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Das Indische Grabmal [Part 2] (The Tiger of Eschnapur [Part 1]; The Indian Tomb [Part 2])

West Germany/Italy/France, 1958

Director: Fritz Lang

Dist—BFI. *p.c*—CCC Film (West Berlin)/Rizzoli Film (Rome)/Régina/Critérion Film (Paris). *exec. p*—Artur Brauner. *p*—Eberhard Meichsner, Louise de Masure. *p. managers*—Woldemar Wasa, Wolfgang Volker, Peter Krahe. *asst. d*—Frank Winterstein. *sc*—Werner Jörg Lüddecke, Fritz Lang. Based on a novel by Richard Eichberg and an original idea by Thea von Harbou. *adapt*—Thea von Harbou, Fritz Lang. *ph*—Richard Angst. *ColorScope*. *col*—Eastman Colour. *ed*—Walter Wischniewsky. *a.d*—Willi Schatz, Helmut Nentwig. *m*—(*Der Tiger von Eschnapur*) Michel Michelet, (*Das Indische Grabmal*) Gerhard Becker. *instrumentation* *m.d*—Gerhard Becker. *cost*—Claudia Herberg. (Debra Paget) Günter Brosda. *choreo*—Robby Gay, Billy Daniel. *make-up*—Jupp Paschke, Heinz Stamm. *sd. rec*—Clemens Tütsch. *p. assistant*—Frank Winterstein. *l.p*—Debra Paget (*Seeta*), Walter Reyer (*Chandra*), Paul Hubschmid (*Harald Berger*), Claus Holm (*Dr. Walter Rhode*), Sabine Bethmann (*Irene Rhode*), Valery Inkijonoff (*Yama*), René Deltgen (*Prince Ramigani*), Jochen Brockmann (*Padhu*), Jochen Blume (*Asagara*), Richard Lauffen (*Bhowana*), Helmut Hildebrand (*Ramigani's Servant*), Victor Francen (*Busser*), Panos Papadopoulos (*Messenger*); *Der Tiger von Eschnapur*: Luciana Paluzzi (*Bahrani*); *Das Indische Grabmal*: Guido Celano (*General Dagh*), Angela Portulari (*Peasant*). (*Der Tiger von Eschnapur*) 3,636 ft. 101 mins; (*Das Indische Grabmal*) 3,420 ft. 95 mins. (16 mm.). *Subtitles*.

Der Tiger von Eschnapur [Part 1]. Architect Harald Berger, en route to an appointment as adviser to Chandra, the Maharajah of Eschnapur, rescues Seeta, an Indian dancer also bound for Chandra's palace, from an attack by a man-eating tiger. Their friendship subsequently flourishes. Berger, who deduces that her father was a European, wishes to watch Seeta dance in the temple and does so, despite the warnings of his assistant Asagara, after discovering a secret tunnel beneath the palace. Chandra's brother Ramigani plots with other notables, including Padhu and the High Priest Yama, to seize the Maharajah's throne. During a tiger hunt, Seeta, to whom Chandra has proposed marriage, is kidnapped by Padhu; Chandra gives chase, however, rescues her and discredits Padhu. But Ramigani still plots to turn popular feeling against his brother by revealing Chandra's relationship with Seeta, and consequently sets about destroying the evidence that Seeta and Berger have become lovers by arranging the death of Seeta's maid Bahrani, a potential witness to her mistress' liaison. Later, Chandra himself witnesses a lovers' tryst. In a jealous rage he has Berger cast into the tiger pit, but the latter kills one of the beasts and is set free on condition he leaves the palace. When Seeta leaves with Berger, Chandra's soldiers are despatched after them. *Das Indische Grabmal* [Part 2]. Seeta and Berger are saved by villagers but subsequently betrayed for the Maharajah's reward and chased into the mountains. Eventually, Seeta is captured and in a fight with guards Berger falls over a cliff and is reported dead, although in fact Ramigani has taken him in secret to a palace dungeon to use as a weapon against Seeta. Meanwhile, Berger's sister Irene and her husband Dr. Walter Rhode have arrived at the palace and become suspicious of what they are told. Chandra vows love for Seeta and violates a sacred custom in order to save her life at a trial before the High Priest. Seeta spurns Chandra, however, whereupon he swears she will become his bride; after the wedding ceremony she will be buried alive in a massive tomb which Rhode is required, under false pretences, to design. Irene finds Seeta, who has herself traced Berger's whereabouts, and as a result Irene and her husband discover Berger's dungeon. Berger has, in the meantime, effected his own escape. At this time, Padhu leads a short-lived palace revolution. Chandra is about to be put to death when troops under the command of the loyal General Dagh overthrow the insurgents. In the ensuing mêlée, Padhu is killed and Ramigani dies in the jaws of a crocodile. Chandra forgets his pride and permits Berger and Seeta to leave peacefully together.

