JOURNAL FOR TRANSCULTURAL PRESENCES &
DIACHRONIC IDENTITIES FROM ANTIQUITY TO DATE

thersites

21/2026

www.thersites-journal.de

Imprint

Universitätsverlag Potsdam 2026
http://verlag.ub.uni-potsdam.de | https://ror.org/01femje42
Email: verlag@uni-potsdam.de
https://www.thersites-journal.de/

ISSN 2364-7612

Contact
Principal Contact
Prof. Dr. Filippo Carlà-Uhink
Historisches Institut, Professur Geschichte des Altertums
Am Neuen Palais 10, 14469 Potsdam (Germany)
Email: thersitesjournal@uni-potsdam.de
Support Contact
PD Dr. Christian Rollinger
Email: thersitesjournal@uni-potsdam.de

Layout and Typesetting
text plus form, Dresden

Cover pictures:
Left: Hadrian's Wall, quisnovus (flickr.com). CC-BY 2.0
Right: Interior of Teatro Olimpico (Vicenza) scena, Didier Descouens (wikipedia.org). CC-BY-SA 4.0

Published online at:
https://doi.org/10.34679/thersites.vol21

JOURNAL FOR TRANSCULTURAL PRESENCES &
DIACHRONIC IDENTITIES FROM ANTIQUITY TO DATE

thersites

21/2026 | pp. 56 – 70

SIMONE RENDINA
(University of Cassino and Southern Lazio, Italy)

Little Caesars

Roman History in Gangster Films

Abstract Gangster films contain several references to ancient Rome. In the historical reality of the Italian-American Mafia, at least one mobster, Salvatore Maranzano, was fascinated by ancient Rome and used it as a model for his gang. In 1931, the same year Maranzano was killed, Mervyn LeRoy's film "Little Caesar" connected, although mainly through its title, a fictional gangster's ambition with an iconic historical figure from ancient Rome. An articulate reflection on how the Mafia was inspired by Roman history first appeared in Francis Ford Coppola's "The Godfather: Part II" (1974). As suggested by a dialogue from the film, the main reason for the presence of notions regarding ancient Rome in gangster cinema is that Roman history provided images of power and successful military organisation. The representation of the Mafia as an association that respects a code of honour, although a twisted one, declined after the first two "Godfather" films. This provoked the disappearance of references to honourable examples from the ancient past in later gangster films. Ancient Rome is frequently mentioned only in the television series "The Sopranos" (1999–2007). However, these references are mainly meant to ridicule the Italian-American Mafia's ill-conceived ideas of honour and masculinity.

Keywords Gangster Films, "Little Caesar", Roman Army, Roman Suicide, "The Godfather: Part II".

URL https://thersites-journal.de
DOI https://doi.org/10.34679/thersites.vol21.309

INTRODUCTION*

Ancient Rome provided social and behavioural models throughout modern and contemporary history. It did so even in subversive and criminal contexts, such as the Italian-American Mafia. This paper occasionally analyses the use of Roman history in the real-life Mafia, but primarily focuses on the fiction (especially films) inspired by it.

Although there are several references to Roman history in gangster films, their significance has previously been overlooked. Why was ancient Rome so important in gangster cinema? It should be asked whether Roman history was known in the real-life Italian-American Mafia in the 20th century, to what extent the image of Rome inspired gangster films, and what ancient Rome meant for the film-makers and screenwriters who created those films.

1. EARLY GANGSTER CINEMA: "LITTLE CAESAR"

Gangster films originated in the USA in the 1910s. The 1920s saw a rise in their popularity, before they enjoyed a boom in the USA in the 1930s.[1] This trend was inspired by the contemporary emergence (particularly evident in the 1920s and 1930s) of the Italian-American Mafia. The golden age of this film genre soon came to an end: from the late 1930s onwards, fewer and fewer gangster films were produced.[2]

In early gangster films, there are a few references to ancient Rome; these references probably derive from general knowledge of the most famous aspects of Roman history in popular culture at that time. For example, in "The Penalty" (dir. Wallace Worsley, 1920), the protagonist, a crime boss played by Lon Chaney, expresses his desire to obtain "the pleasures of a Nero and the powers of a Caesar"

* This article has greatly benefited from suggestions by anonymous reviewers.

