

## Phryne in Modern Art, Cinema and Cartoon by Eleonora Cavallini

The biographical data antiquity has bequeathed to us about Phryne, the 4th century b.C. Greek courtesan, is so romanced (and romanticized) as to make things very difficult for modern scholars who try to separate reality from fiction with a degree of accuracy. However, I think raising doubts about the historical authenticity of this fascinating yet disquieting female figure would be excessive. Similarly, the scepticism some scholars recently expressed about traditional data, such as Phryne's famous trial, seems to be too radical.<sup>(1)</sup> A careful evaluation of the sources is of course mandatory, especially if one considers that these (except for the comic poets Timocles, Amphis and Poseidippus, whom we will discuss later) <sup>(2)</sup> mostly date from the 1st to the 4th century A.D. -therefore, not only were they written at a much later date than the events they narrate, but they also presumably reflect a penchant for anecdotal and sensational stories that was common among erudite authors of the Hellenistic-Roman period.

In fact, when examining ancient documents about Phryne, one gets the impression that the first forger of her 'myth' was not a biographer nor a poet, but the woman herself, with her skilful use of provocative statements that were bound to cause a sensation, especially among conformists, as well as a series of carefully contrived, spectacular public appearances. Moreover, the sources emphasize Phryne's tendency to 'celebrate' her own beauty by having expensive images of herself placed<sup>(3)</sup> in 'strategic' places, such as Eros' temple in Thespieae, her hometown, or even the Delphic sanctuary, where a golden statue of Phryne made a fine show next to the simulacra of kings and queens.<sup>(4)</sup>

However, it is not unlikely that such brazen exhibitionism has helped create a generally hostile atmosphere around Phryne, nor can the animosity of conformist Athenians be ruled out as one of the causes that might have led the hetaera to risk capital punishment in a trial full of uncertainties and unexpected turns of events, paradoxically ending with the definitive consecration of this extraordinary woman and of her disturbing appeal. <sup>(5)</sup>

The most significant evidence of the lasting influence of Phryne's 'myth' can be found in visual art. It is worth noting how the renewed attention towards this female figure, almost ignored during the Renaissance (which seems to have a preference for 'heroines' such as Lucretia, or even Cleopatra)<sup>(6)</sup>, increased especially towards the end of the 18th century, and coincided with a wider, more general interest for classics. It is interesting to observe how modern re-readings of Phryne's figure are independent of Praxiteles' Knidian Aphrodite, which was still to be seen in pseudo-Lucian's *Erotes* (IV century b.C.),<sup>(7)</sup> and which is known to us only from literary sources, as well as from several Roman copies. The Aphrodite of Knidos, in fact, survived as a completely autonomous work, as the prestigious incunabula of a typical iconography, strictly linked to the figure of Aphrodite/Venus. Conversely, in portraying the woman who, according to the tradition of antiquity, had been chosen as the model for the famous statue, modern artists have resorted to entirely different modes of representation.

The earliest examples of a modern painted rendition of Phryne as a character are probably two paintings by Angelica Kauffmann (1740-1807), *Praxiteles Showing Phryne the Statue of Cupid* (oil on canvas, 1794, Museum of the Rhode Island Art of Design), as well as *Phryne Trying to Seduce the Philosopher Xenocrates* (oil on canvas, 1794, private collection). The first painting is a typical example of the sentimental, somewhat affected classicism of the Swiss painter, who portrays Praxiteles as a young, fervent lover gazing languidly at Phryne, who is (incredibly) a chastely dressed maiden with a demure look. The second painting, *Phryne Trying to Seduce the Philosopher Xenocrates*, is more coherent with the tradition. It is inspired by an ancient anecdote, which narrates how Xenocrates (396-314 b.C.), a disciple of Plato known for his restraint and contempt of material goods, had been the target of a seduction attempt by Phryne who, failing to achieve her goal, commented: «That's not a man, that's a statue!». <sup>(8)</sup> In Kauffmann's representation, this time Phryne is sumptuously dressed up according to the neoclassical fashion, sly and provocative, both in her look and in her attitude, next to Xenocrates, whose adamantine impassibility could be doubted.

