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Topic of the Year: Connective (T)issue

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Review: Le tre vite di Aquileia

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Docufilm: Le tre vite di aquileia. Country: Italia – Director: Giovanni Piscaglia – Duration: 60 minutes – Production year: 2019 – Produzione – Production: 3D Produzioni per Fondazione Aquileia – Website: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=n6Jph4ZcL7E

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Keywords: Aquileia, docu-film, three lives, SkyArte, 2200 years

"Le tre vite di Aquileia" is a docu-film made by the Aquileia Foundation to present to the general public the millennial history of the city which became a UNESCO heritage site in 1998. The docu-film was produced by 3D Produzioni in collaboration with Sky Arte and Istituto Luce Cinecittà, directed by Giovanni Piscaglia. The 'number 3' mentioned in the title also highlights the versions in which the documentary was made, together with a 25-minute film intended to welcome visitors and schools in Aquileia and a 3-minute trailer, produced for the occasion of the celebratory exhibition "Aquileia 2200. Porta di Roma verso i Balcani e l'Oriente ".

From the very first sequences, all filmed with a camera mounted on a drone, the Sky filming style becomes immediately evident: Giovanni Piscaglia, in fact, is a documentary maker of the American platform. The images are certainly spectacular and evocative when they show the faces of the Roman statues in the museum or the excavations from above. The intent of the documentary is to restore in 60 minutes the image of a city with many souls and to communicate the complexity of its historical heritage. Aquileia, in fact, is presented in its vital and cosmopolitan dimension, starting from its ancient history up to the present day.

The documentary develops along a general chronological line, although several thematic digressions are also offered from time to time. To guide us in the journey are the interventions of the Director of the Foundation (Cristiano Tiussi), the Director of the Museum (Marta Novello) and the experts.

The first life of Aquileia, the Roman one, begins with the images of the bas-relief that

testifies to its foundation in 181 BC. The Natissa, the river that crosses the city, is also portrayed to underline the perfect balance between land and water which characterizes the city. In fact, the role of military outposts in the Roman conquest of north-eastern Italy and the Danube regions is highlighted, with Aquileia representing one of the most flourishing commercial ports in the Mediterranean.

The inscriptions, the funerary monuments, and the portraits of the National Archaeological Museum, accompany the development of the story of men and women who contributed in making Aquileia a privileged place where different ideas, religions and cultures meet. The economic importance of the city is highlighted through the images of the funerary relief with pressing scenes that recall how the production of wine was a distinctive feature of Aquileia; together with the amber present in the funerary objects of the imperial age, they demonstrate how the north-Adriatic area was, since prehistoric times, an important junction of the "Amber road". Aquileia also had the merit of having saved the fate of Rome and the Empire from the advance of the usurper Maximinus Thrax, who, aiming for the eternal city in 238, found in the capital of the 10th Augustan region, always faithful to Senate, a mighty barrage.

However, the city did not have the same strength before Attila's arrival in 452: its walls gave way after three months of siege and night fell on Aquileia.

But history does not stop, and after having been, in the fourth century, the radiating hub of Christianity towards Central and

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Eastern Europe, Aquileia was on the way to becoming the largest metropolitan diocese on the continent. It was bishop Theodorus who promoted the construction of the largest episcopal complex in the West.

The documentary continues by revealing the various layers of the city and by introducing the second life of Aquileia, the Christian one, thanks to its basilica complex which still represents one of the highest examples of medieval art and architecture in the world. Between 1077 and 1420, it was the capital of an important ecclesiastical state, until the conquest by the Serenissima Republic of Venice.

The third and final story told by the documentary is that of the Great War. During the conflict, Aquileia became a symbol of the reunification of Italy, and this is where the coffin of the Milite Ignoto (the Unknown Soldier) in Vittoriano would originate from, as the images of the Istituto Luce clearly document in the film.

Aquileia continues living in the black and white shots of the Friulian photographer Elio Ciol, which somewhat inherit the function of those epigraphs, busts, portraits, in a sort of circular closure of the documentary.

The strong point of this documentary is certainly its images. Immediate attention is drawn through the scrolling of close-ups, the reconstructions in three-dimensional graphics, and the drone shots. In addition to the quality of the images, the precise editing and the clarity of the display and graphics also contribute to

the success of the documentary. The sounds and music in the documentary film intervene to enrich the images with meaning and to enhance their expressive power.

The choice of employing the directors and the archaeologists involved in the project as narrators instead of making use of a non-specialist to communicate to the wider audience did justice to those who have been working in Aquileia for years. It was, in fact, important to create a product that was able to blend the scientific nature of the discoveries with the right amount of narration, accompanied by different voices of experts.

The only downside is the off-screen text which also acts as a common thread, whose narrating voice is flat and solemn, failing to make the story captivating and which, on the contrary, is very didactic.

However, there is no doubt that SkyArte is a successful production that does not disappoint expectations. The documentary returns the complexity of the historical legacy of Aquileia by investigating the way in which history has become the object of study, excavation, musealization and protection. Aquileia is a non-elitist place, which is in fact not limited exclusively to scholars and researchers but is a reality open to the human community.

The documentary is not just a means of promotion; the richness of the images enables us to feel part of a living city, which constantly renews itself in values at every age and which has embarked on its fourth life cycle.



