



Queen Emma: A History of Power, Love, and Greed in 11th-Century England

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"A lively account of the harsh realities of war and politics in this era, the vagaries of political marriage and the thin line between invaders and settlers."—*Publishers Weekly*

Emma, one of England's most remarkable queens, made her mark on a nation beset by Viking raiders at the end of the Dark Ages. At the center of a triangle of Anglo Saxons, Vikings, and Normans all jostling for control of England, Emma was a political pawn who became an unscrupulous manipulator. Regarded by her contemporaries as a generous Christian patron, an admired regent, and a Machiavellian mother, Emma was, above all, a survivor: hers was a life marked by dramatic reversals of fortune, all of which she overcame.

Queen Emma: A History of Power, Love, and Greed in 11th-Century England Details

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From Reader Review Queen Emma: A History of Power, Love, and Greed in 11th-Century England for online ebook

Rebecca says

This non-fiction book starts off on a surprisingly narrative and almost fictional note in that it sets the scene of how young Emma, daughter of the Duke Richard of Normandy was set upon a ship to England to marry a man double her age and seal a strategic alliance against the growing strength of the Vikings. Some people may not like this narrative introduction but I think it adds that extra sparkle and almost depth to the text as it helps the reader imagine what Emma must have been like as each chapter and section goes through the key areas of history and introduce key characters that had a major influence not just on Emma's own life but of course the very history of English rule.

Emma is one of those forgotten queens who sadly reigned not once but twice (as well as strongly in the background of two of her son's reigns - Harthacnut and Edward (the confessor's early rule)) but also in a period of history not often talked about or featured in historical literature both non-fiction and fiction. That is the period before 1066, when King Ethelred the Unready (ill-counceled) was in power and the time when England was actually under Danish rule and formed part of a large scandinavian empire under King Cnut (or Canute if you prefer).

The reader will learn an awful lot not just about Emma but about the world and society she grew up in and will realise that Emma show's the inner strength, cunning and social survival skills that shone through in Queen Elizabeth 1st in the sixteenth century and equally Queen Victoria in the nineteenth century. But I am pleased to say that not one jot of this book is dry or boring. Each chapter is interesting, enriching, enlightening and even entertaining as the first.

If you wish to understand better the background behind 1066 well why not start from where it truly all began, with a similar battle of wills for the throne of England - before Godwinesone vs Hardrada vs Duke William it was Swein/Cnut vs Edmund Ironside and the current King Ethelred who held a shakey stability. And weaving between these great men was one woman who was a foriegner herself - Emma of Normandy who outlived them all.

Wealththeow says

Queen Emma (called Aelfgifu by most of her subjects) was a strong-willed Norman who was queen of England twice over--first as the wife of Anglo-Saxon king Aethelred, then as the wife of the conquering Danish king Cnut. She had little impact in Aethelred's court, but was (according to O'Brien) very involved in revitalizing Cnut's reputation in Europe through conspicuous acts of piety and generosity. After Cnut's death, she fought long and hard to get one of her sons on the English throne. Cnut's two sons, Harold Harefoot (son of Cnut's first wife, also named Aelfgifu) and Harthacnut (Emma's son) each claimed the throne, but Harold died and Harthacnut was crowned King of England without having to fight. Emma's younger son by Aethelred then returned to England (he had been hiding in Normandy) and joined his half-brother Harthacnut as co-ruler. Harthacnut was a brutal and heavy-handed ruler, and few mourned when he died only a few years later. Edward, later called "Confessor", was then the sole ruler of England. Upon his childless death many years later, Emma's nephew William the Conquerer claimed the throne.

It's fascinating history, but there is frustratingly little known about Emma herself. Today, we only have a few clues, from The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle and the history she commissioned, the *Encomium Emmae*.

Lauren Albert says

Interesting if not exciting look at what can seem a very alien time. It is not really so much about Emma--it couldn't be a modern style biography because of the lack of evidence about her life. But it places her and her life history into the context of the histories of England, the Viking invasions, and Normandy before the conquest.

Fence says

This is the story of Queen Emma, by birth a Norman, who married two kings of England. Her first marriage was as peacemaker between her family and England. Her second came about because Cnut defeated her first husband and came to power. She was, in effect, the spoils.

