

HUMBLE QUEEN OF ENGLAND:
AN ANALYSIS OF ELEANOR OF AQUITAINE'S ROLE IN THE GOVERNANCE OF
THE ANGEVIN EMPIRE

A Thesis
by
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Abstract

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Many historians have tackled the subjects of Eleanor of Aquitaine as well as the Angevin Empire. However, few have studied her role in the governance of the Plantagenet lands. This work is an attempt to remedy this situation through the study of Eleanor's charters and letters during her time as Queen of England. Eleanor's charters and letters demonstrate that she was a vital figure in the governance of the Angevin Empire as her husband Henry II and her sons Richard I and John I. The charters she issued during her early marriage to Henry II Plantagenet, from her 'Court of Love' in Poitou and imprisonment, and after Henry II's death during the reigns of her sons, Richard I and John I will prove the important role she played in the Angevin Empire. The actions Eleanor took as Queen and the letters both to and from her during her marriage to Henry II will also support this argument.

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Dedication

Dedicated to my parents, Johnny and Vicki Quesenberry, for their steadfast encouragement and support.

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INTRODUCTION

On April 1, 1204, England lost one of the most powerful women in its history. Eleanor of Aquitaine, Queen of France and England, wife of Louis VII of France and Henry II of England, and mother of ten children including Richard the Lionheart and John I, passed away at the Royal Abbey of Our Lady of Fontevrault where she retired after her long and tumultuous life. She was buried there alongside her second husband, Henry II, and her son Richard I. Her tomb is topped with an effigy of the queen wearing a wimple and veil beneath her crown and reading a book that many historians believe is a Bible. This effigy is one of the only confirmed image of Eleanor of Aquitaine in existence.

The wimple and veil Eleanor is wearing in the effigy was common in the Middle Ages. Medieval society believed it was unseemly for a married woman to show their hair so married women and widows donned a veil and possibly a wimple, a head covering that developed in the twelfth century worn under the veil around the head, cheeks, and chin, as a symbol of modesty. According to Désirée G. Koslin, the wimple on the sculpture of Eleanor was a true twelfth-century wimple, covering the space between the collar of the tunic and the chin.¹ Although Eleanor's contemporaries often thought of her as immodest or immoral due to her transgressions in her marriages, the sculptor presented her in a modest light, a reverence for the dead even the most "immoral" queens deserved.

¹ Désirée G. Koslin, "'He hath couerd my soule inwarde': Veiling in Medieval Europe and the Early Church," in *The Veil: Women Writers on its History, Lore, and Politics*, ed. Jennifer Heath (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2008), 164.

The most fascinating detail about the effigy of Eleanor is the look of tranquility on her face. Eleanor lost her father at a young age and from that moment on her life would never be the same. She was forced to live under the roof of Louis VI to protect her and her inheritance and then to marry Louis VII. Eleanor was forced into the role of Queen of France beside a man with whom she had little in common. On her journey to the Second Crusade, gossips accused Eleanor of having an affair with her uncle. After Eleanor and Louis VII finally received permission to divorce, she married the much younger Henry II, had eight children with him, incited a riot among her sons against their father, and was subsequently held Henry II's prisoner until his death. Eleanor was released immediately upon Henry's death but continued to spend the rest of her life helping her sons Richard and John rule during their respective kingships. At the age of 82, Eleanor passed away at the Abbey of Fontevrault.

To understand this extraordinary woman, it is important to examine every aspect of her life and political career. Not much is known about Eleanor's childhood but after the death of her brother, Eleanor was Duke William X of Aquitaine's eldest child and only heir to Aquitaine and Poitou. Fortunately for Eleanor, she grew up in a region of France where women enjoyed many of the same rights as men and a female heir would not have been unheard of. William X groomed Eleanor to rule Aquitaine and as a child she travelled with him through Aquitaine and Poitou to observe the workings of the ducal government. After her father's death while he was on pilgrimage, Eleanor was sent to live with King Louis VI of France in Paris to protect her from greedy lords seeking her inheritance. Louis VI planned

to have his son and heir Louis marry Eleanor, for who could let such a prize – Aquitaine and Poitou – escape?²

Eleanor's marriage to Louis was a long and unstable one. Shortly after their marriage, Louis VI died and Eleanor's new husband became King Louis VII of France. The marriage was destined to fail, for as Eleanor is said to have stated, her husband was more monk than king and spent little time in the marriage bed with his wife. In the first thirteen years of their marriage they had only one child, a daughter Marie, unable to inherit the throne after her father's death. This caused problems in their marriage that erupted when the royal couple sailed to Jerusalem in 1145 on the Second Crusade. While on crusade, Louis VII and Eleanor stayed with Eleanor's uncle, Raymond of Antioch, whose closeness to his niece sparked rumors of incest and adultery among Eleanor's peers. This closeness also contributed to Eleanor's desire for freedom from her husband. On their return to Paris in 1149 after the failed crusade, Eleanor and Louis VII visited Pope Eugenius III whom Eleanor petitioned for divorce on grounds of consanguinity, something women did not do in the twelfth century. Eugenius III denied her petition and in 1150 she gave birth to her second child, another daughter named Alice. After the birth of only his second child in fifteen years, and a daughter at that, Louis VII realized his marriage to Eleanor might not have been prudent to the future of the Capetian line. Therefore, this time the king petitioned the pope for divorce, which the pope granted in March of 1152.³

On May 18, 1152, Eleanor married Louis VII's vassal, the much younger Henry Plantagenet, Duke of Normandy and son of Geoffrey Plantagenet, Count of Anjou and Duke

² Ralph Turner, *Eleanor of Aquitaine: Queen of France Queen of England* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009), 30-48.

³ *Ibid.*, 70-105.

of Normandy before he passed the title to Henry, and Matilda of England.⁴ After her marriage to Henry Plantagenet, she presided over her duchy of Aquitaine and county of Poitou, as well as her husband's duchy of Normandy and county of Anjou. She would also preside as Queen of England after Henry's uncle, Stephen, King of England, died in 1154 leaving Henry as his heir. During this time of her life, Eleanor was more politically active than any time in her fifteen years of marriage to Louis VII.

AIMS AND CONTEXT

Research Aims

The principle aim of this work is to track the political career of Eleanor of Aquitaine after her marriage of Henry Plantagenet. Medieval queens often played more prominent roles in the government of their lands than chroniclers and historians have credited them. Two notable exceptions, intriguingly, have ties to Henry II. The first, Melisende of Jerusalem, eldest daughter of King Baldwin II and his wife Morphia, married Henry's grandfather, Fulk of Anjou in 1129 after he had relinquished Anjou to his son Geoffrey. The two had a son, Baldwin III, and Melisende ruled as regent for nine years after Fulk's death. Seven of those years were after her son came of age, until he finally sought his birthright at age twenty-two. Even after Baldwin III became king, Melisende continued to act as regent and her ability to rule was so remarkable in an era when women were still considered subordinate to men, that William of Tyre praised her reign upon her death in 1161.⁵

The second exception is Matilda herself. Henry's mother was the daughter of King Henry I of England. At eight years old Henry I sent her to Germany where she married Holy Roman Emperor Henry V and acted as his regent in Italy while he faced difficulties in

⁴ Ibid., 108.

⁵ Margaret Tranovich, *Melisende of Jerusalem: The World of a Forgotten Crusader Queen* (London: East & West Publishing, 2011), 26-7; 35-9.

Germany and political companion from the age of sixteen. The couple had no children and after the death of her brother William Aetheling on the White Ship, Henry I called Matilda back to England as his only legitimate heir. He made his lords recognize swear fealty to Matilda as the future Queen of England. Unfortunately for Matilda, after Henry I's death, her cousin Stephen beat her to London and took the throne in her place. This led to a long and destructive civil war that only ended when Stephen named Henry Plantagenet, Matilda's son by her second husband, his heir. Throughout those long years, Matilda held her own against Stephen and retained the loyalty of several English lords, a feat for a woman in the twelfth century.⁶

Although Eleanor was duchess in her own right, she was not a queen regnant. However, she reigned as consort with the same vigor as both Melisende and Matilda. Like the two queens before her, Eleanor kept the loyalty of her lords in Aquitaine and Poitou through two marriages to two kings who would be named Duke of Aquitaine and Count of Poitou, as well as two sons who obtained the same titles. This loyalty kept Aquitaine and Poitou in the Angevin Empire through several changes of leadership during Eleanor's lifetime. She relied upon the loyalty of her lords particularly during her years as Henry II's political prisoner, and during the early years of her youngest son John's reign to keep the Empire together as he tended to alienate those who pledged fealty to him.

Historiography

Several historians have written biographies on Eleanor since the 1950s. In 1950 Curtis Walker wrote *Eleanor of Aquitaine*. Walker's biography of Eleanor of Aquitaine was one of the first of its kind. In the 1950s, medieval women were not given the credit they were

⁶ Marjorie Chibnall, *The Empress Matilda: Queen Consort, Queen Mother and Lady of the English* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1991).

due, even women as famous as Eleanor. Walker stated that neither historians nor some of Eleanor's contemporaries took her seriously in their assessments of her and her life. He attempted to rectify this situation. In his book, Walker explores the social and cultural influence of Eleanor in a way that previous historians had not. In 1950 Amy Kelly also published a biography on Eleanor. Amy Kelly's book, *Eleanor of Aquitaine and the Four Kings* was a narrative of the life of Eleanor of Aquitaine focused on Eleanor as an individual. At the time, the book was groundbreaking since historians of the 1950s tended to ignore Eleanor's contributions. However, much of the book is outdated, particularly its depictions of Eleanor's jealousy of Henry II's mistresses as her sole motivation for leaving England for Poitou and later rebelling against her second husband, and *Eleanor and the Four Kings* has since been dismissed by modern historians. More primary documents have emerged and there has been an increase in scholarship interest in Eleanor of Aquitaine since the 1950s.

Historian H.G. Richardson wrote several books on medieval history, particularly the Angevin Empire, and his 1959 article "The Letters and Charters of Eleanor of Aquitaine" studied Eleanor's letters, charters, and the chancellors that surrounded her. This work is one of the only works in English that studied the documents Eleanor wrote. Through the writs, or informal orders, and charters, formal declarations, Richardson examined Eleanor the queen, ruling England while Henry was absent. He also examined the charters of Eleanor during the early years of John's reign and how they differed from her earlier charters. Knowing who issued the charters, whether just Eleanor or Eleanor and one of her husbands, is useful to understand how much or little power she held in Aquitaine, France, and England.

William Kibler and Marion Meade both published works concerning Eleanor of Aquitaine in 1976 and 1977, respectively. Kibler edited *Eleanor of Aquitaine*, a collection of

essays written about the queen. They include essays on her life as well as love and music in her court, written by medieval historians, art historians or literary scholars whose focus was on works from the medieval period. Some historians believe that Eleanor of Aquitaine and the other ladies of her court patronized the arts in England, while others believe Eleanor was more interested in politics than in art. The essays in this book shed light onto how Eleanor influenced art during the medieval period as well as the politics. Meade's biography of Eleanor of Aquitaine, like more recent biographers, attempted to write about the real Eleanor. In Meade's time, historians treated Eleanor as little more than an accident among kings and paid little attention to her in their writings. Meade, however, recognized that Eleanor was more than a shadow to her husbands. Therefore, she attempted to go beyond folklore and legends created around Eleanor to discover her true life and character.

British historian Desmond Seward has written extensively on medieval French history. His 1978 work *Eleanor of Aquitaine: The Mother Queen* provides an individual look into every different aspect of Eleanor's life. The author does not just write a biography that flows from her life to her death; instead he looks at each facet of her life separately. Each chapter of this book focuses on a specific part of her life. Most of the book is dedicated to Eleanor's life in England and it is very detailed. These chapters are dedicated to Eleanor as Duchess of Normandy, Queen of England, Queen regent, her sons, and many other parts of Eleanor's time in England.

D. D. R. Owen's 1993 biography of Eleanor, *Eleanor of Aquitaine: Queen and Legend* was an attempt to learn more about her as a woman rather than as a queen. He tried to sift through the legend to determine what the "real" Eleanor was like. However, he did not do his subject the justice she deserved. Owen wrote more about Eleanor the woman than many

biographers but, due to limited reliable sources, focused much of his writings on her husbands, sons, father, and grandfather. Owen began the nearly impossible task of discovering what Eleanor of Aquitaine was truly like. Though he succeeded more than many biographers before him, more work needs to be done to expand upon Owen's.

French Historian Georges Duby's *Women in the Twelfth Century*, volumes one and two, first published in 1995 and translated into English in 1997, provided a detailed look at what life was like for women during Eleanor's lifetime. The first volume explored the lives of seven specific women including Eleanor of Aquitaine, Heloise, and Mary Magdalen. The second volume explored the different facets of life for medieval women from marriage, the lives of mistresses, and widowhood. The work on Eleanor of Aquitaine is useful to uncovering how she lived her life and what role she played in the government of the Angevin Empire.

Medieval historian Alison Weir has researched and written on several medieval queens, including Eleanor. Like D. D. R. Owen before her, Weir attempted to tell the story of the real Eleanor of Aquitaine in her 2006 biography *Eleanor of Aquitaine: A Life*. Weir used mainly chronicles for her discovery of Eleanor. Unlike many prior biographers, Weir recognized that not all chronicles were ill informed or biased and even those that were could be useful in their own way. She focused more attention on Eleanor's childhood and formative years than other biographers, possibly recognizing the importance Eleanor's childhood played in her adult life. Weir, however, like other biographers before her, seemed to give at least as much attention to the men in Eleanor's life as she did to Eleanor herself.

John Gillingham's *The Angevin Empire*, published in 2001, provided information on the government of the Plantagenet lands from the civil war between Matilda and Stephen to

the succession of Henry III. In this short work, Gillingham covered the system of government, the acquisition of lands, the treasury of the Angevin Empire, and a little of the personalities of each of the kings. Gillingham relied heavily on the chronicles of people such as John of Salisbury. This work provides a condensed yet thorough overview of the governmental mechanisms of the Angevin Empire, a vital piece in understanding the role Eleanor played in the government.

In 2009 Ralph Turner published *Eleanor of Aquitaine: Queen of France, Queen of England*, the premier work on Eleanor of Aquitaine. Ralph Turner attempted to go beyond the two-dimensional figure of legend in this biography of Eleanor. As he stated, contemporary sources that resembled a biography of Eleanor were nonexistent so he relied on chronicles left by monks and a few letters she left behind. Turner acknowledged that the chronicles were not perfect, as the chroniclers focused on noblemen and clergymen. Those chronicles that did mention Eleanor were often written years after the fact and were laced with gossip and the chroniclers' preconceptions. This work was quite extensive, covering every aspect of Eleanor's life. While this allowed for a thorough overview of Eleanor's life as duchess and queen, it did not allow for a detailed examination of any one aspect of her life. As such, though his work was exhaustively researched, Turner's biography glossed over many parts of Eleanor's life, particularly her charters and role in the government.

