



Queens Consort: England's Medieval Queens

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Occupying a unique position in the mercurial, often violent world of medieval state-craft, England's medieval queens were elemental in shaping the history of the monarchy and the nation. Lisa Hilton's meticulously researched new work explores the lives of the 20 women crowned between 1066 and 1503. She reconsiders the fictions surrounding well-known figures like Eleanor of Aquitaine, illuminates the lives of forgotten queens such as Adeliza of Louvain, and shows why they all had to negotiate a role that combined tremendous influence with terrifying vulnerability. The result is a provocative and dramatic narrative that redefines English history.

Queens Consort: England's Medieval Queens Details

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From Reader Review Queens Consort: England's Medieval Queens for online ebook

Madeline says

"In the period between the Norman Conquest and the accession of Mary Tudor in the sixteenth century, no woman ruled England as queen in her own right. The role and status of king were constantly in the process of redefinition, an ongoing negotiation between royal, ecclesiastical and aristocratic powers, but they remained throughout essentially constitutional, their authority enshrined in and upheld by law. No equivalent constitutional role existed for the king's consort. Yet between the eleventh and fifteenth centuries, English queenship evolved an identity of its own, an identity predicated on, but not limited to marriage to the king. The story of England's medieval queens is composed of two entwined narrative strands: the first the development of queenly tradition and practice, the second the diverse lives of the very individual women who controlled, enlarged and manipulated their customary heritage."

As stated in the introduction, Lisa Hilton's purpose is to present individual portraits of twenty English queens, from Matilda of Flanders to Elizabeth of York, while also examining the changing role of the queen and the monarchy in general. The queens are divided into individual chapters (except for Anne of Bohemia and Isabelle of France, who have to share one) that vary in length depending on how much information we have about a given queen and how much she actually did - Eleanor of Aquitaine and the York princesses, obviously, get the highest page counts. Hilton gives a brief biographical sketch of each queen, and then examines the circumstances surrounding her marriage, the political climate of the time, and the overreaching effects of that king's rule. The changing face of the monarchy from the Middle Ages to the beginning of the Tudor dynasty was interesting, especially the details Hilton digs up about the queen's role in the coronation ceremony and how it changed over the years.

The main problem with this book, however, lies in the format: with only twenty to thirty pages being spent on each queen, there isn't nearly enough time to fully explore who these women were, much less understand the complex political climate of their time. After a few chapters the queens start to sort of blend together, with no one really distinguishing herself from the pack. It doesn't help that we have three queens in rapid succession named Matilda, and later on there are at least three Elizabeths running around during the Wars of the Roses and Hilton will often refer to them by just their first name, so I have no idea if she's talking about Elizabeth Woodville, Elizabeth York, or Elizabeth Woodville's daughter Elizabeth (seriously though, can all of the Wars of the Roses scholars hold a symposium and decide on some universal nicknames for all the Elizabeths, Margarets, Edwards, Henrys, and Richards that keep popping up in this period?). Another factor that makes the queens hard to distinguish is that Hilton, for all her enthusiasm, cannot escape the fact that the majority of these women didn't do much of anything. Complicated marriage negotiations, mild warfare that she wasn't involved in, unhappy marriage, lots of stillborn babies, death: that summarizes the life story of about two thirds of the queens featured in this book. In her concluding lines for each chapter, you can often see Hilton grasping at straws to make her subject seem more interesting (like Berengaria of Navarre, whose chapter ends, "The glory of the Third Crusade is Richard's, but it is worth recalling that had it not been for his last-minute wedding to Berengaria, it might not have happened at all.") or just throwing up her hands and admitting that there is nothing particularly noteworthy about the woman she's just spent twenty pages telling us about (like poor Isabelle of France, who gets this ending line: "Perhaps the most that can be said of Isabelle is that, like so many of Richard's grandiose gestures, her symbolic value was huge. But as a means of retaining and governing a kingdom, she had been virtually pointless.")

Hilton's tone is also weird, veering from dry and scholarly to bizarrely informal and almost snarky ("John

was twenty and the Duchess a spring chicken of anywhere between sixty and eighty, depending on the bitchiness of the chronicler.") There are numerous typos throughout the text, and Hilton apparently had a stroke and forgot what her book was supposed to be about when she was writing the conclusion, because she spends six pages comparing the queens in *Beowulf* and *Le Morte d'Arthur*, having never mentioned either of those texts before. It reads almost like someone at the printer accidentally inserted pages from a completely different book, and no one realized what had happened until it was too late.

