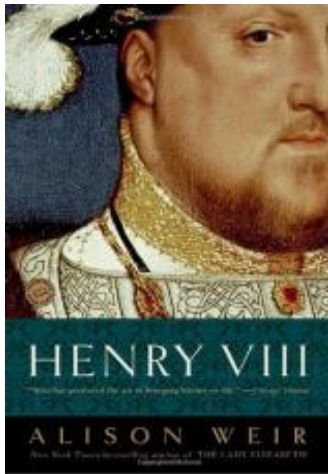


Henry VIII: The King and His Court

by Alison Weir



About the Book

Henry VIII, renowned for his command of power and celebrated for his intellect, presided over one of the most magnificent—and dangerous—courts in Renaissance Europe. Never before has a detailed, personal biography of this charismatic monarch been set against the cultural, social, and political background of his glittering court. Now Alison Weir, author of the finest royal chronicles of our time, brings to vibrant life the turbulent, complex figure of the King. Packed with colorful description, meticulous in historical detail, rich in pageantry, intrigue, passion, and luxury, Weir brilliantly renders King Henry VIII, his court, and the fascinating men and women who vied for its pleasures and rewards. The result is an absolutely spellbinding read.

Discussion Guide

1. At the beginning of the reign of Henry VIII, his virtues were extolled by those who served him. How does the adulation the young King initially inspired of the court compare to the subsequent attitudes his courtiers held toward him? In which ways was he burdened by unrealistic expectations? How did the King manipulate his early reputation to his advantage?
2. It's an adage that a man can often be judged by the company he keeps. How did this prove true of Henry VIII? How much choice did he have over who comprised the court, and how much of it was determined by external factors (for example, tradition, custom, blood ties, or the influence of others)?
3. How did the rich physical appearance of the court and his various palaces reflect the way that Henry VIII felt about himself and his place in the world? Why were opulent surroundings, including innovations in architecture, so important to him? How did the physical arrangement of the King's palaces establish the hierarchy of his courtiers?
4. What characteristics of a courtier do you think that the King held in highest regard? Which characteristics were

undesirable? Can you apply these to advisors of leaders in modern times? In your opinion, which of the King's courtiers was most successful in serving Henry VIII? Who was the most successful in advancing his own personal interests?

5. How did the itinerant nature of the court and its constant movement from place to place affect its makeup? How might it have been different--both physically and politically--if it had been permanently situated in one spot?

6. The Privy Council and the Privy Chamber formed the most elite core of Henry's courtiers and advisors. Was this similar or different to the setup of the King's father, Henry VII? What were the differences between the two groups? How did these individuals wield their influence? How did Henry VIII's mistrust of the gentry shape the court, and how did it prove less constrained by a strict social hierarchy than the outside world as a whole at that time?

7. At the time of Henry VIII's kingship, the ideas of the Renaissance were flourishing. Which of these ideas were most influential to the King and his court? How did influential humanists--for example, Petrarch or Sir Thomas More--shape the thoughts and policies of the King? How was the King's warlike spirit at odds with the opinions of his humanist friends and confidants?

8. Thomas Wolsey enjoyed a spectacular rise to power, becoming a cardinal who was considered as powerful--or even more--than his master, Henry VIII. Which attributes make him indispensable to the King? How does he arouse antipathy from the others around him? What role does his background, breeding, and personal ambition play in his rise and eventual downfall? What purpose did Wolsey serve for both his friends and his enemies?

9. How could the King's favor--or displeasure--toward a courtier affect their fortunes? Examples to discuss could include Cardinal Wolsey, Thomas Cromwell, Archbishop Cranmer, Sir Thomas More, the Duke of Suffolk, Sir Nicholas Carew, and Fray Diego Fernandez.

10. Henry VIII's love for Anne Boleyn changed not only the court, but also the path of England. It led to the King's "Great Matter"--his desire to nullify his marriage to Queen Katherine of Aragon. How did this issue factionalize the court? What issues do you believe it eclipsed, and which did it bring to the forefront? How did the religious climate of the time, and Luther's 95 Theses in particular, also affect the question of religion?

11. Anne Boleyn positioned herself as a paragon of virtue and morality. How did this contrast with her ascent to the throne and some of her own personal characteristics? How did her influence compare to that enjoyed by Katherine, and how did pomp and patronage play into her reign? How did the opinion held of her by the courtiers evolve, and how did that compare to public's view of her? What attributes that initially attracted Henry to her proved to be her undoing?

12. Thomas Cromwell was the second powerful figure to take precedence in the court of Henry VIII. How did he compare to Wolsey? In which ways did Cromwell wield more influence on the King and on the policies of England than Wolsey? Why? How was his downfall similar to that of Wolsey? How was he merely the victim of his adversaries?

13. How did the question of succession shape not only Henry VIII's marriages and liaisons, but also the court in general? How did the birth of Prince Edward affect this? What type of relationship do you believe that Henry's children by three different mothers enjoyed with one another? In particular, how did the relationship between Mary and Elizabeth thrive? What restrictions were placed upon it?

14. How did the lavish spending on coronations, palaces, queens, and wartime activity affect the later years of the King? How did he react to the constant scourge of plague and illness?

15. How was the Reformation of Henry VIII a dividing point between the conservatives and the radicals of his court? How was the Act of Six Articles, which established the doctrine of the Church of England as law, received by both groups? What elements of the Act most reflected Renaissance thinking?

16. How did Henry's advisors use the King's faith to their own advantage, often in ousting their enemies? How did his position of head of the Church influence the King and his way of thinking? In your opinion, how much of his faith was motivated by personal desires (for example, the nullification of his marriages)?

17. How did the various wives--particularly Katherine of Aragon and Anne Boleyn--wield power and influence? How were they employed to advance the interests of particular courtiers, especially in regard to alliances with other countries? Which causes were advanced by each Queen?

18. How were at least three of the wives removed from power by the maneuverings of the King, the court, or both? Do you think that the influence enjoyed by women in Henry VIII's court was unusual based on the gender attitudes of the time? Why or why not?

19. At the close of his life, Henry VIII had grown quite ill. How did this affect the day-to-day workings of the court and the King's advisors? How would you characterize the management style of the King? Would you say that Henry VIII was by nature a laissez-faire manager, or was he merely forced to become one because of his failing health? Why or why not?

Author Bio

Alison Weir is the *New York Times* bestselling author of numerous historical biographies, including THE LOST TUDOR PRINCESS, ELIZABETH OF YORK, MARY BOLEYN, THE LADY IN THE TOWER, MISTRESS OF THE MONARCHY, HENRY VIII, ELEANOR OF AQUITANE, THE LIFE OF ELIZABETH I and THE SIX WIVES OF HENRY VIII, and the novels ANNE BOLEYN, A KING'S OBSESSION; KATHERINE OF ARAGON, THE TRUE QUEEN; THE MARRIAGE GAME; A DANGEROUS INHERITANCE; CAPTIVE QUEEN; THE LADY ELIZABETH; and INNOCENT TRAITOR. She lives in Surrey, England, with her husband.

Critical Praise

"WEIR'S BOOK OUTSHINES ALL PREVIOUS STUDIES OF HENRY. Beautifully written, exhaustive in its research, it is a gem. . . . She succeeds masterfully in making Henry and his six wives . . . come alive for the reader."

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