

The Taj Mahal, a Tomb and a Love Story

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Level **820L**



A frontal view of the Taj Mahal in India. Asitjain/Wikimedia Commons

The famous Taj Mahal was built in India 400 years ago. The Mughal Emperor Shah Jahan had it built for his wife when she died.

The building is made of shimmering white marble. It seems to change color depending on the sunlight or moonlight. It is one of the world's most famous buildings and shows India's rich history.

A story of love and death

Shah Jahan was a member of the Mughal family, which ruled most of northern India 500 years ago. When Shah Jahan's father, King Jahangir, died, Shah Jahan battled for power against his brothers. He was able to win and became emperor of the Mughal Empire. At his side was Mumtaz Mahal, whom he married. She was his favorite of his three queens.

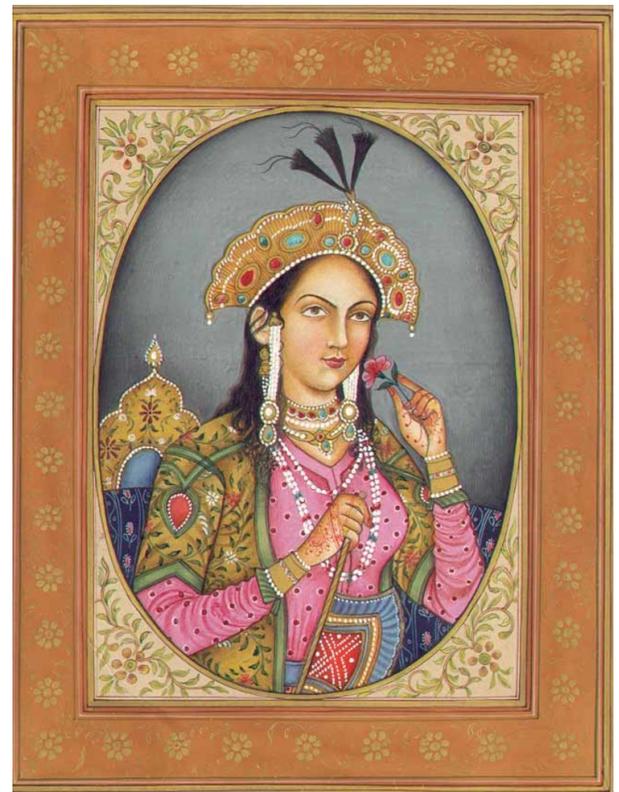
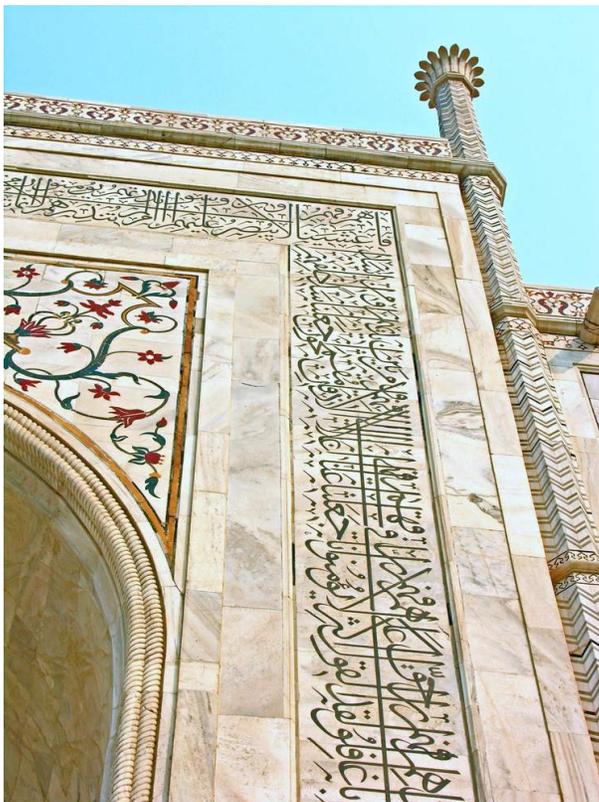
Mumtaz Mahal died soon after. Shah Jahan was heartbroken, and ordered his men to build the Taj Mahal across the river from his own royal palace. This building was to keep the body of his beloved wife.

