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## ITALIAN FILM PRODUCERS AND THE CHALLENGE OF SOVIET CO-PRODUCTIONS: FRANCO CRISTALDI AND THE CASE OF *THE RED TENT*

**Barbara Corsi**

There could have been no better beginning to the short season of Italian-Soviet film co-productions than *Kräsnaĵa palátka, La tenda rossa* (The Red Tent, 1969), a film in which images of melting ice in the Arctic sea metaphorically set the seal on an entire historical period. The story of the long and complex making of *The Red Tent*, coproduced by the Italian company Vides Cinematografica sas, run by Franco Cristaldi, and the Soviet Mosfilm, occupies a position of importance in the history of diplomatic-cinematographic relations between Italy and the USSR, in the history of Italian film, coproductions and in that of the Vides production company. Coming soon after approval of the inter-governmental accord between Italy and the USSR on 30 January 1967<sup>1</sup> - whose main features had been publicised beforehand – the film was the trailblazer for a collaboration that promised to widen the already extensive network of Italian cinema, permitting it for the first time to penetrate the ‘iron curtain’. The established practice of co-production, however, in the case of the USSR, had to be adapted to conditions different from those to which Italian producers were accustomed and find a meeting point between capitalist criteria of efficiency on the one hand and the requirements of a highly bureaucratised state production system on the other.

*The Red Tent* was the first international colossal produced by Vides, a medium-sized company that on this occasion invested great material as well as creative resources in order to arouse the interest of the big American distributors and establish itself as a capable organiser and executor of large projects. In this case, Cristaldi sought to reconcile three worlds and three modes of production, uniting the power of the Soviet state, the creativity of European art cinema

and the reach of American distribution. The producer succeeded in his aim thanks to his ability to manage complex economic and diplomatic situations, but the final balance of the operation, while commercially positive, was disappointing relative to the energies deployed and future opportunities generated. After this first official collaboration and the handful of others which followed in the first few years following the treaty, Italian-Soviet co-productions stalled and Italian cinema turned once more to its traditional foreign partners.

Taking into account earlier work on this film by Paula A. Michaels,<sup>2</sup> who, after a brief discussion of its production history, analyses the role of masculinity and honour in the story, and the useful framework offered by Stefano Pisu in his discussion of the Italian-Soviet coproductions,<sup>3</sup> this article aims to investigate from the point of view of Italian entrepreneurs the economic and diplomatic reasons for the strong initial impulse towards collaboration between the Italian and Soviet film industries and for its subsequent interruption. After setting out the broader picture of Italian coproductions in the 1960s and in particular the strategy of Vides in this sector, the production history of *The Red Tent* will be explored. This history is emblematic in many respects on account of the innumerable obstacles that had to be overcome in order to bring to successful conclusion a collaboration that was undermined by reciprocal diffidence. In the final section, a comparison will be developed between *The Red Tent* and other Italian-Soviet films made between 1969 and the end of the 1970s with the aim of finding similarities and differences and offering an interpretation of the causes of an outcome that failed to meet initial expectations.

### **Coproductions and diplomacy**

For Italian cinema, coproductions were a winning formula that contributed to establish the conditions of its postwar expansion. From the signing of the accord with France in October 1949,<sup>4</sup> production companies benefitted from official collaborations that enabled them to spread the risks and share markets with business partners from one or more foreign countries, pooling

financial, technical and artistic resources and take advantage of the benefits offered by the various national laws. The Italian producers' association ANICA (Associazione Nazionale Industrie Cinematografiche & Affini) worked hard to forge treaties with various European countries as steps towards a global project for European cinema that overcame the territorial and economic limitations of the single national markets. Even though this project was never fully realised, it can be said that collaborative arrangements between European cinemas produced positive artistic and commercial results for a period of at least fifteen years, between the mid 1950s and the early 1970s. For Italian cinema, coproduction was the touchstone of the quantitative increase in production, from the 137 films of 1957 to the around 240 annually of the period 1962-1968, a significant proportion of which (between 40 per cent and 60 per cent) were made in coproduction.<sup>5</sup>

From 1949 to 1967 no fewer than 1,411 Italian films were produced in association with France, Spain and Germany, on the basis of bi- or tri-national formulas.<sup>6</sup> With these three countries, and in particular with France, coproductions in the 1960s were adapted to every type of product, from auteur films to genre films. After the rigid obligations of parity that obtained in the early years, which envisaged that each film would have a 'twin' and a percentage share fixed in advance for each party, a more flexible system gained official approval that allowed for a simple financial contribution while preserving double nationality. In this way it became easier to establish collaborations and increase the volume of production, with the consequence that Italian producers large and small were constantly on the lookout for new partners.

In the course of the 1960s, ANICA made agreements with Austria, Yugoslavia, Argentina and, finally in 1967, with Great Britain and the Soviet Union. The reasons for this last accord were clearly expressed by Eitel Monaco, the president of ANICA, in his annual address:

Soviet cinema beats Italian cinema decisively in terms of the scale of investment made in production over the last few years. Yet the number of new films going into production does not exceed 120 per year. In addition, exports of Soviet films to the various western markets, and thus also the profits accruing from them, stand significantly below the scale and profitability of Italian film exports.<sup>7</sup>

The huge economic capacity of Soviet state cinema was undermined by the limited scope of commercial activity and the poor returns achieved by film exports, characteristics that were the exact opposite of Italian cinema. On paper, collaboration between the two countries could offset the weak points of each cinema and, with the blessing of the respective governments, benefit from the more open diplomatic climate which had already given rise to other economic initiatives. Above all, Italian producers were attracted by the financial and material resources of the Soviet state system. In return, they were able to offer the Soviets a vast network of relations with western film markets. No sooner were the Italo-Soviet accords signed than three projects went into production in quick succession. The first of these was *The Red Tent*, produced by Franco Cristaldi.

### **Cristaldi and the coproduction strategy of the Vides company**

In 1967 Cristaldi was head of 'Vides Cinematografica di Franco Cristaldi sas', the company that was formed in 1959 following to replace the Turinese producer's previous company Vides spa - Produzione Cinematografica. Cristaldi, who was born in 1924, began his professional career in 1946 producing documentaries and newsreels. He made his first fiction film in 1954 and achieved a great box office success four years later with *I soliti ignoti* (Big Deal on Madonna Street, Mario Monicelli 1958). He reached the apex of his career in the 1960s, when he turned his company into a special limited partnership that accorded him full powers as the sole decision-maker. At the

same time, he formed an alliance with a property company that acted as an investor in his film business and, in conjunction with this, he built a fully-fledged film studio that placed actors and directors under contract. Thanks to this development, he was able to control the whole production cycle. His output was marked by a commitment to art cinema and by high technical standards, qualities which found due reward when films such as *Divorzio all'italiana* (Divorce Italian Style, Pietro Germi, 1961), *Salvatore Giuliano* (Francesco Rosi, 1962), *I compagni* (The Organizer, Mario Monicelli, 1963), *La Cina è vicina* (China is Near, Marco Bellocchio, 1967) were the recipients of numerous international prizes.

Like many of his colleagues at the time, Cristaldi often produced films in collaboration with foreign associates. His regular partner was the Frenchman Alexandre Mnouchkine of Films Ariane, who shared with him a production policy geared to balancing artistic quality and mass entertainment. Vides and Films Ariane produced together *I delfini* (Silver Spoon Set, Francesco Maselli, 1960) and *Rue des praires* (Denys de La Patellière, 1959), *Arrivano i Titani* (My Son, the Hero, Duccio Tessari, 1962) and *Cartouche* (Philip de Broca, 1962), *Mare matto* (Mad Sea and Crazy Sea, Renato Castellani, 1963) and *L'homme de Rio* (The Man from Rio, Philip de Broca, 1964), *Per amore...per magia* (Duccio Tessari 1967) and *Vivre pour vivre* (Claude Lelouch, 1967). Each pair of films was conceived on the basis of alternating percentages of contribution (80/20 - 20/80) on the part of the two coproducers. This method allowed films to be made which had both strong national features and an international perspective. The bulk of the work was undertaken by the majority producer, who was in charge of the project, while the minority producer simply made a financial contribution. It effectively doubled the volume of production and income of both companies. For an understanding like this to work, there had to be both reciprocal respect between participating companies and complete harmony over the type of product that would on each occasion be made.