Ultimately, Hilton accomplishes her goal - giving a brief biography of women that have been largely ignored by history, and showing how the English monarchy has changed since the Norman conquest - but none of the women featured manage to distinguish themselves from the larger horde, despite Hilton's best efforts to convince us that they're interesting.

Elia Princess of Starfall says

Games of Thrones has a great deal to answer for.

And I'm not just saying that because I love both the TV and book series and the general upsurge in all things medieval and Middle Ages, from video games to historical fiction, that this interest in a brutal bloody and hierarchical past has sparked into an inferno!

Game of Thrones has ignited a powerful and at times consuming fascination with the endlessly enigmatic medieval era and this has furious trend has seen a monstrous proliferation from new history on the middle ages, new video games detailing historical reality of medieval fantasy and an intense explosion of historical fiction concerning the medieval era (Anyone Conn Iggulden, the author who could not for the life of him achieve any sort of subtle homage to Game of Thrones in his novels on the Wars of the Roses?). This enthrallment with our shared medieval past has been eagerly embraced by a motley and often troublesome gang of historians (professional and amateur), TV producers (documentary and drama) and novelists (respected and those who shall not be named) and has thus resulted in more and more people being thoroughly engrossed by the violent, corrupt, dangerous and power hungry world that was the Middle Ages.

Which finally brings us to England's Medieval Queens, a book that briefly covers all of England's queens (19 in total) in biographical form and seeks to place each Queen's social, economic and political importance within their own personal importance and historical context. It is a daunting task indeed for any historian to try and provide respectable and accurate bios of England's medieval queens while also including their historical and personal achievements in under 500 pages. I feel that the author succeeded in this endeavor for the most part but fell short in several crucial aspects. I did enjoy reading and learning about the Queens from this book and found it overall a worthwhile and engaging read and it does shine an accessible and well written light upon the lives of these women and goodness knows that from all the books on kings, knights and other historical personas from the middle ages we do need more books about women and how they lived and contributed to their era in history.

England's medieval queens has a promising start detailing the goal of the book and how the queens will be discussed and their historical importance analysed and a final commentary on how queen-ship in the

medieval period altered throughout its 500 year reign. It is an ambitious goal and one that at times the authors falls short of reaching. This is partly down to the 500 page limit; writing bios and historical commentary on 19 separate queens requires skill and an in depth historical knowledge on the queens and their time period that I didn't feel that Hilton quite possess. Another flaw I found throughout the book was Hilton's occasional historical declaration of certain facts for which she presented no evidence; she states that the mother John of Pontefract, Richard's III bastard son, was Alice Burgh. I've read many works on Richard III but have never seen any hard evidence for who his sons mother was and as Hilton leaves this evidence without a source the reader has no idea where she got it from which is highly frustrating.

In spite of theses setbacks I found England's Medieval Queens to be interesting, insightful and well-written. Hilton clearly has great respect and admiration for theses queen and how they survived and often thrived within this era of history where women were second class citizens and considered the physical and intellectual inferiors of men. This translates brilliantly into a book that revolves around the personal and political achievements or failures of England's 19 medieval queens. Hilton strives to be fair, objective and cautious in her approach to the queens; she does not favour or hate one queen over another and allows the reader to make their own personal conclusions regarding the queens and whether they succeeded in making a difference in a world ruled entirely by men. She writes engaging, accessible and well thought out bios for each of the queens even if they are understandably on the short side and the lack of historical jargon makes this book a frank introduction to medieval queen-ship for the general reader.

From Matilda of Flanders to Elizabeth of York, from 1066-1503, Hilton covers almost 500 years of medieval queenship in her book and strives to give interesting and thoughtful retellings of these queens and what their achievements or failures were and how they impacted on the overall role and perception of a medieval queen. within this book we come to learn and understand how and why medieval queenship was lionised and reviled in equal measure and how a women's power in queenship caused fear and uncertainty within the patriarchal society they found themselves tethered to for life. It at times makes for a somber less feminist read but this because Hilton stays firmly within historical context and does not proscribe anachronistic feelings or ideologies behind any of the queens goals or ambitions. They are placed securely within their historical period and they act accordingly; neither feminism nor equality between the genders existed in the medieval world and to pretend that they did is a disservice to history.

