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**MARTYRS ON THE SILVER SCREEN: EARLY CHURCH  
MARTYRDOM IN ITALIAN SILENT CINEMA (1898-1930)**

**JOSEPH ALBERT NORTH**

Doctoral Thesis

Italian department, School of Modern Languages and Cultures

Durham University

2015

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## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

AC	Author's collection.
AIRSC	Associazione Italiana per le Ricerche di Storia del Cinema
ASV	Archivio Segreto Vaticano, Vatican City
BFI	British Film Institute, London
CAS	Commissione di Archaeologia Sacra.
CCB	Cineteca Del Comune di Bologna, Bologna
CSC	Centro Sperimentale del Cinema- Cineteca Nazionale, Rome
EYE	Eye Film Institute, Amsterdam
FRI	Cineteca del Friuli, Gemona.
ICR	Italian Interior Ministry censorship record (Visto di censura).
MNC	Museo Nazionale Del Cinema, Turin.
NYCR	New York State Censorship Record
UCI	Unione Cinematografica Italiana. A company which purchased many Italian studios in the 1920s, before going bankrupt.

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## COPYRIGHT

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## NOTE ON REFERENCING

The title of each film is maintained in its original language for its release in its home country, except where quoting from a different language review or press release.

The date of production suffixes many films in this thesis every time they are mentioned. Generally, I include the film's title and release date once during each chapter, but a number of film titles are always suffixed by their release date, in order to avoid confusion. This only occurs where the same title was used by several different film-makers in the silent era: examples include *Messalina* (1910, 1923), *Gli ultimi giorni di Pompei* (1908, 1913, 1913, 1926) and *Santa Cecilia* (1911, 1919). In the case of *Gli ultimi giorni di Pompei* and *San Sebastiano*, where two versions were filmed by two different Italian film companies and released in the same year, the production company is added in brackets, eg. *San Sebastiano* (1911, Cines) or *San Sebastiano* (1911, Milano).

References mostly follow the Harvard system, but I have made some adjustments to cope with anonymous sources and to make reader consultation easier.

The main nineteenth century literary texts referenced in this thesis, such as Nicholas Wiseman's *Fabiola* or Edward Bulwer-Lytton's *Last Days of Pompeii*, are often viewed in either free online version or in various old editions which are still in circulation. To make references intelligible to all readers, these texts are referred to by Book or Part and Chapter, rather than by page number. For example, (Bulwer-Lytton 1, III) refers to the first book and third chapter of *The Last Days of Pompeii*.

For the twenty volume filmography of Italian silent cinema produced by Aldo Bernardini and Vittorio Martinelli, I reference the specific volume, with (Martinelli 1996 [1915,2]: 101] referring to the second volume devoted to the films of 1915. This allows easier consultation, as the digitised and print versions of the filmographies have different and overlapping publication dates.

Italian film journals and magazines often used pseudonyms, and where these occur, the authors are listed under that pseudonym. For anonymous articles, the reference refers to the publication and date, to enable easy consultation and differentiate between several quotations from the same publication in the same year. Some of the longer titles are also shortened, with *Film, corriere...* referring to *Film corriere dei cinemtoграфи*.

Censorship records are referred to by their unique number in the Italian censorship records (ICR), rather than the date. The New York State censorship records are referred to by year and letter because they lack the simplicity of the Italian system.

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Finally, I would like to thank Rodney North, Pamela North and Kimberley Workman for their wonderful support.

## DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to all of the people who have helped me learn and improve my languages.

## INTRODUCTION

Un anno prima della morte, dopo aver rintracciato casualmente il suo rifugio, chi scrive tentò ostinatamente di incontrarla, senza esito. Solo una volta, prese il telefono dalle mani della figlia, con la quale ero riuscito a mettermi in contatto, e con molta gentilezza ringraziai dell'atteggiamento che avevo nei suoi riguardi, ma con altrettanta fermezza pronunziò queste testuali parole: 'Alla, mia età, caro signore, si ha il *dovere* di dimenticare.' E chiuse la comunicazione.

- Vittorio Martinelli, in conversation with Pina Menichelli, (Martinelli 2002a: 34)

### *A Lost World*

After fascinating audiences from Britain to Brazil with her sexual poses, intense acting and Kohl-lined eyes, Pina Menichelli disappeared. She was an internationally famous actress who knew that her every movement was, "un peccato d'amore per chi la guarda" (Alacci 1919: 36). But, in 1924, she became a respectable aristocratic wife. Besides Salvador Dalí's confused recollections and the occasional projection organised by silent film archivists, the world also forgot. Films were recycled; documents abandoned; photographs burned by the diva herself. If an example were required to explain why Italy's silent past ended up at the furthest reaches of film and cultural studies, it would surely be that of its most elusive femme fatale. Along with Menichelli's past, the remains of a once-flourishing film industry that had entertained millions across the globe almost completely vanished, as attention focussed on sound films and the triumphs of its post-war successor.

Fortunately, some of the films and materials from the silent period were preserved by the Cineteca Nazionale, the nascent Museo Nazionale Del Cinema and other archives, but little was available to researchers. Until the 1960s, the sum of research on the silent period in Italy extended to two histories of the period and two issues of the film magazine *Bianco e Nero* (Brunetta 2013: 20-23). In the 1970s and 1980s, Gian Piero Brunetta, Aldo Bernardini and Vittorio Martinelli began to chart the history and filmography of the period. By the end of the 1980s, Italian silent cinema was the subject of film festivals, restoration efforts, significant interest from Italian academics and a growing number



of monographs dedicated to important genres, directors and actors. In the last twenty-five years, new scholarship has furthered the work of earlier pioneers, and some actors, directors and genres have been uncovered and appraised in impressive detail. The world of Italian silent film scholarship has also opened up, as academic conferences and doctoral programmes bring new researchers to the period and new dialogues between Italian and international scholars (Bertellini 2013: 6-8). Impressive international contributions using methods from across cultural studies have shed light on women film-makers, transnational film culture, screenwriters, *divismo* and Jewish representation (Bruno 1993, Alovisio 2005, Dalle Vacche 2008, Bertellini 2010, Owen 2014). However, many important directors, actors and phenomena remain unstudied, and far less attention is devoted to this period in Italian cinema than any other.

Gian Piero Brunetta noted that the relationship between Catholicism and the film industry during the silent period still requires detailed study (Brunetta 2013: 64). In addition, Peter Bondanella assessed the religious film as an offshoot of the historical epic film genre, often linked to it in “style and attention to historical detail” (Bondanella 2011:12). This thesis aims to increase our understanding of both of these areas by investigating representations of Early Church martyrdom in the silent period. The initial ground has been charted. Riccardo Redi’s publications have shed light on the Catholic connections of Cines, one of the major Italian film companies of the period, and explored the production of *Christus* (1916) in great detail. Of the three-volume history *Attraverso lo schermo, Cinema e cultura cattolica in Italia* (Eugeni, Viganò 2006), the first volume provides an introduction to the history of Catholicism and cinema in the period, and historical case studies, such as the Catholic studio SIC-Unitas, the 1910 Milan Film Competition and religious slide production. However, besides the overview of Christian iconography provided by Luisa Zanzottera, there is little deep textual analysis of the films themselves. Significant gaps remain in our understanding of religious themes in Italian silent cinema. This thesis aims to increase our knowledge of this area by investigating representations of Early Church martyrdom in Italian silent cinema.

While the Italian contribution to the Christ biopic was limited because of the early success and wide diffusion of French Passion films, the theme of Early Church martyrdom can be seen throughout the entire history of Italian silent cinema. Yet, from the pioneering work of Vatican archaeologist and

film-maker Baron Rodolfo Kanzler through to the last film of the Neapolitan director Elvira Notari, depictions of Early Church martyrdom remain almost completely overlooked by film historians, with the exception of *Quo Vadis* (1913), one of the most important steps in the evolution of the historical epic film, and its remake *Quo Vadis* (1924). Early Church martyrdom in cinema is fascinating because of the nature of the suffering, sublime human form; its mixture of the sacred and profane; visual and narrative. From the legacies of Renaissance Art and Catholic religious feasts through to d'Annunzio's *Le martyre de Saint Sébastien* and patriotic films like *Guglielmo Oberdan, il martire di Trieste* (1915), the theme of self-sacrifice had a broad resonance across the culture of Liberal and Early Fascist Italy. Early Christian martyrdom was explored in Vatican-backed short films, wartime propaganda and emigrant-commissioned films, as well as by commercial cinema. This thesis attempts to understand these films' representation of martyrdom within the cultural context of the period, and investigate their use of Catholic iconography and appeal to audiences.

It is hoped that this thesis will advance knowledge of the interactions between Catholicism and the Italian cinema during the silent period, on both historical and cultural levels. It uncovers the little-known magic lantern work of Vatican archaeologist Rodolfo Kanzler, and examines his interactions with cinema. Through the film case studies, the thesis also explores how several Italian film studios approached religious topics. On a cultural level, the thesis explores the fluctuations in the figure of the Early Church martyr in films conceived with very different intentions: emigrant-commissioned movies, wartime propaganda and historical epics. It analyses the filmic imagery of the martyr and explores the religious, political and social discourses behind these films, considering their reception in Italy and abroad.

My research topic is fortunate in that, of the nineteen films I initially wanted to analyse, thirteen still exist. By comparison, only around twenty percent of Italy's silent films still exist (Brunetta 2013: 60). This high survival rate is perhaps down to the wide international distribution and continuing popularity among religious audiences these movies enjoyed, which meant that a copy was likely to remain in existence. Moreover, certain films within the group were considered as aesthetically significant when film preservation was in its infancy. In 1929, Edward Foxen Cooper, who had headed the Imperial War Museum Film Archive, suggested that *Quo Vadis* (1913) was, "one of the masterpieces

of cinematography,” and worth preserving (Cooper 1929:7). The high survival rate of the Early Church martyrdom films means that this thesis can directly examine a significant number of films on this topic across the silent era, with the exceptions of both pioneering (1903) and very late (1930) works. I reconstruct these lost works using archive materials. This allows us to see how the theme of martyrdom was explored during dramatic changes in Italian cinema’s aesthetic, industrial and social position.

Before considering the cultural context and the films themselves, we need to explore the methods employed to analyse and organise the filmic case studies. I begin by surveying the practical problems of analysing silent films, including travel and the incompleteness of many works. I propose methods for examining lost films, and accounting for the lacunae, differences in quality and variations between surviving film copies.

### *Corpus and method*

It would be foolhardy to proceed to the analysis of the silent films and materials without making some consideration of the selection of the films themselves and the difficulties of conducting research in this field. I survey the loss of many silent films and the effect this and other practical considerations have had on my research. The films I wish to study differ immensely: they include restored, largely-complete films, fragmented copies and lost films for which only documentation survives. Here, I acknowledge the work of archivists and restorers on the surviving films, and explore the ethics of comparing these films with non-restored films and lost works.

Many silent films were recycled or used as blank ‘leaders’ once people no longer wanted to watch them (Abel 1998: 45, Bottomore 2002: 188). Even where films were held in archives, casual attitudes to film preservation, wartime looting (notably of the Cineteca Nazionale in Rome) and fires led to major losses (Slide 1992: 6-7, Barbina 1987: 9-12, Heckman 2010: 484). The fragile nature of nitrate film, both inflammable and vulnerable to decomposition in ambient conditions, means that those that remain have generally been preserved by film archives. Although an increasing number of silent films are now available for study at distance via YouTube, online film archive projects and DVD releases, visits to

archives remain essential in many cases. Many films have only been copied onto a cellulose acetate ('safety') film, rather than digital media, or archive policy does not allow digital copies to be viewed off the premises. So, research in this area often requires viewing films in situ, and this in turn places some limits on what can be studied. I have largely excluded *Nerone e Agrippina* (1914) from the study because viewing it would have meant a reduction in my research in London, Amsterdam and across Italy. The Roman Epic films of 1913-1914 are already well-represented in this thesis, so I have restricted my analysis to the mise-en-scène and plot outline, using a period film programme in my collection. In this way, the film becomes part of the cinematic context surrounding the other works examined here.

Missing footage is perhaps the most well-known difficulty of studying silent films. The recent re-discovery of parts of *Metropolis* (1927) brought the issue to wider attention (Enticknap 2013: 13). This research deals with films with differing degrees of narrative completeness, arising both from their position relative to the 'original' and whether reconstruction work has been carried out. At one end of the spectrum, the thesis examines works which have simply been duplicated 'as is' onto safety film or digital media. At the other, this thesis deals with restored films which are the combination of several prints into a version which approximates the original as closely as possible in its narrative completeness, organisation and high visual quality. Thus, film restoration has often been compared to textual criticism in philology, with the product of both being a 'critical edition' as close as possible to the author's original version, at least as far as the restorer is concerned. Although leading film archivist Paolo Cherchi Usai has criticised the "pretentious" nature of the comparison, I believe it is useful in helping us to explore the consequences of the restoration and reconstruction processes (Cherchi Usai 2002: 27).

At first glance, the criteria for restoration seem simple: go back to the 'original' camera negative. The quest becomes tricky when the realities of the corpus confront us. Firstly, the more numerous and geographically-scattered release prints are more likely to survive than the camera negatives (Enticknap 2013: 38). As we look at the reality of exhibition prints, the notion of the 'original' becomes more difficult to define. When exhibitors owned their films (1895-c.1915), they frequently edited them. The release of different Passion films and their availability on a scene-by-scene basis produced veritable bricolages of cinema (Gunning 1992: 102-111). This process of editing went a step further when major blockbusters, such as *Quo Vadis* (1913), were presented as 'highlights' or imitated using footage from

older films (Blom 2003: 228-232). After the rental model took hold, studios and distributors modified films for national markets (Bertellini 1995: 281). Of the films examined here, *Quo Vadis* (1924) and *Gli ultimi giorni di Pompei* (1926) have recognisably different versions (Musumeci 1994: 109, Fossati 2002, Pescetelli 2010: 136). The severity of the cuts from national censors, established across Europe around 1910, contributed still further to these national variations. Of course, these cuts often meant that films were a success in certain countries and a failure in others. Finally, subsequent re-releases and re-edits, such as the 9.5mm *Fabiola* and *Messalina* (1935), demonstrate the continuing circulation of these films decades after their first commercial exhibition.

Given these layers of editing, the act of film reconstruction is a subjective process, like the critical edition. Those assembling these composite texts do so according to their own methods and priorities. Considering the genealogy of *Metropolis*, a film which circulated internationally in about half a dozen variants, Giorgio Bertellini described it as:

‘a history of effects’...where different spectators have scratched their discursive (sic) effusions or their violent rejections. (Bertellini 1995: 287)

This statement could be applied to all of the films examined here. As well as the copies ‘scratched’ by distributors, censors, exhibitors and collectors, we have seen that reconstructions are themselves edited by film archive staff. This realisation introduces an element of equality into consideration of the filmic corpus. Although there is a stark visual and aesthetic divide between viewing the reconstructed and nearly-complete films and those which have been left ‘as is’ with significant narrative gaps, they can both be considered as a history of effects. The only difference is that the reconstructed films have received effects more recently.

So, the apparently heterogeneous film corpus is more similar than it appears at first. The restored and reconstructed films are composite texts, as are the fragmentary reels ‘duped’ from ageing nitrates. None of these films can be considered as ‘original’. Moreover, the editing, censorship and re-editing practices of the silent era negate the idea of the original and instead promote textual multiplicity through the circulation of different versions. As we have seen, film variants were a rich and valid part of cinematic practice throughout the silent era. We must now consider how this situation effects the research and how we should approach these films.

The first rule is, of course, rigorous awareness of the filmic texts under consideration. There are no convenient sigla to tell us what is missing from these texts. The researcher must astutely read the film copy itself, catalogue notes and ask the archivists. One can then examine other evidence: original production documents, censorship ledgers, marketing materials, film reviews, photographs and postcards. This material can shed further light on the film, and help us understand different versions, missing scenes and so on. However, one must always be aware of the flaws and missing parts of such documents. For instance, censorship records can be very brief regarding cut scenes, but they do tell us the cut film's length. Film reviews can either gloss over or magnify the weaker parts of a narrative. After considering both the filmic text and these surrounding materials, one can then understand the partiality of the filmic text and the interventions made after release.

This textual awareness should then condition our response to these films. For instance, it is clearly difficult to analyse the pacing of *Messalina* (1923), which survives only as a condensed 1935 sound print, as the later print is considerably shorter than its silent predecessor. Italian censorship records confirm these differences in length. We could cautiously consider what contemporary reviewers said about the pacing of *Messalina* (1923), while remembering the bias in these accounts. In the 1920s, Italian and foreign film reviewers were divided by differing national conceptions of cinema, with Italian journals heavily promoting the products of their beleaguered industry and foreign reviewers often preferring their own domestic output. Furthermore, bourgeois, urban men dominated Italian film periodicals, which were in turn heavily reliant on industry advertising (Rhodes 2013: 263). These reviewers constituted a very limited part of cinema's total audience. In sum, then, our reading of the patchy filmic text and the discourse surrounding means that we cannot be certain about the pacing of *Messalina* (1923). We can suggest some hypotheses, but nothing definitive. The noted archivist Paolo Cherchi Usai wrote, good research into silent cinema should, "fronteggiare con il necessario acume l'incompletezza dei dati a disposizione" (Usai 1991: 37). This should be the next guiding principle of our research: to understand the fragmentary nature of the data and to skilfully deal with this, while remembering that often we cannot come to a truly definitive conclusion.

As well as textual awareness, research into silent cinema needs awareness of what is often missing: the context in which films were received and enjoyed. However, as film historian Ian Christie points out, audience reception remains, “still largely hidden,” in oral and ‘local cinema’ histories (Christie 2012: 21). For silent cinema, the problem is considerably worse, since almost all of the spectators died before their experiences were recorded or they wrote them down. As if to highlight this absence, Italian cinema’s largest paper archive, the Museo Nazionale Del Cinema collection, contains just two scrapbooks compiled by a local girl around 1915 (*Novara scrapbooks*, c.1915). Since direct testimony is missing, the approach of film historians must take a broader perspective, investigating the public spheres and socio-cultural context in which film audiences existed. The definition of the Cinema of Attractions by Tom Gunning and André Gaudreault moved silent cinema towards this approach because of their interest in the exhibition context. In her study of immigrant spectatorship in the United States, Hansen sought to:

reconstruct the configurations of experience that shaped their horizon of reception, and ask how the cinema as an institution, as a social and aesthetic experience, might have interacted with that horizon. (Hansen 1991: 101).

The influence of this call to contextual awareness can be felt in Giuliano Bruno’s study into Neapolitan director Elvira Notari (Bruno 1993: 129-130). Building on the earlier research of Enza Troianelli, Bruno managed to uncover the broader cultural context surrounding a director whose work has been almost entirely lost. However, it should be noted that the major scholars of Italian silent cinema, such as Gian Piero Brunetta, Aldo Bernardini, Vittorio Martinelli and Riccardo Redi, have always proposed studies based on a precise cultural histories and detailed knowledge of local exhibition practices. My research follows these trends, exploring the broader cultural context and horizons of reception surrounding the films as well as the works themselves.

As with all doctoral studies, the changes in research direction still contribute to the overall thesis. In my case, I spent a great deal of time investigating and writing about Catholic Church history and culture in the nineteenth century, but my attempts to combine this earlier period with the case studies were not entirely successful. While I investigate some of the influences this culture had in Chapter Two, where I consider media forms and discourses which closely pertain to the films, devoting

two large chapters to this more remote period began to unbalance my research. As 'lost' films became more visible, whether due to fortuitous restorations or my own archival research, the value of analysing the Early Church martyrdom theme across the silent period increased and the value of in-depth analysis of the more obscure areas of Church culture diminished. Consequently, I restructured the contextual chapters into one which outlines the history of the religious film in Italian silent cinema and a second which considers a limited number of texts, artworks and discourses closely tied to the case studies.

I also spent some considerable time looking at histories of the Early Church and religious studies of martyrdom, notably those of Elizabeth Castelli, Virginia Burrus, G.W. Bowersock and Judith Perkins, and trying to construct a model of martyrdom against which the case studies could be tested. This theoretical approach delivered a chapter which was too remote from the case studies and the contextual realities of Italian early cinema. Yet, these authors' skilful analyses of Early Christian martyrdom and its role in transmitting Christian ideas about gender, politics and faith have inspired into my approach to the case studies. I have brought some perspectives from their work into my analysis of the case studies. Ultimately, an interdisciplinary project bringing together experts in religious, film and Italian studies would be the optimum way to analyse the various martyrdom films produced by Italian cinema, such as the Early Church martyrdom film, Risorgimento martyrdom films of 1910-1915 or the anti-Mafia martyrdom films. However, such a broad approach is clearly beyond the scope of this thesis, which already covers a thirty year period in film history. The value in my pioneering research is that it illuminates these little-known films and highlights the potential of future investigations into cinematic martyrdom.

In sum, the analysis of films in this thesis starts from rigorous awareness of the filmic texts and the complexities of their reception contexts. Having a deep understanding of the issues surrounding the texts, from the problematic notion of the original to the condition of the copies, informs the analysis of the cinematic depictions of martyrdom. The broader cultural context surrounding the films, and their audiences' horizons are also considered. Given the span of the period analysed (1900-1930) and the vast changes Italian cinema and society underwent during these years, the reading of the cultural context must be precise and nuanced. Where appropriate, I bring in perspectives from studies of religious martyrdom and film theory. Finally, although the films were all produced in Italy, they were aimed at



transnational audiences. Accordingly, my examination of the audiences' horizons of reception takes in Europe and the Americas, while being grounded in Italy.

### *Selection and structure*

Beginning with Rodolfo Kanzler's pioneering still and moving images of martyrs in the Catacombs, and ending with Elvira Notari's film of a martyred patron Saint, this thesis spans thirty-two years and the entirety of Italian silent cinema. In examining the topic of Early Church martyrdom, one is offered various organisational possibilities: chronological, thematic, Saint-by-Saint or any mix of these. The purpose of this section is to consider the selection of the filmic case studies, and their organisation.

In any study of silent films, the natural tendency is to group films chronologically. This allows us to compare films produced in a similar socio-political context, and in similar cinematic contexts; an important issue given the rapid artistic and technical changes cinema underwent during the silent era. However, to rigidly apply this schema can prevent us comparing films with the same source material or director. In this thesis, the organisation of the filmic case studies blends these two approaches, but is mostly chronological. The one-reel films are analysed with other works they closely resemble, rather than in strict chronological order. *Quo Vadis* (1913) initiated a seismic shift in depictions of Early Christianity. Its feature length, spectacular re-imagining of the ancient world and adaptation of an important literary work made Enrico Guazzoni's epic a huge success, which the Italian studios would try to repeat in their darkest days. Despite their chronological difference, it is fitting that I examine *Quo Vadis* (1913) alongside *Quo Vadis* (1924) because of their common subject and the former's influence on the latter.

Some films have not been selected as case studies because of their survival status (see Appendix Two). Clearly, it would be impossible to analyse *Santa Cecilia* (1919) because so little remains. All we have are a few advertisements, some brief notes in the censorship records and the novel from which the

latter was adapted. By contrast, the illustrated lectures and films of Baron Kanzler or Elvira Notari are two unique projects, which we can investigate through their distinctive cultural remnants. There are some dubious titles. Natacha Aubert includes the film *Il Martirio di Santo Stefano* (1912) in her list of Italian silent epics (Aubert 2009: 264). However, the title is not included in the Bernardini-Martinelli filmography or Italian censorship records. Perhaps Aubert saw a print or reference to Pathé's *Le Martyre de Saint Étienne* (1912).

This thesis examines lost films because, although they are not physically present in the film archives, their presence in the historical archive is utterly fascinating. The pioneering film work of Baron Rodolfo Kanzler and Notari's last and little-considered film project are analysed in detail in the third and seventh chapters. Other lost films are analysed as much as possible alongside the surviving works considered in this thesis. For instance, the plot summary of *San Sebastiano* (1911, Cines) shows that the film was quite different from the surviving *San Sebastiano* (1911, Milano Films), and it is fascinating to bring these two works into dialogue where possible. While one must be careful not to speculate and to acknowledge that one is often engaging with the cultural context surrounding a lost film rather than the work itself, some of the most fascinating discourses of the period are no longer on celluloid. Rather than simply ignoring them, it is far more interesting to integrate them into the analysis where possible.

The selection of *Messalina* (1923) as a filmic case study may strike some readers as bizarre. Ostensibly, the film features neither Christians nor martyrs, but an Empress and an Egyptian priestess who pursue an honest slave-couple and their muscular helper, Tigrane. Yet, the suffering of the slave-girl Egle has some remarkably parallels with the Christian heroines of *Quo Vadis* (1913) and *Fabiola* (1918). I argue that Guazzoni's final epic film can be read as a reworking of themes from his earlier work, and that Egle's suffering can be read as a quasi-martyrdom. Furthermore, I argue that the richness of the film's Christian symbolism did not escape contemporary audiences. In short, *Messalina* (1923) is an interesting re-working of Christian martyrdom, and worthy of examination here.

The thesis comprises two contextual chapters and five case studies. In the first two chapters, I examine religion in Italian silent cinema and selected media closely related to the case studies. The first chapter begins by exploring the history of religious films in Italian silent cinema, and suggesting a

thematic grouping of these works based on their subjects. This allows us to identify the main patterns in religious film production throughout the period. The chapter then considers the social, commercial and artistic contexts within which religious films were made and watched. Particular attention is paid to the circulation of religious images in the period 1895-1912, and the dynamics behind religious film-making during this period of rapid change. The next section considers religious feature films and their cinematic context in the period 1913-1930. It analyses the commercial and artistic difficulties in making large numbers of religious films, the size of the religious exhibition sectors and the extent of Catholic involvement in film-making and exhibition.

Early Church martyrdom spread across nineteenth century social and cultural forms, spanning everything from Church architecture and Vatican museums to popular novels, archaeological studies, religious devotions and mass spectacles. The purpose of the second chapter is to explore the cultural roots underpinning the depictions of Early Church martyrdom in Italian silent cinema. It is structured into three parts. The first considers the discourses surrounding *mise-en-scène* in the Italian historical film, of which the religious film was a sub-genre. The second examines the place of Early Church martyrdom in some of the most important historical novels of the nineteenth century, contrasting entertainment and polemically driven works. The third part considers Early Church martyrdom within Catholic culture, focusing specifically on the reign of Pius IX, Catacomb archaeology and changes in devotional culture which occurred during the Catholic Revival.

Beginning with magic lantern slides first shown in 1898, the first case study discovers and analyses the screen practice of a leading Vatican archaeologist, Baron Rodolfo Kanzler. From his photographed reconstructions of Early Christian life and the Catacombs, through to his involvement in *Fabiola* (1918) and as a board member at Guazzoni Film, Kanzler's career spans over twenty years, yet has never been considered in its entirety before. This thesis presents the first ever chronology of Kanzler's illustrated lectures and films, using documents from Vatican archives and across Europe. It also considers Kanzler's film project *Sepoltura di una martire cristiana in una catacomba* (1903). Finally, it explores how Kanzler's pioneering work fused the Vatican's propagandistic use of the Catacombs with screen media, how his depictions of Early Church martyrdom interacted with other nineteenth century cultural forms and his possible influence on later film-makers.

Chapter Four examines the surviving martyrdom one-reelers produced in Italy prior to 1913. It begins by considering the brief references to Christian martyrdom in *Gli ultimi giorni di Pompei* (1908) and *Nerone* (1909), and the influence of these works on the films which followed. I then analyse *San Paolo dramma biblico* (1910), a work which is unusual because it is the only filmic case study to give Paul more than a very minor part. I investigate the religious film festival for which *San Paolo* was made, and how the film connected Paul's martyrdom to the Roman cityscape. I also debate whether Rodolfo Kanzler was involved in the film's production. I consider two films by the Roman studio Cines: *Dall'amore al martirio* (1910) and *Santa Cecilia* (1911), both of which show the martyrdom of a young Christian couple. Finally, I analyse the two films about Saint Sebastian which were made in 1911, one of which survives and one of which is lost. I situate these works within the iconography and culture surrounding the Saint.

Chapter Five considers the two film adaptations of *Whither Quo Vadis?* Building on the phenomenal popularity of Henryk Sienkiewicz's novel in world culture, Enrico Guazzoni's version of 1913 was an enormous critical and commercial success, and was quickly imitated by other Italian studios. In 1924, as the Italian film industry went through a period of profound crisis, Georg Jacoby and Gabriellino d'Annunzio attempted to return to a winning formula. This chapter navigates the depiction of Early Christianity and martyrdom within these two films, both of which evolved from a text that had a calculatedly universal appeal. I examine the religious and political messages of both films, and possible readings of them as socio-political allegories. I also consider the enduring influence of Enrico Guazzoni's film in establishing the blueprint for feature-length depictions of Early Christian martyrdom.

Chapter Six considers the Constantine Epic *In hoc signo vinces* (1913) and two films from 1918: the wartime propaganda short *La Leggenda di Santa Barbara* (1918) and the Early Church martyrdom epic *Fabiola* (1918), based on Cardinal Wiseman's 1854 novel. The only film of the case studies devoted to Constantine, *In hoc signo vinces* has been rarely studied because only a few reels of it survive. With the aid of film brochures, I investigate this anomalous work, which was released during the sixteenth centenary of the Edict of Milan, an event widely celebrated by Catholics. I then review the one-reel wartime propaganda film *La Leggenda di Santa Barbara* (1918), considering its relevance

to the themes of sacrifice, its interaction with the wartime documentary it was part of and the importance of the performance by Lyda Borelli. Finally, I discuss Enrico Guazzoni's *Fabiola* (1918), which depicted the most famous Early Christian martyrs of the Diocletian persecution and had particular resonance during the final year of World War One. I discuss the portrayal of the major martyrs in the film (the fictional Agnes, Saint Pancras and Saint Sebastian) and how these portrayals differ from those of martyrs in historical epics.

The final chapter considers the diverse representations of Early Church martyrdom produced during the early years of the Fascist period. These include the martyrdom-like narratives in the epic film *Messalina* (1923), the brief Early Christian appearances in *Gli ultimi giorni di Pompei* (1926) and a lost film, *Trionfo Cristiano* (1930). Guazzoni's final silent epic, *Messalina* (1923), did not explicitly feature any Christian martyrs and promised much decadent eroticism. Yet, with its group of honest slaves being persecuted by a capricious Empress and an evil Oriental priestess, its Christian subtext is obvious on an extended viewing, despite its controversial mixture of eroticism and sadistic displays. Thus, I read this as a continuation of the director's exploration of martyrdom. *Gli ultimi giorni di Pompei* (1926), the fourth adaptation of Edward Bulwer-Lytton's novel produced during the silent period, is the only one to depict the novel's Christian sub-plot. The final case study is *Trionfo Cristiano* (1930), a little-known, lost film made by Elvira Notari. The film was commissioned by the town's emigrants living in the United States, and depicted the martyrdom of Saint Pellegrino, who is a central part of the annual festa. Uncovering fragments of information about the film, Notari's studio, Pellegrino's martyrdom and the Altavillese diaspora, I read the film as a remote participation in the *battenti* ritual performed during the feast of Saint Pellegrino, and a crucial text for the emigrant community.

## RELIGION IN ITALIAN SILENT CINEMA

The purpose of this chapter is to provide an overview of the production and reception of religious films in Italy during the period 1895-1931. In so doing, it considers developments in the film depictions of Early Christians and martyrs over the life-cycle of Italy's film industry, as it went from modest beginnings to become an industrial-scale producer with global reach, only to then suffer near-terminal decline. The aim is to provide a historical framework for understanding the questions posed by the films and documents analysed in the five case study chapters.

The first section considers Christian themes in Italian silent cinema and the European film market, providing an overall context for analysing films based on early Christian martyrdom. The section defines the development of Italian silent cinema, dividing it into five distinct phases. This historical periodisation of the film industry is combined with an initial thematic grouping of religious films to allow us to identify salient patterns. The saints, scripture and themes commonly found in these works are then examined. It is argued that the selection of religious subjects was closely influenced by European popular culture and contemporary events. The thematic categorisation of the Italian religious film highlights two genres in which early Christian martyrdom is particularly prevalent: martyr films and the Roman epic.

In the first two periods (1895-1912), the main product of film studios across the world was the one-reel film and cinemas showed programmes composed of such films. The earlier years were dominated by a spectacular cinema, dubbed the Cinema of Attractions (1895-1907), and then by a narrative cinema (1908-1912) composed of one-reel films. The latter periods (1913-1930) saw the feature film dominate global output and establish itself as the main attraction for cinema-goers. By 1913-1914, Italian films had stabilised at a feature length of around 1000-1500 metres (Bernardini 1982: 95-96). As Ben Brewster has highlighted, the one-reel narrative film fits "into neither the models of the cinema of attractions nor those of feature film-making," and it has often been examined as an evolutionary step towards the feature rather than a distinct form (Brewster 2012: 248-252). Accordingly, the religious-

themed film is examined here in its three forms: 'Cinema of Attraction' one-reelers, narrative one-reelers and feature films. This division is maintained in the case studies, with one-reel narratives of Christian martyrdom being examined in Chapter Four.

The years 1895-1907 have been theorised as a Cinema of Attractions, where spectacular visual display took precedence over creating narratives. Given the universality of Christianity in Western culture, the spectacular aspects of the Bible and the lives of the Saints had huge potential appeal. Both longer Passion films and short 'trick' films were produced. Although Italy's film industry was still developing in this period, it marked an important time for religious works on screen. Some of the tendencies established in these early works, such as recourse to extraneous narratives and the tableaux scene, would persist throughout the silent era. The early success of Catholic magic lantern slides and cinematograph films in France would lead to similar hopes for a Catholic cinema in Italy and spread a visual iconography upon which religious films would be based. The success of French Passion films meant that the Italians would tackle other genres in the following years, such as the lives of Early Church martyrs.

The next section analyses religious films during the years of the one-reeler (1908-1912). This era saw the cinemas offer programmes composed predominantly of narrative films under ten minutes in length. The Italian film studios also went through a period of very rapid growth, building impressive facilities and winning a prominent place in international markets. In this section, I examine the context surrounding the religious films produced by the major Italian studios, such as studio policies, the preferences of directors and competition with Pathé. I look at the development of religious films in this time, looking at their production values and narratives. I explore the Catholic film initiatives of 1909 and why they were destined to fail as cinema became the world's pre-dominant form of entertainment.

The final section investigates the religious feature films produced from 1913 until 1930. In the years 1913-1914, the Italian religious and historical epics enjoyed international success, leading to a golden period for Italian film-makers. The success of these films, and in particular *Quo Vadis* (1913), established the paradigm for future productions. Religious films became epic works which required high levels of intellectual and financial investment, as well as a spectacular mise-en-scène. I explore the factors which limited the production of religious films as a means to explore the cinematic context

within which they were produced. While Italy's entry into the First World War spelt trouble for a genre which mobilised thousands of extras, other factors limited the production of religious epics. The genre had a problematic relationship with film stardom. Adaptations of sacred texts might be poorly received by the faithful. The failure of the Catholic magic lantern and early film shows to develop into an alternative cinema sector limited the market for religious films. Finally, the cinematic formula proposed by some historical and religious epics of 1913-1914 began to look rather unappetising and outdated a decade later.

### *Italian silent cinema and religious themes*

Religious-themed films are a small but visible group within Italian silent film production, across drama and documentary. The earliest surviving Italian film is of Pope Leo XIII, shot by Vittorio Calcina in 1896 (Viganò 2001: 16-17). This preceded a longer film of twelve Vatican scenes shot by William Kennedy Dickson in 1898 and released to great applause from Catholic audiences worried about the Pontiff's health (Musser 1994: 219-221; Viganò 2001: 16-17). In both films, Leo XIII blesses the camera and, by extension, the viewing faithful. Notwithstanding the success of these films, only eight more newsreels of the Popes were made during the rest of the silent period, with the most extensive showing Benedict XV (Szücs 1981: 679-680). The Popes would be far rarer in actuality films than the British or Italian royal families. A limited number of documentary films were also made to capture large-scale devotional events, such as *Pellegrinaggio italiano a Lourdes* (1909) or *La quarta incoronazione centenaria della Madonna di Oropa* (1920). Such films had a strong local appeal, and they may have circulated more widely. For instance, the Neapolitan director Elvira Notari, who produced the Early Christian martyrdom film *Trionfo Cristiano* (1930), also filmed religious processions and feste in Southern Italy (Paliotti, Grano 2006: 86-87). This footage circulated in documentaries and feature films, both of which were very popular in both the South and its diaspora (Bruno 1993:132, 187-196).



A thematic categorisation of historical religious films allow us us to contrast depictions of martyrdom with other paradigms and to see how Christianity was represented in cinema. My classification is more detailed than that proposed by film studios during the one-reel era. Around 1910, the major Roman studio Cines grouped its films into four simple genres: Storica, Drammatica, Romantica Comune and Comica (Redi 2009: 32). With their historic settings, prestigious texts and elaborate mise-en-scène, films of the Bible and the lives of Saints were a sub-genre of the historical film. However, while Cines' 1910 groupings reflect the basic organisation of a cinema programme made up of one-reel films, they are simplistic even for this period and were definitely outdated in the feature era. By 1911, studios had widened their generic offer to include the crime film (Ambrosio) and grand guignol-inspired romance (Navone Film) (Bernardini 1982: 63-64).

In reality, the thematic differences between films were keenly felt by all involved in cinema, from studio moguls to consumers, throughout the silent period. The fact that Italian studios avoided making a lengthy Passion film before *Christus* (1916) demonstrates their awareness of the success of Pathé and Gaumont in this area. Distributors of Italian historical films, like Jean Desmet, were aware of the differences between secular historical films and those with a Christian message. Desmet's religious-themed historical films, such as *In hoc signo vinces* (1913), enjoyed seasonal popularity and appealed to exhibitors in Catholic areas long after their initial release date (Blom 2003: 226-231, 319-321). Finally, even with the varied offer of cinema programmes, spectators were struck by films of Early Christian martyrs. In his novel *Al Cinematografo* (1907), Gualtiero Fabbri details the reactions of a fictional group of spectators to the one-reel films of the era. The novel includes the different Biblical and martyrdom scenes which made up *Les martyrs chrétiens* (1905) (Fabbri 2012: 64). So, religious themes were differentiated by the industry and spectators alike.

I have surveyed the religious-themed works produced by the Italian film industry. The films which I consider to have religious themes and/or Christian heroes are listed in Appendix One. Where a film copy is lost, I have referred to documents and plot summaries. The Italian film industry's production of religious-themed works can be classified as follows:

- 1) Old Testament films. This category includes films based upon Old Testament scripture.
- 2) Gospel. This category covers films which show incidents from the Gospels and the Passion of Christ in its entirety. Films based around other figures in the Gospels, such as Judas and Mary Magdalene, give an alternative perspective on Jesus' sacrifice.
- 3) Early Christian martyr films. This category includes films which give the majority of their coverage to a Christian saint martyred before AD 400. These films are generally based on hagiographic literature or derivatives of it, such as the novel *Fabiola*.
- 4) Films about other saints who were not martyred, including ascetic saints and warrior saints. Saint George is included in this category because his martyrdom is not featured in these films, which focus solely on his conflict with the dragon.
- 5) Roman Epics featuring some religious content, such as *Quo Vadis* (1913, 1924). These films are different from the biopics of martyred saints and New Testament films because they are not closely focused on hagiographic literature or Scriptures. The Roman Epics mix Christian characters and saints with historical figures and fictional characters in epic narratives, which have the Roman/Christian conflict as one of their main plot elements. Christian martyrdom features frequently in these films, but unlike the Early Christian martyr films, martyrs are not focal characters.
- 6) Other films. I have only used this category where one problematic film overlaps the boundaries laid out above. This is the case with *Satana* (1912), a four-act feature with one act set in the Old Testament and one during the New Testament.
- 7) Moral dramas. These were edifying fictional works show Christianity in the contemporary period, with prayers leading to miraculous interventions or kindly priests resolving social and familial problems (Mosconi 2006: 268-271). The moral dramas are unusual compared to other religious-themed films because they only existed during the one-reel era. With their melodramatic tone and modern settings, these films do not share the textual origins of films

based on the Bible or hagiographies. Instead, they are closer to edifying secular one-reel films, edifying children's literature and perhaps magic lantern narratives.<sup>1</sup>

One could argue that all films featuring Early Christian martyrs should simply be categorised together, as they include the same subject. However, as Early Christian martyrdom is the main topic of this thesis, I have implemented a more fine-grained definition. In short, I have asked the following questions: is this film devoted to the theme of Early Christian martyrdom or is it just included as part of a broader epic vision? Are the Early Christians central characters or minor ones? Of course, these distinctions originate with the literary works adapted for the screen, a topic considered in more depth in the following chapter. For the moment, we should note that there was a spectrum of literature featuring the Early Church, from Cardinal Wiseman's theologically-driven *Fabiola* through to Edward Bulwer-Lytton's adventure romance *Last Days of Pompeii*, in which Early Christianity has only a minor role. Provisionally, I have placed the film adaptations of *Whither Quo Vadis* in the Roman Epic category. However, Sienkiewicz's novel circulated in original and expurgated versions in Italy (Gallerani 1900: 48-49/708-709). How these films explore Early Christian martyrdom is considered in detail in each of the case studies: the classification here is merely an initial one to give us an idea of trends across the period. I have divided the chronology of the Italian silent film into five distinct periods: the pioneer era (1895-1907), the industrialising era (1908-1912), the mature phase (1913-1918), the decline (1919-1924) and the total collapse (1925-1930). This periodisation appropriately segments the history of the Italian studios in the silent era, allowing us to view religious-themed films within an industrial context.

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<sup>1</sup> In my opinion, the origins of both edifying secular films and the moral dramas might lie in magic lantern narratives. In the United Kingdom, there was a significant body of sentimental and elevating magic lantern lectures which discussed the social question of poverty (Bottomore 2014: 22-23; Vogl-Bienik 2014: 35-64; Marsh, Francis 2014: 65-82). Some heart-rendering early British films even directly referred to well-known slides (Henkes 2014: 97). Further research on the connections between Italian magic lantern slides and moral drama films would be worthwhile, especially when the online database Lucerna receives additions from Italy and France, such as the collection of Museo Nazionale del Cinema, the Minici-Zotti collection and archives holding materials distributed by La Bonne Presse.

ERA	Old Testament	Gospel	Roman Epic	ECM film	Other saint Biopic	Other	Moral drama	TOTAL
1895-1907				1	1		1	3
1908-1912	4	3	2	6	4	1	4	24
1913-1918		1	3	2	2			8
1919-1924	3		2	1	1			7
1925-1930	1		1	1	1			4
TOTAL	8	4	8	11	9	1	5	46

Table 1: The production of religious-themed films in Italy during the silent era. The statistics are based on my Filmography of Italian Religious Films (1885-1931), Appendix One. Dubious examples have not been included in these totals.

While overall Italian output was very low in the pioneer era, *Passione di Cristo* (1900) and Rodolfo Kanzler's *Deposizione di una martire cristiana in una catacomba* (1903) may have been produced during this time (Brunetta 2008: 160; Aubert 2009: 213). The period 1907-1912 saw the greatest number of religious-themed films produced because a night's entertainment at the cinema comprised a programme of short one-reel films, rather than one feature. The one-reel format was ideal for recounting the key moments in a saint's life, and religious films would have been used to add seasonal or educational content to film programmes. The feature film was established as the dominant film form in the period 1913-1915 (Bernardini 1982: 95-96; Bordwell Thompson 1994:73; Sandberg 2005: 452-456). Early Church martyrs appeared on the silver screen during the golden years of 1913-1914, and in 1918, as sacrificial themes gained a final importance. During the Italian film industry's collapse in the twenties, historical and religious-themed epics would be used to attempt a relaunch (Brunetta 2008:

344-346). Most of the religious-themed epics were made in 1919 and 1920 by smaller studios, but production continued throughout the decade.

Within the context of overall output, religious-themed films were a minor phenomenon, occupying less than one percent of Italian film production. Twenty Biblical or saintly films and five moral dramas were made between 1907 and 1912. Yet over this period, the studios went from making 392 titles per year in 1909 to 813 in 1912 (Aubert 2009: 40). During the decline phase (1919-1924), only seven religious subjects were produced, but 1296 feature films were released (Micciché 1980: 354, Redi 1999: 175). The collapse of Italy's studios saw a proportional increase in the number of films featuring religious figures, but even then, only four such films were made out of a total production of one hundred and twenty-nine films (Redi 1999: 175). We must be mindful of the religious genre's statistic marginality and remember that, on the average trip to the cinema, spectators were far more likely to encounter a diva romance or an action-packed serial than a religious film.

It is notable that the number of saints and biblical figures featuring in films is relatively limited. From the Old Testament, the group is small: Joseph (son of Jacob), Cain, Abel, Judith and Holofernes. Besides Jesus Christ, the only figures from the New Testament to receive regular attention outside of the Passion films are Salome, Judas and Mary Magdalene. As for the Saints, St. Sebastian, St. George, St. Cecilia and St. Francis appear repeatedly on the screen, with the latter being the only ascetic saint to have his life adapted for the screen during this period. Saint Paul is the subject of only one short film, but is briefly included in the various *Quo Vadis* adaptations, as is Saint Peter. The number of biopics produced about martyred saints is double the number made about saints who exhibited other paradigms of sanctity, but these 'other saints' were more likely to be the subjects of a feature film.

Which factors determined the selection of religious subjects? Despite the geographic spread of Italian studios and the numbers of local saints venerated all over the country, *Trionfo Cristiano* (1930) was the only film made about a religious figure who was not internationally well-known. This film was commissioned by Italian emigrants and had relevance primarily to a limited audience (Bruno 1993: 315-317). Indeed, this silent film was produced when sound cinemas were becoming well-established. The anomalous nature of *Trionfo Cristiano* highlights the universality of Italian religious film-making. In general, Italian studios only featured religious figures who were extremely well-known, either

because of their longstanding prominence in international Catholic culture or their place in contemporary popular culture. For instance, the life of Salome captivated theatre and opera audiences in the period 1890-1915, and made Loïe Fuller famous for the Dance of the Seven Veils (Garelick 2007: 92-103; Bentley 2002: 33-46; Dierkes-Thun 2011: 94-104). In Italy, Lyda Borelli's legendary performance as Salome scandalised the Church, excited male spectators and was subsequently referenced in her film career (Puffet 1994: 20; Dalle Vacche 2008: 162; Lottini 2013: 152-155). Thus, the films *Salomé* (1910) and *Erodiad* (1912) were clearly influenced by the Salomania craze. Likewise, two one-reel biopics of Saint Sebastian were released just five weeks before Gabriele d'Annunzio's controversial drama premiered in Paris. The release dates seem unlikely to have been determined by chance, as the Italian press began eagerly reporting on D'Annunzio's project ten months before its first public performance (*Stampa* 29/07/1910: 4; *Simplicissimus* 1911: 3; Bassi 1911: 3). Alternatively, contemporary religious events could also prompt a film. After filming an actuality film showing the beatification of Joan of Arc, Cines also made a brief biopic of the Saint's life called *Vita di Giovanna d'Arco* (1909). *In hoc signo vinces* (1913) was produced during the celebration of the sixteenth centenary of the Edict of Milan.

In summary, the religious film was a statistically minor area of Italian film production during the silent era, albeit one that produced some impressive and entertaining works. Italian directors explored Christianity across all historical periods: from the beginning of Creation to friendly priests in contemporary urban life. Overall, commercial viability determined the selection of religious subjects, and only the most famous saints and biblical figures made it onto the silver screen. Given the prominence of Early Church martyrs like Cecilia, Agnes and Sebastian across the Catholic devotional culture and their place in popular culture, it is unsurprising that they featured prominently.

*Religion and the Cinema of Attractions (1895-1907)*

Having explored the outline of religious film production in Italy, we must now consider the culture of religious film-making during the period 1895-1907 in greater depth. During this period, Italian film production was initially restricted to a few pioneers, and began to industrialise from 1905 onwards (Brunetta 2008: 31-45). Meanwhile, French film production grew rapidly and led the global market (Bordwell, Thompson 1994:26-28). Films were projected in all manner of places and styles, from brief screenings in variety theatres and café concerts through to lengthy programmes in lecture halls and mobile cinemas. By 1907, fixed entertainment cinemas were established in many American and European cities. Religious films were very prominent on film programmes, both as lengthy Passion films and short trick films. Catholic organisations also began their own film production, building on decades of experience with the magic lantern, and religiously-minded exhibitors began exploiting the new medium. So, although Italian film production was very limited during this period, the early years of cinema saw the creation of the religious film genre. The films, marketing and reception trends of this period established the place of religion in the cinema and would be perpetuated in films made in subsequent decades, including those considered by this thesis.

Study of the early years of cinema has dominated by the paradigm of the Cinema of Attractions, which was developed by Tom Gunning and André Gaudreault and has been debated continuously since its inception nearly thirty years ago. In essence, they define the Cinema of Attractions as a cinema based on visual display and directly addressing the spectator, which flourished shortly after the invention of the medium (Gunning 2005: 124-126). The Cinema of Attractions delivered sensational elements and pure entertainment rather than building a narrative, and was not an evolutionary step towards the Classical Hollywood style (Gunning 2005: 124-126). Gunning argues that the Cinema of Attractions dominated cinema until 1906-1907, after which narrative tendencies led to progressively longer films (Gunning 2000: 234). Significantly more dramatic religious films were produced in this era than in later ones. For example, Pathé's 1904 catalogue offered 81 comic films, 62 trick films, 41 religious films and 25 dramatic films (Abel 1998: 60). 1905-1906 saw Biblical films take precedence over history in

Pathé's output, and Gaumont launched its own Passion in 1906 (Abel 1998: 162-164). So, the beginnings of the religious film are heavily bound up with the Cinema of Attractions, and we need to closely examine this production in order to understand the continuation of the genre in the narrative film era.

There were two main types of dramatic religious film on offer in 1895-1907. Firstly, we have comparatively short 'religious trick' films which show miraculous moments from the Bible and saints' lives. The surviving religious films of Georges Méliès, such as *La Tentation de Saint Antoine* (1898) and *Le Juif Errant* (1904), are perfect examples of this sub-genre. Watching these films today, one is struck by their fast tempo, focus on a single miraculous incident and their similarity to trick films. They rely on audience foreknowledge of the scenes they represent to provide context for the miraculous transformations. However, these films also set some patterns for later religious works. The appearances of the angels and Jesus, made using double exposures, were repeated in feature films like *Christus* (1916) and *Quo Vadis* (1924) because of how well they suggested the miraculous divine. A similar selection of almost universally-known Christian figures and key scenes would appear in the feature film era.

Gualtiero Fabbri's novella *Al Cinematografo* provides us with a very rare glimpse into the position of these religious trick films in an Italian cinema of the time. Written by a Methodist preacher turned film critic and published in March 1907, the thin love story is used as a pretext to discuss films and the typical behaviour of an urban cinema audience. The surviving Pathé film *Les martyrs chrétiens* (1905) is considered by Fabbri. Its 135 metres are divided into four scenes : gladiator, Christian persecution, Daniel in the lions' den and the feast of Balthazar. The first three parts feature a lion and his tamer, and their appearances are the most exciting elements of the film. These are not strictly tableaux scenes, as the first two scenes are connected by their setting and the presence of the lion and his tamer, but the scenes mostly rely on audience familiarity with Christian martyrdom and the Old Testament. The spectacle incongruously includes the Christians saluting the Emperor in the manner of Jean-Léon Gérôme's *Ave Caesar, morituri te salutant*. The martyrs are quickly swapped for meat carcasses as the lion leaps to eat them. Despite its brevity, simple double-exposure trick and the circus-like antics of the lion tamer, Fabbri's narrator is of the opinion that the first scene of *Les martyrs chrétiens* (1905)



explained the martyrdoms of the Early Church, “con una chiarezza, una pastosità e un’efficacia ammirabili” (Fabbri 2012:64). This enthusiastic praise veers into hyperbole, like much of the criticism of subsequent historical and religious films. But Fabbri’s novel captures the wonder these brief films could have for the spectators of the period, even if they seem too short and too closely based upon a cinematic trick for us. Fabbri’s protagonist is impressed by the film’s accuracy, his girlfriend horrified by its cruelty and the wise professor reminds them to think of Chateaubriand’s *Les Martyrs* (Fabbri 2012: 64-67). However, Fabbri also highlights the viewers’ romantic distractions and how a travelogue quickly attracts their interest (Fabbri 2012: 64-67). Despite their brevity and place in heterogeneous cinema programmes, we should not totally dismiss these films’ capacity to emotionally involve the spectator, even for a relatively brief period.

Secondly, we have the Passion film, a crucial sub-genre for attracting spectators to the new medium. At least five Christ biopics were produced before the winter of 1899, including La Bonne Presse’s *La Passion du Christ* (1897) and the nineteen minute long *The Passion Play of Oberammergau* (1898) (Bekker 2009: 13-14). These works were exceptionally lengthy films and built on the established popularity of Passion plays and magic lantern shows (Musser 1993: 419-456). The most significant Passion film was Pathé’s *La Vie et La Passion du Jésus Christ* (1903-1913), which was expanded four times and probably seen by more people in Europe and North America than any other film of its era (Pearson 2005: 68-71). Vast fortunes were made from its exhibition (Talbot 1912: 174-177). Gaumont also produced their own impressive Passion, *La naissance, la vie et la mort de Notre-Seigneur Jésus-Christ* (1906), directed by Alice Guy and based on Biblical illustrations (McMahan 2002: 102-103). As regards Italian contributions, Luigi Topi and Ezio Cristofari may have made a twelve-scene Passion film in 1900, but the sources for this are doubtful (Bernardini 1992: 3-4).

With their special status, length and sources of narration that were both diegetic and non-diegetic, the Passion film has been at the centre of debates about early film narratives. Roberta Pearson and Tom Gunning have both argued that, by presenting autonomous tableaux representing the most spectacular scenes of Jesus’ life, the Passion films function as a lengthier version of the religious ‘trick’ film and did not create a diegetic narrative (Gunning 1992: 102-111; Pearson 2005: 68-71). Exhibitors varied the narratives they presented. Cinema managers could order different versions of Passion films and

early religious films, varying from a single scene to a lengthy spectacle, and also combined different versions of them, resulting in hybrid texts (Abel 1998: 164-167; Gunning 1992: 102-111). Charles Musser has argued that, while the Passion film narratives were not self-contained, exhibitors could reinforce the narrative with additional scenes, such as the raising of Lazarus (Musser 1993: 444-447). Thus, the Passion narrative varied with every film copy.

In all this argument over narrative and attraction, one can lose sight of the Passion films' lasting influence on religious cinema. Although later Italian religious films would develop self-contained narratives, they would still make recourse to extra-diegetic forms of narration and audience foreknowledge like the earlier Passions. One could cite the libretti supplied to spectators of *Quo Vadis* (1913) and *Christus* (1916) as examples of this, or the selection of religious figures who had transnational appeal, such as the Early Christian martyrs who had featured so prominently in nineteenth century culture. The mystical poems composed for *Christus* (1916), *Redenzione* (1919) and *Giuda* (1919) also formed a partly extraneous narrative. Even though these poetic texts appeared in the intertitles, they often run parallel to the action rather than enhancing with it. Italian religious and historical films persisted with lengthy expository intertitles as late as the mid-twenties, when dialogue intertitles were common (Brunetta 2008: 344-346). In brief, Italian historical and religious epics often referred to an extraneous literary narrative, as if their themes were too sacred to be wholly depicted in the seventh art.

The autonomous tableaux and artistic influences of early Passions would also linger in later religious films. While Gaumont's Passion has long been linked to Biblical illustrations, recent analysis has shown the influence of Gustave Doré's engravings and other artworks on the Pathé Passion, with "chaque tableau proposant un recyclage d'une imagerie préexistente," placing itself with an intermedia network composed of magic lantern slides, postcards, book illustrations and religious art (Boillat, Robert 2010: 53-55). Italian religious films were made within this intermedia network, and make their own contributions to it: the films themselves, promotional postcards and illustrated novels. The autonomous tableaux of the early Passions would give way to continuous narratives in the religious feature, but directors would still sometimes break the action with a tableaux scene, giving viewers a chance to marvel at the religious sacrifice, and appreciate the composition of the scene. In the opinion

of Gian Piero Brunetta, *Christus* (1916) “forse fallisce proprio per l’eccesso di citazionismo pittorico non ben metabolizzato nel ritmo del racconto” (Brunetta 2008: 214-215). The narrative style of Italian religious features, with the building up to key scenes, and their focus on mise-en-scène meant that these films had elements reminiscent of the Passions throughout the silent period.

Besides the Passions and religious trick films produced by the commercial film industry, Catholic organisations also produced films. These built on the long-standing use of the magic lantern in teaching and evangelism, an important form of screen practice which remained prominent until the First World War. Here, I examine Catholic use of the magic lantern and cinematic initiatives during the period 1896-1907. I focus on the Catholic magic lantern and slide producer La Maison de la Bonne Presse and the legacy of its activities for the filmic case studies. I also introduce Vatican archaeologist Rodolfo Kanzler, who both photographed magic lantern slides of Early Christian life and was involved in the production of *Fabiola* (1918).

As France was riven by Church-State cultural conflict, secularism was countered by Catholic activism. One of the leading French Catholic newspaper publishers, La Maison de la Bonne Presse, began a visual education department in 1896, energetically led by Michel Coissac. One year later, films and film projectors would be added to the company’s range of slides, lecture notes and magic lanterns, and they would also make one of the first Passion films. The company sold these materials to individuals giving illustrated lectures and diocesan associations who coordinated the lecturers’ efforts and supplied them with materials (*Union diocésain des projections*, 1907). The early years were undoubtedly the high point for La Bonne Presse. Illustrated lectures were still very popular as an entertainment form. Moving image production also flourished at La Bonne Presse, judging by the eighty or so documentaries and religious tableaux made by the Abbés Mulsant and Chevalier in the Holy Land around 1903-1904, which have recently been re-discovered. Between 1905 and 1909, the company sold 500 movie projectors and distributed 800,000 metres of film (Bernardini 1989: 356). The Bonne Presse occupied a central place in pre-War Catholic screen practice through its magazines (*Le Fascinateur* being the most important), conventions, vast product range and international distribution.

However, the inexorable rise of entertainment cinema presented serious problems for a company which used slides and films as supports for a lecture. In 1907, *Le Fascinateur* noted that that the magic

lantern was rapidly losing its appeal as rural cinemas were established and that the widespread adoption of the cinematograph by Catholic speakers was some way off (Petit 1908: 13). Ultimately, the high costs of film production and exhibition for the non-commercial sector, coupled with the development of a film culture based around entertainment rather than education, meant that La Bonne Presse's illustrated lectures went into decline in the years before 1914. Catholic magic lanternists continued to attract the faithful and educate converts well into the twenties, but no longer appealed across society.

So what were the legacies of La Bonne Presse's activities for religious film-making as a whole and the case studies examined in this study? Firstly, La Bonne Presse was the most active and visible proponent of an explicitly Catholic screen culture prior to 1914. To my knowledge, no research has been done on the Bonne Presse's activities in Italy, but we should note that it had an office in Rome in the period 1911-1914 and that the Turin-based Catholic studio and distributor SIC-Unitas advertised itself as an agent (*Cine-fono...*16/09/1911:17; *Cine-fono...*16/05/1914:64; *Illustrazione Cinematografica* 01/04/1912:4). La Bonne Presse and the French diocesan associations inspired the flurry of Catholic film initiatives in Italy in 1908-1909, such as the formation of the SIC-Unitas studio and the Federazione Cinematografica Diocesana (FCD) in Lombardy. The FCD united ninety-six people who had held Catholic film shows between 1906 and 1909 (Bernardini 2008: 44). In 1908, an association of Catholic magic lanternists was formed in Emilia-Romagna, and similar groups were formed in Tuscany, Umbria and Le Marche (Coissac 1909: 1-5). The Emilia-Romagna association had 86 members, gave 600 illustrated lectures in its first year and was closely linked to La Bonne Presse (Coissac 1909: 1-5). In general though, Italy's Catholic screen culture in the period 1896-1907 seems distinctly undeveloped compared to its French counterpart. However, this is an area at the margins of film history and clearly needs further research. This thesis does make a contribution to this area by examining the illustrated lectures of Baron Rodolfo Kanzler, a Vatican archaeologist who photographed Catacomb scenes and used them in his talks between 1898 and 1907.

Secondly, La Bonne Presse contributed enormously to the network of images which would have been present in the minds of many spectators watching the films in this thesis. Particularly relevant conférences included a thirty-five slide lecture on the Early Christian martyrs, a twenty-three slide lecture on Saint Cecilia, a seventeen slide lecture on Early Christian martyrs and other scenes of martyrs

within a broader Christian narrative (*Rayon*... 10/1908: 135; Belleney 1911: 1-22; Sully 1912: 225-245; *Rayon*... 06/1913: 83; *Rayon*... 06/1913: 84). I have found some of the slides and the lecture text for the Cecilia lecture, and these are analysed in Chapter Four, alongside the film *Santa Cecilia* (1911). On initial examination, we should note that the lecture texts of the presentation show that martyrdom was depicted in gory fashion and that the images used included scenes created by the photographers and scenes inspired by religious art.

To summarise, the period 1896-1907 saw religious films produced by both entertainment and educational organisations, and cinema co-existing with and borrowing from earlier screen practice. So, what was the influence of the early religious film (1895-1907) upon the Italian film studios, who only industrialised from 1905 onwards? Firstly, with the religious film market already well-supplied, it made little sense for the first Italian film-makers to make Biblical or hagiographic films in the years 1895-1907. Since films were then sold rather than rented, any exhibitor who wanted a religious short film had probably already bought one and would be unlikely to buy another until their old film wore out. Consequently, the Italian studios produced religious subjects later, and the only explicitly religious films they produced in the period 1895-1907 consisted of a Christmas film and a contemporary moral drama. Secondly, a certain cinematic style for the religious film had already been established, distinguished by autarchic tableaux, references to high art and audience knowledge of Christianity filling in any gaps in the narrative. Traces of these aesthetic choices can be seen throughout the case studies. Thirdly, a Catholic film production, distribution and exhibition sector was founded in cinema's early years, building on the popularity of the magic lantern in evangelisation. This Catholic screen practice inspired various religious interventions in Italian cinema in the period 1908-1912.

#### *The Italian religious one-reeler (1908-1912)*

The period 1908-1912 immediately stands out as a busy period for the production and exhibition of films in Italy. In late 1906, the Alberini and Santoni studios received significant investment, expanded

and renamed themselves Cines (Bernardini 1981: 83-95). Italian film production of 1908 was triple that of 1907 (Redi 1999:145). By 1912, one of the first books on the global motion picture industry described Cines as, “one of the largest film producing establishments in the world,” and acknowledged the phenomenal growth of the Italian film industry (Talbot 1912: 174-177). Rapid development had occurred at other studios, such as Itala, Ambrosio and Milano. As fixed cinemas spread rapidly in Italian urban areas and became a popular form of entertainment, fairground cinemas began to decline (Bernardini 1981: 21-65; Bernardini 2001: 50-53). With the film industry expanding and the one-reel film being its standard product, as many religious films were produced in Italy during these five years as would be made in the rest of the silent era. Following the example of La Bonne Presse, Catholic studios, cinemas and film contests sprung up in Italy around 1909, but many of these would not have a long lifespan. In this section, I outline the specifics of the one-reeler and survey trends in Italian religious production and exhibition.

Around 1905-1908, the one-reel narrative film became established as the global standard (Redi 1999: 69). Film historians have devoted considerable resources to understanding the one-reeler as an evolutionary step from the Cinema of Attractions towards the classical feature, but this attention to genealogy has meant that our understanding of the one-reeler itself has suffered (Brewster 2012: 252). This has changed in recent years, as one-reel production has been defined as a different cinematic institution to the Cinema of Attractions and the feature film, with a “relatively distant relation to its audience, and...concern with duration rather than attraction.” (Brewster 2012: 252). Other characteristics have been noted. Rudmer Canjels notes that “intertextuality overcame the lack of psychologization typical of this period” (Canjels 2011: 11). Actors were forced to compress their gestures into short scenes, rather than the lengthy performances allowed by plays and feature films (Brewster, Jacobs 1997:108). The studios also expected a high rhythm of production because of their weekly release schedule. Although it was rarely reached on a consistent basis, the expectation was one film from each director-producer and their troupe per week. In sum, film lecturers, intertextuality and different acting styles all supported the tightly-structured narratives of the one-reeler.

Considering the development of the Early Church martyrdom film within Italy’s studios sheds light on studios’ openness to religious subjects. Early Christian martyrdom stands out as the most popular

religious theme, with seven films made in the period. No Passion films were produced: a sensible policy considering the ubiquity of the French efforts discussed above. The only studios to produce Early Christian martyrdom films in the period were Cines, Latium and Milano Films, with the latter producing three films. Cines was Italy's largest film producer and made about as many films in 1910-1912 as its two nearest rivals, Turin-based Itala and Ambrosio (Alovisio 2000: 253). Cines aimed to produce films in all genres and offer a completely new programme of films each week, so the fact that it produced four Early Church martyrdom films seems unsurprising. Moreover, Cines was located in the Eternal City, invested in historical film-making, marketed its Classical origins and was backed by Vatican financiers (Tomadjoglou, Ormson 2000: 263-267). These factors were conducive to the studio making religious films, such as the Early Christian one-reelers, *Quo Vadis* (1913) and *Christus* (1916).

Surprisingly, given the large size of Itala and Ambrosio, their output of Biblical and martyrdom films was half that of their smaller rival Milano Films. Some Ambrosio films show a lack of interest in the Early Church. Although Ambrosio's *Gli ultimi giorni di Pompei* (1908) and *Nerone* (1909) both reference Christian martyrdom, they do so in a brief manner which makes it a spectacular part of the film, but tangential to its plot. By contrast, Milano Films' management wanted to win a Catholic film prize with *San Paolo dramma biblico* (1910). Winning cultural prestige was a key objective for the aristocrat-backed studio, as the exceptional investment in *L'Inferno* (1911) demonstrates (Gherardi, Lasi 2007: 385-402; Lasi 2012: 216-225, 309-314). Milano Films purportedly enlisted the services of Vatican archaeologist Rodolfo Kanzler to help win the prize (Zangrando 1973: 280-281). Milano Films' directors clearly had a mind for religious spectacle and commercially valuable topics: *San Sebastiano* (1911) was released just before D'Annunzio's infamous play hit the Parisian stage and *San Giorgio cavaliere* (1912) had considerable transnational appeal, given the Saint's heavy veneration across the World. These films were part of a production strategy which eschewed modern subjects in favour of literary classics, high-brow theatre and historical film-making (Lasi 2012: 207-208). The minor studio Latium films had a strong interest in Classical subjects in the period 1909-1910, before specialising in modern dramas (Bernardini 2012: 118-123). The lost film *Il martirio di Santo Stefano* (1912) probably used up the remaining scenery from this earlier phase.

Given that religious movies made up less than one percent of Italian output during the era of the one-reeler, they could be viewed as by-products of studio's attempts to offer a wide choice of output and develop the historical genre. Indeed, for the studio bosses of Cines, recreations of the Bible and the Early Church would be placed in the broad 'historical' category, which covered everything from Ancient Babylon to Risorgimento Italy. Contextual factors influenced the religious output of Milano and Cines and steered them towards religious film-making, while other studios were not influenced by such factors and thus made fewer religious films.

As regards individual directors, Enrico Guazzoni's one-reel Biblical films and his biopic of Saint Francis stand out as preparation for feature films like *Quo Vadis* (1913) and *Fabiola* (1918). In general though, the position of the director was very fluid in this period because they were expected to make many films of different genres, rather than specialise as they did in the feature film era. Indeed, Baron Fassini's 1910 report for Cines suggested that getting directors to select particular genres and take more interest in storylines would improve film quality (Redi: 1999: 38). In addition, the names of many directors were not listed on their films. Thus, with the exception of Guazzoni, it is often easier to discuss the creative policies of the whole studio in the one-reel era rather than individual directors.

Several film historians have cited competition with Pathé as a major inspiration for the business models and aesthetic practices of the Italian studios (Sadoul 1948: 384; Tomadjoglou, Ormson 2000: 263-266). From poaching Pathé's directors and imitating its products through to benchmarking its films against its rival and copying its plans, Kimberly Tomadjoglou and Jennifer Ormson argue that Cines' business strategy was dominated by its rivalry with Pathé (Tomadjoglou, Ormson 2000: 263-266). According to film historian Richard Abel, these international rivalries peaked in 1909-1910, and growing signs of French weakness in literary and historical films were increasingly apparent from 1911 onwards (Abel 1998: 43-46). On the other hand, for the Italian film industry, 1911 was "l'anno del primo grande balzo in avanti, quantitativo ma soprattutto qualitativo." (Bernardini 1996 [1911, 1]: 7). Equally, this competition was inevitable given Pathé's dominant position and attempts to shape the European film market to its advantage at the Congrès des dupes in 1909. Besides the rivalry, the Italian film industry was also driven by its own unique creativity and cultural circumstances which would lead it to make globally successful, innovative genres like the historical epic and the diva film. In the case



of the historical epic, for example, Italian directors borrowed from the country's conception of its ancient past, filmed at historical sites and used its cheap labourers to make large crowd scenes.

So, was the Italian religious film defined by this competition with the French studios? In the years 1908-1912, Italian religious films competed against religious films made for the Cinema of Attractions, which were still widely available, and the works of Pathé's Le Film Biblique subsidiary. While French and Italian studios both made films depicting the more obscure Bible stories, Early Christian martyrdom featured more frequently in Italian cinema. Gaumont made *La martyre* (1910) and *Aux lions les chrétiens* (1912), while Pathé only made *Le martyre de Saint Étienne* (1912). Meanwhile, Cines and Milano Films made seven films about the martyrs. The Roman martyrs were part of a Classical inheritance to which the Italian film studios laid claim, motivated by geographical proximity, nationalist ideology and artistic discourse. The flurry of historical religious films of 1910-1912 were Italian cinema's first concerted attempt to deal with religious subjects. The mise-en-scène of these thirteen Italian films is grander than competing films. If we compare *San Sebastiano* (1911, Milano) and *Il poverello d'assisi* (1911) with Pathé's *Les martyrs chrétiens* (1905) or Le Film Biblique's *David et Goliath* (1910), the Italian productions are far more visually impressive. The Pathé actors perform in front of intricately painted flats. Although there are some outdoor scenes in Le Film Biblique's production, the camera is positioned closer to the actors because of the small number of actors and the occasional use of painted sets. By contrast, *San Sebastiano* (1911, Milano) was filmed in parkland and features several shots constructed to maximise scenic depth, with distant figures placed in the background. *Il poverello d'assisi* (1911) is even more spectacular, as it clearly references Giotto's fresco cycle and was recognisably shot in Assisi itself. To conclude, in this very small area of film production, it would appear that there was an element of French-Italian competition and that the Italian films began to distinguish themselves through their setting.

Amidst the development of the religious narrative film and the Italian film industry, Catholic cinema also advanced. 1909 was a year of great hope for the sector (Bernardini 1994:7). A Catholic businessman and a Father Musso launched their Catholic studio, SIC-Unitas, and a regular magazine *Luce et Verbo*, with a reported circulation of 10,000. Catholic organisations paid the Troncone brothers in Naples to make religious films (Bernardini 1989: 343). A Federazione Cinematografica Diocesana

united ninety-six members in Lombardy, following a similar initiative in Venice in 1908, and several regional associations of Catholic magic lanternists were also formed (Coissac 1909: 1-5). Cardinal Ferrari launched a religious films prize at the Concorso Cinematografico, held in Milan (Mosconi 2006c: 184-188). Yet, by 1912, the Pope had banned projected images in Churches, La Bonne Presse starting to struggle and Unitas was no longer making films (Bernardini 1994: 6; Véronneau 2003:4; Friedemann 2006: 194-198). The article ‘Cinematografo e moralità pubblica,’ published in *La Civiltà Cattolica*, recognised the immoral possibilities of venues, the need for religious involvement in censorship and the medium’s potential for moral corruption (Marchesi 1998: 12-13). The Church’s first semi-official statement regarding the medium was largely concerned with moral control, clearly recognising the dominance of entertainment cinema and the minority position occupied by Catholic exhibitors. So, why did these Catholic initiatives lose their momentum and what does this tell us?

