



Eleanor of Castile

Sara Cockerill

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Eleanor of Castile, the remarkable woman behind England's greatest medieval king, Edward I, has been effectively airbrushed from history; yet she had one of the most fascinating lives of any of England's queens. Her childhood was spent in the centre of the Spanish reconquest and was dominated by her military hero of a father (St Ferdinand) and her prodigiously clever brother (King Alfonso X the Learned). Married at the age of twelve and a mother at thirteen, she gave birth to at least sixteen children, most of whom died young. She was a prisoner for a year amid a civil war in which her husband's life was in acute danger. Devoted to Edward, she accompanied him everywhere, including on Crusade to the Holy Land. All in all, she was to live for extended periods in five different countries.

Eleanor was a highly dynamic, forceful personality who acted as part of Edward's innermost circle of advisers, and successfully accumulated a vast property empire for the English Crown. In cultural terms her influence in architecture and design – and even gardening – can be discerned to this day, while her idealised image still speaks to us from Edward's beautiful memorials to her, the Eleanor crosses. This book reveals her untold story.

Eleanor of Castile Details

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From Reader Review Eleanor of Castile for online ebook

Madigen says

I absolutely love this book and was so glad Sara Cockerill wrote it. It gives great detail on the life of Eleanor of Castile. It's very clear the author had done extensive research on the subject matter.

Becky says

I read this book because I was curious about Eleanor of Castile, a woman who, if not for the Eleanor Crosses, probably wouldn't have much recognition today. Eleanor was the woman whom Edward I loved so much, that after her death, built a cross (more like a small monument in some cases) at every stop in her funeral procession from Lincoln to London. Eleanor wasn't your typical medieval queen - she had quite the land holding business and was advisor to her husband in the running of England. Despite having 16 children, she left child-rearing to the nannies, though, there was evidence she did have concern for them. Overall, Eleanor of Castile isn't as one-sided as some of the other medieval queens.

Carina says

This book reads like a series of very dense and very good lectures. There were points where I actually giggled at how information was phrased. I definitely recommend this not only for learning about Eleanor herself but also for a general sense of thirteenth century Western Europe and as a source for inspiration for any authors doing world building.

Caroline says

Eleanor of Castile is certainly deserving of the title 'shadow queen', being probably one of the least known of all England's medieval queens. If people have heard of her at all, it is likely either through the surviving 'Eleanor crosses', erected by her grieving husband Edward I to mark the passage of her funeral bier, or through the saccharine apocryphal story of her sucking poison from Edward's wounds after an assassination attempt in the Holy Land whilst on Crusade. So it's refreshing to read a biography that attempts to flesh out her story and bring her out of the shadows.

That said, I'm not sure Sara Cockerill doesn't oversell her subject here somewhat. I'm all for giving credit where it's due and highlighting accomplishments and achievements, and Cockerill has certainly done her research and then some - but there were many points in this book where I felt she was giving too much credit to Eleanor. Medieval gender roles didn't often give women, even queens, much of a voice, and however much Edward was devoted to his wife, I very much doubt he paid much heed to her opinions on town construction, military strategy, treaty-making, or international diplomacy, as Cockerill claims. Simply because Edward and Eleanor had an exceptionally close marriage doesn't automatically give her an equal role in his actions and accomplishments. And by the same token, just because Eleanor and Edward were often together and seemed to avoid separation wherever possible, doesn't mean the historian can take Eleanor's presence for granted, in places where the historical record gives us no evidence.

The author also very much seems to have an agenda in terms of leavening history's view of Eleanor as acquisitive and grasping when it came to her property dealings. It does leave a reader wondering how one individual can provoke such contradictory views in historians relying on apparently the same scanty sources - this book is very sympathetic to Eleanor's character, whereas Lisa Hilton's recent book on medieval queens takes almost the opposite approach. The book is also very sympathetic to Edward too, a figure far less deserving, and makes very little mention of his harshness in dealing with his enemies, whether English, Welsh or Scottish. You wouldn't know he was the king known to history as the Hammer of the Scots from this portrayal.

From the criticism you would think I didn't enjoy this book - I did. But as with any biography of a subject so far removed in history, with so little trace in the historical record, there is just far too much supposition, conjecture and interpretation here for my comfort.

Annette says

Source: Free copy from Amberley in exchange for a review. All reviews expressed are from my own opinion.

Summary:

On the 1st of November 1254, twelve year old Eleanor of Castile (1241-1290), and fifteen year old Edward (1239-1307), the son of Henry III (1207-1272) king of England were married. Eleanor's brother Alfonso X (1221-1284) was king of Castile and Leon. Their father had been King Ferdinand (1201-1252). Edward and Eleanor's marriage was a political marriage; nonetheless, it would become a successful marriage considering most royal arranged marriages. They were married thirty-six years. Eleanor had at least sixteen children, six survived. Their son Edward of Caernarfon (1284-1327) became the future Edward II.

