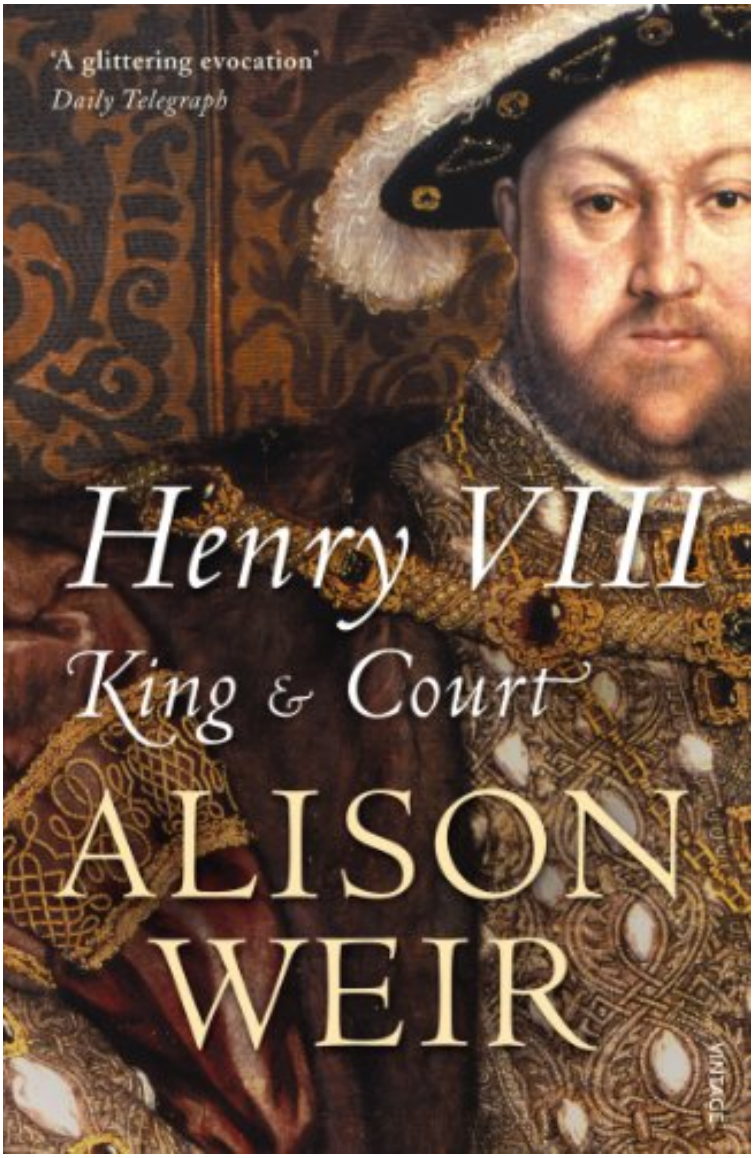
Henry VIII: King and Court



Par Alison Weir
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[Read free] Henry VIII: King and Court

Par Alison Weir : Henry VIII: King and Court before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Henry VIII: King and Court:

Description : Description du produitWEIRS 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.Philadelphia InquirerHenry VIII, renowned for his command of power and celebrated for his intellect, presided over one of the most magnificentand dangerouscourts 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.

