

The Second Life of Alma-Tadema

By Ivo Blom

Lawrence Alma-Tadema's work fell out of favour in art circles during the early twentieth century, but it enjoyed a second life through the new medium of film. He died on 25 June 1912; less than a year later, on 8 May 1913, the Italian epic *Quo Vadis?* premiered in Rome. Based on Henryk Sienkiewicz's best-selling 1895 novel of the same title, the film was produced by the Cines company and directed by Enrico Guazzoni, a specialist in the historical genre. It premiered not in just any old cinema, but at the Teatro Costanzi, now the Teatro dell'Opera, built in 1880 on the site of Emperor Heliogabalus's villa.

The opening of *Quo Vadis?* was attended by many dignitaries and was a success with audiences and critics alike. Soon thereafter it was screened to acclaim – even from the elite – throughout Italy and then Europe, including Paris, London and Berlin. The film won praise not necessarily for its extreme length (two hours rather than the customary fifteen minutes), but, more crucially, for Guazzoni's narrative style, in which he alternated individual and collective events and portrayed the grand arc of history through the behaviour of individuals. Indeed, he made highly effective use of cinematic techniques to translate the complexity and breadth of Sienkiewicz's novel into film. He achieved this by carefully pacing the rhythm of the acting and editing, the figurative qualities of the sets and costumes

and the spectacular effect of the crowd scenes, such as the arena and the burning of Rome. Particularly noteworthy is Guazzoni's eye for space and depth in the sets, especially the exteriors.¹ In fact, his approach to space strongly resembles that of Tadema.

Quo Vadis? was not the first film about Roman antiquity. Guazzoni had made short films set in that era before, such as *Agrippina* (1910). In France, Louis Feuillade of the Gaumont company had already made short films such as *Le fils de Locuste* (1911) about Nero's poisoner, and *L'Orgie romaine* (1911, Fig. 229) about the Emperor Heliogabalus, in which the rain of petals from Tadema's *The Roses of Heliogabalus* (1888, Fig. 228) is brought to life.² But in 1913, *Quo Vadis?* set a new standard for such films. This applied equally to the treatment of popular novels

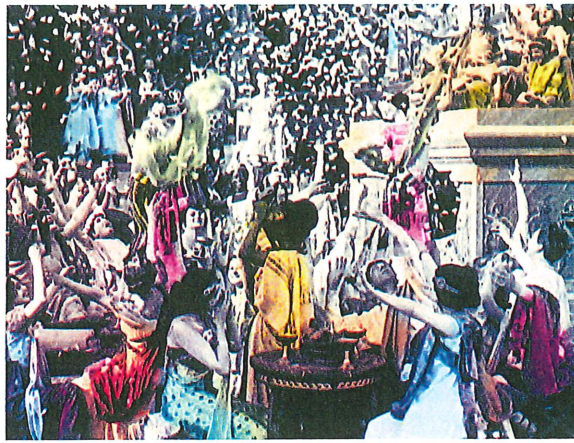
and to the representation of antiquity, which was based on archaeological reconstructions of ancient Rome and Pompeii, and also on their visualisation by British and French academic artists, the main exponents being Tadema and Jean-Léon Gérôme (1824–1904). In the case of Guazzoni, the powerful influence of painting was not altogether unexpected, as he had attended an art school in Rome and initially worked as a painter. His films thus have a clear pictorial gaze. This also

accounts for Guazzoni's visual citations in *Quo Vadis?* from the then-famous paintings by Gérôme, *Pollice Verso* (1872) and *The Last Prayer of the Christian Martyrs* (1883).³

Less direct but just as important, and also more profound, is Guazzoni's appropriation of aspects of Tadema's paintings. Within the cinematic *mise-en-scène* of *Quo Vadis?*, his use of such elements as sets, location, costumes, props and the play with offscreen space and deep staging is striking and, for its time, extremely complex. The *mise-en-scène* is also very similar to that of Tadema's paintings, especially his work until the early 1880s, when he often used the same props and experimented with depth in the same way. The tone Tadema infused into his paintings was maintained in films like *Quo Vadis?* and other Italian epics, such as the two versions of *Gli ultimi giorni di Pompei* (The Last Days of Pompeii) by Eleuterio Rodolfi and Giovanni Enrico Vidali (both 1913), Guazzoni's *Marcantonio e Cleopatra* (1913) and *Cajus Julius Caesar* (1914), and Giovanni Pastrone's mega-production *Cabiria* (1914). Because of their elaborate set design and huge crowd scenes, all these films became role models for American filmmakers such as D.W. Griffith and Cecil B. DeMille. Tadema's imagination is also present to varying degrees in Hollywood films of the 1950s and 1960s that are set in antiquity, and was strongly revived by the British-born director Ridley Scott in *Gladiator* (2000). Had Tadema been born a few decades later, he might easily have become a filmmaker; in fact, he took initial steps in this direction by designing sets and costumes for London theatres (see pp. 172–185). Ridley Scott's famous comment about *Gladiator* – 'I like to create worlds' – is equally applicable to Tadema's way of working.

SETTING THE STAGE

Thanks to the widespread distribution of Tadema's reproductive prints (see pp. 166–167), his depictions of



