

Eleanor of Aquitaine

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Eleanor of Aquitaine (French: *Aliénor, Éléonore*, Latin: *Alienora*; 1122 – 1 April 1204) was a member of the Ramnulfid dynasty of rulers in southwestern France, and one of the wealthiest and most powerful women in western Europe during the High Middle Ages. She inherited the Duchy of Aquitaine from her father, William X, in 1137, and by successive marriages became queen of France (1137–1152) and then England (1154–1189). She was the patron of literary figures such as Wace, Benoît de Sainte-Maure, and Bernart de Ventadorn. She led armies several times in her life, and was a leader of the Second Crusade.

As Duchess of Aquitaine, Eleanor was the most eligible bride in Europe. Three months after she became duchess, she married King Louis VII of France, son of her guardian, King Louis VI. As Queen of France, she participated in the unsuccessful Second Crusade. Soon afterwards, Eleanor sought an annulment of her marriage,^[1] but her request was rejected by Pope Eugene III.^[2] However, after the birth of her second daughter Alix, Louis agreed to an annulment, as fifteen years of marriage had not produced a son.^[3] The marriage was annulled on 11 March 1152 on the grounds of consanguinity within the fourth degree. Their daughters were declared legitimate and custody was awarded to Louis, while Eleanor's lands were restored to her.

As soon as the annulment was granted, Eleanor became engaged to Henry, Duke of Normandy and Count of Anjou, who became King Henry II of England in 1154. Henry was her third cousin (cousin of the third degree), and eleven years younger. The couple married on 18 May 1152 (Whit Sunday), eight weeks after the annulment of Eleanor's first marriage, in a cathedral in Poitiers, France. Over the next thirteen years, she bore Henry eight children: five sons, three of whom would become kings; and three daughters. However, Henry and Eleanor eventually became estranged. Henry imprisoned her in 1173 for supporting her son Henry's revolt against her husband. She was not released until 6 July 1189, when Henry died and their son ascended the English throne as Richard I.

Now queen dowager, Eleanor acted as regent while Richard went on the Third Crusade; on his return Richard was captured and held prisoner. Eleanor lived well into the reign of her youngest son, John. She outlived all her children except for John and Eleanor.

Eleanor of Aquitaine



Eleanor's effigy at Fontevraud Abbey

Duchess of Aquitaine

Reign	9 April 1137 – 1 April 1204
Predecessor	William X
Successor	John

Queen consort of the Franks

Tenure	1 August 1137 – 21 March 1152
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Queen consort of England

Tenure	25 October 1154 – 6 July 1189
Coronation	19 December 1154

Born	1122
	Poitiers

Died	1 April 1204 (aged c. 81/82)
	Poitiers, Angevin Empire

Burial	Fontevraud Abbey, Fontevraud
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Spouse	Louis VII of France
	(m. 1137; annulled 1152)
	Henry II of England
	(m. 1152; d. 1189)

Issue	Marie, Countess of Champagne
<i>Detail</i>	Alix, Countess of Blois
	William IX, Count of Poitiers
	Henry the Young King
	Matilda, Duchess of Saxony
	Richard I, King of England
	Geoffrey II, Duke of Brittany
	Eleanor, Queen of Castile
	Joan, Queen of Sicily
	John, King of England

House	Ramnulfids
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Father	William X, Duke of Aquitaine
Mother	Aenor de Châtellerault
Religion	Roman Catholicism

Early life

Eleanor's year of birth is not known precisely: a late 13th-century genealogy of her family listing her as 13 years old in the spring of 1137 provides the best evidence that Eleanor was perhaps born as late as 1124.^[4] On the other hand, some chronicles mention a fidelity oath of some lords of Aquitaine on the occasion of Eleanor's fourteenth birthday in 1136. This, and her known age of 82 at her death, make 1122 more likely the year of birth.^[5] Her parents almost certainly married in 1121. Her birthplace may have been Poitiers, Bordeaux, or Nieul-sur-l'Autise, where her mother and brother died when Eleanor was 6 or 8.^[6]

Eleanor (or Aliénor) was the oldest of three children of William X, Duke of Aquitaine, whose glittering ducal court was renowned in early 12th-century Europe, and his wife, Aenor de Châtellerault, the daughter of Aimery I, Viscount of Châtellerault, and Dangerose de l' Isle Bouchard, who was William IX's longtime mistress as well as Eleanor's maternal grandmother. Her parents' marriage had been arranged by Dangerose with her paternal grandfather William IX.

Eleanor is said to have been named for her mother Aenor and called *Aliénor* from the Latin *alia Aenor*, which means *the other Aenor*. It became *Eléonor* in the *langues d'oïl* of Northern France and *Eleanor* in English.^[3] There was, however, another prominent Eleanor before her: Eleanor of Normandy, an aunt of William the Conqueror, who lived a century earlier than Eleanor of Aquitaine. In Paris as the Queen of France she was called Helienordis, her honorific name as written in the Latin epistles.

By all accounts, Eleanor's father ensured that she had the best possible education.^[7] Eleanor came to learn arithmetic, the constellations, and history.^[3] She did learn domestic skills such as household management and the needle arts of embroidery, needlepoint, sewing, spinning, and weaving.^[3] Eleanor ended up developing skills in conversation, dancing, games such as backgammon, checkers, and chess, playing the harp, and singing.^[3] Although her native tongue was Poitevin, she was taught to read and speak Latin, was well versed in music and literature, and schooled in riding, hawking, and hunting.^[8] Eleanor was extroverted, lively, intelligent, and strong-willed. In the spring of 1130, her four-year-old brother William Aigret and their mother died at the castle of Talmont, on Aquitaine's Atlantic coast. Eleanor became the heir presumptive to her father's domains. The Duchy of Aquitaine was the largest and richest province of France; Poitou (where Eleanor spent most of her childhood) and Aquitaine together were almost one-third the size of modern France. Eleanor had only one other legitimate sibling, a younger sister named Aelith, also called Petronilla. Her half brother Joscelin was acknowledged by William X as a son, but not as his heir. That she had another half brother, William, has been discredited.^[9] Later, during the first four years of Henry II's reign, her siblings joined Eleanor's royal household.

Inheritance

In 1137, Duke William X left Poitiers for Bordeaux and took his daughters with him. Upon reaching Bordeaux, he left them in the charge of the Archbishop of Bordeaux, one of his few loyal vassals. The duke then set out for the Shrine of Saint James of Compostela in the company of other pilgrims. He died, however, on Good Friday of that year (9 April).

Eleanor, aged twelve to fifteen, then became the Duchess of Aquitaine, and thus the most eligible heiress in Europe. As these were the days when kidnapping an heiress was seen as a viable option for obtaining a title, William dictated a will on the very day he died that bequeathed his domains to Eleanor and appointed King Louis VI of France as her guardian.^[10] William requested the king to take care of both the lands and the duchess, and to also find her a suitable husband.^[7] However, until a husband was found, the king had the legal right to Eleanor's lands. The duke also insisted to his companions that his death be kept a secret until Louis was informed – the men were to journey from Saint James of Compostela across the Pyrenees as quickly as possible to call at Bordeaux to notify the archbishop, then to make all speed to Paris to inform the king.

