

Eleanor of Aquitaine Queen of England

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Born: 1122 - Belin, Gironde, Aquitaine, France

Married: 18 May 1152 King Henry II of England

Died: 31 Mar 1204 - Mirabell Castle, Tarn-et-Garonne, Midi-Pyrenees, France

Parents: William X Toulousan Duke of Aquitaine & Aenor de Chatelleraut

Eleanor of Aquitaine (about 1122 - April 1, 1204) was one of the most powerful people of the Middle Ages and the richest and most powerful woman in Europe during her lifetime. She was married first to the French King Louis VII and then to the English King Henry II, a marriage that produced the two English kings Richard the Lionheart and John. Her father was William X, Duke of Aquitaine, and her mother was Aenor Aimery. When Eleanor was born she was named after her mother and called "Alia Aenor", which in their language meant "other Aenor", but it became "Eleanor" in English.

The eldest of their three children, she became heiress to the province of Aquitaine, largest and richest of the provinces that would become modern France, when her only brother died as a baby. As soon as her father died in 1137, when she was 15 years old, Eleanor became the target of marriage proposals from all parts of Europe. She married King Louis VII of France, bringing to the marriage her vast possessions from the river Loire to the Pyrenees, most of what is now the west of France. She also gave him a wedding present that is still in existence, a rock crystal vase. She took part in the Crusades with some female contemporaries but 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, and her conduct was repeatedly criticized by Church elders as indecorous. However her testimonial launch of the 2nd Crusade from Vezeley, the rumored location of Mary Magdalene's interment, dramatically emphasized the role she led women to play in the campaign. While in the eastern Mediterranean countries, she learned about maritime conventions developing there that were the beginnings of what would become the field of admiralty law, and she later introduced those conventions in her own lands, on the island of Oleron in 1160, and then into England, while she was acting as regent for her son, King Richard.

Even before the Crusade, Eleanor and Louis were becoming estranged as vigor and piety clashed. She sided with her flamboyant, handsome uncle, Raymond of Toulouse, in his desire to re-capture the County of Edessa. Louis preferred to visit Jerusalem which eventually led to a debilitating campaign. When Eleanor declared her intention to stand with Raymond for Edessa, Louis had her brought with him by force. Eleanor's imprisonment disheartened her Aquitaine knights and Magdalene followers and the divided Crusade armies could not overcome the Muslim forces. For reasons unknown Louis and the Crusade kings targeted Damascus, an ally until the attack. Failed, they retired to Jerusalem and sailed home. When they passed through Rome on the way to Paris, the Pope himself tried to reconcile Eleanor and Louis, and Eleanor did conceive their second daughter (Alix (or Alice) Capet, the first being Marie de Champagne), but there was no saving their marriage. In 1152 the marriage to Louis was annulled on the grounds of consanguinity. Her vast estates reverted to her and were considered no longer a portion of the French royal properties.

Within a year, Eleanor married Henry Plantagenet, Duke of Anjou, who was shortly to become king of England. She was eleven years older than he and related to him in the same degree as she had been to Louis. She bore Henry five sons and three daughters — (William, Henry the Young King, Richard I "the Lionheart", Geoffrey, Duke of Brittany, John "Lackland", Matilda, Eleanor, and Joan) — over the next thirteen years. Some time between 1168 and 1173, Eleanor instigated a separation, deciding that from then on she would mostly remain in her own territory of Poitou where she developed the rumored Court of Love, while Henry concentrated on controlling his increasingly large empire elsewhere. A small fragment of her codes and practises remain written by Andreas Capellanus.

In 1173, Eleanor led a rebellion against Henry, in league with their three surviving sons, although his bastard sons stood by him. Henry in 1170 had Archbishop of Canterbury, Thomas Beckett murdered and Europe was outraged. Eleanor was certainly incensed by Henry's numerous sexual dalliances leaving a division of family inheritance. She was annoyed with his attempts to control her patrimony of Aquitaine and the social progress of her court Poitiers. The rebellion was put down, and Eleanor was imprisoned by Henry at the age of 50 for the next fifteen years.

Upon Henry's death in 1189, her son Richard inherited the throne and released his mother from prison. She ruled England while Richard went off to Crusade. She survived him and lived long enough to see her youngest son John on the throne.

Eleanor died in 1204 and was entombed in Fontevraud Abbey near her husband Henry and her son Richard. Her tomb effigy shows her reading a Bible.



Information from online research at Ancestry.com