In 2009 and 2014 historian Michael Evans wrote a chapter "A Remarkable Woman? Popular Historians and the Image of Eleanor of Aquitaine" in *Defining Medievalism(s)* and a book, *Inventing Eleanor: The Medieval and Post-Medieval Image of Eleanor of Aquitaine*, respectively in attempt to dispel the "exceptionalism" of Eleanor of Aquitaine. Evans is a medieval historian who has lectured at several colleges and universities in both Britain and

England, including his current position at Central Michigan University. Evans' book, like the works of modern historians, was an attempt to unravel the complicated truth about Eleanor of Aquitaine from the legends and rumors. In this book, Evans argues that Eleanor was not as unique among twelfth century noblewomen as historians previously thought. He claimed that modern feminism and her more recent biographers created an Eleanor of legend rather than one of truth. He even dispelled the long-held belief that a mural in Chinon depicted Henry and Eleanor hunting when one historian identified both figures in the mural as male. In this work, Evans engages with contemporary sources as well as more modern sources, from chronicles to novellas, to understand how the myths and legends surrounding Eleanor have changed over the centuries.

Like his more recent book, Evan used "A Remarkable Woman?" to dispel the myths surrounding Eleanor of Aquitaine. As it is only a chapter, Evans did not go into the great detail about Eleanor's life that he did in the book. However, he still attempted to get to the real Eleanor among the myths and legends, most of which were created by modern historians who called her a "remarkable woman." Evans, however, believed that Eleanor was not as remarkable as many claimed and began contesting historians' views in this essay in *Defining Medievalism(s)*. My thesis will explore gender and power dynamics in the court of Louis VII and the Angevin Empire until Eleanor's death, so this book will help provide context for Eleanor's power and insight into how "remarkable" she truly was.

Helen Castor is a medieval historian who wrote *She-Wolves: The Women Who Ruled England Before Elizabeth*, a brief biography of four queens of England who "ruled" as consort, regent, and, in the case of Matilda, regnant, before Elizabeth I, in 2011. The list of powerful queens included Eleanor of Aquitaine. The section on Eleanor is fairly short, only

about 93 pages, however it is thorough. Castor discussed the major events in Eleanor's life, including her participation in the Second Crusade, the death of her second husband, and the successions to the throne of her two surviving sons. Castor ended the section on Eleanor with examination of the lasting impact she had on England as well as her territories in France. Castor engaged with many primary sources, mostly chronicles, including William of Newburgh's *Historia Rerum Anglicarum* as well as the writings of Gerald of Wales, Walter Map, John of Salisbury, and Roger of Howden. Castor also relied heavily on Ralph Turner's biography of Eleanor as well as his articles, H. G. Richardson's article on Eleanor's charters, and Amy Kelly's biography of Eleanor. Written in the more readable style of a narrative nonfiction book, Castor's book, nevertheless provides a biography of Eleanor that, although in no way complete, helps clarify the major events that occurred during Eleanor's lifetime.

Even though several historians have tackled Eleanor's biography, none have attempted an analysis of her role in the government. Every historian who wrote a bibliography of Eleanor touched on the government of the Angevin Empire, but most wrote about it from her husband or sons' roles. Only H. G. Richardson and Donna Gordon even touched on Eleanor's charters. However, Richardson studied her chancellors instead of the charters' contents and Gordon only translated them with a few notes on historical context. This work is an attempt to remedy missing piece in the study of Eleanor of Aquitaine.

METHODOLOGY

Charters were important aspects of medieval government. They provided an official solution to land disputes, granted land and/or privileges to both lords and churches, and were used as a means to further the interests of the person granting the charter as well as whomever received it. In order to understand Eleanor's personal role in the governance of the

Angevin Empire, I will examine the extant charters she issued during her marriage to Henry II and after his death. These charters were translated into English by Donna Gordon in her 1970 master's thesis, "A Translation of the Letters and Charters of Eleanor of Aquitaine." To analyze Eleanor's charters, I will borrow from the extensive methods Barbara Rosenwein used in her book *To Be the Neighbor of Saint Peter: The Social Meaning of Cluny's Property, 909-1049*.

In *To Be the Neighbor of Saint Peter*, Rosenwein broke down charters issued by Cluny. She studied the structure of the charter to understand property ownership and gifting in the "gift economy" of the tenth and eleventh centuries. This included an examination of the *protocol* or beginning, which listed the principal (person who issued the charter) and that person's titles as well as the greeting, and the list of witnesses at the end of each charter in addition to the content of the charter.⁷ Although Rosenwein's study ended a century before Eleanor became Queen of England, some of her methods can still be used to understand Eleanor's charters. I will, therefore, use the same method of analysis as well as a look at the political climate of the Angevin Empire to understand the reasons Eleanor issued her charters.

CHAPTER LAYOUT

The following chapters examine most of the extant charters of Eleanor of Aquitaine to understand her role in the governance of the Angevin Empire. Chapter one argues that Eleanor was an important player in the Angevin empire from the beginning by examining the charters she issued and her role as regent during Henry's absences. This chapter will study the early years of Eleanor's marriage to Henry II and will explore her role in the government

⁷ Barbara H. Rosenwein, *To Be the Neighbor of Saint Peter: The Social Meaning of Cluny's Property, 909-1049*, (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1989), 22, 112-3.

of her dower lands, Aquitaine, and England. It will also explore how Eleanor's role in her sons' lives. This chapter will study Eleanor's charters and letters as well as chronicles to demonstrate the role Eleanor played in the government, both political and through her personal actions. For example, her choice to divorce Louis and marry Henry placed England and France in direct opposition to each other, a conflict that would last many years. It will also study Eleanor's seal used on her letters and charters to understand how she viewed herself and her own role in government.

Chapter two argues that since Eleanor ruled Aquitaine and Poitou on her own during her absence from England and that she played an important political role in the Angevin Empire, even during the years she was imprisoned. This chapter will focus on Eleanor's time in Aquitaine and Poitou after 1168, her role in her son's revolt against her father, and her time as Henry's prisoner. It will examine any letters written to and from Eleanor as well as Henry's decision to remain married to Eleanor to show how important she was in the Angevin Empire. Unfortunately, few charters survived from this period in Eleanor's life, so the chapter will also focus on the government of Poitou and Eleanor and her sons' motivations for rebelling against Henry II.

Chapter three argues that Eleanor was one of the most, if not the most, important political figures during her sons' reigns, to the extent that she was what held Aquitaine's loyalty for John. The final chapter will focus on the last years of Eleanor's life from her release from prison until her death. This chapter will argue for Eleanor's continued role in the government of England and Aquitaine, including focus on her role in collecting taxes to pay for Richard's release and her role in keeping peace between John and Philip II of France by arranging the marriage of her granddaughter Blanche of Castille to Philip's son Louis.

CHAPTER ONE

THE NEW QUEEN OF ENGLAND:

ELEANOR'S ROLE IN THE ANGEVIN GOVERNMENT, 1152-1163

In 1137, Eleanor of Aquitaine married Louis Capet, future King of France. The marriage was an unhappy one for Eleanor and fifteen years later, in March of 1152, Pope Eugenius III granted the annulment of Eleanor and Louis VII's marriage on the grounds of consanguinity. Eleanor was free to return to Aquitaine but her large duchy meant that she faced the potential for attempted kidnappings from unmarried lords. Twice on her return to Aquitaine from Paris, Eleanor faced abductions – once from Count Thibaud V of Blois and once from Count Geoffrey of Nantes, son of Geoffrey Plantagenet. Eleanor refused Thibaud V and avoided Count Geoffrey as she had decided to marry Henry Plantagenet, Duke of Normandy, future Count of Anjou, and heir to the King of England. The duchess and the count married in May, just weeks after her separation from Louis VII. She acted as Duchess of Normandy and Aquitaine as well as Countess of Anjou and Poitou until December 1154 when Henry was crowned King of England. After this, she added Queen of England to her long list of titles.

During her early years as Queen of England, Eleanor travelled the Angevin lands with Henry and his household. She remained pregnant through almost the entire first two decades of her marriage, giving birth to the couple's first child William in 1153 and their last child, John, in 1166 for a total of eight children, seven of whom survived into adulthood. Despite her near constant pregnancies, Eleanor played an active role in the governance of all the

Angevin lands until the couple had a falling-out and she returned to Aquitaine in 1168. While in England, she acted as regent on Henry's behalf when he had affairs to handle on the Continent. She wrote letters and issued charters in favor of both religious and political entities. Although not a queen in her own right, Eleanor involved herself in the politics and governance of England and the entire Angevin Empire during the first fifteen years of her marriage to Henry II.

Ralph Turner's definitive biography of Eleanor examined several aspects of her life, including her involvement in governing her personal lands as well as those of her husbands. His large volume presented a stately Eleanor, more than the stuff of the "Black Legend" that clouded her image for so long. He wrote throughout the work about Eleanor's involvement in the government, even citing John of Salisbury's claim that Eleanor played as large a part in the Angevin government as Henry II. However, although his work covered Eleanor's entire life as well as the Angevin world around her, Turner glossed over the charters Eleanor issued in favor of evidence from chronicles and secondary sources. In doing so, he did not do justice to the political life of a woman who spent most of her life involved in the governance of her family's territories, and later, the lands of her husbands and sons.¹

This chapter serves to examine Eleanor's role in the early government of the Angevin Empire. In doing so, it will first briefly examine her early life in France through her divorce from Louis VII. As the heir to Duke William X of Aquitaine, Eleanor would have witnessed her father governing his duchy and the county of Poitou. Observing her father's ruling of his lands would have given Eleanor a great understanding of a ruler's duties and how to conduct both affairs of state and the business of her subjects. While the principal focus of the chapter

¹ Ralph V. Turner, *Eleanor of Aquitaine: Queen of France, Queen of England* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009).

is on the charters Eleanor issued during her early marriage to Henry, it will also examine her roles as queen and queen regent in other areas of government, such as her involvement in Henry's attempts to overtake Toulouse.

ELEANOR'S LIFE

Life in France

Eleanor of Aquitaine was the first-born daughter of Duke William X of Aquitaine and heir to the duchy after her younger brother's death. Eleanor's father died when she was a young girl and after his death she moved to Paris under the guardianship of King Louis VI to protect her from avaricious barons seeking the wealth of Aquitaine. While in Paris she married the king's second son, Louis Capet. The young Louis' elder brother and heir to the throne died in a tragic riding accident, so after Louis VI's death, the young Louis became Louis VII of France and Eleanor his queen.² Eleanor quickly found that the life of a French queen was numbingly tedious and she was expected not to be Louis VII's partner in the government but a figurehead and mother to his children.³ As such, Queen Eleanor was relatively politically inactive, issuing only four extant charters during her marriage to Louis. Those early charters either granted or confirmed grants Louis had given to abbeys and one given to the Knights Templar.⁴ This might have been the extent of Eleanor's political duties and she fulfilled them well. However, she did not fulfill one vital role, giving Louis sons to inherit the throne of France. Eleanor and Louis VII had only two children, both daughters, leaving Louis without a male heir by the time of their divorce.

² Helen Castor, "Eleanor" in *She-Wolves: The Women Who Ruled England Before Elizabeth*, 133-226, (New York: Harper Perennial, 2011), 136-7; Amy Kelly, *Eleanor of Aquitaine and the Four Kings* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1950), 1-2.

³ Alison Weir, *Eleanor of Aquitaine: A Life* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1999), 28.

⁴ Donna Mildred Gordon, "A Translation of the Letters and Charter of Eleanor of Aquitaine" (master's thesis, The University of Alberta, 1970), 1-6.

In 1147 Eleanor accompanied Louis on the Second Crusade where she stayed with her Uncle Raymond in Antioch. There, rumors began of an incestuous relationship between Eleanor and Raymond that would plague her for the rest of her life. On their way home from Crusade Eleanor and Louis stopped to see Pope Eugenius III and Eleanor asked for an annulment from Louis based on consanguinity, but the pope refused. Instead, he told them to attempt to reconcile their differences, which they outwardly did because Eleanor soon became pregnant with their second child.⁵ Fortunately for Eleanor, this child was another girl, and with no male child to inherit the throne Eleanor had further leverage for another attempt to obtain a divorce.

During this time, Count Geoffrey Plantagenet of Anjou and his son Henry, recently appointed duke of Normandy, came to Louis VII's court so that Henry could swear fealty to the king as his liege lord. This was the first instant Eleanor laid eyes on Henry Plantagenet and, according to some of her more romantic biographers, the moment she fell in love.⁶ Immediately after Geoffrey and Henry left Paris, Eleanor began scheming again for an annulment. It was unheard of at that time for a woman to ask for a divorce but Eleanor was no ordinary woman. Louis agreed to it, most likely because it appeared to him that Eleanor would not give him a male heir. They made one final circuit of their lands together in 1151 and they met in Orleans that October to finalize the annulment.⁷

Annulment of Marriage to Louis

Abbot Suger of Saint-Denis was one of the people who originally opposed the separation of Eleanor and Louis but his death in 1151 gave greater strength to the party in

⁵ Zoe Kaplan, *Eleanor of Aquitaine* (New York: Chelsea House Publishers, 1987), 51, 53.

⁶ Polly Schoyer Brooks, *Queen Eleanor: Independent Spirit of the Medieval World* (New York: J. B. Lippincott, 1983), 55-56.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 58.

favor of the annulment. Suger's death and Eleanor's evident inability to have a son made her path to freedom easier.⁸ Before Eleanor and Louis VII could complete the divorce, his men had to be removed from her castles in Aquitaine and Louis VII, apparently too depressed at the thought of losing Eleanor to care about losing her lands, did not object to removing his knights from Aquitaine. In January 1152 Eleanor and Louis made their final journey as a couple through Eleanor's lands so that they might bring Louis' knights back to Paris.⁹ On March 21, 1152, the Archbishop of Sens assembled the clergymen in the king's castle of Beaugency that sanctified the separation of the royal couple on the grounds of consanguinity. From there, Eleanor returned to her own lands in Aquitaine without hindrance from Louis or his men.¹⁰

Marriage to Henry Plantagenet

Eleanor married Henry Plantagenet on May 18, just weeks after her separation from Louis VII.¹¹ The two kept their marriage quiet so as not to offend Louis, for neither had sought his permission to marry as Eleanor's ex-husband or both Eleanor and Henry's liege lord. However, with control over Aquitaine, Normandy, Anjou, and Poitou, Eleanor and Henry would have had the resources to defend themselves against Louis should his anger at their impropriety stir him to action.¹² In addition to Eleanor's political knowledge and experience, the acquisition of Aquitaine and Poitou made the marriage to Eleanor and prudent choice for Henry. Eleanor seemed, in more ways than one, the perfect choice for an ambitious man like Henry Plantagenet. Many who wrote about Eleanor said that she had a lively personality and a great mind; she was worldly and knew a great many people as well

⁸ Curtis Howe Walker, *Eleanor of Aquitaine* (New York: Lancer Books, Inc., 1950), 100.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 106.

¹⁰ Amy Kelly, *Eleanor of Aquitaine and the Four Kings* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1950) 79-80.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 81.