The king of France, known as Louis the Fat, was also gravely ill at that time, suffering from a bout of dysentery from which he appeared unlikely to recover. Despite his impending mortality, Louis remained clear-minded. His heir, Prince Louis, had originally been destined for the monastic life of a younger son but became the heir apparent when his older brother, Philip, died from a riding accident in 1131.^[11] The death of William, one of the king's most powerful vassals, made available the most desirable duchy in France. While presenting a solemn and dignified face to the grieving Aquitainian messengers, Louis exulted when they departed. Rather than act as guardian to the duchess and duchy, he decided to marry the duchess to his 17-year-old heir and bring Aquitaine under the control of the French crown, thereby greatly increasing the power and prominence of France and its ruling family, the Capets. Within hours the king had arranged for Prince Louis to be married to Eleanor, with Abbot Suger in charge of the wedding arrangements. Prince Louis was sent to Bordeaux with an escort of 500 knights, along with Abbot Suger, Theobald II, Count of Champagne, and Count Ralph.

First marriage

On 25 July 1137 Louis and Eleanor were married in the Cathedral of Saint-André in Bordeaux by the Archbishop of Bordeaux.^[7] Immediately after the wedding, the couple were enthroned as Duke and Duchess of Aquitaine.^[7] However, there was a catch: the land would remain independent of France until Eleanor's oldest son became both King of the Franks and Duke of Aquitaine. Thus, her holdings would not be merged with France until the next

generation. As a wedding present she gave Louis a rock crystal vase, currently on display at the Louvre.^{[7][11][12]} Louis gave the vase to the Saint Denis Basilica. This vase is the only object connected with Eleanor of Aquitaine that still survives.^[13]

Louis' tenure as Count of Poitou and Duke of Aquitaine and Gascony lasted only a few days. Although he had been invested as such on 8 August 1137, a messenger gave him the news that Louis VI had died of dysentery on 1 August while Prince Louis and Eleanor were making a tour of the provinces. Thus he became King Louis VII of France. He and Eleanor were anointed and crowned King and Queen of the Franks on Christmas Day of the same year.^{[7][14]}

Possessing a high-spirited nature, Eleanor was not popular with the staid northerners; according to sources, Louis's mother Adélaïde de Maurienne thought her flighty and a bad influence. She was not aided by memories of Constance of Arles, the Provençal wife of Robert II, tales of whose immodest dress and language were still told with horror.^[a] Eleanor's conduct was repeatedly criticized by church elders, particularly Bernard of Clairvaux and Abbot Suger, as indecorous. The king was madly in love with his beautiful and worldly bride, however, and granted her every whim, even though her behavior baffled and vexed him. Much money went into making the austere Cité Palace in Paris more comfortable for Eleanor's sake.^[11]

Conflict

Although Louis was a pious man, he soon came into a violent conflict with Pope Innocent II. In 1141, the Archbishopric of Bourges became vacant, and the king put forward as a candidate one of his chancellors, Cadurc, while vetoing the one suitable candidate, Pierre de la Chatre, who was promptly elected by the canons of Bourges and consecrated by the pope. Louis accordingly bolted the gates of Bourges against the new bishop. The pope, recalling similar attempts by William X to exile supporters of Innocent from Poitou and replace them with priests loyal to himself, blamed Eleanor, saying that Louis was only a child and should be taught manners. Outraged, Louis swore upon relics that so long as he lived Pierre should never enter Bourges. An interdict was thereupon imposed upon the king's lands, and Pierre was given refuge by Theobald II, Count of Champagne.

Louis became involved in a war with Count Theobald by permitting Raoul I, Count of Vermandois and seneschal of France, to repudiate his wife Eléonore of Blois, Theobald's sister, and to marry Petronilla of Aquitaine, Eleanor's sister. Eleanor urged Louis to support her sister's marriage to Count Raoul. Theobald had also offended Louis by siding with the pope in the dispute over Bourges. The war lasted two years (1142–44) and ended with the occupation of Champagne by the royal army. Louis was personally involved in the assault and burning of the town of Vitry. More than a thousand people who sought refuge in the church there died in the flames. Horrified, and desiring an end to the war, Louis attempted to make peace with Theobald in exchange for his support in lifting the interdict on Raoul and Petronilla. This was duly lifted for long enough to allow Theobald's lands to be restored; it was then lowered once more when Raoul refused to repudiate Petronilla, prompting Louis to return to Champagne and ravage it once more.



At left, a 14th-century representation of the wedding of Louis and Eleanor; at right, Louis leaving on Crusade.



Eleanor's grandfather, William IX of Aquitaine, gave her this rock crystal vase, which she gave to Louis as a wedding gift. He later donated it to the Abbey of Saint-Denis. This is the only surviving artifact known to have belonged to Eleanor.

In June 1144, the king and queen visited the newly built monastic church at Saint-Denis. While there, the queen met with Bernard of Clairvaux, demanding that he use his influence with the Pope to have the excommunication of Petronilla and Raoul lifted, in exchange for which King Louis would make concessions in Champagne and recognise Pierre de la Chatre as Archbishop of Bourges. Dismayed at her attitude, Bernard scolded Eleanor for her lack of penitence and interference in matters of state. In response, Eleanor broke down and meekly excused her behaviour, claiming to be bitter because of her lack of children. In response, Bernard became more kindly towards her: "My child, seek those things which make for peace. Cease to stir up the King against the Church, and urge upon him a better course of action. If you will promise to do this, I in return promise to entreat the merciful Lord to grant you offspring." In a matter of weeks, peace had returned to France: Theobald's provinces were returned and Pierre de la Chatre was installed as Archbishop of Bourges. In April 1145, Eleanor gave birth to a daughter, Marie.

Louis, however, still burned with guilt over the massacre at Vitry and wished to make a pilgrimage to the Holy Land to atone for his sins. In autumn 1145, Pope Eugene III requested that Louis lead a Crusade to the Middle East to rescue the Frankish Kingdoms there from disaster. Accordingly, Louis declared on Christmas Day 1145 at Bourges his intention of going on crusade.

Crusade

Eleanor of Aquitaine also formally took up the cross symbolic of the Second Crusade during a sermon preached by Bernard of Clairvaux. In addition, she had been corresponding with her uncle Raymond, Prince of the Crusader kingdom of Antioch, who was seeking further protection against the "Saracens" from the French crown. Eleanor recruited some of her royal ladies-in-waiting for the campaign, as well as 300 non-noble Aquitanian vassals. She insisted on taking part in the Crusades as the feudal leader of the soldiers from her duchy. The story that she and her ladies dressed as Amazons is disputed by historians, sometimes confused with the account of King Conrad's train of ladies during this campaign (in Edward Gibbon's *The History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*). She left for the Second Crusade from Vézelay, the rumored location of Mary Magdalene's grave.

