

CLAS 157a

Ancient Egypt on the Silver Screen

Summer 2024 ZOOM LINK FOR SYNCHRONOUS CLASS: [LINK](#)

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From the *Ten Commandments* to *The Mummy* to Michael Jackson's *Remember the Time*, Ancient Egypt has attracted audiences with images of powerful pharaohs from Ramesses to Cleopatra and a divine pantheon with Isis, Horus, and Anubis. The archaeological discoveries of ancient Egypt in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries fueled the global imagination of a world of gold riches, mummified bodies, and palace intrigue. From silent films to modern music videos, directors, writers, and set designers have used ancient history and the history of modern archaeology to present Egypt's past for entertainment.

In this course, students will view films and read scholarship on historical dramas related to ancient and modern Egypt, primarily through the eyes of English-language films. When possible, we will view Arabic, French, and Italian films that offer counter-narratives to the Anglophone film tradition. Such films as *The Mummy* (1932), *El-Momya/The Night of Counting the Years* (1969), and *Sphinx* (1981) present windows into the history of archaeology, the antiquities market, and the protection of Egyptian cultural heritage. With this foundation, we turn to Egypt in silent films such as Cecil B DeMille's 1923 *The Ten Commandments*, Michael Curitz's 1924 *Moon of Israel*, and Theda Bara in *Cleopatra* (1917). With color cinema, we will see Ancient Egypt now with vivid set designs and the racialization and elitism of ancient Egyptian rulers as white,

in contrast to enslaved Egyptians (*Valley of the Kings; Land of the Egyptians; Cleopatra*). We will discuss the race, ethnicity, and sexuality of powerful leaders such as Moses, Joseph, Queen Nefertiti, Pharaoh Akhenaten, and Queen Cleopatra and how their portrayal in film compares to the historical evidence from Egypt. The course will conclude by comparing recent films (*Cleopatra*-1999, *Agora*-2009, *Gods of Egypt*-2016, *The Mummy*-2017) with animated representations (*Prince of Egypt*-1998, *La Reine Soleil*-2007; *Mummies*-2023). Students will read scholarship examining enslavement, colonial archaeology, and Egyptian history to assess the historical value of the films.



Class meetings will discuss the films (viewed outside of class) in their historical context, outline major archaeological elements of the film related to set designs, and trace how ancient Egypt has evolved as a

subject from silent films to epic films to modern music videos. Most films will be in English, with some in Arabic, French, Italian, and German, with English subtitles.

Assessment:

- 20 % . . . . . Participation on Zoom and for In-class Padlets
- 25 % . . . . . Reflection responses—Weeks 2, 3, 4
- 25 % . . . . . Quizzes (3)
- 30 % . . . . . Rewrite/Redesign & Update a Film

\*Instructions for assignments found at Latte

**Learning Goals:**

By the end of this course, you should be able to:

- articulate the complexity and richness of Egyptian history as represented in ancient sources;
- analyze primary sources and compare them to modern interpretations of the past;
- develop an understanding of how moderns have rewritten and reinterpreted ancient and modern Egypt, considering national and ethnic differences
- develop critical skills in reading and critiquing the veracity of cinematic representations;
- refine your capacity to examine critically and comparatively the past and present.



Summer Calendar: 3 days a week, 2.5 hours

**Week 1 —Archaeological Discovery of Egypt in the Modern Period**

Monday—The Mummy (1932)

Tuesday—Watch: Valley of the Kings (1954)

- *NYTimes* extracts on Tut’s impact; E. Larsen, “Traffic in Mummies: *The Mummy*,” *Jump Cut* 43 (July 2000): 12-15.
- Yee, Vivian. “Whose Queen? Netflix and Egypt Spar Over an African Cleopatra.” *New York Times (Online)*. 2023.
- A. Lant, “The Curse of the Pharaoh, or How Cinema Contracted Egyptomania,” in M. Bernstein & G. Studlar, eds., *Visions of the East: Orientalism in Film* (Rutgers, 1997), pp. 69-98.
- Freeman, Richard. “The Mummy in Context.” *European Journal of American Studies* 4, no. 1 (2009): 1–13.

