

other Classical scholars. This is partly due to the fact that Strauss was navigating uncharted waters (e.g. with respect to Xenophon) and also to his predilection for dialogue with greater minds (e.g. those who did take Xenophon seriously [p. 195]). But it seems also to be due to a more troubling aspect, namely an apparent lack of interest in scholarship that could contradict the more politically conservative Straussian insights. Strauss himself was constantly engaged in dialogue with opponents, whose work he meticulously studied (Heidegger, Kojève, Gadamer, Schmitt, Lukacs). Inaccuracies in the work of his followers suggest that this practice is no longer followed (e.g. with respect to Heidegger, the reference to ‘Dekonstruktion’ [p. 214] and the summation of his work which gets him exactly wrong at p. 206: ‘Being’ is anything *but* a ‘thing’ for Heidegger). What is the evidence that Plato and Xenophon settled the question concerning the causes of beings (p. 20)? How can we know that ‘society is not possible if ancestral custom is not regarded as sacred as far as practice is concerned’ (Strauss, cited at p. 374)? Strauss relies throughout on indemonstrable insights, seemingly gained through intelligence or Aristotelian *nous*. That may be fine in philosophy, but it is at least problematic in political philosophy.

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BEN-HUR: LEW WALLACE’S NOVEL AND ITS EXTENSIVE AFTERLIFE

SOLOMON (J.) *Ben-Hur. The Original Blockbuster*. Pp. xviii + 910, colour ill. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2016. Paper, £29.99, US\$44.95 (Cased, £105, US\$162). ISBN: 978-1-4744-0795-3 (978-1-4744-0794-6 hbk).

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This volume is an impeccably researched history of Lew Wallace’s novel, *Ben-Hur: a Tale of the Christ*, from its inception in the 1870s through the stage and screen adaptations of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries to early twenty-first-century versions across a range of media (though not including the 2016 film, which had not been released when the book went to press). S. convincingly argues throughout that *Ben-Hur* was a ‘phenomenon’, with the popular novel earning shrewd businessman Wallace unprecedented remuneration from book sales and theatrical royalties, and spawning a myriad of uses of the Ben-Hur name for products and services. In an era when *Game of Thrones* is often described as a ‘phenomenon’, with the success of George R.R. Martin’s *A Song of Ice and Fire* series of novels and the HBO television series supported globally by digital media, the large-scale success of *Ben-Hur* in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, when large advertising budgets and global networks did not exist, is all the more phenomenal. Although the history of *Ben-Hur* is primarily an American history, S. also includes the impact of the novel and adaptations in Europe, Canada, Australia and New Zealand. He demonstrates the important legacy of a book that has received less critical attention than other contemporary novels that have had a less wide-ranging afterlife. The material that S. has amassed on all aspects of *Ben-Hur* is in itself phenomenal, clearly the product of years of painstaking research.

One word of warning to readers who come to this volume with a primary interest in films about the Classical world, rather than receptions in advertising, music and stage productions: although part of the EUP *Screening Antiquity* series, S. does not come to the two major twentieth-century film versions of *Ben-Hur* from 1925 and 1959 until over halfway through the volume (p. 561). S. covers the non-screen aspects of *Ben-Hur* thoroughly, and this is important material not available elsewhere, which will be of interest to scholars of American history, advertising, stage production and music. As a reader who came to *Ben-Hur* through the 1959 film, I found S.'s chapters on the production and reception history of the 1925 and 1959 films to be of most interest. However, S. keeps the reader entertained throughout. For example, S. found out about a number of boats named *Ben-Hur* because they sank, and this was worthy of inclusion in local newspapers (pp. 449–55), and the Klaw and Erlanger London stage production met with a lukewarm critical reception but was enjoyed by European royalty (pp. 369–71).

The first chapter summarises the impact of *Ben-Hur* and surveys the scant previous scholarship. Chapter 2 covers the biography of Lew Wallace, including his early life and education and his military, political and legal careers. A resident of Crawfordsville, Indiana, Wallace's diplomatic career took him to Mexico, and his first novel, *The Fair God*, about the Spanish conquest of Mexico, was published in 1873. Chapter 3 pieces together evidence about the writing of *Ben-Hur*, including Wallace's own account, 'How I came to Write Ben-Hur' (1893), and Wallace's autobiography (1906). S. gives a comprehensive account of the writing of the novel, including the ancient and geographical sources Wallace used, how the novel was composed, and the inception of the main characters and episodes. Chapter 4 covers the publication of *Ben-Hur* by Harper and Brothers in 1880. S. considers early reviews of the novel in the general and the Christian press, and discusses the initial steady sales of the novel, and how sales began to grow year on year: 2,800 sold in the first six months of publication, 57,000 in 1886 (pp. 116–18), by which time unlicensed editions of the novels began to appear, and Wallace went on a US lecture tour, earning substantial fees.

