The Roman Salute
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This book is the first systematic study of the saluto romano, the Roman or Fascist salute, in the various cultural contexts that were decisive for the origin of this gesture, its appropriation by totalitarian ideologies, and its dissemination. It also traces the survival of the raised-arm salute in the popular media until today, adducing and interpreting extensive textual and visual evidence since well before the birth of Fascism. Popular theater and even more so the cinema are of particular importance in this. Since European and American visual culture from the 1890s to the 1920s had made forms of the raised-arm salute widely familiar, these were readily available to be adopted for political purposes. The book demonstrates that what came to be known as the Roman salute was invented on the nineteenth-century stage in long-running productions of “toga plays,” melodramas set in the Roman Empire, and that the gesture then reached the cinema screen. Film, the most powerful new mass medium, became the chief means for the dissemination of various supposedly authentic aspects of the visual reconstructions of antiquity. European and American silent films about ancient cultures were most influential for the popularity and eager acceptance of the Roman salute in political contexts.

1. History and Ideology: Half-Truths and Untruths

In the twentieth century the Roman salute was the most familiar symbol of Fascism in Italy, Nazism in Germany, Falangism in Spain, and several
other right-wing or nationalist movements. Those executing this gesture extended their stiff right arm frontally and raised it to roughly 135 degrees from the body’s vertical axis, with the palm of the hand facing down and the fingers touching. According to the Fascist ideology of the 1920s and in common perceptions still current, this salute was based on an ancient Roman custom, just as the term Fascism itself is associated with the Roman fasces, the bundles of rods with an axe in their middle that were a symbol of the power of office held by higher Roman magistracies and some priests. As will be seen, however, the term “Roman salute” is a misnomer. Not a single Roman work of art—sculpture, coinage, or painting—displays a salute of the kind that is found in Fascism, Nazism, and related ideologies. It is also unknown to Roman literature and is never mentioned by ancient historians of either republican or imperial Rome. The gesture of the raised right arm or hand in Roman and other ancient cultures that is attested in surviving art and literature had a significantly different function and is never identical with the modern straight-arm salute. Until comparatively recently, historians have tended to neglect modern popular culture in general and the cinema in particular; as a result, misconceptions about the origin of the Roman salute have remained unexamined and uncorrected. This book refutes the distortions of the past. It does so from a perspective that is critical of errors in modern portrayals of antiquity but at the same time remains sympathetic to popular art and media culture.

Although the ideologies which popularized it in the 1920s and 1930s have been thoroughly discredited, the raised-arm salute can still be observed today, sometimes in mainstream politics but more often on far-right or extreme fringes of society and in more esoteric circles. American and European Skinheads, especially prominent in Germany in the 1980s and 1990s, are a familiar example. One of the more bizarre American

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1. An example of these is The Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn (Stella Matutina), founded in 1888 and a self-described “system of magic.” Its “Neophyte Ritual” includes a raised-right arm gesture as the sign of the “zelator”; an illustration appears at Regardie 1997, 133.

2. On these see, among numerous other works, Cadalanu 1994; Ridgeway 1995; Hasselbach and Reiss 1996, turned into a 2002 feature film by Winfried Bonengel, co-author of the original German version of Hasselbach’s book; Langer 2004; Ryan 2004. Bonengel’s 1993 film Profession: Neo-Nazi is a German documentary; Tony Kaye’s American History X (1998) a fiction film dealing with the same topic. The essays in Fenner and Weitz 2004 deal with various aspects of the phenomenon. See further Eatwell 1996, 245–362 and 384–92 (notes), on neofascism in different European countries and especially Laqueur 1996 on Fascism, neofascism, and postfascism.—The modern German variation of the straight-arm salute, the Kühnengruß, so named after Michael Kühnen, a former neo-Nazi, and the public display of the saluto romano on the part of a popular Italian soccer player indicate the continuing attraction of the Nazi and Fascist past to some. On the latter see, e.g., Duff 2005 and Fenton 2005.
manifestations is The World Church of the Creator, an organization replete with a supreme leader, a Pontifex Maximus, and the Roman salute.\(^3\) Right-wing politics in Italy even returned a measure of acceptability to Fascism on the level of a national government within the European Union.\(^4\) Political organizations of various stripes regularly employ straight-arm salutes.\(^5\) So the continuing presence of certain aspects of Fascism and modern extremism makes an examination desirable, especially when the true origins of such a potent and persistent symbol as the raised-arm salute and its history are barely known. Even professional classicists and historians of ancient Rome and scholars of twentieth-century European history and culture have contented themselves with perpetuating vague opinions based on insufficient evidence, often taken uncritically from earlier writings. The following two examples are representative.

