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CHAPTER FIVE

THE NORTH-AFRICAN FILM EXPERIENCE OF REX INGRAM: HOLLYWOOD'S "LAWRENCE OF ARABIA"

A foremost aim of this book is the establishment and elaboration of the characteristics and confines of the Oriental genre along clear generic guidelines. It has being largely accepted that film directors are less visible in genre films since the genre's iconography and formalized structure smother individual directorial expressions. Yet, a genre approach ought to not completely disregard the contribution of a director to a genre film, particularly if his/her input significantly rearranges the pre-established generic elements of the film. Depending on each specific film, directorial influence on the Oriental genre may range from significant to no more than a slight twist on a jaded plot line meant to keep audiences interest. However, with regard to director Rex Ingram, it is safe to say that his directorial contribution to the Oriental genre was both extraordinary and far-reaching.

Rex Ingram by no means started the Oriental genre, nor did he make the genre's most famous or commercially successful films. Yet, no other American film director dedicated entire decades of his life to the making of Oriental films in authentic Oriental settings. After 1924, Ingram's life simply became inseparable from his North African films, which he completely dominated from inception to exhibition, making him thus a textbook *auteur*. This chapter will explore the effect that this extraordinary film director had on the Oriental film genre, and in the process bring him to the attention of film enthusiasts who had undeservedly ignored him for too long.

Born Reginald Hitchcock in Dublin in 1893, Rex Ingram arrived in America in time for the nickelodeon era. He first acted for Edison and Vitagraph for a few years before directing his first film, *The Great Problem* (1916) at Universal. The subsequent colossal critical and financial success of his next films *The Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse* (1921), *The Prisoner of Zenda* (1922) and *Scaramouche* (1923) earned Ingram a place, according to film critic Tamar Lane, among the four leaders of the film industry, along with D. W. Griffith, Cecil B. DeMille, and Marshall Neilan (Koszarski 238). Emboldened by these successive money makers, he lobbied for and received permission to make *The Arab* on location in Tunisia in 1924. The film was the first in a series of others made throughout North Africa and in part in his French studios in Nice, the Victorines, acquired for him by M-G-M and later coming under his own control. The most important of these films are: *The Arab* (shot in

Tunisia and released in 1924), *Mare Nostrum* (1925-26), *The Magician* (1926), *The Garden of Allah* (shot in Algeria and released in 1927), and his last film and first in sound, *Baroud* (shot in Morocco in 1932, and released in America under the colorful title, *Love in Morocco*).

The Irish newspaper that carried the notice of his birth also carried this item: "The Ultimatum to Morocco; Sultan consents to pay indemnity for the murder of Juan Trinidad" (O'Leary 10). Ingram was destined to have his fate and that of North Africa intertwined for many years. Liam O'Leary, in his excellent biography of Ingram, noted that Ingram and his brother had visited the International Exhibition at Cork in 1902, during which Ingram's first interest in the Arab world was perhaps first stirred. (O'Leary 19). In fact, it hardly had to take an international exhibition for this young man to become interested in the Orient; since nineteenth-century romantics and Europe's continuing colonial involvement in the region had created in the West what Raymond Schwab had labeled an "Oriental renaissance." When Victor Hugo was composing the *Orientales*, "the entire left-wing element of his audience was composed not of poets but painters; young people expecting Hugo to deliver them from Greco-Latin formalism" (Schwab 411). Hugo had reopened the vast Eastern vistas and legitimized the Oriental experience in art; after that, the traditional voyage to the Orient was duly made by Delacroix, Lamartine, Chateaubriand, Gautier, Nerval, Flaubert, and others. The position of the Orient for the romantics, whatever the medium of expression, was so central and indispensable that in 1840 Maxime De Camp, referring to the previous generation's mediated approach to the Orient, wrote: "To make up the *Orientales* without knowing the Orient is like making rabbit stew without the rabbit" (Schwab 411).

Furthermore, the diffusion of the popular and oft-translated *Arabian Nights*, the accessibility of Indian and Persian lore, the diverse accounts of travelers and histories about the East, and to a certain extent the translation in 1859 of the poetic work of Omar Khayyam, the *Rubaiyat*, literally made of the Orient for the romantics what Rome was for the classical Renaissance. The general pervasiveness of the East in the arts and even in the national mood during the second part of the nineteenth-century was acknowledged by none other than Rex Ingram's father, Dr. Hitchcock, a religious scholar in his own right who had published many works. Dr. Hitchcock once wrote to reassure the British public that "the sense of society may be titillated with the poisonous perfume of the *Rubaiyat* but it is not permeated by it for there is always the virile optimism of Tennyson and Browning to act as an antiseptic in stirring the hearts and kindling the enthusiasm of our people" (O'Leary 34).