I would recommend this book as it is engaging, thoughtful and histrionically relevant although at times its lack of footnotes and referencing leaves something to be desired.

Jen says

I'm trying to clear out some bookshelves (and the space beside my bed) by getting rid of (reading) books that I've had for years. This is one that I picked up for some fun reading (yes, biographies of medieval queens counts in my world as "light reading").

This book starts with Matilda of Flanders, wife of William the Conqueror, and ends with Elizabeth of York, wife of Henry VII. Not to spoil things, but by the end of the book, they are all dead.

The author does a good job within the confines of the book. After all, if you're covering a lot of queens in one book, you don't have much space for each. That said, this book included more information than I've

found in most places about Berengaria of Navarre. The book doesn't allow the author to ignore the less interesting wives and just talk about Eleanor of Aquitaine.

Obviously, this book is not going to give you all the information you could possibly want about the queens, but if you're interested in learning how the role of queen consort evolved, it's ... wait for it... a good read.

Lisa says

Personally, I found *Queens Consort: England's Medieval Queens* to be a work of see-sawing quality that landed more on the negative side of the things. Lisa Hilton has given herself a thankless task in trying to condense the lives of twenty queens who ruled England from the time of the Norman Conquest to the beginnings of Tudor rule – all in all, about four hundred years' worth of history – into the space of five hundred pages, with each chapter needing to at least to pretend to be a biography of the queen at its focus. Additionally, Hilton is hamstrung by various problems such as a paucity of evidence, a notoriety that needs to be thoroughly examined, or queens who appeared to do little at all.

Some of the individual biographies were a slog to get through, quite dry in tone and weighed down by a mass of names and compressed history. This is more apparent in the early chapters, which might reflect a lack of evidence or my lack of knowledge about that time period (the result being that my brain was overloaded by the sheer amount of new information). But other biographies I found quite engaging. The section on Marguerite of France marked a turning point where I started not to struggle through *Queens Consort*, though this might be because I'd reached the point where the history was familiar to me.

Unfortunately, when I reached the point where the history became familiar, I began to notice mistakes, misunderstandings and/or misrepresentations. There is no contemporary evidence that Isabella of France and Roger Mortimer were lovers, much less that their affair was as “flagrant” as Hilton boldly claims. Richard II was not “clean-shaven when it was conventional for grown men to wear a beard” – there are numerous depictions of him with a beard, including the well-known Westminster Portrait. Henry IV and Mary de Bohun had six children, not seven and certainly not nine. Hilton's discussion of Catherine de Valois's husband, Henry V, did little to impress – beginning with a Freudian's wet dream of psychoanalysis based on dialogue written by William Shakespeare, following up by describing him as “fair-haired” when the best-known portrait of him depicts him with dark hair, and concluding by labelling him a prig. No, I'm not being snarky, she literally uses the word “prig”.

The crowning glory of Hilton's mistakes is when she states that Henry VI was Henry Tudor's father. Err, no, Henry Tudor's father was Edmund Tudor and Henry VI was his uncle. This is clearly a mistake and other sections and the genealogies do get Tudor's paternity right, but the fact it exists at all is worthy of a yikes.

Of course, Hilton is dealing with masses of history and I imagine that it would be easy to make mistakes or get confused during the drafting process. However, I'm not reading a draft or an ARC. I'm reading a book that has been written by an author who presents themselves as an authority, which has gone through the drafting, editing and (presumably) fact-checking processes and is now published as a mass market paperback. These mistakes, which could have been easily checked, are inexcusable. Furthermore, they make me doubt the veracity of every conclusion and every detail in the book.

Hilton's various discussions of the sexuality and the sex life of various kings was poor (no queen has her

sexuality examined beyond some rumours of adultery, in case you're wondering). While her discussion of Richard I's theorised homosexuality is ultimately thoughtful and evidence-based, prefacing the discussion with a joke about how there were two queens in his marriage is tasteless and desperately unfunny. She appears to go out of her way to continually label Richard III with a serious predilection for incest. In another instance of her misrepresenting history, her discussion of Edward II's rumoured sexual relationships with his favourites seems to come to the conclusion that it's far more likely he was having an affair with his own niece (Despenser's wife, Eleanor de Clare). This is unlikely, as it's only attested in one chronicle (a non-English one at that) and Edward's fondness for his niece is well-attested and pre-dates Despenser's rise to power and Edward's apparent affections – but not Despenser's marriage to Eleanor. Hilton also seemed to obsess over the idea of Richard II's chastity, arguing that that he never consummated his marriage with Anne of Bohemia and seeming to verge towards concluding that he remained a child as far as his sexual maturity went. There is some small evidence that he and Anne were hoping to have children (even a reference to what could have been a miscarriage; more creditable historians than Hilton have suggested that one or both of them were infertile) and none at all of the chaste marriage Hilton is obsessed with.