The Crusade itself achieved little. Louis was a weak and ineffectual military leader with no skill for maintaining troop discipline or morale, or of making informed and logical tactical decisions. In eastern Europe, the French army was at times hindered by Manuel I Comnenus, the Byzantine Emperor, who feared that the Crusade would jeopardize the tenuous safety of his empire. Notwithstanding, during their three-week stay at Constantinople, Louis was fêted and Eleanor was much admired. She was compared with Penthesilea, mythical queen of the Amazons, by the Greek historian Nicetas Choniates. He added that she gained the epithet *chrysopous* (golden-foot) from the cloth of gold that decorated and fringed her robe. Louis and Eleanor stayed in the Philopation palace just outside the city walls.

From the moment the Crusaders entered Asia Minor, things began to go badly. The king and queen were still optimistic – the Byzantine Emperor had told them that the German King Conrad had won a great victory against a Turkish army (when in fact the German army had been massacred). However, while camping near Nicea, the remnants of the German army, including a dazed and sick King Conrad, staggered past the French camp, bringing news of their disaster. The French, with what remained of the Germans, then began to march in increasingly disorganized fashion towards Antioch. They were in high spirits on Christmas Eve, when they chose to camp in a lush valley near Ephesus. Here they were ambushed by a Turkish detachment; the French proceeded to slaughter this detachment and appropriate their camp.

Louis then decided to cross the Phrygian mountains directly in the hope of reaching Eleanor's uncle Raymond in Antioch more quickly. As they ascended the mountains, however, the army and the king and queen were horrified to discover the unburied corpses of the previously slaughtered German army.

On the day set for the crossing of Mount Cadmos, Louis chose to take charge of the rear of the column, where the unarmed pilgrims and the baggage trains marched. The vanguard, with which Queen Eleanor marched, was commanded by her Aquitanian vassal Geoffrey de Rancon. Unencumbered by baggage, they reached the summit



Second Crusade council: Conrad III of Germany, Eleanor's husband Louis VII of France, and Baldwin III of Jerusalem

of Cadmos, where Rancon had been ordered to make camp for the night. Rancon however chose to continue on, deciding in concert with Amadeus III, Count of Savoy (Louis's uncle) that a nearby plateau would make a better campsite: such disobedience was reportedly common.

Accordingly, by mid-afternoon, the rear of the column – believing the day's march to be nearly at an end – was dawdling. This resulted in the army becoming separated, with some having already crossed the summit and others still approaching it. At this point the Turks, who had been following and feinting for many days, seized their opportunity and attacked those who had not yet crossed the summit. The French (both soldiers and pilgrims), taken by surprise, were trapped; those who tried to escape were caught and killed. Many men, horses, and much of the baggage were cast into the canyon below. The chronicler William of Tyre, writing between 1170 and 1184 and thus perhaps too late to be considered historically accurate, placed the blame for this disaster firmly on the amount of baggage (much of it reputedly belonging to Eleanor and her ladies) and the presence of non-combatants.

The king, having scorned royal apparel in favour of a simple pilgrim's tunic, escaped notice (unlike his bodyguards, whose skulls were brutally smashed and limbs severed). He reportedly "nimble and bravely scaled a rock by making use of some tree roots which God had provided for his safety", and managed to survive the attack. Others were not so fortunate: "No aid came from Heaven, except that night fell."^[15]

Official blame for the disaster was placed on Geoffrey de Rancon, who had made the decision to continue, and it was suggested that he be hanged (a suggestion which the king ignored). Since he was Eleanor's vassal, many believed that it was she who had been ultimately responsible for the change in plan, and thus the massacre. This did nothing for her popularity in Christendom – she was also blamed for the size of the baggage train and the fact that her Aquitanian soldiers had marched at the front, thus not involved in the fight. Continuing on, the army became split, with the commoners marching toward Antioch and the royalty traveling by sea. When most of the land army arrived, the king and queen had a profound dispute. Some, such as John of Salisbury and William of Tyre, say Eleanor's reputation was sullied by rumours of an affair with her uncle Raymond. However, this may have been a ruse, as Raymond through Eleanor tried to sway Louis forcibly to use his army to attack the actual Muslim encampment at nearby Aleppo, gateway to retaking Edessa, by papal decree the objective of the Crusade. Although this was perhaps the better military plan, Louis was not keen to fight in northern Syria. One of Louis's avowed Crusade goals was to journey in pilgrimage to Jerusalem, and he stated his intention to continue. Reputedly Eleanor then requested to stay with Raymond and brought up the matter of consanguinity – the fact that she and her husband, King Louis, were too closely related. This was grounds for divorce in the medieval period. Rather than allowing her to stay, Louis took Eleanor from Antioch against her will and continued on to Jerusalem with his dwindling army.^[16]

This episode humiliated Eleanor, and she maintained a low profile for the rest of the crusade. Louis's subsequent assault on Damascus in 1148 with his remaining army, fortified by King Conrad and Baldwin III of Jerusalem, achieved little. Damascus was a major trading centre that abounded in wealth and was under normal circumstances a potential threat, but the rulers of Jerusalem had recently entered into a truce with the city, which they then forswore. It was a gamble that did not pay off, and whether through military error or betrayal, the Damascus campaign was a failure. The French royal family retreated to Jerusalem and then sailed to Rome and made their way back to Paris.

While in the eastern Mediterranean, Eleanor learned about maritime conventions developing there, which were the beginnings of what would become admiralty law. She introduced those conventions in her own lands on the island of Oleron in 1160 (with the "Rolls of Oléron") and later in England as well. She was also instrumental in developing trade agreements with Constantinople and ports of trade in the Holy Lands.

Annulment

Even before the Crusade, Eleanor and Louis were becoming estranged, and their differences were only exacerbated while they were abroad. Eleanor's purported relationship with her uncle Raymond,^[17] the ruler of Antioch, was a major source of discord. Eleanor supported her uncle's desire to re-capture the nearby County of Edessa, the objective of the Crusade. In addition, having been close to him in their youth, she now showed what was considered to be "excessive affection" toward her uncle. Raymond had plans to abduct Eleanor, to which she consented.^[18] While many historians today dismiss this as normal affection between uncle and niece (noting their early friendship and his similarity to her father and grandfather), some of Eleanor's adversaries interpreted the generous displays of affection as an incestuous affair. Louis's long march to Jerusalem and back north, which Eleanor was forced to join, debilitated his army and disheartened her knights; the divided Crusade armies could not overcome the Muslim forces, and the royal couple had to return home.

Home, however, was not easily reached. Louis and Eleanor, on separate ships due to their disagreements, were first attacked in May 1149 by Byzantine ships attempting to capture both on the orders of the Byzantine Emperor. Although they escaped this attempt unharmed, stormy weather drove Eleanor's ship far to the south (to the Barbary Coast) and caused her to lose track of her husband. Neither was heard of for over two months. In mid-July, Eleanor's ship finally reached Palermo in Sicily, where she discovered that she and her husband had both been given up for dead. She was given shelter and food by servants of King Roger II of Sicily, until the king eventually reached Calabria, and she set out to meet him there. Later, at King Roger's court in Potenza, she learned of the death of her uncle Raymond, who was beheaded by Muslim forces in the Holy Land. This appears to have forced a change of plans, for instead of returning to France from Marseilles, they went to see Pope Eugene III in Tusculum, where he had been driven five months before by a revolt of the Commune of Rome.

