

Who Was Henry VIII?

Source A – A description of King Henry VIII by the Venetian Ambassador in 1515. The Ambassador was attending a feast Henry VIII had thrown as a celebration.

“He wore a cap of crimson velvet in the French way. The brim was tied up with lace loops, which had gold enamel tags. His doublet was in the Swiss fashion with stripes of white and crimson satin. Scarlet was his tights. Close around his neck was a gold collar from which hung a round cut diamond the size of largest walnut I ever saw. From this hung the most beautiful and very large pearl. His cloak was pure velvet lined with white satin, the sleeves open with a train more than four metres long. Around his cloak was thick gold cord from which hung thick gold tassels.”

Source B – A portrait entitled ‘King Henry VIII’. This portrait was commissioned by Henry and he would have posed for it. It is thought Henry would have been about 20 at this time.

Source C – From a book about the Tudors written by a modern historian in 2005.

“At the end of his life Henry VIII was so fat that three men had to haul him out of bed in the morning. His legs had oozing scabs on them. He was almost bald.”

Source D – A portrait of Henry VIII painted by Hans Holbein in 1540. It shows Henry in his finest clothes and was sent to all European courts.



Source E – Written by a modern historian in 1999.

“...England’s most tireless horsemen, foremost wrestler, a first-class archer, hawker and joustier.”

Source F – Written in the 16th Century by a close friend of Henry VIII.

“He is very talented, a good musician, composes well... speaks good French, Latin and Spanish, is very religious, hears three masses daily when he hunts and sometimes five on other days... He is very fond of hunting and never takes his sport without tiring eight or ten horses.”

Source G – Written by a modern historian in 2005.

“Henry VIII was simply one of the most charismatic rulers to sit on the throne.”

Source H – Written by a modern historian in 2017.

“It is impossible to be accurate as many records have been lost, but it is thought that between 57,000 and 72,000 people were executed by King Henry VIII during his 37 year reign. Over 50,000 families in England had a family member executed by Henry. King Henry’s tactic for dealing with heresy, dissent or rivalry to his power was to execute. One of his first acts on succeeding to be King was to execute his father’s most trusted advisors. By the end of his reign, Henry was a tyrant.”

Source I – Portrait entitled ‘Henry VIII and the Barber Surgeons’ by Hans Holbein from 1540. Henry did not pose for this portrait.

