



# Eleanor of Castile: The Shadow Queen

*Sara Cockerill*

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## **Eleanor of Castile: The Shadow Queen** Sara Cockerill

Eleanor of Castile has been effectively airbrushed from history, portrayed as the archetypal submissive queen. In fact Eleanor had perhaps one of the most fascinating lives of any of England's queens. Her childhood was spent in the center of the Spanish reconquest and was dominated by her famed military hero of a father (St Ferdinand) and her intellectual polymath brother. Married at the age of twelve and a mother at thirteen, she gave birth to at least fourteen children, most of whom died young. She was to live for extended periods in five different countries, venture on Crusade and endure destitution and captivity amid a civil war in which her husband's life was in acute danger. As Queen of England she enjoyed, alongside Edward I, the full glory of returning Crusaders and conquerors.

Personally she 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, design and even gardening can be discerned to this day, while her idealized image speaks to us from Edward's beautiful memorials to her, the Eleanor crosses, the most complete and ornate set of monuments to a beloved spouse ever seen in this country.

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