

The Pennsylvania State University

The Ancient World in Film

CAMS 130 - Fall 2025



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CAMS Department
Weaver Building 221

Class time: M/W/F 10:10 – 11:00 am
Venue: Hammond Building 304
Office hours: T/Th 3:30 – 5:00 pm
Weaver 221 & Zoom

Course Description:

CAMS 130 examines the ancient Mediterranean world as it is represented in the cinema. Students will view, interpret, and critically evaluate twelve popular and/or critically acclaimed films that illustrate the narratives and themes that have engaged the interest of filmmakers and audiences since the birth of motion pictures. The curriculum will naturally gravitate toward “epic” films that are rooted in the stories of the Bible, classical mythology, and the histories of the ancient Greeks and Romans; but some attention will be paid also to other kinds of film, such as adaptations of classical drama and literary works, or parodies of “epic” films. To pursue the critical analysis of each film, students are required to read the ancient source materials on which it is based and to apply methods of interpretation that they will have learned from assigned readings about film studies. By researching a film’s ancient historical and cultural backgrounds, students will advance their global learning. By applying the analytic frameworks of film studies to the interpretation of films, they will have the opportunity to engage in integrative thinking and to hone the skills of effective communication. CAMS 130 fulfills the Bachelor of Arts requirements in the field of Humanities (BA) and the General Education requirements in the Humanities (GH).

Learning Objectives:

- Evaluate historical accuracy in film representations of ancient civilizations
- Analyze cinematic techniques and their impact on historical interpretation
- Understand the relationship between ancient sources and modern adaptations
- Develop critical thinking skills about media representation and cultural bias
- Examine the evolution of ancient world films across different decades

Course Activities and Grading:

1. Participation (30%)

- Students are expected to **complete assigned readings** and **actively participate** in class discussions (15%).
 - You are allowed **two unexcused absences**, but if you have to miss more classes, make sure to notify me before class (or shortly afterward) and provide a valid excuse.
- The instructor will also start a threaded discussion in **Ed Discussions** each week, contributing to asynchronous discussions and interacting with your classmates is **required** to earn participation grades (15%).

2. Movie Reviews (10% x 4 = 40%)

- Throughout this semester, you will write **four movie reviews** examining how contemporary cinema portrays different periods and cultures of the ancient world. Each review should be approximately **2 pages in length** (500-600 words, double-spaced) and demonstrate your ability to critically analyze historical films through an academic lens.

3. Student presentation (30%)

- In addition to your movie reviews, you will deliver one 8-10 minute in-class presentation based on one of your four review essays. This presentation allows you to share your analysis with the class and engage in scholarly discussion about how cinema represents the ancient world.

Make-up Work and Late Submission Policy:

- Make-up work or late submissions of assignments without a penalty require a documented, university-approved excuse, such as illness, health issues, or family emergency. Students who do not provide such documentation may still submit their work; however, late submissions will incur a penalty of **1% reduction in the final grade for the assignment per calendar day** past the deadline.
- Students who anticipate needing an extension should **notify the instructor as early as possible**, preferably **before the due date**, to discuss their situation and determine whether an accommodation can be made. Extensions may be granted at the discretion of the instructor and typically require supporting documentation.

Grades will be assigned in accordance with the following scale:

A (93 – 100), A- (90 – 92.9), B+ (87 – 89.9), B (83 – 86.9), B- (80 – 82.9), C+ (77 – 79.9), C (70 – 76.9), D (60 – 69.9), F ($\leq$ 59.9).

Other Responsibilities and Information:

Students must bear in mind that the **class lectures** and presentations are the **de-facto study guides** for all tests and written exercises in this course. Any necessary digital files will be uploaded onto Canvas **before** each class.

Students are expected to behave within the guidelines of **academic and personal integrity**. Penn State defines academic integrity as the pursuit of scholarly activity in an open, honest, and responsible manner. All students should act with personal integrity, respect other students' dignity, rights, and property, and help create and maintain an environment in which all can succeed through the fruits of their efforts (Faculty Senate Policy 49-20). For more information about academic integrity at Penn State, see the [policy website](#). Students who may need general guidance concerning writing should utilize the [Penn State Learning Center](#) in 220 Boucke.

Penn State **welcomes students with disabilities** into the University's education programs. If you have a disability-related need for reasonable academic adjustments in this course, contact the Office for Disability Services. For further information regarding policies, rights and responsibilities please visit the [Office for Disability Services \(ODS\) website](#). Instructors should be notified as early in the semester as possible regarding the need for reasonable accommodations.