The wonderful composition by J. M. W. Turner, *Phryne Going to the Public Baths as Venus. Demosthenes Taunted by Aeschines* (oil on canvas, 1838. London, Tate Gallery [fig. 6]) can be placed on a totally different level. Turner's work doubtless presupposes a degree of knowledge of antique sources (above all Athenaeus),

although the data provided by these sources are considerably altered. According to Athenaeus (XIII 590f), «it was not easy to see Phryne naked. She used to wear a tunic fit close around her body and did *not* (9) attend the public baths»: in short, the contrary of what we are shown in the painting, where Phryne actually wears a tight, but scanty, tunic. The specific mention of Venus («as Venus»), moreover, seems to have been suggested by a subsequent reference Athenaeus (XIII 591a) made to Phryne as a source of inspiration for Apelles, for his Aphrodite Anadyomene.(10) One would say that the subject of the work is taken from a schemy, inaccurate summary of Athenaeus's passage, which Turner most likely did not refer to personally.(11) Moreover, the scene also includes Demosthenes and Aeschines. Although Phryne was their contemporary, she apparently had no relationship with neither of them (unlike Hyperides, whose love relationship with the hetaera was renowned), and the architectural scenery is purely imaginary. As often happens in Turner, the classical reference appears fairly instrumental, while the protagonist role is played by nature and landscape, in particular the magnificent tree that dominates the whole composition, and the sky, characteristically flooded by sunlight.

Hardly hinted at in Kauffmann's small paintings, ignored by Turner's austere muse, the erotic overtones of Phryne's figure explode in a triumphant parade in the work of the French academic painters of the Second Empire. The outer magnificence (generally supported by exceptional technical skills), the frequent introduction of an appealing yet clichéd exoticism, the complacent, subtly morbid use of the nude, these are the elements that contributed to the extraordinary success of the *pompier* painters.(12) It is therefore no wonder that a character like Phryne, famous for her imaginative grandeur and her adventures, worthy of a novel heroine, was bound to attract their attention.

After *Phryne* (1850) by Gustave Boulanger, an academic painter widely appreciated in the Parisian *Salons*, (13) one of the most renowned and celebrated representatives of *l'art pompier*, Jean-Léon Gérôme (1824-1904), conquered the French public with his painting *Phryne before the Areopagus* (oil on canvas, 1861. Hamburg, Kunsthalle [fig. 1]). Compared to Boulanger's arbitrary interpretation, (14) Gérôme's work adheres more strictly to the antique evidence, especially Athenaeus' (XIII 590de), even though the Heliaea court, mentioned by the sources, is transformed into the more famous Areopagus (which was actually only responsible for judging blood crimes). The scene shows us the orator Hyperides just as he performs the crucial act of unveiling Phryne's charms before the eyes of the judges, who are partly astonished, partly bemused, while the woman covers her face in a rather dubious, if not paradoxical, gesture of restraint, for her body is entirely bare, an inconceivably indecent pose even for antique sources, according to which Hyperides restricted himself to baring Phryne's breasts (see *supra*). Despite this touch of spicy enticement, the painting nonetheless remains fatuous and rhetorical, and betrays the predominant aims of French painting at the time – captivating the eye of the spectator with an impeccable mastery of technical means, but without any study of the underlying historical problems and their psychological or ethical implications. Several years after, Émile Zola, still annoyed by the prevalence of works by Gérôme at the Parisian Exposition (as opposed to the significant, or total, lack of visibility of artists such as Courbet), ironically commented: «Tout le monde se souvient de sa Phryné devant l'Aréopage, une petite figure nue en caramel, que des vieillards dévorent des yeux; le caramel sauvait les apparences» (*Lettres de Paris: L'École française de peinture à l'Exposition de 1878*).(15)

Gérôme's painting nonetheless caused quite a stir, and became a 'classic' of sorts, soon destined to attract many followers.(16) However, after Gérôme's successful portrait, Phryne's figure seemed to become a mere pretext for impressive, as well as purely aesthetic, virtuoso style exercises. This cliché even affects a sumptuous composition by Polish-born painter Henryk Siemiradzki, (1843-1902), *Phryne at the Festival of Poseidon at Eleusis* (1889, oil on canvas. Saint Petersburg, State Russian Museum). The source is, once more, Athenaeus, precisely 590f -591a (already mentioned *supra*): «At Poseidon's festival in Eleusis, under the look of all the Greeks, Phryne bathed in the sea after removing her cloak and letting her hair down – and Apelles took her as a model when he painted his Aphrodite 'raising from the sea'». This time the painter not only accurately stuck to Athenaeus' narration (who had been available for some years in the practical edition by G. Kaibel, Lipsiae 1887-1890), but the archaeological-antiquary reconstruction is more accurate than usual (although it shows an inevitable degree of approximation, such as the generalized use of the cheiton as an item of male clothing), maybe also due to the progress archaeological research was making at the time.