Prsentation de l'diteur'This magnificent biography of Henry VIII is set against the cultural, social and political background of his court - the most spectacular court ever seen in England - and the splendour of his many sumptuous palaces.An entertaining narrative packed with colourful description and a wealth of anecdotal evidence, but a comprehensive analytical study of the development of both monarch and court during a crucial period in English history. As well as challenging some recent theories, it offers controversial new conclusions based on contemporary evidence that has until now been overlooked. This is a triumph of historical writing which will appeal equally to the general reader and the serious historian..comContemporary 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 extraordinare 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 DelaneyExtraitChapter 1 "A Most Accomplished Prince"On 21 April 1509, the corpse of King Henry VII, ravaged by tuberculosis, was laid in state in the chapel at Richmond Palace, whence it would shortly be taken to Westminster Abbey for burial. Few mourned that King's passing, for although he had brought peace and firm government to England and established the usurping Tudor dynasty firmly on the throne, he had been regarded as a miser and an extortionist.The contrast between the dead King and his son and heir could not have been greater. The seventeen-year-old Henry VIII was proclaimed King on 22 April,1 whichmost apt for a prince who embodied all the knightly virtueswas also St. George's Day. The rejoicings that greeted Henry's accession were ecstatic and unprecedented, for it was believed that he would usher in "a golden world."2William Blount, Lord Mountjoy, a courtier, expressed the national mood in a letter to his fellow humanist, the renowned Desiderius Erasmus:I have no fear but when you heard that our prince, now Henry the Eighth, whom we may well call our Octavius, had succeeded to his father's throne, all your melancholy left you at once. What may you not promise yourself from a prince with whose extraordinary and almost divine character you are acquainted? When you know what a hero he now shows himself, how wisely he behaves, what a lover he is of justice and goodness, what affection he bears to the learned, I will venture to swear that you will need no wings to make you fly to behold this new and auspicious star!If you could see how here all the world is rejoicing in the possession of so great a prince, how his life is all their desire, you could not contain your tears for sheer joy. The heavens laugh, the earth exults. . . . Avarice is expelled from the country, extortion is put down, liberality scatters riches with a bountiful hand. Yet our King does not desire gold, gems or precious metals, but virtue, glory, immortality!3To his contemporaries, Henry VIII was the embodiment of kingship. Thomas More's coronation eulogy states that "among a thousand noble companions, the king stands out the tallest, and his strength fits his majestic body. There is fiery power in his eyes, beauty in his face, and the colour of twin roses in his cheeks."4 Other evidence proves that this was not mere flattery. Henry's skeleton, discovered in 1813, was six feet two inches in length. Henry was certainly of strong and muscular build: the Spanish ambassador reported in 1507 that "his limbs are of a gigantic size."5 In youth, he was slim and broad-shouldered: his armour of 1512 has a waist measurement of thirty-two inches, while that of 1514 measures thirty-five inches at the waist, forty-two inches at the chest.Several

sources testify to Henry's fair skin, among them the poet John Skelton, who called him "Adonis, of fresh colour." His hair, strands of which still adhered to his skull in 1813, was auburn, and he wore it combed short and straight in the French fashion. For many years he remained clean-shaven. In visage, the young King resembled his handsome grandfather, Edward IV,6 with a broad face, small, close-set, penetrating eyes, and a small, sensual mouth; Henry, however, had a high-bridged nose. He was, wrote a Venetian envoy in 1516, "the handsomest prince ever seen,"7 an opinion in which most contemporaries concurred.The young Henry enjoyed robust good health, and was a man of great energy and drive. He had a low boredom threshold and was "never still or quiet."8 His physician, Dr. John Chamber, described him as "cheerful and gamesome,"9 for he was quick to laugh and he enjoyed a jest. A Venetian called him "prudent, sage and free from every vice,"10 and indeed it seemed so in 1509, for Henry was idealistic, open-handed, liberal, and genial. Complacency, self-indulgence, and vanity appeared to be his worst sinshe was an unabashed show-off and shamelessly solicited the flattery of others. He