¹² Walker, 117.

as the gossip and intrigues of the land.¹³ All of this made her an unparalleled choice for the wife of England's future king. During her marriage to Henry, Eleanor issued several writs, letters, and charters in her own name; however, from 1152 until 1154 Eleanor issued few charters that survived. Although Henry obtained the rights to Eleanor's inheritance through their marriage, some of the charters issued in her name concerned the ruling of her inheritance as well as the ruling of her dower lands.¹⁴

Coronation

On October 26, 1153, just six months after Eleanor's marriage to Henry, messengers from Archbishop Thibault of Canterbury brought news to Henry that his cousin, King Stephen I of England, had died.¹⁵ The news of Stephen I's death brought Henry swiftly back to Rouen from Normandy as the English barons desired him to return quickly to England. As heir to the throne, Henry was finally able to cross the Channel and take possession of his inheritance.¹⁶ Before he left for England, Henry instructed Eleanor to prepare everything she would need to make her comfortable on the journey. He allowed her to collect money through her own writs that would be honored at the Exchequer. Soon after the beginning of 1154, Henry once again left his wife and began his journey to England where Eleanor would later join him so that they could be crowned as king and queen.¹⁷

Henry and Eleanor were crowned the King and Queen of England at Westminster Abbey by Archbishop Theobald on December 19, 1154. Thus, the couple gained control of the largest kingdom in Europe, composed of Aquitaine, Anjou, Normandy, Gascony, and

¹³ Kelly, 77.

¹⁴ H.G. Richardson, "The Letters and Charters of Eleanor of Aquitaine," *The English Historical Review* 74, no. 291 (1959): 195.

¹⁵ Turner, 113; Gordon 7-12.

¹⁶ Gordon, 12-3.

¹⁷ Walker, 138-9.

England. By 1172, their kingdom would expand to include Flanders, Brittany, Scotland, Ireland, and Wales.¹⁸ Still early in their marriage, the rule of Eleanor and Henry II was a strong one. The two had much in common including a sharp wit, intelligence, and cultural interests. They both had forceful personalities and boundless energy to achieve their goals.¹⁹ Clearly Gervase of Canterbury was correct in his assumption that Eleanor and Henry shared a strong attraction, if not love in their early marriage, and the two worked together for their shared ambition and self-interests.²⁰

In the first years of their reign, Henry Plantagenet and Eleanor “were the hammer and the anvil of a single enterprise,”²¹ which was to bring together their individual provinces gained through conquest and inheritance into a massive domain, and create a dynasty that would not owe service to any feudal overlord, including Louis VII in Paris. This desire controlled the entire beginning of their marriage and was likely one of the few things the couple saw eye-to-eye on throughout their entire marriage.²² Eleanor served as Henry’s regent while he was away either on the continent or in other regions of England. Since Henry’s court was an itinerant court, he spent almost all his time travelling. Eleanor would often travel with him but she likely did not travel everywhere he went, especially late in her several pregnancies.²³ It would have been during these times when she served as regent. During her brief rules as regent, issued writs in her name rather than in the name of her husband.²⁴ Between 1152 and 1168, Eleanor issued twenty-one surviving charters in her name and she may have issued more that did not survive.

¹⁸ Walker, 103; John Gillingham, *The Angevin Empire*, 2nd ed. (London: Arnold, 2001), 26-8.

¹⁹ Walker, 139.

²⁰ Allison Weir, *Eleanor of Aquitaine: A Life* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1999) 92.

²¹ Kelly, 94.

²² Turner, 124.

²³ Turner, 125-6.

²⁴ Richardson, 195.

Children

Eleanor's first year of marriage to Henry disproved Louis' court's belief that she could not have a son. Eleanor gave birth to the couple's first child, a son named William on August 19, 1153.²⁵ Eleanor and Henry had seven more children over the next several years. She gave birth to their second son Henry in 1155, a daughter Matilda in 1156, followed by Richard in 1157, Geoffrey in 1158, Eleanor in 1161, Joan in 1165, and John in 1166.²⁶ According to Amy Kelly, Henry left Eleanor and her children in the care of Thibault of Canterbury and John of Salisbury when he would go on one of his many tours of the kingdom. Kelly claimed that this relegated Eleanor to an "accessory role" in the government of the Angevin Empire.²⁷ However, Eleanor issued several charters during her time as queen both with and without the express authorization of the king. Ralph Turner also pointed to two distinct instances where Eleanor herself served as regent in England while Henry was away and those were likely not the only two times in which she acted in that capacity. Clearly, Eleanor was more than an "accessory" to Henry during his time as king.

INVOLVEMENT IN GOVERNMENT

Regencies

During her time as Henry's queen, Eleanor served as his regent on occasion and Eleanor's charters and other writings show her acting on Henry's behalf from 1154 until around 1170.²⁸ Ralph Turner used letters from John of Salisbury to point to two separate regencies in 1156 and 1157. In January 1156, Henry left England to deal with his brother

²⁵ Dan Jones, *The Plantagenets: The Warrior Kings and Queens Who Made England* (New York: Penguin Books, 2012) 125.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 139

²⁷ Kelly, 98.

²⁸ Michael R. Evans, *Inventing Eleanor: The Medieval and Post-Medieval Image of Eleanor of Aquitaine* (London: Bloomsbury, 2014), 9.

Geoffrey's rebellion in Anjou and left Eleanor as regent until she joined him on the Continent that summer. Again, in 1157, Eleanor returned to England where she served as regent until Henry's return in April. In one of his letters, Salisbury wrote that the people of England could appeal "to the Pope and to the king or queen alike."²⁹ Salisbury clearly believed that the queen had the power to not only listen to but alleviate the grievances of her people.

Thomas Becket's Negotiations with Louis VII

Eleanor's activity in the governance and politics of the Angevin Empire did not end with charters. She also acted to aid negotiations with other monarchs. In one instance, Henry sent his chancellor Thomas Becket to France to arrange for the marriage of his son Henry to Louis' daughter Alice from his second marriage. Becket arrived in France in the summer of 1158 with a great entourage designed to impress the French people with the wealth of the English and their king to make for smoother negotiating. Although Becket was a great negotiator, he was a simple man who lived a simple life and likely would not have known how to impress the French. Eleanor, on the other hand, was born in one of the richest duchies of France and lived in Paris for most of her life. She knew precisely how to impress both the people of France and Louis VII himself. Although Becket was the one who brought all this finery with him to France, Eleanor's hand could clearly be seen in the design of his expedition.³⁰

Toulouse

Another famous instance where Henry allowed Eleanor to interfere in politics did not end as well as Becket's negotiations with France. Eleanor's grandfather William IX had once

²⁹ Turner, 151; John of Salisbury as quoted in Turner, 152.

³⁰ Kelly, 107.

had claim to the Mediterranean province of Toulouse through his first wife Philippa, but gave up that claim when he abandoned her for the Countess of Châtelleraut. Eleanor, however, had never given up the province as part of her rightful inheritance and urged Henry to ride against the Counts of Toulouse and gain back what she thought was hers. However, Louis VII had ridden to Toulouse with recklessness to join the defense and Henry did not want to face Louis both as his vassal and as Eleanor's current husband. To the chagrin of those who had followed him to Toulouse, Henry withdrew from the province. He would not attack his overlord, even to regain his wife's territory.³¹

ELEANOR'S WRITS AND CHARTERS

Charters as Duchess of Aquitaine and Normandy

Immediately after his marriage to Eleanor, Henry had to return to Normandy to protect his lands from Louis. While he was away, Eleanor had her own affairs to sort. Less than a week after the wedding, Eleanor visited Montierneuf Abbey and the Abbey of Saint-Maxient in Poitiers and Aquitaine, respectively. On May 26, 1152 Eleanor issued a charter to the church of St. John the Evangelist of Montierneuf that confirmed the gifts given to the monks there by her father, grandfather, and other ancestors in her name at the request of the abbot.³² In this charter, Eleanor simply reaffirmed the gifts that had already been granted to the abbey by her male ancestors; however, the fact that the abbot requested her to reaffirm these gifts is interesting. Eleanor listed as her reason for the reaffirmation of the gifts in the charter "because the memory of man soon fades, and lest for these reasons a scruple of debate might arise among posterity..."³³

³¹ Ibid., 109-110

³² Richardson, 193; Weir, 9; Eleanor of Aquitaine, "A letter from Eleanor of Aquitaine (1152, May 26)," *Epistolae*, May 26, 1152, <https://epistolae.ccnmtl.columbia.edu/letter/896.html>; Gordon, 7-8.

³³ Gordon, 7.

This was likely just a formal reaffirmation of gifts, tangible or intangible, granted by Eleanor's family, particularly since no specific gifts were mentioned, only vague references made to the gifts granted. Therefore, this charter, and the gifts themselves were likely social gestures.³⁴ However, in a time when the Church reigned supreme, social gifts presented to religious houses were politically useful in both reaffirming ties through generations and keeping peace between the church and the monarchy or lordship of a region. Quarrels with churchmen could, in the worst case, result in excommunication. Excommunications resulted in the halting of religious services and interdicts placed upon lands.³⁵ Since Eleanor's father had been excommunicated for quarreling with bishops in her youth, she more than most other queens would have realized the impact fights with clergy could have on recently the political landscape of a duchy or kingdom. As Eleanor had recently divorced Louis VII and remarried his vassal without the king's knowledge when she issued this charter, it undoubtedly would have been important for her to have the monks of St. John of Montierneuf on her side. It also established Eleanor as the "lord" of the region. She, not Louis VII or Henry Plantagenet, granted and confirmed gifts made to the abbey.

The next day, she granted a charter in favor of the Abbey of Saint-Maxient that restored woodlands that Louis had granted to the abbey and Eleanor had taken away after her divorce. In this charter, Eleanor claimed that she "half unwillingly" granted the abbey the wood of Sèvres at the behest of Louis VII and she took back this gift after their divorce. However, she went on to say that she, with the concession of Henry and on good faith with the church, gave back the land that she had taken from them. The Abbey of Saint-Maxient was one of Poitou's most prestigious religious houses, founded by her ancestor Duke Guy-

³⁴ Barbara H. Rosenwein, *To Be the Neighbor of Saint Peter: The Social Meaning of Cluny's Property, 909-1094* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1989) 142; Gordon, 7-8.

³⁵ Turner, 21.

Geoffrey after he divorced his first wife for another woman.³⁶ Although at first glance, revoking the gifts made to the abbey seemed ill-advised and made Eleanor seem like a flippant, impulsive duchess, the move was quite politically astute. Not only was this abbey founded after her ancestor's divorce, making it an almost ironic choice to bestow benefits upon after Eleanor's own, but by revoking the charter made in the names of both her and Louis and restoring it solely in her own, she removed both his influence and association with her as a ruler in the minds of the monks at Saint-Maxient.

Alison Weir's explanation that Eleanor only took back the grant as a way to remove Louis' influence over Aquitaine and establish her and Henry's rule instead seems the most probable in the situation.³⁷ The statement that Eleanor issued the first gift unwillingly but then reissued it on her own showed that Eleanor, who had been in control of the king, was now acting on her own will and authority. Since Louis had retained the title of Duke of Aquitaine during his marriage to Eleanor, and over two years after their divorce, and Henry did not accept the title until spring 1153, she would have needed to reclaim her lands and remind her subjects that she, not Louis, was the true heir and ruler of Aquitaine.³⁸ To help with reestablishing her own control of Aquitaine, she called herself “Eleanor, by the grace of God, Duchess of Aquitaine and Normandy, united with the Duke of Normandy, Henry of Anjou.”³⁹

In June of the same year, Eleanor visited the abbey of Fontevrault and granted a charter to the abbey to approve and affirm “all that [her] father and forebears have given to God and this church” as well as a gift of 500 *sous* that she and Louis had made while they

³⁶ Gordon, 8-10; Turner, 35.

³⁷ Weir, 91.

³⁸ Turner, 113.

³⁹ Weir, 91.

were married. In this charter, Eleanor stated that she visited the abbey because of “divine inspiration” and she accomplished “what she had in mind” while there.⁴⁰ Eleanor had a new seal made as Duchess of Aquitaine and Normandy which depicted a slender woman wearing a long, fitted gown, cloak, and veil holding a flower in one hand and a bird in the other which she attached this to the charter granted to Fontevrault.⁴¹ Undoubtedly, Eleanor had this seal created as further confirmation that it was she, not Louis, who ruled Poitou and Anjou and used it on her charter to remind the nuns of the abbey that she was their benefactor. This reminder was of great importance as Eleanor’s grandmother had persuaded William IX to grant Robert d’Abrissel a tract of land in Poitou on the Angevin border to help establish the abbey.⁴² Eleanor’s family had been connected to the abbey from its inception, which made her reaffirmation of her family’s gifts even more significant. Not only did she have the authority to take away monetary gifts, she could revoke the gift of the very land upon which the abbey sat, if she so desired.

Between 1153 and 1154, Eleanor issued a charter in favor of Lord Robert, abbot of Vendôme in Anjou, and his monks. In this charter, Eleanor gave alms to the church and abolished forever the custom of her family, bailiffs, provosts, and servants to attempt to sell or demand money from the monastery.⁴³ Why would any ruler abolish a system that favored his- or herself? Eleanor issued the charter to ensure the wellbeing of her husband and their new son, William. Perhaps she was happy in her marriage and wanted to make others happy as well. This seemed to be the belief of Curtis Walker who claimed that Eleanor’s early

⁴⁰ Gordon, 11-12

⁴¹ Weir, 92.

⁴² Ibid., 11-2.

⁴³ Gordon, 12-14.

charters were evidence for the happiness of the couple.⁴⁴ More likely, though, Eleanor wanted to show that she and her new husband were merciful and to help maintain peace with the men of Vendôme. This charter also helped establish Eleanor as Countess of Anjou and her authority to grant privileges there.

Only one of the aforementioned charters included authorization from Henry. In a time when a woman inheriting and ruling her own lands was not unheard of but not the norm, getting her husband's approval to issue charters would not have been unthinkable, especially since Eleanor's right to rule here would have gone to Henry after their marriage.⁴⁵ The lack of Henry's authorization likely meant that, at least early in their marriage, he trusted Eleanor to issue charters in her own name for not only her lands in Aquitaine but his lands of Anjou, as well. That the people of Aquitaine accepting Eleanor's charters without Henry's endorsement showed that they were loyal to Eleanor rather than her husband. They accepted her as their duchess and obeyed the charters she issued in her own name rather than her and Henry's names.

Further evidence of Eleanor's independent rule of her duchy came from the witnesses of her charters. Each charter was witnessed by Hugh of Châtelleraut, his brother Ralph, Sebrand and Briand Chabot, Maingot of Melle, and other members of Eleanor's household.⁴⁶ Only the charters issued in Anjou were witnessed by members of Henry's household. His brother William and Joscelin, seneschal of Anjou, witnessed the charter benefitting the monks of Vendôme and the charter to the Abbey of Fontevrault was created in the presence of his mother Matilda.⁴⁷

⁴⁴ Walker, 139.

⁴⁵ Richardson, 195.

⁴⁶ Turner, 113; Gordon, 7-12.

⁴⁷ Gordon, 12-3.