But Emma was not a woman to be taken lightly, nor was she one to sit back and let events unfold. This book attempts to show her as an active, manipulating Queen, one who held power in her own right.

Full review: <http://www.susanhatedliterature.net/2...>

Joel Adamson says

This is a quality book with beautiful printing and a very interesting subject. I had high hopes that this book would be a well-informed and analogous to Dan Jones's Wars of the Roses, but in a different time period. Emma is a very interesting subject whose life spans several cultures and a tumultuous era of European history. Unfortunately the facts are quite thin. That would be okay if the author didn't fill in the gaps with admittedly outlandish speculation that directly contradicts more well-informed books on the same subjects. It got to the point where every sentence was packed with weasel words (probably, maybe, we can guess, and so on), and then it became clear that the author was substituting modern caricatures of medieval life in place of facts. Women are depicted as powerless units of property (with enough "maybe" and "probably" to cover her), directly in contradiction to other books on the subject. Having just read a treatise by Christine Fell on women in Anglo-Saxon women, I wanted to get an idea of how things were different in the Norman world. Instead of just saying "we don't know" the author fills in a best guess that has no basis in fact. I had to stop reading.

Laurel Bradshaw says

Book Description from Amazon.com

“A lively account of the harsh realities of war and politics in this era, the vagaries of political marriage and the thin line between invaders and settlers.”—Publishers Weekly

Emma, one of England's most remarkable queens, made her mark on a nation beset by Viking raiders at the

end of the Dark Ages. At the center of a triangle of Anglo Saxons, Vikings, and Normans all jostling for control of England, Emma was a political pawn who became an unscrupulous manipulator. Regarded by her contemporaries as a generous Christian patron, an admired regent, and a Machiavellian mother, Emma was, above all, a survivor: hers was a life marked by dramatic reversals of fortune, all of which she overcame.

Courtney says

The title is a little misleading, as the book mostly talks AROUND Emma rather than ABOUT her. This is unsurprising, given the lack of hard documentary evidence about the lady herself. There's a lot of discussion about what her husbands and sons did, and what was going on during the time she was living, so if nothing else it's a good introduction to early English history.

ClareT says

This is another of those books that should have been a chapter in another book. There are too few records about Emma in this period, but it seems to be the vogue to write about queens from the medieval period about which little is known.

I didn't like the style at all, it was too much like a docu-drama with the author trying to guess what historical characters would be feeling or thinking.

I admit that I knew little about Emma or Cnut before this book and I know more now, which is why it gets two stars, not one. But the style of writing, the fact that it is more about England just before the Norman Conquest rather than Emma herself means that I wouldn't recommend this book. I am sure there are many better books covering this period that don't read like a novel.

Susan Fehr says

Oh dear. this was one of those books which I guessed would be difficult because of the lack of historical records on which to base the biography, but I really did feel that the style of writing was too dramatised and not sufficiently supported by the facts available. There was too little critical analysis of how much Emma might have actually been involved and how much might have been coerced from her, with or without her actual presence or cooperation. Ms O'Briens Emma seems to be a virtuous woman in difficult circumstances with all benefit of the doubt with regard to her relations and the situation politics. There is also a little to little background information presented in order to understand how Ms O'Brien arrived at her opinion and conclusions. Perhaps this was only a flaw in the first part of the book, but it was sufficient to put me off, and I didnt manage to finish reading it.

Steve says

The book is based on what few facts there are about Queen Emma who was the Great-Aunt of William 1 of England. She was the daughter of a Duke, wife of 2 Kings and Mother of 2 Kings. She was determined not to take a back seat to anyone and she paid for it several times. However, her strength and perseverance helped

her become a force to be reckoned with in Anglo-Saxon England.

Queen Emma used her diplomatic skills to help shape a Viking Warlord-King into a well-liked sovereign. However, her own propaganda worked against her on several occasions. This book is part historical fact and part Tuchmanesque novel. The facts are many and often contradictory.

Even though we may never know the true Queen Emma, this book provides the reader with a remarkable insight into the lives of the Anglo-Saxon England Nation and their rulers.