1 For the early gangster films in the 1910s and 1920s, see Mason (2002) 1–5; McCarty (2004) 13–25; Phillips (2014) 1–6. David W. Griffith's short "The Musketeers of Pig Alley" (1912) is considered to be the very first gangster film. See Phillips (2014) 1. However, Wallace McCutcheon's "The Black Hand" (1906) should also be mentioned.

2 Silver (2007); Phillips (2014) 88.

and to "be a Caesar".[3] In "Underworld" (dir. Josef von Sternberg, 1927), the main character, a gangster, is compared to "Attila, the Hun, at the gates of Rome".[4]

However, the most explicit example of the use of Roman history in gangster cinema is represented by "Little Caesar" (1931), an American Pre-Code film directed by Mervyn LeRoy. The film is an adaptation of the 1929 novel of the same title by William R. Burnett and is one of the three ground-breaking American gangster films of the early 1930s, along with William A. Wellman's "The Public Enemy" (1931) and Howard Hawks' "Scarface" (1932).[5] The film by LeRoy is the story of the rapid rise and fall of Caesar Enrico "Rico" Bandello, nicknamed "Little Caesar" (played by Edward G. Robinson), an ambitious and merciless gangster whose only weakness is his morbid attachment to his best friend. This weakness ultimately provokes his defeat by the police force and his death.

However, the influence of ancient Rome is more evident in the title than in the content of the novel and the film. Both works lack any reference to Julius Caesar or Roman history in general.[6] The allusion to Caesar in the title of the film and in Rico Bandello's nickname is commonplace and is not further elaborated upon. The name "Caesar" only seems to suggest a vague idea of ambition and power. The adjective "Little" reminds us that, in the end, Rico is only a small-time criminal. In any case, the use of the epithet "Caesar" is noteworthy because it indicates that Julius Caesar was an iconic historical figure in American popular culture of the 1920s and 1930s.

In a 1958 foreword to the novel, American writer Gilbert Seldes offers an interpretation of the presence of Caesar in the title. He believes that the reference is not to Julius Caesar but to Cesare Borgia:

> This opulence is the appearance, not the reality, of power. But it is aptly chosen. It precisely defines the character of the book. Here are people who live flamboyantly, moving with a retinue of servants, spending lavishly, laughing more loudly at crueller jests, running faster, eating more – doing everything in excess of the average, being immoderate, going beyond all bounds in everything. And where do we

3 Title cards at 18:34 and 1:17:45. See McCarty (2004) 48.

4 Title card at 14:49. See McCarty (2004) 70. For this film, see Phillips (2014) 4–6.

5 Phillips (2014) 7–18.

6 Mervyn LeRoy would direct a well-known film version of Henryk Sienkiewicz's "Quo Vadis" in 1951, in which Peter Ustinov played the role of Emperor Nero. However, "Little Caesar" does not seem to anticipate LeRoy's later take on ancient Rome.

> meet their parallels in the past? Not in ancient Rome, not even in its declining days, but in the degradation of the Renaissance. It is not after the Emperor Caesars (*sic*) that this book is truly named, but after the Borgia's Cesare – degenerate and vile.[7]

There is, however, an implicit influence of Roman history, and of Julius Caesar in particular, on both the novel and the film.[8] "Little Caesar" was the nickname of Salvatore Maranzano, an Italian-American gangster renowned for his role in the "Castellammarese War", a mob war that was fought in New York City from 1930 to 1931.[9] It ended when Maranzano had his rival, Joe Masseria, killed in 1931. Maranzano, in turn, was shortly after stabbed and shot to death in that same year by order of Charles "Lucky" Luciano. During his short rule, however, Maranzano was acknowledged as the "capo di tutti i capi" ("boss of all bosses") and established an organisation for the Five Families in New York City. He was very fond of Roman history (which was probably the reason for his nickname) and planned to model his criminal organisation after the Roman army.[10]

This hoodlum was "a well-educated former seminarian" who "kept a substantial library of books about ancient Rome" and was especially fascinated by Julius Caesar.[11] Knowledge of Roman history was not surprising, even in the likes of Salvatore Maranzano. At that time, Roman history was a primary model both for American society and culture (as it had been since the 18th century) and for Italy.[12]Maranzano had moved from Sicily to New York City as an adult in the 1920s.[13] Since he had studied in Italy to become a priest, it can be assumed that

---

7 Burnett (1958) 10. The history of the Borgia family also influenced the plot of Howard Hawks' "Scarface"; see Mason (2002) 28; Sarris (2007). Meanwhile, Kaminsky (2007) sees parallels between Julius Caesar's rise to power and that of Rico Bandello.

