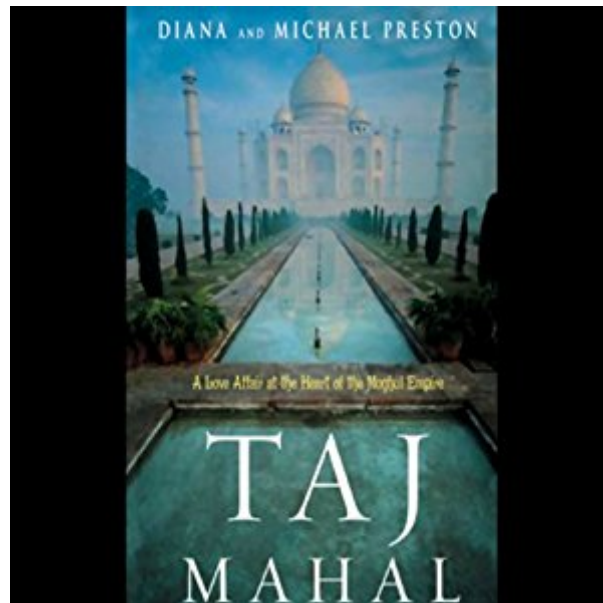


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Taj Mahal: Passion And Genius At The Heart Of The Moghul Empire



Synopsis

While Galileo was suffering under house arrest at the hands of Pope Urban VIII, the Thirty Years War was ruining Europe, and the Pilgrims were struggling to survive in the New World, work began on what would become one of the Seven Wonders of the World: the Taj Mahal. Built by the Moghul emperor Shah Jahan as a memorial to his beloved wife, Mumtaz Mahal, its flawless symmetry and gleaming presence have for centuries dazzled all who have seen it. The story of its creation is a fascinating blend of cultural and architectural heritage. Yet, as Diana and Michael Preston vividly convey in the first narrative history of the Taj Mahal, it also reflects the magnificent history of the Moghul Empire, beginning with legendary warriors Genghis Khan and Tamburlaine. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

. A splendid little book. Not just about the famous monument, but a complete and concise history of the Moghuls from Babur to Aurangzeb. That provides the setting for a more detailed account of the lives of Shah Jehan and Mumtaz. Full of anecdotal detail from the memoirs of British and Venetian visitors to the Moghul court. The usual fallout with Jahangir and a period of rebellion, but a proven effective general in Deccan wars as well as a connoisseur of fine arts. Probably kills his most competitive brother Khusrau. Is consistently beaten by his father's armies during the rebellion and has to make amends. Then outlives all the competition against the machinations of step-mother and mother in law (all in one) Nur. Fights numerous campaigns afterwards, always taking the empress with him and she dies in her late 30s after a 12th pregnancy. Then the massive tomb project. Surprisingly little on the actual architectural details, although a

reasonably clear idea of the layout. Most detail related to the elaborate inlays of calligraphy and flowers. These are not normally prominent in the panoramic photos of the shrine. Daughter Jahanara becomes the focus of his life afterwards. The last Moghul years seen as decay of the whole empire as it descends into corruption and inefficiency – the income being tripled, but the spending quadruples, while Aurangzeb adopts a rigorous Islamic policy that alienates his allies and subjects. Court favorites rewarded sumptuous salaries and no investment or encouragement of new enterprise. So the architecture remains but the last days of the reign were a sad sequel. Ends the book with an examination of several important issues. Refutes any western influence on the plan. Suggests SJ may have intended a separate but matching black marble tomb across the river in the Mahtab Bagh garden, but was unceremoniously stuck into the Taj by his ungrateful son. But that garden across the river seems to form a symmetrical plan with the grounds of the Taj, and the author contends that must have been an integral part of the artistic plan. The book certainly enhanced my appreciation of the Taj on a recent visit.

Taj Mahal by Diana Preston depicts the Taj Mahal as this breathtakingly beautiful tribute to a great love between Shah Jahan, the Mogul emperor and his wife Mumtaz Mahul, who died during childbirth. Although Preston labors for entire chapters over the beauty of the Taj Mahul and the love these two people shared, the rest of the book is dedicated to illustrating the barbaric inter-family brutality and lust for power that eventually led to the downfall of Mogul rule. For the many advancements and achievements credited to the Mogul empires under the Jahan line from beautiful architecture to advances in mathematics and education, the empire itself is tainted beyond repair because the quest to get and hold land and power proved all consuming, pitting fathers and sons against one another and even in one case a scheming female against the Shah. This culture of war depleted the Mogul strength and eventually made them ripe for conquest. Fans of architecture will love it for the vivid descriptions of the Taj's picturesque beauty and fans of an intriguing story will love the dynamic story of family betrayals and loyalties unfolding as an empire hangs in the balance.

Fascinating little history of the Mughals and of the devotion between Sha Jahan and Mumtaz. I got that book for my daughter, and she was so intrigued by the story she visited India, mainly to see the Taj Mahal.

I enjoyed reading this book before I went to India.

Although the Prestons' book is well written, only a portion of it delivers what its title and cover seem to promise. This, of course, you will quickly discover if you have a copy to preview. If you don't, you should know that much of the book focuses on the struggles to gain/keep territory and the throne over the course of almost two centuries and six shahs. There is also much information about various shahs' idiosyncrasies and addictions, their strengths and weaknesses as leaders, and the customs of their courts and harems. What 3/4ths of the Prestons' book is really about, in fact, was equally well covered in the aptly titled *A Brief History of the Great Moghuls*, reprinted in 2002. It is difficult to rate the approximately 60 pages of text in the Prestons' book that do focus on the Taj complex, including its antecedents, the people directly involved in its construction, its ornamentation, the toll time has taken on it, and a chapter on the theory that Shah Jahan had planned a different mausoleum for himself. Those who are reading about the complex in depth for the first time will likely find the material interesting; those who have read other books on the subject are unlikely to find much that is new. Unfortunately, it is not at all difficult to rate the 23 snapshots of the Taj complex and related funerary architecture in this book. First, most are small, grainy black and grays that reveal little more than general outlines. Second, even the seven in color (four of them small ones of interior details) are taken from too great a distance to reveal technical brilliance or artistry. That only the cover and another mood shot of the mausoleum appear to be the work of a professional is a major weakness in a book that purports to be about the genius of the Taj Mahal, for only superb photography can truly convey much of it. As for drawings to illuminate structural detail, the only two merely shade in an arch and a vault. For the reasons noted above and more, if you are interested in India's national treasure, you will do yourself a great favor if, before deciding on the Prestons' book, you investigate the following: 1) Okada, Joshi & Nou's *Taj Mahal* (1993), a visually stunning and informative book and 2) E. Koch's *The Complete Taj Mahal* (2006), a TEN-STAR BOOK that "should be in the library of anyone fascinated by the Taj Mahal, not just historians and architects." (Incidentally, that the Prestons' bookcover is almost identical to Koch's does not make their book comparable to hers.)

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