

Despite some flaws, this book deserves recognition for its argument that popular media affects historical thinking. While it may not be the best choice for an introductory ‘Ancient World on Screen’ class, it would be an excellent addition to any course that examines how the ancient world is used in modern political contexts. Given that lack of engagement with film studies scholars has been a critique of many similar books, the book represents a step in the right direction for reception studies in general. I have been an advocate for the inclusion of reception in teaching undergraduate courses because, as McG. states, that is often how students are introduced to the ancient world. It is refreshing to see an academic book acknowledge this.

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## WOMEN IN CLASSICAL VIDEO GAMES

DRAYCOTT (J.), COOK (K.) (edd.) *Women in Classical Video Games*. Pp. xii + 271, figs, ills. London and New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2022. Cased, £95, US\$130. ISBN: 978-1-350-24191-6.  
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This volume comprises fifteen chapters examining the representation of women in video games inspired by classical antiquity. It is a fitting addition to the Bloomsbury *Imagines* series, which explores the reception of ancient subject matter in contemporary visual and performative media. As Draycott and Cook note in their introduction, the video game industry is the fastest growing in the world (p. 1), providing useful material for Classical Reception scholars to examine people’s engagement with the ancient world. As a Classical Reception scholar with a particular interest in women’s history, I was excited to see a volume devoted to ancient women in video games, hoping that it would shed light on their mode of representation and subsequent societal attitudes towards women, both ancient and contemporary. This volume met and exceeded my expectations – I found it cohesive, accessible and informative, illuminating the real-world issue of the video game industry’s hostility towards women, ‘both as individuals playing or working on games, and as characters represented within those games’ (p. 1). While the individual chapters are well written and thoroughly researched, the real strength of the book lies in the thematic interlinking and consistent dialogue between chapters, which provides readers with various perspectives on the key tropes, stereotypes and modes of representation used to portray ancient women.

The introduction clearly sets out the focus of the volume, outlining its overarching premise and how individual chapters work together to create a cohesive, unfolding narrative. Draycott and Cook begin by advocating the importance of Classical Reception, noting that, for many people, popular media can be their first introduction to the ancient world (p. 1). They then focus on the role and representation of women in the video game world, drawing readers’ attention to an underlying hostility towards women. This is sustained through a relevant example: the hostility of male gamers towards the inclusion of the Amazons in *A Total War: Troy*. Draycott and Cook provide extensive examples of gamers denigrating the Amazons and dismissing them as a ‘politically incorrect’ inclusion to appeal to ‘the woke faction’, in spite of the fact that Amazons

featured in the Trojan Epic Cycle from the eighth century BCE onwards (pp. 3–4). Draycott and Cook's central premise of the volume succinctly captures the joint focus of the individual chapters: 'female characters are under-represented as secondary characters within video games', and even when they do appear, 'their portrayals are often limited to stereotypes and tropes, many of which are sexist in nature' (p. 2).

The remainder of the introduction sets out the scope of the volume, beginning with the division of the book into discrete sections. The structure is clear and logical, with Part 1, 'Commencing Classical Gaming', providing the historical and cultural context underpinning the study of classical video games, and Parts 2, 'Gods, Heroines and Monsters', and 3, 'Queens and Commoners', providing more detailed, focused case studies of the representation of mythical and historical/everyday women respectively. The big-picture focus of Part 1 makes the volume widely accessible, as it outlines key scholarly approaches in the study of video games and provides an overview of the role of ancient women in video games, meaning that the intended audience is not limited to those who are already well-versed in game studies or Classical Reception studies. The division of Part 2 and Part 3 is also effective for distinguishing between the depiction of women in games engaging directly with mythical subject matter and games with a more historical focus, providing a nuanced examination of the role of genre and the audience's expectations on the representation of both mythical and historical women. The introduction provides a summary of the scope of the individual chapters, making the volume easy to navigate, and also offers further resources on games studies and scholarship on female characters in video games.

