In 1914 the Italian cinema presented audiences with one of the most colossal spectacles in film history. Giovanni Pastrone’s Cabiria was an epic of gigantic proportions, with an astonishing running time of over 150 minutes (varying according to the speed of projection, which was not standardized in the era of silent cinema). The story of Cabiria is set before and during the Second Punic War and takes place mainly in North Africa. Cabiria sported color tinting throughout and had breathtaking sights like the eruption of Mt. Aetna, Hannibal’s crossing of the Alps, and the Romans’ siege and capture of Syracuse. A symphonic score by a famous composer deepened the impact of the images. Equally famous was the involvement of Gabriele D’Annunzio (or d’Annunzio), which made the film a gigantic success.

1. Some sources give Cabiria an incorrect release date of 1913. Sadoul 1951, 211, mentions an original running time of almost four hours. The original, 3370 meters long, is not known to have survived. The film was recently restored by the Museo del Cinema in Turin to 3300 meters, resulting in a length of about 152 minutes at current projection speed. On earlier restorations see Paolo Bertetto, “Il materiale di tournage di Cabiria e la messa in scena di Pastrone: ovvero come Piero Fosco vigilò l’esecuzione,” in Bertetto and Rondolino 1998, 184–211, with data on surviving footage and restoration in notes 2 and 3. (Piero Fosco was Pastrone’s pseudonym as director; he was primarily a film producer and studio head.) See further Paolo Cherchi Usai, “Alla ricerca della ‘vittima eterna’: Pastrone, D’Annunzio e l’edizione 1914 di Cabiria,” in Gabriele D’Annunzio 1989, 229–43 (“The Eternal Victim” was D’Annunzio’s earlier title for the film), and Umberto Ferrari, “Cabiria come prototipo estetico: Innovazioni tecniche ed influenze stilistiche dell’opera di Pastrone,” in D’Anelli 2003, 79–84. A two-hour version of Cabiria is available on DVD.

2. Bertetto and Rondolino 1998 gives extensive information on various aspects of the
sensations in Europe and America and exerted an unprecedented influence on epic and historical cinema. It was also a cultural and artistic event of the highest order. In Italy and wherever else it was shown, the film conclusively removed the stigma that had made cinema socially suspect from its earliest days as a form of low-level entertainment.

1. Gabriele D’Annunzio and Cabiria

Its success was mainly due to D’Annunzio, Italy’s greatest and most famous man of letters at the time and a cultural and literary figure well


3. Cabiria had deep focus, split screen, and double exposure. Griffith’s Intolerance, mentioned in chapter 4, owes much to Cabiria, not least its famous Babylonian statuary of elephants rampant, whose cinematic ancestors were the Carthaginian elephant statues on display in Cabiria. Cf. Sadoul 1951, 217–18. In particular see on this Fausto Montesanti, “Pastrone e Griffith: Mito di un rapporto”; Davide Turconi, “G. P. & D. W. G.: Il dare e l’aver”, and Adriana Belluccio, “‘Cabiria’ e ‘Intolerance’ tra il serio e il faceto,” all three in Cincotti 1975, 8–16, 33–39, and 53–57. More famously, Cabiria introduced camera movement independent from the movement of on-screen characters, a technique that came to be known as “Cabiria movement.” On this see Bordwell, Staiger, and Thompson 1985, 228–29. Cf. further the relevant works cited above in note 1. For the first time in the history of marketing, an airplane was used to advertise a film. For its opening in Rome a pilot flew across the city four times and dropped leaflets announcing that Cabiria would be shown that evening (Prolo 1951, 111 note 7).
known throughout Europe. In Italy D’Annunzio was generally referred to simply as “the Poet” (il Poeta, with a capital letter). Another of his honorific titles was il vate (a term meaning “the seer-poet”) or vate nazionale. The term vate is derived from the Latin vates and indicates the stature of a poet who is as visionary as he is accomplished and who is beloved by his readers. In ancient Rome Virgil and Horace, among others, had been such exemplary vates. In contemporary Italy and beyond, D’Annunzio was another:

D’Annunzio’s name, extremely well known in Italy and abroad, living symbol of contemporary “grand poetry,” [was used] to give luster to a filmic spectacle that was announced as grandiose and grandiloquent, of vast proportions, in which actions and characters, settings and dramatic situations were placed on the background of history, with Carthage, Hannibal’s elephants, the Second Punic War, and all the nationalist myths and school memories connected with them.

This immense international prestige was the very reason why Pastrone, who chiefly occupied himself with the production and distribution of films and only occasionally directed any, wanted D’Annunzio to be involved in his upcoming super-production. His contract with Pastrone, for example, required D’Annunzio to be present when Cabiria would open in different countries. Its simultaneous premieres in Turin and Milan on April 18, 1914, followed by the one in Rome four days later, indicate the level of cultural, social, and hence political importance that was being accorded a film for the first time:

Era la chiamata a raccolta della intellettualità italiana di maggior prestigio cultural-mondano per nobilitare il cinema come spettacolo non più soltanto per le “masse,” ma anche e soprattutto per la borghesia. Di qui il richiamo alla tradizione storografica colta, alla grandiosità della messinscena, alla letterarietà delle didascalie, all’uso della musica appositamente composta. . . . Di qui la necessità di presentare il film in un
teatro abitualmente impiegato per concerti sinfonici e opere liriche. Di qui l’attesa e poi la soddisfazione del pubblico e della critica.

It was the rallying cry of the Italian intellectuals with a major reputation in the world of culture to confer nobility on the cinema as a spectacle no longer only for the “masses” but also and above all for the middle and upper classes. Hence the call to the venerated tradition of historiography, to the grandeur of the production, to the high literary level of the intertitles, to the use of music expressly composed [for the film]. . . . Hence the necessity to show the film in a theater usually reserved for symphony concerts and lyrical operas. Hence the high expectation and then the approval of the public and of the critics.

