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 Patricia Bracewell, Author

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Praise for
SHADOW ON THE CROWN

“Bracewell’s portrayal of Emma . . . is a real tour de force. A five star debut!”

—*Historical Novels Review*

“Bracewell delivers a highly entertaining addition to the historical fiction genre.”

—*Publisher’s Weekly*

“The familiar themes of political rivalry, court scandal, and disputed lineage so often explored in historical fiction get a new cast of schemers and scoundrels set in a less familiar but no less dramatic period of English history. Readers of historical sagas and romances will embrace this rich narrative.” —*Library Journal*

“What a great book! A fascinating, little-known period of history, a tense, exciting story, and characters who spring as naturally from their own time as mushrooms from the forest floor.” —Diana Gabaldon, author of the *Outlander* series

“Who could have known that the court of Aethelred the Unready was as full of intrigue, passion, and danger as anything in Tudor times? A well-wrought journey back to those little known times, this novel entertains while it educates.”

—Margaret George, author of *Elizabeth I: A Novel*

“A stellar achievement.” —Adrienne McDonnell, author of *The Doctor and The Diva*

“A woman whose spirit will not be vanquished, Emma of Normandy will live in your heart long after you finish the last page.” —Ella March Chase, author of *Three Maids for a Crown*

“From the moment I picked up the book it captivated me, calling me back and back again until I abandoned everything to finish it in a breathless rush. Brava!”

—Emma Campion, author of *The King’s Mistress*

“*Shadow on the Crown* drew me in from the first page and held me in its grip . . . a vivid and compelling tale.” —Gillian Bagwell, author of *The September Queen*

AT THE PARTY

Serve

THE BRACEWELL SCONE

(recipe from the author!)

Makes 12 biscuits

Ingredients:

- 1/3 c currants
- 1 c boiling water
- 2 c all-purpose flour
- 3 T sugar
- 5 tsp baking powder
- 1/4 tsp salt
- 1/3 c butter
- 1 c milk

Method:

1. Preheat oven to 425°F
2. Soak currants in boiling water 5 minutes while preparing remaining ingredients.
3. Combine flour with sugar, baking powder & salt.
4. Cut in butter until it is in small pieces. Drain currents well, pat dry & add to mixture.
5. Pour milk over dry ingredients & lightly gather dough together with your fingers. Place dough onto a lightly floured board & knead 5 or 6 times.
6. Pat dough out to a thickness of 3/4". Cut into 2 1/4" circles. Pat extra dough together lightly and cut out more circles.
7. Place circles of dough onto a buttered & floured cookie sheet. Dust the tops lightly with flour.
9. Bake for 15 to 18 minutes.

Serve warm with hot Earl Gray tea, or small glasses of Meade!

AT THE PARTY

Play

(songs picked by the author!)

- The entire soundtrack from the movie *Tristan & Isolde*
(music by Anne Dudley)
- Celtic Patrick Ball's "Celtic Harp" (*because Emma played the harp,
& harp music would have been a constant in 11th c—PB*)
- Mary Chapin Carpenter's "It's Not Too Much To Ask" (*because it
always makes me think of Emma and Athelstan's tryst—PB*)

Introduction to

SHADOW ON THE CROWN

The year is 1001, and the wife of Æthelred II, Anglo-Saxon king of England, has just died. Emma, the sixteen-year-old sister of Richard, duke of Normandy, is promised in marriage to the king, on the condition that Richard will help protect England's shores from his ally Swein Forkbeard, the plundering Dane. The bargaining chip is that Æthelred make Emma not just his wife but queen of England.

When Emma arrives at the royal court, her reception is chilly at best. Her husband keeps her at a distance and treats her with suspicion. In fact, he seems to resent that he has had to take a new wife at all, and the more she attempts to fulfill her role as queen and counselor, the more hostile he becomes. Haunted by past sins and terrified by the prospect of being overthrown, Æthelred makes rash decisions and as his difficulties increase he becomes ever more hostile toward Emma.

His sons are no better, for they are threatened by the power she wields and by her potential to bear a child who will usurp them in the line of succession. The only exception among them is the eldest, Athelstan, to whom Emma feels an immediate attraction and emotional connection—feelings that she knows are dangerous.

Among her worst enemies is Elgiva, the beautiful but conniving daughter of Ælfhelm, ealdorman of Northumbria and one of the king's closest advisers. With her own designs on the crown, Elgiva insinuates herself as the king's mistress and sets about undermining Emma's power wherever possible.

The only way for Emma to secure her status is to bear the king a son, which means luring him away from Elgiva's bed. In the meantime, she works to build alliances with members of the court, the church, and her subjects who admire her for her generosity and noble spirit. Yet everything Emma has worked for is threatened when Swein Forkbeard and a Viking army sweep into England, plundering towns and brutally murdering innocent citizens.

