



CLAS 157a

Ancient Egypt on the Silver Screen

Summer 2025 ASYNCHRONOUS CLASS—10 Weeks June 2–August 8, 2025

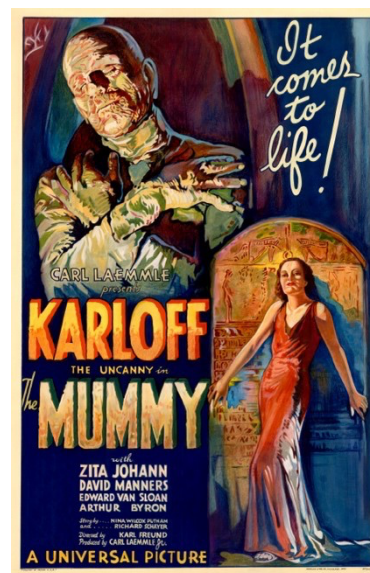
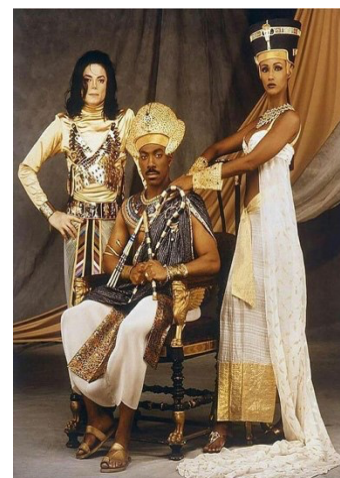
Prof. Darlene L. Brooks Hedstrom Email: brookshedstrom@brandeis.edu

NOTE: The syllabus may change according to the interests and availability of the films outlined below.

*** You will have deadlines every two weeks to complete the assigned work before moving to the next section.

From the *Ten Commandments* to *The Mummy* to Michael Jackson's *Remember the Time*, Ancient Egypt has captivated audiences with images of powerful pharaohs from Ramesses to Cleopatra and a divine pantheon featuring 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-Momyya/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 Curtiz'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.



Learning Goals:

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

- articulate the complexity and richness of Egyptian history as represented in films and set designs
- Identify the racial and ethnic coding present in primarily American & British films relating to Egyptians, Nubians, and colonial archaeology
- identify differences between Egyptian Arabic and French presentations of ancient Egypt and modern archaeology with the American and British
- 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 integrity of cinematic representations;
- refine your capacity to examine critically and comparatively the past and present

You will watch lectures I have recorded, use VoiceThread to discuss the films in their historical context, outline major archaeological elements of the film related to set designs, identify the racialization of ancient and modern Egypt for primarily white American and British viewers, 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:

- 25 % VoiceThread Audio/Video Responses per film (5-6 slides) and one response to a peer
- 25 % Perusall Comments (3-1-1=5 comments)—for 5 articles assigned
- 50 % Film Journal and Historical Reviews—read historical reviews provided at Moodle and respond to the prompt for each unit, addressing the reviews and your own assessment of the historical elements of the films, 5 times, 10% each

*Instructions for assignments found at Moodle and/or Perusall

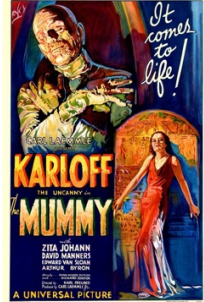
Academic Integrity at Brandeis and AI Use in CLAS 157: You are expected to be honest in all of your academic work in this summer course. Do not use AI to generate responses to your posts or summaries—this would be a violation of preparing your work for this class and will have adverse consequences. Copying and pasting from other sources is tracked in Perusall, VoiceThread, and Moodle. I do not grant permission for my lectures to be uploaded into any AI platform, including NotebookLM—the lectures are my intellectual property and provided only for students to view during the class.

Please let me know if you wish to discuss the AI policy to ensure you understand the limits in this class, please let me you by emailing me at brookshedstrm@brandeis.edu

Please consult [Brandeis University's Rights and Responsibilities](#) for all policies and procedures related to academic integrity. Allegations of 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](#).