229 *L'Orgie romaine*, Louis Feuillade, Gaumont, 1911, EYE, Amsterdam

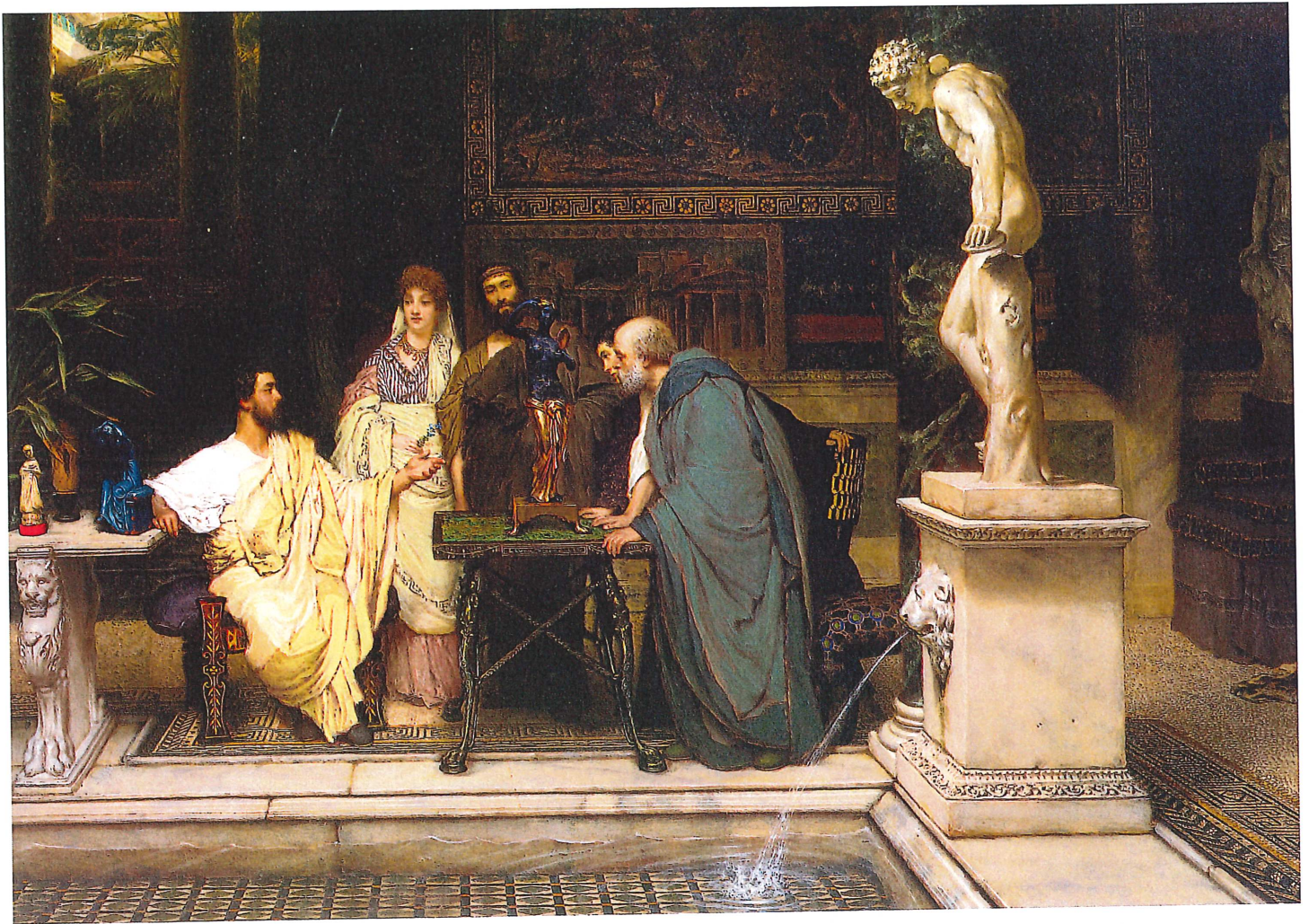
everyday life in antiquity were fully absorbed into mass culture and the collective memory. Early film producers could build upon this familiarity when planning and releasing new films. The relentless dissemination of photographs and postcards of Tadema's paintings, and of the remains of ancient Rome and Pompeii, further paved the way for public understanding of this milieu; images of the sites could be bought on the spot and were often of high quality (such as the photographs of

Giorgio Sommer and Roberto Rive).

In the nineteenth century, massive audiences visited panoramas and viewed painted magic lantern slides showing the eruption of Vesuvius and the destruction of Pompeii – even before the appearance of Edward Bulwer-Lytton's novel *The Last Days of Pompeii* (1834). A special late nineteenth-century method of appealing to the popular imagination was James Pain's so-called *pyrodrama*, a fireworks production with a shortened version of Bulwer-Lytton's narrative that climaxed with the eruption. Pain's show could be seen in London from 1879, then travelled to Berlin and New York. For the first time, the growing working class spawned by industrialisation could attend an affordably priced spectacle that was realistic, educational and moralistic: Christians survived the ordeal, while decadent Romans and sinister Egyptian priests perished.⁴ In short, by 1900 the Western public was ready for a cinematic portrayal of the ancient past.

INTERIORS AND PROPS

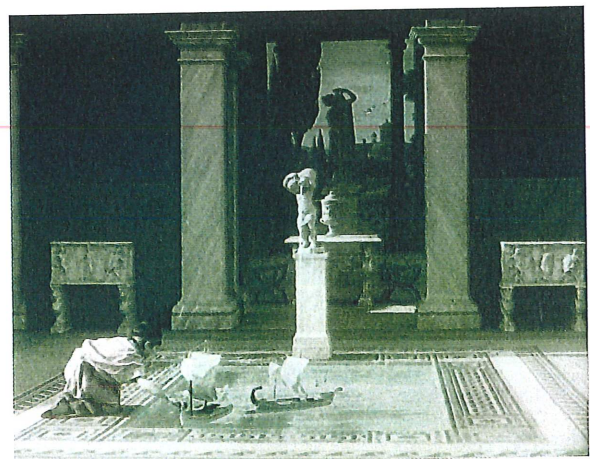
When comparing paintings and films, researchers today often look only to visual citations, yet the issue of cinema's appropriation of Tadema is far more layered and complex. Even though filmmakers simplified his details and failed to match his colour palette, Tadema's vision can still be discerned in their creations. A good example is the use of antique furniture, which French, Italian and American filmmakers used to signal that the scene was occurring in antiquity.⁵ Film audiences were thrilled to see, for example, classical Pompeii brought to life again. Not only were its ruins restored and corpses revived, but its furniture and artefacts – now familiar sights in European and American museums – were re-presented in their 'natural habitat'.⁶ Yet the fame of these objects came not only through their reproduction in photographs and postcards, but also through Tadema's deployment of them.