To begin, Catholic film producers lacked the capital to achieve a high level of production. Unitas had a starting capital of just 70,000 lira in 1907, and 42,000 lira of this failed to arrive (Friedemann 2006: 203). This was not necessarily a fatal blow: the successful Pasquali studio was founded late in 1908 with just 50,000 lira (Bernardini 1981: 166). But Pasquali quickly produced numerous, high-quality films and secured the funds to expand within a year. Unitas’ film production withered as it concentrated on distributing to the limited market of Italian Catholic cinemas (Bernardini 1981: 166; Friedemann 2006: 194-200). The Troncone brothers made four actualities and two comedies in 1910, followed by four one-reel dramas in 1911 (Bernardini 2012: 250-254). They took some payments from the Church for religious film-making (Bernardini 1989: 343; Paliotti, Grano 2006: 51-58). But the Troncones were film industry minnows and did not make any religious-themed films at all, despite the funding. Cardinal Ferrari’s religious film prize failed to spark religious film production, and the competition had to be re-run in 1910 because of the lack of high quality entries in 1909 (Mosconi 2006c: 184-188). In France, La Maison de la Bonne Presse failed to impose its educational vision outside of Catholic circles, despite all of its efforts and campaigning (Véronneau 2003:4)

As regards Catholic film exhibition and distribution, the exhibitors were non-commercial and relied on donations or Church funds. No amount of diocesan associations or magazines could change the financial realities of the sector. The magic lantern lecture was preferred by many Catholic speakers

because of its cost and simplicity (Friedemann 2006: 196). The extraordinary programme of film exhibition undertaken by the Abbé Joseph Joye in Basel between 1902 and 1911 was only possible because most of his collection was bought second-hand from cinemas or gifted to him (Cosandey 1992: 65-66). Although the marginal Catholic sector should be further investigated, few Catholics were exhibiting films with anything like Joye's frequency and determination. The Catholic sector was incapable of rivalling local entertainment cinemas in the way parish cinemas would in the fifties. Finally, other Catholic voices began calling for prohibition of the medium, especially the Jesuits (Casetti, Alovio 2006: 113-117). Priests were banned from film showings in 1909, and projected images were banned from Churches in 1912 (Bernardini 1994 [1913,1]: 6). Such measures indicated Catholic distrust of the medium, but they also reflected the passing of the dream of a Catholic cinema and the hegemony of entertainment cinema.

To conclude, the one-reel era saw the development of narrative film-making, in a style which differed from both the Cinema of Attractions and the later feature era. Relatively few Italian studios were engaged in the production of religious-themed films, but those that did were influenced by specific cultural priorities and their business strategy. The Catholic cinema sector of the 1900s and early 1910s remains a little researched area, especially regarding exhibition. After a wave of initiatives around 1909, the rise of entertainment cinema and commercial realities killed off hopes for a Catholic sector. This failure meant that Christian films needed to be successful across wider society and could not rely on a Catholic spectators alone. The coming of 1913 ended religious short film production in Italy. Following the amazing success of *Quo Vadis*, Italian religious films would attempt to scale new heights in the feature form, building on the spectacular values developed in the short film production of 1910-1912. I contend that the religious feature film functioned in a different way to the short film and, as such, deserves separate consideration.

*The religious feature film (1913-1930)*

This section considers the driving tendencies behind the Italian religious feature film (1913-1930), and provides a context in which to consider the later case studies in this thesis. Given the difficulties in analysing financial information, which only survives in isolated fragments, I attempt a more general analysis of the religious feature film's position within Italian cinema. I begin by considering the place of these films within the production systems of the one-reel and early feature eras. I then outline the golden era of Italian historical and religious film-making, 1913-1914, and explore the economic, cinematic and cultural factors which limited production in this genre for the remainder of the silent era.

To understand the development of the religious feature, we have to contextualise it within the development of the narrative feature. Film historian Gian Piero Brunetta divided the films of the Italian silent cinema into three styles: *alto*, *medio* and *basso-comico* (Brunetta 2008: 176-179). Brunetta defines the *stile alto* as expensive productions based on prestigious sources (literary classics or history), which demanded financial and intellectual investment in their impressive mise-en-scène, but formed the high point of film programmes. The *stile medio* comprised cheaper, dynamic films based on popular sources, such as bourgeois dramas, popular literature and melodramas. Finally, the *stile basso-comico* was reserved for the slapstick comedies produced on the streets or using existing sets. This schema is closely related to Cines' 1910 categorisation of its own products. It is noteworthy that this co-existence of styles in typical cinema programmes only exists between about 1908 and 1915. 1908 saw Cines vaunt its artistic investment in film-making, and the release of *Gli ultimi giorni di Pompei* (1908) (Brunetta 2008: 35-37). 1915 saw the complete decline of Italian comic cinema (Brunetta 2008: 233-234). 1915 also confirmed the ascendancy of the diva genre, which deployed the financial resources of the *stile alto* to extravagantly pay actresses performing screenplays derived from the *stile medio*, and the decline of the traditional cinema programme, as documentaries and comedies became far less important than features.

Of course, Brunetta's typology contains elements of the contested cultural hierarchies which became popular in the late nineteenth century. To an extent, cinema broke down such hierarchies with

the diva film, as studios invested huge sums in works of the *stile medio*. This notwithstanding, the discourses surrounding the new art were often determined by earlier media forms. *Stile alto* films made a particular claim for the Italian people as privileged interpreters of the artistic and cultural pasts of the peninsula. Whether referencing high literature (d'Annunzio, Dante and Tasso) or Renaissance art (*Il poverello d'assisi*, *Christus*), these works were marketed and often reviewed as continuations of Italy's great artistic and cultural pasts. In addition, Brunetta's typology implicitly recognises the organisation of the studio into quasi-theatrical troupes of actors, each led by one director or actor-director, which received differing levels of resource investment. For example, Enrico Guazzoni received a large amount of resources to make historical films of the *stile alto* from 1911 onwards. By contrast, Emilio Ghione received far less funding to make his cheap melodramas and crime serials, which were clearly of the *stile medio*. Ghione claimed that he made two features in twenty-seven days, and that his boss remarked of *Za La Mort* (1915), "Per quello che costa si può anche cestinare" (Ghione 2011: 70).

Brunetta's typology is very useful for understanding the birth of the religious feature film. Besides the moral dramas set in the modern period, one-reel religious films were evidently part of the developing *stile alto*. After the critical and commercial success of *Gli ultimi giorni di Pompei* (1908) and *Nerone* (1909), works set in the Ancient past saw high levels of intellectual and financial investment from film studios. From this point onwards, the genre was locked into a trajectory of spectacular escalation. With marketing stressing higher budgets, more extras, longer running time, greater involvement of culturally-prestigious figures and more marvellous spectacles, each new epic film had to strive to reach ever greater aesthetic heights lest it fail completely. By 1911, the average ancient historical film was 40% longer than the average Italian fiction film; two years later, they would be four times longer (Aubert 2009: 31-32). Cines' Early Christian martyrdom films fit within these patterns. With its artistic prestige and high culture status, the genre became crucial for opening international markets and distinguishing Italian film output from that of other countries.

So, how did the cultural priorities of the *stile alto* translate into films? Multi-reel historical works like *La Gerusalemme Liberata* (1911) or *L'Inferno* (1911) opened international markets to Italian studios and demonstrated the potential success of the historical formula (Bernardini 1982: 87-90). *Quo Vadis* (1913) was "the consecration of the [historical] genre," and its huge success encouraged others

to imitate it (Leprohon 1972:28; Bernardini 1982: 145-154) The *Quo Vadis* (1913) formula combined film huge length, stunning mise-en-scène and spectacular crowd scenes. In successfully adapting a complex literary work and referencing prestigious paintings, the film also trumpeted its high culture values. In 1913-1914, the Italian studios produced epic and expensive visions of the Roman past, which triumphed on world markets and culminated in Giovanni Pastrone's *Cabiria* (1914). The Early Church was an important theme in films like *In hoc signo vinces* (1913) and *Nerone e Agrippina* (1914), which also offered a broader depiction of the Roman world. It is notable that no Biblical or Passion films were made in Italy in this period, perhaps because of the number of shorter films already in circulation. While Brunetta's typology becomes less useful by 1915, the year in which Italy entered the War and the golden period ended, historical and religious epics were already firmly entrenched in the *stile alto* because of the paradigms established in 1913 and during the Cinema of Attractions.

The Ancient World was over-exploited in Italy's film output of 1913-1914. By May 1914, a leading critic in the film magazine *La Cine-Fono*, was warning of the exhaustion of universally-known historical periods and popular historical figures (Keraban 1914: 19-21). The diva genre grew in popularity (Leprohon 1972: 33-37). It is hardly surprising that, having made *Quo Vadis* (1913), *Marcantonio e Cleopatra* (1913) and *Caius Julius Caesar* (1914), Enrico Guazzoni explored other historical periods for a few years. Guazzoni only returned into the Ancient period to finish *Christus* (1916), which had been started by Giulio Antamoro in 1914. With the great moments of the Roman Empire and the Early Church already depicted by feature films, attention turned to Greek mythology, Late Antiquity and Biblical subjects for almost a decade (Aubert 2000: 34-36) So, religious subjects clearly offered some novelty as feature film projects, since the only subject to have been covered with some regularity was the Early Church, as part of Roman Epics. Still, with the exception of *Trionfo Cristiano*, the choice of religious subjects would remain within the parameters established in the one-reel era, with directors choosing well-known religious figures and periods with international appeal. I believe that exploring the factors which limited the production of religious and historical epics allows us to understand them and the context within which they were produced and received. In so doing, I also explore the factors which limited the evolution of the religious feature in Italian silent cinema.

Besides generic exhaustion, the War also affected the production of Ancient Epics and religious films. Giovanni Pastrone's *La Bibbia* project was planned to surpass even *Cabiria*, with six thousand extras, three hundred camels, fifty elephants and a tower taller than the Mole Antonelliana, but the War forced its cancellation (Brunetta 2008: 214). Obviously, in a wartime economy, extras and finance could not be mobilised on such a scale. As if to illustrate this, some of the crowd scenes in *Fabiola* (1918) would be borrowed from *Quo Vadis* (1913) (see page 270). Moreover, Italy's entry into the War turned attention towards propagandistic historical films set during the Wars of the Risorgimento, and towards the escapism offered by the diva and crime-adventure genres (Brunetta 2008: 241-257). The War also drastically reduced the Italian film industry's earnings on export markets. Cines endured a second year of heavy losses (Redi 1999: 85). It should be noted, however, that the failure on export markets was not entirely caused by the War. Cines' contract with American distributor George Kleine was rescinded in 1914, after the studio was unable to supply enough feature films to hold its market position and *Caius Julius Caesar* (1914) arrived six months late in October 1914 to commercial failure (Harrison, Mazzanti 1991: 168). But similar problems of lateness also occurred in 1912 (Harrison, Mazzanti 1991: 162). If even Italy's largest film studio struggled to produce a regular output before the War, then wider issues of organisation and finance were clearly factors in preventing the success of the epic films being exploited on a regular basis.

To summarise, Pastrone's *Bibbia* project demonstrates that the genre had become locked into a policy of spectacular escalation, with new films requiring ever larger amounts of money, complicated logistics and cultural prestige. The War and other economic and organisational constraints limited the potential of the Italian studios. In such a context, it seems unsurprising that many major studios avoided historical epics for the remainder of the War, especially given the exhaustion of the historical genre and the popularity of new types of film.

Another reason for the rarity of historical and religious films was that they had become associated with an anachronistic conception of cinema. This was perhaps best summarised by a reviewer of *Giuliano l'apostata* (1919):

I difetti che si notano in questa figurazione storica di Ugo Falena, sono comuni a tutti i films dello stesso genere e dipendono più che altro dal vecchio ed immutato

criterio con cui i lavori stessi vengono eseguiti e progettati. ... Si concentrano quasi tutti gli sforzi nella ricostruzione di monumenti architettonici e nel mettere insieme le più fitte schiere di comparse e si trascura invece la parte più importante, direi vitale, del lavoro; e cioè il soggetto e gli interpreti.... La fantasia e l'erudizione dell'architetto e la virtuosità degli scenografi... non destano che una relativa curiosità nel pubblico o una fredda ammirazione (Bomance 1923: 10-11).

Although this review was written a few years after the film's initial release, it encapsulates the negative reaction to this genre. Italian studios and directors returned to the 'golden years' and offer a decade-old cinematic formula to spectators who had moved on. In effect, the marketing and nationalist rhetoric surrounding the historical accuracy and artistry of the genre's *mise-en-scène* had imprisoned it in a static conception of itself, which negated the close up, modern acting, dialogic intertitles and the fast pacing of other genres. With their static cameras and slow pacing, the directors of films like *La Nave* (1921) and *Gli ultimi giorni di Pompei* (1926) were certainly culpable of disregarding modernity.

However, we should be careful about taking the opinions of cultured twenties film critics and later film historians as completely representative of the situation. The epic formula could still pull in spectators with sheer spectacle, as the worldwide success of *The Ten Commandments* (1923) demonstrated. Italian historical films which added a new elements to the epic formula, such as the erotically-charged lead performances of *Teodora* (1922) and *Messalina* (1923) or the adventure-serial pacing of *Il ponte dei sospiri* (1921), were popular at home and abroad. By 1919, film journal correspondent Orrigo Bocchi wrote that Italian directors had realised that "the full capability of the artiste was [being] lost in the grand scene and the big action" (Bocchi 1919:77). According to Bocchi, this issue, "the poorness of the scenario," and inattention to the main actors was being addressed. The close ups of *Fabiola* (1918), the growing emphasis on international stars and the serial drama format of *Il ponte dei sospiri* (1921) demonstrate directors' advances in these areas and the stylistic evolution of the epic formula.

Furthermore, if we look at epic films throughout the feature era, they have a problematic relationship with stardom, which became one of the dominant dynamics in feature films from 1915 onwards. Historical and religious-themed epics launched some of the biggest stars of the period, including Bartolomeo Pagano, Maria Jacobini, Italia Almirante Manzini, Amleto Novelli, Elena Sangro



and Rina De Liguoro. Yet, with the exceptions of Amleto Novelli's continued starring roles in Guazzoni's epics and the secondary muscleman roles played by Bruto 'Ursus' Castellani, the genre was not really compatible with repeated star performances. This seems particularly true of the religious film, in which there was almost a tradition of picking untested actors for the lead roles, such as Alberto Pasquali (*Christus*, 1916), Umberto Palmarini (*Frate Sole*, 1918), Elena Sangro (*Fabiola*, 1918) and Atillio De Virgilis (*Joseph*, 1920). By contrast, religious films with star actors in lead roles, such as *Giuda* (1919) and *Redenzione* (1919), were critical and commercial failures. One could put this down to the films' controversial screenplays rather than the stars performing them, but the two are inextricably linked. Febo Mari was financial backer, writer, director and star of *Giuda* (1919), and the project gave its lead actor's re-invented Judas far too much heroic prominence at the expense of Jesus (Genovese 1998: 130-133). Similarly, *Redenzione* combined Mary Magdalene with Diana Karenne's star persona. The result was a performance judged "troppo personale e caotico," and a version of Magdalene that, "non e[ra] nella più spinta tradizione, cattolica o cristiana" (Imperi 1919: 225-226).

Clearly, the religious film did not fit well with *divismo*. Whether one discusses medieval Passion plays or films like *La Passion de Jeanne D'Arc* (1928) and *Il vangelo secondo Matteo* (1964), the performances of non-professional actors have a special resonance because of their perceived 'authenticity' and lack of professional training. Moreover, there was little possibility that their star personas and acting style would clash with the popular conception of Biblical figures, as occurred in *Redenzione* (1919) and *Giuda* (1919). Indeed, the only really successful star performance in a religious epic occurred when the actresses' performance style and persona were perfectly aligned with the role. Unlike the glamorous, man-eating and capricious divas, Leda Gys usually played pathetic *femmes fragiles*. Gys was even nicknamed 'la povera Leda' (Bernardini, Martinelli 1987: 26-30). Gys was perfectly suited to performing Mary's suffering, and the film also stuck closely to the traditional visual iconography and narrative of the Passion in its key scenes.

In short, the text-star conflict seen in *Giuda* and *La Redenzione* was symptomatic of a fundamental incompatibility between stardom and the religious film. Whether a diva romance or an adventure-serial, screenplays in other genres could be adapted to emphasise the star's performance. For example, the plots and characterisation of the *Za La Mort* serials were profoundly unstable, but action sequences and

Emilio Ghione's powerful acting compensated for this (North 2011: 150). Carmine Gallone's *Malombra* (1917) de-emphasised the minor characters of Fogazzaro's novel to give more space to Lyda Borelli's performance. Caesar Films purchased the rights to forty major nineteenth century French plays for Francesca Bertini (Bertini 1969: 92-96). Many of these dramas were constructed to display the acting of Sarah Bernhardt, the great theatrical diva idolised by her cinematic successors. Lucia Re's comments about these texts help explain their appeal in the divismo era:

These texts allowed her [Sarah Bernhardt] to be the sole protagonist and fill the theatres...Being a veritable reciting machine and a technical wonder, Bernhardt rendered the origin of the words irrelevant. The author was entirely forgotten, his authority erased. The power of the actress implicitly demolished the myth and the authority of author...as an original creative genius. (Re 2004: 106-110)

Adapting nineteenth-century texts which showcased the performance of one actress facilitated the centring of the film on the diva and also advanced the divas' claims to be considered as the foremost talents of their generation. The tight focus on the diva enabled a mechanism of seriality, since everything else (plot, setting and other actors) could be reconfigured around another performance of extreme emotion. We can see this in the diva films, but also in the adventure films starring Maciste and *Za La Mort*. By contrast, the text of the religious film was sacred and had an authority of its own, which could not be significantly tampered with. Of course, religious films often followed the example of D'Annunzio and *Cabiria* in presenting their screenplay as a *poema drammatico* or *misteri*, but such literary interventions were limited by audiences' familiarity with major Biblical tales. Flights of fancy, such as the trip to Egypt in *Christus* (1916), could be allowed, but major alterations to the storyline or characters could not countenanced if a film were to be attractive to Catholics. Furthermore, the religious themes could not be obscured by the performance of one person because to do so would be disrespectful and isolate the very faithful that the films sought to attract. Instead of highlighting the greatness of the film star, religious films had to try and capture something of the greatness of God.

Finally, as we have seen above, hopes of a Catholic cinema to rival entertainment cinemas had faded because of practicalities, economics and popular taste in a world dominated by expensive feature films. The Church gave a very limited support to religious film projects by allowing studios to give special film showings to numerous Cardinals and even the Pope himself. For instance, *L'Osservatore*

*Romano* reviewed *Christus* (1916) (Redi 2002: 52-54). Such tacit endorsements were probably crucial in marketing such films to Catholics at a local level, but there is little evidence of them in the popular film press or advertising. Yet, there was neither a regular market nor a sustained popular appetite for religious features. However, religious films did enjoy a long shelf-life because of their appeal during Holy Week and around Christmas. As well as religious features, even shorts like *San Sebastiano* (1911) and *Il poverello d'assisi* (1911) would be distributed well into the mid-twenties (Costa 1925: 22). A small Catholic exhibition sector also remained, and La Bonne Presse offered it features like *Frate Sole* and *Fabiola* (Véronneau 2003: 25-40). In the late 1920s, however, some small Catholic cinema initiatives began. *La rivista del cinematografo* (1928) began to classify films' suitability for Catholic audiences. Local co-operation between priests and cinema owners also occurred, such as at the Sala Don Bosco in Cosenza (Mollo 1926: 7).

In a large part, however, cinema and its audiences had changed. An educational vision of cinema had definitely been displaced by entertainment features. The documentary declined in importance as a genre in studio production, unsurprising given the rise of the feature and the availability of newsreels showing the global conflict. After making a flurry of unrealistic propaganda features shortly after Italy's declaration of War, the film industry returned to the escapism offered by divas, melodrama, strongmen and serial adventures, all of which had considerable popular appeal. The masses certainly needed distraction. With the War, came militarised industries, food shortages and worries about loved ones; after it, recession and social conflict. The thrilling serials and the performances of Chaplin, Keaton and Lloyd were wonderful entertainment. Slow historical epics with flowery poetic intertitles, didactic intentions and an operatic acting style were not. One unusually frank reviewer noted that, while the Cardinals and aristocrats greeted *Frate Sole* (1918) with "entusiasmo e plauso," the public "si annoia[va] discretamente," having been attracted by the well-organised publicity and the prestige of the Teatro Costanzi (Imperi 1918: 86-88).

In conclusion, the religious epic would always be an exceptional and rare film. High levels of financial investment and the expressive stasis of the genre clearly deterred some studios. For example, Tiber Film, one of the most prolific studios of the War years, never made an Ancient Epic. Audience tastes had also changed somewhat, and epic film-making would not enjoy the prestige it had in 1913-

1914. The sacred nature of religious films also made for potential clashes with the profane stardom of the troublesome and expensive divas. The Catholic cinema that the magic lanternists hoped for had failed to materialise, and did not give film-makers a secure audience which they could easily target.

So, why did studios continue to make such films? Firstly, they generated considerable prestige for film studios. This was an important objective for many studio boards, composed of aristocrats and upper bourgeoisie, “oscillanti tra il mecenatismo di tipo rinascimentale e la logica di rischio dei giocatori d’azzardo” (Brunetta 2008: 52) For them, cultural prestige and artistry often trumped concerns over profitability. Secondly, betting the production house on one epic was perversely logical, especially in the post-war period. The Italian film industry relied on exports because its internal market was poor. As foreign distributors increasingly ignored Italian films in favour of better and cheaper offerings from Germany and America, the big ‘Kolossals’ were one of the few genres likely to be picked up abroad because of the legacy of *Quo Vadis* and *Cabiria*. The attempts of minor studios to make religious epics in the period 1918-1920 should be seen in this context. In fact, German funding for *Quo Vadis* (1924) and *Gli ultimi giorni di Pompei* (1926) or the American decision to begin filming *Ben Hur* (1925) in Rome showed the continuing esteem other nations held for Italian Ancient Epics. Even at Italian silent cinema’s lowest ebb, in 1927, *Frate Francesco* was one of the few Italian films to be exhibited abroad (Martinelli 1996 [1923-1931]: 308). This perverse logic perhaps explains why many small studios produced big-budget religious films in the years after the First World War.

### *Conclusion*

The Early Christian martyrdom films examined in this thesis cover the entire history of Italian silent cinema: from the magic lantern slides presented to the Pope in 1900 through to a specially-commissioned film produced in the same year as the first Italian sound film, *La canzone dell’amore* (1930). This chapter has given the cinematic and historic context within which the case studies existed.

We began by surveying the overall pattern of religious film production in Italy and looking at the different types of films produced. Religious subjects enjoyed a certain prominence in the production of

Pathé during the Cinema of Attractions, but were statistically rare throughout the silent period. In the years 1914-1924, Emilio Ghione produced the equivalent of twenty-six feature films based around his French apache *Za La Mort*, whereas only eighteen religious dramatic films would be made by the entire Italian film industry during the same period. Overall, religious films were carefully calculated to have a near-universal appeal, so were usually based on popular saints or Biblical stories which had been recently adapted by playwrights or novelists. Given their place in Ultramontane propaganda, it is unsurprising that Early Church martyrs were prominent, making up nearly forty percent of religious film production. Some of these depictions showed Christians as secondary characters within an epic narrative of Roman history, whereas others featured them as main characters.

In the first decade or so of cinema's existence, Italian film-making efforts were restricted to the efforts of a few pioneers, but the religious genre took shape abroad. Short trick films showing miraculous incidents and longer Passion films became key parts of the spectacular cinema. Both types of films had a lasting influence on the style of the religious genre, which would still have autonomous tableaux, extra-diegetic sources of narration and artistic references well into the feature film era. The external sources of narration included film-lecturers who were initially introduced to aid comprehension of films (Blom 2003:61). The number of Passion films made in this period and their wide distribution perhaps encouraged later film-makers to tackle more diverse topics, such as the Early Church. Finally, as entertainment cinema spread across the globe, lectures illustrated by the magic lantern were enjoying their last years as a major form of genteel popular entertainment. Vatican archaeologist Baron Rodolfo Kanzler photographed reconstructions of Early Christian life and projected them on very large screens during his lecture series. The popularity of the magic lantern in catechistic education prompted a growing number of associations interested in promoting a Catholic screen culture.

Around the time the one-reel narrative film became the world's standard film product, the Italian film industry was growing rapidly. Although many studios attempted to produce films in all genres, there was a particular interest in religious topics and Early Church martyrdom at Milano Film and Cines. There were several reasons for this interest: religious film prizes, studio production strategies, competition with Pathé, the influence of aristocratic backers and a recognition of the Church's position in Italian society. In 1909, the hopes for a Catholic cinema in Italy were translated into action, including

a new studio, Catholic cinema federations and a lively activism. However, the meagre financing of these initiatives, the rapid growth of entertainment cinema and calls for censorship meant that Catholic cinema would not develop as a rival form.

Multi-reel dramas became common in the early years of 1910s, but the feature format would soon be adopted, especially after the success of historical films like *Quo Vadis* (1913) and diva films like *Ma l'amor mio non muore* (1913). For a brief period prior to the First World War, epic visions of Italy's Roman past and Early Church history were popular all over the world. These films required extensive financial investment in their mise-en-scène and intellectual investment in their historical accuracy and high-culture screenplays. Throughout the remainder of the silent era, Italian religious film-making would be defined by these epic dynamics and would be a relatively rare presence on cinema screens. There were several reasons for this rarity. The cinematic style of religious and historical epics did not always please audiences and some films certainly looked outmoded on their first release. In addition, religious films had a problematic relationship with *divismo* because of the controversial star profiles of certain performers and the difficulties in adapting religious texts to their performance style. While religious films were dusted down at Easter and Christmas, there was no profitable Catholic cinema circuit to which they could appeal on a year-round basis and the public had got used to an entertainment-based medium. As a result of these factors, the feature length films examined in this thesis were a rare religious presence on cinema screens.

My definition of religious cinema within Italian film output of 1898-1930 is a restricted one, which only looks at overt representations of Christian figures and does not consider religious elements being reflected in Italian cinema, such as in patriotic martyrdom films or in the *mater dolorosa* types of the diva film. Leaving aside the moral dramas set in the present day, many of the religious films I discuss were grouped within the historical genre by Baron Fassini in 1910, contemporary critics and recent scholars (Redi 1999: 84-92; Brunetta 2008: 343-346; Muscio 2013: 161-170). Yet, while *Quo Vadis* (1913) and *Marcantonio e Cleopatra* (1913) share many elements of their source materials, production design, marketing and cultural impact, the Christian elements of *Quo Vadis* (1913) cannot be overlooked, especially given the Catholic readings of the novel and its adaptations. The religious films examined in this thesis were grounded in a Catholic popular culture which purely historical films did

not share. In addition, the works of Elvira Notari and Rodolfo Kanzler are fascinating examples of Catholic screen culture, yet were made by people estranged from the mainstream Italian studios and its development of historical genre. So, while many of the case studies were produced within the generic system of the historical film, the categories do not overlap entirely. The novelty of this study is that it considers the religious dimensions of these films in their own right, rather than analysing them solely within the historical genre. It is hoped that, by examining representations of Early Church martyrdom using a range of critical, historical, intertextual and cultural studies approaches, we can gain valuable insight into how Italian cinema and society dealt with religious topics during this period.

## EARLY CHURCH MARTYRDOM, MEDIA AND CINEMA

In the previous chapter, I discussed the cinematic context within which the case studies existed, making an initial distinction between films entirely organised around Early Christian martyrdom and those in which it is a smaller part in a film about Roman history. The chapter then considered the place of religious film-making within Italian silent cinema. We noted its place within the historical genre, but also its interactions with Catholic cinema, the Passion film and contemporary religious events. For reasons of international marketability and widespread comprehension, film-makers usually chose well-known Biblical and hagiographical characters, even as cinema changed from Attractions to one-reel narratives and features. Source materials, such as earlier films, religious art and literary texts, played a key role in the construction of the religious film.

There is much to be gained by examining the broader cultural context in which silent films were produced and consumed. As Simon Popple and Joe Kember highlight, early cinema is increasingly being studied through intertextual and intermedia lenses, and focus on the inter-play between media has been stimulated by micro-historical studies of individual film-makers, film subjects, exhibition sites and events (Popple, Kember 2004: 38-44). In the case of early one-reelers, investigations into the widespread diffusion of Shakespeare plays and *Uncle Tom's Cabin* in American culture have explained the concise nature of the first film versions of these narratives, and their focus on key images and scenes (Staiger 1992: 105-123; Pearson, Uricchio 2004: 155-168). This intertextual method is best summarised by Roberta Pearson and William Uricchio, who argue that:

augmenting film-specific evidence (the films themselves and the industry's own discourse) with intertextual evidence more fully illuminates the conditions of cinematic production and reception (Pearson, Uricchio 2004: 166).

This approach combines the patient examination of films and their surrounding discourses, long practised by the first scholars of Italian early cinema, with intertextual evidence, namely analysis of the relationships between texts which influence the reading of a text under analysis.

The study of intertextuality in cinema originated with Roland Barthes and Julia Kristeva and has subsequently received much theoretical work and practical application. Kristeva famously declared that:



tout texte est d'emblée sous la juridiction des autres discours qui lui imposent un univers : il s'agira de le transformer... La valeur sémantique du texte est à chercher précisément à partir de ce statut dialogique où tout énoncé autre est un acte de présupposition; faute de prendre en considération cette présupposition généralisée, on rate le fonctionnement spécifique du texte (Kristeva 1974: 338).

A theory which suggests how this universe of previous discourses might determine the meanings of new texts has great potential for grounding films in textual culture and providing new understandings of these works. Firstly, intertextual approaches could allow us to define the differences between historical films and those with religious content. Peter Bondanella assessed the religious film as an offshoot of the historical epic film genre, often linked to it in “style and attention to historical detail” (Bondanella 2011:12). Both belong in the *stile alto* and were made by similar directors, studios and actors. Yet, despite the amount of overlap between the genres, films featuring Early Church martyrs interacted with the commemoration of the martyr's sacrifice by spectators, priests and generations of Christians, writers and artists: purely historical films did not. Their intertextual fields are significantly different and analysing them offers opportunities to differentiate religious films from the historical epic and understand their place in Italian culture. Moreover, intertextuality forces us to reflect on “diverse cultural phenomena” linked to a text, not just its immediate precursors (Iampolski 1998: 246-247). Mikhail Iampolski argues that:

The intertext...binds a text to a culture, with culture functioning here as an interpretive, explanatory and logic generating mechanism (Iampolski 1998: 247).

Exploring the film texts and their surrounding cultures thus illuminates the possible meanings of these texts in the Italian culture of the period. Furthermore, intertextuality allows us to understand the semantic differences between apparently similar figures of speech, by exploring the intertextual field around them (Iampolski 1998: 250). This has a value in a thesis which considers one theme, with its similar scenes of piety, persecution and martyrdom, in films produced across four decades by very different directors and studios. Finally, by exploring beyond the film and its obviously linked texts, we can attempt to answer questions about the production and reception of these films which cannot be answered with the fragments of surviving evidence (Pearson, Urricchio 2014: 6-7). Although we cannot

be certain exactly how these films were produced and received, examining their intertextual fields offers a variety of possible readings to augment the study of the surviving elements.

As the examples of Uricchio and Pearson's study of Vitagraph's quality films or Miriam Hansen's analysis of the Nickelodeon audiences demonstrate, intertextual analysis needs to part of a multi-layered approach. In this thesis, intertextuality is combined with insights drawn from religious studies, film history, anthropology, Italian studies, film theory and film analysis in my consideration of the films and their associated materials. However, given the breadth of the case studies, this study could risk descending into what Iampolski called the "often methodologically fruitless," search for a precise genealogy of symbolic elements found in each film (Iampolski 1998: 14-16). Iampolski's warnings about the searching for endless prior instances certainly apply to depictions of Early Church martyrdom, which reference media across nearly two millennia, from Early Christian artwork on Catacomb walls to the Pompeiian villa recreated during the Great Exhibition of 1851. In conducting an overall examination of these materials, we should be careful to observe the way the texts relate to one another, as Iampolski notes:

By creating a specific intertextual field as its own environment, each text in its own way seeks to organize and regroup its textual precursors. Furthermore, the intertextual field of certain texts can be composed of 'sources' that were actually written after them...[such as] statements...that were written after the film (Iampolski 1998: 246).

In several of the film case studies, films quote literature and fine art over other cultural forms. Post-hoc sources include both the statements of Italian directors, manipulated for promotional and political ends, and the peplum films and historical epics of the 1950s, upon which much of the criticism of these earlier films has been retrospectively based. I have attempted to sensitively handle the former. As for the films of the 1950s, I have tried to consider the case studies in the context of their era.

When intertextual approaches are brought into the study of early cinema, they can enhance our understanding of the relationships between the text and its textual field and surrounding culture. The broad outlook of intertextuality, rather than the stricter tradition of adaptation studies, is of great use when considering works where so much has been lost, both from the film text and its cultural context, and where the intertextual field is so vast. Given that the thesis frequently searches out the textual

connections between the films and other materials, intertextuality has a prominent place in this thesis. However, the size of the intertextual field surrounding the martyrdom films demands that we work carefully. In this chapter, the topics examined are *mise-en-scène*, martyrdom in the historical novel and the Catholic devotional culture surrounding martyrdom. Its purpose is to see how prevalent texts, artworks and discourses shaped the production and reception of the filmic case studies examined in the second part of this thesis.

*Setting the scene: mise-en-scène and the historical film*

Let us begin with the ‘high culture’ which most obviously defined the genre: nineteenth century historical novels, like Edward Bulwer-Lytton’s *Last Days of Pompeii*, Nicholas Wiseman’s *Fabiola* and Henryk Sienkiewicz’s *Whither Quo Vadis?* Their transnational fame and freedom from copyright suited a cultural industry with global ambitions. Gian Piero Brunetta notes Italian cinema’s support for abbreviating literary classics and important historical moments, a sign of the upper bourgeoisie’s control of production (Brunetta 2008: 180). In the feature film era, Brunetta states that the basic elements of each novel were given their “riduzione visiva,” and that :

proprio su questo piano della ricostruzione scenografica ambiziosa, del confronto con opere letterarie di successo, il film inizia ad apparire come opera d’autore (Brunetta 2008: 203-204).

Brunetta’s emphasis on scenography as the basis of the historical cinema’s reputation as art is echoed in the films and discourses surrounding them, notably in the writings of director Enrico Guazzoni, which conceptually could have been written by a nineteenth century academic artist. Linking his creative processes to art, literature and research, Guazzoni’s discussion of film-making is structured around his control of great crowd scenes, a process facilitated by his training as a painter (Guazzoni 1918: 55-57). As we will see in greater depth in Chapter Five, much of the criticism of Guazzoni’s *Quo Vadis* (1913) has proceeded along these lines. Of course, Guazzoni was hardly a Neorealist, but his self-view denies the advances in his own cinematic storytelling and instead reflects the discursive formations privileging

scenography in the historical genre. Stefania Parigi makes an interesting point about the value of mise-en-scène relative to the historical films' plots:

La storia è come un libretto d'opera; il racconto, giocato su archetipi forti ed elementari al tempo stesso, costituisce il canovaccio su cui si esercita l'estro sceneografico, che rappresenta il vero polo attrattivo del film, e anche il suo più autentico contenuto. (Parigi 1994: 67).

As we will see, the elevation of scenography in the genre was caused by a variety of artistic and cultural influences. But Parigi's analysis is also reflected in criticism of historical novels.

For literary historian James C. Simmons, *The Last Days of Pompeii* was "...an unsuccessful merger of historical romance and guidebook," where the conflict between these two elements cancels out the effectiveness of both (Simmons 1973: 16). Edward Bulwer-Lytton acknowledged that his central couple "seem of too slight and commonplace a mould," but insisted that this helped contrast their "bright and bird-like existence," with "the vicissitudes of their coming fate." (Bulwer-Lytton 3, IV). Glaucus and Ione are weak characters, and the colour in their chaste romance comes from the obstacles placed in their way by other characters, four of whom are interested in splitting the couple. But romance had to be relatively bland for an author to expect mainstream success in the period (Jackman 1977: 91-93). The 'guidebook' elements appealed for their vividness and didactic function, with "descriptions as clear and unpedantic as possible" (Bulwer-Lytton 1, II). *Last Days* ultimately became a substitute journey for those who could not afford to visit Pompeii. The novel inspired recreations at the Great Exhibition of 1851, and even changes in visitors to the Pompeiian site, who wandered, imagining the scenes of the novel, rather than looking at exceptional objects in the museum (Hales 2006: 106). However, Bulwer-Lytton does add ahistorical settings, such as the Isidian temple or witch's cave, to support his characters and drama.

In *Fabiola*, Cardinal Wiseman drew extensively on his own visits to the Catacombs and the recent archaeological discoveries in the Catacombs, which were used for Catholic propaganda. While some of the main characters are rather stereotyped, the Roman setting is described in rich antiquarian detail (Rhodes 1995: 95-101). From the beginning, Wiseman contrasts humble Christian houses, Churches and Catacombs with decadent Roman monuments and the "larger and more splendid," palaces occupied by the Roman elite (Wiseman 1, IV). While decadent spaces are crushed (by further building of palaces

on top of them, and Churches upon them), the Catacombs, the Mamertine Prison and other Christian spaces endure. Maximian's magnificent palace becomes the Lateran Basilica, seat of, "an immortal race of sovereigns, spiritual and temporal" (Wiseman 2, VI). Chromatius' gaudy villa goes from being *Ad Statuas* to *Ad Palmas* when it becomes, "a training school for the great combat of faith, martyrdom to death" (Wiseman 1, XVII). Royal W. Rhodes notes how Wiseman uses the city to contrast Christian and Pagan elements (Rhodes 1995: 102). Significantly, the novel's level of detail meant that the *Edinburgh Review* analysed it alongside Catholic and Protestant archaeological studies of the Catacombs (Gaston 1983: 160).

In sum, both novels are based around vividly-described archaeological worlds and use them as crucial backdrops for the characters. The scenographic tendencies of the Italian historical film can be partly explained by the novels' rich archaeological detail, and scenic contrasts are used to reinforce ideological divides in both novels and films. Wiseman's novel is also closely influenced by Catholic archaeological studies and propaganda, and contributed to the Catholic-Protestant polemic raging in mid-nineteenth century England (Dorman 1979:174). This cultural conflict is examined in greater depth in the third section of this chapter.

As well as being a defining feature of the nineteenth century historical novels, the issue of historical accuracy in *mise-en-scène* frequently arises in the discourses surrounding the Italian historical film. Guazzoni's early writings emphasised his blend of artistic craft and historical research (Guazzoni 1918: 55-57). Giovanni Pastrone used museum catalogues for *Cabiria* (Pastrone 01/08/1913). These efforts reflected publicity discourses, Italian cultural nationalism and the desire to appeal to bourgeois and aristocratic audiences by legitimating the historical film as an educational experience. In his study of nationalism in Italian film periodicals, which were closely connected to the film industry, John D. Rhodes has identified the "nationalistic rhetoric that assimilates Italy's power as a nation to its artistic heritage," and established a connection with the periodicals' preoccupation with *mise-en-scène* in the historical film (Rhodes 2013: 263-268). Rhodes argues that the exaggerated and unrealistic praise for Roman sets in one-reel films is because of the place of Roman urban imagery in Italian nationalism (Rhodes 2013: 268-272). Since the Risorgimento, Italy's leaders believed that their nation had inherited the virtues of the Roman Empire and that colonial expansion would realise Italy's greatness (Bosworth

1979: 144-147). Roman imagery played a key part in the nationalist view of Italy. This rhetoric was also occasionally taken on by foreign reviewers and promoters. *Messalina* (1923) was marketed as “a nation’s effort” (*Messalina Pressbook* 1923: 1). A British reviewer of *Quo Vadis* (1913) opined that:

In fact, no other artists could have acted this story as they act it, for it is a Roman tale, and they, themselves, are Romans, with all the mighty power and passion of the ancestors they have here portrayed (*Bioscope* 20/02/1915).

Abroad then, the Roman studio’s physical proximity to the ruins of Empire was emphasised by friendly promotional discourses. On intertitles and trade advertisements, Cines’ logo of the she-wolf, Romulus and Remus proudly proclaimed their Classical roots and international reception occasionally emphasised this.

Despite the nationalistic proclamations regarding historical accuracy, the reality was that there was a considerable degree of flexibility in regards to ‘historical accuracy’ in order to provide spectacle and support the storyline. Firstly, a wide range of figures contributed to the historical films’ mise-en-scène.<sup>2</sup> Many of these were creative figures were from literature, theatre and opera, and did not necessarily start from the prescriptive historicism proclaimed in film magazines. Fantastic Orientalist elements were added to *Cabiria* to ensure a stark contrast between Rome and Carthage (Dorgerloh 2013: 232-246). *Christus* (1916) set sections of Christ’s life in Egypt and re-arranged certain incidents, as Fausto Salvatori’s poetic re-imaginings of the Gospels and the film’s own spectacular premise trumped strict Scriptural accuracy (Redi 1999: 91). However, we should note that the rearranged elements of *Christus* (1916) were less well-known areas of the Scriptures, and that the beginning and end of Jesus’ life adhered strictly to Catholic iconography and traditions. The Egyptian sites in *Christus* (1916) and the Christian catacombs in *Gli ultimi giorni di Pompei* (1926) are interesting examples of strict historical accuracy being adjusted for spectacular purposes.

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<sup>2</sup> As well as poets like Fausto Salvatori, the mise-en-scène of the historical film drew in diverse artists, including painter Camillo Innocenti (*Quo Vadis*, 1913), leading Fascist architect Armando Brasini (*Teodora*, 1922; *Quo Vadis*, 1924) and theatrical sceneographer Duilio Cambellotti (*Frate Sole*, 1918; *Gli ultimi giorni di Pompei*, 1926) (Redi 1999: 128-134). Furthermore, in an analysis of the two surviving 1913 film adaptations and their screenplays, Silvio Alovio demonstrates the emphasis on scenic detail within the screenplay of the Gloria version and the number of creative figures involved in sceneography (Alovio 2005: 327-341).

Besides the cultural nationalism swirling around the discourse of *mise-en-scène*, the historical film has often been seen as a vehicle for Italian imperialism. The overlap between the imperial adventures of the Roman Empire and Italy's own Libyan War adventures is an important subtext in films like *Marcantonio e Cleopatra* (1913) and *Cabiria* (1914) (Wyke 1997: 78-80). As Maria Wyke highlights, Guazzoni's *Marcantonio e Cleopatra* exceeds Shakespeare's narrative, and shows a triumphant procession of Octavian and his troops through Rome (Wyke 1997: 78-80). Recent investigations by Italian film historians have deepened our understanding of the connections between Libyan war and film. Newsreels of battles and the 'cinematone' enthused the Italian public (Berutti, Mazzei 2011: 53-94). Denis Lotti has charted the colonialist themes which spread across Italian cinema during this time, and found an outlet in the metaphor of the historical genre, with its opportunities for Orientalism, conquest narratives and battle scenes (Lotti 2011: 11-52). Both Wyke and Lotti highlights the colonial subtexts in Guazzoni's epics, and the Vatican financial connections between Cines and Libya (Wyke 1997: 78-84, Lotti 2011: 50).

However, some film historians disagree with overly contextual readings of the historical film. Stefania Parigi asserts that the juxtapositions of pagan and Christian Rome, or Classical and Barbarian cultures were more influenced by spectacle than ideology (Parigi 1994: 69). There is a degree of truth in this because the Italian historical film was not a metaphor for discussions of Italian society and restricted to the culture of the peninsula. Unlike the Risorgimento films which mythologised the Italian unification and were aimed at a national public, the universality of the Roman Empire made these films relevant in many of the countries in which these films appeared, especially in imperial powers like Britain and France which continued a tradition of Classical learning. Finally, while many historical epics contrast 'barbarian civilisations', such as Egypt and Carthage, against 'civilised' Rome, the case studies contrast decadent, pagan Rome against Early Christianity, thus implicitly discussing many states' fractious relationships with the Catholic Church. In sum, while the influence of colonialist documentaries and themes can be seen in scenographic Orientalism, these films often have multivalent messages, which requires careful unpicking in each case.

Without developing the idea a great deal, Giuliana Muscio has noted the inspiration of opera set designs in historical films (Muscio 2013: 167). Besides opera's predominant position in Italian

entertainment culture, later taken by cinema, there are deeper connections between the two media forms. On the Italian peninsula, long divided by internal politics and different dialects, words were subordinated to music and mass spectacle in opera or the intimate gestures of the *commedia dell'arte*, and these tendencies carried through into cinema (Dalle Vacche 1992: 4-5). Despite their literary links and libretti, Italian historical films also de-emphasised words in favour of mass spectacle. Guazzoni's assertion that he had "mirato soprattutto a far sì che il protagonista vero fosse la folla, la grande folle variopinta," has a sensibility which could be that of historical opera or the mass scenes in theatre (Guazzoni 1918: 56). Opera historian Allan Mallach notes that, as cinema displaced opera from the hearts of the Italian bourgeoisie to become the predominant cultural form in Italy, it took inspiration from it, with the historical film borrowing the spectacle and scenography of grand opera (Mallach 2007:355-360). Opera did treat one of the key narratives considered in this thesis, Sienkiewicz's *Whither Quo Vadis* (Figure 2.1). In its construction of the Christian group in the centre of the arena, this staging is very close to *Quo Vadis* (1913) and both seem to share a common influence in Jean-Léon Gérôme's *Christian Martyrs' Last Prayer*. Theatrical versions of *Fabiola* also appeared, with a sumptuous décor similar to that of the historical film (Figure 2.2). Chapter Three highlights the connections between Rodolfo Kanzler, historical consultant and scenographer on *Fabiola* (1918), and his earlier involvement in the historical productions of the *Drammatica compagnia di Roma*. Although it is beyond the scope of this research, there is clearly the need for extra research into the connections between Italian theatre, opera and the historical film.

Besides the 'high culture' influences in the *mise-en-scène*, Mario Verdone has also highlighted other forms of spectacle:

Forse il gusto delle grandi rievocazioni storiche e delle sfarzose pantomime equestri, della parate di armati e di fiere, venne da un altro genere di spettacolo: quello dei caroselli storici, degli ippodromi napoleonici, delle arene (Verdone 1963:20).

In his focus on these attractions, Verdone points to the complexity of Barnum's spectacular circus narratives and also the international nature of the phenomenon. Of particular note are Victorin-Hippolyte Jasset's *Vercingetorix*, an enormous theatrical spectacle which took place in a huge Parisian theatre later used to première many of the Italian historical films, and the great theatrical spectacles and circuses using *Whither Quo Vadis* (Hendryowska 1995: 9). Pyrodramas, panoramas and other



spectacular displays recreated great moments in Roman history (Yablon 2007: 189-206, Nichols 2015: 55-58). Then we have walkthrough recreations, such as the Pompeian House of the 1851 Great Exhibition, the mock Catacomb of the Exposition Universelle of 1867 or the Valkenburg Catacombs completed in 1913.

As Jon Yablon highlights, those viewing these works as ‘pre-cinema’ often overlook their narrative elements and specific features (Yablon 2007: 190). But some common elements can be seen. In considering pyrodramas in Manchester, David Mayer noted that the safety distance between actors and audience in the pyrodramas meant actors relied “more upon gesticulation, physical actions and spectacle than verbal subtlety,” central narratives were based on easily-identified stock characters and printed programmes were sold to aid comprehension (Mayer 1992: 185). These are characteristics shared with the *mise-en-scène* of the historical film. Establishing some of these spectacles and recreations as direct source materials for Italian historical films is difficult, as some of them existed well outside of the cultural horizons of Italian directors and of the silent period. However, as these popular versions of Classical culture spread across countries and continents in the nineteenth century, they established a cultural framework for the production and reception of the film case studies.

The increasing visibility of Roman buildings and *romanità* also provided some inspiration. During Pius VI’s papacy and French rule over Rome, the city’s Roman heritage was excavated, renovated and exhibited in museums in order to draw implicit connections between the glorious past and the present. (Ridley 1992: 238-246; Erenstoff 2008: 56-58; Gilson 2009: 55-68). When Rome became capital of the united Italian state, it was remodelled with buildings in a new Classically-influenced style and Roman archaeological sites were cleared. (Atkinson, Cosgrove, Notaro 1999:47-49). Classical culture was introduced at certain national celebrations including the 1902 Festival of Palilia, when thousands of Romans joined a procession in classical costume, and the Exhibition of 1911, during which dignitaries dined on a full-size replica of a Roman galley (Atkinson, Cosgrove, Notaro 1999: 49-51). As part of the *Esposizione Internazionale* of 1911, which celebrated the fiftieth anniversary of the unification of Italy, a large archaeological exhibition was held in the newly-uncovered Baths of Diocletian, with plaster casts bringing together sculpture fragments dispersed in museums. A full size replica of the Temple of the Monumentum Ancyranum was also constructed, hinting at earlier Latin dominance of

the shores of the Mediterranean. In this way, the Liberal state promoted Italy's classical past as a vital part of the contemporary identity, with the Vittorio Emanuele II monument and the Palazzo delle Belle Arti being the most obvious examples of this tendency. This Liberal *romanità* changed Rome's cityscape less than its Fascist successor, but it was a subtle influence upon film-makers and their attitudes towards historical film mise-en-scène.

To conclude, the mise-en-scène of the historical film is an area which became a critical and artistic focus. The historical novel, with its rich descriptive passages, spectacular actions and weak characters, was definitely an influence, but so too was the silent nature of the medium and the traditions of grand opera and historical drama in Italy. Fuelled by artistic cinematic discourses and nationalism, the 'historical accuracy' of the settings was extravagantly proclaimed and lauded, while the reality was a more fluid creative process which balanced spectacle against veracity. Imperialism and Italian nationalism were features of the Liberal State, but reading these elements into the historical film is challenging because of the transnational origins and destinations of these texts. In each of the case studies examined here, we must be particularly careful when analysing the mise-en-scène because of these clashing elements, the strength of certain discourses and the multivalent meanings behind them.

### *Martyrs of literature*

The nineteenth century historical novel is the most conspicuous source for the Italian film-makers who tackled the subject of Early Church martyrdom during the silent period. Edward Bulwer-Lytton's *Last Day of Pompeii* was adapted into three feature films and one one-reel production, Henryk Sienkiewicz's *Whither Quo Vadis* was made into two feature films and Nicholas Wiseman's *Fabiola* inspired one feature film and a one-reel film. In the previous chapter, I differentiated between films where Christian martyrs have a minor or secondary role within a historical drama (Roman Epics), and those in which the martyrs were primary characters or had a very prominent role (Early Church

martyrdom films). This was an initial judgement, based on my first review of the case studies. In the one-reel era, work based on historical or novelistic outlines that briefly show Early Church martyrs are clearly different from the biopics of martyred saints. The purpose of this section is to understand this difference in nineteenth century historical novels and explore its possible influence on the filmic case studies. Here, I survey the depictions of martyrdom and the Early Church in major novels of the genre, such as *Les Martyrs*, *The Last Days of Pompeii*, *Fabiola*, *Hypatia* and *Whither Quo Vadis*. I suggest how their differing approaches may inform the filmic case studies, and explore the legacies of their reception.

As with the filmic case studies, the most obvious way of gauging a novel's response to martyrdom is to consider its place within the novel. Chateaubriand's *Les Martyrs* was one of the earliest historical novels. It constituted "a manifesto for a Catholic revival," and highlighted the martyrs as a source of inspiration for modern Catholics (Wood 2013: 139). It was seen as a forerunner of *Whither Quo Vadis* (Delormel 1900: 89-91; Lionnet 1903: 237-259; David 2001: 20-24). The main characters are the Christian soldier Eudore and Cymodocée, daughter of a Homeric priest and an eventual convert to Christianity. Their relationship is opposed at various points in the epic narrative by Hiéroclès, a proconsul who falls in love with Cymodocée, and a Breton druidess, Velléda, who kills herself after Eudore rejects her. After adventures across the Empire, Eudore and Cymodocée marry in the arena and are martyred by a tiger, with Eudore's tortured body shielding the pure Cymodocée (Chateaubriand, 24). On their deaths, Constantine sees a crucifix appear above the arena. Martyrdom is the climax of Chateaubriand's narrative, precipitating the victory of Constantine.

Edward Bulwer-Lytton's *Last Days of Pompeii* includes an early Christian community and a martyr-like figure, Apaecides. However, these aspects are minor, and Bulwer-Lytton's portrait of early Christianity is vague when compared with the specifics of Wiseman or Sienkiewicz. The novel revolves around the Glaucus-Ione romance and the impediments to it, chiefly the Isidian priest Arbaces. Apaecides, Ione's brother and a devotee of Isis, converts to Christianity. Apaecides plans to publicly denounce the cult of Isis, and is then murdered by Arbaces, both for the conversion and being an obstacle to Arbaces' plans (Bulwer-Lytton 4, I). But Apaecides' death is not fully explained as a martyrdom. In the dungeons of the arena, Glaucus refuses Olinthus' offer of conversion and both of

them eventually escape. The scene takes inspiration from Early Christian scenes, but Glaucus' refusal encapsulates the novel's lukewarm attitude to the Early Church. Angus Easson argues that Glaucus is uncommitted to the higher refinements of Classical culture or to any alternative political, religious or ethical struggle, and that he does not make a whole-hearted conversion to Christianity (Easson 2004: 108-110). In his final letter, Glaucus lives as a moderate Christian in Greece. Rhodes notes that Bulwer-Lytton engages in "occasional, moderate anti-Catholicism" (Rhodes 1995: 47). I would argue that this is a negligible aspect of the work: Bulwer-Lytton makes one negative comparison between Catholic monks and the Isidian priests, and this remark is a consequence of his cultural background and target audience rather than a specific aim of his work.

The successful formula for the historical novel proposed by Chateaubriand and Bulwer-Lytton was turned to explicitly polemical purposes by British authors. From allowing Catholic MPs in 1829 to the 'Papal Aggression' of 1850, which re-established the ecclesiastical hierarchy, British society was sharply divided by the toleration of Catholicism and the problems this posed for a nation dominated by Protestant values. The Anglo-Catholic Oxford Movement attempted to introduce ritualistic Catholic practices and the veneration of saints to the Church of England, thus aligning it with what they saw as the Catholic character of the Early Church. In this context of political controversy, riots and existential crisis, the Early Church became an important theological battleground. John Henry Newman, the Oxford Movement's leading light who converted to Catholicism in 1845, began this tendency with *Arians of the Fourth Century* (1833), various theological tracts and *The Church of the Fathers* (1840) (Turner 1999: 175-177). The Catholic priest and future Cardinal Nicholas Wiseman lectured on the archaeology of the Catacombs as early as 1836 (Champ 2000:170). The 1840s and 1850s saw the publication of many novels, histories and pamphlets which made propagandistic readings of the Early Church. Such were the similarities in discourse and content between these works that Wiseman's novel *Fabiola* was analysed by the *Edinburgh Review* alongside Catholic and Protestant archaeological studies of the Catacombs (Gaston 1983: 160).

In Charles Kingsley's *Hypatia; Or New Foes with an Old Face*, the action takes place in and around fourth century Alexandria. Its main focus is following the spiritual journeys of the disaffected monk Philammon and wealthy Jew Raphael. From their engagement with different characters and their

beliefs, the protagonists gain knowledge which propels them on their s spiritual journey towards and in the Christian faith (Chitty 1974: 152). Much like Kingsley's other protagonists, this allows Kingsley to debate his own spiritual journey. Kingsley was a prominent Anglican Vicar and his portrayal of the Early Church idealised by the Catholics and Anglo-Catholics is very negative. Denounced by other characters as, “..Saint Firebrand,” and , “...too wise, some say, for a child of the light,” Bishop Cyril is the leader of a fanatical and intolerant Church (Kingsley II, VII). This scheming bishop, his superstitious mob and failed theocracy allow Kingsley to criticise Catholic and Anglo-Catholic doctrinal emphasis on the Early Church, rather than Jesus and the Scriptures (Rhodes 1995: 90-92). Catholic devotional practices and the cult of saints are also heavily criticised and ridiculed (Rhodes 1995: 90-93). Hypatia, a beautiful Pagan philosopher considering conversion to Christianity, becomes a martyr-like figure as she is killed by a mob incited by Cyril, the Bishop of Alexandria. Cyril cynically manipulates martyrdom for his own political advantage, hoping that Philammon will be martyred by Hypatia's followers and uses Ammonius' death the cement his control over the mob (Kingsley VII, XXVI). Catholic doctrines and the Oxford Movement's emphasis on the Early Church are all heavily criticised through the negative portrayal of Cyril and his followers. Kingsley also criticises Catholic celibacy and monasticism as unnatural, by contrasting the heterosexual Goths and Raphael's love for Victoria with the perverted sexuality of the aesthetes, and even exploring *The Song of Songs* (Rhodes 1995: 92-96; Prickett 1996: 238-240; Bowen 2002: 253). Kingsley's protagonists undergo a spiritual journey and eventually emerge very close to Kingsley's own beliefs in Anglicanism, Christian Socialism and muscular Christianity. *Hypatia* prompted Cardinals Newman and Wiseman to write their own novels and begin the Catholic Popular Library series (Bowen 2002: 253).

As the first Catholic Cardinal in England since the Reformation, Cardinal Nicholas Wiseman was a key figure in English public life and a leading Ultramontane. In his novel *Fabiola*, the titular heroine and her weak melodramatic plotline are used to introduce a large number of martyrs in third century Rome (Rhodes 1995: 100). Some of these martyrs are developed as characters, such as Sebastian and Agnes. Others are given a lesser exposure, being mentioned in order to construct an atmosphere of peril and advance readers' knowledge of Early Church history. The tortured martyrs' bodies are presented in a graphic, almost sadistic fashion, while highlighting the sacred nature of the martyrs' submission

(Moran 2007: 154). The frequency of martyrdom in *Fabiola* is at odds with the likes of *Hypatia* where, although the death of Hypatia is very spectacular, it is a one-off event, and martyrdom is far less important than exploring the spiritual journeys of Raphael and Philammon. Royal Rhodes notes that, “ecstasy, rapture, martyrdom and sacrament are all grown together,” in *Fabiola* (Rhodes 1995: 106). Martyrdom becomes a sort of liturgy within the novel, a physical commemoration of Christ. Wiseman shows how the veneration of martyrs spread the Christian message and led to the Catholic Church’s eventual triumph over its opponents. The figure of the martyr in *Fabiola* was also central in many of the tendencies with which Wiseman was aligned: Romanising English Catholic Church culture, protesting against intolerance towards Catholics and the suffering of the Popes. For instance, Wiseman’s presentation of the martyr Popes anticipates the presentation of the suffering Pius IX in the 1860s and the stressing of martyrdom as an integral part of the Catholic experience (Wiseman 1,XI).

To summarise, the novels of Chateaubriand, Bulwer-Lytton, Wiseman and Kingsley can easily be understood within the Roman Epic/Early Church martyrdom binary. Bulwer-Lytton’s work includes Early Christians as one of the religious groups in his depiction of Pompeian life, but they have a minor role within his historical romance. Driven by the suffering of the Church during the French Revolution and the opposition to Catholicism in England, Chateaubriand and Wiseman place martyrdom at the centre of their novels. Kingsley’s approach is somewhat different: rather than glorifying martyrs or Early Church leaders, he uses the Early Church setting to criticise Catholicism and explore the faith journeys of protagonists who share his own views. Kingsley was one of the most visible opponents of Catholicism in English public life, and he prompted Cardinals Wiseman and Newman to write *Fabiola* and *Callista* in response. It should be noted, however, that this denominational conflict and its local nature limited the circulation of novels among opposing faith groups. *Hypatia* did not appear in Italian translation until 1936, but enjoyed a long-lasting popularity in Britain (Kingsley, 1936; Gange 2013: 250). Meanwhile, in predominantly Catholic France, many novels based on the *Fabiola* formula were published with an obvious devotional aim (David 2001: 18-21).

At the dawn of the twentieth century, Henryk Sienkiewicz’s *Whither Quo Vadis* was a popular sensation, both as a novel and in different media forms. This was partly due to its public domain status, as a result of Russia’s failure to sign the Bern convention and protect Sienkiewicz’s copyright

internationally (Soro 1935: 213). Set during the reign of Nero, *Whither Quo Vadis* centres on the romance between a Roman noble, Marcus Vinicius, and a Christian princess, Lygia, against a backdrop of Imperial and Early Church history. Petronius, the sarcastic aesthete and courtier who eventually commits suicide in a heroic fashion with his mistress, is the focal character of the novel and does not embrace Christianity. Other religious-historical novels, such as *Fabiola*, lack “an important and sympathetic character,” who does not become a Christian (Scodel, Bettenworth 2009: 28-29). Petronius means that pagan Rome is not given an entirely negative depiction. Simon Goldhill notes that Sienkiewicz’s “affiliation to sectarian religion is less stridently asserted,” than in the earlier thesis-driven martyrdom novels (Goldhill 2011: 224). Sienkiewicz’s mention of “the basilica of Peter [that] rules till now, from the Vatican heights, the city and the world,” is obviously pro-Catholic (Sienkiewicz, Epilogue). However, international readers clearly viewed the novel outside of the denominational divides of the 1860s. Petronius’ heroism, the toned-down denominational rhetoric and the text’s malleability gave *Whither Quo Vadis* a multivalence which increased its worldwide popularity, but makes it a challenging text to interpret within the Roman Epic/Early Christian martyrdom schema. Contemporary reactions to Sienkiewicz’s novel also further complicate matters.

The main storyline of *Whither Quo Vadis* revolves around the romance between the patrician Vinicius and the Christian hostage Lygia. Lygia, prepares for martyrdom in the arena early in the novel, and is saved at the last moment (VII, LIX). The central romantic couple survive, and Vinicius converts to Christianity. Their relationship develops against the backdrop of Nero’s reign and the persecution of Christians after the Great Fire of Rome. The Apostles Peter and Paul guide the Christian community. The martyrdom of the ‘philosopher’ and partly Jewish Chilo is significant, as it occurs after he is forgiven by Crispus, a Christian he had revealed to the Roman authorities. Thus Sienkiewicz demonstrates the inspirational power of martyrdom. Several vividly-described ‘key scenes,’ such as the amphitheatre martyrdoms, the forgiveness of the burning Crispus and the martyrdom of his converted persecutor, are very spectacular (LVII, LXI, LXII). However, as Bogdan Zakrzewski highlighted, *Quo Vadis* is rooted in the universal morality of the popular novel: a love plot in which the girl is kidnapped, characters nobilitated through relationships, love stories with a happy ending and a Manichean conflict which gives plenty of opportunity for duels, plots and self-sacrifice (Marinelli 1984: 137-138). Its

central characters escape martyrdom, and enjoy romance. This universal morality laid the novel open to secular readings, whereas the religious messages of *Hypatia* or *Fabiola* were clearly defined. Groups as diverse as Italian socialists and Polish nationalists saw themselves in the novel's persecuted Christians (Hendrykowska 1995: 10; Demofonti 2003: 43-47).

Unsurprisingly, given the potential multivalence of Sienkiewicz's moral message and its universal morality, the Catholic reception of the novel was not entirely favourable. For instance, a writer in the *Semaine religieuse du Diocèse de Lyon* stated that, "cette oeuvre n'est point franchement chrétienne," (original author's italics) and cited the Apostles' minor roles, Vinicius' romance-motivated conversion and Petronius' heroic status as factors which made it a dangerous book for Catholics (J.C. 1900: 690-691). As well as having similar misgivings, *La Civiltà Cattolica* warned of the danger of "certe lubriche pitture del paganeismo vivamente colorite," acknowledged that Christianity's victory was not won "in modo assoluto e trionfante," and highlighted instances of historical inaccuracy (Gallerani 1900: 42-48). However, *La Civiltà Cattolica* approved of an expurgated version edited by priests. This included a new introductory passage sent by Sienkiewicz himself, in which a clear symbol of forthcoming Christian triumph substituted Petronius' bath and elegant relaxation (Gallerani 1900: 48-49). Perhaps thinking of the restrained descriptions of pagan life found in *Fabiola*, the censors toned down certain aspects of Sienkiewicz's text:

noi non biasimiamo l'uso dei contrasti, considerato in se stesso, ben sapendo che la luce non può vivamente spiccare senza il contrasto dell'ombra: censuriamo *il soverchio*, cioè il colorimento del male portato a tal grado da renderlo esizialmente attrattivo (Gallerani 1900: 45).

Despite Catholic criticism of its decadent excesses, the efforts put into the expurgated version demonstrated the Church's willingness to harness the Christian aspects of the novel, rather than simply ban or discourage it, and the huge popularity of the novel, which could not be ignored. Catholic archaeologists, priests and educationalists used the *Whither Quo Vadis* phenomenon to interest the general public in their work.<sup>3</sup> The illustrated lectures of Baron Rodolfo Kanzler, examined in Chapter

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<sup>3</sup> Examples of Catholic diffusion and interaction with *Quo Vadis* include: G.B. Lugari. "Il sacello «Domine quo vadis» sulla via Appia." *Nuovo Bullettino di Archeologia Cristiana*, Year 7 (1901), 5-26.



Three, are a good example of this. Furthermore, Luigi Marinelli argues that adaptability and ‘translatability’ featured in Sienkiewicz’s plot design, with the careful descriptions of the scenes allowing for their transposition into visual, performance and print media (Marinelli 1984: 132-140). The chain of translators also played their part in the text’s malleability: the first Italian translation and the most popular English translation both came from a Russian version, which had been cut (Marinelli 1986: 132). These cuts, moral multivalence and intersemiotic possibilities meant that *Whither Quo Vadis* could be steered towards Catholic objectives.

In brief, Sienkiewicz’s more controversial portraits of Pagan life could be toned down and the dynamics of the narrative altered because of its lack of copyright protection, universal morality and inherent malleability, which was facilitated by Sienkiewicz’s cooperation. *Whither Quo Vadis* had a phenomenal appeal across linguistic and national boundaries, and was one of the most popular books in the United States and Europe.<sup>4</sup> The novel also appealed across moral boundaries, and it united “les catholiques les plus ultramontains en même temps que les décadents notoires” (David 2001: 22). In its portrayal of martyrdom and the Early Church, Sienkiewicz’s novel sat between Bulwer-Lytton’s fleeting acknowledgement and the devotional propaganda of Wiseman. Finally, the sheer scale of the print runs, number of translations and adaptations mean that *Whither Quo Vadis* was the most high profile source for the filmic case studies. Despite their earlier popularity and continued print runs, none of the other case studies had the same phenomenal prominence in early twentieth century culture.

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Antonio Pavissich. *Arte sana e arte morbosa e i due romanzi di Quo Vadis e Oltre il mistero, di Enrico Sienkiewicz*. (Milano: Premiata Libreria religiosa Giuseppe Palma, 1900).

Giovanni Semaria. *L’arte e l’apologia cristiana nel Quo Vadis di Enrico Sienkiewicz*. (Genova: Tipografia della gioventù, 1899).

Henryk Sienkiewicz. *Quo vadis? / nuova traduzione ad uso della gioventù e delle famiglie del prof. Enrico Salvadori con introduzione storica archeologica del prof. Orazio Marucchi*. (Paris/Rome: Desclèe, Lefebvre & Co, 1901).

<sup>4</sup> Five years after its publication in Polish, the novel had already been translated into most European languages, 40,000 copies had been sold in Italian, more than a million copies had been sold in English and a Latin version presented to Leo XIII (Marinelli 1984: 132; Sassoon 2006: 639-640). In Italy, a bibliographic survey carried out in 1905-1906 demonstrated the widespread popularity of *Quo Vadis*, especially among the working classes: See: Società Bibliografica Italiana. *I libri più letti dal popolo Italiano. Primi risultati della inchiesta promossa dalla Società Bibliografica Italiana*. (Milan: Società Bibliografica Italiana/ Biblioteca di Brera, 1906), 14, 29.

*Within touching distance: martyrdom and devotional culture*

Martyrs have long been part of Christian culture: the Catacombs and Basilicas were built around their tombs and memorialisation of their sacrifice stretches from the earliest hagiographies to medieval legends and High Renaissance art. However, across nineteenth century Europe, secular liberal regimes constructed a new culture outside of the frame of reference provided by the Catholic faith and, indeed, Christianity as a whole (Poggi 1967: 6-8). From French secularism and Italian nationalism to the Belgian school wars and Bismarck's *Kulturkampf*, the Church's position in everyday life came under increasing threat. But, freed from its links with national Churches partly controlled by autocracies and empowered by new communications technologies, the Vatican could engage directly with the faithful. This was not just a top-down process, however, as the Catholic Revival demonstrated the desire of the laity to engage with the Papacy directly and enthusiasm for new devotions. Popular interest in the Catacombs discovered by Giovanni Battista De Rossi spread far and wide. The ecclesiastical politics of the Church were divided between the intransigent Vatican-focused Ultramontanes, Liberals who wished to reconcile Church-State conflicts and Gallicans, who wished to preserve national Church identity and a degree of autonomy. Liberals and Gallicans were often grouped together by Ultramontanes, and the Church became a battleground for opposing ideas. For example, Nicholas Wiseman reshaped the English Catholic Church into an Ultramontane body during his leadership of it.<sup>5</sup> Over the course of the nineteenth century, the positions of the Liberals, Gallicans and the Ultramontanes became increasingly polarised, and these splits were visible in differences in Church cultures, devotions and aesthetics as well as more obvious areas such as Church politics and theological doctrine (Holmes 1978a: 133-160). The First Vatican Council in 1870 confirmed the Ultramontane triumph.

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<sup>5</sup> Cardinal Wiseman and his successor, Cardinal Manning, were both noted Ultramontanes (Jackman 1977: 43; Holmes 1978a: 48). During his reign, Wiseman challenged the "sober piety" of English devotions and the Church's recusant character by introducing Italianate devotions to Mary, silencing his critics, placing Ultramontanes in the Church hierarchy and shaping the English Church into an Ultramontane body (Holmes 1978b: 88; Gilley 1995: 49-51). Wiseman increased the number of foreign religious orders operating in England, which gave practical support to impoverished parishes, but allowed an Ultramontane presence in each diocese outside of the control of local Liberal Catholics and clergy (Holmes 1978b: 89-97). Wiseman appointed young Ultramontanes to key positions in ecclesiastical colleges, and complained frequently to Rome of Liberal Catholic obstructions (Schiefen 1970: 125-148). Wiseman also played a key role in shutting down the Liberal Catholic mouthpiece, *The Rambler*, following its scientific questioning of the Phials of Blood used to identify the corpi santi from the Catacombs as martyrs (Meyer 1995: 75-94).

In this context, *Fabiola* was not just a nice devotional novel or a riposte to the denominational polemic surrounding the Early Church in Victorian England. It was part of Wiseman's coherent programme to Romanise the life of the English Catholic Church. The Cardinal had even imported a large collection of martyr relics in order to foster interest in the Catacomb Saints among the seminarians at Ushaw College (Norman 1984: 144). The discourses swirling around the figure of the Early Church martyr in nineteenth century Church culture are very significant, not just as the backdrop to the novel *Fabiola* and other nineteenth century texts, but for the light they shed on the case studies. The purpose of this section is to try and understand these texts of Early Church martyrdom, using perspectives from religious, theological and cultural studies.

The translation of *corpi santi* continued a practice established during the Counter-Reformation, when newly-discovered Catacombs gave the Sacred Congregation of Rites a huge stock of dubiously-authenticated saints which could be sent to churches for veneration. Many of these became part of spectacular visual displays, such as the bejewelled bones found in German-speaking countries or the waxed statues found in Italy, which represented their purported backstory and gave a vivid, lifelike image for devotees to contemplate. Devotional traditions were also established around these figures, as in the case of Saint Pellegrino, a Catacomb saint who was the subject of the film *Trionfo Cristiano* (1930). The export of Catacomb Saints reached dramatic heights in the period 1815-1864, stimulated by the need to restore the damages of the French Revolution, the Ultramontane influence on Church culture and the lay desire for contact with sacred objects, which was an important part of the Catholic Revival. Roughly 2500 bodies were sent outside of Rome, heading to Italy (51.8% of the total), France (22.2%), Spain (6.3%) and the rest of the world (19.7%) (Boutry 2009: 144).

