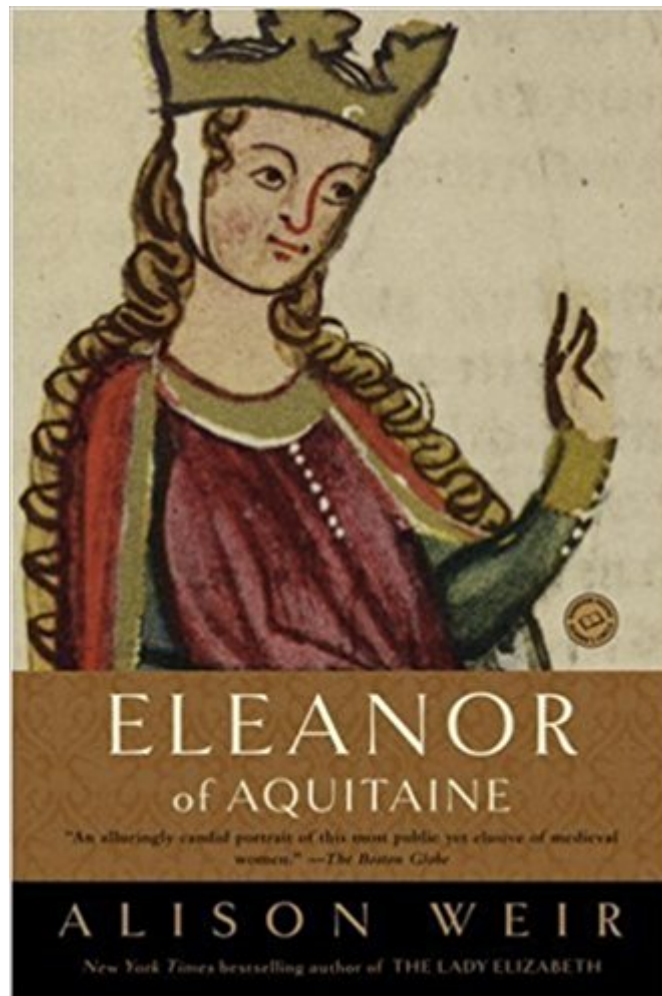




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# Eleanor Of Aquitaine: A Life (Ballantine Reader's Circle)



## 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.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

Combining the pace and descriptive quality of a novel with the authority of a textbook, Alison Weir's study of the revered and reviled Eleanor of Aquitaine should be valuable to anyone with an interest in medieval European history. Wife of Louis VII of France and subsequently of Henry II of England, and mother of Richard "the Lion-Hearted," Eleanor played a prominent part in the politics of the 12th century. The author of a number of other books on the medieval period (Life of Elizabeth I, The Children of Henry VIII), Weir brings all the color and ever-present dangers of Eleanor's world to life, filling the text with absorbing background detail and revelatory contemporary anecdotes. She is

concerned throughout to make critical analysis of the primary sources, the later myths about Eleanor, and other modern biographies. This results in a fresh and thoughtful perspective on the energetic life of a determined and ambitious woman living with the sexism, excesses, and violence of a society in which the word of a single man could condemn thousands to death. Eleanor of Aquitaine is a vivacious but scholarly book with extensive notes and references, giving an objective and rich account of the staunch Eleanor, her feuding family and her complex and unstable world.

--Karen Tiley, .co.uk --This text refers to the Audio Cassette edition.

As delicately textured as a 12th-century tapestry, royal biographer Weir's (The Life of Elizabeth I, etc.) newest book is exhilarating in its color, ambition and human warmth. The author exhibits a breathtaking grasp of the physical and cultural context of Queen Eleanor's life, presenting a fuller, more holistic appreciation of a dazzling world whose charms can easily be anesthetized by dull narrative. And from the start, her auburn-haired subject, a live wire in a restrictive society, muse of poets and crusaders, seduces the reader. Weir conveys a deep empathy for the relaxed south of France where Eleanor was raised, a natural home for the gospel of courtly love. She paints a Brueghelesque picture of England, where wolves roamed the forests and people made skates in winter out of animal bones. In approaching as complex a subject as feudalism, Weir wears her learning lightly and has a pleasant habit of anticipating all the questions of a curious reader. Her account parades a sequence of extraordinary characters: the saintly abbot Bernard of Clairvaux, who as an adolescent leapt into a freezing pond until his erection subsided; Eleanor's first husband, Louis VII of France, haunted by the screams of burning victims after his assault on a village in Champagne; her lover, Raymond of Poitiers, who could bend an iron bar with his bare hands; and her second husband, Henry II of England, her princely mirror in energy, intelligence and sexuality. Above all, there is the heroine, viewed clear-sightedly in all her intoxicating and imperious irresistibility. Illus. not seen by PW. Copyright 2000 Reed Business Information, Inc. --This text refers to the Audio Cassette edition.