Eugene did not, as Eleanor had hoped, grant an annulment. Instead, he attempted to reconcile Eleanor and Louis, confirming the legality of their marriage. He proclaimed that no word could be spoken against it, and that it might not be dissolved under any pretext. Eventually, he arranged events so that Eleanor had no choice but to sleep with Louis in a bed specially prepared by the pope. Thus was conceived their second child – not a son, but another daughter, Alix of France.

The marriage was now doomed. Still without a son and in danger of being left with no male heir, facing substantial opposition to Eleanor from many of his barons and her own desire for divorce, Louis bowed to the inevitable. On 11 March 1152, they met at the royal castle of Beaugency to dissolve the marriage. Hugues de Toucy, Archbishop of Sens, presided, and Louis and Eleanor were both present, as were the Archbishops of Bordeaux and Rouen. Archbishop Samson of Reims acted for Eleanor.

On 21 March, the four archbishops, with the approval of Pope Eugene, granted an annulment on grounds of consanguinity within the fourth degree. (Eleanor was Louis' third cousin once removed, and shared common ancestry with Robert II of France.) Their two daughters were, however, declared legitimate. (Children born to a marriage that was later annulled were not at risk of being "bastardized," because "[w]here parties married in good faith, without knowledge of an impediment, ... children of the marriage were legitimate." [Berman @ 228.]) Custody of them was awarded to King Louis. Archbishop Samson received assurances from Louis that Eleanor's lands would be restored to her.

Second marriage

As Eleanor traveled to Poitiers, two lords – Theobald V, Count of Blois, and Geoffrey, Count of Nantes (brother of Henry II, Duke of Normandy) – tried to kidnap and marry her to claim her lands. As soon as she arrived in Poitiers, Eleanor sent envoys to Henry, Duke of Normandy and future king of England, asking him to come at once to marry her. On 18 May 1152 (Whit Sunday), eight weeks after her annulment, Eleanor married Henry "without the pomp and ceremony that befitted their rank".^[19]

Eleanor was related to Henry even more closely than she had been to Louis: they were cousins to the third degree through their common ancestor Ermengarde of Anjou (wife of Robert I, Duke of Burgundy and Geoffrey, Count of Gâtinais), and they were also descended from King Robert II of France. A marriage between Henry and Eleanor's daughter Marie had earlier been declared impossible due to their status as third cousins once removed. It was rumored by some that Eleanor had had an affair with Henry's own father, Geoffrey V, Count of Anjou, who had advised his son to avoid any involvement with her.

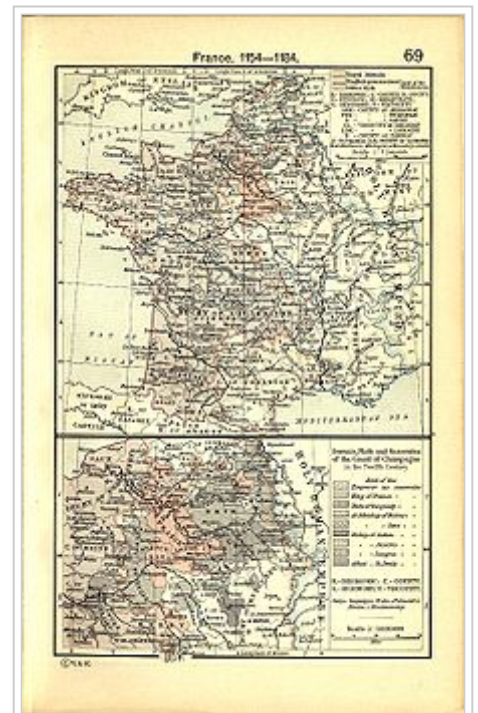
On 25 October 1154, Henry became King of England. Eleanor was crowned Queen of England by the Archbishop of Canterbury on 19 December 1154.^[14] She may not have been anointed on this occasion, however, because she had already been anointed in 1137.^[20] Over the next thirteen years, she bore Henry five sons and three daughters: William, Henry, Richard, Geoffrey, John, Matilda, Eleanor, and Joan. John Speed, in his 1611 work *History of Great Britain*, mentions the possibility that Eleanor had a son named Philip, who died young. His sources no longer exist, and he alone mentions this birth.^[21]

Eleanor's marriage to Henry was reputed to be tumultuous and argumentative, although sufficiently cooperative to produce at least eight pregnancies. Henry was by no means faithful to his wife and had a reputation for philandering. Henry fathered other, illegitimate children throughout the marriage. Eleanor appears to have taken an ambivalent attitude towards these affairs: for example, Geoffrey of York, an illegitimate son of Henry, was acknowledged by Henry as his child and raised at Westminster in the care of the queen.

During the period from Henry's accession to the birth of Eleanor's youngest son John, affairs in the kingdom were turbulent: Aquitaine, as was the norm, defied the authority of Henry as Eleanor's husband and answered only to their Duchess. Attempts were made to claim Toulouse, the rightful inheritance of Eleanor's grandmother Philippa of Toulouse, but they ended in failure. A bitter feud arose between the king and Thomas Becket, initially his Chancellor and closest adviser and later the Archbishop of Canterbury. Louis of France had remarried and been widowed; he married for the third time and finally fathered a long hoped-for son, Philip Augustus (also known as Dieudonne - God-given). "Young Henry," son of Henry and Eleanor, wed Marguerite of France, daughter of Louis from his second marriage. Little is known of Eleanor's involvement in these events. It is certain that by late 1166, Henry's notorious affair with Rosamund Clifford had become known, and Eleanor's marriage to Henry appears to have become terminally strained.



Henry II of England



The marriage of Eleanor of Aquitaine to Henry of Anjou and Henry's subsequent succession to the throne of England created the Angevin empire.

In 1167, Eleanor's third daughter, Matilda, married Henry the Lion of Saxony. Eleanor remained in England with her daughter for the year prior to Matilda's departure for Normandy in September. In December, Eleanor gathered her movable possessions in England and transported them on several ships to Argentan. Christmas was celebrated at the royal court there, and she appears to have agreed to a separation from Henry. She certainly left for her own city of Poitiers immediately after Christmas. Henry did not stop her; on the contrary, he and his army personally escorted her there before attacking a castle belonging to the rebellious Lusignan family. Henry then went about his own business outside Aquitaine, leaving Earl Patrick (his regional military commander) as her protective custodian. When Patrick was killed in a skirmish, Eleanor (who proceeded to ransom his captured nephew, the young William Marshal), was left in control of her lands.

The Court of Love in Poitiers

Of all her influence on culture, Eleanor's time in Poitiers between 1168 and 1173 was perhaps the most critical, yet very little is known about it. Henry II was elsewhere, attending to his own affairs after escorting Eleanor there.^[7] Some believe that Eleanor's court in Poitiers was the "Court of Love", where Eleanor and her daughter Marie meshed and encouraged the ideas of troubadours, chivalry, and courtly love into a single court. It may have been largely to teach manners, as the French courts would be known for in later generations. The existence and reasons for this court are debated.

