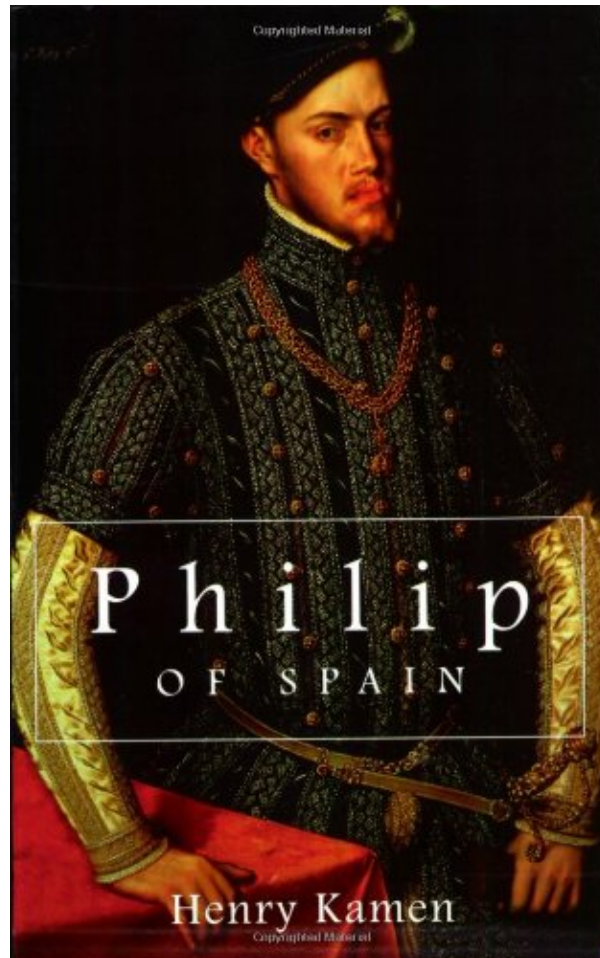
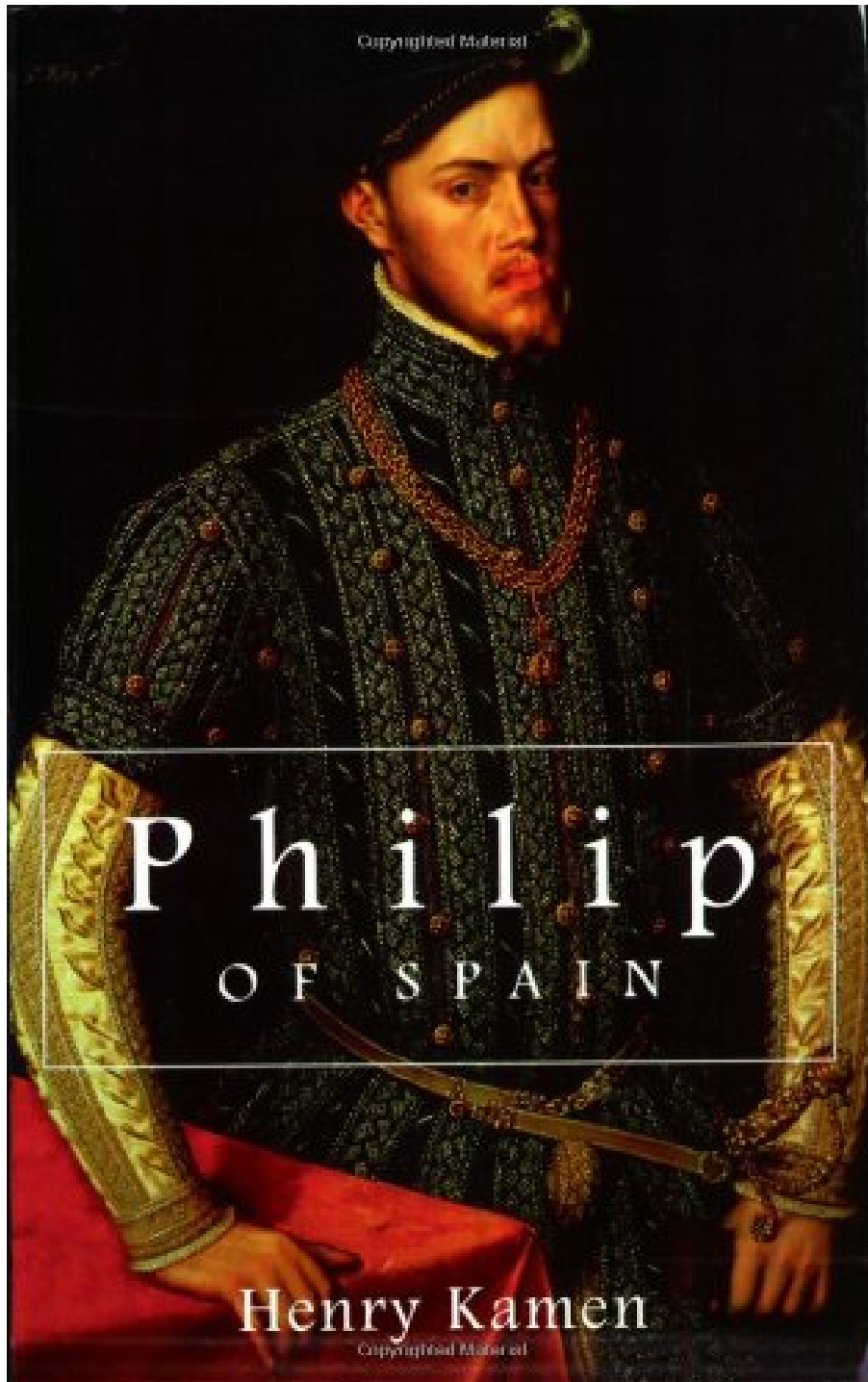