Allison Weir is a brilliant historian and very detailed writer! This book got a little annoying at times because there was so much about the big male players at the time and nothing about Eleanor, the focus of the book; HOWEVER, Allison prefaced with telling the reader that there are a lot of holes in what is known about Eleanor, so she filled in her story with giving you backstory and history on what was going on in her world during her lifetime. I totally understand and it's all great writing and fascinating history; it just got frustrating reading so much about events and things regarding her

husband or her sons when if i had wanted to read about them as the focus, I would have chosen a different book. BUT, it's still really good and I recommend you to read it!

This is another in Alison Weir's series of historical biographical works. As always, the book is well-written with much historical detail coming from each page. As with some of her other works (such as "Katherine Swynford"), she takes a less than complete record of the person about whom she is writing and creates a plausible rendering of that person's life. She notes where evidence is slim and makes cautious suggestions as to what might have happened during periods of time with little record of Eleanor. Here, the target is Eleanor of Aquitaine, notorious after her death, with a greater appreciation of her accomplishments in more recent times. The fact that such a nuanced biography can be written is remarkable, when one accounts for the fact that she lived before records were as easy to come by as later on. Born in 1122, she died in 1204, over 80 years old. There are a number of story lines here. One is simply the trajectory of her rich life. Second is the story of her two marriages--to King Louis VII of France and to King Henry II of England. In addition, she was the ruler of Aquitaine, a large area in France. Her falling out with her husbands is riveting--including her having been under, essentially, house arrest by Henry II for over a decade. The genealogical tables on pages 408 to 421 are absolutely necessary to keep the players straight, to understand their relationships with one another. She was a strong woman in a time when that was scarcely the norm. She was effectively ruler of Aquitaine for a time; just so, when her husband was gone, she had a role in the governance of England. A third story is the chaotic relations of her sons. Two became king of England--Richard I and John. Both had some serious flaws; one, Henry, the "Young King" was heir to the throne before an untimely death. Making this all the more sensational was the warfare (literally) between sons and father (Henry II) and between the sons themselves. Being a mom to these unruly children must have been a challenge! The book also provides insight into the politics, economics, and culture of the time, giving us a broader context in which to consider Eleanor's life and that of her husbands and children. For her time, she was something else again. She traveled widely, played a role in politics, roiled the interfamily tensions. In her 80s, she "retired" from public life to a convent, where she lived the rest of her days. The book concludes by noting (Page 346): "Remarkable in a period when females were relegated to a servile role, she was, as Richard of Devizes so astutely claimed, an incomparable woman."

Alison Weir is a gifted biographer, that's been proven repeatedly. In this book her subject is one of the few non-religious heroines of the Middle Ages. She does her customary great job with this, and I

am really enjoying it. I especially like her asides and notes on the historical context, as well as her obvious love of words, which I share. For instance, you'll learn the origin of the word "Sheriff" - and more! Excellent, well-done, thank you Alison if you ever read this review. Considering the dearth of information on this character, it's an especially impressive feat.

Katherine Hepburn was one of my ultimate favorite actresses, from Hollywood's Golden Years. Her portrait of Eleanor of Aquitaine, in the movie version of: The Lion in Winter, was masterful & earn her yet another Oscar! This book, & this writer, brings Eleanor, & her family to life! The few illustrations & photos are of poor quality. This is not a book for children, but for people that love history. Weir takes a long complicated story, & makes it easy for the reader to understand & follow all the twists & turns. By now, I have a low opinion of Human Nature, & you can see in this book the best & worst of Human Nature! The more things change, the more they stay the same! A family saga, worth reading!!!

"My life, when it is written, will read better than it lived. Henry Fitz-Empress, first Plantagenet, a king at twenty-one, the ablest soldier of an able time. He led men well, he cared for justice when he could and ruled, for thirty years, a state as great as Charlemagne's. He married out of love, a woman out of legend. Not in Alexandria, or Rome, or Camelot has there been such a queen."- Henry II in the play The Lion in Winter by James Goldman (1966) I became entranced by Eleanor after seeing "The Lion in Winter" and have read everything I can find about her. This is an excellent biography of a woman who was as ambitious as any man and took on her husband, the King of England, to control the succession to the crown. Legend has it that she rode at the front of an army bare breasted. If you like your women beautiful, sexy, rich, and powerful, willful lovers of intrigue you will love Eleanor!

I downloaded this biography after visiting the Abbey of Fontevrault in the Loire Valley in France. The Abbey has a 1,000- year history and was closely associated with Eleanor, her husband Henry II and Richard Lionheart, one of her sons. Ms. Weir did extensive research, and since so little was written about women in the 12th century, even a queen, the biography is a very well written history of Eleanor and the men in her life; King Louis of France, her first husband, and Henry II King of England, her second. These were ruthless men, and Eleanor must have been a woman to reckon with herself. She went on crusade with the first husband and in her seventies rode to the Pyrenees

and across France and Italy to Sicily. What a woman! I found it fascinating and very well done. Eleanor lived the last years of her life at Fontevrault, and her effigy and those of Henry, Richard Lionheart and Isabelle, the wife of her son John are all in the abbey church.

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