Indisputably, cinema had arrived as an art form. “Ah, quel D’Annunzio!” (“Ah, that D’Annunzio!”) was one reviewer’s ecstatic outcry in a Turin newspaper the day after the opening. It helped that D’Annunzio had some interest in cinema, although he believed himself vastly superior to this new art with its distasteful mass appeal. A film historian has put the case well: “D’Annunzio, with his Latin exuberance, his facile lyricism, and his fondness for éclat and pathos, was the missing link between the two art forms [of stage and screen]; not unaware of the fact, he became interested in the cinema from the start.” As has been observed recently, “D’Annunzio was the first and most influential figure [in Italy] to formulate what looked like a full-fledged idea of cinema.” His collaboration with Pastrone had begun in June 1913:

4. This and the preceding two quotations are from Rondolino 1980a, 7–8. See further Sadoul 1951, 207–9; he quotes (208) from Pastrone’s 1949 account of his meeting with D’Annunzio. The most famous piece of music written for Cabiria was Ildebrando Pizzetti’s Sinfonia del Fuoco (“Symphony of Fire”) that accompanied the human-sacrifice sequence. 5. Leprohon 1972, 22–23. 6. Giorgio Bertellini, “Dubbing L’Arte Muta: Poetic Layerings Around Italian Cinema’s Transition to Sound,” in Reich and Garofalo 2002, 30–82; quotation at 43. D’Annunzio expressed his awareness of the connections between ancient Roman literature and the cinema in February 1914, in an interview published in Il Corriere della Sera; the text is reprinted in Oliva 2002, 278–85. He was greatly taken with Ovid’s Metamorphoses in this regard—Ecco un vero soggetto cinematografico (“There you have a true cinematic subject”)—and particularly with Ovid’s story of Daphne (282); cf. Usai 1985, 52. D’Annunzio’s first original work for the screen was the 1912 script for the melodramatic love story La rosa di Cipro (“The Rose of Cyprus”). For further details see Aldo Gamba, “Trucco, trucchi, truccherie: Letteratura e cinema nel primo Novecento,” in D’Anelli 2003, 65–78 (the title phrase is D’Annunzio’s, quoted on page 69), and Gambacorti 2003, especially 58–61, 84–85, 111–12, 114–16 (all on Cabiria) and 329–31 (bibliography on D’Annunzio and cinema). See further Ciani 1999.
He set to work revising a silent film already shot in large part and taken from the original novel by Emilio Salgari, *Cartagine in fiamme* (Carthage in Flames); D’Annunzio altered the title to *Cabiria*, changed the names of some of the characters, and rewrote the captions, using much more grandiloquent expressions than those initially employed by Pastrone. In effect D’Annunzio assumed responsibility for the screenwriting, and pocketed a cool 50,000 lire for his pains.

D’Annunzio’s participation in the film was considered to be so important that the title card proudly identified the final product as his intellectual property upon its release: “Gabriele D’Annunzio’s *Cabiria.*” Even earlier, D’Annunzio had disingenuously claimed to be the film’s true creator and the inventor of its plot.

The period of Roman history that *Cabiria* revisits is a crucial and famous part of Rome’s rise to hegemony in the Western Mediterranean and her eventual achievement of world empire. Scipio Africanus the Elder, Rome’s most famous general before Julius Caesar, overcomes the Punic menace with his victory over Hannibal in North Africa. Scipio’s invasion of Africa, the turning point of the Second Punic War, and its aftermath were topical in Italy before *Cabiria* was produced. Ancient Libya had become a Roman province after the defeat of Hannibal. In 1911 Italy had occupied Tripolis in modern Libya. Local resistance had been and remained fierce even after Italy bought Tripolis from Turkey by treaty in 1912. Film historian Georges Sadoul observes about Pastrone’s choice of just this subject for his film:

Ce choix lui avait été suggéré par la guerre Tripolitaine, qui passionnait alors l’Italie et qui avait été pour les nationalistes l’occasion d’évoquer la conquête de l’Afrique par Scipion et d’excuser le revers de l’expédition coloniale de Libye en évoquant les victoires sans lendemain d’Annibal. L’imperialisme italien d’autant plus bouillonnant et désordonné qu’il était jeune et débile parlait hautement de transformer à nouveau la Méditerranée en une *Mare Nostrum.*

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7. Woodhouse 1998, 268. D’Annunzio at this time was in financial troubles and was living in Paris in a kind of self-imposed exile, so the money he earned for *Cabiria* was more than welcome.

8. Bertetto and Rondolino 1998 reproduces three color plates of posters which name only D’Annunzio. Two such posters appear in Bagshaw 2005, 10 and 22. On the film’s title see also De España 1998, 208; he reproduces (207) the title page of the 1931 score of the film when *Cabiria* was reissued with a music track (“Cabiria di Gabriele D’Annunzio . . .”).

This choice had been suggested to him by the Tripolitan war, which then raised Italy’s passions and which had given the nationalists the opportunity to recall Scipio’s conquest of Africa and to excuse the setback of the colonial expedition to Libya by recalling the short-lived victories of Hannibal. Italian imperialism, so much more boiling and disorderly for being new and weak, spoke highly of transforming the Mediterranean anew into a *mare nostrum* [lit., “our sea,” the Romans’ term for it].

Variations of the raised-arm salute occur throughout *Cabiria* on the part of Romans and Africans. Scipio uses the gesture once. Furius Axilla, the story’s fictitious hero, twice employs it as a farewell greeting to his hosts, although in an entirely nonmilitary manner and context. (Figure 18) The Numidian king Massinissa, guest of the Carthaginian Hasdrubal, raises his right arm in greeting and is so greeted in return, as he is once by the strongman Maciste, Axilla’s loyal servant. Princess Sophonisba and King Syphax mutually greet each other with great ceremony by raising their right arms while inclining their bodies. (Figure 19) Non-Romans in general tend to lower their heads and bend their upper bodies when saluting in this way. The ethnic and gestural variety of its occurrences in *Cabiria* is once again proof that the salute is a modern invention to demonstrate to viewers the exotic nature of antiquity.

Pastrone was no newcomer to ancient subjects. He had co-directed, in 1911, another giant spectacle, *La caduta di Troia* (*The Fall of Troy*). So he knew well enough that the use of the raised-arm salute went back to the early history of epic filmmaking and was practically required to appear in *Cabiria*. But he also knew that the excessive gesturing that came with classical topics and settings was part and parcel of this tradition, even if it was already beginning to look antiquated by the time of *Cabiria*. Georges Sadoul considers it this film’s greatest weakness. But Sadoul quotes a fascinating defense by Pastrone of this exaggerated style of acting. It was necessary, Pastrone declared in retrospect, because it afforded *Cabiria* the status of a work of art rather than that of a mere commercial commodity:

> On a pu me reprocher une mimique exagérée, une sorte de déclamation muette. Mais rappelez-vous l’époque. C’était celle de Sarah Bernhardt avec ses maquillages excessifs, sa gesticulation grandiloquente. Mon film

10. Sadoul 1951, 207. For a contemporary account (and defense of the invasion) see, e.g., Cottafavi 1912.
Figure 18. *Cabiria*. Furius Axilla taking his leave from his hosts. Itala Film.

Figure 19. *Cabiria*. Sophonisba and Syphax formally saluting each other. Itala Film.
n’aurait pas été retenu comme une œuvre d’art si (comme j’avais utilisé le nom de d’Annunzio) je n’avais pas, avec l’interprétation d’Itala Almirante Mazzini, payé un tribut à Sarah Bernhardt.

Cette concession une fois faite à l’’élite’’ du public, je me suis efforcé pour les autres interprètes d’obtenir un jeu plein de dépouillement et une grande simplicité.