Ironically, just as he would later resist the logic of Hollywood, the son, Rex Ingram, rejected the balanced rationality of Browning and fled to the perfume and lure of the East. In a letter to his aunt, dated 17 March 1915, Ingram, now a Vitagraph boy, wrote of his artistic preoccupation with Oriental themes: "I am working the finishing touches to another version of the *Rubaiyat* of Omar Khayyam – you know it– this is my first verse – I'll send you a copy when it is published. I am going to illustrate it myself…. I am going to illustrate it in a rather unique way –illustrating the underlying thought, rather than the literal verse" O'Leary 31). The letter in fact included three quatrains from the poem as well as some sketches.

Perhaps a keen sense for the exotic was behind Ingram's decision to leave the Fox studios early in his career, when his request to make a Chinese film had been denied. Shortly after moving to Universal, he was able to make two Chinese films: *Broken Fetters* and *The Flower of Doom* (1916). The eventual success of *The Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse* permitted Ingram to pursue his interest in the Orient. His immediate task was the making of *The Arab* (1924) on location in Tunis. More than a mere location for his films, North African provided a permanent home for Ingram, which he could access easily from the French Riviera where his Nice studios were located. Even after he quit making films after 1932, the Oriental city of Cairo provided temporary quarters. When he returned to California in the late thirties, the Orient accompanied him in the form of hundreds of objects d'art, sketches, sculptures, and other paraphernalia.

It is perhaps stating the obvious to say that Ingram's immersion in the East informs his Oriental films. No Western film director was more devoted, fascinated, or changed by the East as Ingram was. Arguably, if his Oriental films failed to repeat the success of his previous Hollywood productions it is because of Ingram's peculiar understanding of, and interaction with, the Orient. This reason underscores rather than contradicts the other reasons; namely, Ingram's protracted absences from Hollywood, his loosening grip on the taste and desires of American audiences, and the great changes that befell the medium of film itself, in particular the sudden and disorienting onslaught of sound.

When Ingram left the staged reality of Hollywood he substituted it not only with the make-believe reality of his Nice studio, but with another staged reality, that of colonial North Africa. For many years, North Africa had been occupied with varying degrees of intensity and pain. French colonial philosophy mandated that Algeria should become assimilated into the mother country; while Tunisia and Morocco would endure the realities of colonialism under the euphemistic "protectorate system." The French campaign of submission was referred to as "pacification" of the wild tribes; while Arab

efforts of self defense and nationalism were interpreted as acts of incomprehensible defiance. When Ingram chose Nice as his headquarters and North Africa as his theater of operation, he was in a sense adopting the posture of the colonialist master. The symbolism was further reinforced by Ingram's long friendship with Lyautey, the great colonial conscience with Napoleonic visions. Ingram's novel, *The Legion Advances* (1932), a colorful and violent tale of Arab life, was dedicated to the Maréchal. The friendship reflected similar frames of mind and a developed romantic temperament. Both men, for example, professed great respect for the Islamic Orient and were fascinated by its people. However, despite the Maréchal's unrivaled knowledge of the details of the colonial territories and Ingram's avowed Oriental inclinations, neither managed to transcend their elitist European vantage point to establish a genuine rapport with Arabs and develop an understanding of their needs and aspirations.

Furthermore, Ingram's filmmaking activities and generally his movements throughout North Africa owe a great deal to the blessing and encouragement of the colonial authorities and their native allies. For instance, in order to scout locations for *Baroud*, Ingram set out on a journey throughout Morocco, armed with a safe conduct signed by French General Catroux. It was this trip to the Atlas Mountains that provided satirist Windham Lewis with the opportunity to lampoon Ingram as a "Sheik faker." In his collection, *Journey into Barbary*, Lewis called Ingram "one of the first men to fake a Sheik, an old confederate of Valentino and he had been in it at the birth of the tradition" (Lewis 93). Lewis shrewdly recognized the value of Ingram, the master filmmaker, to the colonial administration in Morocco and the French empire in general. With caustic effect, Lewis lashed out at Ingram: "From the point of view of the French Colonial Authorities….this Sheik-complex must have been fairly handy, and this "Sheik" of the Riviera certainly was afforded every facility with his vulgarization of the Berber Steppes. When he built himself a Kasbah in the Provençal Bled… they must have been rather pleased than otherwise. It would be like an annex of the Colonial Exhibition" (Lewis 93.