On the Italian peninsula, most of the *corpi santi* were destined for the Papal States and the Kingdom of the Two Sicilies (Boutry 2009: 144). In these areas, the clergy were often resented because of the wide range of state functions, including moral policing, collecting Church taxes and certificating religious observance, that they were expected to carry out (Pollard 2008: 10-13). Yet, the cult of Saints and patronal feasts remained at the very centre of popular religious practices and civil life in Southern Italy, which was still dominated by a pre-Tridentine mentality (Atkin, Tallett 2003: 45; Pollard 2008:

10-13). In this context, the translation of relics remained an important way of gaining tacit support for this clerical dominance and focusing the attention of believers.

On a European level, the translation of *corpi santi* should be understood as part of the Catholic Revival, which saw dramatic shifts in Catholic practices across Europe, roughly in the period 1830-1870. Devotions became more frequent, more lively and more public (Heimann 1995:7). Charitable committees and devotional associations gained more participants (Holmes 1978a: 287-290). Large numbers of people entered holy orders, and new orders were created or revived (Clark 2003: 12-14). Mass pilgrimage could attract hundreds of thousands of people (Clark 2003: 15-17). The Church emerged as a cultural actor, offering “a counter-attraction to secular society” (McSweeney 1980: 40). *Corpi santi* offered a focus for this devotional enthusiasm and highlighted Catholicism’s difference from secular and Protestant cultures. As in the case of the relics Wiseman requested, the *corpi santi* could also be used to impose Roman/Ultramontane Church culture and discourage local veneration associated with regional or national traditions.

Besides this older model, modern media forms gave the faithful new ways to connect with Early Church martyrs. Firstly, the example of Saint Philomena, a Catacomb Saint displayed in a wax statue in Mugnano del Cardinale (Avellino) since 1802 demonstrates the ability of the Catholic media to allow the faithful to have contact with these figures despite their geographical distance. In just fifty years, Saint Philomena’s relics, identified only by a mysterious inscription and some symbols, acquired an officially-confirmed back story, a miraculous reputation, hagiographical literature in various languages, shrines all over France and worldwide devotion (de Montrond 1872: 88-89; Boutry, Joutard 1991: 437-440). The Saint’s promotion by the Jesuits, Ultramontane clergy and France’s most famous priest, the Curé d’Ars John Vianney, played a crucial part in the spread of her fame. But so to did the inexpensive prints from Épinal, plays, non-fiction accounts and hagiographic novels.<sup>6</sup> The effects of this promotion in spreading the Saint’s devotion were described by Maxime Fourcheux de Montrond in 1872:

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<sup>6</sup> Coquerel (fils). *Des beaux-arts en Italie au point de vue religieux: lettres écrites de Rome, Naples, Pise etc.* (Paris: J. Cherbuliez, 1857), 9-13.  
Fouillard. *Saint Philomène, ou le Triomphe de la virginité, tragédie chrétienne en cinq actes.* (Lyon: Girard et Josserand, 1852).  
*Vie de sainte Philomène, vierge et martyre ou La sainte thaumaturge du XIXe siècle.* (Limoges: E. Ardant, 1885).

Dans les campagnes, dans les villes, son image se retrouve partout, non seulement dans les églises, les chapelles, mais encore dans les maisons, dans les ouvroirs, les ateliers, les filatures, les écoles... Nous l'avons retrouvée avec émotion, cette image bénie, dans la mansarde de la pauvre ouvrière, au-dessous d'un crucifix et à côté de l'image de la Vierge Marie. ...Ainsi la jeune martyre est l'aimable compagne du long et pénible labeur de ces pauvres ouvrières. Un simple regard sur son image, une invocation, une prière les anime, les fortifie, les console. (de Montrond 1872: 90-92).

Philomena's appeal to young French women was in her resistance to violence and hardship. Her sainthood reflected the embattled state of the church, the brutality of the revolution and the growing number of women becoming nuns (Ford 1996: 115-134). Yet, the case of Philomena also illustrates some of the reasons why the translation of Catacomb Saints was eventually halted and replaced with other forms of contact with martyrs. If the Church and different media forms could spread a devotion so widely and sustain it in the hearts of believers, exporting martyr bodies was perhaps not as necessary as it was before.

Finally, Pius IX invested heavily in promoting Early Church martyrdom, by sponsoring the archaeological research of Giovanni Battista De Rossi and connecting himself to the Early Church. With the Church and Papal States under attack, the Vatican emphasised martyrdom, including that of Early Christians, missionaries to Japan and the Pontifical Zouaves fighting for the Papal army, in order to mobilise Catholics and draw analogies with the contemporary political situation (Riall 2010: 272-285). The Pontifical Zouaves and the literature surrounding them advanced a contemporary discourse of Ultramontane sacrifice and idealised Catholic masculinity (Buerman 2012: 107-121). Pius IX supported Church restorations which 'uncovered' their ancient fabric and excavations underneath ancient Churches and in the Catacombs emphasised the links between the Papacy and the Early Church (Erenstoft 2008: 153-174). Besides sponsoring excavations, Pius IX also placed Catacomb archaeology on a secure footing within the Vatican. The Commission of Sacred Archaeology, founded in 1852, operated to far stricter conservational criteria than the lax Custodi delle Catacombe, who had permitted

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*Galerie religieuse. Sainte Philomène, vierge et martyre.* (Épinal: fabrique de Pellerin, imprimeur-librairie, 1838).  
*Bénédiction des maisons. Ste Philomène, vierge et martyre, thaumaturge du XIX<sup>e</sup> siècle.* (Épinal: fabrique de Pellerin, imprimeur-librairie, 1836).

the removal of much archaeological material. The Museo Pio Cristiano, founded in 1854, finally gave Early Christian materials in Vatican collections a scientific classification, and gave Early Christian art some degree of equal standing with the Egyptian, Etruscan and Classical art already in the Vatican Museums. Finally, impressive marble inscriptions and monuments commemorated the sites excavated or restored under Pius IX to stress his patronage and the connections between the Pope and the Early Church (Erenstoft 2008: 149-164). Most of the sites selected were either Christian or, like the Colosseum or the Porticus Deorum Consentium, were Pagan sites which were part of the history of the Early Church or Early Christian Rome. In this way, Pius IX's projects shifted the identity of Rome's cityscape, as he emphasised its Early Christian past.

Giovanni Battista De Rossi's archaeological research and Pius IX's attitudes were shaped by the excavations which occurred during the Counter-Reformation. The Catacombs were largely ignored and inaccessible in the Middle Ages (Osborne 1985: 278-328; De Santis, Biamonte 1997: 21). Protestant interest in Early Church theology encouraged the Catholic excavations (Rutgers 2000: 10-12). In this context, Antonio Bosio (1575-1629) commenced the first systematic studies of the Catacombs, using hagiographies, martyrologies and medieval documents to explore thirty underground complexes. As befitted a man whose first work was a manuscript-based passion of the martyrs Valerian, Tiburtus, Maximus and Cecilia, published shortly after their bodies were re-discovered, Bosio's studies were largely textual rather than archaeological in nature and his "chief preoccupation was to clarify references to places and dates found in martyrs' acts" (Ditchfield 2005: 183). Bosio's work was, "a devotional archaeology where forensic evidence bore the trace of the narrative of martyrdom" (Olson 2002: 131). Latin translations of his *Roma Sotterranea* accentuated its doctrinal polemics (Pergola 2002: 36). In sum, the Catacombs provided a highly useful propagandistic tool for the Catholic Church during the Counter-Reformation: they (arguably) demonstrated the similarity of Early Church and Catholic image cults, and established "a direct physical link between the early Christian experience and the Roman Church." (Caroll 1996: 175-177) With their detailed plans, sketches of architectural details, copies of inscriptions and maps, Bosio's text gives a remarkably detailed picture of the Catacombs and advances Rome's claim to be the centre of Christianity (Bosio 1651; Bosio 1659). The iconic frontispiece, which frames the suffering martyrs and Peter as the first Pope within a design decorated

with the Papal crest and similar to a Baroque Church façade, positions the the modern Catholic Church as the successor of the Early Church.

So, when Pius IX gave De Rossi money to purchase land on the Appian Way, it was not a completely naïve decision, but one with foreseeable consequences. In 1852, De Rossi discovered the tomb of Pope Cornelius, followed by the crypt of Saint Cecilia and the remains of the martyred Saint Eusebio (De Santis, Biamonte 1997: 21). In 1854, De Rossi discovered the crypt of the Popes in the Catacomb of Domitilla. This led to a moving visit to the tomb for Pius IX, who so closely identified with one of his martyred predecessors that the first volume *Roma Sotteranea Cristiana* was dedicated to “Pio IX Pont. Max. Alteri Damaso” (Baumgarten 1892: 43-47). De Rossi also enjoyed rich personal relationships with translators, supporters and academics across Europe (Baumgarten 1892: 61-72; Valdés 2005: 166, 192; Foro 2009: 105; Gourevitch 2010).

As well as the enormous international diffusion this scholar enjoyed, his work neatly protected the Vatican, as we can see during the ‘Phials of Blood controversy’ when the traditional methods used to identify Catacomb saints as martyrs were questioned. Henry Reeve, an Anglican examining Catacomb histories and *Fabiola* for the *Edinburgh Review* in 1859, expressed his doubts regarding the “hasty and improbable assumption,” that the phials contained saintly blood (Smith 1859: 104). A polemic developed in the Liberal Catholic magazine *The Rambler*, between its scientifically-minded editors and contributors, and the Ultramontane faction, chiefly Wiseman and Northcote, who were trying to preserve doctrinal authority, prevent the doubting of the relics and close down the debate (Meyer 1995: 75-94).

De Rossi’s eminence could be invoked by polemically-inclined Catholics such as English convert James S. Northcote, who in defending the methods said, “the indefatigable researches of De’Rossi...may be said to have set this question at rest for ever (sic).” (Northcote 1860: 218) In 1864, De Rossi published an archaeological report in the *Bullettino di Archaeologia Cristiana*, in which he noted that phials of blood had been discovered and scientifically analysed from the tombs of martyrs in the Ambrosian Basilica of Milan, thus confirming the official position. (De Rossi 1864: 21). But, in private, De Rossi questioned the practice, in an essay shared with friends and in a submission to the Congregation of Propaganda (Meyer 1991: 90-91). The Vatican halted relic exports in 1864 and, in the

following century, saints like Philomena were subtly dropped from Church calendars, perhaps proving the critics correct. But De Rossi's behaviour during the controversy demonstrates how the Church benefitted both from his intellectual stature and sympathetic attitude, which meant that his science did not openly contradict Church doctrines.

The total of De Rossi's work is staggering. His enormous epigraphic database consisted of over twenty thousand indexed cards (Ferrua 1984: 357-367). De Rossi published three volumes of his Catacomb history (1864-1877) and the periodical *Bulletino di Archaeologia Sacra* (1863-1894), for which he wrote many of the contributions. De Rossi's discoveries and scholarly esteem were of great propaganda value during the embattled reign of Pius IX, and allowed the Papacy to emphasise the Catholic Church's proximity to the Early Church. It was in this period that international interest in the Catacombs was at its height. Later in his career, De Rossi refused prestigious positions in the Vatican and Universities, accepting only those connected to the Catacombs and the Vatican Christian Museum. As a municipal councillor (1880-1894) and a member of the Roman archaeological commission (1872-1894), De Rossi made pragmatic arguments for the protection of archaeological sites and against the modernisations and monuments which aimed to make Rome the capital of Liberal Italy (Foro 2009: 108). By the time of his death in 1894, De Rossi had elevated Catacomb archaeology to a science, mentored a new generation of archaeologists and made a significant contribution to Catholic propaganda.

As Giovanna Capitelli has noted, De Rossi's research and the Catacombs played a central role in the Papal States exhibit at the Exposition Universelle de 1867 (Capitelli 2012: 555-566). While its display of manufactured goods was rather limited, the Papal States paid for a model of the Catacombs to be constructed under De Rossi's supervision and erected in the outdoor park. This proto-theme park had been added to the Exposition for reasons of space and to boost ticket sales, but it also allowed both exhibitors and visitors to escape the idealised planned heterotopia of the event organisers, with the exhibitors pursuing their own political aims and the visitors enjoying the spectacle and entertainment provided by this "juxtaposition of independent attractions" (Barth 2008:28) As such, the Papal States' archaeologically-exact replica of the Catacombs competed against Italy's Renaissance-style pavilion, and some squabbling occurred (Capitelli 2012: 563).



The Papal States' Catacomb seemed perfectly calibrated for the outdoor park. The Catacomb, composed of three corridors and a central cubiculum, was a miniature showcase of De Rossi's discoveries and showed a representative sample of Catacomb wall paintings, sculpture and funereal architecture. A historian of the event noted that the 'Catacomb' name attracted large crowds, but that it was too small to darken the mood of visitors for very long (Aymar-Bresson 1868: 335). A guidebook was also produced (De Rossi 1867). The success of the exhibit stands in contrast to the Vatican's attitude to the Great Exhibition of 1851, when even Wiseman's entreaties would not allow copies of Roman artworks to be made (Grove 1852; *Times* 22/10/1852: 5). But these copies would have been placed in an exhibit glorifying Classical rather than Early Christian culture. By contrast, the Catacomb perfectly fitted Pius IX's view of himself and the Papal States as the persecuted successors of the Early Church, and it must have reminded Emperor Napoleon III and the French public of the precarious position of the Papacy. Although the French garrison in Rome had been withdrawn following an international treaty, Garibaldi was plotting and, before the Exhibition closed on 31<sup>st</sup> October 1867, regular soldiers and Catholic volunteers from France would be fighting off his redshirts. The Papal States' decision to represent itself as the suffering Early Church made a strong political point.

To conclude, the Church culture surrounding Early Church martyrdom seems a complex process: created and led by the Papacy, hierarchy and prominent members of the laity, yet also demanded by Catholics of all kinds as the devotional practices of the Catholic Revival gained in popularity. Indeed, martyrs could not be translated and devotions could not begin on a widespread basis without lay support. At various points, one can read the Early Church martyrs as emblems of Ultramontane Church culture or as metaphors for the political situation of the Papacy or the Church, but they also played a significant role in the lives of believers. The contradictions between the continued export of martyr relics and more scientific study of the Catacombs manifested themselves in the Phials of Blood controversy, which demonstrated the increasing divergence between old and new methods of exploiting the Catacombs. Put simply, with the spread of devotional cults like that of Philomena, Catacomb science, reporting on the Papacy and increases in popular devotional literature, the Catacombs were more useful to Church propaganda as an archaeological site rather than as intact relics. By emphasising the Early Christian nature of Rome, Pius IX also redefined perceptions of the cityscape.

So, what implications does the Church's nineteenth century promotion of Early Church martyrs have on our case studies? Firstly, we must be aware of the complexity of the martyr figure within Church culture and its layers of political, religious and devotional meanings. Church culture is a complex field, with its devotional ecosystems, ecclesiastical politics and, at times, contradictory approaches. Scientific and archaeological research could be subtly oriented towards denominational polemics or political objectives. Respect for Church doctrine could be used to close down debate. Translation practises rooted in the seventeenth century co-existed alongside modern mobilisation of public opinion and participation in World's Fairs. Secondly, despite De Rossi's fame and Pius IX's efforts, the debates surrounding the Early Church were more removed from public consciousness in the early twentieth century than half a decade previously. The generation of scholars who followed De Rossi lacked his star appeal, the latest discoveries were less dramatic and the heated polemics of the mid-nineteenth century which had sustained much of the interest had been largely extinguished. In England, the intellectual conflict was particularly fierce because of Catholic-Protestant hostility and the interest that members of the Oxford Movement, the Catholic-leaning Anglican group which later gave the English Catholic Church some of its most prominent members, had in the Early Church. But these debates had subsided by the end of the century. The analogies between the Early Church and the 'persecution' of Catholics brought about by Church-State conflicts were also employed less frequently, as relations often settled into uneasy co-existence. However, the theme of Early Church martyrdom would remain present in broader culture, thanks to the popularity of *Whither Quo Vadis*, Catholic devotional culture and controversial adaptations, like Gabriele d'Annunzio's *Le martyre de Saint Sébastien*.

### *Conclusion*

Exploring the textual field from which Early Church martyrdom films could take inspiration would be an enormous task and beyond the scope of this thesis. However, within the scholarship of Italian silent cinema, intertextual approaches have increased our understandings of production and reception, and the content of the films. In this chapter, I have restricted my intertextual considerations to three

areas with a significant impact on the case studies: mise-en-scène, martyrdom in the historical novel and the Catholic culture surrounding martyrdom. At times, there are fascinating links between these areas, such as the Catacomb replicas at the Exposition Universelle of 1867 and the theatrical representations of antiquity, or Wiseman's Romanising of English devotions and his promotion of Roman martyrs in *Fabiola*. It is true that the Italian directors and their heterogeneous world audience cannot have shared all of the culture described above: the Exposition Universelle was ephemeral and the theological and denominational conflict which drove the production of *Fabiola*, *Hypatia* and *Callista* had long passed.

The predominance of beautiful mise-en-scène over other elements in the construction and reception of Italian historical films could be ascribed to the silent nature of the medium or the artistic pride and cultural nationalism which permeated film production and criticism. These are important factors and any investigation into these areas must be aware of this discursive context. However, this chapter has argued that the predominance of mise-en-scène extends further back in time and to other cultural forms: historical novels, opera, large-scale Exhibitions, public spectacles and Italian urbanism. These forms often had characteristics which translated into the Italian historical film: stock characters, spectacle, grandiose artistic constructions and a popular address. The concentration on mise-en-scène in the Italian historical film was partly fed by the historical novels they adapted. With their flat characters and straightforward plotting, the most impressive feature of the likes of *Last Days of Pompeii* or *Fabiola* is their creation of an immersive Roman world.

Several of the filmic case studies were positioned as adaptations of nineteenth century novels. Even historical and religious films which did not have a literary source text often made extravagant and expensive investments in order to obtain one.<sup>7</sup> My categorisation of the case studies into the Roman Epic (films in which Christian martyrs have a minor or secondary role) and the Early Church martyrdom film (where Christian martyrs are primary characters) has its roots in the nineteenth century novel.

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<sup>7</sup> Gabriele d'Annunzio's intertitles for *Cabiria* cost an astronomical 50,000 lire (Ricci 2008: 39). Fausto Salvatori was paid 6,666 lira (six and a half month's wages for a leading film director at the same studio), plus 10-13% of the profits for *Christus* (1916), in return for writing a poem about the Gospels (Redi 2002: 9-38). Febo Mari's screenplay for *Giuda* 1919 was particularly articulated and complex, and the director-star believed in it so much that he funded the production with his own money through the 'Mari Film' label (Genovese 1998: 130-133).

Entertainment-driven works like *Last Days of Pompeii* made far less reference to martyrdom than polemically-driven works like *Fabiola*. With its Christian scenes and secondary characters who embrace martyrdom, *Whither Quo Vadis* sat somewhere between these two points. My initial distinction of the case studies featuring Early Church martyrdom into two categories is justified based on their intertextual field and the space allocated to martyrdom within the films themselves, but the case studies obviously investigate these issues in far greater depth. Although its importance as a work in its own right and in generating *Fabiola* should not be underestimated, Charles Kingsley's *Hypatia* demonstrates the denominational and linguistic limits of these polemical forms. *Whither Quo Vadis* was able to overcome these, thanks to its inherent malleability, multivalent moral message and sensational status. Because of its widespread diffusion in early twentieth century culture, *Whither Quo Vadis* was the most prominent referent for the case studies considered here.

The use of martyrdom in Catholic ecclesiastical and devotional culture is a complex area. The Romanisation of Church culture and the spread of Ultramontanism, both of which favoured the spread of Roman Early Church martyrs, was driven by the popular demands of the Catholic Revival and the will of the Church hierarchy and senior members of the laity. A fascinating aspect of the spread of devotions to martyrs is that long-established and new methods of communication co-existed, although without incident, as the controversy over the Phials of Blood and scientific investigation of the Catacombs demonstrated. Over the course of the century, new media and improved communications supplanted the export of Catacomb Saints and localised devotional cults. In general, the papacy of Pius IX saw a renewed focus on martyrdom and the Early Church. As well as the symbolism of the Japanese martyr commemorations and the contemporary martyrdoms of the Pontifical Zouaves, the archaeological researches of Giovanni Battista De Rossi were given increased funding. De Rossi made fantastic discoveries in the Catacombs, attracted international popular interest and was an important part of Pius IX's self-presentation.

In referencing and adapting nineteenth century depictions of Early Christian martyrdom, filmmakers offered a multitude of possible significations to their heterogeneous audiences. This polyvalence came, in part, from the martyr's varying roles as romantic hero, erotic icon, imitator of Christ, paradigm of sanctity, relic body and metaphor for the persecuted Church. The multiple presentations of Early

Church martyrdom and the differences in their aims also played their part, as martyrs could be developed characters in a religious drama or merely a functional part of a spectacular depiction of the Roman world. Where relevant, I bring a range of texts into my consideration of the filmic case studies in order to strengthen my analysis of the films and their contexts.

## RODOLFO KANZLER: BETWEEN ARCHAEOLOGY, THE MAGIC LANTERN AND CINEMA

The son of the General who led the Papal Armies at Mentana and in the defence of Rome in 1870, Baron Rodolfo Kanzler was a prominent figure in the cultural life of the Eternal City in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. As well as directing the Vatican Christian museum and being a leading Catacomb archaeologist, Kanzler led the reform of Church music, taught at the Saint Cecilia

musical academy and designed sets for the Teatro Stabile of Rome (Possenti 1966: 391-394; Polsell 2013: 136). Such was his place in Rome's musical life that a select group of singers, musicians and composers met at his palace every week (Buran 2010: 39). Kanzler was also a good draughtsman, a painter and enjoyed amateur dramatics, including alongside film star sisters Diomira and Maria Jacobini (*Stampa* 01/06/1906: 5 ; Possenti 1966: 391-394). It is unsurprising that such a versatile figure was also attracted to photography and cinema. Rodolfo Kanzler produced magic lantern views of the Catacombs, which were shown to the Pontiff and audiences in Italy and Francophone countries between 1898 and 1907. Although the source is somewhat doubtful, Kanzler was reported to have made an early film, *Sepoltura di una martire cristiana in una catacomba* (1903), and been involved in the production of *San Paolo dramma biblico* (1910). In the years 1917-1921, film magazines note that Kanzler was a collaborator of the film journal *Decima Musa* and a board member of Palatino Film, Enrico Guazzoni's studio (*Decima Musa* 1920: 9; Mattozzi 1920: 776; Mattozzi 1921: 284). The trade press also reported that Kanzler was a historical consultant for Guazzoni's *Fabiola* (1918) and suggested the unknown Elena Sangro for the lead role (*Film, corriere...* 03/03/1917: 2-3; *Eco del Cinema* 03/1928: 16).

Although this thesis is devoted to film, illustrated lectures were “perhaps the dominant form of screen practice before moving pictures” (Musser 2005: 307). They were also an important influence on the new medium (Herbert 2005: 408). As we saw in the previous Chapter, Catholic magic lantern slide projections played a key part in the circulation of religious images in France and Italy in the early twentieth century, and the success of these illustrated lectures inspired hopes for a religious cinema sector. With Kanzler's involvement in the production of short films and feature films examined in this thesis, it would be wrong not to investigate his slides and how they informed later filmic depictions of the Catacombs and martyrdom.

Baron Kanzler's slide production, early film work and roles on film company boards are briefly mentioned in Italian film histories (Brunetta 2008: 53, 160; Bernardini 2012: 181). Information about Kanzler's most famous showing of magic lantern slides has recently surfaced (Cracolici 2012: 51-52). However, further investigations need to be carried out to determine the duration, scope and meaning of Kanzler's activities, as well as their potential relationship to the moving image case studies. By their nature as a combination of live performance, slides and a structuring narrative, illustrated lectures are

ephemeral, but they were culturally widespread and have left a wide range of fragments behind (Gray 2014: 175).

Italy has a long tradition of projected images, including the magic lantern shows of Jesuit Athanasius Kircher in the seventeenth century or the Venetian *vedute ottiche* of the eighteenth century (Leprohon 1972: 7; Bondanella 2011: 1-2). Despite this heritage, the widespread acknowledgement of the importance of these pre-cinematic machines and large collections of them in Padova and Turin, there have been few Italian studies which examine the iconographic connections between magic lantern and early film representations of the same subject, rather than the broader connections between these media. To my knowledge, Elena Mosconi's work on St. Francis is the only example (Mosconi 2006: 101-121). The absence of a catalogue of Italian lantern slides, like the *Lucerna Magica* website, is a barrier to research. My approach to Kanzler's work borrows from Mosconi's approach and recent British and American studies into the magic lantern. One of the leading proponents of integrating the lantern and early cinema into screen studies, Frank Gray, notes the challenge of researching the magic lantern show:

Each slide and each show/performance had a very distinctive context. It had an inter-textual and inter-medial relationship with a wide, complex set of ideas, discourses, events, other lantern shows, other vision technologies and practices (such as photography, painting, graphics, and panoramas) and other cultural practices such as theatre and literature. To unlock the lantern's history therefore requires the generation of historically-informed description and analysis that positions lantern practice and culture within a defined ideological context and locates it within a particular moment of production and consumption. (Gray 2014: 174)

The following chapter explores the context and history of Rodolfo Kanzler's work in producing magic lantern slides and film in the period 1898-1907. It reconstructs a chronology of Kanzler's activities, which gives a precise context for the discussion of his lecturing practice. It then unearths remnants of the lectures themselves, including reports by those who saw them, Vatican documents and the most remarkable section of his slides, the photographed reconstructions of Early Christian life. Finally, I also examine the reports regarding Kanzler's early film, *Sepoltura di una martire cristiana in una catacomba* (1903), and analyse whether this film was ever made. I consider his role in theatrical

epics and their influence on cinema. Kanzler's involvement in the production of *San Paolo dramma biblico* (1910) is dealt with in the next chapter, while his involvement in *Fabiola* is examined in the sixth chapter of this thesis.

#### *Kanzler's magic lantern talks (1898-1907)*

Reconstructing a chronology of Baron Kanzler's illustrated lectures allows us to understand the evolution of his lecturing practice, and gives us a context within which to discuss the slides and his early film. However, investigations into Kanzler's activities are complicated by the fact that only a minute portion of his vast private archive, collections and personal correspondence survives (Polselli 2013: 136). Ninety letters are held by the Vatican Secret Archive, mostly passive correspondence, but these provide some useful details regarding Kanzler's activities. Four of Gabriele d'Annunzio's letters relating to Kanzler's involvement in *La Nave* were also published (Bona 1939). Of Kanzler's writings, only those left at the Commissione di Archaeologia Sacra (CAS) have survived, and these relate to his work at there. The cataloguing and digitisation of these resources is ongoing. My research relies on these Vatican sources and a wider list of Catholic periodicals, newspapers, archaeological-historical journals and publications.

The earliest reported illustrated presentations by Rodolfo Kanzler on the subject of the Catacombs date from June 1898, and were undertaken as part of the Esposizione d'Arte Sacra, Missioni ed Opere cattoliche in Turin. Kanzler had been among the illustrious names on the Roman committee of the Exhibition, which met in June 1897 to discuss ways of supporting the event with the city's artistic treasures (*Stampa* 23/06/1897: 3). Kanzler's contribution was a talk and magic lantern slides which, according to *La Stampa*, allowed his audience to "rivivere un po' di tempo nella dolcezza dei misteri delle catacombe romane" (*Stampa* 23/06/1898: 2). The reviews of his two talks on the 23<sup>rd</sup> and 24<sup>th</sup> June 1898 were very favourable: the auditorium was "affollatissimo," the slides were "pieno d'interesse," and the talk was "erudita e ad un tempo piacevole" (*Stampa* 25/06/1898: 3). During the Marian Congress



of 4<sup>th</sup>-8<sup>th</sup> September 1898, three talks were given by Orazio Marucchi, Father Grisar and Kanzler on the 6<sup>th</sup>, 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> September respectively (*Stampa* 01/09/1898: 2). All of the talks were illustrated by “*numerosi e splendidi quadri luminosi,*” and discussed the beginnings of Christian art in Catacombs and Basilicas, with a natural focus on depictions of Mary (*Stampa* 01/09/1898: 2).

In 1898, Turin was awash with three and a half million visitors because of the ostentation of the Shroud and the two enormous exhibitions in and around the Parco Valentino (Montaldo 2014: 9). Technically, the Esposizione Generale Italiana, which commemorated the fiftieth anniversary of the Albertine Statute and showcased the industrial, artistic and political progress of Turin and Italy, was separate from the Esposizione d’Arte Sacra at which Kanzler presented. The Exhibitions enjoyed a friendly rivalry for the city’s attention: sacred art versus profane art; the pavilion of Italians abroad versus the Church’s mission stations; the Lumière films of Italy versus Kanzler’s slides, the Shroud and Secondo Pia’s amazing photographs of it. Moreover, they also symbolised the peaceful but uneasy accommodation that Church and State had reached. The neighbouring sites were joined by a giant ornate footbridge, nicknamed Ponte della Concordia (Della Coletta 2006: 95). In a sign of unity, the King and Queen of Italy and the Archbishop of Turin visited the Esposizione d’Arte Sacra together on its opening day (*Civiltà Cattolica* 14/05/1898: 37-40). The Esposizione d’Arte Sacra was a “*momento decisivo di confronto per la cultura ecclesiale torinese e internazionale,*” because it was the first time that a complete and innovative display of Christian Art had been part of a World’s Fair in Italy (Longhi 2008: 71). Moreover, the quality of the artworks and the possibility of seeing mission stations and Christians from across the globe drew many visitors to the Esposizione D’Arte Sacra. Both Exhibitions had their own weekly magazines and events listings in *La Stampa*. To conclude though, it should be remembered that the two Exhibitions and their ideas of universal faith and national spirit were juxtaposed, with occasionally disconcerting results, rather than truly unified (Montaldo 2003: 123).

In this context, Kanzler’s magic lantern slides underscored the antiquity of Christian art, showcased the work of the Commission for Sacred Archaeology and provided an important ‘attraction’ for the repeat visitors and the city’s elite. Furthermore, Kanzler’s offer of travel into the Catacombs and new perspectives of them ‘peopled’ with actors shared the spectacular dynamics of the Exhibitions, with their offer of travel into imaginary worlds, such as the medieval village, Egyptian-style

cinematograph or the international pavilions, as well as the different views offered by the attractions in the Exhibition Sites, such as the footbridge, tethered balloon and the viewing balconies of towers and exhibition halls. Lastly, Kanzler's subject matter also reflected the archaeologically-precise paintings of Alessandro Ceccarini, whose *Estrema unzione nelle catacombe* was part of the Exhibition's Sacred Art gallery.

It seems that Kanzler made no presentations during the remainder of the nineteenth century. At the Second International congress of Christian Archaeology, held in Rome between the 17<sup>th</sup> and 24<sup>th</sup> April 1900, Kanzler gave a presentation on his own, apparently without slides, discussing the work of Christian archaeological institutions in Rome over the previous decade (*Tablet* 05/05/1900: 27). Kanzler did give a seminar in Rome on the 11<sup>th</sup> April 1901, at which he discussed Early Christian life and showed "a series of magic-lantern views" (*Tablet* 20/04/1901: 17-18). At another point in the spring of 1901, Marucchi and Kanzler gave a presentation together about the Catacombs in the great hall of the Roman seminary. This lecture raised money for the Catacomb excavations and was so successful that it was repeated three times (De Courten 1903: 288-294). Crucially, it prepared Marucchi and Kanzler for a truly special lecture on the 18<sup>th</sup> of August 1901.

As Stefano Cracolici has highlighted, Kanzler's most spectacular use of projected images occurred during a special seminar on Catacomb archaeology, held in the Vatican for Pope Leo XIII (Cracolici 2012: 51-52). In the grand setting of the Consistory Room in front of the Pontiff, the Papal Court, twenty-four cardinals, bishops and guests, around seventy images were projected on a large screen by machinery operated by Federico Mannucci, who had installed the photographic telescope at the Vatican observatory (*Nuovo Bullettino...* 1901: 176-177; Maffeo 2007; *Semaine Religieuse...* 1901: 356-357). Orazio Marucchi gave an archaeological-historical explanation of the major Catacombs, Rodolfo Kanzler discussed images "ritraenti i costumi degli antichi cristiani," the Cardinal Vicar gave a summary of the Commission's work and Mgr. Pietro Crostarosa, a prominent defender of the Church's ownership of the Catacombs, also spoke about recent restoration work (*Nuovo Bullettino...* 1901: 176-177). The account of the seminar in the *Nuovo Bullettino di Archeologia Cristiana* was brief, perhaps because of the familiarity its small readership had with the event. Other publications, such as those

written for non-Italian readers interested in Vatican affairs, were more descriptive and allow us to understand the event's political and religious significance.

*The Tablet* gave an extended account of the Pope's involvement in the lecture, noting that he discussed his name saint (Joachim), the delightful projections, the funding of Catacomb excavations and the political problems surrounding them (*Tablet* 24/08/1901: 16-18). These interventions and the organisation of the seminar, ordered by the Pontiff himself and held on the feast day of his name Saint, shows the political backing that he wanted to give to researchers working on the Catacombs (Battandier 1901: 511-512). Such support was urgently required. Radical and Anti-Clerical newspapers had been agitating for the Catacombs to be removed from Vatican control and expropriated by the Italian state because of the Catacombs' supposedly dangerous position beneath Rome's fortifications, the allegedly inadequate conservation work carried out by the Church and the potential revenue from tourists (Battandier (1901: 511-512; Bartoli 1901: 917). One of the speakers at the event, Mgr. Pietro Crostarosa, had taken on the Radical journalists in an open letter, unpicking their claims and stating that, as the Catacombs were all either reliquaries or underground churches, they logically belonged under the control of the Church (Battandier 1901: 511-512).

In short, the objectives of the seminar were to demolish the anti-clericals' arguments, showcase the excellent work of the Commission and make a clear statement of Papal support for its work. The continued Catholic control of the Catacombs depended on the success of the event. A combination of theatrical magic, the impressive slides of the underground galleries "en grandeur naturelle," and the words of the five speakers ensured a positive outcome for the Vatican (Battandier 1901: 511-512; *Nuovo Bullettino...* 1901: 176-177). Following on from Marucchi's discussion of recent excavations in the Catacombs, Kanzler's presentation sought to bring the Early Christians to life. This was a critical part of the proceedings, as Kanzler had to create a vivid emotional connection between the archaeological remains, the Early Christians who had inhabited them and the Church which claimed to continue their work. It seems that these slides were a great success, as Albert Battandier stated that the, "restitutions du baron Kanzler ont été le clou de la séance" (Battandier 1901:514-515).

Three months after this presentation, Baron Kanzler undertook a European tour with these materials, giving "des conférences très remarquées sur les catacombes chrétiennes" (*Revue de*

*l'art...*01/1902: 86-87). The tour began in Compiègne, home to a close friend of Kanzler's called Raymon Du Duget, whose letters occur frequently in Kanzler's surviving correspondence (Du Duget 29/09/1892; Du Duget 20/11/1896; Du Duget 20/10/1898). After giving an illustrated "conférence éloquente sur les catacombes," to the Société historique de Compiègne on 14<sup>th</sup> November 1901, Kanzler was nominated as a correspondent-member of the Society (De Bonnault 1902: 5). While in Northern France, Kanzler also mediated in a dispute between the Vatican and the De Mérode family regarding land on the outskirts of Rome, under which lay the Catacombs of Domitilla (De Courten 1903: 288-294). The De Mérodes had purchased this land in 1874 and excavations, supervised by De Rossi, uncovered the Basilica of Nereus, Achilleus and Domitilla (Marucchi 1909: 2). Kanzler then gave two lectures in Paris, at the Saint Sulpice seminary and L'Institut Catholique, and one in Lille, before heading to Belgium (De Courten 1903: 288-294).

Kanzler's tour included seven lectures in Brussels, and lectures in Antwerp, Ghent, Louvain and Tournai (De Courten 1903: 288-294). The programme was certainly busy. In Ghent, Kanzler gave two talks on the same day in December: one to the seminarians and one to the historical society and the local elite (*Revue de l'art...*01/1902: 86-87). Precise dates for the lectures require further research, but we do know that Kanzler gave a lecture at the Société d'archéologie de Bruxelles on 18<sup>th</sup> December 1901 and two lectures at an unknown location on 9<sup>th</sup> January 1902 (Magnien 1902: 13). The Tour seems to have been very successful. Prince Philippe and the Countess of Flanders, as well as the future King, Prince Albert, warmly congratulated Kanzler at one of his lectures they attended (*Gil Blas* 01/01/1902: 2). Special masses were organised in Kanzler's honour at Tournai and Brussels (Kanzler 06/01/1902; Kanzler 09/01/1902; De Courten 1903: 288-294). The Baron's return journey began on the 14<sup>th</sup> January 1902, with a talk in Milan three days later (Kanzler 09/01/1902).

Kanzler's letter to his son makes clear the objectives for the tour, and his hopes the future of such activities:

Con tutto ciò se queste due ultime [conferenze] non falliscono spero che potrò portare alla Commissione, mille da spese, dalle 5 alle 6000 lire. Mi pare che per un primo tentativo non ci sarebbe male visto che in seguito il terreno si trova molto meglio preparato. (Kanzler 06/01/1902).

However, Kanzler's absence was strongly objected to at a Commission for Sacred Archaeology meeting on 2<sup>nd</sup> December 1901:

2. Il prof Marucchi chiede la parola deplorando la missione del barone Kanzler all'Estero avvenuto che egli ne sia stato inteso; esser questa una offesa personale a lui fatta per la quale protesta e vuole che sia inserta nel verbale (CAS: 02/12/1901: 290).

These are very strong words, and especially so given the context in which they were pronounced. There is nothing in the minutes of later meetings recording a resolution. Perhaps Marucchi was jealous that presentations they had previously given together were now being given by Kanzler alone to the applause of historical societies, royalty and prominent Catholics across Europe. Also, Marucchi's position as the *primus inter pares* among De Rossi's successors was perhaps being threatened by Kanzler's activities and growing international renown. One historical society journal even called Kanzler, "le digne successeur de M. de Rossi" (Morel 1901:134).

Marucchi's objections clearly had some effect, because there are very few mentions of Kanzler's slides after this point and the idea of a fundraising European tour seems to have been abandoned. Kanzler "illustrò varii punti storici," regarding the Catacombs of Domitilla, during a conference which was part of the Queen Natalia of Serbia's visit to the Pontiff in May 1902 (*Civiltà Cattolica* 07/06/1902: 609). Whether Kanzler illustrated these points using his voice alone remains unclear. After this, I have been unable to find mention of talks where Kanzler may have presented slides in the next four and a half years. Of course, it remains possible that he continued to give presentations, as he could have given them privately in locations where they would go unreported in the Catholic press, such as seminaries and schools. But, Kanzler was a busy man and perhaps he was unable to organise such events. As well as family commitments and his roles in the city's cultural life, Kanzler was Secretary of the Commission for Sacred Archaeology (1902-1918) and director of the Vatican Christian Museum. He was also the co-organiser of the impressive Exhibition of Italo-Byzantine Art at Grottaferrata and chief of a committee reforming Church music. One surviving letter, written to his mother in 1904, gives an idea of Kanzler's frenetic activity during this time:

Lunedì debbo andare a Grottaferrata, oggi vado alle Catacombe, domani alle 5 ho udienza privata dal S. Padre per fargli sentire i dischi del grammofono (Kanzler 09/07/1904).

From June 1906, Baron Kanzler was the artistic director of productions at the Teatro Stabile Argentina (*Stampa* 01/06/1906: 5). This engagement “gli ha procurato tanti grattacapi e...pochi capelli bianchi,” and he had left it by June 1910 (*Stampa* 14/03/1910: 5). On 3<sup>rd</sup> January 1907, Kanzler gave an illustrated lecture at the Palazzo Madama, Turin, which was entitled *I sentimenti dei romani desunti dai monumenti classici e cristiani dei primi secoli*, and attended by Princess Laetitia, Dowager Duchess of Aosta (*Stampa* 04/01/1907). This seems to have been the final illustrated presentation at which Kanzler discussed the Catacombs. However, Kanzler did give a warmly-applauded address in July 1912 when he opened the Valkenburg Catacomb replicas, which had been built in a former quarry in the Netherlands (*Tijd* 06/07/1912: 1). He also occasionally gave talks on other subjects (*Stampa* 14/03/1910: 5; *Stampa* 09/04/1916: 4).

In short, Kanzler’s magic lantern presentations begin in 1898, reach their climax in 1901 and were aimed at Catholic circles, historical societies and general audiences. They played an important part in the events programme of the Esposizione D’Arte Sacra and the Marian Congress, as they demonstrated the ancient foundations of religious art and attracted Turin’s elite. The Papal Seminar was a vital re-affirmation of the Church’s ownership of the Catacombs and a celebration of its preservation and study of the galleries. Although the European Tour of November-December 1901 promised much for the future, Marucchi’s jealousy and Kanzler’s responsibilities largely put a halt to further showings, as far as we know.

#### *Kanzler’s catacomb magic: analysing lecture style*

Examining Rodolfo Kanzler’s depiction of the Early Church sheds light on an important antecedent of the films examined in this thesis. The illustrated lecture combined photographic

projections, educational content and live performance. It had a malleability like that of the fairground and one-reel cinema, since the order of the images and the lecturer's commentary could easily be modified to suit different occasions. Illustrated lectures were an intermediary form between performance and mechanical reproduction, but that the speaker's presentation, pacing and ability to interest spectators were crucial to its success (Mosconi 2006: 105-106). In analysing Kanzler's lectures, we must consider his images, organisation and performance style. Many lecturers incorporated moving images into their lectures (Musser 2005: 307). Since the role of film in Kanzler's lectures is doubtful, I examine it in the next section. Here, I examine the organisation of his lectures over the period 1898-1907, and contextualise Kanzler's performances within the form of the illustrated lecture. I then discuss the discovery of some of Kanzler's reconstructions, and analyse the role of images within the lecture narrative.

The two most detailed accounts of Kanzler's lectures are Albert Battandier's report on the Papal Seminar and a *La Stampa* article discussing his 1907 lecture in Turin. Rodolfo Kanzler and fellow Christian archaeologist Orazio Marucchi gave their part of the Papal seminar together. The *Nuovo Bullettino di archaeologia cristiana* stated that:

il prof Marucchi illustrò la parte monumentale e storica ed il barone R. Kanzler i gruppi dei quadri ritraenti i costumi degli antichi cristiani (*Nuovo Bullettino*...1901: 176-177).

De Courten agrees with the division between the speakers reported in the *Nuovo Bullettino*, but contradicts this by stating that they spoke "tour à tour" (De Courten 1903: 290-294). The Commission's list of slides shows the views of the Catacombs were mixed in with the reconstructions (CAS 18/08/1901). Battandier also writes that the reconstructions were used to break up the monotony of similar-looking underground galleries (Battandier 1901:514). The two speakers must have worked together to a certain extent; otherwise, the arrangement of the slides would not have worked and Marucchi would not have been so infuriated by Kanzler's decision to lecture alone in Belgium and France.

The 1907 lecture in Turin was structured slightly differently, with the reconstructions shown only in the second part. In the first, Kanzler showed slides of the "gallerie, sepolcri, pitture, sarcofagi"

of the Catacombs, mixing historical discussion with anecdotes (*Stampa* 04/01/1907: 5). In the second, Kanzler discussed his decade of research on Roman clothing and hairstyles, before showing the reconstructions of Early Christian life. The lecture's title, *I costumi dei romani nei monumenti classici e cristiani dei primi secoli*, suggested that this would have been the main part of the lecture, but Kanzler modified his plans because people expected him to discuss the Catacombs (*Stampa* 04/01/1907: 5). The tone of the lecture was also very different. Freed from the protocols of the Papal court and strictly propagandistic purposes, Kanzler's lecture was "dotta, piacevole ed arguta," and, "non alieno da episodi umoristici, da motti e freddure" (*Stampa* 04/01/1907: 5). The reconstructions provided a source of comedy, with Kanzler discussing his son's performances or the unfortunate friend wrapped in a shroud as a martyr. With its quotations of Kanzler's jokes and little asides, the *La Stampa* article shows us a confident public speaker, whose mixture of expertise, humour and stunning slides made for fascinating lectures.

Although the two detailed accounts of Kanzler's lectures do not cover either his first lectures or his European Tour, the Papal Seminar was anomalous because of Kanzler's reduced role, his cooperation with Orazio Marucchi and the special demands of the Papal Seminar. Despite these factors and the passage of time, it would appear that the overall organisation of the lecture remained constant, with a tour of the Catacombs following discussion of hairstyles and clothing. The reconstructions were the most flexible part of the presentation, capable of being deployed throughout or at the end.

To my knowledge, Kanzler did not supply his slides to organisations like La Bonne Presse or the Federazione Cinematografica Diocesana, who could have given them a wider circulation. For several reasons, his Catacomb lectures cannot be compared with the talks given by Catholic speakers to popular audiences on a variety of subjects, often using slides and scripts supplied by distributors. Firstly, while Kanzler gave Catacomb presentations to varied audiences, including the public at Exhibitions, seminarians, historical-archaeological societies and visiting royalty, he was consistently targeting the educated, Catholic-leaning aristocracy and middle classes. Secondly, at least on his European tour, he was lecturing to make money for the Commission of Sacred Archaeology, rather than receiving charitable funding to educate the poor. Thirdly, unlike the non-expert lecturer, Kanzler had fame and specialist knowledge, which altered the dynamics of his performance. A useful parallel is with



the illustrated lectures of polar exploration given in Britain. Despite the presence of films and photographs within their lectures, the performances of expedition leaders or intrepid cameramen occupied a “central role” (Dixon 2013: 14). Although they both probably used a script, celebrity explorer Sir Ernest Shackleton could improvise and give his performances a personal touch, whereas agency lecturers using the same materials in later years were “less personal and more professional” (Dixon 2013: 118-122). Lecturers like Shackleton or American poverty campaigner Jacob A. Riis had celebrity, first-hand experience and an ‘authorship’ over their lectures, as a result of their personal experiences and commissioning or taking the photographs. Kanzler fits this model. He had supervised the photographing of his slides and designed the costumes (De Courten 1903: 288-294). Likewise, Kanzler had extensive experience of the Catacombs and, thanks to his Vatican roles and his father’s ennoblement, a fame in Catholic circles. This fame meant that special masses were organised for Kanzler in Belgium (Kanzler: 06/01/1902).

Evidently, illustrated lectures given by both professional, non-specialists and celebrity experts had to engage the audience and build a rapport. The confident, warm and joking style we see in Kanzler’s 1907 lecture would have been followed, to a certain extent, by many successful speakers. Whether he was supporting film or other attractions, the fairground showman combined persuasion and narration (Kember 2000: 61-63). However, the celebrity and personal appearance of Kanzler’s presentation add an extra dynamic to proceedings. I believe that the impact of this can be found within the structure of the lecture itself and the composition of the slides. Before exploring this element, we must first consider the slides themselves.

Although Kanzler’s Catacomb lectures are documented in publications across Europe, only one source contains information about them and copies of the slides. Lodovico De Courten’s article in *La Revue de Photographie* reproduces five scenes photographed by Kanzler in the Catacombs and at Pompeii (De Courten 1903: 288-294). Two of these images are exact matches with a set of postcards published during the reign of Pius XI (1922-1939). Undated and with no photography credits, the *Vita Cristiana* cards were published by the Associazione Amici Delle Catacombe, which was based in the same building as the Commission for Sacred Archaeology (Amici Delle Catacombe, c.1930). Furthermore, seven of these images correspond to descriptions of the slides projected at the Papal

Seminar of 1901 (CAS 18/08/1901). It seems certain that these are Kanzler's photographs, given the general similarities between the cards and those featured in *La Revue de Photographie*. In total, we have fourteen of Kanzler's slides, which are reproduced in the following pages (see Figures 3.1-3.14).

According to the list of slides projected during the Papal Seminar, fifty-seven slides were shown, including at least thirteen of Kanzler's reproductions. (CAS 18/08/1901). We have seven of the reconstructions the Pontiff saw (Figures 3.1-3.7). Seven of the images were not shown at the Papal Seminar, but must have been part of other lectures, especially when Kanzler slightly changed topics (Figs 3.8-3.14). The pieces of paper between the Associazione's cards give names to some of these images, but these may not be the original titles, as Kanzler had probably died before the cards were printed. Finally, some reconstructions are mentioned in reports of Kanzler's slides, but not present in the group I have discovered. These include *La vedova del martire che fa baciare la tomba del padre*, a scene of the same widow spreading flowers on her husband's grave, *una scena al pozzo degli agapi*, a bishop teaching seated in a chair carved from the rock, the faithful praying in a sanctuary, visitors inscribing their names on the walls and Lygia drawing the fish symbol in a Pompeiian garden (Battandier 1901: 514; De Courten 1903: 292; *Stampa* 04/01/1907: 5). So, in total there were at least twenty-one reconstruction photographs shown during Kanzler's lecturing career. This itself feels like a modest total, given the low number of photographs of Pompeii and the effort involved in photographing there.

At the Papal Seminar, the slides began with a historical-architectural tour of the Catacombs which, like the illustrations in Catholic studies of the Catacombs, included both general views and 'close-ups' of frescoes and carvings. The images were ordered by the Catacomb in which they were taken, beginning with Priscilla (9 slides) and ending with Saint Callisto (9) and Domitilla (16) (CAS 18/08/1901). Given the ongoing disputes regarding Church control of the Catacombs, the lecture also illustrated the conservation work of the Commission. This included showing the different phases in the excavation and reconstruction of the Basilica of Saint Petronilla, and a slide showing a pontifical mass being said there by Cardinal Satolli (CAS 18/08/1901; Battandier 1901: 515). This must have formed a powerful continuity with the scenes of the Early Christians celebrating mass underground. The final

reconstructions, photographed above-ground at Pompeii, were projected in colour. These scenes were clearly very popular:

“Ces tableaux passaient trop vite au gré des spectateurs et on peut dire que ces reconstitutions du baron Kanzler ont été le clou de la séance.” (Battandier 1901: 514-515).

Only the scenes showing Christian activity in Pompeii were used at the Vatican, and secular images like Figures 3.12-3.13 were left out.

Let us now consider the first part of the illustrated lecture, the tour of the Catacombs. The Vatican projections showed the Catacombs “en grandeur naturelle,” with special equipment being employed to permit the enlargement and projection of the photographic slides (De Courten 1903: 292-294). In its discussion of the seminar, a Lyon-based religious journal noted that Leo XIII’s imprisonment in the Vatican meant had been unable to visit the newly-discovered galleries as his predecessor Pius IX had done, accompanied by De Rossi (*Semaine Religieuse...* 1901: 357). The sites that they had visited together and De Rossi’s statue were shown in the slides, as well as the discoveries and restorations the Pope had not seen in person (Battandier 1901: 513). So, for foreign audiences, Exhibition visitors and for the imprisoned Pontiff, the slides were a virtual means of travel through the underground passages. The possibility of virtual travel with an educated guide was a crucial appeal of photographic projections, from the panorama and the magic lantern through to cinema, where travel films were one of the most popular genres in the medium’s early years (Bruno 2002: 75-110; Peterson 2005: 640-643). In selecting the most exciting architectural and historical discoveries from kilometres of subterranean galleries and compressing them into one impressive space, the slides operated according to the same logic as De Rossi’s model Catacomb or the illustrations in Bosio’s *Roma Subterranea*.

In both the Papal seminar and the Turin lecture, Kanzler discussed his research on Roman clothing, hairstyles and Early Christians vestments. The sources for this research came from ancient statues, paintings and the Catacombs themselves (De Courten 1903: 291; *Stampa* 04/01/1907: 5). This research was given greater prominence in the 1907 lecture. At this lecture, Kanzler projected slides showing models folding their togas in the patterns preferred by the Romans (*Stampa* 04/01/1907: 5).

As well as its antiquarian interest, this research confirmed the ‘authenticity’ of the reconstructions and had a propaganda value for the Church. For instance, the historical discussion of the pallium legitimates its place in the images and, by extension, its continued use as a Catholic vestment. This ‘historical authentication’ would be found in the marketing of epic films, with “the aid of the illustrious archiological (sic) authority, Baron Rodolfo Kanzler,” to the producers of *Fabiola* (1918) being reported in the film press (*Film, corriere*...03/03/1917: 2-3).

Some of Kanzler’s slides simply show Christians walking through the spaces, as if to give a human scale to the ancient sites shown in the earlier slides (see Figures 3.1, 3.2 and 3.9). Others show the sacraments and the mourning of a martyr. In these scenes, Kanzler emphasises Catholic worship rather than the dramatic moments of Roman/Christian confrontation, such as arrests or martyrdom, which commonly feature in other depictions of the Early Church. Kanzler’s depictions do have a propagandistic edge. In showing the Catacombs as underground Churches and a burial place for martyrs, he supports Mgr. Crostarosa’s argument that the Catacombs were part of the Church history and should remain under Catholic control.

These reconstructions also had an emotional impact: Battandier stated that, in comparison with the liturgical scenes, those of the mourning widow “remuaient plus profondément le coeur humain” (Battandier 1901: 514-515). From the missing cards reported by De Courten and *La Stampa*, there was a certain narrative continuity in four of the scenes associated with the burial of a martyr. These include *Transport funèbre d’un martyr*, Deposition (Figure 3.5), a martyr’s widow spreading flowers on her husband’s grave and a scene of the same widow making a child kiss the tomb (De Courten 1903: 293; *Stampa* 04/01/1907: 5).

De Courten talks of “épisodes tirés du roman de *Fabiola* et de *Quo Vadis*” (De Courten 1903: 291). The depiction of Saint Pancras and Lucina in Figure 3.7 is a nod to the depiction of the Saint in *Fabiola*. Figure 3.14 could also have a connection to Lucina in the novel, as she mourns both her husband and son. Figure 3.6 does have a slight connection to *Fabiola*. Prudentius was a late fourth century poet, whose *Peristephanon* collected the suffering of the martyrs (Ross 1995: 325). Wiseman quotes his poetry in chapters thirteen and twenty-nine of *Fabiola*, in both English and Latin. Reports of the lectures also confirm the slides’ literary connections. Battandier remarks that the scene of a Christian

virgin taking the veil was based on a description from Wiseman's novel (Battandier 1901: 514). An image of Lygia tracing the fish in the sand, closed Kanzler and Marucchi's presentation in front of the Pope (CAS 18/08/1901). This derived from Sienkiewicz's novel, and the scene is mentioned in the intertitles of *Quo Vadis* (1913).

Why did Kanzler not develop the scenes from *Fabiola* or *Quo Vadis* into a narrative? Why did he avoid the biographical intentions of the film *Santa Cecilia* (1911) or Joseph Belleney's illustrated lecture *Une Fleur des premiers siècles chrétiens. Saint Cécile, martyre?* (Belleney 1911: 1-22)? Kanzler's audiences were not young Catholics being taught the catechism and Church history, but middle-class, educated Catholics. In a sense, a hagiographical narrative was superfluous: Kanzler's purpose was illustrating his research and his audiences could easily imagine the other scenes of a generic martyrdom narrative because of their familiarity with the topic. This, of course, leads us to an interesting parallel with the earliest religious films, where a Saint's life could be condensed into a single miraculous incident because of audiences' near-universal familiarity with the subject. Secondly, the narrative weakness of the slides points to the strength of Kanzler's performance as a lecturer. The different strands of the talk could only be woven together by an expert who was a confident speaker. This perhaps explains why Kanzler's slides were not passed on to other organisations: as it was, the 'narrative' of the images was too disparate for a non-expert speaker.

One major difference between films like *Quo Vadis* (1913, 1924) or *Fabiola* (1918) and the Catacomb slides is that Kanzler does not include the destruction of the martyr's body. The violent spectacle of the arena or the death scene is usually the highlight of a *passio*, as it is the moment when the martyr reaches spiritual ecstasy and the display of Roman violence is reconfigured as a testament of faith. Whereas many images and passions present the sensational and spectacular aspects of persecution and the martyred body, Kanzler's slides focus on everyday aspects of Early Christian life, such as mourning, teaching and performing the sacraments in the Catacombs and in house Churches. Intimate and touching, the photographs of a Catacomb wedding and the deposition of a martyr strike a very different chord to the gory arena martyrdoms painted by Jean-Léon Gérôme and referenced by Enrico Guazzoni in *Quo Vadis* (1913). Without doubt, Kanzler's aim was to present the Catacombs as part of the normal life of the Early Christians and avoid the distraction of more sensational scenes which

we see in films and art. Furthermore, Kanzler's work was part of Catholic propaganda, and implicitly positioned the modern Catholic Church as a continuation of the Early Church. Made by commercial film-makers aiming for an international circulation, the epics examined in subsequent chapters were always going to downplay explicit Catholicism.

Understanding the spectacular impact of Kanzler's slides and lecture is particularly challenging. In an era dominated by digital screens and moving images, it is perhaps hard to grasp the visual appeal of still photographs projected on the big screen. Yet, the nineteenth century saw a real advances in the magic lantern as a medium. With impressive photographs of distant lands, colour or a sophisticated use of mechanical slides, projections could be a visual spectacle. Kanzler's slides were technically advanced. The equipment used a high-quality format which supported projection at up to 36m<sup>2</sup> (De Courten 1903: 293). The images of Pompeii caused Battandier to note that:

la couleur, soit des vêtements, soit du milieu où se développait la scène était si bien reproduite que cette reconstitution était un vrai plaisir pour les yeux. (Battandier 1901: 515)

Prior to the invention of the Lumière Autochrome process in 1907, colour photography was difficult, but Lumière three-colour transparencies were used to make photographic slides (Lavédrine 2009: 70-76). There is no reference to colour photography in De Courten's account, who would surely have discussed it as he was writing for a photography journal. Magic-lantern slides, could also be hand-painted by individuals and specialist companies, with results varying from "the exquisitely subtle to the excruciatingly garish" (Herbert 2001: 73). This was far more common, and is the most likely source of the coloured scenes.

Impressive visuals on a giant screen offered a possibility of immersion in the distant past. As Germain Lacasse highlights, spectators were prepared for these visual attractions by expectations (deriving from earlier experiences, announcements and word of mouth), and the lecturer's performance. Hopefully, the lecturer would put the spectator, "in a state of concentration...and amplify his reactions," to the images, thus accentuating interest in the slides (Lacasse 2006: 184). So, Battandier's astonishment at the lifelike quality of Kanzler's images is both a genuine reaction to the images themselves and a reaction prompted by the lecturer's skilful narration and preceding experiences. Notwithstanding the

interwoven nature of lecture and image, we can admire the visual splendour of Kanzler's slides. Projected life-size onto a huge screen, the visible details and texture of the Catacomb walls must have given the scenes a haptic quality, especially for the foreign audiences and the imprisoned Pontiff, who were willing to go on an imaginary journey through the Catacombs and into the world of the Early Christians.

Kanzler's reconstructions were clearly special because they combined genuine historical settings with drama: another point which they shared with Italian religious epics. In his review for *La Revue de Photographie*, Count Lodovico de Courten denounced Kanzler's competitors, who:

sans connaissances spéciales, dénués de sens artistique véritable, repoussés par toutes les directions [de sites archéologiques] où ils se sont présentés, leur dernière ressource a été de faire peindre des fonds tirés des gravures et des photographies!  
(De Courten 1903: 294)

What is fascinating here is that Kanzler's slides were implicitly praised because they were produced in authentic locations, and mobilised both artistic skills and archaeological-historical expertise. This same formula would also distinguish Italian silent cinema's religious one-reelers and epics in the global film market. Now, the evocation of this recipe was partly driven by savvy studio marketing and a complicated nationalist rhetoric that saw the new nation state validated through its artistic and imperial pasts (Rhodes 2000: 308-321). These motivations should obviously be disregarded in the case of Kanzler's slides, which were not promoted or presented in the same way.

Yet, besides marketing and nationalism, there was a genuine belief in the importance of a historically accurate, beautiful *mise-en-scène* in the Italian religious and historical epic. Enrico Guazzoni would be the most successful director to propose this vision. Through his scenographic assistance to Guazzoni and possibly Giuseppe De Liguoro, Kanzler too would make his own contribution to the excellent *mise-en-scène* of the Italian epics. However, the Baron's film-making career may well pre-date the existence of Cines and the major Italian film studios.

*Baron Kanzler, film pioneer?*

In this section, I investigate Baron Kanzler's involvement in cinema and theatre during the period 1903-1910. Kanzler's status as a film pioneer is also frequently mentioned in the major histories of Italian silent cinema (Bernardini 2002: 52; Redi 2006: 122; Brunetta 2008: 53, 160). As well as the photographic slides listed above, Kanzler reportedly made a short film called *Sepoltura di una martire cristiana* (1903) based on the Early Christian slides examined above. This would make a fascinating connection between the magic lantern lectures explore above and the films with which Kanzler was later involved as an advisor. But there is one large problem: the attribution for this is questionable and very late. Published in 1973, nearly fifty years after Kanzler's death, Fiorello Zangrando's article was published in the obscure *Lazio ieri e oggi. Rivista mensile di cultura arte turismo*. The testimony regarding the *Sepoltura* film seems unusually late, and the silence around the film seems worrying. In addition, Zangrando's scholarship has been questioned, with Giannalberto Bendazzi dismissing Zangrando's 1972 book on Italian animation as an, "unreliable source" (Bendazzi 1995: 15). This approach permeates the unreferenced Kanzler article, in which Zangrando states that Kanzler directed *La sposa del corinto* (1916), which was never made. As their existence pre-dates the film press and the regular records of censorship boards, the activities of Italy's film pioneers required careful investigation. Here, I investigate the mystery surrounding Kanzler's early film-making. Mention of Kanzler's involvement in theatre and the Saint Cecilia music academy are frequent in articles about him, and he also owned a large collection of theatre posters (Possenti 1966: 391-394; Buran 2010: 39; Polselli 2013: 136). I also explore his involvement in the mise-en-scène of large-scale theatrical performance in Rome.

Fiorello Zangrando stated that the film *Sepoltura di una martire in una catacomba* was filmed on land above the Cemetery of Domitilla, and that a highly detailed set was made for the occasion. This seems credible: the performance of the cinematograph lenses of the period in low-light and the difficulties of lighting the Catacombs meant that it would have been nearly impossible to capture motion pictures below ground. Furthermore, certain details in Zangrando's account also tally with what we



know about the production of the slides, such as the involvement of Kanzler's son (who had taken part in the earlier photographs) and the director's "scrupolosissimo spirito di critica storica" (Zangrando 1973: 280). Zangrando states that "sette tratti di pellicola avariataissima," by Kanzler were preserved by Renato May in 1938 (Zangrando 1973: 281). This too seems plausible, given that May was then working at the Centro Sperimentale di Cinematografia (CSC), Italy's national film school (May 1940: 31-48; Laura 1976: 16; Arosio 1984: 86-90). The subsequent loss of the film is easily explained. During the German occupation of Rome in 1943, over three hundred films in the CSC archives were requisitioned, sent to the Reichsfilmarchiv in Berlin and thence to a temporary storeroom in Kostebrau, north of Dresden, after which they disappeared (Montesanti 1952a: 54-57; Barbina 1987: 9-12; Baldi 2010: 103-107). If Kanzler's film were one of these, it must be presumed destroyed. Despite numerous post-war attempts to find this important collection, which included the realist masterpiece *Sperduto nel buio* (1914), no trace of these films has surfaced.

While we could reasonably conjecture that *Sepoltura di una martire* could have been destroyed during the conflict, the silence of Renato May and other figures regarding the discovery makes us question whether they ever recovered it. The close-knit group of film theorists, teachers and directors surrounding the CSC in the late thirties and early forties were all prolific writers, contributing regularly to the *Bianco e Nero* film journal and the magazine *Cinema*. For example, May directed a documentary on film editing and published an article which collected silent film screenplays together (May 1940: 31-48). Francesco Pasinetti, May's colleague at the CSC, edited an anthology of important film sequences, *Cinema di tutti i tempi* (1939), and published a large single volume history of cinema (Pasinetti 1939; Viazzi 1949: 396). More broadly, the thirties and early forties saw the birth of an interest in film history. Several prominent figures released biographical and historical accounts (Ghione 1930; Soro 1935; Collo 1938; Palmieri 1940, 1994; Guazzoni 1941). In 1935, a gala evening and a special Luce newsreel also celebrated forty years of cinema (*Stampa* 23/03/1935:4; *Stampa* 10/04/1935: 5). Despite this interest, to my knowledge, the CSC-linked film magazines and histories of the period contain no mention of Kanzler's early film project, and only discuss his involvement in *Fabiola* (1918).

However, Pierre Leprohon references a 1949 article by Piero Regnoli, which stated that Kanzler had made "a considerable number" of films and that *The Tomb of a Martyr* was still being projected

and in an excellent state of preservation (Regnoli 1949; Leprohon 1972: 16). This is the first reference to *Sepoltura* which I have been able to find. Michele Lacalamita briefly remarked on “alcuni interessanti cortometraggi di Kanzler sulle catacombe,” in an article about Catholic cinema, published in *Bianco e Nero* (Lacalamita 1957:11). Furthermore, Rodolfo Kanzler’s film-making has been included in works by three of the most prolific historians of Italian silent cinema, who all cite Zangrando’s article (Bernardini 2002: 52; Redi 2006: 122; Brunetta 2008: 53, 160). While this scholarly consensus is based on Zangrando’s dubious article, these film historians must have judged the film’s existence as highly probable and they perhaps benefitted from access to oral history or the earlier written sources I have not found. Finally, Zangrando writes that Kanzler’s work was closely based on his earlier magic-lantern slides (Zangrando 1973: 280). This shows that he did not confuse the images presented here with film stills.

Yet, none of the contemporary reports of Kanzler’s lectures mention moving images. The chronology established above means that we must question Kanzler’s motivation for making a film, the practicality of the project and why it was not more widely disseminated. Firstly, why did Kanzler not show his film in Turin in 1907? The city had a nascent film industry, so projection equipment would have been easily sourced. The films would have impressed the prominent *torinesi* in the audience, including Princess Laetitia, Dowager Duchess of Aosta (*Stampa* 04/01/1907: 5). Secondly, the chronology of Kanzler’s lectures makes us question the possible motivation he would have had for making a film in 1903. It would have been logical to make a film for the special events occurring in 1900-1901, such as the Early Christian archaeological conference, the Papal seminar or the Catacombs lecture tour. Why would Kanzler produce a film several years later, during a period in which he few (if any) lectures about Early Christian life? Thirdly, given his love of spreading information about the Catacombs and Early Christians, why did Kanzler not pass the film onto an educational organisation that diffused Catholic films at that time, such as La Maison de la Bonne Presse, so that his beautiful reconstructions could be more widely seen by religious audiences? If the film were made in 1903, why was it not exploited commercially by the cameraman or whoever provided the cinematic equipment?

My enquiries in the Fondo Kanzler-Vannutelli in the Vatican Secret Archives, the photographic archive of the Pontifical Commission for Sacred Archaeology and various film archives do not shed

any further light on Kanzler's 1903 film project. Of course, Baron Kanzler could have made the film and kept it at home. Emilio Bodrero noted that his Roman palace included a cinematograph room, a dark room, a small theatre and "un vero piccolo museo" of props, scenery and costumes (Bodrero 1943: 51-56). The burial of the martyr was a narrative created between several slides, so it would make sense to combine them into one film. Ultimately, it is impossible to prove whether or not *Sepoltura di una martire cristiana in una catacomba* was made. My own view is that, even in the uncertain world of the film pioneers, its existence is doubtful. The influence of the film was also minimal. At best, *Sepoltura* was little-known and completely disappeared; at worst, it never existed.

If Kanzler's place among Italy's cinema pioneers remains doubtful, the years between the Catacomb lectures and the production of Guazzoni's *Fabiola* (1918) saw him combine archaeology and drama in a different way. As discussed above, theatre was one of the Baron's most important hobbies. During the Esposizione d'Arte Italo-Bizantina, held at the abbey of Grottaferrata to celebrate its ninth centenary in 1905, "quadri storici viventi" were performed in the Sala Umberto on Via della Mercede as part of the Exhibition (Bongirolami 2011). Was Kanzler involved in these, given his co-organisation of the Exhibition and his love of drama and history? Kanzler was artistic director for the Drammatica Compagnia di Roma, based at the Teatro Argentina, between June 1906 and some point before March 1910 (*Stampa* 01/06/1906: 5; *Stampa* 14/03/1910: 5). During this time, Kanzler co-ordinated the mise-en-scène of one of the most successful and important Italian plays of the 1900s, Gabriele d'Annunzio's *La Nave*. The history of the Drammatica Compagnia di Roma has yet to be told (Petrini 2012:180). Yet, what is immediately striking is how some of its historical productions anticipated the directions taken by Italian film-makers a few years later.

The company's first production, *Julius Caesar*, opened in December 1905 (Rastignac 1905: 1-2). It revived a Shakespeare play which had hardly been performed in Italy during the nineteenth century, but which would be filmed by Giovanni Pastrone and Enrico Guazzoni (Rastignac 1905: 1-2; Brunetta 2008: 58, 208). The magnificent mise-en-scène, epic scenes and coordinated masses of the theatrical *Julius Caesar* all won praise (Petrini 2012: 181). Its scenic ambitions anticipated those of the epic film. Furthermore, in musing on the psychology of the crowd in Shakespeare after seeing the play, *La Stampa*'s critic Rastignac seems curiously close to Guazzoni's ideas of the choral action, which the

director claimed were from his study of the Bard (Rastignac 1905: 1-2; Guazzoni 1918: 55-57). Armando Petrini's opinion of *Julius Caesar* was that, like the 1898 production of Pietro Cossa's *I Borgia* at the Teatro d'Arte in Turin, the beautiful scenography and spectacular scenes took precedence over the actors' performances (Petrini 2012:171-182).<sup>8</sup> The Drammatica Compagnia di Roma purported to combine 'cultured' theatre with mass scenes and spectacle to amuse more 'popular' audiences (Petrini 2012: 182). This mix of class appeal and register obviously foreshadows the universal appeal of historical films. However, despite their mass appeal, theatrical ticket prices were never lowered to an affordable level (Petrini 2012: 182).

After Kanzler entered the company, he worked on the première of Gabriele d'Annunzio's tragedy *La Nave*, which was adapted for the screen in 1912 and 1921. The patriotism of *La Nave* helped it triumph, but its emphasis on big scenes over narrative and mix of "sadistic voluptuousness, cruelty and thirst for blood" did not go un-noticed (Gullace 1966: 77-79). Again, this formula could be easily be applied to epic films, especially the more violent and sensual works of the twenties. The play's combination of Ildebrando Pizzetti's music and d'Annunzio's epic visions would be successfully repeated in *Cabiria* (1914). Finally, the historical research trumpeted by Italian film directors was mirrored in the discourses surrounding *La Nave*, as newspapers reported Kanzler and d'Annunzio visiting the Catacombs together to study Early Christian art and worked closely on the costume and set designs (*Stampa* 10/12/1906: 5). It is difficult to discern what Kanzler's role was in other plays. Kanzler's sets and costumes for *Molière e sua moglie* were described as being of "una fedeltà rara e d'una ricchezza pittoresca e d'un buon gusto squisito" (Oliva 1911: 228). The sets provided a magnificent support to the drama's precise recreation of Louis XIV's world (Oliva 1911: 228).