Chapter 5 covers different editions of the novel, including many produced as gift books, and the Sears Roebuck edition for mail order, which sold in great numbers in the early twentieth century. By 1893 Wallace had finished his third novel, *The Prince of India*, and while he continued on the lecture circuit, *Ben-Hur* was taken up by other speakers, who organised public readings. In Chapter 6 S. discusses why *Ben-Hur* became such a successful novel, arguing that its Christian content was a key factor for nineteenth-century readers, who were also interested in reading about other cultures.

Chapter 7 focuses on dramatic representations, in staged readings, tableaux and pantomime. Wallace initially refused to permit most dramatic performances of his novel. However, a number of performers continued without requesting permission, resulting in a large number of independent performances, often in aid of charitable causes. An authorised tableaux company was formed in the late 1880s, producing tableaux with songs which toured the US, providing Wallace with additional revenue. Chapter 8 focuses on *Ben-Hur* music, including popular songs and marches. Chapter 9 covers the Klaw and Erlanger theatrical production of *Ben-Hur*, for which Wallace negotiated highly preferential terms. This production toured the US, England and Australia, and S. demonstrates the vast scale of this production, which brought the chariot race with live horses on stage, and the wide appeal to churchgoers as well as regular theatregoers. Chapter 10 covers the use of the *Ben-Hur* name to sell a range of products and services, including the *Tribes of Ben-Hur* fraternal society, cigars, flour, soap and other household products. S. also lists boats, trains, bicycles, automobiles, roller coasters and diverse businesses.

Chapter 11 moves nearer to *Ben-Hur* on screen, with the stereopticon (magic lantern) presentations, including helpful lists of slides and examples of images. The unauthorised Kalem film of 1907, and the ensuing lawsuit and retrieval of the film, are also covered. The 1925 MGM silent film version, authorised by Lew Wallace's son Henry, is discussed in Chapter 12, with a full account of the chequered production history. S. describes the main scenes in the film and discusses changes made from the story in the novel, and covers the screening strategies and distribution outside the US. Chapter 13 covers the period between the two MGM films. During this period *Ben-Hur* adaptations appeared on the radio and in comics, and products and businesses associated with the *Ben-Hur* name continued to proliferate. Chapter 14 discusses the 1959 MGM film version, with a detailed and informative analysis of the script generation process at the hands of Karl Tunberg, Gore Vidal and Christopher Fry. S. covers production, casting, music, publicity, screening, contemporary reception and merchandising. Although many Classicists have written about the 1959 *Ben-Hur*, the chapter includes much previously unpublished information. The final chapter deals with *Ben-Hur* on television, with screenings of the 1959 film, followed by video and DVD editions. Finally late twentieth- and early twenty-first-century audio, DVD and stage versions are discussed.

It is regrettable that S. could not include the 2016 *Ben-Hur*, as it seems that this entertaining but not 'phenomenal' film has probably marked the end of the *Ben-Hur* phenomenon and would have provided a fitting ending to the volume (S. mentions that the film was in production at the time of going to press on p. 858). Scoring a 5.6/10 rating from viewers on IMDb (<http://www.imdb.com/title/tt2638144/>), when compared with the 8.1/10 awarded to the 1956 film (http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0052618/?ref_=nv_sr_2), the 2016 film unfortunately could not live up to expectations. One marker for popularity of films, novels and television series in the early twenty-first century is the number of stories posted by fan writers to *Archive of Our Own* (<https://archiveofourown.org>). While a search for *Game of Thrones* returned 21,421 stories, only 24 were found for *Ben-Hur* (including stories based on the 1956 and 2016 films, and stories unrelated to the novel or films but including a pun on the name Ben Hur in the title). The *Ben Hur* phenomenon therefore appears to have ended. However, S. expertly demonstrates the dominance of *Ben-Hur* in a surprising range of fields in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, and his meticulous research shows what can be achieved in reception studies, paving the way for future scholars.

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