**Dangerous Loot! The History of the Koh-i-noor Diamond**

The Koh-i-noor diamond or ‘Mountain of Light’ was, according to one tradition, mined in Southern India during the Middle Ages. It was said to have weighed 793 carats when uncut and may have formed the eye of the statue of a Hindu goddess.

In the 15th century it may have been looted during a war and taken to Delhi in Northern India where it formed part of the treasury of successive rulers of the city including the Mughal emperors.

An alternative origin is that it was actually mined in Mughal territory and presented to the dynasty in the 17th century.

Either way, it was placed on display in the Mughal’s Peacock Throne, which was in turn looted by a Persian ruler who sacked Delhi in 1739. The diamond soon passed to an Afghan general who established a dynasty in Afghanistan.

In 1813 the Sikh ruler of Punjab, Ranjit Singh, gave sanctuary to a deposed Afghan ruler and demanded the diamond from him in return.

After the final conquest of Punjab by the British in 1849 the Koh-i-noor diamond was confiscated (in effect looted as it had been several times already) and presented to Queen Victoria by the East India Company.

It was displayed at the Great Exhibition in London in 1851 but caused widespread disappointment among the crowds that flocked to see it, as it appeared dull and did not live up to its name. In 1852 the Queen’s husband Prince Albert had the Koh-i-noor diamond re-cut by a specialist from Amsterdam so that it could be set in a broach for her. It was reduced in weight by over 40% and from 186 to 105 carats to increase its brilliance. The Queen wore the broach afterwards and it was kept at Windsor Castle.

At a time of international threats to British imperial power in 1902, the Koh-i-noor was placed in the crown of Queen Alexandra, consort to King Edward VII, and was used at the coronation. It had become a visible symbol of British rule in India.

By this time the tradition had also grown up that it was an unlucky jewel for men to wear, and to this day the diamond remains in the crown of the late Queen Mother in the Jewel House of the Tower of London.

Demands to return it to the government of India or descendants of Ranjit Singh have been resisted so far.