8 Needless to say, Julius Caesar was and still is more renowned in popular culture than Cesare Borgia, so it seems easier that the reference was to Julius Caesar rather than the other historical figure. The former had already been mentioned, e.g. in "The Penalty" (1920); see above.

9 For his nickname, see Guillen (2007) 312; Wyke (2012) 119.

10 Wyke (2012) 119. In fiction, the killing of Masseria by order of Maranzano and Maranzano's own death are recreated in the fifth season (2014) of the HBO television series "Boardwalk Empire", where Maranzano's interest in ancient Rome is also highlighted.

11 Wyke (2012) 119.

12 For the reception of ancient Rome in the history of the USA, see Malamud (2009).

13 Wyke (2012) 119.

he had at least a primary education (which was obligatory in Italy at that time).[14] The classical world was central to the Italian school system in the decades following the unification of the country in 1861.[15]

The nickname of Salvatore Maranzano, who was killed in 1931, probably inspired the title of the "Little Caesar" book (1929) and film (1931). However, Rico Bandello was probably based mainly on Al Capone, who was convicted in 1931.[16]

In sum, the first attested connection between gangsterism and Roman history was due to the images of power and military organisation provided by the latter. Another possible reason for mentions of ancient Rome in the context of the Italian-American Mafia is the (extremely loose) connection between gangsters of Italian origin and the ancient Romans, who had once occupied the Italian peninsula.

In the following years, there were few equally explicit references to Roman history in gangster films. Maria Wyke mentions "High School Caesar", a 1960 American film about juvenile delinquency.[17] Another film whose title recalled "Little Caesar" appeared in 1973: the American blaxploitation film "Black Caesar" by Larry Cohen, a very loose remake of the 1931 film.[18]

In the real-life Mafia, however, there seem to have been other individuals nicknamed "Caesar" or "Little Caesar" in later years, such as two minor mobsters, Joe "Little Caesar" Roma (1895–1933) and Joseph "Caesar" DiVarco (1911–1986).[19]

The nicknames of these two last "Caesars" were probably inspired by the 1931 film rather than by an unlikely remembrance of the unsuccessful gangster Salvatore Maranzano. After all, gangsters did watch films: John Dillinger was killed

14 The "Legge Casati" (Gabrio Casati's Law) of 1859 and its following additions and modifications had made primary education compulsory in Italy.

15 Bruni (2005) 25–47; Baldo (2012).

16 McCarty (2004) 116; Kaminsky (2007); Wyke (2012) 120; Phillips (2014) 7. Pfeiffer (2023) has a different opinion: "Although it was speculated that the Rico character was based on Al Capone, no hard evidence exists to support the claim". However, Al Capone's negative notoriety at that time made him an easy source of inspiration for "Little Caesar". Al Capone also heavily inspired Tony Camonte, the protagonist of Howard Hawks' "Scarface" (1932): see McCarty (2004) 120; Kaminsky (2007).

17 Wyke (2012) 120.

18 Mason (2002) 138.

19 Life (1958) 16; Find a Grave (2008).

by the police in 1934 in front of the cinema where he had just watched the crime film "Manhattan Melodrama", whereas "Crazy Joe" Gallo (killed in 1972) cherished Richard Widmark's role as a villain in the film noir "Kiss of Death" (1947).[20]

2. "DON'T WORRY ABOUT ANYTHING, FRANKIE FIVE-ANGELS"

In the 1970s, Francis Ford Coppola's first and second Godfather films (1972 and 1974) represented a triumphal revival of the pre-war gangster cinema of the USA. Coppola's interest in ancient Rome, which has become fully evident in his recent film "Megalopolis" (2024), was already apparent in "The Godfather: Part II".[21]