was also high-strung, emotional, and suggestible. Only as he grew older did the suspicious and crafty streaks in his nature become more pronounced; nor were his wilfulness, arrogance, ruthlessness, selfishness, and brutality yet apparent, for they were masked by an irresistible charm and affable manner.Kings were expected to be masterful, proud, self-confident, and courageous, and Henry had all these qualities in abundance, along with a massive ego and a passionate zest for life. He embodied the Renaissance ideal of the man of many talents with the qualities of the mediaeval chivalric heroes whom he so much admired. He was "simple and candid by nature,"11 and he used no worse oath than "By St. George!" A man of impulsive enthusiasms, he could be naive.Decision making did not come easily to Henryit was his habit "to sleep and dream upon the matter and give an answer in the morning"12 but once his mind was made up he always judged himself, as the Lord's Anointed, to be in the right. Then, "if an angel was to descend from Heaven, he would not be able to persuade him to the contrary."13 Cardinal Wolsey was later to warn, "Be well advised what ye put in his head, for ye shall never pull it out again."14Few could resist Henry's charisma. "The King has a way of making every man feel that he is enjoying his special favour," wrote Thomas More.15 Erasmus called Henry "the man most full of heart."16 He would often put his arm around a man's shoulder to put him at his ease, although he "could not abide to have any man stare in his face when he talked with them."17 There are many examples of his kindness to others, as will be seen. Yet the King also had a spectacular and unpredictable temper, and in a rage could be terrifying indeed. He was also very jealous of his honour, both as king and as a knight, and had the tenderest yet most flexible of consciences. His contemporaries thought him extraordinarily virtuous, a lover of goodness, truth, and justicejust as he was always to see himself.Because the young King was not quite eighteen, his father's mother, the venerable Lady Margaret Beaufort, Countess of Richmond and Derby, acted as regent during the first ten weeks of the reign. Lady Margaret had exercised considerable influence over the upbringing of her grandson, since it had been she, and not Henry's mother, Elizabeth of York, who was in charge of the domestic arrangements in Henry VII's household. And it had been she who was entrusted with perfecting Edward IV's series of ordinances for the regulation of the royal household;18 the procedures she established would continue to be enforced throughout Henry VIII's reign and beyond, and they covered, among other things, the rules to be observed in the royal nurseries.The Lady Margaret was now a frail, nunlike widow of sixty-six, renowned for her piety, learning, and charitable works; yet her influence was formidable. She had been an inveterate intriguer during the Wars of the Roses, and had outlived four husbands. After the King, she held more lands than anyone else in the kingdom. Henry VII, born when she was only thirteen, was her only child, and she had been utterly devoted to him. That devotion extended to her grandchildren, whose education she probably supervised. For this she was admirably qualified, being a generous benefactor of scholarship and the foundress of Christ's College and St. John's College at Cambridge. A patron of William Caxton, she was both a lover of books and a true intellectual. She was also an ascetic, wearing a severe widow's barbe up to her chin and a hair shirt beneath her black robes, and her rigorous religious regime represented the harsher aspects of mediaeval piety. From her, the Prince inherited his undoubted intellectual abilities and a conventional approach to religious observance. * * *Henry had been born on 28 June 1491, and was created Duke of York at the age of three. His seventeenth-century biographer Lord Herbert of Cherbury, who had access to sources lost to us, claimed that Henry VII intended this second son to enter the Church, and had him educated accordingly. Certainly Henry was pious and very well grounded in the- ology. Yet on the death of his elder brother, Arthur, in 1502, he became Prince of Wales and heir to the throne. The death of his mother, Elizabeth of York, in 1503, seems to have affected him deeply: in 1507, having learned of the death of Duke Philip of Burgundy, he confided to

