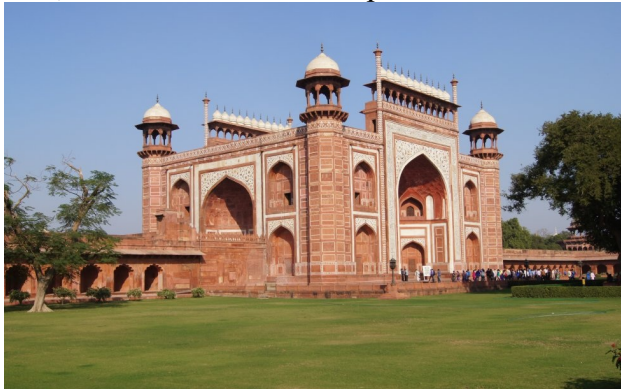


Architectural Beauty

Our group visited the city of Agra, Uttar Pradesh, India, on Thursday, 4 December 2014. In the afternoon we went to see the famous Taj Mahal. My first visit there was with my wife in March, 1970, slightly more than two months after our wedding. Our younger daughter visited there in February 2003 on her trip around the world by ship. In 1983 the Taj Mahal became a UNESCO World Heritage Site. It was constructed from 1632 to 1653 as a mausoleum (tomb) in honor of the third wife, Mumtaz Mahal, of Mughal emperor Shah Jahan.

The entire site is 300 meters wide from east to west. It includes land on the north side of the river as shown in this image (from a DigitalGlobe satellite) screen captured from Google Earth. The famous white building is in the center of this view. The entrance is through the pink building at the south end of the park area, also shown in the next photo.



From there we had the classic view of the monument's symmetry.



Shallow water is in the reflecting pools that are along the center line to the white building. To the sides are park layouts designed by the British at a later time.



The main building is built with white marble, inlaid with black marble and precious and semiprecious stones. The other buildings are built of red sandstone and inlaid with white marble and designs of similar colored stones. Some of the illustrations are of bas relief (3-dimensional carved stone) which may cast shadows.



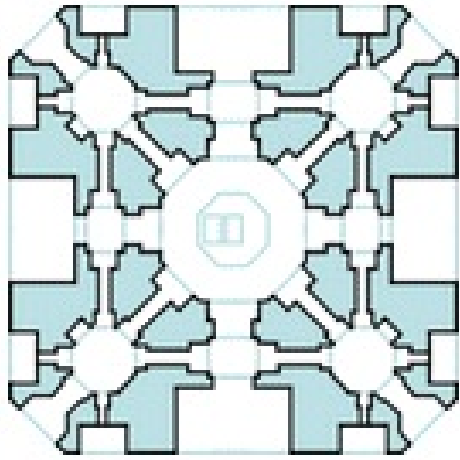


In addition to the artistic decorations there is much writing in Arabic, with portions of 15 Suras of the Qur'an written throughout the building. Details are identified in Wikipedia, the source of some other details and images below, including this quote: "The Taj Mahal was constructed using materials from all over India and Asia and over 1,000 elephants were used to transport building materials. The translucent white marble was brought from Makrana, Rajasthan, the jasper from Punjab, jade and crystal from China. The turquoise was

from Tibet and the Lapis lazuli from Afghanistan, while the sapphire came from Sri Lanka and the carnelian from Arabia. In all, twenty eight types of precious and semi-precious stones were inlaid into the white marble." Here are some additional photos of artistic detail:



Even the pavement had designs, and we needed to have shoe coverings or have bare feet. Inside the white building the public was not allowed to take photos. These images are from Wikipedia. The coffins on the main floor are for decoration only. The real coffins are on a lower floor directly below and not available for public viewing. There is much carved marble inside.



Simplified diagram of the Taj Mahal floor plan



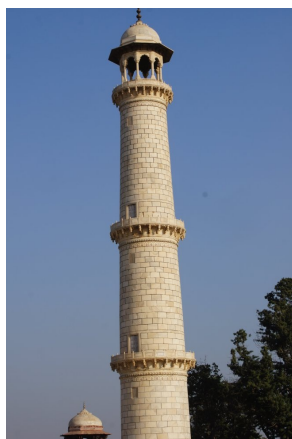
Lattice of carved marble, allowing viewing through it.



Upper tombs, for decoration and viewing.

Lower tombs, actually filled with the bodies.

The upper and lower tombs of Mumtaz Mahal are in the actual center of the entire building. The larger tomb of Shah Jahan is offset to the west of center.

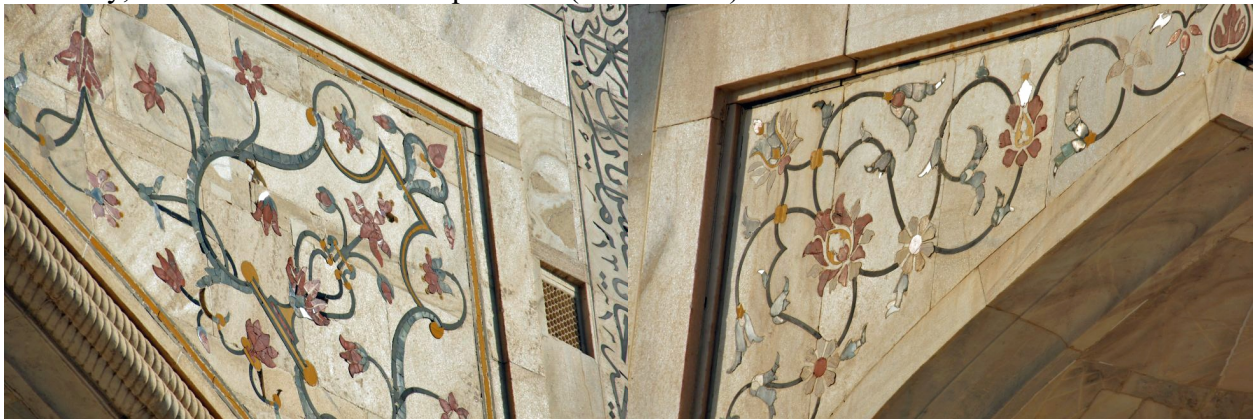


These photos show one of the four minarets and the view back to the entrance building.

Our guide during the tour of the Taj Mahal was a Christian pastor. He added some anecdotal stories and interpretations. Mumtaz Mahal was Shah Jahan's third and favorite wife. As she was about to die during the birth of their 14th child she wanted her husband's assurance that he would not marry another woman. She also wanted an indication of how much he really loved her, and Shah Jahan had the Taj Mahal built as a result, at great expense. Though Shah Jahan's empire had been very rich, the construction brought it to poverty by spending most of its resources. In disgust Shah Jahan's son had his father arrested and imprisoned for the rest of his life. From his prison cell Shah Jahan was allowed a window to view the Taj Mahal.

The pastor summarized that the great love was shown at great expense, creating a work of great beauty. He said that Jesus Christ showed God's love for his followers (the Church, the Bride of Christ) at great expense. He endured God's punishment for our sins (disobedience of God's commands for us) by dying in our place, giving his life as a ransom for our own lives. In return, we can show our great love and appreciation for what Jesus Christ did for us by "spending" the most important valuables of our lives in service to Jesus and spreading the good news of what was done for us. Doing so does not earn us access to life in heaven but should be a freely given expression of thanks to our great God.

Many of the inlaid stones are polished to a smooth mirror-like surface. They appear bright at certain sun angles, as shown by the bright (white, though colored) stones in these images. Similarly, our own lives should be polished (made better) and be a reflection of Jesus Christ.



Ed Holroyd
23 December 2014