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Sex With Kings: 500 Years Of Adultery, Power, Rivalry, And Revenge



Synopsis

Throughout the centuries, royal mistresses have been worshiped, feared, envied, and reviled. They set the fashions, encouraged the arts, and, in some cases, ruled nations. Eleanor Herman's *Sex with Kings* takes us into the throne rooms and bedrooms of Europe's most powerful monarchs. Alive with flamboyant characters, outrageous humor, and stirring poignancy, this glittering tale of passion and politics chronicles five hundred years of scintillating women and the kings who loved them. Curiously, the main function of a royal mistress was not to provide the king with sex but with companionship. Forced to marry repulsive foreign princesses, kings sought solace with women of their own choice. And what women they were! From Madame de Pompadour, the famous mistress of Louis XV, who kept her position for nineteen years despite her frigidity, to modern-day Camilla Parker-Bowles, who usurped none other than the glamorous Diana, Princess of Wales. The successful royal mistress made herself irreplaceable. She was ready to converse gaily with him when she was tired, make love until all hours when she was ill, and cater to his every whim. Wearing a mask of beaming delight over any and all discomforts, she was never to be exhausted, complaining, or grief-stricken. True, financial rewards for services rendered were of royal proportions -- some royal mistresses earned up to \$200 million in titles, pensions, jewels, and palaces. Some kings allowed their mistresses to exercise unlimited political power. But for all its grandeur, a royal court was a scorpion's nest of insatiable greed, unquenchable lust, and vicious ambition. Hundreds of beautiful women vied to unseat the royal mistress. Many would suffer the slings and arrows of negative public opinion, some met with tragic ends and were pensioned off to make room for younger women. But the royal mistress often had the last laugh, as she lived well and richly off the fruits of her "sins." From the dawn of time, power has been a mighty aphrodisiac. With diaries, personal letters, and diplomatic dispatches, Eleanor Herman's trailblazing research reveals the dynamics of sex and power, rivalry and revenge, at the most brilliant courts of Europe. Wickedly witty and endlessly entertaining, *Sex with Kings* is a chapter of women's history that has remained unwritten -- until now.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

When kings marry foreign strangers for dynastic or financial reasons and queens are trained in piety over sensuality, royal mistresses seem an inevitability. Kings had flings and extramarital relationships through much of European history, and in her first book, Herman offers, with relish and dry wit, a delightful overview of their sexual escapades. Her subjects are international, though France dominates and England gets a strong showing. It's a lively account, organized by topic e.g., "The Fruits of Sin" "Royal Bastards." Herman weaves into a larger pattern the tales of recurrent figures, such as Louis XIV's mistress AthÃ©naÃ©s de Montespan and Madame de Pompadour, who is perhaps more famous than her royal lover, Louis XV. Fashions, love potions and cheerful conversation kept kings enthralled while mistresses made themselves wealthy, husbands acquiesced or simmered, courtiers wooed the mistresses and the public admired or ridiculed. A striking number of these relationships continued despite arguments and even the lack of sex. George II even felt it necessary to keep a mistress for his reputation despite actually loving his wife. Herman ends on a modern note, recounting how Camilla Parker-Bowles famously introduced herself to Prince Charles by noting that her great-grandmother had been his great-great-grandfather's mistress. Herman ends on a serious note, but her wit and perceptiveness will carry readers through this royally pleasurable romp. Copyright Â© Reed Business Information, a division of Reed Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

Certainly a catchy title. And Herman's spirited history of royal "mistresshood" is certainly a catchy read. Her book is not a collective biography of mistresses of European kings through the ages, although she does pay relatively brief but nevertheless trenchant visits to famous ones and some not so famous. No, her book is more an accounting of the "art and science" of being a royal mistress, ranging in time from the "departing mists" of medieval Europe (before which "royal sin" was kept from public knowledge) to the present day (namely, Prince Charles' girlfriend, Camilla

Parker-Bowles). Her treatment is a royal-mistresses-for-dummies look at male monarchs having sex on the side. She establishes a basic chronological history of the institution and assigns it a set of general characteristics (for instance, the paramour is "never to be tired, ill, complaining, or grief-stricken"). The author explains what mistresses got out of their relationships, and she looks into the issue of how mistresses traditionally got along (or didn't) with queen wives. History made as buoyant as fiction. Brad HooperCopyright © American Library Association. All rights reserved
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