It was, however, with the advent of cinema that Phryne was finally set free from the stereotyped academicism where the visual art of the 19th century seemingly relegated her. In 1952, Italian cinemas showed Alessandro Blasetti's film *Altri tempi* [Times Gone By], whose eighth, and last, episode bears the title *Il processo di Frine* [Phryne's Trial]. The episode is taken from the eponymous short story by Edoardo Scarfoglio (1884).<sup>(17)</sup> The story focuses on the legal vicissitudes of a peasant buxom young woman from Abruzzo, guilty of poisoning her husband and her mother-in-law, which led to the death of the latter. Scarfoglio's short story, informed as it is by a cynical, condescending verism, portrays the beautiful Mariantonia as the caricature of a woman brutalized and degraded by the consequences of poverty and ignorance, instinctive like an animal, almost completely devoid of intelligence. Although incapable of denying her crime, Mariantonia nonetheless shows a gleam of cunning when she chooses to entrust her defence to solicitor Pietro Saraceni, a self-centred intellectual who aims at winning the case not so much because he feels for her wretched client, but rather for a strange, narcissistic whim. Despite the accused's confession and the overwhelming evidence (such as the victim's guts, displayed in court with lugubrious, Lombrosian complacency), Saraceni manages to show that Mariantonia fell victim not so much to her lust, but rather to poverty and hunger, which forced her to provide sexual favours in exchange for food, or better, for more tasty dishes than the ones usually served on the table of her peasant husband. Saraceni closes his peroration with a reference - actually nothing more than an artifice - to Phryne's story and to Greek morals, which, in the simplistic yet effective harangue of the pettifogger, was founded on aesthetics: «Ora questa donna, o signori, voi lo vedete, è bellissima: un tribunale greco la rimanderebbe senz'altro libera». <sup>(18)</sup>[Now gentlemen, as you can see, this woman is extremely beautiful. A Greek court would certainly set her free]. The solicitor's argument, albeit captious, turns out to be effective, for the murderer is sentenced to a very light punishment due to «partial insanity». <sup>(19)</sup>

Blasetti's film fragment, shot at least seventy years after the short story, avoids the most sinister aspects of Scarfoglio's text, turning the dark story into an irresistible, *strapaesana* farce, admirably led by Vittorio de Sica in the role of the defending counsel. Mariantonia herself, who, in the short story is still a very attractive woman, although she is about to sink into a slothful fatness, is turned by the film into a sunny creature, oscillating between a disarming ingenuity and a subtle, insinuating slyness. The character is played by a gorgeous Gina Lollobrigida, as overwhelming as she is restrained, both sensual and innocent at the same time. Mariantonia/Lollo answers the judge's complaints on her excessive availability with an almost blasphemous impudence: «We are all good Christians. How can you say no?».

On his part, the counsel/De Sica, pushing far beyond Saraceni's captious loopholes, does not hesitate to resort again to the trick made famous by Hyperides, wrapping the defendant in a large cloak, which he removes abruptly, with a sudden, peremptory gesture inspired not by the antique sources, but to the by then 'classical' Gérôme painting, <sup>(20)</sup> extolling the dazzling charms of the marvellous poisoner. Nor does Blasetti's counsel content himself with requesting a reduction of punishment for Mariantonia due to 'partial insanity': on the contrary, in sharp contrast with the expression 'minorato psichico' (mentally disabled), which is still contemplated in articles 88 and 89 of the Italian penal code (and is often used as an expedient to obtain an easy acquittal), he creates the expression 'maggiorata fisica' (physically endowed), which was going to mark a whole epoch and produce a wide echo throughout the Fifties and Sixties.