This section has brought up lots of questions regarding the involvement of Rodolfo Kanzler in film-making and theatre, and these areas deserve further research beyond this thesis. As regards cinema, the existence of *Sepoltura di una martire cristiana* (1903) remains doubtful. While the consensus from film historians may be that the *Sepoltura* film was made, it does not feature in reports of Kanzler's

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<sup>8</sup> Fascinatingly, Luigi Sapelli ('Caramba') was the costume designer for *I Borgia* (Petrini 2012: 171). Besides his work on costumes and sets for major Italian theatres, he also designed the costumes for the film *Jone ovvero Gli ultimi giorni di Pompei* (1913) and directed the Dante epic *La mirabile visione* (1921) (Redi 1999: 128-134)

lectures. It is unlikely that he would have produced the film, and then not exploited it within his lecturing activity. Nonetheless, whether the film existed or not, Kanzler was certainly involved in composing dramatic scenes for photographs using very modern photographic technology. Kanzler's involvement in the *Drammatica Compagnia di Roma* is more certain. Interesting parallels have emerged between its historical plays and the epic films of Italian silent cinema. The emphasis on spectacular scenes, elaborate *mise-en-scène*, the movement of large crowds and an appeal to both 'cultured' and 'popular' publics are shared by the two forms. The depiction of Early Church martyrdom on stage and screen developed within these parameters, as the spectacular staging of *Le martyre de Saint Sébastien* and films like *Quo Vadis* (1913) indicates. Kanzler's involvement in the scenography of plays like *La Nave* helps us understand why he was later called upon to provide assistance to film companies.

### *Conclusion*

Whether the *Sepoltura di una martire cristiana in una catacomba* film existed or not, Kanzler was definitely a figure who spanned the worlds of Early Christian archaeology, photography, theatre and cinema. From a cinematic perspective, Rodolfo Kanzler's well-documented illustrated lectures are clearly worthy of detailed analysis in a thesis like this one. They demonstrate a care for artistic composition, historical detail and authentic settings which would be a defining feature of Italian religious and historical epics, at an artistic and rhetorical level. As regards the Early Christians, they avoid directly depicting martyrdom in favour of presenting everyday scenes, the sacraments and the reverent burial of a martyr. However, Kanzler's lectures do differ from Early Christian martyr films and Roman Epics in several significant ways. Kanzler's lectures were consistently aimed at the educated, middle-classes in Catholic countries, rather than having a broad appeal across class and denominational boundaries. Unlike the Roman Epics or martyrdom films, the Roman/Christian conflict is absent in the reconstructions. With their autonomous tableaux and narrative of a martyr's burial, the tableaux-like scenes had little integral narrative, but relied on Kanzler's presentation and the

foreknowledge of audiences to give them coherence. Baron Kanzler's celebrity, humorous approach and vast knowledge of the Catacombs meant that he was an important 'attraction' within the spectacle itself, and this is reflected in the organisation of the slides. Alternating between a tour of the Catacombs, reconstructions of Early Christian life and detailed study of Roman life, the presentation straddled generic boundaries.

As regards Baron Kanzler's martyrdom film, it is difficult to reach a definite conclusion. While film historians agree on the production of the film and there was a place for it in the lectures, no contemporary sources mention moving images and the reported production date is at odds with Kanzler's lecturing career. Whether Kanzler was an early cinema pioneer or not, his scenographic experience was appreciated by magic lantern and theatre audiences. In directing the *mise-en-scène* of *La Nave*, Kanzler had an important role in a theatrical production which anticipated the nationalism and spectacular qualities of the Italian historical epic.

In theatre, photography and possibly early cinema, Kanzler's built up experience in the set design of ancient worlds. This knowledge would be put to good use in Enrico Guazzoni's *Fabiola* (1918). Bino Sanminiatielli, who had attended Orazio Marucchi's lectures at La Sapienza university, recalled going for a walk with his lecturer to see "un modello di catacombe che il barone [Kanzler] in persona aveva approntato," for Guazzoni's *Fabiola* (1918) in the sparse ruins above one of the great Catacombs, perhaps that of Priscilla (Sanminiatielli 1940: 14-15). Marucchi chided Kanzler for using fifth-century ruins as a backdrop for scenes set in the third century, to which Kanzler knowingly replied that such details would not be visible on-screen and "le cose venivano fatte a press'a poco," in the world of cinema (Sanminiatielli 1940: 14-15). Was this remark a result of making *Sepoltura* or did it come from Kanzler's other experiences? Sanminiatielli and Kanzler were certainly acquainted, as they were photographed at one of the Baron's frequently-held musical soirées (Possenti 1966: 391-394; Carlone 2010: 14/F25). This testimony establishes a connection between Kanzler's pioneering Catacomb lectures and later films. What is remarkable about this account is that, according to Sanminiatielli, scenes of *Fabiola* were filmed in exactly the same place and manner as Zangrando alleges *Sepoltura di una martire cristiana in una catacomba* was filmed some fifteen years before.

## THE SHORT MARTYRDOMS

The earliest surviving depictions of Christian martyrdom in Italian cinema are in one-reel films, produced in the period 1908-1911. While Rodolfo Kanzler's slides and possible short film were produced for illustrated lectures, the films examined here were made for entertainment cinemas. Mixed programmes of one-reel narrative films dominated world cinema in the period 1907-1914, constituting the bulk of studio production and occupying a space in film history between the Cinema of Attractions

and the extended narratives of the feature format. Our understanding of the one-reel narrative film has suffered because they have often been viewed as evolutionary steps towards the feature film, rather than works with their own distinctive characteristics, such as a distant address to the spectator, condensed narrative style and use of intertextuality to explain characters' motives (Canjels 2011:11, Brewster 2012: 250-254). As we saw in Chapter One, there is a growing move to reconsider these films and understand their context. It is hoped that this chapter will make some contribution towards this re-evaluation of an overlooked format and films which have only been considered within the development of the feature-length epic.

This chapter begins by discussing two brief depictions of Early Christian martyrs in *Gli ultimi giorni di Pompei* (1908) and *Nerone* (1909). These films, both from the Turin-based Ambrosio studios, included Christian martyrdom briefly in narratives dedicated to other concerns. I explore the reasons for this marginalisation of martyrdom and how these films relied on audiences' understanding of typical Christian martyrdom narratives in their synthetic presentation of these events.

I then discuss *San Paolo dramma biblico* (1910), a biopic of Saint Paul which contrasted his role as persecutor with his later position as Christian leader and martyr. I reconstruct the film by comparing two film copies and a short fragment with information from film journals. I also explore the film's production and argue that it was a direct appeal to a Catholic film competition being held in Milan in 1910. In spite of its religious audience, however, *San Paolo* has a somewhat imaginative take on Paul's biography which I believe is compensated for by its explicitly Roman setting and its situation of Paul within the Roman pantheon of Early Church martyrs. I argue that *San Paolo* sets the template for the treatment of Paul in subsequent films like *Quo Vadis* (1913), and that his Roman martyrdom is emphasised more than his ministry.

I then examine the role of romance in two Cines Christian martyrdom films, *Dall'amore al martirio* (1910) and *Santa Cecilia* (1911). I present a plot summary of *Dall'amore al martirio* and consider its unusual fictional plot, which uses the tropes of martyrdom narratives to develop its characters within the short length of the film. I then describe the plot of *Santa Cecilia* (1911), and discuss its freedom with hagiographical sources and its use of romance. As sets from these films are re-used in other Cines projects, I reflect on the effects of the studio's similar mise-en-scène in its historical films of 1910-1914.



The final part of the chapter explores the surviving Milano Films' version of *San Sebastiano* (1911) and contrast it with Cines' *San Sebastiano* (1911), which is now lost. I explore these films' connections to the multivalent depictions of Sebastian's martyrdom found in Gabriele d'Annunzio's 1911 play *Le martyre de Saint Sébastien*, Wiseman's *Fabiola* and modern readings of the Saint. Released a month before d'Annunzio's scandalous play, both films capitalised on d'Annunzio's fame and massive interest in his latest work.

*Gli ultimi giorni di Pompei (1908) e Nerone (1909)*

The earliest surviving depictions of Christian martyrdom in Italian cinema can be found in two works made by Turin's Ambrosio studios and directed by Luigi Maggi: *Gli ultimi giorni di Pompei* (1908) and *Nerone* (1909). *Gli ultimi giorni di Pompei* (1908) was widely praised for its special effects, accurate mise-en-scène and adaptation of a complex storyline (Bernardini 1996 [1905-1909]: 207-209). Writing in 1911, the French director Victorin Hippolyte Jasset described *Gli ultimi giorni di Pompei* (1908) as “un chef d'oeuvre...qui révolutionna le marché pour son sens artistique” (Sadoul 1948:385). *Nerone* sold an impressive 342 copies worldwide (Bernardini 1982: 16). *Nerone* was acclaimed by the British film magazine *Bioscope* as, “one of the, if not *the*, moving picture events of the year” (*Bioscope* 28/09/1909). The editors of the American film trade magazine *Moving Picture World* singled out *Nerone* for praise and noted that they:

sat in simple amazement at the marvelous (sic) manner in which the production had been staged, artistically dressed, lighted and photographed..... Gorgeousness of procession, brilliancy of costume; such a marvelous (sic) realism of effect (Chalmers, Bedding 1909: 635-636).

Film historians have noted the importance of these two works in popularising the historical genre and driving up expectations of film quality (Bernardini 1981: 283; Martinelli 1994: 35-37; Brunetta 2008: 183). The Museo Nazionale del Cinema conserves a large model of the Pompeian sets and several architectural sketches for both films (Figs 4.1-4.2; Bonifanti 1908a; Bonifanti 1908b; Bonifanti 1909).

They show the care paid to set design and craftsmanship, two key features of the Italian historical genre. In addition, both films were special products promoted with postcards and leaflets (Cinematografo Lumière Moderno 1908; Cinematografo Moderno 1909). Similar materials would later be used for feature films. While the place of these one-reelers in Italian cinema history is certain, their place in this study seems dubious because Christian martyrs are only on-screen in one scene in each film. However, despite the brevity of these scenes, both films are important because they are the first surviving depictions of Christian martyrdom produced by Italian cinema, and their treatment of the topic foreshadows that of several films examined in this thesis. Fortunately for this thesis, both films survive as largely intact copies.

Edward Bulwer-Lytton's *The Last Days of Pompeii* is a lengthy novel with several side-plots, detailed descriptions of Roman life and digressions into a wide range of areas, including archaeology, Roman religions, magic and comparisons with Regency society (Rhodes 1996: 43-47). The plot is focused around the romance and the impediments to it, chiefly the Egyptian priest Arbaces, who is infatuated with Ione, and Nydia, the blind slave-girl who has an unrequited love for Glaucus. Glaucus rescues Nydia from her cruel master and then has her give flowers to Ione, his fiancée. Nydia's jealousy is exploited by Arbaces, who convinces her to give Glaucus a love potion, which is actually poisonous. Nydia administers the poison and, as Glaucus wanders around dazed, he stumbles upon Arbaces murdering Apaecides, Ione's brother and a recent convert to Christianity. Arbaces frames Glaucus for the crime. As the condemned Glaucus and the Christian leader Olinthus await their fate in the arena, the volcanic eruption occurs. In the pandemonium, Arbaces is killed and the central couple are guided to a boat by Nydia, who remains on the shoreline. The RAI3 broadcast of a French print of the film shows Nydia walking into the water and concludes with an image of Lydia's body floating on the water (Fig 4.5). This scene is missing from the Italian language print from the EYE Film Institute.

William St Clair and Annika Bautz state that Glaucus' Christianity "is that of a nineteenth century Anglican" (St Clair, Bautz 2012:54). There is one moment of mild anti-Catholicism in the novel, a comparison between Isidian priests and monks (Bulwer-Lytton 2, II), but I would argue that St Clair and Bautz are inaccurate. In fact, the Church of England of the 1830s was going through a "serious identity crisis" and fervent doctrinal debate (McCulloch 2009: 838-846). More precisely, Glaucus'

conversion is unenthusiastic and occurs only in the final chapter. Bulwer-Lytton clearly differentiates between the provocative fanaticism of Olinthus, the Early Christian leader, and Glaucus' eventual choice of a dispassionate, private Christian faith, preferring the latter (Bulwer-Lytton 4, I; 5, IV). The murder of Apaecides can be read as a martyrdom, but Bulwer-Lytton gives greater emphasis to Arbaces' other motives. Arbaces kills Apaecides as a punishment for this conversion and to prevent him denouncing the Isis cult or interfering with Arbaces' desire for Ione (Bulwer-Lytton 4, VI). Olinthus does attempt to claim the body, and a palm is secretly placed on Apaecides' tomb (Bulwer-Lytton 4, VIII). These faint traces of martyrdom continue in other areas, such as the scenes in the amphitheatre and its dungeons. Overall though, Early Christianity is not a major theme in the novel, despite its relatively frequent appearance.

In his one-reel film, Luigi Maggi presented a straightforward version of the Glaucus-Ione romance and recreated the novel's most evocative key scenes. Christianity is not depicted, and Apaecides is murdered in order to frame Glaucus for the crime. Olinthus is absent. While Bulwer-Lytton's novel was very popular in Italian silent cinema, being adapted into two feature-length versions in 1913 and a third in 1926, only this latter film included explicit mention of Christianity and depicted Olinthus. The laicisation of the novel is discussed further in Chapter Six, which examines Olinthus' role in the 1926 film. For the moment, we should note that Bulwer-Lytton's slightly negative portrayal of fanatical Christianity, mild anti-Catholicism and the avoidance of plot complications may have explained why earlier Italian directors bypassed the novel's Christian elements. Other factors include maximising the romantic plot, glorification of Rome's Imperial past and the impact of the volcanic eruption within the films concerned.

Despite the 1908 film's excision of Glaucus' religious journey, a trace remains in the arena sequence. The scene is preceded by a lengthy intertitle which summarises the action from the arena to the flight from Pompeii. One of the lines states, "The condemned are delivered to the wild animals" and, in the following scene, we see two Christians in the foreground beside Glaucus. Luigi Maggi's scene shows the cell, the arena and the volcano in one shot, mixing detailed suffering and an epic panorama in the manner of compositions by Jean-Léon Gérôme and other Academic artists. During the brief gladiator fight, the Christian man waves a cross as Glaucus looks up to the sky (Figure 4.1).

While this momentary gesture can be read as simple apprehension, Christians in religious films frequently look upwards to show their connection to God. This gesture and the crucifix-waving martyrs hint at Glaucus' journey towards Christianity in the novel. For those familiar with the novel, it is a reminder of its vague Christian subtext; for others, the fact that Glaucus shares the same space and makes the same gesture as the Christians gives him a moral connection to them. On the other hand, Christianity is not explored in *Gli ultimi giorni di Pompei* (1908) and Glaucus' brief upwards glance is quite unlike the sustained heavenward gaze of Christians in other films. Thus, it is very difficult to read a Christian meaning into Glaucus' gesture and any such reading by contemporary audiences would have been reliant on a good understanding of Bulwer-Lytton's novel.

In *Nerone* (1909), Christian martyrs are introduced in a tangential manner which invites comparison with *Gli ultimi giorni di Pompei* (1908). *Nerone* (1909) has similar objectives to Maggi's earlier historical film, namely a plot based around romantic rivalry and evoking the key spectacular scenes of Nero's biography. Perhaps the film's dramatic structure was inspired by Monteverdi's opera *L'incoronazione di Poppea* (1642), given its focus on the Octavia-Poppaea rivalry. The final third of the film is of interest for this study because its depiction of Nero's fall contains two images of Christian martyrdom. My analysis of *Nerone* (1909) is based on the film version and archive materials conserved at the Museo Nazionale del Cinema and a slightly longer print at the Centro Sperimentale di Cinematografia.<sup>9</sup> There are some slight differences between the two prints.<sup>10</sup> For instance, the Great Fire of Rome sequence is very brief in the MNC version, but lasts around forty seconds in the CSC version.

After the scenes of fleeing crowds and the burning of Rome, the film's action turns towards the Christian martyrs. An intertitle reads, "A prey to the imagination of his disordered brain, Nero's courage

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<sup>9</sup> Luigi Maggi (dir). *Nerone* (1909). Videoteca, MNC. MNC-M (VH) 115.  
Luigi Maggi (dir). *Nerone* (1909). Videoteca, CSC. Coll: 32-5-21.  
Ambrosio 1909: 6.

<sup>10</sup> The CSC version includes an image of Nero on his own at the start, the lengthier fire sequence and the correct concluding intertitle ("Ma un nuovo simbolo..."). However, the CSC version lacks scenes of Octavia's maid inciting protests, the scene of the human torches and certain shots from the suicide scene. The MNC brochure suggests that the fire scene was paired with a scene showing crowds fleeing the burning city, and this is missing in both copies. Given the importance of the fire in the publicity materials and in other films of the Neronian persecution, it seems probable that the fire scene was longer.

forsakes him and he takes flight,” and we see Nero’s intense stare (Fig 4.2). With its red tinting, couch and Nero’s gaze directly at the spectator, the composition resembles John William Waterhouse’s painting *The remorse of the Emperor After the Murder of his Mother* (Fig 4.3). Then, haunting visions of the Christian martyrs appear as double-exposures on the wall behind Nero, causing the Emperor to recoil in shock and fall backwards onto the couch. Two scenes appear: the first shows a group of Christian martyrs awaiting their fate in the arena, while the second shows them as human torches. The first visualisation of Nero’s dreams is very similar in its composition to Jean-Léon Gérôme’s painting *Christian Martyrs’ Last Prayer*, especially with the bearded man at the centre of the image (Fig 4.4). Cleverly, this scene also re-uses the amphitheatre set from Maggi’s earlier film *Gli ultimi giorni di Pompei* (1908). Comparing Figures 4.1 and 4.4, we can see that the superimposed image disguises the Vesuvian backdrop and cuts out the frontal archway in the 1908 film, leaving a distinctive wall on the right hand side of the image, where the curved amphitheatre set ends. The second dream image shows Nero’s human torches, with one figure on the left-hand side writhing in agony (Figs 4.7-4.8). The scene concludes with a slave telling Nero to flee.

The scene of Nero’s suicide is complete in the MNC version, but the incomplete CSC version does have the final intertitle referred to in the film brochure:

Ma un nuovo luminoso simbolo di pace germigliava da quelle lacrime e da quel sangue: L’amore e la libertà (Ambrosio 1909: 6).

Is this a reference to the Pax Romana and the Rome’s more benevolent, successful Emperors or to the nascent Christian faith and its spread? The conclusion of *Nerone* remains ambiguous. While the kind of Christian apotheosis scene we see in *Quo Vadis* (1913) does not appear in Luigi Maggi’s film, it could be that the final words contain a subtly Christian message.

Seeing Nero’s dreams and his reactions to them combined in one double-exposure adds an interesting psychological depth to the film. While early cinema often used superimpositions to represent the supernatural, such as the angels in Pathé’s *La vie et la passion de Jésus Christ* (1903) or the lost souls in Milano Films’ *L’Inferno* (1911), here the effect is used for character development, as Nero is literally haunted by his past crimes. Alberto Capozzi’s repeated staring at the camera also reinforces the

association with guilt. However, while the martyrdom dream sequence is visually effective, it is disconnected from the plot, which centres on the Octavia-Poppaea rivalry and does not include Christians. Amidst the praise for *Nerone* (1909), this shift angered a contemporary reviewer who complained of certain “cervellotiche scene,” and questioned the film’s plotting.

Nerone ebbe dei rimorsi? E dove Ambrosio ha trovato ciò? Un Nerone scettico, delinquente, cinico, che ad un tratto sia assolto da rimorsi ci sembra un enorme anacronismo: è capovolgere interamente la figura di lui (*Lux* 31/10/1909).

Nero’s nightmares feature in some Classical biographies, notably Suetonius’s *Twelve Caesars*, with results that are not entirely convincing, but which add pathos to his character (Fulkerson 2013: 151-160). However, the reviewer’s displeasure is justified. Suetonius wrote that Nero was terrified by nightmares about his murdered relatives and his own demise, but made no mention of the Christians (Suetonius: Nero, 45). Given its narrative focus, *Nerone* should follow Suetonius’s pattern, but instead, Luigi Maggi makes a sudden shift towards religious themes.

To conclude, Luigi Maggi’s films use Early Christian martyrdom briefly within their plotlines, primarily as references to other texts rather than as an element of the narrative. The Christians in the arena are like Olinthus in *The Last Days of Pompeii*, but also recall popular narratives of Early Christian persecution. The gladiator in the same scene re-enacts the triumphant gesture of Jean-Léon Gérôme’s *Pollice Verso* (Fig 4.3). In *Nerone* (1909) the nightmare sequences have some similarity to parts of paintings of Early Christian martyrs, such as Jean-Léon Gérôme’s *Christian Martyr’s Last Prayer* and Henryk Siemiradzki’s *Human Torches* (Figs 4.5, 4.6). François De la Bretèque noted that early religious films often used one emblematic moment to stand for an entire hagiographical narrative (De la Bretèque 1992: 121-130). Maggi’s films continue this strategy into the one-reel narrative era, using single scenes to draw on audiences’ wider knowledge of Early Christianity. The difference is that, rather than using a scene from a Saint’s life as an emblem of its entirety, Maggi uses a single scenes to refer to other representations of Early Church martyrdom and support his historical-adventure plotlines. *Gli ultimi giorni di Pompei* (1908) and *Nerone* have different priorities to the films examined later in this chapter, which are condensed hagiographies, and has more in common with later feature-length Roman Epics which included some Christian scenes within films devoted to adventure-romance and history. Both

films show the keen awareness of the power of Early Church imagery and audiences' familiarity with it.

*San Paolo dramma biblico (1910)*

*San Paolo dramma biblico* (1910) was the winning entry in a religious film contest, organised by Cardinal Ferrari and held in Milan in 1910, at which a special golden cup was awarded (Mosconi 2006c: 188). *San Paolo* was shaped by this Catholic initiative and Milano Film's cultural ambition. The film depicts the martyrdoms of two saints, James the Less and Paul. I consider the state of the surviving copies and present a reconstruction of the film's plot. I analyse the depiction of martyrdom and the film's interaction with Biblical sources. I discuss the filming at an archaeological site and the suggested involvement of Rodolfo Kanzler in the production. In recent years, recognising the importance of *L'Inferno* (1911), Milano Films' activities have been subjected to extensive analysis (Bernardini 1985: 91-112, Gherardi, Lasi 2007: 385-402, Lasi 2012, De Berti 2013: 113-122). It is hoped that this analysis of the often overlooked *San Paolo dramma biblico* will give further insight into the practices of Milano Films.

Three copies of *San Paolo* survive, and all of them are shorter than the original length of 289 metres reported by Aldo Bernardini (1996 [1910]: 357-358). A 208 metre long copy with incomplete Italian intertitles is owned by the Associazione Italiana per le Ricerche di Storia del Cinema (AIRSC) and held at the CSC (Martinelli, Redi, Striuli 2012: 282-283). The AIRSC copy notes the an entire sequence of the film has deteriorated, although the location of the 85 metre missing sequence is not mentioned. The main copy at the British Film Institute (BFI) is 138 metres long and lacks the final scenes.<sup>11</sup> The BFI also has a fragment of nearly 23 metres, listed as *Der Helige Paulus*, which only the intertitles and some other scenes present in the main copy.<sup>12</sup> This only contains the intertitles and the final scenes of the

<sup>11</sup> Giuseppe De Liguoro (dir). *San Paolo dramma biblico* (1910). BFI. Reference number: C-580484.

<sup>12</sup> Giuseppe De Liguoro (dir). *San Paolo dramma biblico fragment* (1910). BFI. C-752946

main BFI copy. The BFI prints come from the collection of Abbé Joye, the Swiss Jesuit film exhibitor who was one of the leading figures in Catholic cinema.

Both BFI copies have partially incomplete German intertitles, some of which appear on-screen for the briefest of moments. The AIRSC copy has Italian intertitles, some of which also appear very briefly. ‘Flash’ intertitles would have been stretch-printed by the distributors for each release print, and they are still present in these film copies because they have been conserved, rather than fully restored. If we re-integrated readable English intertitles into the BFI copy, our restored film would be 249 metres long, forty metres short of the original length.<sup>13</sup> Even accounting for the intertitles and the AIRSC concluding scene, around thirty-forty seconds of footage is still missing. We must also be aware of the narrative value of tinting in *San Paolo*, as a short film strip from the BFI nitrate consists of a red-tinted intertitle and an amber-tinted scene of the blinded Paul heading towards Damascus, whereas the modern viewing copies are in black and white (Turconi, FRI, 4582). The original nitrates probably had a vivid colours, especially in scenes like the fire of Rome and the blinding of Paul, which would have enhanced the film’s spectacular effects.

*San Paolo dramma biblico* starts with giving details of the competition it won. The film is divided into two parts, and begins with the intertitle: “FIRST PART. Paul (sic), persecutor of Christians and merchant in Tarsus, hears of a Christian meeting.” The following shot shows Paul selling cloth to a crowd by a riverbank and then gesturing to them, suggesting an ambush. The next intertitle reads, “Paul goes to the pine forests, hiding place of the Christians.” Paul and his fellow Pharisees walk towards the camera, and pause to make plans in the foreground. “Paul surprises James the Younger and has him stoned.” As a bearded figure preaches to a Christian group in a forest clearing, Paul and his followers attack them from two directions. The Christians scatter, but the preacher remains standing on a rock. He is dragged from this position towards the camera, and the attackers melodramatically beat him in the foreground, before picking him up and dragging him away. The following shot shows a procession of soldiers, Pharisees and Christian martyrs moving by a stream, with St. James the Less at the front of

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<sup>13</sup>The English language intertitles are listed in *The Bioscope* (01/12/1910: 9; 22/12/1910:35). The reading rate recommended by the *Encyclopaedia of Early Cinema* is one word per second, plus five seconds per intertitle. See: La Tour 2005: 471-476..



the group. "Paul leaves Tarsus with a few friends to go to Damascus." Paul takes leave of his friends in the middle ground, and walks towards the camera. "On the road to Damascus. The voice of the Lord." Streaks of light, an effect probably achieved via double-exposure, cover the forest scene. An intertitle, on a background of billowing smoke and written in capitals, interrupts the shot with the words, "SAUL, SAUL, WHY DO YOU FORSAKE ME?" Paul then collapses and, gesturing that he is blinded, is helped by his friends. "The conversion of Paul." Walking on an ancient road besides a stone wall, Paul encounters an old man, presumably Ananias, who restores his sight. Paul gestures to the sky and collapses in prayer at Ananias' feet as his friends curse him and walk away.

The second half of the film begins with the title: "SECOND PART. Paul as Apostle. On the Appian Way, Paul enters the Catacombs of the Christians." We see an older Paul talking with a boy on the Appian Way near the tomb of Cecilia Matella. Two other figures are placed in the background to illustrate the depth of the scene. Paul is then led into the tower at the Villa of Maxentius, with the camera panning slightly to show the archaeological site. In the AIRSC copy, an intertitle reads "La conversione della schiava di Nerone," but this is lacking in the BFI version. Paul appears in a simple Catacomb, surrounded by Christians kissing his cloak and bowing. The group pray as Paul baptises a soldier and a woman in the foreground. Paul gestures upwards and greets the converts. "The fire of Rome and the capture of Paul." Paul and a despairing group of Christians stand behind a column, as they look out on the city in flames, which is really a model introduced using a double-exposure technique similar to that in *Nerone* (1909). The scene then cuts to a hole in the wall of the Circus of Maxentius (Figs 4.10-4.11). The group furtively emerge, only to be seized by the soldiers. Paul attempts to calm them as they are led away. While the BFI film ends abruptly here, the AIRSC version continues. During the arrests, a woman drops to her knees. "La morte dell'apostolo." In the Roman countryside, a procession of people with Paul, a centurion and an executioner move towards the camera. Paul gently refuses to do the soldier's bidding, the executioner pushes him down and the Christian women cover their eyes. Interestingly, this image appears in an American advertisement for the false *Quo Vadis*, a 1913 compendium of scenes intended to rival Cines' latest release (see Harrison, Mazzanti 1991:165). The film then cuts to a final scene, in which a Christian group holding palms and flowers walk to the execution site.

The final part of the film was advertised in the film magazine *Lux settimanale*:

Nell'arena, Nerone ispeziona i cristiani destinati a essere uccisi appresi come torce umane alle croci. Paolo è portato fuori dalla prigione sotteranea in cui era stato rinchiuso, perché i romani temono che egli possa far ricadere su di loro l'ira del Dio cristiano; ma poi viene ucciso. I cristiani portano fiori e palme sulla sua tomba ai margini della strada. San Paolo ha dato il nome a una delle più belle basiliche romane (*Lux* 11/12/1910: 12-13).

Neither Nero nor Paul's prison are included in the advertised intertitles published in *The Bioscope*. Although an arena model or part of the Circus of Maxentius might have stood in for the arena or Paul's prison, the lack of correspondence with the film's published intertitles means we are unable to be sure if the description is marketing hyperbole or a genuine description of the missing footage. The connection to the Basilica of Paul does perhaps chime with the final scene, where the Christians are shown mourning at the site of Paul's execution, and the specifically 'Roman' emphasis in the film.

With its narrative pivoting around the Damascene conversion at the end of the first part, *San Paolo dramma biblico* follows the dramatic pattern contemporary films of popular piety, such as *Carità Ricompensata* (1909) and *I rintocchi dell'Ave Maria* (1911), in which miraculous interventions cause dramatic changes in the lives of the protagonists. Martyrdom emphasises the definitive spiritual change in *San Paolo*, with Paul putting James the Less to death in the first half of the film and then becoming a martyr himself. The film emphasises this shift with its two part structure, with the expository intertitles in each part beginning with the words "Paul persecutor of Christians," and "Paul as Apostle." Milano Film's approach to Paul's life focuses on martyrdom and over two decades of missionary work, letter-writing, theology and leadership are largely ignored. Just one scene, the baptism of Nero's slave and the soldier, gives a hint of his wider Christian mission.

In its narrative approach to the Saint's life, *San Paolo* is closer to the selection of emblematic moments that characterised earlier hagiographic films rather than the more complete narratives of works like *Il poverello d'Assisi* (1911). The martyrdom of James the Less is a bizarre inclusion in the film, as the Bible mentions Saul's part in the stoning of St. Stephen several times (Acts 7: 20-22, 58-81). By contrast, James the Less is a very obscure Apostle, with the Bible mentioning only his family origins (Matthew 10:3). Hardly any popular tradition or Christian texts are based upon him (Phillips 2007:101).

Of course, the film-makers could have chosen James to represent the nameless victims of Saul's persecutions of Christians (Acts 8:1-8:3, 9:1-9:3). Nonetheless, the choice is strange given how obvious Stephen's martyrdom is and that, as *San Paolo* was intended to win a religious film prize, one would have thought that Biblical accuracy would have been prioritised. Nonetheless, whether it was a mistake in the intertitles or a creative interpretation of Paul's early years, the martyrdom of James the Less does not seem to have had any effect on the film's reception or reviews.

Analysing the filming location for *San Paolo dramma biblico* sheds light on both the investment of Milano Films, and connections between the Roman cityscape and Paul's martyrdom. The aristocrats who controlled of Milano Films explicitly aimed to produce "film 'artistici', ispirati cioè a soggetti 'nobili', a modelli culturali alti," capable of interesting Italy's elites (Bernardini 1985: 95). This ambition culminated in the feature length *Inferno* (1911), which succeeded in attracting the support of Dante Alighieri societies and Italy's urban elites (Gherardi, Lasi 2007: 385-396). Milano Films wanted competition victories because they helped build the studio's reputation for artistic quality and formed a key part of its marketing strategy. We can see this in three advertisements published in *La Cine-fono e la rivista fono-cinematografica*, in which the prizes won by previous films are advertised more prominently than new film titles (*Cine-Fono*... 16/09/11: 20; *Cine-Fono*...07/10/1911: 20; *Cine-Fono*... 21/10/1911: 20). Indeed, Milano Films won a prize at every film competition held in Italy in the years 1909-1911 (Bernardini 1982: 57, Mosconi 2006c: 175-188).

While film companies often used local scenery, such as castles in Milano's *Napo Torriano* (1910), *San Paolo dramma biblico* (1910) was unusual because it was filmed at considerable distance from its home studio. Travel expenses and limited investments meant that one-reel films were rarely made far beyond the studio.<sup>14</sup> The *San Paolo* project was a desperate bid to ensure the Cardinal Ferrari cup stayed in Milan. When the competition opened, Milano Films' president opined that educational films could be winning entries, and discussed the studio's entry, *Murat* (1910) (Camerini 1983: 38-39; Mosconi 2006c: 188). This clearly was not enough for the jury. Elena Mosconi writes that *San Paolo* was rushed

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<sup>14</sup> Gaumont routinely sent its directors further afield, but this was a special case, prompted by its small facilities and high production targets (Bastide 2008: 101-103). More common were the vociferous objections of Cines' management to Enrico Guazzoni's plans to film *Il poverello d'assisi* (1911) in the Umbrian city (Redi 2009: 40).

for Cardinal Ferrari's competition, which was then extended to allow the new work to be presented (Mosconi 2006c: 187-188). From the extension and the initial promotion of *Murat*, we can infer that *San Paolo* was hurried into production in order to appeal to the judges and guarantee victory. The costs of travelling to Rome were clearly worth it. But Rome was also an integral part of Paul's martyrdom.

The martyrdoms of Peter and Paul played a key part in establishing Rome's central position in the Early Church, as Antioch and Alexandria had saintly connections, episcopal authority and theological schools which made them potential rivals to the Imperial capital. Henry Chadwick argued that Rome's claim to lead the Church was based:

not upon the fact of the apostles' residence in Rome and alleged foundation of the church there, but upon the fact of their martyrdom in the city. The unique authority of the Roman see was sealed by the apostles' blood: it depended upon their death rather than upon their life (Chadwick 1957: 36).

In part, Rome's ecclesiastical primacy was established by monuments commemorating the martyrdoms of Peter and Paul, which enshrined their deaths in the Roman cityscape, civic identity and Church to this day (White 2007: 18-20; Harrill 2012: 105-106). Buildings Paul had seen, such as the Mamertine Prison, the Arch of Drusus and the Cestius pyramid, remained part of the city. The Basilica of Saint Paul outside the walls, the Chapel of the Parting, St. Paul's Gate and Three Fountains Abbey commemorated his martyrdom. However, at the time of the film's production, the city's physical space was contested by Church and State. The monument to Vittorio Emmanuele II rivalled the Basilicas on the skyline and newly annexed Church buildings asserted the values of the Third Rome (Kirk 2011: 103-113). Fittingly, given the gap between Liberal Italy's ambitions and its means, the huge monument would be inaugurated in 1911, but remain unfinished until the thirties (Gentile 2007: 21).

Given this context and the competition, the Roman setting of *San Paolo* has an importance that goes beyond calls the nationalistic discourses calling for historically accurate mise-en-scène in films like *Nerone* (1909), or the sightseeing of travel films like *Roma antica* (1909). *San Paolo* draws particular attention to Paul's time in Rome, as his ministry across the Mediterranean and his letters are not featured in the film. Paul's entry into the Catacombs at the Circus of Maxentius makes a subtle hint at his later veneration. As early as the third century, there was a widespread belief in the *Memoriae Apostolorum Ad Catacumbas*, namely that Peter and Paul had been buried in the Catacombs close to the Circus of Maxentius (De Santis, Biamonte 1997: 45). The Vatican was reluctant to engage with this tradition, despite the inscriptions found on the site (Chadwick 1957: 31-35). After entering the

Catacombs and watching the Great Fire, Paul is arrested on leaving the Catacombs. This scene ignores the fact that Paul was already under arrest and travelled to Rome as a prisoner to ‘appeal unto Caesar.’ However, it makes Paul’s death part of Nero’s persecution of the Christians in Rome. In addition, although the final part of the film is missing, it may have also emphasised Paul’s links to Rome. The scenes of the prison would have reminded certain audiences of the Mamertine, whether it was filmed there or not. The advertisement also states that an explicit connection was made between the mourning Christians and the later Basilica in the final scene.

In sum, *San Paolo* has an explicitly ‘Roman’ setting and emphasises the links between the city and his martyrdom. The film is unusual within the case study group for explicitly linking the martyrs and a Church which commemorates their sacrifice. One could argue that such connections were superfluous or might have displeased Protestant audiences, but on reflection, it does seem odd that such connections were not made in the films of Cines, especially given the studio’s location and links to the Vatican. Roman aspects are further emphasised by the film’s adaptation of Paul’s biography, which excludes his ministry, the Council of Jerusalem, writings and wider mission. Why was such emphasis put on Rome in *San Paolo*? It is difficult to view the film as a coherent piece of Catholic propaganda because of its factual slips, but it was clearly meant to wow Catholic audiences and the competition judges. Preceded only by Kanzler’s projects and *Dall’amore al martirio*, the film’s combination of Biblical action and authentic locations must have been very impressive. The Great Fire scene and the on-location shooting demonstrated that Milano Film’s organisation and special effects were equal to those of other major film companies.

Fiorello Zangrando cited Rodolfo Kanzler as the director of *San Paolo dramma biblico* (Zangrando 1973: 280-281). Subsequent mentions of the Baron’s involvement in the film cite this article (Bernardini 1996 [1910]: 357-358; Brunetta 2008: 53, 371). However, other scholars attribute *San Paolo* to Milano Films’ usual production team (direction by Giuseppe De Liguoro, writing by Adolfo Padovan and set design by Sandro Properzi) and make no mention of Kanzler (De Berti 2000: 278; Mosconi 2006c: 184-188; Havelly 2012: 359; Lasi 2012: 312). The advertisement in *Lux* also makes no mention of Kanzler (*Lux* 11/12/1910: 12-13). After examining the film copy and its context, I believe it is highly doubtful that Kanzler had a production role in *San Paolo*, as the film shows little influence of his archaeological

knowledge and precise scenography. The Catacomb set is composed of a grey painted flat with a plain archway and two white tablets affixed to the wall, one bearing an illegible notice and the other a Chi Rho symbol. It cannot be compared with the intricate sets of *Fabiola* (1918), Kanzler's magic lantern slides or the Catacomb set in *Santa Cecilia* (1911). Of course, Kanzler could have assisted the project in a small way, such as supplying costumes from his theatrical connections, but a more profound involvement seems doubtful given the film itself and the lack of contemporary reports in film journals.

*Love and martyrdom: Dall'amore al martirio (1910) and Santa Cecilia (1911)*

*Dall'amore al martirio* (1910) and *Santa Cecilia* (1911) were two Early Church martyrdom films centred around romantic plots and produced by the Roman studio, Cines. With their shared production studio, subject and sets, the two films deserve to be considered together. *Dall'amore al martirio* was Cines' first film to depict Early Christian martyrdom. The film was alternatively titled *Amore e martirio* and *Martiri cristiani* (Bernardini 1996 [1910]: 132). The BFI copy is titled *Marcus Lycinius* and, at 330 metres, is the same as the reported length of the film.<sup>15</sup> The copy does have some problems with flash intertitles and shots being repeated in the following scene, which one imagines were not present in the original copy.

The first intertitle announces "Marcus Lycinius the cruel patrician loves Livia who scorns his affection," and cuts to a packed feast, with a dancer performing. A woman interrupts the dance and Marcus then angrily ejects the revellers. The scene then cuts to a courtyard, where an old man is being flogged. Various women beg for mercy around Marcus, and he releases the old man. Marcus courts Livia, but the woman watches from behind a column and interrupts. "A jealous woman follows Livia and, having discovered that she is a Christian, hastens to give information to Marcus Lycinius." The veiled Livia walks down the road, pursued by the jealous woman. The scene then cuts to a group of

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<sup>15</sup> Unknown director. *Marcus Lycinius* (1910). BFI. Reference number: C-102359. Bernardini (1996 [1910]: 132).

Christians talking at the entrance to the Catacombs. As they pray and look heavenwards, the camera pans to show the woman's arrival. After being blessed, the group enter the galleries, leaving the woman pointing. Like the scene of Livia on the road, this was filmed in the Roman countryside. The woman runs into Marcus' palace. Marcus is shocked by the news, throws her to the floor and curses her. "M. Lycinius denounces Livia to the pretor (sic) as a Christian." The soldier surround the Catacombs and seize Livia and her fellow-believers. In the praetor's impressive office, Marcus goes through the guards and crowds to converse. He leaves accompanied by soldiers. They ambush the Christians exiting the Catacombs, and Livia is manhandled in to foreground. In an impressive archaeological site, perhaps the ruins of a large bath complex or palace, the Christians walk and pray, escorted by soldiers.

"In her dungeon his love for Livia and the heroism of the maiden convert M. Lycinius to the Christian faith." Livia and the Christians are forced into the prison. Livia sobs on the cell floor. Livia is then confronted by an angry Marcus: he makes gestures of passion and aggression (perhaps warning her of her forthcoming death); in return, she makes gestures of piety. As Marcus embraces Livia and attempts to take her away, an angel appears in double exposure, holding the palm of martyrdom and urging them to halt. They step back, and Marcus professes his love for Christ and Livia. "M. Lycinius confesses his new faith before the pretor (sic)." Marcus stands before the praetor and is quickly dragged off. "United in martyrdom and glory." Marcus is thrown into the Christians' cell and ridiculed by the guards. Marcus declares his love for Christ and embraces Livia. Marcus kneels before the bearded priest and is baptised, as the other Christians pray pointing upwards. He embraces Livia. The soldiers then handcuff the couple and drag them off, to the dismay of the Christian prisoners. Marcus and Livia walk through a baying mob, who occupy either side of the frame. The painted scenery is intricately done and shows a Roman panorama with the Temple of Jupiter and the Capitoline Hill clearly visible. The couple walk up and down in the centre, while soldiers, one of whom is holding the fasces, restrain the crowd. Two soldiers strip them of their capes and jewellery, but they keep praying and expressing their love for Christ and one another.

*Dall'amore al martirio* is anomalous within the case studies because its plotline is not derived from hagiographical accounts or an historical novel. In the one-reel era, when several films were shown on a cinema programme and they were rarely marketed separately, referencing a famous historical novel or

religious figure was less important than in the feature film era, when titles like *Quo Vadis*, *Christus* or *Joseph* gave films an obvious public appeal. However, the fact that a film like *Dall'amore al martirio* could be released without a source text or exegesis demonstrates the pervasiveness of the Christian martyr in the culture of the period.

In his analysis of the one-reeler *Get Rich Quick* (1911), Ben Brewster notes that the details of the financial scam are not explained because audiences were familiar enough with them “to fill in the blank, and the brevity of the film justifies the absence of the explication” (Brewster 2012: 253). This narrative economy is also shown here. The audience can guess or the film lecturer can explain why Marcus falls in love with the beautiful, demure Livia, or that the man being whipped is a slave because these situations are frequent in depictions of Roman and Early Christian life. Marcus’ decision to denounce Livia and then attempt to convert her to paganism fits the pattern established in the martyrdom of Saint Agnes. The crucial parts of the film are the love story and the transformation of Marcus, as he goes from dissolute, cruel patrician to Christian martyr; from denouncing Christians to proclaiming the faith himself. This contrast can also be seen in *San Paolo dramma biblico*.

The intertitles state that Marcus’ love for Livia and her heroism convert him to the Christian faith, and the appearance of the angel adds other explanations. If the angel is a literal manifestation of the divine, then the story has similarities with Saint Cecilia’s angel, who appeared to her husband, and the angelic apparitions of early religious films. If the angel is symbolic, as the palm of martyrdom she is carrying suggests, then it is a clever way of visually representing the strength of Livia’s faith. The second explanation seems more likely, as this fits with the intertitles. Conversions motivated by romantic reasons in historical novels displeased some Catholics, with Sienkiewicz’s depiction of Vinicius being especially criticised. However, the director points to Livia’s courage and the presence of the divine as motivations for Marcus’ conversion. *The Bioscope*, the only publication known to have reviewed the film, was happy with the combination:

This is a truly magnificent production...Full of life and action, the film deals in a stirring way with the life of the early Christians in Rome, and the story is the more interesting by reason of the love romance woven around it” (*Bioscope* 02/06/1910: 39).



As she was one of the most famous Roman martyrs and an influence on *Dall'amore al martirio*, Saint Cecilia's life was an obvious choice for Cines' next martyrdom film. *Santa Cecilia* (1911) was released in February 1911, nearly two months before the Sebastian films. At 916 feet (279 metres), the British Film Institute copy is significantly shorter than the reported length of the original film (377 metres).<sup>16</sup> There are no obvious lacunae, and it would seem that the flash intertitles in the BFI copy account for much of the difference.<sup>17</sup> Directed by Enrique Santos, *Santa Cecilia* had a cast of actors who would subsequently become stars in the early years of the feature film, including Fernanda Negri-Pouget, Amleto Novelli and Bruto Castellani.

"Cecilia rejects Lentulus' love; but she consents to become the wife of Valerianus who promises her to become a Christian." After Valerian greets and converses with Cecilia, Lentulus threatens the maiden as Valerian hides behind the curtain and a column. Lentulus then spies on the lovers. "Lentulus detects Valerianus who enters the catacombs and is baptized by Bishop Urbanus." The Bishop is followed into the Catacombs by Valerian, who is himself spied on by Lentulus. The Bishop and Valerian sneak into the Catacombs, trailed by Lentulus. This scene is shot in the Roman countryside. Standing against a cave-like backdrop, Urbanus and his flock recoil at the sight of Valerian, who presents them with a scroll and is baptised. Hands raised, the group pray and the Bishop presents the soldier with a wooden cross. "Lentulus denounces to the Prefect of Rome Valerianus as a Christian." The Prefect receives the jealous Lentulus in his elaborate office.

"Cecilia marries Valerianus according to the Roman Law. 'Ubi tu Caius, ego Caia.'" Musicians, flower girls and the veiled bride process away from the corridor. Valerian embraces Cecilia at base of steps, before turning to priest once more. "The nuptial banquet is interrupted. –Valerianus is arrested." After the couple arrive walking arm-in-arm, a soldier presents a mandate for the groom's arrest. After desperate embraces from Cecilia and her parents, Valerian walks away. "In force of the imperial edict of persecution against the Christians Valerianus is condemned to death." Valerianus is brought before

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<sup>16</sup> *Santa Cecilia*. BFI. Reference number: C-24913. Bernardini [1911, 2]: 153-154.

<sup>17</sup> If the existing flash intertitles were correctly printed, this would add at least 220 feet (67 metres) of film, according to the readability rate recommended by La Tour 2005: 471-476.

the Prefect, with his arms crossed in defiance. He is offered something to swear on, but throws it down and repeatedly kisses the wooden cross. The guards move to seize him, but Valerian gently kisses the cross and meekly exits.

“The martyr’s body, piously taken up by Cecilia, is buried in the Catacombs.” Cecilia embraces her husband’s prostrate corpse, as the Christians surround him and gaze reverently. The camera cuts to a medium-long shot, showing the extended Christian group carrying palms and the columns of a building. Urbanus comforts Cecilia as the pall-bearers carry the body away. The funeral procession then enters the Catacombs, using the same area in *Dall’amore al martirio* (1910). We then move inside the Catacombs, to a gallery full of filled-in *loculi*. Veiled in white, Cecilia weeps in the foreground. The procession continues. Another cut shows the procession turning from the passage into a chamber. Cecilia again pauses in the foreground, then follows Valerian looking closely at his face. We then enter a richly-decorated cubiculum, and sees Valerian anointed, wrapped and placed in the tomb. “Leaving the Catacombs Cecilia also is arrested under the accusation of being a Christian.” In the countryside, a squad of soldiers stop Cecilia and three women. Cecilia crosses her arms over her chest, before walking away. “Cecilia, being a roman patrician, suffers death in her own home.” Cecilia arrives, escorted by the soldiers. Her mother embraces the Saint, and her father reads the charge. They both point to a Roman statue and sacrificial stand, but Cecilia gestures heavenwards with both arms. The soldiers take her away. With two lines of soldiers guarding, the centurion draws back a curtain and checks the work of the executioner, played by Bruto Castellani. They all leave. The agonised family of Cecilia draw back the curtain, seeing her writhing on the ground in ecstasy, In a medium-long shot, calf height, Cecilia’s mother holds her as she outstretches an arm to heaven. The film then ends abruptly. *The Bioscope* noted a final scene in which, as Cecilia’s friends gather round her body:

the symbol of the Christian faith appears over the spot where the martyr lies in her last sleep, and the sorrowing throng fall on their knees in reverent awe before the Cross (*Bioscope* 02/02/1911).

This final scene of apotheosis would have made a far stronger conclusion to the picture, and demonstrated the power of martyrdom to inspire other Christians.

*Santa Cecilia* was well-received on its release. *The Bioscope* gave all aspects of the film enthusiastic praise and called it a “faithful reproduction,” of her story (*Bioscope* 02/02/1911). Yet, in *La Cinematografia Italiana ed Estera*, Gualtiero Fabbri said that the producers could have made a “ben più veritiera, nel senso il più lato ed esteso, pellicola,” had they followed Wiseman, Bulwer-Lytton, Sienkiewicz, Chateaubriand, Sue, the Roman breviary and other sources (Fabbri 1911). Although Fabbri’s criticism is indicative of the nationalistic culture and literary pretensions developing around the Italian historical films, the film does stray from the most common versions of Cecilia’s *passio*. For instance, there is no mention of the angel who protects Cecilia and appears to Valerian. Lentulus and his romantic jealousy are entirely fictive. The executioner carries a short sword, and there are no indications of the failed beheading on Cecilia’s neck. In 1910, Fabbri had written that a historical subject should be, “*esattissimo* in ogni particolare.” (Raffaelli 2012: 87). Measured against this criteria, the plot of *Santa Cecilia* is not as exact as the sumptuous *mise-en-scène*. Even at this early stage, martyrdom narratives were freely adapted, presumably to meet commercial imperatives. The romantic elements of the film give it a wider appeal beyond devotional circles and also simplify the psychology of characters like Lentulus.

Both *Dall’amore al martirio* and *Santa Cecilia* mix romance and betrayal into their depictions of Christian martyrdom. Why? Firstly, the pursuit of the jealous party gives these works a scene-to-scene continuity, and provides unity in narratives which could easily become autonomous tableaux. The jealous concubine of *Dall’amore* is particularly effective in this regard, as she chases Livia. Secondly, the jealous parties provide a simple causality for the arrest and martyrdom of the Saints, rather than having to use intertitles to explain why they denounce themselves. Finally, as with the lavish historical settings, the romantic sub-plots gave these films a broader commercial appeal beyond a devout Christian audience. In 1910, while conducting an internal review of the studio, Baron Fassini assessed that romantic plots were one of Cines’ weakest areas, but that its historical *mise-en-scène* was very strong (Tomadjoglou 2000: 266). These Early Church martyrdom films combined historical, religious and romantic elements, giving them wider audience appeal.

In comparison with *Dall’amore al martirio*, *Santa Cecilia* represents a step forward in terms of composition and *mise-en-scène*. The camera cuts from a long shot to a medium-long shot to bring us

closer to the action when Cecilia embraces Valerian's body or during her death scene. The camera position and staging occasionally eschew the frontal tableaux dynamic of *Dall'amore al martirio*. In the earlier film, the scene in the praetor's office and the finale were filmed with the main characters processing between two lines of people, towards and away from the camera. In *Santa Cecilia*, the camera is positioned closer to the action and often gives us a fresh perspective. For instance, as Valerian confesses, the camera is positioned to the left of the praetor below the steps. This gives us a diagonal viewpoint across the set, similar to that one of the guards may have had, and brings us closer to Valerian. We have a close-up view of Valerian's burial, with the camera side-on to the bishop and his attendants. It is as if we too are crammed into the tiny cubiculum, rather than observing from a theatrical position.

*Santa Cecilia* (1911) has a far richer mise-en-scène than *Dall'amore al martirio*. The Catacomb sets, with the *loculi*-filled walls and the Early Christian style paintings in the cubiculum, are the Italian studio's first effort at an authentic Catacomb set. Small details, such as the distinctive clay lamps used in the Catacombs or the frescoes above the sarcophagus, show a greater degree of historical research than contemporary films. After watching Cines' ancient epics of 1911-1914, one notices that the same sets and props are re-used. The scene in Cecilia's house at the beginning of *Santa Cecilia* (1911) uses the same textured set, curtain and distinctive table ornament as we see in *Agrippina* (1911), albeit in a different configuration (Fig 4.12). One set in *Agrippina* re-uses the wall panels and door from Cecilia's wedding dinner, while the table later appears in *Quo Vadis* (1913) (Figs 4.13, 4.16). Perhaps most infamously, the four-legged table with winged cats appears in *Messalina* (1910), *Santa Cecilia* (1911), *Agrippina* (1911), *Quo Vadis* (1913) and *Caius Julius Caesar* (1914) (Figs 4.12-4.14). This prop resembles a Roman table conserved in the Vatican Museums, suggesting that Guazzoni's statements regarding historical research were valid (Fig 4.15, Guazzoni 1918: 56).

One could argue that this recycling of carefully-crafted objects is nothing remarkable, and a staple of the studio system. But Cines had heavily invested in scenery and costuming (Tomadjoglou 2000: 266). These investments meant that Cines was bound to venture into the Early Christian martyrdom film, in order to maximise its return on Classical props and costumes. Indeed, *Quo Vadis* (1913) feels like a bricolage of the earlier one-reelers, broken up by a few spectacular new sets.

*The martyrdoms of Sebastian (1911)*

Two hagiographic films depicting the life of Saint Sebastian were released in 1911 by Milano Films and Cines. Here, I examine the surviving Milano Films version and collect information about the lost Cines copy. I then survey connections between the two films and Gabriele d'Annunzio's play *Le martyre de Saint Sébastien*. I consider how the films' interpretations of the Saint's martyrdom compare against traditional versions, religious novels and the version proposed by d'Annunzio, which appeared in Parisian theatres to huge scandal in 1911.

The eight and a half minute-long Milano Films production (190 metres at 20 frames per second) is complete (Bernardini 1996 [1910]: 152). It is preserved in a digital copy with Dutch intertitles at the Eye Film Institute, and has had the original nitrate tinting added.<sup>18</sup> "In the time of Emperor Diocletian. Roman Drama." "The centurion Sebastian meets the Christian Fulia." Gathering flowers by a brook, the maiden meets Sebastian and the Emperor's concubine, Sylvia. Sebastian talks to her alone. "Sylvia the Emperor's lover surprises the two lovers." As they talk besides a fountain, the camera pans slightly to show Sylvia listening from a bush. "The distractions of the Emperor." Attended by his court and soldiers, Diocletian watches a dancer. The scene is carefully constructed to maximise scenic depth, with people walking up to the pavilion in the background. The line of soldiers in the middle-ground screen Sylvia's arrival, allowing us to be surprised when she interrupts the Emperor. Moving from a long shot to a medium shot of the Imperial couple, we see Sylvia's denunciation up close (Fig 4.17). Returning to the previous long shot, the Emperor gives his orders. "The Emperor orders Sebastian's arrest." The Emperor and his troops proceed through the woods. In a dramatically-lit shot, Diocletian looks into a cave sheltering the Christians. In a medium-long shot, we see the Christian couple expressing their love for one another and Christ, with the bars symbolising their imminent future. The scene cuts back to Diocletian. "On the track of the guilty."

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<sup>18</sup> Giuseppe De Liguoro (dir). *San Sebastiano (Uit den tijd van Keizer Deocletianus)*. Desmet Collection, Eye Film Institute, Amsterdam.

The troops ambush Sebastian at the cave entrance. They grab Sebastian in the next scene, but he refuses and continues to walk. In the pavilion, Sebastian and the troops arrive, and the Emperor orders the Christian into the foreground. Fulia presents Sebastian with a goblet either to swear on or to drink, but he throws it down, followed by his helmet and sword. The enraged Diocletian whips the martyr, and the troops then drag him off. In a shot angled upwards, the Emperor watches as Sebastian is manhandled. “The martyr’s death of Sebastian.” Standing before several ranks of soldiers, Sebastian is brutally stripped and tied to a tree trunk. Looking upwards to God, he is tied around the tree trunk. The commander of the guards points heavenwards, and steps back as the archers take aim. The film copy then ends. According to the film’s publicity, there was also a final shot in which Fulia covers the martyr’s body with flowers at night (*Vita Cinematografica* 15/03/1911). This does seem like a sensible ending to the romance, but this shot is not present in the surviving film copy. The publicity could be inaccurate and the scene may not have existed (this seems possible, given that the advert also mentions Sylvia’s arrival on a chariot at the beginning of the film), or it may have been cut from the Dutch copy.

The Cines interpretation of *San Sebastiano* (1911) features a different storyline to the Milano version and, at nearly fifteen minutes playing time (340 metres at 20 frames per second), was almost twice as long. The acting and staging were praised by *The Bioscope* (*Bioscope* 23/03/1911). Cines’ *San Sebastiano* was submitted for censorship in 1914 (ICR 4307). This suggests that the Cines version was still marketed some years after its initial release. Indeed, it was distributed in Spain as late as 1925 (Costa 1925: 20-22). By contrast, the Milano Films version was not submitted and may have had scant distribution, at least in Italy. *San Sebastiano* (1911, Cines) doubtless benefited from the combination of impressive sets and historical locations on view in comparable productions like *Santa Cecilia* (1911), whereas Milano Film’s version was mostly filmed in parkland without specialist sets. Although lost, a summary of the Cines film was published in the Neapolitan magazine *Cinema*, and reproduced by Aldo Bernardini (1996 [1911, 2]: 152).

*San Sebastiano* (1911, Cines) began with Tarcisio, a young boy carrying the host to Christian prisoners, being attacked by the mob, but rescued by Quadratus, a muscular soldier serving Sebastian. As Sebastian cares for the dying Tarcisio and then takes the holy bread to the prisoners, he is spied upon by Fulvius and Corvino. During an audience with the Emperor, these two characters denounce

Sebastian, who confesses his faith. Using her slave Afra, Fabiola bribes the commander of the Numidian archers, who pierce the centurion's body, but do not kill him. Sebastian then recovers, presumably cared for by the love-struck Fabiola, and goes to the Emperor to denounce him for his treatment of Christians, “cogliendo così con l'atto audace la palma del martirio” (*Cinema* 20/03/1911).

Directed by Enrique Santos, Cines' *San Sebastiano* was firmly linked to Wiseman's novel and was advertised as part of a *Serie Fabiola* (Bernardini 1996 [1911, 2]: 152). *Fabiola* was perfect for adaptation as a series of one-reel films. The central character of Wiseman's novel is tangential to the plot, and facilitates the introduction of a large number of saints (Rhodes 1995: 100). It also has an episodic quality, formed by the manner in which it was written (Wiseman: preface). However, if the film were intended to be part of a series, the summary suggests that such a series was imperfectly planned. For example, the scene featuring Tarcisio could have been made into a separate film, and substituted with another scene of Sebastian's life, such as his role in hiding the Bishop of Rome, curing Zoë's muteness or burying the first martyrs. Nonetheless, the plot clearly shows that it was inspired by Wiseman's novel. The reasons behind the discontinuation of the series are unclear: perhaps the *Serie Fabiola* was simply a label to promote the film, rather than a long-lasting production plan.<sup>19</sup>

Milano Films' *San Sebastiano* is decidedly different to the Cines version because it freely adapts Sebastian's hagiography, adding two new female characters. In her spying and rage at the martyr, Sylvia's behaviour resembles that of the jealous lovers in *Dall'amore al martirio* and *Santa Cecilia* (1911). With Sylvia's jealousy and the Fulia-Sebastian relationship, the unknown director muddles potential decadent and homoerotic readings of the Saint. The romance is, of course, very pious: the couple frequently point upwards towards God, indicating their holiness and chastity (Fig 4.17). In the final scene, the actor playing Sebastian does not have the Adonis-like physical beauty of Renaissance versions, which lessens the erotic impact of seeing him half-naked bound to a tree (Fig 4.17). Nor do we see the arrows piercing his body, producing the image so famed in painting and loved for its decadent

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<sup>19</sup> In the Italian film industry, both film series and serials were notoriously unstable, and were often released irregularly or abruptly discontinued. Characters would be killed off, only to then re-appear in subsequent episodes. See Bernardini 1982: 62-63, North 2011: 27-28.

aesthetics. As mentioned, it seems doubtful whether the film included scenes of Sebastian's death and Fulia's morning, given the exaggerations present in the advertising.

Both Saint Sebastian films were released in mid-April 1911, preceding the première of Gabriele d'Annunzio's controversial play *Le martyre de Saint Sébastien* by one month (Alatri 1983: 313; Bernardini 1996 [1910]: 152). The film release dates were not casual, as the Italian press began eagerly reporting on D'Annunzio's project ten months before its first public performance (*Stampa* 29/07/1910: 4; *Simplicissimus* 1911: 3; Bassi 1911:3). D'Annunzio's play received mixed reviews, but its controversial nature certainly attracted theatre-goers in Paris (Woolf 2000: 55-58; Klopp 2013: 44). There was considerable scandal over d'Annunzio's erotic interpretation of Sebastian's life and death. The play was condemned by the Catholic Press in France, and all of d'Annunzio's works were placed on the Index of Forbidden Works shortly before its première (Gullace 1966: 87; Levitz 2012: 426-427). The Italian poet protested against the Archbishop of Paris's veto on French Catholics seeing the play, noting that his was an "oeuvre profondément religieuse" (De Firmont 1911:24-26). But these were hollow protests of innocence, as the work used martyrdom for decadent and erotic ends. Furthermore, notwithstanding the work's length and its faults, it brought together some of the era's leading talents in different fields: literature (d'Annunzio), music (Claude Debussy), dance (Ida Rubenstein) and set and costume design (Léon Bakst).

D'Annunzio's lavishly-staged epic controversially mixed eroticism and sacrament (Alatri 1983: 309-314). The androgynous lead performance by Ida Rubenstein combined "sodomasochistic eroticism and spirituality" (Levitz 2012: 426-433). The final scene of martyrdom, in which Ida Rubenstein cried "Encore! Encore!" to encourage the arrows to penetrate her, "marked a watershed year in Sebastian's devolution into decadent icon," (Kaye 1996: 88). Claude Debussy's score emphasised this androgyny as, in the final part of the work, the Soul of Sebastian was sung by a high soprano (Sheppard 2001: 102). Of course, such controversial use of the Saint was not new: Sebastian was frequently eroticised by Renaissance artists, with Fra Bartolomeo's painting infamously provoking the lust of female worshippers (Burke 2006: 490; Peritti 2007: 699).

In contrast, both films have no obvious connection to d'Annunzio's decadent interpretation of martyrdom. Milano Films' version may depart from conventional hagiographical tales of the Saint, but



it remained chaste throughout, like *Dall'amore* and *Santa Cecilia* (1911). Cines' version took Wiseman's *Fabiola* as its obvious inspiration and, while the arrows may have penetrated Sebastian, it seems unlikely that they took on the distinctly homoerotic value they had for d'Annunzio. The distance between the play and these films can be explained by the scandal, which would have meant any filmic adaptation of it would have faced severe opposition from Catholic audiences. Moreover, d'Annunzio had proved himself to be very unreliable in his involvement with film companies, and had broken a contract with Milano Films.<sup>20</sup> With attention focussed on d'Annunzio and Saint Sebastian in 1911, the films can be seen as a calculated attempt to exploit popular interest in this subject, and the mounting scandal. This followed the commercial pattern established in other religious films, where only famous Saints were deemed worthy of big-screen treatment.

### *Conclusion*

This chapter has traced the depiction of Early Church martyrdom through seven one-reel films made between 1908 and 1911. The manner in which these early film-makers brought Italy's Classical and Early Christian pasts to the silver screen foreshadowed that of later film-makers operating in the feature era. The works of Wiseman and Bulwer-Lytton would again be preferred literary texts in the period 1913-1918, and the fame of d'Annunzio was such that even his association with a work could bring it a degree of success. While they might look modest when viewed in the context of the later case studies, the mise-en-scène of these films was very impressive. Their combination of large crowd scenes, special effects and authentic historical locations gave many of these films international success. Of course, this

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<sup>20</sup> In late 1908, Milano Films (then known as SAFFI-Comerio) had contracted d'Annunzio to produce six screenplays per year and deliver at least three by the end of 1909. Notwithstanding the generous advance and contractual terms, d'Annunzio did not write anything and Milano Films took him to court. The case was finally resolved in 1910, with an order to repay the advance plus interest and legal fees. (Bernardini 1982: 47; Lasi 2012: 209).

success was partly due to the open nature of the world film market before the First World War, as well as the mix of overheated nationalistic impulses and savvy marketing which propelled these films into the public consciousness.

As regards the theme of martyrdom, these seven films also show the contrasting approaches which we see reflected in later case studies. For Luigi Maggi, Early Christianity was a tangential part of his representation of the Roman world, in which the spectacle of Pompeii and the excesses of Nero were the main topics. By contrast, Enrique Santo's borrowings from Wiseman's *Fabiola* in *San Sebastiano* (Cines, 1911) or the particularly Roman flavour of *San Paolo dramma biblico* demonstrate a close reading of Catholic sources and a concerted effort to appeal to religiously-minded audiences. Several films balanced between entertainment and religious value by integrating romance into hagiographic plots. Bruce Babington and William Evans note that the American-made Roman/Christian Epics, from *Ben Hur* (1925) to *Barrabas* (1962), typically contrast baser forms of sexuality with a Christianised love, ending in the triumph of the latter (Babington, Evans 1993: 199). This contrast is present in *Dall'amore al martirio* (1910), *San Sebastiano* (1911, Milano) and *Santa Cecilia* (1911). However, whatever their approach to Christianity, all of these films deployed a spectacular mise-en-scène to wow audiences. Scenes such as the Great Fire of Rome, the lavish orgy, the Roman-Christian confrontation and the martyrdom were established as key scenes, whatever the dynamics of the narrative.

Of course, this contrast is also present in earlier silent epics, the historical novels examined in Chapter One and these one-reel films. Love triangles in which potential lovers try to split the central couple are present in *Dall'amore al martirio*, *San Sebastiano* (Milano, 1911) and *Santa Cecilia* (1911). This made for an exciting action of covert meetings, spying and jealousy, but showed that film-makers were willing to change established martyrdom narratives in order to make a product that was more commercially viable and entertainment.

## QUO VADIS AND THE CIRCUS OF SUFFERING

Henryk Sienkiewicz's novel *Whither Quo Vadis?* had been an enormous international success on its publication in 1896 (Kosko 1976: 7-8). The popularity of *Quo Vadis* as a novel stemmed from Sienkiewicz's talent as an epic writer and his skilful combination of colourful romance, spectacle, sensation, imperial history, Christianity and historical description. Russia's non-adherence to international copyright treaties also meant that Sienkiewicz's work was in the public domain outside the Russian Empire (Soro 1935: 213). Following its publication, French literary critics and journalists understood Sienkiewicz's novel as an evolution of the matrices established by Chateaubriand, Bulwer-Lytton, Wiseman and other historical novelists (Kosko 1976: 21, David 2001: 21-25). It leaned towards the spectacular tendencies of the Roman Epic, and featured a pagan focal character, Petronius. But the conversion of Vinicius, Lygia's steadfast Christian belief and the sufferings of the persecuted Early Christians gave it a degree of devotional value.

*Quo Vadis* (1913) was one of the first historic feature films to enjoy wide acclaim and has been considered as the inauguration of the cinematic 'Kolossal' or Classical Epic genre by many film scholars (Leprohon 1972: 28, Cyrino 2005: 18, Brunetta 2008: 56, Bondanella 2011:8). Enrico Guazzoni's film capitalised upon the ubiquity and prestige of *Whither Quo Vadis* in Western popular culture, but also fulfilled its cinematic potential: staging the great scenes, dealing effectively with its lengthy narrative and commencing a process of cinematic reinterpretation which would result in Sienkiewicz's novel being almost completely ignored in favour of its cinematic interpretations some hundred years later. The 1925 version directed by Georg Jacoby and Gabriellino d'Annunzio enjoyed commercial success, but was blighted by disastrous production problems (Redi 1999: 177, Soro 1935: 214-223). Released in an era when the historical epic genre had been firmly established by *Cabiria* (1914), *Intolerance* (1916) and *The Ten Commandments* (1923), it could never hope to have the novelty or cultural impact of its illustrious forebear.

I begin by contextualising the reception of the two films and exploring the frequent comparisons made between them. I commence my analysis by considering the place of Christians and martyrs in the narratives. After exploring monumental scenes in the light of Deleuze and Bazin, I analyse the

spectacular appeal of selected key scenes, namely the orgy and martyrdom sequences, and expound their negotiation of Christian martyrdom. With their multiple perspectives on the suffering in the circus, these films have a complex message for audiences. Finally, I examine the socio-political relevance of the two films and their representations of martyrdom.

Before embarking on such analysis, it is worth briefly considering the film copies available to us, both of which have undergone extensive restoration at the EYE Film Institute in the Netherlands. The restoration of the 1913 film combines four prints and is 1944 metres long (Blom 2001: 292; Lasi 2013: 39). The original film was 2,250 metre long (Shepherd 2013: 159). This missing fourteen percent of the film seems to have attracted no critical commentary, perhaps because it is difficult to locate the missing material in the sequences of the movie. The version we have before us tallies with the numerous historical reviews and printed programmes which survive. Some scenes, such as the arrival of the ship at Antium, do seem unusually truncated, especially when compared with the use of the same scenery in *Agrippina* (1911).

*Quo Vadis* (1925) was available in different versions for the Italian, European and American markets. The American version, which has some variations in the intertitles and is slightly shorter than the European version, is held on nitrate film at the UCLA Film Archive in Hollywood (Scodel, Bettenworth 2009: 228). I have been unable to examine this film, and its footage is not part of the EYE restoration. The restoration combines six incomplete prints, including two camera negatives of the Italian and European edits of the film (Fossati, 2002). The national and European versions of *Quo Vadis* (1925) differ very slightly and very rarely (36 shots out of 1801), mostly regarding the use of irises, the centrality of characters and the length of the shots. The only significant differences are that Petronius' friendship with Nero angers Vinicius in the European version (rather than making him laugh) and that Lygia is shown topless tied to the bull in the European copy. The original Italian release was 3308 metres long, and the restored version is 2820 metres long (ICR 20143; Martinelli 2002b: 19-21). The exact plot for *Quo Vadis* (1925) is little-discussed in film magazines because of its familiarity to film-goers, and it is difficult to see where the missing 15% of the film was, besides the lost scene of Nero's nightmare about his mother's death. One contemporary critic noted that, "the story itself is unfolded

much too slowly to make a strong picture” (Hall 1925: 19). Rather than lacking complete scenes, both films are probably missing lengthier screen-time for the intertitles and longer shots.

### *Success or failure?*

The contrasting fortunes of the two adaptations of *Quo Vadis* have long been a staple of Italian cinema history (Ghione 1930:55 ; Soro 1935: 211; Brunetta 2008: 345). The 1913 version of *Quo Vadis* successfully adapted Sienkiewicz’s complex novel and gave cinema a higher cultural status (Tomadjoglou 2013: 106). Promoted with extensive publicity and exhibited in theatres, *Quo Vadis* (1913) was one of the first feature films to enjoy global financial and critical success. By contrast, *Quo Vadis* (1925) was “un clamoroso insuccesso” (Brunetta 2008: 277). Beset by a series of costly controversies, *Quo Vadis* (1925) was summed up by the phrase, “tempo e denaro buttati via! (Chiti, Quaragnolo 1957: 34). Before we examine these two films, it is vital that we investigate this dichotomy because it shapes so much of the discourses surrounding them. I argue that the comparison says as much about the changed film market as it does about the relative qualities of the two works.

Giorgio Bertellini argues that the innovation of *Quo Vadis* and *Cabiria* have been overstated and that other Italian historical films produced around 1908-1913 had high production values, were shown in theatres and contributed towards the adoption of the feature format (Bertellini 1999: 244-250). This is true, although only seven films were made in Italy in 1912 which surpassed 1,000 metres (Bernardini 1982: 96). While the format and presentation of *Quo Vadis* were not entirely new, its success dwarfed that of other early features like *Satana* or *L’Inferno* (Abel 2006: 33-36). It also helped cinema appeal to the middle-classes, as one contemporary exhibitor explained:

The new stuff, the big reel stuff is bringing to the houses better people...who were coaxed by *Quo Vadis*...and who turn to the regular picture theaters once they have found that the pictures are something bigger and better than they thought they were. These are persons of good taste and refinement. (Winthrop 1914: 1376).

*Quo Vadis* (1913) played “a decisive role in the embourgeoisement of the cinematic medium” (Tomadjoglou 2013: 106). As we saw in Chapter One, Sienkiewicz’s novel had been a global sensation. *Quo Vadis* (1913) married a length narrative and spectacular mise-en-scène to a subject with international appeal. The film also harnessed the spectacular Rome of nineteenth century Academic art (Blom 2001:281-296). Furthermore, the film's distributors and exhibitors exploited it to the maximum of its commercial potential.

