



Eleanor of Aquitaine: A Biography

Marion Meade

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"Marion Meade has told the story of Eleanor, wild, devious, from a thoroughly historical but different point of view: a woman's point of view."—Allene Talme, *Vogue*.

Eleanor of Aquitaine: A Biography Details

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Author : Marion Meade

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From Reader Review Eleanor of Aquitaine: A Biography for online ebook

Ellen Ekstrom says

A balanced history of Eleanor; I would liked more quotations from sources.

Katie says

An insightful biography of a highly interesting woman. I have never read anything about Eleanor of Aquitaine before and I found this book was very well researched and a delight to read. I recognised a few of the key players in her life (especially Thomas of Beckett, Peter Abelard and Richard III) and it was great to find out more about the times they existed and the main powers in Europe at the time.

Siria says

Average biography of Eleanor of Aquitaine. It does a good job of bringing together what evidence we have for Eleanor's life--her political involvements, her family disputes, her religious and cultural patronage--but it has to be admitted that what we have isn't much. Meade falls into the trap of saying that Eleanor 'must' have done such and such, or 'must' have felt something else, when she has no evidence beyond her own extrapolations and inferences. Decent introduction, but take it always with a grain of salt.

Karen says

This book has been sitting in the attic for nearly a decade. As a student I tried to read it for my studies and gave up. While very readable, you are left wondering how much of it is true as Marion Meade continually over-stretches her sources and tells you how characters "must" have been feeling. Ultimately, the work feels like it could be fiction.

While the author, writing in 1977, can perhaps not be expected to have overthrown the then-prevalant views of some topics where research has uncovered uncertainties and raised new questions - over the existence of courts of love, for instance, or against Richard the Lionheart's homosexuality - some errors and curious turns of phrase do creep into the text. To pick one small example, it would be hard to guess that Richard faced some (admittedly relatively minor) military resistance in support of his brother John, after his return from captivity. Eleanor and he 'made a relaxed progress to Nottingham' - no mention of his assault on the castle and subsequent council at which he ordered the punishment of many of John's adherents.

Now that I am reading "Eleanor of Aquitaine" for pleasure, I am free to enjoy the book, but anyone using this for study would be advised to keep "Eleanor of Aquitaine: Lord and Lady" a collection of essays edited by Bonnie Wheeler and John Carmi Parsons close at hand.

Abigail says

This is okay. My mom really wanted me to read this book. I enjoyed the historical references. It was a little long and sometimes boring but still a nice read. For historical buffs the book is great. For novel lovers, steer clear.

Ryan says

Eleanor of Aquitaine

Marion Meade

Read it in disintegrating mass market oversized paperback at 416 pages including tiny biblio and appendix.

In a century almost exclusively dominated by men Eleanor stands apart and above her contemporaries. Over the course of her life she married two kings and mothered three (two of which actually sat on the Plantagenet throne.) She traveled with her husband to the distant lands of the near east as an active Crusader and came from a court that espoused the virtues of troubadours and poetry. She was a glimmer of light in an otherwise very dark part of history. But despite all of this she created a lot of chaos, she pulled strings and worked actively against her first and second husband and in a way she facilitated the destruction of all she fostered. An interesting character for sure.

The problem of course is that ancient sources for Eleanor are thin. Most of what we know about her movements, what charters she signed, and her overall communications is very limited and comes from her kingly attachments. Meade is simply forced to use a very reduced set of source material from the age, most of which details her husband's movements or the chroniclers that make short reference when she's in procession. This all translates to a widely speculative biography where Meade takes the liberty to hypothesize and expand on the unknown. I'm not always sure Meade is successful in that. She lets herself speculate on how Eleanor felt about this or that and we have no way of knowing and Meade often justifies her actions which were tantamount to tyranny. She is successful though in outlining this Queens amazing life in amazing times.

Worth a read I suppose if the 12th century Europe is of interest to you. I also see that a lot of women seem to enjoy Eleanor or at least reading about her, no doubt because of her influence in a time dominated by males and their interactions.

Paula Hartman-Carlo says

Eleanor of Aquitaine didn't leave any diaries and none of her contemporaries even described her appearance except to say she was beautiful. The author took what information she did have and really made Eleanor come alive for the reader. Her writing isn't as "fun" as that of Alison Weir but it was still enjoyable.

Karen says

While a long book and Marion Meade clearly has a strong bias in favor of Eleanor, the book is fascinating

both from its amazing history of world/European geography as well as feminism's roots.

I was either never taught in my history classes or failed to comprehend just how tangled up the boundry lines of all of modern European countries have been during the last millineum. The feuding between such "stable" nations as France and England as late as the 12th century and even the fighting between royal siblings for power and property gave me new perspective on world politics today. Additionally, the failed history of the Crusades and the "truth" about such modern mythical heros/villans such as of Richard the Lion-Hearted or King John is quite interesting.

Eleanor herself is obviously an astonishing women -- even for modern times her energy and persistence would be legendary. More young women need to be taught today her belief in self-determination.

Eric_W says

Eleanor grew up in the Dukedom of Aquitaine at a time when most of France was ruled by England. In northern Europe, and England, women had little social standing. Aquitaine, in the south, named "land of waters" by the Romans, was a rich land, filled with orchards and vineyards; life was good for those in power. Leisure was preeminent and women were more highly respected. They could inherit property and many became wealthy landowners. Such was Eleanor's case. She had inherited Aquitaine, which made her a rich prize for any king. She was only fifteen when her father, the Duke, died, and King Louis the Fat (he was so enormous he was virtually unable to sit up) arranged a marriage between his second son, Louis, and the attractive Eleanor, now heir to the most prized lands in Europe.

