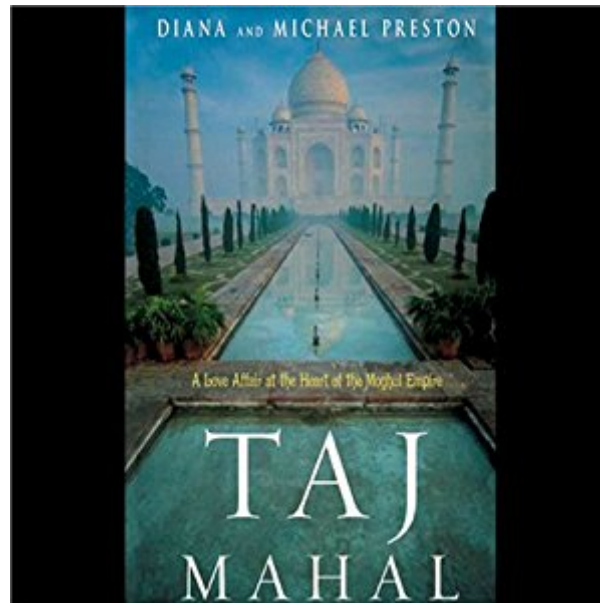


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Taj Mahal: Passion And Genius At The Heart Of The Moghul Empire



Synopsis

The dazzling story of the Taj Mahal and the empire whose spirit it epitomizes. Built by the Moghul emperor Shah Jahan as a memorial to his beloved wife, Mumtaz Mahal, the Taj Mahal's flawless symmetry and gleaming presence have for centuries dazzled everyone who has seen it, and 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, it also reflects the magnificent history of the Moghul Empire itself, for it turned out to mark the high point of the empire's glory at the same time as it became a tipping point in Moghul fortunes. With the storytelling skills that characterize their previous books, the Prestons bring alive both the grand sweep of Moghul history and the details that make it memorable. A tale of overwhelming passion, the story of the Taj has the cadences of Greek tragedy and the ripe emotion of grand opera, and puts a memorable human face on the marble masterpiece. --This text refers to the Paperback edition.

Book Information

Audible Audio Edition

Listening Length: 9 hours and 59 minutes

Program Type: Audiobook

Version: Unabridged

Publisher: Blackstone Audio, Inc.

Audible.com Release Date: April 5, 2007

Language: English

ASIN: B000P6R520

Best Sellers Rank: #40 in Books > Audible Audiobooks > Arts & Entertainment > Architecture

#247 in Books > Audible Audiobooks > History > Asia #1179 in Books > History > Asia > India

Customer Reviews

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.

For those that want to see complete visuals and illustrations of the Taj Mahal, then this book is not for you. It contained many photos but most were taken at a distance and others were a bit blurry. Even my heavily scratched reading glasses did not assist in delivering me an adequate detailed photo. I visited the Taj, in 2002, and have more interesting photos than what was portrayed in the book. I also visited the Red Fort in 2006, which was also described in the book. The only other 'pessimistic item' that I would write about was that, at times, it was difficult to follow the authors when they would describe informative detail on the building and how it was constructed. Since there were no photos about these fine details to observe, this information proved difficult to follow. It could be just me. I am a very visual person and that describing things in detail usually averts my attention. I need visuals! Now, for the good side. I thought the book was very informative on the Moghul empire. It discusses all the friction between the families on the strive to gain power and gives you a pretty good account of the history of India (Moghul empire, mainly) during that time frame. It also makes you understand why imperialistic empires just don't survive and how the desire for power destroyed this infamous empire. I am no avid historian and have read only a few books containing any history of India. Even though I lack the historical background of India, I found the book easy to read and follow. Basically I read it in 2 days and found the information that the authors presented to be fascinating. I felt as if I was standing there watching the whole thing unfold in front of my eyes. In addition, I was able to perceive the physical sensation of the characters written within the pages.

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