Italian producers were most successful, both quantitatively and qualitatively, in their relations with France, due to the affinities that prevailed between the two countries in terms of

industrial organisation, culture, cinematic taste and type of audience. With Germany and Spain, successful combinations were created with specialised in given genres, such as the western or, in the case of Cristaldi, the melodrama (*Soledad*, Mario Craveri, Enrico Gras 1959; *La venganza*, Juan Antonio Bardem, 1959). With other countries, like Yugoslavia, production accords were determined by the need to limit costs (*Kapò*, Gillo Pontecorvo, 1960).

How then, in this context, did the new Italian-Soviet accord figure in relation to the division of labour between the various European countries? What was expected from collaboration with a film industry so distant and different but at the same time rich with vast human and physical resources? Italian producers were unanimous in concluding that the answers lay in the colossal.

### **The airship Italia and the icebreaker Krassin: ideal protagonists of the first Italian-Soviet coproduction**

Directed by the Georgian Michail K. Kalatozov (abbreviation of Kalatozishvili), *The Red Tent* tells the story of the Arctic mission led in 1928 by the Italian general Umberto Nobile (played in the film by Peter Finch) with the aim of gathering cartographic and meteorological data.<sup>8</sup> The airship Italia, in which some sixteen people were travelling including Nobile and several scientists, crashed on the ice pack on 25 May 1928, after about a month of troubled flights and technical problems. The impact of the crash caused some members of the crew to be thrown out of the ship, while the shell containing the remaining six members went adrift and was never found. The survivors, some of whom were wounded, used the materials that had fallen to the ground to feed themselves and to construct a tent, on which they drew a red lattice design using the aniline that had been intended for use in altimetric surveys. In this way, they hoped that rescuers would be able easily to identify the position of the temporary encampment on the ice. Forty-nine days would pass before the survivors were rescued, despite the efforts of pilots and

explorers from various corners of the world, who gathered in the area round Kingsbay, on the Svalbard islands in Norway. Roald Amundsen (played in the film by Sean Connery) perished during a rescue attempt, while the Swedish pilot Einar Lundborg (in the film, Hardy Krüger) succeeded in landing a small aircraft near the tent. With room on board for just one additional person, he took Nobile to safety. Other planes identified the survivors and rescuers who had got lost, but failed to save them because melting ice made landing extremely difficult. In the end it was the Soviet icebreaker *Krassin*, which docked from Leningrad on 16 June, with the geographer Rudolf Samoilovich on board, that finally managed to reach the Italian survivors and other rescuers and conduct them to safety on 12 July.

Beyond recounting historical events, Kalatozov's film introduced the theme of the moral responsibility of the commander by including scenes of a imagined trial of Nobile, who was accused of having abandoned his men in order to save himself, instead of remaining with them until the end of their ordeal.

The story of the airship *Italia* and the epic coming together of various forces in the rescue effort was a perfect theme for an international film. It had adventure, drama, moral questions, a high degree of spectacle, real landscapes, and the chance to put well-known individuals on the screen and have them played by famous actors. In addition, it was centred on Nobile, a figure held dear by the Soviets, and left ample space for due emphasis to be placed on their own decisive contribution to the happy resolution of the drama.<sup>9</sup> For all these reasons, the Soviet state production company Mosfilm accepted without hesitation the offer put to it in 1965 by the West German company MCS 70 to set up a coproduction with a western country based on the story.<sup>10</sup>

The collaborative Soviet attitude can be seen in relation to the relaxation of Cold War tensions promoted by CPSU secretary Nikita Khrushchev, which had already led to the establishment of agreements for cultural cooperation with the USA, France and the UK. MCS 70, which specialised in the production of large-scale films, was founded in Munich at the end of the



1950s by Rudolf Travnicek with the initial aim of commercialising the Cinerama system and distributing 70mm films (Modern Cinema System KG). Travnicek was attracted by the opportunities that the Nobile story offered for spectacle, but he saw the need for a reliable partner with authority over the political territory covered by the ice. For this reason, he made contact with the representatives of Soviet state cinema, who had been seeking for some years to emerge from isolation and find new foreign markets for their products.

In February 1965 MCS and Mosfilm stipulated a preliminary accord for the production of a 70mm colour film in which it was envisaged that the technical equipment for both the shoot and post-production work would be supplied by MCS, while Mosfilm would provide the director, all technical personnel, the airship and the icebreaker. The screenplay, drafted by Yuri Nagibin, was to have been revised by the German playwright Hans Meter, but the Russian text reached the desk of the chief executive of MCS Georg Reuther only in January 1966, barely ahead of the start of the shoot, that had been slated to begin in the Spring. 'Our working rhythms are different', Reuther wrote in a letter to Vladimir Surin, general director of Mosfilm,<sup>11</sup> and this observation, coming in the preliminary phase of the collaboration, could remain valid until the end of the experience, putting under considerable stress the whole western way of organising film production.

The failure to keep to schedule led Reuther to adopt a cautious approach towards the establishment of a full-blown coproduction agreement, geared to the delivery of a script modified along the lines indicated by the Germans. By contrast, the Soviets who, by the summer of 1966, were eager to conclude the matter, broke the confidentiality of negotiations and distributed the treatment to other German and Italian production companies such as Bavaria Film and the De Laurentiis company, which rejected the project on account of the high costs and defects in the screenplay which was regarded as inferior by western standards.<sup>12</sup>

While the correspondence with MCS continued amid a flurry of accusations and counter-accusations, by the last few months of 1966 Mosfilm was already negotiating with Franco Cristaldi. On 27 November, Mosfilm and Vides signed a preliminary agreement and, in a letter bearing the same date, the Italian producer expressed to Surin his ‘gratitude for the proposal that you have made me’.<sup>13</sup> In December, a delegation from Vides was received with full honours in Moscow, in a sign that the Soviets were interested in initiating permanent relations with the Italian industry, ‘while giving voice to concerns over the difficulties that arose from the fact that single producers often lacked financial solidity’.<sup>14</sup> The weak points of the Italian film industry were well known to the Russians, but Cristaldi’s company evidently enjoyed a different and higher reputation. Vides was a well-run company that had produced prestigious films; Cristaldi himself, a former partisan, was politically close to the Italian Communist Party. This still counted for something even if Soviet-Italian relations, at this juncture, were less dependent on the mediation of the PCI than had been the case in the past. On 22 December, Cristaldi reached an accord with Sovexport, the Soviet state body entrusted with the import of foreign films and the export of Soviet ones, over the division of international markets.<sup>15</sup> Even at this early stage, the producer managed to win agreement to an advantageous clause, which stated that the profits from *The Red Tent* deriving from markets other than Italy or the USSR would in the first instance be used to cover the costs born by the Italian company.<sup>16</sup>

### **Political and cinematic relations between Italy and the USSR**

The ‘Red Tent’ project thus found an Italian connection that was perhaps in any event inevitable given the origins of the story and Surin’s desire to have the part of Nobile played by an Italian of the standing of Marcello Mastroianni or Enrico Maria Salerno, both of whom were well-known to international audiences.<sup>17</sup> The Soviet preference for an Italian partner, that even preceded official approval of an inter-governmental accord between the two countries on 30 January 1967, was a

result of the effective diplomatic operation conducted by ANICA over the previous decade. Relations between the Italian and Soviet cinemas were inaugurated in January 1954 by an accord which envisaged the annual exchange of a number of films (between five and fifteen), that was signed by the president of ANICA Monaco and the representative of the Italian Union of Film Exporters (UNIEF) Emanuele Cassuto for the Italian side and by the Sovexport director general Zakharevic and the president Zinemin.<sup>18</sup> The Italian delegation from ANICA went to Moscow at the invitation of the Soviet leadership, a sure proof that cinematic diplomacy, at the height of the Cold War, was conducted independently and in advance of the political variety. The difference between these accords and the official ones of 1967 lay in the fact that the first, Monaco admitted, 'have a mainly moral value, the commercial value is relatively modest',<sup>19</sup> while the 1967 ones established a full-blown cooperation and commercial exchange.