In *The Art of Courtly Love*, Andreas Capellanus (Andrew the chaplain) refers to the court of Poitiers. He claims that Eleanor, her daughter Marie, Ermengarde, Viscountess of Narbonne, and Isabelle of Flanders would sit and listen to the quarrels of lovers and act as a jury to the questions of the court that revolved around acts of romantic love. He records some twenty-one cases, the most famous of them being a problem posed to the women about whether true love can exist in marriage. According to Capellanus, the women decided that it was not at all likely.^[22]

Some scholars believe that the "court of love" probably never existed, since the only evidence for it is Andreas Capellanus' book. To strengthen their argument, they state that there is no other evidence that Marie ever stayed with her mother in Poitiers.^[7] Andreas wrote for the court of the king of France, where Eleanor was not held in esteem. Polly Schoyer Brooks (the author of a non-academic biography of Eleanor) suggests that the court did exist, but that it was not taken very seriously, and that acts of courtly love were just a "parlor game" made up by Eleanor and Marie in order to place some order over the young courtiers living there.^[23]

There is no claim that Eleanor invented courtly love, since it was a concept that had begun to grow before Eleanor's court arose. All that can be said is that her court at Poitiers was most likely a catalyst for the increased popularity of courtly love literature in the Western European regions.^[24] Amy Kelly, in her article, "Eleanor of Aquitaine and her Courts of Love", gives a very plausible description of the origins of the rules of Eleanor's court: "in the Poitevin code, man is the property, the very thing of woman; whereas a precisely contrary state of things existed in the adjacent realms of the two kings from whom the reigning duchess of Aquitaine was estranged."^[25]

Revolt and capture

In March 1173, aggrieved at his lack of power and egged on by Henry's enemies, his son by the same name, the younger Henry, launched the Revolt of 1173–1174. He fled to Paris. From there, "the younger Henry, devising evil against his father from every side by the advice of the French King, went secretly into Aquitaine where his two



Palace of Poitiers, seat of the Counts of Poitou and Dukes of Aquitaine in the 10th through 12th centuries, where Eleanor's highly literate and artistic court inspired tales of Courts of Love.

youthful brothers, Richard and Geoffrey, were living with their mother, and with her connivance, so it is said, he incited them to join him".^[26] One source claimed that the Queen sent her younger sons to France "to join with him against their father the king".^[27] Once her sons had left for Paris, Eleanor may have encouraged the lords of the south to rise up and support them.^[7]

Sometime between the end of March and the beginning of May, Eleanor left Poitiers, but was arrested and sent to the king at Rouen. The king did not announce the arrest publicly; for the next year, the Queen's whereabouts were unknown. On 8 July 1174, Henry and Eleanor took ship for England from Barfleur. As soon as they disembarked at Southampton, Eleanor was taken either to Winchester Castle or Sarum Castle and held there.

Years of imprisonment 1173–1189

Eleanor was imprisoned for the next sixteen years, much of the time in various locations in England. During her imprisonment, Eleanor became more and more distant with her sons, especially Richard (who had always been her favorite). She did not have the opportunity to see her sons very often during her imprisonment, though she was released for special occasions such as Christmas. About four miles from Shrewsbury and close by Haughmond Abbey is "Queen Eleanor's Bower", the remains of a triangular castle which is believed to have been one of her prisons.

Henry lost the woman reputed to be his great love, Rosamund Clifford, in 1176. He had met her in 1166 and began his liaison in 1173, supposedly contemplating divorce from Eleanor. This notorious affair caused a monkish scribe to transcribe Rosamund's name in Latin to "Rosa Immundi", or "Rose of Unchastity". The king had many mistresses, but although he treated earlier liaisons discreetly, he flaunted Rosamund. He may have done so to provoke Eleanor into seeking an annulment but, if so, the queen disappointed him. Nevertheless, rumours persisted, perhaps assisted by Henry's camp, that Eleanor had poisoned Rosamund. It is also speculated that Eleanor placed Rosamund in a bathtub and had an old woman cut Rosamund's arms.^[18] Henry donated much money to Godstow Nunnery, where Rosamund was buried.

In 1183, the Young King Henry tried again to force his father to hand over some of his patrimony. In debt and refused control of Normandy, he tried to ambush his father at Limoges. He was joined by troops sent by his brother Geoffrey and Philip II of France. Henry II's troops besieged the town, forcing his son to flee. After wandering aimlessly through Aquitaine, Henry the Younger caught dysentery. On Saturday, 11 June 1183, the Young King realized he was dying and was overcome with remorse for his sins. When his father's ring was sent to him, he begged that his father would show mercy to his mother, and that all his companions would plead with Henry to set her free. Henry II sent Thomas of Earley, Archdeacon of Wells, to break the news to Eleanor at Sarum.^[b] Eleanor reputedly had had a dream in which she foresaw her son Henry's death. In 1193 she would tell Pope Celestine III that she was tortured by his memory.

King Philip II of France claimed that certain properties in Normandy belonged to his half-sister Marguerite, widow of the young Henry, but Henry insisted that they had once belonged to Eleanor and would revert to her upon her son's death. For this reason Henry summoned Eleanor to Normandy in the late summer of 1183. She stayed in



The obverse of Eleanor's seal. She is identified as *Eleanor, by the Grace of God, Queen of the English, Duchess of the Normans*. The legend on the reverse calls her *Eleanor, Duchess of the Aquitanians and Countess of the Angevins*.^[14]

Normandy for six months. This was the beginning of a period of greater freedom for the still-supervised Eleanor. Eleanor went back to England probably early in 1184.^[7] Over the next few years Eleanor often travelled with her husband and was sometimes associated with him in the government of the realm, but still had a custodian so that she was not free.

Widowhood

Upon the death of her husband Henry II on 6 July 1189, Richard I was the undisputed heir. One of his first acts as king was to send William Marshal to England with orders to release Eleanor from prison; he found upon his arrival that her custodians had already released her.^[7] Eleanor rode to Westminster and received the oaths of fealty from many lords and prelates on behalf of the king. She ruled England in Richard's name, signing herself "Eleanor, by the grace of God, Queen of England". On 13 August 1189, Richard sailed from Barfleur to Portsmouth and was received with enthusiasm. Eleanor ruled England as regent while King Richard went off on the Third Crusade. Later, when Richard was captured, she personally negotiated his ransom by going to Germany.

Eleanor survived Richard and lived well into the reign of her youngest son, King John. In 1199, under the terms of a truce between King Philip II and King John, it was agreed that Philip's twelve-year-old heir-apparent Louis would be married to one of John's nieces, daughters of his sister Eleanor of Castile. John instructed his mother to travel to Castile to select one of the princesses. Now 77, Eleanor set out from Poitiers. Just outside Poitiers she was ambushed and held captive by Hugh IX of Lusignan, whose lands had been sold to Henry II by his forebears. Eleanor secured her freedom by agreeing to his demands. She continued south, crossed the Pyrenees, and travelled through the Kingdoms of Navarre and Castile, arriving in Castile before the end of January 1200.