Erasmus that "never, since the death of my dearest mother, hath there come to me more hateful intelligence. . . . It seemed to tear open again the wound to which time had brought insensibility."19Henry was very well educated in the classical, humanist fashion. Thomas More later asked, "What may we not expect from a king who has been nourished on philosophy and the Nine Muses?" The poet John Skelton was the Prince's tutor for a time, as was William Hone, of whom little is known.Skelton may have owed his appointment to Margaret Beaufort, for he was a Cambridge man, a Latin classicist in holy orders. He had been appointed poet laureate by the universities of Cambridge, Oxford, and Louvain, and was described by Erasmus as "that incomparable light and ornament of British letters." He had probably been Henry's first teacher, for he claimed:The honour of England I learned to spell,In dignity royal at that doth excel. . . .I gave him drink of the sugared wellOf Helicon's waters crystalline,Acquainting him with the Muses nine.He probably also taught Henry to read, and to write in a rounded, Italianate hand. Skelton was a colourful and eccentric character, an indifferent poet who wrote scurrilous, vitriolic satires, such as The Bouche of Court, which targeted the corrupt courtiers in Henry VII's household. Unlike most court versifiers, Skelton wrote in English, not the customary French or Latin. He was conceited, quarrelsome, and often ribaldhe took a cruel pleasure in exposing ladies of the court as whores, and was obsessed with young girlsyet at the same time he set himself up as a champion of morality. Not surprisingly, he made many enemies.Skelton may have been in his post as teacher by the time Henry was three, for, in a poem he composed to mark the boy's creation as Duke of York, he referred to him as "a brilliant pupil." Around 1501, Skelton wrote a rather pessimistic Latin treatise, Speculum PrincipisThe Mirror of a Prince, for the edification of his charge; he urged him never to relinquish power to his inferiors and to "choose a wife for yourself, prize her always and uniquely." In 1502, Skelton spent a short spell in prison for a minor misdemeanour, which effectively terminated his royal duties; upon his release he was appointed rector of Diss in Norfolk, but around 1511 he was dismissed for living with a concubine. Thereafter he lived at Westminster, where he would write his most vituperative and famous poems.Along with Skelton, Prince Arthur's former tutor, the poet Bernard Andre, may have taught Henry Latin, and Giles d'Ewes was perhaps his French master. The Prince showed a flair for languages at an early age. By the time he became king he was fluent in French, English, and Latin, and had a good understanding of Italian."20 In 1515, Venetian envoys conversed with Henry VIII "in good Latin and French, which he speaks very well indeed."21 Henry customarily used Latin when speaking to ambassadors. He later acquired some Spanish, probably from his first wife, Katherine of Aragon. In 1519, he began studying Greek with the humanist Richard Croke, but soon gave it up, possibly for lack of time.He showed early on that he had inherited the family aptitude for music, and in 1498 his father bought him a lute, although no details of his tuition survive.He was also given instruction in "all such convenient sports and exercises as behoveth his estate to have experience in,"22 and that included the gentlemanly skills of riding, jousting, tennis, archery, and hunting.In 1499, when Henry was eight, Thomas More took Erasmus to visit the royal children at Eltham Palace; afterward, the Prince corresponded with Erasmus in Latin. The Dutch humanist suspected that Henry's tutors were helping him with the letters, and was later amazed to discover from Lord Mountjoy that they were all his own work. He later flattered himself that Henry's style emulated his own because he had read Erasmus's books when young.23Erasmus, who was by no means a sycophant, was to call Henry VIII "a universal genius" and wrote, "He has never neglected his studies." As King, Henry would continue those studies, taking Cardinal Wolsey's advice to read the works of Duns Scotus, Thomas Aquinas, and the Church Fathers. He saw himself as a scholar and humanist, and desired to be recognised as such by learned men. His interest was genuine, and it is attested to by the numerous annotations in his own hand in the margins of his surviving books. For Henry, learning was a great source of enjoyment, a journey of discovery for a mind avid for new information. He was extraordinally well read for a layman, and had wide interests. He also had some ability as a writerhis letters to the Vatican were exhibited as some of the most elegantly written ever received thereand as a speaker he showed eloquence "worthy of a great orator rather than a king."24Henry had a sharp an eye for detail and an encyclopaedic memory. "There was no necessary kind of knowledge from a king's degree to a carter's, but he had an honest sight of it."25 He had a quick mind, superb organisational skills, and a formidable intellect. He possessed, wrote Erasmus, "a lively mentality which reached for the stars, and he was able beyond measure to bring to perfection whichever task he undertook."26 "The King's Majesty has more learning than any English monarch possessed before him,"27 Thomas More claimed, with some truth. "He is in every respect a most accomplished prince," wrote one Venetian,28 while another declared him to be "so gifted and adorned with mental accomplishments of every sort that we believe him to have few equals in the world."29 Princes were routinely eulogised by