The two-volume *Dizionario del fascismo*, published in 2003 by one of Italy’s most reputable publishing houses, ought to be a reliable source of information. Its entry on the Roman salute, however, begins as follows:

Il modello cui il fascismo attinse per il cosiddetto saluto romano fu certamente l’antichità classica, ma il primo ad aver utilizzato questa forma di saluto nel Novecento sembra essere stato Gabriele D’Annunzio, durante l’impresa di Fiume.

The model on which Fascism drew for the so-called Roman salute was certainly classical antiquity, but the first to have used this form of salute in the twentieth century seems to have been Gabriele D’Annunzio during the occupation of Fiume.\(^6\)

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4. Cf., for example, Quaranta 1998.
5. For examples see Bulathsinghala 2003 and Daniel Johnson 2006. The Black Tigers interviewed in Bulathsinghala are the suicide force of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (Tamil Tigers).
6. Stefano Cavazza, “Saluto romano,” in de Grazia and Luzzatto 2003, vol. 2, 578–79; quotation at 578. The next paragraph begins: *Il gesto del saluto, che richiamava alla memoria la tradizione romana . . .* (“The gesture of the salute, which recalled the Roman tradition . . .”). This statement is correct only if any generally held belief is included in the meaning of “tradition,” regardless of historical fact. For an earlier example of such misperception cf. Salvemini 1973, 229: “the so-called Roman salute, made by raising the right hand in the air, [was] . . . the salute of the ‘arditi’ [i.e. the Italian shock troops in World War I] during the war and [was] adopted in Fiume.” A footnote to this sentence explains: “In classical antiquity it was the slaves who saluted their masters by raising the right hand. Free men greeted one another by shaking hands.” No source references are provided. The *arditi* (“Daring Ones”) raised their arms holding their daggers; see, e.g., Rochat 1997, 88: *saluto collettivo con il pugnale snodato e sollevato al cielo* (a “collective
The statement that Fascism took ancient Rome for its model is true enough but does not address the question whether the Fascists were concerned with historical accuracy in their use of antiquity, not least in connection with their ritual use of the raised-arm salute. Expressions like “certainly” and “seems to have been” are too vague to assure readers that the description here provided is factually correct. Classical antiquity was demonstrably not the true model of the Roman salute, although in the 1920s such a perspective was foisted on a people willing enough to believe that it was. The one to do so was indeed Gabriele D’Annunzio. But D’Annunzio was not at all “the first” to employ the raised-arm salute in the twentieth century. He was the first to give it an explicit ideological and propagandistic turn when he made it part of his rituals at Fiume in 1919, and the salute was soon adopted by Mussolini and the Italian Fascists. However, in 1919 the gesture was anything but new.

Modern scholarship in English is equally unreliable. In it we may find the following assertion: “The PNF [Partito Nazionale Fascista, the National Fascist Party] insisted on the adoption of the virile Roman straight-armed salute in place of the degenerate, effeminate (and germ-ridden) bourgeois handshake.” This statement is correct in mentioning the Fascists’ contempt for the traditional—and entirely unpolitical—custom of shaking hands, but it merely presupposes the antiquity of the raised-arm salute without any concern for actual Roman culture.

The main reason for such lack of accuracy is that a thorough analysis of the history of the raised-arm salute requires a synthesis of various areas of knowledge that scholars usually keep separate: the history, literature, and art of ancient Rome; the cultural and political history of modern Italy, Germany, and the United States; the history of late-eighteenth-century European painting and late-nineteenth-century popular theater; and film history from its beginnings to today. For this reason no comprehensive scholarship on the raised-arm salute has previously been attempted. My subject is therefore by nature wide-ranging. It incorporates Roman civilization, its influence on modern politics, and its connections to popular culture and its most influential medium, film. At the same time it remains focused on a specific symbolic gesture. My book aims to deepen our understanding of a particular, and particularly effective, way in which the past—imperial Rome—has been appropriated
for purposes of modern political propaganda and has become an integral, if incorrectly understood, part of our view of this past.