Eleanor was successful in fulfilling her duty as queen to have children; but, she was also a successful partner in a royal marriage taking part in Edward's cabinet of advisers, she was also an astute business woman.

Eleanor of Castile: The Shadow Queen, is a narrative biography non-fiction book. It stands alone both in its own distinct genre and its own weighty merit.

My Thoughts:

Sara Cockerill worked on Eleanor of Castile for ten years. She read, studied, and researched, a queen which had been swept aside for other notable queens through the course of British history. One other complete non-fiction work has been written by J.C. Parsons, Eleanor of Castile. Cockerill will refer to his book in her book, it is one of the many sources she utilized. This is the first reason I have given Eleanor of Castile a 5 star review. Ten years of research is a great achievement. The patience and careful study given over ten years has produced an excellent work. I read through Cockerill's list of first, second, and online sources. Many of these sources found on Eleanor is included inside another person's historical account, chronicle, letter. Piecing and shaping the information into a readable biography that is informational and interesting is a careful balance. I feel Cockerill has achieved all of this.

To give the "basic template" of a life is bland. In order to breath life into a character one must see the person's essential qualities, decisions made, reactions to events, and most importantly the legacy. While reading Eleanor of Castile the book begins and continues with the actions of historical events surrounding Eleanor and family, her husbands reign, children that were born and including those who lived, a Crusade in which Eleanor accompanied Edward, land purchases and business dealings, and then chapter eleven came. In chapter eleven, Cockerill gave me a close-up perspective of Eleanor. I felt the book culminated in this chapter.

The last chapter of the book is a study on the crosses (several of which are forever lost) which were made after Eleanor's death. This was a added gem in the book.

Edward I is not beloved by all, those in Wales or Scotland have strong opinions of him. He was brutish,

avenging, larger than life. On the other hand, he was faithful to his beloved Eleanor. This last point leaves me astounded. In the royal world, where kings such as Henry VIII is written about in popularity in both non-fiction and historical fiction, he was not a faithful husband. I'm thinking of another king who was also a tyrant, William I the Conqueror, I've read he was faithful to his diminutive wife Matilda. People are fascinating to me, this is just one of the reasons I have always loved history.

Therese says

\$7.99

After reading a biography of Edward I, I was naturally curious about his consort, Eleanor of Castile since I knew nothing about her. I'm not the only one although this author has changed that. To say that considerable research has gone into this biography of Eleanor would be an understatement. I think I read somewhere that she did 10 years of research, and it shows. I just wish it could have been a little more interesting. It got dry in some places, and I guess that is also why I prefer well written historical fiction so I can get a little more idea of what a person is like, or at least an interpretation.

Eleanor married Edward when she was 12 and had her first child when she was 13. She was to bear 16 children although only six of them survived to adulthood, including the future Edward II and five daughters. In reading about her early upbringing, it appears that she was extremely well-educated, probably more so than Edward, and experienced a very good life as the daughter of King Ferdinand III and later the half-sister of Alphonso X. I didn't realize she, along with Edward, could trace her ancestry back to Henry II and Eleanor of Aquitaine. She descended through Eleanor's daughter, Eleanor of England who married Alphonso VIII of Castile. It is beginning to get tricky to follow all the relatives of the folks I have been reading about, but it was also interesting to note that Alys, formerly betrothed to King Richard, was also one of her ancestors.

Eleanor noted the mistakes her mother-in-law, Eleanor of Provence, had made, and while she was active in politics, it was quietly behind the scenes, a real shadow queen. She began acquiring property, and was a great collector of books, gardens (creating them), and perhaps even introducing some "modern" conveniences to England that she had experienced in a warmer and more advanced country.

Eleanor was extremely devoted to Edward and they were rarely apart. Still after reading all of this, it is clear she was not dedicated to her children although that may not have been uncommon for Royals during the time. I just couldn't get a taste of her personality, and while it is clear the author thinks she was a great queen, I neither liked nor disliked her although I am glad I read this book.

Anja Fruelund says

The biography of a formidable queen, very comprehensive and well written. An industrious woman, obviously with a keen eye for business and clearly an inquisitive mind. Cockerill describes a woman who is extremely aware of the responsibility she shoulders as queen of Edward I and who lifts it with dignity and grace.

Apart from that an extremely interesting period in English history.

Ashley Catt says

Eleanor of Castile is certainly worthy of the epithet 'Shadow Queen' that Sara Cockerill attributes to her. Although she is not a woman unworthy of comment, it could be seen that she has resided in the shadows of her contemporaries, namely her husband Edward I and her step-mother Eleanor of Provence.

