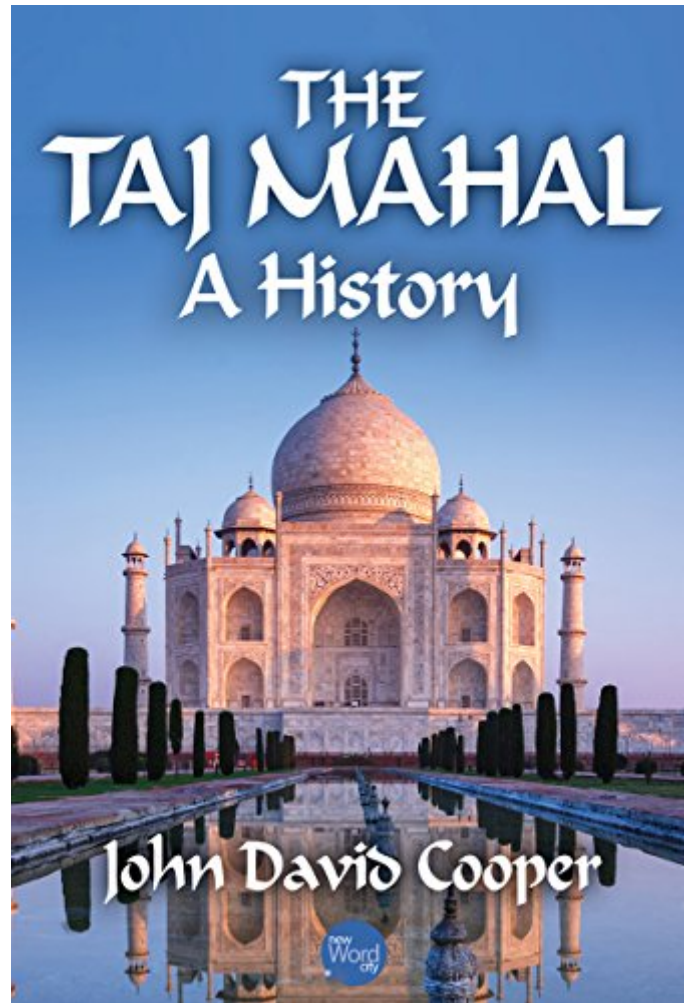




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The Taj Mahal: A History



Synopsis

Everyone has seen photographs of the Taj Mahal. The massive, bulbous central dome, the four slender minarets, the shimmering marble, the long reflecting pool, the manicured gardens - all seem too striking for adequate description and proper appreciation. But there is more to the Taj than its beauty. The world's best-known mausoleum celebrates the love story of the seventeenth-century Moghul emperor Shah Jahan and his queen, Mumtaz Mahal. They fell in love at first sight and were married for nineteen years. She ruled at his side as almost an equal, but her death in childbirth in 1631 left him wild with grief and determined to build a monument to their devotion. Behind this romantic tale is the saga of the Moghul emperors who swept into North India only a century earlier. By the time of Shah Jahan, they had established an absolute monarchy comparable to Louis XIV's. The Moghul court was rich, cruel, and omnipotent. As descendants of Tamerlane and Genghis Khan, they relished bloody combat, savage sports, and hideous torture of their victims. In the absence of primogeniture, brother fought brother for the throne - it was the law of the land - "throne or coffin." But less than a century after Shah Jahan was deposed by his ruthless son, the dynasty was in decline and ripe for conquest by Great Britain. For a time, it seemed like the Taj - like the Moghuls - would vanish. Only in the twentieth century was the Taj restored to something of its former glory. Here is the dramatic and often tragic story of the Taj and the men and women of the dynasty that created it.

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Customer Reviews

Great Book! I loved this book and found it among the most interesting I've read this year. I knew a little about the Taj Mahal's story of an Indian emperor built a tomb for his wife like none the world had ever seen or would see. But with this book, I learned so much more. For example, the Taj was slated to be torn down during the British Raj the Brits didn't think much of Indian architecture - and was saved only at the last minute. My favorite thing about the book, though, was its focus on the Mughals, the line of emperors behind the building of the Taj and similar tombs in India. All I can say is that the Mughals make the Tudors look tame. They were complicated, fascinating, blood-thirsty lot. Succession was not designated, leaving each emperor's sons to fight it out for power. They had a saying, "The throne or the coffin," which pretty much sums up the situation. This book a real page turner. I highly recommend it.

I have had the privilege of visiting the Taj Mahal but was aware of its purpose but not of its complete and exciting story. I had always wondered about the buildings at each side. It is a long ride from Delhi (5 hours) but its beauty and its history is well worth it. Thank you

First part was very interesting, but then got bogged down in telling many leaders who followed, which was very boring,

Emperor Shah Jahan built the Taj Mahal - "Crown of the Palace" - for his favorite wife, Mumtaz Mahal, who died giving birth to their fourteenth child. This succinct, enlightening, highly readable book tells their story but also conveys the tales of the Mughal emperors and empresses who preceded them for the Taj Mahal was, in many ways, representative of the architecture and art of earlier rulers. My favorite chapter in this book, though, is about Emperor Akbar. He was, John David Cooper writes, "the greatest of all the Mughals, a Renaissance prince who excelled at everything from warfare to philosophy, ruled justly, made his court a kind of Camelot, and created a library of more than 24,000 volumes." There is much to admire about Akbar - religious tolerance being at the top of the list. I bought this book at a

discount through a promotional newsletter, but it's worth paying full price. A really good book.

I came to this book knowing little about the beautiful, famous Taj Mahal and even less about the Mughal Empire. John David Cooper's history is enlightening and entertaining, and I'm glad I took the time to read it. The Mughals were a contradictory people. As Cooper writes, "They loved warfare and dealt with enemies decisively; like the Romans, they relished watching their adversaries die gruesome deaths – trampled by a herd of elephants or suffocated slowly by the shrinking skin of a freshly killed buffalo they were sewn into. But they loved the arts as well, created spectacular monuments and gardens, and could be kind and generous, even extravagant, with their gifts." My favorite parts of the book, though, were its compelling portraits of the Mughal queens – not only Mumtaz Mahal, who lies in the Taj Mahal, but her powerful aunt – smart, talented Nur Jahan, who was born of an impoverished, noble Persian family but rose to become India's most powerful empress. If you like reading about kings and queens, you will enjoy this book.

Author John David Cooper delivers a fast-paced, first-class history of India's Taj Mahal. It's the story not only of one of the most extraordinary structures ever built but of the powerful, bloody empire that lay behind it. I give the book five stars for its writing and its flesh-and-blood portrayal of the Mughal emperors and their queens. It's hard not to admire their tenacity, although their cruelty knew no bounds. I found the book hard to put down and think you will, too.

Excellent descriptions of the architecture and the grounds. Also the history of the rulers was fascinating. One could really feel the difference in cultures.

Love factual history. Well done.

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