

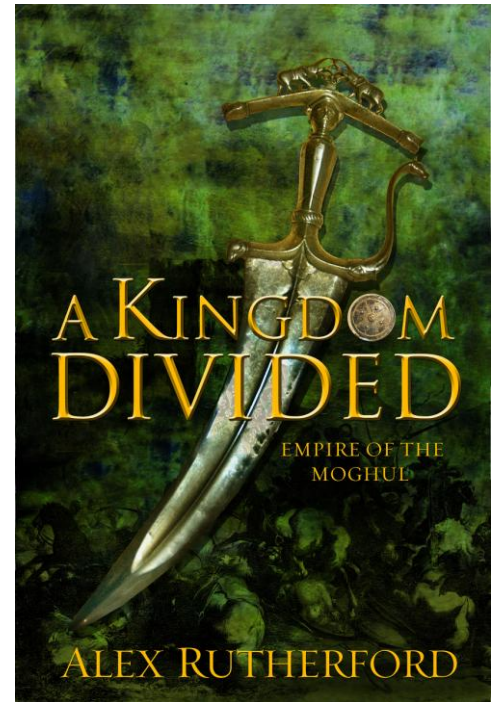


A Kingdom Divided

by Alex Rutherford

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About this Guide

The following author biography and list of questions about *A Kingdom Divided* are intended as resources to aid individual readers and book groups who would like to learn more about the author and this book. We hope that this guide will provide you a starting place for discussion, and suggest a variety of perspectives from which you might approach *A Kingdom Divided*.

About the Book

Already an international bestseller, *A Kingdom Divided* continues the epic story of the Moghuls, one of the most magnificent and violent dynasties in world history.

India, 1530. Humayun, the newly crowned second Moghul emperor, is a fortunate man. His father, Babur, has left him wealth, glory, and an empire that stretches a thousand miles south of the Khyber Pass; he must now build on his legacy, and make the Moghuls worthy of their legendary forebear, Tamburlaine.

But, unbeknownst to him, Humayun is already in grave danger. His half-brothers are plotting against him; they doubt that he has the strength, the will, the brutality needed to command the Moghul armies and lead them to still-greater glories. Soon Humayun will be locked in a terrible battle: not only for his crown, not only for his life, but for the existence of the very empire itself.

Praise for *A Kingdom Divided*

"The hand-to-hand combat pulsates with heroic vigor and plentiful gore, sure to entertain fans, and the climax paves the way for the next epic entry."—*Publishers Weekly*

"This book has everything: a flawed yet heroic leader, love, jealousy, and treachery. It is a perfect summer read—fast paced and completely absorbing." —*City A.M.* (U.K.)

"A roaring landslide of an historical epic full of the red-hot heat of battle and the blackout of treachery, with a cast of characters to die for." —*The Northern Echo* (U.K.)

"Literally packed with the stuff of legend—bloody battles, brutal killings, and treachery—this is a turbulent and timeless story told with gripping reality and epic scope." —*Lancashire Evening Post* (UK)

"Extremely readable . . . and Rutherford . . . has mined the rich historical material to tell a cracking tale." —*The Times of India*

"Rutherford very deftly re-creates the life and times of the second Moghul emperor who ruled present-day Afghanistan, Pakistan, and parts of northern India." —*The Sunday Tribune* (India)

Praise for *Raiders from the North*:

"A historical novel filled with authentic historical characters that give the readers a glimpse into the savagery and ruthless ambition of the Moghul rulers." —*Deseret News*

"A totally absorbing narrative filled with authentic historical characters and sweeping action set in an age of horrifying but magnificent savagery. The writing is as compelling as the events described and kept me eagerly leaping from one page to the next." —Wilbur Smith

About the Author

Alex Rutherford is the pen name of Diana Preston and her husband Michael. Both studied at Oxford University reading History and English respectively. They are keen travellers and have now clocked up visits to over 140 of the world's countries.

Says Diana 'our greatest love is India where we've spent at least a year of our lives. Our research into the building of the Taj Mahal for our non-fiction book 'A Teardrop on the Cheek of Time', led us to explore the early history of the dynasty which built the Taj – the Moghuls. To help us get inside the heads of the founders of the Moghul dynasty for our fiction quintet 'Empire of the Moghul', we've read all the chronicles of the time. Over the years we've also retraced the steps of the Moghuls from the Ferghana Valley in Kyrgyzstan – home to the first Moghul emperor, the boy-king Babur – to Iran and to the blue domes and minarets of Samarkand in Uzbekistan, across the red deserts to the Oxus River, over the Hindu Kush to Kabul and Afghanistan and down through the Khyber Pass to the plains of northern India.