Inevitably, Ingram's relationship with the people of North Africa was filtered through this colonial reality. Not that he did not possess some affinity, albeit abstract, with the Arabs; his biographer believed that Ingram "felt a strange affinity with the Arab people, approving of their rather passive attitude to life, contrasting it with the rush and bustle of American habits" (O'Leary 129). In point of fact, during his long sojourn in the Arab lands, it is disputable if he hardly had any real and mutually satisfying contact with ordinary people. His friendship with the Bey of Tunis during the making of *The Arab* resulted in the latter offering him his personal jester, a dwarf by the name of Ben Mairech, who made frequent cameos in many of his films and was all along the butt of Ingram's

temper. A similar paternalistic concern for the East made him adopt a Tunisian boy, Abdelkrim, who also figured besides the dwarf in his film, Mare Nostrum. Another Arab and an extraordinary actor, John George, had met Ingram earlier and appeared in some of his early films. This deformed young man, originally named Tufei Fatella, came from Syria to the United States in 1911 in search of his mother and sisters, who had previously settled in Nashville, Tennessee. Like the other two Arabs, George would become a characteristic feature in Ingram's films, and even appeared with Lon Chaney in the Unknown. The list of vulnerable Arabs also included Rebha, the Tunisian female dancer, whose Tunisian husband Ingram had to compensate for divorcing her before she could dance in his film, *The Garden of Allah*. The amount paid to the husband was reportedly taken from the wage of the dancer. Ingram later took Rebha to his Nice Studios, from which she was one day seen riding away on a bicycle into the French countryside, her fate forever changed. In sum, the Arab people Ingram enjoyed and with whom he was intimately involved included one dwarf, a deformed actor, a child, and a female belly dancer; a foursome characterized by deformity and extreme dependency.

A sense of romantic exaggeration also marks Ingram's acquaintance with another Arab figure, El Glaoui, the great feudal lord of the Atlas and Marrakech. El Glaoui showed great support for Ingram in the making of his last North African film, *Baroud*, supplying men, arms, horses, costumes, and protection. There was perhaps more to the relationship of Ingram with this tribal chief, other than the supply of logistic aid and props. El Glaoui wielded great power in Morocco's south, and was therefore a source of immeasurable fascination for Ingram and Western visitors and readers alike. In 1920, the Tharauds published a book in which they "picture the Great Caids [El Glaoui was perhaps the greatest] as typical representations of ancient nobility, warrior princes who carried the finest traditions of medieval chivalry into the prosaic twentieth century" (Bidwell 113). A lady novelist even reported, or perhaps invented, the legend that the name El Glaoui was derived from Goliath (Bidwell 113). Ingram's keen romantic individualism and a characteristically romantic yearning for the past brought him under the spell of this legendary native; the friend of the French and a controversial figure in the eyes of Moroccan nationalists.

Like Lyautey, the French administrator of Morocco, Ingram learned to write Arabic and took pleasure in signing his acquired Muslim name, Bib Alim Nasr El-din, in Arabic. Also, following an Orientalist tradition honored by Napoleon and Gerard De Nerval, Ingram reportedly became a Moslem and donned the emblematic native Arab garb. News of his conversion caused a stir in Hollywood and Ingram had to explain: "For many years I have been interested in things Arabic and

have always had a profound respect for Islam. I admire much in Islam as I do in Christianity and Buddhism but my sympathy for Islam is rather a question of philosophy of life than faith" (qtd. in O'Leary 176).

Ingram's conversion constituted interesting material which Ingram's publicity agent, Gabriel Costa, duly relayed to fans in the United States and elsewhere. In an article in *The Film Pictorial of London* (15 October 1932), Costa reported "Ingram's adoption of the Islamic faith and that he [Ingram] was received by Abdul-Mejid, ex-sultan of Turkey and Caliph of all Islam." Both Michael Powell, who worked under Ingram in Nice, and O'Leary, think his conversion was real. The former, however, retained a dose of unease about the conversion as late as the 1970s, when his autobiography was published: "Unfortunately Rex loved North Africa and was becoming fascinated by Mohammedanism" (Powell 162). Ingram's Islam, as all the signs indicate, was not more than skin deep, coming more from an idealized view of the life of the Bedouin than a result of a crisis of faith. When it came to religion, Ingram adopted an eclectic and comparative stance, symbolized by one of his clay statues of Christ in the arms of Buddha. His positive views about the desert nomad and his life's style, however, were genuine and seemed to grow in proportion to his increasing dislike for Hollywood and its practices. "The desert nomad," he said, "can pack all his earthly goods in a couple of camel bags. He is richer, more free and happier than the richest man in the world. In the desert all men are free and equal. Their code is the unwritten law of hospitality. Nothing can threaten this freedom, not even Bolshevism, because in threatening there is nothing material to gain; so the personal freedom of the nomad will continue indefinitely" (O'Leary 173).