The turning point in relations between Italy and the USSR in 1960 came with the journey to Moscow of Giovanni Gronchi, the first president of the Italian republic to visit the USSR. In the course of this trip, the foreign minister Giuseppe Pella and the president of the Soviet Committee for Intercultural Relations Georgij Zukov signed a collaboration agreement between the two countries in all sectors of culture, art, science, technology and sport, which also envisaged film exchanges. Italy was one of the the USSR's preferred partners in this new phase of detente, and for various reasons. These included its central position on the European chessboard, the country's new foreign policy of relative independence from NATO favoured by Gronchi and Christian Democrat leader Amintore Fanfani, the presence of a strong Communist Party (led up until 1964 by Palmiro Togliatti), and the dynamism of the country's economic and political situation in this historical phase. From 1960, leading Italian companies undertook initiatives that were reciprocally advantageous for the two countries, which allowed the Italians to make use of low-cost Russian manpower and to draw on the country's rich energy sources, while permitting the Soviets to import efficient modern technologies. On these bases, Fiat won

approval to open a factory for motor vehicle production at Togliatti in 1966,<sup>20</sup> while the Italian state energy company ENI began importing petrol in 1960 and methane in 1969.

From 1967, the same arrangement of mutual convenience that worked for the leading companies applied to the film industry agreements. The Russians supplied the raw materials (locations, huge set constructions, thousands of extras for crowd scenes) and the Italians the technology (cameras, film development and printing) and the last word on matters concerning creative direction.

*Italiani brava gente* (Attack and Retreat, Giuseppe De Santis, 1964) set the standard for collaborations between the two countries. Produced by the Italian company Galatea and Mosfilm, the film was not properly-speaking a co-production, but rather a technical, artistic and financial co-participation that came about through the mediation of the PCI.<sup>21</sup> Nonetheless, the terms of this first collaboration were very similar to those that would govern the agreement between Vides and Mosfilm for *The Red Tent*. In both cases, the contract was very advantageous for the Italian side, as far as the division of costs and foreign markets was concerned. For both the war scenes in *Italiani brava gente*, and the polar rescue in *The Red Tent*, complex and spectacular sets were built in the Soviet Union with vital support from the armed forces. Even the problems that arose during the shoot were similar as they derived, in the final instance, from irreconcilable organisational differences between a commercial industry and a state one.

It was thanks to the earlier experience of collaboration over the De Santis film that, no sooner had news begun to circulate about the imminent Italian-Soviet inter-governmental agreement, than Mosfilm decided to jettison its German partners in favour of an Italian producer, offering moreover the best possible terms. Aside from the geo-political factors that made Italy a country with which the USSR could enter into dialogue, Italian cinema was itself a source of attraction due to the international prestige it had won, thanks also to the contribution of Cristaldi.

The Soviet film industry needed precisely an eye-catching connection of this type to initiate its new strategy of international collaboration.

### **Collaboration and diffidence**

The coproduction contract between Vides and Mosfilm was signed on 29 June 1967, after ten days of negotiations and on the basis of the protocol of 27 November 1966. This already envisaged a precise division of roles:

with the aim of ensuring the widest possible distribution of the film throughout the world....(with respect to) the commercial requirements for the exploitation of the film, Mosfilm organizes and oversees the pre-editing of the Russian version of the film. Vides proceeds to the definitive edit of the film. Each of the parties will be responsible for the dubbing and editing of the film for the countries that are pertinent to it, on the basis of a live-recorded soundtrack.<sup>22</sup>

From the start, there was a decision to make two versions of the film and to make a clear division of the markets, on the basis of the political blocs to which the two countries respectively belonged. Italy took Western Europe, the USA, Canada, the Philippines, Hong King, Macao, Singapore, Malaysia and Formosa, while the USSR took all the countries of Eastern Europe plus China, Vietnam, Cuba, Finland and Japan. Vides managed to win advantages for itself, confirming a key point in the preliminary accord, namely that ‘the sale [of the film] to third parties will be the responsibility of the Italian group that will retain all profits (along with earnings from the countries in its sphere of competence) until such time as it will have recovered its outlay on the production of the film’.<sup>23</sup> The Italian company thus secured precedence in the

recovery of costs and, only after it had fully recovered its outlay, was there to be profit-sharing between the two parties.<sup>24</sup>

The two production companies were aware of their different needs (more oriented towards propaganda in the case of the Soviets, who were concerned to underline their role in the rescue; a spectacular, star-oriented approach for the Italians). In consideration of the fact that the film was made with the intention of ensuring that it received the widest possible worldwide audience on television and in cinema, they gave each other a free hand to implement ‘different adaptations of the final edit of the film. Such adaptations, however, must not alter the content, the substance or the spirit of the film itself’.<sup>25</sup> The first challenge therefore was to finalise an agreed screenplay that met the different exigencies and left space for eventual later interventions, the very stumbling block which had obstructed progress on the Mosfilm-MCS.

Cristaldi engaged the scriptwriter Ennio De Concini, who had already worked with the Soviets on *Italiani brava gente*, to modify the original screenplay. Drafted by the Russian Nagibin, this evidently was not readily digestible by westerners. The collaboration with Kalatozov on the re-write began at the start of 1967, but it would be around a year before all the details were settled. Communication problems between the coproducers began straight away during the delicate phase of re-elaboration of the screenplay and pre-production. They are evident from the correspondence between Cristaldi and Surin, in which the two men blame each other for delays and the consequent increases in costs. The reasons for the clashes were numerous. The Russian director of photography, Levan Paatashvili, who came to Rome in January-February 1967 in order to acquire familiarity with the movie cameras and the modalities of development and printing afforded by Vides, was substituted the following October by a new director (Leonid Kalashnikov) who was completely unaware of the techniques learned by the former.<sup>26</sup> The material (filmstock and movie cameras) that Vides sent to Moscow for aerial shots and landscapes in June had still not been returned by October. It seemed moreover that the Soviet

government was reluctant to allow the re-export of the shot film, a circumstance which imperilled the very presuppositions of the coproduction. In fact, the accord envisaged precisely that all filmed material should be sent to Rome 'where it will be deposited in a processing laboratory chosen by Vides, where it will be preserved until there is a definitive edit of the film'.<sup>27</sup> Cristaldi's company was the supplier of all the technical equipment (cameras, lenses, filmstock) and was also owner of the negative and of all visual and sound material recorded in the Soviet Union. Cristaldi regarded this contractual condition as a guarantee against possible surprises in a collaboration that was unprecedented and risky.

Embarking on the making of a colossal for the first time with unfamiliar partners, the producer sought to take every possible precaution, to the point that, in a document marked 'top secret (riservatissimo)', that was probably sent to a governmental or banking authority towards the end of 1967, he cited as the only dangers for the coproduction the outbreak of war between the USA and the USSR and the hypothesis that *The Red Tent* would not turn out to be a masterpiece but merely a large-scale spectacular film.<sup>28</sup> Cristaldi had good reason to be confident. The project's theme was politically neutral and it came about shortly after an inter-governmental agreement. For this reason, it could count on the full support of the authorities of the two countries. Moreover, the Soviets accepted the marked disparity in the way the costs were born (Cristaldi, probably exaggerating, said that the former contributed 8-9 million dollars - 5.3 billions Lit; 50m €)<sup>29</sup>, while the Italian contribution stood at around 1.8 million dollars (1.1 billions; 1,1m), almost all of them above the line.<sup>30</sup> The coproduction was organised in such a way that there was no transfer of currency from one country to the other; thus, it was supposed that, since the Soviets would be making their contribution in their own country in sectors that were of their specific competence, they would have every interest in avoiding increases in costs. Surin, as a state employee, was presumed to be committed to doing his best to meet this challenge. The film was to be shot in English – like all the coproductions that aimed at the widest

possible distribution – and would be between 100 and 160 minutes long. It would have to be approved jointly by Surin, Kalatozov, Cristaldi and De Concini. The entire post-production and editing was to be carried out in Rome. As an extra guarantee, the shooting schedule was conceived in such a way that the key linking scenes were to be shot in Rome after the others so that, in the case that any connections were missing, there would be no encouragement to break the agreement ahead of time.<sup>31</sup>