G. Lawrence says

An excellent, smooth narrated biography of Emma and her world. Really enjoyable!

Elizabeth says

A delightfully readable book.

There are only so many textual sources for Anglo-Saxon history, and O'Brien makes the most of them. So there's familiarity about it, both in the familiar historical information from the Anglo-Saxon Chronicles and the tropes we see in television and movies - I found myself thinking from time to time of "Lord of the Rings" and "Game of Thrones".

The book actually has more power and greed in it than love. It was good to see the events of Emma's life (and her lifetime) neatly and chronologically explained, and the fate of her sons and companions.

O'Brien's narrative doesn't leave much sense of Emma's personality or her motivation, but she characterizes her as a survivor - and so she was. Perhaps that was all the motivation she needed.

Jamie Collins says

This is a short history of England in the decades before the Norman Conquest. The author centers her story on Emma of Normandy, who arrived in the year 1002 to marry the aging English king, but this is not a biography. There is very little personal information available about any of these people who lived 1000 year ago and were for the most part illiterate.

The book is accessible and entertaining. The author gets a little fanciful sometimes, using educated guesses to flesh out scenes which are not documented in any detail. This feels a little unscholarly, but it serves to give the reader a better sense of place and time.

She tries to judge the quality and accuracy of historical records, and often supplies the reader with multiple versions of events. A lot of information comes from the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, but another surviving contemporary source is the *Encomium Emmae Reginae*, a book commissioned by Emma herself, to tell the version of history she found most useful at the time. Many historical accounts were written decades after the

events themselves, and many are written with obvious agendas, if only to scandalize or entertain the reader.

Emma makes a great focus for the history, especially because of her marriage first to an Anglo-Saxon king, and then to the viking conqueror Cnut. She was queen consort of England for more than 30 years, and the mother of Edward the Confessor, and great-aunt of William the Conqueror.

It's fascinating to read about England as a part of the "North Sea Empire". Cnut ruled England competently for almost 20 years, but his reign is overshadowed by the Conquest.

Louise says

Twice Crowned Queen. Twice a Queen Mother.

It's clear that Emma didn't passively attain this distinction, so how did she do it? The records for the era are hardly extensive, so the biographer has a lot of work to do.

O'Brien did the work and has produced a solid bio. I particularly liked the parts on how Emma commissioned her book and how the assigned monk may have constructed her spin on history. I also liked the chronological chart at the end which sets Emma and her time within not just a European timeline, but also a worldwide framework.

The amount of research that goes into a volume like this is to be respected, but I held back a star because the question of how Queen Emma made her comebacks is only technically answered. You do not get the feeling you understand Emma the way you come to understand the central characters in a Fraser or Weir biography.

Care says

Quick Version

A history of Emma, Norman wife of two kings of England (one Anglo-Saxon and one Dane), mother of two kings of England, and great-aunt of William the Conqueror.

Long Version

Emma is every historian's dream subject. Born into a position destined to make her a pawn in the power plays of the highest nobility, Emma had the intelligence and the cunning to rise to eminence in a world where women were undereducated and disregarded.

Despite a length of less than three hundred pages, this book does an excellent job telling not only Emma's story, but the tale of the time in which she lived. This is a period of English history full of shifting politics and cultures. Alfred the Great had ruled shortly before, the apex of Anglo-Saxon England. Emma's first husband, the inept Aethelred led to its ruin. Cnut the Dane conquered England and in a stunning move

married the popular and recently widowed Queen Emma. Following his demise, Emma held on long enough to put not just one, but two sons, one by Aethelred and one by Cnut, on to England's throne.

In addition to the machinations of politics, Harriet O'Brien paints a vivid picture of life at all levels of society during Emma's lifespan, interspersing her portrait with useful tidbits such as which food items would not have been seen and when they were first cultivated in England. I finally learned the difference between mead and ale!

I highly recommend this history to readers of Helen Hollick's historical fiction, [B]The Forever Queen[/B] and its recently released sequel [B]I am the Chosen King[/B]. It also stands on its own as a wonderfully readable account of the life and times of a woman too often overlooked in the annals of history.
