

Eleanor of Aquitaine



Born: 1122 Aquitaine, FR

Married: 18 May 1152

Died: 1 Apr 1204 FRA

Parents: Duke William Aquitaine & Eleanor

Eleanor of Aquitaine (1122 – 1 April 1204) was one of the wealthiest and most powerful women in Western Europe during the High Middle Ages. She was the patroness of such literary figures as Wace, Benoît de Sainte-More, and Chrétien de Troyes.

Eleanor succeeded her father as *suo jure* Duchess of Aquitaine and Countess of Poitiers at the age of fifteen, and thus became the most eligible bride in Europe. Three months after her accession she married Louis, son and junior co-ruler of her guardian, King Louis VI. As Queen of the Franks, she participated in the unsuccessful Second Crusade. Soon after the Crusade was over, Louis VII and Eleanor agreed to dissolve their marriage, because of Eleanor's own desire for divorce and also because the only children they had were two daughters - Marie, and Alix. The royal marriage was annulled on 11 March 1152, on the grounds of consanguinity within the fourth degree. Their daughters were declared legitimate and custody of them awarded to Louis, while Eleanor's lands were restored to her.

As soon as she arrived in Poitiers, Eleanor proposed to the eleven years younger Henry II, Duke of the Normans. On 18 May 1152, eight weeks after the annulment of her first marriage, Eleanor married the Duke of the Normans. On 25 October 1154 her husband ascended the throne of the Kingdom of England, making Eleanor Queen of the English. Over the next thirteen years, she bore Henry eight children: five sons, two of whom would become king, and three daughters. However, Henry and Eleanor eventually became estranged. She was imprisoned between 1173 and 1189 for supporting her son's revolt against King Henry II.

Eleanor was widowed on 6 July 1189. Her husband was succeeded by their son, Richard the Lionheart, who immediately moved to release his mother. Now queen mother, Eleanor acted as a regent for her son while he went off on the Third Crusade. Eleanor survived her son Richard and lived well into the reign of her youngest son King John. By the time of her death she had outlived all of her children except for King John and Eleanor, Queen of Castile.

Early life

Eleanor or **Aliénor** was the oldest of three children of William X, Duke of Aquitaine, whose glittering ducal court was on the leading edge of early-12th-century culture, and his wife, Aenor de Châtelleraut, the daughter of Aimeric I, Viscount of Chatelleraut, and Dangereuse, who was William IX 's longtime mistress as well as Eleanor's maternal grandmother. Her parents' marriage had been arranged by Dangereuse with her paternal grandfather, the Troubadour.

Eleanor was named for her mother Aenor and called Aliénor, from the Latin alia Aenor, which means the other Aenor. It became Eléanor in the langues d'oïl and Eleanor in English. There is, however, an earlier Eleanor on record: Eleanor of Normandy, William the Conqueror's aunt, who lived a century earlier than Eleanor of Aquitaine.

By all accounts, Eleanor's father ensured that she had the best possible education. 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. Eleanor was extroverted, lively, intelligent, and strong willed. In the spring of 1130, when Eleanor was eight, 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. Duchy of Aquitaine was the largest and richest province of France; Poitou and Aquitaine together were almost one-third the size of modern France. Eleanor had only one other legitimate sibling, a younger sister named Aelith but always called Petronilla. Her half brothers, William and Joscelin, were acknowledged by William X as his sons, but not as his heirs. Later, during the first four years of Henry II's reign, all three siblings joined Eleanor's royal household.

Inheritance

In 1137, Duke William X set out from Poitiers to Bordeaux, taking his daughters with him. Upon reaching Bordeaux, he left Eleanor and Petronilla in the charge of the Archbishop of Bordeaux, one of the Duke's few loyal vassals who could be entrusted with the safety of the duke's daughters. The duke then set out for the Shrine of Saint James of Compostela, in the company of other pilgrims; however, he died on Good Friday 9 April 1137.

Eleanor, aged about fifteen, 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 had dictated a will on the very day he died, bequeathing his domains to Eleanor and appointing King Louis VI of France as her guardian. William requested the King to take care of both the lands and the duchess, and to also find her a suitable husband. 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 across the Pyrenees as quickly as possible, to call at Bordeaux to notify the Archbishop, and then to make all speed to Paris, to inform the King.