Patricia Bracewell's debut novel is based on a little-known period of real-life history recorded in The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle. Starring a fiercely passionate, independent heroine, *Shadow on the Crown* is the first installment of a dazzling new trilogy that is sure to hook readers with its exquisite period detail, courtly intrigue, and irresistible suspense.

About Patricia Bracewell

Patricia Bracewell grew up in California where she taught literature and composition before embarking on a writing career. This is her first novel. She lives in Oakland, California.

Discussion Questions

Emma is a teenager when she's selected to be the next queen of England. What circumstances have created this situation for her?

Right away, Æthelred and Emma have a challenging relationship. What do they think of each other at the outset of their marriage, and how does this impression evolve or change over time?

The threat of Swein Forkbeard hovers over most of the action of this book. Why is he so feared, and what do the royal family and their subjects stand to lose?

Emma realizes early on that the loyalties of her court and the public at large are constantly shifting. What measures does she take to protect herself and build alliances?

Emma's Danish heritage is a blessing and a curse in her new role as queen of England. How does it help her and how does it hinder her?

How does Æthelred's past come back to haunt him? How does it inform his actions throughout the book?

What draws Emma and Athelstan together and what keeps them apart?

What is Elgiva's role in this story, and what is her ultimate motivation for behaving as she does?

After several attempts, Emma finally gives birth to a son. How does Æthelred react and what does this mean for the future of England?

How do Emma's priorities and values evolve over the course of the book? Where do you expect her to go from here?

A conversation with
PATRICIA BRACEWELL

1. *Shadow on the Crown* is set in eleventh-century England. What drew you to this particular time and place in history?

It was Emma herself who drew me there. I first stumbled across a reference to Emma of Normandy on an Internet bulletin board that mentioned the bare details of her life: daughter of the duke of Normandy, wife to two kings of England, and mother of two kings. I had considered myself fairly well versed in English queens, but I had never heard of Emma. What piqued my interest the most was that she had been wed to two different rulers of England. There must, I thought, be quite a story there. I began to dig a little, and I was hooked.

2. In the notes following the novel, you mention how some parts of the story have been fictionalized. How did you decide where to digress from the official record? In which areas might you have wanted a bit more source material to work from?

Any digression from the official record was made in order to create conflict and complication for the story. In every instance I asked myself if the incident I was relating or the relationship I was inventing could have happened. If the answer was yes, I gave myself the green light. For example, Emma and Elgiva would historically be rivals at a later period in their lives. I chose to start that rivalry many years earlier. I needed a foil for Emma, and why make up a fictional character when there was a historical figure waiting in the wings? As for additional source material, I wish that *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* had been much more comprehensive. The men who compiled it wrote down only what they believed were the major events of a given year. Seldom did they attempt to explain why things happened, or how.

3. Can you talk about your research methods and process for this book? What discoveries surprised you along the way?

I began by reading general histories of the Anglo-Saxons, the Normans, and the Vikings. From there I progressed to books that dealt specifically with Æthelred II and Emma of Normandy. At the same time I began to research details about the period in academic journals—clothing, weaponry, warfare, land ownership, architecture, trade, roads, ships, horses, food, and much more. I drove through Normandy, visiting Rouen and the abbeys along the Seine. I went to England and followed Emma's route to Exeter, spent several days in Winchester, took a two week summer course on the Anglo-Saxons at Cambridge, visited the Anglo-Saxon village at West Stow, and watched a reenactment of the Battle of Hastings. What surprised me the most was just how little is left from the eleventh century. Artifacts are rare, and building remains even rarer. The late Anglo-Saxon kings had great wealth and large retinues. They must have had great halls and palaces, but very few traces of them can be found.

4. What are the advantages, as an author, of writing historical fiction? What are some of the challenges?

One advantage to writing historical fiction is that the bones of the story—the names, the dates, the events—are already laid out for the writer. That being said, once the author has created a personality for each character in the novel, a whole host of motivations, emotions, and conflicts come into play. The writer has to continually remind herself that the story is not in the historical events, but in the actions, attitudes, and relationships of the characters caught up in those events.

5. You chose to tell this story through four different points of view: Emma, Æthelred, Athelstan, and Elgiva. How did you choose this particular structure and why did you settle on these four figures as the focus of the story?

