpbCIsIldUIjoyfQ%3D%3D%7C0%7C%7C%7C&sdata=RffGQmhIAdEI1dbQn8d%2Foy17lm2S0QrX3Dlfc17aT%2B4%3D&reserved=0)

see details of our activities on our website:

<https://www.ucl.ac.uk/classics/research/research-projects/museum-dream-worlds>

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