Charters as Queen of England

Sometime after Henry took the throne of England, Eleanor issued several short charters, mostly in favor of churches. The first of these was a charter to “the knights and men who hold land and tenures from the abbey of Abingdon”⁴⁸ asking them to come to the aid of Walkelin, the abbot of Abingdon. In this charter, she ordered the knights and men of Abingdon to grant to Walkelin the full service granted to his predecessors by their ancestors. Unlike most of Eleanor’s previous charters, this charter was written by specific request of the king.⁴⁹

Around the same time, Eleanor issued a charter in favor of the monks of Saint John of Colchester in Easton, granting them two parts of her total tithe to Easton. She also issued a charter to William of La Garde-Freinet telling him to allow the brothers of Colchester to securely hold their land in Withermundeford. She also addressed a charter to the sheriff of London ordering him to investigate whether the monks of Reading had been deposed of land given to them and return the land if they had. Eleanor also issued charters for the benefit of the monks of Fontmorigny, the Church of the Holy Faith of Abraham, and another in favor of the monks of Reading. The charter for the Church of the Holy Faith was written on the behalf of the king.⁵⁰ By Henry’s writ, Eleanor issued a charter guaranteeing that the canons of the Church of Saint Paul retain their lands and customs granted to them by Henry’s grandfather, Henry I.⁵¹ Medieval society expected their queens to be pious and to spread religion throughout their kingdoms. Twelfth-century queens would often patronize religious

⁴⁸ Ibid., 14

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ Ibid., 15-20.

⁵¹ Ibid., 22.

institutions so these charters likely would not have been out of character for a twelfth-century queen.⁵² Henry's mother Matilda often patronized and wrote charters in favor of religious houses during her fight with Stephen for the throne, and many of Eleanor's other predecessors often gave gifts to religious institutions. Eleanor did not found any new religious institutions; however, she gave and confirmed several gifts to several different abbeys, monasteries, and churches.⁵³

In 1158, Eleanor issued a charter ordering the abbot of Holme to "justly and without delay" seize William of Ouby's property and give it to the monks of Saint Benedict in return for his livelihood. Just two years later, Eleanor issued another charter in favor of the monks of the Church of Saint Benedict of Holme. In this charter, she ordered that the monks be allowed to keep all their feudal holdings peacefully until Henry returned to England or ordered otherwise. Both charters were written "by the king's writ."⁵⁴ At the time these charters were issued, Eleanor would have either been pregnant with or recently given birth Geoffrey and Joan respectively, thus, she likely was acting as regent for Henry while he was away, likely on a tour through his kingdom.

Sometime between 1156 and 1159, Eleanor issued a charter stating that she and her "lord the king" had reviewed and confirmed a compromise made between Gervase, treasurer of the church of Saint Hilary, and the same church. Even though Eleanor and Henry both confirmed the compromise made between Gervase and his church, Eleanor alone issued the charter and only members of her household witnessed the charter, including her chancellor,

⁵² Therese Martin, "The Art of a Reigning Queen as Dynastic Propaganda in Twelfth-Century Spain," *Speculum* 80, no. 4 (2005): 1136, 1166-8.

⁵³ Marjorie Chibnall, *The Empress Matilda: Queen Consort, Queen Mother and Lady of the English* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1991), 127-37; Turner, 129.

⁵⁴ Gordon, 25-26.

her steward, and the provost of Poitier.⁵⁵ As the church of Saint Hilary was located in Poitiers, the capital of Eleanor's county of Poitou, she likely would have had greater authority there than in the Angevin lands outside of her inheritance and would not have needed Henry's concession or explicit approval of the charter.

Eleanor's charters did not end with churches, however. She issued several charters in favor of towns and subjects during her early years as queen, both at the writs of Henry while he was away or on her own. November 29, 1158 Eleanor issued a charter stating that Robert Flambard renounced the claims of Warner of Iusoriis in exchange for four silver marks in her presence. She also issued a charter in favor of Matilda, Countess of Chester. Eleanor demanded of the sheriff of Derbyshire that Matilda be given her wapentake and hundred*, of Septon as well as the liberties and customs fully as her husband Ranulf, Earl of Chester, had had under Henry I.⁵⁶ Although historians have not uncovered information stating why the sheriff denied Matilda the land she was due, Ranulf was one of Empress Matilda's allies during her war against Stephen and Henry had granted him lands and inheritances in a charter issued in 1153.⁵⁷ Eleanor likely wanted to reward Countess Matilda as an ally of her husband and his family.

Intriguingly, all of Eleanor's early charters issued in favor of individuals rather than religious institutions have only one witness, either her chancellor, a bishop, or a nobleman. Witnesses for charters were chosen deliberately through their social status and occupation, as Rosenwein explained.⁵⁸ One, by Henry's writ, was witnessed only by her chancellor,

⁵⁵ Ibid., 20-1.

⁵⁶ Ibid., 22-24.

⁵⁷ R. H. C. Davis, "King Stephen and the Earl of Chester Revised," *The English Historical Review* 75, no. 297 (Oct 1960): 655.

⁵⁸ Rosenwein, *To Be the Neighbor of Saint Peter*, 67-8.

* Administrative units into which counties were divided. W. H. Stevenson, "The Hundreds of Domesday," *The English Historical Review* 5, no. 17 (Jan 1890): 96.

Matthew.⁵⁹ Presumably, only one witness was necessary because Henry II's writ would have been witnessed by at least the chancellor who wrote it and maybe others as well. Therefore, at least two other people would have known the contents of the king's writ with Matthew as the third. However, I have been unable to find a reason why only one witness was required for the other charters. It is an interesting occurrence, though, that warrants further study.

RETURN TO FRANCE

The years from 1154 until 1165 had been prosperous for the Plantagenets. They had created a dynasty stronger than even the kingdom of France. They had quickly and irrevocably altered both the map and the lives of the peoples of the world.⁶⁰ However, that prosperity would not and could not last forever. During his time as king, Henry engaged in several extramarital affairs and fathered multiple illegitimate children. His most famous mistress is Rosamond Clifford, whom he began an affair with in 1165.⁶¹ "The chroniclers are, as usual in matters touching the privy concerns of kings, discreet. But the news had already spread that a breach had occurred between the King of England and the Countess of Poitou; and that the Queen of England, taking with her own dedicated heir, the young Prince Richard, had set sail from Britain with seven ships carrying her retinue and her belongings; and that, after sharing Henry's Christmas court at Argentan, she had retired to her ducal city of Poitiers."⁶² Little is known about Rosamond herself but until recently, many historians believed she drove a wedge between Henry and his wife. The royal couple had been growing more estranged throughout their reign; however, he extremely public affair might have pushed her over the edge. She was, after all, the Countess of Poitou and Duchess of

⁵⁹ Gordon, 22.

⁶⁰ Kelly, 112

⁶¹ Giraldus, as quoted in Kelly, 150; Kelly, 150.

⁶² Kelly, 135.

Aquitaine in her own right and was determined to rule over her own lands. Eleanor took her leave of Henry and returned to her own lands in Aquitaine to separate them from Henry's rule.

When Eleanor returned to the Continent, she took her favorite son Richard with her and established him as heir of Aquitaine. Although Eleanor was still under Henry's scrutiny, her return to Poitou shows that Eleanor may have intended to separate herself and her lords from Henry and establish her own distinct reign.⁶³ Once she returned to her own lands, Eleanor established her own court in Poitou, what some historians have termed a Court of Love. There she and her household ruled over her duchy of Aquitaine and her county of Poitou not as Queen but as Duchess. It was during this time when Eleanor's political life truly began.

CONCLUSION

In the beginning of her political career, Eleanor of Aquitaine was not an active participant. As Queen of France, she issued only four extant charters in fifteen years of marriage to Louis VII. When Louis went on the Second Crusade, Eleanor went with him rather than staying in France and ruling as regent. While there, her actions had negative political ramifications but she never truly involved herself in the politics of France and the Crusade. Her most daring political action was to request permission from the pope for a divorce from her husband, something not typically undertaken by women in the twelfth century.

However, after she married Henry Plantagenet in May of 1152 and became Duchess of Normandy and Countess of Anjou, she became more and more active in the governance of her husband's lands. A little over two and a half years after she married Henry, she became

⁶³ Ibid., 153-155.

Queen of England. During her early marriage to Henry, Eleanor greatly involved herself in the politics and governance of the Angevin lands, particularly Aquitaine and Poitou. Most of Eleanor's early charters concerned matters of different churches, however, these charters would have been important for the Plantagenets. Eleanor often stated that those charters' purpose was for the protection and salvation of her and her husband, father, and sons' souls. However, they served a greater purpose in keeping the peace of the kingdom. Charters granting money and lands to churches kept the abbots and monks of those churches happy, keeping peace between the monarchy and the clergy as well as forging or maintaining social ties.

CHAPTER TWO

DUCHESS OF AQUITAINE: ELEANOR'S ROLE IN THE ANGEVIN GOVERNMENT, 1168-1189

In 1168, Eleanor of Aquitaine journeyed across the English Channel to her homeland of Aquitaine where she would remain for the next five years of her life. There she established her own court, which historians have called the Court of Love, where she successfully ruled in her place as duchess of Aquitaine and Countess of Poitou but she issued few charters in those five years, only six charters between 1168 and 1173. Her private actions would contribute to the drastic changes of the Angevin Empire. Her eldest sons, particularly her oldest, Henry, grew discontented with the inheritances Henry gave them and Eleanor, for reasons historians can only guess at, stirred her sons' antagonism against their father. She and her ex-husband Louis VII supported Young Henry, Richard, and Geoffrey and a full-scale rebellion against Henry II. For her part in the rebellion, Henry II captured and imprisoned Eleanor. She remained his prisoner, as he was intelligent enough to know that divorcing Eleanor would mean losing her lands like Louis had, until Henry died in 1189. As Henry's political prisoner, Eleanor still attended court so the royal couple could keep up appearances but he did not allow her to participate openly in the governance of his lands. She issued only one extant charter in her fifteen years of imprisonment.

Much has been written about both Eleanor's "Court of Love" and the Great Rebellion of 1173. In 2009, Ralph Turner provided new insight to Eleanor's return to her homeland as well as her involvement in her sons' revolt. Unlike Amy Kelly and Curtis Walker's 1950

biographies, among other histories of the twentieth century, Turner claimed that Eleanor did not return to Poitou because of Henry's infidelities or her alienation from her husband. Rather, Henry II sent her there to help alleviate tensions among her Aquitanian subjects who had grown tired of Henry II's rule and Eleanor's absence from the duchy. Turner also thoroughly explored Eleanor's motivations for inciting her sons into rebellion against their father, which included a desire to continue to rule Aquitaine and Poitou herself. Thomas Asbridge, in his work *The Greatest Knight*, examined Henry II and Eleanor's sons' reasons for rebellion, focusing on their eldest, Henry. The younger Henry, who was named heir to the throne, was forced to live in Henry II's footsteps and, without resources, grew tired of his father's shadow and desired more power.¹ From Asbridge's description of Young Henry's dissatisfaction with his father, one can see how Eleanor, herself dissatisfied with Henry II, could have encouraged her son to join forces with his brothers and Louis VII against his father.

THE COURT OF LOVE

Historians have written extensively on Eleanor's years of direct rule over Aquitaine and Poitou and the development of what has been termed a Court of Love. The concept of "courtly love" was first developed in 1170 and gradually evolved into a new chivalric code by 1220. In its earliest form, courtly love varied from place to place, but in all its expressions, knights were expected to declare love, real or imaginary, for a noblewoman.² Based on the descriptions of courtly love, many historians have romanticized this period in Eleanor's life as a time when she took off on her own and ruled her lands from a court where

¹ Ralph V. Turner, *Eleanor of Aquitaine: Queen of France, Queen of England* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009), 184, 218; Thomas Asbridge, *The Greatest Knight: The Remarkable Life of William Marshal, the Power Behind Five English Thrones* (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 2015), 99.

² Martin J. Dougherty, *King Arthur and the Knights of the Round Table: Stories of Camelot and the Quest for the Holy Grail* (London: Amber Books, 2015), 42.

the women would act as lords, judging the behavior of and creating etiquette book for the young men and women of the court. This assumption is also based on the perceived frivolity of southern France, so different from the sternness of the Parisian court. In Eleanor's homeland, nobility considered the arts important and her grandfather himself was both duke and troubadour. Chroniclers would have imagined a southern French court as frivolous with a male leader, and even more so with a woman in charge. Since the court of Eleanor's grandfather, a major influence in her childhood, was a sanctuary for artists and troubadours, she did support the arts but her patronage to the arts and the new code of chivalry were not her only contributions in Poitou and Aquitaine.³

The assumption that Eleanor's court differed from that of her father's Aquitanian court was completely erroneous. As a child, Eleanor would have learned how to rule Aquitaine in the same manner her brother would have had he lived to inherit the duchy. Although Eleanor finally had control of her own lands, she was not simply a duchess who had taken her father's place. Aquitaine and Poitou belonged to Eleanor by right but in 1168 they were an inseparable portion of the Angevin Empire. Her continued marriage to Henry II and formal declaration of Richard as heir to her lands in 1169 ensured that those lands would remain in Plantagenet hands. When Eleanor returned to rule her inheritance, she ruled almost as Henry's regent, guaranteeing that a large portion of the Angevin Empire would remain peaceful and loyal to Henry II.

Eleanor's daughter Marie's chaplain, Andreas Capellanus, wrote of the court meetings in *De Arte Honeste Amandi* (*The Art of Courtly Love*). His work claimed that Eleanor established a Court of Love in Poitiers where she and the other ladies judged the behavior of courtiers, issued decisions, and created a code of conduct for the members of the

³ Turner, 23, 51.

court. However, this work was not intended to be a literal image of Eleanor's court but a satirical image, possibly a criticism of the doctrine of courtly love.⁴ According to early historians, Eleanor's Court of Love attracted the attention of artists, troubadours, poets, and other talented persons who took up residence in Poitiers. As a patron of the arts, this surely pleased Eleanor who had to place the needs and wishes of her husband above her pursuit of literary interests.

Whether she ruled a Court of Love or not, Eleanor herself was a favorite among the troubadours. Bernart de Ventadorn was a troubadour who was rumored to have fallen in love with Eleanor and composed *When I see the lark*, a love poem, likely about Eleanor. Geoffroi de Vigeois provides an account of what Eleanor's court must have looked like. According to his chronicle, even the poorest among Eleanor's court would not be seen wearing sheep or fox skin but rather wore clothes of rich cloth and slash or cut holes in their clothing to show the lining. The young men, he stated, wore long hair and pointed shoes while the women wore long tails that dragged behind them so that "you might think them adders."⁵ Clearly the men who documented Eleanor's life in Poitou thought that Eleanor's court posed an antithesis to the masculine court of Henry II and the previous lords at Poitiers, and Geoffroi apparently did not like life under the rule of Eleanor. Aside from de Vigeois' description of the courtiers' clothing, however, very little evidence survived for a Court of Love at Poitou and most modern images come from legends passed down from *De Arte Honeste Amandi*.⁶

⁴ Morris Bishop, *The Middle Ages* (Boston: Mariner, 2001), 121; Turner, 198-9.

⁵ Amy Kelly, *Eleanor of Aquitaine and the Four Kings* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1950), 161, 165; Curtis Howe Walker, *Eleanor of Aquitaine* (New York: Lancer Books, Inc., 1950), 161; Barbarah H. Rosenwein, ed, *Reading the Middle Ages: Sources from Europe, Byzantium, and the Islamic World*, 2nd ed. (Toronto: University of Toronto Press Incorporated, 2014), 348-349.

⁶ Turner, 198.