I could be reproached for an exaggerated sign language, a kind of mute declamation. But remember the period. It was the time of Sarah Bernhardt, with her excessive make-up, her grandiloquent gesticulations. My film would not have remained a work of art if (just as I used the name of d’Annunzio) I had not, with Itala Almirante Mazzini’s performance, paid tribute to Sarah Bernhardt.

With this concession once made to the “elite” among the public, I was forced to obtain, for the other performers, an acting style full of restraint and a grand simplicity.\textsuperscript{11}

With an acting style in the long-approved manner of one of Europe’s most famous and revered stage personalities for its main female role, combined with the renown of D’Annunzio’s name and reinforced by hours of the most stupendous sights ever put on the screen by means of pioneering technical innovations, \textit{Cabiria} could not fail to be both popular and prestigious. We see once again, but with special clarity, that actual Roman culture had precious little to do with how antiquity was portrayed on cinema screens.

\section*{2. Fiume: The Roman Salute Becomes a Political Symbol}

It was, however, Gabriele D’Annunzio and not Giovanni Pastrone who was to exert the greatest and longest-lasting influence that \textit{Cabiria} was to obtain on modern history. Poet, lover, dandy, and World War I aviation hero—D’Annunzio was all of this. As a historian observed:

D’Annunzio the poet, novelist, dramatist, and aesthete, lived for sensations, gloried in violence, revelled in speed, power and adventure.

\footnote{11. The quotation is from Sadoul 1951, 212–13. He provides no source reference for this French version of Pastrone’s words (but cf. 208 note 1). According to Edmond Rostand, Sarah Bernhardt was the queen of posture and princess of gestures; cf. Joannis 2000. This book’s title quotes Rostand’s famous dictum.}
Theatrical and flamboyant in both his private and public life, he offered his public fascinating tales of brutality, voluptuousness and Nietzschean supermen. Often he took as his themes the martial tradition of Rome... he educated a whole generation... to dream of a new Italy, assertive, masterful and imperial.\textsuperscript{12}

Another historian aptly summarized D'Annunzio's character in the terms of cinematic melodrama: “D’Annunzio’s life was like the spectacle films such as \textit{Cabiria}.”\textsuperscript{13} That such verdicts are not exaggerated became evident in 1919, when D’Annunzio became an unexpected political and military force and acquired another famous epithet, that of “soldier-poet” (\textit{poeta-soldato} or \textit{poeta-condottiere}).\textsuperscript{14} D’Annunzio now turned into a small-scale precursor of two of the most influential shapers of history in twentieth-century Europe. He had already been a close associate of young Benito Mussolini, on whom he exerted considerable influence, if only for a time.\textsuperscript{15} On September 12, 1919, D’Annunzio, at the head of about two thousand men, invaded and occupied the Yugoslav city of Fiume, today’s Rijeka in the Republic of Slovenia, which he declared part of Italy and held until December 1920.\textsuperscript{16} This episode, a turning point in Italian, European, and even world history, was intimately connected with D’Annunzio’s flamboyant character as poet and man of refined sensibilities. His close friend and private secretary Tommaso Antongini, who was with D’Annunzio in Fiume for several months, wrote years later:

\begin{footnotes}
\item[13] Landy 1986, 120. For further information on the subject see Casadio 1989. On D’Annunzio in World War I see especially Martinelli 2001. D’Annunzio had won gold, silver, bronze, and other medals and honors in the war. His airplane was called \textit{Asso di picche} (“Ace of Spades”) and so decorated on its sides; a photograph is at Martinelli, 21. The ultimate conclusion reached by Martinelli, 309, is that D’Annunzio was \textit{non imitato e inimitabile} (“not imitated and inimitable”).
\item[16] Detailed accounts of D’Annunzio’s invasion of Fiume and its social and political contexts are numerous. The most extensive, if hagiographic, one is Chiurco 1929, the first two volumes of a four-volume history covering the years until Mussolini’s acquisition of power in 1922. See further Antongini 1957, 492–540. Modern scholarship includes Woodhouse 1998, 315–52; Ledeen 2002; De Felice 1978, especially 3–104; Andreoli 2000, 557–82. Among others, Lyttelton 1973 gives a detailed overview of early Fascist history. For a contemporary voice cf. Giovanni Gentile 1929, now accessible in English (Gentile 2002). Pfaff 2004, 153–86 (chapter entitled “The Mediterranean Superman”), gives a brief survey of D’Annunzio’s life, with emphasis on Fiume.
\end{footnotes}
No one but a poet could have wrought such a miracle, and the fact that the rest of the world has been painfully slow to understand his gesture [i.e., the invasion] is only the most convincing proof of the immense spiritual importance of the audacious expedition on which he embarked, for its very grandeur is beyond the comprehension of the average individual. . . . The city itself, enchanted, and in ecstasy before its conqueror, gave itself to Gabriele D’Annunzio as a passionate woman gives herself to her lover, and lived as contentedly as if it had been assured of the protection of millions of bayonets.\(^\text{17}\)

A major part of D’Annunzio’s political strategy was to strengthen the ties among himself, his men, and the population of Fiume. In this he was entirely successful. One important part was D’Annunzio’s custom of addressing the people in a manner that was to set a pattern for dictators in the 1920s and 1930s:

Nearly every day the Comandante harangued the mob from the balcony of the Palace. The spiritual communion between him, the Legionaries and the people was complete. His words nourished his listeners, who had been starved of hope; they constituted a sort of miraculous sustenance. . . . Thus the life of Fiume became daily more paradoxical and more sublime.\(^\text{18}\)

It fits in with this elevation of D’Annunzio into the sphere of the superhuman hero—not to say, of the demigod—that he was accorded a more than human accolade when people referred to or addressed him. Religiously charged terms like Salvatore (“Savior”) or Redentore (“Redeemer”) had no trace of irony about them.\(^\text{19}\) In this D’Annunzio found himself

\(^{17}\) Antongini 1938a, 520, in a chapter entitled “D’Annunzio, King of Fiume” (520–36; the title is not meant ironically). This is the English version of Antongini 1938b.

\(^{18}\) Antongini 1938a, 527. The anti-Fascist politician Emilio Lussu even reports that D’Annunzio “harangued the populace four times a day”; cf. Lussu 1936, 8. This book is an expanded version of Lussu 1945. The poet-soldier’s political writings done at Fiume are collected in D’Annunzio 1974, with an extensive introduction by the editor on D’Annunzio’s seizure of Fiume (vii–lxxviii). For D’Annunzio and the crowds of Fiume see, e.g., the two photographs reproduced in Andreoli 2003, 50. D’Annunzio was already experienced in this sort of thing; for illustrations see the photographs of him and the crowds in Rome from May 1919, in Salierno 1988, figs. 3–4 (unnumbered). On Mussolini’s appearances before huge crowds see, e.g., Galeotti 2000, 49–50, with reference to the aptly named documentary film Balconi e cannoni: I discorsi di Mussolini (1996).

