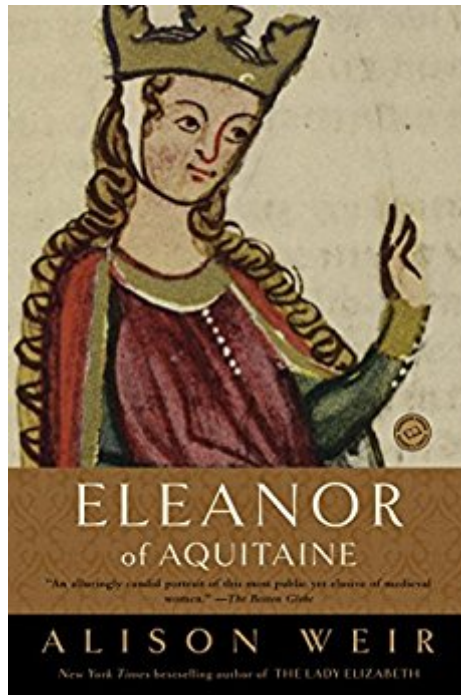


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Eleanor Of Aquitaine: A Life (Ballantine Reader's Circle)



Synopsis

Renowned in her time for being the most beautiful woman in Europe, the wife of two kings and mother of three, Eleanor of Aquitaine was one of the great heroines of the Middle Ages. At a time when women were regarded as little more than chattel, Eleanor managed to defy convention as she exercised power in the political sphere and crucial influence over her husbands and sons. In this beautifully written biography, Alison Weir paints a vibrant portrait of this truly exceptional woman, and provides new insights into her intimate world. Eleanor of Aquitaine lived a long life of many contrasts, of splendor and desolation, power and peril, and in this stunning narrative, Weir captures the woman and the queen in all her glory. With astonishing historic detail, mesmerizing pageantry, and irresistible accounts of royal scandal and intrigue, she recreates not only a remarkable personality but a magnificent past era.

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Customer Reviews

Ever since I saw Katherine Hepburn play Eleanor of Aquitaine in the film *Lion in Winter*, I have read everything available on this fascinating 12th century woman - and this book was, by far, the most readable, and probably the most accurate. Though Allison Weir avoids over romanticizing the story by passing along legends as facts (that Eleanor murdered her husband's mistress or the many tales

surrounding her Court of Love), she still weaves a fascinating tale. Because Weir is such a stickler for researched facts, there are long sections where she admits that very little is known about what exactly Eleanor was doing at the time (most notably during the murder of Thomas Becket), but I still never lost interest - and she provides enough balanced background on the many characters that you develop a true understanding for their complicated motives. After reading Weir's other books (especially the definitive "Six Wives of Henry VIII"), I was positive that this would be another enjoyable history lesson - and Ms. Weir, as usual, did not disappoint!

Once again Alison Weir has produced another wonderful and exciting biography. In this book on Eleanor of Aquitaine she has told the story of this most interesting person in a manner that had me glued to the pages. I must state that I have not previously read any books on this subject, quite a few on Richard I but nothing on his mother. I usually enjoy military history but this was an excellent story, well researched and well presented with heaps of plots, fighting and treachery. The story may well be known to quite a few people out there but to me this book offered the first timer a grand and interesting panorama of this most interesting person during a most interesting period. The narrative was quick and exciting, moving along covering a vast period of time and people however I never got lost in the story. On a number of occasions points in dispute were threshed out and a common sense approach was adopted in trying to find the truth of the matter. Eleanor of Aquitaine had a number of detractors throughout history but I think the author tried to present her story in a non biased manner. This is a good book and I think that most people will enjoy the story and even those who know the whole story should gain something from this account.

She was the wife of two kings (Louis VII of France and Henry II of England) and a fascinating and controversial woman in her own right. Eleanor, Duchess of Aquitaine, was one of the most important and influential personalities of the Middle Ages and she truly comes alive in Alison Weir's masterful biography. After a short introduction on the history and culture of Southern France, Ms. Weir describes Eleanor's life in wonderful detail, examining contemporary sources, modern historical investigations, myth and reality. Everything you ever heard about Eleanor is here: her marriage to King Louis, her journey to Constantinople and Jerusalem during the Second Crusade, her marriage to King Henry, her emotional and political relations with her sons (two of them were also kings of England: Richard the Lionheart and King John), her role as Queen Regent, the legendary Courts of Love, and her imprisonment and eventual release are all told in Alison Weir's wonderful style. The author also includes a lot of information about other fascinating personalities of the time, such as

Bernard of Clairvaux, Thomas Becket and William the Marshall, and she always manages to evoke the feeling of the period. This is a very well researched and brilliantly written biography that reads like a historical novel.

This book was a delight to read -- well-researched, descriptive, engaging. *Eleanor of Aquitaine* gives you the information of a well-researched thesis with the pacing of a novel. However, it was a subtle disappointment because the information on Eleanor was much less than I had expected. (Note to self: Next time read an excerpt!) Weir sets the reader up in the Forward, mentioning that little information about Eleanor has been found or proven. However, she is quick to point out the difference between her book and the books of other authors attempting to portray Eleanor. Weir claims that some previous biographers have painted a not-so-virtuous picture of Eleanor because they have relied on poor evidence. (For example, many biographers have used fictional works -- poetry, songs -- of the period to prove that Eleanor was an adultress.) A continuing refrain in the book is, "Some historians have said X. Contemporary theorists have said Y. Based on the evidence I've seen, I can't decide between X or Y." While I do appreciate Weir's unbiased opinion, it didn't always make for the most interesting reading. Often I felt dissatisfied because I wanted to know more - I wanted to know the truth. However, perhaps that is Weir's point - we'll never truly know what Eleanor was like because there is simply not enough evidence. In order to learn more about Eleanor's life, Weir had to painstakingly resurrect it from accounts of the lives of her children and family members. Consequently, the book serves as an excellent primer about Eleanor's historical period and family. For me, this was an unexpected bonus because I know very little about medieval times, the Crusades, etc. However, readers that are very medieval-savvy may find Weir's extensive (but necessary) digressions annoying. Overall: If you're looking for a peek into the life of a lesser-known historical figure and time period, this book is an excellent choice.

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