The author's breadth of knowledge and research on her subject is impressive, but there is a clearly detectable agenda laced throughout the book, and that is to 'prove' that Eleanor was not a conventional Queen, but one who was distinguished both from her predecessors and her successors. Largely, I find Cockerill's arguments for this convincing when focusing on the 'property empire' that the Queen accrued and how she rarely took part in the ceremonial intercessions that Queens were notable for in the period. However, I feel as if this way of presenting the research has led to a rather one sided approach, which I find can be quite common with some biography writers. It is understandable that some might become too attached to their subjects, when their subjects are in fact an individual person - a feeling one gets when reading biographies also.

It is not that Cockerill is completely biased when it comes to the Queen. She does acknowledge that Eleanor's popularity suffered due to the acquisitive nature of her property business, however she is reluctant to ascribe blame to Eleanor solely, and rarely does this. Whether this attitude lends itself to reliable presentation of research is up for debate.

The author also relies on conjecture a modicum too often for me to feel completely comfortable with the overall depiction of Eleanor that is presented. Very often, we are presented with phrases along the lines 'although we don't know for sure, Eleanor's influence can be inferred here'. Now, this isn't necessarily wrong. Often Cockerill looks at works of literature, some specifically penned by her brother Alphonso, and draws comparisons between that and action that Edward I is taking, and speculates that Eleanor's voice can be heard there, which I think is an interesting thing to stipulate. However, just as often, it is simply the case of the author saying 'Eleanor probably would have advised Edward with this course of action' simply because it is likely that they shared a close relationship. Although this may not be incorrect, I find the reasoning (or lack thereof) a little tenuous at times.

Despite all of this, I do find myself agreeing that Eleanor of Castile was a fascinating Queen. Business minded, intelligent and strong willed, it is completely legitimate that she should be brought from her assumed shadow and placed into the limelight. However, I find the penning of a work specifically with this purpose somewhat questionable.

Definitely a recommendable work. Despite certain agendas that may drive the presentation of research, as long as you read with an open mind, then you should be able to know where to take what the author says with a pinch of salt. Eleanor is a fascinating woman, and I'm glad I read this book. Now, to look for a book on Eleanor of Provence...

Rebecca Hill says

Eleanor of Castile is definitely a shadow in the annals of history, but her life has so much more to offer than what we see at first glance. Her queenship was a different sort than that of her Mother-in-law Eleanor of Provence. She worked hand in hand with her husband Edward, and made the most of their reign together as she could. Different from other queens, she spent as little time apart from her husband as possible, and Edward's grief at her death was not hidden or faked.

The book is a great read, although the first couple of chapters are very technical and geneological, and it is very easy to get bogged down and find it hard to move forward. Once the story starts moving, it picks up a little, with a few places that seem to get bogged down, but then pick up again. I was sad when it ended, but the pictures and supplements at the end are wonderful.

Great read!

Linda Humberstone says

This is not a romantic novel but a thoroughly researched history of the title subject. Extremely interesting and absorbing, why history has forgotten this women is incomprehensible, she is every bit as fascinating and important as Eleanor of Aquitaine. Edward 1 was indeed lucky that she was chosen for him but unfortunately a woman's role in history has not exactly appreciated, even when now and then we learn of one who had more brains and common sense than most men. Eleanor could have been another Elizabeth 1, given the chance, but having 16 children probably wore her out and lead to her early death. There is much information on the political machinations in the thirteenth century and also the journeys taken, both in England and abroad, of Edward, Eleanor and their court but it is not one for bedtime reading.

Joan says

Eleanor of Castile, She Shadow Queen (The Property-Hungry Queen)

While reading this book I gradually became disappointed in Eleanor of Castile. It's not the quality of the writing of the author, but it could have to do with the focus of the book, or the available sources of the period. We all know Edward I loved his 1st wife so much that, after her death, he planted crosses all over the country to remember his beloved wife, so I had high expectations of Eleanor.

However, while reading this book, Eleanor of Castile emerges as a Queen interested only in acquiring property, property and more property. Edward I is always short of cash, but he doesn't mind paying for more properties for his wife, even on remote locations like the Isle of Wight. Eleanor also made sure to arrange good marriages for her many relatives, mostly of the Brienne and De Fiennes families, resulting in them becoming ancestors of the Royals involved in the Wars of the Roses.

According to this author Eleanor had 15 children, including John (5), Henry (6), Eleanora (29), Joan (35), Alphonso (11), Margaret (58), Mary (54), Elizabeth (34) and Edward II (43), but she didn't seem to show much interest in them. The author claimed it was Eleanor who made sure her eldest same-named daughter's marriage was delayed to avoid an early-teenager pregnancy, but the marriage seems to have been postponed due to the groom and his father being under an interdict by the pope - and thus not allowed to marry. Daughter Joan, born during the crusade, was left in France with her grandmother during the first years of her life. Daughter Mary was destined to become a nun as a little girl, regardless of her inclinations.