As an especially revealing example of the common misperceptions about Romans and Fascists—or even about Romans as Fascists—I quote, without the slightest editorial interference, from the now defunct Internet site of the American Falangist Party, which had this to say under the heading “The Roman Salute”:

No, it’s not a Nazi salute, though most people in the United States think that’s what it is when they see it given and it has been called that in this country for so long that you really can’t blame the people too much. What it really should be called though, is a Roman Salute because that’s where it came from, ancient Rome and is the oldest known form of salute. It was made popular in the early 1920’s by Benito Mussolini and his Fascist Party who wanted to revive the Roman Empire and save Western Christian Civilization from the Communist/Socialist forces that were spreading like a cancer throughout Europe and the World. Hitler copied it from the Italians as did many other anti-Communist movements at the time.

Anyone who has seen old movies where the Roman Centurian would come into the room give this salute and say “Hail Caesar!” knows that this salute was around a long time ago. Yes the Nazis and Fascists use it, but so do a lot of other people, especially in the Middle East and Latin America. It was even used in the United States during the Revolutionary war and in the early part of the 1900’s when new citizens took their oath of allegiance to the United States. If you go to our photo page you’ll see a photograph of president Franklin Roosevelt being saluted in this manner. Mostly because of tradition, we’ve been using it since the early 1930’s when the Communist used the closed fist salute, the opposite of that being the Roman Salute.

The American Falangist Party discourages Party members from using this salute too much in public until people become more informed.

This text is telling for several reasons. Blind adherence to ideology replaces any knowledge of ancient and modern history. Carelessness of grammar, style, orthography, and punctuation reveals carelessness of thought. So the simple belief in the accuracy and reliability of films set in the past that the text evinces is to be expected. The words here quoted appeared below a color still from the 1951 Hollywood film Quo Vadis, in which the commander of a Roman legion gives the raised-arm salute to Emperor Nero.8

8. The entire Falangist text and the illustration from Quo Vadis used to be accessible at
(The film and the sequence in which this moment occurs will be discussed in chapter 6.) The Falangist party provided no information about the origin of the image it displayed with such prominence, as if it were as good as a historical document that needed no explanation. (Did none of the Falangists recognize actor Robert Taylor in the part of the Roman commander?) The other pages of the Falangist site were instructive, too; evidently, knowing the past or learning from it is not for everybody.

2. Ideology and Spectacle: The Importance of Cinema

Unintentionally the American Falangist Party provides a strong justification for a detailed inquiry into the history of the Roman salute. But the Falangists also make clear, again inadvertently, how pervasive and important the visual media have become in modern culture, not only in terms of apparently innocuous entertainment but also, and more importantly, as purveyors of political ideologies. All manner of spectacle, not least the historical epics on our screens, were and are politically important, nowhere more so than in systems of totalitarian power in the twentieth century: “The spectacle is the self-portrait of power in the age of power’s totalitarian rule over the conditions of existence.” My book will make and reinforce this point on most of its pages. So it is appropriate for us to be aware that mass entertainments, not least the cinematic ones, are potent social and political factors. French cultural critic Guy Debord has commented on the nature of spectacle:

It is the sun that never sets on the empire of passivity. It covers the entire globe, basking in the perpetual warmth of its own glory. . . .
spectacle, being the reigning social organization of a paralyzed history, of a paralyzed memory, of an abandonment of any history founded in historical time, is in effect a false consciousness of time.\textsuperscript{10}

The false historical consciousness of Fascists and Nazis concerning the raised-arm salute, their common symbol, is the subject of my book. The spectacles of twentieth-century totalitarian states reveal the need of ruling elites for pomp and circumstance to impress the masses emotionally. They also provide compelling evidence for the political importance of ritualized mass shows. In the words of Debord:

In all its specific manifestations—news or propaganda, advertising or actual consumption of entertainment—the spectacle epitomizes the prevailing model of social life. . . . In form as in content the spectacle serves as total justification for the conditions and aims of the existing system. It further ensures the permanent presence of that justification.\textsuperscript{11}