Towards the end of "Part II", Michael, the boss of the Corleone crime family, settles the score with the people who have defied him throughout the film. One of the individuals he has to deal with is Frank Pentangeli (nicknamed "Frankie Five-Angels"), a member of the Corleone family who has betrayed him by testifying against him at a Senate hearing. Although he has withdrawn all charges, having ultimately bowed to the rule of *omertà*, he must still pay for his initial disloyalty. Thus, Michael Corleone sends his lawyer, Tom Hagen, to exact his punishment. The following conversation ensues in Mario Puzo and Francis Ford Coppola's screenplay:

> HAGEN
> Frankie, you were always interested in politics, in history. I remember you talking about Hitler back in '43. We were young then.
>
> PENTANGELI
> Yeah, I still read a lot. They bring me stuff.

20 Life (1963) 21; FBI (2009). See McCarty (2004) 241–242 for the influence of gangster films on real-life gangsters. See Miklitsch (2020) and Killeen (2022) 45 for the interaction between film noir and gangster cinema, of which "Kiss of Death" is an example.

21 "Megalopolis" reimagines some events of Roman history (especially of the late Republican period) in modern America and reflects on the possible decline of the USA through the historical decline of Roman power.

HAGEN
You were around the old timers who dreamed up how the Families should be organized, how they based it on the old Roman legions, and called them 'regimes' … with the 'capos' and 'soldiers,' and it worked.

PENTANGELI
Yeah, it worked. Those were great old days. We was (*sic*) like the Roman Empire. The Corleone family was like the Roman Empire.

HAGEN
Yeah, it was once. The Roman Empire … when a plot against the Emperor failed, the plotters were always given a chance to let their families keep their fortunes.

PENTANGELI
Yeah, but only the rich guys. The little guys got knocked off. If they got arrested and executed, all their estate went to the Emperor. If they just went home and killed themselves, up front, nothing happened.

HAGEN
Yeah, that was a good break. A nice deal.

PENTANGELI
They went home and sat in a hot bath and opened their veins, and bled to death. Sometimes they gave a little party before they did it.

HAGEN
Don't worry about anything, Frankie Five-Angels.

PENTANGELI
Thanks, Tom. Thanks.[22]

Thus, Hagen subtly induces Pentangeli to commit suicide to pay for his betrayal against the "Emperor", Michael Corleone. Pentangeli kills himself by opening

22 3:02:00–3:04:25. The dialogue in the film shows some minor changes from the original screenplay: see Puzo/Coppola (2020), Scene 9. These changes, however, do not affect the reflections that follow in this paper. For this dialogue, see Phillips (2014) 104.

his veins soon after that conversation. It is shown here that Frank is erudite in Roman history. Fellow mobsters in the Corleone family were also interested in the military aspects of ancient Rome. They used that model to make the crime family grow: "You were around the old timers who dreamed up how the Families should be organized, how they based it on the old Roman legions, and called them 'regimes' … with the 'capos' and 'soldiers,' and it worked".

Pentangeli displays a sweeping knowledge of politics and history. Adolf Hitler appears, along with Roman history, as an object of interest of the gangster. Although it is not specified whether the mobster loathed or admired the dictator, this collateral interest in Nazi Germany seems to suggest that he was mainly interested in the brutal aspect of domination. Roman history appears here, as elsewhere, as a source of images of power.

The idea that Roman legions were structured in "'regimes' … with the 'capos' and 'soldiers'" is a blatant distortion of Roman military history. Still, it is true that the Sicilian Mafia has a military, pyramidal organisation, with a boss commanding his subordinates, who lead their own minions, unlike other criminal associations, where bosses operate within a context of families competing at a horizontal level.[23] The screenwriters of "The Godfather: Part II", Mario Puzo and Francis Ford Coppola, were certainly aware of this specificity of the Sicilian mob and sketched a reflection on this aspect by two fictional insiders of the Mafia, Pentangeli and Hagen. The idea that mobsters could conceive the Mafia as similar to the Roman army is entirely plausible, as shown by the story of Salvatore Maranzano.