20-year construction job

It took 20 years to complete the Taj Mahal. More than 20,000 workers, along with 1,000 elephants, were brought over to work on it. A story says that Shah Jahan had the hands of the Taj Mahal's workers cut off after it was finished. This was to make sure they would never build another building like it. No one is sure if the story is true.

The Taj Mahal was named in honor of Mumtaz Mahal. It was made with white marble and jewels that formed complicated designs. The middle part is a tall dome and is surrounded by four smaller ones. Four thin towers, called minarets, stand at the corners.

Verses from the Quran are written on some of the



entrances. The Quran is the holy book of Islam, which is one of the main world religions. Inside the Taj Mahal there is a marble chamber which honors Mumtaz Mahal. This chamber is decorated with carvings and jewels.

Elaborate building

The Taj Mahal has a main gateway of red sandstone. It also has a square garden, divided by long pools of water, and a red sandstone mosque. A mosque is a building where Muslims pray. A building called a jawab, or "mirror," looks just like the mosque and stands right across it.

As the story goes, Shah Jahan wanted to build a second Taj Mahal across the river, connected to the first one by a bridge. He wanted his own remains to be buried there when he died. In the end, this second Taj Mahal was never built.

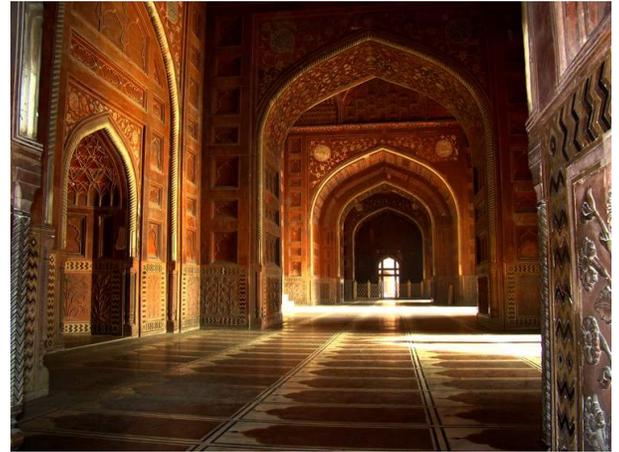
Aurangzeb was Shah Jahan and Mumtaz Mahal's third son. He took power for himself when his father became sick. Aurangzeb imprisoned his father in a tower, where he could see the Taj Mahal through a small window. When Shah Jahan died, he was buried next to his beloved Mumtaz Mahal.

Neglect and restoration

Under Aurangzeb's rule, which lasted 50 years, the Mughal family was stronger than ever. But its power ended soon afterward. As Mughal power crumbled, the Taj Mahal started to fall apart too. Many years later, India was ruled by the British. Lord Curzon was in charge of India for England. Near the start of the 1800s, Curzon gave the order to fix the Taj Mahal. Although the British had taken over, they did not want India's artistic and cultural history to disappear.

Today, 3 million people a year visit the Taj Mahal.

During the busiest season, that is as many as 45,000 each day. But the beautiful white marble can easily become dirty. All it takes is air pollution, which are gases from cars and factories. India's government decided to slow down pollution to protect the building. Some factories were closed and cars were not allowed near the building. This way, Mumtaz Mahal's great tomb will stay beautiful like it was meant to be.



Quiz

1 Read the section "Elaborate building."
Select the paragraph from the section that shows how the Taj Mahal was carefully designed.

2 Read the section titled "A story of love and death."
Which sentence from the section shows WHY Mumtaz Mahal was important?

- (A) He was able to win and became emperor of the Mughal Empire.
- (B) She was his favorite of his three queens.
- (C) Mumtaz Mahal died soon after.
- (D) This building was to keep the body of his beloved wife.

3 Read the paragraph below from the introduction [paragraphs 1-2].

The building is made of shimmering white marble. It seems to change color depending on the sunlight or moonlight. It is one of the world's most famous buildings and shows India's rich history.

Which phrase from the selection helps the reader to understand the meaning of "shimmering"?

- (A) white marble
- (B) seems to change color
- (C) most famous buildings
- (D) India's rich history

4 Read the following sentence from the section "Neglect and restoration."

As Mughal power crumbled, the Taj Mahal started to fall apart too.

Which sentence uses "crumbled" in the SAME way as the sentence above?

- (A) The cookie crumbled when he ate it.
- (B) The building crumbled during the earthquake.
- (C) The boy crumbled the cheese on top of the spaghetti.
- (D) The organization crumbled after last year.