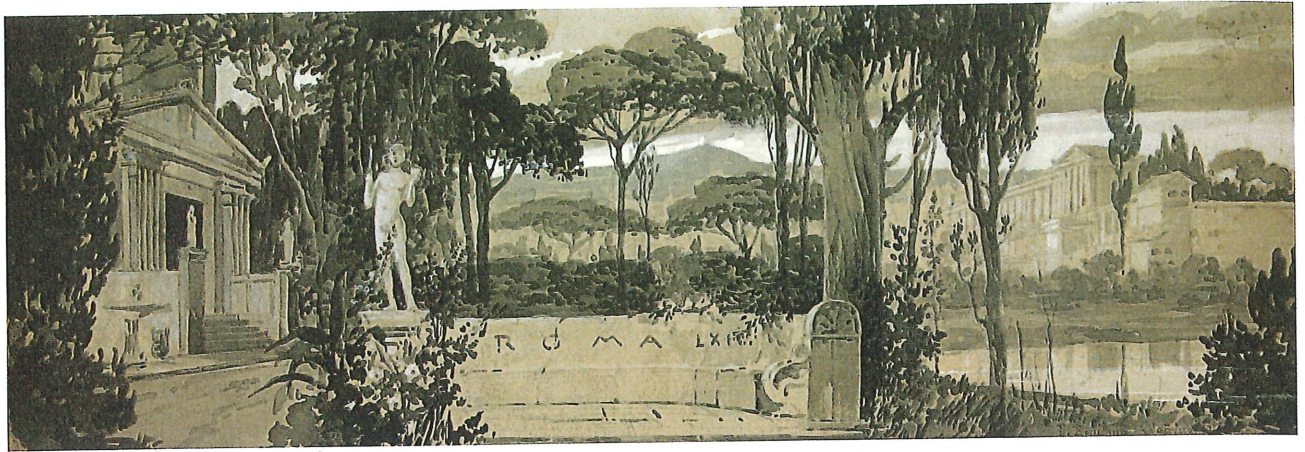
230 *A Roman Lover of Art*, 1868, oil on panel, 55.9 × 84.5 cm, Yale University Art Gallery, New Haven

How did Tadema build up his *mise-en-scène*, and how did this translate to film? A good example is the painting *A Roman Lover of Art* (1868, Fig. 230). It teems with objects that could be described, in cinematic terms, as props, and which appear often in – mostly Italian – cinema of the 1910s, such as *Quo Vadis?*, *Gli ultimi giorni di Pompei* (Rodolfi's version) and *Cajus Julius Caesar* (Fig. 231). Tadema also experimented with space in *A Roman Lover of Art* in a way that reappears regularly in these films. In his painting, wealthy Romans gather in the atrium of a Pompeian house by the impluvium, a shallow basin that collects rainwater through the open roof. The art lover himself is seated on an ornate chair with cushions. In the centre of the painting is a small bronze folding table with four slender legs composed of satyrs and with claws for feet. The onlookers admire a precious polychrome sculpture on the table. At left is a *cartibulum*, a rectangular table with a massive base of griffins (winged lions). At right, water pours into the impluvium from a stone lion's head adorning the pedestal that supports a version of the Uffizi Gallery's *Dancing Satyr*, who gazes into the water. The ornate mosaic floor with its geometric patterns and the tiger-skin rug are striking. In the background, shrouded in darkness, a staircase leads to an upper level, where the sunlit peristyle

(courtyard) is visible. An enormous curtain hangs to the right of the stairs. The garden's plants and trees can be seen between gigantic columns. While almost all these elements draw on actual archaeological material related to Pompeii and its surroundings, it was their use by Tadema that led them to become part of filmmakers' repertoire.



231 *Cajus Julius Caesar*, Enrico Guazzoni, Cines, 1914, EYE, Amsterdam



232 *Gli ultimi giorni di Pompei*, Luigi Maggi, Ambrosio, 1908, set design by Decoroso Bonifanti, Museo Nazionale del Cinema, Turin

In antiquity the *cartibulum* was generally placed in the atrium.⁷ A famous example was found at Pompeii's House of Meleager and was frequently depicted during Tadema's lifetime in photographs such as Roberto Rive's from 1889.⁸ Another *cartibulum*, this one with lions bearing ram's horns, was found in the House of Cornelius Rufus and displayed in the Archaeological Museum at Naples. Tadema owned several photographs of variations of this prototype.⁹ He often depicted it, not only in *A Roman Lover of Art*, but also in *Glaucus and Nydia* (1867, Fig. 5), *The Honeymoon* (1868) and *The Sculpture Gallery* (1874, Fig. 10). It might be seen from the side in the background, as in *Glaucus and Nydia*, or perhaps frontally in the foreground, as in *The Honeymoon*. In *A Roman Lover of Art*, the intermediate decoration on the base is missing, as are the animals' wings, yet these features can be seen in *Glaucus and Nydia* and *The Sculpture Gallery*.¹⁰

A second type of Pompeian table was a round, mostly marble one with three legs formed by lion claws splayed upwards into a chalice ornamented with foliage and surmounted by a lion's head: the *mensa delphica*. This was as ubiquitous in Pompeii as the *cartibulum* and thus equally popular in early spectacle films and among Tadema's fellow painters. Although Tadema had images of such tables in his reference collection, it is curious that he never included one in his paintings.

These two table prototypes were used regularly in early French and Italian historical films to enhance the impression of authenticity. Before the 1910s the set designs were freer and coarser in their detailing, but from 1910 they became more accurate. After *Quo Vadis?*, both table types remained reliable indicators of Roman antiquity, as seen in Guazzoni's *Fabiola* (1918) and Ugo Falena's *La tragica fine di Caligula Imperator* (1918).¹¹ From the early 1920s, however, they began to fade from view.¹² Tadema's klismos or cathedra-style seats with their outward curved legs, his characteristic beds and stools, can-

dlesticks, oil lamps, braziers, incense burners, murals and wide exedra-like benches – all appear frequently in Italian films of the 1910s, though in many variations that did not always reference original examples from Pompeii or Rome. For example, compare the exedra in a set design by Decoroso Bonifanti for Luigi Maggi's 1908 production of *Gli ultimi giorni di Pompei* (Fig. 232) with that in Alma-Tadema's 1871 *An Exedra* (Fig. 129).

