

## Silent Antiquity Prints Unique to the BFI National Archive

Wednesday 25 June 2025

15:00 – 16:30 & 17:00 – 18:30

Aula Seminari, DAMsLab, Piazzetta P. P. Pasolini 5/b, 40122 Bologna



### Museum of Dreamworlds :

Silent Antiquity Films  
in the BFI National Archive

These two workshops will include presentations on some silent antiquity prints which we believe to be unique to the BFI National Archive, the screening of substantial clips from them and plenty of time for discussion. The organisers welcome the comments of participants as they further develop their research on these films.

The workshops have been organised by the members of the University College London research project *Museum of Dreamworlds*: Prof.

Maria Wyke (UCL), Dr. Ivo Blom (Vrije Universiteit, Amsterdam), Dr. Aylin Atacan (UCL) and Bryony Dixon (silent film curator, BFI National Archive), in collaboration with Eye Filmmuseum and other partner archives. The project (2023-2027) focuses on the paradoxically close relationship between the modern medium of silent cinema and the distant worlds of ancient Greece and Rome, using film prints and film-related materials from the collection of the British Film Institute as its point of departure and comparing them with what survives in other archives. For more info on *Museum of Dreamworlds*, see <https://www.ucl.ac.uk/classics/research/research-projects/museum-dream-worlds>

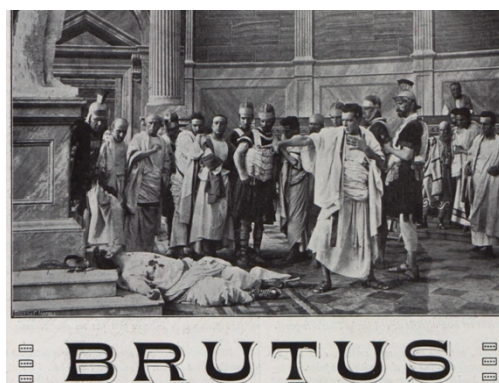
### Session 1 15:00 – 16:30

#### Research & Restoration

Maria Wyke (UCL) will introduce the *Museum of Dreamworlds* project and its ambition systematically to investigate all the silent antiquity prints in the BFI. Bryony Dixon (BFI National Archive) will discuss the history and condition of the BFI antiquity prints and present her current project to restore *Bruto* (1911, Cines, dir. Enrico Guazzoni).

#### Synopsis:

Brutus, who has been brought up as a son by Julius Caesar, is persuaded by Cassius to conspire against him. Despite warnings by his wife, Caesar goes to the Senate, where he is murdered by the conspirators. After the funeral, the people of Rome rise up and throw the conspirators out of the city. Brutus manages to escape to the East where he amasses an army. Mark Anthony is sent with a legion to combat him. The night before the battle at Philippi, Brutus is visited by Caesar's ghost. The next day he is defeated in battle and commits suicide.





### Martyrdom Italian style

Ivo Blom (Vrije Universiteit, Amsterdam) will present *Santa Cecilia* (1911, Cines, dir. Enrique Santos). He will explore its relationship to earlier traditions for the saint (in lantern slides, on postcards, in performance) and how its design is situated in a specifically Italian context.

#### Synopsis:

Cecilia, gracious daughter of the Cecilii, has embraced the Christian faith without the knowledge of her parents. Beautiful and wealthy, she has, unwittingly, wakened the love of Quintus Lentulus who, seeing himself rebuffed, swears vengeance. In fact, Lentulus discovers that Valerianus, a young tribune, to whom Cecilia has promised her hand in marriage, has been converted to Christianity, and quickly runs to denounce the tribune to the Prefect of Rome. The very day of their wedding and just when the young couple are about to sit down for the wedding feast, Valerianus is arrested, conducted before the Prefect and condemned to death. The body of the martyr, reverently collected by Cecilia and the Christians, is buried in the Catacombs. Soon after, Cecilia is also arrested. Courageously confessing her faith, she is condemned to severe torture and death which, because she is a Roman patrician, she suffers in her own home. She is then buried in the catacombs.

### Martyrdom American style

Jon Solomon (University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign) will present *The Way of the Cross* (1909, Vitagraph, J. Stuart Blackton). He will consider how the film represents martyrdom in terms of Protestant American conceptions of early Christianity.