Wednesday—Watch: Pharaoh’s Curse (1957) & Al-Mummia/The Night of Counting the Years (1969, Arabic—Egypt)

- Walid El Khachab, “The Cinema of the Pharaohs: Film, Archaeology, and Sub-Imperialism,” in *Dialogues artistiques avec*



*les passes de l'Égypte: Une perspective transnationale et transmédiiale* (Paris : Publications de l'Institut national d'histoire de l'art, 2017), 53–64.

- Doris V. Sutherland, *The Mummy* (2019) Excerpt “The Egypt of the Mummy”

## Week 2—Biblical Epics—Moses and Joseph

Monday—Ten Commandments (1923) & Moon of Israel (1924) —

### Quiz

- Orrison, Katherine, *Written In Stone: Making Cecil B. DeMille's Epic, the Ten Commandments* (Lanham, MD: Vestal Press, 1999), 1-33.
- Nuno Simões Rodrigues, “Stephen Sommers’s *The Mummy* (1999): Modern Legacies of the Tutankhamun Excavations,” in *How Pharaohs Became Media Stars*, (2023), 110-135.

Tuesday — Ten Commandments (1956)

- Schroeder, Caroline, “Ancient Egypt Religion on the Silver Screen: Modern Anxieties about Race, Ethnicity, and Religion,” *Journal of Religion & Film* 7 (2003): <https://digitalcommons.unomaha.edu/jrf/vol7/iss2/1>
- Mat Hardy, “I Said No Camels!” Indiana Jones and the Catalogue,” in *Excavating Indiana Jones: Essays on the Films and Franchise*, ed. Randy Laist (Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Co., 2020)

Wednesday—1994 Al-Mohager—(Arabic, Egypt) & Prince of Egypt (1998)

- Youssef Chahine and Joseph Massad, “Art and Politics in the Cinema of Youssef Chahine,” *Journal of Palestine Studies* 28.2 (1999): 77-93.
- David Murphy and Patrick Williams, “Youssef Chahine,” in *Postcolonial African Cinema: Ten Directors*, (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2007), 30-50.

### • COMPARATIVE FILM REFLECTION #1



## Week 3—Biblical and Egyptian Monotheists—Moses & Akhenaten — Quiz

Monday—Watch Exodus: Gods and Kings (2014)

- Guillermo Juberías Gracia, “From Alma-Tadema to Cecil B. DeMille: The Influence of Nineteenth-Century Painting on Classical Hollywood Films Set in Ancient Egypt,” in *How Pharaohs Became Media Stars*, (2023), 136-161.

Tuesday The Egyptian (1954) & Nefertiti, Queen of the Nile (1961)

- Akhenaten: *Great Hymn to Aten; Tale of Sinuhe*; D. Montserrat, *Akhenaten: History, Fantasy and Ancient Egypt* (Routledge, 2000), 55-94.

- Jeffrey Richards, *Hollywood's Ancient Worlds* (2008)—Excerpt on Ancient Egypt  
Wednesday Watch *La Reine Soleil*—(2007, animation)
- Llewellyn-Jones, Lloyd, *Designs on the Past: How Hollywood Created the Ancient World* (2018).
- Gregory N. Daugherty, *The Reception of Cleopatra in the Age of Mass Media*, excerpt “Silent Cleopatras,” 26-36.
- Shelley P. Haley, “Black Feminist Thought and Classics: Re-mem-bering, Re-claiming, Re-empowering,” in *Feminist Theory and the Classics*, ed. Nancy Sorkin Rabinowitz and Amy Richlin, (New York: Routledge, 1993).