Since a review of this size cannot adequately address every chapter individually, I will instead outline some of the dominant stereotypes and tropes explored throughout the volume and how they shape the representation of women. The volume's comprehensive treatment of the portrayal of women in video games is evident in the analyses of women as both figures to be saved (the 'damsel-in-distress' trope) and adversaries who must be killed (representing the 'monstrous feminine'). D. Lowe illustrates the pervasiveness of the damsel-in-distress figure – a woman rescued by a male protagonist – in video games from the 1980s (pp. 16–17), while M.G. Persyn and H.-M. Chidwick highlight this enduring mode of representation in more recent video games (see Persyn, p. 50 on *Ryse: Son of Rome*, 2013; and Chidwick, p. 156 on *God of War: Ascension*, 2013). Lowe provides an interesting variant on the typical damsel-in-distress trope, citing *Artemis* (1986), where the titular princess rescues herself, functioning as a 'subverted damsel' trope (p. 17). Other authors explore representations of damsels-in-distress within games that otherwise feature empowered female characters. In her analysis of *Rise of the Argonauts* (2008) S. Ngan argues that the main female protagonists are presented as heroines in their own right rather than as adjuncts to heroic men (pp. 92–8), though the game's ultimate focus on saving Jason's wife Alceme presents her as a damsel in need of saving (p. 94). Similarly, R. Tuplin notes that a scene in *Assassin's Creed: Odyssey* (2018) treats a group of *hetaerae* as damsels-in-distress (when the player stops them being attacked by a gangster), which contrasts the game's positive portrayal of the *pornae* as empowered, influential women (p. 215).

As well as exploring the representation of women as vulnerable characters in need of rescuing, the volume provides comprehensive examples of a vastly different mode of representation: women as monsters who must be defeated by players. Chapter 4 provides the most in-depth treatment of the topic, as D. Goad draws upon two theoretical frameworks – Barbara Creed's notion of the 'monstrous-feminine' and Julia Kristeva's abjection theory – to examine the role of female monsters and monstrous female characters across a range of video games. Goad notes that several games conflate female sexuality and monstrosity, presenting monstrous women as obstacles for male heroes to overcome

through violence (p. 62). Chidwick similarly argues that video games have a tendency to ‘take sexualized body parts and render them monstrous, heightening the horror of the female as emasculating agent’ (p. 157). Several chapters explore this mode of representation in games featuring mythological subject matter, such as: Callisto in *God of War: Ghost of Sparta* (2010), who attacks her son with her fangs and tusks (Goad, p. 64); the monstrous Megaera in *God of War: Ascension*, who births insects out of holes in her breasts (Chidwick, p. 156); and *SMITE*’s (2014) depiction of Medusa, Arachne and Scylla as monstrous figures who ‘showcase transgression of the female form’ (K. Beydler, p. 122). Interestingly, the ‘monstrous-feminine’ trope has also been used to portray real historical women – Goad examines Cleopatra’s appearance in *Dante’s Inferno* (2010), where she shoots babies from her nipples that attack the protagonist (p. 66).

In the case of both the damsel-in-distress and the monstrous-feminine figure, video games tend to hypersexualise the woman’s body. Lowe draws attention to Artemis’ red bikini in *Artemis* (1986) (p. 23), while J.D. Orellana Figueroa explores the predominance of ‘boob armour’ or ‘bikini armour’ in video games more broadly (pp. 38–40). Monstrous women can also be hypersexualised in video games, such as the bare-breasted sirens throughout the *God of War* series (Goad, pp. 62–3), bikini-clad Medusa in *Rise of the Argonauts* (Goad, p. 68) and the revealing clothing of the Furies in *God of War: Ascension* (Persyn, p. 43; Chidwick, p. 157). These examples reinforce Goad’s observation that exposed breasts ‘are not inherently sexual, but in the hyper-masculine world of gaming they almost always are, even when attached to a monstrous form’ (p. 63). Other chapters examine hypersexualisation in relation to depictions of the goddess Aphrodite (O. Ciaccia, pp. 128–40, and K. Jones, p. 103, on Aphrodite in *God of War III*, 2010) and historical figures (Draycott, p. 169 on Cleopatra and A. Dufton, p. 186 on Punic women). This tendency to hypersexualise women is attributed to hostile attitudes towards women in the video game industry and gaming community (see Goad, p. 71 on male gamers’ denigration of female twitch streamers) as well as to the ‘tradition of misogynistic representations of women in media’ more broadly (Ciaccia, p. 130). Alternatively, some authors provide examples of games that do not present women’s bodies in a hypersexualised manner – such as *Assassin’s Creed: Odyssey*, 2018 (R. Cole, p. 194 and Tuplin, p. 214), *Choices: A Courtesan of Rome*, 2018 (Cook, pp. 223–32) and *Hades*, 2020 (Jones, pp. 103–10) – indicating that ‘more recent games have tended towards more progressive depictions of women, although these gains have not been without struggle’ (Jones, p. 103).

