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HOLLYWOOD'S EGYPTIAN DREAMS

THE VISUAL LANGUAGE, CONCEPTS AND COSTUMES IN EGYPTIAN MONUMENTAL FILMS

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Introduction

The e-book tries to replicate the printed editions as much as possible, but also wants to go its own way, as the direct links to video sequences are available on YouTube.
The image rights for the films were exorbitant, so they will be published in a separate board volume, which in all likelihood can only be published once. In the e-book, an attempt is made to give direct links to the thumbnails of picture archives. The interested reader can look at the pictures there and decide for himself/herself whether he/she wants to purchase photos for around 53 euros per picture.

The book follows on thematically from the work of Markus Junkelmann, who examined the relationship between Hollywood and monumental film, which primarily depicted Roman culture (Junkelmann 2004). As far as I know, there is no monograph on Ancient Egypt as a representation in film. There is a thesis on Cleopatra in film (Wenzel 2003).
Monumental films are not really considered a genre, as they are very heterogeneous and only have in common that they "break the boundaries of the normal" due to the amount of equipment, superstars, mass scenes and are excessively expensive. The enormous production costs are even part of the film's typical promotion. Moreover, monumental films are particularly at risk of being misused as political propaganda, as they often work with religion and national epics. Historical films set in the past (antiquity and the Middle Ages) dominate in terms of numbers (Pasch 2014).

The book focuses on the films that include Ancient Egypt as a theme, the mummy horror films are not dealt with. The

golden years of the monumental film are actually long gone, as this film genre is considered difficult and commercially very risky (Junkelmann 2004, 91). Even the best-known productions, such as Cleopatra from 1963, brought the studios to the brink of bankruptcy. In terms of plot content, only the pioneering years between 1900 and 1930 are decisive for monumental films; since then, monumental films generally only reproduce older originals. These are brought up to date technically and updated somewhat in terms of content in order to appeal to the audience once again. What applies to the classic Roman films also applies to the sandal films with an Egyptian theme.

In the 1950s and 1960s, the Roman films were also part of the spiritual national defence of "Bible-believing America" against megalomaniac dictators and tyrants - represented in the film by Nero or Commodus - but the parallels to 20th century dictators were intentional (Junkelmann 2004, 104). In the case of the Egypt films, things are slightly different. In the story plot "10 Commandments", the Egyptians take on the role of the fascinating villain in the battle with the Hebrews, analogous to Romans versus Christians.

The particularly popular Cleopatra plot is also a battle between two world views: Orient versus Occident. In any case, the monumental film lives per se from the tension between two opposing worlds: Thus, it is the sacrificial but boring Christians against the bellicose and power-hungry Romans. But it is the Romans who carry the story and they represent everything that makes the monumental film "cool": "It is Nero and the pharaohs who throw the parties." (Junkelmann 2004, 171; Wood 1989, 185). In the Egypt plot Cleopatra, it is a real race to see who offers more: Rome or Egypt. This makes the Cleopatra adaptations particularly attractive.

The recipe for success of the monumental film was raised to a professional level by Cecil B. DeMille to a professional level, namely to sell sin and spectacle under the guise of the moral (Junkelmann 2004, 171). In the Egypt film, the immorally decadent can be imagined in the Orient, thus changing the role of Rome, which can now take on the somewhat staid, republican worldview of the West. It is the explicit ambiguity of the "idea of Rome" (Junkelmann 2004, 328): Julius Caesar, one of the most important figures of the idea of Rome can represent both sides at the same time: Caesar can represent virtue and political foresight - but his murderers Brutus and Cassius can also represent the same values. Depending on the political standpoint and the spirit of the times. This Roman ambivalence makes Rome an ideal player in the monumental film, because this genre produces and needs pronounced pole positions (Junkelmann 2004, 328). In the monumental film, the following poles offer themselves as a basis for the story:

- Rome vs Slaves (Spartacus plot): The Romans are the bad guys.
- Rome vs Christians (Quo Vadis plot): The Romans under Nero are the bad guys.
- Decadent Rome vs Moral Rome (The Fall of the Roman Empire Plot). This plot represents the ambiguity of Rome like no other.
- Rome vs Egypt (Egypt being the last surviving state of the Hellenistic East). Egypt here represents Alexander the Great's idea of a nation-bonding commonwealth-like union of cultures but decadent, depraved fascinating Orient. As with the Fall of the Roman Empire plot, the audience's sympathy vacillates between the two poles.
- Egypt vs Hebrews (10 Commandments, Faraon).