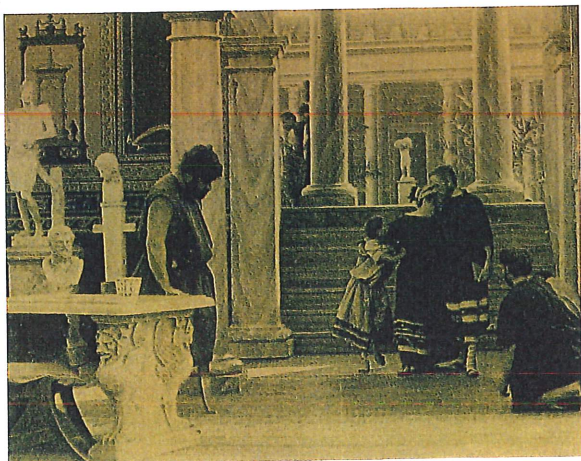
SPATIALITY

During the 1910s, European filmmakers were fascinated by deep staging: they built huge sets where the action plays out simultaneously in the foreground and background to such a degree that the eye cannot take it all in. This approach differed from the so-called analytical variant, in which the gaze is directed through the action, that is divided into several shots and merged during the editing process. Deep staging in films set in antiquity seems to owe much to Tadema, who had himself studied interiors by such seventeenth-century painters as Pieter de Hooch. As mentioned earlier, a conspicuous feature in the background of *A Roman Lover of Art* is the staircase ascending from the atrium to the peristyle. This area is cloaked in darkness, but in *The Convalescent* (1869, Fig. 233), a similar passage is much brighter. Now we can clearly see the peristyle, and we notice the long curtain hanging at right. In *Quo Vadis?* we see the same view from the atrium to the peristyle in Aulus's house, though the curtain is missing (Fig. 234).

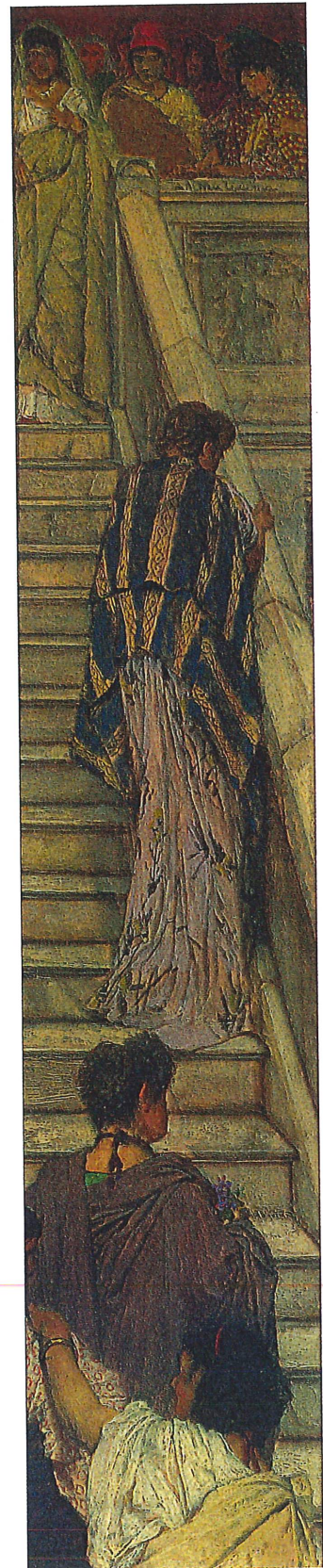
Tadema enjoyed depicting people ascending and descending grand staircases, as seen in *A Staircase* (1870, Fig. 235), *An Audience at Agrippa's* (1876, Fig. 65) and *The Triumph of Titus* (1885, Fig. 151). Strikingly similar is the shot in Luigi Maggi's film *Nerone* (1909), in which the Emperor Nero presents his new love, Poppaea, as he descends the staircase amid the cheering crowd. Despite the rigid horizontal film frame, vertical-



233 *The Convalescent*, 1869, oil on panel, 69.9 × 44.5 cm, Joslyn Art Museum, Omaha, Nebraska, Gift of Francis T. B. Martin



234 *Quo Vadis?*, Enrico Guazzoni, Cines, 1913, EYE, Amsterdam



235 *A Staircase*, 1870, oil on panel, 42.5 × 9.5 cm, Dahesh Museum of Art, New York



236 *My Sister Is Not In*, 1879, oil on panel, 40.6 × 31.1 cm, The Walters Art Museum, Baltimore, Maryland

ity is emphasised here. In addition, Maggi made use of the diagonal to convey more depth, and to prevent his protagonists and secondary characters from blocking each other. In many French and Italian films of the 1910s, filmmakers made similar use of diagonal compositions, especially when dealing with crowds and enormous sets.

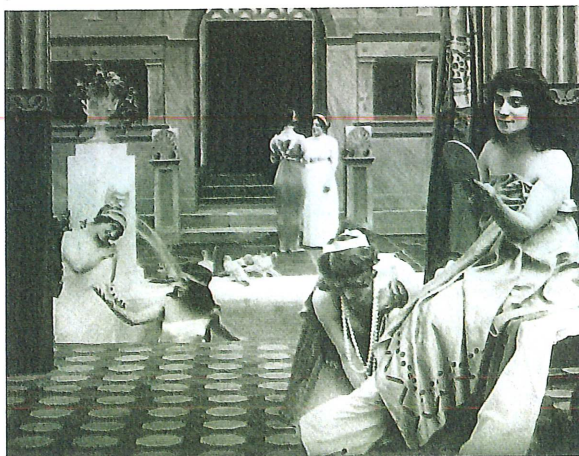
Both in painting and in 1910s cinema, curtains were a favourite motif to suggest, conceal or reveal adjacent spaces. Did cinema adopt this motif from theatre or from painting? In his own homes, Tadema often removed interior doors and replaced them with *portière* curtains; these could be drawn for privacy, yet there was always the potential for contact with adjacent spaces. (For example, see views of Townshend House at Figs. 100, 102.) Not surprisingly, Tadema often depicted curtains in doorways in such pictures as *My Sister Is Not In* (1879, Fig. 236), *Welcome Footsteps* (1883) and *An Earthly Paradise* (1891, Fig. 139).¹³ He also raised or opened curtains in historical scenes, like the discovery of Claudius cowering after Caligula's murder (two versions), or in romantic moments with unnamed characters, such as *Midday Slumbers* (1888). Several shots in Rodolfi's *Gli ultimi giorni di Pompei* are comparable to this painting; for example, when Glaucus lays Ione to rest in his home, or the scene in Nero's palace in Guazzoni's *Quo Vadis?* (1913) in which Acte awakens Lygia.