The tone of the book is uneven. In some ways, I felt that Hilton would have liked *Queens Consort* to be a rollicking tale of England's medieval queens, written with a snarky, "witty" commentary by Hilton (for example, calling Henry V a "prig" and Richard I a "queen"). Yet overall, the text was more formal and scholarly (dry at times, as well), so these snarky interjections simply stood out as out of place. I often did not appreciate Hilton's sense of humour, either, and wished, more than once, that she'd butt out of her own book and stop trying to crack jokes.

The structure of the book is not as neat as the contents page depicts, with a chapter for each queen. The chapter on Marguerite of France, for instance, also covers the early stages of Isabella of France's life and marriage, while the queens of the Wars of the Roses often blend into each other's chapters – quite a lot of attention is given to Marguerite of Anjou in Elizabeth Woodville's chapter, and Elizabeth Woodville features heavily in the chapters about Anne Neville and Elizabeth of York. I'm not necessarily criticising Hilton here – history is rarely as neat as book chapter titles would like us to believe – but it's worth knowing if you're looking to read a chapter at random.

There were times that I enjoyed *Queens Consort* – some biographies were quite engaging reading, some of Hilton's jokes amused me, and there was some information that I'd not read before that excited me (however, I feel I need to find other, more reliable sources). But on the whole, this is a disappointing read. The concept, as I've said, is great. But it is let down by Hilton's sloppy approach to the history and the individuals she writes and her inability to commit to either an informative, authoritative approach or a snarky, rollicking-good-time approach. 1.5 stars.

Shannon Elizabeth Heffner says

This book of mini-biographies of the medieval queens of England was kind of a let down. Lisa Hilton didn't have much personal flare in here which is a shame because I actually do think she is a good author for the most part. I enjoyed her book on Madame de Montespan, mistress to Louis XIV, very much; it was nowhere near unbiased, but it was good. Hilton has potential, and I wouldn't mind seeing her turn her attention toward fiction.

That being said, the main problem I had with this book was that there were some pretty serious glaring errors in certain chapters. There was one chapter (I can't remember which one, but I think it was Eleanor of Castile,

first wife of Edward I. Unfortunately I borrowed the book and can't reference it for clarification.) where the author mentions an incident and the year in which it occurred, and she mentions that the queen in question was 26 years old. However just few paragraphs down another event and year are mentioned, but the queen still 26 years old. Either history is stranger than previously thought, or this is an error of horrendous proportions. I'm leaning toward the latter. There are also quite a few birth/death dates that are wrong in their respective chapters but are correct in the family trees that take up several pages at the front of the book. That was really disheartening. Someone should've lost their job over that many mistakes. It'd be forgivable for it to happen once (a year can turn into another so easily with the wrong stroke of a keyboard), but there were many of these discrepancies throughout the first part of the book that it truly was unforgivable.

Now this is a personal dislike, but I didn't like that two lesser known queens (Anne of Bohemia and Isabelle of Valois, spouses of Richard II) were lumped together in one chapter. Like I said, they are lesser known figures, but Anne of Bohemia was a patron of Geoffrey Chaucer and other writers, poets, and artists, and she was instrumental in securing pardons for many people who took part in the Peasant's Revolt of 1381 (this role as pacemaker was the epitome of medieval queenship). She is also said to have introduced the sidesaddle and helped design a new type of English traveling coach after she had to travel by the outdated and ultimately uncomfortable open cart when she traveled to England for her marriage. And as if that wasn't enough to secure a pretty good legacy, she brought the wicker "horned" headdress and veil into fashion where it would remain for the rest of the 14th century and a good part of the 15th. So, I guess with such a nice record of her accomplishments, I thought she merited a chapter of her own even if it had to be a short one. And for the record, the author did not omit these things, she just didn't detail Anne of Bohemia's or Isabelle of Valois's lives to the same extent she did for other queens.

