



Mary Boleyn: The Mistress of Kings

By Alison Weir

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NATIONAL BESTSELLER • NAMED ONE OF THE BEST BOOKS OF THE YEAR BY THE CHICAGO TRIBUNE

New York Times bestselling author and noted British historian Alison Weir gives us the first full-scale, in-depth biography of Mary Boleyn, sister to Queen Anne as well as mistress to Anne's husband, Henry VIII—and one of the most misunderstood figures of the Tudor age. Making use of extensive original research, Weir shares revelations on the ambitious Boleyn family and the likely nature of the relationship between the Boleyn sisters. Unraveling the truth about Mary's much-vaunted notoriety at the French court and her relations with King François I, Weir also explores Mary's role at the English court and how she became Henry VIII's lover. She tracks the probable course of their affair and investigates the truth behind Mary's notorious reputation. With new and compelling evidence, Weir presents the most conclusive answer to date on the paternity of Mary's children, long speculated to have been Henry VIII's progeny. Alison Weir pieces together a life steeped in mystery and misfortune, debunking centuries-old myths to give us the truth about Mary Boleyn, the so-called "great and infamous whore."

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Mary Boleyn: The Mistress of Kings By Alison Weir Bibliography

- Sales Rank: #129716 in Books
- Published on: 2012-09-04
- Released on: 2012-09-04
- Original language: English
- Number of items: 1
- Dimensions: 7.99" h x .97" w x 5.19" l, .71 pounds
- Binding: Paperback
- 416 pages

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Editorial Review

Amazon.com Review

A Letter from the Author: Mary Boleyn on Film



Mary Boleyn has been portrayed several times on screen. In *Anne of the Thousand Days* (1969), Valerie Gearon plays her as the dark-haired, 'pliant eldest daughter' of Thomas Boleyn. Henry VIII's affair with her is dated to 1523; Anne Boleyn complains: 'We have had the King in the bosom of this family for three years!' When next we see Mary, she has been banished to Hever and is pregnant with Henry's child. Sir Thomas tells her she must make no trouble about being abandoned, to avoid putting her family at risk. Mary warns her sister: 'Learn from me, Nan. Lock up your heart.' She has clearly lost her own heart: when the King visits, she sits weeping alone. It is inevitable that film makers make dramatic capital from the scenario of one sister snaring the King who has abandoned the other. Watching the film today, one is struck by its integrity and the efforts made to achieve a degree of accuracy, which are markedly absent from some modern historical films. Clare Cameron made a cameo appearance as Mary in *Henry VIII* (2003). When the King (Ray Winstone) descends on Hever to court Anne, Mary is big with a child he doubts is his--and faints at the sight of him. This is one of many gratuitous scenes in the series. The pregnant Mary is about to be married to 'a provincial book-keeper'. Later, bending the historical chronology, Henry says he will grant Mary lands, a title and a good marriage; and he titles her father Earl of Essex (his title was in fact Earl of Wiltshire!) In 2003, the BBC filmed Philippa Gregory's novel, *The Other Boleyn Girl*. Henry VIII's interest in Mary (Natasha McElhone) is dated to 1524, and Katherine of Aragon (why is she always shown as black-haired in films?) is improbably aware of the affair. Mary is manoeuvred by her family into becoming the King's mistress, but she loves her husband, William Carey, and only reluctantly succumbs. But as their intimacy deepens, she comes to favour Henry, and a rift opens between her and Carey. William Stafford, who will become Mary's second husband, appears early on in the unlikely guise of a servant of the Boleyns, when he would have been about twelve years old! Mary becomes pregnant in 1525. Her father is worried that the King will stray while she is unavailable to him, so he pushes Anne into Henry's path. Inevitably, Henry falls for Anne. Mary is shown being confined as a queen, taking to a darkened chamber in readiness for the birth. Henry VIII was discreet in his illicit amours, and these ordinances were laid down only for the Queen, so this is just pure silliness. Mary gives birth to a son, but the Duke of Norfolk tells her that the King no longer desires her because he wants her sister. Only Stafford is there to support her. Mary is forced to wait on Anne, whom she now hates, and to witness her flirting with Henry. Carey tells her to forget the King, and forces himself on her, fathering a daughter. But the chronology is skewed, as is the likely paternity of the children. Carey dies after Anne becomes queen in 1533 (in reality, he died in 1528). When Anne tries to wed

Mary to the fictional Lord Farnley, she marries Stafford in secret. When she confesses, she is banished for disgracing the family. Mary is then seen suggesting that Anne lie secretly with another man in order to conceive a son, when in reality, she was likely in Calais during Anne's fall. In the series, it is she who asks their brother George, 'Could you lie with her?' Later, she comforts Anne for the loss of the son George has incestuously fathered, and after Anne's arrest, she attends her in the Tower. There is no sense of politics in the film, as in the movie, *The Other Boleyn Girl* (2008), starring Scarlett Johansson as a rather vacuous Mary. The costumes are often anachronistic and the chronology shaky. The story is told on a superficial level, and follows a similar plot to the TV movie. At the end, Mary is seen watching Anne's execution; but the real Anne did not weep on the scaffold. The most far-fetched scene is where Mary rides back to court afterwards and snatches Anne's daughter Elizabeth, carrying her off to be reared with her own children in the country. In the TV series *The Tudors* (2007-2010), Mary Boleyn (Perdita Weeks) appears in six episodes. From the moment you see the eighteenth-century coach in the opening shots of the series, you know that historical integrity is going to be an issue. Hopeless chronology, dated costumes and unforgivable factual errors spoil a series that is often well acted by a strong cast. *The Tudors* inhabits a world of its own: only occasionally do you get a sense of Tudor England. Many of the female characters, like Mary, look like modern fashion models with breast implants and teased hair. We see the King of France pointing out Mary to Henry VIII at the Field of Cloth of Gold in 1520. When Henry later asks Mary what French graces she has learned, she offers him oral sex. Later, we see Mary waiting on her sister Anne and visiting Calais with the royal party. Anne and Mary are depicted as being very close and affectionate, which may not have been the case in real life. In the show it is Mary (not even recorded as being present) who carries the Princess Elizabeth to her christening. Later on a heavily pregnant Mary--had Anne not already noticed?--confesses that she has married Stafford secretly, and the Boleyns banish her from court. Mary Boleyn is misrepresented in popular culture because of such films. It concerns me that the demarcation line between historical fact and fiction has now become blurred. Why would one ever want to change history? The truth, as Byron famously said, 'is stranger than fiction'.

Review

"This nuanced, smart, and assertive biography reclaims the life of a Tudor matriarch."—*Publishers Weekly*

"Weir has achieved the enviable skill of blending the necessary forensic and analytical tasks of academia with the passionate engagement that avocational history lovers crave."—*Bookreporter*

"Top-notch . . . This book further proves that [Weir] is a historian of the highest caliber."—*Washington Independent Review of Books*

"Weir matches her usual professional skills in research and interpretation to her customary, felicitous style."—*Booklist*

About the Author

Alison Weir is the *New York Times* bestselling author of many historical biographies, including *The Lady in the Tower*, *Mistress of the Monarchy*, *Henry VIII*, *Eleanor of Aquitaine*, *The Life of Elizabeth I*, and *The Six Wives of Henry VIII*, and of the novels *Captive Queen*, *Innocent Traitor*, and *The Lady Elizabeth*. She lives in Surrey, England, with her husband.

From the Hardcover edition.

Users Review

From reader reviews:

David Bergeron:

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