King Alfonso VIII and Eleanor's daughter, Queen Eleanor of Castile, had two remaining unmarried daughters, Urraca and Blanche. Eleanor selected the younger daughter, Blanche. She stayed for two months at the Castilian court, then late in March journeyed with granddaughter Blanche back across the Pyrenees. She celebrated Easter in Bordeaux, where the famous warrior Mercadier came to her court. It was decided that he would escort the Queen and Princess north. "On the second day in Easter week, he was slain in the city by a man-at-arms in the service of Brandin",^[27] a rival mercenary captain. This tragedy was too much for the elderly queen, who was fatigued and unable to continue to Normandy. She and Blanche rode in easy stages to the valley of the Loire, and she entrusted Blanche to the Archbishop of Bordeaux, who took over as her escort. The exhausted Eleanor went to Fontevraud, where she remained. In early summer, Eleanor was ill and John visited her at Fontevraud.

Eleanor was again unwell in early 1201. When war broke out between John and Philip, Eleanor declared her support for John and set out from Fontevraud to her capital Poitiers to prevent her grandson Arthur I, Duke of Brittany, posthumous son of Eleanor's son Geoffrey and John's rival for the English throne, from taking control. Arthur learned of her whereabouts and besieged her in the castle of Mirebeau. As soon as John heard of this, he marched south, overcame the besiegers, and captured the 15-year-old Arthur. Eleanor then returned to Fontevraud where she took the veil as a nun.

Eleanor died in 1204 and was entombed in Fontevraud Abbey next to her husband Henry and her son Richard. Her tomb effigy shows her reading a bible and is decorated with magnificent jewelry. By the time of her death she had outlived all of her children except for King John of England and Queen Eleanor of Castile.



Tomb effigies of Eleanor and Henry II at Fontevraud Abbey

Appearance

Contemporary sources praise Eleanor's beauty.^[7] Even in an era when ladies of the nobility were excessively praised, their praise of her was undoubtedly sincere. When she was young, she was described as *perpulchra* – more than beautiful. When she was around 30, Bernard de Ventadour, a noted troubadour, called her "gracious, lovely, the embodiment of charm," extolling her "lovely eyes and noble countenance" and declaring that she was "one meet to crown the state of any king."^{[10][29][30]} William of Newburgh emphasized the charms of her person, and even in her old age, Richard of Devizes described her as beautiful, while Matthew Paris, writing in the 13th century, recalled her "admirable beauty."

However, no one left a more detailed description of Eleanor; the colour of her hair and eyes, for example, are unknown. The effigy on her tomb shows a tall and large-boned woman with brown skin, though this may not be an accurate representation. Her seal of c. 1152 shows a woman with a slender figure, but this is likely an impersonal image.^[7]

Popular culture

Art

Judy Chicago's artistic installation *The Dinner Party* features a place setting for Eleanor.^[31]

Books and dramas

Eleanor and Henry are the main characters in James Goldman's play *The Lion in Winter*, which was made into a film starring Peter O'Toole and Katharine Hepburn in 1968 (for which Hepburn won the Academy Award for Best Actress and the BAFTA Award for Best Actress in a Leading Role and was nominated for the Golden Globe Award for Best Actress - Motion Picture Drama). The film was remade for television in 2003 with Patrick Stewart and Glenn Close (for which Close won the Golden Globe Award for Best Performance by an Actress In A Miniseries or Motion Picture Made for Television and was nominated for the Primetime Emmy Award for Outstanding Lead Actress - Miniseries or a Movie).

The depiction of Eleanor in the play *Becket*, which was filmed in 1964 with Pamela Brown as Eleanor, contains historical inaccuracies, as acknowledged by the author, Jean Anouilh.

In 2004, Catherine Muschamp's one-woman play, *Mother of the Pride*, toured the UK with Eileen Page in the title role. In 2005, Chapelle Jaffe played the same part in Toronto.

The character "Queen Elinor" appears in William Shakespeare's *King John*, along with other members of the family. On television, she has been portrayed in this play by Una Venning in the *BBC Sunday Night Theatre* version (1952) and by Mary Morris in the BBC Shakespeare version (1984).

She figures prominently in Sharon Kay Penman's novels, *When Christ And His Saints Slept*, *Time and Chance*, and *Devil's Brood*, and also appears briefly in *Here Be Dragons*.

Penman has written a series of historical mysteries in which Eleanor, in old age, sends a trusted servant to unravel various puzzles. The titles are *The Queen's Man*, *Cruel as the Grave*, *Dragon's Lair*, and *Prince of Darkness*.

Eleanor features as a more minor character in *Lionheart* and *A King's Ransom*, both of which focus on the reign of her son, Richard, as king of England.

Eleanor is the principal character of *Beloved Enemy* and *Gilded Cages*, the last two volumes of a trilogy of romance novels by Ellen Jones.

E.L. Konigsburg's young adult novel *A Proud Taste for Scarlet and Miniver* takes place in Heaven of the late 20th century, where Eleanor of Aquitaine, Empress Matilda, and William the Marshall are waiting for King Henry II to be admitted to eternity at last. The Abbot Suger stops to chat with Eleanor and stays to wait, too. To pass the time, the four recall Eleanor's time on Earth. The flashbacks on earth are set during the Middle Ages in France and England, with a brief trip to the Holy Land. The flashbacks trace the highlights of Eleanor's life from 1137 (when she is 15 years old and about to wed Louis Capet, soon to be King Louis VII of France) to her death in 1204. Her life encompasses the rule of England by her husband Henry II and by her sons Richard and John. Originally published in 1973, the novel was put back in print by Atheneum in 2001.

Eleanor is associated with Nicole des Jardins in Arthur C. Clarke and Gentry Lee's follow-up series to Clarke's *Rendezvous with Rama*.

Jean Plaidy has written about her in several novels. *Courts of Love* is written from a first person perspective in Plaidy's *Queens of England* series, and in *The Plantagenet Saga*, Eleanor of Aquitaine is featured in *The Plantagenet Prelude*, *Revolt of the Eaglets*, *The Heart of the Lion*, and *Prince of Darkness*.

Eleanor is featured in a book in The Royal Diaries series, *Eleanor: Crown Jewel of Aquitaine* (2002) by Kristiana Gregory. The books in the series are written as fictional diaries of royal women in their earlier years; Eleanor's is set in the year 1136.

Christy English's historical novel, *The Queen's Pawn*, published in April 2010, depicts Eleanor of Aquitaine from 1169–1173, during her marriage to King Henry II of England and her relationship with Princess Alais of France. In April 2011, English published a second novel, *To Be Queen*, which is another historical novel centered on Eleanor of Aquitaine's life. This novel covers the years 1132–1152, from before she became Duchess of Aquitaine until the end of her first marriage to Louis VII of France. Also published in April 2010 was Alison Weir's novel, *The Captive Queen*, which details Eleanor's life from when she first met Henry II of England to her death in 1204.

Cecelia Holland's 2010 novel, *The Secret Eleanor: A Novel of Eleanor of Aquitaine*, set in the years 1151–1152, is centered on Eleanor's relationship with her sister Petronilla; it narrates the meeting of Eleanor and Henry Plantagenet, the beginning of their love affair, Eleanor's annulment of her marriage to Louis VII, and Petronilla's role helping her sister in these events, in a fictional secret history concordant with the known facts of their lives.

