An enduring monument of haunting beauty, the Taj Mahal seems a symbol of stability itself. The familiar view of the glowing marble mausoleum from the gateway entrance offers the very picture of permanence. And yet this extraordinary edifice presents a shifting image to observers across time and cultures. The meaning of the Taj Mahal, the perceptions and responses it prompts, ideas about the building and the history that shape them: these form the subject of Giles Tillotson’s book.

More than a richly illustrated history—though it is that as well—this book is an eloquent meditation on the place of the Taj Mahal in the cultural imagination of India and the wider world.

Since its completion in 1648, the mausoleum commissioned by the fifth Mughal emperor, Shah Jahan, for his wife Mumtaz Mahal, has come to symbolize many things: the undying love of a man for his wife, the perfection of Mughal architecture, the ideal synthesis of various strands of subcontinental aesthetics, even an icon of modern India itself. Exploring different perspectives brought to the magnificent structure—by a Mughal court poet, an English Romantic traveler, a colonial administrator, an architectural historian, or a contemporary Bollywood filmmaker—this book is an incomparable guide through the varied and changing ideas inspired by the Taj Mahal, from its construction to our day. In Tillotson’s expert hands, the story of a seventeenth-century structure in the city of Agra reveals itself as a story about our own place and time.

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My Personal Review:
The most famous and easily recognized building in the world quite possibly is the Taj Mahal. It is like no other structure, and is one of the most
photographed and visited of architectural sites. Eight thousand visitors a day go through it (only slightly fewer than go through the Sistine Chapel). Although there have been plenty of pictures taken of the place, over the centuries there has not been a great deal of scholarship devoted to it. There was a detailed scholarly monograph in 2006 by Ebba Koch, and Giles Tillotson has drawn upon it and upon many other sources to produce a guide to the building that is slim, accessible, and entertaining. _Taj Mahal_ (Harvard University Press) covers the personalities involved in creating the Taj, the architecture and its sources, its interpretation, and its current status and preservation.

The Taj was completed in 1643. Its builder was the Mogul Emperor Shah Jahan who may have had an eye for design, but could be a cold-blooded warrior. It was a tomb for his best-loved wife, who bore him fourteen children and died giving birth to the last one while she was with him on a military campaign. He went into deep and sincere grief, and after he returned with her body to the great Mogul city of Agra, the stricken emperor planned her tomb. We don't know for sure who the Taj architects were or how much responsibility they had for the eventual look of the building; there are no plans or statements of architectural purpose, and the lack of documentation may be a reason that the Taj has had relatively little scholarship directed toward it. With little documentation about the planning or building of the Taj, for centuries interest groups have been trying to claim it as their own. "For a building that is supposedly a symbol of love," writes Tillotson, the Taj has generated a lot of anger." The Victorians, convinced that no indigenous people could have produced such a masterpiece, developed the ludicrous theory that a visiting European had planned it all. Hindu supremacists would rather not acknowledge that this is a Muslim building, convincing themselves that it was actually produced in accord with ancient Hindu scriptures. A fellow named P. N. Oak published a book in 1968 to show how the Taj is really a Hindu palace (Tillotson calls it a "startling piece of pseudo-scholarship"), and this could be but laughable except that Hindu organizations have used such claims to attempt to wrest control of the site from the Archeological Survey of India which has custodianship of the Taj as a national monument.

Tillotson's book is a perfect guide for the armchair traveler, but there is a final chapter with practical information on how to make a visit to the Taj, and as long as you are in Agra, the other things you can see including the Agra Fort, inside which are palaces that Shah Jahan built. Tillotson addresses the nonsense about the Taj's "real" origins and its other myths with authority. He is a historian specializing in the art and architecture of India, but this guide gives good general information rather than being a scholarly tome. It also has a sense of fun. Although it never mention the Trump Taj Mahal Casino in New Jersey, it does allude to Taj Mahal brand teabags, for instance, and to the popular Hindi film _Bunty aur Babli_, in which filmflam artists sell the Taj to gullible Americans.
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Taj Mahal (Wonders of the World) by Giles Tillotson - 5 Star Customer Reviews and Lowest Price!