The documentary scenes (site inspections and exteriors) were the first to be shot by the Soviet second unit in the summer of 1967, though the shoot proper did not begin until 19 February 1968. Over eight weeks, spectacular exteriors were filmed with actors in the USSR and Estonia and these were followed by the studio scenes in Rome which were finished by mid-June. After the summer, during which a Russian troupe was engaged to film landscapes, further interior work was carried out in Moscow and was concluded by December 1968. In all, including the extra scenes filmed in 1969, the shoot lasted 205 days, a few more than the anticipated 198, which was already very high.<sup>32</sup> These consisted of 86 of exteriors in Moscow, Leningrad, Tallin, Repino, in the Spitzbergen archipelago; 62 in Italian soundstages (50 days in the Vides studios, 12 in the De Laurentiis studios); 57 in the facilities of Mosfilm in Moscow.<sup>33</sup>

By mid-February 1968, shortly before the start of filming with actors, Cristaldi held a press conference to present the film. This took place in the home of Umberto Nobile, who by then was 83 years old, with Peter Finch, Hardy Kruger, Mario Adorf and Claudia Cardinale.<sup>34</sup> Besides being a brilliant publicity stunt, this gathering was intended to mark the sixtieth anniversary of the actual events and to show that the film was supported by the real-life protagonist who, for the occasion, was accompanied by the admirals Viglieri and Mariano and by the fleet air arm general Valle, all of whom were in some way linked to the episode of the airship Italia.<sup>35</sup> During the meeting with journalists the impressive scale of the production was underlined. The entire Kingsway complex had been reconstructed near Tallin, complete with streets, buildings, an



airport and port; the scenes with the tent would be filmed in Siberia in the arctic zone of Lake Bajkal; the largest icebreaker in the world would be hired to stand in for the Krassin; to fly over the Arctic Ocean aeroplanes and helicopters would be employed, as well as some models of flying airships; five movie cameras and 10,000 extras would be involved in shooting the most spectacular scenes. Finally, the movement of ice during the thaw would be filmed as it actually happened by a troupe assembled specifically for the task.<sup>36</sup>

The director of production responsible for overseeing these complex operations was Vittorio Musy Glori, flanked by the Russian Vladimir Maron, while Cristaldi's chief representative was to be Fernando Ghia. The 'foreign minister of Vides', as he termed himself,<sup>37</sup> Ghia came from a long experience as an actors' agent in London and, thanks to his contacts in Great Britain, he played a key role in recruiting Peter Finch and Sean Connery – contracted last of all, at the end of 1968 – and in persuading the writer Robert Bolt to revise the screenplay. Cristaldi was still not satisfied with the screenplay completed at the start of 1968, and he was determined that it should be more spectacular and international. Through Ghia, he managed to make contact with Bolt, the author of the script for *Lawrence of Arabia* (David Lean, 1962) who had won two Oscars for adapted screenplays for *Doctor Zhivago* (David Lean 1965) and *A Man for All Seasons* (Fred Zinnemann 1966, adapted from his own stage play). Bolt worked on the screenplay in the final months of 1968 and proposed substantial changes – in particular to the role of Amundsen and to the scenes of the trial – which necessitated adding further scenes or re-shooting scenes that had already been filmed.<sup>38</sup>

The new screenplay annoyed Surin, who blamed Cristaldi for the delay to the schedule for filming in Moscow, slated for October and November, which by December had not yet started. Cristaldi replied on 4 December with a very form letter, in which he listed the reasons which it had been necessary to revise the production plan. Among these were the disappointing outcome of some of the more spectacular scenes, the inordinate length of others and the worrying increases in

costs which had grown by 40 per cent with respect to the original budget.<sup>39</sup> These reasons alone were more than sufficient to justify a review of the way the production was unfolding, Cristaldi wrote, but there was also another one that had increased the difficulties faced by the film, namely the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia on 20 August 1968.

### **The most difficult moment**

History exploded right in the middle of the first Italian-Soviet coproduction and, even if it was not a world war, as Cristaldi had conjectured, the armed repression of the Prague Spring was a very serious political development that impacted even on cinematic diplomacy. The American companies with which Cristaldi was discussing distribution, notably Fox and United Artists, interrupted negotiations. The famous actors with whom Vides was in contact over roles which had not yet been filmed turned down the offer for fear of harming their images. The atmosphere in Hollywood was such that any collaboration with the USSR seemed to be out of the question.

‘I found myself alone (Italnoleggio had in the mean time pulled out of the film) dealing with one of the most difficult situations I had ever faced in my career as a producer,’ Cristaldi wrote to Surin in December, exaggerating a little in order to make an impression on the Russian. The interplay between the two men, as it emerges from their correspondence, was based largely on exhibitions of strength and was marked by an unsurmountable diffidence that stemmed from their different working methods. In reality, Cristaldi and Surin had reached an agreement in September to let a little time pass so that the political situation could be clarified or at least become calmer as far as the film world was concerned. This would indeed occur. In the meantime, the two producers resolved to continue with work of a technical nature and to seek the collaboration of a writer regarding improvements to the script.

Cristaldi was aware that this suspension and then the additional filming would bring a notable increase in costs. In particular, pro-rata payments to the actors for 8-10 weeks of extra

work between December 1968 and February 1969 weighed on the budget.<sup>40</sup> The contract for Peter Finch alone, which was for 20+5 weeks of work, exceeded considerably the time normally stipulated for important films, which at that time amounted typically to 12+4 or 13+2 weeks.<sup>41</sup> Cristaldi was prepared to slow down work on the film and absorb an increase in costs – among which there was Lit. 25 million (250,319) for Bolt to be added to the 16 (160,204) already spent on the screenplay – in order to give the film the stamp of ‘western’ quality and commercial validity that he felt could only be assured by an expert revision of the screenplay and by the addition of a bankable name to the cast. However, the director Kalatozov was reluctant to accept variations in the screenplay leading the producer to write a new sternly-worded letter in which he offered various possible solutions among which was even definitive interruption of the project.<sup>42</sup> Relations between the producer and the director remained tense right up to the end, above all on account of Kalatozov’s repeated failure to stick to the agreed schedule. Indeed, he completed filming only in mid-April 1969.<sup>43</sup> The lack of urgency with which filmed material was sent from the USSR to Italy, the importance of which had been underlined in the coproduction contract, constituted an element of tension between the parties and was complicated by the long bureaucratic procedure which had to be undertaken every time people or things had to move from one country to the other. For the cold calculator Cristaldi, who was used to western economic criteria and bureaucracy, it was a torture to be subjected to Soviet-style disorganisation and failure to keep to time. He put up with it all purely because he was a firm believer in the validity of the film itself. Indeed, he believed in it so much that he took financial and production risks that, up to that point, he had always avoided.<sup>44</sup>

### **The challenge of foreign deals**

*The Red Tent*, according to what was communicated to the authorities in Italy in February 1968, had a budget of around Lit. 3 billion (30m), of which 1.2 (12m) were to come from the Italians.<sup>45</sup>

The Italian quota was divided between Italnoleggio Cinematografico (INC), that was also the distributor of the film in Italian territory and la Vides Cinematografica di Franco Cristaldi sas. The former contributed 75 per cent and the latter 25 per cent. The first provisional budget (13 march 1968) was for Lit 1.170 billion (11.7m), of which 440m (4.4m) were for below-the-line costs, 460m (4.6m) for actors and 30m (300,000) for the English copy.<sup>46</sup> Since the production was the responsibility of Vides, l'INC requested a completion guarantee and a guaranteed block on the price; together the two companies arranged a loan of 400m (4m) from the BNL each offering as a guarantee the exploitation rights and governmental contributions to the value of 520m (5.2m).<sup>47</sup> However, in June 1968, the Socialist Mario Gallo resigned as president of INC together with administrators of the Ente Autonomo Gestione Cinema (EAGC) – the state agency on which INC depended - who also been nominated by the Italian Socialist Party. The move, provoked by accusations of waste and differences of opinion over which films should be backed, was occasioned by the rejection of Visconti's film *La caduta degli dei* (The Damned, 1969) on the part of Christian Democrat members of the board, a decision that was overturned following the resignation of the Socialists.<sup>48</sup> The agency's problems and Gallo's resignation led Cristaldi to take over the INC share of the *The Red Tent*, which retained only its role as distributor of the film in Italy. The magazine *Questo cinema* commented on this development as follows:

If Cristaldi, who is an able and intelligent producer, re-acquires world rights to the film, it means that he is sure of doing some very good business. INC gave up its share of the profits from *The Red Tent* to ensure smooth administration or, rather, it has done so in order to demonstrate that the initiatives it adopted earlier were not advantageous?<sup>49</sup>

Aside from commenting on internal problems at INC and EAGC, that would persist for years to come, the article correctly surmised that Cristaldi was convinced that the reacquisition was a

good move. He probably seized the opportunity to secure total ownership of the film because he had already sounded out American distributors and wanted to conduct the negotiation with them on his own.