Less common is the opening of a curtain to reveal the outdoors: a good example is Tadema's *The Frigidarium* (1890), where a female slave opens the curtains to present a generous view of an outdoor bathhouse. At right in the foreground a lady is being dressed. This resembles a scene in Rodolfi's *Gli ultimi giorni di Pompei*, in which Ione takes her bath (Fig. 237). As in *A Roman Lover of Art*, water spurts into the bath from a sculptur-

ed head, and similar to *The Frigidarium*, Ione is in the foreground being undressed by a slave, though the bathers in the film are not as naked as in the painting. Because frontal nudity was usually not allowed in early Italian cinema, Ione even steps into the water wrapped in a huge sheet.¹⁴ Where *Welcome Footsteps* suggests that a garden is beyond the curtain, the film of *Quo Vadis?* shows us the actual garden (Fig. 238). While Petronius and Vinicius are visiting the house of Aulus and Pomponia, the hostess opens a large curtain to reveal an expansive, park-like garden where Aulus's son and Lygia are playing with a ball. A fountain can be seen at the top of a flight of stairs in the background. The guests and the parents greet the children. The boy first runs into the foreground, but then they all walk towards the rear, making this a long shot with great depth. The effect of deep staging, enhanced by the actors' movement, was audacious for the time (1912–13) and transcended early films' tradition of painted backdrops, which were still used as recently as Maggi's 1908 version of *Gli ultimi di giorni di Pompei*.

VISUAL CITATIONS

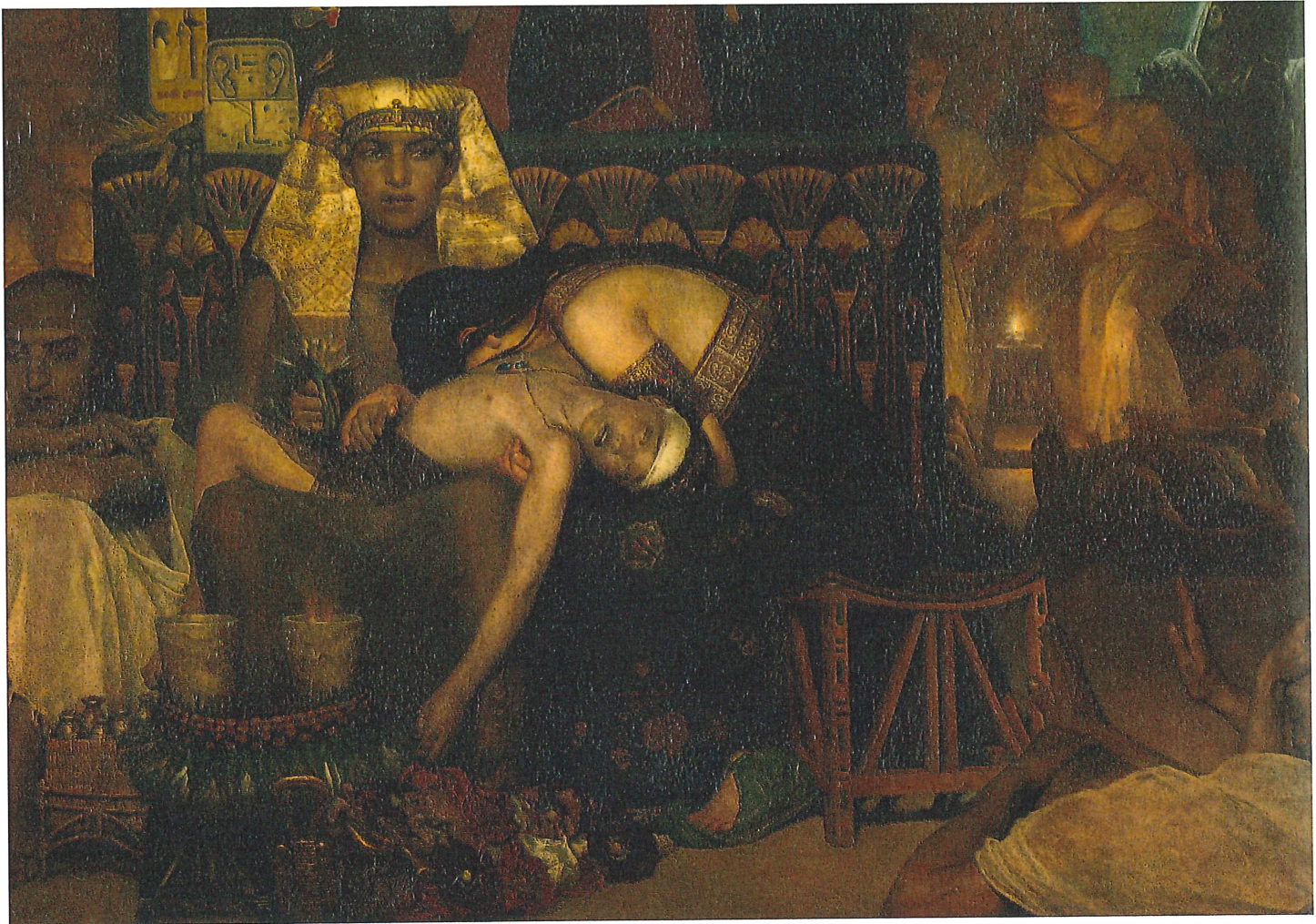
Among the key citations from Tadema's paintings are *A Juggler in Gladiator* and *The Roses of Heliogabalus* in *L'Orgie romaine*, *The Finding of Moses* (1904, Fig. 166) in DeMille's *The Ten Commandments* (1956),¹⁵ and *Spring* (1895, Fig. 202) for the triumphal parades in *Cajus Julius Caesar*, *Ben-Hur* (Fred Nibo, 1925) and *Cleopatra* (DeMille, 1934).¹⁶ Especially noteworthy, however, are the numerous references to Tadema's *The Death of the First-Born* (1872, Fig. 239). In his study *The Bible on Silent Film* (2013), David J. Shepherd shows a direct relationship between this painting and a scene of the same biblical episode in Feuillade's film *L'Exode* (1910, Fig. 240).¹⁷ This is evident from the use of a near-