It is difficult to gauge the production costs for *Quo Vadis* (1913), but they were certainly low compared to later epics.<sup>21</sup> The hype around the film and the selling of national and regional exclusive rights rather than individual copies drove up distribution prices. In London, *Quo Vadis* (1913) was the first film to be auctioned as a national exclusive to one company, and made £7,600 (200,000 lira) (*Moving Picture World* 01/1913: 1091). This probably covered the production costs. Distributors then organised glamorous premières to draw in royalty and social elites.<sup>22</sup> These were profitable events in themselves, but they were also great marketing and established a pattern of luxury presentations in theatrical venues rather than standard cinemas. In the United States, the film was almost exclusively offered as a ‘roadshow’ to theatres, and the well-informed *Moving Picture World* reported only two showings in cinemas between April 1913 and January 1914 (*Moving Picture World* 07/1913: 654; McQuade 1913: 729). Spectators paid handsomely to see the film. One of the earliest American cinema showings still cost film-goers between thirty-five and fifty cents, a big increase on the usual price of ten cents and identical to a theatre ticket (*Moving Picture World* 04/1913: 467; *Moving Picture World* 07/1913: 58; Winthorp (1914: 1376). At the Politeama in Livorno, notwithstanding considerable expenses, seven luxury showings generated a huge profit of 8431 lira (Bovani, Del Porro 1986: 11-16).

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<sup>21</sup> *Quo Vadis* reputedly cost only 48.000 lira to 60.000 lira, about a twentieth of the budget for *Cabiria* (Jarratt 1951: 17-19; Sadoul 1951:200). Redi highlights that Cines’ budget seems suspiciously small compared to similar productions made in the same year, with the budget for *Marcantonio e Cleopatra* being 300.000 lira (Redi 1999: 66-68). Nonetheless, *Quo Vadis* would have still been made relatively economically because its actors were not yet stars and scenery was re-used from earlier one-reelers.

<sup>22</sup> In Paris, the world’s largest cinema was hired and the film was presented with a huge orchestra and a choir of one hundred and fifty voices performing music specially composed by Jean Noguès, who had also written the *Quo Vadis* opera (Leprohon 1972: 28; Abel 2012: 351). In Rome, the distributors presented the film at an opera theatre to the cream of Roman society and made high profits despite the elevated venue costs (Bernardini 1982: 149; Redi 1999: 66). A screening for the Italian royal family followed at the Quirinal palace (Bernardini 1982: 149). In London, The Albert Hall première was attended by King George V, several thousand people and Bruto Castellani (Ursus) (Bernardini 1982: 149).

Given the global success of *Quo Vadis* (1913), it was unrealistic to expect the later adaptation to live up to this because it could not have the same novelty. Even the epic that followed it, *Marcantonio e Cleopatra* (1913), did not generate the same levels of excitement, although it attracted even higher rights payments (Redi 2009: 49; Christie 2013: 116). Despite reaching the aesthetic heights of *Cabiria* in 1914, other Italian epics struggled to interest American audiences, and Italian studios rapidly lost market share in the United States (Harrison, Mazzanti 1991: 168). By the twenties, cinema had fundamentally changed. American feature films and the Classical Hollywood style dominated the world's cinema screens (Bordwell, Thompson 1994: 71-81). Hollywood had made its own highly successful epics (Muscio 2014: 162). While the Italian film industry appeared in rude health at the beginning of the decade, its exports had greatly diminished (Brunetta 2008: 268). Disorganisation, foreign competition, high taxation, rising costs, recession and an outdated style caused a rapid decline in Italian film output (Brunetta 2004: 132-135). However, as we saw in Chapter Two, Italian producers continued to invest in big epics after the 1913-1914 boom because they hoped for large returns and they were one of the few types of Italian film which still got international distribution.

*Quo Vadis* (1924) was a tragically troubled project. The two directors and the producer squabbled, and a girl was badly injured by the human torches (Ghione 1930: 56-57). The scene of arena martyrdom resulted in the death of an extra, Augusto Palombi, who was killed by a lioness (*Rivista Cinematografica* 10/02/1924: 9-10; *Astrologo* 1924: 13-14). After a manslaughter trial, a small fine was levied (Soro 1935: 223). Ambitious sets and international talent cost nearly nine million lira, making it the most expensive Italian film at the time and for some years to come (Redi 1999: 177). Copyright lawsuits halted the film's distribution in Germany and Poland, and the film's producers made four significant pay-outs to parties claiming to have the rights to Sienkiewicz's novel (Soro 1935: 211-218). Additional sums had to be paid out to stop exhibitors showing copies of the 1913 film. In Italy at least, the earlier film continued to circulate in provincial cities and receive a warm response from audiences (Sassarello 1924: 53; Scardia 1924: 51). Unsurprisingly, given its disastrous production and the crisis of the industry, the film press took umbrage at the UCI's claims that a re-birth was occurring in Italian cinema and that *Quo Vadis* (1924) was the proof of it (Lega 1926: 55).

*Quo Vadis* (1924) has been branded as “one of the flops of this decade,” because of its outdated acting style (Pitassio 2002: 259). Jacqueline Reich states that it won “little approval” from audiences and critics (Reich 2013: 137). Yet, it got a good review from *The Times*, excellent reviews in Italy and was successful in Paris, New York and Italian cities.<sup>23</sup> *The New York Times* review was mixed, praising the spectacle and settings, but criticising the shifting scenes and Jannings acting (Hall 1925: 19). Jannings playing of Nero looks rather exaggerated in the context of 1920s cinema, but similar historical performances had made him a global star.<sup>24</sup> In brief, as Riccardo Redi neatly summarises, the film was “un successo di pubblico, ma...un disastro economico” (Redi 1999: 177).

Both versions of *Quo Vadis* have been defined as much by their production context as by the integral qualities of the films themselves. In the case of *Quo Vadis* (1924), the film was more successful with audiences than its reputation suggests, but it could never escape from the disastrous circumstances of its production and the unrealistic hopes that it would be as successful as its predecessor. *Quo Vadis* (1913) was a triumph, both for the qualities of the work itself and the fortuitous period in which it was released: at the dawn of the feature film era, when foreign markets were open and the film business was looking to appeal to middle-class audiences. What we must do here is not escape the historical context of these productions, but step beyond it and analyse their aesthetic qualities and deeper meanings.

### *Christianity and the narrative*

As Ruth Scodel and Anja Bettenworth note, *Whither Quo Vadis* has three major narratives (the Vinicius-Lygia romance, the history of the Early Church during the Neronian persecution and the struggle for power at Nero’s court), a rich focal character in Petronius and a wealth of expository information (Scodel, Bettenworth 2009:16-18). Wiseman’s *Fabiola* had similar long expository

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<sup>23</sup> (*Rivista Cinematografica* 15/05/1924: 16; De Ferrini 1924: 19; Fischer 1925b: 35; Pinto 1925: 32; *Times* 22/07/1925: 12; *Rivista Cinematografica* 31/01/1926a: 14-16)

<sup>24</sup> Janning’s Nero is in keeping with his performances in *Anna Boleyn* (1920) and *Danton* (1921). Over the course of the decade, Janning’s theatrical style and imposition of his star personality on great historical roles helped make him a global cinema star and the first actor to win an Academy Award (Germünden 2010: 182-196).



sections, but was focussed on the history of the Early Church martyrs and had a simpler plot for its protagonists (Chapman 1970: 150; Rhodes 2005: 110). As we saw in Chapter Two, the width of *Whither Quo Vadis* attracted Catholic criticism because of the perceived weakness of its support for Christian values, but gave the novel a malleability which suited the differing objectives of its adaptors. Here, I examine the depiction of the Christian community in both films, discussing their place in the narrative, the roles of minor characters and the details of the mise-en-scène.

In the twenty-fifth minute of *Quo Vadis* (1913), an intertitle announces “Ursus and the Christians follow Lygia’s litter.” Seven minutes later, a second intertitle states, “Vinicius remembers that Lygia once drew a fish in the sand—an emblem of Christianity.” Thus, Christianity is introduced as a consequence of Vinicius’ pursuit of Lygia. The young patrician hears Peter preach in the Catacombs and is nursed by Lygia. The couple also briefly encounter Paul, Glaucus and Crispus. In the second half of the film, after the Great Fire, we see Peter preaching in the Catacombs again and the baptism of Vinicius. After Nero blames the Christians, the film then shows Vinicius’ search for his beloved and the martyrdoms of the arena. Finally, as part of the concluding scenes, we see Chilo convert and Peter on the Appian Way.

Christian characters are present in the first half hour of Guazzoni’s film. Lygia’s innocent appearance and resistance to Vinicius at the orgy code her as a Christian virgin; Ursus’ noble interventions and connections to Lygia code him as Christian. The long wait before the word Christian appears in the intertitles shows the extent to which the 1913 film’s audiences relied on extra-diegetic sources, including Sienkiewicz’s novel, the printed programme and the conventions of the Early Church novel, in order to interpret the action in a religious context. Cultural stereotypes are used to express political-religious beliefs without them being explicitly stated. For instance, Chilo’s Fagin-like appearance, mercenary interest, crippled physique and attempts to distract Vinicius while he is listening to Peter’s preaching all reference Semitic stereotypes, but the character’s faith is never explicitly stated in the filmic text. Gerwyn Owen argues that Guazzoni’s depiction of Chilo relies on centuries of negative anti-Semitic stereotyping (Owen 2014: 145-154). The film’s depiction of Christianity also relies on a similar cultural coding.

The 1925 film contrasts Christianity with Nero's vice from the opening sequence. After Nero has watched a slave fed to his lampreys (Figure 5.5), Tigellinus warns him that the Christians "threaten the very foundations," of his throne. The next intertitle develops the spatial metaphor further, as Peter's sermon occurs "in the darkness of the Catacombs, which stretched the tentacles beyond the confines of the city." If the Catacombs of the 1913 adaptation and the one-reelers remain outside the city limits, in the 1925 version they are directly under it: a comprehensive network, as suggested by Bosio and explored by De Rossi. Christianity is constructed as a spatial counterpoint to Nero's decadence through the alternating montages between Nero's court and the Catacombs beneath. Peter also repeats the phrase, "my kingdom is not of this world," which reinforces the metaphor. The sharp spatial divide is inverted in the final scenes of the film. Nero's giant palace offers him no possible hiding place, but Christian slaves help him flee into the Catacombs, where he encounters Lygia and Ursus.

One contemporary reviewer opined that "the characterizations and the action are spoiled by the many shifting scenes, which [are] confusing" (Hall 1925: 19). Although the montages do slow the action, they help setup the 1925 film's moral conflict and cleverly adapt Sienkiewicz's novel, which contrasted the decadent Palatine with the humble Trans-Tiber area. Some scenes which occur above ground in the 1913 version, such as the Ursus-Croton fight and Lygia's nursing of Vinicius, take place in the Catacombs and the Christians spend much of their time underground. Furthermore, it is a richly-decorated world: *loculi* and *arcosolia* are part of the sets, and we can clearly make out early Christian art on the walls (Fig 5.1-5.2). By way of comparison, we spend comparatively little time in the Catacombs of the 1913 film, which are shown crowded with worshippers. The frequency with which we see the Catacombs, the richness of the detail and the repeated use of simple symbolism, such as the double exposure of a crucifix and Peter, shows that the directors of the 1925 film were exploiting Christian imagery familiar to many of their spectators, and prompting them to indulge their own religious imagination. But crucially, the pious veneration of martyrs or the precise liturgies of Kanzler's projects or *Fabiola* (1918) are left out: for all its architectural precision, this Early Church remains a blank canvas.

Although *Quo Vadis* (1913) is obviously constrained by the economy of the film form, Guazzoni still introduces many minor characters from the novel, and their names clutter the intertitles. As regards

the Christians, these include Plautus, Linus the quarryman, Nazarius, Saint Paul, Glaucus and Crispus. Plautus fosters Lygia and Linus guides the group once out of the Catacombs. Nazarius' brief moment of romantic jealousy in the novel is reprised here, as we see him care for Vinicius and accompany Peter on the Appian Way. Paul appears when Peter meets the couple, and he also baptises Chilo. Glaucus recognises Chilo "as the one that ruined his family, but forgives him." In a later scene, Chilo recognises Glaucus as a human torch in Nero's garden and begs his forgiveness again. This awful coincidence and the realisation that he has totally destroyed Glaucus and his family are powerful motives for Chilo's conversion. However, for this scene to be fully effective, it relies on the audience remembering who Glaucus is: not an easy task given the number of minor characters and the brevity of their forgettable appearances.

Many Christian characters have very minor roles in the plot and, to modern eyes, their introduction in the intertitles serves little purpose beyond confusing the viewer. From a cinematic perspective, the effect of a vastly-peopled world is more easily achieved through the mass scenes and impressive sets than by including large numbers of characters. But, if Guazzoni's medium prevented him from fleshing out character portraits in the manner of an historical novelist, that did not stop his audience from doing so via their own knowledge of the novel. So, these minor characters function on two levels. For the reader familiar with the novel, they reference their memories and ask them to fill in the gaps: a narrative strategy born from the one-reeler. For the reader unfamiliar with the novel, these minor characters give a sense of a densely-peopled world. Crucially, the Christian community in *Quo Vadis* (1913) is effectively a blank canvas upon which international audiences could project their own denominational beliefs. Sienkiewicz's novel had downplayed liturgical specifics and had a "less denominational flavour," than other novels of the period (Scodel, Bettenworth 2009:186). Guazzoni arguably took this even further, by presenting the minor characters with even less background and smoothing out the Catholic apotheosis present in the novel.

The story of *Whither Quo Vadis* is drastically re-shaped in the 1925 film, with more emphasis on Nero and shifts in narrative techniques. This reflected the changing dynamics of the feature film. Firstly, the development of the star system meant that the choral narrative of the 1913 version was not commercially possible. In casting Emil Jannings as Nero, the directors had to make him the centre of

the film because he was a global star. Jannings was famous for stamping his own personality on historical roles (Germünden 2010: 187-193). Secondly, the narrative techniques of film had changed in the twelve years between the two adaptations. Extra-diegetic supports, such as film lecturers and the plot summaries given out with *Quo Vadis* (1913) and *Cabiria* (1914), were no longer common. To a certain extent, Guazzoni's film continues the narrative conventions of one-reelers by relying on audience knowledge, as minor characters like Saint Paul are given little place in the film itself. Furthermore, instead of expository intertitles telling the spectator what would happen before each scene and introducing minor characters, a film's action was now shown using cutting, close ups and dialogue intertitles. The difference in narration can be grasped by comparing the two film versions:

Film version	Expository intertitles	Dialogue intertitles	Exposition and Dialogue
1913	116	40	4
1925	50	197	1

Minor characters were side-lined by the necessity of focussing on the stars and the fact that they were no longer supported by expository intertitles and extra-diegetic resources. As a result, Linus the quarryman, Nazarius, Saint Paul, Glaucus and Crispus all disappeared from the 1925 film version, with the action being changed so that they are not required. The roles of Saint Peter and Plautus are expanded. What role do the minor characters play in the 1913 film and how are their positions covered by the 1925 version? Nazarius and Linus the quarryman offer little to the 1913 film's plot, and their roles are fulfilled by unnamed extras in the 1925 film. As for Paul, the theological importance of his letters and his Mediterranean mission are minimised in the novel (Scodel, Bettenworth 2009: 188). While Paul teaches Vinicius about Christianity and converses frequently with Petronius, Guazzoni reduces his role to and makes him a support to Peter. In so doing, Guazzoni seems to follow the outline of *San Paolo dramma biblico* (1910) which restricts its portrait of Paul's life to his Roman ministry. In sum, these bland characters are unimportant in the 1913 film and any deeper reading of them relies on audiences' extra-diegetic knowledge. Removing them from the 1925 film does little to harm its presentation of Christianity.

Compared with Nazarius and Linus, Glaucus appears quite frequently in the novel because of his friendship with Vinicius and his role as a doctor. As we have discussed above, the horror of Glaucus' martyrdom and his forgiveness inspire Chilo to convert in the 1913 film. Thus, rather than occupying Nero's position in viewing arena violence, we see the potential of martyrdom to inspire new converts. In the 1925 film, which removes Glaucus from the plot, Chilo is horrified by the burning Christians (shown in close-up), but does not convert to Christianity. The 1925 film downplays martyrdom's significance by removing the only named martyr present in the 1913 version.

In Sienkiewicz's novel, Crispus is a principled zealot who gives an apocalyptic view of Christianity and speaks against the Vinicius-Lygia relationship (Scodel, Bettenworth 2009:194). More importantly for this study, he taunts Nero from the cross and is the leader of the Christians in the arena. Sienkiewicz makes clear that Crispus is a willing martyr:

He, ready at all times for death, was delighted with the thought that his hour was approaching. He seemed another man, for his emaciated body was wholly naked,-- only a girdle of ivy encircled his hips, on his head was a garland of roses. But in his eyes gleamed always that same exhaustless energy; that same fanatical stern face gazed from beneath the crown of roses (Sienkiewicz, 63).

In Guazzoni's film, Crispus' character is reduced to a single scene, where he reproaches Lygia for her relationship with Vinicius. The apostles then arrive and, referencing his own denial of Christ, Peter tells the desperate Lygia that her love is not a sin. The abbreviated scene is confusing, as the exact reasons for Crispus' displeasure and Peter's forgiveness are not fully explained (Scodel, Bettenworth 2009:194). After this, we glimpse Crispus in several scenes, including preaching in the Colosseum dungeons as the Christians approach their martyrdom. But Crispus is not really developed as a character and only a viewer with a good memory of the novel or the comments of an attentive film lecturer would recognise him. Like the fanatical Olinthus, who featured in only one of the four Italian film adaptations of *The Last Days of Pompeii*, Crispus is marginalised because of his extreme take on Christianity and willingness to be martyred.

With Saint Paul and Crispus gone, Saint Peter is the sole figure of authority in the 1925 film. He is a father-like figure to Lygia, preaches in the Catacombs, checks the ill Vinicius and sees Jesus on the Appian Way as he leaves Rome. Peter twice reminds the Christians that their kingdom, "is not of this

world,” thereby distancing them from the extravagant world above ground. In contrast to Crispus’ displeasure at the Lygia-Vinicius relationship, Peter gives them his blessing because, “there is joy in heaven over one sinner that repenteth.” Romantic love is therefore sanctioned as valid if it leads to conversion. This is confirmed in the final scene of the 1925 film, where Peter marries the couple. In the 1913 film, one reviewer had complained at the absence of “una scena di chiusura tutta soffusa di dolce sentimentalità,” featuring the two lovers, which could have lifted “l’animo oppresso dello spettatore,” after the violent scenes (Locadier 1913: 14). This is a neater conclusion to the film drama than the 1913 version, and confirms the film’s emphasis on family and Christianity.

While *Quo Vadis* (1913) merely shows Peter preaching and states that he moved Vinicius, *Quo Vadis* (1925) incorporates a flashback to the Passion in Peter’s sermon. We briefly see Veronica wiping the brow of Christ, and then holding up the cloth, imprinted with its miraculous impression of Jesus’ face. The tinting, style and condition of this sequence is very different from the rest of *Quo Vadis* (1925), with its partly-reversed tones and poor condition. The film restorers’ opinion is that it was inserted from another film (Fossati 2002: 1189). In addition, the actor playing Jesus has an uncanny resemblance to Alberto Pasquali, who frequently played Jesus.<sup>25</sup> In sum, the Veronica sequence in *Quo Vadis* (1925) looks like it has been inserted from an unknown Passion film. But what does this scene mean and what is its purpose?

Ruth Scodel and Anja Bettenworth argue that the Veronica sermon is a coded message for Catholic audiences, as the legend of Veronica is part of the Stations of the Cross (Scodel, Bettenworth 2009: 189). The legend of Veronica does not feature in the Scriptures and is rare in Protestant traditions. The veil itself is held in St. Peter’s basilica and is shown annually from a distant balcony (Belting, Jephcott 1996: 220). Yet, this miraculously-formed *acheiropoieta* has a celluloid-like quality and, along with the Turin Shroud, has been considered as “the conceptual model for photography itself” (Rabaté 1996: 82). In *Camera Lucida*, Roland Barthes argued that a photograph was an “emanation of the referent;” an “attestation of that which existed;” a resurrection of a past state like the image on the veil (Barthes 1981: 79-82). Sidestepping the issue of staged photographs, such as Baron Kanzler’s, Barthes noted

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<sup>25</sup> Alberto Pasquali played Jesus in *Christus* (1916), *Redenzione* (1919) and *The Man from Nazareth* (1921). He also performed as Jesus in a Roman Passion play in 1924. See: *Al Cinema* 12/07/1925: 15.

that (fictional) cinema “combined two poses: the actor’s ‘this-has-been’ and the role’s,” and that these poses were being continually swept away by the series of images projected on the screen (Barthes 1981: 78-79). By showing Veronica’s veil to the audience, film directors stop the flow of images (not technically, but in the spectator’s perception) and point at the witness the films bear to Christ. Yes, the frame contains an actor’s ‘this-has-been,’ but it also references a divine image which emanates directly from the face of Jesus. In featuring Veronica’s veil early in *Quo Vadis* (1925), the directors acknowledge the film’s nature as both staged recreation and witness to historical events of the Early Church. This commentary on the nature of film is ultimately far more interesting than the bland version of Christianity expressed in the film.

With the shrinking of the Christian community, the role of Aulus Plautius is expanded. Instead of disappearing after the early scenes of the novel, he is present throughout. Plautius’ family give a hetero-normative flavour to the Christians community, contrasting with the dissolute sexuality displayed in Nero’s court and providing a model for Lygia and Vinicius. Their son has a pathetic role which seems to recall the mawkish children in one-reel religious and patriotic moral dramas. The separation of the family in the Mamertine and the amphitheatre provides another area of dramatic interest in the arena scenes before the appearance of Lygia. Plautus escapes the lions by climbing a column and some decorations. His wife (Pomponia Græcina in the novel) is dragged behind a chariot in a macabre race, but manages to pull herself to safety on the chariot body. The interesting part here is the crowd’s horrified reaction, following the intertitle “She is a mother!”, and their cheering of Pomponia’s courageous attempts to free herself (Fig. 5.3). This will be analysed further below, but it confirms the emphasis on family in the 1925 film.

In both film versions of *Quo Vadis*, the version of Christianity is blandly non-denominational to decrease potential problems on export markets. Guazzoni’s intertitles tell us, “Peter’s words have a singular effect on Vinicius’ soul,” but the silence of the medium means we do not hear them. The theme of martyrdom is not deeply examined in either film adaptation. In the 1913 film, martyrs are shifted to the very edge of the film narrative. Their stories are only comprehensible to those with knowledge of the novel and a sharp eye for mass scenes. The 1925 film anonymises martyrs entirely. It portrays a Christian community based around family and sexual morality, developing Guazzoni’s focus on chaste

romance. Gilles Deleuze argues that, in preparation for his journey of self-actualisation and the final realisation of his power, the cinematic hero needs:

a fundamental group, which gives him its blessing, but also a makeshift group which helps him, which is smaller and more heterogeneous. (Deleuze 1986: 154)

Vinicius' makeshift group is indeed heterogeneous, as it includes a decadent patrician, a scheming 'philosopher', a Christian maiden and a muscular strongman. But martyrs are not part of the makeshift group in either film and Vinicius' journey involves becoming a Christian, rejecting lust for love and confronting Nero. In short, martyrs merely become figures in the spectacular scenes.

### *Spectacle and suffering*

Martyrdom has always been a spectacular offering from the Church. Re-enacting Christ's Passion, martyrs performed and participated in a complex, thrilling spectacle of faith, staged violence, entertainment, public defiance and corporeal humiliation. With its rich descriptions of epic scenes of Roman and Early Christian history, the novel *Whither Quo Vadis* had the potential for an epic cinematic adaptation (Marinelli 1984:138-140). Even though it was just over three minutes long, *Quo Vadis* (1901) was the only billed film in a Parma theatre's variety programme and was described as "riproduzioni delle più importanti scene dell'opera omonima" (Teatro Reinach 1901). So, cinema's pioneers understood the marketability of the novel's key scenes. In reality, the orgy and the Great Fire were reproduced, and other elements were added into them. The orgy, included a gladiator fight, with a final pose recreating Jean-Léon Gérôme's *Pollice Verso* (a touch later repeated in Guazzoni's film version), and the rescue of Lygia (Bosquet; Blom 2001: 286). Whether Guazzoni or Gabriellino d'Annunzio saw this version remains unknown, but it is clear that Sienkiewicz's novel was defined by spectacular scenes at the dawn of cinema.

Theoretical insights from later periods in film history can perhaps help us understand the spectacle of the early *Quo Vadis* films. Working from Nietzsche's conceptions of monumental, antiquarian and



‘critical’ (ethical) history, Gilles Deleuze outlined the spectacular history and key scenes of the epic film in *Cinema 1, The Movement Image*. Massive historical scenes, such as the defeat of Babylon or Samson destroying the Dagon’s temple, “made the image itself monumental,” and focussed on individual duels, rather than the causes of these (Deleuze 1986: 149-150). Of course, the monumental scene is not the place for a deep discussion of cause and effect: the battle of Cannae in *Cabiria* or the arena scene in *Quo Vadis* provide an immense stage for conflicts between individuals and the civilisations/beliefs they represent. Running parallel to this is antiquarian history, in which “intimate customs, vast tapestries, clothes, finery, machines, weapons or tools, jewels [and] private objects,” are all put before the viewer (Deleuze 1986: 150). ‘Historical research’ into these antiquarian fields and the supervision of craftsman was a key part of Enrico Guazzoni’s conceptions of what a *metteur-en-scène* should do in a historical film (Guazzoni 1918: 55-57). Furthermore, spectators appreciated the tangible reality of the Roman world. After watching *Quo Vadis* (1913), author Matilde Serao exclaimed, “La cinematografia non ha mai creato nulla di simile. Sì, è un mondo quello che la Cines ha ricostruito” (Serao 1913: 34). Finally, ethical history organises the monumental and antiquarian histories; allowing Good to triumph over Evil, a new civilisation to dawn and the foundation of America to be re-staged once again (Deleuze 1986:150-151). This patriotic parallelism has also been noted in Italian historical epics. Maria Wyke has considered Guazzoni’s *Marcantonio e Cleopatra* (1913) as a colonialist text, and Denis Lotti has drawn attention to the broader colonial discourses in Italian film-making prior to the First World War (Wyke 1997:80-85; Lotti 2011:11-52).

Antiquarian history was a key part of the appeal of *Quo Vadis* (1913), but the kind of amazement expressed by Serao lessened with the release of each historical epic. Monumental scenes must have a certain level antiquarian accuracy, but the spectacle is in beholding the thrilling action and the rise and fall of Empires, rather than the accuracy or beauty of the props. The difference can be seen in earlier presentations of the Roman world, which were cultural references for the directors and audiences of the films considered here. Lawrence Alma-Tadema mostly painted the intimate life of the Romans, while Jean-Léon Gérôme painted spectacular public scenes which were quoted in *Quo Vadis* (1913) (Blom 2001: 283-287). The intimate spectacle offered by the Pompeian Court at the Crystal Palace, with its combination of archaeological accuracy and imagined proximity to ancient lives, continued into the

epic films with their precise scenic details (Nichols 2015: 113, 122). Across the Atlantic, however, the destruction of Pompeii was staged at Coney Island and these epic scenes gave audiences a taste of destructive spectacle (Yablon 2007: 190). Clearly, in the films of *Quo Vadis*, martyrdom is part of monumental scenes in the Arena and Nero's gardens. But, if we are to understand the monumental history expressed in the martyrdom scenes, we must also understand how other spectacular scenes work in the two films.

Discussing epic destruction in the cinema, André Bazin coined the 'Nero complex,' which he defined as "the pleasure experienced at the sight of urban destruction" (Bazin 1997: 188). Guazzoni's shot of the Great Fire, in which the audience sits behind Nero, is a perfect example of this. Writing during World War II, Bazin observed the moral ambiguity of the Nero complex and he optimistically hoped that, after the horrors of war footage, the reconstitutions of the epic film seemed "dubious, indecent and sacrilegious" (Bazin 1997: 188). This audience exposure to destruction is a key difference with the earlier period, although the Nero complex of Italian cinema-goers was indulged prior to *Quo Vadis* (1913) by newsreels of the 1908 Messina earthquake and the Italo-Turkish War. It should be noted that the scope of Bazin's Nero complex is limited to urban destruction. Although we view some of the arena spectacles from Nero's position, Bazin's idea should not be applied to these scenes. By recreating the Great Fire of Rome, film-makers allowed spectators to enjoy monumental history from Nero's position. The Great Fire sequence also sits partly outside of Deleuze's conception of a monumental scene, since there is no individual Good versus Evil duel in place. While Jonathan Stubbs notes the moral ambiguity of destruction in the epic film, he highlights that the human aspect of the destruction is often diminished by focussing instead on the destruction of buildings and objects (2013: 143). When the human body is being threatened or destroyed, identification with Nero's position becomes morally difficult.

*The orgy and the erotic spectacular*

Deleuze notes that, “the orgy allows gigantism and intimacy to co-exist” (Deleuze 1986: 150). It presents both an epic vision of debauchery and individual cases, such as the drunken Vitellius or the close-up views of dancers in the 1925 version. As in the arena scenes, we have a complex position as spectators: we revel in the visual decadence, but the intertitles invite us to be morally outraged. The orgy foreshadows the arena scenes, in both its monumental scope and presentation of conflict between opposing individuals and belief systems; namely the debauchery of the Romans and the purity of the Christians. In the 1913 version, Nero watches the couple out of curiosity. Vinicius pulls Lygia into his arms, only to be knocked out by Ursus, who takes her to Acte and thence to Poppaea. In the 1925 version, despite Petronius’ attempts to divert him, Nero is interested in Lygia and rescues her when Vinicius tries to rape her. The Emperor then does his best to rape Lygia in a side-room, only to be thwarted by the cunning Petronius, who sends Poppaea to the room. Lygia escapes with another woman and meets Ursus in the garden, but remains within the palace complex.

As regards sex, female Christian martyrs are often threatened by the ‘double martyrdom’ of rape and death in numerous *passios*, with Christian men or divine action intervening to preserve their virginity, but not their lives (Jensen 1996: 85-93). For instance, Agnes and Agatha were given to brothels, while Dominina drowned herself and her daughters in order to avoid rape. The image of a Roman tyrant failing to rape a Christian virgin and then submitting her to sexualised torture is well established in Early Church and medieval hagiographic literature (Kelly 2000: 45, Bacon 2007:156, Tracy 2012: 55). In addition, Nero’s rape of a virgin was an established part of historical narratives about him. Nero’s rape of a Vestal, Rubria, was reported by Suetonius. This innocent figure has occasionally been converted into a Christian martyr in works like Arrigo Boito’s *Nerone*, which was published as a tragedy in 1901 and performed as an opera in 1924 (D’Angelo 2007:273; Manuwald 2013: 228-233). In the 1925 version, Nero’s attack on Lygia derives from the Rubria tradition. If we view rape as part of a potential double martyrdom and analyse the orgy using Deleuze’s ideas, then it is a monumental scene. The attempts of Vinicius and Nero to force themselves on the innocent Lygia

are personal conflicts deriving from ideological positions. As in the arena, good eventually triumphs. However, the parallels with the arena scenes are not exact as, in the 1925 version, it is Petronius who ironically affects the rescue. Nonetheless, the orgy scenes anticipate the action of the arena and its contrasting forces.

The orgy is, of course, a spectacle of corporeal excess. The 1913 version has some dancers performing a veil dance similar to that in *Dall'amore al martirio* (1910), but the potential for erotic spectacle is muted because reclining couples in the foreground obscure the action. Vinicius' embrace of Lygia is forceful, especially in the medium shot, and the couple next to them hint at the sexual activity to come. In the main though, the suggestion of decadence sexuality is more important than its actual display. The texts accompanying the film gave greater focus to a general portrait of lavish partying, as the Jury's programme shows:

A mad scene of revelry ensues, costly wines and exquisite delicacies are served to the guests and while a troupe of Syrian dancers are amusing them, showers of roses descend from the roof upon those present. Vinicius presses his suit upon the reluctant Lygia, who is shocked by the scenes she has witnessed and terrified at her defenceless position amid so much vice and corruption. The revels continue until the break of day when we see a delightful view of eternal Rome, beautiful, immense-but corrupt and tottering to its fall (West's Picture Playhouse, 1913).

Guazzoni's orgy spectacle is one of lavish feasting, rather than the overtly sexualised *Quo Vadis* (1925) or the explicit *Caligula* (1979). The orgy may obliquely reference the unrestrained sensuality and decadence of nineteenth century Orientalist art, but it does not represent it directly.

The orgy in *Quo Vadis* (1925) fulfils a different function to the 1913 film because the parallels with the arena sequence are not as stark and the opening sequence steals its impact. At the beginning of the film, the spectator sees Nero looking through his viewing glass and a male slave being thrown to the lampreys. This scene also shows a lesbian embrace, an absolute rarity in Italian silent cinema (Fig 5.4). Petronius is introduced surrounded by courtesans, and Vitellius with his wine jug. The action then cuts back to Nero, as he orders a woman to be thrown to the lampreys, during which her breasts are exposed (Fig 5.5). The Christians are shown praying in the Catacombs, and Nero then issues the edict to persecute them. Debauchery is shown among the ordinary Romans at Chilo's tavern.

Despite its sumptuous setting, the impact of the orgy scene is lessened by the opening sequence, which establishes the Roman: Christian moral dichotomy and shows decadent Rome in full swing. Without Ursus rescuing Lygia, it is the aesthete Petronius who intervenes, using his courtly cunning to send Poppaea to interrupt Nero. As a result, the orgy scene does not foreshadow the clashes of the arena as neatly as its predecessor because Ursus does not rescue Lygia. However, the clash between Roman and Christian values is still played out through the characters. In addition, the directors continue to cut between the Catacombs and the palace. The image of the semi-naked dancer and the baying mob heightens the contrast with the prayers in the Catacombs (Fig 5.6).

After Nero's jewelled lens is trained upon her in the orgy scene, Nero and Vinicius are both engaged in the sexual pursuit of Lygia. The 1925 film adapts the Rubria narrative to give Janning's Emperor greater screen time and to confirm its overtly sexualised vision of the Roman world. The film abounds with erotic spectacle, such as Rina De Liguoro's sensual performance as the slave-girl Eunice and the women in the opening fountain scene. From Vinicius' encounter with Lygia bathing through to Nero's two attempts at rape and the semi-nudity of final arena sequence, the covering and uncovering Lygia's virginal body is a motif throughout the film. The voyeuristic nature of the spectators' position is referenced when Nero attacks Lygia in the empty house. As the camera ogles Lillian Hall-Davies through the broken door and then cuts to show us Nero's eye in our position, it highlights that our voyeuristic position is that of Janning's deranged Emperor (Fig 5.7). In this moment, the martyr-like virgin is confirmed as a sex object. In the main though, the directors eschew such troubling point-of-view shots in favour of showing Janning's depraved Nero clutching his lens. This device, used far more frequently than in *Quo Vadis* (1913), gives a historical justification for the erotic spectacle: these are the sights that Nero ordered; the reality of his reign.

In his essay in eroticism in the cinema, André Bazin wrote that, "for the Romans the mortal combats in the arena were the equivalents of orgies" (Bazin 1971: 173). From the context of his essay, Bazin was talking about the 'little death' of sex and the corporeal spectacles on offer. In both versions of *Quo Vadis*, the orgies are the first monumental scene in which the ideologically-based duels of monumental history are played out, anticipating the arena scenes. However, the films differ in their attitude to sex and the orgy. Marcia Landy notes that the 1913 film subtly dealt with taboo topics, like orgies and

female promiscuity (Landy 2000: 29). Although it may have prompted spectators to think of more piquant representations, the orgy sequence of the 1913 film is nowhere near as outlandish as the later version. The 1925 film uses its extras and minor characters for erotic spectacle, in a manner similar to the films of Cecil B. De Mille and the twenties Italian epics examined in this thesis, such as *Messalina* (1923) and *Gli ultimi giorni di Pompei* (1926). The sexual objectification of Lygia in the orgy sequence and in the cellar draws on interesting parallels with the Vestal/Christian Rubria and the threat of rape in martyrdom *passios*.

Bizarrely, Jacoby and d'Annunzio's exploration of the sexual subtext of martyrdom received little comment from the film press or hindrance from the censors. Comments from the film press about potentially controversial scenes are vary rare. In hindsight, the erotic elements of the Italian epics seem bizarre, given the moral panic of the *biennio rosso*, the rise of Fascism and growing Catholic interest in censorship.<sup>26</sup> Why did the directors include them, and how did they escape the cuts? The directors included them because of the prohibited scenes had an added piquancy for audiences (see Chapter 5). Sexual scenes generally received less attention than those that encouraged crime (Brunetta 2008: 73). Censorship was a process of negotiation and, with the epic remakes needing to differentiate themselves from the works of a decade earlier, perhaps such erotic scenes were let through in order to boost these films' chances in cinemas.

### *The arena and the human torches*

Besides being spectacular entertainment, concluding scenes of the arena and martyrdom are definitely monumental in Deleuze's conception, as they are where Nero's excess and tyranny prove his undoing, as Chilo, Vinicius and the Roman mob turn against his decadent vision. These scenes are

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<sup>26</sup> The Liberal state had even conceded to Catholic calls for influence by putting mothers on the censorship boards in 1919 (Casetti, Alovio 2006: 115). One of the seven housewife-censors for 1922 was a certain Lady Theodali, wife of the Black Aristocrat Marquis Theodali, who sat on the board of the Cines film studio and was closely linked to the Vatican bank. See: Nino Mattozzi. *Rassegna generale della cinematografia*. (Rome: Società Editrice Rassegne, 1921), 563.

complex, as the sympathies of the spectator also move from enjoyment of Nero's spectacles through to support for the Christians. The two versions of *Quo Vadis* differ markedly in the ordering of the arena scenes and the actions of the main characters, so the dramatic context for martyrdom is rather contrasting. Here, I explore these differences and explore how martyrdom is represented.

The spectacular arena scenes in *Quo Vadis* (1913) begin with Vinicius searching for Lygia in the Mamertine. A chariot race and a gladiator fight occur in the arena. As the Christians are driven to their martyrdom, Chilo is made to admire his work. Ursus then rescues Lygia from the bull, and Vinicius manages to incite the crowd against Nero, who shout "Arsonist! Murderer! Clemency!" Nero grants clemency. After Nero grants this, the scene shifts to the suicide of Petronius and Eunice. The imperial court watch "the final torture of the Christians," the torches in the Imperial gardens. Recognising Glaucus, Chilo begs him for forgiveness, denounces Nero for the arson, is baptised by Paul and beaten by Roman soldiers. Peter sees Christ on the Appian Way and Nero kills himself as Galba's revolting legions draw near. In their final intertitle, Nero's destruction and death is contrasted with the "new life: the life of Christianity, in the sign of love and peace." Jesus and some followers are shown before a cross of white light.

In *Quo Vadis* (1925), Peter's encounter with Christ on the Appian Way and the display of the human torches occur before the arena scenes. As the Christians are martyred, we are informed that Galba's legions are closing in. More Christians are led out, but Plautus escapes by climbing onto some decorative garlands. Chilo incites the crowd to rebel against the arsonist Nero, but the Emperor shoots him. Petronius and Eunice commit suicide. A chariot race begins with victims being dragged behind the chariots, including Pomponia. As she manages to climb onto the chariot, the crowd exclaim "She is mother!" and turn against Nero. The Emperor learns that Vinicius is leading a revolt of the Roman troops within the city itself, but he orders the arena spectacles to continue. After Ursus rescues Lygia from the bull, the crowd shout for mercy, and Vinicius enters the arena with his troops. The crowd chant for Nero to be killed, and the Emperor escapes into the countryside via his empty palace and the Catacombs. Nero commits suicide, and the marriage of Vinicius and Lygia ends the film.

Before engaging in the specifics of the arena scenes, we should briefly consider the nature of the these spectacles. Arena violence reinforced the social hierarchy and Imperial hegemony over the

Empire. Although they were individuals of marginal status, gladiators provided both entertainment and a lesson in virtue, by showing the crowd how to fight and die (Edwards 2007: 215). Thus, gladiators received a certain respect (Wiedemann 2002: 37). By contrast, executions were “intentionally degrading and humiliating,” and symbolised Imperial authority and social unity against threats (Fagan 2011: 50). However, martyrs and the Christians who wrote about them subverted these humiliations and symbolic discourses with Christian counter-scripts (Castelli 2004: 119-133). It should be noted that, at least in the Early Church, the memorialisation of Christian martyrs relied on oral/written transmission, rather than potentially idolatrous visual representations (Castelli 2004: 104-106; Edwards 2007: 215). And what of film audiences? David Mayer has argued that toga plays and films allowed audiences to “have it both ways,” siding with both the Romans and the Christians (Mayer 1994: 12). Although such ambiguous identification is possible over the work as a whole, especially with protagonists like Vinicius, the arena scenes are the place for a monumental historical shift from the Romans to the Christians. This is difficult to achieve though since, as spectators, we have been visually revelling in the Nero complex and decadent spectacles. Joanna Paul notes that, in more recent epics like *Ben-Hur* (1951) and *Gladiator* (2000), certain characters guide our reactions to the arena and the identification between the arena audience and the cinema audience allows the former to imagine taking on the role of the latter (Paul 2013:219). While the films in question are both much older than those examined by Ward, the directors use the same techniques in order to affect this shift.

The 1913 film offers us two scenes of arena spectacle before the mass martyrdom and the rescue of Lygia. During the chariot race and the gladiator fight, the camera pivots to show us a closer view of the crowd and to follow the action. While these pans are far less striking than the use of the dolly (*carello*) in *Cabiria*, the special tripod was reported as advanced technology in the contemporary trade press (Bush 1913: 1229-1230). Perhaps these pans across such large sets were far more impressive to audiences of the day. One could see the arena spectacles as Guazzoni merely exploiting the novel grandeur of his *mise-en-scène* to its full cinematic potential and giving his cinema audience a chance to enjoy the view of the Roman spectator. Subtly, by juxtaposing the gladiator fight and mass martyrdom, Guazzoni makes implicit comparison between these two examples of *virtus*, courage and willingness to die. Such comparisons occurred frequently in ancient texts, such as the martyrdom of Perpetua (Castelli



2004: 117-126; Dunkle 2014: 2-3). Eusebius' account of Pancras' death subtly references gladiatorial courage, and is reproduced in *Fabiola* (Wiseman 1, XXIII). The arena spectacles also play a crucial role in establishing the film audience's perspectives for the martyrdom scenes and referencing different types of media.

The gladiator fight clearly references Jean-Léon Gérôme's painting *Pollice Verso*, an image which circulated very widely, from illustrated versions of *Whither Quo Vadis?* to newspaper advertising (Blom 2001: 286; Bertellini 2010: 253-254). Guazzoni also references Gérôme's *Ave Caesar morituri te salutant*, and the composition of the martyrdom scenes recalls the same artists' *Christian Martyrs' Last Prayer*. In a calculated reference to Gérôme, a still photograph of the saluting gladiators was widely used in the film's American publicity (Shields 2013: 115).

Although analysis of Guazzoni and painting has mostly focussed on these three works, subtler references to other paintings, such as Jan Styka's *Saint Peter preaching the Gospel in the Catacombs* and Henryk Siemiradzki's *Nero's torches*, can also be seen in the film (Figs 5.9-5.10). In the case of the Siemiradzki painting, the film splits the action of the canvas into different shots, such as the shot of the Emperor and his court walking down the palace steps, the procession and the garden stroll. Although Guazzoni avoids the nudity of Siemiradzki's *Christian Dirce*, the composition seems peculiarly like the 1925 film adaptation (Fig 5.11). The works of these Polish artists appeared at the same time as *Whither Quo Vadis*, and were viewed in the context of Sienkiewicz's work. Styka's work is particularly close to Sienkiewicz's novel, but has not been considered in relation to the films. Unfortunately, many of Styka's paintings were lost in a fire in 1905 (Fitzpatrick, 1997).

Jan Styka's panorama *Martyre des Chrétiens au cirque du Néron* was exhibited in Paris in 1900, just before the publication of the French translation of *Whither Quo Vadis*, and was "en effet, un Quo Vadis plastique" offering "vues analogues à celles du poète-peintre qu'est Sienkiewicz." (Halpérine-Kaminsky 1901: 174). Plates of Styka's enormous martyrdom panorama survive and, in my opinion, it inspired the arena scenes of *Nerone e Agrippina* (1914) (D'Agen 1900: 36-53; *Maggese*... 10/03/1914: 18; Fig 5.12). Styka painted on a gigantic scale: his *Crucifixion on Calvary*, was 195 feet wide and 45 feet high (*Chicago Tribune* 09/08/1905: 2). Besides the arena panorama, Styka exhibited other scenes from *Whither Quo Vadis*, such as Eunice kissing Petronius' statue (Fig 5.13) and Vinicius and Lygia in

the garden. Styka painted the Great Fire of Rome (Fig 5.14), gory scenes of lions eating the wounded in the Circus (Fig 5.15) and Chilo's conversion. There are some notable similarities between Styka and Siemiradzki's paintings and Guazzoni's film. In some cases, the sensuality of the paintings is better reflected in the 1925 film, which had greater license to convey the eroticism of Siemiradzki's *Christian Dirce* and Styka's *Eunice embracing Petronius' statue* (Figs 5.11, 5.14). The erotic performance of Rina De Liguoro, shown in a revealing medium shot and in a close up caressing the statue, has far more in common with the 1925 version than the brief and staid shot of the 1913 version.

Jan Styka, Henryk Siemiradzki and Enrico Guazzoni share the same subject, so it could be argued that this is the sole reason for the apparent similarity between the images and the film. However, there is a connection between Italian epic film-makers and these artists, whether their works are 'cited' more directly (Figs 5.9, 5.12, 5.13, 5.15) or broken down into a sequence of shots (Figs 5.10, 5.11). Styka's gigantic paintings of the arena action from different perspectives (*La loge du Néron*, *Le Cirque de Néron* (*Vue prise sur la meta*), *La spina du Cirque de Néron* and Figure 5.12) should be seen as a conceptual model for the arena sequences offered in Guazzoni's *Quo Vadis* and other epics because of their giant size, detail and shifting perspectives. Finally, Styka's association with Sienkiewicz and the fame of these paintings makes them important references for film directors and audiences. Styka's work had considerable impact in early twentieth century Paris, and it was exhibited on the Champs-Élysées at the height of the novel's popularity (Jankowski 1902: 11). As well as being reproduced on postcards and in magazines, Styka's images appear in La Bonne Presse's magic lantern slides and translations of Sienkiewicz's novel (Sully 1912: 243, Giergielewicz 1967: 92, Joucaviel 2005: 64). Alongside the paintings of Gérôme, the works of Jan Styka deserve recognition as an important influence on Guazzoni, Italian Roman Epics and the audiences who watched them.

However, it should be noted that Guazzoni's repeated citations of paintings, in both his films and writings, were also part of the promotional discourses surrounding his films and his own conception of what a *metteur-en-scène* should do.<sup>27</sup> The film press supported these discourses, which fed into its

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<sup>27</sup> For Guazzoni's writings, see:

Guazzoni, Enrico. "Mi confesserò." *In Penombra*, Vol. 1 No. 2, 2<sup>nd</sup> July 1918, 55-57.

Bernardini, Aldo, Martinelli, Vittorio and Tortora, Matilde. *Enrico Guazzoni regista pittore*, (Doria di Cassano Jonio (CS): La Mongolfiera Editrice, 2005).

middle-brow culture and claims of cultural prestige. For instance, journalists frequently referred to “il noto pittore Guazzoni” (Guazzoni 1913: 11; *Cine-Fono...* 27/12/1913: 11; Geymonat 1913: 59). One critic remarked that the Catacomb scenes looked like “una riproduzione di un quadro di scuola fiamminga” (Keraban 1913). Another said that, in *Marcantonio e Cleopatra*, Guazzoni:

compone, in mutevoli visioni di bellezza, sull schermo bianco quei quadri che non ha potuto eseguire durante la sua fatica giovinezza (Colasanti 1913: 15).

These comments could be genuine reactions to the scenes’ pictorial realism or an acknowledgement of the influence of the artworks, both in the director’s work and in the spectators’ own imaginings of Rome. Equally, they support the discourses of ‘cultured cinema’ advanced by Guazzoni, studio marketing and the film press itself. By continuing in this field, films scholars have pursued a worthwhile avenue of enquiry, but one which has been clearly signposted by the director, studio and film critics, for reasons of cultural prestige and marketing.

The effects of these direct ‘quotations’ from Jean-Léon Gérôme has been disputed, with Maria Wyke’s contention that Guazzoni’s use of cuts and shots, “challenges the stasis of the nineteenth century picture frame” being questioned by Marc Gottlieb, who argues that chronological details, such as chariot tracks and the torch lighter in the *Christian Martyr's Last Prayer*, gives the paintings complex narratives (Wyke 1997: 119-123; Gottlieb 2010: 59-64). In a sense, both are correct, because Guazzoni mobilises modern cinematic techniques to wow his audiences with spectacular action while using the anachronistic concept of the tableaux to rupture the action and highlight the monumental nature of the scenes. In short, he adapts the sensational formula of Gérôme and Styka but, if the monumental history of these scenes is clear, the ethical history is less so. Ivo Blom noted that, in the arena martyrdom scene:

we get the point of view of both the attackers and the spectators...[but that] of the victims is emblematically absent, and here Guazzoni comes closest to the harshness that is so evident in Gérôme’s paintings (Blom 2001: 287).

Indeed, despite acknowledging his technical mastery, *The Art-Journal* criticised Gérôme for glorifying, “heartlessness, cruelty, lust... while that which is noblest in humanity his pictures ignore or outrage (*Art Journal* 1868: 14). Likewise, the “ruthless cruelty” of Guazzoni’s arena was highlighted by *The New York Times* (*New York Times* 22/04/1913). Thus, in referring to nineteenth century Academic art which had a historical rather than religious emphasis, the disturbing martyred body remains a distant presence,

like Glaucus and Crispus in the film's plot. The closest we get are burning dummies or the lions feasting on ragged remains which are not easily identifiable as people. The brief close-ups of burning Christian torches in *Quo Vadis* (1925) are the only moments where the films' depiction of martyrdom comes close to the graphic imagery found in religious art, such as the fresco cycle of Santo Stefano Rotondo or the rich descriptions of *Fabiola* or *Whither Quo Vadis*. This distancing of martyrdom weakens the Christian message in the films.

If the pictorial allusions bring cruelty into Guazzoni's film and put martyrdom in the distance, the film's spectators and the reactions of Chilo play a crucial part in leading the film audience to recognise the monumental historical shift towards Christianity. The shots of the crowd and the imperial box show everyone enjoying the spectacle, but this ruptures when the Christians are martyred. Vinicius' anxious glance over the balcony, Petronius' sarcastic response to Nero's enjoyment ("Oh Caesar, the show is worthy of you!") and Chilo's inability to look at the spectacle signal the beginning of the shift. Scodel and Bettenworth note that Sienkiewicz gives us more of Chilo's perspective prior to his conversion, and that Guazzoni makes him "the center of narrative tension" in the arena scene (Scodel, Bettenworth 2009:23, 42). In Guazzoni's version, this sets up Chilo's conversion. Moreover, Chilo represents some of our guilt as spectators: like him, we have feasted upon the visual spectacle of decadence and are now unable to view its consequences. Nonetheless, we still view the lions consuming the remains of the Christians from the heights of the Imperial box. Ursus' tussle with the bull leads the Roman spectators to demand clemency and revolt. In the background, we see crowd in uproar and the pan across to Nero confirms the schism. When Vinicius and Ursus plead from the arena floor, one of them points away from the camera and one towards it. While this is explained by the elliptical shape of the arena, it also recognises that there are two audiences watching the events: one in the stands and one in the cinema.

The 1925 film takes a different approach to arena spectacle and the conclusion of Sienkiewicz's narrative. By placing the scene of Jesus on the Appian Way and the human torches before that of the arena, the narrative regarding Nero's persecution is strengthened. Compressing the novel's action, the arena sequence tightly combines the three main narrative stands (namely, the drama of the protagonists and the histories of Nero and the Early Church). For example, Vinicius sides with Galba and arrives with soldiers just after Ursus saves Lygia. The arena spectators go from "thirsting for revenge" against

the Christians to agreeing with Vinicius' calls for revolt, via bewilderment at Chilo's claims and shock at the treatment of Pomponia. It is a perfect monumental history, in that Nero's fall from power occurs within the scene itself, whereas the 1913 version splits this into different scenes and an expository intertitle. The unifying theme is rebellion against tyranny, which encompasses the Christians, the Roman mob and the distant legions of Galba.

Jacoby and d'Annunzio begin the arena sequence by contrasting the waiting spectators with the pious Christians imprisoned below them. The mass martyrdom is shown from the perspectives of the martyrs, the lions and the imperial box, but the montage of high-angle shots of the pride dismembering the bodies and the shot of Nero holding his jewelled lens confirms our connection with Nero's viewpoint. In particular, the camera quickly cuts between medium close-ups of Nero with his lens and a woman who the crowd attempt to rescue with a white sheet, only for her to be dragged back by the lions. A two-shot shows Nero's glee and Poppaea's disgust at this sight. However, until the outcry at Pomponia's suffering, the crowd is fickle. The Christian woman is pulled up slowly, as if the crowd want to see the lions snatch her. They are stirred up by Chilo's message about Nero, but also applaud him being eaten.

The novelty of chariot races and gladiator fights for their own sake had been lessened by the epic films of the preceding decade, so all the arena scenes after the initial mass martyrdom feature fictional characters immersed in the action. The escapes of Pomponia and Aulus mirror the Vinicius-Lygia plot and allow them to reinforce the message about heterosexual Christianity in the film's final scene, the wedding of Vinicius and Lygia. Now, escapes from death or sexual violation are part of many *passios*, but they usually result in eventual martyrdom. The one famous exception is Thecla, who courageously faced death three times, only to escape and become one of the Church's first ascetics. Thecla differs from Pomponia or Lygia because the latter actively escape from death, as they do not wish to die as martyrs. The hallowed fate awaiting them is not monasticism, but marriage.

As Pomponia frees herself from being dragged behind the chariot, the crowd seem horrified and the intertitles exclaim "She is mother!" This bizarre mention of motherhood makes little sense after the earlier mass martyrdoms, but it highlights the hypocrisy of the cinema audiences' own contradictory position, as both revellers in the visual spectacle and supporters of the Christians. The value the crowd

put on Pomponia's motherhood reinforces the film's promotion of marriage and anticipates Fascism's public celebrations of maternity. In the aftermath of War, Italy's women negotiated the possibilities of political, financial and personal independence and ideas of motherhood as both traditional gender role and biologically-determined patriotic sacrifice (Belzer 2010: 159-183). Film too typified and explored these social fault lines. Divas may have been extravagantly-paid, iconic performers who dominated the film industry, but women's roles behind the camera were often ignored, downplayed or hidden by a pseudonym (Bruno 1993; Jandelli 2006; Dall'Asta 2008). On-screen, women could be independent seductresses or serial adventure heroines; equally, they could be vulnerable *femmes fragiles* exploited by a patriarchal society or defined by their status as mothers. Just a couple of years after the release of *Quo Vadis* (1925), Mussolini launched his pro-natalist policies and a moral crackdown (De Grazia 1992: 41-44). Behind modern rhetoric, traditional paradigms were re-affirmed. The demise of the national film industry meant that liberated screen women existed largely in a foreign context. The family message of *Quo Vadis* (1925) anticipates these social shifts. Pomponia's devotion to her son provides a model of motherhood; sharply contrasting with Poppaea, whose child eventually dies of illness after being cared for by an African slave. In elevating motherhood and with St. Peter giving it his explicit blessing in the final marriage scene, the value of martyrdom is completely downplayed.

From Academic Art through to the Salvation Army's *Soldiers of the Cross* (1900) and the contextless interruption into the otherwise dynastic *Nerone* (1909), the human torches has long been a crucial image of Nero's reign. In Sienkiewicz's novel, Chilo is shocked by the burning Christians in Nero's gardens, which include Glaucus. Before he dies, Glaucus forgives the man who ruined his family. Chilo denounces Nero, disconcerts the Romans and escapes. After Paul baptises him, Chilo is horrifically tortured, crucified in the arena and dies before a disinterested bear eats him. The three chapters devoted to the torches and Chilo's conversion show the power of the martyr's testimony of faith to convert others and how Christianity could redeem even the worst of sinners. It should be noted that, although Chilo has a Jewish mother in the novel and plots against the Christians, he is not an observant Jew and his denunciation is based on personal rather than religious grounds. Nonetheless, Sienkiewicz's novel involves Jewish figures, including rabbis, and Poppaea, in the conspiracy to persecute the Christians and repeats the common historical viewpoints of its time which alleged their

involvement (Matual 1999; Scodel, Bettenworth 2009: 179-181). Both films condense this conflict into the person of Chilo, whose Fagan-like appearance stereotypes him as Jewish.

In Guazzoni's film, the human torches sequence is placed after the arena scene, rather than before it, which weakens the connection with the Great Fire. However, this re-ordering gives Guazzoni more time to prepare for Chilo's embrace of Christianity, and allows Glaucus' forgiveness to be a pivotal moment. The connection between Glaucus and Chilo shows the power of the martyr's example to inspire others. The scene in which Paul baptises Chilo is full of reverence and the Apostle's own history is an important parallel to Chilo's story. Bizarrely though, Chilo's martyrdom is not shown and we only see Tigellinus beating him. Although spectators might have deduced Chilo's eventual destiny or known about it from the novel, Guazzoni chooses to end the story there, which weakens the message of Christian redemption.

The 1925 film places the human torches sequence before the arena action. Although there is no Glaucus, the close-up views of the burning martyrs are a grisly sight for both Chilo and the cinema audience (Fig 5.8). They contrast markedly with the more distant portrayals in Academic paintings and *Quo Vadis* (1913). Prior to the shot of the second female martyr, the intertitle states "Be cursed unto eternity!" This is a far cry from the forgiveness of Glaucus, and closer to the anti-Semitism spreading through Italian society in the early twenties. Although less organised and radical than in later periods, this period saw an uptick in anti-Semitism, due to Jesuit hostility, anti-Semite voices on the edges of the Fascist movement and increasingly Mediterranean construction of Italian identity (Feinstein 2003:199-220; Donati 2013: 163-164). Rather than redemption through Christ and martyrdom, Chilo's political rebellion leaves him in a more uncertain moral position. This equivalence is reflected in the crowd's ambivalent reaction to Chilo's moment as 'prosecutor' and apparent joy at his death.

### *Conclusion*

Martyrdom is a marginal issue in the plots of the two versions of *Quo Vadis*. Although Crispus and Chilo die as martyrs in the novel, neither film depicts this. The 1913 version includes many Christian

minor characters. This creates a densely populated world, but these characters cannot be fleshed out and the action involving them is often confusing. Audiences must have relied on the exposition in the intertitles and extra-diegetic information, such as the pamphlets given out in the screenings or knowledge of the novel, in order to fully comprehend the minor characters. Chilo's witness to martyrdoms and his eventual conversion is perhaps the strongest plotline involving the Early Church. The 1925 film dispenses with the novel's minor characters and uses montage in order to establish the difference between Romans and Christians. The film's spatial metaphor means that the Catacombs are far more present as a physical representative of the Early Church. Furthermore, the 1925 film has a Christian familial sub-plot which mirrors the action of the Vinicius-Lygia relationship. Although the 1925 version features a coded reference to Catholic practices in its reference to Veronica, neither film really engages in doctrinal specifics, presumably to increase the films' circulation in Protestant countries. Sienkiewicz's closing comments about the Basilica of St. Peter dominating Rome and the world are switched for a more denominationally neutral pictures of Christ and, in the later film, Peter marrying Vinicius and Lygia.

Although they are pushed to the edges of the film narrative, the spectacular scenes give the martyrs a greater prominence. Through individual conflicts, they play out the clash of beliefs between the Roman and Christian belief systems. The Great Fire provides a moment of guilt-free indulgence in the Nero complex, as does the eruption of Vesuvius in other historical epics. The Roman orgy foreshadows the arena, with Lygia's role referencing the 'double martyrdom' of virginal Saints. Guazzoni heavily references Academic Art in his depiction of the arena martyrs, and the distance these compositions put between the martyred body and the spectators lessens the emotional impact of martyrdom. By contrast, the 1925 film takes a more varied perspective, and depicts the martyred body in close-up. But its overwhelming identification is still with Nero, who wields his lens as a metaphor for the film's focus on spectacle. In this later work, the arena spectacles are closely tied to the fictional sub-plot, and reinforce its emphasis on family and motherhood.

In the main, the films place the emphasis on marriage over martyrdom. They create an atmosphere of Christian persecution which threatens some of the main characters, but do not really explore martyrdom or its meaning in significant depth. If audiences were to derive much religious meaning



from these films, it would be through sharp readings of the films and extra-diegetic knowledge. The beating of Chilo at the end of the 1913 version hints at his eventual martyrdom; the richly-decorated underworld of the 1925 adaptation brings to mind Kanzler's slides or Bosio's drawings. But, both films were aimed at an international general public, and such subtleties must have been missed by many. Furthermore, unlike the Carthaginian/Roman clashes in *Cabiria* (1914) where the Romans are clearly depicted as the superior civilisation, the Roman/Christian clash in the monumental scenes of *Quo Vadis* is not as neat. Nero may be decadent evil incarnate, but Petronius is good and Vinicius combines the best of both value systems.

Their ambiguity and explicitly international appeal make it difficult to read either *Quo Vadis* as particularly relevant to the situation in Italy. Although *Quo Vadis* (1925) has a pro-family message and anticipates elements of Fascist pro-natalism, it is difficult to connect this film to the overt propaganda of the 1930s. *Quo Vadis* (1913) has been read as a pro-Catholic propaganda. But this too is a very complicated issue. Maria Wyke highlights that the financial backers of Cines, the Vatican-controlled Banco di Roma, would have delighted in a film which enhanced, "the contemporary claims of the Catholic Church to the renewal of its temporal power," and suggested the merits of, "re-establishing the value of the Catholic Church in the social and political order of modern Italy" (Wyke 1997: 126-7). While Wyke acknowledges the tacit truce between Church and State in her argument and Italian audiences' difficulties in switching identity between the Romans and their Christian victims in the arena scenes, she maintains the view that a dichotomy existed and asserts that, "the role of Catholics in Italy's national life had become a central preoccupation" (Wyke 1997:126). In reality, I would argue that this interpretation of the film relies on an incomplete understanding of Cines, the Banco di Roma and Italian society.

Between 1908 and 1916, Cines was owned by the Banco di Roma, which was the repository for the Vatican's investments and effectively a Vatican bank. Cines' board members included the bank's president Ernesto Pacelli and Prince Prospero di Colonna (*Cinematografia Italiana*...31/03/1915: 61; Tomadjoglou, Ormson 2000: 263-266). However, these figures were skilful mediators between Italy and the Vatican, rather than intransigent Ultramontanes. Pacelli frequently led Italian-Vatican negotiations (Pollard 2008: 46). Prospero di Colonna may have been one of the foremost members of

the Black Aristocracy, but he was also an Italian senator and twice mayor of Rome. In his examination of the Banco di Roma archives, Riccardo Redi notes only one complaint at Cines board meetings about the moral content of the movies: this occurred in 1916, shortly before the studio was sold (Redi 2009: 69). To my knowledge, film periodicals record no active participation from Cines' board members in film-making. Considering Cines' film production in its entirety, it is difficult to argue, as Wyke does, that Cines, “was organising its film-making activities as a way of extending Catholic influence in Italian society” (Wyke 1997: 126). True, there was an openness towards religious subjects at Cines, but they still made up a tiny part of its massive commercially-driven output. Rumours did circulate regarding *Christus*, which began production in 1914 and was apparently ordered by the Bank and, ultimately, the Vatican. (*Cinematografia Italiana* 01/11/1914: 87). But, equally, rumours also suggest that the film project was started in order to foil a new version of the Passion by Pathé (Redi 2002:6).

Secondly, far from being an ideologically-run financial arm of the Papacy, the Banco di Roma financed the few local agricultural and industrial projects it could find, then embarked on an ambitious programme of colonial expansion, opening branches and investing on business in North Africa (Zamagni 2003:154). The bank attempted an economic penetration of Libya, effectively working as an arm of the Italian state (Childs 1990: 32-34). Even though its investment was not enormous, Ottoman objections to it were cited in Italian justifications for the War (Childs 1990: 34-36). Pacelli mobilised Catholic newspapers in favour of the invasion (Pollard 2005:104). During this time, Cines also produced a suspiciously large number of pro-War or Orientalist dramas and newsreels (Lasi 2011: 110-117). In May 1917, the Banco even financed an Italian propaganda film for war finance (*Arte Muta* 30/04/1917: 23). In sum, as characterised by the bank's investments or the Giolitti-Gentiloni pact of 1913, the Church and the Liberal state had reached a pragmatic accommodation. Far from being mutually incompatible, the Church, the State and their supporters maintained a veneer of official antagonism while maintaining practical working relationships in many areas, including the film industry, finance, politics, welfare and empire.

The level of this collaboration breaks down the notion of Liberal-Catholic antagonism being a dominant feature of Italian society and makes reading *Quo Vadis* (1913) as a political allegory very difficult. On the contrary, a political reading of Guazzoni and Cines' filmography seems to suggest that

Catholic martyrdom and the splendours of Ancient Rome could happily co-exist in thrilling yet politically incompatible spectacles. In my opinion, most audiences in Italy would have identified with both the patrician Romans and the Christians, as did viewers all over the world.

## LEGENDS OF MARTYRDOM

This chapter examines three depictions of Early Church martyrdom produced after Enrico Guazzoni's *Quo Vadis* (1913). The first film, *In hoc signo vinces* (1913) unusually focuses on Emperor Constantine, the first Roman Emperor to accept and promote Christianity. After the epic film successes of 1913-1914, Italian studios did not make any films featuring Early Church martyrs until 1918. Indeed, out of an annual feature film production in the hundreds, only two films per year were set in the ancient period between 1915 and 1917 (Aubert 2009: 33). Exhaustion of the genre, shortage of manpower, high production costs, audience fatigue and the rise of other genres were all factors in this pause (see Chapter 1). In 1918, Enrico Guazzoni directed a feature-length adaptation of Cardinal Nicholas Wiseman's novel *Fabiola; Or The Church of the Catacombs*. Set during the Diocletian persecution, the novel had been extensively translated since the 1850s and enjoyed long-lasting popularity (Champ 2000: 170). A short martyrdom film, *La Leggenda di Santa Barbara*, was also produced in 1918. Starring diva Lyda Borelli, this short film sat between two propaganda documentaries on munitions manufacture in Italy. All three films have received little attention from scholars.

Before considering the Early Christian martyrdom case studies, we should acknowledge the predominance of nationalist martyr films during the war years and outline the relationship between these films and Early Church martyrdom pictures. These films built on the nationalist heroes constructed during the formation of the Italian state. Papal and Italian nationalist martyr cults were important propaganda features during the Risorgimento, with each side promoting its heroes in order to mobilise domestic and international opinion (Riall 2010: 255-287, Buerman 2012: 107-117, Pesman 2012: 109). Risorgimento martyr postcards replaced *santini*, national anniversaries competed with religious celebrations and battlefield tours became a new type of pilgrimage (Lasi 2011: 4-5). This nationalist culture has a long history in Italian cinema, from *La Presa di Roma* (1905), one of the earliest Italian dramatic films, through to one-reel films, Libyan War documentaries and early feature films.

In 1915, Italian studios quickly churned out forty-seven dramatic films inspired by the First World War and the Risorgimento (Redi 1999:113). When patriotic fervour was at its height, some of these films were very successful (Rondone 1915: 70). However, despite building on the martyr cults of the Risorgimento, most of these films were failures. Censorship, poor reviews, a lack of realism and growing realisation of the horrors of War were all contributing factors (Redi 1999: 113, Brunetta 2008: 257). Few propaganda dramas were made in 1916-1917, and those that were often had a calculated appeal to external markets, such as the mountain scenes of *Maciste Alpino* (1916) or the female martyrs of *L'eroina serba* (1916) and *Come morì Miss Cavell* (1916). The government concentrated on strictly controlling newsreels (Brunetta 2008: 259-261).

Italian domestic and foreign propaganda was re-energised following the defeat at Caporetto, financial difficulties, the Turin bread riots and the fall of the Boselli government. Amidst a desperate need to sell bonds, war ministries and Italian banks financed some nationalistic dramas from May 1917 (*Arte Muta* 30/04/1917: 23; Martinelli 1989 [1918]: 141). War bond campaigns targeted the entire population and employed every media form (Torello 2005: 178-185). The divas lent their assistance, and the film industry made patriotic proclamations.<sup>28</sup> The government appealed to the film industry for its support, and censorship was further tightened (Baldi 2002: 11). Nonetheless, war films remained a difficult financial proposition and the excessive production of 1915 was not repeated.<sup>29</sup> The Italian state made a concerted effort to raise morale. An official propaganda office was finally established (Belzer 2010: 47). In contrast with General Cadorna's harsh discipline, General Diaz used cinematic

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<sup>28</sup> In *La posta in guerra* (1917), the famous diva Hesperia played a "madrina di guerra," writing to troops to encourage them (Martinelli 1989 [1917]: 232). *Mariute* (1918), a medium-length film starring Francesca Bertini, was also made as part of the War finance drive (Martinelli 1989 [1918]: 141). Diana Karenne, a diva and representative of the Lega Aerea Nazionale, planned a film project with d'Annunzio (Dalle Vacche 2008: 112-114). Prompted by the comments of Ministro Ciuffelli and the enthusiasm of Alberto Sannia, the editor of *Films, corriere dei cinematografi*, a Consorzio per la propaganda di films di guerra rapidly attracted public and enthusiastic support from across the film industry. The Consorzio was little more than an outpouring of patriotism in Sannia's trade newspaper, but it demonstrated the industry's support for the War effort. See *Film, Corriere...* 12/12/1917: 3.

<sup>29</sup> As well as the failure of many war films in 1915 and audience demands for cinematic escapism, long distribution times also meant war films could be potentially irrelevant if events changed. *Fabiola*, for instance, finished production in 1917, but was released the following year (Redi 1999: 114). The combination of financial risk and instant irrelevance could have tricky consequences. The attempts of ageing diva Mary Cléo-Tarlarini to launch her own production house were dealt a blow when the war ended, and *Gli invasori* (1918) and *Il canto della fede* (1918) were made redundant before they were even released (Martinelli 1989 [1918]: 36, 108). Italian film journalists also lamented the lack of government support for dramatic propaganda. See: (Athos 1918:2).

propaganda on his troops to boost morale (Thompson 2008: 214, 331; Gooch 2014: 255-259). In 1917, the Italian government established propaganda offices targeting foreign countries (Manetti 2012: 36). In May 1917, an agent was appointed for London (*Kinematograph Year...* 1918:59). From August 1917, official Italian war films were very successful in the United States, and aimed to enhance Italy's reputation (Mould 2014:184-188). *La Leggenda di Santa Barbara* was part of this propaganda drive in 1918: a unique example of Early Church martyrdom being bent to nationalist priorities.

The historical films produced in 1917-1918 allowed directors to obliquely reference Italy's situation, without entering an overcrowded genre. *La tragica fine di Caligula* (1917) had an obvious correspondence with the tyranny of the Kaiser (Aubert 2000: 33). The epic *Attila* (1918) was reviewed as being "la più viva e popolare propaganda della nostra santa guerra" (Da Castello 1918: 33-34). The noted film critic Pier Da Castello recognised the film as responding to the Consorzio's propaganda initiatives and the similarities between the central character and the Kaiser (Da Castello 1918: 33-34). Guazzoni's *La Gerusalemme Liberata* (1918) had an obvious relevance to Allied action in the Middle East. The final sequence of the British print of the film showed the victorious Crusaders entering Jerusalem and then the victorious Allies entering the same city (Costa 2005: 131-141). Finally, the themes of Christian self-sacrifice that predominate in *Fabiola* (1918) have an obvious wartime relevance. Even the publicity stills of the martyred Agnes bore an uncanny resemblance to propaganda images of the martyred nurse Edith Cavell (Figure 6.1). There is a connection: Cavell was frequently portrayed as a holy martyr. The illustrator of the postcard, Tito Corbella, worked at Enrico Guazzoni's poster design and printing company (Bertetto 1995: 114, 115).