In order to establish complete control over the production, Vides took over the loan already granted by the BNL and requested that it be increased to one billion Lire (10m). A figure of that order being unusual for an Italian production, the bank demanded concrete guarantees. As in the past, these were provided by a satellite company of Cristaldi's, the property-owning L'Immobiliare La Giustiniana spa.

La Giustiniana was a company that, from the moment it was founded in 1962, had backed the rise of Vides in film production. Indeed, the company was founded with the precise aim of supporting and integrating Vides activity and it was run by the very same people who were stakeholders in Vides Cinematografica sas. The most important of these was Giuliano De Ferrari, an associate of Cristaldi's since 1952 and a partner in Vides sas. La Giustiniana owned the land on which the Vides studios were built and it offered guarantees every time a film was made that required a substantial financial outlay. Vides was one of the first Italian production companies to apply to the banks for credit, using a sister company to offer solid guarantees of a scale to allow it to produce big-budget films or, as in this case, take on a large project on its own.

On 6 February 1969 a meeting of shareholders in Giustiniana accepted the request to offer surety to the BNL, a move that required the pledging of shares and limitations on the powers of the board according to a standard formula that had been followed in earlier cases: ' Vides must not be regarded solely as renting land owned by Giustiniana, but as a company that, by creating an industrial centre of its own complete with relative infrastructures, has added great value to the remaining property of Giustiniana'<sup>50</sup>. Once it obtained this guarantee, the BNL handed all the the rights to the film back to Vides. Having secured full control of the film, Cristaldi was free to negotiate the sale of *The Red Tent* to the Americans. To achieve this, he sought the help of the

president of ANICA, Monaco. The latter was to raise awareness of the project during his travels to America with the aim that, once the film was completed, one of the major companies would be ready to take on the distribution. Cristaldi explained that:

By and large all the American ‘majors’ have expressed interest, directly or indirectly, in the film and all of them have made approaches. It has been my decision not to proceed with negotiations because my belief in the film (based – obviously – on what I have seen so far) is such that I have opted for the most risky and certainly the most time-consuming and difficult path of negotiating once the film is finished instead of going for an advance sale because I was convinced that the quality, the form and the originality of the film itself would be such to allow me to conclude a much better deal afterwards that I could have earlier.<sup>51</sup>

The producer put all his faith in foreign distribution deals because the Italian market was not large enough to earn back an outlay on the scale that Vides had committed to. Deferring the sale until the product was ready was a high-risk strategy, though also, potentially, a very profitable one.

Whether it was down to the good offices of Monaco or the tenaciousness of Cristaldi and Ghia, the sale of *The Red Tent* was sealed on 2 April 1969. The contract with Vides was signed by the vice-president of Paramount Maxwell Setton for a minimum of 3 million dollars (Lit. 1.8 billion) (18m) in exchange for the cession in perpetuity of world distribution rights (with the exception of Italy and Soviet-controlled territories).<sup>52</sup> In the agreement, Paramount was granted the right to re-edit the film, while Vides took on the responsibility for dealing with any legal actions that might be embarked on by people actually involved in the events described in the film. On 27 May, Paramount took over the debt with the BNL and committed itself to paying the bank \$1.6m (998.4 m; 10m) by 10 March 1970. In the event, the debt would be paid off the following year when Paramount finished work on the English-language version of the film and was reassured that

it would not be subject to legal problems. Only in April 1971 did the BNL inform Vides that it had returned the shares of La Gustiniana to the original owners as the loan had been repaid.<sup>53</sup>

### **The three versions**

In the mean-time, on 23 December 1969, *La tenda rossa* was released in Italy in an edition of 142 minutes prepared by the director Ettore Giannini and approved by both Kalatozov and Nobile. Despite the green light of the director, Mosfilm, that was awaiting the Italian version in order to make its own edition, requested further modifications, additions and technical material from Vides that the latter company, under the terms of the contract, was not in any way obliged to supply.<sup>54</sup> The issue of the Soviet and American versions of the film would become for Vides a burdensome matter that had not been adequately taken into account.<sup>55</sup> The idea of the international colossal conceived by Cristaldi in fact did not suit the Soviets – as perhaps might have been expected and to some degree was expected – but neither did it suit the Americans, who demanded radical changes to the original version.

A rough version of *La tenda rossa* was delivered to Paramount on 31 January 1970 and was handed to the screenwriter Harry Craig and the film editor Peter Zinner in order that they could implement modifications. The last-mentioned completed his work with Fernando Ghia in Rome, at the expense of Vides. In all, the cost of producing the American edition would amount to circa 180.000 dollars (112m; 1.1m) and this would be borne by Cristaldi's company. Taking account of the fact that the Paramount's payment to the BNL was put off for a year, with the consequence that the Italian company was liable for further interest payments, and that the world premiere was postponed for 16 months, the sum of \$3m (1.8 billions; 18.7m) paid by the American major, though very substantial, in practice amounted to less.<sup>56</sup>

The film had a mixed reception. 'In New York *The Red Tent* was screened at the Radio City Music Hall, where it earned one million dollars over seven weeks, beating the previous

American box office record for one theatre', Cristaldi recalled with pride.<sup>57</sup> In reality, considering the complexity and scale of the production and the brief duration of its success, it is difficult to disagree with Paula A. Michaels, who wrote that *The Red Tent* 'landed in the middle ground between flop and smash'<sup>58</sup>. In Italy, the film earned Lit. 1,029 billion (10.3m) over the course of the distribution cycle, two thirds of which were attributable to the first three months following its release, and most especially the Christmas holiday period. To find a point of comparison, the figures for *The Red Tent* can be compared with those of the top Italian box office film for 1969-70, *Nell'anno del Signore* (In the Year of Our Lord, Luigi Magni, 1969), that earned Lit. 1.3 billion (13m) in the first year and 3 billion (30m) by the end of its release life.<sup>59</sup>

In the final balance, the cost of *The Red Tent* was Lit. 4.4 billion (44m) of which 2.6 billion (26.4m) were spent by Mosfilm – a sum equal to 3.8m rubles - and 1.7m by Vides (17.6m).<sup>60</sup> To this must be added 293m (2.9m) spent on post-production, promotional activities and interest payments. It is not clear why Cristaldi spoke during the production phase of much larger figures, reaching even 12 million dollars (Lit. 7.5 billion at the time)(75m) of which 4.5 (2.8 billions; 28m) were borne by the Italian side. Possibly, he did it in order to make an impression on his interlocutors; more likely though it was because the costs of the Soviet producer were difficult to quantify, given that some of the people involved were salaried staff. The figure of almost 2 billion (20m) attributed to Vides at any rate was extremely high for Italian cinema and in particular for Cristaldi's company, which in that period made films with an average cost of around Lit. 400m (4m).

### **Co-production and the issue of affinity**

If it had not for the American sale, therefore, *The Red Tent* would barely have recovered one third of its cost through earnings from the domestic market. Its impact on Vides would have been comparable to the airship Italia's crash on to the icepack. As a producer known for his foresight,



Cristaldi had planned everything carefully, shifting the production to a country where the costs were much lower, while ensuring that the technically sophisticated aspects were dealt with in Italy, and conceiving the final product principally as one for export on the basis of an industrial logic similar to that of other Italian companies operative in the USSR. However, cinema is not an industry like any other and it is not limited to the manufacture of material goods. Consequently, the difficulties of dialogue that persisted despite the thawing of relations complicated matters.