In those years, Italy saw the spread of the *péplum* genre,<sup>(21)</sup> and there are reasons to believe that it was the success of Blasetti's film, with its modern adaptation of Phryne's famous mishap, that led the studios of Cinecittà to take a serious interest in the figure of the Greek hetaera, so that the following year a *péplum* was produced, entitled *Frine cortigiana d'Oriente* (fig. 2)(not a very appropriate title, since the protagonist came from central Greece). <sup>(22)</sup> The director, Mario Bonnard, had earned himself a remarkable fame, ever since the age of silent movies, focusing on the easy emotional effect of languid sentimental plots (*Anima perversa*, 1913; *Colei che tutto soffre*, 1914; *L'amor tuo li redime*, 1915). Later, in the late post-war period, he turned to history, creating a series of films of some interest (*Margherita da Cortona*, 1949). <sup>(23)</sup>As early as the Fifties, however, the late Bonnard had taken under his protection a young filmmaker, son of director Roberto Roberti (pseudonym of Vincenzo Leone) and actress Bice Valerian. <sup>(24)</sup> It was, of course, Sergio Leone, who, in the film credits for *Frine cortigiana d'Oriente*, appears as assistant director, but also as co-writer (next to Bruno Baratti, Mario Bonnard, Cesare Ludovici, Nicola Manzari and Ivo Perilli).<sup>(25)</sup>

Despite the unlucky title, the film is one of the most interesting of its genre. The use of black and white is an intelligent device, for it allows not only to avoid the gaudy chromatic effect typical of the *péplum* genre, which is, in general, not very pleasing to the modern eye (since the age of Winckelmann, we are accustomed to imagine Greece as made of white marble),(26) but also to mix, in an ultimately harmonious whole, the forms and colours of the different pieces of furniture, which are not always convincing if taken individually.(27) The interiors of private houses are beautifully rendered (although they look too sumptuous to be Greek houses, even if they belong to rich people), and the costumes are pleasing, stylised and, in general, not ridiculous, apart from an exaggerated use of long coats and oriental-looking headgears.(28) As far as history is concerned, it would be too much to expect an in-depth analysis of the sources (which even scholars find hard to interpret). Nonetheless, the plot is far from arbitrary and, although taking shortcuts and making adjustments, it reconstructs Phryne's ups and downs with a degree of coherence, while not losing sight of literary evidence.

Phryne is indeed presented as a young woman of noble birth, on the run from Boeotia (29) to Athens following complex political events. Despite the introduction of romanced details - such as the plot against the girl's parents -, such a premise might not be far from truth, (30) if we leave out the fact that, in the film, the beginning of Phryne's career coincides, not very plausibly, with the destruction of the city of Thebes by Alexander the Great (335 b.C.). This dating is no doubt pushed too forward, and is hardly compatible with the chronology of Praxiteles who, in the film, plays a predictably prominent role.(31) In Athens the young woman, helped by a clever, but untrustworthy pimp, becomes an avid, haughty and, soon, also incredibly rich courtesan (the merchant reduced to rags is excellently characterised, and recalls fr. 25 K.-A. by the comic author Timocles). (32) However, she generously uses her riches to help the refugees from Thebes and even offers (in accordance with the tradition) to rebuild the town at her own cost, provided that her name is carved into the gate of the town itself. The *basileus* archon refuses the offer and the courtesan, ill-advised by the wicked pimp, tries to impress the people by posing, sacrilegiously, as priestess of Aphrodite at the festival in Eleusis. (33) Hence the famous trial (this time correctly held before the Heliaea, and not the Aeropagus!), and all related events, until we reach the inevitable *happy end*.

The film no doubt contains mistakes and ingenuities. (34) For instance, the use of ancient writing is approximate, to say the least, like in almost all other films of the *péplum* genre. (35) Moreover, the character of Lamachus is everything but convincing (actually, he may be the true weak point of the film). He is the stereotyped villain, and plays, hardly credibly, the twofold role of the traitor of Phryne's parents and of the woman's pimp. Besides (despite his Spartan name!), he is characterized as an underhand schemer with Phoenician-Punic traits,(36) in accordance with a stereotype that goes back to the times of the colossal movie *Cabiria* (1914), and which reflects the diffidence, widespread in Italian 'popular' culture, towards some civilizations of Oriental origin, in particular of Carthage, the traditional enemy of Rome.(37)

