



Henry VIII: The King and His Court (Ballantine Reader's Circle)

By Alison Weir

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For fans of *Wolf Hall*, Alison Weir's *New York Times* bestselling biography of Henry VIII brilliantly brings to life the king, the court, and the fascinating men and women who vied for its pleasures and rewards.

BONUS: This edition contains an excerpt from Alison Weir's *Mary Boleyn*.

Henry VIII, renowned for his command of power, celebrated for his intellect, presided over the most stylish—and dangerous—court in Renaissance Europe. Scheming cardinals vied for power with newly rich landowners and merchants, brilliant painters and architects introduced a new splendor into art and design, and each of Henry's six queens brought her own influence to bear upon the life of the court. In her new book, Alison Weir, author of the finest royal chronicles of our time, brings to vibrant life the turbulent, complex figure of Henry VIII and the glittering court he made his own.

In an age when a monarch's domestic and political lives were inextricably intertwined, a king as powerful and brilliant as Henry VIII exercised enormous sway over the laws, the customs, and the culture of his kingdom. Yet as Weir shows in this swift, vivid narrative, Henry's ministers, nobles, and wives were formidable figures in their own right, whose influence both enhanced and undermined the authority of the throne. On a grand stage rich in pageantry, intrigue, passion, and luxury, Weir records the many complex human dramas that swirled around Henry, while deftly weaving in an account of the intimate rituals and desires of England's ruling class—their sexual practices, feasts and sports, tastes in books and music, houses and gardens.

Stimulating and tumultuous, the court of Henry VIII attracted the finest minds and greatest beauties in Renaissance England—poets Wyatt and Surrey, the great portraitist Hans Holbein, "feasting ladies" like Elizabeth Blount and Elizabeth FitzWalter, the newly rich Boleyn family and the ancient aristocratic clans like the Howards and the Percies, along with the entourages and connections that came and went with each successive wife. The interactions between these individuals, and the terrible ends that befell so many of them, make Henry VIII:

The King and His Court an absolutely spellbinding read.

Meticulous in historic detail, narrated with high style and grand drama, Alison Weir brilliantly brings to life the king, the court, and the fascinating men and women who vied for its pleasures and rewards.

NOTE: This edition does not contain illustrations.

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Editorial Review

Amazon.com Review

Contemporary observers described the young king in glowing terms. At over six feet tall, with rich auburn hair, clear skin, and a slender waist, he was, to many, "the handsomest prince ever seen." From this starting point in *Henry VIII, the King and His Court*, biographer extraordinaire Alison Weir reveals a Henry VIII far different from the obese, turkey-leg gnawing, womanizing tyrant who has gone down in history. Henry embodied the Renaissance ideal of a man of many talents--musician, composer, linguist, scholar, sportsman, warrior--indeed, the Dutch humanist Erasmus (not a man inclined to flattery) declared him a "universal genius." In scholarly yet readable style, Weir brings Henry and his court to life in meticulous, but never tedious, detail. Weir describes everything from courtly fashions to political factions and elaborate meals to tournament etiquette. Along the way she offers up charming--if all too brief--glimpses of Henry's court: tiny Princess Mary, still a very young girl, at her betrothal ceremony saying to the proxy, "Are you the Dauphin of France? If you are, I want to kiss you"; Henry weeping with joy as he held his long-awaited son and heir for the first time; Henry showing off his legs to the Venetian ambassador ("Look here! I have also a good calf to my leg"); Henry's courtiers dressing in heavily padded clothes to emulate--and flatter--their increasingly stout monarch. She also reveals some surprises, for example, that Henry and Katherine were still hunting together as late as 1530, even though Henry was desperately trying to have their marriage annulled. Weir also describes surprisingly happier times in their relationship; Henry loved to dress up in costume, and "was especially fond of bursting in upon Queen Katherine and her ladies in the Queen's Chambers.... Henry took a boyish delight in these disguisings and Katherine seemingly never tired of feigning astonishment that it was her husband who had surprised her." Henry's queens receive relatively little attention here (for them, see Weir's excellent *Six Wives of Henry VIII*), but this book is fascinating and a joy to read. Alison Weir has done it again. --Sunny Delaney

From Publishers Weekly

In a succession of books on medieval and early modern monarchs, Weir has established her credentials as one of the most evocative of popular historians. In *Eleanor of Aquitaine* (which will be reissued in paperback to tie in with this publication), she brushed aside a forest of scholarly debate in favor of fully rounded human portraits. She now turns to the colossal figure of Henry VIII, aspiring chivalric hero and accidental spearhead of the Reformation. In the age's luxurious ceremony, Weir is thoroughly in her element. She revels in the Field of Cloth of Gold, an elaborate showpiece where Henry met his French counterpart; in the zesty supporting cast; and even in the less appetizing duties of the Groom of the Stool. Henry's passions were many and charming: his beloved dogs Cut and Ball were evidently so prone to getting lost that he would pay some æ225 to their finder. Weir's fondness for her character has its difficulties. While admitting that the king proved to be "an imperious and dangerous autocrat who became mesmerised by his own legend," she too is seduced by the myth. Given to romantic hyperbole, she concludes with the largely unsupported sentiment that Henry "excelled all who ever wore a crown"; chalk up another victory for his propagandists. Other problematic characters, like Thomas More ("calm, kind, witty and wise"), are also let off lightly. Still, Weir's nose for detail, her sharpness of eye and her sympathetic touch make this a feast for the senses. (May 1)Forecast: Weir always gets excellent reviews, and Ballantine says there are 500,000 copies of her books in print, and yet she hasn't broken out big-time. Her choice of subject here may make this the one. It is a dual main selection of BOMC, as well as a selection of the Literary Guild, the History Book Club and QPB.

From Library Journal

The events surrounding Henry VIII's tumultuous life have long held public fascination. Weir (*The Six Wives of Henry VIII*) here examines the minutiae of his daily life and gives prominence to the background players of his court. We learn of the king's daily ablutions, hunting pursuits, "mania for property," and amorous liaisons. Numerous other aspects of the period are examined, such as kitchen hygiene, religious feasts and observances, the adornments of the royal palaces, the financial administration of the household, and, of course, the political maneuvering. As the lens shifts to the court, we are introduced, through such notables as Thomas Wolsey and Thomas Cromwell, to the dangerous jockeying for position to achieve royal favor. The paintings of the royal family by Hans Holbein are meticulously described, illuminating the culture and sensibilities of the period. At times, the weighty detail and numerous characters will make the work inaccessible; however, as a scholarly study it is a significant achievement. Recommended for larger public libraries and academic libraries. Isabel Coates, Brampton, Ont. Communications
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