The extended negotiations that occurred over every decision relating to the production had repercussions also for *Waterloo* (Sergei Bondarchuk, 1970), another hybrid colossal made following the same pattern of partnership with Mosfilm (60 per cent), in this case by Dino De Laurentiis Cinematografica (40 per cent). De Laurentiis's decision to seek the collaboration of Mosfilm was opportunistic, as he himself admitted: 'I can see that I will need thousands of soldiers and thousands of horses. There are battles scenes that go on forever. So, I say to myself: "I'll put the idea to the Soviets; they can give me everything"'.<sup>61</sup> The filming of *Waterloo* was beset by difficulties ("Bondarchuk could not speak a word of English and was not able even to read the script....To simplify things, we cut a lot of the dialogue"<sup>62</sup>) and the box office outcome was weak ("I was able to make money because the Russians bore the brunt of the costs"<sup>63</sup>). In Italy the total box office was Lit. 1,020 billion (10.2m), almost the same as *La tenda rossa*, with the difference that *Waterloo* cost three times as much, around Lit. 15 billion (150.2m), five more (50m) than the initial estimate.<sup>64</sup> Both films were conceived with an international audience in mind. The Italian audience did not embrace them as something of their own and responded coldly to them.

A film that was more successful was *I girasoli* (Sunflower, Vittorio De Sica, 1970); however, this differed from the earlier films in that it was an Italian-French co-production between Compagnia Cinematografica Champions and Films Concordia *in association* with Mosfilm. Carlo Ponti was at the helm of the project and he saw the film as a re-edition in Soviet sauce of the well-established artistic association between Sophia Loren, Marcello Mastroianni and the director

Vittorio De Sica. On account of these characteristics, which gave the film a more Italian feel for domestic audiences, it earned twice what the other films took, some Lit. 2,446 billion (24.5m) by the end of the distribution cycle.

No coproduction with the USSR ever achieved the status of ‘masterpiece’, as Cristaldi had hoped. Nor did any film manage to conquer the American market, an aim that was the true objective of the operation. If the producers had hoped to profit from Russian resources to develop their international strategies, the calculation proved to be mistaken, both because of the mish-mash that resulted on the screen – a consequence of the compromise between modes of production that were too distant from each other – and the resistance of the American market to foreign-made colossals.

Obstacles arising from logistical issues, communication problems and above all the difficulty of reconciling different methods and ways of organising film production - one based on efficiency and cost-effectiveness, the other unencumbered by capitalistic imperatives – soon discouraged other Italian producers from engaging in further coproductions with the USSR. The sister film that was intended to follow shortly on the heels of the Vides-Mosfilm accord was never made, even though Cristaldi and Surin considered various possible titles as early as 1967: *The Master and Margherita* (from Mikhail Bulgakov), *The Battle of Stalingrad*, *The Truce* (from Primo Levi) *Martian Chronicles* (from Ray Bradbury) and *The Sisters* (from Tolstoy). Among the various hypotheses was also a film about John Reed, that was proposed to Vides by Mario Gallo’s company Alfa Cinematografica and was to be directed by Visconti.<sup>65</sup> Italnoleggio briefly reappeared on the scene, as Cristaldi thought that, as a prospective partner, it would have offered the best guarantees, but the Soviets evidently were not convinced. The John Reed project saw the light of day many years later, in 1982, in the form of a coproduction between Vides International-Mosfilm-Rai-Cinefin-Conacite 2 (Italy-USSR-Mexico), that saw the release of two films - *Mexico*

*in flames* and *Ten Days that Shook the World* – and a television series directed by Sergei Bondarchuk.

In the twelve years that separated the first Vides-Mosfilm collaboration from the second, only two other Italian-Soviet coproductions took place: *Una matta, matta, matta corsa in Russia* / A Mad, Mad, Mad Race in Russia, by El'dar Rjazanov e Franco Prospero, 1974 (Produzioni Cinematografiche Inter.Ma.Co, International Manufacturing Company di Luigi De Laurentiis / Mosfilm) and *La vita è bella*/Life is Beautiful by Grigorij Ciuchraj, 1979 (La 4 Cavalli Cinematografica / Mosfilm). These were two decidedly minor films, with limited costs and minimal revenues in Italy that employed the Russian setting as mere background for Italian-style comedies.<sup>66</sup> The judgement of the Italian government commission on the Rjazanov e Prospero film, which was scripted by renowned duo Castellano and Pipolo, gives an indication of their quality: 'little short of a pochade...it would be absurd not to say pointless to try to find any qualities in it that it does not even aspire to'.<sup>67</sup> The film cost around Lit. 700m (7m), divided equally between Italy and the USSR, a figure that was far removed from those of previous experiences and that stood as a symbol of a dramatic down-scaling of ambitions and investments.<sup>68</sup> It would not be until the successful release of *Oci Ciornie* (Dark Eyes, Nikita Michalkov<sup>69</sup>, 1987) that there was any further interest in Italian-Soviet coproductions. However, by the eve of the 1990s, the rules governing international collaborations had changed and the political and mediatic landscape was completely different.

Overall the limited degree of cooperation that followed from the accord between Italy and the USSR in the matter of cinematic relations illustrates how far initial enthusiasm gave way to realistic assessments of the benefits of such collaborations. The treaty with the USSR came at a moment in which the practice of coproduction was already in decline and a new crisis of the Italian film industry was on the horizon. Opportunistic considerations (the 'they can give me everything' of De Laurentiis) were no longer enough to offset the difficulty of finding agreement on projects and modes of production. The only way in which the agreement seemed able to find

expression was in the form of spectacular products with large budgets, in costume or with massive crowd scenes. Such films, however, were born with the stigmata of the cinema of the past. It is enough to highlight the gulf between the John Reed of the Vides-Mosfilm collaboration and that of Warren Beatty in *Reds* (1981). The two films were made in the same period but there were major differences in the approach to the subject, as indeed there were in the reception each film encountered at the box office. The old-style colossal films, that were held dear in Europe, were swept away within the space of a few years by those of the new Hollywood which relaunched American cinema in the international market. After *The Godfather* (Francis Ford Coppola, 1972) and *Star Wars* (George Lucas, 1977), there was no call whatsoever for any more Italian-Soviet colossals.

## NOTES

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<sup>1</sup> The treaty bore the signatures of Nikolaj Podgornyj and Aldo Moro. On the policy of Italian-Soviet dialogue, see Antonio Salacone, 'Le relazioni italo-sovietiche nel decennio 1958-1968: uno sguardo da Mosca', *Storicamente*, no.9 (2013); Bruna Bagnato, *Prove di Ostpolitik: Politica ed economia nella strategia italiana verso l'Unione Sovietica 1958-1963* (Florence: Olschki, 2003).

<sup>2</sup> Paula A. Michaels, 'Mikhail Kalatozov's *The Red Tent*: A Case Study in International Coproduction across the Iron Curtain', *Historical Journal of Film, Radio and Television* 26, no. 3 (2006).

<sup>3</sup> Stefano Pisu, *La cortina di celluloidi. Il cinema italo-sovietico nella Guerra Fredda* (Sesto San Giovanni: Mimesis, 2019).

<sup>4</sup> Mario Montanari and Guido Ricciotti, *La disciplina giuridica della cinematografia* (Firenze: Cya, 1953), 333 – 349.

<sup>5</sup> SIAE data. Michel Gyory and Gabriele Glas, *Statistics of the Film Industry in Europe* (Brussels: The European Centre for Research and Information on Film and Television, 1992).

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<sup>6</sup> Eitel Monaco, *L'industria cinematografica negli anni 1966-1967: Relazione all'assemblea generale dell'Anica* (Rome: Anica), 28.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, 13.

<sup>8</sup> On Nobile and the expedition of the the airship Italia, see Francesco Surdich, *Umberto Nobile*, Vol. 78 of *Dizionario Biografico degli Italiani*, ed. by Serena Andreotti (Rome: Istituto della Enciclopedia Italiana, 2013); Ovidio Ferrante, *Umberto Nobile* (Rome: Tatangelo, 1985); Wilbur Cross, *Disastro al Polo. La tragica spedizione di Nobile al Polo Nord con il dirigibile Italia* (Milan: Corbaccio, 2001); Carlo Barbieri, *S.O.S. dal Polo Nord* (Milan: Biblion, 2008).

<sup>9</sup> Embittered by the controversy that followed the Italia affair and disgraced in the eyes of the Fascist regime, Nobile emigrated to the USSR, where he participated in an airship project. He returned to Italy in 1943 and in 1946 was elected to the Constituent Assembly as an independent candidate in the lists of the Italian Communist Party.

<sup>10</sup> According to Paula A. Michaels the proposal initially was advanced by the German company. See Michaels, 'Mikhail Kalatozov's *The Red Tent*': 317.