Small wonder that the raised-arm salute should have been Fascism’s and Nazism’s most powerful common aspect, the only one that survived both politically (among right-wingers and radicals) and in popular culture at large. A particular film contemporary with Fascism and Nazism gives us the best proof that the raised-arm salute was the chief defining visual side of both ideologies. This film is Charles Chaplin’s \textit{The Great Dictator} (1940), the first popular exposé of twentieth-century European totalitarianism and its vanity and barbarism. Adolf Hitler’s Germany appears as Adenoid Hynkel’s Tomainia. The country’s name is a pun on \textit{ptomaine} that is as clever as it is revealing. Chaplin’s verbal satire of the megalomaniacal dictator centers on Hitler’s speeches, delivered as linguistic nonsense of Chaplin’s own invention. His visual ridicule of the Nazis is equally sophisticated. The swastika, the German \textit{Hakenkreuz}—literally, “hooked cross”—has become the Tomainian Double Cross. But the straight-arm salute is Chaplin’s most effective means of satire. It is frequently given in an exaggerated fashion that makes it look ridiculous, as when Hynkel and his fellow dictator, Benzino Napaloni of Bacteria, hectically exchange salutes when they first meet during Napaloni’s state visit to Tomainia. (The sequence satirizes Mussolini’s trip to Berlin in 1937.) The most telling instances of the raised-arm salute occur early in the film. Hynkel’s motorcade along a broad avenue that is meant to evoke the Siegesallee

\textsuperscript{10} Debord 1994, 15 and 114. Emphasis in original.
\textsuperscript{11} Debord 1994, 13. Emphasis in original.
(“Victory Avenue”) in Berlin passes before oversize statues of the Venus de Milo and of Auguste Rodin’s *Thinker*. Both statues are giving the raised-arm salute. As in a newsreel, a voice-over explains to us that these are “the new Venus” and “the new Thinker.” Their brief appearance on the screen speaks volumes, for here two iconic images of the greatness of Western civilization have been claimed for a new and supposedly superior society. In the process both have been utterly subverted. By implication, so has all of European culture. It is no coincidence that the names of the two totalitarian countries in *The Great Dictator* evoke disease and decay. (“Tomainia,” given as “Tomania” in some sources, also carries an overtone of madness.) The raised-arm salute with all its *faux*-classical connotations is Chaplin’s most concise visual means to make the point.12

Sometimes one specific scene or image from a film can be instructive. An epic-scale sequence in Carmine Gallone’s *Scipione l’Africano* (*Scipio Africanus*, 1937) shows us Scipio returning to the people of Rome from the senate house. He is descending an open-air staircase ahead of a group of lictors with *fasces* in their arms while on either side a huge crowd greets them with the raised-arm salute. Scipio returns their greetings.13 The moment is of emblematic significance in regard to Debord’s sense of spectacle. It points to the most powerful aspects of the mass appeal of Fascism: an anonymous crowd of people is united in near-mystical ecstasy with an elevated individual in absolute power. An intermediary group—the stern-faced lictors, heroically looking straight ahead and past the camera—share both anonymity and closeness to that power. On prominent display are the symbols of this power, the *fasces* and the straight-arm salute. As my examination of Gallone’s film in chapter 5 will show, the analogies between the two leaders, Scipio then and Mussolini at the time of the film’s making, are intentional. In historical retrospect and from our vantage point of the fall of Fascism and Nazism and our knowledge of the reasons for that fall, this scene in the film is almost uncanny. It is as if, lemming-like, the idolized leader, his entourage, and the people were all marching straight to their doom.

Films have been our greatest means of mass communication for more than a century. The cinema has shown itself capable of reaching the most remote corners of our global village. More importantly, it is also a kind of cultural seismograph. Films have the ability to detect and reveal currents

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12. Extensive up-to-date information on Chaplin’s film may be found in *The Dictator and the Tramp* (2002), a documentary directed by Kevin Brownlow, in Scheide and Mehran 2004, and on the DVD edition of *The Great Dictator*.

13. Aristarco 1996, 92 (fig. 21), provides a still image of the same moment, as does figure 21 in the present book.
of social issues or political trends. Often they do so unconsciously, sometimes intentionally in works of political or social criticism. So careful attention to the filmic record is indispensable for any historical account of the raised-arm salute.