The King of France himself was also gravely ill at that time, suffering "a flux of the bowels" (dysentery) from which he seemed unlikely to recover. Despite his immense obesity and impending mortality, however, Louis the Fat remained clear-minded. To his concerns regarding his new heir, Louis, who had been destined for the monastic life of a younger son (the former heir, Philip, having died from a riding accident), was added joy over the death of one of his most powerful vassals — and the availability of the best duchy in France. Presenting a solemn and dignified manner to the grieving Aquitanian messengers, upon their departure he became overjoyed, stammering in delight.

Rather than act as guardian to the Duchess and duchy, he decided, he would marry the duchess to his heir and bring Aquitaine under the French Crown, thereby greatly increasing the power and prominence of France and the Capets. Within hours, then, Louis had arranged for his son, 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, as well as Abbot Suger, Theobald II, Count of Champagne and Count Ralph of Vermandois.

First Marriage

On 25 July 1137 the couple were married in the Cathedral of Saint-André in Bordeaux by the Archbishop of Bordeaux. Immediately after the wedding, the couple was enthroned as Duke and Duchess of Aquitaine. However, there was a catch: the land would remain independent of France and Eleanor's oldest son would be both King of the Franks and Duke of Aquitaine. Thus, her holdings would not be merged with France until the next generation. She gave Louis a wedding present that is still in existence, a rock crystal vase, currently on display at the Louvre.

Eleanor's tenure as Junior Queen of the Franks lasted only few days. On 1 August, Eleanor's father-in-law died and her husband became sole monarch. Eleanor was anointed and crowned Queen of the Franks on Christmas Day of the same year.

Possessing a high-spirited nature, Eleanor was not popular with the staid northerners (according to sources, Louis' mother, Adélaïde de Maurienne, thought her flighty and a bad influence) — she was not aided by memories of Queen Constance, the Provençal wife of Robert II, tales of whose immodest dress and language were still told with horror.

Her conduct was repeatedly criticized by Church elders (particularly Bernard of Clairvaux and Abbot Suger) as indecorous. The King, however, was madly in love with his beautiful and worldly bride and granted her every whim, even though her behavior baffled and vexed him to no end. Much money went into beautifying the austere Cite Palace in Paris for Eleanor's sake.

Conflict

Though 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, whilst 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 William X's similar attempts to exile Innocent's supporters 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. This brought the interdict upon the King's lands. Pierre de la Chatre was given refuge by Theobald II, Count of Champagne.

Louis became involved in a war with Count Theobald of Champagne by permitting Raoul I, Count of Vermandois and seneschal of France, to repudiate his wife (Leonora), Theobald's niece, and to marry Petronilla of Aquitaine, Eleanor's sister. Eleanor urged Louis to support her sister's illegitimate marriage to Raoul of Vermandois. Champagne 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 (1300, some say) who had sought refuge in the church died in the flames.

Horrified, and desiring an end to the war, Louis attempted to make peace with Theobald in exchange for supporting the lift of 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 the Champagne and ravage it once more.

In June, 1144, the King and Queen visited the newly built cathedral at Saint-Denis. Whilst there, the Queen met with Bernard of Clairvaux, demanding that he have the excommunication of Petronilla and Raoul lifted through his influence on the Pope, 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 her for her lack of penitence and her 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 to this, 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 had been 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-le-Brûlé, and desired to make a Pilgrimage to the Holy Land in order to atone for his sins. Fortuitously for him, in the Autumn of 1145, Pope Eugenius requested Louis to 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 a crusade.

Crusade

Eleanor of Aquitaine took up the crusade during a sermon preached by Bernard of Clairvaux. She was followed by some of her royal ladies-in-waiting as well as 300 non-noble 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 serious historians; however, her testimonial launch of the Second Crusade from Vézelay, the rumored location of Mary Magdalene's burial, dramatically emphasized the role of women in the campaign.

The Crusade itself achieved little. Louis was a weak and ineffectual military leader with no concept of 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 it would jeopardize the tenuous safety of his empire; however, during their 3-week stay at Constantinople, Louis was fêted and Eleanor was much admired. She is compared with Penthesilea, mythical queen of the Amazons, by the Greek historian Nicetas Choniates; he adds 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, the Crusade went badly. The King and Queen were optimistic — the Byzantine Emperor had told them that the German Emperor Conrad had won a great victory against a Turkish army (where in fact the German army had been massacred), and the company was still eating well. However, whilst camping near Nicaea, the remnants of the German army, including a dazed and sick Emperor Conrad, began to straggle into 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. Their spirits were buoyed on Christmas Eve — when they chose to camp in the lush Dercervian valley near Ephesus, they were ambushed by a Turkish detachment; the French proceeded to slaughter this detachment and appropriate their camp.