Penn State takes great pride to foster a **diverse and inclusive environment** for students, faculty, and staff. Acts of intolerance, discrimination, or harassment due to age, ancestry, color, disability, gender, gender identity, national origin, race, religious belief, sexual orientation, or veteran status are not tolerated and can be reported through Educational Equity via the [Report Bias webpage](#)

Many students at Penn State face personal challenges or have psychological needs that may affect their academic progress, social development, or emotional well-being. The university offers a variety of **confidential services to help you through difficult times**. Please note the following:

[Counseling and Psychological Services](#) at University Park (CAPS): 814-863-0395

Penn State Crisis Line (24 hours/7 days/week): 877-229-6400

Crisis Text Line (24 hours/7 days/week): Text LIONS to 741741

According to [Penn State policy G-9: Academic Integrity](#), an academic integrity violation is “an intentional, unintentional, or attempted violation of course or assessment policies to gain an academic advantage or to advantage or disadvantage another student academically.” Unless your instructor tells you otherwise, you must complete all coursework entirely on your own, using only sources that have been permitted by your instructor, and you may not assist other students with papers, quizzes, exams, or other assessments. If your instructor allows you to use ideas, images, or word phrases created by another person (e.g., from Course Hero or Chegg) or by **generative technology**, such as ChatGPT, you must identify their source. You may not submit false or fabricated information, use the same academic work

for credit in multiple courses, or share instructional content. Students with questions about academic integrity should ask their instructor before submitting work.

You may use AI tools (e.g., ChatGPT, Claude) to support your learning in this course, but you **must cite AI assistance properly** using the citation format specified in our course materials and **verify all AI-generated information against credible academic sources** before including it in your work. AI tools can make errors and produce inaccurate information, so critical evaluation and verification are essential scholarly skills. You are responsible for the accuracy and integrity of your submissions, and submitting AI-generated content without proper citation constitutes academic dishonesty. When in doubt about appropriate AI use, consult me before submitting your work.

Main Reference Books:

Potter, Amanda, and Hunter Gardner, eds. *Ancient Epic in Film and Television*. Screening Antiquity. Edinburgh University Press, 2022.

Renger, Almut-Barbara, and Jon Solomon. *Ancient Worlds in Film and Television: Gender and Politics*. Brill, 2012.

Solomon, Jon. *The Ancient World in the Cinema*. Rev. and Expanded ed. Yale University Press, 2001.

Note: All required reading materials will be provided by the instructor in **Canvas Modules**. Most movies are licensed through Swank, you may need to rent or purchase a few movies not in the Swank catalog.

Class Structure and Schedule

Note: The instructor **reserves the right to amend the syllabus** in any way or fashion whenever deemed necessary. Students will be notified of any changes in advance.

Week 1:

Class 1.1 Course Introduction

NO REQUIRED READINGS

Class 1.2 The Ancient World in Film 1

Required readings:

- Lecture slides

Class 1.3 The Ancient World in Film 1

Required readings:

- Lecture slides

Week 2

1/19 NO CLASS (MLK DAY)

Class 2.1–2.2 10,000 BC (2008)

Required readings:

- Lecture slides.
- Eric Burnett, “10,000 B.C. – End of the Ice Age,” *History through Film* (2008), pp. 1-8

Optional readings:

- The Met’s Heilbrunn Timeline of Art History. “[Egypt, 8000–2000 B.C. | Chronology | Heilbrunn Timeline of Art History | The Metropolitan Museum of Art.](#)” Accessed August 21, 2025.

Class 2.3 10,000 BC (2008)

Discussion session

Week 3

Class 3.1–3.2 Gods of Egypt (2016)

Required readings:

- Lecture slides.
- Excerpts from “The Contendings of Horus and Seth” (ancient Egyptian text), from Miriam Lichtheim, *Ancient Egyptian Literature: A Book of Readings. Volume II: The New Kingdom* (University of California Press, 2006), pp. 214-23.
- Readings from the Metternich Stela (Isis and Horus in the Delta)

Optional readings:

- Donald Redford, *A History of Ancient Egypt*, chapter 14 (Evolution of the Egyptian Belief Systems).
- *Isis and Osiris* by Plutarch.

Class 3.3 Gods of Egypt (2016)

Discussion session

Week 4

Class 4.1–4.2 The Mummy (1999)

Required readings:

- Lecture slides.
- Jasmine Day, “Giggles and Goosebumps: Late Twentieth-century Popular Culture,” *The Mummy’s Curse* (2006), pp. 94-128

Optional readings:

- Selections from ancient Egyptian funerary texts: The Pyramid Texts, The Book of the Dead.