However, Eleanor's court in Poitiers would have been far from the romanticized Court of Love historians have imagined it to be. Eleanor's father taught her how to rule at a young age and she would have ruled her lands in the manner her father taught her. It is difficult to imagine a woman like Eleanor, brought up to rule and married to two kings, would concern herself only with the chivalry of her courtiers. Placing women in charge would have likely appealed to her but she had more to concern herself with than the behavior of knights and courtiers. In the years of her second marriage leading up to Eleanor's return to her homeland, she had only visited once and the local lords grew restless. The people of the Poitevin region grew so restless that they threatened to revolt against Henry, and in order to pacify his Southern subjects, Henry sent Eleanor to rule Aquitaine and Poitou from the county.⁷

Eleanor's rule in Poitou would amount to the most independence she would have until Henry II's death, although she did not have full autonomy as Henry II kept his hand in matters of the military and he likely kept his share of the Poitevin revenue as well. During her time in Poitou, Eleanor performed all matters of state usually reserved for the male ruler. She issued charters, letters, and writs, signed with her own seal. She also used her seal to confirm grants given by others under her rule, a definitive sign of her authority in Aquitaine and Poitou, and even acted as Henry II's regent in Normandy at least once during her time away from England. She also used her time in Poitou to ensure the succession of Richard as Duke of Aquitaine and Count of Poitou. In naming him her heir instead of the Young King, Eleanor ensured the continuation of Aquitaine and Poitou as a separate political unit from Henry II's lands in France and England.⁸

⁷ Ibid., 183-4.

⁸ Ibid., 186-190.

Regrettably, despite the myriad of descriptions of Eleanor's "Court of Love," there is a distinct lack of descriptions of any genuine proceedings in Poitou under Eleanor. Even Ralph Turner's biography lacked any description of Eleanor's daily activities when she resided in Poitiers. Through letters, charters, and scant mentions in chronicles, historians have tracked several changes Eleanor made after Henry II placed her back in her domain. She continued to give generously to the Abbey of Fontevrault, important to her personally as she housed her two youngest children, Joanne and John there while she focused on governing her domains. Henry II did not infiltrate her court with his own men, so Eleanor took the opportunity to fill her household with members of families loyal to her and her own family members in addition to those she brought to the Continent from England. She named members of her own family to prominent positions in her administration, including her uncle Ralph de Faye chief Poitevin counselor and he apparently acted as seneschal of Aquitaine. Though high-ranking nobles were notably absent at Eleanor's court, members of low-ranking families loyal to the counts of Poitou were a constant presence.⁹

Although little information survives about Eleanor's actual court in Poitou, it likely closely resembled the court of her father and grandfather. Not much is left describing their courts, either, though, as the chroniclers likely did not find the everyday dealings of the Poitevin courts exciting or worthy of writing down. The court of her grandfather William IX, like that of Henry II, was an itinerant one. Although the court did not remain in the same place, it was the heart of his ducal power where the great lords of Aquitaine would gather and offer counsel to the duke. Like her husband, her father and grandfather had to travel around their territories to both nurture friendships with their vassals and preside over judiciary courts. They also had large households whose members combined governing duties with

⁹ Ibid., 190-6.

domestic ones, as governing was a part-time job during Eleanor's childhood. The courts of her father and grandfather were quite sophisticated for the time, filled with art, literature, and music.¹⁰ Growing up under the rules of William IX and William X would have greatly shaped Eleanor's perceptions of how a court should be conducted. She might have incorporated influences from both Louis VII and Henry II in her ruling style but the lessons she learned about ruling as a young child, following her father throughout Poitou and Aquitaine, would most likely have been the greatest influences in Eleanor's governance of Aquitaine and Poitou.

THE GREAT REBELLION, 1173-1174

While Eleanor ruled over Poitiers, her sons grew more and more upset with their father. Henry had apportioned his sons' inheritances but that caused growing discontent among his sons. Henry II had Young Henry crowned co-king of England, granted Aquitaine to Richard, Brittany to Geoffrey, and the castles of Anjou to John. He would not allow Henry the Young King to rule as king over any part of his kingdom although Henry appeased his son with a second coronation but still did not grant him any power. Henry II never got along with his sons and Eleanor, estranged from her husband, did everything in her power to stir her sons against their father. By dividing up his kingdom, Henry made Eleanor's task of riling her sons against their father much easier. With Eleanor and Louis VII's support, Young Henry and Richard took up arms against their father. Eleanor was captured and imprisoned for her part in the rebellion in 1173 and Henry had to spend the next year and a half quashing his sons' rebellion.¹¹

¹⁰ Ibid., 23; Allison Weir, *Eleanor of Aquitaine: A Life* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1999), 17.

¹¹ Kelly, 169-170; David Soud, *Kings & Queens of Great Britain: Every Question Answered* (Irvington, NY: Moseley Road Inc., 2014), 68-70.

The “War Without Love” was a trying time in Angevin history. Henry II had just ordered, intentionally or not is up for debate, the murder of Thomas Becket by four knights in anger at the Archbishop. The murder caused Henry II’s subjects to grow wary and distrustful of him. It also caused a major rift between the monarchy and the church. When, in 1173, Henry II’s sons rose against him, many of his subjects believed that was God’s punishment for the murder of the archbishop.

The Young King had been groomed for the position of King of England from an early age. Henry II married his son to French princess Marguerite when the pair were five and two years old, respectively, to ensure peace with Louis VII. As the boy grew, Henry II sent him to Thomas Becket to receive an education, involved him in government, and formally announced his succession in 1169 at Montmirail. The Young King was crowned on June 14, 1170 and Henry II immediately put him to work. Henry II named the Young King regent while he returned to France in hopes of reconciling with Thomas Becket but limited the boy’s power. The Young King ruled merely as an accessory to the king, not as a true regent. He had little actual power and no way to collect an income. Just two months later, the Young King was tortuously close to the throne. In August, on his return trip from France, Henry II fell deathly ill and was bedridden in Normandy. During this time, Henry II feared his demise and made provisions for his death and burial. However, Henry II recovered from his illness and returned to power with vigor after a pilgrimage to Aquitaine to visit the shrine of the Virgin Mary at Rocamadour. While he was away, the young king ruled as successfully.

With the Old King back on the throne, the Young King was once again forced into his accessory role in the government. Although Young Henry had some power in the government of the empire, Henry II did not give him any of his inheritance after his

coronation for fear that his son would usurp his throne. Instead, the Young King was merely a figurehead, a security in case Henry II was killed. The coronation of his eldest son also was designed to alleviate tensions between all his sons over their inheritances. However, it just made the Young King more and more agitated. When the Young King was crowned as King, he should have received the money and resources due to the heir to the throne. However, Henry II did not grant his son any of the privileges due him aside from a yearly allowance of a thousand pounds. In his biography of William Marshal, Thomas Asbridge blamed Henry II's actions on greed for power, but fear that his son would take his crown likely also played a role. Greed and fear of having a throne stolen were inherent in the monarchy, particularly Henry II's family. Henry II's grandfather, Henry I, could not force himself to plan for the succession of his daughter and her husband, even when he was old and dying. Because of his father's lust for power, Young Henry was forced into the world and expected by his lords to live a lavish lifestyle although he did not have the resources to do so. He had no land or source of money under his control and yet, as a crowned king, he had a queen and household of his own for which he had to provide. Unfortunately, his allowance, however generous, was not enough to provide indefinitely for his household.

The Young King's frustration found its outlet in February 1173. He and his wife Marguerite had visited her father, Louis VII, in November 1172 and later held their own Christmas Court apart from Henry II and Eleanor. In February, Henry II called Eleanor and their sons to a meeting at Limoges where he announced that he had found a wife for his youngest son John, who was only five, and that he would receive three of the most important castles in Anjou, castles that rightfully belonged to the Young King but would default back to the Old King until John came of age, a shrewd decision on Henry II's part. In spring 1173,

the Young King, his brothers, and his mother gathered in Paris with Louis VII where Henry was crowned Henry III of England and they began plotting to overthrow the Old King. In June 1173, the rebels made their first strike of the ultimately failed rebellion.¹² Ironically, the very paranoia that prevented Henry II from giving his son any power caused Young Henry to rally his brothers against their father. Fortunately for the Old King the rebellion failed and he maintained control over his lands. The Young King was forced to live his life under his father's watchful gaze while Eleanor was imprisoned for her efforts in attempting to overthrow her husband's regime.¹³

Eleanor clearly played a part in encouraging her sons to rebel against their father, as evidenced by her presence at Louis VII's court with the Young King, Geoffrey, and Richard. How large a role she had and her reasons for joining her sons are up for debate. Some mid-twentieth century historians believed that she joined her sons for the same reason she fled to Poitou, because she was jealous of Rosamund. However, it is more likely that she enjoyed ruling her county and duchy without interference from her husband. As Ralph Turner suggested, Eleanor saw her power as regent slipping away and could have desired a greater political role in her duchy.¹⁴ If that is the case, she probably would have believed that, if her sons succeeded, she would have been able to continue to rule as Duchess of Aquitaine on her own. She also would have had more influence over the next King of England as his mother. As has been previously discussed, Eleanor was politically shrewd, as knowledgeable as any king, and, as discussed in the next chapter, had great influence over her sons.

¹² Thomas Asbridge, *The Greatest Knight: The Remarkable Life of William Marshal, the Power Behind Five English Thrones* (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 2015), 86, 88-111; John Gillingham, *The Angevin Empire*, 2nd ed. (London: Arnold, 2001), 12.

¹³ Asbridge, 112.

¹⁴ Kelly, 152-3; Turner, 185.

Eleanor's own dissatisfaction and disillusionment with her husband would have made it easy for her to influence her sons, particularly the Young King, so dissatisfied with his father, and Richard, her own designated heir. She desired to maintain the integrity of her own lands and Richard's inheritance of Aquitaine without interference from Henry II.¹⁵ If Henry II refused to grant his own son and heir his right to rule, she had little chance of maintaining her position in Aquitaine and Poitou without continual interference from the King. Young Henry and Eleanor both wanted freedom from Henry II and the ability to rule on their own. Her role as Young Henry's mother as well as their common goal would have provided a great opportunity for her to work in the background conspiring with her son. William Marshal, a knight in Eleanor's household whom she ransomed from Lusignan captivity joined the retinue of the Young King where he would enjoy a prominent part. Although Henry II placed Marshal with his son, Eleanor probably encouraged it and may have used the knight to watch out for Henry and encourage her son to rise up against his father.¹⁶

Although many factors contributed to his sons' rebellion, Henry II blamed Eleanor for his sons rising against him. Henry II had the support of his subjects, too, who were more than willing to see the worst in Eleanor based on her past transgressions of disobeying her husband.¹⁷ He might have known deep down that he was partly to blame by dividing his lands amongst his sons but not granting them any actual powers. However, he never admitted that he was to blame, at least not in any remaining sources. Instead of accepting some of the blame for his sons' rebellion, Henry asked the Archbishop of Rouen to write a letter to Eleanor to chastise her for her role in the rebellion, which was composed on behalf of the archbishop by Peter of Blois.

¹⁵ Turner, 218.

¹⁶ Asbridge, 112.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 217.

According to Peter of Blois' letter, Eleanor was the one at fault for everything that happened to Henry. None of the blame rested on Henry, his sons, or Louis VII who had enticed the Young King to join him against his father. Peter of Blois opened the letter with "Greetings in the search for peace – Marriage is a firm and indissoluble union." The remainder of the letter continued with the same tone. He used Matthew 19 and Ephesians 5 to explain to Eleanor that she had transgressed against the Lord by leaving her husband and should return to him or risk the anger of God. Peter even told her that she would cause "widespread disaster" to the kingdom unless she came back to Henry "with sorrow and tears."¹⁸ Henry obviously feared what would become of his kingdom and his sons without his wife back at his side and under his control. Therefore, he did everything within his power to coerce Eleanor to come back to him. Whether Eleanor wrote a written response to Peter's chastisement is unknown but she clearly did not respond the way Henry desired. Instead of coming back to him "with sorrow and tears," Eleanor was locked away from the world and remained his prisoner for fifteen years, until his death in 1189 when Richard demanded her release.

ELEANOR'S CHARTERS

Court in Poitou

One of Eleanor's earliest charters after her arrival in Aquitaine granted Geoffrey Berland, a wealthy Poitevin merchant, favorable concessions. She granted him "all liberties and customs in selling and buying" in the marketplace and freed him from military service and confrontation by bailiffs, saying that he answered only to her, Henry II, or Richard.

Eleanor also stated that Richard confirmed the concessions she had granted to Berland and

¹⁸ Peter of Blois, "Letter 154 to Queen Eleanor, 1173," *Fordham University: The Jesuit University of New York* (May 1997), <http://legacy.fordham.edu/halsall/source/eleanor.asp>.

his heirs. Eleanor's inclusion of Richard in her charter was unnecessary for the charter to be carried out, however it was a strategic political move. A treaty between Henry II and Louis VII in 1169 named Richard as heir of Aquitaine but he had no real control in his inheritance while Eleanor and Henry still lived. Adding his name to the charter would have presented to Eleanor's Aquitanian and Poitevin subjects the future Duke of Aquitaine and Count of Poitou. It allowed them time to grow accustomed to Richard's rule while he was still learning how to rule the French duchy under Eleanor's tutelage.¹⁹

It is important to note the absence of Louis VII in this charter. Eleanor stated that Geoffrey Berland only answered to the Dukes and Duchess of Aquitaine, not their lord, the King of France. As Duchess of Aquitaine, Eleanor was a vassal of Louis VII and, in theory, she and her vassals would have been required to provide money and troops to Louis VII. However, as evident by her and Henry II's hasty marriage without his consent, the couple was unconcerned with their feudal obligations to the French king. Even with the recent treaty between the Plantagenets and Louis VII, Eleanor probably would not have considered any obligations to the French crown.

Unlike many of Eleanor's other charters, the witnesses of this charter belonged almost entirely to Henry's household. The clerk, Manasser Bisset acted as Henry's steward from 1153 until December of 1170. The second witness Ralph de Faye, Eleanor's uncle, was the only witness firmly in Eleanor's household, while the final two, Joscelin de Balliol and William de Lanvalein, had served Henry in various capacities.²⁰ Joscelin de Balliol presents an intriguing issue, however. Ralph Turner stated that Joscelin de Balliol, who had

¹⁹ Gordon, 33; Marie Hivergneaux, "Queen Eleanor and Aquitaine, 1137-1189" in *Eleanor of Aquitaine: Lord and Lady* edited by B. Wheeler and John C. Parsons (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002), 68.

²⁰ Donna Mildred Gordon, "A Translation of the Letters and Charter of Eleanor of Aquitaine" (master's thesis, University of Alberta, 1970), 34; Graeme J. White, *Restoration and Reform, 1153-1165: Recovery from Civil War in England*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 83.

previously been a member of the Empress Matilda's household, served Eleanor and witnessed more of her charters than anyone else.²¹ Did Henry transfer de Balliol to Eleanor's household or did he send him with Eleanor as a representative of the king's household in Aquitaine?

As evidenced by previous charters, a witness did not have to be a member of the issuing party's household. However, de Balliol witnessed several of her charters which would seem to indicate that he was indeed a member of her household. Closer examination of the dates of those charters, however, shows that that might not have been the case. Before Eleanor crossed the Channel in 1168 de Balliol witnessed four, possibly five, of Eleanor's surviving charters and only one (above) after 1168. Of the four he witnessed before 1168, two were issued "by the King's writ" and the other two were issued in 1158, likely while Eleanor was acting as Henry's regent in England.²² All the charters de Balliol witnessed were issued at a time when Eleanor was serving as a regent for Henry, whether in England or during her time in Aquitaine and Poitou. De Balliol likely served as Henry's steward in Aquitaine and Poitou while Eleanor ruled on her own to ensure Henry's interests were taken care of while Eleanor ruled, further evidence that, although she was not technically acting as regent, Eleanor ruled Aquitaine and Poitou in Henry's stead, at least early in their separation.