\(^{19}\) The honorifics—capitalized, of course—occur in the proclamation that made D’Annunzio a citizen of Fiume on March 18, 1920, the name-day of the Archangel Gabriel. The text of the proclamation, with comments, may be found in Gerra 1974, 272–73.
in a direct line extending back to Roman emperors, some of whom received divine titles and cults, and extending forward to Mussolini and Hitler, who both were accorded quasi-religious status.\textsuperscript{20} D’Annunzio’s reign at Fiume has been vividly described in the following terms:

Fiume became a symbol of patriotic fervour and youthful vitality. Futurists, ex-servicemen, Nationalists, syndicalists, anarchists and adventurers flocked there from all over Italy. They swaggered round in cloaks and daggers (literally), bullied the local citizens, and enjoyed themselves immensely. The regime was a permanent \textit{festa}, full of processions and ceremonies, of dancing and slogans. D’Annunzio’s idea of democratic decision-making was rather like Mussolini’s later: long rhetorical speeches from balconies to the eager crowds below, punctuated by massive acclamations. D’Annunzio also invented many of the other trappings of the later Fascist regime, including the militia, the ‘Roman salute,’ the compulsory castor-oil ‘purification’ for dissidents, and even the meaningless war cry ‘Eia, eia, alalà.’ However, D’Annunzio’s Fiume was not just comic opera. . . . The ‘Comandante’ issued proclamations \textit{urbi et orbi}.\textsuperscript{21}

Closely connected to D’Annunzio’s custom of regularly appearing before the people is his introduction of the raised-arm salute into his political and military protocol. In imitation of early epic films, not least \textit{Cabiria}, D’Annunzio appropriated the raised-arm salute for his own purposes. Now a more rigid—and rigorously observed—form of the salute became a propagandistic symbol for D’Annunzio’s political aspirations and later for those of all Italy, to which Fiume by this time belonged. The memory of the glorious Roman past played a large part in all this. That D’Annunzio had himself been a war hero also helped. He was now called Consul, and

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{20} For the religious aspects of Fascism see especially Emilio Gentile 1993 or, in English, 1996b, a fundamental work. See further Galeotti 2000, with the texts of numerous Fascist “Ten Commandments.” The book’s main title (“Mussolini Is Always Right”) is one such commandment. The following are particularly telling examples of the divine nature of the Duce: \textit{Mussolini è Dio} (“Mussolini is God”) and \textit{un nuovo Gesù} (“a new Jesus”) and the school creed which begins \textit{Io credo nel sommo Duce} (“I believe in the highest Duce”); quoted from Galeotti, 19 and 31, who gives the source references. If Mussolini was a new Jesus, D’Annunzio was considered by many to have been the John the Baptist of Fascism. Emilio Gentile 1990 gives a summary in English. That the quasi-religious nature of Fascism was considered to accord well with pagan Rome becomes evident from the following Fascist statement quoted by Emilio Gentile 1996b, 80: “Rome . . . knew how to impart a mystical value to its very name, which was no longer that of a city but that of a divine entity; being a citizen of Rome meant partaking of that divinity.” The Nazi equivalent of this will be dealt with in chapter 6.
\item \textsuperscript{21} Clark 1996, 204–5.
\end{itemize}
his soldiers, many of them _arditi_ from the Great War, were called Legionaries—the _Federazione Nazionale dei Legionari Fiumani_—or Praetorians.\(^{22}\) As such, they needed a sign to distinguish them visually from their political adversaries, one that was readily comprehensible even to outsiders as being (supposedly) ancient. So D’Annunzio and his legionaries adopted the raised-arm salute, long familiar to all and sundry from the screen and now declared to be _il saluto romano_, i.e., the real thing:

They also invented a new salute, the raised right arm, chosen from among the many gestures of Greco-Roman orators. It was clearly superior to the humble bow or bourgeois handshake; its limits seemed the sky. At the same time it seemed, symbolically, to thrust a dagger into the throat of an invisible enemy.\(^{23}\)

The metaphor of the dagger is apropos because it reminds us of the earlier salute of the _arditi_, who used to raise their arms holding their naked daggers. But as we now know, raised-arm salutes are even older, although they are not among the gestures of ancient orators. D’Annunzio’s introduction of raised-arm salutes at Fiume vividly illustrates that a gesture from stage and screen, one that had previously functioned equally well in various invented situations—private and public, political and military—can be adopted for a specific ideological purpose. Through appropriation for a new political reality it became thoroughly militarized. As a result it could never again be perceived as a harmless or innocent gesture. But in the process of this appropriation the salute also lost the wide variety of arm movements that had been possible before. It became rigid and from now on _had_ to be performed in a snappy and pithy manner to achieve the visual impact it was intended for. So it remained and remains an aspect of spectacle, although of a spectacle much different in nature from the comparatively innocuous and naïve spectacles presented on stage and screen earlier. The gesture’s new contexts are serious determination, force,

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22. On the close connections between D’Annunzio’s troops at Fiume and veterans of World War I, especially the _arditi_, see the standard work by Cordova 1969 and the more recent study by Marco Rossi 1997. Cordova, 66, quotes D’Annunzio stating in 1921 that three quarters of his legionaries at Fiume had been _arditi_. On the _arditi_ cf. also my Introduction.

and hostility, all aimed at subjugating enemies or dissenters. Small wonder that such a gesture should later appeal to the Nazis. Their political and highly military system of power bent on conquests far exceeded anything ever envisioned by D’Annunzio or his Italian imitators.

Modern historians have provided only little information about the origin of the Roman salute as adopted by D’Annunzio and his men and then by the early Fascists. The most noteworthy account comes not from a professional historian but from a contemporary eye-witness, who was also one of the leading figures of Italian literature and culture in the early twentieth century. This is Giuseppe Antonio Borgese, a novelist, poet, essayist, and literary critic and historian. He had been an admirer of D’Annunzio, about whose work he published an appreciative study in 1909, replete with D’Annunzio’s portrait and signature: *Gabriele D’Annunzio: Con bibliografia, ritratto e autografo.* But later Borgese became an anti-Fascist: “In his essays published in [the newspaper] *Il Corriere della Sera,* he . . . openly defied Benito Mussolini and his Fascist propaganda.” Borgese went to the United States in 1930, where he lived and worked as an academic until 1948. He had not returned to Italy earlier in order to preserve his intellectual independence from Fascist totalitarianism. In 1937 Borgese published, in English, his book *Goliath: The March of Fascism,* simultaneously a study of the origins of Fascism and an indictment of it. *Goliath* became “one of the most famous and best-received denunciations of Mussolini’s dictatorship” and was translated into numerous languages. Unfortunately it now seems to have been excluded from scholars’ reading lists.

