



## AGRA

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**AGRA**, city and district center in the state of Uttar Pradesh in northern India, situated on the west bank of the river Jumna (Yamonā) approximately 125 miles south of Delhi. Capital of Mughal empire during the 16th and 17th centuries, it is today the location of some of the most important examples of Mughal architecture, including the Taj Mahal. Mention of Agra as a local center occurs as early as Ghaznavid times (5th/11th century) and throughout the period of the Delhi sultanate as a dependency of nearby Bīāna. In 879-80/1475 a local *zamīndār*, Badal Singh, is recorded as having constructed nearby a fort, Badalgarh, and in 898/1492 when Agra was besieged by the troops of Sultan Sekandar Lōdī of Delhi (874-923/1489-1517) it was a walled town. Sultan Sekandar, finding Delhi too distant for his campaigns against Bīāna, Gwalior, and Dholpur, decided to remove his capital to Agra, and the foundations of a new fort were laid in 911/1505. This was on the left, or east bank of the Jumna. At the same time a court suburb developed across the river about five and a half miles to the northeast of modern Agra along the Mathura road, to be known henceforth as Sikandra, where an elegant *bārādari* was built by the sultan, to be converted during Akbar's reign into the mausoleum of Maryam Zamānī. Other structures dating from the Lōdī period at Sikandra were probably demolished to provide space or building material for Akbar's mausoleum. The last Lōdī ruler, Sultan Ebrāhīm (923-32/1517-26), retained Agra as his capital. He was defeated and killed in battle by the Mughals, and the victorious Bābor dispatched his son, Homāyūn, to occupy the city and seize the late ruler's family and treasure. When Bābor reached Agra, he criticized the lack of amenities, especially gardens; one of his first acts was to order the



construction of an Iranian-type *čār-bāg*, whose site may be preserved by the present Ram Bagh. Bābor's reign was short, and the reign of Homāyūn, who seems to have shown a marked preference for Delhi, was too disturbed to allow much time for building. Agra attained its apogee as the premier metropolis of the empire during the reigns of his successors, Akbar (963-1014/1556-1605) and Jahāngīr (1014-37/1605-27), and during the first part of the reign of Shah Jahān (1037-68/1628-57). Agra's position was hardly effected by the foundation of Fatḥpūr Sīkrī (q.v.), twenty-three miles away, where Akbar spent much of his time between 982/1574 and 994/1586. Akbar's inauguration of a provincial system to include the entire empire made Agra, in addition to the emperor's principal residence, the administrative headquarters of a *šūba* (or province) and the seat of government of the *šūbadār* or *nāzem*.

Akbar's Agra was situated on the right or west bank of the Jumna, in contrast to the Lōdī foundation on the east bank. In 972/1565, under the direction of Qāsem Khan Mīr-e Baḥr, work was commenced on the great red sandstone fort which, according to Abu'l-Faẓl, included 500 structures erected by workmen from Bengal and Gujarat in the architectural style of those regions. At the same time, beyond the walls of the fort a new city rapidly came into being and continued to grow. By the close of the century it had become an enormous metropolis straggling along the river bank, having long since outgrown its original walls. The few surviving remains of 16th century Agra convey slight indication of the seminal role which the city played in the diffusion of Indo-Islamic culture under the early Mughals. Notwithstanding Akbar's personal interest in the customs and beliefs of his Hindu subjects, life at the Mughal court remained rooted in the cultural patterns of Timurid Herat and Samarqand. There was a continuous influx into northern India of emigrants from Iran and Central Asia, and their influence reinforced the traditionally Turco-Iranian lifestyle and cultural values already established in the Delhi sultanate. These trends continued under Jahāngīr, who also spent much of his time in Agra, despite his attachment to Lahore and Kashmir. During his reign his wife, Nūr Jahān, built for her father, E'temād-al-dawla, an elaborate tomb of inlaid white marble located in an Iranian-style *čār-bāg* on the east bank of the river. After the synthesis of Indo-Islamic and Hindu architectural styles so characteristic of Akbar's buildings at Fatḥpūr Sīkrī and Sikandra, the tomb of E'temād-al-dawla (d. 1031/1622) marks a shift to a more self-consciously Indo-Iranian style in both form and surface decoration. This shift reached its culmination with the Taj Mahal (q.v.), the tomb built by Shah Jahān for his wife, Arjmand Bānū Bēgam, better known as Momtāz Maḥall,



downstream from the Agra Fort, on the same west bank of the Jumna. The Taj Mahal is too completely *sui generis* to be regarded as merely derivative, yet it possesses a well-defined pedigree, stretching back past the tombs of the Kān-e Kānān and of Homāyūn at Delhi to the Timurid monuments of 9th/15th century Iran and Central Asia, and even to Il-khanid Solṭānīya. It perfected an architectural tradition distinct from those of Akbar's reign or the earlier Indo-Muslim dynasties of the Delhi sultanate.

In the first half of his reign, Shah Jahān lavished enormous sums of money on the beautification of Agra, which he renamed Akbarābād in honor of his grandfather, although the name never took root. Within the fort itself he ordered the building of the exquisite series of open courts and rooms between the new Dīvān-e 'Āmm (hall of public audience) and the river frontage: the Machchi Bhawan, the Dīvān-e Kāṣṣ (hall of private audience), the Ḥammām (or bathhouse), the Moṭamman Borj, the Šiš Maḥall, the Angūrī Bāg, and the Kāṣṣ Maḥall. He also built three mosques within the palace complex: the superbly proportioned Motī Masjed (Pearl Mosque), the Negīna Masjed for the imperial women, and the Mīnā Masjed for the emperor's private devotions. Outside the fort and opposite its Delhi Gate stands the Jāme' Masjed built in 1058/1648 by Shah Jahān's oldest daughter, Jahān Ārā Bēgam, on the site of an older mosque erected by Akbar's *dīvān*, Moṣaffar Khan Torbatī. Although the history of Agra is so closely connected with Shah Jahān's name, he contributed directly to the city's decline by his decision to build at Delhi a new capital Shahjahanabad, upon which work began during the 1640s. Agra went into further decline during the years of Awrangzēb's residence in the Deccan, and when his successors came north again, Delhi was to be their invariable place of residence. Following the Mughal period, Agra never regained its former stature.

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