Ingram's conversion to Islam did not go unnoticed by lampoonist Windham Lewis who offered this explanation: "He said he had become a Mohammedan–at least his publicity-staff interpreted his fascination for Islam and for Islamic Sensations in that way. For the public of the Sheik-fans at all events he was a follower of the Prophet. He had built himself a Berber *Timgremt* or Kasbah, upon the Riviera…. Yes, not content with living amongst sham-Sheiks, false Palace-guards, Mokhaznis, and Viziers, for a few months every year, he actually wanted to *be* a Sheik forever" (Lewis 93).

The Kasbah Lewis was referring to was Ingram's villa in Nice, which he decorated with Moorish objets d'art and a collection of paintings by Dinet, a French painter who had also given up Western ways to live as a brother among Arabs. Clearly, Ingram has carried his novel Sheik status seriously as far as his residence at Nice; where, many have observed, he was not above acting as sultan to his guests and to the Niçoise bathing girls.

Inevitably, Ingram's life-style, his publicized conversion to Islam, and in particular his unfavorable remarks about Hollywood as an enemy of artistic creation, made the people at M-G-M uneasy and the Hollywood colony in general suspicious and angry. When in 1926 M-G-M refused to renew Ingram's contract, Louella Parson, the sharp voice of the industry and the reflector of its mood, wrote in The *American* (23 July 1927): "No one can deny that the officials of M-G-M have had the patience of Job with Rex Ingram. Mr. Ingram refused point blank to make his pictures in America, although Marcus Loew pleaded with him to come to Culver City where he would have every facility and co-operation." She added: "As I remember the situation, Mr. Ingram did a lot of talking about Bourgeois America and Hollywood conditions…. My only surprise is that M-G-M did not take this stand a long time ago." (qtd. in O'Leary 169) Ingram, however, was certain he was the target of this criticism because "the Americans are sick with [him] for producing out of Hollywood. They like money to come into their country, not to leave it." (Ibid)

The Arab (1924)

Although Ingram operated within an Orientalist world-view and produced films that could be placed at the center of the Oriental genre, there is no doubt his intense, intimate, and peculiar relationship with the Orient had resulted in a vision very much his own. In large measure, this relationship was characterized by the ambiguous and shallow rapport with the common Arab, an ideological alliance with the region's colonial rulers, a fascination with local feudal lords, his conversion to Islam, his perceived status as Sheik and demigod, and a romantic predilection toward the deformed and exotic. Ingram's relationship with the Orient simply failed to connect. It is symptomatic that the myriad relationships depicted in his North African films, in particular those concerned with inter-racial love and marriage, themselves tell of a similar story of unconsummated rapports. To a large extent, the failed relationships, the cinematic as well as the personal, stand as a metonymy to the wider and more violent colonial relationship in the region. Ingram's film, *The Arab*, is a demonstration of this.

The Arab (1924) was probably intended to invoke the Sheik/Valentino formula, a successful and proven recipe no Oriental picture in the few following years after *The Sheik* of 1921 could afford to ignore or go against. According to one reviewer, "the picturialization of Mrs. E. M. Hull's novel, *The Sheik*, started a craze among film producers for Sahara photoplays in which the beguiling beauty of Anglo-Saxon maidens wrought havoc with handsome Arabian chieftains." (*The New York Times* 14 July 1924)

Based on the Edgar Selwyn play (first made into a film in 1914 by Lasky with Selwyn himself in the lead), the story revolves around a love relationship between a Christian missionary's daughter and the son of an Arab chief, Jamil, culminating in the latter rescuing the Christians from a massacre on the hand of the natives. Jamil (played by Ramon Novarro) likes to describe himself as "the best dragoman in the world," and is therefore proud of, and often shows, a testimonial written for him by an American which he thinks contains his praise but actually reads thus: "Jamil is the finest little liar in this country of liars, and as a dragoman he is a bunco artist." To a white girl, Mary Hilbert (played by Alice Terry, Ingram's wife), the manners of this indigenous Arab are peculiar, since his sole interest in having the Bible read to him by pretty Mary Hilbert comes from listening to the sweet voice and watching the fair face before him.

Despite saving the white girl and the Christian mission (brazenly erected by the side of a mosque, as a reviewer was able to remark) from destruction by marauding Arabs, Jamil and the girl do not unite in the customary Hollywood salute to the divinity of love and family. The ending is strategically left open; yet, the traditional attitude to miscegenation leaves no doubt that this relationship will go unconsummated. *Variety* gingerly but tellingly approached the point: "The 'happy ending' is wisely left 'open' –it is asking too much for her to dismiss the handsome noble Moslem who has saved her and her whole white family and flock, given up his indigenous rascalities for her and fallen in love with her; yet he is 'tan,' by birth and tradition, and she is white –oh, so white" (*Variety* 16 July 1924).