The specific passage that is important for our topic is Borgese’s detailed and vivid description of the new ritual that D’Annunzio instituted for his addresses to the assembled people of Fiume. Borgese also gives his explanation of the origin of the raised-arm salute. His description of D’Annunzio at Fiume is so visual, even cinematic, that it deserves to be better known. It must therefore be quoted in its entirety.

Borgese begins by summarizing a poem by Italy’s famous writer Giuseppe Carducci in which peaceful country folk take up arms to defend themselves against “the Hun or the Slav.” In this poem the following words appear: “In the name of Christ and Mary—I order and will that

Raising their hands the people said: Yes.” The poem also refers to the rural population’s “little senate.” (The term here does not, of course, mean the senate of classical Rome.) Borgese then describes, with occasional sarcasm, the reality analogous to Carducci’s poem that could be observed in Fiume when D’Annunzio spoke to the people:

This delightful poem, together with a few high-school reminiscences from pages of Greek and Roman historians in which Pericles or Caesar addressed, outdoors, the citizens or the legionaries, provided the foundation of d’Annunzio’s political system, which in turn was to be the foundation of Mussolini’s and Hitler’s regimes.

The people and the soldiers convened in the square beneath the palace of the government. The poet, in his over-medalled military uniform, appeared, conveniently flanked by some of the staff, on the balcony, which looked like a baldachin. There he delivered an elaborate harangue, more or less pertinently moulded according to the rhetorical rules of Graeco-Roman public speaking. At the end he bolstered up as best he could his penetrating but rather effeminate voice, and asked the people for consent.

The people raised their right hands and arms, and answered: Yes.

The gesture of the raised right arm, which was to be sooner or later the Roman and, unbelievable but true, the German salute, had been picked at random from classical museums, from gestures of Graeco-Roman orators and rulers, and perhaps also from the medieval romance of Carducci. In antiquity it had been occasionally an attitude of oratorical vehemence, or of command, or even of pardon. It may also have been seen, occasionally, as a salute from the distance, which happens nowadays as it always has, whenever people at the railway station or on the pier bid farewell to departing friends. It never had been the ordinary salute in the streets of Greece and Rome, where the free citizens shook hands or affectionately clasped each other’s wrist, while no doubt the slave, meeting his master, saluted with the raised right arm, almost to show that his hand was disarmed and his obedience defenceless. A salute of slaves; such indeed was the gesture of Fiume to become, sooner or later, in Italy and Germany.

D’Annunzio and the Fiumani liked it because it seemed straight and strenuous, incomparably more dignified than the humble bow of the civilian baring his forehead, and more powerful, also, than the military salute stopping at the képi level, midway between the hero’s torso and the sky, his limit. The dash of the fully swung arm in Fiume seemed,
on the contrary, to plunge right away a dagger into the throat of an invisible enemy, gladiator-like. It spread, at least symbolically, future and blood in the elastic air; and since no Hun or Slav threatened battle it incidentally was a kind of exercise. Several might have seen the equestrian monument which represented Garibaldi sighting Palermo from the surrounding mountains and showing the golden city to a comrade as he, the red-shirted liberator, raised the right arm and promised: “Nino, tomorrow in Palermo.” D’Annunzio, at the balcony or on horseback, imitating the posture, was likely to mean: “Boys, tomorrow we sail toward the world.” But it is even possible that at times he would add a vague allusion to some sort of episcopal or papal benediction, which solemn gesture he much enjoyed in the all-embroiling stew of his imagination.

The crowd, surging and raising hundreds of right arms, answered, no matter what he had said: Yes. But they also often—and more often in the process of time—yelled or sang: Eya! Eya! Alalà!

These syllables, which were soon to become the Fascist outcry, had also been concocted by d’Annunzio, from obscure recollections of Homeric poetry with a dash of the Kaiser’s hip-hip-hurrah and of the hunter’s hallali and tallyho.\(^{28}\)

In his references to ancient Rome Borgese is not quite accurate when he assesses the gesture and concludes that it is not a true revival of a classical Roman custom. But anybody interested in the origin of the Fascist and German salutes must be indebted to him. Indeed Borgese’s comparison of the raised-arm salute to a dagger thrust did exert some influence on modern scholarship, as when it was revived more than twenty years later, as we have already seen.

Despite its usually pithy appearance the raised-arm salute allowed for a certain measure of variation, as a contemporary description tells us:

The whole arm is raised forward and upward at an angle of about forty-five degrees, the palm of the hand out straight and stiff. Sometimes the salute is performed with grace and dignity, but usually it is either excessively vigorous and awkward or slovenly and formless. The former attitude is common among the boys, the latter is conspicuous among politicians and officials. Doormen, porters, etc., in public employ have taken up with the custom and are apt to carry it to ridiculous lengths.

\(^{28}\) Borgese 1937, 158–59. The following pages are also instructive. For an indication of the value of Borgese’s description of D’Annunzio at Fiume cf. Farrell 2003, 87, a passage that is clearly indebted to Borgese.
The salute is most effective when made by soldiers in mass formation or by a large crowd at a public gathering.\(^{29}\)

5. From D’Annunzio to Mussolini

In this way there began, in the Fiume of 1919, what Eric Hobsbawm has termed the invention of a tradition.\(^{30}\) After D’Annunzio the raised-arm salute and its Roman connotations caught on immediately, not only within Italy. Nazi Germany is the most prominent example. As Borgese and other contemporary and recent scholars have stated, Mussolini and Hitler followed D’Annunzio’s model. The importance of the raised-arm salute for their new political systems is not to be underestimated. How seriously the Fascist party hierarchy took it becomes evident from the role the salute played in the ideological education of Italy’s youth.\(^{31}\)

D’Annunzio had imperial designs and modeled himself on Julius Caesar. For example, he began a letter written to Mussolini on the day before his seizure of Fiume with the words: *il dado è tratto* (“the die is cast”), an allusion to Caesar’s famous *Alea iacta est*.\(^{32}\) As early as 1935 a historian sarcastically described D’Annunzio’s vision of himself as a new Caesar:

He revelled in instituting analogies between himself and Caesar. Like Caesar, he was middle-aged and bald, but, like Caesar, he would conceal his baldness with a laurel wreath. Like Caesar, he had been obliged to remain for years outside the frontiers of Italy owing to financial troubles, financial troubles which an ungrateful Government had refused to solve for their greatest poet. Like Caesar, too, he had had numerous love affairs, and like Caesar he had never allowed those love affairs to hamper

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29. Schneider and Clough 1929, 192.
him in his career as a literary man and a soldier. And, unlike Caesar, who had been merely a poetaster, he was the world’s greatest poet!!!