Films in which the antagonism of two rival world views is not made clear quickly run the risk of producing a flop at the box office. Land of the Pharaohs", for example, crashed because the flat historical story lacked the antagonism of two fascinating advanced civilisations.

The monumental stories and their film adaptations also reflect the roles of the states in modern times: in the late 18th century, the Americans saw themselves in revolution against England as the Republican Rome in battle with the monarchist Rome represented by Great Britain (Junkelmann 2004, 331).

In the following Victorian era, the British then saw themselves as the new Romans, until after World War I they slowly switched to the role of the "Greeks" and left the role of the Romans and their world domination to the USA. As Greeks, they were left with the consolation of having the superior culture of the West. Today, the role of the Greeks is played by the Europeans, while Rome is played by either the USA (the good Rome) or Russia. Russia sees itself as the "Third Rome" (Rome - Constantinople - Moscow) anyway. Since February 2022, Russia has been taking on the role of the evil-imperial "Rome" anyway. So it is not surprising that Putin fans donated a bronze bust to the Kremlin a few years ago, which depicts Putin as a Roman emperor with an ancient breastplate - instead of the Medusa head the Russian double-headed eagle... (D. Smith 2015). Russia as the Roman Empire 3.0 (Daily Kos 2018).

Today's world views will have no problem working off a new generation of monumental films. A new Cleopatra adaptation has already been announced starring Gal Gadot. But back to the monumental films of the past. The classic Roman films have numerous historical errors, and the flaws in costuming are numerous (Junkelmann 2004, 121). This is no different with the Egypt films.

In the case of the Romans, numerous fantasy creations can be observed that downright constitute the DNA of a "toga film". It is only in recent film adaptations such as the 2002 remake of Quo Vadis that a toga is correctly donned for the first time. The classic monumental hams of the 50s and 60s also cut the tunic much too short and too tight. Therefore, the actors then had to wear briefs to cover scandalous things (Junkelmann 2004, 119). Gladiators appear like commanders in muscle armour - which contradicts all historical tradition.

Another absurd feature of the monumental film are the leather cuffs on the wrist. There is no ancient model for them, but the nonsense persists, as they seem to express a kind of "cinematic antiquity".

Even worse than the men's garments are the female costumes, as these are even more subject to the audience's fashion expectations. The super-expensive monumental films were and are images of the current fashion. They reflect what is "in" at the moment and project this back to the distant past. Thus, women's costumes usually say more about current fashion and our present than about antiquity. Because of the décor and the female costumes, a monumental film can usually be dated quite precisely to its creation (Junkelmann 2004, 124). The audience is apparently considered by the producers to be abundantly ignorant. At least, the opinion used to be: "If a historical film were suddenly released showing women in the correct get-up for the period in question, the shock to the uninitiated would be great. Fans would be horrified at the appearance of their favourite star." (Junkelmann 2004, 124). This may be true for the majority in the past, but is it also true today?

As early as 1939, Bette Davis sacrificed the fashion expectations of the time for the correct portrayal of Queen Elizabeth I and had herself made up with a constricted

chest, highly shaved forehead and white made-up skin - to the horror of the film bosses. Critics and audiences, on the other hand, praised this historically accurate portrayal. In the ancient film, the turnaround began only a few years ago and this is especially true for the Egypt film. The oriental belly dance costume is one of them. It was invented in the West as a decadent costume of the Orient. Via Hollywood, it found its way to the Middle East, where it became the cabaret costume of oriental dance, thus once again affecting the Western imagination (Junkelmann 2004, 126). Cleopatra film adaptations played a decisive role in this. Theda Bara in the 1917 film Cleopatra seems to have triggered the decisive influence on this type of costume. The look is constructed as follows: A brassiere combined with a low-slung gazer skirt with side slits and, crucially, an exposed torso. This costume was adopted virtually one-to-one by Arab dancers from the 1920s onwards. The costume is supposed to express glamour and decadent sensuality of the Orient. Whether the historical Cleopatra ever wore such a thing is irrelevant to the visual language of the monumental film. Even more unhistorical in Egyptian films are the hairstyles and make-up of most women's costumes. Actually, only the 1966 film Faraon is a laudable exception. But first let's jump back in time to the birth of cinema:

The Genesis of the Film and the Genre

The monumental film came into being very soon after the pictures learned to walk. The French inventor Léon Guillaume Bouly had already applied for a patent for a Cinématographe apparatus in 1892 (it received French state patent no. 219'350). The invention was doomed by patent law, because in 1894 the annual fee was not paid and the invention was no longer protected. In 1895, the Lumière brothers were therefore able to apply for a patent for their "Domitor", which they later renamed the "Cinématographe". It functioned similarly to Bouly's apparatus. The first private screening took place on 22 March 1895 and the first public screening on 28 December 1895. The world had thus arrived in the age of film. Among the nine muses of art,

Κλειώ (Kleio), historiography;

Εὐτέρπη (Euterpe), poetry;

Μελπομένη (Melpomene), tragedy;

Ἐρατώ (Erato), the love poetry;

Τερψιχόρη (Tepsychore), the chorus and dance;

Οὐρανία (Urania), the astronomy;

Θάλεια (Thaleia), the comedy;

Πολύμνια (Polyhymnia), the song;

Καλλιόπη (Kalliope), the epic and rhetoric, philosophy and science)

now came the very late post-born

Κινηματογραφία "Kinematogaphia".

Sometimes cabaret and cabaret are also called the "light tenth muse". The Κινηματογραφία, still young, steals and copies from her older sisters quite uninhibitedly, as the analysis of the Egyptian monumental film will show.

The Lumière brothers had a groundbreaking success with their screenings, which they also sold to fairground operators, but the demand could not be sufficiently satisfied and so they sold the patent to the company Pathé Frères in 1905. In 1908, they brought out the first professional film camera called Pathé industriel. Initially, the Cinématographe was only intended by the Lumière brothers to complement photography and to document historical events. Georges Méliès, a French theatre owner and illusionist, recognised the narrative potential of the new medium and made his first short film, Cléopâtre, as early as 1899, featuring Ancient Egypt.

With the stop trick, the art of the new muse could suddenly realise things that were impossible for the theatre. In stop tricks, a shot is taken and then the camera is stopped. Now something could be changed in the picture (remove or add an object) and then the filming continued. This made it possible to realise magic tricks in a simple way. As early as 1895, Alfred Clark shot the historical film "The Execution of Mary Stuart" with a running time of 15 seconds. The executioner raised the axe after Mary Stuart had laid her head on the block. Then Clark stopped the camera and they exchanged for a doll, which was then decapitated as the camera continued to run. With the film editing, the impression of a real decapitation was created. Thus the trick technique was born. Méliès subsequently used this type of trick intensively. With "Journey to the Moon", he achieved an early masterpiece of trick technique and one of the first films that today are called "science fiction". In some respects, however, Méliès still remained committed to the rules of the theatre, for he largely filmed in long shot, i.e. the recording of the entire scene, just as a spectator in the theatre experiences a stage play. Because Méliès

produced a great many films, he initially made this style the common practice of how films were shot and experienced.

The stage play film was already broken through for the first time in 1902 when Arthur Melbourne-Cooper made the film "The Little Doctor", showing a close-up of a cat. The film thus became narrative, varied in perspective and image size, and from this arose its own film language.

Film language refers to the means of expression that cinematography can use to convey a content to the viewer, both visually and acoustically. It is a language of its own, which, however, is not based on a language system with grammar and vocabulary, but stimulates familiar social codes and signs. The montage, the sequence of shots tells the story to the people watching. The codes are derived from the general culture and their interplay then creates an effect. This can be perceived as intended by the director or completely differently. The analysis of these codes also makes it possible to analyse the film scientifically. The codes arise from the image level (what is shown, how and how large, exposure, set design and costumes) and the sound level (sounds, language, music) and their connection with the image level. In addition, the perspective from which a story is told and how the time levels play out are decisive.

