

Taj Mahal (1630–1653)

The building of the Taj Mahal was an act of love and devotion. Shah Jahan, one of the early Muslim emperors during the Mughal reign in India, built it as the final resting place for his favorite wife, Mumtaz Mahal, who died in childbirth. During their 18 years of marriage, the couple had 14 children. Mumtaz Mahal often accompanied Shah Jahan on his military campaigns. The pair's love was remarkable in an era when most royal marriages were political and/or economic alliances, rather than matters of the heart. 47

Although the Taj Mahal is fit for royalty, it is not a palace, but a large tomb, or mausoleum. The Taj Mahal consists of four main elements—the main gateway, garden, mosque, and the mausoleum itself. Passages from the Qur'an decorate the outside of the palace, along with intertwined floral mosaic designs. One of the most striking features of the Taj Mahal is its proportionality—the calligraphy, for example, increases in size so that it maintains its perspective relative to the position of the viewer.

Numerous sources cite the Indian architect of Persian descent, Ustad Ahmad

Lahori, as the designer. Skilled masons, craftworkers, sculptors, and calligraphers from Persia, the Ottoman Empire, and Europe all participated in the construction of the Taj Mahal. The building took about 20,000 workers more than 20 years to complete. Building materials, which included marble, jade, crystal, turquoise, and sapphire, came from all over India and Asia. It is estimated that the Taj Mahal cost more than 32,000,000 rupees—an astronomical sum for the time.

Looking questions

- **What attracts your attention about this building?** *The colors, the dome, and different kinds of towers in this building immediately attract your attention.*
- **What do you think the building might be used for?** *Answers may include a church, the home of someone important, etc. Explain that the building was commissioned as a memorial to the wife of Emperor Shah Jahan by the emperor himself.*
- **Where are examples of three important Islamic architectural features?** *The domes, minarets, and pointed arches are examples of important Islamic architectural features.*
- **Point out the minarets. What are minarets used for? What do they tell us about Shah Jahan?** *Minarets are used in Islamic culture to call people to prayer. Shah Jahan was a Muslim.*