<sup>11</sup> Fondazione Cineteca di Bologna, Archivio Cristaldi Film [henceforth ACF], Documenti relativi alla produzione del film "La tenda rossa", busta 8.1.39.1, fascicolo "Rapporto Mosfilm/MCS-70", "Lettera da Reuther a Surin", 16 November 1965.

<sup>12</sup> This was the thinking of the producers at MCS. In his effort to find an Italian co-producer, Hannelore Travnicek of MCS made contact with Rizzoli, who declined to take an interest. De Laurentiis, by contrast, who was already in negotiations with Surin over *Waterloo*, expressed concern about possible

legal problems or complaints from living witnesses. ACF, "La tenda rossa", busta 8.1.39.1, fascicolo "Rapporto Mosfilm/MCS-70", "Lettera da Travnicek a Surin", 17 August 1966.

<sup>13</sup> ACF, "La tenda rossa", busta 8.1.39.1, fascicolo "Edizione Usa", "Lettera da Cristaldi a Surin", 26 November 1966.

<sup>14</sup> Archivio Centrale dello Stato di Roma [henceforth ACS], Fondo Ministero del Turismo e Spettacolo, Divisione Cinema, Fascicolo CO 306 *La tenda rossa*, "Telespresso" dall'Ambasciata d'Italia a Mosca al Ministero degli Affari Esteri a Roma, 27 December 1966.

<sup>15</sup> On 23 December 1966 Surin sent a telegram to Travnicek in which he declared that Mosfilm, not having received any reply to its requests, considered itself free of all obligations to MCS. The following January MCS replied that it did not intend to give up on the project and declared that it had informed Cristaldi of the earlier negotiations. It is possible that the German company put up to this by Vides. ACF, "La tenda rossa", busta 8.1.39.1, fascicolo "Rapporto Mosfilm/MCS-70", "Telegramma da Surin a Travnicek", 23 December 1966; *Ibid.*, "Lettera da Travnicek a Surin", 9 January 1967.

<sup>16</sup> ACS, Fondo Ministero del Turismo e Spettacolo, Divisione Cinema, Fascicolo CO 306 *La tenda rossa*, "Accordo Vides-Sovexport", 22 December 1966.

<sup>17</sup> ACF, "La tenda rossa", busta 8.1.39.1, fascicolo "Rapporto Mosfilm/MCS-70", "Lettera da Surin a Reuther", 20 December 1965. Surin also proposed Max Von Sydow for the role of Amundsen. Negotiations proceeded with Mastroianni after Cristaldi entered the picture but without success.

<sup>18</sup> L.D.F. (Lino dal Fra), 'Vedremo i film sovietici', *Cinema Nuovo*, no. 29 (1954). UNICEF acted as intermediary between the distributors, but the choice of films was left for each party to determine for itself.

<sup>19</sup> 'Accordo italo-russo', *Araldo dello spettacolo*, no. 20 (1954).

<sup>20</sup> Togliatti – better (if erroneously) known as Togliattigrad – is the name with which the old city of Stavropol on the Volga was re-named in August 1964 in honour of the long-time leader of the PCI Palmiro Togliatti, who had recently died.

<sup>21</sup> The same formula (a joint Galatea / Film Napoleon production with the participation of Mosfilm) was adopted for the documentary *Russia sotto inchiesta* (Russia Under Investigation, Romolo Marcellini, Leonardo Cortese and Tamara Lisizian, 1963). On the production of *Italiani brava*

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gente, see Simone Venturini, *Galatea spa (1952-1965)* (Rome: Associazione Italiana per le Ricerche di Storia del Cinema, 2001) and Stefano Pisu, 'Coesistenza pacifica e cooperazione culturale nella Guerra Fredda: Il film *Italiani brava gente* e l'avvio delle coproduzioni italo-sovietiche', *Mondo Contemporaneo*, no 1 (2016).

<sup>22</sup> ACF, "La tenda rossa", busta 8.1.39.1, fascicolo "Corrispondenza Mosca 1966-70", "Estratto degli accordi relativi alla edizione del film *La tenda rossa*", 7 August 1969.

<sup>23</sup> ACF, "La tenda rossa", busta 8.1.39.2, fascicolo "Tenda rossa coproduzione italo-russa", "Comunicazione del Ministero del Turismo e Spettacolo a Vides", 7 March 1969.

<sup>24</sup> As Vides associate producer Fernando Ghia testified, 'the difficulty lay in establishing how much the film effectively cost the Soviets, because theirs was a state film industry and it was difficult to assign a stable value to the Ruble. So Vides established that it would have considered the costs covered when it had earned back two and a half times the company's outlay'. Fernando Ghia (producer), in discussion with the author, March 2003.

<sup>25</sup> ACF, "La tenda rossa", busta 8.1.39.1, fascicolo "Corrispondenza Mosca 1966-70", "Estratto degli accordi relativi alla edizione del film *La tenda rossa*", 7 August 1969.

<sup>26</sup> ACF, "La tenda rossa", busta 8.1.39.1, fascicolo "Corrispondenza Mosca 1966-70", "Lettera di Cristaldi a Mosfilm", 25 October 1967.

<sup>27</sup> ACF, "La tenda rossa", busta 8.1.39.1, "Note sulla realizzazione di *La tenda rossa*. Riservatissima", 1967.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid. The second hypothesis is close to the reality.

<sup>29</sup> From here onwards, next to the figures in Italian Lire at 1967-69 values, there is the corresponding value in Euros at 2018 values. The figures in American dollars are converted into Lire on the basis of the 1968 exchange rate (\$1 = Lire 624) and then expressed, after punctuation or in brackets, in present-day Euros.

<sup>30</sup> The figures cited by Cristaldi in the note headed "Riservatissima" bear witness to the desire of the producer to impress, but they are not reliable. The Ruble at the time was not a convertible currency and in any case it would not have made sense to convert it into dollars since the Soviets used the quota of the coproduction to pay for labour and services within their own borders. In both official documents and Vides's own internal ones, the total cost of the film is cited as Lit.4,4 billion, but it is impossible to know exactly how much the Soviets spent.

<sup>31</sup> ACF, "La tenda rossa", busta 8.1.39.1, "Note sulla realizzazione di *La tenda rossa*. Riservatissima", 1967. The contract contains a clause that states that any dispute will be examined by the arbitration commission for foreign trade of the Moscow chamber of commerce according to the usual system applied to Italian companies operating in the USSR.

<sup>32</sup> ACS, Fondo Ministero del Turismo e Spettacolo, Divisione Cinema, Fascicolo CO 306 *La tenda rossa*, "Contratto per la coproduzione di un film a soggetto".

<sup>33</sup> ACF, "La tenda rossa", busta 8.1.39.2, "Comunicazione da Vides a Ministero del Turismo e Spettacolo per pratica di Nazionalità italiana", 3 December 1970.

<sup>34</sup> In the film a totally fictional female character – the nurse Valeria, who is in love with Malmgren – is inserted to make room for Claudia Cardinale, the star launched by Cristaldi in 1959 who from that time was under contract to Vides.

<sup>35</sup> C.C., 'Il dirigibile Italia sullo schermo', *Il Messaggero* 16 February 1968. Nobile was contacted by Mosfilm as early as 1966 with a view to acting as consultant on the film. As the direct protagonist, he wanted to exercise some control over the screenplay, something that Cristaldi would never grant him. He made excuses each time while granting other requests such as that to pay for a commemorative stone to be placed at the location of the actual events.

<sup>36</sup> During the press conference, it was announced that explosive charges would be used, but in a later interview Cristaldi recounted that "a Soviet boat with two operatives on board waited for six months for the event to happen, so that it could be filmed live". See Cesare Biarese 'EuropaCinema

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dei produttori: Franco Cristaldi', in Cesare Biarese and Francesco Bruni (eds.), *EuropaCinema 89: VI mostra del cinema europeo* (Rimini: edizioni EuropaCinema, 1989), 62.

<sup>37</sup> Fernando Ghia (producer), in discussion with the author, March 2003.

<sup>38</sup> Bolt did not want his name to appear in the credits because he did not want to be thought of as a 'script doctor'. See ACF, "La tenda rossa", busta 8.1.39.1, fascicolo "Bolt", "Lettera da Bolt a Cristaldi", 13 August 1969.