There was a feeling of a bit of homophobia in the chapters concerning Richard I, Edward II, and Richard II. Maybe it was just me, but there were a few rather unnecessary comments about their supposed sexuality that was off putting to me personally, especially since the proof of homosexuality in both Richard I and Richard II isn't anything more than speculation. Just not the kind of comments you'd expect to see from an historian. Being impartial to history and the people in it is a key feature one would want in historical biographies.

The author asserts herself as someone who goes against the idea of Richard III as a hunchback. That was fine for when this book was written in 2010, but following the discovery of his remains in 2012, I hope she plans on updating the content either in the chapters on Anne Neville and Elizabeth of York or in a new introduction about what has been discovered since the book was originally published.

My second biggest issue with this biography compilation was that the author relied too heavily on other historians for quotations. There were so many of these throughout the book that it made me feel like Ms. Hilton was afraid to count on her own opinions. But all in all, where the information is right, this is quite readable and enjoyable, even for a layman. But where it's wrong, well, it is a bit of a mess. I think a good editor and fact checker (maybe even a second fact checker to be on the safe side) could clean this up and make it very good. The editor for the original publication did not do this manuscript or its author any favors. My 2 star rating is really more like a 2.5 because it does have good content, but overall it falls short so it doesn't get 3 stars. I wish we could rate in partial stars. Sometimes a book just falls in between!

Eileen says

I'm back on the history reading kick and picked this book up at B&N while visiting my son in Connecticut. This is really my kind of book! I loved all 482 pages and would have gladly read more. But don't pick this

one up if you are looking for wild interpretation or speculation.

This book is serious history and Ms. Hilton uses lots of primary and secondary sources for her profiles. If you want romantic stories, made up dialog, or other flights of fancy you won't find it here. The author gives us her profiles based on what is found in charters, contemporary writings, and other official documents that speak about these remarkable women.

I've read some about almost all of these queens and quite a bit about some but I always learn something. With this book I learned a lot and enjoyed every minute of it. The most fascinating, to me, are the queens who immediately followed Mathilda of Flanders, William the Conqueror's queen. I've read about her in other works, including her famous statement that she would never marry a bastard, upon hearing of William's suit for her hand. But I knew very little about the next three queens who followed.

Of the next 15 queens profiled, in 10 cases I'd read about them either individually or in context of their husbands but again there is always something to learn and Ms. Hilton didn't disappoint. If you love real history and the early queens of England you will love this book. If you are looking for a romantic story about a prince wooing a beautiful princess - keep looking!

Finuala says

It's a tribute to my stubbornness that I finished this book. I took a break of six months and almost didn't bother picking it up again. I managed to crawl through it finally by reading three other books at the same time.

What can I say? I don't even know where to begin. I've read books where I didn't agree with the author's premiss and, whilst this is certainly one of those, that doesn't even begin to describe the issues I have with it. Let's start with the errors. I lost count of the number of errors. Literally. And there was no way I was going back through for a recount. So this fails as a reference book because it is unreliable. Then there's clarity. If you introduce a truckload of Elizabeths and Matildas, it doesn't seem unreasonable to expect you to be clear as to which one you mean when you bring in a point concerning one of them. Which brings me to editing: was there any? Really? I think not. And what's with the unprofessional bias?

Now to the final premiss itself. I have to say that at no time whilst reading Beowulf and Le Morte d'Arthur did I ever think to myself, well Nuala, isn't this the perfect metaphor for the decline of mediæval queenship in England between 1066 and 1503? Where did that come from, Ms Hilton? The best I can say of this is that it's unproven by this book.

I cannot recommend this; although it is a weighty tome, so maybe as a doorstop?

