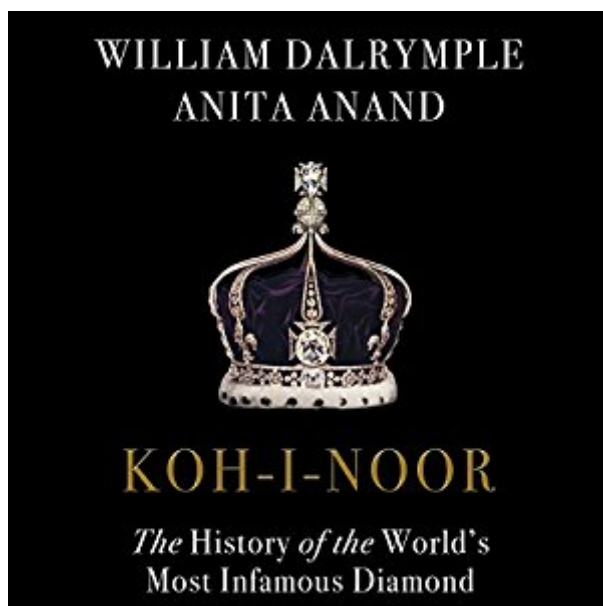


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Koh-i-Noor: The History Of The World's Most Infamous Diamond



Synopsis

The first comprehensive and authoritative history of the Koh-i Noor, arguably the most celebrated and mythologised jewel in the world, from the internationally acclaimed and best-selling historians William Dalrymple and Anita Anand. On 29 March 1849, the 10-year-old Maharajah of the Punjab was ushered into the magnificent Mirrored Hall at the centre of the great Fort in Lahore. There, in a public ceremony, the frightened but dignified child handed over to the British East India Company in a formal act of submission not only swathes of the richest land in India but also arguably the single most valuable object in the subcontinent: the celebrated Koh-i-Noor diamond. The Mountain of Light. Under commission from the British East India Company, gossip from Delhi bazaars was woven into what would become the accepted history of the Koh-i-Noor. Now, for the first time, 150 years after it was written, this version is finally challenged, freeing the diamond from the fog of mythology which has clung to it for so long. The resulting history is one of greed, conquest, murder, torture, colonialism and appropriation through an impressive slice of South and Central Asian history. Masterly, powerful and erudite, this is history at its most compelling and invigorating.

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Customer Reviews

Love everything that the passionate and extremely well researched and knowledgeable William Dalrymple writes

Visiting the Jewel House in the Tower of London is a truly awe-inspiring experience. Crowns, orbs, sceptres, and other pieces of royal regalia, some of them centuries old, lie before the crowds of

viewers, priceless as much for their history as for the intrinsic value of their gold and precious stones. Among the most impressive pieces must be the crown created for the late Queen Mother for her coronation in 1937. It contains many beautiful diamonds and other precious stones, but the paramount feature of the crown must be the very large diamond at the front, the fabled Koh-i-Noor, or Mountain of Light. One of the most famous, yet still mysterious, diamonds in the world, the Koh-i-Noor's history is wrapped in legend and rumor. William Dalrymple and Anita Anand have sifted through the fables and come up with as accurate a history of the Koh-i-Noor as we are ever likely to see. That true history, as readers of this well told tale will find, is as remarkable as any fantasy. The origins of the stone which eventually came to be part of the British royal regalia are shrouded in the mists of history. India was the ancient source of most of the world's diamonds, and the large, irregularly shaped stone called the Koh-i-Noor was probably extracted from a river bed hundreds, perhaps thousands of years ago. There are many tales of mysterious large diamonds in Indian history, but the undisputed record of the Koh-i-Noor begins with the establishment of the Mughal Dynasty in the 1500s. Throughout the vicissitudes of the Mughals, who included some of the most powerful and wealthy rulers in Indian history, the Koh-i-Noor blazed its own trail: adorning the Peacock Throne, taken to Iran, returned to India, taken to Afghanistan, and then coming into the possession of the Sikh rulers of Punjab. In 1849 the British East India Company, which had succeeded in taking over much of the Indian subcontinent, obliged the last Sikh maharajah to hand over the Koh-i-Noor as a present for Queen Victoria. In England the Koh-i-Noor was a star attraction at the Great Exhibition of 1851, then shaped by jewellers into a more sparkling and multi-faceted stone. Queen Victoria wore it, and it adorned the coronation crowns of three queens consort. But Queen Elizabeth II has never worn it, nor have any male British monarchs. Dalrymple and Anand trace the fascinating tale of the Koh-i-Noor as well as possible, given the ambiguity with which early records speak of it and other large Indian gems. The various owners of the Koh-i-Noor in India, Afghanistan, and Iran led colorful and often violent lives, but the most interesting parts of the story to me were the chapters that dealt with the last Sikh ruler, Duleep Singh. At the age of 10 he was coerced into giving up his nation's sovereignty along with handing over the great diamond. Raised by English caretakers, he converted to Christianity and went to live in England where he became a sort of adopted son of Queen Victoria. Becoming rebellious and resentful in later years, he led an unhappy life and in many ways symbolizes the complex relationship between Britain and India. I also found the final chapter detailing the efforts of various Indian, Pakistani, and Afghan governments to reclaim the Koh-i-Noor interesting for the light it sheds on the complex relationship between a former mother country and its colonies. The story of the Koh-i-Noor stretches for

centuries and involves great artists and craftsmen as well as venality and violence. William Dalrymple and Anita Anand's history does full justice to their remarkable subject.

Wow, what a fantastic insight into the Koh-I-Noor! The stories I have previously read with regards to the world's most infamous diamond are fairy tales in comparison, painting pretty little pictures with royalty and jewels. Sadly the real picture is a little more bloody and does not give the best impression of Britain. Part one of the book gives the reader insight into the history of the Koh-I-Noor and India and Britain. The account is well written and contains so much information (I read this book on my kindle, maybe it would've been better to read a hard copy as I needed to keep going back to check information and references (mainly because I'm forgetful). The second part of the book covers information with regard to the diamond itself and its journey to England, along with its introduction to the British public, to its final resting place in the royal crown. Until reading this account of the Koh-I-Noor I had no idea about how controversial the ownership of the diamond is. As to my opinion as to where its final resting place should be, I'm going to keep that to myself. I received a copy of this book from the publisher via NetGalley in exchange for an honest review.

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