However, despite these flaws (which were, anyway, a commonplace in the cinema of that time), the solid screenplay and the excellent narrative rhythm seem to suggest that Leone's presence was stronger than the credits could lead us to believe.(38) What is particularly beautiful is the sequence where Phryne runs away in the woods, especially the shot where she bends upon a stream to drink. The close-ups of the extras are intense and evocative (as will later be the case in all Leone films). The dance scenes are beautifully crafted (albeit a bit stereotyped), and vaguely reminiscent of symbolism and the Parnassian school. A particularly effective scene, although it is not confirmed by any antique anecdote, is when Phryne purchases, for few drachmas, her own 'battle name' from an ordinary prostitute of the city square,(39) who also wishes her good luck in a disinterested and touching way.(40) Finally, what is unusual with respect to the *péplum* genre is the presence of black slaves and courtesans, which betrays the film authors' intention to present the city of Athens in the IV century as a 'multiethnic' society, which in fact anticipates a situation that is more appropriate for the Hellenistic-Roman world.

The most bitter disappointment is precisely the 'climax scene' of Phryne's undressing before the judges. In order to escape the fetters of censorship, the directors could not think of anything better than to show the beautiful Elena Kleus' back and keep her in the background, thus avoiding to emphasize both the emotional reaction of the woman and that of the onlookers. Finally, we reach the end, which is really too edifying - Phryne putting her clothes back on with dignity and decorum, obtaining from the archon the permission to rebuild Thebes on behalf of the whole city, and finally starting a new life with Hyperides. However, it is

worth noting how, in this case, too, the iconographic model for the (however restrained) scene is the painting by Gérôme, instead of the story narrated by the antique sources, whose knowledge at that time must have been rather limited, also because of the lack of an Italian translation of Athenaeus. (41)

With the two Fifties movies, Phryne entered the universe of modern communication by full right. In 1976, Claude Chabrol, in his film *Trappola per un lupo* [Docteur Popaul, High Heels], introduced a Boccaccio-style scene where a statuesque Laura Antonelli, caught in an embarrassing situation to say the least, covers her face with her hands, while leaving her plump, provocative forms perfectly visible. Once again, this scene reveals the all-pervasive influence of the leading figure of the Eighteenth-century *art pompier*. In even more recent times, the popularity of Gérôme's painting found yet another confirmation in what is perhaps the most saucy and irreverent among the visual re-readings of the character of Phryne – an illustration taken from the book *The model* (2002) by Milo Manara, where the hetaera is evoked as Praxiteles' model, even though the character portrayed next to her is Hyperides – or, to be more precise, Gérôme's Hyperides, scathingly parodied by the artist. From the Italian 'pin-up art' (42) creator, this is yet another example of his kaleidoscopic citationism. From the point of view of contemporary mass culture, it is a confirmation of the everlasting success of the most ancient model whose name has been handed down to our times.

## ABSTRACT

Phryne, probably the most renowned Greek courtesan (especially because of the famous trial where she was defended by Hyperides, the orator), was a source of artistic inspiration not only for the Greek sculptor Praxiteles, but also for modern painters, such as Angelica Kauffmann, J. M.W. Turner and the French *pompier*s. In the XX century, Phryne was also 'discovered' by filmmakers. After the successful *Altri tempi* by A. Blasetti (1952), where a gorgeous Gina Lollobrigida starred as a modern Phryne, Mario Bonnard directed a *péplum* entitled "Frine, cortigiana d'Oriente" (1953), starring Elena Kleus. In spite of its absurd title, probably chosen by the production for commercial reasons, the movie is not totally lacking in historical interest: Phryne is represented as a war refugee, and as a fierce opponent of Alexander the Great, who had destroyed Thebes, capital city of the region where Phryne was born. In fact, a major role in the screenplay and direction can apparently be attributed to young Sergio Leone.

## Footnotes

1) For a critical re-reading of the sources relating to Phryne's figure, see the recent studies by C. Cooper, *Hyperides and the Trial of Phryne*, «Phoenix» 49 (1995) 303-318; P. A. Rosenmeyer, *(In-)versions of Pygmalion*, in A. Lardinois-L. McClure (eds.), *Make Silence Speak. Women's Voices in Greek Literature and Society*, Princeton University Press, Princeton and Oxford 2001, 240-260.