Class 4.3 The Mummy (1999)

Discussion session

Week 5

Class 5.1–5.2 Cleopatra (1963)

Required readings:

- Lecture slides.
- Monica S. Cyrino, “Cleopatra (1963)” from *Big Screen Rome* (2005), pp. 121-58.

Optional readings:

- Plutarch’s “Life of Antony” excerpts.
- Willmar Sauter, “Cleopatra – Between Historical and Movie Scandals,” *Theater Scandals: Social Dynamics of Turbulent Theatrical Events* (2013), pp. 239-57.
- Ella Shohat, “Disorienting Cleopatra: A Modern Trope of Identity,” *Transition*, no. 132 (2021): 148–69.
- Jon Solomon, “In the Wake of ‘Cleopatra’: The Ancient World in the Cinema since 1963,” *The Classical Journal* 91, no. 2 (1995): 113–40.

Class 5.3 Cleopatra (1963)

Discussion session

Week 6

Class 6.1–6.2 Clash of the Titans (2010)

Required readings:

- Lecture slides.
- A. Chiu, “Clash of the Titans,” *The Classical Outlook* 87, no.3 (2010): 104-5.
- Aji Septiaji, “Heroic Narratives of Greek Mythology in the Movies *Clash of the Titans* and *Wrath of the Titans*: A Comparative Literature Approach,” *Multidisciplinary Indonesian Center Journal* 2, no.3 (2025): 2620-32.

Optional Readings:

- Selections from Apollodorus, *Bibliotheca*.
- Selections from Hesiod, *Theogony*.

Class 6.3 Clash of the Titans (2010)

Discussion session

Week 7

Class 7.1–7.2 Troy (2004)

Required readings:

- Lecture slides.
- Greene, Sophie. “Tory – The Trojan War” from *History through Film* (2008), pp. 9-15
- Celina Proch and Michael Kleu, “Models of Masculinities in *Troy*: Achilles, Hector, and Their Female Partners,” *Ancient Worlds in Film and Television: Gender and Politics* (2013), pp. 79-94

Optional readings

- Selections from Homer’s *Iliad* (Books 1, 6, 22).
- Andreas Krass, “Over His Dead Body: Male Friendship in Homer’s *Iliad* and Wolfgang Petersen’s *Troy* (2004),” *Ancient Worlds in Film and Television: Gender and Politics* (2013), pp. 153-174.
- Joanna Paul, “Homer on the Silver Screen,” *Film and the Classical Epic Tradition* (2013), pp. 36-92.
- Kirsten Day, “Looking a Gift Horse in the Mouth: Helen of Troy and the Trojan Horse,” *Ancient Epic in Film and Television* (2021), pp. 98-118.

Class 7.3 Troy (2004)

Discussion session

Week 8

Class 8.1–8.2 300 (2006)

Required readings:

- Lecture slides.
- Selections from Herodotus, *Histories* (Book 7, Thermopylae passages).
- Eric Burnett, “300 – The Battle of Thermopylae,” *History through Film* (2008), pp. 16-26.
- Jeroen Lauwers *et al.*, “‘This is Sparta!’: Discourse, Gender, and the Orient in Zack Snyder’s *300*,” *Ancient Worlds in Film and Television: Gender and Politics* (2013), pp. 79-94.

Optional readings:

- Thorsten Beigel, “With Your Shield or On It: The Gender of Heroism in Zack Snyder’s *300* and Rudolph Maté’s *The 300 Spartans*,” *Ancient Worlds in Film and Television: Gender and Politics* (2013), pp. 65-78
- Ralph J. Poole, “‘Everybody Loves a Muscle Boi’: Homos, Heroes, and Foes in Post-9/11 Spoofs of the 300 Spartans,” *Ancient Worlds in Film and Television: Gender and Politics* (2013), pp. 95-122.

Class 8.3 300 (2006)

Discussion session

3/8 – 3/14 NO CLASS (SPRING BREAK)

Week 9

Class 9.1–9.2 Alexander (2004)

Required readings:

- Lecture slides.
- Daniel Ogden, ed., *The Cambridge Companion to Alexander the Great*, [Cambridge Companions to the Ancient World](#) (Cambridge University Press, 2024), chapters 4, 5, 6, 8.

Class 9.3 Alexander (2004)

Discussion session

Week 10

Class 10.1–10.2 Gladiator (2000)

Required readings:

- Lecture slides.
- Eric Burnett, “*Gladiator* – Roman Gladiators,” *History through Film* (2008), pp. 36-41.
- Allen M. Ward, “*Gladiator* in Historical Perspective,” *Gladiator: Film and History* (2004), pp. 31-44.