Louis was a retiring young man best suited, most thought, for the monastery. Eleanor wasted no time -- remember she was still an adolescent -- corrupting (in the mind of her mother-in-law) Louis to the more secular ways of the south. Their marriage was a catastrophe. He was ineffectual, indecisive, inadequate, generally most of the "in's" one can apply. Louis' Second Crusade was a disaster. The presence of Eleanor and her ladies with their enormous baggage train made travel difficult. The Pope's personal intervention, virtually dragging them to bed to force reconsumation of their marriage was the catalyst for the final dissolution, because the product of this pathetic reunion was a girl, and Louis' Capetians desperately needed a male to continue the line.

Then Henry and the Plantagenets entered on the scene. Interestingly, Plantagenet was not a family name. It came from a nickname of Henry's father, Geoffrey of Anjou, who used to wear the yellow blossom of the broom plant, the *planta genesta*, in his hair.

Eleanor was tired of Louis -- once she said it was like being married to a monk -- and when she met eighteen-year-old Henry, eleven years her junior and heir to Anjou and all of England, she fell head over heels in lust for him. Meade suspects that sexual attraction, richly spiced with political advantage, was a major justification for her divorce from Louis. Consanguinity was the publicly announced reason permitting annulment. She married Henry eight weeks later. It was a stinging slap at the Capetian, for he and Henry were bitter enemies.

Henry Plantagenet became the most radical monarch in English history. During the next thirty-five years he revolutionized government, streamlining it and making it so efficient the government could function kingless if necessary.

Eleanor played a major role in the reexamination of the role of women in the twelfth century. Even the Church abandoned its traditional view of women as an instrument of the devil, but women continued to oscillate between superiority and inferiority. Eleanor and her daughter by Louis, who lived with her as she

approached her later forties and became estranged from Henry, made a conscious and deliberate effort to define the female role in a legal code of social conduct called *Tractus de Amore et de Amoris* & *medies*. It was loosely modeled after Ovid but is almost the opposite to his *Art of Loving*. Their tract proclaimed woman to be the "dominant figure, the man merely a pupil who must be carefully instructed until he becomes a fit partner for his lady." "Woman is supreme, a goddess to be approached by her man only with reverence.

When Eleanor died at age 82, she had been a queen for sixty-six years. She produced several sons, including Richard Coeur-de-Lion, famous for his third crusade but notorious for his flaunted homosexuality (a problem because it meant he would produce no heir), and King John, whose meanness, recklessness and appalling judgment resulted in the Magna Carta. Perhaps because of his evil personality, he was the only English king ever named John. Eleanor was the glue that held the Plantagenets together, and after her death, her first husband's descendants made considerable inroads into Henry's Normandy and her beloved Aquitaine.

linda says

Bought this in a secondhand shop off of Rue de Severin in Paris and consumed it by the time I was back in London less than a week later. A really gorgeous, lively biography of a really gorgeous and lively woman, and it has one of the best lines about Eleanor of Aquitaine, about how she was the wife of two kings and the mother of Richard the Lionhearted, but whenever we think of her, we only ever think of her as Eleanor. Really, really wonderful.

Cwelshhans says

This book was thorough, but readable, and I enjoyed the unapologetically feminist approach. Meade did not hesitate to point out the number of things Eleanor did that were unique for a woman living when she did. The entire book moved along, and it would be a good start for anyone looking to learn about Eleanor of Aquitaine. It just doesn't quite live up to Alison Weir's masterpiece on the same subject.

Lorina Stephens says

Eleanor of Aquitaine, by Marion Meade, is a well-written, highly informative and entertaining read about one of Europe's most remarkable and influential women. Meade places Eleanor on the large as well as intimate and personal stages, allowing readers to understand what made Eleanor into the cultured, sometimes tempestuous, always intelligent woman who loved and lost two kings and empires. Highly recommended.

Lizzy says

This was a hard read. I like reading historical/biographical fiction. But this one was hard. It definitely did not flow easily. But it was interesting, and kept me company between classes in college.

Debbie Woodruffe says

Had a very interesting life, I enjoyed the book but the chapters were too long. Difficult to find a convenient place to stop.

JoséMaría BlancoWhite says

Eleanor of Aquitaine was indeed a woman worth a biography, even with the scanty details about her life as we have, as a very interesting historical figure of Medieval times between France and England. We do have plenty of information about her life but not about her the woman. Marion Meade makes this up I'm afraid with a lot of personal wishful thinking: where there's not one single physical detail to grab on to, she makes her come to live by inferences from her relationships with other people and by her own way of life. Where no witness can be called on to tell us how she felt, or what were the inclinations of her heart, Ms. Meade fills in the gap with her own stuff, which is not bad stuff if we speak in terms of fiction, even historical fiction. For she moves on swiftly through the myriad of happenings taking place family-wise and historical-wise strictly speaking. We attend the Crusades, we travel throughout most of modern France over and over, we witness battles, family feuds, coronations, the killing of Beckett, and much, much more. All of it interesting enough, and presented as in relation to Leonor's life. So historical facts abound. And it does not become entangled at all (it could easily have been). But I'd rather have made up the gaps myself. I think an honest historian needs to draw the line clearly between what we know and what we assume. Mixing fiction and history doesn't help credibility. Of course the creative facet of the author only operates on the deeply personal level; historical facts are not messed with. But nevertheless, when I am reading history I'd like the author to stick to the facts, and whatever incursions into fictional territory I'd like to be -at least- warned. Its a good read, though; a bit too long, but makes for a good history read.