UNIT 1 Weeks 1 & 2 Archaeological Discovery of Egypt in the Modern Period

Week 1— Beginning June 4 (Wednesday)



- 👁 Watch Introduction Videos 1, 2 (VoiceThread Instructions), and 3 (Perusall Instructions)
- 👁 Watch Lecture 1 on The Mummy, 1932
- 🎬 Watch FILM: The Mummy, 1932
- 🎙 POST to VoiceThread Responses to The Mummy, 1932
- 📰 READ : Film Review: “Mummy, Unusual Film,” 1933, *Los Angeles Times*
 - “The Mummy,” 1933, *Daily Boston Globe*
 - “The Mummy,” 1933, *The Times of India*












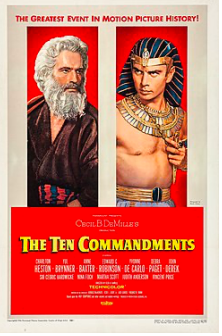
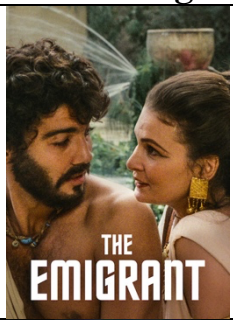
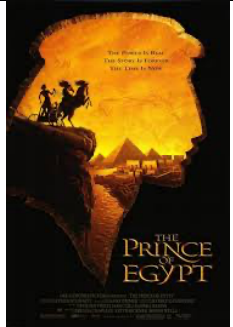
- 👁 Watch Lecture 2 on The Mummy’s Hand, 1940
- 🎬 Watch FILM: The Mummy’s Hand, 1940 ([Internet Archive](#))
- 🎙 POST to VoiceThread Responses to The Mummy’s Hand, 1940
- 📰 READ: “The Mummy’s Hand,” 1940, *The Sun*
 - “New Films: The Mummy’s Hand & The Leather Pushers,” 1940, *Daily Boston Globe*
 - “Thrills vie with Comedy in Melodrama,” 1940, *Los Angeles Times*

Week 2 Beginning June 9



- 👁 Watch Lecture 3 on Valley of the Kings, 1954
- 🎬 Watch FILM: Valley of the Kings, 1954
- 🎙 POST to VoiceThread Responses to Valley of the Kings, 1954
- 📰 READ: “Egypt Scene of Suspense Melodrama,” 1954 *Los Angeles Times*
 - “Valley of the Kings,” 1954 *Variety*
 - “Valley of the Kings,” 1954, *The Daily Film Renter*

	<p> WATCH Lecture 3 on Al-Mumya’/The Night of Counting the Years, 1969, Arabic—Egypt (2 hours) w/English subtitles</p> <p> WATCH FILM: Al-Mumya’/The Night of Counting the Years, 1969</p> <p> POST to VoiceThread Responses to Al-Mumya’/The Night of Counting the Years, 1969</p> <p> LISTEN: Podcast about Shadi Abdel Salam’s other film, “The Eloquent Peasant” and “The Mummy”</p>
<p>END OF UNIT WRITING & VOICETHREADS — Due Sunday June 15th midnight</p> <p> COMMENT Perusall Doris V. Sutherland, <i>The Mummy</i> (2019) Excerpt “The Egypt of the Mummy” (15 pages)</p> <p> COMMENT Perusall Walid El Khachab, “The Cinema of the Pharaohs: Film, Archaeology, and Sub-Imperialism,” in <i>Dialogues artistiques avec les passés de l’Égypte: Une perspective transnationale et transmédiiale</i> (2017) (12 pages)</p> <p> WRITE Unit 1 Summary— </p>	
<p>UNIT 2 Weeks 3 & 4 Egypt in Biblical Epics: Silent Films to Animation</p> <p>Week 3 Beginning June 16</p>	
	<p> Watch Lecture on Ten Commandments 1923 & Moon of Israel 1924</p> <p> Watch FILM: Ten Commandments 1923 (only til 50:00 mark) & Moon of Israel 1924</p> <p> POST to VoiceThread Responses to Ten Commandments 1923 (only til 50:00 mark) & Moon of Israel 1924</p> <p> READ: “The <i>Ten Commandments</i> is De Mille’s Greatest Film,” 1923 <i>Women’s Wear</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “The Ten Commandments,” 1924 <i>Life</i> • “The Screen: The Ten Commandments,” 1923 <i>New York Times</i> 

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “Moon of Israel,” 1924 <i>Kinematograph Weekly</i> • “The War of the Films,” 1924 <i>New York Times</i> (Moon of Israel & Ten Commandments)
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 👁 Watch Lecture on Ten Commandments 1956 🎬 Watch FILM: Ten Commandments 1956 🎙 POST to VoiceThread Responses to Ten Commandments 1956 📰 READ: “Jews Acted in DeMille’s “The Ten Commandments,” 1956 <i>The Southern Jewish Weekly</i> • “The Ten Commandments’ Is A Magnificent Epic,” 1958 <i>The Times of India</i> • “The Ten Commandments,” 1957 <i>Kinematograph Weekly</i> • “The Ten Commandments,” 1956 <i>Variety</i>
Week 4 Beginning June 23	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 👁 Watch Lecture 3 on Al-Mohager 1994 🎬 Watch FILM: Al-Mohager 1994 (Egyptian Arabic) 🎙 POST to VoiceThread Responses to Al-Mohager 1994 📰 READ: “Al-Mohager/L’émigré,” 1994 • “The Emigrant” 1994 <i>Variety</i>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 👁 Watch Lecture on Prince of Egypt, 1998 🎬 Watch FILM: Prince of Egypt, 1998 (animation) 🎙 POST to VoiceThread Responses to Prince of Egypt, 1998 📰 READ: “Turning a Tidy Prophet in Hollywood,” 1999 <i>The Times of India</i> • “<i>Prince of Egypt</i> is no King at the Box Office,” 1998 <i>New York Times</i>

