

**Abstract – KINHMA Panel (APA 2008)**  
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**“A Thousand Tempting Beauties!”: Representations of Women In  
Sword-and-Sandal Movie Posters of the 1950s and '60s**

The “sword and sandal” B-movies of the 1950s and '60s, based on ancient mythological and historical themes, operated within strong generic conventions of masculinity and femininity which reflected the sexual politics of their own contemporary social and cultural milieu. At the same time, however, just as those movies and their tales of male heroes, played by a series of musclemen, explored the nature and limits of masculinity, so too they offered a variety of representations of women. This paper examines the depiction of women in the poster art of the sword and sandal movies and the semiotics of their representations within this visual realm of hypermasculinity. From scantily clad women in distress, to alluring temptresses and amazons, the women in these posters play many roles: they reinforce the heroic nature of the male through their physical subordination and subservience; they short-circuit the homoerotic tensions implicit in the depictions of muscular, and also scantily clad, male bodies coupling (in battle); and, when they come to the fore as figures of threatening or even lauded power rivaling the male heroes, they call into question the gender roles of their own genre – and the gender assumptions of their own society.