The romantic relationship does not mask the longstanding state of conflict between West and East; in fact it dramatizes and re-enacts it, as is further symbolized by the Christian missionaries' and the colony's attitudes and actions against the Muslim Arab tribes. *The New York Times* was able to discern the colonial drift of the film in a statement that may be taken to reflect America's post-war sense of restraint and feeling that the Europeans' involvement with the colonies is not beyond questioning: "The tale is spun around the hatred of the Mohammedans for the 'infidels,' and consequently one is surprised at the temerity of the missionary, Dr. Hilbert, in setting up the headquarters in a house contiguous to a mosque" (*The New York Times* 14 July 1924).

Made in Tunisian Gabes and Sidi Bou Said, *The Arab*'s iconography and general atmosphere responded to Maxime de Camp's previously cited injunction to the romantics to seek the real Orient for their artistic productions. As such, Ingram crammed in as much atmosphere and local color from the East as possible, commandeering, among other Oriental paraphernalia, about 800 camels and 400 horses (O'Leary 134). Reviewers approved of Ingram's insistence to go on location, as is evident from

this endorsement by *Variety*: "there is a complete illusion of being there with the events. *The Arab* gives the truest impression of the great desert that this reviewer has ever enjoyed, even when in the desert himself, for Ingram is a better picker than this reviewer and a more inspired translator of symbolisms into concrete picturialization" (*Variety* 16 July 1924).

The famed American poet Carl Sandburg, also a fine critic and apologist of the new motion picture medium, was cited in *the Chicago Daily News* article, "Chicago Critics Applaud Rex Ingram's *The Arab*," as saying that "in several of its scenes [*The Arab*] delivers sketches of Arabia that are the work of genius" (qtd. in *The Moving Picture World* 13 Sep. 1924). In the same article, another Chicago critic, Bob Reel, lauded Ingram's direction: "*The Arab* is great. Of the Sheik type of photodrama it rises above its class. In the first 100 feet you are given more genuine atmosphere of Algiers (sic) than is to be found in the entire seven or eight thousand feet of any of its competitor." Similarly, Maurine Watkins of the *Chicago Daily Tribune* was impressed by the "colorful scenes of the Orient, patriarchs with long beards and flowing robes, broken walls and white stone roads, mosques and temples, Turks with cruel scimitars, Bedouins on eager steeds." Virginia Dale's endorsement in the *Chicago Daily Journal* was spontaneous and perhaps representative of female reactions to Oriental pictures: "Once again an Arabian Knight flies over the moonlit desert, a white girl standing enthralled and the audience ready to jump out of its seat. This is Rex Ingram at his best and I would walk a mile for a camel, a hero and a lady as he presents them."

Ingram's excessive (romantic) attention to detail, his skill as a master pictorialist and his staging abilities were visible to all. Ingram's production manager in *The Garden of Allah* offers a glimpse of a meticulous master at work: "We had a set in a deserted town in the desert. The prop man shot spider webs around the interior. Rex looked at the set and asked if there could be spiders in the desert. I checked this out and there could not be. So out came the webs…. He made drawings of the sets with details of the furnishings. We had to find out just such pieces, sometimes going to Paris to rent them." (Qtd. in O'Leary 174)

Heightened attention to detail did cost Ingram precious time resources; and if he were not now independent of Hollywood, this luxury would have been certainly denied him. Often, he would spend months, and in the case of *Baroud*, even years scouting locations in North Africa. It is therefore illegitimate to ask what for Ingram came first: making films, or living in Arab lands, or filtering the Orient through his peculiar lenses.

The Garden of Allah (1927)

The Garden of Allah (1927) was indeed the type of picture many other filmmakers wanted to make, but none was more naturally or publicly drawn to it than Ingram. Frank Scully, the publicity man for the film, advanced in his book *Cross my Heart*, the theory that Ingram wanted to make The Garden because the monk in it has a bastard child (0'Leary 172). My view however is that the parallels between Ingram and the monk are legion; chief among them is the monk's repudiation of monastery life, a move which should bring to mind Ingram's grappling with the issue of faith, his abandonment of Christianity in favor of Islam; and most importantly perhaps, a vicarious return of Ingram to the Christian fold, just as the monk returns to the vows and the monastery after the temporary lapse.