**COMPARATIVE FILM REFLECTION #2**

**Week 4—White Cleopatra in Cinema—Quiz**

Monday— Cleopatra (1934)

- Margaret M. Mills, ed., “Cleopatra in Egypt, Europe, and New York: An Introduction,” in *Cleopatra: A Sphinx Revisited* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2011), 1-20.
- LaZebnik, Ken. *Hollywood Digs: An Archaeology of Shadows*. (Berkeley, CA: Kelly’s Cove Press, 2014) EXCERPT “Riddle of the Sands: Hollywood Egyptology,”

Tuesday— Caesar and Cleopatra (1945)

- Francesca Royster, “Becoming Cleopatra/Becoming Girl: Shaw’s *Caesar and Cleopatra*, Her Favorite Roman, and Reclaiming the Lives of Black Girls,” from *Becoming Cleopatra: The Shifting Image of an Icon*, (2016): 121-144.

Wednesday— Cleopatra (1963)

- Francesca Royster, “Egyptian Scandals: Elizabeth Taylor’s *Cleopatra* an the White Grotestque,” from *Becoming Cleopatra: The Shifting Image of an Icon*, (2016): 93-120.
- Suzman, Janet. "On Playing Cleopatra." *Shakespeare in Southern Africa* 25, (2013): 1-12,

**COMPARATIVE FILM REFLECTION #3**



## Week 5—Powerful Egyptian Women Restored

Monday—Cleopatra (1999)

- Nicholas J. Cull, “Infamy! Infamy! They’ve All Got It in for Me!”: Carry On Cleo and the British Camp Comedies of Ancient Rome,” in *Imperial Projections: Ancient Rome in Modern Popular Culture*, ed. Sandra R. Joshel, Margaret Malamud, and Donald T. McGuire, Jr. (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2001), 162–190.

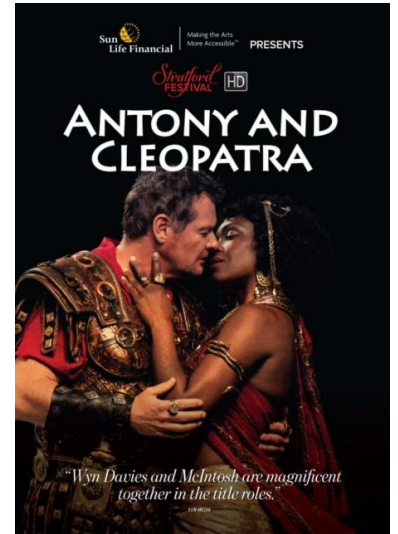
Tuesday—Agora (1999)

- Socrates Scholasticus *Ecclesiastical History*
- Carla-Uhink, Filippo, “Thinking Through the Ancient World: Late Antique Movies’ as a Mirror of Shifting Attitudes towards Christian Religion,” 307-329.

Wednesday—Antony and Cleopatra—Royal Shakespeare Company, 2017

- Melissa E. Sanchez, “Was Sexuality Racialized for Shakespeare? Antony and Cleopatra,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Shakespeare and Race*

**SUBMIT Movie Rewrite paper—Due Friday**



### Additional Bibliography



- R. Barsam and D. Monaghan. [\*Looking at Movies: An Introduction to Film \(6th ed.\)\*](#). Norton, 2018.
- Huckvale, David. *Ancient Egypt in the Popular Imagination: Building a Fantasy in Film, Literature, Music and Art*. 2012
- Joseph H. Roquemore, *History Goes to the Movies* (1999)
- Michael Ryan and Melissa Lenos, *An Introduction to Film Analysis: Technique and Meaning in Narrative Film* (2020), Introduction—1-28 and Art Direction—101-109
- Carter Lupton, “Mummymania” for the Masses: Is Egyptology Cursed by the Mummy’s Curse? 2009
  - Sam Sarafy, “Egypt in Hollywood: Pharaohs of the Fifties,” 2009
  - Tim Schadla-Hall and Genny Morris, “Ancient Egypt on the Small Screen—From Fact to Faction in the UK, 2009
    - Siv Jansson, “Egyptian Excesses: Taylor, Burton and Cleopatra,” in *Ancient Egypt in the Modern Imagination*.
    - Tyson Smith, Stuart, “Unwrapping the Mummy: Hollywood Fantasies, Egyptian Realities,” in *Box Office Archaeology: Refining Hollywood’s Portrayals of the Past*, ed. Julie M. Schablitsky (New York: Routledge, 2007).