The Great Train Robbery" from 1903, shot by Edwin S. Porter, is considered to be a decisive impulse for the narrative in film. It tells the first western in film history in 12 minutes with a robbery of a train, the escape and a showdown.

Cinematography and monumental stories were literally made for each other - the perfect pair. As early as 1912, a monumental film called Cleopatra was released, of which 87 minutes have been preserved (the entire film).

The films were still silent, but in the newly built cinemas the films could be accompanied by music. At first, however,

there was no actual film music. After live music was often played with a piano at first, the so-called photoplayer soon came along, a self-playing piano with which sound effects could also be triggered.

Typical for the silent films are the intertitles with very short explanations or important dialogues to make the action understandable when needed. Much of the action and the emotions of the main characters were communicated exclusively visually. Consequently, silent films are very physical, and the actors' gestures and facial expressions often seem pathetic and exaggerated today. Silent films were ideal for international distribution: everyone understood the plot and the intertitles could be translated into other languages at low cost.

Not only the USA, but also Italy became the leader in the production of monumental films from 1912 onwards. For a time, Italy was even in the lead with the films "The Fall of Troy", "Quo Vadis" of 1913 and "Cabiria" (1914). Now mass scenes with thousands of extras and elaborate sets were used. Quo Vadis was also exported very successfully to the USA and for a time was considered the greatest masterpiece in the world.

Crucial Cinematic Innovations

Crucial technical innovations and the trend towards high-quality monumental films were created in the USA in 1915. Unfortunately, the film "Birth of a Nation" is an unbearably racist film in terms of content, which blatantly propagated the superiority of the white race (the roles of black Africans were played by white actors with painted faces, worst blackfacing). However, the battle scenes and technical effects produced at great expense, including a colour sequence at the end of the film, gave cinematography the inspiration that was to be fully appreciated in the monumental films of the following decades. The film was also the first significant film production from Hollywood. Before that, the American East Coast had dominated the US film industry.
From the 1920s onwards, numerous monumental films were released, always setting new high points. The monumental film was a main driver of technological innovation in film.

Around 1927, the replacement of silent films by the new film standard, initially called "talkie", slowly began. The talkie process combined the film and sound track. However, the transition took about 10 years. For a while, there were also hybrid films that had only partial dialogue passages. Because many cinemas were not yet equipped for the new sound film, there was sometimes still a silent film variant to the sound film. Today, unfortunately, many silent films are lost, experts assume a loss of 80-90% of all silent films because the cellulose nitrate of the film tends to self-decompose after long storage and from the 1920s in the USA many films were also destroyed to recover the silver. Especially films before World War 1 are often lost because

they were not considered worthy of preservation. From the 1970s onwards, a rethink took place in this regard. For it was precisely these early films that laid the foundations on which cinematography was developed.

Colour and Widescreen: a Technological Leader among Movies

Even earlier than with sound film, experiments were made with colour film sequences. Colour film began at the end of the 19th century with the elaborate subsequent colouring of black and white images. In addition, there was the art of viraging, the colouring of individual scenes with a single colour, whereby this tinting had a certain dramaturgical significance at the time as a cinematic code:

- Yellow (amber) stood for daytime and sunny outdoor scenes
- Blue: outdoor scenes at night
- Sepia: interior scenes set at night
- Orange: scenes by candlelight
- Pink for the peaceful state of mind and joy
- Purple for dramatic night scenes
- Red for love and violence
- Green for magic and mystery

Today, hardly any viewers understand these colour codes of the early films, as they soon tried to use all primary colours. The first feature film that used all three colours and was a full-length feature was "Becky Sharp" in 1935, directed by Rouben Mamoulian, a man who would later go on to direct Cleopatra in the 1960s. This was immediately followed by a series of colour films such as Walt Disney's animated feature "Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs" (1937), or "Robin Hood" (1938) and the "Wizard of Oz"

(1939) and epic length "Gone with the Wind" (1939). Nevertheless, films were still often made in black and white until well into the 1960s.

Because of their already high cost, the monumental films were soon converted to colour film and also to Cinemascope widescreen. The conversion of 35mm films to this process was not very expensive and therefore caught on quickly. The monumental film "The Robe" from 1953 was the first feature-length Cinemascope film.