The Garden of Allah, based on the popular Hichens novel, had previously been filmed a decade earlier (in 1916) by Colin Campbell, with Helen Ware and Tom Santsci in the lead. The tale seemingly continued to fascinate, as Richard Boleslavsky later filmed it in 1936 as a sound film featuring Marlene Dietrich and Charles Boyer. The film recounts some events in the life of Boris Androvski, a rich novice who has embraced a religious career and become a monk in the Trappist monastery of Staoueley, in southern Algeria. The young monk, now Father Adrien, finds the monastic regime too severe. After being kissed by a girl whom he has saved after falling from a tree, father Adrian becomes tormented and finally decides to quit the monastery. After regaining his liberty, he becomes an elegant man of the world. Traveling in the Biskra region he helps save an English lady, Dominique, from being robbed in a native dance hall. After a period of friendship comes their marriage. Dominique is extremely religious, but somewhat eccentric as she insists on passing the honeymoon in the desert. During a sandstorm, Boris confesses his former calling to his wife and his dislike for modern civilization. Dominique recognizes that her husband is not shaped for society and concurs with his decision to return to Holy orders. As he enters the monastery for the rest of his life, the 'widowed' Dominique decides to live alone in Algeria, consoled in her solitude by a child, the fruit of her brief marriage to the monk.

The film, premiering on 2 September 1927 at the Embassy Theatre, New York, achieved some commercial success but attracted some mixed press. The beauty of the desert and the North African setting, rendered faithfully by Ingram and photographer Lee Garmes, were singled out for praise. *The Moving Picture World* believed it to be "a picture that for sheer beauty of scene has never been equaled" (3 Sep. 1927) but felt that atmosphere and pictorial qualities were achieved at the expense of character. *The New York Times* was guarded but reflected a general mood of the audience weariness: "the effect of the many desert romances that have preceded [*The Garden of Allah*] have undoubtedly made Mr.

Ingram's task a very difficult one. *The Garden of Allah* is a picture which one regretfully finds to be a series of scenes which in themselves are pleasing to the eye, but which do not often engender much in the way of suspense or drama, except in individual episodes. And the characters, with the exception of Boris, are lacking in vitality" (*The New York Times* 3 Sep. 1927).

In its comprehensive review of the film, *Variety* similarly observed that the film is somehow dated in both subject matter and technique; defects feared traceable to Ingram's absence from Hollywood. Specifically, the failure is to be attributed to Ingram not keeping up with new developments in film technique and audience taste. Here are some of *Variety* explanations: "What faults *The Garden of Allah* has may either be attributed to the making or the cutting. No question that in certain passages the story becomes dull as it pauses. Running 90 minutes, there is much that the program houses will delete and which should be of advantage to the picture. At odd moments some of the photography is beautiful as regards desert scenes. Yet the sandstorm, the kick of the play, doesn't impress as much more than a flurry against the big stuff that has been hitting the screen of late. A main idea again is that possibly Ingram has been staying away from this country too long" (7 Sep. 1927).

Ingram did not seem to heed the critics' and the audiences' shifting alliances and tastes, as these were exactly the same criticisms leveled later at his last and first sound picture *Baroud*.

Baroud (1932)

Baroud was made at a time when Ingram's Nice studios had already slipped away from his control, and most importantly after his Hollywood backers had either died or ceased to be supportive (for example, Marcus Loew, the only friendly executive at MGM; Rudolph Valentino, his friend and protégé; and June Mathis, his favorite scriptwriter, all died in 1926). Therefore, financial backing for the film came from an English producer, United Artists only undertook distribution. An assortment of international actors with varying degrees of experience was used, while hordes of Moroccans supplied the needed local color. It was by then apparent that Ingram lacked confidence in native talent, a feeling which coheres with his Orientalist paternalism. After all, the Orient for Ingram was largely a palette of vivid and exotic colors to be dished out to eager Western audiences.

The plot of *Baroud*, involving the familiar love relationship between a native female and a Western male, was based on a story by Ingram and Benno Vignay, whose novel, *Amy Jolly*, later provided the material for Von Sternberg's Morocco. A French officer falls in love with a female native, who happens to be the sister of the officer's native friend and the daughter of an Arab chief. The brother

disapproves of this relationship and, as custom dictates, decides to kill his French friend. The Arab chief in the meantime comes under attack from a bandit and the French officer and the brother rally to his support. The film ends with the French lover riding off with his regiment as the native female lover bids him farewell, in a gesture reminiscent of the finale of *The Arab*.

Of the three film versions announced to be made (in English, French, and Arabic) only the English and French materialized –the significance of the omission hardly needs underscoring. The film(s) took a year to prepare and another to make, costing $1 million. For the French version, Rolland Caillaux played Ingram's part and Colette Darfeuil that of Rosita Garcia.