To summarise, the history of Italy's patriotic martyrdom films remains unwritten, and is worthy of extensive analysis, beyond that which can be afforded here. Italy's nationalist culture was part of its cinema from its very beginnings, and screen depictions of political martyrs ran parallel to those of Christian martyrs. In 1915, there was a glut of patriotic martyrdom films which, in terms of their number and total length, were far more significant than Early Church martyrdom films produced by Italy's film industry over the silent period. But the links between the two forms are very deep, as nationalist martyrdom drew heavily on Catholic symbolism and competed with the counter-Risorgimento in the nineteenth century. The pause in representations of the Early Church between *Nerone e Agrippina*

(1914) and *Fabiola* (1918) can be explained by the predominance of nationalist martyrdom on Italian screens, and a range of factors discussed in the second chapter, including the exhaustion of the historical epic genre, financial troubles, closing export markets, incompatibility with film stardom and the demands of wartime. Likewise, the return to the ancient period in 1918 offered a chance to explore themes of sacrifice and cruelty, while retaining lasting appeal and commercial viability.

*In hoc signo vinces: Constantine and martyrdom*

*In hoc signo vinces* (1913) was a Roman Epic centred around the familial dramas of Emperor Constantine, the first Roman Emperor to convert to Christianity, and the spectacular moments of his life, such as crossing the Alps with his army and his conversion before the battle of Ponte Milvio. Given the sainthood of Constantine's mother Elena and his daughter Costanza, much of the film dealt with the Early Church and two scenes of martyrdom were shown. The film coincided with significant Catholic celebrations to mark sixteen hundred years since Constantine's victory and the promulgation of the Edict of Milan. *In hoc signo vinces* (1913) was directed by Nino Oxilia. A poet, songwriter and playwright, Oxilia became one of Italian early cinema's most important directors and made impressive contributions to the diva genre before his death (Dalle Vacche 2008: 225-254). Despite its epic size and important director, *In hoc signo vinces* has been little analysed because only a few reels of it survive and doubts remain over its reception. It does not seem to have widely circulated in Italy, and was quickly surpassed by *Marcantonio e Cleopatra* (1913) (Redi 1999:86). After exploring the surviving materials related to *In hoc signo vinces* (1913) and its reception, I analyse its use of Early Christian martyrdom.

The surviving print of *In hoc signo vinces* (1913) is twenty-eight minutes long with Dutch intertitles. This is between a fifth and a sixth of the length of the original. Although the length of *In hoc signo vinces* was not officially recorded, it was reported to be around 2500-3000 metres (ICR 1833; Bernardini 1994 [1913,1]: 285). Inflating film lengths was, however common in the historical genre during this period (Alovisio 2005: 232). A publicity brochure with an eight page plot summary and

photographs survives at the Museo Nazionale del Cinema (Savoia Film, 1913). This allows us to reconstruct the narrative of this unusual epic, and to discuss the themes of the work. The surviving film section contains one of the two scenes of Christian martyrdom, and shows evidence of the strong Pagan/Christian contrast also found in the plot.

The Roman Empire is ruled by a tetrarchy composed of Constantine, Maximinian and Maxentius. Constantine's sister Constantia falls in love with Licinio, but her mother Fausta (sister of Maximinian, brother of Maxentius and Constantine's wife) wants to break up their union and marry Constantia to Maximinian. Maximinian's courtship is unsuccessful, and Constantia decides to become Christian to give her strength in her struggle against him. Fausta observes the baptism and reports back to Maximinian. Maximinian's attempts to seduce Constantia at an orgy fail when she refuses to enter it, despite Fausta's pleading. Maximinian decides to persecute the Christians in order to persuade Constantia, remarking "Dove non valgono le insidie del senso, varrà il martirio del cuore" (Savoia Film 1913: 5). Constantia is forced to watch the death of Christians in the arena.

Maximinian forces his army to swear allegiance to him, but three Christian soldiers refuse and are quickly killed. Their bodies are loaded onto chariots and driven past Constantia's palace, where Fausta again tries to convince her. The Christians secretly collect the martyrs, and bury them in the countryside. Constantia has her love for Licinio blessed by Bishop Materno, and takes flight to Constantine's palace. Fausta leads Maximinian into Constantia's bedroom, but she has already left and the siblings pursue her. Enraged by the treatment of his sister, Constantine defaces the inscription 'Divo' under Maximinian's statue. Fausta seduces a centurion, Elvo Bruto, who attempts to assassinate Constantine. His sister warns him, and the Emperor places a doll in his bed, who the centurion stabs. Maximinian's coup is defeated, and the army turns against him.

In Rome, Fausta and Maxentius hear of their father's death and prepare for war. Constantine and his army cross the Alps. After swearing to his mother Helena to respect the Christians, Constantine sees a cross in the sky. Jesus appears to Constantine in a dream, and Constantine decides to raise a Christian banner. Meanwhile, Fausta and the pagan high priests declare that Maxentius will win. At the Battle of Milvian Bridge, Maxentius is defeated and Maxentius drowns as he crosses a pontoon bridge.



Constantine pays homage to Pope Miltiades and, by respecting Christianity and giving the papacy the Lateran palace, he allows Christianity to flourish.

The surviving footage comes from the first and third acts of the film. Although the plot summary does not structure the film in this way, the ‘acts’ seem to correspond to the reels of the film. The first act covers the introduction of the characters, Constantia’s first rejection of Maximinian and the initial blessing of Licinius and Constantia. The third act begins by showing the martyrdom of the three Christians, their public display and burial. It then shows Constantine’s flight from the palace, Fausta’s failed attempt to lead Maxentius into Constantia’s bedchamber and Constantia’s arrival at Constantine’s palace. The footage is only a sample of the total work, but it allows us to make some judgements about the film without speculating.

As the plot summary suggests, the early part of the film is focussed around Constantia and Maxentius’ attempts to seduce her, while the latter part gives greater weight to Constantine’s struggle to become Emperor. The intertitles clearly state that the ‘Costanza’ of the Italian-language summary or ‘Constantine’ in the Dutch fragment is Constantine’s sister, Flavia Julia Constantia, rather than his daughter Costanza (Constance), who is venerated as a Saint and buried in Rome. As regards the mise-en-scène, the photographs and surviving footage suggest *In hoc signo vinces* was not as sumptuous as *Quo Vadis* (1913), in particular for the number of extras and the grandeur of the Roman interiors. Myriam, the Trieste correspondent of *La Vita Cinematografica*, opined that Oxilia’s film was superior to Guazzoni’s epic for sheer spectacle (Myriam, 1913). The surviving footage and screenshots do not concur with this statement, and this assertion can be ascribed to the local favouritism of Turin’s film magazines or over-enthusiasm at the Christian scenes. Nonetheless, outdoor filming and the fourth century setting cover some of these deficiencies. For example, although the plot summary mentions the burial of Felix and Nabor in the Cimitero ad martires (sic) and the surviving footage shows a simple countryside setting, this is not inaccurate, as these men were martyred and buried in Milan rather than in the Catacombs of Rome.

Maximinian and Fausta’s attempts to separate Constantia and Licinius bear some similarities with the narrative formula of *Whither Quo Vadis*, as decadent Pagans try to separate a chaste Christian couple. In the first scene, the intertitle immediately informs us of Fausta’s illicit love for Licinius.

Fausta's sexualised pose startles Licinius, while Fausta wears white clothing and behaves modestly. Fausta also attempts to help her father, Maximinian, divorce his wife and marry Constantia, and helps him into her bedchambers to further this objective. Maximinian also displays martyr bodies and takes Constantia to the arena. However, the dynamics behind these provocations are slightly different to Early Church martyrdom films and Roman Epics because Maximinian is unable to threaten Constantia with martyrdom or rape directly, unlike Fulvius in *Fabiola* (1918) or Nero in *Quo Vadis* (1924). Nonetheless, martyrdom plays a key part in Maximinian's attempts to gain power and seduce Constantia: he attempts to horrify her with the display of three martyrs outside her palace and in the arena (Figs 6.2, 6.4).

The deaths of Felix, Nabor and Victor come as the army is ordered to sacrifice and salute Maximinian. Rather than passing near to the Emperor as the previous soldier did, the first martyr stands away from him, throws his helmet down, points to the sky and crosses his arms. Two other martyrs leap forward, and adopt the same pose. After the intertitle, the Emperor orders the soldiers to kill them, and they swarm around them. This does not completely hide the murder, as the stabbed martyrs are still visible in the foreground, but maximises the screen presence of the soldiers (approximately fifty in number) and the drama when they disperse and leave the martyrs' corpses on the floor. The shots showing the collection of the bodies and roughly loading them into chariots seem designed to contrast with the reverent shots of Christian burial (Figs 6.2, 6.3). As the chariots leave, the camera pans right to left across the military camp, showing the natural setting and the number of extras, which seem underwhelming in comparison with other Italian historical epics.

In the scene on Constantia's balcony, the camera remains fixed as she moves from the right into the foreground. The staging emphasises scenic depth, with first elements of the crowd moving onto the steps furthest from the camera before the martyrs and soldiers appear below. Much of the shot is taken up by the terrace and railing, so Constantia's reaction is emphasised by its position in the centre of the image (Fig 6.2, bottom right). She enters alone from the right, looking towards the camera in an anguished state, and then alternates between looking over the railing and displaying her despair in the direction of the camera. Although it does not survive, the plot summary notes that the scene of martyrdom in the arena would have also given considerable space to Constantia's anguish:

Con crudela malizia [Massenzio] obbliga la neofita ad assistere allo spettacolo del Circo. Un popolo feroce, assetato di spettacoli di sangue, assisterà alla lotta dei gladiatori, all'ecatombe dei martiri plaudendo; il cuore di una fanciulla educata a più miti sentimenti invece subirà un martirio atrocissimo. Un soldato esce dalle file e si professa Cristiano. Le urla della folla lo condannano...i barbari soldati della guardia gli si fanno sopra...e il sangue del martire arrossa l'arena (Savoia Film, 1913: 5).

A publicity photograph of the arena scene shows two crucified martyrs, the soldier-martyr and other soldiers saluting Maxentius (Fig 6.4). It is interesting that, in the plot summary, the watching of these execution constitutes “un martirio atrocissimo” for Constantia and, presumably, sensitive cinema-goers, as the reviewer for *Moving Picture World* acknowledged:

The costuming is gorgeous and historically correct...several scenes of bacchanal orgies are shown, which, if indulged in at the present time, would make the cabaret look like a Sunday school picnic. These scenes mar somewhat the picture, but they represent the mode of life at that early period. There are other scenes where Constance, the young neophyte, is forced to view by her persecutor, the gladiatorial games, at the heticomb of the martyrs. The dragging of the dead over the sand with hooks is not a pleasant sight, even in a picture (*Moving Picture World* 28/02/1914: 1073).

This suggests a scene in which the extravagant performance of Constantia's horror was very prominent and carefully contrasted with the ferocious cruelty of Maximinian and the arena audience.

As well as martyrdom, *In hoc signo vinces* also plays close attention to Christian worship and sacraments. In the surviving footage, the reverence of the Christians at an open air mass is contrasted with the licentiousness at Maximinian's orgy. The sequence showing the pious burials of the martyrs contrasts with their rough handling by the soldiers (Figs 6.2-6.3). Similarly, the first Mass is juxtaposed against an orgy; Constantia's baptism with the Circus action. Besides this mechanism of contrast, the reverent scenes are also brought into the central narrative by Constantia's presence. For instance, the Christian couple appear at the martyr's solemn burial and are very active in the prayers, before seeking Bishop Materno's blessing. According to the Savoia Film brochure, the second half of the film features far fewer of these liturgical moments, as the action shifts towards Constantine. After Helena blesses her

daughter, she then forces Constantine to respect the faith. In this way, the faith of Constantine's family is shown to be a key part in his conversion, as the brochure confirms:

La fede di milioni di Martiri, la fede di Elena, di Costanza, la sua stessa fede predice  
a Constantino il trionfo (Savoia Film 1913: 9).

*In hoc signo vinces* should be seen within the context of the celebrations of the anniversary of Constantine's victory and the Edict of Milan. The Constantine celebrations were the first to be organised in the Church's history (De Nardis 2013). Pius X decided on them in February 1912 (*Stampa* 13/02/1912: 6). A Committee was formed from Cardinals and Vatican figures with an international outlook (*Tablet* 03/02/1912: 25). The commemorations began at the Lateran Palace on the 28<sup>th</sup> October 1912, with a talk from Orazio Marucchi and other members of the organising committee to a group of dignitaries (*Stampa* 29/10/1912: 3). The events organized include *conferenze* (both popular and high culture), the building of a new Basilica, masses in the Catacombs for the Popes of Constantine's reign, mass pilgrimages, special Masses and events organised across Italy, including a scheme whereby people undertook the pious activities of the pilgrims in their local Church in order to obtain plenary indulgences (Tacchi 2015: 253-263). Hundreds of books and magazine articles were published across Europe, creating a mythologised portrait of the Emperor (De Nardis 2013). The attention given to Early Church martyrs, such as in the Catacomb services and in printed pilgrimage guides, should also be considered (Association Catholique...1913). For instance, Nepi was the Roman territory in which the Milvian Bridge was located and home of forty martyrs, including two Bishops, and both of these elements were emphasised during the week-long celebrations (De Nardis 2013).

The celebration of Constantine's Edict of Milan and the liberties he granted the Church had an contemporary relevance in the context of laicisation and Church/State struggles in Spain, Portugal, France and Italy (Serra de Manresa 2013, De Nardis 2013, Tacchi 2015: 249). The precise details of the Constantine celebrations do require further investigation, and it remains difficult to draw a definitive political meaning from them (Tacchi 2015: 279-280). For instance, while Catholics in Milan sought to open a dialogue with the State, other elements of the Church launched fierce criticisms of it (Tacchi 2015: 279-280). We could see the Constantine celebrations as a means of making a 'cultural offer' to Catholics, similar to Italy's unification celebrations in 1911, and steering popular interest in Roman

history towards the Early Church. However, the celebration of Constantine in Italy came at an uneasy time. Intransigent Catholics and anti-clericals were still very vocal over issues like the laicisation of primary education in 1911. Following years of support in local elections and gradual relaxation of the *non expedit*, the Giolitti-Gentiloni pact was enacted between the Unione Elettorale Cattolica and the Liberals to prevent universal male suffrage leading to socialist electoral victory at the general election of 1913 (Coppa 2008: 73-74). Catholic voters ensured the survival of the Liberals until the post-war crisis, with the new parliament including twenty-nine Catholic MPs.

Drawing an explicit political or religious message from *In hoc signo vinces* is difficult. Both the film and the Constantine celebrations were multivalent and transnational, functioning as a social spectacle and a primer for debate about Church-State relations in different countries. But the wider political and religious contexts of the Constantinian celebrations provided a favourable reception context for *In hoc signo vinces*. A copy of the film was sent to the Pope (De Marco 1913: 84). This featured in Savoia Film's own publicity articles and, presumably, in that of exhibitors. Looking at Parisian newspapers, where the Colisée and the Constantinian epic competed against the lavishly-advertised *Marcantonio e Cleopatra* (1913) at the Gaumont Palace, the world's largest cinema, one sees a contrast between the two visions of the Roman world: Constantine against Cleopatra, wholesome family matinées against epic entertainment with a decadent twist (*Journal* 21/11/1913: 8; *Petit Parisien* 21/11/1913: 6; *Matin* 27/11/1913: 4). *In hoc signo vinces* was profitable in Jean Desmet's distribution network in the Netherlands, as it was repeatedly requested by cinemas in Catholic areas (Blom 2003: 231). While Savoia Film's epic may not have had the visual grandeur of Cines' film or the star performance of Giovanna Terribili-Gonzales, it had a distinctive appeal for Catholic audiences. Neither Savoia Film nor Nino Oxilia were interested in the historical genre or religious film-making for very long, but the choice of Joan of Arc and Constantine as film subjects demonstrates a savvy knowledge of topics which would do well on export markets. Nonetheless, the lack of Italian and foreign reviews points to *In hoc signo vinces* having a more limited impact than the epics produced by Cines and Itala in 1912-1914.

*The Legend of Saint Barbara*

*La Leggenda di Santa Barbara* was a short film which sat between two documentaries on munitions factories and weapons manufacturing, with the whole programme being referred to as *L'altro esercito* (*Film, corriere...*20/10/1918: 2). The whole film was 2603 metres long, giving a total run time of 94 minutes at 24 frames per second (ICR 13305; ICR 13306). *L'altro esercito* was made by Cines, commissioned by the Munitions Ministry and profits went to the Opera Nazionale per gli Orfani degli Operai ed Invalidi di guerra (*Film, corriere...*31/05/1918: 11-12). The title, *L'altro esercito*, points to both its audience and its subjects. The Minister for Munitions had described women as 'the other army' because of their work on the home front and in industry (Belzer 2010: 45). Equally, several hundred thousand workers in war industries were subject to military discipline and living in barracks (Gooch 2014: 123-126). After showing the Italian commanders and some images of War through the ages, presumably borrowed from Cines' historical epics, the first part covered the construction of arms, from the raw steel through to field guns, rifles, sights and explosives.<sup>30</sup> The start of the second part, on munitions, showed the special school for children, the disabled and women, as well as "l'esercito delle donne operaie," before showing workers making shells, tanks, aircraft and submarines. Here, I examine the film copy, the unusual context in which the film was presented, the role of Lyda Borelli and the connections between nationalist and religious martyrdom.

The Eye Film Institute hold a Dutch-language copy of the Early Christian martyrdom film, entitled *De Legende van de Heilige Barbara (De Patrones der Artillerie)*. A couple of shots do seem to be unnaturally shortened, especially when the Romans draw their swords and Barbara's father dies. Nonetheless, at 5 minutes and 37 seconds, the film looks largely complete.<sup>31</sup> The documentary elements of *L'altro esercito* also survive. The Imperial War Museum (IWM) holds two reels of *The Other Italian Army* with English language intertitles, which correspond with the second part of *L'altro esercito*. At

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<sup>30</sup> (*Film, corriere...*12/01/1918: 14).

Italian Ministry of Munitions. *The Other Italian Army*. Imperial War Museum, London. Catalogue no: IWM 460.

<sup>31</sup> As the censorship records only detail the length of the two parts of *L'altro esercito*, we are unable to assess if any footage is missing from *La Leggenda di Santa Barbara* (ICR 13305: 11/02/1918; ICR 13306 11/02/1918).

26 minutes and 44 seconds, the IWM film is an abbreviation of the Italian second part, which would have ran for nearly 46 minutes, according to the length mentioned in the censorship ledgers (ICR 13306). The National Archives in Maryland contain *Historical Film No. 1138*, a ten minute fragment which quickly shows scenes from both parts of *L'altro esercito* and matches some scenes of the IWM film.<sup>32</sup> This fragment is largely without intertitles and is a compilation of scenes, perhaps made for archival purposes. Meanwhile, the IWM film is a coherent work. As the surviving copies suggest, the footage that made up *L'altro esercito* was edited into different forms for international distribution. Sadly, we do not know whether the foreign version included Borelli's performance. The surviving copies were kept by archives initially interested in military/historical film, so the section could have been removed by them, or it could have been edited out by Italian propagandists when it was released abroad.

*La Leggenda di Santa Barbara* re-imagined Barbara as a national-religious martyr, blowing herself up to prevent the onslaught of the Huns. Saint Barbara had been the patron saint of artillerymen since the medieval period (Smith, Devries 2013: 157; Kinard 2007: 37). The first scene shows a woman and a girl entering a room in a Roman house, and the woman examining a box on a table. The first intertitle reads: "The father of Barbara trusts the results of the nights he has spent in order to discover an explosive." One of the girls looks sad and paces in the foreground, while Barbara's father talks to another young woman. Barbara arrives in the background, and the camera briefly cuts to a medium-shot of Borelli, before cutting back to its former position. Barbara's father salutes the woman and children, who leave the room. Barbara comes into the foreground. "Do you see? How much money went into the powder in this box..." In a medium-long shot, Barbara's father shows her a letter, and she looks sad. "The invasion of the Vandals." In a medium shot, an agonised woman crawls along the ground and begs for mercy. The next shot shows a group of men and women in a ravine, with the latter dressed in virginal white. The men draw their swords, as the Vandals rush on. "Barbara's father is murdered." A half-naked warrior leans over Barbara's prostrate father, partly blocking our view as he stabs him. The high angle of the shot emphasises his powerless state. The next scene shows the chained

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<sup>32</sup> *Historical Film No. 1138 (Italian Munitions Manufacture, 1914-1918)*. US Army Signal Corps/National Archives, c.1935. 905 feet. National Archives Identifier: 24642.

Christian women in procession being accompanied by semi-naked spearmen, with some of the women being carried on their shoulders, and then a larger group of warriors.

“The virgins, who fled into the temple with Barbara, attempt to find safety in the subterranean vaults.” As a woman protects a small child, other women rush down some stairs and into a colonnade. They huddle together. Barbara slowly process down the steps and walks towards the camera, and the other women kneel in prayer around her. She blessed one of them. “Go, friends...and warn me if the gate gives way!” Borelli looks upwards to heaven, and closes her eyes. She walks away from the camera, holding a wooden box aloft. The next shot shows the Vandals using battering rams on a gate, and then cuts back to the Christian women below ground, distressed by the warning. “The gate is breaking...save us...save us...Barbara...!” The women stand around Barbara and hold their arms outstretched, as Barbara holds the box aloft and throws it towards the camera. A hand-coloured flash of red and yellow smoke appears across the image, and we then see another puff of grey smoke and some figures fleeing. Barbara and two companions are shown in ecstasy in the final scene.

The costumes and sets of *La Leggenda di Santa Barbara* show the influence of the colonialist othering found in Italian silent cinema. The half-dressed Vandals could be the Carthaginians in *Cabiria* (1914) or the black cannibals of adventure films like *I topi grigi* (1918). Meanwhile, the white-robed women are coded as Christian virgins, and the Roman men wear elegant costumes. The exotic animals embroidered on Barbara’s fathers robe hint at the conquests of the Roman Empire, and the elaborate interior of the family home also suggests a level of sophistication far above that of the Goths. Rape is the obvious threat hanging over Barbara and the Christian virgins. An Austrian newspaper apparently reacted angrily to Borelli playing “le eroine nazionali italiane violentate dai soldati austriaci.” (*Film, corriere*...22/03/1918: 7). Quite how this misunderstanding came about is difficult to comprehend, but it does illustrate the propaganda value of Borelli’s work and the prevalence of rape as an Austro-Hungarian threat in Italian patriotic films like *Maciste Alpino* (1916), *La guerra e il sogno di Momi* (1917) and *Mariute* (1918).

If the film’s nationalistic divide is clear, its Christian elements are less so. On the one hand, the Dutch film copy mentions *de Heilige Barbara* in its title and features straightforward Christian symbols. A curtain with a crucifix design is displayed in Barbara’s house, and she wears a crown (of martyrdom).



The image of Barbara blessing one of the praying virgins underground could be from an Early Christian novel. The final scene showing three women in agony/ecstasy is powerful. Yet, there are no scenes of obvious Christian symbols or religious worship. The Dutch language intertitles refer to Barbara and the virgins taking refuge in the subterranean vaults of the temple, rather than the crypt or Catacombs of a Church. Barbara and the women pray and raise their arms heavenwards, but the film features no explicit references to Christianity, such as small crucifixes, religious art or an apotheosis scene like at the end of *Quo Vadis* (1913).

Furthermore, the film is a complete re-writing of Barbara's common hagiographical legend. Most manuscripts have Barbara's father protecting her from suitors by putting her in a tower, but discovering her Christianity when she alters the bath house to reference the Holy Trinity (Williams 1975: 156-157). Her father's attempt to kill her is unsuccessful, and she is miraculously transported to a mountain. After horrific tortures, Jesus appears and heals her, before another day of suffering and shame, including having her "sides torn open, wounds lacerated, head battered [and] breasts cut off" (Williams 1975: 157). Her own father executes her on a mountain top, and is struck by lightning. As a result of the freedom of the adaptation, symbols of her martyrdom shown in paintings, such as the palm, the sword and a tower, do not feature in the film.

As well as blurring both hagiographic and nationalist meanings, the film had a special significance because of Lyda Borelli's performance and stardom. Already an accomplished and famous theatre actress when she starred in her first film in 1913, Borelli was widely acknowledged as one of the greatest stars of the 1910s and had an irresistible combination of sex appeal, passion, stagecraft and elegance (Bernardini 1982: 201; Redi 1999: 101-102; Brunetta 2008: 94-100; Dalle Vacche 2013: 190). Combining fabulous escapism, fatal passions, edgy romance and melodrama, the diva films of Lyda Borelli have received extensive analysis, as has the development of her star persona (Pantieri 1995; Torello 2005: 121-164; Jandelli 2006: 93-146; Dalle Vacche 2008; Blom 2010: 69-96; Dagna 2012: 57-85). *La Leggenda di Santa Barbara* was one of Borelli's last films before her retirement. Immediately prior to this, she had also featured as Italia in another government-Cines propaganda one-reeler, *Per la vittoria e per la pace!* (Martinelli 1991 [1918]: 191). In her last feature film, *Il dramma di una notte* (1918), Borelli played a woman who prostituted herself to support her family and whose

happiness is undone when her past is discovered. The tragic sacrifice of Borelli's character led *La Vita Cinematografica*'s critic to comment, "Non è più corruzione, pervertimento, ma olocausto, martirio" (Bertoldo 1918: 221). What we need to consider here is the influence of her stardom and performance on the character of Saint Barbara, the role the film had within Borelli's career and its relationship to the rest of the *altro esercito* film programme.

Angela Dalle Vacche notes the violence that commonly ended the diva film, with its oppressed or socially-dangerous heroines often pushed to murder once all hope of transformation is extinguished (Dalle Vacche 2013: 189). Suicide also plays a prominent role in these films. In this sense, *Santa Barbara* can be seen as a noble conclusion to Borelli's career, as the destructiveness of her diva-persona shown in *Malombra* (1917) and *Carnevalesca* (1918) is used for inspirational, patriotic ends. Cristina Jandelli argues that, while Francesca Bertini used her appearances in war propaganda to shape her star image, Borelli took a different path:

Lyda Borelli non si sottrae alla chiamata patriottica, ma ne interiorizza il rapporto trasformandolo in espressione di sentimento, cioè di dolore...Italia Madre, Santa votata al sacrificio per la Patria: i simboli del patriottismo nazionale si trasformano con la Borelli in liriche esplosioni del sentimento elementate che la guerra provoca: si soffre (Jandelli 2006: 121-122).

The difference Jandelli notes between Italy's two starring divas may be caused by commercial factors; Borelli was retiring, while Bertini was setting up her own film studio and launching her Seven Deadly Sins films. In short, the lyrical suffering and sacrifice that was part of Borelli's performances from her first feature film to her last are thus reaffirmed in her patriotic short films.

*L'altro esercito* was reportedly given a warm reception (Bruno 1918:6; *Film, corriere*...10/03/1918: 4). For instance, the film was not shown in cinemas in Pavia, but appeared for five days at the Teatro Fraschini, which was crammed with people eager to see the film and support the local wounded veterans' association (Magnani 1918: 6). The film's status as patriotic event clearly attracted many viewers. The prominence attached to Lyda Borelli in the Italian film's advertisement shows how much it traded on her fame, despite the brevity of her appearance. As regards its foreign circulation, Francesco Soro wrote that the film was "proiettato ed apprezzato da tutti gli Alleati" (Soro 1935:61). The IWM catalogue notes that the *The Other Italian Army* is:

a comparatively sophisticated and entertaining film, showing a number of techniques in the use of graphics and wipes which were to become clichés twenty years later, but are surprising in a First World War film. This compares very favourably indeed with its British equivalent, IWM 161, *Woolwich Arsenal and its Workers* (Smither 1994: 176).

So, while *L'altro esercito* did attract Italian patrons because of the opportunities it provided for easy manifestations of patriotism and Lyda Borelli's performance, the documentary elements were relatively entertaining, at least in the shorter version found in Britain. Elements of *Santa Barbara* clearly reflect the surrounding documentary, from her father's mention of the money invested in producing explosives through to her own self-sacrificing contribution to the war effort. The intertitles of the IWM film also mention "the final victory against barbarism" in its second reel. If this intertitle existed in *L'altro esercito*, it would have been a link between the barbarian invaders shown in *Santa Barbara* and the imager of anti-German propaganda.

To conclude, *La Leggenda di Santa Barbara* is rare example of hagiography being 'corrupted' into nationalist martyrdom. Christian symbols and gestures are consequently downplayed, although they are referenced at certain points, such as the final sequence of ecstasy. By transferring Lyda Borelli's diva-persona into a patriotic context, the film-makers exploited her extravagant performances of suffering femininity for propaganda purposes and promoted the notion of female sacrifice, which could be expressed through munitions work, charity or supporting soldiers. The historical action provides a clear parallel with the depictions of Germanic barbarism that were part of Allied propaganda and uses rape as an important subtext. By situating events in the Early Church, the film-makers also subtly allied Italian nationalism and the Catholic faith.

There was no attributed director for *La Leggenda di Santa Barbara*. However, there are circumstantial factors linking Enrico Guazzoni to the film, such as his work with Borelli in *Madame Tallien* (1916) and prominence in the historical genre. In May 1917, the Catholic Banco di Roma ordered Enrico Guazzoni to make an unspecified propaganda film (*Arte Muta* 30/04/1917: 23). This commission coincided with the production of *Fabiola* (Redi 1999:114). Some props, such as a chair and the distinctive curtain, appear in both *Fabiola* and *Santa Barbara* (Fig 6.5-6.6). Moreover, there were strong connections between Guazzoni's Palatino Films, majority stakeholder Cines and Cines'

former owner, the Banco di Roma (Bernardini 2012: 180). It is highly probable that Guazzoni directed the film.

### *Fabulous Fabiola*

While it has received far less academic attention than *Quo Vadis* (1913) or *Cabiria* (1914), *Fabiola* (1918) was a key work in Enrico Guazzoni's career and in the depiction of Early Church martyrdom. In returning to a genre which gave Italian cinema its brief golden period and made him internationally famous, Guazzoni demonstrated his continuing excellence in *mise-en-scène* and reflected the evolution of cinema in the intervening period. As regards Early Church martyrdom, *Fabiola* links many of the different films examined in this thesis. In its production values, length and marketing, *Fabiola* had much in common with the earlier epics. But *Fabiola* gave the Early Christians greater coverage than these more secular works. Indeed, one could consider it as a combination and amplification of the various one-reel Early Christian martyr films examined in Chapter Four, such as *Dall'amore al martirio* (1910), *Santa Cecilia* (1911) and *San Sebastiano* (1911, both versions). Rodolfo Kanzler's involvement means that there is a strong connection to his work in magic lantern slides and early film. Finally, in adapting an explicitly Catholic source, Guazzoni's work appealed to the Catholics who had supported illustrated lectures and the Catholic film sector.

I have viewed two copies of Guazzoni's *Fabiola*: the restoration held at the Cineteca Nazionale in Rome, and a 9.5mm version for the Pathé Baby, an amateur camera and projector system popular from the 1920s. The Pathé Baby system was advertised to Catholic educationalists in Italy during this decade (Piredda 2013: 216). The 9.5mm *Fabiola* print is inferior to the restored 35mm print: it is thirty-eight minutes shorter, has drastically slimmed-down intertitles, poor image quality and alterations to the

narrative structure, which allow some scenes to be condensed or cut.<sup>33</sup> Although my plot summary and analysis are based around the restored version, I do consider the 9.5mm copy and a possibly different American version of the film. After presenting a plot summary, I consider the narrative in general and then analyse the key scenes of Early Christian martyrdom in the film. I then examine the role of the *mise-en-scène* in *Fabiola*, and the reception of the film.

*Fabiola* begins by introducing the Christian characters as they venerate the body of a martyr in the Catacombs. The martyr's widow, Lucina, and young son, Pancras, are shown, as well as the slave Sira, the Christian strongman Quadratus, the blind girl Caecilia and the centurion Sebastian. The action then moves to Fabiola who, punishes her Christian slave Sira for lateness. At Fabiola's lavish dinner, the adventurer Fulvius begins his pursuit of Agnes, Fabiola's cousin and a future Saint. A chance sighting of Sira's scarf leads to a flashback, in which Fulvius realises that Sira is his sister Myriam, who he conspired to sell into slavery after losing the family fortune at the gaming table. The action then moves to the blind Caecilia's house, where the Christians happen upon a parade of wild beasts destined for the circus.

During the drunken street parties of the Saturnalia festival, Pancras and Caecilia are assaulted by the bully Corvinus, but Quadratus intervenes and takes them to Sebastian's house. From the balcony, the Christians observe as Corvinus pays Afra, Fabiola's African slave, to target a love potion and a talisman at her mistress. Returning to the party at Fabiola's house, Fulvius and his sidekick Eurotus force the Christian Torquatus to reluctantly sacrifice to the imperial deities. In the next scene, Fulvius and Eurotus send Corvinus undercover into Agnes' house, where alms are being distributed. Corvinus' disguise is uncovered, but Pancras saves him from any angry retribution. After Corvinus plays with his talisman, a model of Fabiola, Fulvius steals it and uses it during a debate with the Emperor as proof of the Christians' evil superstitions. The edict of persecution is promulgated. Fulvius and Corvino show Torquatus the fearsome torture chamber. The action moves to the feast, where Fulvius enjoys the dancing girls and beats Torquatus at dice. Despite handing over a ring with a Christian fish symbol as

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<sup>33</sup> As well as abbreviating the length of shots and removing some of the intertitles, the Pathé Baby version also ends with the martyrdoms and Fabiola's baptism, so scenes like Fabiola's speech to the mob and Fulvius' discovery of his sister are missing. Fulvius' scenes are often reduced and his narrative is not concluded.

payment, Torquatus again sacrifices to the imperial deities. Soldiers affix the edict of persecution. Fulvius pushes Torquatus to reveal the Catacombs and secretly watches as Agnes and the virgins take their holy vows. In the night, Quadratus and Pancras overpower the guards and destroy the imperial edict. The following morning, angered by the destruction of the edict and whipped up by demagogues, the mob become agitated. Fabiola sends Agnes to her country villa as Fulvius incites the crowd. The mob sack the Christian homes.

After initially heading for Catacombs, Corvino and Fulvius head to the countryside to capture Agnes, but Quadratus and Pancras delay them by barricading the road. Nonetheless, Pancras is captured by Roman soldiers. Fulvius sneaks into the villa and threatens Agnes with marriage or martyrdom, before showing the warrant to Fabiola. Directed by the anguished Torquatus, Corvino sets off into the Catacombs after Pancras. The Christians are blessing the host, and hear the commotion. Quadratus causes a landslide on the Romans, and the blind Caecilia guides the women to safety. Soldiers waiting above ground glimpse Caecilia through an opening, and throw rocks down to kill her. The soldiers throw the body into the river. Corvino selects the arena victims from among the Christian slave labourers, and picks Pancras. As he spots Caecilia's body in the river, Torquatus repents for his wrongdoing.

In the Catacombs, the communion is blessed and the young boy Tarsicius offers to take the sacrament to the Christian prisoners. He is killed by the mob, before Quadratus intervenes and removes his body. Fabiola offers Fulvius money for Agnes' liberty, but he sticks to his threat. The next scene shows "Il martire adolescente [e] Mater dolorosa," as Lucina embraces Pancras for the last time and he is killed in the arena. An angel appears to Fulvius and Agnes, as he attempts to persuade her for the last time. Agnes is taken before the Emperor, and tried. Fulvius's denunciation against Sebastian is heard, and the centurion makes the sign of the cross to the shocked audience. Quadratus is ordered to arrest him, but he too proclaims his faith. Fulvius is distraught at Agne's execution, and kills Eurotus in the next scene because of his role in suggesting the marriage or martyrdom dilemma. Fulvius goes to watch Sebastian's execution, but is anguished when the martyr foresees his conversion. In the Catacombs, Fabiola assists in the pious burial of Agnes. After secretly watching this scene, Fulvius is overwhelmed with grief and converts. Fulvius meets his sister again. Fabiola is baptised. In the final scene of

apotheosis, a martyred woman lies dead on a pagan altar and two angels appear. The scene fades, and the final scene shows the angels and a crucifix.

In Roman Epics such as *Quo Vadis* (1913, 1924), the narrative alternates between the fictional protagonists and the historical events of the Imperial court and the Early Church. In many of the case studies which tend towards the Roman Epic style, the Early Christians receive the least emphasis, and frequently used to create an atmosphere of persecution around the central couple or exploited for spectacle. Yet, in Wiseman's novel, "the characters are principally props for the motions of the spiritual drama around them," and saints become the novel's main concern (Rhodes 2005: 100). Far more so than Alessandro Blasetti's 1949 adaptation, Guazzoni's version closely follows Wiseman's text. Considered within the typology proposed in Chapter One, *Fabiola* (1918) is an Early Christian martyr film rather than a Roman Epic. We see little of the Emperor, apart from his appearances in the Imperial box and during Agnes' trial. As in Wiseman's novel, Pancras and Agnes appear more frequently than Sebastian. The intrigues of Fulvius and Corvinus are a constant threat to the Christians and, towards the end of the film, we see a succession of martyrdoms prior to the baptism of Fabiola. The heroine's proximity to Agnes and Sebastian and her grief at their deaths also illustrates the power of martyrdom to inspire conversion. In *Fabiola*, Guazzoni demonstrates an effective use of the close-up, shot rhythm and alternate montage, breaking with the stylistic traits of the Italian historical epics of 1913-1914, such as long takes, a comparatively fixed camera and emphasis on composition, which still dominated contemporary works like *Frate Sole* (1918). In short, the five martyrdom scenes are crucial in the film because they mark the culmination of narrative strands regarding the Saints, showcase Guazzoni's cinematic techniques and point to the power of martyrdom to inspire Christians.

The first martyr's death in the film, that of Caecilia, is depicted through powerful close-ups and careful referencing of other elements in the film (Fig 6.7). As Caecilia guides the Christians in the darkness, the scene is very poorly lit. The chiaroscuro effect of this shot contrasts with the next, in which Caecilia's blindness and the light allow the Romans to murder her. Cutting between the stone-throwers above and the martyr below, the sequence first shows Caecilia's bloodied face in close up, followed by a medium shot of her agony as she raises her hands to God and is continually struck. The camera tilts down as she falls to her knees. The final close up shows her lying dead on the floor. As the

Romans carry the body away, the Christians reverently follow at a distance and gasp when the body is thrown into the river. We see Caecilia's corpse floating in a medium shot. In a slightly later sequence, when Torquatus sees Caecilia's body floating in the river, the camera vividly cuts between his distraught face and the floating corpse, mimicking the earlier scene which cut between the Romans and Caecilia. As Torquatus begs for forgiveness, the camera tilts downwards, as it did to capture Caecilia's final moments.

In Wiseman's novel, Caecilia's remains are meant to be discarded in the river, but are secretly spirited into the Catacombs (Wiseman: 2, XVII-XVIII). Guazzoni instead shows them discarded in the river, a scene which allows them to be juxtaposed with the reaction of Torquatus. The final image of the sequence shows Caecilia's corpse with a halo. Certain elements of Guazzoni's composition hint at Paul Delaroche's *La Jeune Martyre*, notably the change to a white dress in the final shot, the anguished mourners and the halo which appears around the martyr's head and is far brighter in the 35mm restoration (Fig 6.8). Hava Aldouby notes that Federico Faruffini's *Sacrifice of a Virgin on the Nile* (1865) may have inspired the scene of the sacrifice in Guazzoni's *La sposa del Nilo* (1911), and that Guazzoni's 1911 film eschews the painting's tableaux to focus on the victim in its final shot (Aldouby 2013: 36). There was also an image of the drowned Nydia in some prints of *Gli ultimi giorni di Pompei* (1908) (Fig 4.5). The image of the floating, drowned virgin has a powerful and lasting symbolism, which Guazzoni exploits here. Guazzoni's concluding image shows the continuing influence of painterly and cinematic works in his film-making, while moving away from the direct citations of *Quo Vadis* (1913) and *Christus* (1916). On a cinematic level though, the rather statue-like drowned Caecilia is not particularly lifelike, especially when compared with the earlier images of the martyr (Fig 6.7-6.8).

In Wiseman's novel, the blind Caecilia, a fictional character similar to Lydia in *The Last Days of Pompeii*, is captured in the Catacombs and dies in the torture chamber (Wiseman: 2, XVII). In his adaptation, Guazzoni's Caecilia fits within the framework of the somewhat melodramatic and mawkish portraits of blind people in Italian silent cinema, and is not developed much as a character.<sup>34</sup> Also, the

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<sup>34</sup> In Victorian fiction, most blind women do not marry because of the impossibility of keeping a home and raising children, while blind men are aided by their devoted wives (Gitter 1999: 675-676, Carpenter 2010: 145-



Catacombs are imagined as the site of her death, adding to the connections between martyrdom and the subterranean world. The shots of Caecilia guiding the Christians in the dark recall that her life and death are closely linked to the underground space, rather than the arena or other spectacular locations. Compared with the deaths of other martyrs examined in this thesis, where the violent moment of death is not shown (*San Paolo dramma biblico*, *San Sebastiano* (Milano, 1911)), blocked by a crowd (*In hoc signo vinces*) or shown from a great distance (*Quo Vadis*, 1913), Caecilia's death is unusually graphic and emotionally intense. Her physical suffering is clearly shown in the close ups. The shot/reverse shot mechanism between the soldiers and Caecilia's body is continued in the scene with Torquatus, emphasising his guilt and position as a "falso fratello" in the 35mm version and a "novello Giuda" in the 9.5mm. Although Torquatus' grief and anger may seem overwrought for the modern viewer, it perhaps had more effect when the violence of Caecilia's death was shocking in its cinematic context.

Tarcisius is the least developed of the martyr-characters. After Pancras' arrest, Tarcisius volunteers to take the blessed host from the Catacombs to the prisoners in the Mamertine, but is killed by a group of boys in the street. The main function of Tarcisius' death is to help build the atmosphere of Christian persecution. His martyrdom comes after the arrest of Pancras and Torquatus' grief, and before Fabiola's pleading with Fulvius and Pancras' death in the arena. As the patron saint of altar servers and first communicants, Tarcisius would also have been well-known to Catholic audiences and his inclusion would have surely pleased them. The scene of Mass in the Catacombs, which begins the Tarcisius section, has a certain choreographic similarity to Kanzler's images of the Mass in the Catacombs and in house Churches (Figs 3.4, 3.11, 6.9). The death of Tarcisius at the hands of a gang of boys and his position as an altar server, with its proximity to the masculine power of the priest, means he can be potentially read as a queer figure (Boisvert 2009: 414-418). Although Tarcisius is not a famous figure in the queer imaginary, certainly when compared with Sebastian, there is an element of

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148). In *The Last Days of Pompeii*, for instance, Nydia rouses sympathy but is not developed as a genuine romantic rival to Ione. Her suicide, allowed by ancient ethics, leaves the Christian couple to live happily (St Clair, Bautz 2012: 52). As well as Nydia's rejection and self-sacrifice in the various adaptations of *Last Days of Pompeii*, Emilio Ghione's *L'ultimo dovere* (1915) follows this melodramatic pattern of self-sacrifice, as a blinded engineer kills himself so that his wife can marry a family friend. In *L'amore bendato* (1913), preserved at the BFI, a blinded Count is abandoned by his aristocratic lover, but cared for by a gypsy girl who he had taken in several years earlier.

homo-eroticism in this scene, especially when the bishop tucks the sacrament under Pancras' cloak and when the boys tug at the same garment.

The sequence of Pancras' death in the arena is quite different to the martyr's deaths in *Quo Vadis* (1913), even though the crowd sequences are borrowed directly from the earlier film. Instead of a long shot inspired by Academic painting and a shot of the lions consuming the ragged remains, Guazzoni shows Pancras being mauled in close-up and two final shots of his bloodied face (Fig 6.9). When we view Pancras, the camera is positioned on the arena floor rather than in the stadium, so we do not have the arena audience's perspective and the possibility of identifying with them. Although its internal organisation is much like other arena martyrdoms, with cuts away to the crowd and the Imperial box, the sequence places a heavy emphasis on Pancras' mother, Lucina. It begins with the intertitle "Il martire adolescente. Mater dolorosa." Lucina embraces her son for the last time, making a sign of the cross on his head. The dissolve between the image of her standing alone and her son in the arena emphasises their separation, and the scene ends with an image of Lucina's agony (Fig 6.10, 6.12).

The mater dolorosa archetype was prominent in Italian culture, and an important component of female suffering in the diva genre (Dalle Vacche 2008: 29). However, Lucina's roles has little to do with the escapism of the typical diva film, which blended elements from the mater dolorosa, the femme fragile and the femme fatale together in its portraits of passion, heartbreak and suffering. Instead, Lucina's costuming and gestures closely link her to other familial tales of separation and loss, such the unusual diva film *Cenere* (1916), and war dramas like *Guglielmo Oberdan, il martire di Trieste* (1915) or *L'imboscato* (1917). For instance, similar costuming and shots emphasising the loneliness of the mater dolorosa appear across several of these films (Fig 6.11-6.12). *Cenere* (1916) presents a poor mother's self-sacrifice, combining gestures borrowed from Giotto's frescoes with a theme of sacrifice which was very relevant in the War years (Jandelli 2006: 163-170). The correspondence between Guazzoni's Pancras and Emilio Ghione's *Oberdan* is particularly fitting. Maternal suffering is emphasised throughout the Risorgimento drama, as each step closer to her son's martyrdom leads to a meeting in which she displays her tragic despair, and acceptance of his resolve. The gesture where the martyr looks up, reminding us of his higher purpose, contrasts with the mother's physical love (Fig 6.12). The forced separation, in which she attempts to reach out to him, is another standard feature, and

necessitates someone to provide support to the mother. A final image of abject grief is shown in both films after their sons are executed. .

Lucina's role is the only example of a *mater dolorosa* within the Early Church martyrdom films examined in this thesis. Lucina does not disrupt the integrity of the arena martyrdom which, like similar scenes in the other case studies, features the martyr's resolute sacrifice and a diegetic audience divided between those buying for blood and those inspired by the martyr. While *Fabiola* does not have as long to explore the *mater dolorosa* as *Oberdan* and *Cenere*, the scene clearly shares a common iconography. It should be noted that the *mater dolorosa* type assumed great prominence in Italy towards the end of the War. While the unknown soldiers of France and Britain were chosen by their comrades, the *Milite Ignoto* was chosen by a bereaved mother (Mosse 1990: 107). In this context, the *mater dolorosa* of *Fabiola* provides an example of this sacrifice early in the Christian faith and outside of the supernatural elements of the Passion.

The martyrdom scenes of Sebastian and Agnes emphasise another important spectator: Fulvius, the villain of the film. In Wiseman's novel, Fulvius is crucial, as his pursuit of Agnes drives the plot and brings together the fictional and historical figures. The conversion of the Fulvius serves:

a didactic purpose to affirm the efficacy of a saint's death and the eventual triumph of Christianity over its bitterest foes (Rhodes 2005: 100).

In Guazzoni's adaptation, Fulvius' position is further enhanced because the role is played by Amleto Novelli, who had starred as the love interest and romantic hero in major diva films and Guazzoni's epics. Novelli was also one of the most loved actors in Italian silent cinema (Genina 1924: 4-5). The screen-time given to Fulvius, Novelli's stardom and the character's role as the most antagonistic figure to convert to Christianity all make the martyrdom scenes featuring Fulvius key moments in the film.

The final scene of Fulvius' failed pursuit of Agnes occurs after Pancras' martyrdom and a shot showing the appearance of a cross in the sky over the arena.<sup>35</sup> The "desiderio torbido dell'avventuriero d'Asia" is met with a miraculous apparition, as an angel with a sword appears after Agnes makes the sign of the cross (Fig 6.13). This apparition does not appear in Wiseman's text, but it translates the

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<sup>35</sup> In the 9.5mm copy, however, this image and the scene with Fulvius are missing. The action passes from the mourning Lucina directly to Agnes' trial and execution.

words of Agnes' steadfast refusal into a visual form. As in *Dall'amore al martirio* (1910), sufficient ambiguity remains for the angel to be read as a symbol of Christian will or a literal manifestation of the divine. The scene also modifies Fulvius' behaviour; instead of the angry parting shot at Agnes and Fabiola recounted in the novel, Guazzoni foregrounds his romantic despair and makes him a slightly more sympathetic character, despite his pleasure at Pancras' death in the preceding scene.

Agnes' martyrdom occurs after she refuses to swear in front of the Emperor. Sebastian steps in to protect her from the crowd and, after Fulvius denounces him, he also makes the sign of the cross. Quadratus is sent to seize the centurion, and he too professes his faith. Guazzoni's condensing of different scenes of the novel results in a shot with all three martyrs together. As Agnes is prepared for execution, the scene cuts between her courage and Fulvius' desperation as Eurotus restrains him. In the version of Agnes' hagiographical legend common in the Middle Ages, her hair grew over her body when she was condemned to the brothel, the flames did not touch her when she was burned and Christians mopped up her blood (Ryan 1993: 101-104). The brothel scenes could obviously not be included in a film aimed at a Catholic public, but Guazzoni includes a subtle reference to them, as Agnes' long hair covers her body as she is prepared for execution. Agnes' death is shown in a long shot, but the close-up of her head with the slit neck and the hands mopping blood from the floor provide gory detail.

The death of Sebastian is also structured around Fulvius, who taunts the martyr as the arrows are fired into him. The film cuts between close-ups of the martyr, with his eyes rolling heavenwards, and his oppressor. As he is dying, Sebastian tells Fulvius that he too will convert ("La profezia del martire. E tu Fulvius mi sarai fratello in Cristo"). Fulvius sinks to his knees in despair and hold his hands on his heart, in a gesture of pain. This sequence shows Guazzoni's rejection of an obvious tableaux and his decision to focus on Fulvius. Interestingly, the 9.5mm print cuts Fulvius out from the martyrdom sequence entirely, and returns the focus to Sebastian. The prioritising of Sebastian and the saints in the edit perhaps reflects the 9.5mm print's circulation among a Catholic audience, either at home or in education, and their preference for a devotional conclusion to the film.

Agnes' funeral scene contrasts between the reverence of the Christian procession, in which her wrapped body winds its way through the Catacombs with Fabiola as chief mourner, and the lonely Fulvius who follows behind. The shot of Fulvius kissing the sheet on which Agnes was carried shows his sorrow and also refers back to his actions, since it is the patterned curtain he moved aside when sneaking into her chambers (Fig 6.6). When the body is placed in the *loculum*, Fabiola and Fulvius both mourn, with Fulvius kneeling down in front of the body, crying and being comforted by the Bishop in a medium close up of the two. Fulvius' redemption comes when he collapses in the Catacomb gallery and meets his sister, who begins to pray with him.<sup>36</sup> Fabiola's conversion is confirmed in a baptism ceremony and several close ups of her praying. The intertitle remarks:

Per virtù del sangue dei martiri l'anima di Fabiola sorge pura verso la luce. Di quella  
Roma onde Cristo e Romano.

The concluding Catacomb sequence draws a very strong connection between Agnes' martyrdom and the conversion of the two fictional characters. Interestingly, the 9.5mm print removes Fulvius' prayers at Agnes' tomb, collapse and reunion with his sister, thus leaving his narrative unresolved. In the 35mm print, the final image is of a dead woman on the steps of a Roman sacrificial location, which then fades to be replaced by two angels and a crucifix. It is unclear whether this woman is Fabiola herself, but the ending is a positive, Christian apotheosis, similar to the conclusion of *Quo Vadis* (1913).

Rodolfo Kanzler was a historical consultant on *Fabiola*, and suggested Elena Sangro for the titular role (*Film, corriere...* 03/03/1917: 3; *Ego* 1928: 7; *Eco del Cinema* 03/1928: 16). Kanzler also prepared at least one of the Catacomb sets (Sanminiatielli 1940: 14-15). The influence of Kanzler's slides can be seen in the composition of some of the Catacomb sequences: the outstretched arms of the worshippers at the Eucharist, the reverent carrying of Agnes' remains or the medium shots of the *fossor* digging a burial place. The scenes of the Eucharist and the Consecration of a Virgin resemble Kanzler's earlier work (Figs 3.3, 3.4, 3.11, 6.9) The detailing of the Catacomb settings is also very strong, with on-location shooting at archaeological sites mixed with carefully constructed sets. However, Guazzoni's use of chiaroscuro and close ups gives the Catacomb scenes an intimacy which would have been

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<sup>36</sup> The scenes featuring Fulvius' mourning and redemption are absent from the 9.5mm print, as are the final close-ups of Fabiola in prayer.

impossible for Kanzler to achieve with the number of slides available for reconstructions in his lectures. Compared with the other case studies, the characters of *Fabiola* spend far longer in the Catacombs. *Fabiola* is the only case study which includes the Eucharist and the taking of Holy Orders, and these sacraments take place within the Catacombs. Caecilia's martyrdom is relocated to the Catacombs with great pathos, as her blindness enables her to rescue the Christian women before condemning her when they become visible. The burial of martyrs also assumes a high importance. In the sequence where the Christian characters venerate Pancras' father, a light shines through the marble inscription 'Valerius-martyrum', and reveals the outline of the body in the *loculum*. This scene is a visual way of highlighting the sacred nature of the martyr's body, as is the close up of hands mopping up Agnes' blood in the aftermath of her execution. The scene of Agnes' burial is crucial to the entire film, as the martyr's sacrifice is shown to inspire the conversions of Fulvius and Fabiola. In short, *Fabiola* uses the Catacomb setting far more than other films. The detail of the sets and the number of events that occur underground means that the Catacomb setting is very strongly linked to the Early Church, following the polemical purpose of Wiseman's novel.

Film historian Fausto Montesanti noted the change in epic film mise-en-scène which occurred in *Fabiola*. The set design and costumes "anziché appesanti di una sovrabbondanza ornamentale destinata a «fare colpo», [sono] tenuti invece su un tono nettamente realistico (Montesanti 1952b: 104). A contemporary British film journal praised the film's "wonderful realism...perfect historical accuracy...[and] intimate domestic details" (*Bioscope* 05/04/1919: 64). I would agree that *Fabiola* is a less ostentatious version of the ancient world, especially when compared with the ornamental splendour and spectacle of *Quo Vadis* (1913), *Marcantonio e Cleopatra* (1913) and *Cabiria* (1914). Beyond the re-creation of the Roman streets and a central square, most of the film avoids monumental spaces and is set in domestic interiors, forests and the confined Catacombs. This continues the spatial dynamics of *Whither Quo Vadis* and some of the Early Church one-reelers, which established a dichotomy between the luxurious and monumental pagan Rome and the humble, natural locations of the Christians. As if to indicate the economies made during production and the unimportance of spectacle in *Fabiola* (1918), shots of the arena crowd and the Roman senate appear very briefly, and were borrowed from *Quo Vadis* (1913) and *Caius Julius Caesar* (1914) (Fig 6.14). In the clearer 35mm print, they even have a

noticeably different texture and exposure to the rest of the film. Despite these economies, the sets and furniture are still beautiful, and the film avoids looking overly cheap.

While noting *Fabiola's* appeal to religious organisations, The *Variety* reviewer noted that “much time is given to the burial of Agnes” (*Variety* 08/02/1923: 8). This lengthy scene, the murder of Agnes and tortures, such as the death of Pancras, were judged to be one of many things which “removed the possibility of popular applause.” The *Variety* reviewer stated that the American version of the film was geared towards Catholic organisations, and had both an explicitly didactic exhibition and additional scenes at the beginning of the film, which included pictures of Ancient Rome and maps of the Empire (*Variety* 08/02/1923: 8). In the USA, the film was exhibited as a roadshow, rather than opened to conventional cinemas. This was organised by the *Fabiola Photoplay Corporation*, which was incorporated in 1921-1922 (Dannenberg (ed.) 1922: 296). A score was composed especially for the American version (McCarty 2000: 136). A tie-in version of Wiseman's novel was also published by Matre and Company of Chicago. As well as confirming that the American release was edited in the United States, the novel's preface promotes the film:

The photoplay has a heart appeal that makes it immensely popular. It is an education in the history of the Roman Persecutions. It lends itself admirably to dramatization, and being photographed in Rome brings it right in the very locations in which the Cardinal had been inspired to write this wonderful story....The theme of the story is the conflict of the cruel and licentious pagan Rome and the supreme courage of a small band of mighty souled men and women in the Christian Catacombs (Wiseman, c.1922).

The 1922-1923 American version of the film was targeted at Catholic audiences and its didactic functions emphasised. The distinctive exhibition context noted in the *Variety* review, coupled with the editing and investment put into the five year old film, suggests a reprise of the roadshow format, albeit in an explicitly religious context. In the early twenties, Hollywood was beset by scandals which displeased religious audiences (Lindvall 2001: 251-256). By editing *Fabiola* to emphasise its Catholic content, the *Fabiola Photoplay Corporation* and the *Pathé Baby* editors re-offered the religious film to limited audiences in these troubled times.

### Conclusion

Despite the stylistic differences between them, the Early Church films examined here can all be strongly linked to contemporary events, namely the Constantine celebrations of 1913 and the final years of the First World War. In *In hoc signo vinces* (1913), Maxentius uses the deaths of the Christian soldiers and the arena victims to horrify and intimidate Constantia. The brutal death scenes do not mark a historical turning point against Maxentius, in the way they do in *Quo Vadis* (1913, 1925), but confirm Constantia's horror at the violence of paganism. The emphasis on the pain of the diegetic spectator is repeated in the martyrdom scenes of *Fabiola* (1918). Rather than provoking the rebellion of larger crowds and a macro-historical shift, as in *Quo Vadis* (1913, 1925), the emphasis is on the suffering and emotions of one figure in each scene: the mater dolorosa, the distraught traitor and the heartbroken persecutor inspired to convert by his beloved's sacrifice. The close-up views of the martyrs are unprecedented in their gore and frequency. These graphic scenes explain the distress of the diegetic spectators and contrast with *La Leggenda di Santa Barbara*, where Barbara's sacrifice occurs in a flash of smoke. As the Saint stands amidst a reverent group of kneeling Christian women filmed in a long shot, she has a relationship which is more distant and impersonal than that of the diegetic spectators and martyrs of *Fabiola*. Borelli's status as a diva and the patriotic nature of the film are the causes of this distance. This Saint Barbara does not sacrifice herself to inspire one person to adopt the Christian faith, but to save a group and, by extension, the Italian nation.



## MARTYRDOM, 1923-1930

The end of the First World War marked a period of profound crisis for both Italian society and the national film industry. Italy endured a severe post-war recession and two years of left-right political conflict, the *biennio rosso*, culminating in the Fascists seizing power in 1922. The crisis in Italian film production was driven by low capitalisation, poor organisation, loss of export markets, high taxation and competition from American and Germany. Almost all the Italian film studios were purchased by the Unione Cinematografica Italiana (UCI), which suffered severe financial difficulties when one of the banks supporting it went bankrupt in December 1921. In 1922, film production halved and entered a phase of rapid decline, with total production going from making hundreds of films for export to a handful of films for internal consumption. (Redi 1999: 175). In this context, the historical epic offered a potential return to past glories, and a level of spectacle which still had some international appeal. With limited overheads and close proximity to their target market, Neapolitan film-makers could exploit hit songs and appeal to a large audience at home and abroad. Their films were one of the few successes in an otherwise desperate time. The aim of this chapter is to explore the Italian representation of Early Church martyrdom on film during the years 1922-1930, and to consider how the depiction of Early Church martyrdom changed compared with the films examined in previous chapters. As the 1924 version of *Quo Vadis* has already been analysed alongside Guazzoni's 1913 version, this chapter considers *Messalina* (1923), *Gli ultimi giorni di Pompei* (1926) and *Trionfo Cristiano* (1930).

The first section considers Enrico Guazzoni's final silent epic, *Messalina* (1923). Despite its lack of explicit Christian references, I believe that this film incorporates so many types, symbols and plot elements from Early Christian martyrdom films that it is worthy of analysis alongside the other films considered in this thesis. I summarise the original filmic narrative from the partly-complete, post-sonorised copy dating from 1935 and twenties archive material before considering the traces of the Early Christian martyrdom film in the plot and mise-en-scène. I argue that one group of characters can be read as implicit Christians and that one of them is constructed as a martyr-like figure. I then consider what the meanings of the martyrdom references are in Guazzoni's final silent epic. Do suggestions of Christian martyrdom form a counterpoint to the commercialised sadism and eroticism of the narrative,

thus mitigating moral concerns and preventing censorial interventions, or do they fulfil a wider function for the film's audience? What relationship, if any, do the implicit Christian martyrs of *Messalina* have to the wider exploration of early Christian martyrdom in film?

The second section analyses *Gli ultimi giorni di Pompei* (1926). Although Edward Bulwer-Lytton's work was adapted into two feature films in 1913, neither included the novel's Christian sub-plot. The 1908 version, examined in Chapter Four, briefly depicts Early Christian martyrs. In the novel, Apaecides, brother of Ione and priest of Isis, converts to Christianity, but is murdered by the high priest of Isis. The Christian leader Olinthus mentors Apaecides and introduces the novel's hero to Christianity as they both await death in the arena. The 1926 film introduces some new Early Christian scenes to the plot, but the directors broadly follow Bulwer-Lytton's outline and Christianity remains a minor part of the storyline.

Elvira Notari's *Trionfo Cristiano* (1930) was one of the most unusual evocations of the sacred produced during the silent era. Produced by a Neapolitan female director working on commission for a group of Italian-Americans, this three reel film depicted the life of a martyred Saint venerated in only one Italian village, rather than universally famous Saints like Sebastian or Francis of Assisi. Unfortunately, *Trionfo Cristiano* does not survive. I examine what little we know about the production within the contexts of Elvira Notari's film-making, diaspora audiences and the religious traditions surrounding Saint Pellegrino in Altavilla Irpina. I explore the connections the film had to the *battenti* ritual, a folkloric procession which is the highlight of Saint Pellegrino's festa.

### *Messalina and the quasi-martyrs*

*Messalina* was Enrico Guazzoni's last silent epic. The film's blend of eroticism, historical reconstruction and action, including an exciting chariot-race sequence subsequently copied in *Ben Hur* (1926), make it one of the most successful Italian films of the twenties. Film historian Roberto Paoletta considered *Messalina* (1923) as the most important work from the second half of Guazzoni's career

(Paolella 1949: 46-52). The film consolidates the evolution in cinematic style already visible in Guazzoni's films of 1918. Although the plot does not contain explicitly Christian characters, I believe that the slaves are implicitly Christians and that the experience of the slave-girl Egle resembles martyrdom. In its re-interpretation of martyrdom and the Early Christian world, *Messalina* demonstrates the perseverance of religious subtexts in the historical epic. Its camp aesthetics and generic knowledge also make it a proto-peplum. After dealing with questions raised by missing parts of the film, I argue for a reading of implicit Christianity in *Messalina* and uncover connections to previous cinematic portrayals of Christian martyrdom.

Any analysis of *Messalina* is complicated by the fact that only the post-sonorised 1935 version exists. For this later version, conserved at the Cineteca Nazionale in Rome, most of the intertitles were removed, sound was added and the film was re-edited (Martinelli 1996 [1923-1931]: 74-78). While Guazzoni's original cut would have lasted 147 minutes at 20 frames per second, the sound version lasts only 79 minutes at the same speed. Ultimately, we must analyse Guazzoni's silent original *through* the sound film. Working on this film copy and silent-era reviews, I explore the silent version, while accounting for the discourses present in reviews and the edited film. I then present a plot summary and explore the thematic oppositions which drive *Messalina* (1923) and are reflected in every aspect of its *mise-en-scène*.

The mediations of the editors are less clear than the interventions of contemporary restorers. *Messalina* (1923) was edited as Guazzoni re-launched his career, Fascist students celebrated his artistic legacy and his nationalistic visions acquired new relevance.<sup>37</sup> Given this context, we can hypothesise that the 1935 film was edited to be 'faithful' to Guazzoni's vision and narrative while modifying *Messalina* (1923) for an audio track and the changed audience expectations of the sound era. While shots of the divas' posing or the Roman cityscape feel occasionally shortened, *Messalina* (1935) exactly

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<sup>37</sup> In 1935, Guazzoni Film re-released two of the three historical epics it had made, profiting from the re-release of *Marcantonio e Cleopatra* a year earlier, the director's resurgent career and the central position afforded to his works at the *quarantennio del cinema* celebrations organised by Count Ciano, the Sottosegretariato di Stato per la Stampa e la Propaganda and Fascist university students. Fascist university cinema clubs did not have explicitly propagandistic aims, and often showed international films, including from the Soviet Union (Bondanella 2011: 23). Guazzoni's nationalistic visions were re-invented in Carmine Gallone's *Scipio Africano* (1937) and the regime's imperial adventures.

follows narrative summaries of the earlier film version published in popular film magazine *Al Cinema* (d'Alfa 01/06/1924: 10-12; d'Alfa 08/06/1924: 9-11). Consequently, we can use the 1935 film to analyse how the narrative and *mise-en-scène* of *Messalina* (1923) referenced Early Christian martyrdom because these elements seem very close to Guazzoni's original text. However, the shortened film cannot fully answer our questions about the film's pacing, intertitles and reception.

On the surface, *Messalina* (1923) marked a return to the golden era of the epic, which its director and some of the actors had enjoyed a decade previously. The movie was shown at the Gaumont Palace in Paris, the world's largest cinema and venue for Guazzoni's earlier epics, and was the only Italian film of the decade to reach the Soviet Union (*Presse* 05/07/1924: 2; Martinelli 1996 [1923-1931]: 78). *Messalina* (1923) received good reviews in Belgium and in the French press (*Ouest-Éclair* 04/10/1924: 4; Verhulst 1924: 15-16; Tedesco 1924: 28). Rina De Liguoro and Lucia Zanussi were warmly welcomed in England, and *The Times* gave a positive review (*Times* 31/03/1924: 10; *Eco del Cinema* 11/1924: 312). The Italian criticism was generally very positive (Bernabò 1924:80; Fischer 1925: 42). Alberto Bruno noted “un certo spirito d'innovazione e di fresca modernità,” in Guazzoni's new epic (Bruno 1924: 33-34). From the 1935 copy, we can see that the Circus Maximus sequence is very impressive, with a bold choice of camera angles and an effective balance between the action and the emotional reactions of the film's protagonists. In other scenes, the camera frequently moves from the medium shot to the medium close-up to emphasise key parts of the action, such as the sexualised confrontation between the divas or Mirit's seduction of Ennio, and to provide a closer view of the flagrant eroticism of certain scenes (Figure 7.1).

However, two negative reviews cast doubt on this acclaim. *The New York Times* said that the narrative was “not particularly smooth,” and that Lucia Zanussi and Giovanna Terribili-Gonzales were chosen, “rather for their avoirdupois than their ability or their beauty” (*New York Times* 25/08/1924). The spectacles did not dissuade its reviewer from giving a negative verdict. While acknowledging the impact of censorship cuts, a reviewer for the *Licht Bild Bühne* argued that these were necessitated by the “pazzia” of the film's subject, which “nessuna censura al mondo...potrebbe lasciare passare” (*Eco Del Cinema* 05/1924: 142). The plot which resulted was decried as worthy of, “un romanzo apocrifo di sotto scala, degno solo della fine del secolo scorso,” while the interminable intertitles in a barely-

legible font further muddled the action. The actors' performances "senza vita e con gesti puramente esteriori e affettati," were unbearable for the German public. The American *Variety* magazine judged the film "a balanced combination of good and bad screen accomplishments," but then listed many faults highlighted by the other reviewers: flowery intertitles, a confused narrative and overacting (*Variety* 31/08/1924: 25). Reflecting the twenties fashion for thinner actresses, the *Variety* reviewer joked:

Rina plays the queen called Messalina—  
What a shame she's not a little leaner!

These critiques were part of a polemic which the historical epic generated in 1923-1925.<sup>38</sup> The Italian film press trumpeted international success, and argued against negative foreign reviews. Notwithstanding this polemic context, the American and German criticism does have some validity. The silent version had exactly the same plot as the 1935 edit, but was forty-seven minutes longer and must have been slowed by lengthy intertitles and slow shots. Furthermore, the 1923 Italian release seems to have had fewer censorship cuts than the German and American versions, so it would have had greater narrative coherence. The largely uncensored Italian version also had a powerful erotic appeal:

La forbice della censure questa volta, in rispetto alla storia, è rimasta inerte: così Messalina è un'autentica Messalina, corrotta, bella, depravata e...non diciamo di più (Bernabò 1924: 80).

This comment shows how film-goers enjoyed the transgressive elements of *Messalina* (1923). Where the film was censored, this annoyed those looking for more transgressive thrills:

The picture starts in as though it were trying to eclipse the sex stuff in our modern "Flaming Flapper" films. The title itself brings to mind hazy suggestions of a vamp *ne plus ultra*: the most profligate of the naught Roman empresses and a character sufficiently wicked to cause the yellow newspapers to refer to our present humdingers as "modern Messalinas."

A Roman orgy or two gives promise of some extreme sex stuff, but the film has evidently been cut right at the most characteristically Italian places, and after the

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<sup>38</sup> In the 1920s, distinctive 'national' styles began to develop: German Expressionism, French Impressionism and Soviet montage (Bordwell, Thompson 1994: 183-189). These developments and the decline of the Italian film industry led to several controversies. Prominent examples include Enrico Guazzoni's tepid welcome in the United States, criticism of Emil Jannings for creating a Nero "alla tedesca" in *Quo Vadis* (1925) and arguments between *L'Eco Del Cinema* and the *Licht Bild Bühne* regarding *Messalina* (1923) and Mussolini. See: De Marco 1924: 9-11; Merciai 1924b: 14-15; Uccellini 1925: 183; *Rivista Cinematografica* 31/01/1926b: 14-16; *Eco Del Cinema* 06/1925: 222-223.

first 20 minutes the pace is as voluptuous as a Baby Peggy special. It might be said, however, that brassieres, or whatever the Roman ladies wore in place of them, are nearly as much out of evidence as at Times square on a hot July afternoon (*Variety* 31/08/1924: 25).

The censorship of *Messalina* in different countries clearly effected the film's reception. Although they perhaps failed to enchant the American reviewers, the *avoirdufois* of the actresses was an important attraction. Giovanna Terribili-Gonzales was appreciated for her curvaceous figure (Alacci 1919: 113-114). Advertising for *Messalina* (1923) hinting at its eroticism and revealing photographs of its stars appeared.<sup>39</sup> Unsurprisingly, it was banned from Parish cinemas (*Rivista di Letture*...15/05/1925: 159-160). Nudity and transgression were selling points for the twenties films examined in this thesis, but were rarely discussed in mainstream reviews. In sum, the eroticism, spectacle and cinematic innovation of *Messalina* (1923) were perhaps enough to compensate for its wordy intertitles and length in most international film markets.

The plot of the sound version is the same as the silent version, according to surviving documents. Messalina (Rina De Liguoro) becomes Empress when her husband Claudius becomes Emperor, thanks to the support of Messalina's lover, Marcus. Senator Apollonius purchases a slave-girl, Egle (Lucia Zanussi), who falls in love with another slave, Ennio (Gino Talamo). Egyptian priestess Mirit (Giovanna Terribili-Gonzales) makes a human sacrifice in the name of Isis. Ennio and a muscular slave, Tigrane (Bruto Castellani), rescue Egle from being raped by Apollonius and prevent Messalina from being attacked as she prostitutes herself in the Suburra. Marcus is murdered, and replaced by his rival, Caius Silius. Messalina and Mirit both fall in love with Ennio. Mirit attempts to seduce Ennio, but he spurns her. Egle, who had taken refuge with Mirit, is beaten. Tigrane helps her to escape, and they watch Ennio participate in a chariot race where he hopes to win his freedom. Unfortunately, Ennio's horses are drugged and he loses the race, but Messalina prevents his execution, cares for him in her palace and prevents Marcus' attempt to kill the young charioteer. Mirit acquires Ennio from his owner

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<sup>39</sup> In *La Stampa*, the second title advertised "Tre belle donne per un uomo." A film magazine advertisement promised "la visione della triplice divinità multiebre." Launched by this film, Rina De Liguoro (Messalina) was a heavily-eroticised diva and the only Italian actress of the period to feature topless on promotional postcards. Lucia Zanussi also appeared topless in film magazines. See: *Stampa* 27/05/1924: 5; Maastracchi-Manes 1924: 34-35; Pisselenko 1926: 5.