Louis then decided to directly cross the Phrygian mountains, in the hope of speeding his approach to take refuge with Eleanor's uncle Raymond in Antioch. As they ascended the mountains, however, the army and the King and Queen were left horrified by 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; this, being unencumbered by baggage, managed to reach the summit of Cadmos, where de Rancon had been ordered to make camp for the night. De Rancon however chose to march further, deciding in concert with the Count of Maurienne (Louis's uncle) that a nearby plateau would make a better camp: such disobedience was reportedly common in the army, due to the lack of command from the King.

Accordingly, by midafternoon, the rear of the column — believing the day's march to be nearly at an end — was dawdling; this resulted in the army becoming divided, with some having already crossed the summit and others still approaching it. It was at this point that 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 Turks, having seized the summit of the mountain, and the French (both soldiers and pilgrims) having been taken by surprise, there was little hope of escape: those who tried were caught and killed, and many men, horses and baggage were cast into the canyon below the ridge. William of Tyre placed the blame for this disaster firmly on the baggage — which was considered to have belonged largely to the women.

The King was saved by his lack of authority — having scorned a King's apparel in favour of a simple soldier's tunic, he 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."

The official scapegoat for the disaster was 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 — as did the blame affixed to her baggage, and the fact that her Aquitanian soldiers had marched at the front, and thus were not involved in the fight. Eleanor's reputation was further sullied by her supposed affair with her uncle Raymond of Poitiers, Prince of Antioch.

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 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. The city of Antioch had been annexed by Bohemond of Hauteville in the First Crusade, and it was now ruled by Eleanor's flamboyant uncle, Raymond of Antioch, who had gained the principality by marrying its reigning Princess, Constance of Antioch. Clearly, Eleanor supported his desire to re-capture the nearby County of Edessa, the cause of the Crusade; in addition, having been close to him in their youth, she now showed excessive affection towards her uncle — whilst many historians today dismiss this as familial affection (noting their early friendship, and his similarity to her father and grandfather), most at the time firmly believed the two to be involved in an incestuous and adulterous affair. Louis was directed by the Church to visit Jerusalem instead. When Eleanor declared her intention to stand with Raymond and the Aquitaine forces, Louis had her brought out by force. His long march to Jerusalem and back north debilitated his army, but her imprisonment disheartened her knights, and the divided Crusade armies could not overcome the Muslim forces. For reasons unknown, likely the Germans' insistence on conquest, the Crusade leaders targeted Damascus, an ally until the attack. Failing in this attempt, they retired to Jerusalem, and then home.

Home, however, was not easily reached. The royal couple, on separate ships due to their disagreements, were first attacked in May by Byzantine ships attempting to capture both (in order to take them to Byzantium, according to the orders of the Emperor). Although they escaped this predicament unharmed, stormy weather served to drive Eleanor's ship far to the south (to the Barbary Coast), and to similarly lose her husband. Neither was heard of for over two months: at which point, 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. The King still lost, she was given shelter and food by servants of King Roger 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 learnt of the death of her uncle Raymond; this appears to have forced a change of plans, for instead of returning to France from Marseilles, they instead sought the Pope in Tusculum, where he had been driven five months before by a Roman revolt.

Pope Eugenius III did not, as Eleanor had hoped, grant an annulment; instead, he attempted to reconcile Eleanor and Louis, confirming the legality of their marriage, and proclaiming 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 had no choice but to bow to the inevitable. On 11 March, 1152, they met at the royal castle of Beaugency to dissolve the marriage. Archbishop Hugh Sens, Primate of France, 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 Eugenius, granted an annulment due to consanguinity within the fourth degree (Eleanor and Louis were third cousins, once removed and shared common ancestry with Robert II of France). Their two daughters were, however, declared legitimate and custody of them awarded to King Louis. Archbishop Sampson received assurances from Louis that Eleanor's lands would be restored to her.