Gareth Russell says

It is often stated that writing a biography of a medieval person, particularly a woman, is impossible and that any effort will descend into quasi-fiction, littered with more than its fair share of "must haves" and "presumably would haves". In her new book, "Eleanor of Castile: The Shadow Queen", Sara Cockerill disproves this assertion. Edward I's queen and Edward II's mother emerges from this beautiful book full of fire, vigour, and more than her fair share of deeply off-putting flaws.

At 410 pages in length, "The Shadow Queen" can hardly be accused of narrative anaemia and the decade or so of research that went into writing it bounces off the page as intellectually convincing but rendered readable by Cockerill's light narrative touch. There are touching and thought-provoking deviations about the humanity of her subject - a particular favourite of mine being when the author, weighing up evidence that Eleanor was either fair or dark, concludes, "her own colour choices make it almost certain that her colouring was dark; as will be seen, she favoured reds and greens, colours which no blonde would be likely to choose but which are very becoming to brunettes." This is set alongside a razor-sharp understanding of the quagmire of thirteenth-century international diplomacy and warfare, both of which shaped Queen Eleanor's life.

Cockerill believes that Eleanor of Castile was a more likeable individual than she has been presented in recent histories of the monarchy, for instance in Lisa Hilton's study of English medieval queens, from which Eleanor emerges as a chillingly avaricious matriarch, who bled the Anglo-Jewish community white in her relentless quest for personal financial security. Cockerill allows Eleanor's faults to show in all their ugliness, but she suggests that, by the standards of her own generation, England's second Iberian queen consort had more on the credit than debit side by the time she passed away in 1290. Personally, I emerged from my compulsive reading of "The Shadow Queen" still rather dubious about the Queen's personal plus-points, but that is a tribute to the wealth of detail that Cockerill relates to her readers. While the author wears her views plainly, she is too good a writer to force them upon her audience. "Eleanor of Castile: The Shadow Queen" is a compelling and exhaustive look at one of England's most fascinating queens and a beautiful example of a medieval biography.

J. Ross says

Fantastic! I really enjoyed this book and it's main character, Eleanor of Castile. The story is easy to follow, it's well constructed and flows seamlessly through the history line.

The prose is a bit dense at times - not unwieldy, but the author writes like an academic. A few times I caught myself thinking about Alison Weir's more straight forward, popular prose style and comparing Sara Cockerill to that. Again, this wasn't really a negative. I enjoyed the book greatly and she did an excellent job taking scattered ephemera and turning it into a narrative to help the reader understand a shadowed and shadowy queen.

Susan Abernethy says

Link to my review of this book:

<http://flhwnotesandreviews.com/2014/1...>

Jodi says

Sara Cockerill does an excellent and thorough job researching the available sources on Eleanor of Castile. While the staggering amount of real-estate transactions conducted by or on behalf of Eleanor do deserve coverage in the text, the continual comments (rather randomly tossed in) did become tedious. Also was concern for the implied message that Edward and Eleanor only traveled because she had her eye on another property or to check the ones she already possessed. A king would be in great demand throughout his realm and would have traveled for his own sake.

Regardless of these issues, Cockerill's extensive research, professional presentation and resistance of placing 21st century responses on the medieval context, is to be lauded. As Cockerill argues concerning the historical interpretations of Eleanor of Castile during the Victorian Era---one must attempt to withdrawal present-day sensibilities.

The first two chapters were of particular interest to this reviewer as many years have been spent studying the histories, relations and movements within the ruling houses of Europe. Beginning with the novel idea of the important marriages that led to the union of Eleanor and Edward, Cockerill tackled an almost thankless job of keeping track of the Eleanors, Edwards, Berengarias, Alfonsos, etc. Being a student of history, this reviewer actually created her own chart to keep the relationships straight (the included family tree diagrams were excellent but covering that many different branches can be confusing in the confined space of a book page).

Finally, this reviewer must comment on the closing remarks comparing Eleanor of Castile to Eleanor of Aquitaine. To imply that Eleanor of Castile was the more remarkable of the two women, completely missing the author's own continued point—Eleanor of Castile had the loving, trusting support of her spouse. Eleanor of Aquitaine accomplished tremendous political and social change within the unstable confines of her marriages. Now there is a woman who led an exceptional life! Dissolving the marriage with a king and taking a risk on a son of a duke---that is courage!

Sara Cockerill flushes out the many facets of Eleanor of Castile, an intelligent, admirable woman, to present a well-rounded historical figure. A personage living in a time where there were few public records let alone those that addressed the women in society.