Apollonius, but her new slave refuses her sexual advances. Messalina attempts to seize Ennio from Mirit, but Claudius intervenes. Mirit has Egle abducted and the young girl is nearly raped by the Egyptian's followers, but Tigrane intervenes. Messalina plots the overthrow of Claudius and his replacement with Caius Silius. Egle is recaptured, but Tigrane and the slaves save her from being sacrificed in the temple of Isis, and leave Mirit to be eaten by her own lions. Claudius allows Messalina to divorce him, but secretly mobilises the soldiers, senators and people of Rome against the Empress and Marcus. Pursued by Claudius' troops and the mob, Messalina kills herself.

Contemporary critic Edgardo Rebizzi noted that, "spesso Messalina passa in seconda linea ed occupano il primo piano le vicende di due innamorati...persequitati" (Rebizzi 1925: 75-76). Messalina's historical narrative is of minor importance. Rejecting a political or feminist contextualisation of the film, Maria Wyke argues that *Messalina* (1923) draws upon the conventions of earlier historical epics, and that it presents a moral hierarchy of femininity, with the cruel Egyptian Mirit at the bottom and the virtuous Egle at the top (Wyke 2007: 345). I agree with this, but believe that the film's Early Church aspects deserve further exploration to help us to understand its recycling of Classical culture. *Messalina* was received in the context of earlier epics, as reviews frequently discussed the evolution of Guazzoni's film-making over the decade since *Quo Vadis* (1913). The character of Mirit alludes to earlier works. Giovanna Terribili-Gonzales was most famous for playing Cleopatra in Guazzoni's 1913 film (Martinelli 1986: 12-17). Mirit is a blend of Cleopatra and Arbaces, the high priest of Isis in the films of the *Last Days of Pompeii*. There are elements of these prior performances in several characters, including Tigrane (played by Guazzoni's favourite strongman, Bruto Castellani) and Egle. These references are crucial in the film, which can be read as a bricolage of elements from Italian historical epics, including Early Church martyrdom.

Ostensibly, Christianity does not feature in *Messalina*. While Messalina makes an offering and Mirit a human sacrifice, the slaves do not worship anyone. The only religious gesture the slaves make is Egle's gesture of prayer when Apollonius attacks her (Fig 7.2). Although the 1935 soundtrack adds the words "O vergine dea, salvami tu" to this image, its Christian symbolism is obvious. The scene also recalls Ursus' rescue of Lygia from the orgy. Tigrane was played by Bruto Castellani, who was synonymous with the kind-hearted Christian strongman he had first played in *Quo Vadis* (1913), and

reprised in *Fabiola* (1918) and the Ursus serial films. Christian strongmen frequently intervene to defend virgin martyrs in hagiographical literature (Jensen 1996: 85-93). So, the actions of Quadratus can be viewed within their hagiographic and cinematic contexts. Contrasted against the curvaceous bodies and revealing outfits worn by the decadent antagonists, Lucia Zanussi's girl-like body, long hair and modest clothing recall those of Christian martyrs like Saint Agnes (Fig 7.3). Yet, despite appearances, the shot cuts away to show that Egle is thinking of an embrace with Ennio. In the same scene, Tigrane is shown in a medium close-up holding a kid goat, rather than the Christian lamb. In scenes of confrontation, Egle's resistance is physical and anguished, rather than calm like the martyrs. Guazzoni seems to play with the symbols of Early Christianity and martyrdom: referencing them, but officially denying their place in the narrative.

In Egle's prayer gesture and in an English-language publicity brochure's mention of the slaves' departure to "the land of promise," Maria Wyke detects, "faint surviving traces of the theme of Early Christianity" (Wyke 2007: 345). One sentence in the English pressbook hints strongly at the dilemmas of martyrdom:

Once more Mirit pleaded with Ennius and offered him love or death. Without a moment's hesitation, the slave replied that death was preferable (*Messalina pressbook* 1923: 6).

Although the pressbook was written by the film's British distributor, the love-death threat closely recalls Fulvius' actions in *Fabiola* (1918), as well as similar situations in *Dall'amore al martirio* (1910) and *Santa Cecilia* (1911).

The narrative oppositions of *Messalina* bear comparison with *Quo Vadis* (1913), given that Guazzoni's last epic is based around a love-rescue plot, in which the decadent characters (Messalina, Mirit and Apollonius) pursue the virtuous couple (Ennio and Egle), who are protected by a noble savage (Tigrane). Details of the plot construct the slaves as Christians. Ennio and Egle are slaves from the East of the Roman Empire: Egle is sold by an Arab merchant and Ennio's family arrive with a camel caravan. Historically, the first Christians in Rome may have come from the East of the Empire (Beard, North, Price 2004: 295). In Wiseman's *Fabiola*, the heroine links the Christianity of Syra and Sebastian to the Eastern territories (Wiseman 1, XVI; 2, VII). The Christian Sira is also sold in similar way in *Fabiola*



(1918). *Messalina* repeats the spatial hierarchy of earlier Italian epics, and the slaves occupy the same spaces as the Early Christians in these films: plain buildings, forests and prison cells. *Messalina* looks down on the slaves from her palace and the Emperor's box, like Nero in *Quo Vadis* (1913). Moral messages are reinforced via the settings: as Egle is whipped, the camera cuts to Mirit laughing against an elaborately hieroglyphic backdrop, thus linking sadism and the Orient (Fig 7.4). Finally, Mirit's decision to release the lions on the slaves, only to end tied to a column and savaged by them, is an ironic twist on the *ad bestias* punishment meted out to Christians.

The two chaste slaves are promised to one another rather than God, but the threats to their virginity, violence and resistance give the plot parallels with hagiographic narratives. Egle is a modest virgin, who is roughly unveiled at the slave market, spied on by Mirit's voyeuristic followers, whipped half-naked and sexually threatened (Figs 7.1, 7.3, 7.5). In her analysis of medieval French hagiographical romances, Brigitte Cazelles notes narratives "whose main story line puts the heroine's virginal status in constant jeopardy." (Cazelles 1991: 44) Cazelles also identifies the "forced visibility" of virgin martyrs, who are made into objects of desire and sadistically tortured and exposed, especially in the case of Agnes (Cazelles 1991: 50-53). These patterns continue in the film. Despite the eroticism of the *Messalina* and Mirit characters, it is Egle whose flesh is exposed and who is an object of desire for the male characters. This is not always a comfortable position for the viewer. The scene where she is whipped is far more graphic than any other Italian silent epic: similar scenes in *Quo Vadis* (1913, 1924) or *Marcantonio e Cleopatra* (1913) are depicted in shadow or put off-screen, whereas here, Egle is clearly topless in the shots. As Egle bathes in the lake, we see her from the same voyeuristic perspective as her would-be rapists (Fig 7.5). So, while the film delivers some of the erotic thrills demanded by its reviewers, it also highlights the sexualisation of virginal women in such narratives.

*Messalina* (1923) references enough Early Christian martyrdom tropes for Egle to be legible as a quasi-martyr, similar to Lygia in *Whither Quo Vadis*, by anyone familiar with either the earlier Italian epics or hagiographic literature. But what do these Early Christian references mean? In a plot which depicts two dangerous femmes fatales fighting over the same man, Egle's quasi-martyrdom provides a moral counter-point to their eroticism. The eventual victory of the slaves provided a belated triumph for 'orthodox morality' and perhaps distracted the censors from the film's eroticism. Equally, as Mario

Praz neatly summarised, “without a Justine to oppress and torture, no sadistic amusement would be possible” (Praz 1970: 108-109). So, we could view Egle as an outlet for the sadism of Messalina and Mirit, which constitutes a large part of their appeal. Finally, the implicit Christianity could also be viewed as a necessary part of filming a subject like Messalina in the modern era, and marks the beginning of a common strategy in films about the Empress. Despite dying sixteen years before the first mention of Christians in Rome, Messalina biopics frequently contrast her with Christians.<sup>40</sup> Though ahistorical, such comparisons were easily comprehensible for modern viewers, as were the comparisons with Agrippina the Younger in the Classical period.

*Messalina* combines flagrant eroticism, spectacular sets and a set of characters and situations which both refer to and subvert the historical epic genre. Certain scenes also have an air of camp comedy. The knives used in the sacrifice of the young virgins in Mirit’s temple and in Messalina’s suicide are obvious phallic motifs (Fig 7.6). As Messalina orders Mirit’s summary execution, the close up of the executioner shows him in a tight loincloth, and the scene has a somewhat ridiculous edge, despite its apparent seriousness (Fig 7.7). Although the executioner wears a similar outfit in *Santa Cecilia* (1911), the earlier scene has a sobriety which Guazzoni’s epic lacks. *Messalina* is not a definite comic reinterpretation of the genre like Buster Keaton’s *The Three Ages* (1923) and any view of the film as a spoof is partly shaped by the exploitation of Classical culture in popular cinema long after Guazzoni’s epic was made. The sound version increases comic effects with its condensed action. Yet, a mixture of déjà vu, sexuality and a tongue-in-cheek approach to generic conventions is undeniable in *Messalina* (1923).

In this context, Guazzoni gently subverts some of the stereotypes of Early Christian narratives, while avoiding potential controversy he may have caused by including the Christian faith directly. Egle is an innocent victim of ‘depraved’ female sadism, and an erotic attraction in her own right. Her quasi-martyrdom pushes the the limits of silent era censorship. In so doing, Guazzoni provides his audiences with some sexy thrills, but he also points to their voyeuristic nature and the uneasy status of the martyr’s

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<sup>40</sup> *Demetrius and the Gladiators* (1954), *Messalina* (1951), *Messalina venere Imperatrice* (1960) and exploitation *Messalina, Messalina!* (1977) are prominent examples.

body on the screen: alluring yet chaste, ecstatic and innocent. The sexualised Lygia of *Quo Vadis* (1924) continues this trend.

*The Last Days of Pompeii: Return of the Christians*

*Gli ultimi giorni di Pompei* (1926) was the last ancient epic produced by the mainstream Italian film industry during the silent period. It was directed by Carmine Gallone and Gabriellino d'Annunzio. With its wonderfully-decorated sets, extravagant archaeological vision and vividly-coloured footage, the film is one of the most visually-striking epics produced in the silent period. Topless bathers and Isidian devotees further pushed the erotic tendencies of the 1920s Italian epic. This nudity displeased Catholic reviewers considering the film for parish cinemas (*Rivista Cinematografo* 02/1926). These daring scenes were not matched by the film's style, which is archaic and slow. This notwithstanding, the film's sensuality and spectacle meant that it was a critical and commercial success abroad, with audiences being drawn in by the suggestive photographs in the publicity materials (Martinelli 1994: 47). The review in *Variety* was very positive, praising the acting of Bernhard Goetke and Rina De Liguoro, the fidelity to Bulwer-Lytton's story and proclaiming that, "no finer spectacular has ever been done," than the scenes of Pompeii's destruction (Gore 1926: 38). Influenced by nationalistic fervour, the Italian critical response was also favourable (Donzelli 1926: 30; *Rivista Cinematografica* 15/04/1926: 21).

The longer term reception of the film has been less kind, with actor Emilio Ghione writing of its inferiority to the epics of 1913-1914 and dubbing it "les Derniers jours de la cinématographie italienne," in his early work of film history (Ghione 1930:68). In comparison with contemporary films of the period, it is hard to disagree that *Gli ultimi giorni di Pompei* is "cinematograficamente...meno che mediocri," and dogged by static camerawork and slow montage sequences (Orsoni 1943: 159). Gian Piero Brunetta criticises the outdated acting style, camera work, disruptive intertitles and expressive stasis (Brunetta 2008: 346). While acknowledging the film's cinematic failure, Denis Lotti highlights some positive aspects, such as Emilio Ghione's expressive performance and the "attualizzazione

archaeologica,” which brings together literary references and didactic exposition (Lotti 2008: 68). Indeed, despite the presence of ancient sites in many of the case studies, *Gli ultimi giorni di Pompei* (1926) and the American version of *Fabiola* are the only case studies which explicitly contrast the ancient sites and modern recreations, presumably to emphasise the educational value and historical accuracy of the works. However, notwithstanding the impressive nature of the sets and some small points of innovation, *Gli ultimi giorni di Pompei* (1926) is cinematically unimpressive when compared with its contemporaries and the slow narrative pace kills off much of the potential excitement.

Unlike the two feature versions of 1913, the 1926 film does depict Early Christianity. Here, I summarise Early Christian themes in Edward Bulwer-Lytton’s *Last Days of Pompeii* and explore their place in the 1926 film. My reading is based on a viewing of a VHS cassette of the Cineteca Nazionale restoration held at the British Film Institute.<sup>41</sup> This restoration was based on a long, uncut film copy from the Cineteca Nazionale, with elements from the the Filmarchiv of Vienna and stencil-coloured Pathécolor footage from the British Film Institute (Musumeci 1994: 107-108). The Czech-language Vienna print has many of the nudes censored out, compared with the Italian version (Luppi 1994: 110). The exact distribution history of the censored and coloured versions remains unclear.

Early Christianity is one of a number of competing religions in Bulwer-Lytton’s *Pompeii*. Olinthus is the zealous leader of the city’s Christians, whose heroism has “something in it fierce and intolerant...more the courage of the martyr than the charity of the saint.” (Bulwer-Lytton IV, 4). Olinthus converts Apaecides, brother of Ione and priest of Isis. Apaecides meets a man who had been miraculously revived by Jesus, and prepares to publicly defy Arbaces, the Egyptian high priest of Isis. Apaecides tells Arbaces of his conversion, and the Egyptian murders him. The murder is motivated by Arbaces’ sense of betrayal and his lust for Ione, but Apaecides is a martyr too. A symbol of martyrdom, the green palm, appears on his tomb (Bulwer-Lytton 4, VIII). Framed for his murder, Glaucus meets Olinthus, who has refused to swear to the Roman Gods and is also due to face the amphitheatre lions. Although swayed by the new religion, Glaucus remains with his pagan beliefs as he prepares to die, but Vesuvius allows the prisoners to escape. Olinthus stands with other Christians, proclaiming “THE

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<sup>41</sup> “Gli ultimi giorni di Pompei (VHS cassette).” BFI. C-998319.

HOUR IS COME!” as the volcano erupts (Bulwer-Lytton 4, IX.) The final chapter informs us that, after another encounter with Olinthus, who was later martyred, Glaucus has converted to Christianity.

Christianity is a minor theme in Bulwer-Lytton’s novel. Unlike the theologically-driven works of Kingsley, Wiseman or Newman, Bulwer-Lytton’s primary concern is entertainment, which comes principally from the impressive destruction chapters, vivid setting and lively romance. The novel shows little interest in the specifics of Early Christian doctrine (Easson 2004: 111-113). The fervent zealotry of Olinthus is not appealing to the reader. Apaecides is moved by the “more gentle, more divine,” Christianity of the old man (Bulwer-Lytton 4, IV). While appreciating Olinthus, Glaucus becomes a more moderate Christian (Rhodes 2005: 45). Bulwer-Lytton clearly prefers this less fervent Christianity. The Early Church provides a contrast with the Isidian cult, paganism and Roman religion, but is mostly exploited for its picturesque moments and dramatic conflicts. The confrontation between Apaecides and Arbaces is given an extra charge, and the chapters spent in the amphitheatre dungeons borrow a typical Early Church setting.

In the 1926 film, the Christians are an intermittent presence. Dialogic intertitles introduce Olinthus, as three men watch him meet Apaecides in the forum. The next intertitle announces “Le catacombe dei cristiani.” A crucifix dissolves in the middle of the image, as Christians pray in the catacombs. “Apeceide scese col cuore trepidante, fra i fedeli di Cristo.” An old priest welcomes Apaecides and some children, and then blesses the new convert. They all kneel and pray. In the next Christian scene, Olinthus warns the sinful Romans of divine retribution and soldiers intervene to keep order. Later, Apaecides is baptised in the Catacomb by the old priest, and given communion by Olinthus, in front of the kneeling Christian. Apaecides swears:

Giuro di abbattere i falsi dei, di disilludere gli idolatri, di elevare sempre più in alto  
la croce del vero Dio.

After this, Olinthus, Apaecides and the Christians appear outside the temple of Isis, planning Apaecides’ public denouncement of Arbaces and forecasting that the temple will soon be “un cumulo di rovine.” During Apaecides’ chance meeting with Arbaces, he tells the Egyptian of his conversion and the impending doom of the Isidians. At Apaecides’ funeral, the Christians are shown watching and praying hidden behind the bushes. Interrupted by the arena action, two short prison scenes show Olinthus and

the old man supporting Glaucus and giving him a crucifix, but remaining faithful to his Gods. During the eruption scenes, the camera cuts to the Christians five times, contrasting their calm prayers against the rush and panic of the crowd. The courtesan Julia also seeks out Olinthus, and converts. The film's apotheosis, with everyone praying to their respective Gods from the rescue boat, is less explicitly Christian than the novel's conclusion. Overall, the Christian elements of the film are minor.

Olinthus is not a particularly positive figure, and it is easy to see why the 1913 film-makers simplified their plots and reduced the likelihood of angering Church-goers by removing all references to Christianity. Besides avoiding potential problems with religious audiences, this simplification strengthened both films' core storyline. Adrian Stähli suggests that Early Christianity and references to Glaucus' Greek origins are included in the 1926 version to show fidelity Bulwer-Lytton's novel (Stähli 2012: 82). At 3683 metres in length, the 1926 version was nearly 1700 metres longer than the Ambrosio Film version and over 1100 metres longer than the Pasquali version, so there was plenty of time to develop the novel's sub-plots (Bernardini 1994 [1913,1]: 296; Bernardini, Martinelli 1994 [1913,2]: 314; ICR 22422). However, the film-makers still take some licence with the book, adding Julia's conversion, the Christians at Apaecides' funeral and the Pompeiian Catacombs. So, the directors' choice to include the Christians seems to be influenced by other factors.

Visual conventions from other films of the Early Church are employed in *Gli ultimi giorni di Pompei* (1926): the superimposed crucifix, the catacombs (curiously located underneath Pompeii), reverence for the sacraments and an elderly priest similar to St. Peter. But these motifs all appear briefly and are used with little obvious purpose: it is as if the Catacombs are a shorthand for the Early Christian world. There is nothing like the Veronica sermon in *Quo Vadis* (1924) or the poignant close-ups of bloodied martyrs in *Fabiola* (1918), which attempt to visually communicate the passion or sacrifice of Christianity. Indeed, the Christians in the 1926 film are so unremarkable that, in all of the reviews and marketing materials I have consulted, the only mentions of them come in a plot summary published in *Al Cinema* (*Al Cinema* 21/11/1926: 8-9). Unlike *Quo Vadis* (1924), where the decadent court and the austere Christians are juxtaposed in montage sequences, there is no stark Isidian/Christian contrast in *Gli ultimi giorni di Pompei* (1926). As regards Apaecides, his attraction towards Christianity and his

potential martyrdom are not really explored in the film. The Christians are present at his Isidian funeral, but his status as a martyr is left unclear.

The main purpose of the Christians in *Gli ultimi giorni di Pompei* (1926) are related to the volcanic eruption. Olinthus' apocalyptic warnings are a diegetic reminder of the forthcoming disaster. His moral condemnations also offer a possible excuse for the film's depiction of Roman decadence and nudity. During the eruption scenes, the peace of the Christians awaiting their fate is repeatedly contrasted against the pandemonium of the mob, making these epic scenes even more visually impressive. In sum, *Gli ultimi giorni di Pompei* (1926) makes a slight use of Early Christian imagery as an impressive contrast in the destruction scenes. As in Bulwer-Lytton's novel, the martyrdom of Apaecides is not explored, reflecting the entertainment-driven nature of both works.

### *Christian Triumph*

*Trionfo Cristiano* (1930) was one of the last films made in Italy during the silent era. Within the case studies, it is an anomaly: directed by a woman, produced on commission for an Italian-American audience and depicting the life of a little-known Catacomb Saint, Pellegrino the martyr, who is venerated in Altavilla Irpina (province of Avellino). Despite the loss of the film, its unusual subject and production outside the mainstream film industry mean that it must be examined in any study of Italian religious films from the silent period. I begin by briefly outlining the place of Saint Pellegrino within the life of Altavilla Irpina and the film-making of Elvira Notari, the director of *Trionfo Cristiano*. I then consider the surviving elements of the film, and their connections to the macro-text of Pellegrino's martyrdom and the performance of Eduardo Notari, an actor synonymous with the Southern Italian identity, as Saint Pellegrino. I examine the film's relationship to sacred *battenti* ritual held in Altavilla Irpina every year, during which barefooted pilgrims damage their feet and venerate the Saint in an elaborate folkloristic procession, and the meanings that the film could have had for its emigrant audience.

Saint Pellegrino was an Early Church martyr, confirmed as a historical figure in the *Martyrologium Romanum*.<sup>42</sup> In reality, his generic hagiographical legend, dubious identification process and the waxed sarcophagus in which his remains were housed means that Pellegrino bears some notable similarities with the Catacomb Saints exported from the Counter-Reformation until the Risorgimento (see pages 66-70). Pellegrino's relics arrived in Altavilla in 1780, where they quickly acquired a reputation for supernatural healing (Cirelli 1873: 70-96, Severini 1907: 82). A young Padre Pio witnessed a miracle during the 1875 festa (Chiron 1997: 19, Pronzato 1998: 58). By this time, the August feast day attracted large numbers of pilgrims and onlookers, and it continues to do so today.

Although its origins remain obscure, the highlight of Pellegrino's festa is the *battenti* procession. Dressed in white clothes with a red sash, recalling the Saint's own clothing, barefoot groups of *battenti* process through the town, lying or kneeling to pray and damaging their feet by jumping on the cobbles. The final Altavillese group carry Pellegrino's vial of blood and some bone, housed in a golden reliquary-altar, followed by a statue of the Saint, similar to the waxy sarcophagus in which his remains are enclosed (Musco 2007: 11). The *battenti* groups parading at Altavilla are made up of local people, Altavillese who have moved away and groups from nearby villages who venerate either Pellegrino or his 'sister' Saint Filomena (Luciano 1996: 23-25). The name *battenti* is shared with the other devotees of Southern Italian Catholic cults, whose practices include or have included self-flagellation, barefoot walking and tongue dragging (Carroll 1992: 131-137). In the early twentieth century, devotees of Pellegrino dragged their tongues along the Church floor (Severini 1907: 83). This has now ceased. However, as Pellegrino Luciano observes in an anthropological study of belief in Altavilla, the "public display of suffering is a significant component of the vow to the Saint," and onlookers usually perceive the Altavillese *battenti* as enduring pain (Luciano 1996: 28-29). The procession is watched by an audience composed of pilgrims, locals and tourists. The festa day also saw decorations and fireworks put up in the village (Fig 7.8). For a certain period, the community space was given a more magical touch; a practice which continues today.

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<sup>42</sup> *Martyrologium Romanum*. (Venice: Typis Francifei and Nicolao Pezzana, 1784), 164.



While the *battenti* procession has been sanitised as a pilgrimage, it incorporates diverse elements: the summoning of miraculous intercessions, salvific violence, narration of the Saint's martyrdom and performances of piety, pain and community unity. In Southern Italian Catholic practices, relics give supernatural protection to a community (Carroll 1996: 185). So, by parading the relics through the village, the participants and spectators have a visual and spatial contact with the Saint and his miraculous powers. The festa participants' performance of pain and the onlookers' empathy can also be connected to the participant/audience relationship of medieval flagellant processions.<sup>43</sup> This is a complex area, but there are vestiges of earlier public physical displays and their multivalent interpretations by spectators within the twentieth century versions. Saint Pellegrino became a crucial part of Altavillese identity, and mutual aid societies were named after him, both in the village itself and in the United States.<sup>44</sup> Around two thousand Altavillese emigrated in 1890-1906 (Severini 1907: 182). Elvira Notari's films would be dispatched to similar destinations (Bruno 1993: 124).

After beginning with travel films and film processing work in the late 1900s, Dora Film released two to three features per year from the mid-1910s onwards, working at an artisanal level (Bernardini 2012: 214). Affectionately nicknamed 'La Marescialla,' Elvira Notari was the director, screenwriter and manager of her family film studio, Dora Films (Paliotti, Grano 2006: 83, Martinelli 2008: 134). Her husband Nicola Notari worked as a cameraman and their son, Eduardo 'Gennariello' Notari, mostly

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<sup>43</sup> According to local historian Raffaele Sarti, the remains of medieval flagellant processions can be seen in the modern *battenti* ritual (Sarti 2013). Mitchell Merback observes that the medieval flagellants' mortification copied the violence of the Passion, and offered, "an intervisual experience of sacral presence to the spectators," who took on an empathetic role, that of the Virgin Mary (Merback 2007: 165-168). These performances had a supernatural quality of their own, activated by audiences watching in a collective and conventionalized manner. "While the flagellants aimed their performative pain and bloodshed, mimetically, at the things they sought to neutralize, pious spectators actualized the salvific potential of these actions in the experience of watching. ....The deeper the desire for a salvific or curative effect, the more the gaze itself becomes a kind of magical force for unleashing these powers (Merback 2007: 173-175)."

Is the mimetic violence of the Altavillese *battenti* aimed at avoiding the pains suffered by the Saint? Do the spectators gaze upon them and unleash the miraculous powers of the Saint? An anthropological study of the early twentieth century *battenti* ritual is impossible because little evidence for it survives and even the modern version has not been analysed in depth. Nonetheless, the reader should be aware of the potential for connections between earlier forms of popular religious devotion, the *battenti* ritual and Elvira Notari's film, and the complex mix of sacred elements occurring simultaneously within the *battenti* procession.

<sup>44</sup> A mutual aid society, "The Mutual Succor and Benevolent Society of Altavilla Irpina," was incorporated in Boston in September 1918. See: Massachusetts (1919: 211). In Philadelphia, a lodge of the Order of the Sons of Italy America (OSIA), named 'Altavilla Irpina,' was founded in 1914. Sadly, nothing exists in the Altavilla Irpina Lodge's archive linked to *Trionfo Cristiano*. Its president informed me that there was another organisation, the Saint Pellegrino Society, but little is known about it. Altavilla also had its own Pellegrino association. See: Società Cattolica San Pellegrino M (01/01/1912).

starred in Elvira's films, but briefly established his own production company (Martinelli 2008: 134). Elvira Notari's features were grounded in Neapolitan culture and its *sceneggiate*, *scugnizzi*, panorama, dialects, violence, music and traditions, and had a strong appeal to Southern Italy and its diaspora. However, Notari adapted elements of Southern culture, such as its literature and songs from the Piedigrotta contest, which had wider national appeal (Troianelli 1989: 122, Bertellini 2010: 86-88). Winning songs were transformed into film dramas and accompanied by Neapolitan musicians across Italy and in the United States (Bernardini 2012: 215-218). The street-urchin 'Gennariello' star image of Notari's son was integrated into broader patriotic discourses during wartime.<sup>45</sup> Gennariello's success meant that films were billed under his name, even if he had only a secondary part (Fig 7.9). From 1923 to 1925, despite negative reviews from bourgeois critics, Notari's feature films were successfully exhibited not just in Southern Cities, but also in Northern cities and Italian colonies.<sup>46</sup> In the late twenties, Fascist censorship, fierce competition, the rise of sound cinema and critical disapproval led to a slowing of Dora Film's activities, and *Trionfo Cristiano* was Elvira Notari's last film.<sup>47</sup> It was released under another label, Ente Cinematografico Meridionale "Unitas" (ICR 24810; Bernardini 2012: 212).

Dora Films also engaged in a specialised production for the American market. Around seven hundred immigrant-commissioned documentaries were made, and a New York office was established to coordinate these exports and Notari's feature films (Bruno 1993: 122-124). Dora also distributed films from other Italian studios in the United States (NYCR 1923a; NYCR 1927a). Little trace of these Italian-American commissions remains. Besides *Trionfo Cristiano*, Notari also filmed the Festa dei Gigli at Nola and the Madonna di Carmine procession in Avellino (Paliotti, Grano 2006: 86-87). Dora

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<sup>45</sup> Examples include: *L'eroismo di un aviatore a Tripoli* (1912), *Il Tricolore* (1913), *Sempre avanti*, *Savoia* (1915), *Gloria ai caduti* (1916) and *L'Italia s'è desta* (1927).

<sup>46</sup> Suzzi 1923: 40; Scipio 1924: 44; Mak 1924: 63; Mak 1925: 27; Merciai 1924a: 44; Merciai 1924c: 31-32; Bologna 1924: 32; Yvelise 1924: 58-60; ro-ma 1924: 36; Matteucci 1925: 38; Morano 1924: 30.

<sup>47</sup> A number of factors contributed towards difficulties at Dora Films in the mid to late twenties, and it is difficult to discern which had most effect. Giuliana Bruno and Aldo Bernardini argue that Fascist censorship and a 1928 pronouncement against the type of films Notari produced were key factors in Dora Film's demise (Bruno 1993: 137-144, Bernardini 2012: 217-218). But Notari often exhibited films to audiences, both in Campania and the Americas, before Roman censors could judge them and some films, like *Sotto S. Francisco* (1923), were successful in spite of cuts (Bruno 1993: 125). With Naples having the largest urban population in Italy and an enormous diaspora, several studios copied Notari's business model and themes, including Any Film ('A New York Film), Del Gaudio and Stefano Lombardo's film production starring Leda Gys. This competition is an overlooked aspect of Dora Film's failure. Clearly though, the rise of sound cinema posed serious problems for films supported by live music.

Films also made *The Holy Year in Rome* (distributed in New York in 1925) and may have produced *The Life of Saint Genevieve*, which it distributed in 1923 (NYCR 1923b; NYCR 1925).<sup>48</sup> Small studios also satisfied the emigrant market with locally-set feature films (Martinelli 1998: 9-10). Four Italian festa documentaries were recorded by the censors of New York State during the period 1924-1930 (NYCR 1924; 1927; 1928; 1930). The work of small companies, these films are probably just a small fraction of total film production, but they show the continuing emigrant interest in the popular religious devotions of the homeland.

Unfortunately, there has been an exceptionally low survival rate for Notari's films and associated materials.<sup>49</sup> All that remains of *Trionfo Cristiano* are comments from Notari's son and a plot summary transcribed by Vittorio Martinelli (see Appendix Three). This fictionalisation was written in Elvira Notari's style (Bruno 1993: 315). Besides Gennariello Notari's starring role, the other actors are not recorded. Some scenes were shot in Altavilla Irpina using non-professional actors, while others were shot in Dora Films' studio using theatrical actors who usually performed in Napolitan dialect (Bruno 1993: 101). Little is known about the reception of *Trionfo Cristiano*. Vittorio Martinelli reports that it had a limited circulation in Italy, mostly during Holy Weeks, but that it was very successful with Italian emigrants (Martinelli 1996 [1923-31]: 402-403). Aldo Bernardini has stated that the film received a special gala showing in Pittsburgh (Bernardini 2014: 218). However, neither writer quotes primary sources, and further research upon Italian-American newspapers is unfortunately beyond the resources of this thesis.

Although it abbreviates Pellegrino's life and focuses on his martyrdom, Elvira Notari's fictionalisation demonstrates close familiarity with Father Giuseppe Cirelli's *Vita, martirio e miracoli del glorioso martire S. Pellegrino* (1873), the hagiographical hypotext of the Saint's life, death and miracles. Cirelli describes Emperor Commodus as a "despota per indole, e servo vile di ogni rea Passione," and Notari notes "il dispotismo, le vile e ree passioni." (Cirelli 1873:7). For Notari,

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<sup>48</sup> *The Life of Saint Genevieve* is listed as being produced by Aurora Films (NYCR 1923b), but there are no records of an Italian film studio under this name existing after 1915.

<sup>49</sup> Only three complete feature films and one fragment produced by Notari survive out of a total production of sixty features (Bruno 1995: 25-30, Nuñez, Farina 2008: 178-183). Some of Notari's equipment and materials were held at the Museo internazionale del cinema e dello spettacolo in Rome, but have been unavailable since the closure of this museum.

Pellegrino is a “forza olezzante di tutte le cristiane virtù,” while the Altavillese priest calls him “un fiore olezzante di tutte le cristiane virtù nella vigna di Gesù Cristo” (Cirelli 1873:8). Cirelli notes that the courtesans used, “tutte le armi della seduzione,” against the Christian men, a phrase which Notari copies almost exactly (“tutte le armi di ogni seduzione”) (Cirelli 1873: 49-50). Pellegrino is anxious “di propugnare, e propagare la parola della salute,” a combination of verbs repeated by Notari (Cirelli 1873: 10). Pellegrino’s words to the seductresses are also very similar in both texts. While *Trionfo Cristiano* did not reference the historical literature beloved of mainstream film industry, it did adapt this local hagiography.

The visual recreation of Pellegrino’s temptation was far more explicit than Cirelli’s vague references to seduction. Little was left for the audience to imagine, as Eduardo Notari recounted:

Mia madre fece cucire alle sarte dei costumi color carne, aderentissimi. Sia io che le tre donne che si strusciavano su di me sembravamo nudi, ma non eravamo nudi (Martinelli 2008: 135).

The scene explicitly presented male/female corporeal differences and a tangle of competing sexual desires: heterosexual lust, latent homo-eroticism (between the Saints, resisting heterosexual temptation) and sexual renunciation in favour of Christianity (Bruno 1993: 316). The scene must have had an eroticism similar to *Le tentazioni di Sant’Antonio* (1911) where, according to the film’s publicity and a surviving photograph, temptresses offered themselves “nude, lascive, con i seni eretti, con i corpi felini corsi da brividi di voluttà” (Fig 7.11; *Vita Cinematografica* 30/07/1911: 7-8). Breaking from Cirelli’s narrative, the Saint’s body is shown to have a seductive power of its own, as it ‘seduces’ one of the courtesans to convert to Christianity and thus, eventually, mimic the suffering of the Saint. However, it might be that Giuliana Bruno has over-emphasised the importance of this sexualised scene within the film as a whole. Suffering Christian bodies appear throughout the narrative of *Trionfo Cristiano*, with Pellegrino’s visits to other Christians foreshadowing his eventual destiny. If the close-ups we see in Notari’s surviving films were repeated in *Trionfo*, then it would have foregrounded the martyred body in a similar way to *Fabiola* (1918) and the sexuality of the seduction scenes would have been countered, to a degree, by the depiction of gory martyrdom.

Elvira Notari's fictionalisation shows her close awareness of the tradition surrounding Saint Pellegrino. Notari closely understood festa culture. As well as her documentary commissions, a reviewer of her feature film *E'piccerella* (1922) noted that it was:

materiato altresì di elementi folkloristici e etnografici, di colore locale e quel che più preme di passione eminentemente paesana (Gulliver 1924: 42).

Festas structure the film's doomed romance, and have symbolic meanings (Fig 7.10). Despite his attempts to elevate his position, Tore has more in common with his brother Gennariello, the drunkards, the recipients of festa charity and the *scugnizzi* than his beloved and the other wealthy pilgrims headed for Montevergine. *Scugnizzi* run alongside the pilgrims' carriages at the beginning of the film and Tore re-enacts this, leaping into his lover's carriage and killing her. The festa scenes also had an appeal to the Neapolitan audiences who were "represented textually as diegetic participant, in, and witness of, the public drama," of the festivals, and could then go and watch themselves on the big screen (Bruno 1993: 191). Bruno was clearly very aware of festa poetics, and the views of festa in her films might have prompted emigrant audiences to remember their own performances in and witness to the traditions of their home town. In order to understand what this might have meant for *Trionfo Cristiano* and its audiences, we need to consider the actor playing Pellegrino and the *battenti* ritual.

Eduardo Notari, was a very popular star in Italy and among the Italian diaspora because of his 'Gennariello' street-urchin persona (Paliotti, Grano 2006: 85-86). Eduardo's appearance and suffering gave him a direct connection to Southern Italian audiences at home and abroad, who, "took him to be one of their own" (Verdicchio 1997: 54-56). Eduardo's casting introduces a doubling of star and Saint which, as noted in Chapter Two, could be problematic when the two collided. However, there was a physical overlap between the *scugnizzo* and boyish martyr, and Gennariello was a suffering character rather than an extravagant divo. Crucially, in his embodiment of the *scugnizzo* archetype, Gennariello represented the transatlantic Southern Italian community. A Neapolitan film magazine called him an actor, "who interprets with effective truth the soul of our people" (Bruno 1993: 119). In casting Eduardo as Pellegrino, Elvira Notari emphasises the transatlantic veneration of Pellegrino and represents emigrant participation in the sacred rituals of the homeland.

In Altavilla Irpina, families have a longstanding, inter-generational attachment to a particular Saint (generally, either Saint Pellegrino or Saint Antonio), and family members join the *battenti* procession to represent the vows of relatives and discharge their own vows (Luciano 1996: 36-39). Nonetheless, the two Saints share a similar message of triumph over temptation. By commissioning the film, the vows of the Altavillese emigrants were represented by a surrogate who embodied the transatlantic Southern Italian community. The empathetic reaction to the *battenti* ritual may also have been played out among emigrant audiences watching *Trionfo Cristiano*. In the silent era, immigrant cinemas has a long tradition of sociability and participation (Hansen 1994: 95). With their dialect intertitles, encouragement to singing and status as, “an event of community life,” Notari’s films were consumed in a social atmosphere (Bertellini 2010: 264). So, it is possible that the empathetic spectatorship of the streets of Altavilla Irpina occurred in the emigrants’ community space, the cinema, as part of a conscious participation in the popular veneration of Saint Pellegrino, and that Notari constructed her film to elucidate such responses.

Placed within the context of Italian-American film-going, the regional specificity of *Trionfo Cristiano* marks a fascinating counter to the depictions of the Early Church offered by the Italian and American film industries. Giorgio Bertellini highlights how, in the 1920s, the celebration of national difference in the Italian historical epic and the proud nostalgia of Neapolitan films gave way to a new emphasis on cultural equality and exchange, in which Hollywood film-makers adapted Italian sources, and the Italian-American press “engaged in efforts to transnationalize film culture and...deprovincialize Italian film customers” (Bertellini 2014: 88-89). Instead of the minor role afforded Christianity in the Roman Epics, the Ultramontane universality of *Fabiola* (1918) or Hollywood’s international outreach, *Trionfo Cristiano* was grounded in the local religious cult of its commissioners.

However, the nature of Italian-American religious culture means *Trionfo Cristiano* could have appealed to other Italian emigrants, not just those from Avellino province. During the years 1815-1864, many Catacomb Saints like Saint Pellegrino were installed in Southern Italian churches (Boutry 2009: 144). As Pellegrino’s hagiographic legend mixed that of generic Early Church martyrs with Saint Anthony, it was easily comprehensible for Catholics. Furthermore, Italian-American communities demonstrated a degree of devotional flexibility. Local cults of Saints and patronal feasts dominated

village life in Southern Italy (Atkin, Tallett 2003: 45, Pollard 2008: 10-13). But, once removed from their original regional identity, popular religious devotions to the Madonna of Mount Carmel and the accompanying festa appealed across the Italian diaspora in New York City (Orsi 2010: 52-58, 180). Yet, despite the potential diaspora appeal and the star performance of Gennariello, *Trionfo Cristiano* did not gain a New York State censorship record, unlike so many of Notari's other feature films. This suggests that *Trionfo Cristiano* circulated only among its commissioning audience and not more widely.

To conclude, the loss of the film and the lack of information about its audience make analysis of *Trionfo Cristiano* very challenging. Further research into Italian-American newspapers might uncover traces of the film, as my enquiries with Altavillese groups in the United States and Italy have come to nought. However, the surviving information points to an ultimately fascinating martyrdom film. *Trionfo Cristiano* was the depiction of an Early Church martyr's life and death, but its production and reception were massively influenced by the local devotional culture and the *battenti* ritual. The festa and the waxed, wounded sarcophagus of Pellegrino are the most significant visual representations of Pellegrino's life and any film about him would have to interact with these sources. Its director Elvira Notari never lost sight of, "l'esigenza, tutta meridionale, di ricongiungersi con la storia e l'ambiente del territorio particolare" (Troianelli 1989:123). This can be seen in her fictionalisation for *Trionfo Cristiano*, which closely follows Giuseppe Cirelli's account of Saint Pellegrino's life. Other festa commissions and the sensitive use of festa in her surviving films also demonstrate that Elvira was closely attuned to the nature of these popular religious devotions.

The exact role the film had in the lives of its customer-audience remains unclear, and would have depended on how each family engaged with Pellegrino and the *battenti* tradition. *Trionfo Cristiano* may have offered something very different from other religious films of the period: a form of surrogate participation in a sacred community ritual which deeply connects the Altavillese to the martyrdom of their patron saint. In restaging one of the most important myths of the community in the streets of the town, the film taught second generation Altavillese emigrants about their heritage and had a folkloristic appeal. In the context of the more universal depictions of Early Church martyrdom examined in this thesis, *Trionfo Cristiano* is a powerful articulation of regional and cultural specificity, and the only example of Catacomb Saints and popular devotional culture influencing Early Church martyrdom films.

### *Conclusion*

All of the cinematic depictions of Early Church martyrdom examined in this chapter were shaped by the legacy of the epics of 1913-1914. Their reception was determined by how they continued this formula, but adapted to new cinematic trends and changed audience expectations. *Messalina* (1923) represents a move towards a more decadent portrait of Roman life and actualises the erotic promise of the genre. While objectifying its diva-stars, it also contains a subtle criticism of the cinematic voyeurism and the objectification of the martyr's body by showing the action from the perspective of Egle's would-be attackers. The connections between the slave characters and the Christian characters of Guazzoni's earlier work are evident, but the links to martyrdom remain subtle. Martyrdom also occupies a similarly marginal role in *Gli ultimi giorni di Pompei* (1926). The film includes the Early Christian characters of Bulwer-Lytton's novel, but also reflects their marginality in this work and its entertainment focus. The Catacombs are shown under the Pompeiian cityscape, as if they were the natural environment of the Early Church. This referencing reflects the success of generations of Catholic propagandists in entwining the Early Church and the Roman cityscape.

Rodolfo Kanzler's projects and *Trionfo Cristiano* (1930) are the only two case studies which were produced outside of the mainstream Italian film industry. They were both aimed at relatively restricted publics, and had a notable specificity of place: the Catacombs and the home-town of the emigrant audience, Altavilla Irpina. With *Trionfo Cristiano* itself lost, analysis of the film is challenging. But the discourses surrounding Notari's last work indicate a profound connection between the Early Christian martyr, local devotional culture and notions of the homeland. The poetics of the *battenti* procession, during which shoeless pilgrims venerate Pellegrino and take on some of his pain in a folkloristic sacred ritual, must have been keenly felt in Elvira Notari's martyrdom film. Notari's fidelity to Saint Pellegrino's hagiographic macro-text and her keen sense of Southern cultural identity must have made this a fascinating film.

Alongside *Quo Vadis* (1924), all of the films in this case study chapter contain sexual scenes and illustrate a surprising leniency in the Italian State censorship regime, in spite of the changes undertaken



during the crisis of the Liberal State and the rise of the Fascist party.<sup>50</sup> The leniency shown towards the historical epic form contrasts with the clampdown on films which might have been socially disruptive, such as the strikes of *I figli di nessuno* (1922), the criminals of Emilio Ghione's *Za La Mort* films or the proletarian Neapolitans of Elvira Notari's films. Potential reasons for the censors inattention to certain scenes of the case studies include the massive investments of the major film companies, the prestige of the genre, its patriotic identity as an 'Italian' genre and the inherent flexibility of the laws and decrees, which were more clear on films which could incite revolution or crime than those with potential erotic appeal. Gian Piero Brunetta has also highlighted the detailed focus of the Italian censors, with particular scenes or ungrammatical intertitles attracting attention while the overall moral tone of a film went largely unchallenged (Brunetta 2008: 73).

In her study of British film censorship from 1909 to 1925, Annette Kuhn noted that film censorship is not a fixed system, but that it is produced "within an array of constantly shifting discourses, practices and apparatuses" (Kuhn 1998: 127). Although the British system was very different to the Italian model, notably because of its shakier legal foundations, we can see a similar array of shifting discourses and institutional flexibility in Italy, despite the apparent firmness of a system defined by laws and ministerial decrees. Looking at a broad selection of surviving films, cinema magazines and Interior Ministry ledgers, which briefly record judgements on particular films, censorship was a process of negotiation between the calls for stricter interventions coming from government, politicians, moral campaigners and some Catholics, on the one hand, and film trade associations, exhibitors, studio moguls and film critics pleading for leniency on the other. Attenuation usually won out over prohibition: banned films were usually passed on appeal, re-submission or after cuts, and the phrase "ridurre a fugace visione" seems to occur more frequently than "eliminare" in the ledgers, as in the modifications for *Quo Vadis* (1924). The history of Italian film censorship in the silent era has yet to be fully explored.<sup>51</sup> Investigation

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<sup>50</sup> There were modifications to the censorship committees in 1920 and again in 1924, which means that *Messalina* was considered by an enlarged committee (two Interior Ministry civil servants, a magistrate, a mother, a publicist, a literary expert and either a teacher or a member of a moral protection association), while *Quo Vadis* (1924) and *Gli ultimi giorni di Pompei* (1926) were viewed by a mini-committee, composed of a police civil servant, a magistrate and a mother.

<sup>51</sup> The issue of censorship in the Italian silent cinema is given an initial consideration in Baldi (2002: 9-16), and in some histories of Italian silent cinema (Redi 1999: 93-97, Brunetta 2008: 64-77). Brunetta's contribution and the Italia Taglia project would make a good base from which to commence a more detailed analysis, and a

of it would surely add much to our knowledge of State-cinema relationships and the industry's production practices.

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greater analysis of censorship as an element within film-making and spectatorship. There are also structural considerations, such as the changes in laws and the functioning of companies which liaised between the censors and the studio.

## CONCLUSION

This thesis has sought to investigate the theme of Early Church martyrdom across Italian screen practice and cinema in the period 1898-1930. After establishing the cinematic and textual contexts within which these works existed, the thesis has examined representations of martyrdom which vary enormously: illustrated lectures based on Church-sponsored archaeological research, one-reel Saint biopics, epic depictions of the Roman world, wartime propaganda, eroticised historical films and emigrant-commissioned projects. The connections between the Church, Italian society and the film industry and the ways in which these connections shaped the case studies and Italian cinema have been central concerns of this study. The combination of different research methods has opened up the study of this theme and overlooked group of films in a way that a more restricted research design could not achieve. Film theory, religious studies, history of art and close readings of the film text were all combined in the *Quo Vadis* chapter, in order to illuminate the functions of spectacle and martyrdom in these films. Bringing film analysis and film history research into contact with other research methods has illuminated the connections between Academic Art and the epic; the First World War martyrdom film and its Early Christian counterpart; the religious culture of Southern Italy and *Trionfo Cristiano*; interpretations of Rome's archaeology and films shot on location. Although Italian cinema did not present religious films as frequently or as forcefully as the proponents of a Catholic magic lantern and cinema may have dreamt of, Early Christian martyrdom remained a subtle but important theme throughout the period, with a profound but changing relevance for Italian and world culture. This thesis has given us new understandings of Italian silent cinema, Catholicism in Italian popular culture and the activities of Enrico Guazzoni, one of the most important directors of the period.

*The research journey*

After being captivated by films like *Quo Vadis* (1913) and *Fabiola* (1918), my research initially considered filmographies and archive holdings to assess the feasibility of the project. Despite the losses which blight study of the silent era, the Early church martyrdom topic looked promising. While some films like *Il martirio di Santo Stefano* (1912) and *Santa Cecilia* (1919) remain lost, my research found a group of films held at archives which were accessible on my research budget. The digitisation of documents held by the Museo Nazionale del Cinema and the increasing number of film archives posting materials online meant that I could allocate resources towards films visible only in the archives themselves. Certain areas, such as the activities of Rodolfo Kanzler, appeared worthy of further investigation.

I also noted the literature surrounding the topic left some considerable gaps. *Quo Vadis* (1913) had been analysed, with Ivo Blom considering its artistic influences and Maria Wyke its referencing and reinterpretation of Classical culture and Italian Church-State relations (Wyke 1997; Blom 2001). Ruth Scodel and Anja Bettenworth had also considered the two silent versions of *Quo Vadis* (1913, 1925) within their study of the film adaptations of Henryk Sienkiewicz's novel (Scodel, Bettenworth, 2009). The contributions to the first volume of *Attraverso lo schermo, Cinema e cultura cattolica in Italia* (Eugeni, Viganò 2006) laid out a significant portion of the background to the Catholic Church's involvement in cinema in the period, but does not analyse films in depth. This meant that a study like mine, which traced the paradigm of Early Church martyrdom across Italian screen culture in the period 1898-1930, had the potential to make an important contribution to our understanding of this era in Italian cinema.

After this initial phase, I began exploring religious, theological and cultural studies, paying particular attention to European Catholicism and representations of the Early Church in the period 1815-1870. Although I over-invested in the study of this period after overestimating its relevance to the films, my work was not entirely in vain. It strengthened my understanding of the intertextual field which surrounded the case studies, and sharpened my analysis of the films themselves. My explorations of studies of martyrdom and Early Church culture enhanced my readings of the cinematic martyrs, even

though my attempts to combine the two disparate fields were unsuccessful. This is an area that requires interdisciplinary collaboration beyond the scope of this study.

As I investigated the filmic case studies, I became aware that the contextual issues surrounding religious films in silent cinema required further exploration. While the Passion films and the rise and fall of Italian silent cinema are relatively well-known elements of film history, many aspects are less famous or even unexplored. Returning to the filmographies of Vittorio Martinelli and Aldo Bernardini, I surveyed the entirety of religious film production in Italy during the period 1900-1930. This highlighted the statistical marginality of Christian films, but also the prominence of Early Church martyrs within this area. I initially observed that martyrs were represented in films which exclusively narrated their stories and those which included them within a broader epic representation of the Roman world.

I then explored religious film production across the different formats which dominated the silent era: the Cinema of Attractions, the narrative one-reeler and the feature film. Although Italian film production did not take on an industrial aspect until 1907, this earlier period influenced the choices of later film-makers, with early Passion films discouraging later re-makes and some of the aesthetic choices of this time persisting into the feature film era. The popularity of the magic lantern for educational purposes led to great hopes for a Catholic film sector. During the era of the one-reel narrative film, Italian film output increased rapidly, and some studios produced religious subjects because of their interest in historical films and desire to compete with Pathé. In the early years of the 1910s, hopes for a Catholic film sector faded, as economic reality and the growth of entertainment cinema led to gradual decline. Religious film subjects would now have to appeal to a wide audience. In Italy, the success of *Quo Vadis* (1913) determined later approaches to Biblical and hagiographical subjects. Studios made sizeable financial and intellectual investments in historical films, fuelled by cultural prestige, nationalism and a desire to repeat the success of *Quo Vadis* (1913). The War years imposed practical limits on the production and distribution of large-scale historical films, from the difficulties of mobilising extras to the loss of export markets. The genre had also been over-exploited and many major Religious films also struggled with the star system and the dramatic constraints imposed by the sacred nature of their subject matter. Yet Italy's reputation for spectacular film-making

meant that epics would still have international appeal, and a limited production continued even as the industry crumbled in the 1920s.

In the next chapter, I considered three of the major intertextual fields shaping the presentation of Early Church martyrs in Italian cinema: mise-en-scène in the historical film, nineteenth century literary representations and Church culture. In the Italian historical film, discussions over the scenography were fuelled by cultural nationalism and marketing, with the criteria ‘historical accuracy’ being emphasised and frequently discussed. In reality, these historical criteria were flexibly interpreted, as cinema borrowed spectacular influences from other media forms and Italy’s own re-imagining of its Classical past. The primacy of the mise-en-scène in historical films can be explained by cultural nationalism and the visual nature of the silent medium. But the descriptive nature of historical novels and the spectacular values of grand opera, circuses and recreations of the Roman world also played their role. In the second section, I discussed the prominence given to Early Church martyrdom in historical novels. I argued that a distinction can be drawn between works motivated by entertainment, in which the Early Church is one plot thread, and those formed by the theological debates of the mid-nineteenth century, which used the early Church as a means to inspire their readership and ferment religious debate. Henryk Sienkiewicz’s *Whither Quo Vadis* sits between these two models. In the third part, I considered the promotion of the Early Church martyr within nineteenth century Church culture. This revealed the complexities of the martyr, as a part of worshippers’ faith, symbol of Romanising devotional practices and subject for inter-denominational debate. New and old practices co-existed: while the Catholic press divulged martyr cults across national boundaries and archaeologists proclaimed their latest discoveries to an international scholarly community, the relics of Catacomb saints were still being dispatched around the world.

The first case study uncovered the work of Vatican archaeologist and film pioneer Baron Rodolfo Kanzler. I used newspapers, Catholic journals, film magazines, archaeological journals and archive materials from the Vatican Secret Archive and the Pontifical Commission for Sacred Archaeology to reconstruct Kanzler’s lecturing across Europe and his involvement in Italian and cinema. But for three years, the Early Christian slides eluded me. After tracking down an unattributed reprint of what looked like Kanzler’s slides in an auction, I searched for a corroborating source and eventually found *La Revue*

*de Photographie* (1903). This finally allowed us to glimpse Kanzler's reconstructions, and consider the Catacomb illustrated lectures as a complete screen practice. The 1901 Papal Seminar, co-presented with Orazio Marucchi, was serious in tone and had a strictly propagandistic purpose, while Kanzler's other lectures were more convivial. Kanzler's scenes are unusual, in that they represented Catholic worship and ordinary life, steering away from the dramatic scenes of confrontation or suffering often shown in painting and cinema. In showing different moments of Early Church life without a unifying hagiographical narrative, the slides did not construct a parallel narrative to the lecture, but tableaux scenes similar to the Cinema of Attractions. Finally, Kanzler probably made a pioneering short film, *Sepoltura di una martire cristiana in una catacomba*, but it is difficult to understand the motives behind its production, given that it was not included in his known lectures. The statements of film historians regarding the film's existence stand at odds with earlier documents, which make no mention of it. Finally, as a theatrical scenographer, Kanzler worked on *Julius Caesar* and Gabriele d'Annunzio's *La Nave*. Their lavish spectacle, 'historically-accurate' mise-en-scène perhaps had an influence on filmmakers and provided Kanzler with experience of set construction, which he would later use on *Fabiola* (1918).

The second case study chapter investigated seven one-reel narrative films, produced during the period 1908-1911. Ranging from epic productions in which the Early Church martyr receives the briefest of mentions to works focused on the lives of Saints, this group of films anticipate many of the approaches seen later in the feature film era. For Luigi Maggi and Itala Films, the Early Christians were very minor parts of Nero's history and Edward Bulwer-Lytton's novel *Last Days of Pompeii*. For Cines and Milano Films, the lives of saints took a higher priority, but strict hagiographical accuracy was not always foremost. Borrowing from the love and sacrifice formula of *Dall'amore al martirio* (1910), *Santa Cecilia* (1911) and *San Sebastiano* (1911, Milano) combined fictional romantic elements into their hagiography to simplify psychological motivations and increase commercial appeal. *San Paolo dramma biblico* (1910) heavily skewed Paul's life towards his time in Rome, linking his martyrdom firmly to the city and impressing the judges for Cardinal Ferrari's religious film prize. While *Saint Cecilia* (1911) was the only film to really give an impressive vision of the Catacombs, all of the films exploited natural surroundings, archaeological remains or elaborate sets to produce works of

scenographic beauty. The one-reel narrative films emphasised key spectacular scenes, such as the Great Fire of Rome, the eruption of Vesuvius, the Damascene conversion and the martyrdom of Cecilia. The spectacular set pieces, scenographic beauty and plot elements found in these works anticipate the tendencies of the feature film era.

The following chapter considered the two adaptations of *Quo Vadis* (1913, 1925). A massive phenomenon in Western culture at the dawn of the twentieth century, Henryk Sienkiewicz's novel was a malleable text which blurred the lines between the Roman Epic and the Early Church martyrdom film. In the two films, the Early Church becomes a marginal issue. In *Quo Vadis* (1913), the film retains many of the novel's minor Christian characters, creating abbreviated versions of the sub-plots in which they feature. One needs either extra-diegetic information or a good knowledge of archetypal martyr stories in order to understand them. The 1925 version simplifies the Christian cast, relying on a strong spatial contrast between decadent Rome and the pious Catacombs to create its Early Christian world. In the 1925 film, Plautus and his family function as a model for Vinicius and Lygia, and a trace of fascist family politics exists in their depiction.

Both versions of *Quo Vadis* have spectacle as one of their primary attractions, building on the spectacular promise of the one-reelers and an early film which abbreviated the novel to its key scenes. This places the film audience in complex and contradictory positions. The orgy and the Great Fire allow the audience a largely guilt-free enjoyment of the corruption of pagan Rome and the destruction of the Nero complex. The sexualised scenes of the 1925 adaptation push at the limits of 1920s censorship, but they also frame Lygia as a martyr-like figure in her resistance to Nero's attacks. The Christian martyrdoms in the arena precipitate a revolution, as the cinema and diegetic audiences shift from revelling in Nero's spectacles to moral outrage. Guazzoni's alignment with Academic art and distance from the martyrs' suffering weakens his depiction of martyrdom. The 1925 film, with its gory close-ups of the human torches and more emphatic representation of Nero's downfall, draws a closer connection between the outrages of Nero and the arena audience's revolt. But this is not discussed in a strictly Christian context. The audience rebels against Pomponia's treatment because they are appalled at a mother being tortured. Chilo's revolt is grounded in secular morality, rather than the Christian conversion and martyrdom depicted by Sienkiewicz. My reading of these film texts shows them to be



subtle and, at times contradictory, works which reflect elements of contemporary Italian society, but allow international audiences to identify with both Romans and Christians.

*In hoc signo vinces* (1913), *La Leggenda di Santa Barbara* (1918) and *Fabiola* (1918) all interpret the Roman Epic and Early Church martyrdom formats in very different ways. With its focus on the rise of Constantine, the dynastic political struggle of *In hoc signo vinces* assumes a religious dimension. Maximilian uses martyrdom to shock Constantia and as an implicit threat during his lust-driven pursuit. The martyrs' bodies are paraded under Constantia's balcony as she weeps in the foreground. The gory arena sequence, sadly missing in the surviving footage, emphasised the horror of martyrdom in a way *Quo Vadis* (1913) did not. The film also emphasised the burial of martyrs, and the actions of Helena and Constantia in influencing Constantine's conversion. The Catholic Church celebrated the anniversary of Constantine's victory and the Edict of Milan in the year of the film's release, and this helped it enjoy a long distribution on export markets with Catholic audiences. However, whether because of its more modest spectacular ambitions or the strength of the distribution networks enjoyed by larger studios, *In hoc signo vinces* enjoyed only a modest level of success.

An intermezzo between two documentaries on munitions production in Italy, *La Leggenda di Santa Barbara* (1918) combined *divismo*, religious martyrdom and national martyrdom. Hagiographic sources were corrupted into nationalist martyrdom, bridging the gap between the case studies and the numerous patriotic martyrdom films of the time. The final film starring Lyda Borelli, Italy's most famous theatrical and cinematic diva, *La Leggenda di Santa Barbara* channelled her performative suffering and destructiveness into noble sacrifice, as she ecstatically destroys herself to prevent the barbarian goths raping the Christian women. These themes tie in with the discourses of Allied propaganda. Combined with a documentary that recalibrated the nation's post-Caporetto image and showed Italy as a contributor to the war effort rather than a weaker ally, *La Leggenda di Santa Barbara* used Early Church martyrdom to try and change domestic and international preconceptions of Italy. While Italian nationalist martyr films often borrow Catholic iconography, as did the heroic martyr cults of the Risorgimento, and there are elements of Italian cultural nationalism in several Italian religious films, *La Leggenda di Santa Barbara* is the only case I know of where a Catholic Saint is re-imagined in a nationalistic context.

*Fabiola* (1918) is the only surviving case study film which sublimates the spectacular demands of the Roman Epic in favour of devoting greater attention to Christian martyrdom. The early part of the film centres on the intrigues surrounding Fulvius, Agnes and Fabiola, but the later part centres on key martyrdom scenes. The gory close-ups, intimate settings and reactions of diegetic spectators, contrast powerfully with the distant tableaux and monumental historical shifts of *Quo Vadis* (1913, 1925) or *In hoc signo vinces* (1913). The martyrdom scenes makes heavy use of diegetic spectators, such as the converts Fulvius and Fabiola or the mater dolorosa Lucina, and these figures indicate the value of the martyrs' sacrifice. While most of the films examined here cut away before the moment of death, the graphic nature of martyrdom depicted in *Fabiola* gives the film a powerful emotional sensitivity. Its insistence on corporeal proximity gives the work a devotional value, and demonstrates the influences of the cultural production surrounding Early Church martyrdom, such as the waxed corpi santi and the bloody descriptions of hagiographic literature. The composition of scenes in the Catacombs hint at the advisory role of Rodolfo Kanzler and his pioneering work in recreating the Early Church.

The final group of case studies were produced as the Italian film industry collapsed in the 1920s. Together with *Quo Vadis* (1925), all of these works eroticise Roman life and were largely permitted by the Italian censors. *Messalina* (1923) is outwardly a decadent historical epic, but its protagonists are a virtuous couple, Ennio and Egle, who are protected by a strongman. This quasi-Christian group have much in common with cinematic stereotypes of Early Church martyrdom, and Egle's resistance to sexual assaults recalls martyrdom narratives. The 'quasi-martyr' figure and the tongue-in-cheek tone of the production make it a difficult work to assess, and fact that it survives only as an abbreviated, sonorised version further complicates matters. Yet, by returning to the discourses created by the 1923 original and analysing the surviving scenes with care, *Messalina* is revealed as a perplexing work. While revelling in decadence and eroticism, it also highlights cinematic voyeurism and the contradiction between sex and purity encapsulated in the virgin heroines who populate hagiographic narratives and Early Church novels.

*Gli ultimi giorni di Pompei* (1926) was the third feature-length adaptation of Bulwer-Lytton's historical novel, and the first to include its Early Church characters. The Isidian priest Apaecides converts to Christianity and is preparing to denounce his old religion when he is murdered by the high

priest. Olinthus, the zealous leader of the Christians, shares the arena cell with Glaucus. The film-makers increase the importance of the Christian sub-theme in their adaptation. Julia's conversion is added, Christians appear at Apaecides funeral and the Pompeian Catacombs make an appearance, illustrating how much the Early Church was symbolised by its archaeology. In the main though, the apocalyptic Olinthus functions as a diegetic reminder of impending doom and the existence of Christianity offers a moral contrast with the more decadent scenes. In taking this approach, Gabriellino d'Annunzio and Carmine Gallone closely follow Bulwer-Lytton's outline.

*Trionfo Cristiano* (1930) is a film which is almost entirely lost, yet is fascinating because it is so anomalous within the case study group. Produced by a woman film-maker operating outside the conventions of the Italian film industry and funded by a group of Italo-Americans, *Trionfo Cristiano* narrates the life of a minor saint, Pellegrino the martyr. Elvira Notari's fictionalised summary was closely related to the hagiographic macro-text, demonstrating her close attention to local culture. This Catacomb Saint is venerated annually by shoeless pilgrims in the *battenti* ritual, which combines salvific violence, hagiographic narrative, a summoning of supernatural forces and performances of pain, piety and unity. By funding the recreation of the Saint's life on celluloid in the streets of their hometown, the emigrants reconnected with their devotional practices via the performance of a surrogate whose personality was closely connected to Southern identity. Eduardo 'Gennariello' Notari, the embodiment of the *scugnizzo* archetype and a star across Naples and its diaspora, played Pellegrino. While many elements of the film are lost, *Trionfo Cristiano* closely interacted with the devotional practices and community identity of Altavilla Irpina. In so doing, it was very different from the transnational religious subjects chosen by the mainstream film industry, with their appeal to an international public.

### *Concluding thoughts*

This thesis has sought to investigate representations of Early Church martyrdom in Italian silent cinema (1900-1930). I have attempted to establish a detailed contextual and intertextual framework against which these representations can be explored. In investigating this topic, I have uncovered one

of the most significant adaptations of Catholic culture with the cinematic medium during the silent period, and integrated it into the scholarship of the discipline. Besides Rodolfo Kanzler's illustrated lectures and Elvira Notari's late martyrdom film, both of which appealed to limited audiences in specific contexts, the films examined here were targeted at general audiences and were released through mainstream distribution channels. These transnational and commercial considerations placed limits on the possible extent of Catholic propaganda and meant that entertainment was prioritised. At the same time, for all of the discourses swirling around Italian film-making regarding historical accuracy, the reality was that this was a flexible concept, mostly concerned with the grandiosity of the *mise-en-scène*. Minor deviations from established hagiographies, such as the martyrdom of James the Less in *San Paolo dramma biblico* or the fictional romances of *San Sebastiano* (1911, Milano) and *Santa Cecilia* (1911), did not attract much visible criticism and do not seem to have impeded these films' circulation. More controversial works like *Messalina* (1923) and *Quo Vadis* (1924) tested the limits of acceptability, but were received within a benign censorship regime and avoided the free adaptation of the Scriptures which condemned *Giuda* (1919) to commercial failure.

Despite their international destinations and audiences, it is hard not to view the Early Church martyr within an Italian context and explore its connections to the complex cohabitation between Church and State. Fittingly, Rodolfo Kanzler's Catacomb slides were first shown at the Esposizione d'Arte Sacra, which ran alongside the Italian state's exhibition. There are numerous points where the film industry chose to engage with the Church initiatives or appealed to a Catholic public. *San Paolo dramma biblico* was constructed to win a Catholic film prize; *In hoc signo vinces* appeared alongside the Constantine celebrations; *Fabiola* (1918) appears as a Catholic reaction to the sufferings of War; *La Leggenda di Santa Barbara* combines previously separate notions of patriotic and religious martyrdom in the diva persona of Lyda Borelli. Even the case studies of the twenties, with their decadent scenes, suggest an attempt to distract from contemporary social strife.

Yet, while many of the case studies have their parallels in religious and social issues of the period, it is hard to read them as being entirely motivated by ingrained Catholicism within the film studios or social strife. Maria Wyke has suggested a Vatican influence over Cines (Wyke 1997: 126). Although Cines was owned by the largely Vatican-controlled Banco di Roma until 1915, Cines put

more energy into culturally justifying the colonial expansion of the Italian state and the Banco than in producing a religious sub-genre. Cines' films also have a slightly casual nature with their religious source material, adding entertaining romantic elements (*Dall'amore al martirio*, *San Sebastiano*) or making martyrdom a minor theme deployed for maximum spectacle (*Quo Vadis*, 1913). This reflects the trends of other studios and critical discourses concentrating on the *mise-en-scène*. Perhaps the religious production could even be considered as a by-product of the Italian studios' financial and intellectual investment in Classical subjects. This notwithstanding, we can definitely note a sensibility towards religious subjects at certain film studios (Milano, Cines, Savoia and Ambrosio) which did not really exist in others (Lombardo, Itala and Tiber). At a systemic level, this sensibility reflects the lack of control over popular culture which the Church had in the Liberal and early Fascist eras, and contrasts sharply with the post-1945 period.

In my initial consideration of these films and their context, I argued that some were interested in exploring religious martyrdom (Early Church martyrdom films) and some gave this a more minor consideration with an entertainment-driven version of the Roman world (Roman Epics). Early cinema sees a rough balance between these two types. The one-reel narrative film was perfect for narrating the life of a saint, building on audience familiarity with their visual representation via magic lanterns and other media forms. But, as the historical feature film took on its epic proportions, the martyr was increasingly displaced from the centre of the narrative. While *Fabiola* (1918) and *Trionfo Cristiano* are devoted to exploring martyrdom and depicting the Early Church, other films explored it within a spectacular vision of the Roman world, ambiguously positioning the spectator between revelling in the spectacle and empathy for the participants.

Enrico Guazzoni's three films stand out as the most complex exploration of Early Church martyrdom undertaken by any director in the period. With its interest in realising the visual and narrative grandiosity of Sienkiewicz, *Quo Vadis* (1913) uses martyrdom to create an air of threat around the central couple and to develop epic cinematic spectacle as never seen before. *Fabiola* (1918) abandoned this grandiosity in favour of bloodied close ups of ecstatic martyrs, physical suffering and distraught diegetic spectators. Beneath its tongue-in-cheek approach to the Roman past and its exaggerated

eroticism, *Messalina* (1923) implicitly questions the sexualised nature of the confrontation between the Early Christians and decadent Romans. It simultaneously feeds and challenges cinematic voyeurism.

#### *Areas for future research*

This thesis has identified several possible areas for future research. Within early screen practice, my research highlights the need for a broader investigation into the Catholic Church's use of the magic lantern in Italy and early cinema. This thesis has uncovered the activities of Rodolfo Kanzler, and highlighted the connections between Catholic users of cinema and magic lantern in Italy, organised into associations at diocesan and regional levels, and La Bonne Presse, the Catholic magic lantern and slide supplier based in Paris. As well as enlarging our knowledge of the Church's involvement in the magic lantern, such research could potentially uncover and analyse lantern slide sets and lectures as texts themselves, drawing inspiration from recent Anglophone studies of the lantern (Dixon 2013; Gray 2014; Vogl-Bienik, Crangle (eds.) 2014). Research in diocesan archives and among private collectors could be combined with databases and digitised documents, such as the Lucerna magic lantern website and digitised issues of La Bonne Presse's magazine, to explore the transnational aspects of the Catholic lantern.

Chapter Seven highlighted the illicit thrills of eroticism in the historical epic, and the surprising leniency of Italian censors in the early years of the *ventennio*, especially when compared with those of other countries. The issue of censorship in the Italian silent cinema is given an initial consideration in Alfredo Baldi's history of Italian film censorship in the period 1947-1998, and in some histories of Italian silent cinema (Redi 1999: 93-97, Baldi 2002: 9-16, Brunetta 2008: 64-77). Itala Film's involvement with the censors has been analysed (Cherchi Usai 1985: 16-20). Yet, although the history of film censorship in Italy is reasonably well-known and the *visti di censura* are often the starting point for research in Italian silent cinema, the discourses and processes of censorship in this period require more systematic research.

The process of film censorship in Italy in the silent era also holds fascinating potential. Looking at a broad selection of surviving films, cinema magazines and Interior Ministry ledgers, censorship was a process of negotiation between the calls for stricter interventions coming from government, politicians, moral campaigners and some Catholics, on the one hand, and film trade associations, exhibitors, studio moguls and film critics pleading for leniency on the other. After defining the terrain within which film censorship operated, the study could consider the fate of individual directors and different genres. The leniency shown towards the historical epic form contrasts with the clampdown on films which might have been socially disruptive, such as the strikes of *I figli di nessuno* (1922) or the proletarian Neapolitan lifestyles of Elvira Notari's films. The negotiation of censorship boundaries in Emilio Ghione's *Za La Mort* crime serials is another interesting area (North 2011: 151). Careful attention would have to be shown to the 'gaps' in films, as products of both censorship and loss, but such a study could be very rewarding for our knowledge of film industry-State relations and understanding of the creative boundaries surrounding films produced in this era.

Finally, investigating the broader history of representations of martyrdom across Italian cinema would make a fascinating interdisciplinary project, and a way of exploring the cinematic depiction of Italy's national traumas across the twentieth century. It would draw in perspectives from across religious, cultural and film studies, as I have sought to do here. Such a project would plot the iconographic development of the martyr across the films examined here, propaganda movies of the World Wars, post-war cinema and recent films about the Years of Lead and Mafia killings. Aspects of martyrdom in Fascist era films, Neorealist war movie *Roma Città Aperta* (1943) and post-war historical epics like *Fabiola* (1949) and *Spartaco* (1953) have already been identified (Wyke 1997: 53-70, Landy 2000: 67, 135). Academic consideration of films about the deaths of Aldo Moro and Pier Paolo Pasolini, two potent martyrs for the Italian left, has already begun (Renga 2008: 197-209, O'Leary 2012: 151-170). The filmic memorialisation of anti-Mafia martyrs is another area worth of investigation (Marcus 2007: 290-300, Marlow-Mann 2011: 179-185).