END OF UNIT WRITING & VOICETHREADS — Due Sunday June 29th midnight



COMMENT Perusall Nuno Simões Rodrigues, “Josephus as Source of the Egyptian Sequences in Cecil B. DeMille’s *The Ten Commandments* (1956),” in *How Pharaohs Became Media Stars*, (2023), 110-135. (25 pages)



COMMENT Perusall Russell, James. “FOUNDATION MYTHS: DreamWorks SKG, The Prince of Egypt (1998) and the Historical Epic Film.” *New Review of Film and Television Studies* 2 (2004): 233–55. (20 pages)



WRITE Unit 2 Summary—



UNIT 3 Weeks 5 & 6 Ancient Egyptian Pharaohs, Drama, and Religion

Week 5 Beginning June 30



Watch Lecture on The Egyptian 1954



Watch FILM: The Egyptian 1954

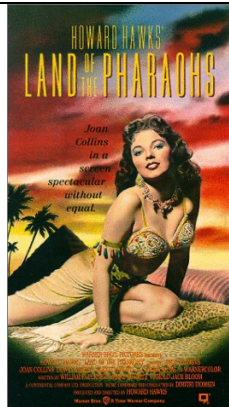


POST to VoiceThread Responses to The Egyptian 1954



READ: “Wood Discovers Egypt,” 1954

- “*The Egyptian* Leads the New Film Cycle,” 1954 *Managers’ Round Table Section*
- “The Egyptian at Roxy is based on the Novel,” 1954 *New York Times*
- “The Price of Size: *The Egyptian* Manifest the Peril of Over-Production in Films,” 1954 *New York Times*



- 👁 Watch Lecture on Land of the Pharaohs 1955
- 🎬 Watch FILM: Land of the Pharaohs 1955
- 🗣 POST to VoiceThread Responses to Land of the Pharaohs 1955
- 📰 READ: “Land of the Pharaohs,” 1955 *Religious Magazine*
- “Egyptian Spectacle Now at MET,” 1955 *Daily Boston Globe*
- “Land of the Pharaohs,” 1955 *Times of India*

Week 6 Beginning July 7



- 👁 Watch Lecture on Nefertiti: Queen of the Nile, 1961
- 🎬 Watch FILM: Nefertiti: Queen of the Nile, 1961
- 🗣 POST to VoiceThread Responses to Nefertiti: Queen of the Nile, 1961
- 📰 READ: no reviews for the film



- 👁 Watch Lecture on La Reine Soleil, 2007
- 🎬 Watch FILM: La Reine Soleil, 2007 (animation)
- 🗣 POST to VoiceThread Responses to La Reine Soleil, 2007
- 📰 READ: “Princess of the Sun,” 2007, *Variety*

END OF UNIT WRITING & VOICETHREADS — Due Sunday July 13th midnight



COMMENT **Perusall** 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. (25 pages)



COMMENT **Perusall** D. Montserrat, *Akhenaten: History, Fantasy and Ancient Egypt* (Routledge, 2000), 55-94. (24 pages)




WRITE Unit 3 Summary—



UNIT 5 Weeks 7 & 8 Anglo-American Cleopatras

Week 7 Beginning July 14




 Watch Lecture on Cleopatra 1934


 Watch FILM: Cleopatra 1934 (1 hour 40 min.)