The biography of Maranzano, who cherished Roman history and attempted to model his criminal organisation after the Roman army, may have served as a reference for this part of the screenplay. However, Pentangeli, who testifies against Michael Corleone, is primarily based on the historical figure of Joe Valachi, the first *mafioso* who, in 1963, publicly acknowledged the existence of *Cosa Nostra.*[24]

After the first two "Godfather" films, few references to the ancient world appeared in gangster films. One example is perhaps the interior decorations of

23 Sciarrone/Storti (2014).

24 As mentioned in the audio commentary by Francis Ford Coppola: see Coppola (2025), at 2:26:50. See also Nourmand (2007) 120. The historical character, Salvatore Maranzano, briefly appears, in a fictional context, in the novel on which the first two "Godfather" films are based, Mario Puzo's "The Godfather" (1969). See Puzo (2019) 204–207.

the gangster Tony Montana's mansion in Brian De Palma's "Scarface" (1983).[25] In the hall of the mansion, Pompeian red is the predominant colour; classical statues and ancient Roman mural paintings also appear. The reconstruction of a Roman villa in Miami in the 1980s is consistent with Tony Montana's larger-than-life behaviour and tasteless lifestyle.[26] Interestingly, the fictional mobster's kitsch taste has been imitated by real-life gangsters. The hall of *Camorra* boss Walter Schiavone's villa near Caserta (Campania) was identical to that of Tony Montana's mansion.[27] Again, images from ancient Rome, due to their antiquity and prestige, were used to support fictional and real gangsters' hunger for power and glory.

3. THE CHILDREN OF SCORSESE: FILMS AND TELEVISION SERIES OF THE 1990S AND 2000S

Martin Scorsese's film "Goodfellas" (1990) initiated a new wave of gangster films that were characterised by a hyperrealistic portrayal of the Mafia.[28] In 1994, Quentin Tarantino's "Pulp Fiction" was even more radical in transforming gangster life into pop, postmodern material. In gangster films made in the USA in the 1990s, the tragic and somewhat dignified attitude of Coppola's gangsters is replaced by the idiosyncrasies of small-time criminals. On the one hand, these characters are greedier, crueller, and more vicious than the members of the Corleone crime family; on the other hand, they appear ridiculous in their

25 De Palma's film is a remake of Howard Hawks' "Scarface" (1932).

26 In the same film, there is at least another reference to the classical world, that is, a night-club called "Babylon Club", which is inspired by the Erechtheum. See Corliss (1983), quoted in Bogue (2007).

27 Saviano (2007) 246. The influence of cinema on *Camorra* bosses is amply analysed *ibid.*, 244–258; see also Renga (2013) 145–146; Massaro (2015) 12–13. Schiavone's villa has been confiscated by the Italian government. It is featured in a scene of Matteo Garrone's film "Gomorrah" (original Italian title: "Gomorra"), where two young aspiring *Camorra* gangsters, obsessed with De Palma's "Scarface", quote Tony Montana and imitate his attitude.

28 "Goodfellas" was followed by Scorsese's similar-themed "Casino" (1995). For the American gangster films of the early 1990s, see Hildenbrand (2019).

mundane lives and hollow conversations.[29] Unlike Frank Pentangeli, they do not try to model their existence after grand images from the past. Instead, their worldview is based on the popular culture of their own time.

Therefore, references to Roman history are lacking from gangster films of the 1990s. However, there are references to it in a television series that expands on and reimagines many aspects of Scorsese's films, "The Sopranos" (HBO, 1999–2007).[30] In that series, allusions to ancient Rome are highly ironic. They are also second-hand, as mobsters from "The Sopranos" are not well-educated but are familiar with pop culture and references to Roman history in pop culture.[31]

This television series has at least two significant references to Roman history.[32] The protagonist of the series, Tony Soprano, tries to force Ariel, a Hasidic Jew, out of a contract with violence. As Ariel points out that his situation is similar to that of the Jews who resisted the ancient Romans at Masada in 72–73 CE, and asks where the Romans are now, Tony answers that he is "looking at them":

> ARIEL
> You ever heard of the Masada? For two years, 900 Jews held their own against 15,000 Roman soldiers. They chose death before enslavement. The Romans? Where are they now?
>
> TONY
> You're looking at them, asshole.

After threatening Ariel with even greater violence, Tony gets what he wants.[33] Ancient Rome, although known superficially, is used by the mobster to support his professed strength and masculinity.