"In fact, apart from on one occasion when we were stranded on a remote island off the coast of Borneo and forced to hide from pirates, some of our hairiest moments when travelling have been when researching our non-fiction books. While working on our book about Captain Scott and the race for the South Pole, 'A First Rate Tragedy', the Russian research vessel on which we were sailing into Antarctica's Ross Sea was nearly lost in one of the worst storms in Antarctic history with 140 knot winds

(over 240 kilometers per hour) and 20 meter high waves. The life rafts washed overboard and the superstructure iced up like the inside of an old fridge, putting us in danger of capsizing. On another occasion while researching our book on one of our favorite characters the buccaneer-naturalist William Dampier, 'A Pirate of Exquisite Mind', we set out in his footsteps to cross the Darien Isthmus in Panama with local Indian guides. We had to dodge FARC guerrillas, Colombian paramilitaries and the deadly fer de lance snake, in the latter case wading waist high in rivers – our guide claimed snakes don't bite and swim at the same time!"

Discussion Questions

1. Soon after the establishment of the Moghul Empire, in the Europe of the day 'Moghul' became a synonym for immense wealth. In the 1920s it was applied to the powerful, opulent film magnates of Hollywood and also to major industrialists. If we know the name 'Moghul' so well, why don't most of us know much about the history behind it? Who were the Moghuls and why did they matter?
2. What makes Humayun persist in his quest to recover his empire? How much is down to:
 - a. a wish to live up to the expectations of his father Babur, the first Moghul emperor?
 - b. his own character?
 - c. a sense of destiny?
3. What effect does telling the story through a single point of view - Humayun's - have? How might our perceptions be altered if we had multiple points of view?
4. Humayun believed in astrology and in messages from the stars as well as being a student of astronomy. How did these interests affect his actions and the course of his life?
5. Humayun's marriage to Hamida was a pivotal event in his life. What do you think of their relationship? What was her impact on his story?
6. In addition to Hamida, Khanzada and Gulbadan were strong influences on Humayun. To what effect? What if anything does the book tell us of the role of women in Moghul society at this time?
7. Humayun's father Babur made him promise as he lay dying to do nothing against his half-brothers however much they might deserve it. Humayun struggled valiantly to keep the promise. Would he have been a better ruler if a less likeable character if he had ignored it?
8. This is the second book in a series about a ruling dynasty. In Moghul times dynasties were bolstered by the concept of hereditary rule. In the UK we still have an hereditary monarchy and political dynasties persist in modern societies (e.g. the Nehru/Gandhi dynasty in India, the Bhuttos in Pakistan, the Bushes and the Kennedys in the United States) Why? How might it feel to be the child of a dynasty?
9. How does Humayun change through the book and why?
10. Humayun became addicted to opium and alcohol for part of his life. Do you think there is such a thing as an addictive personality and if so was Humayun one and in what way?

11. What might be the main difficulties when writing an historical novel and looking at the sources?
- getting beneath the skin of the main characters using the available material which might be scanty and having to imagine their thoughts and feelings etc.?
 - deciding what events to include and which to exclude?
 - deciding the kind of dialogue? (Alex does not use archaic language but also tries to avoid anything too modern in terms of similes, metaphors and modes of expression.)
 - having to immerse oneself in the culture of the time and working out how far to judge motivation and character against that background rather than that of today?
 - While knowing the historical ending, avoiding this foreknowledge dominating the action and dissipating the tension?

14. Alex Rutherford is the pen name for a husband and wife. What might the difficulties be in writing with someone else and in particular one's partner in life as well as in work?

A Conversation with Diana Preston on behalf of Alex Rutherford

Tell us about your Empire of the Moghul Quintet and the place of 'A Kingdom Divided' within it.

The quintet relates the epic rise and fall of one of the most powerful, opulent and glamorous dynasties in history – the Moghuls. The series spans two hundred turbulent years and the lives of six very different emperors - big personalities all of them. The novels are being published annually.