Second Marriage

Two lords — Theobald V, Count of Blois, son of the Count of Champagne, and Geoffrey, Count of Nantes (brother of Henry II, Duke of the Normans) — tried to kidnap Eleanor to marry her and claim her lands on Eleanor's way to Poitiers. As soon as she arrived in Poitiers, Eleanor sent envoys to Henry Count of Anjou and Duke of Normandy, asking him to come at once and marry her. On 18 May, 1152 (Whit Sunday), six weeks after her annulment, Eleanor married Henry 'without the pomp and ceremony that befitted their rank'.^[11] At that moment, Eleanor became Duchess of the Normans and Countess of the Angevins, while Henry became Duke of Aquitaine and Count of Poitiers. She was about 12 years older than he, and related to him more closely than she had been to Louis. Eleanor and Henry were third cousins through their common ancestor Ermengarde of Anjou (wife to Robert I, Duke of Burgundy and Geoffrey, Count of Gâtinais); they were also both descendants of Robert II of Normandy. A marriage between Henry and Eleanor's daughter, Marie, had indeed been declared impossible for this very reason. One of Eleanor's rumoured lovers had been Henry's own father, Geoffrey V, Count of Anjou, who had advised his son to avoid any involvement with her.

On 25 October 1154, Eleanor's second husband became King of the English. Eleanor was crowned Queen of the English by the Archbishop of Canterbury on 19 December 1154.^[5] It may be, however, that she was not anointed on this occasion, because she had already been anointed in 1137.^[12]

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.^[13]

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. Their son, William, and Henry's illegitimate son, Geoffrey, were born just months apart. 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 and a prostitute named Ykenai, was acknowledged by Henry as his child and raised at Westminster in the care of the Queen.

The period between Henry's accession and the birth of Eleanor's youngest son was turbulent: Aquitaine, as was the norm, defied the authority of Henry as Eleanor's husband; attempts to claim Toulouse, the rightful inheritance of Eleanor's grandmother and father, were made, ending in failure; the news of Louis of France's widowhood and remarriage was followed by the marriage of Henry's son (young Henry) to Louis' daughter Marguerite; and, most climactically, the feud between the King and Thomas Becket, his Chancellor, and later his Archbishop of Canterbury. Little is known of Eleanor's involvement in these events. By late 1166, and the birth of her final child, however, Henry's notorious affair with Rosamund Clifford had become known, and her marriage to Henry appears to have become terminally strained.

1167 saw the marriage of Eleanor's third daughter, Matilda, to Henry the Lion of Saxony; Eleanor remained in England with her daughter for the year prior to Matilda's departure to Normandy in September. Afterwards, Eleanor proceeded to gather together her movable possessions in England and transport them on several ships in December to Argentan. At the royal court, celebrated there that Christmas, she appears to have agreed to a separation from Henry. Certainly, she 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 inheritance.

Of all her influence on culture, Eleanor's time in Poitier was perhaps the most critical and yet the least is known of what happened. Away from Henry, Eleanor was able to develop her own court in Poitiers. At a small cathedral still stands the stained glass commemorating Eleanor and Henry with a family tree growing from their prayers. Her court style was to encourage the cult of courtly love. Apparently, however, both King and church expunged the records of the actions and judgments taken under her authority. A small fragment of the court letters, codes and practices were written by Andreas Capellanus.

It appears that one activity in the court style was for 12 men and women to hear cases of love between individuals. This forum was the forerunner of the jury system that she would implement in England after releasing all prisoners upon Henry's death. The proceedings of the court are speculative and there is no evidence of any such love court, though the legends of the court have endured. ^[14]

Henry concentrated on controlling his increasingly-large empire, badgering Eleanor's subjects in attempts to control her patrimony of Aquitaine and her court at Poitiers. Straining all bounds of civility, Henry caused Archbishop Thomas Becket to be murdered at the altar of the church in 1170 (though there is considerable debate as to whether it was truly Henry's intent to be permanently rid of his archbishop ^[15]). This aroused Eleanor's horror and contempt, along with most of Europe's.