---

29 Hildenbrand (2019) 133.

30 Interestingly, in those same years, HBO and the BBC also produced a television series on Rome between the time of Julius Caesar and Augustus, "Rome" (2005–2007). For this series, see Cyrino (2008 and 2015).

31 See McCarty (2004) 246 for the love of cinema shown by the characters of this television series.

32 In addition to other minor references, like the title of the sixth episode of the first season, "Pax Soprana".

33 Season 1, episode 3. The episode, titled "Denial, Anger, Acceptance", first aired in the USA on January 24, 1999.

Another reference to Roman history in "The Sopranos" has obvious connections to popular culture and to a specific film. Ralph Cifaretto, a sociopathic *capo,* is obsessed with "Gladiator", the successful 2000 film by Ridley Scott that relaunched the epic film genre set in ancient Rome.[34] Other than mentioning the film several times, Cifaretto wounds a subordinate in a botched attempt to imitate the moves of Maximus Decimus Meridius, the protagonist of Scott's film. In addition, he is seen watching Stanley Kubrick's "Spartacus" (1960), which he wholeheartedly dislikes due to the anachronistic haircut of the protagonist, played by Kirk Douglas.[35] In these and other cases, the generally Scorsesean TV series appears to be more Tarantinoesque, as Tarantino's films introduced gangsters who are fond of watching films and television.

The meaning of the use of "Gladiator" in scenes involving Ralph Cifaretto is basically a reflection on masculinity. Cifaretto is a violent hoodlum who, in a crucial scene, kills his mistress. In other scenes, he beats men and kills animals as well. His enthusiasm for the "Gladiator" film reflects his search for strong, masculine models in his misogynistic, amoral, and sleazy life. Identifying a role model in a fictional character from the Roman Empire does not derive, in this case, from having a classical education but rather from watching a box-office hit.[36]

34 Interestingly, the scene in "Gladiator" where Commodus demands loyalty from his subordinates after the death of Marcus Aurelius was inspired by "The Godfather," as acknowledged by Ridley Scott: see Cotta Ramosino/Cotta Ramosino/Dognini (2004) 131. In Scott's sequel, "Gladiator II" (2024), the villain, played by Denzel Washington, has all the characteristics of a gangster. The influence of gangster cinema on films set in classical antiquity would require a separate paper.

35 The scenes that involve Cifaretto's enthusiasm for "Gladiator" are from "The Sopranos", season 3, episodes 4–6.

36 Ancient Rome was and still is a constant source of images of personal and political power. Elon Musk's use of Roman imperial myths (including the most dangerous, modern distortion of Roman history, the so-called Roman salute, also lately made by Steve Bannon) is a recent example of this attitude. See Agbamu (2025); for the Roman salute, see Winkler (2009). The recent "How often do you think about the Roman Empire?" internet trend showed that ancient Rome still represents a myth of power and masculinity, especially amongst men: see Murray (2023).

CONCLUSIONS

Ancient Rome was used, both in films and in the real-life Mafia, to strengthen one's confidence in his brutal force and as a model to structure a criminal organisation with military aspects, which is an actual characteristic of the Sicilian Mafia.

An erudite enthusiasm for ancient Rome characterised the historical "capo di tutti i capi" Salvatore Maranzano and the fictional character Frank Pentangeli. Tony Montana's relationship with Antiquity is even crasser than that of Maranzano and Pentangeli. The decorations of his mansion aim to flaunt a vague idea of wealth, power, and prestige. In recent fiction, especially in "The Sopranos", allusions to ancient Rome are second-hand and mostly derive from pop culture.

References to ancient Rome in this TV series highlight how Roman history has the potential to reinforce images of power and masculinity. However, the irony with which the TV series treats mobsters' self-identification with ancient Romans successfully disarms their delusions of grandeur.

It is essential to ensure that ancient Rome is not a source of dangerous myths of power, as it often was in the past. Irony, combined with a thorough historical analysis of all aspects of ancient Rome – including those frequently overlooked by those who draw on Rome as a symbol of power – can effectively challenge malicious misinterpretations of Roman history.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Agbamu (2025). – Samuel Agbamu, 'Elon Musk and the History of the "Roman Salute"', *University of Reading Research Blog*, 29 January 2025, https://research.reading.ac.uk/research-blog/2025/01/29/elon-musk-and-the-history-of-the-roman-salute/ (accessed 14 March 2026).