Film producer Michael Todd introduced Todd-AO (AO for American Optical) in 1955, a process for 70mm widescreen films with better film quality. Because Todd had been married to Elizabeth Taylor, this led to Cleopatra of 1963 being shot in Todd-AO.

Technically, the monumental films led the way in every aspect. In terms of story and the image of society conveyed, they deliberately aligned themselves with the mainstream of the time, because only a monumental film that was accepted by the general public had (and still has) a chance of commercial success. Therefore, monumental films serve extreme stereotypes, some of which border on the embarrassing. The Roman is portrayed as "ultra-masculine" and sexy in his violence. The heterosexuality shown is sometimes so exaggerated that, according to some critics, it unintentionally turns into the opposite (Junkelmann 2004, 134). Pagan antiquity is anyway painted as a licentious, pagan den of decadence, perversion and sadism. Ancient Rome is a stomping ground for: "sadistic emperors, lascivious and equally sadistic empresses, macho brutal soldiers, cynical courtiers, man-hungry salon ladies, muscular, brainless gladiators, half-naked slaves... and a sensationalist mob. In between, as a contrast, there are upright republicans, dutiful soldiers struggling with their consciences, rebellious slaves and peaceable Christians". (Junkelmann 2004, 137). Until before the Second World

War, the lascivious bathing scenes of Roman empresses also appeared in classical Roman films. Afterwards, they are only set in the decadent Orient and thus become typical of the Egyptian setting in Cleopatra.

The Egyptian monumental films lack other elements typical of the monumental film, such as gladiator fights and chariot races. This gives the Egypt film the chance to shine with plot and clever dialogue, which the 1963 film Cleopatra managed to do for long stretches, even though the film was severely cut for cost reasons.

The Decline of the Classic Monumental Film

Monumental films are hopelessly American in their pursuit of "better and bigger" (Junkelmann 2004, 105). Only the USA was truly capable of bringing the grandeur of Rome and the splendour of Egypt to the big screen. In the mid-1960s, the science fiction film was supposed to replace the monumental film as the most expensive film genre - but basically Star Wars and Co. are the same material, simply projected into a distant galaxy, with an evil empire, a diabolical emperor, Stormtroopers instead of legionnaires... (Junkelmann 2004, 114). Mainstream suitability also set the limits to story plots at some point, where nothing new could come along. The major studios also rivalled among themselves for the favour of the audience and many epics were produced at the same time (for example, in the mid-1950s, monumental films "The Ten Commandments" versus "The Egyptian" were shot in parallel at times).

Another reason for the decline is also seen in the secularisation of the themes. While in the beginning it was the plot with Christians/Hebrews against Rome/Egypt, which in 1959 just included Ben Hur, from 1960 onwards secularisation was initiated with Spartacus. Instead of - simplified and stereotyped USA/Christians versus USSR/Rome - it was now the republican idea fighting against the imperial idea of Rome. This ideological civil war was ultimately unsettling for the viewer (Junkelmann 2004, 108). The monumental films of a classical nature thus benefited from an ideologically charged confrontation of the systems and dwindled with the weakening of the same.

The Third Phase of the Monumental Movies

After the silent film phase and the Golden Age of the 50s and 60s, we are now in the third phase: In the 1990s, the Epics experienced a revival, albeit with new stories: "The English Patient" (1996) won 9 Oscars, "Titanic" from 1997 even managed to win 11 Oscars.
This was followed in the new millennium by "Gladiator" (2000) and "The Lord of the Rings (2001-2003) in three parts, "Troy" (2004) and "Alexander" (2004). The film "Alexander" was very badly received by film critics, but is praised by historians for its many historically accurate details. The only monumental film with an Egyptian setting worth mentioning was "Exodus: Gods and Kings" (2014). The film, however, is in many respects unsuccessful and weak. In Egypt, the film was even banned (Awford 2014).