237 *Gli ultimi giorni di Pompei*, Eleuterio Rodolfi, Ambrosio, 1913, production still, Museo Nazionale del Cinema, Turin



238 *Quo Vadis?*, Enrico Guazzoni, Cines, 1913, EYE, Amsterdam



239 *The Death of the First-Born*, 1872, oil on canvas, 76.9 × 124.5 cm, Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam

ly identical fresco depicting papyrus in the background, the replacement of the physician sitting to the left of the pharaoh with a seated female slave to his right, and the replacement of male spectators with grieving female slaves, who discover the tragedy and sound the alarm. Shepherd writes:

It is, however, in the depiction of the Pharaoh's firstborn himself that Feuillade's homage is most evident: in both Tadema and Feuillade, the dead boy is bare-chested and bare-legged, in both he is positioned centrally, and, most clearly of all, Feuillade follows Alma-Tadema in positioning the firstborn in the form of the *pietà* – lying on his back, arms splayed as he is cradled. Indeed, further reflection suggests that the painting has supplied the conceptual inspiration not only for this scene, but for Feuillade's *Exode* as a whole. [...] while the firstborn and his mother are at the centre of the canvas, it is the visage of Alma-Tadema's Pharaoh which looms largest and holds the viewer's attention.¹⁸

But the bystanders, the mourners in the film and in the painting, as well as Moses and Aaron in the

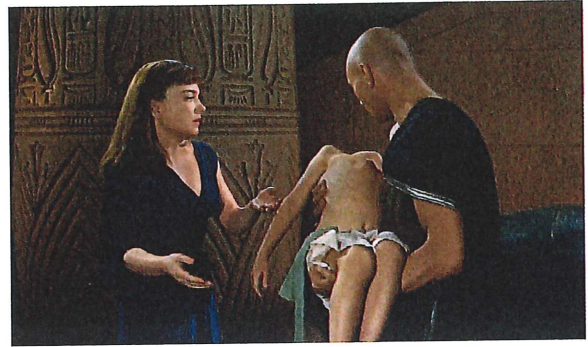
background on the canvas, also indicate that the catastrophe is far greater than just personal suffering, that the Pharaoh could have prevented it and that it will lead to the Exodus of the Jews. Shepherd continues:

While Feuillade was not the first (nor would he be the last) to draw inspiration from the pictorial tradition, his radical conceptual dependence on Alma-Tadema's singular painting and his daring exploration of the tragedy of Pharaoh in *L'Exode* confirm both the depth of Feuillade's aesthetic convictions and his originality as director of biblical films.¹⁹

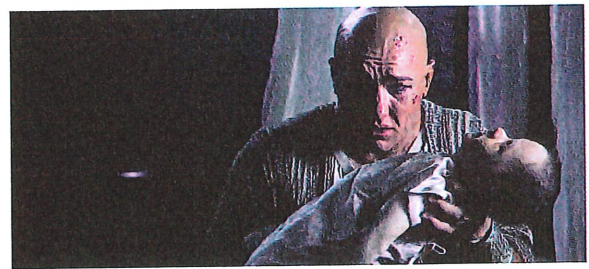
In DeMille's *Ten Commandments* (Fig. 241), Ramses holds the child in the same *pietà*-like manner. But instead of merging all the different aspects into one large pictorial composition, DeMille splits the action over different moments, according to the principle of analytical editing. Queen Nefretiri brings her dead son to Ramses. Even though she does not cry like the woman in the painting, she is visibly distraught. As in *L'Exode*, the half-naked child's trailing arm and the way his body slumps backwards are redolent of Tadema. The father takes the child from her – the dangling arm remaining clearly in view – and brings him to the statue of the Egyp-



240 *L'Exode*, Louis Feuillade, Gaumont, 1910



241 *The Ten Commandments*, Cecil B. DeMille, © Paramount Pictures, 1956



242 *Exodus: Gods and Kings*, Ridley Scott, © Chernin Entertainment/Scott Free Productions/Babička/Volcano Films, 2014



243 *Joseph, Overseer of Pharaoh's Granaries*, 1874, oil on panel, 35 × 45.7 cm, Dahesh Museum of Art, New York

tian god Sokar. Unlike in the painting, here Ramses does not wear a pharaonic headdress, although he frequently does so later in the film. When he finally sees his entire army swallowed by the Red Sea, he returns to his palace, stunned and aghast. Sitting on his throne, his frontal, frozen expression is close to that of the Pharaoh in Tadema's painting.²⁰ (In 1874, two years after *The Death of the First-Born*, Tadema presented another compressed frieze-like Egyptian interior – albeit one less charged – in *Joseph, Overseer of Pharaoh's Granaries*, Fig. 243).

