In recent years, Hollywood has released a number of big-budget films set in antiquity, yet cinema has been fascinated with the ancient world and with Roman history in particular ever since it emerged as a new technology more than one hundred years ago. Within a few months of the first public shows of moving images held in 1896, Nero was brought onto the screen trying out poisons on his slaves.

The vast majority of these films remain largely forgotten although they still survive in archives across the world, some of them in multiple prints designed for different types of audience. They range from historical and religious epics, adaptations to screen of theatre, opera and the novel, to comedies, animated cartoons, and travelogues. The persistent presence of ancient Rome in early cinema compels us to ask: why did so modern a medium have so strong an interest in antiquity right from its start? What did ancient Rome do for cinema? And what did cinema do for ancient Rome?

Bio

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