How to do it badly
The famous quote by Charlton Heston still holds true:
"An epic is the easiest kind of picture to make badly."
(Pasch 2014). See also: Link

Monumental films are a challenge for the producers. They require intensive research and usually the complete reconstruction of most of the architectural elements, since the ancient ruins usually cannot be used (and are not allowed to be used for reasons of monument preservation). Knowledge gaps in the equipment on the part of the research must somehow be filled by the equipment in the film. For example, Egyptological knowledge of palace complexes in Ancient Egypt is rather rudimentary. The palace of Malqata in Thebes-West from the time of Amenhotep III is probably the best. In addition, the actors

must be outstanding in their performance, otherwise the monumental film quickly falls flat.

Even if a film is historically accurate and the set does not incur the displeasure of historians, it can still fail the audience because of weak dramaturgy and insufficient creativity. The director thus has to find the right balance between effective dramaturgy and historical accuracy (Pasch 2014).

Bible films are particularly at risk because the audience already knows the plot (lack of suspense) and is quickly offended by simplifications or errors (blasphemy). Often the problem already lies with the script, which contains numerous historical problems. Lew Wallace's historical novel "Ben Hur - A Tale of Christ" from 1880 is a typical example. Interestingly, the first film version of Ben Hur (1907), with a running time of 15 minutes, set a precedent of a lost copyright case. This also meant that copyrights applied in the new medium of film and the profession of screenwriter subsequently came into being.

The Fig Leaf Called Advisor

Monumental films were often sold not only as the "most expensive film" and "grand spectacle", but also as an "epoch-making effort in historical research" (Junkelmann 2004, 49). Some of the advertising for the films claims that tens of thousands of books, thousands of photos, paintings and more were consulted. Strangely, however, the films then present masses of equipment errors. Often the film team lacks historical background knowledge and awareness of the chronological development of the objects. This can then lead to faithful replicas of armour and helmets, which are, however, chronologically totally wrong. In the film "Spartacus" (1961), for example, you can see a Roman with the Italic H helmet (Niedermörmter) in the opening scene. The helmet is well made, but unfortunately this type was only introduced in the 2nd half of the 2nd century AD - The uprising of Spartacus, however, took place in 73-71 BC. Correctly, a republican Montefortino helmet made of bronze should be worn.

Therefore, one has to suspect the research battle is a token exercise for the audience to swallow the unhistorical details. Often a production bible is created, which then goes to the costume and set departments as a template. There is a danger here that chronologically incorrect pictures and, at worst, historical paintings of later eras convey the wrong picture. Even when historical advisors are consulted, their advice is often ignored. A look at the golden years of the monumental film shows how problematic the relationship between historians with a claim to historical fidelity and the director's desire for crowd-pleasing scenes can be. Noël Howard, who advised Howard Hawks on the Egyptian epic "Land of the

Pharaohs" (1955), has documented the following episode: The production planned to produce 30 chariots and buy horses in Egypt for the film. Because the film was to be set in the Old Kingdom, Noël Howard intervened:

The advisor told the director that he was sorry but there had been no horses when the Pharaohs built the pyramids. Howard Hawks' reaction is said to have been a mixture of disbelief and deep sadness, like a child whose toys have been taken away. Almost meekly, he is said to have begged for camels. Since there were no camels then either, despair set in. Finally, Hawks proposed a deal to leave out the horses but leave him the camels...

(Junkelmann 2004, 52). Finally, the historian persuaded the filmmaker to use a grandiose throne instead, supported by 20 bearers. Howard Hawks then wanted 100 bearers. In the finished film there are four thrones, based on material from the New Kingdom, and in the parade a collection of camel riders passes by...

You can watch the scene on YouTube:

Land Of The Pharaohs (1955) - Khufu Returns From War – YouTube

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=J_f96C9Sjj0

The absolute highlight is that Cheops sits on a throne, which in turn is placed on the ritual bed from the tomb treasure of Tutankhamun.

In the palace, the ladies of the court await him, and of course earrings are worn - unfortunately, the Egyptians only adopted the custom of wearing earrings in the transition from the late Second Intermediate Period to the New Kingdom. No earrings are attested in the Old Kingdom. Overall, the dresses of the Egyptians are far too colourful anyway.

Film producers have shown various strategies in dealing with scientific advice in the past.

In the case of Ben-Hur, the equipment material was produced and only then was the opinion of experts sought (Junkelmann 2004, 52-53). Then the consultant is only a fig leaf for the film, but gets paid well for it. On the other hand, one or more consultants can also be an integral part of the production, accompanying it from planning to completion, being on location. You can make it authentic, believable and still have audience appeal. At least in many cases, if you plan properly from the beginning.