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2) Note that Poseidippus (III century b.C.) already describes Phryne as «by far the most famous (*epiphanestate*) of the hetaerae». The hetaera's widespread fame is confirmed by the great number and variety of sources (which even includes the Latin elegiac poet Propertius) that contain references to her. The rhetorician Alciphro later came back to Phryne's celebrity, and to her equally famous trial, in one of his fictitious *Letters of Courtesans* (see *infra*).

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3) At her own cost, of course, although the statue at Delphi officially bore a dedication by the inhabitants of Thespieae that read «Phryne, daughter of Epicles, Thespian» (see Athenaeus 591c; on the two statues, one of Aphrodite, the other of Phryne, sculpted by Praxiteles for the city of Thespieae, see also Pausanias IX 27,5; Alciphro, *Letters of Courtesans* IV 1). Phryne's extraordinary beauty is explicitly referred to by the two 4th century comic poets Timocles (fr. 25 K.-A.) and Amphis (fr. 23 K.-A.), both mentioned by Athenaeus, 567d-f and 591d; the subject of *Phryne tam multis facta beata viris* is also discussed by Propertius, II 6,5-6.

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4) There should be no more doubts about the existence of these statues (Plutarch, among others, mentions them in his *Dialogue on Love* 753ef, having seen them personally). Nonetheless, one can only imagine what

a scandal such monuments could raise, especially if one considers that it was uncommon to erect a statue to a hetaera, least of all in a sacred place. The statue at Delphi, in particular, was probably regarded as an extremely serious provocation, since one philosopher (Crates according to Plutarch, *Mor.* 401a, Athenaeus 591b; Diogenes the Cynic as claimed by Diogenes Laertius, *Lives of the Philosophers* IX 60) described it as a «monument to the Greeks' incontinence». If we follow the tradition, both statues were sculpted by Praxiteles, who, as alleged by several sources, had been Phryne's lover. However, it is likely that the love story between the two was invented *a posteriori* by the biographers, who were impressed by the remarkable number of works the sculptor reportedly created upon Phryne's order, or having Phryne as his model (in particular, the hetaera was supposed to have lent her features to the highly famous Aphrodite of Knidos): on this topic see C. M. Havelock, *The Aphrodite of Knidos and her Successors*, Ann Arbor 1995, 39-54; Rosenmeyer, *op. cit.* (n. 1), 244f.

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5) About Phryne's trial, see Cavallini, *Il processo contro Frine: l'accusa e la difesa*, «Labeo» 50 (2004) 231-238.

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6) A reference (actually not so significant) to Phryne is to be found in the rhetorical practice of Hortensius Landus, entitled *Paradossi cioè sentenze fuori del comun parere* [Paradoxes, or sentences outside the common opinion] (XXV: *Che la donna è di maggior eccellenza che l'uomo* [That women are more excellent than men]): «Non si vidde anche nella bella Frine un eccellente animo poi che si offerse di ridicare le gran mura di Tebe pur che si contentassero e Tebani che il nome suo fusse nelle predette mura scolpito? era questa una spesa infinita, essendo Tebe città sì grande che appena cento porte le bastavano» [Did not the beautiful Phryne also reveal an excellent soul, she who offered to rebuild the great walls of Thebes, as long as the Thebans would agree to carve her name in the aforementioned walls? That was indeed an infinite expense, the city of Thebes being so big that a hundred gates were hardly enough].

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7) Chaps. 13-15.

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8) See Diogenes Laertius, *Lives of the Philosophers* IV 7

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9) My italics.

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10) The information is, however, far from confirmed. According to Pliny the Elder (*NH* XXXV 87), the model for the Aphrodite Anadyomene was Pancaspe, Alexander the Great's favourite.

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11) At the time of painting, the only complete translation into a modern language was the French translation by J. B. Lefebvre de Villebrune (Paris 1789-1791).

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12) On the so-called '*pompier art*', or "l'art pompier", extremely appreciated by its contemporaries but later disparaged as dull and lacking in inspiration, see J. Harding, *Artistes pompiers : French academic art in the 19. century*, London 1979; P. P. Luderin, *L'art pompier : immagini, significati, presenze dell'altro Ottocento francese, 1860-1890*, Florence 1997.