Baroud was released in France by Armor Films and in Britain by Ideal Films. Its reception was mixed at best. The film's international cast did hurt the film, as did Ingram's unease with the new sound technology. Reviewers invariably and rightly noted the weaknesses in characterization and the excessive concern for local color. *The New York Times* thought the film "pleasantly amateurish in its acting, juvenile in its story development and definitely charming in its creation of the Moroccan atmosphere and the dark beauty of its people as idealized by Mr. Ingram's canvas. The pastel skies, the mountains and the desert country, the narrow winding alleys of Marrakesh, the flat white houses and the Moorish civilization make a fascinating background" (*The New York Times* 20 March 1933).

Variety, on the other hand, was exasperatingly damning. Ingram, it noted, has become incorrigible in his superficial rendering of the East: "It is all Ingram. He retains his looks, but what he's actually done is to take a good old-fashioned western and transpose it to Morocco. Two tribes are warring, and in the usual way, the good tribe is surrounded in the fortress, while a messenger is dispatched for aid. The bad boys are closing in, the good boys run out of ammunition, it looks like finis. But in the distance, a blare of trumpets, a roll of drums–the marines…. Feeling throughout is that the film is merely a shell. No warmth and no fire" (21 March 1933).

And, it was Ingram himself who played the role of the French officer, in front of Rosita Garcia who played the native girl. Windham Lewis, who deemed the director-turned-actor excellent fieldwork for a psychologist, wondered with characteristically biting rhetoric, "why at this distant date from such epical events [Ingram's successful past] this wire pulling dictator should wish to take a hand himself in the sets, at the dead end of the wire, where the automatons capers–and smile out in debonair close-ups, or prance in wistful middle distance shots, for the benefit of a gum-chewing World-pit–that was difficult to see" (Lewis 94).

One ought to agree with Lewis: it is surely difficult to comprehend why the celebrated director of The Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse, (labeled once one of the four, never however outside the ten, best directors of the silent era), suddenly opted to appear in a film like *Baroud* at a time when his career was on a clear downside trend. One answer, or rather an impetus, could be his admiration for the colonial mission in general, turned into support through the adoption of the colonial uniform.

Those who came into contact with Ingram were usually struck by his colorful, yet also discordant, personality. The man who chose to stay in Europe and North Africa, away from the Hollywood that bestowed fame and power upon him, appropriated and came to exercise extraordinary princely qualities and capabilities. Ingram was a self-idealizer who was not beyond preaching what he rarely practiced. His strutting and posing throughout Morocco earned him the label of "Sheik faker". More important to comprehending his downfall is his failure to take seriously his own recipe about filmmaking. He once wrote: "There is a tendency in film production when one is striving to make something of beauty, to sacrifice, or lose sight of, story theme. In moving pictures, this is particularly dangerous…" (qtd. in Koszarski 88). In his Oriental films, Ingram did not attend to the choice of story and characterization, privileging instead photographic detail and artistic design. Moreover, although he believed that a successful director is one who enjoys a broad familiarity "with the world at large; an intimate knowledge of the races; an understanding of how people live in the countries throughout the earth," he himself was never able to perceptibly delve into the mindset, the practices, and the aspirations of his Oriental subjects. Notwithstanding his professed love and respect for the Arabs, "for they are the most sincere people in the world," as he said in an interview in 1926 (*The New York Times* 19 Sep. 1926) the Arabs in Ingram's films emerge either as romantic oddities (dwarfs and hunchbacks), violent marauders, or lifeless shadows, as expressive and one dimensional as their spears.

In fact, in reducing the conflict between the natives and the French into the terms of Barbarians versus Civilized, in adopting a paternal and essentially Romanticist and Orientalist view, and in staging and managing the East for export, Ingram wound up caricaturing the Oriental instead of understanding him. By secluding himself in Nice and North Africa, Ingram also failed to keep track of shifting Western tastes as well as the rapid and far-reaching technical and aesthetic advances brought about by the sound film. Like Griffith, Ingram simply had become dated. *Variety*'s comment on *Baroud* sums up the failure of Ingram's Oriental mission: "Someday somebody will make a good picture of, about, or, in Morocco. This one, like its predecessors, has some beautiful scenery and costumery, with

its authenticity, but that is all" (21 March 1933). Many today would agree with this feeling, deeming it applicable to past and present attempts at the cinematic representation of the Arab.

Ingram: Hollywood's "Lawrence of Arabia"?