Baldo (2012). – Gianluigi Baldo, 'Gli studi di latino nell'Italia postunitaria. Dalla legge Casati alla scuola media unificata', in: Luciano Canfora, Ugo Cardinale (eds.), *Disegnare il futuro con intelligenza antica. L'insegnamento del latino e del greco antico in Italia e nel mondo* (Bologna 2012) 171–193.

Bogue (2007). – Ronald Bogue, 'De Palma's Postmodern "Scarface" and the Simulacrum of Class', in: Alain Silver, James Ursini (eds.), *Gangster Film Reader* (Pompton Plains [NJ] 2007) 183–194.

Bruni (2005). – Elsa M. Bruni, *Greco e latino. Le lingue classiche nella scuola italiana (1860–2005)* (Roma 2005).

Burnett (1958). – William R. Burnett, *Little Caesar,* with a foreword by Gilbert Seldes and a new introduction by W. R. Burnett (New York 1958; original ed. New York 1929).

Coppola (2025). – Francis Ford Coppola, 'The Godfather, Part II. Audio Commentary'. Recorded in 2001 for the DVD release of the film, *podscan.fm,* 25 November 2025, https://podscan.fm/podcasts/dvd-commentary-the-original-podcast/episodes/the-godfather-part-ii-commentary-by-francis-ford-coppola, (accessed 14 March 2026).

Corliss (1983). – Richard Corliss, 'Say Good Night to the Bad Guy', *Time Magazine,* 5 December 1983, https://time.com/3833724/scarface-movie-review-oliver-stone/ (accessed 14 March 2026).

Cotta Ramosino/Cotta Ramosino/Dognini (2004). – Laura Cotta Ramosino, Luisa Cotta Ramosino, Cristiano Dognini, *Tutto quello che sappiamo su Roma l'abbiamo imparato a Hollywood* (Torino 2004).

Cyrino (2008). – Monica S. Cyrino (ed.), *Rome, Season One. History Makes Television* (Malden [MA]/Oxford 2008). https://doi.org/10.1002/9781444301540

Cyrino (2015). – Monica S. Cyrino (ed.), *Rome, Season Two. Trial and Triumph* (Edinburgh 2015).

FBI (2009). – FBI, 'FBI History. Famous Cases. John Dillinger', *fbi.gov,* 19 September 2009, https://web.archive.org/web/20090919030546/http://www.fbi.gov/libref/historic/famcases/dillinger/dillinger.htm (accessed 14 March 2026).

Find a Grave (2008). – Find a Grave, 'Joseph Pasquale "Little Caesar" Roma (26 Jul 1895–18 Feb 1933)', *Find a Grave,* ID 29233505, 22 August 2008, https://it.findagrave.com/memorial/29233505/joseph_pasquale-roma (accessed 14 March 2026).

Guillen (2007). – Matthew Guillen, *Reading America* (Bethesda [MD] 2007).

Hildenbrand (2019). – Karine Hildenbrand, 'The 1990s Hollywood Gangster. Generic Reflections and Deflections', in: George S. Larke-Walsh (ed.), *A Companion to the Gangster Film* (Malden [MA]/Oxford 2019) 129–145.

Kaminsky (2007). – Stuart M. Kaminsky, '"Little Caesar" and Its Role in the Gangster Film Genre', in: Alain Silver, James Ursini (eds.), *Gangster Film Reader* (Pompton Plains [NJ] 2007) 47–64 (= *Journal of Popular Film* 1, 3 [1972] 208–227).

Killeen (2022). – Padraic Killeen, *The Dark Interval. Film Noir, Iconography, and Affect* (New York 2022).

Life (1958). – Life, Vol. 45, No. 3, 21 July 1958, https://books.google.it/books?id=1FMEAAAAMBAJ&printsec=frontcover&hl=it&source=gbs_ge_summary_r&cad=0#v=onepage&q&f=false (accessed 14 March 2026).

Life (1963). – Life, Vol. 55, No. 9, 30 August 1963, https://books.google.it/books?id=GlIEAAAAMBAJ&printsec=frontcover&hl=it&source=gbs_ge_summary_r&cad=0#v=onepage&q&f=false (accessed 14 March 2026).