Briefly, the first in the series, 'Raiders from the North', published in 2009 in hardback and in paperback earlier this year, tells the story of the nomadic warrior Babur, first of the Moghul Emperors. Daring and utterly confident of his destiny, in 1525 Babur swept down from the sandy plains of Central Asia into India to found an empire that would at its peak stretch from the mountains and saffron fields of Kashmir and the high passes of Afghanistan to the blue ocean near Goa and the steamy jungles of Bengal. Relentlessly energetic, he was the first of a line of warrior emperors whose courage on the battlefield would be matched by their love of luxury, their passion for beauty, their unbridled ambition and their unfettered authority over one hundred million people – roughly one sixth of the then world's population. Even in faraway Europe the 'Great Moghul' became spoken of with wonder and awe, his very name a synonym for power and wealth beyond imagining.

The second novel 'A Kingdom Divided, is about Babur's son Humayun, warrior and dreamer and second Moghul emperor. He loses his empire early in his reign and fights to recover it, not only against external enemies but also against the treachery of his half-brothers and an early addiction to opium and alcohol.

The subsequent novels continue the Moghul saga. Briefly:

- The third novel covers the brilliant reign of the charismatic and liberal Akbar, truly the greatest of the 'Great Moghuls'.
- The fourth novel about Akbar's son Jahangir will show how the cycle of distrust and rivalry that will ultimately doom the Moghuls is in full motion.

- The fifth and final novel will be about the final flowering of the Moghuls under the last great emperor, the jewel-loving Shah Jahan, devoted husband of Mumtaz Mahal and builder of the Taj Mahal, with whose passing the once magnificent Moghul empire began to fade into anarchy and decline.

Our aim in the quintet is to bring our readers to the heart of the battles as vast armies lock in conflict, to conjure in their imaginations the Moghul palaces and cities of milk white marble and rose sandstone as they rise up and to share with them the Moghul Emperors' innermost feelings and desires.

What made you decide to write about the Moghuls?

The decision wasn't sudden. Our love of and interest in India began long before we ever thought of telling their story. Over the years we've travelled all over India from the Rajasthan deserts to the backwaters of Cochin, the temples of Trivandrum and the Dal Lake in Kashmir. The great Moghul monuments of northern India – Humayun's tomb and the Red Fort in Delhi, Akbar's tomb, the Taj Mahal and the Fort in Agra - overwhelmed us. We became increasingly curious about their creators and started to read the Moghuls' own diaries and chronicles. They revealed to us a compelling dynastic saga combining the high emotions and rich cadences of grand opera with enough edge-of-the-seat historical drama to fill a dozen big-screen epics and inspired us to write these novels.

For us as writers, one of the most human and compelling parts of the story is that for all its outward brilliance the Moghul dynasty carried within it the seeds of its own destruction. Their inheritance from their ancestor the great Timur was the warrior code that the strongest takes all. Their mantra - handed down through the centuries - was 'Throne or Coffin!' With no law of primogeniture, Moghul princes fought each other and even their fathers for the crown. The succession was never secure and the poison of jealousy seeped corrosively down through the generations. The story of the Moghuls is a vicious circle of sons plotting against fathers, brothers murdering brothers and half-brothers and of empresses and would-be empresses plotting, scheming and seducing. Re-creating this in a series of novels was irresistible to us as story-tellers.

What are the sources? How did you use them and what other research did you do?

We were fortunate there's so much good original source material. We have been able to draw the major events - battles, coups, deaths, executions - and the principal characters from the immense treasure trove of sources that have survived. As well as Babur's own account of his life the Baburnama – the earliest autobiography in Islamic literature - we have, for example, the Akbarnama written by Abul Fazl, Akbar's chronicler, which covers Babur, Humayun and the Moghuls' early days as well as Akbar. For 'Brothers at War' we also had the Humayunnama written by Humayun's sister Gulbadan and the memoirs of Jauhar his personal attendant. The physical detail of the Moghul period is superbly captured in these chronicles and also, for the later Moghul emperors, in other surviving letters and diaries that convey the sheer excitement of events as they unfold. They burst with compelling, exuberant stories not only about great battles and the passions of family politics but more intimate things like the number of an emperor's concubines and the frequency of his couplings, the name of his favourite war elephant, the cost of his bed linen and the way the empire was ruled.