Carolina Casas says

This is an excellent book if anyone wants to learn more of the medieval queens of England. The book excels in many parts and I learned a lot from it about the Anarchy period and the civil war between Matilda and Stephen and the important role Stephen's wife (also named Matilda) played in her husband's rule and repelling her rival once she was in England. I did not know a lot about William the Conqueror's wife before

reading this, only the basics or her successors (Henry I's wives), Edith of Scotland who later renamed herself Matilda and Adeliza of Louvain. However there were some parts in which the book's credibility went downhill. Starting with Eleanor of Aquitaine which I agree with the author regarding the many myths surrounding this woman that either extol her or undermine her. But she seemed to focus a lot on her own views instead of what the primary documentation said to 'prove' that when it came to 'great' queens like (in her view) Matilda (wife of Stephen I) was, she didn't come anywhere near. To her view, Eleanor of Aquitaine is just a woman whose only accomplishments were her fertility and she was a great detriment to Henry II for rebelling against him. She takes into account her role of Regent, but even here she says she wasn't that great and there were many women before her that were better and she paints her as this she-devil who was dead set on power and was very jealous of Richard I's wife for taking her position of Queen Consort away from her. Secondly we have Eleanor of Castile -Edward I's first wife. She dispels the myth that Edward tried to build around her, but doesn't do her any favors when it comes to lending credibility to her enemies' whispers of her. Eleanor of Castile was no nice lady but she did bring education and many romances to England and with her -as with Eleanor of Aquitaine and Eleanor of Provence- a chivalrous court, but all these are nothing in Hilton's view who sees her as a poor queen whom she infers her husband did not like and might have gotten along better with his second wife, the teenage Princess of France. Thirdly and lastly she perpetuated the nasty rumors regarding Elizabeth of York and Richard III and cast Anne Neville as this immoral conniving Lady Macbeth-like persona who felt no love whatsoever for Richard and only married him to rescue her from her status as Clarence's ward and restore her prominence. She uses the words "desperate" and "immoral" and "illegal marriage" when it comes to her union with Richard and casts her off as an uncaring woman who married her first husband's murderer but who was willing to do everything to get what she thought was hers by right. If anyone wants to read a good biography on Anne, I recommend Amy Licence's Anne Neville: Richard III's Tragic Queen. She doesn't shy away from the possibility this may have been what Anne was thinking, but she doesn't cast this off as the ultimate judgement and instead gives out all the possibilities that could have led Anne to marry Richard -one of them is of mutual help and that they knew each other, grew up together and above all she makes it clear their union was *not* illegal and in fact they had obtained a dispensation months before the possible date of her wedding (June or July 1472).

But the thing that really made this book lose its credibility in the end was believing a secondary source and once again putting words in historical women's mouth which should be a big no when it comes to serious research. The George Buck letter based off his seventeenth century biography of Richard is NOT a primary source, it is a secondary source. Also she fails to mention that the copy of the original letter is not complete and it has been re-written two times (yes, two times!) to fill in the gaps and fit in with the theories the writers were trying to prove. In the original copy there is no date, there is no mention of Elizabeth explicitly saying she wants to marry her uncle or is anxious to hear any news of Anne dying. There is a line where she expresses interest in the development of someone dying, we assume today thanks to a much later historian's reconstruction that she meant Anne Neville, but we cannot know for sure. When we read the copy of the letter and see there are so many parts missing (not to mention the date), it becomes clear that this can't be regarded as a reliable source. One big possibility is that the letter she addressed to John Howard was during the beginning of the 1480s before the betrothal to the Dauphin was called off. Edward IV was said to favor Elizabeth above his other daughters, she could have (as other historians have pointed out) written a letter to John Howard who was in France at the time and working to keep negotiations going, to inquire what was wrong about her betrothal? Why wasn't she married yet, and why was the King of France stalling? Then she goes on to cast Margaret Beaufort as a copy-cat, another monstrous woman who with her son cast off Elizabeth Woodville into a terrible abbey and indirectly forced her into penury and cast her off in the shadows, only to appear when Henry needed her. She is not intelligent, she is just copying Elizabeth Woodville's contributions and claiming all the fame for herself.

I am not dissuading the avid reader not to pick up this book, on the contrary -read it! But have an open mind

when you do and check for other sources.

LeslieVA says

so, after waiting 8 weeks to get this from the library, I really wanted to enjoy this book. Let's face it, this book should have been heaven for me. I totally geek out on medieval history, women studies and religious history. It should have been a fabulous read. I was very excited to get a different perspective on Eleanor of Aquitaine and Isabella of France, but I was particularly to read more about English Queen consorts I have only read about on the fringes of other histories or biographies. Boy was I disappointed.