Other key topics covered include: the use of racist Orientalising tropes (Draycott; Dufton); female empowerment and the opposition of patriarchal systems/norms (A.L. Norgard; Jones); pedagogical principles for teaching ancient women in games (Beydler); player experience and the role of gender in shaping gameplay (Cole); and the representation of sex workers, particularly with regards to female agency (Tuplin; Cook). Altogether, this vast array of topics allows the volume to comprehensively unpack the complex, and often sexist, representation of women in classical video games.

Overall, the volume is of high quality and provides a unique contribution to the emerging field of Classical Reception Studies (and specifically, games studies) as well as to the broad corpus of scholarly works on the role and representation of ancient women. The volume does not shy away from highlighting and critiquing sexist modes of representation within games as well as wider issues among the gaming community and video game industry at large. It is highly readable and easy to follow, with comprehensive notes at the end of each chapter to point readers towards relevant scholarly discussions. The volume functions as a cohesive whole – with authors often cross-referencing other chapters in footnotes or in the text –, and individual chapters

also work well if read on their own, containing all the relevant information and context to function as stand-alone works if readers choose to do so. I was pleased to see great diversity among the contributors, including the collaboration of academics across various stages of their career progression, with strong contributions by Ph.D. candidates and long-established academics alike. Another strength of the volume is the inclusion of relevant screenshots from the video games, as this helps readers to visualise key elements of the representation of women and the worlds that female characters inhabit, increasing the volume's accessibility and engagement for readers who may not be familiar with the games explored.

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## THE HISTORY OF CLASSICAL PHILOLOGY LIVES!

LANZA (D.), UGOLINI (G.) (edd.) *History of Classical Philology. From Bentley to the 20th Century*. Translated by: Antonella Lettieri. (Trends in Classics – Scholarship in the Making 2.) Pp. x + 366. Berlin and Boston: De Gruyter, 2022 (originally published as *Storia della filologia classica*, 2016). Cased, £109, €119.95, US\$137.99. ISBN: 978-3-11-072266-6.

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This volume, edited by Lanza and Ugolini, is an English translation of the award-winning Italian collection *Storia della filologia classica* (2016). The original collection was designed for Italian university students, and as an introductory text this volume truly shines (p. vi). The contributions strike a balance between communicating well-established narratives of the history of classical philology and presenting new research and arguments to render it more complex.

Yet this is not a mere collection of introductory texts. The volume also has a more ambitious aim because, as Ugolini writes in the preface, ‘for a long time an updated history of classical philology has been a *desideratum* of classical scholars’ (p. v). In this he is certainly right. Most of the classic texts in the field are over half a century old and rarely consider the twentieth century. This is not to suggest that individual studies have not abounded or to neglect the recent boom in works on the history of philology more generally. But an updated history of *classical* philology has been long overdue. Writing the history of classical philology *in toto* would be an expansive task, and the editors rightly note that they cannot do justice to the entirety of this field in a single volume. The focus of this work is thus on the last 250 years, selected because this is the period in which classical philology ‘defined itself as an autonomous discipline’ (p. v).

The volume contains thirteen chapters, split into three sections, which progress chronologically from the eighteenth to the twentieth centuries. An introduction by Lanza and Ugolini places these sections upon a solid foundation, which outlines the deep history of classical philology, beginning with the libraries of antiquity. The introduction also articulates many of the overarching topics and tensions that recur in subsequent chapters. These include, but are not limited to, the relationship between pedagogy and scholarship, the difference between emulation or imitation and inspiration or renovation, the proper