PHILIP OF SPAIN BY HENRY KAMEN



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This book, published four hundred years after Philip's death, is the first full-scale biography of the king. Placing him within the social, cultural, religious and regional context of his times, it presents a startling new picture of his character and reign. Drawing on Philip's unpublished correspondence and on many other archival sources, Henry Kamen reveals much about Philip the youth, the man, the husband, the father, the frequently troubled Christian and the king. Kamen finds that Philip was a cosmopolitan prince whose extensive experience of northern Europe broadened his cultural imagination and tastes, whose staunchly conservative ideas were far from being illiberal and fanatical, whose religious attitudes led him to accept a practical coexistence with Protestants and Jews, and whose support for Las Casas and other defenders of the Indians in America helped determine government policy. Shedding completely new light on most aspects of Philip's private life and, in consequence, on his public actions, this book is the definitive portrayal of Philip II.

- Sales Rank: #986329 in Books
- Published on: 1999-02-08
- Original language: English
- Number of items: 1
- Dimensions: 9.10" h x 1.19" w x 6.23" l, 1.47 pounds
- Binding: Paperback
- 400 pages

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Great Historical Perspective on King Phillip II

By Amazon Customer

Great historical perspective on King Phillip II. Good documentation, and author perspective.

17 of 17 people found the following review helpful.

Intriguing but Deflating

By Arthem

I suppose it is true of many a biography, and in individual experience, that we rarely recognize greatness in people we know well. Kamen does an excellent job painting an unconventional portrait of Philip. In the process, however, the "Black Legend" is reduced to a somewhat flighty renaissance princeling.

For whatever reason, I never received the anglophile's disdain for Philip. Perhaps it was Warren Carroll's portrait of Philip in his Christendom series, or Hillaire Belloc's view, both of which tended to paint Philip as the tragically ineffectual hero of Catholic Europe, standing in the breach against both the heretic and the Turk, and only partially saving Europe while dooming his own Empire.

As ought to have been expected, Kamen's well researched and presented portrait shows a complex individual, capable of progressivism (ala opposition to blood purity laws and early support for Tridentine reforms), while simultaneously enjoying the public manifestations of the Inquisition. The casual nature of Philip's early marriages contrasts starkly against his reaction to the death of his fourth wife. "Philip the Bureaucrat" would seem to be an apt title for a King paralyzed by paperwork, and unable to govern his vast realms due to slow communication, shifty underlings, and a byzantine political system that only Umberto

Eco could love.

It is hard, in the end, to get a bead on Philip. It is indeed tragic for Spain that the many great chances for the establishment of their empire were lost in the various cataclysms of Dutch piracy, stormy seas, and overzealous generals - thus contributing to the later usurpation of Portugese westernization of the orient, English dominance of North America, and setting the stage for Cardinal Richelieu and far bloodier events in Europe.

Of course, Kamen avoids projecting out consequences, only hinting at the damage done to Spain by the misfortunes of Philip's reign. For a biography of "the world's most powerful man," the focus is so narrow as to be somewhat myopic. But it is at this price that we obtain the detail which saves Philip from both the Black Legend and latter-day sanctification - neither of which he deserves.

5 of 7 people found the following review helpful.

This book explains many contemporary aspects of life

By A Customer

For anyone who has visited Philip's magnificent El Escorial palace outside Madrid and wondered at the power of this monarch when looking at his sober and modest bedroom (furnished only with a small chapel), this book is a must. Philip was the greatest Spanish King ever (his father, Charles, was not truly Spanish), possibly upstaged only by Juan Carlos, the current modern ruler. He was the first ever European monarch to be able to claim that the sun never set on his dominions, which stretched from Europe to America to the Phillipines.

Kamen explores his life and unintentionally offers information from which Spaniards, and their descendants in America, can explain much of their/our present culture. He possessed the mightiest army in Europe, but living inland, he did not develop a navy capable of bettering the British; this had implications for the future American nations that we still see today. He received enormous wealth from his American colonies, but it was all dillapidated in the senseless war and occupation of Holland and Belgium. He intended to modernize Spain by importing goods from the rest of Europe, but not ideas; this aided the development of North Europe and Italy but not of his country. And above all, he followed a policy of strict religious intolerance that insured that his realms remained Catholic --as was his wish--, but prevented his country and the future Spanish-speaking nations of America from developing truly democratic traditions. Spain, in particular, has seemed to oscillate like a pendulum ever since between intolerance and liberalism. When you read this book, you will trace this particular trait back to Philip as the greatest inheritor of Spain's eight centuries of nation-building through war.

Kamen presents this biography with no anti- or pro-Spanish taint, as far as I could notice. If anything, his position as a fellow with a Catalan institution is an asset that allows him to view the King of Castille from Spain's important periphery. His book provides for balanced reading and a wealth of information and general culture. I recommend it to anyone interested in understanding the history of all of Spain and Spanish America, and not just Philip.

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