Revolt and Capture

In March 1173, aggrieved at his lack of power and egged on by his father's enemies, 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 youthful brothers, Richard and Geoffrey, were living with their mother, and with her connivance, so it is said, he incited them to join him'.^[16] The Queen sent her younger sons to France 'to join with him against their father the King'.^[17] Once her sons had left for Paris, Eleanor encouraged the lords of the south to rise up and support them.^[18] Sometime between the end of March and the beginning of May, Eleanor left Poitiers to follow her sons to Paris but was arrested on the way and sent to the King in Rouen. The King did not announce the arrest publicly. For the next year, her whereabouts are unknown. On 8 July, 1174, Henry took ship for England from Barfleur. He brought Eleanor on the ship. As soon as they disembarked at Southampton, Eleanor was taken away 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 had become 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 his great love, Rosamund Clifford, in 1176. He had met her in 1166 and began the liaison in 1173, supposedly contemplating divorce from Eleanor. Rosamond was one among Henry's many mistresses, but although he treated earlier liaisons discreetly, he flaunted Rosamond. This notorious affair caused a monkish scribe with a gift for Latin to transcribe Rosamond's name to "Rosa Immundi", or "Rose of Unchastity". Likely, Rosamond was one weapon in Henry's efforts to provoke Eleanor into seeking an annulment (this flared in October 1175). Had she done so, Henry might have appointed Eleanor abbess of Fontevrault (Fontevraud), requiring her to take a vow of poverty, thereby releasing her titles and nearly half their empire to him, but Eleanor was much too wily to be provoked into this. Nevertheless, rumours persisted, perhaps assisted by Henry's camp, that Eleanor had poisoned Rosamund. No one knows what Henry believed, but he did donate much money to the Godstow Nunnery in which Rosamund was buried.

In 1183, Young Henry tried again. 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's troops besieged the town, forcing his son to flee. Henry the Young wandered aimlessly through Aquitaine until he 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. The King sent Thomas of Earley, Archdeacon of Wells, to break the news to Eleanor at Sarum.^[19] Eleanor 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.

In 1183, Philip of France claimed that certain properties in Normandy belonged to The Young Queen 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 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. Over the next few years Eleanor often traveled 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 Henry's death on July 6, 1189, just days after suffering an injury from a jousting match, Richard was his undisputed heir. One of his first acts as king was to send William the Marshall to England with orders to release Eleanor from prison, but her custodians had already released her.

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 as 'Eleanor, by the grace of God, Queen of England'. On 13 August, 1189, Richard sailed from Barfleur to Portsmouth, and was received with enthusiasm. She ruled England as regent while Richard went off on the Third Crusade. 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 of France and King John, it was agreed that Philip's twelve-year-old heir Louis would be married to one of John's nieces of Castile. John deputed Eleanor 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, which had long ago been sold by his forebears to Henry II. Eleanor secured her freedom by agreeing to his demands and journeyed south, crossed the Pyrenees, and travelled through the Kingdoms of Navarre and Castile, arriving before the end of January, 1200.

King Alfonso VIII and Queen Leonora 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. Late in March, Eleanor and her granddaughter Blanche journeyed back across the Pyrenees. When she was at Bordeaux where she celebrated Easter, the famous warrior Mercadier came to her and 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",^[17] 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 Fontevrault, where she remained. In early summer, Eleanor was ill and John visited her at Fontevrault.

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 Fontevrault for her capital Poitiers to prevent her grandson Arthur, John's enemy, from taking control. Arthur learned of her whereabouts and besieged her in the castle of Mirabeau. As soon as John heard of this he marched south, overcame the besiegers and captured Arthur. Eleanor then returned to Fontevrault 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 and Queen Leonora.

Appearance

Eleanor was very beautiful: all contemporary sources agree on this point. 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, which would have been considered middle aged or even old by medieval standards, 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." ^{[21][22][23]} 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. Thus, we are ignorant to even the color of her hair and eyes. The effigy on her tomb shows a tall and large-boned woman, 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. However, she was still slim enough to disguise herself as a man at the age of fifty-one, which means that she was reasonably lithe, tall, and not too buxom.

The 12th-century ideal of beauty was blond hair and blue eyes, thus many have suggested that the chroniclers would not have been so exuberant in their praises if Eleanor had not conformed to this ideal. However, it is more likely that she had red or auburn hair, inheriting her coloring from her father and grandfather, who were both brown-eyed with copper-red hair. The evidence for this can be found in a mural in the chapel of Sainte-Radegonde at Chinon. The mural, which was painted during Eleanor's lifetime in a region in which she was well known and almost certainly depicts her, shows a woman with reddish-brown hair.

What is certain is that from an early age Eleanor attracted the attention of men, not only because of her looks but also because of her "welcoming" manner and inherent flirtatiousness and wit. Gervase of Canterbury described her much later as "an exceedingly shrewd and clever woman, born of noble stock, but unstable and flighty."