



Circle of Stones

Anna Lee Waldo

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The author of the 1.5 million-copy bestseller *Sacajawea* now brings to life an extraordinary historical saga, capturing the breathtaking castle intrigue of medieval Wales and the passions that drove men and women to explore new horizons...

History would call her Brenda, the mistress of a powerful Welsh prince. But when she arrives at Gwynedd Castle, she is only a naive girl who cannot control her desire for Prince Owain-- until he decides to murder her child. Now, in a court filled with jealousy and betrayal, Brenda will harbor a dangerous secret-- and daringly become a Druid healer, a woman who steadily gains influence and cunning to protect her son Madoc at any cost. But soon a prophecy that has foreseen him as a messiah for the Druids and the finder of a faraway shore called America, will magnificently, thrillingly unfold...

Circle of Stones Details

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Author : Anna Lee Waldo

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From Reader Review Circle of Stones for online ebook

Gina says

This is a true historical fiction. It is rich with characters, culture, and daily life of the times. It reminds me of the Greenlanders by Jane Smiley because it likewise gives a glimpse into life at a certain time and place through the lives of the characters (Circle of Stones is in 12th Century Wales). From other reviews I've read, perhaps you need to be an historical fiction fan to really like this book. Some felt it lacked a plot. Personally, the first couple pages were hard to get into, and I was afraid I'd be disappointed, but it grabbed me right after that, and I've been loving it ever since.

I'm about 60% done. I like learning about some of the herbal remedies they used at the time. I think that is an added benefit. One thing with historical fiction...when they base it on real-life characters, they are somewhat tied to the true story, to the best of their knowledge. I am really enjoying this, but there are some things I wish could be different. I would like to find an historical fiction of this caliber that is not based on real people who existed so there can be a bit more happiness. I don't want to spoil anything, so I am being intentionally vague in what I mean here, sorry.

having gone a bit farther (75% done), things do improve, happiness-wise. I won't say anything about it bc I don't want to ruin the story.

Completely done, and I loved it. In the beginning of each chapter, the author takes an excerpt from an historical book. I love that bit of research thrown in, and it sets the stage for where the story she is spinning goes next. At the end of the book, she has quite a bibliography. Going to read the next book, Circle of Stars.

Lorna says

I read this book over a decade ago. Its mystical and hisorical and thought provoking. Anna Lee Waldo is an accomplished author as we all know. Worth reading twice ... at least!!

Emily says

It was an epic novel that tells a fictional account of a fact based theory that destiny led a tribe of Welsh Druids escaping religious persecution to discover America. A lot of magic and fanstasy in a great time period. Great book!!

Magda says

A bit disappointing for various reasons. I thought there would be more on Madoc, as there's quite a bit of prophecy about him, but evidently that's in the sequel, Circle of Stars: A Novel. Then there's no sympathetic "New Religionists" (Christians), and the "Old Religionists" ("druids") are proud of being "pagans" (wouldn't they be proud of being druids? and I thought there would be fewer actual druids and more followers of the

old religion and they wouldn't necessarily identify as "pagan," which seems an outsider's term) and they're not terribly sympathetic, either. And only the ORs believe that the world is round, and the NRs only believe that the world is flat?

I kinda want to say this would have been a better book if it hadn't been historical fiction.

Frank says

I read Waldo's "Sacajewea" several years ago and found it to be engrossing and well-researched. In that long novel, I learned of a possible connection of the Mandan Indians with Madoc, the legendary Welshman who purportedly sailed to America in the late 12th century and established a colony there. "Circle of Stones" is the first in a series of novels by Waldo telling the story of Madoc. This novel was obviously well-researched but I found it somewhat lacking in plot and I struggled sometimes with Waldo's stilted language in this one. The novel is actually about Brenda, Madoc's mother, who had an illicit affair with Owain, the 12th century Welsh prince. The book ends before Madoc makes his voyage to America so I was a little disappointed in that. However, I found most of the historical information about Wales, the Druids, King Henry II, and the wars among the heirs to the Welsh kingdom, to be very interesting. Overall, I would mildly recommend this. I have a copy of the next book in this series, "Circle of Stars", and hope it will be better.

