

Scipione l'Africano: Scipio and Mussolini

Scipione l'Africano is a 1937 Italian film about the African campaign of Scipio Africanus. Written and directed by Carmine Gallone, who had a long and robust film career spanning from 1913 to 1962, the film draws heavily from Livy's account in *Ab Urbe Condita* Books 24-30. The film was made in cooperation with Mussolini's Fascist government and this is perhaps the reason why this film hardly gets even a mention, if at all, in texts about the classical world in cinema, such as Winkler (1991 and 2009). However, the film deserves more attention because it demonstrates how the Italian Fascists reinterpreted their Roman past to legitimize their government.

In this paper, I show that Gallone used and adapted the Livian narrative of the events of Scipio Africanus' campaign to provide an *exemplum* of a valorous Italian for Fascist Italy. Not surprisingly, Gallone's portrait of Scipio Africanus as a brave Italian greatly resembles Mussolini. More interestingly, I show that Gallone built up his *exemplum*, using the same four constituent parts that Livy did. As Roller (2004) demonstrates, Livy's *exempla* always had an initial action, an audience for that action, commemoration of the action, and imitation of the action. The fact that Gallone uses these same four parts indicates that he closely followed Livy's telling of the story and understood how Livy used figures as *exempla* well enough to imitate him.

Furthermore, I build upon Caprotti's (2009) article to show that this film was a part of the Fascist government's effort to show the Italians that they could conquer the land within Italy, in particular the Pontine Marshes, and to portray the ancient Roman war in Carthage as a mirror for their own war in Ethiopia. By comparing Scipio Africanus' speeches in Livy with the corresponding speeches in Gallone's film, I find that Gallone clearly evoked the imagery used to depict Mussolini, contrary to the conclusions of previous scholars, such as Feig-Vishnia (2008).

Bibliography

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