The faux-Roman legions of the soldier-poet provided an effective starting point for political rituals: “He held a procession of parades, meetings at which he distributed medals, and other public events designed to appeal to the Italian love for the theatrical.” But D’Annunzio’s influence was not limited to Italy. As has been observed more recently about his influence on European Fascism:

D’Annunzio anticipated the aesthetics of fascist mass politics with rituals such as the speech from the balcony, the call-and-response dialogue and the mystical fusion of leader with crowd, the Roman salute, and the ritual cry—in other words, a politics of spectacle.

George Seldes, an American journalist expelled from Fascist Italy in 1925, was more sarcastic on the grand theatrics of D’Annunzio and Mussolini.

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34. The quotation is from Hoyt 1994, 49.
In his book *Sawdust Caesar* he commented on the invasion of Fiume as follows:

Comic opera as this may seem today, the attack and its success led directly to the making of the Fascist movement and the advent of Mussolini in Rome. The poet had supplied the black shirts, the black fezzes, the slogans, the spirit of armed adventure, the ideal of force triumphant and the salutes, yells, and claptap of Rome of the time of the Caesars. A shrewder man knew how to employ them on a national scale.36

The name “Fascism” (in Italian, *fascismo*) derives from the term *fascio di combattimento* (“bundle of combat”), which had first appeared in 1919 as a name for Mussolini’s troops. From these, D’Annunzio took over the term for his men in Fiume.37 D’Annunzio’s initial spectacular success only reinforced Mussolini’s own ambitions, and he quickly adopted D’Annunzio’s Roman rituals and terminology. Robert Paxton’s recent comments are a concise summary of the connections between D’Annunzio and Mussolini but also of their differences in political shrewdness and foresight:

In September 1919, D’Annunzio led a band of nationalists and war veterans into the Adriatic port of Fiume, which the peacemakers at Versailles had awarded to the new state of Yugoslavia. Declaring Fiume the “Republic of Carnaro,” D’Annunzio invented the public theatricality that Mussolini was later to make his own: daily harangues by the *Comandante* from a balcony, lots of uniforms and parades, the “Roman salute” with arm outstretched, the meaningless war cry “Eia, eia, alalà.”

As the occupation of Fiume turned into a national embarrassment for Italy, D’Annunzio defied the government in Rome. . . . D’Annunzian Fiume became a kind of martial populist republic whose chief drew directly upon a popular will affirmed in mass rallies. . . .

Mussolini uttered only mild protests when [Prime Minister Giovanni Giolitti] negotiated a settlement with Yugoslavia in November 1920

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36. Seldes 1935, 73; cf. 73–75 on D’Annunzio’s penchant to dress in various uniforms and style himself on famous figures from different eras of history. Cf. further Bosworth 1998, 58–81 (chapter entitled “Mussolini the *Duce*: Sawdust Caesar, Roman Statesman or Dictator Minor?”). Cf. Farrell 2003, 84–89 (section entitled “If d’Annunzio’s March on Fiume Was Comic Opera, Mussolini’s March on Rome Was *Opera Lirica*”).

that made Fiume an international city, and then sent the Italian navy at Christmas to disperse D’Annunzio’s volunteers. This did not mean that Mussolini was uninterested in Fiume. Once in power, he forced Yugoslavia to recognize the city as Italian in 1924. But Mussolini’s ambitions gained from D’Annunzio’s humiliation. Adopting many of the Comandante’s mannerisms, Mussolini managed to draw back to his own movement many veterans of the Fiume adventure. . . .

D’Annunzio . . . was more interested in the purity of his gestures than in the substance of power. . . . D’Annunzio’s failure is a warning to those who wish to interpret fascism primarily in terms of its cultural expressions. Theater was not enough.38

It is no exaggeration to say that the founding father of Fascism was D’Annunzio and that his most observant disciple was Mussolini. This is the result:

Many [of D’Annunzio’s] legionaries now [i.e., 1921] joined the fascist militia, which provided the best prospects of ‘action,’ and accepted Mussolini’s leadership. But though the Fascist party broke with D’Annunzio and Fiume radicalism, it showed that it had learnt much from the Fiume adventure. The uniforms and the black shirts, the ‘Roman salute,’ the ‘oceanic’ rallies, the party hymn, Giovinezza [“Youth,” the song of the arditi in World War I]; the organisation of the militia into cohorts and legions, commanded by consuls; the weird cries of Eia Eia Alalà!, the demagogic technique of ‘dialogue’ between orators and massed audiences; all the symbolism, mystique and ‘style’ with which the world

38. Paxton 2004, 59–60; notes omitted. (The cover of the 2005 reprint edition shows a photograph with a straight-arm salute.) D’Annunzio had first introduced his air squadron to the cry Eia, eia, alalà in 1917 during the bombardment of Pola; he revived it at Fiume. It, too, is an example of D’Annunzio’s (pretentious?) veneration of classical antiquity and of his appropriation of its cultural standing for his own purposes; cf. Giardina and Vauchez 2000, 214–15. The words—Greek, not Latin—are not quite as meaningless as Paxton believes since they are attested in the works of dramatic and lyrical ancient poets. Eia (something like “Up! On! Away!”) appears in Aeschylus, Euripides, Aristophanes, and Plato; it is not “di origine latina,” as Cavazza, “Saluto romano,” in de Grazia and Luzatto 2003, 579, has it. Alalà, deriving from the ancient Doric dialect (in Attic: alalè), is an onomatopoeic term for a loud cry, especially a war cry, and occurs in Euripides and Pindar, with Aristophanes’ variant alalá. Pindar even personifies Alale as Daughter of War. D’Annunzio, a famous dramatist and lyrical poet, saw himself in a line with the great authors of an idealized classical past. Cf. Green 1991, 133, on the Macedonian battle line: “At the same moment, every man of the phalanx beat his spear on his shield, and from thousands of throats there went up the terrible ululating Macedonian war cry—‘Alalalalai!’—echoing and reverberating from the mountains. This sudden, shattering explosion of sound . . . completely unnerved [the enemy].”
was later to grow so familiar, were plagiarised from D’Annunzio, who in this sense too could justly claim to be one of the spiritual fathers of fascism.  

Now a new version of the imperial and military spectacles that the Italians for many years had loved to watch on the screen about their mighty ancestors, the Romans, was turning into a kind of reality, for legions and leaders were again on the move in Rome and in the cities and towns of Italy. D’Annunzio was a kind of father figure for Mussolini, to be emulated at first but then to be discarded:

D’Annunzio had conceived the idea of the uniforms with their black fezzes, the assemblies, the slogans, the administration of castor oil to political opponents, and the claptrap of a Fascist regime. He had appealed to chauvinism, to the adventurous spirit of youth, to the desire of the masses for colorful pomp, and to the ideal of force. Mussolini, who had hitherto relied on inflammatory rhetoric and journalism, was clever enough to see that these meretricious devices of political pageantry could be developed and usefully applied to his own wider purpose.