At a more modest level, the time has surely come for the Italian propaganda films made during the Italo-Turkish and First World Wars to be assessed in detail, especially given the increasing number of surviving and restored films. As I examined in Chapter Six, they share iconographic roots with Catholic

portrayals of martyrdom. In addition to representing patriotic martyrdom during the Risorgimento and Italy's more recent conflicts, these films also discussed gender and social roles during wartime, and featured stars like Lyda Borelli, Bartolomeo Pagano and Francesca Bertini.

Such broader studies are often built on ground-breaking studies like this one. I believe that this thesis has demonstrated that cinematic representations of Early Church martyrdom are a vital means of exploring Italian cinema's relationship with Catholicism during the silent era. This thesis has increased our understanding of faith dynamics and spectacle in some of the most significant religious and historical films of the period. It has also uncovered works which deserve greater attention, such as the screen practice of Rodolfo Kanzler, and made a significant contribution towards increasing our understanding of Enrico Guazzoni, one of the leading directors of the period.



## ILLUSTRATIONS

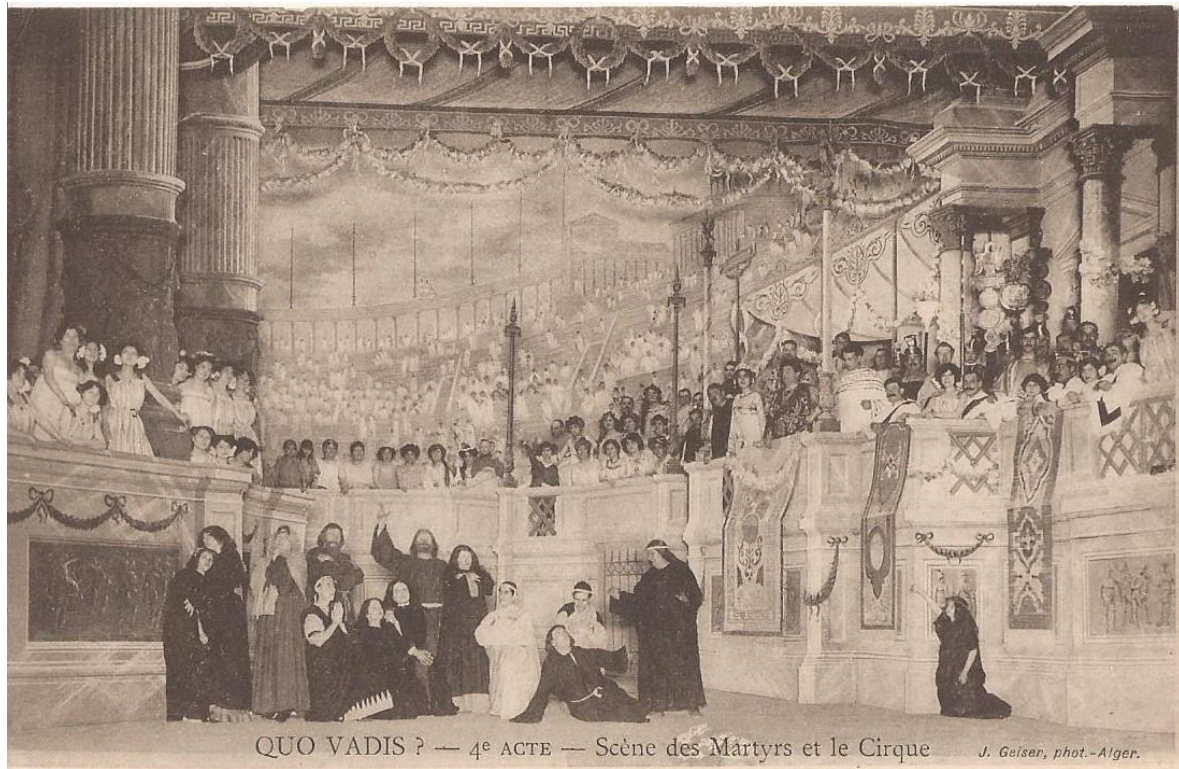


Figure 2.1. A scene of martyrdom in the opera *Quo Vadis*, c.1912. Author's collection.



Figure 2.2. A banquet scene in a theatrical production of *Fabiola*, c.1913. Author's collection.

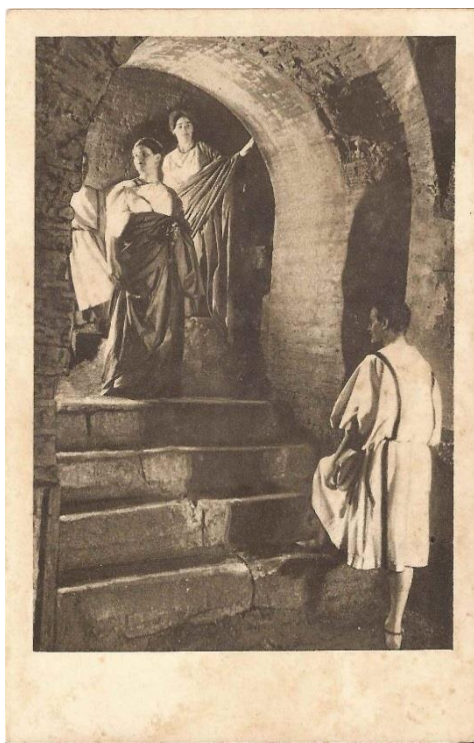


Figure 3.1 .This corresponds with the slide captioned: 7) Scala d'ingresso di Priscilla con figure. It is reproduced in the *Revue de Photographie* article, which gives it the same title.

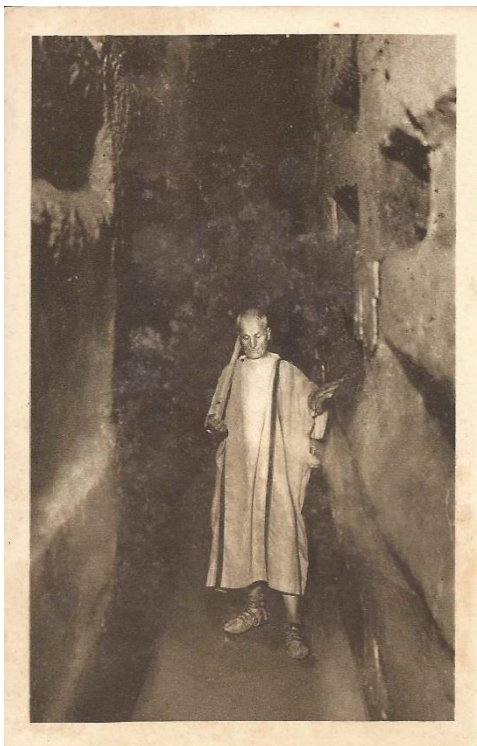


Figure 3.2. This corresponds with: 9) *Galleria di Priscilla con fossore*. It is also reproduced in the *Revue de Photographie* article.



Figure 3.3. This corresponds with 15) *Vestizione di una vergine sacra* (Cimitero Ostiano).

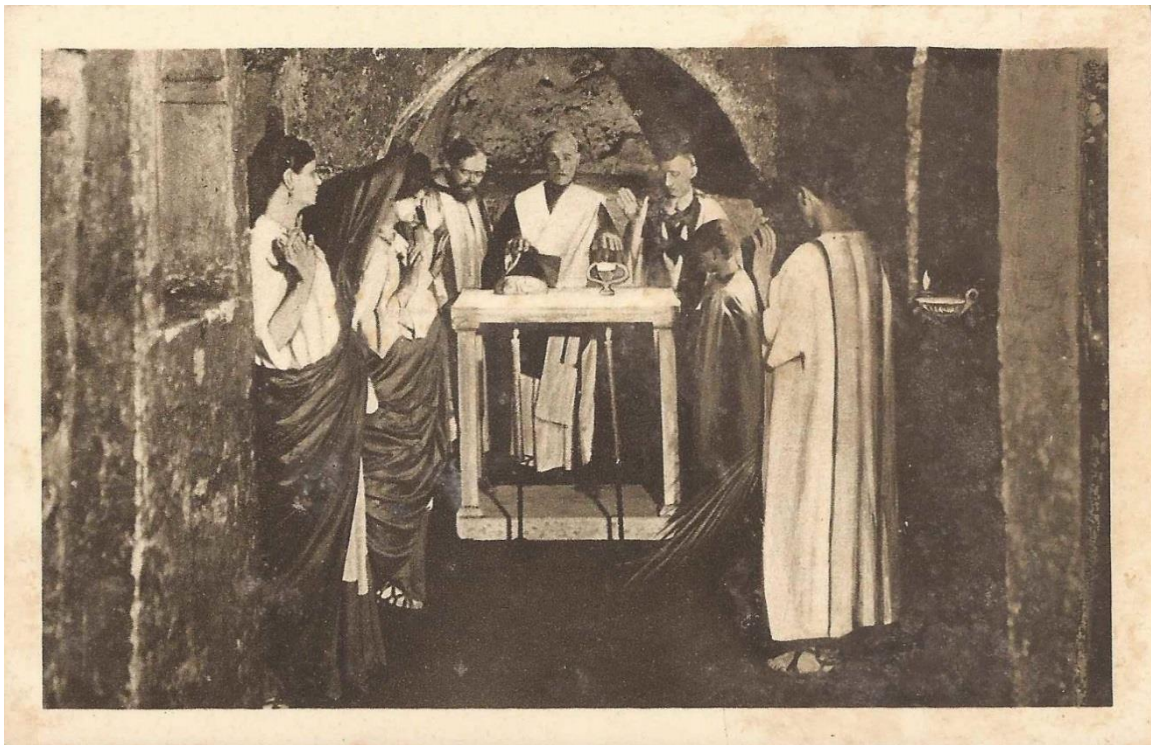


Figure 3.4. This corresponds with 36) *Scena animata della Messa* (Cimitero di San Callisto).



Figure 3.5. This corresponds with 52) *Deposizione in una cripta* (Domitilla).



Figure 3.6. This matches 56) *Il poeta Prudenzio*. The *Revue* article confirms this title.

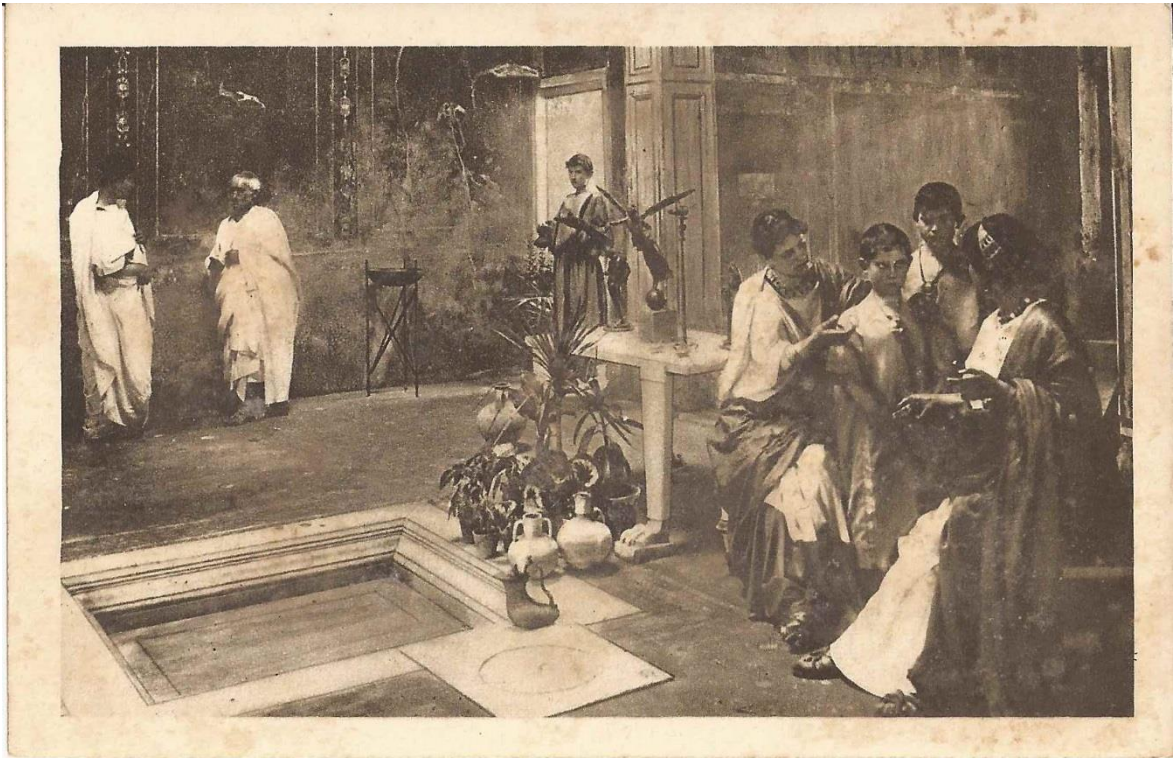


Figure 3.7. This corresponds with: 57) *Pancrazio istruito da Lucina*.



Figure 3.8. The card title is *La celebrazione del Matrimonio nelle Catacombe*.



Figure 3.9. This could be the card titled *Il convegno per l'adunanza liturgica nelle case private al I. secolo.*



Figure 3.10 . The card title is: *La preparazione alla Fractio panis nelle case private.*



Figure 3.11. The card title is *La celebrazione eucaristica nelle case private*.

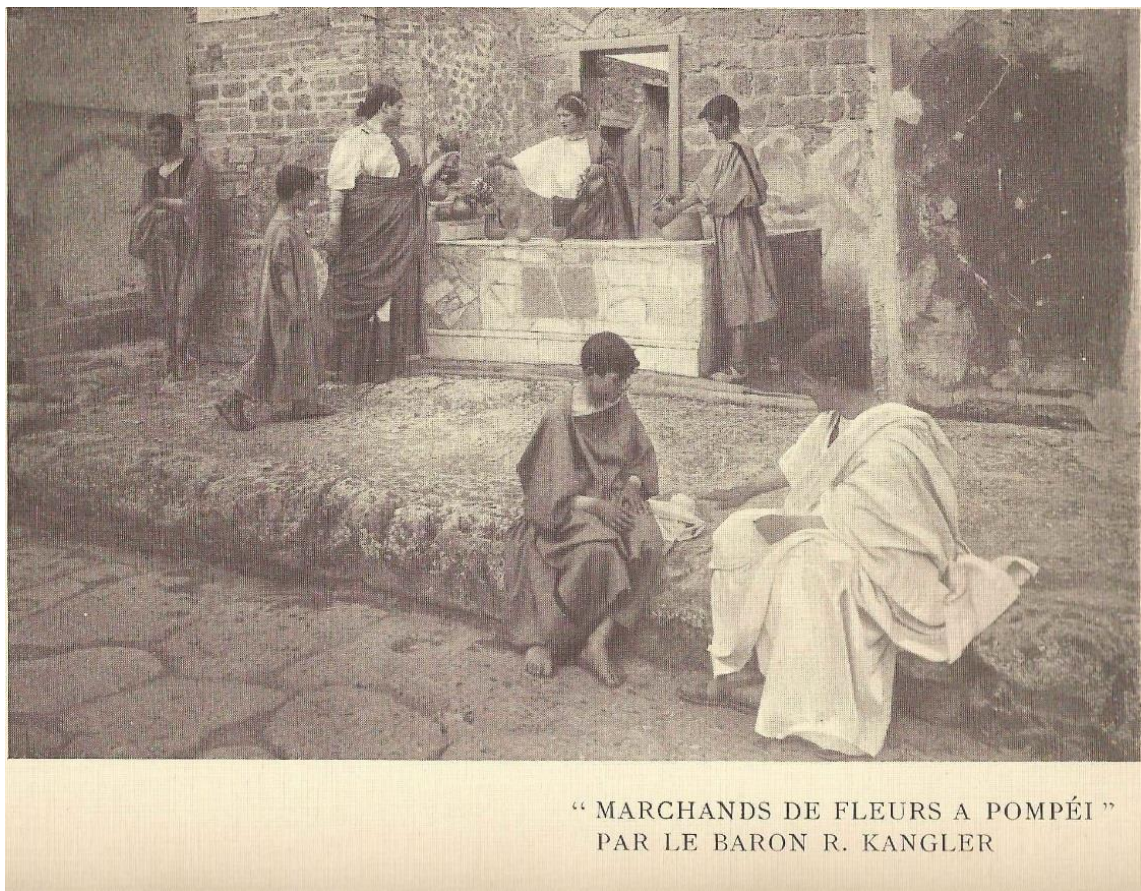


Figure 3.12. *Flower merchants at Pompeii* appears in the *Revue*.





Figure 3.13. *Sacrifices aux Dieux Lates, Pompéi, maison des Vettii* appears in the *Revue*.



Figure 3.14. *Le fossoyeur conduisant la jene mère sur la tombe de son enfant* appears in the *Revue*. It might be part of a martyrdom narrative, composed of Figure 3.5 and lost images.



Figure 4.1 *Nerone* (1909). Watercolour for Nero's dream sequence, painted by Decoroso Bonifanti. Kindly provided by the Italian National Cinema Museum, Turin. Catalogue code: M05831/011.

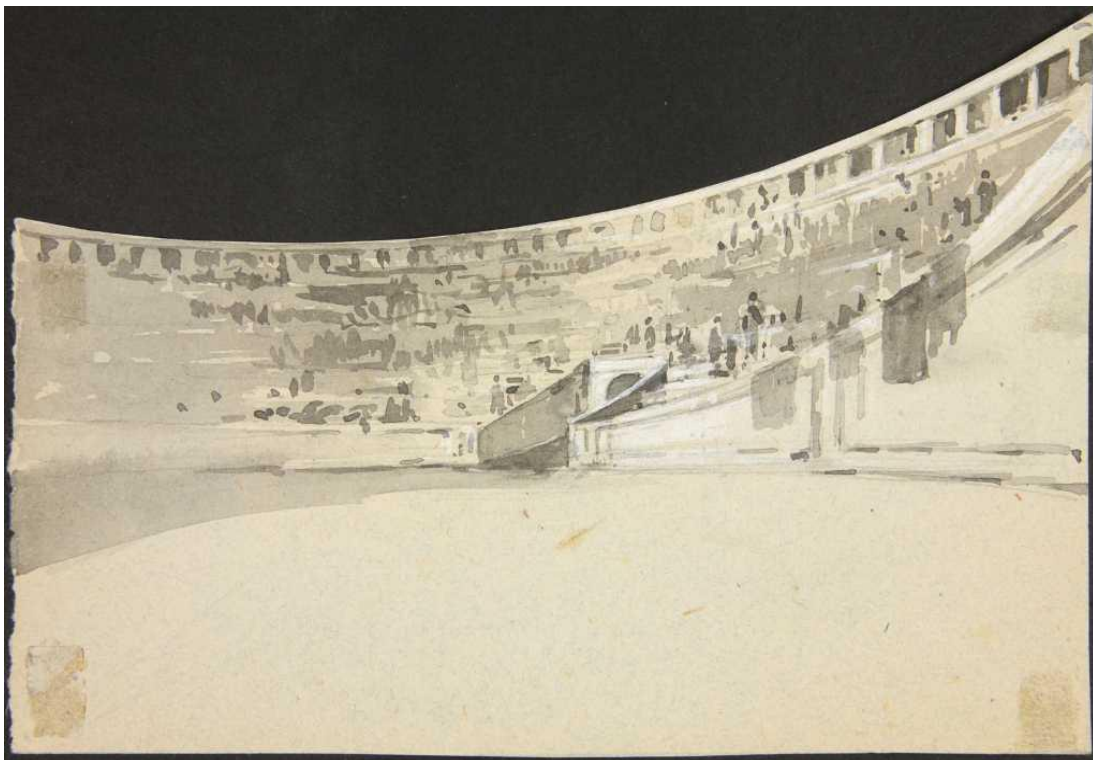


Figure 4.2. *Nerone* (1909). Watercolour of an arena, painted by Decoroso Bonifanti. Kindly provided by the Italian National Cinema Museum, Turin. Catalogue code: M05831/013.



Figure 4.3. *Gli ultimi giorni di Pompei* (1908). The conclusion of the gladiator fight.



Figure 4.4. *Gli ultimi giorni di Pompei* (1908). Vesuvius erupts and Glaucus flees the arena.



Fig 4.5. Nydia's body floating in the French print of *Gli ultimi giorni di Pompei* (1908)



Figure 4.6. *Nerone* (1909). Nero recoils in front of a vision of Christians in the arena.



Figure 4.7. *Nerone* (1909). Nero is haunted by visions of the human torches.



Figure 4.8. *Nerone* (1909). The second dream sequence from an original publicity still, printed by Brunner & Co. for the distributors Raleigh & Robert. Kindly provided by the Italian National Cinema Museum, Turin. Catalogue code: F11447/013.



Figure 4.9. John William Waterhouse. *The Remorse of the Emperor Nero after the Murder of his Mother*. 1878, oil on canvas. Wikimedia.



Figure 4.10. The tower at the Circus of Maxentius, used as an entrance to the Catacombs in *San Paolo dramma biblico* (1910). Wikimedia.



Figure 4.11. The walls at the Circus of Maxentius, with the holes used as a Catacomb exit in *San Paolo dramma biblico* (1910). Wikimedia.



Figure 4.12. *Agrippina* (1911), (05:33). The curtain, set wall, table ornament and winged table are all present in *Santa Cecilia* (1911).



Figure 4.13. The wall panels and door in this screenshot from *Agrippina* (1911) are seen at Cecilia's wedding dinner in *Santa Cecilia* (1911).



Figure 4.14. *Quo Vadis* (1913), (10:38). The curtain is used in *Santa Cecilia* (1911), and the famous table appears once again.



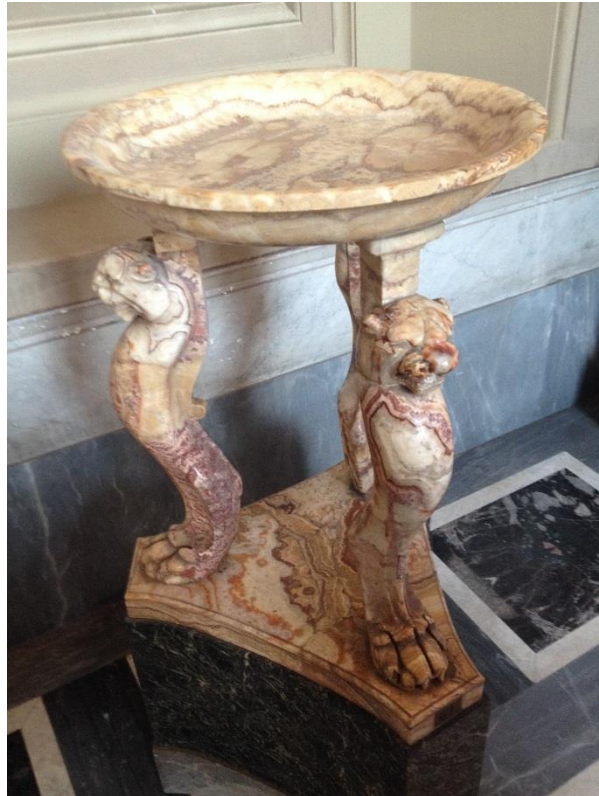


Figure 4.15. A possible inspiration for Cines' famous table in the Pio Clementino Museum, Vatican City. Author's photograph.



Figure 4.16. *Quo Vadis* (1913), (11:09). The table used at the wedding breakfast in *Santa Cecilia* (1911) and in Nero's study in *Agrippina* (1911) becomes Petronius' desk.



Figure 4.17. A selection of images from *San Sebastiano* (1911, Milano Films).



Figure 5.1. Aulus' family in the richly-decorated Catacombs of *Quo Vadis* (1925).



Figure 5.2. Chilo and Vinicius in the Catacombs of *Quo Vadis* (1913)

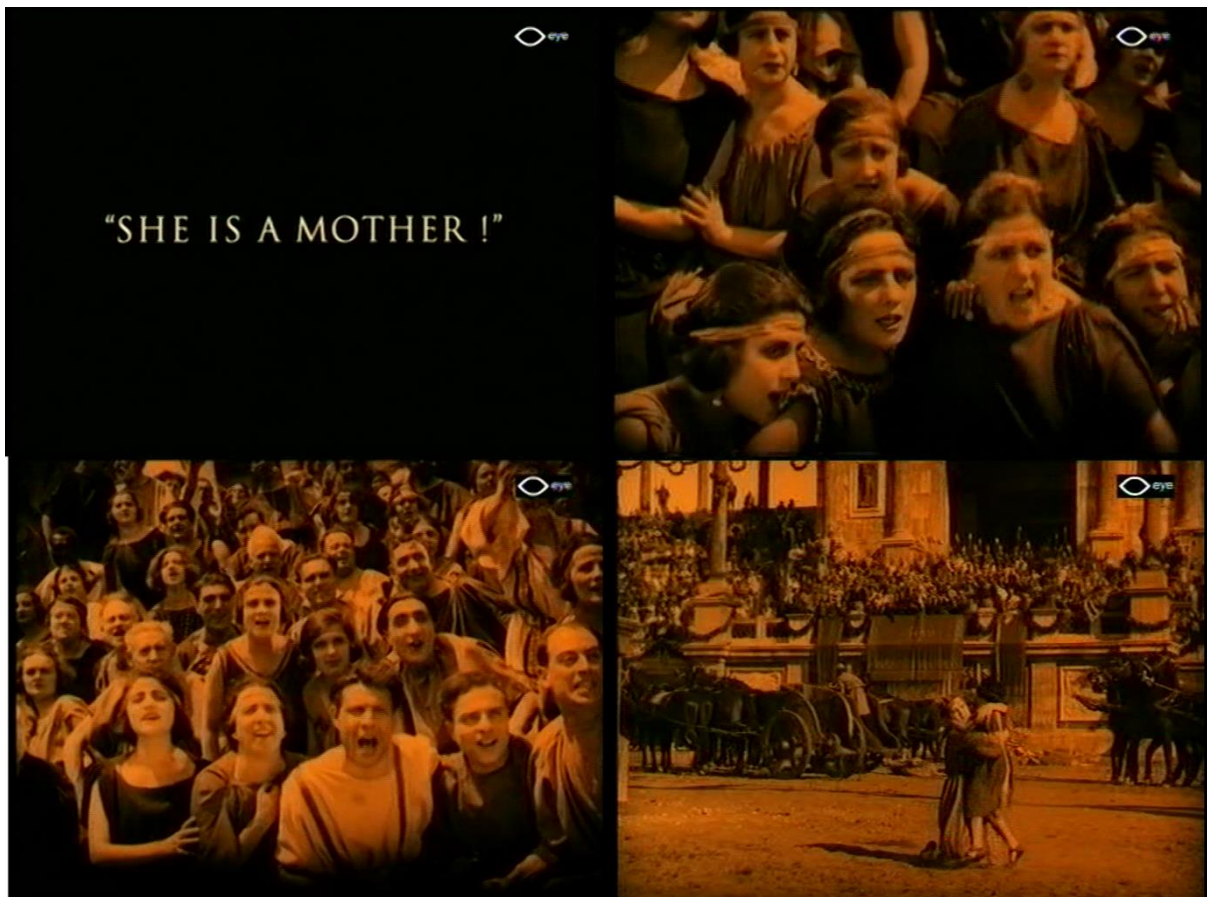


Figure 5.3. The outraged Roman crowd cheer on the mother Pomponia in *Quo Vadis* (1925).



Figure 5.4. As the lampreys eat, the lesbians embrace in *Quo Vadis* (1925).



Figure 5.5. The woman fed to the lampreys at the start of *Quo Vadis* (1925).



Figure 5.6. A reveller strips a dancer at the orgy in *Quo Vadis* (1925).



Figure 5.7. The camera's identification with the voyeuristic Nero is highlighted in this point-of-view shot from *Quo Vadis* (1925).



Figure 5.8. The gory close-ups of the human torches in *Quo Vadis* (1925) on the top row, compared with the more distant perspectives chosen in *Quo Vadis* (1913).



Figure 5.9. Jan Styka's *Saint Peter preaching the Gospel in the Catacombs* (1902) [Wikimedia], and a scene from *Quo Vadis* (1913).



Figure 5.10. Henryk Siemiradzki's *Nero's Torches* (1876) [Wikimedia] and the procession to view the human torches from *Quo Vadis* (1913).



Figure 5.11 Detail from Henryk Siemiradzki's *Christian Dirce* (1897) [Wikimedia], and Lygia tied to the bull in *Quo Vadis* (1925).

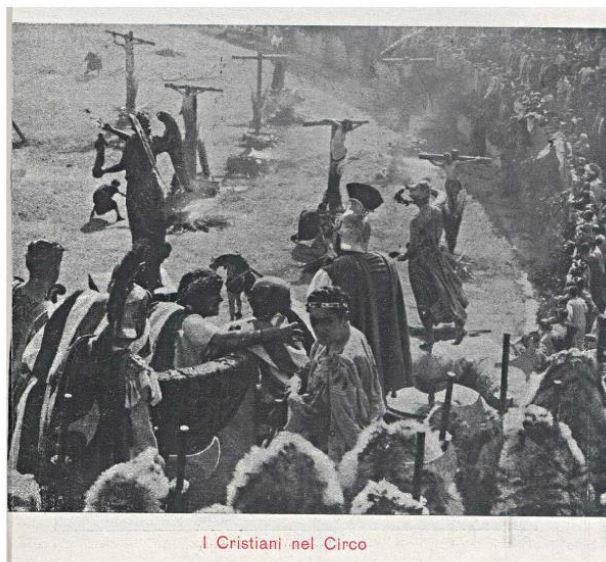


Figure 5.12. One of the views of Styka's panorama published in *La Revue Illustrée* (Vol. 30 No. 13 1900: 40) and (Right) A view from Gloria Film's *Nerone e Agrippina* (1914), published in *Il Maggese Cinematografico* (Year 2 No. 5: 18) and kindly provided by the Museo Nazionale del Cinema, Turin.





Figure 5.13. Postcard of the Great Fire of Rome, by Jan Styka (date unknown, author's collection), and part of the Great Fire scene in *Quo Vadis* (1913).



Figure 5.14. Postcard of Eunice embracing Petronius' statue, by Jan Styka (date unknown, author's collection), and scenes from *Quo Vadis* (1924).

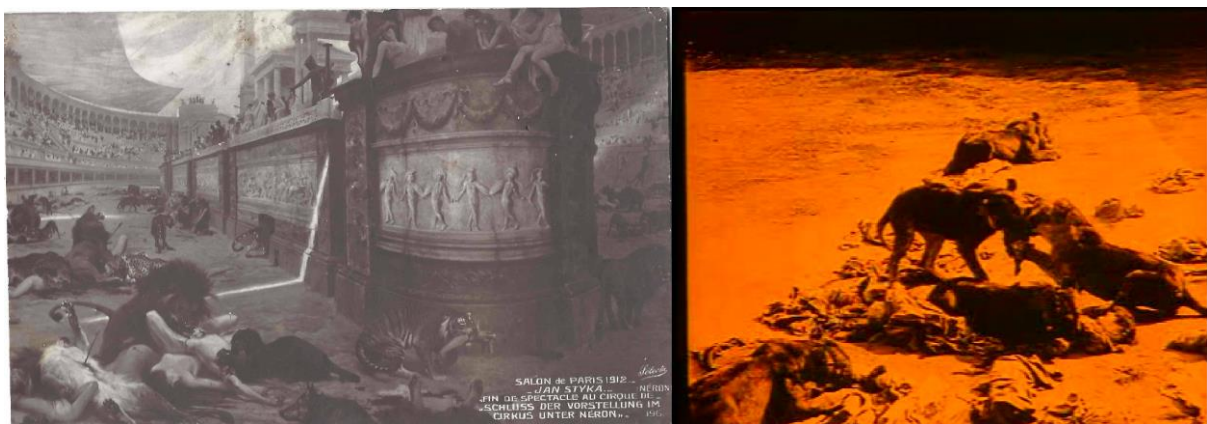


Figure 5.15 Postcard of *The End of the Show in Nero's circus* (1912, Author's collection) and (Right) A scene from *Quo Vadis* (1913).



Fig 6.1 (Top) An advertisement for *Fabiola*, published in *Film*, Year 4 No. 37 (12<sup>th</sup> December 1917), 5. Reproduced courtesy of the Museo Nazionale Del Cinema, Turin. (Bottom) A propaganda postcard by Tito Corbella, depicting Edith Cavell. Author's collection. Corbella produced sketches of the major Italian divas, and worked for Guazzoni's graphics studio.



Figure 6.2. The martyrdoms of Felix, Nabor and Victor in *In hoc signo vinces* (1913).



Figure 6.3. A martyr's funeral in *In hoc signo vinces*.

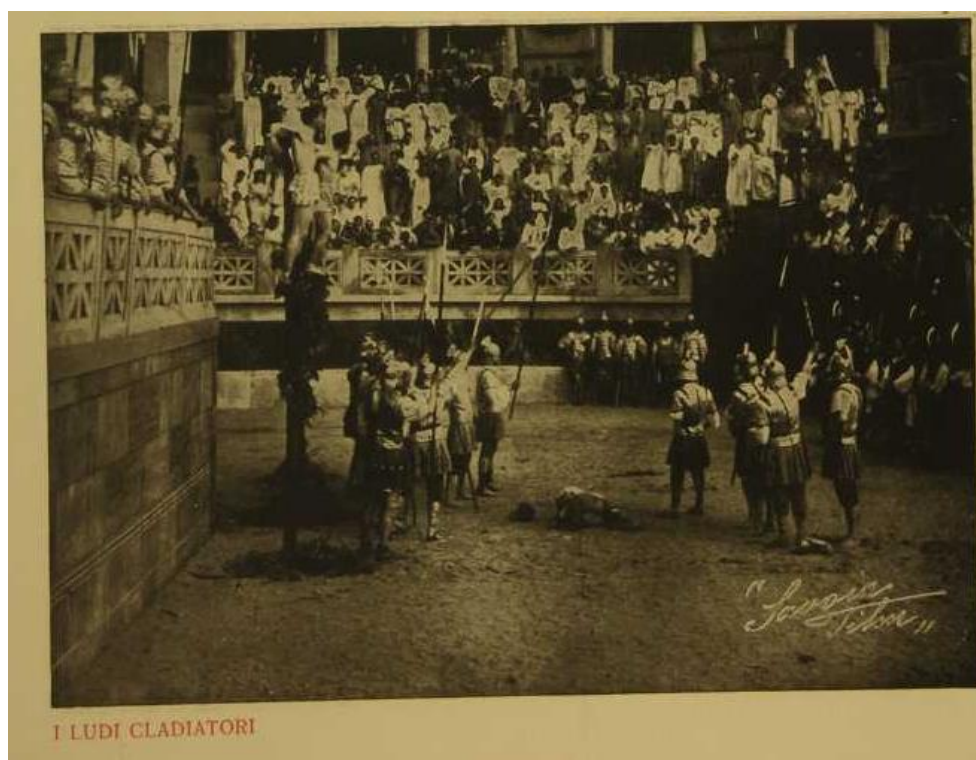


Figure 6.4. *I ludi gladiatori*. From the *In hoc signo vinces* publicity brochure. Kindly provided by the Italian National Cinema Museum, Turin. Catalogue code: P41481.



Figure 6.5. Lyda Borelli in *La Leggenda di Santa Barbara*. The distinctive curtain also appears in *Fabiola* (1918).



Figure 6.6. The same curtain in *Fabiola* (1918) [9.5mm print]: at Agnes' house and used as part of her funeral bier.



Figure 6.7. The martyrdom of Caecilia and the discarding of her body in *Fabiola* (1918) [9.5mm print].



Figure 6.8. Mourners reacting to Caecilia's body in *Fabiola* (1918) [9.5mm print], and the Paul Delaroche painting *La Jeune Martyre* (1855).



Figure 6.9. (Left) A scene of the Eucharist and (Right) the consecration of Agnes as a virgin in *Fabiola* (1918) [9.5mm print].

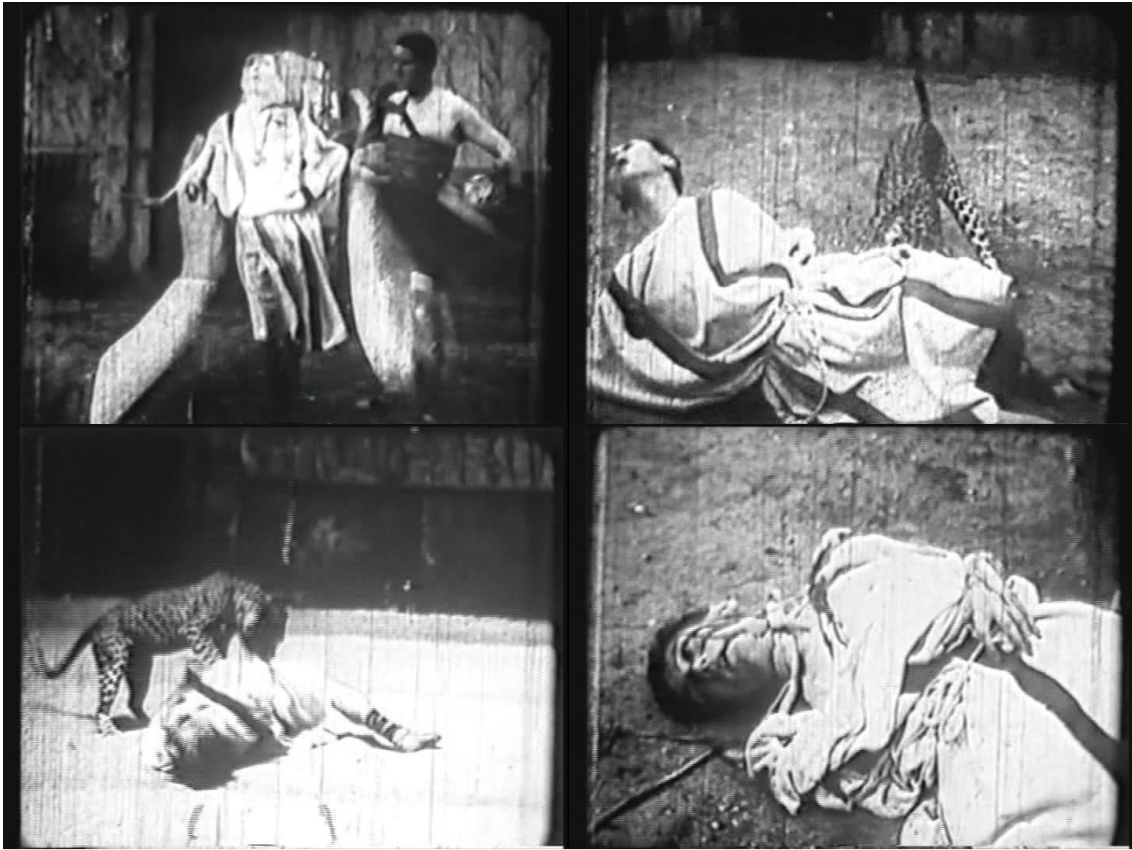


Figure 6.10. The martyrdom of Pancras in *Fabiola* (1918) [9.5mm print].





Figure 6.11. (Top left) The mater dolorosa. Detail from Andrea Del Castagno's *Crucifixion* (1440-1441) [Wikimedia]. (Top right) Lucina in *Fabiola* (1918) [9.5 mm print]. (Bottom left) Rosalia in *Cenere* (1916). (Bottom right) Oberdan's mother in *Guiglelmo Oberdan, il martire di Trieste* (1915)



Figure 6.12. (Left) The gestures of the mater dolorosa in *Fabiola* (1918) [9.5mm print] and (Right) *Guglielmo Oberdan il martire di Trieste*.

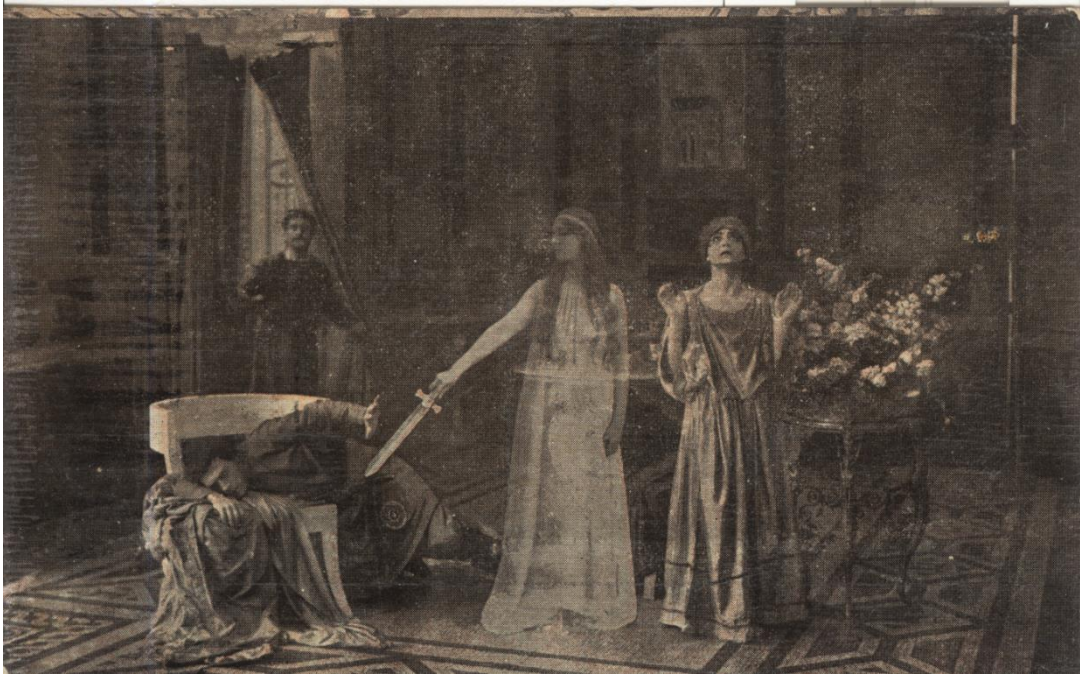


Figure 6.13. An angel appears during Fulvius' final scene with Agnes in *Fabiola* (1918). From a postcard series distributed by Amatller Chocolates, Barcelona c.1918. Author's collection.

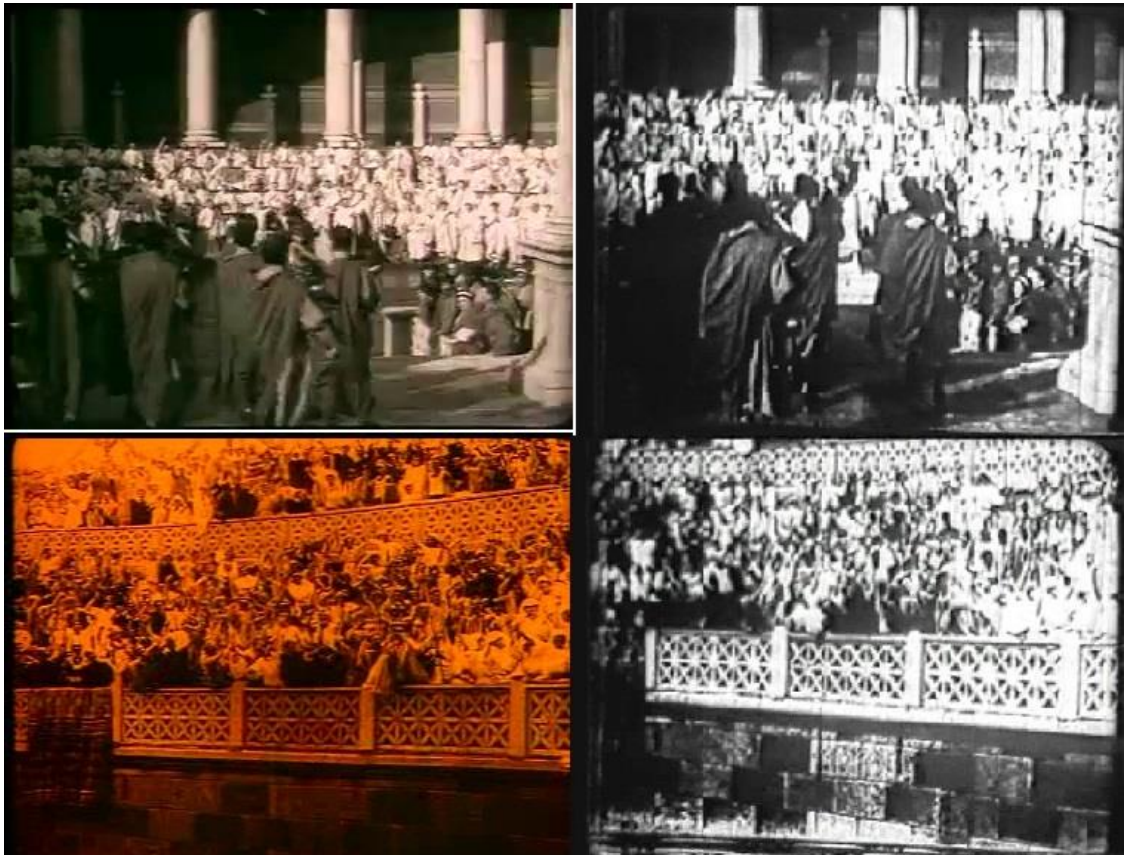


Figure 6.14. (Top left) A scene from *Caius Julius Caesar* (1914). (Bottom left) A scene from *Quo Vadis* (1913). The image on the right are from *Fabiola* (1918) [9.5mm print].



Figure 7.1. From the Empress' foot and dancer's legs to passionate seduction and an erotic clash of the divas, Enrico Guazzoni's *Messalina* (1923) makes a vivid use of the close-up.



Figure 7.2. Egle's prayer gesture as Apollonius attacks her in *Messalina* (1923).



Figure 7.3. (Left) Jusepe de Ribera's *Saint Agnes in Prison* (1642) [Wikimedia] and (Right) Egle in *Messalina* (1923).



Figure 7.4. Oriental sadism is emphasised during the whipping of Egle in *Messalina* (1923).



Figure 7.5. This revealing shot of Egle bathing in *Messalina* (1923) comes from the same perspective as her voyeuristic attackers.



Figure 7.6. In *Messalina* (1923), the knives used on sacrificial virgins and the Empress' suicide have a camp eroticism.



Figure 7.7. The camp theatrics of Miri's near execution in *Messalina* (1923).





Fig 7.8. Corso Garibaldi, Altavilla Irpina. Street decorations and fireworks for the Festa di San Pellegrino, 1903. Kindly provided by the Archivio Biblioteca Caruso, Altavilla Irpina.



Figure 7.9. The opening credits of *A' Santanotte* (1922) proclaim the Serie Gennariello.



Fig 7.10. A selection of scenes from popular feasts in Elvira Notari's *E' piccirella* (1922). (From top left) The first three images are from the procession of pilgrims returning from the shrine of the Madonna of Montevergine, while the balcony scene, lights, dinner and fireworks all come from the Madonna del Carime celebrations.



Fig 7.11. Scene photograph from *Le tentazioni di Sant'Antonio* (1911). Kindly provided by the Museo Nazionale Del Cinema, Turin. Catalogue Code: F11098/002.

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**Appendix Three: Publicity leaflet for *Trionfo Cristiano*.**

“Malgrado il dispotismo, le vili e ree passioni dell’Imperatore Commodo Aureliano, Roma si rigenerava sempre di più dal sangue dei suoi figli che cadevano spenti sotto il ferro omicida della Pagan superstizione. Quale forza olezzante di tutte le cristiane virtù, viveva Pellegrino, propagando e propugando la Verità della Religione, slanciandosi intrepido e coraggioso nei pericoli, per sorreggere e rinvigorire i credenti che languivano nelle prigioni quali incatenati, quali avvinti alle muraglie ed altri destinati a penare sotto i travagli del lavori forzati per essere stati fermi nella Fede di Gesù Cristo (...). Sgomenti dalle sacrileghe pretensioni del principe idolatra, Pellegrino con i suoi carissimi fratelli di fede, Vincenzo, Eusebio e Ponziano mossero a contraddire la temerità dell’insolente sovrano, predicando la purezza dei Santi Evangelii. Catturati, furono sottposti a dolorose torture (...). Dopo l’esperimento della tortura si adottarono quello delle blandizie e dell’amore e si scelsero insinuanti favorite a cui si affidò il difficile impegno di espugnare le costanze dei quattro Santi, ed tutte le armi di ogni seduzione. Risposero i Santi che il loro amore, la loro Gloria era la Croce di Gesù Cristo. La donna, che di Pellegrino doveva correompere sentimenti e cuore, avvinta dalla dolce figura del Santo (...), colpita da tanta Fede ed illuminata anche lei dalla Celeste Verità, prona nella Fede della nuova Religione, piamente, si convertisce. Pellegrino, Eusebio, Vincenzo e Ponziano furono condannati a morte e spirarono sotto le feroci sferze. (...) Furono vinti i soli corpi, giacché le loro anime salirono trionfalmente al Cielo.”

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## Appendix One: Filmography of Italian Religious films (1900-1930)

<b>Title</b>	<b>Year</b>	<b>Survives ?</b>	<b>Director</b>	<b>Length (metres)</b>	<b>Studio</b>	<b>Type/Synopsis/Notes</b>
<i>Passione di Cristo</i>	1900	No	Luigi Topi, E.Cristofari	Unknown	Unknown	Passion- dubious. 8-10 tableaux of the Passion, with La Bella Otéro. Late testimony means this film may not have been made (1937, Aubert: 202)
<i>Sepoltura di una martire cristiana</i>	1903	No	Rodolfo Kanzler	Unknown	N/A	ECM film. Magic lantern version also produced. Short film of the burial of a Christian martyr in a catacomb.
<i>Il cane di San Bernardo</i>	1907	CSC BFI	Unknown	240m	Rossi & Co. (Itala)	Moral drama. A woman thrown out on a snowy winter's night by her husband is brought to a monastery by a St. Bernard. The monks persuade the husband to take her back.
<i>Il Natale</i>	1907	No	Unknown	120m	Cines	Other Saint. St. Nicholas visits a poor family.
<i>Gli ultimi giorni di Pompei</i>	1908	EYE MNC CSC	Luigi Maggi	366m	Ambrosio	Roman Epic. The story of Glaucus, Ione and the blind girl Nydia, based on Bulwer-Lytton's novel. One scene features Early Christians in the arena.
<i>Giuditta e Oloferne</i>	1908	CI BFI	Unknown	140m	Cines	Old Testament. Judith seduces Holofernes and kills him. The end of the film is missing.
<i>Giovanna d'Arco</i>	1909	CSC (Luce)?	Unknown	164m	Cines	Other Saint. A brief version of the French national hero and Christian martyr's life. Some scenes might survive in <i>Rivista Luce- Il Cinema ha quaranta anni</i> (RL004, 1935), 11:37-14:15, but these appear to be from a French film.
<i>Il Redivivo</i>	1908	No	Unknown	248m	Itala	Unknown subject. Set in first century Palestine, no further information.
<i>Leggenda di Natale</i>	1909	No	Unknown	100m	Itala	Moral drama. A peasant welcomes a poor man into his house on Christmas Eve. The beggar turns into Christ, heals the peasant's sick son and then disappears.
<i>Nerone</i>	1909	CSC MNC	Luigi Maggi. With A. Capozzi, L. de Roberti, M.C.	338m	Ambrosio	Roman Epic. Nero biopic. Includes a scene in which Nero has a nightmare, recalling visions of the Christians in the arena and as human torches.



			Tarlarini			
<i>Patrizia e Schiava</i>	1909	BFI CSC	Unknown	351m	Cines	Not overtly religious. A slave called Afra abducts a Roman patrician's daughter and uses black magic. Similarity to Afra of Wiseman's <i>Fabiola</i> .
<i>Redenta, Episodio della Sacra Bibbia</i>	1909	No	Unknown	247m	Milano Films	Gospel. Centurion called Sillo falls in love with a courtesan, who converts to Christianity after meeting Jesus. The Jealous Sillo denounces her for adultery, but Jesus asks for a sinless person to cast the first stone. Adapted from John 7:53-8:11. Joint winner of religious film category at Cardinal Ferrari's film contest (Milan, 1909).
<i>Caino</i>	1910	No	Unknown	177m	Milano Film	Old Testament. Based on Byron's <i>Cain</i> .
<i>Carità Cristiana</i>	1910	No	Unknown	196m	Cines	Moral drama. Priest reconciles a striking worker to his employer; winning the man's job back and preventing family breakdown.
<i>Dall'amore al martirio (Martiri Cristiani)</i>	1910	BFI	Unknown	330m	Cines	ECM film. Marcus Licinius loves a young Christian, Livia. ML's jealous mistress denounces Livia after following her. All the Christians are arrested in Catacombs. ML goes to ask Livia to renounce the faith, but an angelic vision and Livia's faith persuades him to join her in martyrdom.
<i>La Samaritana</i>	1910	No	Unknown. With A. Vitti and B. De Crescenzo.	290m	Film d'arte Italiana	Gospel. Jesus enters Samaria and is ignored, except by one woman, who comes to believe in him. The Samaritans acclaim Jesus.
<i>San Paolo Dramma Biblico</i>	1910	BFI CSC	Giuseppe De Liguoro, Rodolfo Kanzler	293m	Milano	ECM film. Biopic of St. Paul, Paul arrests Christians, Road to Damascus, Via Appia: enters Catacombs, Fire of Rome, Nero's human torches. Won Cardinal Ferrari cup (1909).
<i>Carità Rincompensata</i>	1911	No	Unknown	Unknow n	Unitas	Moral drama. A poor orphan-girl prays to the Virgin Mary to get her a mother. Ignored by heartless nobles, a peasant-woman adopts her. The girl prays to the Virgin again. Filmed in the Borgo Medievale, Turin.
<i>Giuda</i>	1911	MNC	Unknown. With	390m	Ambrosio	Gospel. Dramatisation of Judas' life by Arrigo Frusta.

		FRI	Oreste Grandi, Gigetta Morano, Mario Voller			Priscilla the courtesan falls in love with Jesus but is sent away by Omar. Judas betrays Jesus to Priscilla. Passion of Christ, Priscilla begs forgiveness and curses Judas. Suicide of Judas.
<i>Giuseppe Ebreo</i>	1911	BFI	With Emilio Ghione & Terribili-Gonzales	327m	Cines	Old Testament. Biopic of Joseph: his rivalry with his brothers, sold as a slave, Potiphar's wife, prison, reading Pharaoh's dreams and final reconciliation with his brothers.
<i>I Maccabei</i>	1911	BFI CSC	Enrico Guazzoni with A. Novelli & Gianna Terribili- Gonzales	325m	Cines	Old Testament. The Jews are enslaved in Antioch. Astarté, favourite of Antiochus, ruler of Antioch, falls in love with Judas Maccabee. Astarté seeks vengeance. The Maccabees are executed for practicing their religion by not eating certain foods. Astarté fails to stop a massacre of the Jews.
<i>Maria di Magdala</i>	1911	No	Unknown	Unknow n	Film d'Arte Italiana	No Christian content-drama set in first century Gaul, with druids inciting the people to rebel against the Roman Empire.
<i>I rintocchi dell'Ave Maria</i>	1911	No	Unknown	118m	Itala	Moral drama. A good young boy becomes a tear-away and burgles a large house. His mother's prayers send the Virgin Mary to convince him to turn away from a life of crime.
<i>Santa Cecilia</i>	1911	BFI	Enrique Santos. With F. Negri- Poguet, Amleto Novelli, Gastone Monaldi, Bruto Castellani	377m	Cines	ECM film. Cecilia becomes Christian and rejects the suit of Lentulus, who discovers that Cecilia's fiancé, Valerian, is Christian. Lentulus denounces Valerian, who is arrested after the wedding and martyred. Cecilia buries her husband in the Catacombs, is arrested, confesses to being a Christian and is martyred.
<i>San Sebastiano</i>	1911	No	Enrique Santos, with Amleto Novelli, Enna Sareda, Giuseppe Gambardella.	340m	Cines	ECM film. Tarcisius, taking the communion to Christian prisoners, endures death rather than reveal his secrets to the mob. A soldier from Sebastian's legion called Quadrato rescues him, but he still dies. Sebastian's enemies see this and tell the emperor. Sebastian confesses and his condemned. Via Afra, Fabiola bribes the archers and they only wound Sebastian, who goes to tell the emperor how cruel he is. Part of a planned 'Serie Fabiola.'

<i>San Sebastiano</i>	1911	EYE	Giuseppe De Liguoro	190m	Milano	ECM film. Linked to d'Annunzio and Wiseman. Syla, courtesan of Diocletian witnesses Christian martyrdom. Sebastian falls in love with a Christian, Tullia, and converts. The jealous Syla tells Diocletian, who has Sebastian whipped and killed. Tullia mourns him.
<i>Tentazioni de Sant'Antonio, Le</i>	1911	No	Sc: Arrigo Frusta. With A. Capozzi, F. Negri-Pouget, M. c. Tarlarini	307m	Ambrosio	Other Saint film. Linked to Flaubert. Anthony, leading a decadent life, nearly kills his prostitute-girlfriend, but is stopped by an old man, gives away his possessions and converts to Christianity, living an ascetic life. <i>Brochure and photos at MNC.</i>
<i>Il poverello d'assisi</i>	1911	BFI	Enrico Guazzoni. With E. Ghione, I. Almirante-Manzini	287m	Cines	Other Saint film. Biopic of St. Francis, based partly on Giotto's frescoes, starring Emilio Ghione.
<i>Kri Kri e il Quo Vadis</i>	1912	PRA	Unknown	One reel	Cines	Comedy reusing sets of <i>Quo Vadis</i> , advance publicity for the film.
<i>Martirio di Santo Stefano, Il</i>	1912	No	Unknown	580m	Latium	ECM film. Died stoned, watched by Saul, after a speech.
<i>San Giorgio cavaliere</i>	1912	LOC	Giuseppe De Liguoro. With A. Barbaroux, A. Pirovano, V. De Crescenzo	720m (3 reels)	Milano film	Other Saint. Biopic of St. George at Antioch. The king of a town goes mad at being forced to sacrifice his daughter to the dragon. George kills the dragon and saves her. Publicity for the film suggests that George's martyrdom is not shown.
<i>San Sebastiano</i>	1912	No	?	?	Ambrosio	ECM film-dubious. Natacha Aubert lists it in her filmography, but others reject it (Aubert 2009: 267). Perhaps connected to d'Annunzio's play, as Ambrosio had adapted six of his novels.
<i>Satana (268)</i>	1912	BFI (8')	Luigi Maggi. With M. Bonnard, V. De Stefano, M. V. Buzzi, A. Pouget, F. Costamagna,	1960m (2 parts, four acts)	Ambrosio	Other. Four act drama showing devil in the old testament, new testament, middle ages and modern era. Act One (after Milton): Satan's rebellion. Devil in Eden. Cain and Abel. The satanic worship of Nemrod. Devil following Jesus and inspiring Judas to betray him. Act Two: Satan follows Christ

			M.C. Tarlarini, F. Negri-Pouget			into Jerusalem (after Klopstock), becomes a Pharisee, tempts Jesus in the garden of Gethsemane, incites Judas to betray him and then shows Judas the Passion. Satan attempts to stop the resurrection.
<i>Checco Nerone</i>	1913	No	Unknown. With G. Gambardella	115m	Cines	Comedy, reusing sets of <i>Quo Vadis</i> & promoting it.
<i>Fabiola (I Misteri delle catacombe)</i>	1913	CCB?	Eugenio Perego?	?	Pasquali	ECM film-dubious. Nitrate film at Bologna, unavailable to researchers. Aubert suspects it may be a Pasquali Film production, while Aldo Bernardini states it is a foreign production (Aubert 2009: 270).
<i>Giovanna D'Arco</i>	1913	No	Ubaldo Maria Del Colle. With Maria Jacobini,	1400-1800m	Savoia	Other saint film. Epic biopic of the life of Joan of Arc, including large-scale battles, her trial by the inquisition and her execution.
<i>Quo Vadis</i>	1913	BFI EYE CSC	Enrico Guazzoni. With Amleto Novelli, G. Serena, C. Cattaneo, B. Castellani etc	2250m	Cines	Roman Epic. Tale of Neronian Rome, showing love between Vincius and the Christian Lygia against historical backdrop of Neronian Rome. Petronius and Vincius are two decadent patricians who reform through love: the former is killed on Nero's orders, while the latter converts and is helped by Urusus to save Lygia in the arena. Persecution of Christians in Rome. Christians killed in the arena, human torches. Jewish Chilone converted by Paul, Triumph of Christianity.
<i>In Hoc Signo Vinces</i>	1913	EYE	Nino Oxilia	2500-3000m	Savoia	Roman Epic. Base on Giuseppe Mari's novel. Set in 300AD. Intrigue around pagan emperors, St. Helen, St. Constance, battle of Ponte Milvio. Chaste love of Constance and Emperor Licinius. Triumph of faith and love.
<i>Nerone e Agrippina</i>	1914	NOR	Mario Caserini	2000m	Gloria	Roman Epic. Biopic of Nero. Of Ten parts, it includes: "7) The great promise of Christ-Nero's orgies 8) Paul in the Catacombs-Arrest of Christians 9) Circus-Courageous death of Christians-Human torches." Filmed at Verona arena.
<i>Christus</i>	1914 - 1916	CSC	Giulio Antamoro/ Enrico Guazzoni. With Alberto	2279m	Cines	Gospel. Life of Christ in three mysteries, according to poem by Fausto Salvatori. First mystery: birth, Herod, flight to Egypt. Second mystery: Praying, temptation, baptism. Third

			Pasquali, Leda Gys, Ignazio Lupi, Amleto Novelli.			mystery: the Passion, death and resurrection. Numerous reconstructions of famous paintings.
<b><i>Fabiola</i></b>	1918	CSC	Enrico Guazzoni. With E. Sangro, A. Novelli, V. Sanfilippi, L. Pavanelli, A. Mastripietri	2258m	Palatino	ECM film, adapted from Nicholas Wiseman's novel <i>Fabiola</i> . Set in Rome, AD 303. Pancratius guards the amulet of his martyred father's blood. Fulvius visits patrician Fabiola and finds his sister Syra amongst the slaves and denounces her as Christian. Fulvius is in love with Agnese, Fabiola's Christian cousin, and attempts to blackmail her, but eventually converts after she denounces herself. Martyrdom of numerous Christian saints,
<i>Frate Sole</i>	1918	CI	Ugo Falena, Mario Corsi. With U. Palmarini, S. Maliverni, R. Calabria	2121m	Tespi Film	Other Saint film. Biopic of St Francis of Assisi, divided into four 'canti': Il bacio al lebbroso, Sulle orme del poverello di Assisi, Il tempo and Le Stigmate. Despite large investment and marketing, the film enjoyed little circulation outside of Catholic circles and religious holiday screenings.
<b><i>La Leggenda di Santa Barbara (L'altro esercito)</i></b>	1918	EYE	Unknown. With L. Borelli.	One reel	Cines/ Munitions ministry	ECM film. Lyda Borelli plays Christian martyr St. Barbara, who sacrifices herself in an explosion to protect Rome against Barbarians. Part of a fundraising/propaganda drive for the Italian munitions ministry.
<i>Maria di Magdala</i>	1918	CI (reserved )	Aldo Molinari. With A. Bracci, G. Guiducci, I. Leonidoff	1352m	Vera Films	Gospel. Reconstruction of life of Mary Magdalene. Orgy and sensual scenes heavily cut.
<i>Giuda</i>	1919 (released 1923 )	No	Febo Mari. With F. Mari, N. Mordeglia	2304m	Mari Film	Gospel. Based on the <i>Vangelo Apocrifo</i> by F. Mari, an alternative version of Judas' life. Culminates in the Passion. Pilate's wedding and departure for Judea.
<i>Redenzione (Maria di Magdala o</i>	1919	EYE	Carmine Gallone. With D. Karenne, P. Bonafé, L. Duse	2200m	Medusa Film	Gospel. Biopic of Mary Magdalene from her youth as a courtesan to her meeting with Jesus and conversion. Divided into the mysteries of sacred love, profane love and the

<i>L'Alba del Cristiaesimo</i> )						Passion of Christ. Screenplay by Fausto Salvatori.
<i>Santa Cecilia</i>	1919	No	Vasco Salvini. With M. bayma- Riva, V. Salvini, Gi Guiducci	1836m	Victrix	ECM film. Based on A.G. Barilli's novel, three part story (Ancient Greece, Rome and Middle Ages), one part of which tells the story of St. Cecilia and featured an attempted rape. Little information known about the film.
<i>Giuditta e Oloferne</i>	1920	No	Aldo Molinari. With I. Leonidoff, G. Guiducci, A.Bracci	1545m	Vera -film	Old Testament. Ilena Leonidoff performs as Judith of Bethulia in a film made which combiend new scenes with deleted scenes from Vay Film's <i>La Sacra Bibbia</i> (1919).
<i>Joseph</i>	1920	EYE CSC	Alfredo Robert, CSColo Bacchini. With A. De virgilis, E. Mazzini, Fabbris	2360m	Armenia Film	Old Testament. The story of Jacob's favourite son, sold into slavery, Potiphar, dream interpretation for the Pharoahs and return home.
<i>La Sacra Bibbia</i>	1920	DVD (abbr.)	Pier Antonio Gariazzo	5444m	Appia Nuova/ Vay Film	Old Testament, very long film, also available as three separate films ( <i>La Sacra Bibbia</i> , <i>Il fatto di Giuseppe</i> and <i>Mosè</i> ) or five acts, running from Creation to Moses' leadership, the book of Ruth and Song of Songs.
<i>San Giorgio</i>	1921	No	Giulio A. Sartorio. With F. Ribacchi, V. Villa, M. Caserini-Gasperini	1630m	Triumphal is film	Other Saint. Ranuccio loves Alexandra, daughter of the King, but she has refused him to dedicate herself to a life of charity. Ranuccio's mother worships the devil, who attempts to kidnap Alexandra and is stopped by Ranuccio who dies. The devil sends the dragon. The drawing of lots-Alexandra is sent to the island. Saint George rescues her.
<i>Messalina</i>	1923	CSC Dvd (abbr.)	Enrico Guazzoni. With R. De Liguoro, A. Mastripietri, G. Terribili-Gonzales, B. Castellani, L. Zanussi, G. Bocci,	3373m	Guazzoni Film	Classical Epic, ostensibly no religious content, but relies on archetypal 'Christian victims' group: honest (chaste) man, Lygia-type and Ursus strongman. Lavish, eroticized tale of the love affairs of Empress Messalina. Combines history (Messalina's affairs, death of Claudius) with a fictional chase-rescue narrative, in which Messalina challenges the Egyptian priestess Mirit, both of whom pursue the slave

			G. Talomeo			Ennio, whose slave friends attempt to free from their clutches. After a spectacular chariot sequence and much plotting, Mirit is eaten by her own lions and Messalina kills herself after he attempts to overthrow Claudius and make her lover emperor end in ignominy.
<i>Quo Vadis</i>	1924	EYE	Gabriellino d'Annunzio/Georg Jacoby. With E. Jannings, E. Sangro, A. Habay, A. Fryland, L. Hall-Davis, R. De Liguoro	3308m	UCI	Roman Epic. Adaptation of Sienkiewicz's novel with lavish sets and an extravagant Nero played by Emil Jannings dominating the picture. Features Christians in the Catacombs, arena martyrdom, the preaching of Peter and the strength of Ursus. Disastrous filming, with budget over-runs, lawsuits and a death during filming.
<i>Gli ultimi giorni di Pompei</i>	1926	BFI	Amleto Palermi, Carmine Gallone. With R. De Liguoro, M. orda, V. Vakonyl, B. Goetzke, E. Ghione, L. Maris, B. Castellani	3683m	SA Grandi Film	Roman Epic. Unlike previous adaptations (3), this includes the Christian community of Pompeii and the martyrdom of Olinthus at the hands of the evil Egyptian priest, Arbaces. The main focus is still on the rivalry between Glaucus and Arbaces for Ione, the eruption and the young couple being saved by the blind flower-girl, Nydia. Partly in two-colour technicolor. Epic sets, poorly reviewed because of its outdated cinematic style.
<i>Frate Francesco</i>	1927	DVD (abbr.)	Giulio Antamoro. With A. Pasquali, A. Robert, R. Joubé.	3700m	ICSA	Other Saint film. Biopic of St. Francis of Assisi: his dissolute youth, mystic dream, repudiation of wealth, meeting the leper, poverty, talking to animals, death. Italy's last 'Kolossal' of the silent era.
<i>Giuditta e Oloferne</i>	1928	CI	B. Negroni. With B. Pagano, Jia Ruskaja, F. Sala, C. Tedeschi	2773m	Pittaluga	Old Testament. Two plotlines, modern and old testament with the same actors. The biblical plot features the Assyrian Holofernes (Pagano) besieging Bethulia and cutting the aqueducts to the city. The partner of the city's leader, Giuditta, sacrifices herself to save the city. The modern story tells of an engineer who saves a mountain village from evil speculators.

<i>Trionfo Cristiano</i>	1930	No	Elvira Notari. With Eduardo Notari.	976m	Ente Cinematografica Meridionale Unitas/Dora Film	ECM film. A film of the martyrdom of St. Pellegrino, patron saint of Altavilla Irpina (AV), commissioned by Italo-American emigrants. With three friends, Pellegrino spreads Christianity and visits prisoners in Commodus' Rome. They convert a senator who is tortured and killed. Pellegrino buries his body. Pellegrino and his friends are captured and tortured, but miraculously recover. Women are sent to tempt them to venerate Commodus as a God. Finally, the four are beaten to death in the arena. Filmed at Dora Films and on location in Altavilla Irpinia.
<i>Antonio di Padova, il santo dei miracoli</i>	1930	FRI/ online	Giulio Antamoro. With C. Pinzauti, E. Cosci, R. Barni, I. D'Alba,	2564m	SACRAS	Other Saint film. The life of St. Anthony of Padova. His charity, first miracles, decision to lead monastic life. At the tomb of five Franciscans martyred in Morocco, he confirms his calling. Storm delivers him to Sicily. Rest of life quickly narrated, including miracles, death and veneration. Filmed silent with intertitles (1930), but released as a sound film with no spoken dialogue (1931).



**Appendix Two: Italian silent films of Early Church martyrdom and their availability for this study**

<b>Status</b>	<b>One reeler</b>	<b>Feature film</b>	<b>Totals</b>
Largely complete version (restored or preserved, 80% or more of the reported length)	<i>Nerone</i> (1909), <i>Dall'amore al martirio</i> (1910), <i>San Paolo dramma biblico</i> (1910), <i>Santa Cecilia</i> (1911), <i>San Sebastiano</i> (1911, Milano), <i>Nerone e Agrippina</i> (1914)*, <i>La Leggenda di Santa Barbara</i> (1918)	<i>Quo Vadis</i> (1913) <i>Fabiola</i> (1918) <i>Quo Vadis</i> (1924) <i>Gli ultimi giorni di Pompei</i> (1926)	5 One-reelers 4 Feature films
Abbreviated version		<i>Messalina</i> (1923)	1 Feature film
Film fragment (less than 40% of the original)		<i>In hoc signo vinces</i> (1913)	1 Feature film
Lost film, but selection of documents.			
Lost film. Little evidence (1 review or testimony)	<i>Sepoltura di una martire Cristiana</i> (1901), <i>San Sebastiano</i> (1911, Cines)	<i>Trionfo Cristiano</i> (1930)	2 One-reelers 1 Feature films
Completely lost (only mentioned in adverts, and censorship records)	<i>Il Martirio di Santo Stefano</i> (1912)	<i>Santa Cecilia</i> (1919)	1 One-reeler 1 Feature film

(\* ) *Nerone e Agrippina* (1914) has been restored but is only available at the Norwegian Film Institute. Due to difficulties in accessing it, the film is only considered as far as the documents allow. Sources used include the Museo Nazionale del Cinema archives and my own collection.