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13) Yet destined to become the target of merciless criticism by Émile Zola, who reviewed the 1866 *Salon* (under the pseudonym of C. Beaurin); see C. B., «Revue du XIXe siècle» 3,1, 1866, 470s.: «Son tableau historique: *Catherine Ire chez Méhémet-Beltadji, discutant le traité du Pruth*, n'a pas précisément caractère et valeur historiques. Catherine debout, et Méhémet assis, font les gestes de deux personnages qui discutent

un marché, non un traité. Changez les costumes, et vous aurez deux propriétaires qui débattent entre eux le prix de quelques hectares de terre. Le besoin de familiarité, qui dicte trop exclusivement le style de M. Gustave Boulanger, se pervertit en vulgarité». Zola/Beaurin, among other things, criticized the *pompier* painters, especially Jean-Léon Gérôme, for their immaterial nudes, lacking a bone structure, and, in general, for their tendency to «plastic dissolution» (p. 469). Zola came back several times to this topic (see *infra*, as well as n. 35).

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14) In his representation of Phryne, Boulanger underlines, not without effectiveness, the arrogant sensuality of the character, but (intentionally?) makes a mistake, transforming Phryne, an elegant hetaera coming from central Greece, into an odalisque with heavy, almost vulgar traits, languidly lying among clichéd, oriental-inspired furniture.

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15) In *Lettres de Paris; Notes parisiennes; Le semaphore de Marseille, 1871-1877. Émile Zola ; cronache d'arte raccolte e commentate da Margherita Elia Leozappa*, Lecce 1981.

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16) As a matter of fact, the work of the French painter inspired the statue by Francesco Barzaghi (1839-1892) *Phryne* (marble, around 1863. Milan, Galleria d'Arte Moderna), which was presented with great success at the Paris Exposition in 1867: as in the painting by Gérôme, here, too, the hetaera, richly adorned with jewels, raises an arm above her head, but keeps the other hand in a more demure position. On the whole, this is nothing more than another example of academic stylization, albeit extremely pleasing for its levigated, elegant sensuality. Later, Gérôme's *Phryne* probably inspired also the key scenes of the two Italian movies *Altri tempi* [Times Gone By] and *Frine cortigiana d'Oriente*, as well as the sequence of Laura Antonelli's undressing in the film *Trappola per un lupo* [Dr. Popaul, High Heels] by C. Chabrol (1972), to which we'll come back later.

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17) A new edition of the short story has recently been published, edited by Remo Cesarani (Palermo, Sellerio 1995).

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18) See Scarfoglio, *op. cit.* (n. 37), 67.

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19) See Scarfoglio, *op. cit.* (n. 37), 69.

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20) It is not by chance that the protagonist of Blasetti's film wrongly talks about Phryne being subjected to the judgement of the Areopagus. This oversight might actually be attributed to the title of the painting by the leader of *l'art pompier*.

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21) The term *péplum* refers to the genre of historical-mythological films - especially those that appeared in Italy during the Fifties and Sixties- and is due to French criticism, which was the first to study this genre seriously. See in particular n. 131 of the «Cahiers du Cinema»(1961), which contains three articles on the topic, among them *L'age du péplum* by J. Siclier.

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22) The unlucky choice of the title was probably due to commercial considerations (the Orient has always attracted the public more than Greece – just think of the trend of movies set in ancient Egypt).