#### Synopsis:

After a banquet of gambling and drinking, the Roman Valerius comes across a Christian meeting in the street and falls in love with a participant, Leah. When the crowd begins to mock the young girl and her followers, Valerius rescues her and takes her to her home. The jealous Gallia, lover of Valerius, instructs her slave to follow them. She gives information to Nero about the Christian girl and Leah is brought to the palace and tormented in the presence of Valerius whom she continues to rebuff. The next day, Gallia ensures that Nero decrees the death of all Christians. In disguise, Valerius visits Leah to warn her of the planned extermination and she goes into hiding in the catacombs with her father and young brother. One week later, in peril of his life, the brother sets out to look for food. He is seen by the Romans and captured. They torture him until he tells them of the hiding place. Valerius offers to help Leah but she refuses, saying that she must stay with her family and the Christians. The soldiers come and take them away. The next day, Leah declares her faith before Nero and is sent to be fed to the lions. In the arena, she is seen by Valerius and again refuses to renounce her faith. Valerius sees a vision of Leah holding a cross and Gallia a glass of wine, and then the Cross itself. He decides to join Leah in her cell, where she persuades him to give up his sword. Another vision of the Cross appears and, led into the arena accompanied by Valerius, Leah holds her cross aloft.

Break 16:30 – 17:00

## Session 2 17:00 – 18:30



### Martyrdom: gender & irreligion

Maria Wyke will present *Martire Pompeiana* (1909, Saffi-Comerio, dir. Giuseppe de Liguoro). She will discuss its challenge to more conventional martyrdom films in the way that it focusses on a secular crucifixion and on the courage of women who struggle to support each other within a patriarchal and slave-owning society.

#### Synopsis:

At Pompeii towards evening, the feast of Venus takes place. After the sorceress Sabina's predictions of a bad future for the celebrants are rebuffed, the men leave and the women gather round to offer incense to the goddess of their dance. Nica and Clyo (slaves of the pimp Ceramico) love each other like sisters. Nica loves the gladiator Icelo who promises to free her from slavery. However, the rich patrician Sava arrives, come to make his selection from among the pimp's beautiful girls. He chooses Nica who refuses his advances and is therefore flogged and thrown into prison. Clyo, deciding to save her, steals a horse and rushes to tell Icelo at the gladiatorial school. He arrives at the prison, kills the guard and escapes with his beloved while Clyo, protecting the fugitives from capture, loses her life on the cross. As they run away, Nica and Icelo pass the scaffold and, finding the body of Clyo, bury her attended by the girls. The gladiator kills the patrician when he threatens Nica. Nica and Icelo kiss the flowers that have grown over Clyo's grave, remembering that she was martyred to protect their love.

### Sculpture

Ivo Blom (Vrije Universiteit, Amsterdam) will present the newly identified British film *Pygmalion & Galatea* (1912, Ivy Close Films, dir. Elwin Neame). He will consider cinema's long-standing interest in the myth of Pygmalion and his sculpture that comes alive.

#### Synopsis:

Pygmalion is working on his sculpture of Galatea, a perfect female beauty. He scorns the attentions of various real women who distract him from his work with their frivolity. Eventually, he falls in love with his sculpture. The next scene shows a number of women relaxing in gardens along a riverbank. Pygmalion also comes outside and decides to ask Venus to help him bring Galatea to life. At her all-female court, the goddess grants him his request and ignites a flame symbolizing the initiation of life. Returning to his studio, Pygmalion is initially disappointed to find his statue still of stone, but soon the statue comes to life. One of the women witnesses the metamorphosis and calls in the others, who are amazed. All present praise Venus, the goddess of love.





## Architecture & sculpture

Aylin Atacan (UCL) will present *L'esclave de Phidias* (1917, Gaumont, dir. Léonce Perret). She will use it to explore how the architecture of ancient Greece and of modern France is used to serve a plot about the ancient sculptor and his pursuit of the ideal woman.

### Synopsis:

Sculptor Phydias searches for a divine model for a statue of Venus. Callyce, his slave girl, is in love with him, but her advances are rejected until she makes an offering of love flowers to one of the deities. Phydias embraces her, but their passionate encounter is seen by the sculptor's wife, Quinta. She has Callyce beaten, but Phydias saves her from further punishment. Quinta then steals the sacred gold set aside for the proposed statue of Venus and publicly accuses her husband of the theft. He is arrested. Callyce goes in search of him, playing her lyre. From his prison cell Phydias hears her music. He is sentenced to exile. Quinta meanwhile

watches a display of dancing by slave girls. Phydias is led into exile by a mounted guard of soldiers, followed by the faithful Callyce, who succours him when he collapses. At nightfall, by the sea, he bids farewell to Greece and is embraced by Callyce. On a boat, they approach Elide, the road of oblivion.



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We are very grateful to Professor Paolo Noto and the University of Bologna Dipartimento delle Arti for hosting these two workshops in the university's DAMSLab.