Things started off strong and I did enjoy myself through the chapter on Eleanor of Aquitaine. It was about that time that I began to notice the mistakes. The further I read into the book, the more noticeable they became. It was as if the book was rushed to publication and only the first third was edited for content. First of all there were several glaring errors in the genealogical charts that even someone unfamiliar with the era would catch (a child being born and passing away before his parents were born) and some that are downright painful to someone with a good grasp of the historical context.

I honestly felt that the chapters on Marguerite of France, Elizabeth Woodville, Anne Neville and Elizabeth of York which had so much potential considering the back drop of the War of the Roses were just throw away chapters. The lives of these three queens overlapped a great deal, but I felt like the chapters could have been written better. The chapters on Elizabeth Woodville and Anne Neville felt more like an extension of the chapter on Marguerite of France. I also did not quite understand some of the author's conclusions about concerns raised at the time of Anne Neville's marriage to Richard III as her sister also married into that family with no uproar. Maybe there was and the author didn't feel it was relevant?

The book started out so promising, but by the last few chapters I really just wanted to finish it for the sake of finishing. Sad:(

Kim says

When I first heard about this book, I could have danced for joy. An entire book dedicated to the medieval queens? I was thrilled by such an idea, so I immediately set out to find it, eventually obtaining it through my library's inter-library loan program.

Overall, I was pretty pleased with it. I was able to learn a great deal about the 'forgotten' queens like the second wife of Henry I, Adeliza, or Marguerite of France, the second queen of Edward I, two women I had been curious about for years but about which there is scant attention devoted to them.

My biggest problem with the book, which cost it a star, was the editing. There were several awkward sentences that should have been smoothed out, but more importantly, there were frequent mistakes in the relationships that are mentioned throughout the book, and even kings getting mixed up. Blanche of Castile, who figures prominently in several chapters even though she was a Queen of France, is named the mother of Louis VIII in one chapter, for example, and then (rightly) his wife in another. Similarly, Louis IX (St. Louis) is mentioned as being involved in the events of the reign of Edward IV, nearly a century after his death. Not to mention that Henry Tudor (the future Henry VII) is referred to as the son of Henry VI. All of these things

should have been caught and corrected before publication, and it was rather annoying to have them crop up. It was especially bad in the last few chapters, like the author was growing impatient to have the work finished and grew even sloppier.

That aside, a great book with some really interesting information on the medieval queens of England and the power of medieval queenship.

Carolyn says

Fascinating history!

The title is a bit misleading. The book begins before the conquest, more than 150 years before Eleanor. The book is also as much about the political climates and the kings as it is the queens.

The first section should have been about Emma of Normandy. A fair bit of it is devoted to her anyway, so why not give her her own section? She is probably the first recognizable queen anyway, even if she was before the conquest.

The Norman Section was a little confusing because so many of the ladies were called Matilda. Matilda of Flanders, Matilda of Scotland, Matilda of Boulogne (and her daughter Matilda) as well as Empress Matilda. Since I am not as familiar with this period, I had trouble at times keeping them all straight, particularly during the Stephen vs Matilda years.

Berengaria of Navarre's section is mostly about Eleanor and Berengaria's lack of real influence.

It was very interesting to me to see how various queens got their reputations, for good or ill. Some were more notorious than others, but did they really deserve to be? Were they successful as a political or beneficial force? I really enjoyed reading the facts behind the legends (of both kings and queens).

Robin says

<http://historicalreadings.blogspot.co...>

Received free review copy from publisher via NetGalley.

At first glance this looked similar to Helen Castor's "She Wolves". But Castor focuses more on the misogyny of the times, the individual powerful women who took control of their own destinies in spite of it, and what that meant for their reputations, whereas 'Queens Consort' is more about the role of queenship, both domestic and political, how each consort defined those roles and how it evolved. Castor also talked about Mary I and the lead up to her ascent after her brother Edward VI died when, for the first time, all the contenders for the throne were female. Hilton does not discuss female regnents, only the role of queen consort. There is some overlap in the factual biographies but the thesis and assessment are approached differently and Hilton studies several more queen consorts than Castor.

And for this reason, I was glad to see Hilton actually covered each and every consort from Matilda of

Flanders to Elizabeth of York, whether they are well known or not; you can't explore the role of queenship by picking and choosing certain queens. The conclusion sums everything up by analyzing how Beowulf and Thomas Malroy's *Le Morte d'Arthur* portray, and thus how the different time periods they were written in perceived queenship.