commentators and ambassadors in this period, but the unanimous praises heaped on Henry VIIIsometimes expressed in private lettersundoubtedly contain a high degree of sincerity.Beyond his academic interests, Henry was creative and inventive; he loved novelties and enjoyed experimenting with mechanics and technology. He designed weapons and fortifications, and he took an active interest in building plans. He also had "a remarkable docility for mathematics"30 and was "learned in all sciences";31 the cupboards in his privy lodgings contained various scientific instruments.32Henry had a passion for astronomy. The reformer Philip Melanchton called him "most learned, especially in the study of the movement of the heavens."33 Henry's astrolabe, bearing his crowned coat of arms and made by a Norman, Sebastien le Senay, is in the British Museum. As King, Henry would appoint as his chaplain the Oxford astronomer and mathematician John Robyns, who dedicated his treatise on comets to his master. The two men enjoyed many a discussion on astronomy. In 1540, Peter Apia- nus, a professor of mathematics from Ingolstadt, presented to Henry VIII his treatise Astronicum Caesareum on astronomy and navigation.34Henry's interest in maps is well documented, and it prepared the ground for the eventual mapping of England in the late sixteenth century. The King owned many maps, most of them kept rolled up in cupboards and drawers in his chambers and libraries, as well as mapmaking tools, "a globe of paper," and "a map made like a screen,"35 indicating that Henry himself was something of a cartographer. Elaborate maps hung on the walls of the royal palaces and were used in court entertainments or for political strategy. In 1527, a Venetian mapmaker, Girolamo Verrazano, presented the King with a world map which was later hung in his gallery at Whitehall, along with thirty-four other maps, and there were maps of England, Scotland, Wales, and Normandy in the gallery at Hampton Court.36Later in the reign, the defence of the realm was a major preoccupation, and the King commissioned a plan of Dover from Sir Richard Lee, surveyor of Calais,37 as well as a map of the English coastline from the Dieppe mariner John Rotz, who was appointed royal hydrographer in 1542. The atlas he produced, The Book of Idrography, was dedicated to Henry. Henry also employed a French cosmographer, Jean Mallard, who produced a book containing one of the first circular maps of the world.38Henry emerged from his education as "a prodigy of precocious scholarship."39 But by 1508, for reasons that are not clear, the autocratic Henry VII was keeping his son under such strict supervision that he might have been a young girl.40 Unlike his late brother, the Prince was given no royal responsibilities, nor, it seems, much training in the arts and duties of kingship, apart from some sound schooling in history from the King himself.41 He was not permitted to leave the palace unless it was by a private door into the park, and then only in the company of specially appointed persons. No one dared approach him or speak to him. He spent most of his time in a room that led off the King's bedchamber, and appeared "so subjected that he does not speak a word except in response to what the King asks him."42It may be that, having lost his three other sons, Henry VII was overly concerned for the health and safety of his surviving heir. Another theory is that he was well aware of the Prince's capabilities, and did not trust him; he is said to have been "beset by the fear that his son might during his lifetime obtain too much power."43 The Prince's cousin, Reginald Pole, later claimed that Henry VII hated his son, "having no affection or fancy unto him."44 Once, in 1508, the King quarrelled so violently with young Henry that it appeared "as if he sought to kill him."45Perhaps Henry VII was all too aware of the boy's weaknesses, for he ensured that "all the talk in his presence was of virtue, honour, cunning, wisdom and deeds of worship, of nothing that shall move him to vice."46 Nor did the Prince have any opportunity of indulging in licentious behaviour: the chances are that he retained his virginity until he married.Henry's tutelage did not last much longer. In 1509, the King died, and this untried youth came into his own.From the Hardcover edition.