In 2013, Elizabeth Chadwick published the first of three announced books about Eleanor's life, titled *The Summer Queen*. The second, titled *The Winter Crown* was published in 2014. Eleanor was a major character in Chadwick's historical novels about William Marshal especially *The Greatest Knight*.

Eleanor is one of four women profiled in Helen Castor's 2011 book *She-Wolves: The Women Who Ruled England Before Elizabeth* (Faber & Faber), and of the BBC documentary *She-Wolves: England's Early Queens*, presented by Castor.

Eleanor features in Susan Appleyard's novel of Henry II 'The First Plantagenet'.

In 2012, Mark Richard Beaulieu published the first of six books in the Eleanor Code series, titled "Eleanor of Aquitaine: The Young Life."

Film, radio and television

Eleanor has featured in a number of screen versions of the *Ivanhoe* and *Robin Hood* stories. She has been played by Martita Hunt in *The Story of Robin Hood and His Merrie Men* (1952), Jill Esmond in the British TV adventure series *The Adventures of Robin Hood* (1955–1960), Phyllis Neilson-Terry in the British TV adventure series *Ivanhoe* (1958), Yvonne Mitchell in the BBC TV drama series *The Legend of Robin Hood* (1975), Siân Phillips in

the TV series *Ivanhoe* (1997), and Tusse Silberg in the TV series *The New Adventures of Robin Hood* (1997). She was portrayed by Lynda Bellingham in the BBC series *Robin Hood*. Most recently, she was portrayed by Eileen Atkins in *Robin Hood* (2010).

In the 1964 film, "Becket" (1964), Eleanor is briefly played by Pamela Brown to Peter O'Toole's first performance as a young Henry II.

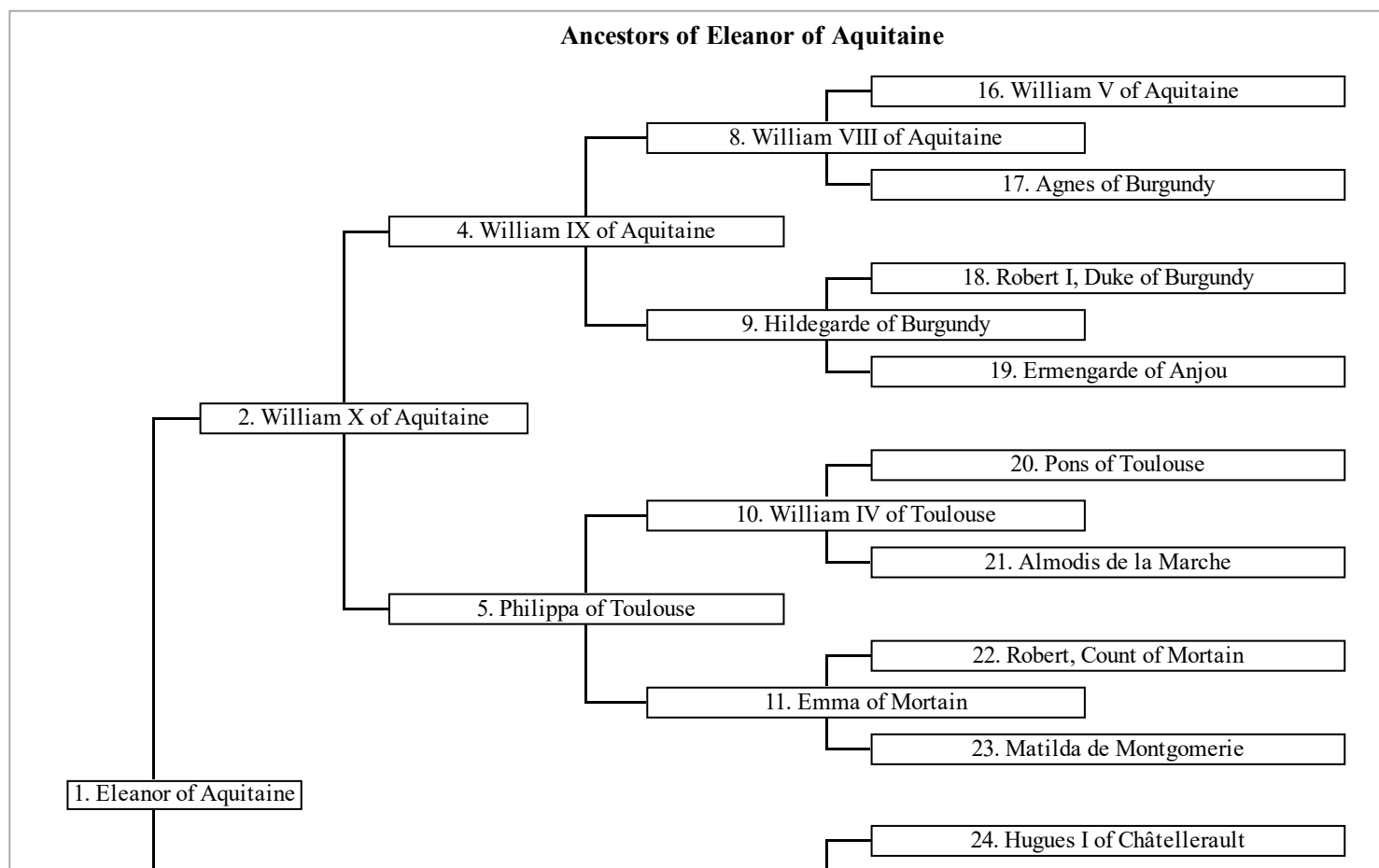
In the 1968 film, *The Lion in Winter*, Eleanor is played by Katharine Hepburn, while Henry is again portrayed by O'Toole. The film is about the difficult relationship between them and the struggle of their three sons Richard, Geoffrey, and John for their father's favour and the succession. A 2003 TV film, *The Lion in Winter* (2003 film), starred Glenn Close as Eleanor and Patrick Stewart as Henry.