The remainder of Eleanor's charters prior to 1173 benefitted various religious houses. The first of these granted the church of Saint Mary of Fontevrault and the house of Sossiz land that Guillot Board had acquired to grant to the church. This charter also granted the brothers and sisters of the church the right to gather their firewood from the Argenson

²¹ Turner, 161.

²² Gordon, 14, 23, 24, 25.

woods.²³ The second charter granted the monks of La Merci-Dieu “all their customs of all their possessions” while the third granted the abbot and monks of Maillensis the “toll of corn of Maillé.”²⁴ Her final surviving charter prior to her sons’ rebellion ordered that Peter of Ruffeo give the abbey of Fontevrault one hundred sous a year on the feast of Saint Hilary. All of these charters fit the standard formula of a Eleanor’s previous charters for religious houses, except her final charter excluded Henry’s subjects in its greeting, written to Eleanor’s subjects alone.²⁵ This omission, discussed below, likely had both personal and political motivations.

Over the course of Eleanor’s time in her own lands her charters experienced two subtle but telling changes of phrasing. Beginning in 1168 nearly all of Eleanor’s extant charters included the phrase “I and my son Richard.”²⁶ As has already been discussed, adding Richard’s name to her charters as her heir indicated that Richard was involved in the government of his mother’s lands, however minimally. Her last extant charter while she ruled as Duchess, issued around 1172, however, was very different from the others. Until that year many of Eleanor’s charters addressed her subjects as well as Henry’s but this one dropped the phrase “the faithful of *the king* [emphasis added] and herself” for “her faithful of La Rochelle,” a city in southwestern France.²⁷

The exclusion of Henry from her charter was not a simple oversight on Eleanor’s part as charters had a very specific formula, including whom they addressed. Excluding “the faithful of the king” was a subtle but significant statement. This charter came about a year before her sons joined together in a revolt against Henry, of which she would play a part.

²³ Ibid., 36-7.

²⁴ Ibid., 37-9.

²⁵ Ibid., 39-40.

²⁶ Ibid., 33-40.

²⁷ Ibid., 39-40.

Historians agree that Eleanor had grown increasingly dissatisfied with her marriage to Henry and had begun trying to separate her lands from Henry's control. The choice to omit Henry's name and title when addressing the subjects of La Rochelle was a calculated move. It informed her subjects that, although she was still married to Henry, they belonged to her alone. Like her first charters issued after her divorce from Louis VII, the phrasing of this charter attempted to remove any influence her husband might have had over her people. Although Henry still retained the titles of Duke of Aquitaine and Count of Poitou, Eleanor took away any loyalty her subjects would have had towards him and any control he would have exercised in her territory simply by addressing the subjects as hers and hers alone.

Interestingly, though, she still styled herself as queen of England when she issued this charter and included Henry near the end of the charter with the statement, "...just as the charter of myself and my lord the king proves witness," one of the only charters to do so.²⁸ If, as many historians have claimed, she truly wanted to separate herself from Henry, why include him at all? On the surface, including Henry II served as a reminder of a past charter, one that she and he had issued together. The inclusion of Henry II in this charter indicated that, despite any personal feelings of animosity, Eleanor was politically shrewd enough to understand that she could not break ties with England completely. Henry II was still an extremely powerful king with the loyalty of many different lords from both France and England.

Imprisonment

Eleanor issued only one surviving charter during her time as Henry's political prisoner. This charter, in favor of the Abbey of Fontevrault, granted "a rent of one hundred pounds in perpetual alms from the provostship in Poitiers and the vineyard of Benon" for the

²⁸ Ibid.

benefit of her own soul as well as the souls of Henry, her sons Richard, Geoffrey, and John, her daughters, and her ancestors. In this charter, Eleanor granted the nuns the ability to collect half of the alms from the vineyard and the other half from the provostship without any herself or any others.²⁹

In this charter, although she issued it “with the assent and wish of my lord Henry, king of England and Richard, Geoffrey and John, my sons,” she still styles the recipients as “her faithful of Aquitaine,” a subtle reminder that, though she was still her husband’s prisoner, the people of Aquitaine owed their loyalty to her alone. Eleanor likely issued this charter late in her imprisonment, sometime between the death of Young Henry in 1183, as he was not mentioned, and her son Geoffrey’s death in 1186.³⁰ Young Henry died in another conflict between himself and Richard over Richard’s refusal to pay homage to his brother for Eleanor’s lands of which he had been placed in charge. On his deathbed, the Young King requested that his father be more lenient toward Eleanor and Henry II complied; however, the more practical concern of keeping Young Henry’s widow, the sister of Philip II of France, from gaining control of her dowerlands probably played a greater role in his acquiescence to his son’s request.³¹ Whatever Henry II’s motivations, Eleanor issued this charter after he had granted her more freedom during her continuing imprisonment. The wording of this charter served to remind her subjects that she might have been under Henry’s control but they owed their loyalty to her first and foremost.

CONCLUSION

Although Eleanor did not issue many charters from 1168 until Henry’s death in 1189, she still played a large role in the history of the Angevin government. In assuming her role as

²⁹ Ibid., 41.

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Turner, 242-5.

Duchess, she acted as regent in Aquitaine and Poitou keeping order in the French territories that were furthest from England and Henry's court. The lack of charters does not indicate the lack of governance of Eleanor's territories. She would have ruled the duchy of Aquitaine and county of Poitou in the same manner of any duke or count, making legal judgements, issuing writs, letters, and charters that did not survive, and travelling around the land reminding her subjects that they were still under her rule. Her support of Richard as her heir would have also allowed for his smooth transition to power after her imprisonment by Henry.

Eleanor's most significant contribution to the governance of the Angevin Empire during those twenty-one years, though, was her support of her sons' rebellion. She could have tried to convince Henry to grant their sons the power that they desired but chose instead to involve herself in a war against him. Had she not involved herself, her sons might have lived discontentedly while she remained in Poitou ruling over her lands. Although Eleanor involved herself in the governance of Henry's lands from early in their marriage, it would not be until after his death in 1189 that she would be truly free to govern the Angevin Empire in the manner she desired.

CHAPTER THREE

“PITIABLE QUEEN OF ENGLAND:” ELEANOR’S ROLE IN THE ANGEVIN GOVERNMENT, 1189-1204

In 1189, Eleanor of Aquitaine finally gained her full freedom from Henry II’s grasp upon his death, and the Angevin lands would never be the same. Eleanor took it upon herself to ensure the succession of both her living sons consecutively to the throne. She ruled the Angevin lands as the unofficial regent and kept John, who was then Lord of Ireland, from stealing his brother’s throne during Richard’s time on Crusade and as a captive of the Holy Roman Emperor. She chose to remove herself from public affairs and retired to the Abbey of Fontevrault after Richard returned safely to England; however, after Richard died from a battle wound, Eleanor emerged from the Abbey to fight for John’s succession as John I and prevent him from losing his family lands to Philip Augustus of France. Although Eleanor of Aquitaine contributed to the ruling of the Angevin Empire throughout her marriage to Henry II, it was after his death that she came into her own as Queen Regent and Queen Mother during the reigns of two of England’s most memorable kings.

Many historians have written extensively on the period in English history after Henry II’s death. However, few of those works explored Eleanor’s active role in the Angevin government. Ralph Turner and Richard Heiser collaborated on *The Reign of Richard Lionheart* that detailed the governance of England after Richard succeeded the throne and, although Turner wrote the premier biography for Eleanor, the work often glossed over

Eleanor's importance during his reign. However, Ralph Turner's biography of Eleanor delved deeper into her role in both Richard and John's administrations after Henry II's death, but in the same way he analyzed her political role for her earlier life; because his work took on every aspect of Eleanor's life his analysis of her political role was shallow at best. In "The Letters and Charters of Eleanor of Aquitaine," H.G. Richardson claimed that "the greatest period of administrative activity" by Eleanor was immediately after Richard's death.³² He based this claim on the fact that more charters *survive* from this period in Eleanor's life than in previous years, but that does not necessarily mean that she issued more. As has been noted throughout this work, Eleanor was an active participant in the Angevin government throughout her marriage to Henry II, as well. In addition, Richardson's work did not analyze Eleanor's letters or charters to understand her "administrative activity" but rather discussed what it meant to be a chancellor for the queen.

RICHARD'S REIGN

Henry II died on July 6, 1189 and was buried at the Abbey of Fontevrault. His death paved the way for Richard Plantagenet to take the throne as Richard I of England. After Henry II's death, Richard remained in Anjou and paid his respects to his father before travelling to Normandy to officially receive allegiance from his Norman vassals. Luckily for Richard, the people of Normandy and England remained loyal to the Plantagenet family and wished for a seamless transition of power. That, combined with Eleanor's work among the subjects allowed for Richard's smooth transition to power. According to Turner and Heiser,

³² H. G. Richardson, "The Letters and Charters of Eleanor of Aquitaine," *The English Historical Review* 74, no. 291 (1959): 207.

Richard immediately released Eleanor from her imprisonment and instructed her to preside over England until he arrived from the Continent.³³

Although Turner and Heiser do not discuss this decision, it clearly demonstrated Richard's respect for his mother and the beginning of her broad involvement in the Angevin governance during his reign. Richard could have granted the hold of England to any number of noblemen loyal to him, such as William Longchamp, whom he would later name chief justiciar during his Crusade. Instead he unofficially granted that position to his mother. Perhaps he chose to grant Eleanor that power because he feared his brother would attempt to usurp his throne if given the opportunity. Considering that his grandmother lost the throne to her cousin and John attempted to steal the throne numerous times after his coronation, that fear was not unfounded. Even if Richard I did fear usurpation, he knew Eleanor could run the government, having witnessed her ruled over Poitou as well as her regencies in England. Not only did Richard I trust his mother, the English people trusted her as their queen.

After she was freed, Eleanor played a prominent role during Richard's reign that began before his coronation as she worked tirelessly to ensure the English people accepted him as king, for Richard Plantagenet, raised in France to be the next Duke of Aquitaine, was largely unknown in England.³⁴ Her importance during Richard's reign was solidified at his coronation when she took the Queen's place beside her son at Richard's coronation. Eleanor was significant in Richard I's government long after his coronation, though. According to Turner and Heiser she, "enforced royal directives, granted lands, prohibited the movement of papal legates, attested royal charters and attended gatherings in the king's court" while

³³ Ralph V. Turner and Richard R. Heiser, *The Reign of Richard Lionheart: Ruler of the Angevin Empire, 1189-99* (Harlow: Pearson Education Limited, 2000), 72-4.

³⁴ Kelly, 250-1.

Richard was away.³⁵ She also acted as an unofficial regent and advisor to Walter Coustance, chief justiciar after William Longchamp was removed from the position.³⁶

Arguably, one of her more important decisions in the government was to reverse the “injustices perpetrated at the end of Henry II II’s reign.”³⁷ In order to secure support for Richard, Eleanor issued a proclamation under her own authority that released those that Henry II had imprisoned at the end of his reign for misuse of the royal forest and those imprisoned solely at the word of the deceased king or his justiciars. It is important to note that the release from prison was incumbent upon specific conditions that were compliant with English law at the time, and Eleanor did not completely empty the jails of England.³⁸ Eleanor, having been a political prisoner for the last fifteen years of her life, would have understood the anguish of with those Henry had unfairly imprisoned and empathized with them. While the decision to release those unfairly imprisoned generally restored peace to England and increased Richard’s popularity, not everyone was happy with the royal decree. William of Newburgh, for instance, was appalled that Richard released the despicable criminals back into society.³⁹

Sometime after Richard’s coronation, Osbert, the prior of Christ’s Church in Canterbury, wrote Eleanor offering her prayers and asking her to intervene on the behalf of the brothers of Canterbury church with “the lord king [her] son.” The letter is not dated and the only clue of its date of origin is that Osbert said that archbishop Baldwin “of holy memory... may be taken suddenly from [them].” As Baldwin died in 1190, this places the

³⁵ Turner and Heiser, 74.

³⁶ Ibid., 131.

³⁷ Ibid., 91.

³⁸ Ibid., 91.

³⁹ William of Newburgh, 1: 306-7 as quoted in Turner and Heiser, 91.

letter during the early years of Richard's reign.⁴⁰ The approximate date of this letter written to Eleanor demonstrates that even early in Richard's reign, although justiciars William de Mandeville and William Longchamp were nominal co-regents of England, people knew that Eleanor played an important role in Richard's government.⁴¹ Had Richard not taken Eleanor's opinions seriously or considered her advice, writing to Eleanor to intercede on their behalf would have been futile for the brothers of Canterbury Church.

Not everyone was happy with Richard's choice of governmental officials, though. While Richard was away, John tried several times to take control of England. One of those times, John allied with their half-brother Geoffrey, archbishop of York. Before Richard left on Crusade he forced Geoffrey to swear to leave England for three years, but Geoffrey, in alliance with John, broke his oath and returned to England eighteen months after Richard left. When Geoffrey re-entered England, William Longchamp and his men captured him at St. Martin's Priory in Dover for illegally reentering the realm. Using his attack on a priory, John convinced the people of Dover and London that Longchamp was a traitor and they blocked Longchamp from entering London when he tried to stop John from taking control of the city. John then dragged Longchamp before a regency council, formed to rule the realm while Richard was away, where his authority was destroyed and he was excommunicated.⁴² Eleanor, who was in Italy at the time, informed Richard I of John's actions and began her return trip to Normandy where she could better monitor the situation for the king.⁴³

⁴⁰ Osbert, "A letter from Osbert, prior of Canterbury," *Epistolae*, n.d., <https://epistolae.ccnmtl.columbia.edu/letter/145.html>; C. "Baldwin of Canterbury," *Encyclopedia*, 2003, <http://www.encyclopedia.com/article-1G2-3407701053/baldwin-canterbury.html>.

⁴¹ Richardson, 200.

⁴² Dan Jones, *The Plantagenets: The Warrior Kings and Queens Who Made England* (New York: Penguin Books, 2012), 112-13.

⁴³ Allison Weir, *Eleanor of Aquitaine: A Life* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1999), 265.