Although I always thought of this as Emma's story, I knew that there would have to be scenes in which Emma could take no part. The history of that period was written by men about the doings of men, so a male viewpoint was necessary in order to round out the world that Emma would have known. Æthelred was the obvious choice, and I was intrigued by him as a historical figure. However one of the very first scenes that blossomed in my mind as I was thinking about this novel was the scene where Athelstan meets the seeress and is told that he will never be king. That scene had to be experienced through Athelstan's eyes, and so I had my third viewpoint and, ultimately, my hero. He gave me, as well, an opportunity to explore what must have been a very difficult father/son relationship. Elgiva was, of course, Emma's rival historically, and I wanted to give her a voice. She is my bad girl. She is dark where Emma is light, selfish where Emma is generous, vengeful where Emma is forgiving. At the same time I tried to give Elgiva enough depth that she would not become a caricature. There should be moments when the reader feels some sympathy for her.

6. One of the themes that emerged throughout the narrative is how little power women had in this society, in which even their brothers could control their fate, and yet Emma is something of a proto-feminist character. What is it about Emma that enables her to have the power that she does?

As a consecrated queen, the historical Emma must have wielded a certain amount of power and she probably had more responsibilities than I could even show in the novel. She would have had properties, revenues, and perhaps even industries—vast weaving sheds, for example—to manage. She would have had a fairly large household staff that she must have supervised to some extent, and she would probably have played a large role in the raising of Æthelred's daughters. In her later years Queen Emma was a force to be reckoned with, and we cannot forget that she sprang from Viking stock. At the same time that I was creating this strong-willed character, though, I wanted to make sure that she was a woman of her time. Emma recognizes and accepts her role as a woman in a patriarchal society, but she also recognizes her power as a queen and she understands what alliances she must make in order to fully achieve it.

7. Æthelred's ghostly visions have a Shakespearean quality to them. While this book seems to be firmly placed in historical reality, paranormal elements are part of the characters' belief systems. What was the thinking behind this aspect of the story and your decision to leave it somewhat ambiguous for the reader?

In the eleventh century, pagan beliefs and Christian thought overlapped. In particular, words carried great power, whether they were prayers addressed to a saint for a good harvest or charms that could hurt or heal. Vikings invaded because there was great sin in the land; diseases were caused when evil spirits entered the body. So belief in supernatural intervention by saints or demons was a historical reality. One of England's

earliest historians, a monk writing in A.D. 1121, described Æthelred as hounded by the shade of his brother. When I read that, I knew that there had to be a ghost. His first appearance probably owes a great deal to the years I spent teaching Macbeth to high school English classes, and by the way, the historical Macbeth lived in the eleventh century, too. The ghost is Æthelred's personal demon—the incarnation of his own guilt and fear, which does not make the ghost any less real.

8. Emma makes a profound choice, between love and honor. How did you arrive at this decision on her behalf?

My function as the author was not so much to choose honor over love on Emma's behalf, but to put her in a situation where she had to make that choice. It doesn't appear anywhere in the histories. It is where history ends and storytelling takes over, where the heroine has to be tested and she must pass the test. The Emma that I created, I hope, could not have made any other decision and still have been true to her nature.

9. What are some misconceptions about this era that you uncovered during the process of writing the book, and what insights would you most want readers to take away from it?

One misconception is that women were chattel and had few rights under the law. In pre-Conquest England, though, women could own, inherit, and bequeath property to their heirs. By law a girl could refuse to marry a man if she did not approve of him, although it's impossible to know how or even if that law was enforced. If girls were not being forced into marriage, such a law would not have been needed. Another misconception, and one that I was certainly guilty of, was that there were castles in England as soon as there were English kings. In fact, the oldest castles—their ruined walls still visible today—were fortresses built by the Normans after 1066 to suppress the English populace. Before that date, there was no need for them, so the English castle was a Norman development. There were English kings, though, long before the Normans came. There were courts filled with ritual and intrigue, royal families whose members did not always get along, and an elite class that patronized the arts and supported religious establishments. The Anglo-Saxon culture was a rich one, and it was the foundation on which high medieval England, more familiar to us, would be built.

10. *Shadow on the Crown* is the first part of a trilogy. Why did you decide to write three volumes about Emma, and what can readers expect from the upcoming books?

I wanted to write a story that would focus on a period in Emma's life about which very little was known, but which must have been an extraordinarily difficult time, not just for Emma but for all of England. As I pondered the history of that period, I realized that there was too much story for just one book, so I divided those fifteen years that I wanted to bring to life into three parts. The next book begins about a year after the final scene of *Shadow on the Crown* and will cover about eight years. The same four viewpoint characters will return, and readers can look forward to murder, vengeance, betrayal, passion, pestilence, and heartbreak. Events will take place on a broader canvas, from a royal hunting lodge at Corfe to London to Worcester to a part of England that was once called Holderness. Emma, though, remains at the heart of it all.