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23 )For Mario Bonnard's filmography, see G. Rondolino, *Storia del cinema*, Turin 2000, 93 and 369.  
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24) A concise but accurate biography of Leone can be referred to at this web address  
<http://www.associazionesergioleone.it/saggistica/ilgiovaneleone.htm> (complete with a bibliography).  
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25) Ivo Perilli collaborated, among other things, to the screenplay for the films *Ulisse* by M. Camerini (1954) and *La Bibbia* by J. Huston (1966). Sergio Leone's presence as a co-writer of *Frine cortigiana d'Oriente* escaped the otherwise extremely accurate editors of the Internet Movie Database (see <http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0045792>, where, however, the great filmmaker is mentioned as assistant).  
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26) Greek statues and temples were in fact very colourful. However, computer-aided reconstructions of ancient monuments mostly bother the modern eye. A paradoxical example is the recent film *Alexander* by Oliver Stone (2005), which shows, in the theatre of Aegae (IV century b.C.), a brand-new statue dressed in a gaudy red, a *kore* which actually dates two centuries earlier. In a black and white movie this mistake would be more likely to pass unobserved.  
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27) For example, Athens in the film seems to pullulate with statues of the naked Aphrodite. In fact, we know that the Aphrodite of Knidos was one of the earliest, if not the first, examples of this statue type (up to then, the goddess was rigorously dressed and adorned: see S. Settis, *Celènè. Saggio sull'Afrodite Urania di Fidia*, Pisa 1966).  
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28) However, one should not forget that, in the IV century, Athens was full of metics, freedmen and slaves of every origin. The Oriental-style costumes were, however, widely employed in historical and mythological films at Cinecittà, no matter their setting, for they were regarded as 'good for all uses'.  
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29) In the film, Phryne apparently comes from Thebes, the capital city of the region, instead of the smaller Thespieae. Her real name (Mnesarete), as well as her father's name (Epicles) lead us to suppose that she was of noble origin, or at least that she was born free and not a slave.  
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30) On the beginnings of Phryne's 'career', see Cavallini, *Le sguadrine impenitenti. Femminilità 'irregolare' in Grecia e a Roma*, Milano 1999, 57s. A very questionable choice in the film is the name Afra (instead of Mnesarete, about which see Athenaeus 591e) as Phryne's real name. The epithet sounds Latin rather than Greek, but evidence of it can nonetheless be found in a later epoch than the narrated events. The screenwriters might have had in mind Saint Aphra, a Christian martyr of the Diocletian age who, according to a dubious, unreliable tradition, was a prostitute born in Cyprus or Crete, who later converted to Christianity after meeting the bishop Narcissus of Gerona in the city of Augsburg (see M. Schad, *Afra, Bilder einer Heiligen*, Augsburg 1993).  
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31) A more reasonable hypothesis has Phryne's family seek refuge in Athens after the battle of Leuctra (371 b. C.), when Thespieae's inhabitants became the targets of suspect and retaliation on the part of the Thebans. On the chronology of Praxiteles' life see Plinius, *NH XXXIV 50*, who places the *akmé* of the sculptor in the years 364-363 b.C.  
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32) On Timocles' fragment, and on the probable connection between the comedy writer's criticism of Phryne and the serious charges he brings against Hyperides, see Cavallini, *op. cit.* (a n. 49), 57s.  
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33) This episode actually seems to have no direct connection with the trial, as can be inferred from the evidence regarding Euthias' harangue (see *supra*).

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34) For example, a 'senate' that is totally out of place.

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35) Not even the generally acclaimed *Gladiator* by R. Scott (2000) is immune from a ludicrous use of ancient writing.

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36) Of course the presence of a Greek-speaking Phoenician in Athens in the IV century b. C. is not a mistake as such. Just think of Zeno, the stoic philosopher of Citium, who was active in Athens right at the end of that century.

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37) It should, however, be remembered that in Italy, in the 20th century, historical research mostly followed the neo-humanistic approach, and therefore showed a marked tendency to contrast the Greek-Roman world with the Oriental civilizations – such an attitude prevailed until the Seventies of the century (see Cavallini, *From Mazzarino until Today: Italian Studies between East and West*, in A. Panaino- A. Piras (edd.), *Melammu Symposia IV*, Milan 2004, 87-91).

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38) Besides, it is well-known that it was Leone, not Bonnard, who directed *The Last Days of Pompeii* (1959).

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39) In fact, other courtesans called themselves Phryne, despite the derogatory meaning of this nickname ('toad'): see Cavallini, *op. cit.* (n. 30), 58.

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40) The film repeatedly insists on a *topos*, widespread in Greek literature, but also shared, in essence, by the modern collective imagination (think of Marguerite Gauthier) – the solidarity among courtesans. Reality, however, was more nuanced, as is shown, for example, by the exchanges of insolences among the hetaerae in the Alexandrine comic author Maco, or between Demetrius Poliorcetes' lovers in Plutarch's *Life of Demetrius*.

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41) Such translations, incidentally, have not been available until very recently: see Ateneo di Naucrati, *Il banchetto dei Sapienti. Libro XIII: sulle donne*, edited by E. Cavallini, Bologna 2001; AA. VV., *Ateneo: i Deipnosofisti. I dotti a banchetto*, I-IV, Rome 2001.

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42) See M. Manara, *Pin up art*, edited by V. Mollica, Turin 2002.

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