It was a shrewd strategy on D’Annunzio’s part to strengthen his military, political, and social influence throughout Italy by an extensive appeal to most people’s inclinations toward ritual, history, and a vague but powerful quasi-religious ceremonial, in all of which ancient Rome played a significant part. As a modern historian summarizes it: “People and nation were bound up in a thick web of symbols, which embraced town- and landscape, machines and monuments, art and costume, dress and gesture, and which stamped on every thing and in every place, from the weapons of the state to roadside milestones, the emblem of the lictor’s fasces.” Another historian observes: “Virtually the entire ritual of Fascism came from the ‘Free State of Fiume.’”

In an autobiographical reminiscence writer Italo Calvino commented on the evolution of Mussolini’s appearance in contemporary art. He observed:

Radio and cinema were the principal media not only of the dissemination but also of the very formation of this [i.e., the classic] image of Mussolini . . . in the cinema the leader’s image was more effective and tangible than when it was seen directly by the crowd underneath that balcony. . . . The audio-visual media of the time were, in short, an essential component of Mussolini’s Roman cult.  

An autobiographical sequence in Federico Fellini’s Roma (1972) that is set in a local film theater during the Fascist era exemplifies Calvino’s point. In general, Mussolini was Italy’s most popular film star (divo):

Considering the ubiquity of . . . newsreels and documentaries during the 1920s and 1930s, it is necessary to recognize that the most widely viewed figure of the Italian cinema for almost twenty years was Benito Mussolini . . . it is film . . . that did most to convey [his] personality through heroic, larger-than-life images, that enabled greatest public access to him (even live, he was often seen from afar), and that still serves as the most vivid record most people have of him.

The influence of Cabiria on Mussolini’s public image is extensive. The film had given cinema one of its most enduring heroes—the strongman Maciste, whom D’Annunzio had named for his parallels to Hercules,

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Maciste’s mythical ancient precursor. Maciste eventually became the hero of a whole series of popular muscleman films down to the 1960s. Maciste could even leave the ancient world and battle evil wherever and whenever it occurred. (The same was to be the case with Hercules in the films of the 1950s and later.) In the Fascist era Mussolini appeared like a modern and real Maciste. Not the least reason for this was that the Duce bore a strong physical resemblance to Bartolomeo Pagano, the actor who had played Maciste for Pastrone and who shortly after had begun appearing in commercially successful Maciste films with contemporary settings. When we first see him on the screen in *Cabiria*, Maciste, with his nude torso and his arms folded over his chest, has a posture and facial expression that uncannily foreshadow Mussolini’s. (Figure 20)
too, employs the raised-arm salute in Pastrone’s film, a circumstance that has caused a modern commentator to call the actor an actual stand-in for Mussolini.\footnote{Bertelli 1995, 42 (“la controfigura di Benito Mussolini”). Bertelli’s first illustration (facing page 192; the same as Figure 20 here) shows Pagano wearing a kind of toga draped over one shoulder, in a heroic leader-like pose (\textit{modello per un condottiere di popoli}, reads the caption). All this is despite the fact that Maciste in \textit{Cabiria} was not even a Roman and that the film’s screenwriters claimed in an article published that year in the film journal \textit{Bianco e nero} “not to have changed in any way ancient values but simply to have compressed, in a necessary dramatic synthesis, historical matter” (\textit{di non aver in nulla alterato i valori storici, ma semplicemente di aver costretto, in una sintesi drammatica indispensabile, la stessa materia storica}; quoted from Bertelli, 44).}

For propaganda purposes Mussolini liked to appear as a kind of heroic laborer in the midst of his people. Stripped to the waist to show off his muscles, he worked in the fields at harvest time as part of his \textit{battaglia del grano} (“battle of wheat”), an endeavor to increase Italy’s grain yields and decrease the necessity of imports. Such occasions were duly recorded on film.\footnote{E.g., in the 1925 documentary \textit{La battaglia del grano}. Brunetta 1975, 33, quotes Curzio Malaparte’s 1926 dictum that Mussolini’s artistic masterpiece was not Fascist Italy but Mussolini himself. Much of this “art” derived from the cinema.}

In Fascist Italy the historical screen spectacle was “one of the most powerful means of cementing popular culture. Through the authority of

\begin{figure}[h]
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\caption{\textit{Cabiria}. Maciste foreshadowing Mussolini. Itala Film.}
\end{figure}
historical film’s realism and mass audience recognition, history seemed to write itself.\textsuperscript{50} Carmine Gallone’s epic about Scipio Africanus (\textit{Scipione l’Africano}, 1937) is the most instructive as well as visually explicit example. The film returns to the same time of Roman history and the same historical figure that \textit{Cabiria} had already immortalized on celluloid.\textsuperscript{51} \textit{Scipione l’Africano} even features a score by the composer who had written the famous “Symphony of Fire” for \textit{Cabiria}.\textsuperscript{52} It also uses the same raised-arm salute. But this time its appearances on the screen are different. Now the salute is Gallone’s chief visual means to make Mussolini an explicit analogy to Scipio in the context of modern Italy’s campaign in Abyssinia. The film, made with government support, was Italy’s most expensive production to date. Mussolini’s son Vittorio served as executive producer, although without screen credit.\textsuperscript{53} The raised-arm salute occurs from the outset and with such abandon that Gallone’s film rivals those of Guazzoni discussed in the preceding chapter. The salute looks most contemporary in scenes with huge crowds filmed in long shot: “the masses are shown like the Red Sea parting for their hero and saluting him in a scene reminiscent of Mussolini’s relationship to the masses.”\textsuperscript{54} (Figure 21) When Scipio appears among them, he is usually in

\textsuperscript{50} Hay 1987, 179. Cf. also the chapter on film in Ben-Ghiat 2001, 70–92 and 235–42 (notes).

\textsuperscript{51} The film is now available on DVD in an English-dubbed version as The Defeat of Hannibal. This version’s running time is less than eighty-five minutes, omitting as much as thirty minutes of the original footage. On the film see Gili 1985, 149–55; Landy 1986, 194–200 (Massinissa, however, is not “a Roman officer,” as Landy, 197, calls him); Casadio 1989, 22–23 and 27–29; and De España 1998, 211–13. Elley 1984, 84; Hay 1987, 155–61; and Wyke 1997, 21–22, have further discussions and quotations from contemporary sources and place the film into the historical context of its making. See now also the extensive analysis by Pasquale Iaccio, “\textit{Scipione l’Africano}: Un kolossal dell’epoca fascista,” in Iaccio 2003, 51–86; the title of this essay collection indicates that Gallone’s name has gone down in cinematic and cultural history because of this one film. The book (bottom of plate 15, unnumbered) provides a revealing photograph of the Barberini cinema in Rome taken on October 27, 1937, in which the building’s façade is decorated with Italian flags alternating with Swastika flags. In 1960 Gallone would make \textit{Cartagine in fiamme} (\textit{Carthage in Flames}), the only film about the destruction of Carthage by Scipio Africanus the Younger at the end of the Third Punic War (148–146 B.C.).


