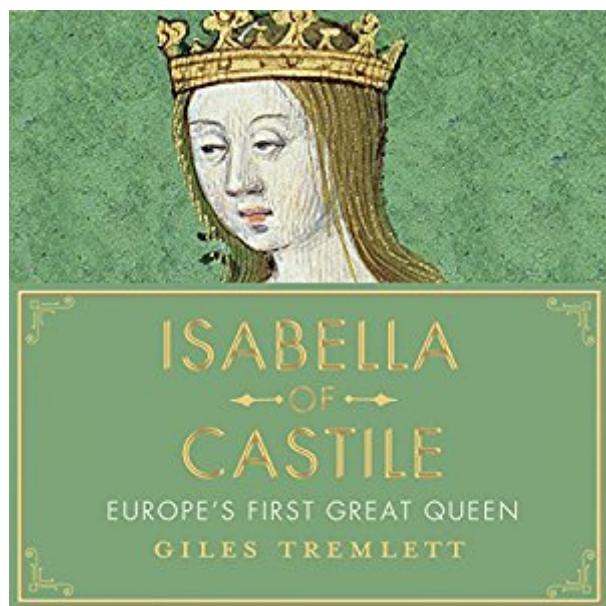


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Isabella Of Castile: Europe's First Great Queen



Synopsis

In 1474, a 23-year-old woman ascended the throne of Castile, the largest and strongest kingdom in Spain. Ahead of her lay the considerable challenge not only of being a young female ruler in an overwhelmingly male-dominated world but also of reforming a major European kingdom that was riddled with crime, corruption, and violent political factionism. Her marriage to Ferdinand of Aragon was crucial to her success, bringing together as it did two kingdoms, but it was a royal partnership in which Isabella more than held her own. Her pivotal reign was long and transformative, uniting Spain and setting the stage for its golden era of global dominance. For by the time of her death in 1504, Isabella had laid the foundations not just of modern Spain but of one of the world's greatest empires. Acclaimed historian Giles Tremlett chronicles the life of Isabella of Castile as she led her country out of the murky middle ages and harnessed the newest ideas and tools of the early Renaissance to turn her ill-disciplined, quarrelsome nation into a sharper, modern state with a powerful, clear-minded, and ambitious monarch at its centre. With authority, insight and flair, he relates the story of this legendary, if controversial, first initiate in a small club of great European queens that includes Elizabeth I of England, Russia's Catherine the Great, and Britain's Queen Victoria.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Great Queen Book !

excellent book

I have read a lot of books on Isabella I of Castile, both in Spanish and English. I have read the primary sources as well, and all I can say: if you want a balanced view of this woman's reign and life, this book is not for you. The first thing that baffled me was the description of The Catholic Monarchs' looks. Plus for providing some citations from chroniclers of the time, but in the introduction the author states as a fact that Isabella was light-auburn haired woman whereas in the sources she does not appear as such. She is described as blond, which the author himself admitted. Her daughter Katherine was described as light-auburn haired by the English, but we can not apply the same to her mother, since people who knew her personally insisted she was a blonde. Besides, "auburn" back then might have meant something else and it does not have Castilian counterpart per se, in the Spanish texts of the time: "1400-50; late Middle English abo(u)rne blond < Middle French, Old French auborne, alborne < Latin alburnus whitish." By describing her as auburn haired, you lead people to false conclusion that her hair certainly was auburn in the modern sense of this word. Ok, granted, in many portraits and manuscripts Isabella's hair looks either reddish blond or ginger but it is highly unprofessional to state it as a fact. The same goes for Ferdinand: the author describes his portrait, saying he looked "swarthy" and had brown eyes (not all manuscripts present him as brown-eyed though). But according to literary descriptions Ferdinand's skin and face were fair and colour of his eyes was not specifically mentioned. All possible exact descriptions should have been inserted in the first place and then the author could have compared them and the portraits, even though I see no point in describing portraits per se. In one miniature Urraca I of Leon looks swarthy, to the point, some came to claim she was of dark race, but does it mean she, indeed, was? Neither of us had a chance to meet those people to state anything about their exact looks. The author relies heavily on the chronicles without any kind of professional and critical analysis, twists facts, which I don't know if is a deliberate action or just simple omission, like in the case of The Catholic Monarchs' argument in May of 1476, when the siege of Cantalapiedra turned out to be the bone of contention. The author proudly states Isabella imposed her will, which is not even true. The sources clearly say, it was Ferdinand who had imposed his will, in spite of Isabella's annoyance. He is cherry-picking the sources and evidence, that present Isabella as great, almighty empress, religious fanatic, some kind of Joan of Arc with ruling powers, who does not really need anyone to achieve her goals, and her husband as someone whom she pushes about. Yes, Isabella was courageous, obstinate, craved glory for herself and Castile, wanted to be obeyed, whereas her husband was pretty flexible but such interpretation is simply unfair. The title of this book itself shows lack of professionalism and bias. I don't care what some of her contemporaries, including Castilians who hated Ferdinand and were highly impressed with her, had to say: she was not Europe's first

great queen. It is clear to me, the author is fascinated with Isabella, so am I. She is actually one of my favorite historical women of all time, but my view of her is balanced. She would have never been who she was without her father-in-law, her husband and many other men of the time. Plus for the mention of Isabella's "new" portrait, that had been believed to be a portrait of Mary Tudor, Queen of France, for centuries, until Pedro Flor re-identified it in 2012. I liked Giles Tremlett's book on Katherine of Aragon much better.

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