 POST to VoiceThread Responses to Cleopatra 1934


 READ: “Cleopatra,” 1934 *Variety*

- “A Big Secret! Critic Laughs at *Cleopatra*,” 1934 *Chicago Daily Tribune*
- “*Cleopatra*, Latest of Hollywood’s Hits, Ready,” 1934 *Chicago Defender*
- “C.B. De Mille’s Cleopatra,” 1934 *New York Times*



 Watch Lecture on Caesar and Cleopatra 1945

 Watch FILM: Caesar and Cleopatra 1945 (George Bernard Shaw) (2 hours)

 POST to VoiceThread Responses to Caesar and Cleopatra 1945

 READ: “Caesar and Cleopatra,” 1945 *Kinematograph Weekly*

- “Caesar and Cleopatra,” 1945 *Daily Film Renter*

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “Caesar and Cleopatra,” 1946 <i>Palestine Post</i>
Week 8 Beginning July 21	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 👁 Watch Lecture on Cleopatra, 1963 🎬 Watch FILM: Cleopatra, 1963(it is over three hours, so divide it into the two films—there’s an intermission) 🎙 POST to VoiceThread Responses to Cleopatra, 1963 📰 READ: “Tremendously Trivial,” 1964 <i>Times of India</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “Cleopatra is Underrated Motion Picture,” 1964 <i>Boston Globe</i> • “US Judges Weigh <i>Cleopatra</i> Romance,” 1967 <i>Los Angeles Times</i>

END OF UNIT WRITING & VOICETHREADS — Due Sunday July 27th midnight



COMMENT **Perusall**

Marie Wyke and Dominic Montserrat, “Glamour Girls: Cleomania in Mass Culture,” Margaret M. Mills, ed., “Cleopatra in Egypt, Europe, and New York: An Introduction,” in *Cleopatra: A Sphinx Revisited* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2011), Chapter 8. (16 pages)



COMMENT **Perusall**

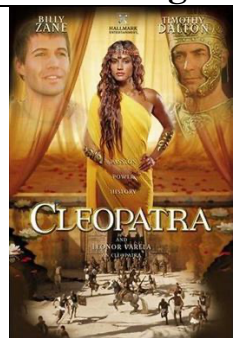
Simon Ryle, “Body Space: The Sublime Cleopatra,” in *Shakespeare, Cinema and Desire: Adaptation and Other Futures of Shakespeare’s Language* (New York: Palgrave 2014) (18 pages)



WRITE Unit 4 Summary— **moodle**

UNIT 5 Weeks 9 & 10 Cleopatra Restored

Week 9 Beginning July 28



Watch Lecture on Cleopatra 1999



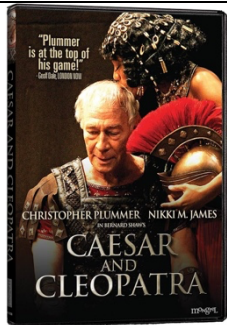
Watch FILM: Cleopatra 1999



POST to VoiceThread Responses to Cleopatra 1999



READ: “Nile High:” *Cleopatra* Piles on the Camp,” 1999 *Boston Globe*



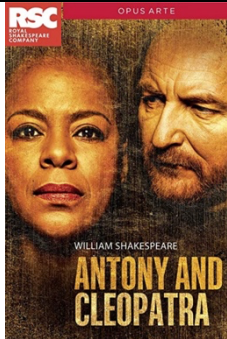
👁 Watch Lecture 3 on Caesar and Cleopatra 2008 (George Bernard Shaw)

🎬 Watch FILM: Caesar and Cleopatra 2008

🎙 POST to VoiceThread Responses to Caesar and Cleopatra 2008

📰 READ: No reviews

Week 10 Beginning August 4



👁 Watch Lecture on Antony and Cleopatra, 2017 Shakespeare

🎬 Watch FILM: Antony and Cleopatra, 2017 Shakespeare

🎙 POST to VoiceThread Responses to Antony and Cleopatra, 2017 Shakespeare

📰 WATCH: no reviews. "Antony and Cleopatra with Kim Cantrell"
<https://video.alexanderstreet.com/p/ywDKmVKPV>



👁 Watch Lecture on Sphinx 1981

🎬 Watch FILM: Sphinx 1981

🎙 POST to VoiceThread Responses to Sphinx 1981

📰 READ: "Sphinx," 1981 *Variety*

- "Schafner's *Sphinx*," 1981 *New York Times*
- "Sphinx," 1981 *Entertainment Weekly*
- "Sphinx is Monumental," 1981 *Boston Globe*

FINAL CLASS WRITING — Due Friday August 8th at 8 PM



COMMENT Perusall Francesca Royster, “Egyptian Scandals: Elizabeth Taylor’s *Cleopatra* and the White Grotestque,” from *Becoming Cleopatra: The Shifting Image of an Icon*, (2016): 93-120. (33 pages)



COMMENT Perusall Vivian Yee “Whose Queen? Netflix and Egypt Spar Over an African Cleopatra.” *New York Times* May 10, 2023 (3 pages)



COMMENT Perusall Islam Issa, “Cleopatra was Egyptian — whether Black or Brown Matters Less,” *Al Jazeera* May 1, 2023 (2 pages)



WRITE Unit 5 Write 