This circumstance points to wider ramifications. Beginning with the late nineteenth century, the visual media of photography, film, television, and now the computer have become mass media. Their images have increasingly shaped historical consciousness and what people consider historical knowledge or awareness. The history of the Roman salute as traced here is a case in point because of the cinema’s central role in twentieth-century politics and ideologies. Far from merely providing to later generations a factual or documentary record of something the camera had recorded, cinema influenced and even made history in a manner not previously possible for a visual art or craft. The historical film, chiefly as costume drama or epic spectacle, became a significant historical force and generated its own tradition of how people raised on mass-media images saw the past, particularly those past times in which such mass media had not yet been invented and for which therefore no competing sets of images existed as correctives to errors, misperceptions, or even deliberate distortions. What American historian, historical novelist, and screenwriter Gore Vidal observed in the early 1990s is highly apposite:

Today, where literature was movies are . . . there can be no other reality for us [besides film and television] since reality does not begin to mean until it has been made art of . . .

Movies changed our world forever. Henceforth, history would be screened; first, in meeting houses known as movie houses; then at home through television. As the whole world is more and more linked by satellites, the world’s view of the world can be whatever a producer chooses to make it . . . through ear and eye, we are both defined and manipulated by fictions of such potency that they are able to replace our own experience, often becoming our sole experience of a reality become . . . irreal.

Vidal’s conclusion from all this may be alarming, but it is unavoidable and entirely correct: “In the end, he who screens the history makes the

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14. I deal with this aspect of the nature of cinema in the “Introduction” to Winkler 2001, 3–22, at 8, with examples adduced in note 7. Kracauer 1947 made the case for German cinema between World War I and 1933. As he observes: “Inner life manifests itself in various elements and conglomerations of external life, especially in those almost imperceptible surface data which form an essential part of screen treatment. In recording the visible world—whether current reality or an imaginary universe—films therefore provide clues to hidden processes” (7).
history.” Many of the pages in my book will bear him out. So does the text of the American Falangists quoted above.

The screening of what purports to be history is of special importance in today’s largely visual culture. Surrounded by images, we live in a world of appearance almost more than in one of reality; the images, as this book demonstrates, supersede reality. Classical scholars may be reminded of Plato’s Cave Allegory, whose subject is the distinction between reality (objects) and images (their shadows projected against a wall). The shadows in Plato’s cave moved but were comparatively small; for us, images of moving objects have taken on a kind of pseudo- or even hyperreality: they can be huge, are usually in vivid color, and are accompanied by varieties of sounds (words, music, effects) to enhance their apparent reality. Deceptively realistic-looking images that move across our screens easily reconstruct the present or the past, in the latter case often without direct reference to any real historical world. Once we have seen the irreal past recreated for us often enough, familiarity breeds—no, not contempt but rather a sense of intimacy which, in turn, leads to what we take or mistake for knowledge. As a result, whatever is right—historically accurate, correct, authentic—may look wrong and is readily regarded to be wrong; what is wrong replaces what is right.

Many epic films exemplify the truth of this effect of our false consciousness of history. The appeal of pseudohistory is at its most powerful when the past can be viewed through the lens of hindsight. Filmmakers assume a cultural, spiritual, or political superiority over this past and inspire the same in their viewers. At the same time the cinema works its spectacular magic by pitting a heroic good side against abject evil. *Quo Vadis*, the first Hollywood epic after World War II, is a case in point for this approach to history. My discussion of this film in chapter 6 will demonstrate that Nero’s Rome, presented as an evil empire par excellence, is intentionally patterned on recent history. The film’s emphasis on the “bad guys,” primarily Nero himself, only serves to intensify the edifying appeal that historical cinema usually claims for itself: to be a thrilling and inspiring history lesson. The souvenir program of *Quo Vadis* that was sold in theaters makes the point as explicitly as we may wish. On the first page of text (“The Story Behind *Quo Vadis*”) we read that “the studio has felt the urge and the ambition to create a film which, with all the technical improvements and resources of modern cinema-making, would carry a message of beauty and inspiration to the people of the earth.”

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section later on (“The Making of Quo Vadis”) sounds the same note with a crescendo:

The story has in it the stuff of immortality... M-G-M feels that it has been privileged to add something permanent to the cultural treasure-house of civilization.17

The immortality that Quo Vadis imparts to history is synonymous with the false consciousness of time described by Debord. The film also imparts to the present and to the future a particular image of the ancient Romans that is still going strong. What greater story than that of an evil empire overthrown, as Quo Vadis makes clear, spiritually and, if not quite yet at film’s end, militarily and politically as well? We can thrill equally to the excesses and debauches of a megalomaniacal despot and his society and to the edification of being able to side with the noble and humbly triumphant with whom we identify.