Richard of Devizes wrote that Eleanor was visiting her dower lands in Cambridgeshire in 1192 where the villagers complained to her of “human bodies lay unburied... in the fields.”⁴⁴ The villagers told Eleanor that the excommunication of Longchamp had caused the suffering, and although Richard did not explain how, it can be assumed that Longchamp could no longer perform funerary rites and no other bishops had been sent in to care for the villagers’ spiritual needs. Eleanor appeared to have taken mercy on the villagers, although she could have merely been saving face for the king, and used her queenly role as intercessor to command that Walter of Coutances, archbishop of Rouen, repeal Longchamp’s excommunication and repay all his income that had been confiscated.⁴⁵ While intercession was a role delegated to medieval queens, Eleanor’s act of intercession was significant as she did not appeal to a king or regent for mercy. Instead, she acted upon her own authority while Richard was gone.⁴⁶

Between 1189 and 1194 while Richard’s was on Crusade, Eleanor acted as diplomat in other matters, as well. She travelled to Navarre to collect Richard’s betrothed Berengaria and delivered her to Richard while he was on his way to the Holy Land. More importantly, though, Eleanor played a crucial role in Richard’s release as Holy Roman Emperor Henry VI’s captive in 1194. She wrote several letters to Pope Celestine III asking him to intervene on Richard’s behalf. The content of these letters demonstrate how diplomatic Eleanor could be as she appealed to the pope’s vanity, calling him “the vicar of the crucified,” and to his

⁴⁴ Michael Evans, *Inventing Eleanor: The Medieval and Post-Medieval Image of Eleanor of Aquitaine* (London: Bloomsbury, 2014), 11.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 11.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 12.

sense of spiritual duty by quoting scripture and drawing parallels between Richard's captivity and Daniel's time in the lion's den.⁴⁷

During his Crusade and captivity, Richard wrote several letters to Eleanor about the governing of the Plantagenet lands and there is no doubt that one such letter from Richard asked her to serve as mediator over issues with John's attempt to take the throne after the fiasco with William Longchamp at Portsmouth, a city on the southern English coast, where she landed on February 11, 1192. The following year, when word of Richard's captivity reached England, Eleanor assumed control of England's affairs.⁴⁸ She played a significant role in the collection of taxes and funds for Richard's ransom, writing letters to churchmen and approving heavy taxes on her subjects and in 1193, Richard wrote her a letter thanking her for her loyalty and her part in the peace and defense of his lands. He then asked her to promote Hubert bishop of Salisbury to the church of Canterbury at the request of Henry VI so that Richard might gain his favor and earn release from captivity.⁴⁹ Later that year, after Hubert's successful promotion to Canterbury, Richard wrote that he was no longer a prisoner but "staying honorably" with the Holy Roman Emperor until Eleanor had collected the ransom she had been "solicitously seeking in cash," further proof that Eleanor held a trustworthy position.⁵⁰

JOHN'S REIGN

There are some names, like Adolf, that have become so negatively associated with one person that parents no longer give them to their children. For the British monarchy, that name is John. John I's reign was so spectacularly awful that no other English monarch named

⁴⁷ Eleanor of Aquitaine, "Letters to Celestine III," *Epistolae*, <https://epistolae.ccnmtl.columbia.edu/letter/139.html>.

⁴⁸ Richardson, 201-2.

⁴⁹ Turner, 272; Letter from Richard, 1193, *Epistolae*, <https://epistolae.ccnmtl.columbia.edu/letter/148.html>

⁵⁰ Letter from Richard, *Epistolae*, <https://epistolae.ccnmtl.columbia.edu/letter/864.html>

any of their heirs John. While historians no longer blame John's failure as king on John alone, John Gillingham, for example, claimed that John's financial problems were handed down from Richard, it cannot be disputed that he had one of the worst reigns in English history.⁵¹ In her old age, Eleanor again worked tirelessly, issuing charters conceding lands and gold to organizations and men, both religious and secular, to keep John's subjects content but even her efforts were in vain. After her death in 1204, just five years after John succeeded his brother, John completely lost the Angevin territory in France and often struggled to retain control of his British lands.

Despite Eleanor's efforts, John's succession would not be as seamless as his brother's. Richard I died suddenly in 1199, childless and without designating an heir with certainty. Before he left for the Holy Land, Richard I named his full brother Geoffrey's son, Arthur of Brittany, heir to the throne but it was said that he later named John his heir at his mother's urging. Arthur of Brittany had come of age after Richard's death and disputed his uncle's claim to the throne, and no one could decide a younger brother of a deceased king or the son of an older brother of the king should succeed the throne. Eleanor fought hard to secure John's succession to the throne in the months after Richard's death. Geoffrey's wife and Arthur's mother, Constance of Brittany, wanted Brittany removed from under Plantagenet influence and Eleanor distrusted her immensely. Eleanor did not want to see Plantagenet lands split between her son and her grandson but she also did not want Constance influencing Plantagenet lands after she died.⁵² Eventually, alliances with powerful

⁵¹ Turner 281; John Gillingham, *The Angevin Empire*, 2nd ed. (London: Arnold, 2001), 98.

⁵² Turner, 280.

lords decided the succession dispute in John's favor; however, that did not put an end to Arthur's schemes to steal the throne.⁵³

According to Gillingham, John relied on Eleanor's irrefutable claim to Aquitaine and Poitou to retain the loyalty of her Poitevin subjects to the Plantagenet crown, without which he could not have held onto Anjou. Eleanor used her influence in her duchy and county to grant lordships and hand out land grants to those who remained loyal to her son, such as Andrew of Chauvigny, to whom she gave the lordship of Ste-Sévère and Ralph of Mauléon, who received the castles of Talmont and Benon.⁵⁴ Philip II of France also attempted to cause trouble for John in Aquitaine before John finally gained the throne. The King of France stirred up trouble for the Plantagenets from the time he took the throne, including helping John in his attempts to undermine Richard, and after Richard's death, he turned his attention to undermining John instead of helping him. Since John did not have control of Aquitaine, Philip II attempted to garner favor from the people of Aquitaine for Arthur of Brittany in the dispute over the English crown.⁵⁵

In the uncertainty of whether John or his nephew would succeed Richard I, Eleanor travelled to Aquitaine from Fontevrault to take homage from her subjects on behalf of John. She also payed homage to Philip II of France for Poitou, and likely Aquitaine as well. Although there was no reference to this in primary documents, her charters show that her roles in Poitou and Aquitaine were identical. After she paid homage for Poitou, she gave the county to John who, unlike Richard, had not been declared Duke of Aquitaine or Count of Poitou before his ascension to the throne. He then gave it back to her while recognizing her

⁵³ Gillingham, 87-8.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 87.

⁵⁵ Tuner, 282.

as his “lady.”⁵⁶ Although the reasons for the exchanging of Poitou are uncertain, she likely paid homage to Philip to prevent him from invading Angevin territory and gain his support for John against Arthur. Unfortunately, although John and Philip agreed to a truce in June of 1199, Arthur, who had been living at John’s court after his victory in the succession dispute, fled to Philip’s court with his mother after hearing a rumor that John planned to imprison him.⁵⁷

Somewhat ironically, John did imprison Arthur in 1202. Philip II and Arthur joined forces in another attempt to take the English throne for Arthur and once again John found himself in a battle with his young nephew. In what proved to be a fatal error, Arthur’s forces captured Eleanor of Aquitaine in Mirebeau, a city in Aquitaine, in July 1202. John, with unusual swiftness, stirred his army and rushed to Eleanor’s aid, freeing her from her grandson’s grasp and killing all of Arthur’s men. John then threw Arthur in prison for his attempt to capture Eleanor and to usurp John’s throne, and supposedly ordered Arthur murdered while he was in prison. Although Arthur’s death removed any threat to the throne, it also turned his subjects against him. After the murder, many of John’s lords in France turned to Philip Augustus. In 1202, John lost Alençon and Philip took Normandy in early March 1204.⁵⁸

On March 31, 1204, just five years into John’s reign, Eleanor passed away at Fontevraud. In accordance to her will, Eleanor was buried at Fontevraud alongside Henry II and Richard I.⁵⁹ After Eleanor’s death, the Angevin Empire’s downward spiral that began with Arthur’s death accelerated. The lords of Poitou rushed to Philip’s court almost

⁵⁶ Ibid., 282-3; Richardson, 205-6.

⁵⁷ Evans, 10; Richardson, 205; Gillingham, 87; Roger of Howden, as quoted in Gillingham, 87.

⁵⁸ Gillingham, 88, 91-2,

⁵⁹ Jones, 152.

immediately after Eleanor's death and John lost Gascony to his brother-in-law Alfonso VIII of Castille since Henry II had given it to his daughter Eleanor as her dowry when she married Alfonso VIII with the stipulation that she would only receive it upon her mother's death.⁶⁰ It cannot be said for sure whether John could have held onto his French lands if Eleanor had lived beyond 1204. However, the loss of Aquitaine and Poitou after her death left John without two important sources of both money and soldiers who defected to Philip Augustus. It also cannot be denied that Eleanor was better at matters of government than her youngest son who did not receive the benefit of formal instruction in the art of governing. Whether or not the Angevin Empire was destined to fall after John's reign, he could have greatly benefitted from more years of political instruction from his mother.

LETTERS AND CHARTERS

Charters during Richard's Reign

Upon her release from prison, Eleanor immediately returned to her political career, and after Richard's coronation, she began issuing charters. Her first surviving charter, issued on October 20, 1189, confirmed Richard's gift to the Church of Holy Cross of Waltham, the canons there, the manor of Waltham, and the village of Nazeing. This charter also ordered the people of Waltham and Nazeing to do homage to the abbot of Waltham as ordered by Richard I through his writ.⁶¹ Eleanor's order that the men of Waltham and Nazeing pay Richard I homage was necessary as Richard I himself commanded it in a writ, an informal written command to perform an action, rather than a formal charter. As dowager queen she would not have needed to confirm any gifts Richard I granted in his own charter; however,

⁶⁰ Gillingham, 94.

⁶¹ Donna Mildred Gordon, "A Translation of the Letters and Charter of Eleanor of Aquitaine" (Master's thesis, University of Alberta, 1970), 43.

she probably did so as a formality and reminder that the king had granted them gifts before ordering that they pay homage to her son.

On December 31, 1189, Eleanor issued a charter which named William Longchamp Bishop of Ely and it was witnessed by her seneschal “Natho’ Wesill,” William of Senago and “diverse others.” William Longchamp had a long political career under Plantagenet rule. Early in Richard’s career, he named Longchamp chief justiciar and served the king well while Richard was away on Crusade. During Richard’s rule, Longchamp became royal chancellor, justiciar, bishop of Ely, and papal legate in Richard’s British territories.⁶² In this charter, Eleanor styled herself not only queen of England but also “lady of Ireland,” a title that she did not use in any other surviving document.⁶³ The use of the title “lady of Ireland” is intriguing. After Henry II’s death, Richard allowed John to remain lord of Ireland, and he of course made a mess of things as he did on his first visit to Ireland. John replaced John de Courcy as lord justiciar and from there on, the province of Connaught was in chaos.⁶⁴ It seems strange that Eleanor should choose to use the title “lady of Ireland” in this charter, issued in England for the bishopric of a town so far from Ireland. It is possible that one of the “diverse other” witnesses was an Irish lord visiting the Plantagenet monarchs seeking assistance in the royal household in the chaos they faced after John’s lordship of Ireland caused such turmoil. It was most likely designed to reinforce her place as John’s mother. He was still unmarried so Eleanor, as mother of the Count, would have taken for herself the same title authority his wife would have had until he married.

⁶² Turner and Heiser, 10, 79.

⁶³ Gordon, 42-3.

⁶⁴ Gillingham, 29; P. W. Joyce, *A Concise History of Ireland* (New York: Longmans, Green and Co., 1903), <http://www.libraryireland.com/JoyceHistory/John.php>.

Eleanor's issuance of charters increased greatly after Richard left for Crusade, particularly after his imprisonment by the Holy Roman Emperor in 1193. In 1190, Eleanor issued a charter confirming gifts – a third of all court fines, sales, minted coins, and bridge tolls – granted to the archbishops of Bordeaux “at any time conceded through whomsoever of our late predecessors, the lords of Gascony.”⁶⁵ Eleanor added to these gifts canonical liberty to the bishops and the promise that neither she nor her descendants would invade or injure the churches, bishops, or towns of Bordeaux.⁶⁶ According to Turner and Heiser, Bordeaux was one of Richard I's chief administrative centers in France, along with Poitiers and Saintes. In his biography of Eleanor, Turner claimed that Richard I ruled the Poitevin region ruthlessly while he was in power and after his death, Eleanor had to once again garner favor with those subjects.⁶⁷ With the king gone, it would have fallen to Eleanor as Duchess of Aquitaine to keep peace among the French subjects in the Poitevin and Aquitaine regions. If Richard I began his rule as ruthlessly as Turner claimed, it was likely that even in 1190 Eleanor needed to placate those in the Poitevin region whom Richard I had mistreated.

If Gordon's date is correct, Eleanor would have issued this charter either right before Richard I's departure for Crusade in the summer of 1190 or after he left. Either way, it would have been important to keep the lords and bishops of Bordeaux happy with their Plantagenet leaders in England. It would have also served as a reminder that, although the Plantagenets relied on the support of Bordeaux, they were in charge. When Richard I left for the Holy Land, the lords of his duchies and counties could have easily revolted with the king and most of his army fighting in the East. Therefore, Eleanor and his justiciars needed to remind those

⁶⁵ Gordon, 44-5. It should be noted that H. G. Richardson dated this charter in 1203, Richardson, 208.

⁶⁶ Gordon, 44.

⁶⁷ Turner and Heiser, 61; Turner, 283.

men that Richard was still king. Eleanor confirming gifts to Bordeaux was her way of subtly saying that her son was still in charge and Richard or she could take back everything that had been granted to the people of Bordeaux.

After Richard's capture in 1193, Eleanor issued several charters and wrote several letters seeking help for the release of her son. Most of Eleanor's extant writings between 1193 and 1199 were letters sent to different houses of worship appealing to the men and women in those houses for help to bring Richard home. One of those letters was sent to the brothers of Canterbury, seeking prayers for Richard's safe return from Henry VI, witnessed by Herbert, archdeacon of Canterbury and Peter of Blois. Somewhat ironically, she "vowed to the memory of the glorious and blessed martyr" Thomas Becket to obtain her son's release.⁶⁸ Appealing to Becket's memory was almost certainly designed to target the men's approval of Richard I. It would have served as a subconscious reminder of how awful Henry II had been and in contrast, how heroic her son was. Richard did, after all, fight against his father in the rebellion that occurred after Becket's murder. Perhaps the reminder that Richard rebelled against the man who supposedly ordered their Archbishop murdered would have moved the monks to pray for his safe return and perhaps moved them to send money to contribute to his ransom.

Eleanor sent several letters to men of God throughout the kingdom of England in search of help for Richard but perhaps the most intriguing were the three letters she sent to Pope Celestine. Not only are the letters to the pope much longer, the language is much more emotionally charged. In her first letter, Eleanor described herself as the emotional grieving mother who had chosen to stay silent, perhaps by not writing to the pope immediately, for fear of seeming insolent or presumptuous, two things she never seemed to worry about any

⁶⁸ Gordon, 45-6.

other time in her life. She also appealed to his sense of Christian duty, calling Emperor Henry VI evil for capturing Richard while he was returning from a holy mission to regain Jerusalem for Christianity. She referenced several passages in the Bible where men rose against threats to the children of God, include Moses and Elijah. She also not so subtly reprimanded the pope for not sending anyone to Richard's aid when his cardinals "busy themselves with a legation in uncivilized areas" for "mediocre cases."⁶⁹ Her second and third letters to Celestine followed the same pattern as the first. In her second letter, she called herself a "miserable mother" and both letters reprimanded him again for not sending assistance to Richard, particularly after she had written Celestine asking for his help in securing Richard's release from the Holy Roman Emperor.⁷⁰

Although, as Ralph Turner noted, historians often dismissed royal letters as inauthentic because they were likely written by clerks, it is highly unlikely that the three letters to the pope reflected none of Eleanor's personal feelings.⁷¹ This letter probably did not much exaggerate Eleanor's distress at her son's captivity, particularly since she herself only recently earned back her freedom and would have understood better than most the feeling of being locked away as a political prisoner. Unfortunately, it would take more than emotional appeals to Pope Celestine to secure Richard's release. Several letters would be exchanged between Eleanor and her son with Richard seeking her assistance in securing his ransom from Henry VI.