The Death of the First-Born was also an important source for Ridley Scott while he was filming *Exodus: Gods and Kings* (2014, Fig. 242).²¹ Here the scene is much more shrouded in darkness, and the parents appear in their nightwear, because Scott wanted the disaster to occur at night. He thought that the lack of oxygen would express the death of the boys, and therefore in the image not only does a huge shadow glide over the city, as in F.W. Murnau's *Faust* (1926), but he also has the lamps flicker out one by one, as an analogy for the snuffing out of the children's lives.²² Pharaoh stands guard by his child after Moses's threat, yet still falls asleep at the critical moment. His wife, instinctively awakened, stiffens when she hears his lamentations. As in Tadema's painting, Ramses holds the child so tightly that one of the boy's arms falls outwards. In contrast to the painting, however, the uncontrolled outburst of the father's emotion is notable. Only later, when he places the child's mummified body in an ornate wooden coffin, is his face as grim and tragic as in *The Death of the First-Born*.²³

ROMANTIC ROME: ALMA-TADEMA AND GLADIATOR

One could argue that *Gladiator* is Ridley Scott's most painterly film. Besides Gérôme,²⁴ Tadema was an important resource. According to production designer Arthur Max:

We tried to bring to *Gladiator* a sense of the Roman Empire in decline – its greatness and at the same time its corruption and decay. And to do that we found ourselves looking not so much to the scholarly historical realm as to interpretations of Rome by certain 19th-century painters – classical Romantics who depicted an exotic view of Rome as they wished it to be, not as it really was. We tried to be relatively faithful to history, but we wanted to visually dramatize our subject, make it as exciting, as rich and as baroque as we possibly could. And so it's a very eclectic interpretation of the Roman Empire.²⁵

Scott explained this borrowing from periods later than the era in which the story unfolds as follows: 'There is a great deal written about the Roman Empire, but there are also questions about what is accurate and what is merely conjecture. I felt the priority to stay true

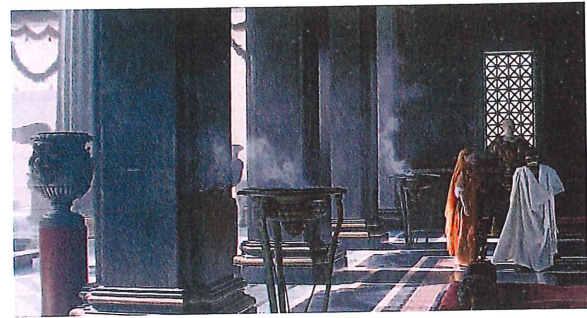
to the spirit of the period, but not necessarily to adhere to facts. We were, after all, creating fiction, not practising archaeology'.²⁶ The lavish but intimidating interiors of Commodus's palace were mainly based on Tadema's paintings. From them were derived many details in the palace set, including the columns, floor mosaics and large sculptural incense burners and lamps.²⁷ For instance, the similarity between the incense burner in Tadema's *The Way to the Temple* (Fig. 244) and those in the palace (Fig. 245) is clear, as with the *cartibulum*, which also makes a re-appearance. Yet, because the filmmakers preferred to create a smouldering darkness around Commodus, they exchanged Tadema's palette of pastel colours for black, gold, crimson and green.²⁸ Dark stones, rather than white marbles, were used to reflect the dark soul of the emperor. In an interview, Max conceded:

Ridley and I decided we wouldn't do the classical, scholastic Rome, which could be represented by researching and staying totally faithful to the museum archives and the factual concepts of Roman scholars. We decided we were more impressed by the romantic vision of Rome by painters such as Alma-Tadema, who was known as 'The Master of the Marble'. We tried to emulate the accessories, pageantry, opulence and scale in his paintings. [...] When you see the ancient ruins and the collapsed roofs, you don't really sense the grandeur of it all. [...] But when you see these paintings, in which the artist has captured the buildings and added the people, you sense the scale. Because the story we were telling has a lot of sinister intrigue and mental manipulation, with people living in fear of the emperor, we had to create an ambience that reflected this. I therefore began working in a style I called 'Black Tadema', tweaking Alma-Tadema's work a little bit.²⁹

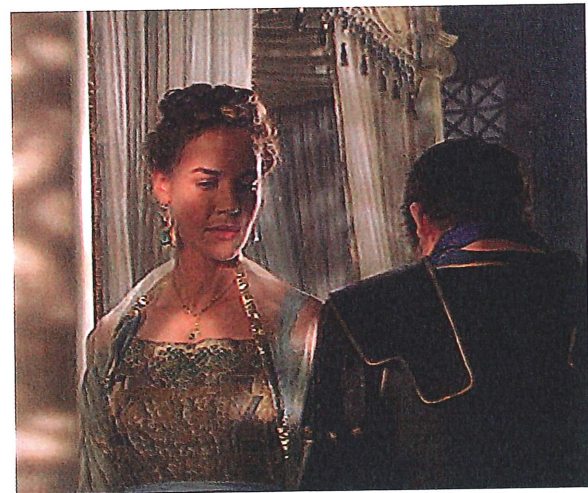
The costume designer for *Gladiator*, Janty Yates, also extensively studied Tadema: 'We must have looked through thousands of books and visited dozens of museums and galleries. We were greatly inspired by the works of artists like Sir Lawrence Alma-Tadema, who really captured the style of the period, and Georges de la Tour, from whom we got ideas for textures and finer details'.³⁰ Scott advised her to consult Tadema while designing the extras' costumes: 'Sir Lawrence Alma-Tadema painted Roman scenes in the late 1800s, using pastels – so I used pistachios, pinks, almonds and sky blue for the extras'.³¹ For these colours, Yates referenced such works as *A Kiss* (1891, Fig. 158), *Coign of Vantage* (1895, Fig. 159), *The Sculpture Gallery* (1874, Fig. 10), *Flora: Spring in the Gardens of Villa Borghese* (1877), *A Favourite Poet* (1888, Fig. 135) and *Thermae Antoninianae/The Baths of Caracalla* (1899). For the ribbons on the wom-



244 *The Way to the Temple* (detail of Fig. 131), 1882, oil on canvas, 101.5 × 52 cm, Royal Academy of Arts, London



245 *Gladiator*, Ridley Scott, © DreamWorks/Universal Pictures, 2000



246 Connie Nielsen as Lucilla in *Gladiator*, Ridley Scott, © DreamWorks/Universal Pictures, 2000

en's costumes, she consulted the paintings *Spring, A Favourite Poet, Thermae Antoninianae, Ask Me No More* (1906) and others. Transparent, layered and sometimes lightly embroidered silks were enormously important for Yates when designing the clothing for Connie Nielsen's character and other wealthy women, so she visited Italy and France to find the proper fabrics (Fig. 246). Tadema's *Silver Favourites* (1903, Fig. 136) particularly influenced Nielsen's costumes: 'When Connie Nielsen wore her dresses for the first time she looked glorious.'³²

