

The Taj Mahal

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Around the world, there are many beautiful architectural structures to study. Many of these structures are amazingly designed with great thought and talent. When you dig deeper into the establishment of these buildings, you will also realize the impact that a particular religion or religions made in the founding of these great structures. The Taj Mahal is a great example of this.

In Agra, India, right in the heart of the Islamic religion, stands an architecturally breathtaking structure – the Taj Mahal. Built in memory of his favorite wife, Emperor Shan Jahan started erecting this structure in 1630, just one year after the death of his beloved Mumtaz Mahal. Mumtaz Mahal died prematurely at the age of 39 while giving birth to her fourteenth child (Stevenson, 2007). Emperor Shan Jahan wanted the Taj Mahal to be his love story to Mumtaz Mahal. The configuration of this project was so great that the Emperor hired over 20,000 workers to build this magnificent piece of architecture. It wasn't until 1653, 23 years later, that the project was completed (Stevenson, 2007).

Resting on seventeen acres of beautifully arranged gardens, the Taj Mahal truly is an earthly paradise. Since the Islamic religion favors geometric designs, each garden is carefully planted with such geometric features. Leading up to the Taj Mahal is a small river lined with a marble platform to avoid flooding and garden erosion. Although not very wide, this river serves as a means of climate control for the Taj Mahal as well as religious practices. Cleverly designed into the river are small fountains used for irrigating the various gardens. The cypress trees lining the river provide adequate shading and are intentionally placed in this way to add to the geometric design.

The Taj Mahal takes after the architectural designs of the Mogul dynasties from the 15th to 18th centuries. The vaulted recess (which is the large opening at the front of the building) was decorated with ornate carvings by one of the finest chief masons. At the completion of this carving, Shan Jahan ordered the chief mason's hand be amputated to avoid duplication of this great carving (Stevenson, 2007). Throughout the structure there are many engravings and carvings, especially over the doorways. The most famous one is a verse from the Qur'an engraved above the front recess. It says, "Enter thou among my servants and enter thou My Paradise" (Muhammad). One prayer tower rests at each corner of the mausoleum to help the building appear elevated from the surrounding gardens. Perhaps, the most famous part of the Taj Mahal is the great dome. It is over 200 feet tall. The marble clad, rubber core, and brick materials

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used to build the dome give it an enchanted glow that may appear in different colors depending on where you are standing. The Taj Mahal is definitely a work of art and deserves the right to be called “the most beautiful building in India” (Spielvogel, 1999).

Isn't it fascinating how the religion of a certain people group can affect their architectural designs? The Islamic effects on the Taj Mahal are quite prominent. The engravings of the Qur'an above the doorways show that Emperor Shan Jahan thought his building was an eternal paradise, not just a tomb. In order to create something that magnificent, he must have thought it had eternal value as well. Also demonstrated in the Taj Mahal is the longing for peace and perfection. You can especially notice this trait when you look at the gardens with their designs of unity. I believe Emperor Shan Jahan was never truly satisfied because he never found the true source of peace and perfection that we find in Christ Jesus and the eternity we will spend with Him.