<sup>39</sup> ACF, "La tenda rossa", busta 8.1.39.1, fascicolo "Corrispondenza Mosca 1966-70", "Lettera da Cristaldi a Surin", 4 December 1968. The Italian estimate on 16 February 1968 was Lit..1.2 billion (12m).

<sup>40</sup> The *pro-rata* are payments due to actors per day for each additional day of work after the end of their contract. These are calculated on the basis of preceding conditions but are more burdensome for the producer. The cachet of the two British actors amounted to about one fifth of the Vides budget. It amounted to Lit. 270m (2.7m), 145 (1.4) for Finch (of which 9 – 90,114 - pro-rata) and 125 (1.2m) for Connery, which was not subject to pro-rata additions. ACS, Fondo Ministero del Turismo e Spettacolo, Divisione Cinema, Fascicolo CO 306 *La tenda rossa*, "Consuntivo".

<sup>41</sup> Fernando Ghia (producer), in discussion with the author, March 2003.

<sup>42</sup> ACF, "La tenda rossa", busta 8.1.39.1, fascicolo "Corrispondenza Mosca 1966-70", "Lettera da Cristaldi a Surin", 22 December 1968.

<sup>43</sup> Cristaldi reminded Kalatozov that Glori was the production director and should not be kept in the dark, that the actors had to be fully aware of the scenes that they would shoot, etc.. See ACF, "La tenda rossa", busta 8.1.39.1, fascicolo "Corrispondenza Mosca 1966-70", "Lettera da Cristaldi a Kalatozov", 20 March 1969. Kalatozov objected that "Not having arranged for me to meet Bolt in good time and having kept the cinematographer away from me are decidedly unpleasant factors", *Ibid.*, "Lettera da Kalatozov a Cristaldi", 21 March 1969. Cristaldi responded: "diplomacy is not the most developed of your many gifts", *Ibid.*, "Lettera da Cristaldi a Kalatozov", 22 March 1969.

<sup>44</sup> Among Cristaldi's motivations there is also pride at being the first to engage in Italian-Soviet coproductions, to pursue a "route that when it was first built involved risks, effort and unforeseen circumstances" ACF, "La tenda rossa", busta 8.1.39.1, fascicolo "Corrispondenza Mosca 1966-70", "Lettera da Cristaldi a Surin", 10 April 1969.

<sup>45</sup> ACF, "La tenda rossa", busta 8.1.39.2, fascicolo "Tenda rossa coproduzione italo-russa", "Comunicazione della Vides al Ministero del Turismo e Spettacolo", 5 February 1968.

<sup>46</sup> ACF, "La tenda rossa", busta 8.1.39.1, fascicolo "Corrispondenza Italnoleggio Cinecittà – Luce", "Lettera da INC a Vides", 13 March 1968.

<sup>47</sup> ACF, "La tenda rossa", busta 8.1.39.2, "Società Italiana Autori ed Editori (Siae), Roma. Pubblico Registro Cinematografico. Film italiano lungometraggio *La tenda rossa*", 5 April 1968.

<sup>48</sup> On the state cinema organisms, see Sergio Toffetti, 'Ital-Noleggio Cinematografico', in *Enciclopedia del Cinema*, ed. Enzo Siciliano (Roma: Istituto della Enciclopedia Italiana, 2003), 3: 323-324; Franco Montini and Enzo Natta, *Una poltrona per due: Cinecittà tra pubblico e privato* (Cantalupa: Effatà, 2007).

<sup>49</sup> 'La saggia amministrazione', *Questo cinema*, 31 July 1968.

<sup>50</sup> ACF, Vides Cinematografica 1960-1992, busta 4.1.1, fascicolo "Atti sociali 2", "Verbale di Assemblea Ordinaria Immobiliare La Giustiniana", 6 February 1969.

<sup>51</sup> ACF, "La tenda rossa", busta 8.1.39.1, "Lettera da Cristaldi a Eitel Monaco", 20 March 1969.

<sup>52</sup> ACF, "La tenda rossa", busta 8.1.39.2, fascicolo "Tenda rossa distribuzione mondiale", "Contratto Vides-Paramount", 2 April 1969. Ghia underlined that, at the time, sales of Italian films in the USA did not even amount to 100,000 \$ (62.4m; 624,796). Fernando Ghia (producer), in discussion with the author, March 2003. On 3 August 1971 Vides communicated to Paramount that France and its former colonies were to be excluded from the distribution agreement with the company. The distribution rights for these territories passed to Marianne Productions s.a. after the film was granted French nationality. Marianne also requested and obtained French nationality for

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*Waterloo* (De Laurentiis), to which it held the rights. See ACF, "La tenda rossa", busta 8.1.39.2, fascicolo "Tenda rossa distribuzione mondiale", "Lettera da Vides a Paramount", 3 August 1971.

<sup>53</sup> ACF, Vides Cinematografica 1960-1992, busta 4.1.4, fascicolo "Azioni", "Comunicazione da BNL a Vides", 7 April 1971.

<sup>54</sup> ACF, "La tenda rossa", busta 8.1.39.1, fascicolo "Corrispondenza Mosca 1966-70", "Lettera da Cristaldi a Surin", 13 January 1970.

<sup>55</sup> In the coproduction contract it is stated that it is Vides's task to prepare the edition for the countries that fall within its assigned area. In the Soviet edition, which was 30 minutes longer than the international edition, Russian actors and the role of the Krassin have more prominence.

<sup>56</sup> ACF, "La tenda rossa", busta 8.1.39.1, fascicolo "Generale Umberto Nobile", "Lettera da Vittorio De Sanctis a Arthur J. Buck", 15 January 1971; *Ibid.*, "Osservazioni alla lettera del 7 gennaio dell'avv. Buck" January 1971.

<sup>57</sup> Biarese, C., 62. *The red tent* was released in New York on 29 July 1971 in the international version of 121 minutes. In the USSR the film came out on 19 September 1970 in a version of 150 minutes. In all other countries, the release occurred between 1970 and 1971.

<sup>58</sup> Michaels, 'Mikhail Kalatozov's *The red tent*': 312.

<sup>59</sup> All figures reported here are taken from AGIS, *Catalogo generale dei film italiani dal 1965 al 1973* (Rome: AnicAgis, 1973); Alessandro Ferrau, 'Borsa Film', *Giornale dello Spettacolo* no. 31 (29 August 1970): 5.

<sup>60</sup> ACS, Fondo Ministero del Turismo e Spettacolo, Divisione Cinema, Fascicolo CO 306 *La tenda rossa*, "Consuntivo", 12 February 1971.

<sup>61</sup> Tullio Kezich and Alessandra Levantesi, *Dino De Laurentiis: La vita e i film* (Milan: Feltrinelli, 2001), 191.

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*, 192.

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*, 193.

<sup>64</sup> AGIS, *Catalogo generale dei film italiani dal 1965 al 1973* (Roma: AnicAgis, 1973); ACS, Fondo Ministero del Turismo e Spettacolo, Divisione Cinema, Fascicolo CO 419 *Waterloo*.

<sup>65</sup> ACF, "La tenda rossa", busta 8.1.39.1, fascicolo "Pratica secondo film con Mosfilm", "Lettera da Cristaldi a Surin", 19 May 1970. The second film envisaged in the agreement between De Laurentiis and Mosfilm, *Dubrowskij*, was cancelled in 1971. The breach between Mosfilm and De Laurentiis put an end to the hypothesis of making *John Reed* with Bondarchuk (1971): ACS, Fondo Ministero del Turismo e Spettacolo, Divisione Cinema, Fascicolo CO 419 *Waterloo*, "Verbale delle trattative", 16 January 1971. The *John Reed* project passed from hand to hand until it returned, many years later, to Vides.

<sup>66</sup> The production of *Una matta...* in reality was undertaken to offset the debts contracted by De Laurentiis towards the Soviets during the making of *Waterloo*. Pisu, *La cortina di celluloidi*, 166.

<sup>67</sup> ACS, Fondo Ministero del Turismo e Spettacolo, Divisione Cinema, Fascicolo CO 1185 *Una matta matta matta corsa in Russia*, "Giudizio della Direzione Generale Cinema", 22 June 1973.

<sup>68</sup> Among the causes of the interruption of the Italian-Soviet collaboration was the changed political climate. Pisu, *La cortina di celluloidi*, 144-159.

<sup>69</sup> Michalkov took the role of the pilot Chuknovsky in *The Red Tent*.