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Koh-I-Noor: The History of the World's Most Famous Diamond

William Dalrymple, Anita Anand

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The first comprehensive and authoritative history of the Koh-i Noor, arguably the most celebrated and mythologised jewel in the world. On 29 March 1849, the ten-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 to Queen Victoria 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. The history of the Koh-i-Noor that was then commissioned by the British may have been one woven together from gossip of Delhi Bazaars, but it was to be become the accepted version. Only now is it 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, murder, torture, colonialism and appropriation through an impressive slice of south and central Asian history. It ends with the jewel in its current controversial setting: in the crown of Queen Elizabeth the Queen Mother. Masterly, powerful and erudite, this is history at its most compelling and invigorating.

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