It goes without saying that the historian must also make concessions in the direction of the filmmakers. Especially in dramaturgy, historical reality must be simplified or dramatically sharpened to make a good film. According to ancient sources, Emperor Commodus is strangled in the bath by the athlete Narcissus as part of a court conspiracy. But it is dramaturgically better when in the film "The Fall of the Roman Empire" the fictional hero Gaius Metellus Livius impales the mad emperor in a dramatic duel with a pilum. Which brings us to the so-called recipe for a monumental film. The following mixture has long been considered particularly promising:

- 80% pagan Rome.
- 20% Christianity.
- A powerful villain, ideally Nero or Commodus or a fictional villain like Messala.
- In an ideal plot, there is a final duel between the hero and the villain.

Basically, historical authenticity and real history often get in the way of a good script. In the case of monumental films centred on Egypt, the diabolical Roman villain is largely absent. "Caesar and Cleopatra Plot" by G. B. Shaw is more silly comedy than drama and in Cleopatra Plot it is basically a relationship drama that ends in the death of the

protagonists. Octavian also makes only a moderately good villain.

The Studio Bosses and Directors

Decisively responsible for the films, their realisation and any mistakes are ultimately the bosses and directors. One of the motives behind the monumental films of the 1950s was to lure audiences back into the cinema halls despite the emergence of television as the primary mass entertainment. A number of directors tried their hand at monumental films, but often only once. Clearly standing out in the list is **Cecil B. DeMille** (1881-1959) stands out, who filmed five true epics from antiquity, though most were made in the silent era: "The Ten Commandments" (1923), "The King of Kings" about the life of Jesus was made in 1927, followed by "The Sign of the Cross" (1932). After that DeMille changed to the talkies and shot the film "Cleopatra" in 1934 which was regarded as authoritative for a long time. At the end of his career, he remade his own film "The Ten Commandments" in 1956 as a sound film and in colour.

Mervyn LeRoy (1900-1987) made the film "Quo Vadis" in 1951 in the middle of his career. Originally, John Huston was intended to direct the monumental film. Various super-stars of later times made their first appearance here: Sophia Loren as a jubilant Roman woman in the audience of the triumphal procession, Bud Spencer as one of the praetorians. It is disputed whether Elizabeth Taylor is one of the Christians in the arena.

Michael Curtiz (1886-1962, emigrated from Hungary, then still using the name Mihály Kertész Kaminer) made a name for himself in the 1930s as a director for well-known swashbucklers such as "Captain Blood" (1935) and "The Adventures of Robin Hood" (1938). Later he created the

classic called "Casablanca" (1942). His only monumental film, "The Egyptian" from 1954, was only moderately successful.

Howard Hawks (1896-1977) made only one monumental film, "Land of the Pharaohs" (1955), set in the Old Kingdom, which crashed at the box office.

William Wyler (1902-1981) came from Alsace, which at that time belonged to Germany, and also had Swiss citizenship because of his father. In the silent film era, he took over the post of assistant director from Fred Niblo when he filmed "Ben Hur" (The 1925 version). With his own film version of "Ben Hur" in 1959, he took the monumental film to its peak. He is said to have an extraordinary feeling for dramaturgy and the right cast. He was a perfectionist who could drive actors to despair with up to 50 takes for a scene.

Anthony Mann (born Emil Anton Bundesmann in 1906-1967) shot many westerns during his career. In Quo Vadis (1951) he was the second director to film the conflagration of Rome. In 1961 he started with Spartacus, but was replaced by Kirk-Douglas, who acted as producer as well as actor, by Stanley Kubrick. Anthony Mann then had a great success with the medieval epic El Cid (1961). Later he made the last real monumental film of the old school, "The Fall of the Roman Empire", which is praised by critics today but reviled by the public at the time.

Joseph L. Mankiewicz (1909-1993) began his career in the silent era and was given a long-term contract at MGM in the 1930s before moving to Paramount in the 1940s. In 1951, by now independent, he filmed "Julius Caesar" and made "Suddenly Last Summer" with Elizabeth Taylor in