Harking back not only—one supposes—to the screenplay which Lang wrote with von Harbou for Joe May's 1921 version, but also to Lang's self-directed *Die Spinnen* (1919-20), this two-part movie is unabashedly archaic in its plot materials. The premises of the exotic pulp serial are faithfully observed in every respect, from background incidentals (comic chimp steals hero's toothpaste) to foreground essentials (chief heavy polished off by crocodile in last reel) as well as in the comic-strip dialogue ("Treacherous dog"), but above all in the linear narrative, which proceeds episodically from one, frequently self-contained, climax to another, sometimes with no pretence to internal logic. Several passages permit Lang to respond gleefully with flamboyantly precise set-pieces, such as the Maharajah's trap which drives Berger inexorably towards the tiger pit. At a deeper level of interest, the film can be related to two of the late movies of Lang's Hollywood period, *Rancho Notorious* and

Moonfleet, which also impose formal patterns on genre material. The use of the ballad in the former and the circular construction of the latter serve much the same function as the exaggerated episodic linearity of the Indian film, establishing an unbreakable chain of causality. As independent works, it must be said, the American movies clearly have the edge, both in boasting charismatic performers like Marlene Dietrich and George Sanders to embody their stereotypes—Paul Hubschmid proves a sadly charmless pukka sahib—and (*Moonfleet* particularly) in their much superior production values. In the Indian film, in fact, the stylisation is erratic: odd details are intriguingly anti-realist, like the symmetrically painted lash marks on the Maharajah's back, and it is a pleasing enough conceit to costume Debra Paget for her temple dance like a chorus extra from *Party Girl*. But to have her menaced by a patently dummy snake attached to all too visible wires is, alas, unacceptable on any level of artifice. As a fable, the film can be seen to draw together several elements from previous works. The positive and negative moral poles within the story are articulated through a schematic stress on family relationships: Berger's chief allies are his sister and brother-in-law. Such relationships have proved a key motif in Lang's later movies—for example, positively, Stewart Granger becoming surrogate father to Jon Whiteley in *Moonfleet*; negatively, the failed relations with their fathers of both

Vincent Price and John Barrymore Jr. in *While the City Sleeps*. Even more significant, though, is the turning inside out of the theme of jealous revenge. Lang told Peter Bogdanovich that the title *Tiger von Eschnapur* was intended to refer to the Maharajah—and while Berger does, of course, come to play the familiar Langian roles of quarry and captive, the Maharajah can be seen as implicitly occupying the centre of the film. Inasmuch as he is a man whose personality is transformed by the loss of the woman he loves, he resembles many another Lang protagonist. In, say, *The Big Heat*, this loss generates the destructive drive by which the protagonist can combat the forces of evil, and is thus tragically celebrated by the film. Here, however, not only does the woman remain alive (thus allowing a full weight of criticism to fall on the Maharajah) but the evil conspirators are routed by an act of instinctive loyalty on the part of General Dagh and his troops. As the result of this moral lesson, the Maharajah is able to abandon his destructive jealousy. Fate has proved benevolent, but one may reflect that it has been necessary for Lang to retreat into a golden-lit fairy-tale to make it so.

TIM PULLEINE

(These films were reviewed in an abbreviated version in the M.F.B., No. 340, p. 64.)