In December 1193, Eleanor issued a charter stating that Walter, abbot of Waltham had sent Eleanor a clerk who collected the queen's gold from the exchequer from the time of Richard's graduation until the previous Christmas. According to the charter, Walter collected

⁶⁹ Ibid., 49-56, 53.

⁷⁰ Ibid., 54-70.

⁷¹ Turner, 272.

the money purely from Eleanor's request and thus, she released him of all future money-collecting requests. That Eleanor continued to receive the queen's gold after her husband's death was unusual. After a king's death, his wife no longer had the right to collect the queen's gold and that right passed down to the new queen. Eleanor was, as usual, the exception to the rule. She might have been receiving payments for past debts, but records indicated that she was receiving new money as well. Even after Richard married Berengaria, Eleanor continued to influence her son and receive the queen's gold. Although Richardson and Nicholas Vincent believed the queen's gold was part of her dower as Henry II's widow, Kristen Geaman suggested that Eleanor continued to receive the queen's gold because of her influence with Richard.⁷²

Letters between Eleanor and Richard

During his Crusade and captivity, Richard wrote several letters to Eleanor about the governing of the Plantagenet lands and there is no doubt that one such letter from Richard asked her to serve as mediator at Portsmouth, where she landed on February 11, 1192. The following year, when word of Richard's captivity reached England, Eleanor assumed control of England's affairs.⁷³ She played a significant role in the collection of taxes for Richard's ransom and in 1193, Richard wrote her a letter thanking her for her loyalty and her part in the peace and defense of his lands. He then asked her to promote Hubert bishop of Salisbury to the church of Canterbury at the request of Henry VI so that Richard might gain his favor and earn release from captivity.⁷⁴ Later that year, after Hubert's successful promotion to Canterbury, Richard wrote that he was no longer a prisoner but "staying honorably" with the

⁷² Gordon, 71-2; Kristen Geaman, "Queen's Gold and Intercession: The Case of Eleanor of Aquitaine," *MF* 46, no. 2 (2010): 17-20.

⁷³ Turner, 256; Richardson, 201-2.

⁷⁴ Letter from Richard, 1193, *Epistolae*, <https://epistolae.ccnmtl.columbia.edu/letter/148.html>

Holy Roman Emperor until Eleanor had collected the ransom she had been “solicitously seeking in cash,” further proof that Eleanor held a trustworthy position in his government.⁷⁵

Charters during John’s Reign

Eleanor lived in semi-retirement from Richard’s return to England until his death in 1199. After her son’s death, she was forced back into politics and she issued more surviving charters after Richard’s death and during John’s reign than any other time of her life- sixty in the five years she lived after his coronation. Between April and July of 1199 Eleanor issued several charters in Aquitaine confirming gifts and privileges to garner support and favor for John as he prepared for and immediately after his coronation in May.⁷⁶ Unfortunately, there is not space for an in-depth analysis of all sixty charters so we will mainly look at the ones dealing with governance and administration. Just two weeks after Richard’s death, on April 21, 1199 Eleanor issued a charter, under the titles of “queen of England, duchess of Normandy and Aquitaine, countess of Anjou,” in her name as well as John’s to “God and St. Mary of Tourpignac” in Poitou. This charter granted to the church and the monks, the pond of Langeais and whatever Richard had granted from the two mills on the waterway “in perpetuity” for the salvation of Richard’s soul.⁷⁷ Considering the succession crisis, Eleanor’s charters after Richard’s death were likely designed to gain support for her youngest son against Arthur and reinforce his status as Richard I’s rightful heir.

In addition to charters granted to churches for the salvation of Richard, Eleanor issued political charters. In 1199, Eleanor issued a charter to her vassals in Saintes granting them and their heirs stability and validity in the commune “in perpetuity.” The charter orders that

⁷⁵ Letter from Richard, n.d., *Epistolae*, <https://epistolae.ccnmtl.columbia.edu/letter/864.html>

⁷⁶ Richardson, 207; Turner, 283.

⁷⁷ “A Letter from Eleanor of Aquitaine (1199, 21 April) *Epistolae*, <https://epistolae.ccnmtl.columbia.edu/letter/1326.html>

the people of Saintes defend their customs and govern the commune in the same manner as Rochelle.⁷⁸ That same year, Eleanor issued a charter freeing Peter Foucher of Rochelle and his heirs from paying taxes and participating in military service as well as a charter granting Andreas of Chauvigny, her friend and relative, the fief of Sancta Severa.⁷⁹ In 1199 Eleanor issued several charters to Oleron, one of which abolished all “bad customs” that had been established after her marriage to Henry II.⁸⁰ All of the charters issued by Eleanor during John’s reign were on equal ground with those written by any king and did not require the confirmation of the king to be effective.⁸¹ Eleanor ruled her lands, and participated in the rule of England as a true leader in her own right.

On April 29, 1199 Eleanor issued a charter in favor of Ralph of Muléon. According to the charter, he came to Eleanor and asked her to give him back the Talmondais and its appurtenances as well as La Rochelle. Eleanor conceded what the Plantagenets held in Talmondais but exchanged La Rochelle for the castle of Benon and he paid homage to Eleanor for his lands. Interestingly, in this charter, Eleanor stated that she granted these things because she and John needed Ralph’s support.⁸² She issued this charter right at the beginning of the succession dispute between John I and Arthur of Brittany. It is no secret that John was not well liked among the nobles of the Angevin Empire, so Eleanor would have needed to garner as much support for John as she could among her nobles.

In 1199, Eleanor issued two charters that specifically mentioned the rights of women who were to be married, and their families, the only time she ever did so. The first confirmed

⁷⁸ “A Letter from Eleanor of Aquitaine (1199),” *Epistolae*, <https://epistolae.ccnmtl.columbia.edu/letter/1328.html>.

⁷⁹ “A Letter from Eleanor of Aquitaine (1199),” *Epistolae*, <https://epistolae.ccnmtl.columbia.edu/letter/880.html>.

⁸⁰ “A Letter from Eleanor of Aquitaine (1199),” *Epistolae*, <https://epistolae.ccnmtl.columbia.edu/letter/889.html>.

⁸¹ Richardson, 206.

⁸² Gordon, 78-9.

the rights granted to the men of Poitiers by her father and grandfather. In this charter, Eleanor explicitly granted women the right to be married wherever they desired, whether inside or outside of Poitiers. In her second charter concerning marriage, Eleanor granted the men of Oléron the right to marry their daughters and widows to whomever they desired and also granted them the wardship of girls, widows, and heirs without interference from Eleanor or her heirs.⁸³

Marriage was an important aspect of medieval life for both noble and peasant alike so it is not particularly surprising that Eleanor would address issues with marriage in her charters or that, sixteen years later, John I's nobles included clauses regarding marriage in the Magna Carta. In the charter regarding Poitiers, Eleanor might have been referring to clandestine marriages, which occurred when couples said their vows in a place other than the steps of a local church, something with which the Church had a problem. In *Life in a Medieval Village*, Frances and Joseph Gies stated that clandestine marriage remained a problem until the sixteenth century, when the Catholic Church decided legal marriages required witnesses. Her charter concerning Oléron was perhaps a preemptive strike against John I and his desires to control every aspect of his peoples' lives. In the Magna Carta, his barons included four clauses concerning the marriage of heirs and widows.⁸⁴ It is possible that even in 1199 John I had exhibited the inclination of forcing women to marry whomever paid the highest price. Or, perhaps, this was a practice handed down from Richard I or Henry II's reign that Eleanor did not agree with, having herself been forced to marry a man whom

⁸³ Gordon, 95-6, 100-1.

* A person or persons who would ensure that the accused would stand trial, Gordon, 96.

⁸⁴ Frances and Joseph Gies, *Life in a Medieval Village* (New York: Harper Perennial, 1991), 113-16; Georges Duby, *Women of the Twelfth Century* vol. 2, *Remembering the Dead* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1997), 61-8; Nicholas Vincent, *Magna Carta: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 112.

she did not love simply because he could protect her and her inheritance from unscrupulous nobles.

As important a social construct as marriage was in medieval Europe, neither of the above stopped at protecting marriage rights, however. Eleanor also granted the men of Poitiers the right to have their alms held by the lord of Poitiers, whether they were made thoughtfully or impulsively. She also granted freedom from capture for those who committed wrongs, excepting thieves, murderers, or traitors, if they could provide *fideiussores* (pledges) to ensure that they would stand trial. She also went so far as to guarantee these rights for anyone who moved to Poitiers with the intent of remaining in the city. In Oléron, she granted rights to heirs to continue selling wine and salt as well as the ability to divide their inheritances even in the absence of a formal will in the event of a sudden death.⁸⁵

Eleanor issued several more charters between 1199 and 1204 concerning either individuals or entire towns. Sometime after May, she issued a charter granting Chitrus, servant of the king, the lordship of Bégles, Corbie, La Combe, and the forest for his lifetime. That year, she issued a charter conceding the fief of Saint-Sévère to her relative, Andrew of Chauvigny and his heirs forever. She also granted the city of Vouillé immunity from demands for payments of taxes, the harvest, and tithes made around Christmas. In 1200, she wrote to her son stating that she had ordered their relative, Amaury, viscount of Thouars, to enter into John I's service as well as make amends because he allowed the barons to disinherit John. In 1203, she granted Reginald of Morin a "bakeoven" in the street called Three Ovens for faithful services rendered to Richard I.⁸⁶ She issued all of these charters during a time of turbulence for the Angevin Empire. From the beginning of John I's reign, he

⁸⁵ Gordon, 95-6, 100-1.

⁸⁶ Ibid., 108-9, 113-4, 121-3.

was fighting somebody and needed Eleanor to help garner support, particularly from the men of Aquitaine. During the time she issued these charters, John I fought Arthur of Brittany for the crown of England and, later, the Lusignans revolted after John I married Isabella of Angoulême despite her betrothal to Hugh of Lusignan.⁸⁷ The aforementioned charters were undoubtedly designed to garner support for her son in the face of such formidable enemies whom John I, with his lack of military prowess, had little chance of defeating without plenty of support from his lords.

The rest of Eleanor's charters in the years between John I's coronation and her death dealt with houses of worship. Those remaining charters followed the familiar pattern as her previous charters, granting land and making concessions to various religious houses. Turner attributed this increased attention to monastic houses as Eleanor's concern for the fate of her soul after her fast-approaching death since they not only increased in number but in generosity. Like her charters from her younger years, many of these benefitted the Abbey of Fontevrault.⁸⁸ Although this abbey was located in Anjou and not her own Aquitaine it was a continual presence in Eleanor's life, even before she married Henry II. It was where she placed her youngest children while she ruled Poitou, buried her husband, her son Richard, where she would go during her many retirements, and where she would eventually be buried herself.

CONCLUSION

Based on the number of surviving charters, Eleanor was most politically active in the last years of her life, after Henry II's death in 1189. She issued sixty surviving charters in the last five years of her life alone. Although Eleanor of Aquitaine played a significant role in the

⁸⁷ Gillingham, 86-94.

⁸⁸ Gordon, 79-94, 97-9, 101-8, 109-13, 116-20, 124-7; Turner, 293.

governance of Aquitaine throughout her lifetime, she had far more prominent role in the government of England after Henry II's death than any other period in her life. After Eleanor gained back her freedom she immediately jumped back into politics, preparing the people of England to accept Richard as their new king. During Richard's reign, she acted as his unofficial regent while he was on Crusade, preventing John from usurping his brother's throne, and worked ceaselessly to raise the money for his ransom. She might have entered semi-retirement when Richard returned from the Holy Roman Empire but that would not last long. Upon Richard's death, the matriarch of the Plantagenet family would once more have to involve herself in the governing of the Angevin Empire.

Unfortunately, John's ascent to the throne would not go as smoothly as Richard's. The first years after Richard's death, Eleanor worked ceaselessly again to ensure her son's succession instead of Arthur of Brittany. She issued most of her charters in the months after Richard's death seeking support for John in his battle with his nephew. She attempted to retire again after John's succession was secure. However, that retirement would be even shorter than her first and she would spend the last years of her life correcting John's mistakes in hopes of keeping the Angevin Empire from crumbling due to the king's poor judgment. The title written on her charters might state otherwise but Eleanor was far from a "humble" queen of England.

CONCLUSION

Eleanor of Aquitaine lived an extraordinary life as Queen of both France and England, as well as Duchess of Aquitaine and Normandy, Countess of Poitou and Anjou. Her divorce from Louis VII of France and remarriage to Henry II of England changed European history forever. Had she not broken the mold and acted upon her unhappiness in her first marriage by asking for a divorce, Henry II's empire would have been half its size, the animosity between France and England might not have existed, and two of England's most famous kings, Richard the Lionheart and John I would never have been born. As queen of two countries, her personal life choices altered history and affected the Angevin Empire in ways many historians have already studied in depth. This work, however, was not concerned with the choices Eleanor made about her personal life. Instead, it delved into her political life by examining the choices she made concerning the Angevin government and charters she issued during her time as queen of England and the impact her political actions had upon the governance of the Angevin Empire from her marriage to Henry Plantagenet until her death.

During her time as queen, Eleanor issued a number of charters. Most of Eleanor's charters, like those of most medieval queens, were for the benefit of religious houses. Other charters sought aid during times of crisis or carried out rulings issued by Henry II while he was away. She issued similar charters while Richard was away and during John's reign. Although Richard left male justiciars to rule England in his stead while he was on crusade, Richard's letters to Eleanor indicated that she truly was in charge. After all, she raised Richard and taught him the intricacies of ruling. Her charters during the early years of John's

reign sought support for John in his succession war with Arthur of Brittany. It seems it was up to her and her political knowledge, as well as the loyalty

Although charters to religious houses may not seem political in today's era of Separation of Church and State, they were in Eleanor's time. Keeping bishops and monks happy might have been the prerogative of queens, and therefore deemed less important than the work of a king, in a time when Christianity ruled it was arguably more important. As demonstrated by the excommunication of the Bishop of Ely, angering the pope could destroy a town. Allowing neither the blessings of newborns nor the administration of last rights caused Ely to fall into a state of squalor. How much more devastating, then, could be the excommunication of a king? Unless, of course, that king was John, as he used his excommunication to collect more money for the treasury. The queen, therefore, was charged with keeping peace between the Crown and the Church.

Most of Eleanor's work as queen was behind the scenes; however, that did not make it less important than that of the kings beside whom she sat as queen. She might not have been a queen regnant like her mother-in-law Matilda or Melisende of Jerusalem, but as queen consort she acted with almost as much power and force, perhaps more. Not only did she rule her own lands with little to no interference from her Henry II, she had a hand in the government of his lands, a role which grew more prominent after his death in 1189. Undoubtedly, Eleanor was not the only medieval queen who worked in the governing of her husband's or son's domains. Matilda herself advised both her husband Henry V and son Henry II throughout her lifetime. Perhaps this work will inspire others to study further the political role medieval queens played in their husbands' and sons' governments.

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