### Credit Hours

Success in this **four**-credit course is based on the expectation that students will spend a minimum of nine hours of study time per week in preparation for class (readings, papers, discussion sections, preparation for exams, etc.

### Course Materials

If you are having difficulty purchasing course materials, please make an appointment with your student financial services or academic services adviser to discuss possible funding options and/or textbook

alternatives.

### **Resources and Methods of Instruction**

**NOTE:** Course meetings may be recorded to make learning accessible to everyone enrolled in the course. The recordings will be uploaded to the Brandeis Course management system, LATTE, and will only be used to educational purposes. Some of the content of our class meetings may be personal as we learn about gender and sexuality in the ancient world. We will agree as a class as to the standards we will hold each other to as a community in using any recording.

LATTE is the Brandeis learning management system: <http://latte.brandeis.edu>. Login using your UNET ID and password.

### **Library**

The Brandeis Library collections and staff offer resources and services to support Brandeis students, faculty and staff. These include workshops, consultations, collaboration, materials and instruction on emerging trends in technologies such as machine learning, emerging trends in research such as data visualization, and emerging trends in scholarship such as open access. Librarians at the Circulation Desk, Research Help Desk, Archives & Special Collections, Sound & Image Media Studios, MakerLab, AutomationLab, and Digital Scholarship Lab are available to help you.

<https://www.brandeis.edu/library/about/index.html>

**Participation and Holiday Acknowledgement:** Students are expected to attend all class sessions and to participate in learning activities to the best of their ability. Students are further responsible for communicating with the instructor to make up missed material. In addition, students should expect to complete activities according to the schedule established by the instructor and found on the syllabus. We will abide by the holiday schedule of the University and, when necessary, adjust in the event of any unexpected health or weather issues, which may limit our sessions. All adjustments will be communicated via LATTE and Slack.

### **Policy on Missing Work and Late Work**

Extensions or incompletes need to be addressed early before work is due. Summer is a short and compact period for a course. Please contact me as your circumstances may change during the semester. You may face different kinds of work and stress that may impact your work. I understand this and want to find the right timetable for assignments that will work for everyone in the course. In order to negotiate such adjustments, I do need you to contact me early about such needs. Planning ahead can mean that you can better cope with the crises that will arise during the semester.

### **Course Requirements and Grading Criteria**

Success in this 4-credit hour course is based on the expectation that students will spend at least 9 hours of study time per week in preparation for class (readings, class discussions, close readings and written assignments).

**Attendance and Syllabus Adjustments:** All class members are expected to attend sessions unless otherwise indicated by the instructor or the university. Lack of participation or attendance will affect one's grade for the course and potentially result in a failing grade for the course.

**Academic Integrity at Brandeis:** You are expected to be honest in all of your academic work. Please consult [Brandeis University's Rights and Responsibilities](#) for all policies and procedures related to

academic integrity. Allegations of alleged academic dishonesty will be forwarded to the director of academic integrity. Sanctions for academic dishonesty can include failing grades and/or suspension from the university. [Citation and research assistance](#) can be found on the [university library website](#). Students may be required to submit work to [TurnItIn.com](#) software to verify originality.

**Accommodations and Support:** Brandeis seeks to welcome and include all students. If you are a student who needs accommodations as outlined in an accommodations letter, please talk with me and present your letter of accommodation as soon as you can. In order to provide assignment, quiz, or test accommodations, I need the letter emailed to me more than 72 hours in advance in order to make an appropriate substitution. If you have questions about documenting or requesting accommodations, please contact Student Accessibility Support at 781-736-3470 or [access@brandeis.edu](mailto:access@brandeis.edu).