The message is clear: History is good for you, but what is presented as history is also good for you. What is shown as history on the screen is particularly good for you. The filmmakers are your best educators, more effective than your favorite teachers, even if the cinema is largely a commercial undertaking. The money that you pay at the box office for historical epics does not only buy you excitement but also an educational and spiritually uplifting experience. The false history on the giant screen looks real enough, sometimes even to experts, but it is a modern creation and so remains irreal. This irreality is good for you. The potent fiction of cinema edges out real history and replaces it in people’s awareness. As we will see, when irreal history is combined with ideology, the result can be irresistible.

5. About This Book

The specific example of a potent fiction that has made reality irreal and the subject of this book is the Roman salute. In view of the ramifications, outlined above, of its history and because of the cinema’s power to create apparent facts and ideological manipulation with equal facility, I present an extensive amount of ancient and modern evidence concerning this gesture: its absence in antiquity, its invention in the late nineteenth

Introduction
century, and its uses in the twentieth and early twenty-first centuries. I
discuss numerous and varied instances of its occurrence.\footnote{18} As we will see,
however, the gesture is not Roman. Why not? Chapter 1 answers this
question by showing that it is neither Roman nor even ancient. Where,
then, does it come from, and when and why? Chapters 2–4 provide
answers to these questions. Chapter 5 then shows how the salute acquired
its misnomer, and chapters 6–7 examine what effect it has had until today.
I begin by reviewing, in chapter 1, the ancient record of Roman art, lit-
erature, and historiography. Since Roman culture was closely connected
to Greek culture, I include, in this chapter and wherever appropriate later
on, briefer considerations of Greek and some other ancient contexts. In
chapter 2 I discuss Jacques-Louis David’s painting *The Oath of the Horatii*
in its historical and cultural contexts and examine its political influence.
Appendix 1 provides readers with my translation of the Roman historian
Livy’s account of the Horatii and Curiatii that is the basis of David’s
painting and the material dealt with in this chapter. Chapter 3 turns to
two aspects of late-nineteenth-century American culture: the Pledge of
Allegiance to the Flag, a quintessential American custom that originally
included a straight-arm salute, and popular stage plays dealing with impe-
rial Rome. After this the cinema, the most influential medium of the
twentieth century, will provide me with my main body of evidence. I
examine its cultural and political importance for Fascism and Nazism, the
two totalitarian ideologies with the most extensive conscious recourse to
ancient Rome, and the iconography of imperial Rome in European and
American films. Chapter 4 demonstrates the widespread occurrence of
the raised-arm salute in silent epic cinema and makes evident how last-
ing an influence a particular convention may exert once it has become
firmly established—once it has made irreality real and has begun to look
right even when it is wrong. Chapter 5 analyzes the intersection of
cinema and politics through the importance of D’Annunzio, first in his
involvement with a particular epic film and then as a crucial force in the
earliest stages of Fascism. Appendix 2 provides an excerpt from the hand-
book of the Italian Fascists’ youth organization concerning the Roman

\footnote{18} I omit, however, a number of curiosities, of which the following may be a representa-
tive instance. The international online edition of the German newsweekly *Der Spiegel* reported
on November, 30, 2006, that readers of the German daily mass publication *Bild* had made a
shocking discovery, which their tabloid duly featured with a picture and an article. I quote
from *Spiegel Online* (http://www.spiegel.de/international/0,1518,451645,00.html): “Christmas
shoppers in Germany are horrified. Across the country, models of Santa Claus in shop windows
appear to be giving the Nazi salute. Some chains have already removed them from the shelves.”
The headline reads: “Is Santa Claus a Nazi?”
salute. It shows how important the gesture was to the Fascist party and how seriously it took it as a means for the education along party lines of Italy’s future generations. Chapter 6 turns to Nazi cinema as political propaganda and in connection with the Olympic salute, a variant on the political straight-arm salute, and to the influence of silent film epics and Nazi propaganda films on Hollywood’s Roman epics. Chapter 7 takes the cinematic history of the Roman salute down to our time and in turn leads to a retrospective conclusion. Altogether I hope to show the extent to which popular culture, especially film, has exerted its influence on modern history and politics and has shaped both our understanding of history and our historical imagination. I also hope to demonstrate the importance of cinema for the study of past ages—in this case, classical antiquity—that did not know and could not conceive of the technology that made this powerful medium possible.