Optional readings:

- Selections from Suetonius, [Life of Commodus](#).
- Monica S. Cyrino, “*Gladiator* (2000),” [Big Screen Rome \(2005\)](#), pp. 207-56.
- Arthur M. Eckstein, “Commodus and the Limits of the Roman Empire,” [Gladiator: Film and History \(2004\)](#), pp. 53-72.

Class 10.3 Gladiator (2000)

Discussion session

Week 11

Class 11.1–11.2 Ben-Hur (2016)

Required readings:

- Lecture slides.
- Monica S. Cyrino, “*Ben-Hur* (1959),” [Big Screen Rome \(2005\)](#), pp. 59-88.

Optional readings:

- Joanna Paul, “‘The Biggest Epic Yet’: Spectacle and *Ben-Hur*,” *Film and the Classical Epic Tradition* (2013), pp. 213-49.
- Jon Solomon, “*Ben-Hur* and *Gladiator*: Manifest Destiny and the Contradictions of American Empire,” *Ancient Worlds in Film and Television: Gender and Politics* (2013), pp. 17-40.

Class 11.3 Ben-Hur (2016)

Discussion session

Week 12

Class 12.1–12.2 Noah (2014)

Required readings:

- Lecture slides.
- Genesis 6-9 (The Flood narrative)
- Becky Bartlett, "[Controversy and the 'Culture War': Exploring Tensions between the Secular and the Sacred in Noah, the 'Least Biblical Biblical Movie Ever'](#)," *The Bible Onscreen in the New Millennium* (2020), pp. 143-60.

Optional readings:

- Wojciech Kosior, "[The Crimes of Love: The \(Un\)censored Version of the Flood Story in Noah \(2014\)](#)," *Journal of Religion and Film* 20, no.3 (2016): 1-20.
- Sylvie Magerstädt, "[From Impulse to Action—Noah \(2014\) and Exodus: Gods and Kings \(2014\) as Secular Bible Epics](#)," *Religions* 12, no. 11 (2021): 1025.
- Anton, K. Kozlovic, [Noah Narratives, Gender Issues, and the Hollywood Hermeneutic](#).
- Lindsay Macumber and Magi Abdul-Masih, [Darren Aronofsky's Noah \(2014\) as a Subversive Kabbalistic Text](#).
- Kevin, M. McGeough, [The Roles of Violence in Recent Biblical Cinema: The Passion, Noah, and Exodus: Gods and Kings](#).
- Rhonda Burnette-Bletsch, ['Real' Women and Multiple Masculinities in Aronofsky's Noah](#).

Class 12.3 Noah (2014)

Discussion session

Week 13

Class 13.1–13.2 The Prince of Egypt (1998)

Required readings:

- Exodus 1-15 excerpts (Moses and the plagues)

Optional readings:

- Donald Redford on the Ramesside period.
- Avivah Gottlieb Zornberg, [Moses: A Human Life](#) (Yale University Press, 2016).

Class 13.3 The Prince of Egypt (1998)

Discussion session

Week 14

Class 14.1–14.2 Agora (2009)

Required readings:

- Lecture slides.
- Walter F. Beers, "Bloody Iuvenalia: Hypatia, Pulcheria Augusta, and the Beginnings of Cyril of Alexandria's Episcopate," *Hypatia of Alexandria: Her Context and Legacy* (2020), pp. 67-86.

Optional Readings:

- Cédric S. Laemmle, “Starring Hypatia: Amenábar’s Agora and The Tropology of Reception,” *Hypatia of Alexandria* (2020), pp. 209-38.
- Joanna Paul, “[Subverting Sex and Love in Alejandro Amenábar’s *Agora* \(2009\)](#),” *Screening Love and Sex in the Ancient World* (2013), 227-41.
- Stefano Moschini, “[Experiencing *Agora*](#)”.
- Karolina Rosińska-Balik, “[An Overview of the Architectural Features of the *Agora*](#)”.
- Awaisuddin and Honggang Wang. “[Hypatia’s Legacy: Framing Intellectual Courage in the Film ‘*Agora*’](#)”.
- Alex McAuley, “[Hypatia’s Hijab: Visual Echoes of 9/11 in Alejandro Amenábar’s *Agora*](#),” *Mouseion: Journal of the Classical Association of Canada* 57, no. 1 (2016): 131–51.
- “[Mice on a Galley: A Review of *Agora*](#)”.

Class 14.3 Agora (2009)

Discussion session

Week 15

Class 15.1 Student Presentation

Class 15.2 Student Presentation

Class 15.3 Student Presentation

5/2 – 5/3 Study Days

5/4– 5/8 FINAL EXAM WEEK