Heather says

Anna Lee Waldo's historical research is superb in this fictionalized account exploring the possibility of a Welsh discovery of America, 300 years prior to Columbus' landing. My version is an Advance Uncorrected Proof, so there may be differences in the final version. The story is told primarily from the point of view of Brenda, Prince Owain's Irish favored mistress. She gives birth to Madoc under difficult circumstances. I won't tell any more about that because I don't want to wreck the story. The book also explores Druids and their persecution under Christianity. It's definitely a good read, especially for anyone interested in Celtic culture.

Julie says

I love historical fiction writing about the druids.

Lookinglas360 says

A wonderfully written, historically accurate account of the 12th century Welsh royals. The characters were portrayed beautifully human in their struggles for survival in what is becoming an English dominated society. The story tells a vivid picture of Old Religionists trying to adapt in a world of dominate Christian beliefs. Alternative twist of history at the end, but I will leave that for you to discover!

Melissa says

I've read the hefty beast that is Waldo's "Sacajawea". And having enjoyed that, I decided to give this first book in a series of hers a try. I wasn't nearly as thrilled with it, although it wasn't terrible.

Brenda is a young mistress of Prince Owain, who rules over Wales. On an auspicious night, she becomes pregnant with her third child but then is unlucky enough to give birth to a son at the same time Owain's other two women give birth to sons. Because of a talk earlier, Owain decides only one son may live so Brenda flees to a Druid encampment. Forces out of her control make her have to go back to Owain's court and leave young Madoc behind, where he will be fostered away from her for years.

Brenda is a mix of intelligent and "what the heck were you thinking". And we are constantly told how wise she is. I personally prefer to be shown, and there's only a little of that for her character. In fact, she always takes the road of least resistance, and it can end up hurting those around her. Owain is a weird person and completely unwise. He seems more concerned with pride than anything else, and that's kind of disappointing. Madoc, for being such an important character to the story, isn't in it very much. And we always see him through Brenda's eyes so there aren't any flaws to be found either. There were a ton of other characters too and at times I got them confused with each other. There were just so many. A lot were based on real people though, and I did enjoy learning a bit more about them than I knew before.

Waldo is gifted with lots and lots of words. While this isn't as long as some of her other books, it does tend to go on and on quite a bit. In fact, I had a hard time getting into this book at first because I was bored by the endless detail. But the further I got in the better it got. I became captivated by Brenda's tale and even while I was frustrated at times I still wanted to know what happened. She even got down to the nitty gritty on Druid medicine. That description is in everything and there is murder, sex, violence, and other such things in this book. Those at least aren't overly descriptive but they're still there. The history I can't say is all correct, I don't know enough about that period of time or region, but it seems like she did do a lot of research for the book. And she was kind enough to list her sources by type.

An ok book. I don't think it told the terrific tale that Sacajawea did, but it still chronicled a very strong woman's life. I might pick up the second book if I come across it.

Circle of Stones

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432 pages

Review by M. Reynard 2013

More of my reviews can be found at www.ifithaswords.blogspot.com

Jessica says

Epic historical fiction at its best! The tale is set in 12th Century Wales and full of strong, fascinating characters and intrigue. I enjoyed it immensely! I had a little trouble with the beginning; I can't put my finger on why. But once I was about 20 pages in, I was hooked. Having read the Eleanor of Aquitaine series by Sharon Kay Penman, which tells the tale of England during the same time period, I was especially

intrigued and interested to hear the other side of the story, since the two countries were frequently at odds during the period. I feel like I've already read five books worth of story in one novel and I can't wait to see what's in store in the next installment. If you're a lover of historical fiction or this period and haven't read Anna Lee Waldo, I recommend you check her out. This is my first time reading her work, and I'm definitely going to be looking up her other novels.

Alicia Utter says

Rate: 4

A mistress of a Welsh king in the 1100s gives birth to a babe that was prophecied to kill his father. In lieu of sacrificing him, Brenda, the mistress, takes off back to Ireland to stay in a druid camp. She is found and brought back to Wales, but her child remains in the camp. Christianity is causing many druids to die, and the English are constantly threatening the land. Along with the sons of the king fighting for rights to the kingdom, Brenda is constantly seeing huge parts of history that shaped that region. She is secretly, kind of, a druid. At the end, her son takes off for America to establish a colony there for druids.