For the later emperors beginning with Akbar, we also have the accounts and letters of European visitors - merchants, mercenaries and missionaries - to the Moghul court. These reveal the visitors' open-mouthed wonder at the spectacle of Moghul wealth and sophistication beyond anything the European courts could offer. To Europeans, the magnificent Moghuls were like characters from an exotic legend. They fastened on every fantastical aspect of Moghul life - gems the size of duck eggs, the gold-leaf decorated food and rose-scented wine prepared for the imperial table, the number of wives and concubines the emperors

enjoyed and the other sensual aspects of Moghul life. A French doctor, exceptionally invited into the imperial harem to treat a woman there, wrote in amazement that he could not locate her pulse because so many ropes of pearls were wound around her arms. The first English ambassador to the Moghul court, Sir Thomas Roe, gives a nice snap shot when, in Jahangir's reign, he describes the Moghul court in terms which could fit the cast of a Shakespearean tragedy: 'a noble prince, an excellent wife, a faithful councillor, a crafty stepmother, an ambitious son, a cunning favourite ...'

Of course, chronicles and diaries only convey part of the picture. They don't capture how the sand changes colour as the sun sinks over the deserts of Rajasthan or how a filmy mist cloaks the Chambal River as the dawn comes up and Sarus cranes take flight or how a Moghul dish of lamb simmered with spinach and pomegranates tastes.

To help us to convey to our readers what life was really like in Moghul times we've been keen to explore everything from architecture to topography. We wanted to understand the similarities and the differences between then and now – for example how the flow of the Jumna River compares with Shah Jahan's time when he reportedly decided to construct the Taj Mahal downstream from the Agra fort where a sharp approximately right-angled bend formed a watershed and reduced the thrust of the Jumna at the proposed Taj site – a problem which it is difficult to envisage being major given the river's present reduced flow.

We also wanted to find out about how people lived, how they dressed, fought, hunted, relaxed and of course ate. We've sampled food at a restaurant behind the Jamma Masjid in Old Delhi whose cooks claim descent from the cooks of the Moghul court. We've checked when ingredients like chillies and potatoes first arrived in India from the Americas to be sure when it would be correct for the Moghul emperor and the maharajahs of Rajasthan to eat *lal mass*, a favourite Rajasthani dish of fiery chilli lamb, or *aloo gobi*, a potato curry.

We've been grateful for help from the staff of the Archaeological Survey of India, not only in explaining new discoveries and theories about the Moghuls to us but in allowing us access to historic sites. For example, we visited Burhanpur to see how the Moghul fortress-palace on the Tapti River where Mumtaz Mahal, the lady of the Taj, died in childbirth is being restored. The archaeologists there showed us delicate floral frescoes in the hammam where Mumtaz bathed in warm, scented rosewater flowing into a marble bath down a slide carved in a fishtail pattern to make the water ripple.

During our latest research trip in spring this year, in preparation for the third book in the series, we re-visited Fatehpur Sikri to look again at the sandstone city Akbar fashioned with such care and attention, even hewing stone side by side with his labourers. We spent time in Rajasthan learning more about Rajput history and culture. We watched riders canter off on Marwari horses, the tips of whose ears do indeed touch just as described in the chronicles. In the Jodhpur fort we examined curved Moghul scimitars and massive double-edged Rajput swords similar to the claymores used by the clans of Scotland in their wars against the English. We were also amazed and amused to see the back-scratchers used by warriors wearing heavy all-encompassing suits of chain mail to reach those inaccessible itchy bits. These kinds of things really make the past come alive and figures emerge as flesh and blood human beings just as we are.

How hard have you found the transition from writing non-fiction to writing historical fiction?

Our previous books have indeed been non-fiction. We've found writing historical fiction liberating and exciting. We have tried to remain broadly true to the main events. The sources are sufficiently rich – and candid – for us to be able to build up a picture of the emperors on which we can build our interpretation of their characters and motivation. We've really enjoyed imagining ourselves into their minds and into those of other players in the drama as well as trying to picture what the locations and the society were like in Moghul times.

We explain to our readers in an historical note at the back of each book what is real and what is invented and want them find our story-telling both compelling and historically convincing. It's for them to say whether we've succeeded but we love the whole process of writing historical fiction.

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