Malamud (2009). – Margaret Malamud, *Ancient Rome and Modern America* (Malden [MA]/Oxford 2009). https://doi.org/10.1002/9781444305074

Mason (2002). – Fran Mason, *American Gangster Cinema. From 'Little Caesar' to 'Pulp Fiction'* (London 2002). https://doi.org/10.1057/9780230596399

Massaro (2015). – Francesca Romana Massaro, *Cinematografia organizzata. La mafia tra cinema fiction e realtà* (Roma 2015).

McCarty (2004). – John McCarty, *Bullets over Hollywood. The American Gangster Picture from the Silents to 'The Sopranos'* (Boston 2004).

Miklitsch (2020). – Robert Miklitsch, *I Died a Million Times. Gangster Noir in Midcentury America* (Urbana [IL] 2020). https://doi.org/10.5622/illinois/9780252043611.001.0001

Murray (2023). – Conor Murray, 'How Often Do Men Think about the Roman Empire? A Lot, according to New TikTok Trend', *Forbes,* 18 September 2023, https://www.forbes.com/sites/conormurray/2023/09/18/how-often-do-men-think-about-the-roman-empire-a-lot-according-to-new-tiktok-trend (accessed 14 March 2026).

Nourmand (2007). – Tony Nourmand, *The Godfather. An Unofficial Look at Francis Ford Coppola's American Classics* (New York 2007).

Pfeiffer (2023). – Lee Pfeiffer, 'Little Caesar', in: *Encyclopaedia Britannica,* 25 August 2023, https://www.britannica.com/topic/Little-Caesar (accessed 14 March 2026).

Phillips (2014). – Gene D. Phillips, *Gangsters and G-Men on Screen. Crime Cinema Then and Now* (Lanham [MD] 2014).

Puzo (2019). – Mario Puzo, *The Godfather. 50th Anniversary Edition,* with an introduction by Francis Ford Coppola (London 2019; original ed. New York 1969).

Puzo/Coppola (2020). – Mario Puzo, Francis Ford Coppola, 'The Godfather, Part II. Screenplay', *genius.com,* 11 August 2020, https://genius.com/albums/The-godfather-film/The-godfather-2 (accessed 14 March 2026).

Renga (2013). – Dana Renga, *Unfinished Business. Screening the Italian Mafia in the New Millennium* (Toronto/Buffalo/London 2013).

Sarris (2007). – Andrew Sarris, 'Big Funerals. The Hollywood Gangster, 1927–1933', in: Alain Silver, James Ursini (eds.), *Gangster Film Reader* (Pompton Plains [NJ] 2007) 85–96 (= *Film Comment* 13 [1977] 6–9).

Saviano (2007). – Roberto Saviano, *Gomorrah. Italy's Other Mafia* (London 2007; original ed. Milano 2006).

Sciarrone/Storti (2014). – Rocco Sciarrone, Luca Storti, 'The Territorial Expansion of Mafia-Type Organized Crime. The Case of the Italian Mafia in Germany', *Crime, Law and Social Change* 61.1 (2014) 37–60. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10611-013-9473-7

Silver (2007). – Alain Silver, 'Introduction', in: Alain Silver, James Ursini (eds.), *Gangster Film Reader* (Pompton Plains [NJ] 2007) 1–10.

Winkler (2009). – Martin M. Winkler, *The Roman Salute. Cinema, History, Ideology* (Columbus [OH] 2009).

Wyke (2012). – Maria Wyke, *Caesar in the USA* (Berkeley/Los Angeles 2012). https://doi.org/10.1525/9780520954274

Simone Rendina
University of Cassino and Southern Lazio
Dipartimento di Lettere e Filosofia, Viale dell'Università (Sant'Angelo, Polo Folcara, Università degli Studi di Cassino e del Lazio Meridionale), 03043 Cassino (FR), Italia.
simone.rendina@unicas.it
simone.rendina.hist@gmail.com

Suggested citation
Rendina, Simone: Little Caesars. Roman History in Gangster Films. In: thersites 21 (2026), pp. 56–70.
https://doi.org/10.34679/thersites.vol21.309