It's very well written and it feels comprehensive despite fitting so many historical figures into one book so I expect this will make an excellent reference book.

As an ebook, however, there were still some lingering OCR errors which will hopefully be resolved in time.

Nikki says

I picked up *Queens Consort* because it looked like it'd be useful to me in understanding the portrayal of queens in literature in the medieval period. It turned out to be interesting in general, covering the lives of queens who are little remembered now as well as the notorious ones, and trying to portray them fairly, rather than as their detractors would have liked them to be remembered (or, similarly, with reference to their flaws as well as the propaganda intended to make them into heroines: Lisa Hilton is after a balanced and truthful portrayal). It's a good survey of how the role of queen consort developed.

I also found her references to the literature -- mostly in the conclusion to the book -- and to concepts I've encountered only in literature until now (the idea of a queen as a "peaceweaver", which I knew of through *Beowulf*; obviously the idea of a diplomatic marriage to make peace was familiar to me, but Lisa Hilton seemed to draw her idea of the role directly from the Anglo-Saxon ideas of the role of women/queens) very interesting: the conclusion discusses Malory's portrayal of Guinevere, which undoubtedly reflected how he saw queenship at the time, and perhaps impacted future queens.

There are a few points where it could have been better edited, and it can be quite dry; if you want something more exciting, I'd go for a book that covers the more notorious queens, like Helen Castor's *She-Wolves*, which I'm about to read.

Sarah says

I was thrilled to see this book; the personalities of the medieval queens of England are incredibly large and vibrant for the time period. The author gives us a window into their lives and personalities, even to the lesser known like Adelizia of Louvain, making them breathe with relevance and making them real people to a modern audience. I really enjoyed getting to know them on a personal level and seeing the role they played on a grander scale. I also was enthralled to see how the role of queens changed throughout the Middle Ages that the author explored.

The amount of research and information that went into this work is astounding. The sheer wealth of information presented makes my jaw drop; the author must have been at it for years. I also liked that she wrote in such a way that the reader is kept engaged and isn't tired out from an excess of dry facts and figures. Chunks of primary material are kept to a minimum, and the author keeps her readers engaged with her research being interwoven with her own words.

However, this book did suffer in a few areas that kept it from being a truly stellar work. First off is the lack of editing and proofreading. I'm not sure if the author didn't have other people editing her work or not; I would think for a professionally published work that she would, though. Yet, there are typos and grammar mistakes literally everywhere. Spaces where there shouldn't be, randomly inserted letters/misspellings, and the occasional run-on sentence made me grit my teeth in frustration. I can just imagine the frustration of a true grammar Nazi...

Then there is the overuse of symbolism the author utilizes throughout, especially in her comparisons to the Virgin Mary and queen-ship. Sometimes the conclusions the author reaches when utilizing these comparisons seemed far-fetched, but maybe that's just me. Yet, I did find the amount of times these comparisons and symbols being used in the narrative excessive and overused.

So not a bad work overall, especially in an area that isn't explored much in non-fiction. The author breathes personalities into people that might otherwise be footnotes in history or stereotypes for all queens or she-wives of history. The amount of research is clearly evident and shines through, to the author's credit. However, an abundance of typos and grammar mistakes along with an excessive use of questionable symbols keep this from being a true forerunner in the nonfiction body of work on medieval queens of England.

Brett says

Wow. This incredibly comprehensive & addictively readable work sees Hilton detailing the lives & experiences of the twenty English Queens of the Medieval era, starting with Matilda, wife to William the Conqueror, & going all the way up to Elizabeth of York, who married Henry VII Tudor. It's absolutely amazing how much detail of these women's day-to-day lives exists, considering that almost one thousand years has passed since the life of the first one, & yet Hilton gets enough information packed in that each one becomes almost knowable to us. It's interesting to see her take on how perceptions of the Queen & what her behavior should be (& how much power she was able to wield) gradually changed over the period, & how each individual woman to hold the post affected both those perceptions & her country's history, for better or worse, & no matter how little the powerful men around her thought of her. Some of them are inspiring, some of them are despicable, a few are more than a little frightening. It's another clear example of how historical lives are simultaneously very much like our modern ones & completely foreign. A true Anglophile history nut will devour this; people who are interested in just the basics may find it a bit overwhelming in its comprehensiveness, although they may enjoy flipping through the chapters that sound interesting.