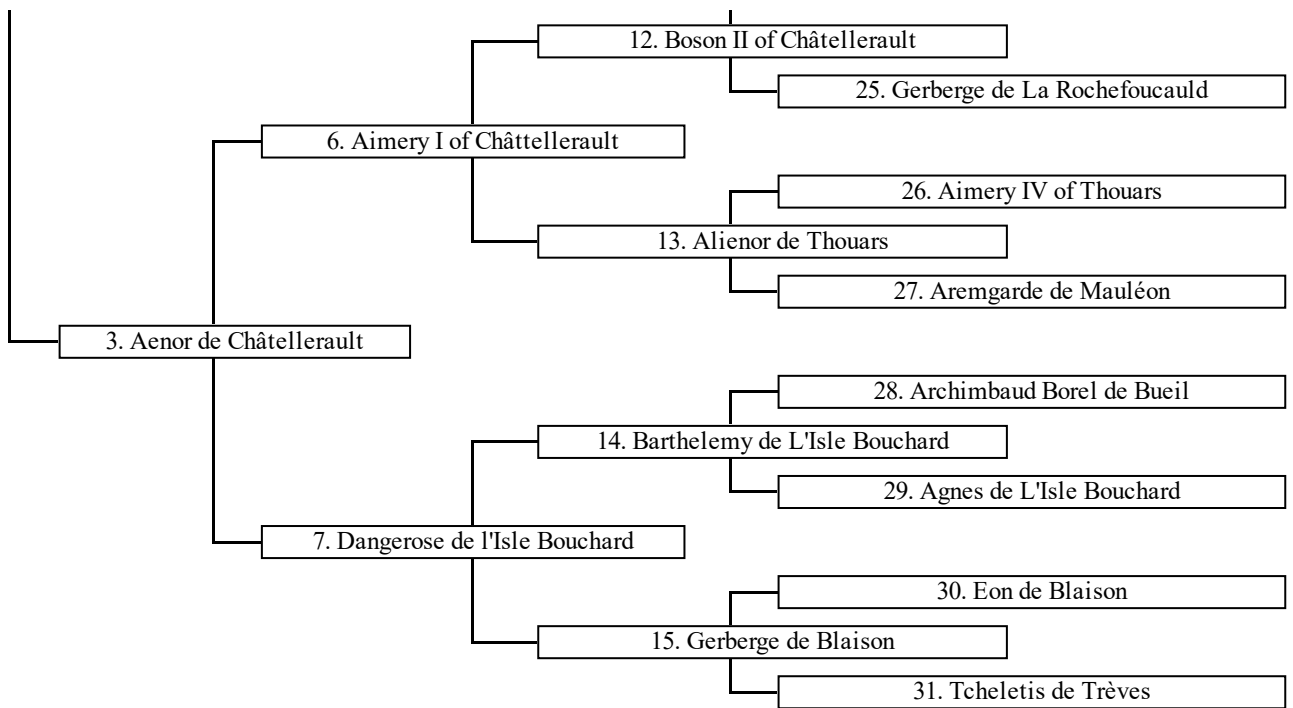
She was portrayed by Mary Clare in the silent film, *Becket* (1923), by Prudence Hyman in *Richard the Lionheart* (1962), and twice by Jane Lapotaire; in the BBC TV drama series, *The Devil's Crown* (1978), and again in Mike Walker's BBC Radio 4 series, *Plantagenet* (2010). In the 2010 film, *Robin Hood*, starring Russell Crowe, Eleanor is played by Eileen Atkins. In the 2014 film, *Richard the Lionheart: Rebellion*, Eleanor is played by Debbie Rochon.

Music

Eleanor and Rosamund Clifford, as well as Henry II and Rosamund's father appear in Gaetano Donizetti's opera *Rosmonda d'Inghilterra* with a libretto by Felice Romani, which was premiered in Florence, at the Teatro Pergola, on 27 February 1834. A recording made by Opera Rara (1994), features Nelly Miricioiu as Eleanor and Renée Fleming as Rosamund.

Ancestors





Issue

Name	Birth	Death	Marriage(s)
By Louis VII of France (married 12 July 1137, annulled 21 March 1152)			
Marie, Countess of Champagne	1145	11 March 1198	married Henry I, Count of Champagne; had issue, including Marie, Latin Empress
Alix, Countess of Blois	1150	1198	married Theobald V, Count of Blois; had issue
By Henry II of England (married 18 May 1152, widowed 6 July 1189)			
William IX, Count of Poitiers	17 August 1153	April 1156	died in infancy
Henry the Young King	28 February 1155	11 June 1183	married Margaret of France; no surviving issue.
Matilda, Duchess of Saxony and Bavaria	June 1156	13 July 1189	married Henry the Lion, Duke of Saxony and Bavaria; had issue, including Otto IV, Holy Roman Emperor
Richard I of England	8 September 1157	6 April 1199	married Berengaria of Navarre; no issue
	23		married Constance,



Issue of Eleanor & Henry

Geoffrey II, Duke of Brittany	September 1158	19 August 1186	Duchess of Brittany; had issue
Eleanor, Queen of Castile	13 October 1162	31 October 1214	married Alfonso VIII of Castile; had issue, including Henry I, King of Castile, Berengaria, Queen regnant of Castile and Queen of León, Urraca, Queen of Portugal, Blanche, Queen of France, Eleanor, Queen of Aragon
Joan, Queen of Sicily	October 1165	4 September 1199	married 1) William II of Sicily 2) Raymond VI of Toulouse; had issue
John, King of England	27 December 1166	19 October 1216	married 1) Isabella, Countess of Gloucester 2) Isabella, Countess of Angoulême; had issue, including Henry III, King of England, Richard, King of the Romans, Joan, Queen of Scotland, Isabella, Holy Roman Empress

See also

- List of longest-reigning monarchs

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Notes

- [Adelaide] perhaps [based] her preconceptions on another southerner, Constance of Provence...tales of her allegedly immodest dress and language still continued to circulate amongst the sober Franks.^[3]
- Ms. S. Berry, Senior Archivist at the Somerset Archive and Record Service, identified this "archdeacon of Wells" as Thomas of Earley, noting his family ties to Henry II and the Earleys' philanthropies.^[28]

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23. Brooks (1983)
24. Kelly (1937), pp. 3-19.
25. Kelly (1937), p. 12.
26. William of Newburgh, Book II, Chapter 7
27. Roger of Hoveden
28. Fripp (2006), ch. 33, and endnote 40..
29. Plain (2005).
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 Beaulieu, Mark Richard (2014) *Eleanor of Aquitaine : The Generation (The Eleanor Code Book 4)* ASIN: B00I3SREI2 <http://www.eleanorofaquitaine.net/Eleanor.html> Mark Richard Beaulieu a series of books about Eleanor. The fifth, *Love and Rebellion* is coming in 2017.

External links

- The Eleanor Vase (http://www.louvre.fr/llv/oeuvres/detail_notice_popup.jsp?CONTENT%3C%3Ecnt_id=10134198673226029&CURRENT_LL_V_NOTICE%3C%3Ecnt_id=10134198673226029&FOLDER%3C%3Efolder_id=9852723696500778&bmLocale=en) preserved at the Louvre
- RoyalList Online interactive family tree (<http://www.royalist.info/execute/tree?person=113>) (en)



Wikimedia Commons has media related to ***Eleanor of Aquitaine***.

Eleanor of Aquitaine House of Poitiers Born: 1124 Died: 1 April 1204		
French nobility		
Preceded by William X/VIII	Duchess of the Aquitainians 9 April 1137 – 1 April 1204 <i>with Louis the Young (1137–1152)</i> <i>Henry Curtmantle (1152–1189)</i> <i>Richard the Lionheart (1189–1199)</i> <i>John Lackland (1199–1204)</i>	Succeeded by John
	Countess of Poitiers 9 April 1137 – c. 1153 <i>with Louis the Young (1137–1152)</i> <i>Henry Curtmantle (1152–1153)</i>	Succeeded by William IX
French royalty		
Preceded by Adelaide of Maurienne	Queen consort of the Franks 12 July 1137 – March 1152 Served alongside: Adelaide of Maurienne (25 July – 1 August 1137)	Vacant Title next held by Constance of Castile
English royalty		
Vacant Title last held by Matilda I of Boulogne	Queen consort of the English 25 October 1154 – 6 July 1189 Served alongside: Margaret of France (1172–1183)	Vacant Title next held by Berengaria of Navarre

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