In view of the wide range of areas on which my book touches, I support each part of my argument and the conclusions I draw with extensive documentation. I adduce quotations from historical, literary, and scholarly works and from film dialogues, and I describe specific scenes or moments in stage plays and films. The notes provide abbreviated references to the scholarship that is important for my topic, while full information about everything cited there appears in my bibliography. An exhaustive bibliography on all aspects of history, culture, cinema, theater, art, ideology, and theory is evidently impossible (and pointless), but I have attempted to be comprehensive enough in my listings of secondary sources to enable readers easily to follow up on individual topics that may be of further interest to them or on questions about my presentation or conclusions. In addition, a number of standard recent works on the connections between Fascism and Nazism on the one hand and classical antiquity on the other are listed in appendix 3. My chief aim has been to provide as solid a basis of primary and secondary texts (including filmic texts) on which to build my argument as readers could expect from an author who addresses several fields of scholarship simultaneously. For this reason I adduce a considerably larger number of sources and references to specific details than might be considered customary or strictly necessary. But this material has provided me with the foundation and evidence to trace the history of the Roman salute with more than a reasonable degree of certainty.

Given the importance of films for the history of the raised-arm salute, readers should keep in mind that complete documentation is impossible. In popular culture, record-keeping and preservation have long been incomplete and haphazard. This is especially true for early cinema but also for the nineteenth-century stage, both of which are crucial for our
understanding of the origins of the raised-arm salute. Moreover, a high percentage of silent films do not survive at all, survive only in a fragmentary state, or are difficult to reach. Nevertheless it has been my aim to develop as coherent an argument as possible about early cinema and its cultural and historical importance.

Since no examination of the different aspects of the raised-arm salute in history, politics, cinema, and popular culture has existed so far, I hope that my book will close a considerable gap in our historical and cultural awareness of ancient Rome and of the classical tradition. The book is therefore intended for scholars, teachers, and advanced students in classical studies, Roman history, art history, twentieth-century European and American history, and film, media, and cultural studies. It also addresses readers outside the academy who are interested in ancient and modern history, in cinema, and in the connections between antiquity and contemporary culture. The book is free of academic jargon and specialized terminology to make it easy for all readers to reach their own conclusions about the evidence I adduce without first having to come to terms with a narrow and frequently obfuscating linguistic code. All passages quoted in languages other than English also appear in translation. Unless otherwise indicated, these translations are my own.

Finally, a word about illustrations. Images of Nazis or Fascists from the 1920s to the 1940s or, more recently, of members of comparable political or ideological organizations (neofascists, Skinheads, etc.) will be familiar to most readers; if they are not, they are easily accessible in printed and electronic sources. For these reasons they have been excluded from this book as not being essential to its argument. In addition, the cost of reproducing a significant number of illustrations in academic publications borders on the prohibitive, and authors of specialized monographs such as this have to make difficult choices about excluding or including certain images. Evidently I would have preferred a far larger number of illustrations to support individual points than appear on these pages. The images included have been selected for their intrinsic value and usefulness, especially those coming from films of the silent era, the most important period in the history of the raised-arm salute of the twentieth century. References to other images—paintings, drawings, posters, or others—that could not be reproduced are provided in my notes, so readers can easily find on their own what I describe. I am aware that this is a compromise, but scholarly publishing is, like politics, the art of the possible. In my discussions of films for which stills were not available or could not be included I describe the relevant scenes or moments in sufficient detail for readers to be able to form a good idea about what is important. I also
discuss, without being complete or exhaustive, a large number of often obscure films. Not each of them is crucial for my argument, but, taken together, all of them support my theses about the origin and spread of the straight-arm salute better than a more selective approach could have done. Specialists may well be able to point to yet additional examples, but I am confident that these will support rather than question my conclusions. With these words I do not maintain or imply that this book contains the last word on all cultural, artistic, historical, political, cinematic, and theatrical aspects of the Roman salute and its variants, but I hope to give readers a solid introduction to a fascinating side of modern life from a new perspective. If they find the book useful for pursuing certain parts of my argument further, whether as the basis of future research or in scholarly disagreement, I will have reached my goal.