\textsuperscript{53} Vittorio Mussolini was his father’s personally appointed expert on historical films (Bertelli 1995, 21).

\textsuperscript{54} Landy 1986, 196. Brief excerpts of this film’s crowd scenes, replete with arms raised, are intercut into \textit{Messalina} (\textit{The Affairs of Messalina}, 1951), Gallone’s second film set in ancient Rome, presumably to save money on hiring huge numbers of extras. Straight-arm salutes like those on display in the earlier film recur, but Gallone includes a few variations. Apparently the
an exalted position, towering above the crowds. Such scenes, in combination with massive architecture on view in numerous shots, present a clear visual analogy to Leni Riefenstahl’s *Triumph of the Will*, a film to be discussed in chapter 6. So does a night scene in which the Romans conduct a torchlight procession to celebrate their victory over Hannibal. When Scipio delivers a speech in the senate, Gallone even has the actor resort to a gesture of the kind that Mussolini had made familiar to his viewers. And like Mussolini himself, this Scipio is rather short and stout and not at all the handsome young hero audiences might expect in a historical epic. Before the decisive battle at Zama, Scipio announces to his army that the Roman battle cry will be “Victory or Death!” This is the kind of pithy slogan with which Fascists (and Nazis) were familiar. Well-known examples are D’Annunzio’s motto *Italia o morte* (“Italy or death”) at Fiume and Mussolini’s *O Roma o morte* (“Either Rome or death”) at his march on Rome. The kitschy choirs on the soundtrack of cinematic tradition is still exerting its influence although Gallone no longer attempts to evoke Mussolini’s Italy.

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55. This in turn echoes “Rome or Death” (*Roma o morte*), Giuseppe Garibaldi’s oath to his supporters of 1862. The oath is quoted, in English translation, in Pick 2005, 75; an illustration, replete with raised arms, appears in Pick, 94. D’Annunzio paid homage to the hero after his death with *La canzone di Garibaldi*. On Mussolini’s imitation of Garibaldi see, e.g., Paserini.
Gallone’s epic which underscore the momentous nature of some scenes are also in the spirit of the Fascist, not the Roman, times. All this bears out the observation made in 1939 by influential Italian film director Alessandro Blasetti:

An historical film can re-create moments perfectly analogous to those that we live, or rather those with which we can readily identify; they can convey warnings, they can excite, they can induce realizations that serve to maintain or to reinforce today’s popular consciousness.56

So it is appropriate that a chapter on Gallone’s film in a critical study of Fascist cinema should be entitled, somewhat sarcastically, “Benito l’Africano.”57

Despite its obvious political intentions, however, the film does not serve Italy’s imperial master all that well. Its Scipio is a bland presence on screen, so much lacking in charisma as a leader that he is no match for its Hannibal. It is also ironic that the actor who plays Scipio (Annibale Ninchi) is named after Hannibal and that those who portray the African leaders Hannibal (Camillo Pilotto) and Syphax (Marcello Giorda) bear names of great Roman heroes: Camillus, the legendary early savior of Rome, and Marcellus, general in the Second Punic War. Even the raised-arm salute is not as exclusively Roman as the overall Fascist nature of the film could lead modern viewers to believe. When the scene switches from Rome to Africa, for example, we are surprised to see that the Carthaginians, too, employ raised-arm salutes. While the Romans executing their salutes keep their bodies upright and their right arms straight, the Africans usually have a somewhat different posture: they tend to incline their heads and upper bodies and to bend their elbows. A particularly noteworthy example of this occurs when Hannibal dismisses a messenger from his tent. (Figure 22) This is the first instance in the film’s English-language version in which someone who is not a Roman so salutes. In a combination of acknowledgment and greeting, the messenger raises his right arm and simultaneously lowers his body backwards by bending one knee but keeping the other leg straight before him. His posture at this moment is reminiscent of that employed by courtiers in films set in the

56. Blasetti 1939, here quoted from Hay 1987, 179, who supplies the original text of the quotation at 267 note 34.

57. Carabba 1974, 52–64. He provides a photo of Mussolini looking through the camera during the filming of Scipione l’Africano (ill. 36).
royal or aristocratic courts of feudal Europe. No doubt the unusual position of his body is intended to show up the difference of his salute from that of the Romans, which appears more heroic and less servile. Except for some nobility in the character of Hannibal, the Carthaginians in *Scipione l’Africano* are barbarians and on a noticeably lower level of culture and manners than the Romans. Massinissa, king of Numidia, also employs the raised-arm salute, if more in the manner of the film’s Romans. Clearly the cinematic tradition which had introduced the raised-arm salute as a key visual aspect of antiquity accounts for the fact that in a highly political film like Gallone’s even enemies of Rome employ what is firmly established in contemporary reality as the Roman or Fascist salute.

At this point in our study of how the Roman salute developed in history, film, and modern culture at large, it is appropriate to look back once more on the way modern scholarship has attempted to understand and interpret this gesture. Two European historians write:

Il saluto fascista . . . , usato originariamente dai legionari fiumani di D’Annunzio, trovava riscontro in un vasto repertorio iconografico romano, anche se non mancavano numerose attestazioni di un saluto identico nell’arte greca. Nella società romana, i significati di questo gesto, che non era l’unico né il più diffuso gesto di saluto, erano molte-
plici e variavano a seconda dei contesti. Prevale tuttavia, nella scultura come nelle raffigurazioni monetali, un significato augurale, del tutto privo di risvolti politici. Nel rituale fascista esso adunse invece una forte connotazione politica e ideologica, perché indicava un’appartenenza partitica intrisa di marzialità. Esso veniva anche esaltato, oltre che per la sua maggiore igienicità, per la sua rapidità, che esprimeva bene il dinamismo fascista.

The Fascist salute . . . , used originally by D’Annunzio’s legionaries at Fiume, found its correspondence in a vast repertory of Roman iconography, even if numerous attestations of an identical salute were not lacking in Greek art. In Roman society, the meanings of this gesture, which was not the only nor the widest-spread gesture of salute, were manifold and varied according to their contexts. Nevertheless, in sculpture as in representations on coins, a benevolent meaning prevailed that completely lacked political aspects. In Fascist ritual, on the other hand, it assumed a strong political and ideological connotation because it indicated a party-political feature soaked in everything martial. It also came to be elevated, other than through its greater hygienic value, through its rapidity, which well expressed the dynamism of Fascism.58

This assessment is inaccurate about antiquity and about D’Annunzio at Fiume, but the description of the ritual and martial aspects of the Fascists’ understanding of the gesture is illuminating. Both the ritualized and the warlike sides of the straight-arm salute become more pronounced in the political and cinematic culture of Nazi Germany, at which we will take a closer look next.