Tadema's *The Coliseum* (1896, Fig. 247) must have been a good source for the exterior of Scott's version (Fig. 248). For the inside, he consulted G r me and presumably also *Preparations in the Colosseum* (1912), one of Tadema's last works. Some references are so fleeting that only a true connoisseur of Tadema will catch them, but *Gladiator* contains an instantly recognisable visual citation: the Egyptian *Juggler* (1870, Fig. 250) literally returns in *Gladiator*, when we see Senator Gracchus lunching in the city (Fig. 249).³³ Scott loved this painting so much that he inserted the citation.³⁴ Moreover, the arena with garlands around the pillars of the Imperial box is

reminiscent of Tadema's *Caracalla and Geta* (1907), while the rose petals spread around the arena and falling upon Commodus and Maximus seem to refer to Tadema's *Caracalla* (1902) and *The Roses of Heliogabalus*.³⁵ Max noted:

Alma-Tadema visually creates everyday detail of *architecture* but also of *rituals*. Instead of dead archeology we wanted antiquity to be alive and breathing. There is where Alma-Tadema was so helpful, the surface of things. He was most important to us for his spatial conception, e.g. of doors and windows, connections between inside and outside, the interiors of public buildings such as the Senate and the Palace of Commodus. I did exactly what he did. I also went to Pompeii and Herculaneum and walked the stones and I visited the museums in Naples and Rome.³⁶

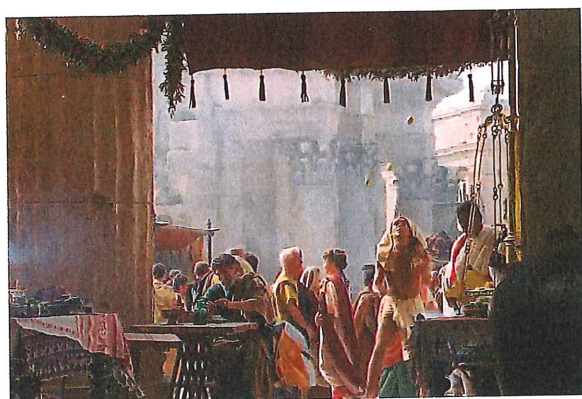
Gladiator's success in the year of its release (2000) put films of antiquity back on the map and inspired many subsequent epics, although films such as *Troy* (Wolfgang Petersen, 2004), *Alexander* (Oliver Stone, 2004) and *Pompeii* (Paul W.S. Anderson, 2014)



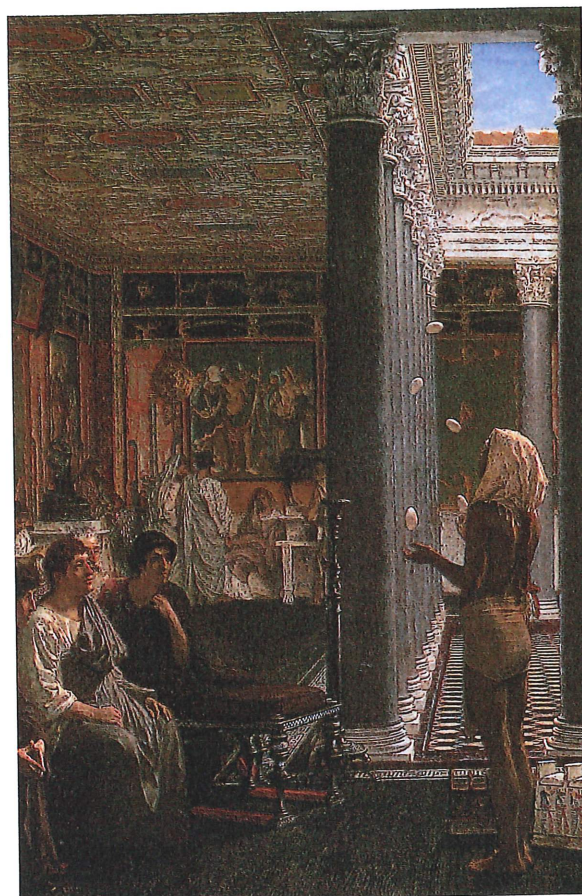
247 *The Coliseum*, 1896, oil on panel, 112 × 73.6 cm, Collection Lord Lloyd Webber



248 *Gladiator*, Ridley Scott, © DreamWorks/Universal Pictures, 2000



249 *Gladiator*, Ridley Scott, © DreamWorks/Universal Pictures, 2000



250 *A Juggler*, 1870, oil on panel, 78.7 × 50.1 cm, Art Gallery of New South Wales, Sydney

remain in the shadow of their predecessor. Scott and his staff had already confirmed their use of painters like Tadema and Gérôme as sources early on. Nonetheless, Scott was subsequently criticised for being rather free in his interpretation of history – of merely stacking up various myths.³⁷ Not everyone was enamoured with his dramatisation of *Gladiator* through the use of nineteenth-century paintings, beginning with the historical consultant for the film, Kathleen Coleman, whose advice was ignored and who eventually removed her name from the credits.

On the other hand, a feature film is not a historical documentary. It seems as if the desire to present the most historically accurate portrayal of Rome is a denial of, or at least disregards, the director's artistic vision – and where it concerns Tadema, we should note, his artistic vision, too. It also ignores the economic necessity of producers having to appeal to modern audiences. In retrospect, one could conclude that every decade constructs its own version of the ancient past, each with its own claims to authenticity, and for varying reasons. Only time will reveal how the raw, colourful, violent and lascivious atmosphere of HBO's television series *Rome*

(2005–07) will ultimately be seen as a reflection of its time, as have Scott's *Gladiator*, or classical films of the 1950s and 1960s, the silent films of the 1910s or even their visual sources, including Tadema's paintings. These productions must be understood within the context of the times in which they are made and seen. Yet, like the tenacity of Tadema's images, and also like their subsequent appropriation through the medium of film, some will transcend time and fascinate us forever.