There were so many historical discrepancies, I had a hard time enjoying it. They had Eleanor and Richard in there, who lived later than this. Druids are still at court, which was not the case in the 1100s. Brenda is conveniently overeducated, and her character is a little hard to believe. There are very trite scenes in here that try and convey more emotion. They fall flat. While I enjoy reading anything about the druids, this was so far-fetched, it was hard to believe. People are behaving very badly, without any courtly rules in there. While she had done her homework on some information of that age, the people are mixed up and it just became tedious. Very tedious.

Giving Away

Benjamin Thomas says

I've had this novel and its sequel on my shelves for over 10 years and am just now getting to them. I had read the author's previous works, *Sacajawea*, and *Prairie: The Legend of Charles Burton Irwin and the Y6 Ranch* back in the early 1990s and have been anxious to give these "Circle" books a try. This novel states that it is the first of a series but to my knowledge only one sequel has been published, back in 2001. A third book, "Watch the Face of the Sky" is/was supposed to be published in 2011 but I'm not certain of its status.

This book was an interesting read about the harsh life in Wales back in the mid 1100's AD. Brenda is the protagonist as well as the mother of Madoc for whom there is some credible evidence for his being the first European to "discover" America. The second book in this series is more about him.

So the book itself was well written and detailed some interesting history of Northern Wales and the time of conflict based upon the old religion (Druids) and the new religion (Christianity). However, I found the story progression to be at a pretty slow pace and thus my 3 star rating. I've unintentionally been reading several novels taking place in that era of the British Isles including *The King Raven Trilogy* (a different sort of take on the legend of Robin Hood by Stephen R Lawhead) as well as *The Pillars of the Earth* so I think it's time to go for something a bit different before returning to the sequel to this one.

Heidi says

"I've rarely read a historical novel where the author went to the trouble of doing so much research and then wasted it with such awkward writing. The characterizations are so poorly drawn and inconsistent that it's very hard to care about the story - a critical turning point in the history of Wales where one of its greatest leaders leaves chaos behind due to his failure to deal with his many immoral sons. The conflict between druidism and Christianity has been used in many other novels to much greater effect, and the author belabors the point so incessantly and with such whiny piteousness that I ended up disgusted by both sides. Dialogue is baffling and stilted, the plot wanders, and moment that the author uses years to build up to never reach their potential. Very disappointing."

Rena Sherwood says

Circle of Stones (1999) by Ann Lee Waldo is a very long book. By the time you finish it, you are rewarded with the information that it is only the first in a series of very long books. This is good or bad news, depending on how you enjoyed the first book. It's very much in the same vein as the wildly popular and influential The Mists of Avalon (1982) by Marion Zimmer Bradley, only the legendary figure is Madoc and not King Arthur.

What's It About?

It is refreshing to see someone take a stab at fictionalizing a little-known legend such as Madoc. For those unfamiliar with the legend, Madoc (or Madoq) was a Druid that led a few boatloads of persecuted Druids to the New World in the twelfth century and bred into the Native American tribes to the point where later generations could not remember their Welsh origins.

Unfortunately, the readers never get beyond the shores of Ireland and Wales in "Circle of Stones". The adventures of Madoc and the Druids crossing the ocean and trying to set up shop in America are what the subsequent books are about. Meanwhile, the readers are stuck with the life of Brenda, Madoc's mother.

There is a reason why most novels set in legendary times center on male characters instead of female characters - the women don't do much that makes for interesting reading. Women in the twelfth century did hard work and had hard lives, but reading about raising babies and getting chased after by the local scalawags gets a little old after a few hundred pages.

Let's Get Quibbling

The main problem of the book is that it tries to be too Welsh. The Welsh language is nearly unfathomable for a native speaker of English to pronounce, spell or understand. There are no pronunciations given for names such as Llanowerth or Dayffyd. Perhaps it would have been best if the names were written phonetically or if a pronunciation guide was included at the front of the book.

Also, sometimes the characters will lapse into Welsh - and then suddenly explain what they just said in English. If it's one Welsh person talking to the other, these explanations would be completely unnecessary.

Fiction is most successful when a reader gets completely immersed in the story. Waldo's sudden breaks in trying to be too Welsh is like someone prodding you in the ribs to say, "Look at the neat Welsh phrase I just learned!"

Finally, Waldo mentions that the Welsh and Irish drank tea. This is the twelfth century. Tea wouldn't be a popular beverage in the British Isles for centuries yet.

Nico says

3 1/2 - 4 stars