Throughout this section, I delayed succumbing to the temptation to label Rex Ingram "the Lawrence of Arabia" of cinema. Indeed, the commonalties between Rex Ingram and T. E. Lawrence are legion; some go beyond the fact that both lived in the Orient for a considerable period of time and had significant and far-reaching contacts with its inhabitants. Curiously, Ingram's biographer does not mention whether Ingram had met Lawrence or, like so many of his contemporaries, he at least followed and admired the famed heroics and singular adventures of Lawrence of Arabia. Be that as it may, it is safe to say that Ingram could not have been oblivious to the legend of this British adventurer, particularly as cinema has done so much to boost his myth. Before David Lean's *Lawrence of Arabia* (1962), T. E. Lawrence had himself recognized the mythologizing power of film, and when the chance had come, he was eager to pose for Lowell Thomas' successful film/lecture "With Allenby in Palestine and Lawrence in Arabia" (1919-1920). Thomas' 1926 book, *With Lawrence in Arabia*, is credited with the glorification of Lawrence, but it was the film/lecture, and particularly the photography of the Arabian scenes, including a moonlit evening on the Nile, which made Lawrence, in his own words, "a kind of matinee idol." This is not surprising; between 1919 and 1923, the film/lecture was shown about four thousand times to four million people around the world (Anderegg 106).

Both Ingram and Lawrence lived in the East amongst the Arabs; and both used them for their own purposes. Both were admired and hated, both became god-like figures; neither British nor American nor Arab. Both represented the British Empire, becoming apologists and admirers of European colonialism; yet both became victims of imperialism, in the sense that none was able to transcend the political realities of the region to be able to express their intimate views or reach their individual potential. Also, both were outstanding actors, performing on a larger stage called the Orient, recycling its inhabitants, plants, and artifacts into props and spectators for their itinerary shows.

In a chapter on "Lawrence of Arabia", Michael Anderegg advances three paradoxes having marked the life of T. E. Lawrence. Of these Ingram could comfortably share two: the "Good/Bad Imperialist paradox" and "The Paradox of Self-Promotion/self-Abnegation"

With regard to the first, Lawrence loved the East, its desert nights, and its people. He longed and worked hard to lead an oppressed people out of bondage; but he also sold out the Arab cause at the

Peace Conference. Worse, he could write the following about the Arabs he proclaimed to love: "for an Englishman to put himself at the disposal of a red race is to sell himself to a brute, like Swift's Houyhnhnms" (qtd. in Anderegg 107). Similarly, Ingram loved the Arabs, admired the Oriental space and its inhabitants, enjoyed the translation and worked on illustration of the Khayyam's *Rubaiyat*, made of North-Africa and Egypt a home for more than a decade, sacrificing the luxury and fame Hollywood had bestowed upon him. Yet, Ingram is also the man who treated the East as a huge bazaar, strutting across its mountains and plains with spectacular arrogance and detachment, playing master to the deformed and the weak, and allying himself to local potentates (the Bey of Tunis, the Pasha El-Glaoui in Morocco….) and to French colonial masters in North Africa, on whose behalf he was content to relay to the world pictures of exoticism, beauty and primitiveness, in lieu of championing self-determination for those he repeatedly called the "most sincere people in the world". In David Lean's *Lawrence of Arabia* (1962), Prince Feisal tells Lawrence: "the English have a great hunger for desolate places." Both Ingram and Lawrence have labored to satisfy this imperial hunger: actively in the case of Lawrence, vicariously in Ingram's case through his films and in particular while in the uniform of the French officer in the film, *Baroud*.

As to "the Paradox of Self-Promotion/self-Abnegation," Lawrence of Arabia enjoyed posing for Lowell Thomas' photographer in the flamboyant white robes of the Arabs in an attempt to consolidate his own myth. He also constructed for himself a palatial literary edifice, *The Seven Pillars of Wisdom*, where he recounted his real and imaginary exploits. Yet this demigod sometimes shunned publicity, and even chose to enlist in the Royal Tank Corps as a private under a false name. Likewise, Ingram converted to Islam admittedly on the strength of the simplicity of the Muslims, and at times donned the humble Arab dress in Rabat to pass as a native. At the same time, Ingram was indeed overpowered by a Sheik complex. An indefatigable self-promoter, he often acted as a royal or sought the company of the great, the rich and famous. The greatest highlight of Ingram's career perhaps, and his closest brush with hubris, may have been his self-imposed righteous mission to speak for, present, and represent an entire people living in a space a hundred times bigger than his native Ireland. For, in this he seemed to reiterate that opening quote to Said's *Orientalism* from Karl Marx's *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte*: "They cannot represent themselves; they must be represented."