Documentary Review: A Volatile History

Chemistry: A Volatile History is a documentary that explores the complex and interesting past of one of the most abundant chemicals in the universe. In part 1 (Discovering The Elements), Al-Khalili traces alchemists that risked their lives to uncover the mysteries of the building blocks of the world. Throughout the numerous captivating experiments that gradually convey the theories of age old alchemists, we the viewer are intrigued by the simplicity of the building blocks that make us. The target audience is 12-17 years of age and I would only recommend this to people that have an interest in science.

This documentary displays a variety of film techniques that retain the viewers attention. Throughout the film it spends most of its time one on one with the narrator (Al-Khalili) while he explores the hidden world of chemistry. To keep the viewer interested the documentary uses non-diegetic music that brings tension to what the narrator has to say, it skillfully adds to the overall mood whether it is tense or cheerful. To further engage the viewer the documentary uses title cards to make the viewer consciously pour their concentration to reading them. The dynamic use of camera shots ranging from very far shots of explosions and zoomed up shots of a hand pouring chemicals stops the viewer from feeling bored of seeing only one camera angle. In the film the narrator uses onomatopoeia, alliteration and sometimes anecdotes, to brighten the mood after gruesome alchemist stories or to catch the viewers attention. Using so many film techniques throughout the film it is hard to lose interest in the documentary even if you are not very interested in the topics.

Paragraph 2 (Purpose/logos) - This documentary’s purpose is to inform the viewer of the exquisite past of chemistry, it uses the style of logos and ethos throughout the film. The documentary uses many credible historians and chemists to push their idea of what was happening in the past, there are many interviews with these credible sources. Supporting the logos facts that Al-Khalili is saying he backs his information with the ethos credibility. In the reign of the new king who was Lord of the diadems, great in glory, the stabilizer of Egypt, and also pious in matters relating to the gods, superior to his adversaries, rectifier of the life of men, Lord of the thirty-year periods like Hephaestus the Great, King like the Sun, the Great King of the Upper and Lower Lands, offspring of the Parent-loving gods, whom Hephaestus has approved, to whom the Sun has given victory, living image of Zeus, Son of the Sun, Ptolemy the ever-living, beloved by Ptah;

In the ninth year, when Aëtus, son of Aëtus, was priest of Alexander and of the Savior gods and the Brother gods and the Benefactor gods and the Parent-loving gods and the god Manifest and Gracious; Pyrrha, the daughter of Philinius, being athlophorus for Bernice Euergetis; Areia, the daughter of Diogenes, being canephora for Arsinoë Philadelphus; Irene, the daughter of Ptolemy, being priestess of Arsinoë Philopator: on the fourth of the month Xanicus, or according to the Egyptians the eighteenth of Mecheir.

Paragraph 3 (context/background) - THE DECREE: The high priests and prophets, and those who enter the inner shrine in order to robe the gods, and those who wear the hawk's wing, and the sacred scribes, and all the other priests who have assembled at Memphis before the king, from the various temples throughout the country, for the feast of his receiving the kingdom, even

that of Ptolemy the ever-living, beloved by Ptah, the god Manifest and Gracious, which he received from his Father, being assembled in the temple in Memphis this day, declared: Since King Ptolemy, the ever-living, beloved by Ptah, the god Manifest and Gracious, the son of King Ptolemy and Queen Arsinoë, the Parent-loving gods, has done many benefactions to the temples and to those who dwell in them, and also to all those subject to his rule, being from the beginning god born of a god and a goddess—like Horus, the son of Isis and Osirus, who came to the help of his Father Osirus; being benevolently disposed toward the gods, has concentrated to the temples revenues both of silver and of grain, and has generously undergone many expenses in order to lead Egypt to prosperity and to establish the temples... the gods have rewarded him with health, victory, power, and all other good things, his sovereignty to continue to him and his children forever.

Conclusion -

I would recommend this documentary to anyone that has an interest in science as it discusses important concepts. It keeps the viewer intrigued throughout the duration of the film by skillfully using film techniques to engage the viewer. The Rosetta Stone is a stone with writing carved into it. French soldiers found it in Egypt in 1799. It helped people get a better understanding of the Ancient Egyptian writing system called hieroglyphics. Its discovery led to the translation of Ancient Egyptian writing. The stone is named after the city where it was found, Rosetta. Today, that city is called 'Rashid'. The stone is now in Museum in London.